Artistic Expression

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Artistic Expression

By Eve Oishi with Jennifer Abod

Abstract

A section of a Special Issue of the Journal of International Women’s Studies dedicated to pioneering Black Lesbian Feminist scholar, activist, artist, teacher Angela Bowen, Ph.D. (1936-2018.) The special issue contains sample materials from Bowen’s archive, which will be housed at Spelman College, including writings, audio and video of speeches, and photos documenting her career as a dancer, her friendship with and scholarship on Audre Lorde, her activism on Black lesbian and gay issues, and her career in Women’s Studies, among other topics. This section focuses on Bowen’s artistic accomplishments from creative writing to the 1963 founding of the Bowen-Peters School of Dance in New Haven, Connecticut.

Keywords: Angela Bowen, Audre Lorde, Kate Rushin, Sharon Howell, Nancy Hughes, Kitchen Table Press, Black feminism, Black lesbians, Black lesbian feminism, queer archives, Black lesbian archives, queer archives, Black lesbian writers, Black lesbian literature, Black feminist archives, history of Women’s Studies, history of dance, Black dance history, Bowen-Peters School of Dance.

Although Bowen’s artistic expression and contributions are most notably recognized within the field of dance, she was also an active creative writer since childhood. Her interest in literary form made itself felt throughout her academic pursuits at Clark University, and in her career at California State University Long Beach, where she briefly taught and developed courses in the English department and regularly incorporated literary texts into her syllabi in Women’s Studies. Her creative writing often draws on her own life and provides a glimpse into her childhood in Roxbury, Massachusetts during the 1940s and 50s. The tensions between familial expectations and one’s own purpose are themes that appear early in her fiction. We have included “The Melody Lingers On,” Bowen’s first published short story, which appeared in her high school literary magazine as well as an excerpt from Folded Dreams, an unpublished play she wrote in 1988 at the age of 52.

When Bowen changed the course of her life from dancer to activist beginning in 1982, she began writing and giving readings of her fictional work, sometimes under the pen name Angelus. She also created cultural events featuring other Black women's writing as well as her own. Her short story “Cornelia’s Mother” was originally slated for publication in the Kitchen Table: Women of Color collection The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism edited by M. Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Albrecht, Sharon Day and Mab Segrest. As scholar Jennifer Gilley chronicles in her article, “Ghost in the Machine: Kitchen Table Press and the Third Wave Anthology that Vanished,” the volume never made it to publication with Kitchen Table Press, but a different

version of it was published in 2003 with Edgework Press as *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray: Feminist Visions for a Just World*, and Bowen’s story appears in this volume. Bowen’s short story collection *Out of the Blue: Aleta’s Stories* (Profile Productions) was solicited for publication by Kitchen Table Press, but the project also fell through, and Abod and Bowen self-published the collection in 2012. The story “History Lesson-1953” from that collection is included here.

This section also contains posters for a 1987 reading that Bowen did with poet Kate Rushin (as well as a photo from that period), an excerpt from her high school yearbook, and photos of her family, her wedding, and her early life as a ballerina.
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