

Queen For a Day
JoAnne McFarland
Library Visiting Artist, 2019

My focus as a BGC Library Visiting Artist has been on exploring how material culture protects the status quo, and in particular how the pursuit of status symbols is often the pursuit of safety from violence. As American society grows ever more polarized, how does material culture reinforce social hierarchies?

During the television show *Queen For a Day*, popular from 1956–1964, women recounted sometimes humiliating hardships in order to elicit sympathy from a live audience and receive a cache of goods that promised to make life easier. My *Queen For a Day* exhibition is a metaphor for how women sometimes embrace systems that demean them in order to gain protection from overt and covert aggression.

In America where wealth, whiteness, and maleness are still the ultimate luxury goods, there's a schism between how black women and white women confront white patriarchy. In this national moment, with women's autonomy once again under siege, how do we develop strategies for long term changes that benefit us all?

Among the articles and books I found at BGC, I discovered Andrea Dworkin's [Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics](#) which includes this passage:

Women try to survive inside the stone, buried in it. Women say, I like this stone, its weight is not too heavy for me. Women defend the stone by saying that it protects them from rain and wind and fire. Women say, all I have ever known is this stone, what is there without it?

Being a Visiting Artist at BGC Library has allowed me to take an in depth look at how inequality is engineered through emotional manipulation keyed to specific products, and think about how the things we long for, and the lifestyles we construct, can serve as a catalyst for growth and connection, rather than as a panacea against fear and shame.

As an example, I discovered recently that Richard Warren Sears and Alvah Curtis Roebuck outsmarted Jim Crow laws by creating a mail order catalogue that shielded black Americans from racist interactions with store owners in the American South. Many of the pieces in *Queen For a Day* include text elements and images from the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue of 1902.

Artist Bio:

JoAnne McFarland is the founder and Artistic Director of Artpoetica, a project space in Gowanus, Brooklyn that explores the intersection of words, visual art, performance, and installation. Along with Sasha Chavchavadze, she produced the SEDIMENT Project, a months-long, multi-venue art experience that began in March 2019 at PS 122 Gallery in NYC, and ended in July 2019 at Park Slope Local Café in Brooklyn. She is the former Exhibitions Director of A.I.R. Gallery in DUMBO, Brooklyn. Her numerous solo and group exhibitions include: *Mending* at 440 Gallery in Brooklyn, *Both Directions at Once* at KALA Art Institute in Berkeley, CA, and *The Black Artist as Activist* at The Corridor Gallery in Brooklyn. McFarland's artwork is part of the public collections of the Library of Congress, the Columbus Museum of Art, and Dynegy Inc. among others. Her previous poetry books include: *Said I Meant/Meant I Said*, a collaboration with poet Paul Epriple, *Identifying the Body*, *13 Ways of Looking at a Black Girl*, and *Acid Rain*. In

her work McFarland treats violence and creativity as diametrically opposed: each act of making thwarts violence's aim to destroy.