

On seeing beyond what's in front of you



Artist JOJO ABOT discusses the importance of believing in your work, the value of not being in a silo, and anchoring yourself in intention.

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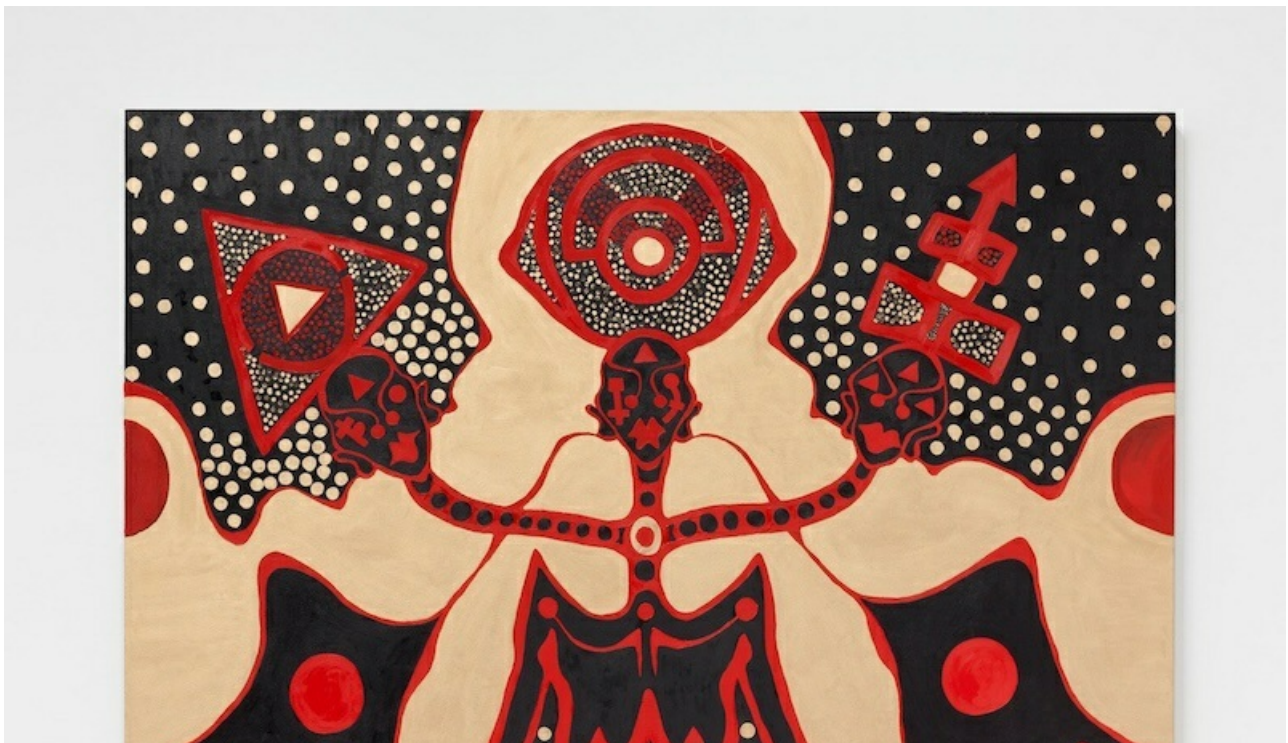
As told to Katy Diamond Hamer, 1652 words.

Tags: [Art](#), [Performance](#), [Music](#), [Collaboration](#), [Process](#), [Identity](#).

What is the catalyst for your artwork?

The work really is anchored in enticement/provocation, into imagining the everyday application of the principle of the Divine Feminine, which operates in a certain state of flow that I believe the world moves in right now. So it talks about masculine rigidity and how forms of leadership refuse to see the many paths to resolution or harmony and instead choose destruction. The feminine principle can reawaken our understanding of our need for sustainability, accountability, transparency, community, spiritual well-being. We need to create systems that support that.

How can this philosophy be applied to the tangible: architecture, design, education, how we eat, politics, and the church or synagogue? How can we affirm life?





JOJO ABOT, *Ta Kpe Kpe*, 2020, oil on canvas, 110 x 74 in. (279.4 x 188 cm)

As you speak about harmony, I picture a spherical shape, a container, but also unending. In the realm of the exhibition and possibilities, how did you decide what to make specifically since you have an interdisciplinary practice?

There is a philosophy of mine called Message over Medium, which offers a release from the chokehold of these linear ways of being. With emphasis on the Divine Feminine principle, there is room for all of it. The medium is more so devoted to the message rather than the message pushed through the material. That guides a lot of my creative process.

To say I choose the work would be quite ballsy, and I'm a ballsy person, but I can't take credit where credit isn't due. I think that I allow it, the work—even that word "work" sounds like something within the constraints of capitalism—I allow the expression to be, I allow the birth to happen. The figures that I make are everything and nothing.

Not only do you use objects, but you also utilize vocalization and the poetry of language. One of the things I've always appreciated about audio or an interruption of space, is that as breath enters the space, it becomes an invisible sculpture. Can you speak on the malleability of the voice and your use of sound?

"A GOD OF HER OWN MAKING" was introduced to the world through the form of an opera. The opera is minimal in its presentation, but expansive in its exploration of spatial sound. We worked with about 190 speakers at a venue in Brooklyn, and the initial inspiration was where *woman meets machine*. We thought: If sound could be expanded upon to move in certain ways with the use of technology, what would happen? It was really exciting to sit people within this type of installation.

To answer your question [about the malleability of voice and my use of sound]: How far, how close, does it feel? Is it circulating, lifting between your feet and your crown, staying within your chest, or does it stay behind your back? I love that because the medicine can be directed in a whole other way, an invisible yet potent dialogue.

For this exhibition we did an all-acoustic version of the opera. With sound, people can walk away with it. People can take fragments with them whether it is embedded in their DNA, shows up in a dream as part of their spiritual code or they might find themselves humming it. It's something that can belong to all of us and none of us at the same time.



JOJO ABOT, *Kpo Nkunyeme*, 2016, bogolan, acrylic, yarn, 63 x 42 in. (160 x 106.7 cm)



JOJO ABOT, *Dzidzor (Joy, Happiness)*, 2023, textile, acrylic, clay, 63 x 42 in. (160 x 106.7 cm)

Can you talk about the title of the exhibition, "A GOD OF HER OWN MAKING"?

"A GOD OF HER OWN MAKING" speaks to a sense of audacity, a sense of self autonomy, self-activation, and personal responsibility. I believe/d God to be in many ways an active invitation to practice certain values that we aspire to embody or have been shown to us. What does this look like in action, not as a myth?

That exploration leads to how can this [show] be an exploration of the personal which ties into the collective. How do I know that I will participate? I believe that God can remain a myth or be an active force, that is in essence the collective, the whole, the harmonious thread. The more we operate from this place the more we realize that God doesn't exist only on a Sunday, Saturday, or a Friday, God exists every day, every moment. So we can challenge ourselves to show up as the embodiment of this thing that we offer so much devotion to through our different religious and spiritual practices or the absence of it.

In a bit of a nutshell, the title came from ownership of this [ideology]. I've always believed in my work since the beginning and believed that connection to the self is an integral part of our connection to the whole, also knowing that wholeness is an ever-evolving space—to offer oneself grace. We are all God's of our own making.

This gives me space to think of the Divine self..if God can be thought of as an interior space, there is a purity of this space and being.

It is the "I Am." The "I" can be a contribution to a whole or a part of the alchemy.

What is your relationship to, if any, the viewer, those present in a space, specifically during a live performance?

I think that the dialogue between the "performer" and "performance" is a tricky one. If you become too focused or a slave to the audience, you can lose the intention of what you brought to offer. I remain mindful to be as impactful as possible with my messaging; however, I won't lose myself in order to appease my audience. I trust that they have the capacity if not in the present, in the future, to process what is happening. I can't carry more than the offering in any given moment.

I know that you've collaborated with other artists. What is your relationship to collaboration?

A large part of my work can be very isolating. About 80% of my practice is contemplative, so I spend a lot of time in thought. Coming out of that to witness others is essential, to have a more holistic perspective. So when I am in collaboration, dialogue, or in the efforts of others, I am able to see myself. I'm able to affirm that I am not alone in the desire for a more harmonious world. And I'm reminded that the divine has gifted us with so many incredible gifts. It's important to not be in a silo. I'm not perfect at it, but some of the greatest teachings to have emerged through collaborations have been trust.





JOJO ABOT, *Weight of the world*, 2023, clay, shells, wood, paper, foliage, metal, 34 x 7 x 8 1/2 in. (86.4 x 17.8 x 21.6 cm)



JOJO ABOT, *Three heads are better than one*, 2023, clay, foliage, metal, 52 1/2 x 17 x 17 in. (133.4 x 43.2 x 43.2 cm)

You seem to have such a strong iconic connection to self, what allowed you to access this while also entering a realm of sharing with others?

I think that perhaps in some ways I take it for granted, Self, spirituality, and community are the three anchors of my curiosity. I was always curious because I was always surrounded by spiritual people who denied the self or separated the self from the divine. The experience was confusing and disconnecting for me. What I'm able to do is not a lack of conviction, I have a strong sense of conviction and I am devoted actively to practices that liberate my mind and soul and amplify a state of love on a core, cellular level.

The truth is that if you are anchored in an intention, you are connected to the people, places, and things that one, need affirmation, or two, want to pour life into the affirmation or are unaware of that life and energy. The message and intention must meet at the impact point and can be carried forward.

That's how we are able to share ideas, possibilities for a better world, inspire dreaming, and provoke critical thought. We need to reach with something. It doesn't have to be a piercing that stabs them, it can be a whisper since oftentimes that is the most effective. When they are ready, if ever, they will sit with you at your table of perspective.

I love that, "sit with you at your table of perspective." It's really strong.

And they're not obligated.

It makes me wonder..what does the table look like?

Exactly! What do you want it to look like? Is it welcoming? It's is terrifying, alienating, warm? We all need to set that table. To solve the world's biggest problems we have to be able to see what is beyond in front of us. We have to have foresight, we have to bear it. It's not just accessible to creatives and artists, it has to be available to all of us. We urgently need that especially from the most rigid of minds, those who have forgotten to ask, "What are the possibilities here?"

JOJO ABOT Recommends:

Love

Community

Listening

Conscious evolution

Good food

True and actionable freedom and liberty for all



‘A GOD OF HER OWN MAKING’ installation, photo by Robert Wedemeyer

Name

JOJO ABOT

Vocation

artist, musician, healer, alchemist

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JOJO ABOT