

...the materials of history are not fixed; we can choose to refashion what we are given to reflect better our understanding of those historical references from our perspective now.

Sonia Boyce, interview with John Roberts, *Third Text* 1987

Being written out of history can happen to you. There is no safety in collusion with those who want to suppress our art and suppress our voices. They will turn their weapons on you and who will be here to help you if your contemporaries no longer exist?

Maud Sulter, *Feminist Art News* 1988

The Evidence of Things Not Seen (after James)

Here is my struggle she indicated.

The fourth wall is broken.

I move in closer.

The 'struggle' is manifest in the rendering of creases in a skirt, though I'm not sure that Walker's reservation is about the skirt's technical depiction or its translation in red Conte pastel and pencil.

Red.

Its chromatic variance and presence is so primordially evocative, carrying us from birth to death and other firsts in-between. This is the first time Walker has deployed red in her portrayals of black servicemen and women, interpreted from photographs documenting their engagement with warfare during the first and second World Wars.

Walker's temporary studio is the gallery and thoroughfare to other spaces in the building. Exposed in residency mode, the artist takes hold of her space differently, recovering what were previously one-to-one conversations with her subjects, who emerge progressively and monumentally on the interior planes of the studio walls.

Looking at them, her subjects' appearances seem to draw out and define in the mind's eye axial lines across demonstrations of 'support' represented within that transitional space; architecturally, the walls and ground define spatial boundaries and circumscribe movement. Evidential source materials lie around in the form of reference copies of photographs retrieved from archive visits attesting to the active participation of African and Caribbean servicemen and women. Also around the studio are partially wrapped, bubble-shrouded framed works resting on foam pallet protectors, etchings spaced and laid out on tables and protected by semi-opaque sheets of paper. All are waiting to reveal a perspective about these allegiances to the colonial Motherland alongside the newly forming drawings.

I pick up a hand mirror and search out the reflection of a soldier drawn on un-stretched canvas taped to a wall in the adjacent room, leaning against a pedestal almost the same length as him. Portraiture assists as a mnemonic device. Walker's commitment to her subjects' memorialisation counters a systematic amnesia of the roles they played in these British/World events. Walker's act is about justice to their memory. 'They' came to fight for a pre-existing and yet to be born 'Us', communities of 'us' divided on the lines of amnesia or ambivalence as to how to connect with these facts that return larger than life.

The scaffold tower wheels in and out of the space at different intervals; leveraging the height and bearing the weight and labour of the artist—conversations transferring and coordinating attentively between mind, muscle, hand and eye. Embodied research in performance, figures appear and simultaneously disintegrate to form abstractions of dusty spray, settling in some places as almost linear red or black ledges edging the wall and floor. In some areas these non-representational markings are disturbed by the occasional footprint or ghost of an extension cable tracing the event of movement. Incidentally, the presence of these additional forms temporarily participates in the larger pictorial conversation—metaphorically they too speak to the blind spots, partial wipeouts and ghosting of bodies embossed into the works on paper, as suggested by techniques that have become part of Walker's visual vocabulary. What is not there, seemingly invisible in proximity or incomplete in detail is just as telling as what is represented, and these ideas carry through to the wall drawings that are resolved as unfinished.

The ensuing gestures are not actually the last. All has not been said or done.

An asterisk suggests that a note needs to be taken of something. That's almost the shape invoked in my mind when looking at the initial wipe-marks made by Walker on one of the soldiers—a black asterisk obliterates his head. In this moment, you can't separate this graphical violence from the real time event in its past and present tenses. We approach each wall drawing knowing what needs to happen and I am complicit, wanting to understand what Walker feels as creator and now destroyer of her work. My hands are streaked from the wet sponge too, and what is now a deeply understood coming to terms with and understanding of impermanence for Walker, for me there's loss. Over a few hours, a perspectival field of carnage has arisen. This was the latent drawing underneath those figures, this is the memorial left to work in the mind that commits you to an ongoing conversation.

Adelaide Bannerman 2018