

Shotgun Seamstress zine No. 4

SISTER OUTSIDER ART

This zine is about art
by black queers, black
feminist punks and
other black folks
I admire. This is

VAGINAL

CREME DAVIS

our sister/mother
outsider.



Shotgun Seamstress is a zine
by and for black punks, feminists,
queers, artists & musicians. Usually
I focus a lot on music, but in this issue
I focus on visual art.

March 2010

"Sister Outsider," the title of feminist
writer Audre Lorde's book of essays, refers
to the experience of being part of a
community, but also separate, on the
margins. Outsider art is the creative
work of self-taught artists that exists
largely outside of the mainstream art
world. Put the two together & what
do you get?



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the artwork on this page is by Adee Roberson.

James Spooner is the filmmaker responsible for the documentary AFROPUNK, that had a huge roll in bringing all the brown punk babies across the nation (& world!) a little closer together. He's an ex-vegan/hardcore, straight, biracial dude and him & his lady are expecting a baby! This interview was done via iChat because this is the future.

SS: Talk about the punk scene you came out of and how you were involved.

JS: I got into the punk scene when I was 13. I lived in Apple Valley, California, this crappy racist town with very few punks. Ironically, the first punk kid I met was a black kid named Travis. He was instantly the coolest kid in school to me and I wanted to know what he was about. He introduced me to a bunch of bands and we started one of our own. Long story short, it was a lame scene and we were a bunch of dummies. Thanks to my mom we moved to NY that's when I got into real punk/hardcore. About a year later I started doing going to shows out side of NYC because I was getting into DIY and ABC NO RIO was the only real place doing it. Also, I eventually started my own record label and zine. Put out four 7inches. It started to get big and I couldn't handle the responsibility at 17 so I quit.

SS: What was your zine called? What was it about?

JS: It evolved. At first it was called "Blinded By Lies blinded by Draino." It was a vegan zine. Then in the second issue, I decided to do some other stuff. The second one was called "Kidney room." I talked about animal rights, feminism, masculinity, and scene politics to some degree. It started getting some praise; good reviews in MRR and Heart Attack. A lot of the popularity came from these patches I made. The most popular one said "It's ok not to drink milk."



JAMES

SS: Do you still have copies of it?

JS: Yeah, over the years kids have sent them back to me so I have most of them. The last one was called "What little boys are made of." That one was way more personal. Dealt with sex, gender politics, being a boy growing into being a man. This one I gave a way free and did semi anonymously.

SS: Anonymous because it was so personal?

JS: Well cause it told intimate details of womens lives. Women I was involved with. So I didn't want to put them on blast. That did backfire on me. Its hard to be anonymous in such a small scene.

SS: You're talking about the scene you moved to in NYC?

JS: Well this was in Ohio. I moved and traveled a lot. You know, punk rock stuff.

SS: Yep. So before you made "AfroPunk" did you have any expectations of the impact it would have?

JS: Never. I thought I'd show it three times and keep it moving.

SS: How does the AfroPunk scene, especially the one in NY, compare to your experience with punk?

JS: There are a lot more black kids at the AfroPunk shows. Honestly, at this point I don't know how "punk" you could call AfroPunk. I mean, it's way bigger than I ever hoped it would be. I don't go to shows with stages taller than me or bouncers keeping audience members from the band. So although I'm happy black bands are getting shine, I don't really enjoy those kind of big shows. We also never had all ages shows until after it got corporate. NY sucks for all ages venues.

SS: I'm glad to hear you say that because even though I think AfroPunk is really important in the way that it made room for black kids who don't only listen to hip hop and r&b and don't wish to be pigeon holed, the result of AfroPunk wasn't exactly punk the way a lot of us have experienced it. But at the same time, I'm wondering if a sub-scene might come out of the larger AfroPunk thing...

JS: There will always be a reaction. I mean here is the thing. The kids have to control things, otherwise its not punk rock. I was 25 when I started AfroPunk. My partner was 32. He is now 40 and running the show on his own. It can never be the same as the 5 dollar all ages shows with bands who don't care about money cause their parents pay for everything. So, Jenelle Monea is important to the black community in general

S SPOONER

but will do nothing for the punk scene. Except maybe get kids into the scene who then find underground bands. Like Nirvana might have done for your generation and I don't know ... Jane's Addiction might have done for mine.

SS: How old are you? I don't think I'm that much younger than you.

JS: I just realized I'm 33. My birthday was like 15 days ago, but I never said it out loud.

SS: I'm 30!

JS: Oh, your 30. No wonder you're doing a paper zine.

SS: Yeah I guess. There's some young kids out there still doing paper zines though. And all the time, younger kids on AfroPunk send me messages like "How do you make a zine?" cuz they wanna do it too. That's what I'm saying about maybe a more DIY scene will eventually come out of the whole AfroPunk movement.

JS: That's cool. Yeah, I mean AfroPunk is at this point of entry for a lot of black people, children & adults. And that's okay.

SS: So I read you were a sculpture student before you made AfroPunk and that you never took any film classes before you made the documentary.

JS: I wasn't a student. I just made sculptures. I've never been much for formal education. Maybe that's why I'm still broke but you know, punk rockers are always reinventing the wheel.

SS: Did you make any movies before AfroPunk? Like even shorts?

JS: Nope.

SS: Ever seen Don Letts' "Punk Movie"?

JS: Of course. Someone had a tape of it when i was 14. It would have really helped me out to know that was a black dude directing it.

SS: I haven't seen the whole thing myself. But his approach is the same as yours, you know?

JS: Yeah, I met him once. He seems like a right place at the right time, living off the legacy kinda dude. But he still keeps making work.

SS: So when did you find out he was a black guy?

JS: When I was making AfroPunk.

SS: No way!

((HONESTLY AT THIS POINT
I DON'T KNOW HOW PUNK
YOU COULD CALL
AFRO-PUNK))

JS: I never even heard of him till i was doing the research. I mean that tape my friend showed me was pretty shitty quality. Trying to read the credits was pointless.

SS: I kinda like that feeling though. I didn't know that Poly Styrene (of X-ray Spex) was half black for a long ass time. I just didn't realize it and no one ever told me.

JS: Oh yeah, I would love to talk to her. She is some kind of Hare Krishna or something.

SS: Yeah a lot of those people from that scene got super religious after their punk days...

JS: Addicts.

SS: Yeah?

JS: Don't know how much of it has to do with punk as it does with drugs. Addicts gotta be hooked on something. But she for sure got cuter as she got older.

SS: I know she looks good. I saw this semi-recent picture of her and she's got this little perm now.

JS: Yeah she was in DPN's last punk movie "Punk Attitude".

SS: I haven't seen it yet. So are there any other artists in your family?

JS: My mom was an art teacher when I was young before moving on to special ed. My eldest brother whom I didn't meet till I was in my mid 20's is an artist too but he lives in Barbados so he is more of a craftsman. Island culture in a lot of ways doesn't allow for the privilege of making traditional art. He has to make a living but I can tell he is an artist. He makes his own clothes and can build anything.

SS: So your family was pretty supportive of you making art?

JS: My mom always admired me. She is one of those "My son can do no wrong" types. My dad always wondered where the money was. But once he saw me in Ebony magazine or one of those black mags, he was cool. Getting in the New York Times was a big legitimizer.

SS: Is your dad black?

JS: Yeah dad's black, mom's white.

SS: You were in Ebony? I wanna get in Essence one day!

JS: I can't remember. I think it might have been Essence. I was in all of them at one point or the other. At least a mention if not an article. The mentions are harder to keep up with.

SS: That's awesome. So what do you think about the idea that the creation of art is a liberating activity for black people?

JS: I think it's liberating for all people. The thing is, I don't think young black artists ever have the dilemma of "What to paint". You know a lot of young artist are talented but there themes are bullshit. Pretentious. Pointless. The best art comes from pain. And yes, white people have pain. But its easier for us to tap into the obvious and have it be moving. But when an artist, any artist, moves past the surface and deals with personal pain, that's when art becomes important. So yeah privilege like anything else is the thing that separates white artists from everyone else.

SS: Ok. What's the weirdest dream you've had lately?

JS: Oh, you'll have to ask me in the morning.

SS: Do you usually remember your dreams?

JS: Yeah but if I don't say them out loud they are gone. They are usually gone shortly after that anyway.

SS: Do you feel like there's any connection between your dreams and the art you make?

JS: Not really. Unless you can call my baby art. I dream about her all the time now.

SS: You're a dad!

JS: I will be in august.

SS: Congratulations!

JS: You gotta check out my blog popnbottles.com. It's the thing I'm most excited about these days.

SS: That's super exciting. Thanks for doing this interview!

JS: For sure. Tell people to be my friend on Facebook, read my blog and ride bikes.

dear miss davis

I hope this letter finds you well and I hope you are loving your life in Berlin. Even though we've been in touch before, I've never had the chance to tell you how I found out about you and how your work makes me feel. The first time I got to see you perform was in 2006 or 2007 in Olympia, Washington at HOMOAGOGO, but I'd probably known about you since 2000. I want to say that your being

one of the many names listed off in that Le Tigre song "Hot Topic" brought you to my attention, but I have a feeling I'd heard of you before that. The point is, you weren't anything more than a name



and maybe a picture or two off the Internet for me for years. But I held onto your name, keeping it safe in my memory for so long because you were the only queer black punk I knew
con't →

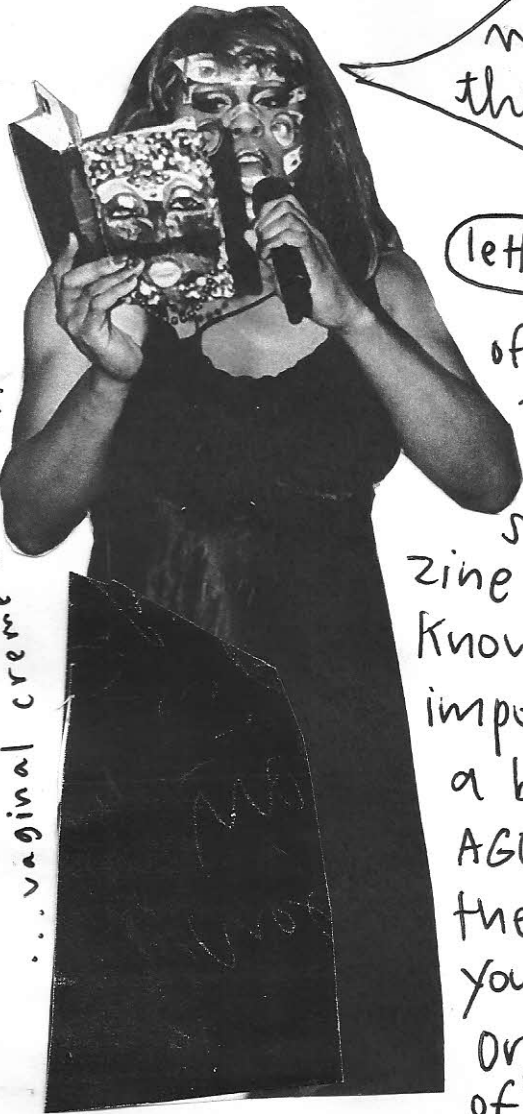
Miss Davis
says...

It's the person
who doesn't fit in
who eventually makes
the greatest achievement,
who has the outsider's
view of culture
that really
sticks.

letter con't...

of that I could trace back
to the earlier days of punk
rock. Even though I hadn't
seen a single video zine, paper
zine or performance, just to
know you existed was really
important to me. You showed
a bunch of videos at HOMO-
AGOGO and the one I remember
the most is the one where
you and your friend, Glenda
Orgasm, walk to the streets
of New York in drag, inter-
viewing women about this self-help book →

... vaginal creme davis...



FOLK/PUNK

the art of adee roberson

Not folk-punk, like the genre of music. It's more like the work of folk-artist Nellie Mae Rowe channeled through a black punk girl who listens to the Raincoats while she draws.

When I met Adee, she was making this cool looking new wave-inspired art with photocopies of tigers' heads and screen prints of wild horses sitting on top of florescent colored backgrounds of stripes and geometric shapes. Her pieces looked great and were really inspiring to me. She is a completely self-taught artist with so much fearless, stubborn ambition. She made me feel like if I had art in my heart, I should quit making excuses about how I can't do it cuz I'm not good enough, and just spit it out.

While she was living in New Orleans, Adee put on a hugely successful benefit DIY art show featuring art by herself and her friends. She was definitely taking it to the next level, but at the same time, I think she was looking to breath more meaning into her work. Adee had always been politically active, volunteering at women's health organizations and helping to organize the 2004 INCITE Conference (Women of Color Against Violence) in New Orleans. She finds great inspiration in history, particularly obscure Black history. She taught me about Queen Nanny and the Maroons of Jamaica, escaped slaves who banded together as early the 1500s and created their own free societies. She had been living in New Orleans for almost two years and was just beginning to be inspired by the celebratory sequins of Mardi Gras as well as Haitian-Voudou sequins art that she had been researching. Soon enough, sequins began to show up in her pieces as an homage to these art forms.

Along with photocopying, screening and painting, Adee would also use fabric in her art. Adee is the original shotgun seamstress, sewing together outfits, all cute, short and tight in just a few minutes flat. She brought her love of sewing to the canvas, stitching pretty pieces of cloth onto her paintings. Almost everything Adee used in her artwork was found or stolen.



Adee's art always had a lot of warmth to it. For a while, she was obsessed with the color peach. Everything she made had a peach background. Adee is originally from South Florida and before she moved to New Orleans, she lived in Pensacola, Florida a small town right on the Gulf of Mexico. Pensacola has some of the most beautiful beaches you've ever seen, with none of the super-commercialized boardwalk action to ruin it. White sands and warm, clear, green-blue water. You can see the influence of the beach in Adee's art. The water. She is a Cancer with a Pisces moon (both water signs). Her grandmother is Jamaican, so Adee always identified really strongly with the imagery of islands: palm trees, coconuts, pineapples, mangoes, water.

When I think about water, I think about the moon, dreams, the subconscious, the feeling of drifting and renewal. I would say that Adee's art is equally inspired by the intensity of Black people's experiences in this continent since we were brought her as slaves, as well as by the desire

to transcend the oppressive nature of that experience through fantasy, dreams, beauty, visions of love and the reclamation of our humanity. She believes, as I do, that the creation of art has been a liberating activity for Black people, and that there is no reason that the creation of art by oppressed people should not be considered a political act in and of itself.

Around the same time as the peach obsession, Adee started drawing these weird flowers with long, spiny petals. Each flower had about a dozen skinny, seemingly fragile petals twisting in the imaginary winds inside of her paintings. She also became very focused on family in her art. She included enlarged photocopied photographs of the women in her family: her mother, her sister, her grandmother and her aunts when they were young, with permed hair curled into mushroom-esque styles and with big 80s glasses. These photos would be set on top of her peach backgrounds, with those strange and beautiful flowers spinning around her auntie's heads.

GLASSES



The drawing of spiny flowers lead to lines. Lines and lines and lines. It kinda started tripping me out how many lines the girl was drawing. However, the drawing of these lines proved to be therapeutic for Adee. She talked to a friend who was an art therapist and they told her what the drawing of those lines actually meant. I won't tell you what the therapist told her because Adee would kill me if I did! But she told Adee to keep drawing the lines as much as she wanted or needed to. There was obviously something Adee's subconscious was trying to work out through the drawing of those lines. Now, there were no more flowers, just millions of tiny lines, lines, lines that eventually would create these seemingly three dimensional landscapes.



FRIENDS

In the winter of 2007, Adee spent a month in Providence, Rhodes Island completing an art residency at AS220. Adee spent thirty days living rent-free, making art and researching other artists. That's when she found out about Nellie Mae Rowe, a black lady folk artist (see next page for more info on her), who also used a lot of line work in her art. It was as if Adee had put herself through DIY art school. You could really tell the difference in her artwork after she returned. There was more confidence in it, it was neater and more refined in a way, but hadn't lost any of it's folk arty rawness. She designed the screen that our band New Bloods used to make our t-shirts, which were a huge hit in Portland, Oregon for about fifteen minutes. The screen was absolutely beautiful: carefully traced kitty cats (Adee's newest obsession) surrounded by all of those swirling lines and lines and lines with "New Bloods" lettered neatly near the top.

Adee's art has been such an inspiration to me, not to mention her zines and her music. Currently she is spending six months in Jamaica, once again at an art residency. Traveling to her life and her work.

Written February 2009

To see new art by Adee & to read her own thoughts & ideas on her work visit pineappleblack.blogspot.com

found out about KALUP LINZY last spring when I found New York. He had an exhibit at Studio Museum that consisted mostly of hilarious low-budget vid-
Harlem. First of all, Kalup Linzy always performs in go shorts. Videos, and he's a BLACK GAY MAN, but in his videos, about as serious a commentary on drag movies or gender as any of John
his sexuality or gender are. Linzy is clearly
race, early to have fun while
waters, just trying QUEER in his
just trying QUEER in his
being openly art.

My favorite
drag queens are the
messy ones with their
beards, shitty wigs and their
refusal to make their penises in-
visible. Kalup Linzy rocks this power-
ful version of femininity (& masculinity)
in some of his videos. In others, like
"Key to Our Heart," which is a spoof on a
classic, old-school black & white movie, he's done
up more like a high-class, middle aged woman.
His stuff is pretty raw as far as video pro-
duction goes, and his aesthetic seems
shapped by such down-to-earth in-
fluences as drag performances,
soap operas, performances,

Old talkies, and Whitney Houston. Seriously, "Melody Set Me Free" uses as many clips from Whitney Houston's self-titled debut as he could possibly fit in a 10 minute time span. That video, by the way, is about a young woman, Patience O'Brien (played by Linzy) who decides to run off to HOLLYWOOD to try to become famous despite her mother's wishes. Aside from his video shorts, he has ^{music} videos featuring original songs and, if I remember correctly, he had a little bit of visual art on display, but his videos definitely left the biggest impression on me.

KALUP LINZY



SILENCE = DEATH

VIDEO PERFORMANCE ARTIST

JACOB
JARRENS



Jacob Gardens is 24 years old from Flint Michigan who has recently moved to San Francisco. Earlier this year, he made his very first video performance art piece called "A Child of Oshun." In this interview, Jacob talks to Shotgun Seamstress about overcoming his initial fear of putting himself out there as an artist. He also discusses his queer, feminist and punk rock roots, his love for Yoko Ono, and how his belief in the occult influences his work.

SS: Well first, for those who haven't seen it, what is your first piece of video art about?

JG: I have been deeply inspired by various queer coming out stories. I wanted to make a short skit or performance piece about coming out as gay.

SS: Which queer coming out stories have you been inspired by? Whose stories were they?

JG: There is a really great book that I read a while back which is called *Gay Soul* and it is edited by Mark Thompson. He interviewed sixteen gay men and asked them various questions about coming out and life in general.

SS: In "A Child of Oshun," you play all of the different characters in the video. You play yourself, your mother and Oshun. Did you feel like playing women in your video was an outlet for your gender expression, or were you just having fun, or both?

JG: Kate Bornstein really did a great job of breaking down the difference between gender and sex for me in her book titled, My Gender workbook. I read her book when I was like fifteen and I was really starting to get into gender outlaws like the early all-girl Portland band the Third Sex or one of my favorite heroines, Patti Smith. Kate Bornstein writes about gender in a really practical, easy to understand way. In my piece I didn't really use a very noticeable voice change for the characters because I wanted to point out again that gender is a performance not something that is stagnant or finite. Kinsey said that our sexualities are on a continuum, he gave evidence of this in his bell curve study or something but I really agree with him on that and just because I am gay doesn't mean that I don't find women sexually attractive or that I could never have sex with a woman at some point in my life. I never have had sex with a woman and I really don't feel or see a need to because I love making love to men and having sex with men, but in all of my performance art and solo music I really would like to touch on issues of race, gender and sexuality and how these things can be so easily changed, even the color of our skin can be changed now and a perfect example of this would be Michael Jackson.

SS: Haha! Or the fact that skin bleaching creams are really popular in Nigeria. Sad but true. I wanted to talk to you about music. I love the music you used in your video. I'm a big fan of Yoko Ono's music and what Black punk kid didn't feel like they died and went to heaven after hearing ESG for the first time?

JG: I love ESG!

SS: Are you a fan of Yoko Ono's performance art? Would you count her as an influence? If so, how?

JG: Yoko Ono is one more artist who I can honestly say changed my life. Many people scrutinize homosexual men for having a "girly" voice and encourage us to "man" up, whatever that means. Yoko helped me to see that it isn't my job to make everyone fall in love with my voice. Tons of people, (especially heterosexual white men) are obsessed with disrespecting Yoko based on their relative "fact" that she can't sing and that she has a horrible voice. Not too many people are aware that before she met John she was a working feminist performance artist and one of the few feminist performance artists of color in the decade she started working in. I appreciate all of Yoko's art not only her music. I only have owned three of her albums, however I first fell in love with Yoko's performance art pictures from her cut piece. The talented and wonderful feminist visual artist Judy Chicago, did a tribute to her and other women artists in her exhibition titled, "The Dinner Piece." In Judy Chicago's piece every feminist artist that has been excluded and somewhat erased from art history is given a place at her table. I never has seen the actual dinner piece exhibit, but I have seen pictures of it and they are breath taking.

SS: What are some of the obstacles you had to overcome in order to put yourself out there and start making your own art?

JG: I'm currently still in college pursuing my BA in theater performance/ Women's gender studies and minoring in French/ Spanish. For a long time I thought that in order for me to perform, I had to have a BA or a BFA to be taken seriously. After our talks and thinking it over, I realized that I just needed to go ahead and make performance art and who cares if anyone takes it seriously or likes it. I've done very little live performance in my life, but I'm only twenty three so I guess there's still time. The biggest obstacle I have had has been myself and MTV for making music and performance look really hard, intimidating and costly. I have had to tell a lot of demons in my "mind" that I am good enough and smart enough to be seen and heard. I've had to remind myself that my ideas are not dumb but based in years of study that has not only come from an actual college setting but also from real live environments.

SS: This is why I wanted to talk to you even though you're not an "established artist." I feel like the hardest part is just getting started, you know?

JG: Yes, I do know what you mean, and I thank you for recognizing artists who are just starting out. Many people don't or won't.

SS: So tell us about those "real live environments" that taught you what you needed to know to make art.

JG: The first time I ever performed something that I had written was in 2004 in Philadelphia at this punk place called the CODE space. It was a short skit/workshop on guerrilla theater and street theater. Also I have just read many books on various subjects and had the privilege to talk to so many beautiful inspiring people who have taught me so many things. I really like the idea of oral learning.

So many authors have inspired me and helped me learn, too many to name. But as far as authors who have shaped my political views and worldviews I would have to say bell hooks, Luisah Teish, Andrew Holleran and other queer and feminist authors have really helped me.

JACOB GARDENS

SS: Luisah Teish*! I'm so glad you mentioned her because I wanted to ask you about your interest in the occult.

JG: I recently took a class with Luisah Teish in the bay area at this store called Ancient ways located in Oakland. The class was great and everyone should go visit Ancient ways if you are ever in Oakland CA. I have always loved the occult and witches and witchcraft. I like the idea of being able to change your life through the use of prayer, candles or incantations and affirmations.

SS: In your video, you reference the goddess Oshun. Why did you make that choice and how did you first get in touch with Afro-centric spiritualities?

JG: Oshun is an orisha of beauty and power. If by chance another young gay black kid watches my video and has Christian parents who reject him or her because of their queerness, I want them to know there are other options as far as deities or spirit guides go. The story of Jesus is not the only story that a person can find strength and comfort in and I wanted to relate that in my video. I first learned about Santeria and Vodoun when I was about eighteen and walked into my first botanica in Philly.

SS: Why'd you go to the botanica in the first place? What were you looking for?

JG: I had been to various occult shops before but I had never been to a shop that instructed people in the tradition of Santeria. When it comes to my spiritual beliefs I label myself an eclectic witch. I have not been initiated in Santeria or Vodun but I appreciate the religion.

SS: So you used to be a punk kid. Does your background in punk have anything to do with your present artistic aspirations?

JG: My background in punk was very brief but also very life saving. When I found punk groups such as Blatz or Bikini Kill I finally found an outlet for my anger at a society that wanted to make me feel inferior for being black, poor, and queer. Unfortunately, I found the punk scene too white dominated and felt that I wasn't always safe or welcomed at shows or punk spaces.

SS: What community did you turn to instead?

JG: Thankfully, I found visionaries such as Marlon Riggs, Audre Lorde and many other queer black writers and thinkers that spoke to me in a way that an angry white kid with a guitar just couldn't. I also am so thankful that I found you and other punk black and brown kids of color who have basically healed me in so many ways.

SS: I'm grateful to have met you too. I can't wait to see how your art grows and changes as you continue to make it.

* Luisah Teish is a black feminist witch who was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. She is the author of the book *Jambalaya: The Natural Women's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*.

Madivinez

a poem by Lenelle Moïse

Mommi
in the apartment i share
with the woman
i love, we have
a bright yellow bookcase.
used
as an arts altar. we shelve
crayons, watercolors, ink, paper
and glue for collages. i keep
my haitian kreyol-english dictionary
behind the colored pencils.

its red cover taunts me, daily.
i am often too afraid
to open it. i pick it up
once —
when i first got it — hungry
for familiar
words that could make me
feel home. i tried
to look up "lesbian"
but the little red book denied
my existence.

i called you, remember?

mommi how do you
say lesbian in kreyol?
oh, you said, you say madivinez
but it's not a positive word.

it's vulgar
no one wants to be
called madivinez.

it's like saying dyke.

but how can cruelty sound
so beautiful? madivinez.
sounds so glamorous. something
i want to be. madivinez?
my divine?
sounds so holy.

i thank you & hang up the phone
to repeat my vulgar
gift word
as i write it
into the dictionary,
next to ke, kreyol
for heart

glamorous, holy, haitian
dyke heart.
something i want to be.

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Thank You:

Senora, Takiaya, Candice, Bea,
Brontez, the City of New Orleans,
Mom & Dad, Nathan Jessee,
everyone who's read this zine &
passed it on, everyone who's written
me a positive letter and all of the
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★ next issue... back to the basics!!