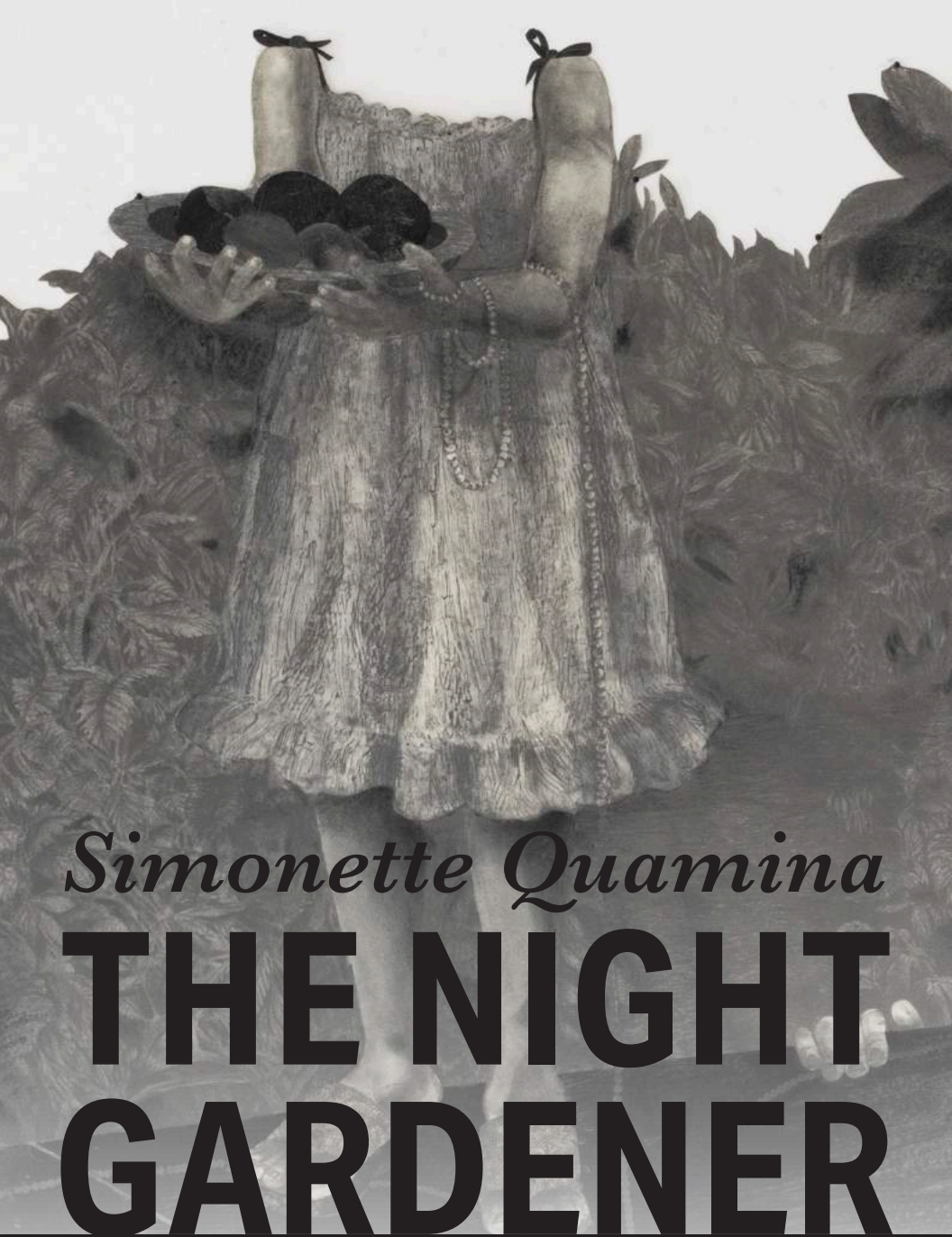
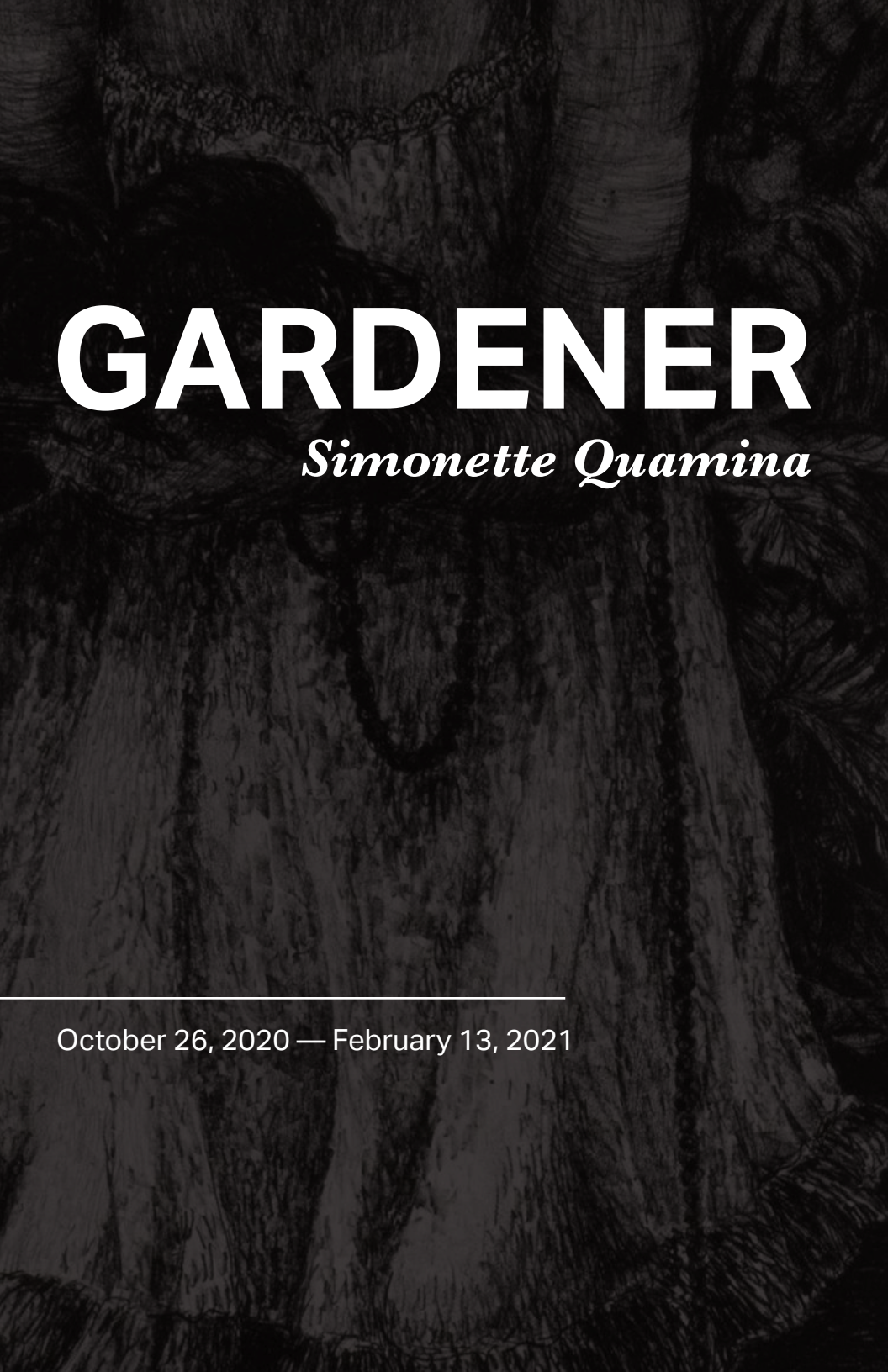


Simonette Quamina

THE NIGHT GARDENER

Pace University
Art Gallery

THE NIGHT



GARDENER

Simonette Quamina

October 26, 2020 — February 13, 2021

Omens of Things to Come

graphite, relief print, and
silkscreen collaged on paper

44" x 56" | 2019

SIMONETTE QUAMINA: THE NIGHT GARDENER

Simonette Quamina's artworks in *The Night Gardener* exhibit collectively function as a visual bildungsroman, a coming of age story told in layered black and white flashbacks to her childhood moving between Canada, Guyana, St. Vincent, and the United States. She writes, "They are narratives that re-evaluate perceptions of cultural, racial and social norms, while simultaneously challenging preconceived, romanticized ideas of the Caribbean." Figures and places are literally and metaphorically pieced together and superimposed as the artist reconstructs past events, places, and dreams in her large-scale collages.

Beginning with her title, *The Night Gardener*, and developed in the artworks themselves, Quamina deftly balances the relationship between apparent opposites like day/night and sowing/reaping. Through her innovative use of graphite that thoroughly reimagines the artistic disciplines of drawing, printmaking, and collage, Quamina's deeply personal narrative examines the duality of the human condition via the imagery of the garden.

They are narratives that re-evaluate perceptions of cultural, racial and social norms...

Between Mary Jane's Shrouded Thoughts

graphite, monoprint, and frottage (from woodcut and linocut) collaged on paper

53" x 39" | 2018

While Quamina evokes place through her depiction of domestic architecture, it is the bountiful, though sometimes dangerous, plants that firmly root the series in the Caribbean. Quamina has built her own lexicon of site-specific flora to relate the memory of the home she left behind as a child when her family immigrated to Brooklyn. She upends the simplistic black is bad, white is good dichotomy throughout this body of work, instead outlining a balance between good and evil like the Taoist yin yang (trans. *shady side-sunny side*) concept of dualism which argues that seemingly contrary forces are complementary.

For example, she illustrates the frangipani tree that produces a beautiful white flower and a sap that is both toxic and healing depending on the application. Likewise, she employs jumbie bead bracelets made of the poisonous *Abrus precatorius* seed that are used in the Obeah practice to ward off the evil eye. Further, because Quamina depicts the jumbies in graphite without their hallmark red color, the seeds may be conflated with pearls and, simultaneously, the three fates thread of life as well as Anancy's spider web of stories.

Quamina has built her own lexicon of site-specific flora to relate the memory of the home she left behind as a child...

Bourda Market Massacre

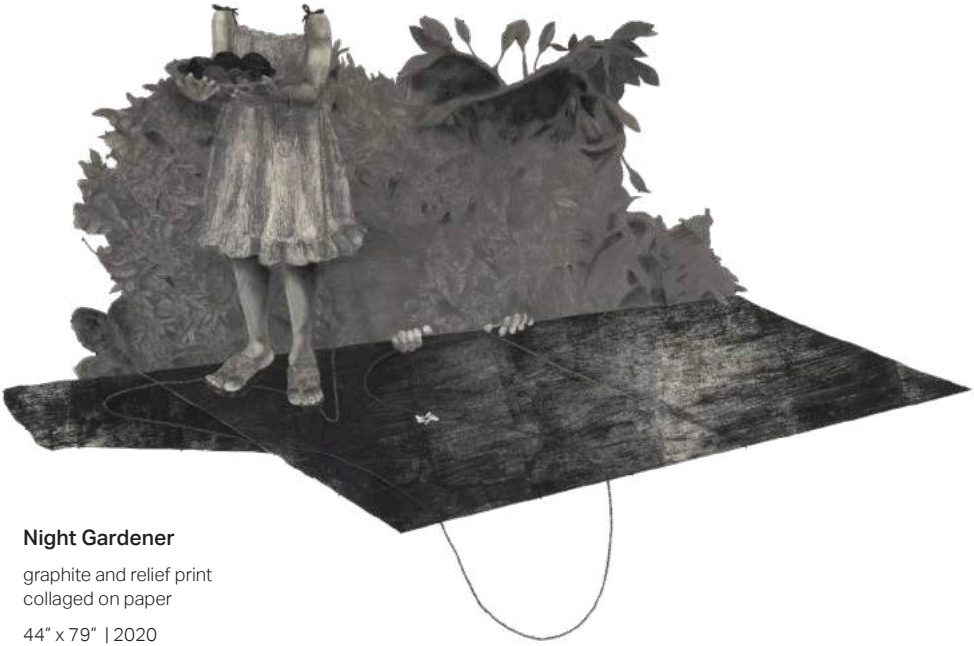
graphite, monoprint, and relief print collaged on paper

64" x 40" | 2018

...the girl is not so much headless as her head is absent, making her both universal and unknown.

In the organically shaped *Night Gardener* collage, a headless girl stands holding a plate of fruit with a loop of Obeah beads dangling over her wrist and dropping below the picture plane. At her feet, another pair of hands reaches up over the edge disrupting the viewer's understanding of the space. What is this the edge of? The paved sidewalk? An interior floor? The earth itself? Perhaps even something more metaphysical? This flat, darker, inky space is distinctly different from the figure's body and the dense garden behind her which are created with a lighter and softer application of the graphite. In the foreground, it is just her feet, the fingers, and a single white frangipani flower that stand out in stark contrast against the darkness yet connected by the string of beads which curves back into the picture.

The artist has carefully cut the outer edge of the collage into a delicate shape following the contours of the leaves and shoots, the little ribbons on the girl's dress, her soft shoulders, and the lacey frill at the top of her bodice. Cut away into the negative space of the wall in the same way as the plants that surround her, the girl is not so much headless as her head is absent, making her both universal and unknown. In earlier works, Quamina's layering of prints is overt, but in *Night Gardener* thin sheets of translucent Japanese paper, each with unique graphite rubbings, are seamlessly laminated together. Due to this imperceptible collage technique, the viewer intuits rather than sees the rich build-up of subtle tonal information below the surface like the murky strata of memory.



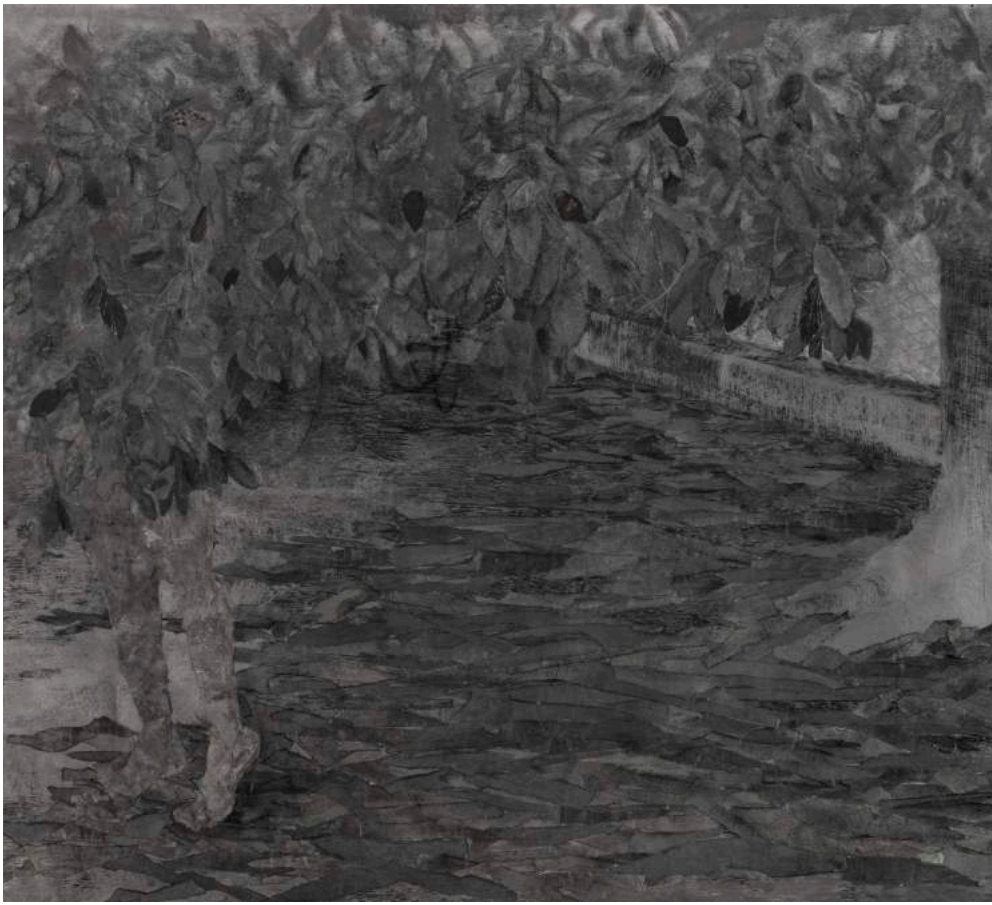
Night Gardener

graphite and relief print
collaged on paper

44" x 79" | 2020

AFTER MR. FARREL'S PLUMROSE TREE

A poem by Laura Gooch, '23



Mr. Farrel's Plumrose Tree

graphite and relief print collaged on paper

60" x 82" | 2017

Beneath Mr. Farrel's plumrose tree
I lie in fallen leaves
and think
about who I am.
I have been all over this world
of never-ending possibilities
viewed it
through many different lenses,
but now here I sit
in this grassy endless sea
and wonder who I am
in relation to it all.

You see
I am torn strips pasted together,
a part of my mother and a part of my father,
bits of my mother, scraps of my father,
pieces put together
in a collage like no other.
I am my father's dark edges
and my mother's striking curves
that run together like threads.

I am sewn
into a girl
into a woman
into everything I am meant to be
and nothing I am not.

I am the darkness
stroking the leaves
on the trees I lie beneath.

I am the light
between the leaves
casting a heavenly glow
on the green sea I dream in.

I am all together
light and dark,
broken and made whole,
familiar and brand new.

...she applies the graphite in solid, powder, and liquid forms — delineating multiple incarnations of superimposed memories in the picture plane via texture.

In every piece in the exhibit, Quamina aptly deploys darkness by limiting her material to reflective gray graphite. The absence of color allows for overlay and slippage between time and place underscoring memory's cumulative, albeit elusive, structure. Further, she applies the graphite in solid, powder, and liquid forms — delineating multiple incarnations of superimposed memories in the picture plane via texture. The viewer can only see Quamina's nocturnal world after their eyes adjust to the darkness. The medium's inherent iridescence also disrupts its seemingly uniform dark hue. As the viewer traverses the length of each planar surface, or even just tilts their head slightly, previously submerged imagery is revealed in the changing light. This shifting perspective is most vivid, both technically and metaphorically, in *Mr. Farrel's Plumrose Tree*, in which the child's legs shimmer briefly into solid form as the viewer crosses from left to right, moving around the piece as moving around a foggy memory. Visually, the child is engulfed by the plumrose tree, her legs a mirror of the trunk. The plumrose tree, also called the mountain apple, is a dramatically beautiful tree that is laborious to maintain but produces delicious fruit. Extending Quamina's exploration of the human relationship to nature, the child is plucking fruit from the tree (like a young Eve seeking knowledge in Eden) while also being subsumed by it.

Crest Piece

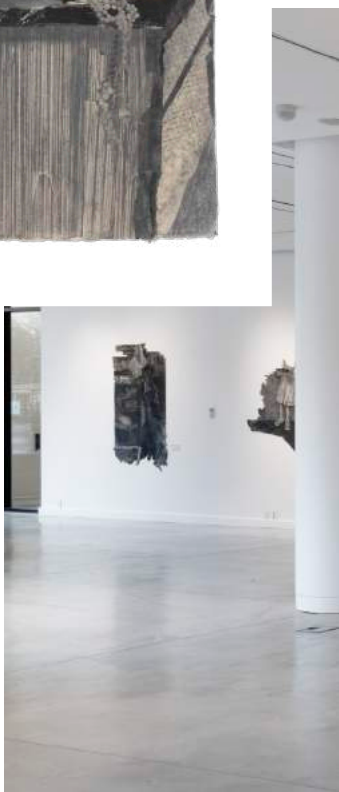
graphite, embossment,
and monoprnt collage
on archival board

31" x 20" | 2020

Pearl Snatcher

graphite, monoprint and relief
print collaged on Kitakata paper

60" x 60" | 2016



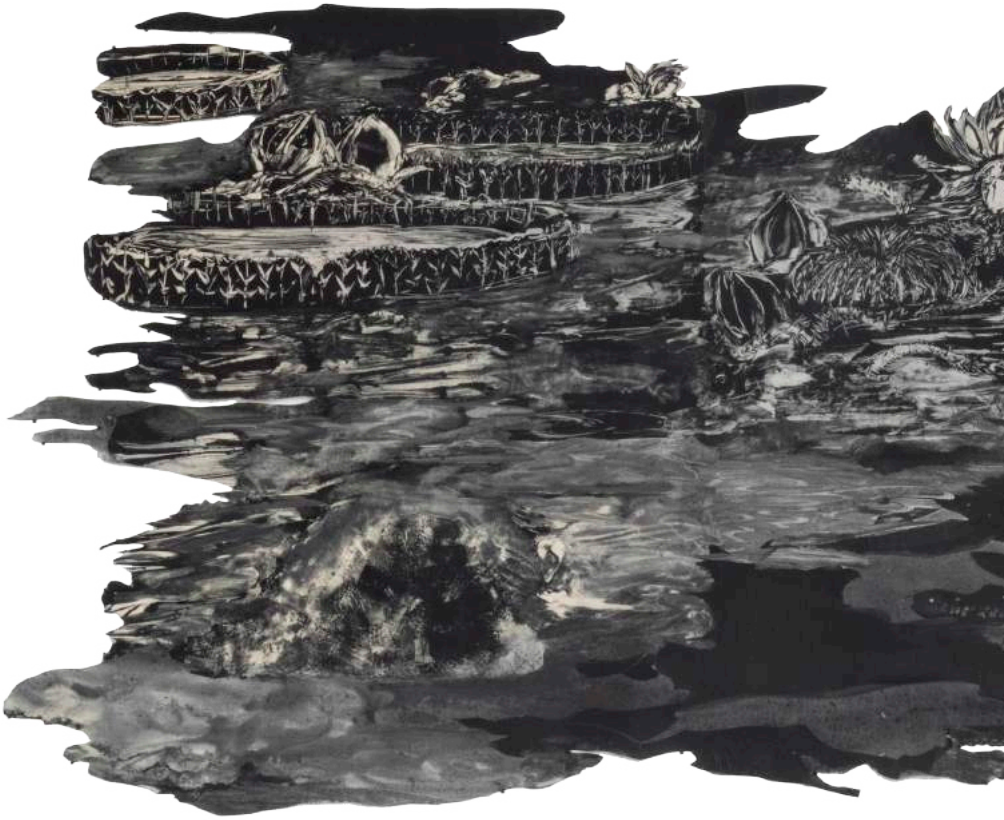
In *Pearl Snatcher*, Quamina plays with interior and exterior space by blending them to make a multilayered scene of the girl sitting on a porch. Through the use of collage, the artist highlights that space is temporal; the house illustrated may correlate to a similar structure where she spent her childhood and, concurrently, to the houses where her parents spent theirs in the stories that they told her when she was little. In addition to multiple eras, these layers may represent the multiple places the artist and her family call home. Likewise, the simultaneous depiction of the exterior and interior space of the house is paralleled by the duality of the child's inner and outer expressions. Indeed, the intense dark and light shading seems to reflect the child's emerging consciousness of the battle to find balance between good and evil, even inside herself. The figure's face is distorted and dark on one side, while the lighter side shows her looking down towards the pearl-like jumbie beads, apparently wrestling with the inner temptation to "snatch" them and claim the knowledge and power they hold as she comes of age.

Ram Goat Salvation (matrix)

archival board, acrylic medium, tape, and relief ink

41" x 30" | 2018

The central figure in *Ram Goat Salvation (matrix)* splits the rectangle of the artwork apart into a jagged shape with her hands. Synchronously, a door pushed open, a craggy mountain pass, and the liminal space between this world and another, the broken picture plane reveals the Ram Goat bursting through the center of the piece and creates three distinct areas within the image: left, center, and right. Also, the repeated right hand breaking the picture plane on both sides implies sequential views of the same scene over time. Like the majority of works in this exhibition, this piece is drawn from a first-person perspective, forcing the viewer into active participation and shared experience with the artist/protagonist. Looking down, the feet precariously perched on the precipice are simultaneously the subject's, the artist's, and the viewer's. The hands tearing apart the surface seem to illustrate her (and the viewer's) own journey seeking the salvation alluded to in the artwork's title. Extending her innovative disruption of printmaking techniques and materials, Quamina presents the inked matrix rather than a pulled print, corralling the power of the mark maker rather than the mark made. Compared with the other works in this exhibit, the tone of *Ram Goat Salvation* is especially and consistently dark; the surface of the piece is covered almost entirely with the hand-mixed black graphite ink, with only a hint of blue from the masking tape peeking through for contrast. Rather than with hue or tone, the bas relief carving of the matboard matrix reveals the image from the darkness.



In *The Night Gardener*, Quamina's nuanced exploration of life's dualities reflects the complicated nature of gaining knowledge and the loss of innocence it requires. In the end, the duality contained in the garden itself is the most compelling because of its capacity to both nurture and destroy. ■

Sarah Cunningham
Art Gallery Director &
Assistant Clinical Professor

Alexander Romans, '21
Gallery Intern &
Curatorial Assistant

Pace University Art Gallery
November 2020

Confirmation in Victoria's Regia

graphite, monoprint on Kitakata paper, dry mounted on cotton paper

36" x 72" | 2018

ABOUT THE ARTIST

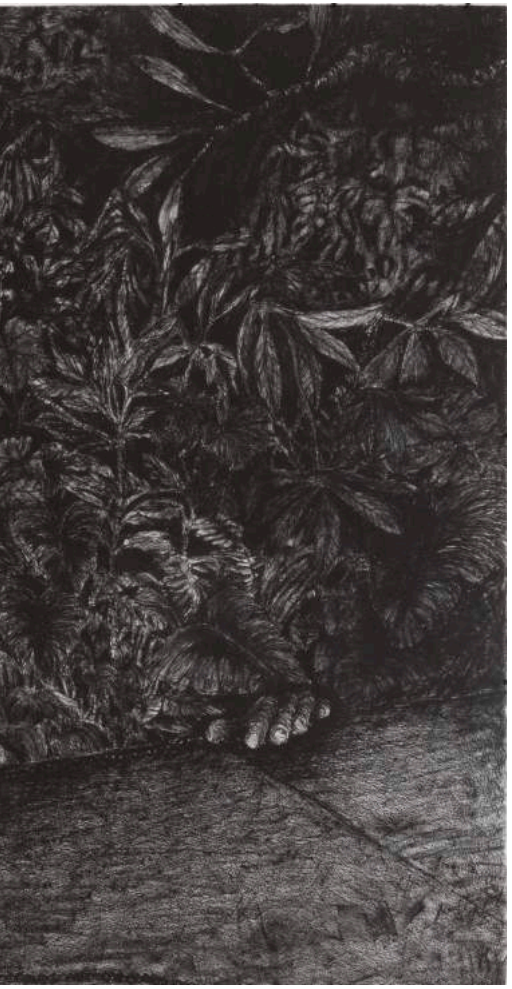
Simonette Quamina was born in Ontario Canada, and spent her early childhood living between South America, the Caribbean, and New York City. Her diverse upbringing is constantly woven into the narratives of her large-scale drawings, prints, and collages. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from the City College of New York and a Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design. She is the recipient of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Studio Program in New York City, the recipient of the 2017-2018 Provincetown Fine Arts Works Center Residency and the 2017 Salem Art Works Fellowship as well as a current 2020 Queen Sonja Print Award nominee. Her work has shown both nationally and internationally. It has been acquired for private and public collections, including the Fleet Library's special collections. Her recent group exhibitions include *Embody* at The Mandeville Gallery, *Figuring the Floral* at Wave Hill Glyndor Gallery, *Artist I steal from* at Gallerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London, *Coded* at the Boston Center of the Arts, Mills Gallery, and *Bathing* at Planthouse Gallery in New York City. She maintains an active studio in New York City and is an Assistant Professor of Printmaking at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

https://www.simonettequamina.com

Night Gardener #1 & #2

lithograph prints

30" x 22" each | 2020



SPECIAL THANKS

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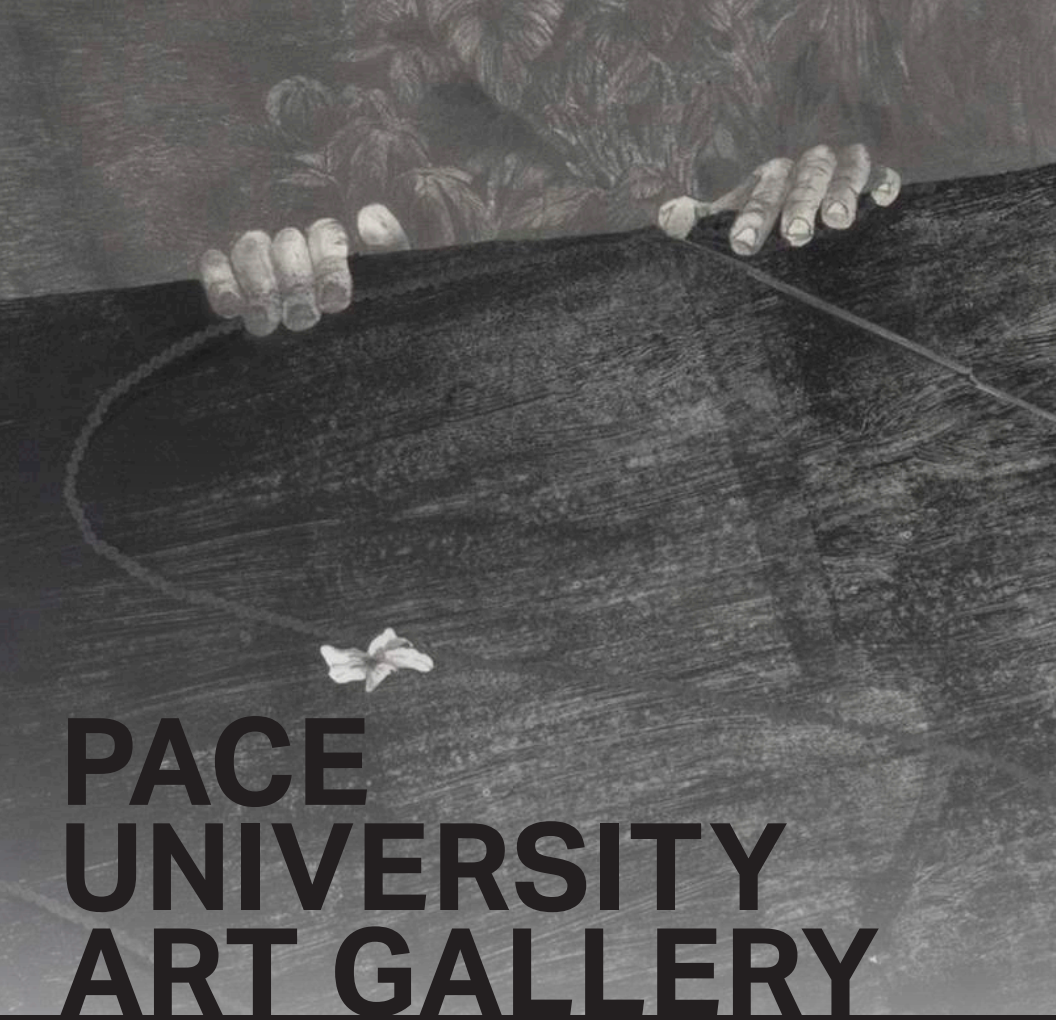
Adam Reich
Photographer



PACE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

Founded with the conviction that art is integral to society, the Pace University Art Gallery is a creative laboratory and exhibition space that supports innovation and exploration for both artists and viewers. Open to students, staff, and faculty from across the Pace campuses and, equally, to the Lower Manhattan community and visitors from around the world, the Art Gallery encourages personal investigation and critical dialogue via thought-provoking contemporary art exhibits and public programming. Enhancing the Art Department's BA and BFA programs, the Art Gallery offers students real-world opportunities to exhibit their own art and to work directly with professional artists to install and promote exhibitions.

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