

Sarah Elizabeth Dirks  
flora fauna  
*what my ancestors wore*

*Home-Making as Self-Care*

Curling over absent shoulder blades, flora fauna's *what my ancestors wore* is a suspended impossibility. Appearing to float in midair, this fragmented vessel of chain mail hangs steadily, steeped in both medieval sensibility and bodily grace. An entrancing collection of trinkets and talismans swings mobile-like from below the armor. Light glistens in circles about the piece, flickering from link to link, alighting off a set of keys, quick to a coin and flaring up into the brassy letters of an old necklace. The piece feels intimate in its delicate preservation; like a chrysalis of self, it warps time to sculpt new space in which to shelter.

Grappling with themes of (in)visibility and (dis)connection as a non-binary biracial artist, fauna cites the insights of queer theorist Sara Ahmed as being conceptually significant within *what my ancestors wore*. Thinking spatially about objects and orientations, Ahmed intersectionally studies structures of emotions and lived experiences. Notably, Ahmed writes that loving one's home "is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one's body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as *overflowing* and *flowing over*."<sup>1</sup> This extension of the body into space as it relates to home-making (and home-loving) plays a critical role in fauna's work. In constructing this armored vessel of

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

protection, fauna plays with mixed cultural histories, engages in treasure collecting and works slowly, stretching time to make a home for themselves. Here, fauna allows a diffusion of the self so as to encourage healing and growth. Inspired by the words of Ahmed, *what my ancestors wore* ultimately represents home-making as a form of radical self-care.

Exploring notions of belonging, fauna spatially confronts elements of their Korean and European heritage. Beneath fauna's glimmering chain mail hovers a near-invisible foundation of *hanji* (traditional Korean paper). Historically renowned for its luster and resilience, the *hanji* draws a quiet parallel to the chain mail's fortitudinous nature. This subtle support system averts collapse - organically gripping the piece together. fauna describes the inconspicuous fundamentality of the *hanji* as a way of speaking to the disconnection they feel from their Korean culture. By juxtaposing visual elements of medievalism with the material use of *hanji*, fauna has fashioned a tangible home-shell retaining the shape of their own body. Accentuating each cultural component's strength and playing with themes of visibility and invisibility, *what my ancestors wore* marks the thoughtful creation of a nuanced space.

Below the web of chain mail and *hanji* hangs a dancing assemblage of personal tokens. These items further lend to the concept of making space for self-affection and self-care via the expansion of the body. Objects such as a miniature skull, a quatrefoil charm and a grey time-worn coin dangle between organic branch-like sculptures. Cited as

“collected treasures from the trash bins of history,”<sup>2</sup> these trinkets reflect the quiet construction of an abode. Carefully curated, they appear as love-gifts or romantic mementos with which one might decorate the walls of a home. Integrating aspects of personal bodily matter into a space invites true home-making, and fauna’s engagement in this process exudes care and attentiveness.

As Ahmed further asserts about home-making, “it takes time, but this work of inhabitation does take place. It is a process of becoming intimate with where one is.”<sup>3</sup> The artistic labour poured into fauna’s piece attests to these sentiments. Great time and effort went into weaving this armored vessel, such that fauna could be spotted putting chains together in lectures outside of studio time. fauna remarks, “I worked slow for this image to become a tangible form and learned a lot about myself and the sore spots I still need to tend to in the process.”<sup>4</sup> Such hours of creative energy play with time, allowing the artist to find Ahmed’s themes of comfort and intimacy in the space manifested therein. *what my ancestors wore* is accordingly a relic of patience and growth, embodying a desire to be at peace in the present and with one’s self.

Seeking to remedy detachment and disconnection, fauna has managed to knit themselves a vessel of shelter and love: a space of their own design in which to exist freely and fully. As a manifestation of cultural crossovers, treasure collecting and slow processes, it stands as a gleaming reclamation of self-identity and belonging. fauna has

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<sup>2</sup> sunrise\_map, “Photo of *what my ancestors wore*,” *Instagram*, December 11, 2019, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B5813KmgCdo/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> sunrise\_map, “Photo of *what my ancestors wore*.”

beautifully allowed themselves and their home to overflow and flow-over. This exploration of self-care remains especially profound as the globe heaves under ongoing racial and pandemic-based adversities. *what my ancestors wore* urges one to turn inwards in search of necessary personal tenderness. It draws upon the importance of finding slow spaces to hold one's self in, all the while radiating glowing sentiments of understanding, endurance and imminent healing.

## Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

sunrise\_map. "Photo of *Untitled*." *Instagram*. December 11, 2019. Accessed August 1, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B5813KmgCdo/>.