

What do you see that you can't see?

Black is the color of pigment

in the plaka imported from Switzerland.

Plain as day or a deep, dark sky?

It's also in the melanin in the skin of W.E.B. Du Bois.

Mabel O. Wilson sees the unseen objects in any archive she enters.

She suggests looking for details missed: the drawing that no one wants to look at, the details not seen.

So you go read Baldwin and you know that someone must bear witness to what no one wants to face:

Black is a swatch of enamel painted on the steel frame of the Eames House.

Black is a tint that's not printed\* in the history books of graphic design.

\*Except for a token here or there, an inadequate symbolic gesture of acknowledgment.\*

\*A drop of color in the asterisk in the footnotes of the index of your archive.

Black is the color of bodies brutally murdered in cold blood, for all to witness. Murdered by those who are supposed to protect us.

Bodies like mine.

Faces like mine.

And here you come to ask me to educate you on fragility management— triage because you can't seem to grasp my own rage that you try to manage.

Charge me with the responsibility of the plantation, but pay me only wages to pick the cotton.

Ask me to earn the accolades that your cronies have preselected or, more likely, rejected by the not-so-secret handshake that says European-American High Modernism.

Black is the color of the ink on my diplomas.

And even with my pedigree to the nth degree, I still haven't yet worked for Nike.

They say white men can't jump, but they sure can put a nigga down.

Frank Ocean can you help? Do you have James Baldwin's digits? I need to text that mofo:

**“RIP Trayvon, that nigga look just like me.” RIP Breonna Taylor. RIP Atatiana Jefferson. RIP Michael Brown. RIP Tamir Rice. RIP Philando Castile. RIP Freddie Gray. RIP George Floyd. RIP Brayla Stone. RIP Merci Mack. RIP Shaki Peters. RIP Draya McCarty. RIP Tatiana Hall. RIP Bree Black. RIP Emmett Till. RIP Tasheka Arceneaux-Sutton. RIP Silas Munro. RIP Freedom. RIP Justice. RIP Safety.**

Did I tell you about that one time I was stopped and frisked in New Haven when applying to grad school?

Asked for my ID and train ticket?

just outside the Art and Architecture Building of the notorious MFA program — the one meant to open up the right doors.

Right over the threshold Paul Rand stepped over with a spring in his step.

The threshold designed by Paul Rudolf.

So many Pauls. Did you know that in the New Testament Paul and Silas ended up in jail after Paul exorcised a Holy Spirit out of a slave?

How many spirits of students do you think Paul Rand exorcised in all his years?

After yet another stop and frisk I asked the only other Black student in the department who happened to be matched as “my buddy” if he gets stopped in town too.

“All the time.”

We both look down.

For a few years he thought Paul Rand was Black. It's that image on the back of that Steven Heller book jacket. I don't blame him.

That's why I went to CalArts.

I felt so comfortable on the visit, I took a nap on the bench behind the desk of one of two black Grad students. I woke up to the harsh reality that still there were only three of us— United Colors of Benetton—and yet the entire time we never talked about our Blackness. I try to go back to sleep. I drift off. I come to, breath short.

Can you imagine a world where Paul Rand was actually Black? Me too.

Let me catch a breath. Let me catch a break Give me a minute.

There are so many names of men

Let me catch a beat. Let me catch a beat down. There are so many names Stacked up in my feed far too many to pour into the gaps missing from your syllabi, Yet not enough to tell my story. References erased, cell blocked, incarcerated, and detained by an alleged sense of justice.

whose necks I would trade for George Floyd's. Just 8 minutes and 46 seconds of your time, respectfully, Mr. President. But you have no neck, like a turtle hiding in the shell of your white supremacy. A headless nation, statues topple. Protesters lynching the bronze effigies of the lynchers on Monument Avenue.

Speaking of Mistress Virginia, it has everything hidden — unseen in the section drawings of Thomas Jefferson. Dumbwaiters cleverly receding “the help” to the basement at Monticello, concealed passages to aid the path to his indiscretions. Sally on her knees.

I'm on my knees.

Fill my jar as we try to tiptoe past the master bedroom. Take me to your hidden chambers. Locked-off closets in the Black community. Stigma inside of stigma.

Don't you know my people have been throwing bricks at The cops for your ass since 1969? But you just want to 69, So long as I don't tell your wife.

Tryin' to get me some of that father's milk.

And Jefferson did it again. And again. Just like the rest. He did it at UVA, placing the slaves below the pavilions that looked like gardens. Serpentine walls drawing the eyes away in wave after wave after wave of the Black labor that built this country on its back.

One stinging lash at a time.

I was always teased for having long eyelashes, a cat o' nine tails on each lid. Wafting in the wind — just like the tiki torches — night burning khaki-slacked douchebags chanting for oppression.

Sally, are you OK?! Annie, are you OK!?! OJ, are you OK?

Tasheka are you OK? George, are you OK? James, are you OK? Silas, are you OK?

Back me up here, homie!

CalArts, are you OK?!?!?!?