

History Is Rarely Black or White

Transcript: Damian Jöel

Hi, my name is Damian Jöel. I'm a multidisciplinary artist whose work is grounded in fashion exploration. Using that as a storytelling tool; intersecting it with media arts to tell stories about our past. But also exploring the convergence of past, present, and future. All right. So, *Songs of the Gullah* was my own exploration into one of the oldest West African ancestral groups here in the western hemisphere, the Gullah/Geechee Nation. What you're looking at right now, actually, is a triptych that really ekes out the three most salient points of the Gullah/Geechee lifestyle. Which is labour, their connection to waterways, and their spirituality. You know, while the garments have their own life, I thought it was very important to create something that had some kind of posterity. And so that's why I developed *Songs of the Gullah*, the fashion film. And, of course, it was a collaborative effort with my muses, I called them, and my tribe. Because I don't refer to them as just models because I think Industry sees them as bodies. And for me, I see them as living holders of archives. And so it's very important that when they were interacting with these garments and holding these stories, wearing them. That the bodies represented a kind of lineage and connection to the story. And this is why I chose, ideally, black models to inhabit these pieces and tell the story of this film. It was important that this wasn't an inspiration that I just took. There's this idea of extraction, constantly. And so I wanted to work in conjunction with and in collaboration with the Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, Queen Quet. Through my conversation with Queen Quet, we thought it very important to bring this back, and the focus to land and to environmental justice. And this is why the film is so grounded in them being barefooted, and touching the land in the sand, and going through bramble spaces and through trees. You know, just feeling and really getting reconnected with even the water. Because the water is so integral and central to us finding our way back. And so *Songs of the Gullah* is really just a story of how is it that after being ruptured and taken from a space, how do we find our way back? How do we find our way back physically and also spiritually?