

Tina M. Campt
**The Loophole of
Retreat – An
Invitation**

01/03

On April 27, 2019, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum was the site of a very special convening. It was the brainchild of Simone Leigh, and shared its title with her 2019 exhibition at the museum. Organized by Leigh, Saidiya Hartman, and myself, “The Loophole of Retreat” was an exhilarating, rejuvenating, and inspirational daylong gathering dedicated to the intellectual life of black women that brought together an international constellation of writers, artists, poets, filmmakers, and activists. This special issue of e-flux journal seeks to lift up the extraordinary voices, thoughts, and conversations that emerged at the convening and share them with a wider audience. In doing so, I and my coeditors, Leigh and Hartman, seek to extend the dialogues of the “Loophole” in the hope of including others and inspiring future gatherings which, like the Guggenheim convening, will honor and celebrate the intellectual and creative labor of black women. Like all the texts included in this special issue, the comments below are revised remarks originally shared at the event.

vessel:

a container for holding something;
a person into whom some quality (such as grace) is infused.

surface:

the outside part or uppermost layer of something (often used when describing its texture, form, or extent);

to rise or come up to the surface of the water or the ground.

touch:

the feeling generated by contact of an item with the exterior of the skin;
to come so close to as to be or come into contact with it.

formation:

an act of giving form or shape to something or of taking form;

an arrangement of a body or group of persons or things

in some prescribed manner or for a particular purpose

insurgency:

an active revolt or uprising;
insurrection against an existing government (usually one's own)

by a group not recognized as having the status of a belligerent;

rebellion within a group, as by members against leaders.

Vessel, surface, touch, formation, insurgency – I offer these terms and definitions as a baseline/bass line for what we hope to gather today. I offer them as a prelude to an open-ended and expanding lexicon of black feminist study. It is a baseline intended as a

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foundation and a launchpad. It is a *bass* line intended to serve as a backbeat, a rhythm section, and an undercurrent for a collective practice of imagining. They are terms that resonate with the work of Simone Leigh, the artist whose accomplishments provide us with the occasion for our convening. But they are terms that resonate beyond her extraordinary body of work. Taken together, they resonate at a very particular frequency.

The loophole of retreat ...

a dark hole

an attic space

she plots, she plans

she dreams of possibility from within impossible strictures of enclosure and confinement

her escape is immanent, as her imagination is boundless

her enclosure is an incubator for a practice of refusal and a roadmap to freedom.

These are the registers of a slave girl who dreamed into life practices of self-care, intellectual fortitude, and fiercely defiant forms of love and connection, of which we are proud beneficiaries. It is these multiple registers of Harriet Jacobs's loophole of retreat that we reference as a preparation ground for this gathering, as our attempt to cultivate a space for celebrating black women's intellectual and creative labor.

It is a site Jacobs claimed as simultaneously an enclosure and a space for enacting practices of freedom – practices of thinking, planning, writing, and imagining new forms of freedom. It is a place we mobilize in an effort to revalue black women's intellectual labor.

The loophole we hope to conjure is intended as a retreat that extends ongoing dialogues, creates new relations, and nurtures our collective intellectual and creative labor. It is a retreat that continues the legacy of Jacobs in stealing away and anticipating freedom in the confines of enclosure. It is a gathering and assembling that attends to urgent questions:

How do we sustain this intellectual and creative labor?

How do we figure, bear, and carry it?

How do we practice freedom inside the enclosure?

How do we hold and sustain each other?

How do we create a future in which it is possible to live unbounded lives?

Our Loophole of Retreat is devoted to intellectual collaboration, dialogue, engagement, and care. We invite your participation as active interlocutors in this assembly. Our hope is that you leave it with an expanded vocabulary of shared terms that allow us to nurture, extend, and transform the project of black feminist study. It is an aspiration to recognize and revalue

black women's labor and to incite a new cycle of radical and rebellious imagination and care.

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