

## BLACK AS LIGHT

In my work, I see black as a color. Color in the sense that black can be many colors. For me, color (black) is also in itself, a light. Light can exist in varying degrees and in varying modalities. I can look at black as a gradation of light, or as a variation of light—some would call this a tone, a shade, or simply, the “dark.” Black can also be understood as an absolute, and in this state, it can become everything, and hence, never one thing alone.

I remember reading long ago a text that Manthia Diawara wrote for Artforum on the artist David Hammons. In this text, Hammons makes an address to the color black and his need to define it as an abstraction, an idea, and as aura:

Hammons told us he felt that younger black artists lacked the “black confidence” of jazz musicians. They have no control over the definition of the art they’re making. For him, black artistic confidence means a willingness to transform blackness into a higher level of abstraction, to push it into silence, until the silence becomes as loud as the metallic bucket rolling across the concrete. Black art should be black only in the thrust of the idea; blackness should be decentered as completely as possible without losing its edge. Confidence comes with the creative ability to make one’s culture “abstract.” It is a gift that can be seen in the outer appearance of the work. In other words, it is an aura.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that Hammons speaks to technique and craftsmanship, or the lack thereof, as much as he speaks to a need for something to be at stake in the intellectual process of making. The text by Diawara has motivated and underscored my approach to thinking about black ever since. I wanted to push myself to think about the experience of blackness as abstraction and as an aura to be re-presented in a multitude of changing formats. My thinking on black eventually brought me to its essential state as color.

When I use reds or yellows or blues in a painting, I know I am doing more than just using red, yellow, and blue. I want viewers to ask themselves about the kind/type of red

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<sup>1</sup> Manthia Diawara, “Make it Funny: The Art of David Hammons,” *Artforum* Vol. 36, No. 9, (May 1998): <https://www.artforum.com/print/199805/make-it-funny-the-art-ofdavid-hammons-32601>.

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they are seeing—to describe the thing further than just saying the objectifying term “red.” And this goes for all the other visible colors in a painting. For me, to say that I cannot see a color twice is to say that I cannot see a “Black person” as the same twice; rather I want us to see Black people as individuals among other individuals within a place. Black is a color, as is light. Black can be the embodiment of experiences as vast and varied as life itself. The Black experience is truly unquantifiable, and in my practice, it is an aura I want to activate without prejudice.

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