



Adebunmi Gbadebo: True Blues

In this series, I am engaged with concepts around land, memory, and erasure. In “History Paper”, I use beaten cotton lintens and human hair collected from black barbershops to form sheets of paper. These papers become abstracted documentations, loaded with genetic histories carried through the hair. Traditionally, cotton lintens are used in the paper making process as a binder but in these pieces, the cotton juxtaposed against the hair, imbue the sheets with various historical and racial references.

I introduced blue into my work after my maternal family traced and located the three plantations our ancestors were forced to work as enslaved Africans. True Blue Plantation harvested Indigo and rice and Lang Syne and Singleton Plantations both harvested cotton. The plantations are located in Fort Mott South Carolina, the furthest being a merely six miles away. Singleton was originally owed by US President Martin Van Buren’s Daughter in law, Angelica Singleton and Lang Syne was eventually owned by former US Congressman Langdon Cheves.

I immediately went to Google Maps to see and study how the land has changed over the centuries. Now the Indigo True Blue Plantation is True Blue Golf Plantation. Robust with undulating manicured hills and calm pounds lined by scattered white homes. The average life expectancy on an indigo plantation was about seven years and now hole eighteen marks the point of major strife for visiting golfers.

Down the Congaree River, Lang Syne Plantation is now a historical landmark largely due to novel, *Scarlet Sister Mary*. Written by former plantation owner Julia Mood Peterkin, It was the first of its kind to portray Blacks of the Jim Crow south as sympathetic and complex. Peterkin used Lang Syne and the residing Gullah people, my possible relatives, as reference. She went on to receive a Pulitzer Prize in literature 1929 for her book and was praised by Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and W.E.B. Du Bois for avoiding the racist stereotypes common at the time among white writers. “Scarlet Sister Mary” made this land worth remembering, worth preserving. Not the centuries of American sin and violence witnessed upon the earth, but her factious version of the land?

I wondered if I inherited the memory of that space and time? Could the memory be stored in the DNA of my hair? Could I tap into it through my work or the material of that land conjure its restless energy? My work is an attempt to answer these questions and process these histories. I baptized pounds of kinky hair, cotton, denim, and indigo hair dye into water, then pull it out to form compositions reminiscent of aerial maps or bodies of water. These actions become a way of accessing place and time through material and process