



ANCIENT WHISPERS

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Poetry by Obii Ifejika

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A people without the knowledge of their past history,
origin and culture is like a tree without roots.

~Marcus Garvey



Ancient Whispers tells the story of an imagined encounter between a young, modern woman and her archetypal female African ancestor. A photographic narrative about the young woman's journey to self-discovery, it is filled with uncertainty and mystery but ends with the creation of a meaningful link to a powerful, enlightening past.

At the beginning of the journey, the young woman is lost- unclear about her life choices and how to find the strength to make and follow them. She is vulnerable yet curious. *Ancient Whispers* transports her into a psychological realm, one I've attempted to make non-physical by keeping the images' environments as minimal as possible while still retaining a feeling of powerful forces at work. In that realm, my protagonist meets an ancient, pre-Colonial queen: a strong, fearless, confident woman who is comfortable with her identity and fulfilled by her own accomplishments. Though their respective worlds could not be more distant in time or place, as the narrative progresses the younger woman is inspired by her ancestor's example, and embraces her fearless and confident spirit. This in turn gives her a road map with which to navigate her own future.

In creating this project, I relied heavily on gesture to advance the narrative. I chose not to use facial expressions for this purpose, in order to keep the story from being too much about individual identity. The gestures are intended to symbolize such feelings and experiences as uncertainty, discovery, amazement, and revelation.

The project was inspired by a word from the Akan tribe of Ghana, *Sankofa*. It means, "Go back and fetch it," and has a highly metaphorical significance. It expresses the importance of returning to one's "roots" to learn important life lessons that can be applied to one's own future. I also drew a lot of ideas from my own childhood as a multicultural African, including the stories and fables my father used to tell my siblings and I. As I've recently watched my father pen his own memoirs, I've hoped that someday I too can tell my stories and experiences to those who come after me. In fact, I would like this narrative to serve as an inspiration not just to people of African ancestry but to anyone struggling with his or her own identity and destiny- an encouragement to them to take a look back and glean wisdom from those who have come before us.

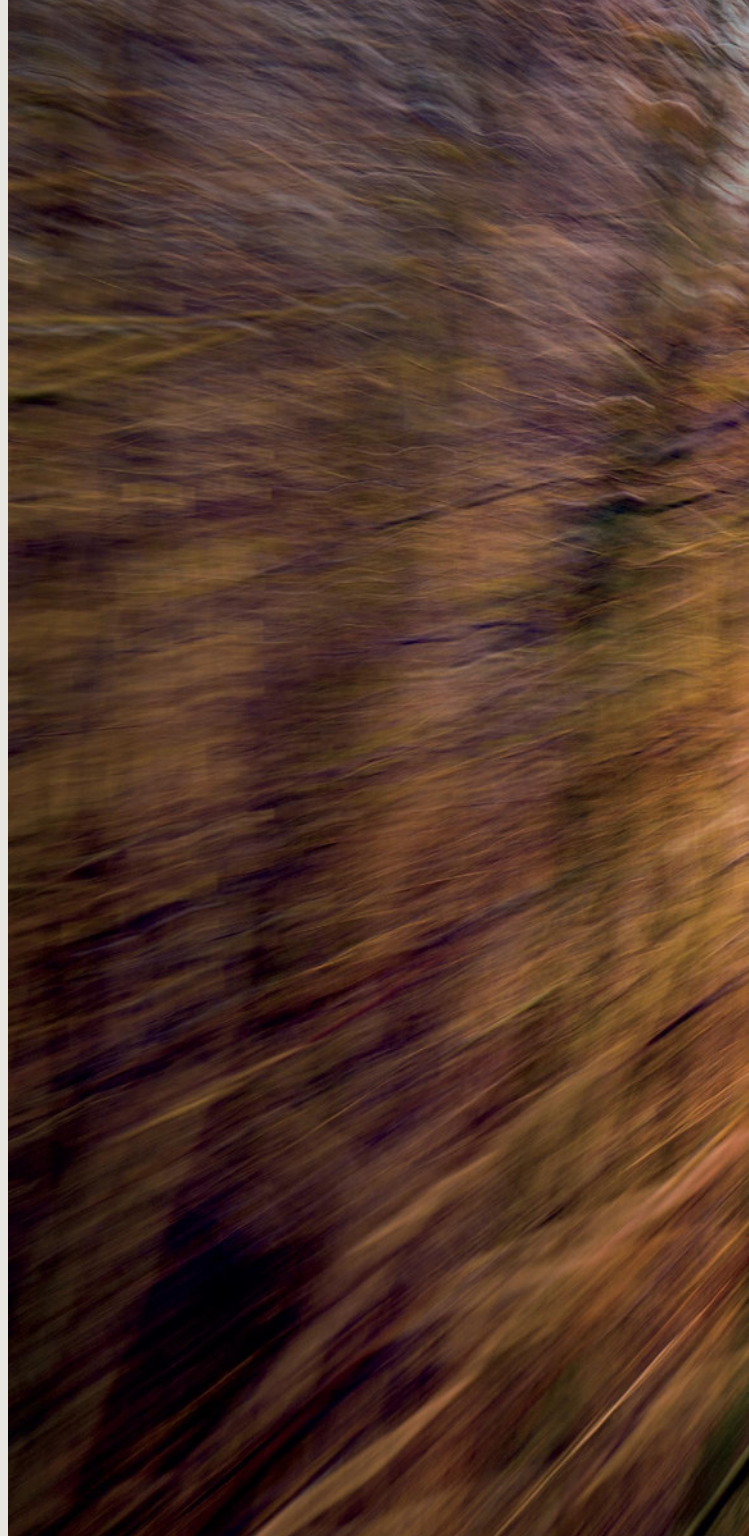




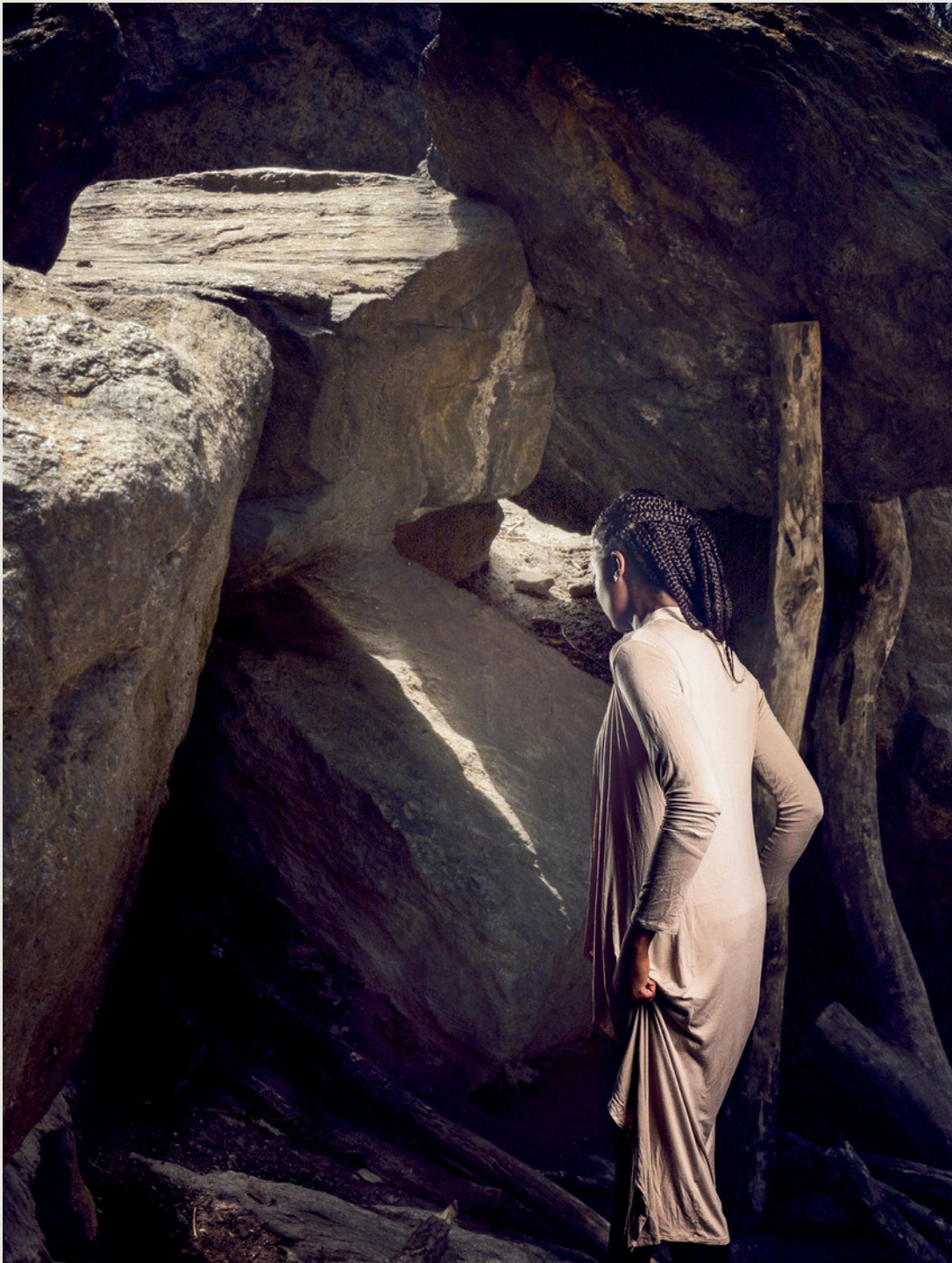
I think you're lost.
I think you're waiting for something
to swallow you whole,
so everything you're feeling can
say it was consumed unbroken.

You're lost,
you've followed a road
that leads to nothing.
But you follow it anyway, to find
yourself just where you began.

You are the wealth,
the beauty of generations,
ancestors of power, shaped
in a frightened cup of a woman.
An empty cup.







But now you know,
so you follow voices
that sound like yours,
that swear in your name.
Something about the languages
tastes like your mother tongue.



And for the first time, you see
yourself as you should be,
an ancient language in a new beauty
a semblance of all the generations
you have never known to claim.
A language lost in translation,
and the translation is you.

Don't touch, see.
Look into me and see where you are lost











In the risen bones before they became dust.
The village by the river your grandmother was
named after.

So this is how you go back.
Declare a reclaiming in the tongues
we fashioned from war







From a language we spoke for ourselves
in praise of our identity, in the commune
of onyx and blood.







Do you see now?





This is how you go back.
From the dust that claimed the ones before you.
The sky too heavy to hold their spirits,
so it rained a new earth.





It rained so you could stand in the sea you know to part,
dip your feet in the welcome of all that you have lost,

wash it away
wave after wave
with thanks,

Become.



On My Journey

I would like to thank the staff and faculty of the School of Visual Arts MPS Digital Photography department: Katrin Eismann, Tom Ashe, Marko Kovacevic, Allen Furbeck, Michael Foley, Russell Hart, Elizabeth Avedon, Greg Gorman.

My wonderful classmates who took time out of their busy schedules to assist me, Yuan Hu, Yiyu Chen, Pongsakorn Jungthaweesil and Xin Liu.

My thesis advisor Adama Delphine Fawundu, I am in awe of your work and accomplishments. Thank you for your insights and advise throughout this entire process.

To Frances Delancey (model) and Tai Ceme (makeup-artist) for making “Queen” come alive.

My friends Elsie Samakai Moore, Bethany Chijindu, Obii Ifejika (poetry) and Arthur Odeka for their encouragements, Inspiration and financial and creative assistance.

My beloved family Emmanuel Chijindu, Mabel Chijindu, Bethany Chijindu and Jacinth Chijindu, thank you for your love, support and prayers.

“Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi,”
There is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight



Go back and Fetch it