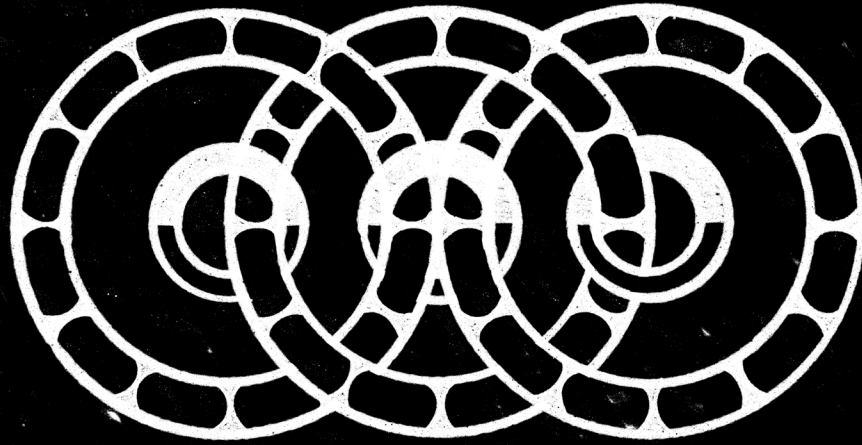


# GALLERY AFERRO

## *Onward Upward Towards the Light*

Curated by Jordan Mason Mayfield



Anjali Benjamin-Webb, *Death Chart*, acrylic paint, 24x36, 2021

**Sep 29 - Dec 21, 2023**

**Gallery Aferro**

**Eleta J. Caldwell and Rodney M.**

**Gilbert Memorial Gallery**

**73 Market Street, Newark**

### **OPENING RECEPTION**

September 29th, 2023

6pm - 9pm

### **GALLERY HOURS**

Wednesday - Saturday

12pm - 6pm

and by appointment

## *Onward Upward Towards the Light*

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Anjali Benjamin-Webb is an interdisciplinary visual artist, writer, and death doula based in New York City. A descendant from a long line of Black and Eelam Tamil revolutionaries who survived generations of state-enacted violence against all odds, their art reckons with violence, loss, and absence in order to connect with the conditions of our living. Their practice spans print, time-based media, and sculptural installation, using natural materials, the body, and space to give form to things felt but unseen. Their art is a tribute to the senses.

In addition to their work as a death doula in community with Death for the Living, a death education and death equity collective providing end-of-life planning for those who are systematically denied a "good death" by the inequitable structures under which we all live, Benjamin-Webb is also the founder of Palmyra Projects and has collaborated with organizations on health equity, artistic freedom, decolonial education, reparations, human rights, and transitional justice.

[www.aferro.org](http://www.aferro.org) | [www.aferrostudios.org](http://www.aferrostudios.org)  
73 Market Street, Newark, NJ | 973.353.9533  
Wed - Sat 12-6pm

## Visit

73 Market Street, Newark, NJ  
Wednesday - Saturday 12-6pm  
and by appointment.  
aferro.org  
aferrostudios.org

## Contact

973 353 9533  
info@aferro.org

Gallery Aferro  
Ironbound Station  
PO Box 5668  
Newark, NJ 07105  
USA

## Mission

The mission of Gallery Aferro is to function as a platform for the exchange of ideas in service of advancing human dignity and beauty, with a focus on visual arts as the vehicle, proudly located in Newark, NJ.

## Accessing The Gallery

Gallery hours are listed above, come by for a visit! Gallery Aferro is a street level store front gallery and is wheelchair accessible. If you need special assistance, requests, or desire additional information about accessibility, please email our ADA Coordinator, Candace Nicholson, at [cnicholson@aferro.org](mailto:cnicholson@aferro.org). We believe art is absolutely for everyone and are very happy to accommodate anyone's needs but please give us one week's notice for any significant arrangements that will need to be made at the gallery. If you require large print press materials, please let us know 48 hours ahead of time.

## Sponsors

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our funders, sponsors and the individual donors who make our programs possible. The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The City of Newark, and RBH Group.



Anjali Benjamin-Webb, *The fading of who they were* [detail], digital poster print, 14x21, 2023

In *Onward Upward Towards the Light*, interdisciplinary artist and death doula Anjali Benjamin-Webb creates a meditative and immersive space for contemplating death. For their first solo show, the artist experiments with video, performance, painting, and sculpture. Through their use of time-based media, Benjamin-Webb calls attention to the illusion of temporality and how humans rationalize the expanse of human life. Their practice calls attention to process and not the final product, mirroring Benjamin-Webb's invocation to surrender oneself to the natural events of life, and eventually, to death.

By empowering people in their last moments, Benjamin-Webb works against colonial and hegemonic logics that regard certain communities as already dead, especially those who regularly witness violent death. Their work echoes historian and theorist Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics," or a nation's ability to assert whose life is worth living and who must die to uphold the power of that nation.

This concept is also reflected in historian and sociologist Orlando Patterson's argument that enslaved Black people were "socially dead" or that they were "alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth" accorded to those considered as human. Looking at Benjamin-Webb's background as a Black and Eelam Tamil artist, one can envision the afterlives of enslavement and genocide entangling with present systems of oppression and hegemony.

In the wake of necropolitics and social death, Benjamin-Webb asserts the importance of futurity and taking agency over one's death. How do you welcome both life and death when society does not recognize your animacy? These sentiments are reminiscent of Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival." In the poem, Lorde declares that "we were never meant to survive." How can we embrace futurity in the midst of social death?

Visual culture scholar Tina Campt reminds us that "the grammar of black feminist futurity" insists on the "future real conditional" or "a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must" to ensure our survival. Black feminist futurity accepts time as something socially constructed and moldable. Benjamin-Webb's work illuminates that time is human-made, and doesn't express the temporal fullness of existence, both during life and after death. Time spirals, corkscrews, moves backwards at times, and creates infinite forms beyond our comprehension.

The exhibition title reminds us that light and darkness have a symbiotic relationship, or they only exist in the other's presence. Benjamin-Webb's work disrupts simple binaries of light/dark, white/black, and presence/absence. One cannot be expressed without the other, meaning that the existence of one calls attention to the other. Their art and experience as a death doula is informed by ancestral knowledge and veneration, tapping into diasporic traditions of becoming part of a greater whole. This exhibition is an invitation to reflect on our mortality, to discover our attachments to living, and to plan our good deaths.