

CELEBRATING
BLACK FUTURES



reading

ist

A IS FOR ACHOLI
Otoniya J. Okot Bitek
2022

Otoniya J. Okot Bitek's *A Is for Acholi* is a sweeping collection that explores diaspora, the marginalization of the Acholi people, the dusty streets of Nairobi and the cold grey of Vancouver. With writing that is playful, lyrical, layered and deeply felt, the poems in *A Is for Acholi* unfold maps of history, culture and identity, tracing a route to a present where the poet dreams of writing a world without empire.

A SSEMBLING A BLACK
COUNTER CULTURE
DeForrest Brown, Jr.
2022

In *Assembling a Black Counter Culture*, writer and musician DeForrest Brown, Jr. provides a history and critical analysis of techno and adjacent electronic music such as house and electro, showing how the genre has been shaped over time by a Black American musical sensibility. Brown revisits Detroit's 1980s techno scene to highlight pioneering groups like the Belleville Three before jumping into the origins of today's international club floor to draw important connections between industrialized labour systems and cultural production.

B LACK FUTURES
Kimberly Drew
and Jenna Wortham
2021

What does it mean to be Black and alive right now? This question is at the centre of Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham's *Black Futures*, a collection of work—images, photos, essays, memes, dialogues, recipes, tweets, poetry and more—brought together to tell the story of the radical, imaginative, provocative and gorgeous world that Black creators are bringing forth today. Presented as a succession of startling and beautiful pieces, this book opens a prismatic vision of possibility for every reader, going from conversations with activists and academics to memes and Instagram posts, from powerful essays to dazzling paintings and insightful infographics.

B LACK WOMEN WRITERS
AT WORK
Edited by Claudia Tate
1983

Long out of print, *Black Women Writers at Work* is a vital contribution to Black literature in the 20th century. Through candid interviews with Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alexis De Veaux, Nikki Giovanni, Kristin Hunter, Gayl Jones, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker and Sherley Anne Williams, the book highlights the practices and critical linkages between the work and lived experiences of Black women writers whose work laid the foundation for many who have come after. Finally available for a new generation, this classic work has an urgent message for readers and writers today.

B UTTER HONEY PIG BREAD
Francesca Ekwuyasi
2020

Spanning three continents, *Butter Honey Pig Bread* tells the interconnected stories of three Nigerian women: Kambirinachi and her twin daughters, Kehinde and Taiye. Kambirinachi believes that she is an Ogbanje, or an Abiku, a non-human spirit that plagues a family with misfortune by being born and then dying in childhood to cause a human mother misery. She has made the unnatural choice of staying alive to love her human family but lives in fear of the consequences of her decision.

CODE NOIR
Canisia Lubrin
2023

Canisia Lubrin's debut fiction is that rare work of art—a brilliant, startlingly original book that combines immense literary and political force. Its structure is deceptively simple: it departs from the infamous real-life "Code Noir," a set of historical decrees originally passed in 1685 by King Louis XIV of France defining the conditions of slavery in the French colonial empire. The original Code had fifty-nine articles; Lubrin's *Code Noir* has fifty-nine linked fictions—vivid, unforgettable, multi-layered fragments filled with globe-wise characters who desire to live beyond the ruins of the past.

Ranging in style from contemporary realism to dystopia, from futuristic fantasy to historical fiction, this inventive, shape-shifting braid of stories exists far beyond the enclosures of official decrees. This is a timely, daring, virtuosic book by a young literary star. The stories are accompanied by black-and-white drawings—one at the start of each fiction—by acclaimed visual artist Torkwase Dyson.

DARK SPACE: ARCHITECTURE,
REPRESENTATION, BLACK
IDENTITY
Mario Gooden
2016

This collection of essays by architect Mario Gooden investigates the construction of African American identity and representation through the medium of architecture. These five texts move between history, theory and criticism to explore a discourse of critical spatial practice engaged in the constant reshaping of the African Diaspora.

African American cultural institutions designed and constructed in recent years often rely on cultural stereotypes, metaphors and clichés to communicate significance, demonstrating "Africanisms" through form and symbolism—but there is a far richer and more complex heritage to be explored. Presented here is a series of questions that interrogate and illuminate other narratives of "African American architecture," and reveal compelling ways of translating the philosophical idea of the African Diaspora's experience into space.

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN
Dany Laferrière
1997

Down Among the Dead tells the story of Dany Laferrière, the narrator and writer living in exile in Montreal, who finally comes home to Haiti. Nothing is different, and yet everything has changed.

There is his mother, who has never left Haiti, not even for one minute, and who still performs all the rituals of old. But there is also the army of zombies that takes over the streets at night, while the American army occupies the country by day.

What is this country of dead men? Is every Haitian a secret citizen? Is it possible for Laferrière to cross over to that country and then return?

DREAMING OF ELSEWHERE:
OBSERVATIONS ON HOME
Esi Edugyan
2014

"Home, for me, was not a birthright, but an invention. It seems to me when we speak of home we are speaking of several things, often at once, muddled together into an uneasy stew. We say home and mean origins; we say home and mean belonging. These are two different things: where we come from, and where we are." —Esi Edugyan

Writing about belonging is not a simple task. Esi Edugyan chooses to intertwine fact and fiction, objective and subjective in an effort to find out if one can belong to more than one place, if home is just a place or if it can be an idea, a person, a memory or a dream. How "home" changes, how it changes us and how every farewell carries the promise of a return. Readers of Canadian literature, armchair travellers and all citizens of the global village will enjoy Edugyan's explorations and reflections as we follow her from Ghana to Germany, from Toronto to Budapest, from Paris to New York.



FAMILY LORE
Elizabeth Acevedo
2023

Flor has a gift: she can predict, to the day, when someone will die. So when she decides she wants a living wake—a party to bring her family and community together to celebrate the long life she’s led—her sisters are surprised. Has Flor foreseen her own death, or someone else’s? Does she have other motives? She refuses to tell her sisters, Matilde, Pastora and Camila.

Spanning the three days prior to the wake, *Family Lore* traces the lives of each of the Marte women, weaving together past and present, Santo Domingo and New York City.

**IMAGINING BLACK DIASPORAS:
21ST-CENTURY ART
AND POETICS**
Edited by Dhyandra Lawson
2024

This book was born out of frustration with art histories that emphasize Black artists’ resilience over the aesthetic impact of their work. The experiences of oppression Black people endure are inconceivable; yet this focus on resilience often overwhelms critical attention to Black artists’ ideas, innovations or use of materials. *Imagining Black Diasporas* defines “diaspora” more broadly, understanding it as a dynamic term that evolves with Black experience.

Through four themes, the book illuminates aesthetic connections among established and emerging US-based artists in dialogue with artists working in Africa, the Caribbean, South America and Europe. Featured Artists include: Mark Bradford, Lorna Simpson, Calida Rawles, El Anatsui, Josué Azor, Isaac Julien, Frida Orupabo, Theaster Gates, Yinka Shonibare and Wangechi Mutu.

**INVISIBLE BOY: A MEMOIR OF
SELF-DISCOVERY**
Harrison Mooney
2022

Harrison Mooney was born to a West African mother and adopted as an infant by a white evangelical family. Growing up as a Black child, Mooney’s racial identity is mocked and derided, while at the same time he is made to participate in the fervour of his family’s revivalist church. Confused and crushed by fundamentalist dogma and consistently abused for his colour, Mooney must transition from child to young adult while navigating and surviving zealotry, paranoia and prejudice.

This powerful memoir considers the controversial practice of transracial adoption from the perspective of families that are torn apart and children who are stripped of their culture, all in order to fill evangelical communities’ demand for babies.

MTAMA ROAD
Linda Musita
2023

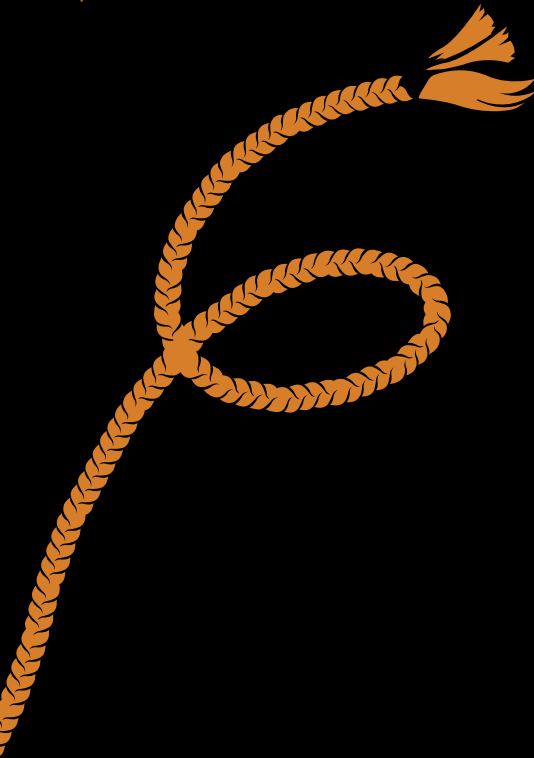
In these seven stories, all set along Nairobi’s Parklands Mtama Road neighbourhood, readers are introduced to snapshots, moments and instances of characters, almost always teenagers, whose lives are connected by virtue of living so close to each other.

The stories presented here are deceptively simple, thanks to Musita’s naturally fluid prose, but they examine characters who are beginning to question the complex worlds around them, teenagers who are becoming more and more aware of the politics of hair, of sex, class distinctions, bad parenting, etc.



NEW YORK, MY VILLAGE: A NOVEL
Uwem Akpan
2021

From a suspiciously cheap Hell's Kitchen walk-up, Nigerian editor and winner of a Toni Morrison Publishing Fellowship Ekong Udousoro is about to begin the opportunity of a lifetime: to learn the ins and outs of the publishing industry from its incandescent epicenter. While his sophisticated colleagues meet him with kindness and hospitality, he is soon exposed to a colder, ruthlessly commercial underbelly—callous agents, greedy landlords, boorish and hostile neighbours and, beneath a superficial cosmopolitanism, a bedrock of white cultural superiority and racist assumptions about Africa, its peoples and, worst of all, its food.



ONE DAY I WILL WRITE ABOUT THIS PLACE: A MEMOIR
Binyavanga Wainaina
2011

In this vivid and compelling memoir—named a 2011 *New York Times* notable book—Binyavanga Wainaina tumbles through his middle-class Kenyan childhood, out of kilter with the world around him, while brilliantly evoking family, tribe and nationhood in joyous, ecstatic language.

OPEN CITY
Teju Cole
2011

Along the streets of Manhattan, a young Nigerian doctor named Julius doing his residency wanders aimlessly. The walks are a release from the tightly regulated mental environment of work, and they give him the opportunity to process his relationships, his recent breakup, his present, his past. Though he's navigating the busy parts of town, the impression of countless faces does nothing to assuage his feelings of isolation.

Julius crisscrosses social territory as well, encountering people from different cultures and classes who provide insight on his journey—which takes him to Brussels, to the Nigeria of his youth and into the most unrecognizable facets of his own soul.

Seething with intelligence and written in a clear, rhythmic voice, *Open City* is a haunting, mature, profound work about our country and our world.

PIDGINIZATION AS CURATORIAL METHOD: MESSING WITH LANGUAGES AND PRAXES OF CURATING
Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung
2023

In this compelling rethinking of curatorial practice, renowned curator and director Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung proposes Pidgin languages as expressions of resistance to settler colonialism and pidginization as a way to approach curating (and the world), creating new spaces for encounter, knowledge and pluralities. Deftly deploying the thinking, writing and rhythmic beat of musicians, philosophers, linguists, poets and novelists, Ndikung offers a new vision for activist curatorial practice and beyond.

SANKOFA: A NOVEL
Chibundu Onuzo
2023

Anna is at a stage of her life when she's beginning to wonder who she really is. In her 40s, she has separated from her husband, her daughter is all grown up, and her mother—the only parent who raised her—is dead.

Searching through her mother's belongings one day, Anna finds clues about the African father she never knew. His student diaries chronicle his involvement in radical politics in 1970s London. Anna discovers that he eventually became the president—some would say dictator—of a small nation in West Africa. And he is still alive...

Examining freedom, prejudice and personal and public inheritance, *Sankofa* is a story for anyone who has ever gone looking for a clear identity or home and found something more complex in its place.

SELECTED WRITING ON
BLACK CANADIAN ART
Yaniya Lee
2023

This collection of essays, reviews and artist interviews by Yaniya Lee, mostly published between 2017 and 2021, gathers the testimonies and achievements of African diasporic artists and curators from across Canada and beyond.

SHUT UP YOU'RE PRETTY
Téa Mutonji
2019

In Téa Mutonji's disarming debut story collection, a woman contemplates her Congolese traditions during a family wedding; a teenage girl looks for happiness inside a pack of cigarettes; a mother reconnects with her daughter through their shared interest in fish; and a young woman decides to shave her head in the waiting room of an abortion clinic. These punchy, sharply observed stories blur the lines between longing and choosing, exploring the narrator's experience as an involuntary one. Tinged with pathos and humour, they interrogate the moments in which femininity, womanness and identity are not only questioned but also imposed.

MTAMA ROAD
Linda Musita
2023

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JAN WADE: SOUL POWER
2022

Jan Wade: Soul Power both honours and documents Jan Wade's compelling but underrecognized practice, which reflects her lived experience as an African Canadian person of mixed cultural heritage.

Comprising mixed media assemblages, paintings, sculptural pieces and textiles made from found or ready-made objects and recycled materials, Wade's art explores the places and practices of her ancestors alongside contemporary political concerns and social movements such as Black Lives Matter. *Jan Wade: Soul Power* accompanied the exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, which presented a survey of the artist's rich body of work from the 1990s to the present and marked the first solo exhibition by a Black female artist in the 90-year history of the Gallery.

WRONG IS NOT MY NAME:
NOTES ON (BLACK) ART
Erica N. Cardwell
2024

Erica N. Cardwell's *Wrong is Not My Name: Notes on (Black) Art* weaves together autobiography, criticism and theory to consider how Black women create alternative, queer and "hysterical" lives through visual culture and performance. In poetic, interdisciplinary essays—combining analytical and lyrical stream-of-consciousness—Cardwell examines archetypes such as the lascivious Jezebel, the caretaking Mammy and the elusive Sapphire to formulate new and inventive ways to write about art. A dazzling hybrid of personal memoir and criticism, *Wrong Is Not My Name* celebrates Black womanhood and illuminates the ways in which art and storytelling reside at the core of being human.



Vancouver
Artgallery

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vanartgallery.bc.ca



For more information about
Celebrating Black Futures 2025 at the
Vancouver Art Gallery, visit:
vanartgallery.bc.ca

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