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Brooklyn's Soldier Angel Inspires a Monument to Resistance

"Persistent Resistance" consists of a central speckled, decorative column that looks like a Rorschach ink blot that's been stretched into a pillar.

Seph Rodney, July 20, 2019



Installation view of Nicole Awai's "Persistent Resistance of the Liquid Land" (2018) in the *Alchemy* exhibition at BRIC House (photo © Jason Wythe)

With [Nicole Awai's](#) "Persistent Resistance of the Liquid Land" (2018) the viewer is offered a visually captivating installation *plus* the story of how the artist came to conceptualize the piece — which makes seeing it a doubly rich experience. "Persistent Resistance" is only one of the pieces in a show of seven artists titled [Alchemy](#), currently on view at [BRIC](#) in Brooklyn, but in its material evocation of something ethereal, it most compelled me to spend time with it.

Via the work's caption, Awai talks about encountering the image of a soldier, at the [Soldiers' and Sailors' Arch](#) in Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn. What stayed with the artist, she attests, is a crouching African-American male figure who "seems confidently poised, holding a gun ... yet calmly awaiting the action to come."



Nicole Awai, "Persistent Resistance of the Liquid Land" (2018) asphalt, resin, synthetic paper, graphite, horticultural charcoal, silk, nail polish, acrylic paint, and construction foam (image by the author for Hyperallergic)

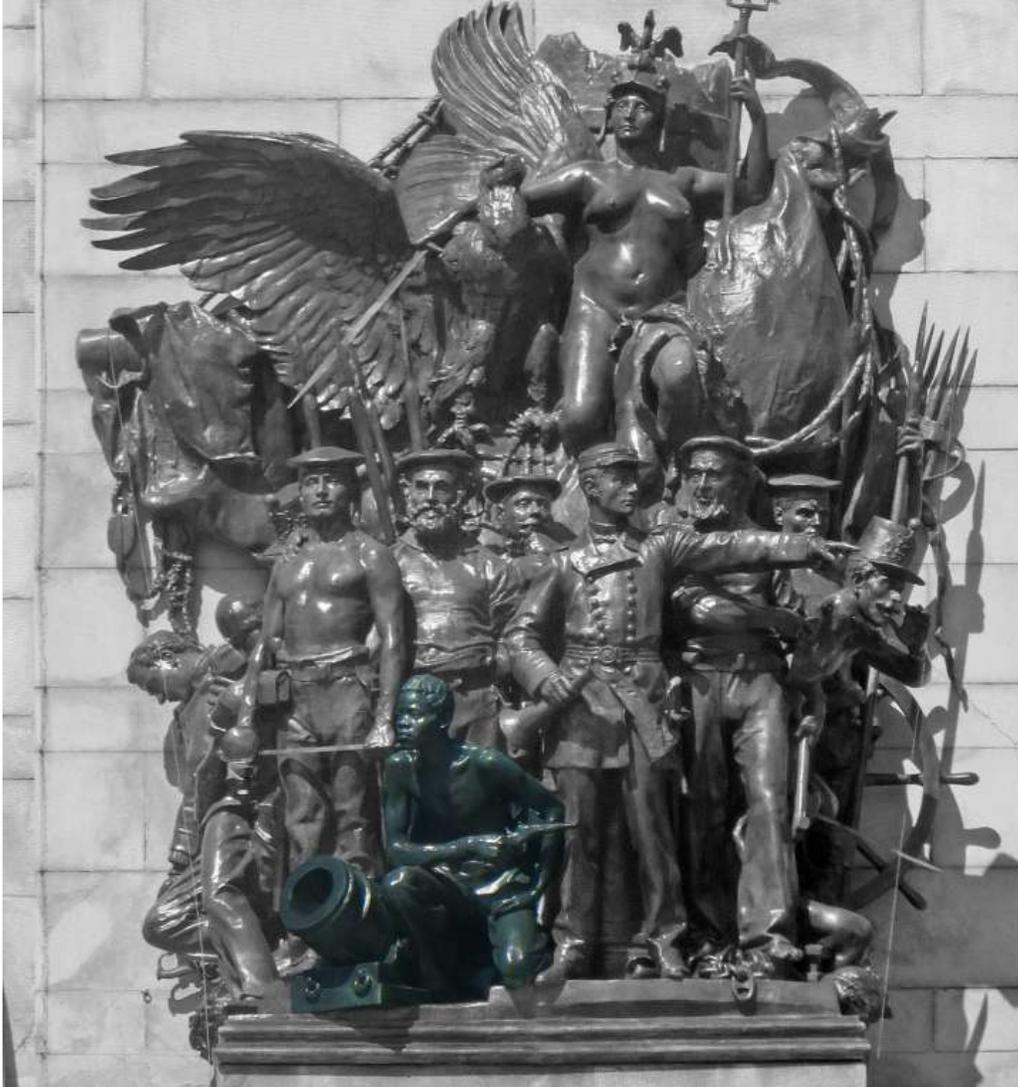
Awai relates that she walked past the figure "for years" never noticing him until she readied herself to leave for a residency in New Orleans. Then, when she did see and comprehend that poise, that readiness, she writes, "He came with me and has been with me since." There is much to be unpacked from that description of her encounter with that revenant from the past, and Awai does that unpacking by creating an abundantly lavish shrine made of materials one would never expect to find in a reliquary.



Nicole Awai, "Persistent Resistance of the Liquid Land" (2018) (detail) (image by the author for Hyperallergic)

Radiating out of a corner of the gallery, "Persistent Resistance" consists of a central speckled, decorative column that looks like a Rorschach ink blot that's been stretched into a pillar. Beneath it pooled on the floor, as if still in the process of cooling, is a pour of asphalt, resin, charcoal, nail polish over foam — lushly iridescent. Around the pillar, all over the two walls are repeating butterfly-like paper shapes in dark blue, black, and gray (with some of the smaller ones in a pinkish hue). They vary in size, but the larger ones have a gray-tone image of the crouching soldier in the middle of them. These are hybrid creatures, reimagined cherubim or seraphim that flutter and float awaiting their marching orders.

On second thought, "Persistent Resistance" may not really be a monument or memorial. It might be more like a wellspring. Awai's alchemic enchantment might be creating these floating spirit beings out of the tar and asphalt that has bubbled up from the earth. In this case, the work suggests that the spirit that enlivens this unique order of guardians also animates that faithful African-American soldier who still remains at his post watching for the battle he knows is coming.



A highlighted image of the black soldier that artist Nicole Awai noticed. (image courtesy [Eden, Janine, and Jim's Flickrstream](#))

The [exhibition Alchemy](#) continues at the [BRIC house](#) (647 Fulton Street, Fort Greene, Brooklyn) through August 12.

Rodney, Seph. "Brooklyn's Soldier Angel Inspires a Monument to Resistance." *Hyperallergic*, 20 July 2018. [online]