

## ARTIST STATEMENT

1.

I write about violence. I write about state-sponsored violence enacted against black and brown and queer and disabled and otherwise non-normative bodies; I write about the small, intimate violences we humans inflict on each other, every day. My work confronts the ways in which bodies like mine are framed by the mainstream in the language of violence. And while I understand and embrace the documentary function that art can serve – my poetry will always bear witness – I’m mindful that my responsibility as a socially engaged artist is to push beyond regurgitation or re-enactment of a violence for the reader/observer, whether on the page or in a performance.

2.

For me, each poem is a process of excavation. I rescue my subjects from muddy metaphor (think: thug. think: predator. think: property), exposing their vulnerabilities, that which makes them relentlessly human, in sensuous detail. I write with a laser focus on sound, in service to the aural experience of the poem. Line breaks are beats, line length sets rhythm and form situates the poem musically: sometimes I’m composing jazz, sometimes I’m serving up funky sweaty tribal house, sometimes it’s full-on Sunday morning gospel.

3.

Linguistically and syntactically, I oscillate between “proper” English and various vernaculars: Bajan<sup>1</sup> (Barbadian) vernacular – my mother tongue. The Black queer vernacular I learned in bars and back alleys and on piers in New York City. The neighborhood slang the kids I grew up with spoke, that I wore like a suit of armor, to mask the queerness. And so on, and so on.

4.

The *why* of my work: to re-orient your gaze, so as not to appropriate or violate or consume but rather to glimpse the sublime in the divine other – that *other* being us. Being me.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced *bay-jun*.