

**For Immediate Release:
SHENEQUA | STILL HERE**

September 9 - Oct 17, 2021

How we feel, matters. Meaning: it creates matter. It assumes form. Pain has the potential to change the very physicality of the brain. Culture, society, discourse, language, tradition. They are physical processes. Biological, even. —Alok Vaid-Menon

High Noon is pleased to present Chicago-based artist **SHENEQUA's** NYC solo debut, **Still Here**. An Afro-Caribbean multi-disciplinary textile artist, SHENEQUA's sculptural wall tapestries combine the labor-intensive skills of a traditional Ghanaian loom and floor loom with Black and African hair styling. Her incorporation and subsequent deconstructing of each practice creates an open system of cultural and generational conversation on identity, diaspora, sisterhood, and sacred space. The work transcends its formal and material properties; braids and patterns merge into each other poetically and painterly, and structure gives way to the organic, like flesh in armor. Comprised of both the choreographed action of the loom and the performative space of a Black Hair Salon, the work leans into the ideas of feelings as corporeal and labor as a marker of time.

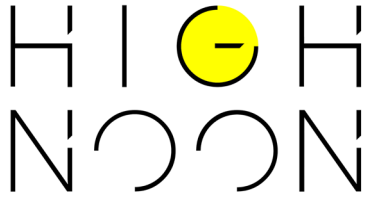
The title, **Still Here**, references perseverance but also delves specifically into the stages of grief, which also perseveres, and which SHENEQUA states is a "constant condition of being a Black woman in America." Tracing the structural system of the tapestries invites the viewer through a non-linear patchwork of memory as well as its limitations. More than autobiographical, the memories are also part of a system that SHENEQUA shares with Black women.

"We're always justifying our bodies," she says. "What we wear, how we dress, how we carry ourselves, always needing to be conscious of how we're styled. Everything has to be up to par with how our hair is done, and that too is consistently scrutinized. If I'm going on a corporate job interview, my hair has to be presented a certain way, and there are debates in schools about what constitutes 'appropriate' hair for Black kids."

Walking down any street in Brooklyn abounding with hair salons at 3am contains worlds within worlds alive with activity and community. Braiding, Bantu knotting and plaiting— all hair techniques that make their way into SHENEQUA's sculptures— carry with them the bonds of sisterhood, stories shared, and rites of passage. Similarly, In Ghana, where she spent a three month long residency learning the alphabet and vocabulary of traditional woven patterns, identity and meaning are embedded in garments. For SHENEQUA, the network of journeys her work addresses shifts from the intimate to the universal, carrying with it the narrative tradition inherent to textiles in both Western and Non-Western cultures, trading their religious association for secular spirituality and sociopolitical allegory, making the unseen seen and the mundane extraordinary. The etymology of the word "weave" c. 1200 is to move from one place to another.

The palette in **Still Here** is dominated by blacks and earth tones, punctuated by strands of red, blue, and purple— the primary colors representing anger and depression, with the secondary color representing bargaining. Gold, a fourth color, representing at its highest form enlightenment, is used in combination with this palette to create layered meanings about wisdom through pain. In **Cowrie me Black and Gold**, the precious metal in combination with black signifies luxury and wealth. Cowrie shells, a symbol of womanhood, were also used as currency in Western Africa, different species of which were introduced through the slave trade. Ghanaian cedi is named for the shells, which drape in rows along the bottom left of the work, their openings rowed with angled forms echoing the range of geometric patterns which striate the length of the tapestry. In both this work and its predecessor, **Cowrie me Black**, braids and knots wind through the structure like brambles, as steadfast as change, and as invasive as trauma.

Other works are more 3-dimensional and confrontational. In **Red Wine Drip**, large swaths of woven planes, like tendons, create a densely layered but meticulously crafted object— part architectural, part portraiture, like a soft take on Jack Whitten's *Black Monolith* series. **Long Swoop Black** is decorative, seductive, and menacing, referencing a mixed vocabulary of Tribal adornments. A crown of red and blue emerges from the center playing the role of self-portrait and paying homage to



SHENEQUA's Chicago-based stylist, Derricka Crumb, whose designs on her own crown she takes inspiration from. She explains, "The use of synthetic braiding hair and high quality blends in conversation with a more 'kinky' puff hair speaks to the Black Hair Salon and my upbringing around what's 'good' and 'bad' hair." The differing material operates as a push and pull of positive and negative space, with SHENEQUA allowing for the material to dictate its own form in certain places, and tightly render the weaving in others.

Many small actions and gestures culminating into something greater than the sum of its parts is integral to SHENEQUA's body of work— her belief in organizing and community at both micro and macro levels and the power of combined experiences. It's also, along with the bold declaration of her name, demonstrative of using her artistic practice to resist oppression through self-love. Using the discussion of grief, particularly grief experienced in isolation, ***Still Here*** taps into survival and proliferation. Through her material, SHENEQUA transubstantiates a spectrum of tradition rooted in technique into a love letter to Black women, referring back to the machines and bodies that the work is built upon.

SHENEQUA received her Masters of Design in Fashion, Body, & Garment at School of the Art Institute of Chicago under the mentorship of Nick Cave and Liat Smestad. Her solo exhibition debut, *Woven Narratives* was on view at Haw Contemporary (Stockyards) in Kansas City, MO in 2019. Recent group exhibitions include *Performing Labor* at Patricia Sweetow Gallery in San Francisco, CA, *The Space We Grow Into* at Woman Made Gallery in Chicago, IL, and *Mane N' Tail* at The Luminary in St. Louis, MO. Her work has been featured in publications such as *American Craft Magazine*, *the Kansas City Star*, and *less than half*. Notable lectures include the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, and the Surface Design Association. She was the 2014 recipient of the Windgate Fellow of the Center for Craft and the 2017-2018 recipient of the inaugural YoungArts Daniel Arsham Fellowship.

An all-day opening will take place Thursday, September 9th from 12 - 7pm. Please email or call ahead if you'd like to reserve a preferred 20 minute time slot. A full color, limited edition catalog of the exhibition will also be published during the exhibition's run. For additional information about the exhibition or **High Noon's** programming, please contact Jared Linge at jared@highnoongallery.com or call 760.519.1956.