

BIOGRAPHIES

Karen Miranda Augustine is a Canadian artist, writer and videomaker whose works have been exhibited in Canada, the US, Scotland, and Haiti at the 2nd Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince. She has been published and cited in several books and publications, including Caribbean InTransit Arts Journal, The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts (Cleis Press) and The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century (Columbia University Press). Formerly, she was the founding editor of *At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women Artists of African Descent* (1992-97), editor of the now defunct *MIX: independent art & culture magazine*, beloved CKLN 88.1 FM radio host of *BASS: Black Afrikan Sistuhs of Soul* (1992-2003), and a poet who had opened for Philadelphia recording artist Ursula Rucker, writer Dionne Brand, and dub poet Lillian Allen. In 2004, she recorded "Sapphire" for the jazz/poetry compilation *The New World Reveal-a-Solution* (Urbanicity Recordings), produced by Chicago DJ Shannon Harris. Three years later, her piece *Miranda and Child* (RaRa Rah) was awarded third place at the CRUX juried exhibition in Norfolk, Virginia. Karen Miranda's creative projects ride on the confluence of pop culture, spirituality and the underground. She holds an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies from York University.

Rachel Gorman is Assistant Professor in the Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies at York University, with a background in dance theatre and performance art. Since receiving her PhD from the University of Toronto in 2005 with a dissertation on cultural production, disability, and class consciousness, she has held a Lectureship at the Women and Gender Studies Institute of the University of Toronto, and Fellowships at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University at Buffalo. She has worked on the programming committee at A Space and the editorial committee of Fuse Magazine. She has two decades of experience in anti-occupation and anti-violence organizing.



Friday June 20 - July 19, 2014

Outgraced

Karen Miranda Augustine

Curated by Rachel Gorman



Karen Miranda Augustine, *Jada Fire as Osun*, 2008, Mixed Media, 2.25 x 3 feet, from the series *Mercy Me*

Opening Reception on Friday June 20 at 7 - 9pm

Artist Talk Saturday July 5, 2-4pm

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The richly textured icons in Karen Miranda Augustine's *Outgraced* unite the sexual, the soul wound, and the sublime in ways that are deeply and specifically rooted in Indigenous and West African spiritual practices of Dominica. Steeped in the altar-based practices of her Catholic mother, and gesturing toward the enduring legacies of her Kalinago grandmother, Augustine traces the sacred through calling upon figures of the celebrity and the sexual outcast to meditate on violence and harm, grief and serenity, exaltation and delight.

Augustine's body of work simultaneously traces and challenges contemporary histories of feminist and queer art. Her work was exhibited in no less than five separate shows at A Space Gallery between 1990 and 1993. She was the founding editor of *At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women Artists of African Descent* from 1992 to 1997. It would be difficult to overestimate the impact Augustine has had on artist-run communities, underground hip-hop culture, experimental feminist fiction, Black cultural organizations, and music journalism over the past twenty-five years. Alongside her continuous engagement with, and shaping of, these artistic movements, Augustine innovates a process of creating the art object as a spiritual practice—a distinctive practice that Augustine refers to as "ritualistic pop art"—a practice that celebrates the sublime and the sacred in struggles over representation.¹

With *Outgraced* opening on the first day of World Pride Toronto, Augustine (re)turns our attention to the queerness of the sexual outlaw. Augustine's icons work against the folding of the queer subject into liberal citizenship, and the nationalist memorialization of anti-queer violence.ⁱⁱ Exposing unacknowledged racial and colonial fantasies at the heart of "mainstream queer political thought,"ⁱⁱⁱ Augustine's work is a reconfiguration of representations of female sexuality through an aesthetic process of disidentification.^{iv}

American Empress: Credit for the Empire's Troubled Royalty celebrates strength in sexuality through an exploration of adversity as a rite of passage. In this series, Augustine channels a thematic and stylistic synthesis of collage, mixed media, and text. Stencilled symbols and letters reveal arcane connections to the spirit world, simultaneously referencing graffiti and goddess cults. Through iconography and ritual, Augustine both celebrates and enriches Afro-Caribbean histories and religious practices, while critiquing one-dimensional and racialized representations of women's sexuality. These works "move across geographical space and re-combine cultural space and syntaxes,"^v and are rooted in contemporary and avant-garde cultural references while imbuing these with historical, mystical, and magical-realist elements.

Painted Love: Requiems for Salacious Sex Queens engages the intimacy of grieving and trauma through portraiture of the deceased. In this series, the sexual outcast is honoured and deified—not through referencing a cult of sexuality—but rather through a careful reconstruction of the circumstance of the women's lives and



Karen Miranda Augustine, Wendy O. Williams, 2013, Mixed Media, 15 x 15 inches, from the series *PAINTED LOVE: Requiems for Salacious Sex Queens*

deaths, and a circuiting of their humanity through the divine. Detailed research on the lives of the subjects of the works does not memorialize so much as exalt those who are excluded from (neo)liberal subjectivity, thus reminding us who experiences the violence of the process of citizen-making.

Part of the collective work of healing through spiritual practice—of "empathic intense dreaming"^{vi}—is the honouring of the iconized women as charismatic and politically sophisticated cultural workers, whose stories contradict the narratives of pathology and criminality that cling to them. Augustine's work reveals to us something of the politics of spiritual work itself—the images and symbols of 'spirituality from below' carry specific and concrete knowledges. In her work, Augustine gives us insight into spiritual practice as knowledge production—not abstract, but deeply specific, grounded knowledge.

Taken together, the works in *Outgraced* give us a frame to resituate sexual violence, racial wounding, and class exclusions. Augustine's richly layered work exceeds our collective articulation of these injuries and, in doing so, presents us with an alternative historiography that gestures toward a process of reparation. In this way, Augustine turns liberal feminist and queer historiographies on their head through a meticulous process of re-contextualization.

—Rachel Gorman, Curator



Karen Miranda Augustine, Ahava / Love Unlimited, 2009, Mixed Media, 22 x 28 inches, from the series *AMERICAN EMPRESS: Credit for the Empire's Troubled Royalty*



Karen Miranda Augustine, *Miranda and Child (RaRa Rah)*, 2007, Mixed Media, 2.5 x 3 feet, from the series *Mercy Me*

¹ Karen Miranda Augustine, artist statement

ⁱⁱ See Jin Haritaworn "Beyond 'hate': Queer metonymies of crime, pathology and anti/violence," *Jindal Global Law Review* 1(2): 44-78 (2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Karen Miranda Augustine "bizarre women, exotic bodies & outrageous sex: or if annie sprinkle was a black ho she wouldn't be all that," originally published in *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly*, no. 42 (Winter 1994) 44-49; reprinted in *Border/Lines: Canada's Magazine of Cultural Studies*, no. 32 (1994), 22-24; reprinted in Mona Oikawa, Dionne Falconer and Ann Decter, Eds. *RESIST! Essays Against a Homophobic Culture* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1994) 44-49.

^{iv} Karen Miranda Augustine *Paradise Jacked: Disidentification and Feminist Cultural Practice* (York University: MA Thesis, 2008)

^v Andrea Fatona "In the presence of absence: Invisibility, Black Canadian history, and Melinda Mollineaux's pinhole photography," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31(1): n. pag. (2006).

^{vi} Dian Million *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013) p. 172.