

# Christian Noelle Charles

## REFLECTIVE JESTER: IT'S JUST A FEELING

Fri 17 September — Sat 16 October 2021

Tue-Sat: 11am-6pm // Free

CCA Glasgow presents REFLECTIVE JESTER: IT'S JUST A FEELING the first solo exhibition by Christian Noelle Charles.

The exhibition explores Christian's personal journey of self-love and an understanding of where her definition of self-love comes from. Divided into three rooms - representing definitive moments in her life and upbringing, each space is a direct connection to Christian's discovery of her self-expression and performance.

The starting point is in The Changing Room, a space to prepare, to look at one's face, put on make-up before a performance. We are introduced to Christian's printmaking techniques and Christian's selfies conveyed through the square frame of the familiar Instagram format. The space to understand her relationship to self-presentation, disclosure and authenticity is heightened by the exposure of our own reflection that reminds us that we are always self-evaluating, blended through an online space that reflects back.

The main space, the Dance Studio, is a site of significance for Christian, who grew up in New York, in a dance school specialising in African dance, musical theater and ballet where she was taught styles such as the Katherine Dunham technique that brought Caribbean and African influences of movement and expression into classical ballet. In the video installation, Christian is rehearsing and performing, combining footage of dance recitals between 2008 to 2012 and building up these layers of improvisation and expressive registers with selfie dance videos accumulated from 2019 to present.

The final room, Grandma's House, is a representation of Christian's childhood home in Queens, New York. This room is dedicated to her uncle, Alfred L. Henley aka Uncle Al who passed away last year at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. Uncle Al, the life of the party, was a major figure in her family and an important presence in Christian's life. Christian embodies the essence of her uncle through her wardrobe in the film. The improvisational character she presents is referent to the spirit and form of jazz in the lineage of legends such as Cab Calloway, Gladys Bentley, Nina Simone, Eartha Kitt and Charles Mingus. The scat singing (improvised emotive, meaningless syllables sung to a melody) of Cab Calloway's Wah-Dee-Dah and the Jester's wild laughter become expressional utterances to understand aspects of Christian's identity and presentation, woven through a family history embedded in each of the hand-picked furniture in the room.

The presence of the Jester trails through the spaces of the CCA. The form of the Jester defined as a professional fool or clown, is instantly recognisable and familiar. Seen especially at a medieval court, its role has now evolved into the modern-day entertainer. The Jester relates to Christian's experience as a performance artist and how categorisation has always been reductive and problematic, particularly in relation to Black entertainers. Christian makes this a

critical feature of the Jester: how a lack of interest in the Jester's depth, character and complexities is also indicative of the often oversimplified aspects of black life and its expressions. Referencing Nina Simone when asked what freedom meant to her, Christian's dialogue on the defining of her individual expression, the feelings and recognition of constantly constructing and reconstructing herself, by looking through the mirror, through the eyes of others, through tradition and family history becomes also a question about a practice of improvisation and expression towards a radical affirmation of herself.

"I fall in love with myself, and I want someone to share it with me, I want someone to share me with me." - Eartha Kitt

There are starting points that are unseen and embedded such as Charles Mingus, The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady and Christian's musical references that have influenced her movement, film and performance work. These can be heard on the playlist using the QR code.



**Christian Noelle Charles** (b. 1993, New York) is that Black visual practitioner currently living and working in Glasgow, Scotland. A Syracuse, New York native, Christian's work is an exploration of female representation and self-love in a contemporary world. She has acquired a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Cooper Union in New York City and a Master of Fine Arts at the Glasgow School of Art. She has presented works with Tramway in Glasgow, Scotland, and South London Gallery in London.

Christian takes inspiration from today's pop culture, modern performance techniques, and personal experiences. She also derives inspiration as a video performance artist from the relationship between performer and audience member. By using the mediums of printmaking, video, and performance her work demonstrates a celebration of self-love and individuality.

A MASSIVE THANK YOU TO:

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