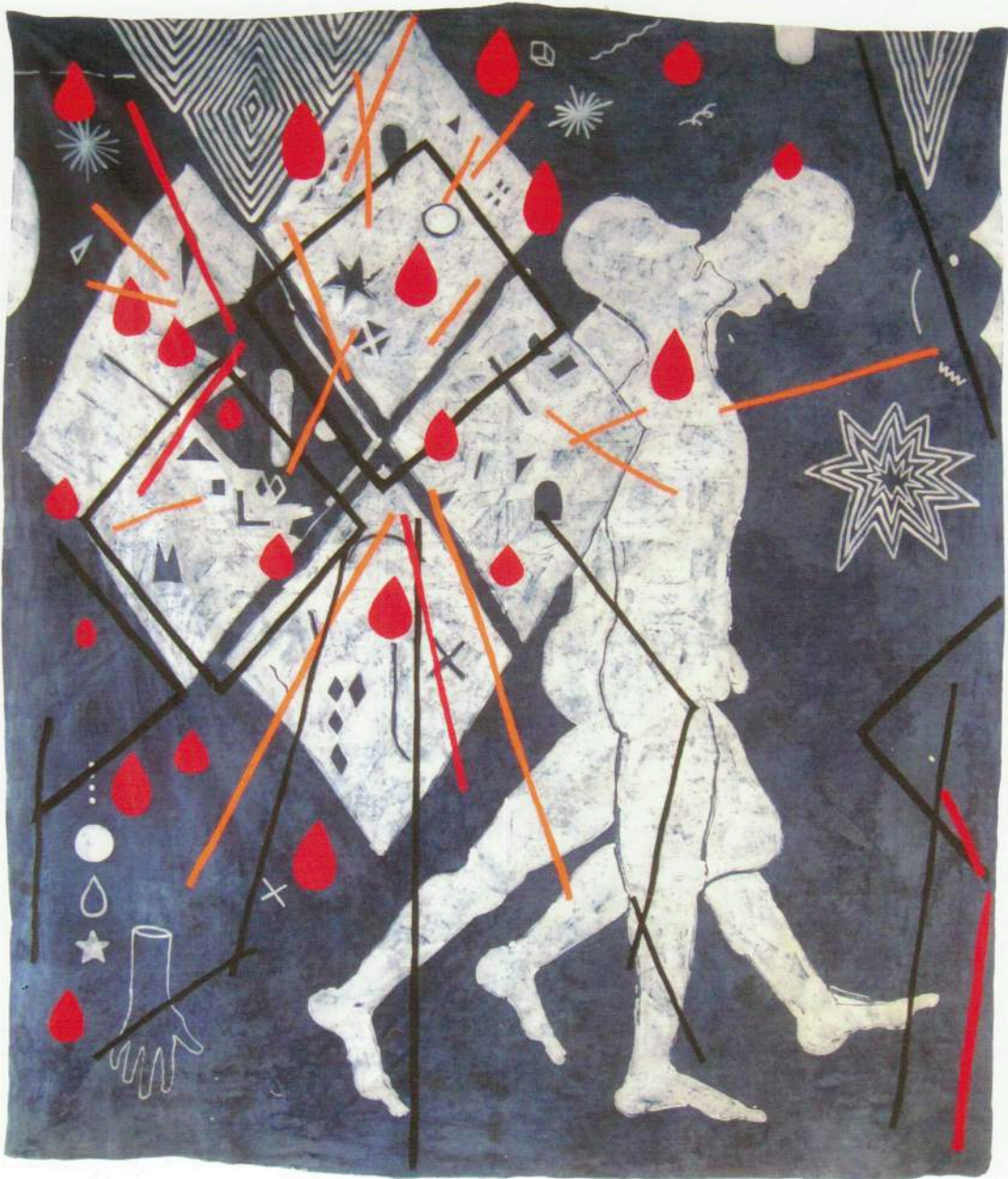




Jovencio de la Paz: Endless Flight

June 12 - August 1, 2015

Opening Reception: June 12, 6-9PM



above: *Endless Flight 1*
Batik (Natural Indigo) and appliqué on cotton, 113" x 88"
2015

cover image: *Endless Flight 4* (detail)
Batik (Natural Indigo) and appliqué on cotton, 113" x 88"
2015

Jovencio de la Paz: Endless Flight

by Kemi Adeyemi

Blue has long been an affect, color, metaphor, and strategy that people of color have mobilized to make do under sometimes impossible conditions. In his first solo show in Chicago, *Endless Flight*, Jovencio de la Paz activates the deep blue shades of indigo and near-oceanic greens to reimagine the expanses that people continue to traverse in search of different, if not better, lives on the other side of such blueness. De la Paz's own family's migration from the same Chinese and southeast Asian provinces that gave rise to the global trade of indigo are reflected in the panels that share their title with this exhibition. He subsequently uses traditional batik practices as a method for rehearsing new relationships to the varied conditions under which queer bodies of color are continually compelled to move.

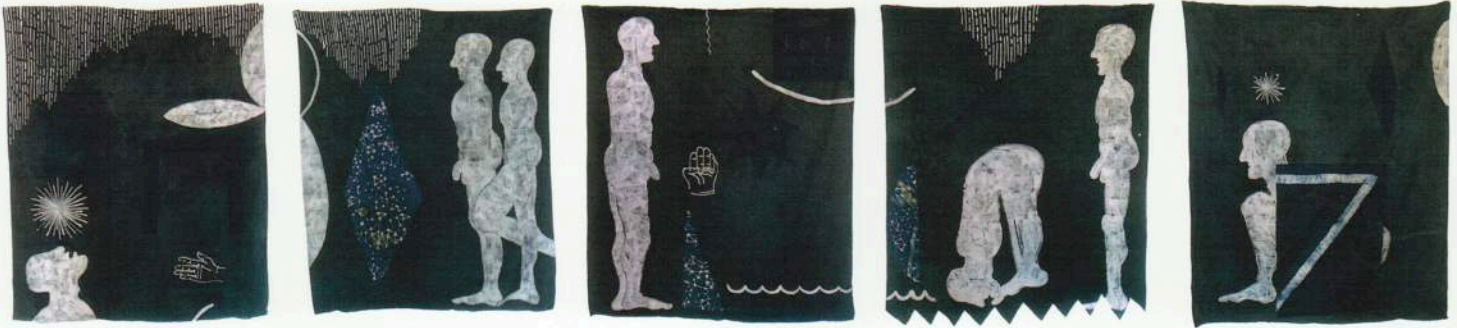
Batik is a laborious process, for which de la Paz applies lines and layers of dye-resistant wax to areas of cloth that remain white after being dyed in indigo that he has tended himself. It is a process traditionally done in Indonesia by guilds of post-menopausal women who can weather the odorous toxicity of the fermented dye. Working with this calculated process of decay and refusal, de la Paz crafts a personal mythology that performs the complex raced and gendered histories of color and textile in order to articulate new relationships between the personal, aesthetic, and political.

The panels in this exhibition are deeply grounded in indigo's fraught history as a seemingly passive commodity; indigo is often described as having been "brought" or "introduced" to the Western hemisphere by industrious Europeans centuries ago. These narrations of the dye's history efface

the millions of black and indigenous slaves who extracted the hue from the indigo crops they planted, cultivated, and harvested in the British, Spanish, and Dutch colonies throughout the modern day Carolinas, Central America, and in the West Indies. These markets could barely keep up with the sheer amount and superior quality of indigo produced in India, where, in the late 1800s, British and Dutch colonizers devoted millions of acres to the crop.

De la Paz uses *Endless Flight* to repopulate this history of indigo, crowding his panels with the undeniable presence of the erased human beings who have always made the world work. As he fills swaths of indigo with increments of white in the figures and symbols that amass in his batiks, he charts a path between and around the prospect of loss that is indelibly engrained in shades of blue. Not so much over or above melancholia, which implies conquering and moving beyond, but situating himself deeply within it.

De la Paz updates the repetitive patterns of traditional Indonesian batik in dark and often funny pieces such as *Untitled (2014)*, which offers a collection of cartoon-esque geometric symbols that transform into glimpses of body parts floating between wobbly star constellations and scenes of domestic despair. The urgent, agitated lines of these pieces gesture toward de la Paz's interest in comic-like illustration, yet they remain balanced by sweeping white planes that call up his adolescence spent exploring the soft atmospheres of graffiti. The playful, symbolic atmospheres found in these textiles complement the increasingly figural work of pieces like the *Endless Flight (2015)* suite. Here the sharp edges of bright orange and



Pentagonia, Batik and appliqué on cotton, 52" x 42" each, 2015

red appliqués, made from yards of mistakes, surround the vulnerable and sometimes awkward positions of figures in the midst of movement.

Indeed, these figures narrate four reasons that might cause someone to flee, and their presence in the exhibition literalizes the potentially catastrophic physical and psychic upheavals that root *de la Paz* in a larger Southeast Asian diaspora, throughout which queer bodies have been variously vaunted and suppressed. Read through the deliberately cut and fraying edges of the textiles, as well as the creases and folds that amass as the pieces hang off the gallery surfaces, these images ultimately remind us that *de la Paz's* batiks are not purely aesthetic, but exist as the space of lived experience.

Where the content of *Endless Flight* ranges from cosmic curiosities to more literal documentations of forced removal, *de la Paz's* overt interest in the physicality of disorientation critically pushes against our compulsion for the easy, minimalist, symmetrical displays of everyday life that fill our Instagram feeds. In *Endless Flight*, *de la Paz* provides a visual and phenomenological argument that challenges our reductive tendencies toward that which is the most consumable. The shades of blue that ghost the scrabbly lines wending around the shape of a toothy

grin, leafy tree, or burning fire tell us as much about the messiness of everyday life as they remind us of the radical, affective power of curiosity—of the desire to spend more time with the structural processes that produce things, ideas, and images.

De la Paz invites us to sit with the dizzying cacophony of his batiks because it is only by looking closer, longer, and from different angles that we can find sites of relief amidst the overbearing load of disaster these works also inculcate. In the process, *de la Paz* poses a trenchant critique of our expectations for certain kinds of order, expectations that typically require us to do away with levity, ambivalence, and ambiguity, to offer disorientation as a site where aesthetic imaginations and political possibility might intersect and emerge anew.

Kemi Adeyemi writes and lectures on the visual and sonic circulations of blackness and queerness in gentrifying city spaces. She has presented work at national conferences including the American Studies Association, EMP Pop, and Cultural Studies Association, and is in the process of co-editing the first collected volume of scholarship on queer nightlife. Raised in rural Minnesota, Kemi currently lives in Chicago, where she will complete her Ph.D. in Performance Studies from Northwestern in 2015.