

ART REVIEW

# After O'Grady

At Mariane Ibrahim, three artists demonstrate the expansiveness of Black women's subjectivity.

by rachel dukes  
March 17, 2026



Installation view, *I Dream I Cross the River in One Stride*, 2026  
Credit: Courtesy of the artists and Mariane Ibrahim

In her seminal essay “Olympia’s Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity,” Lorraine O’Grady arrived at an understanding of Black femme subjectivity as existing outside of binaries defined solely by the absence of whiteness and maleness. O’Grady’s groundbreaking words are embodied in this exhibition, which boldly positions Black women’s sense of being, physical and metaphysical, as a proclamation of liberation.

In Autumn Wallace’s sculpture, *Fruit Loops*, two brown, tangled bodies grab and pull at one another, both dripping in an amalgamation of repurposed fabrics, floral designs imprinted on the bodies of each figure. Their painting, *Heartstrung*, shows fluid figures, drooling and snotty, engulfed in each other’s trance. In both works, the coiffure, depicting plaits with black sparkly rhinestones each adorned with bright ribbons in *Fruit Loops*, is confidently unaware of neat containment, asserting an [aesthetic of resistance](#) and infinite freedom.



The figures in Autumn Wallace’s sculptures are confidently unaware of neat containment, asserting an aesthetic of resistance.  
Courtesy of the artists and Mariane Ibrahim

Freedom through movement is a visual motif throughout the exhibition. Returning to “Olympia’s Maid”’s postscript, O’Grady emphasizes how knowledge flows through movement—“I dance, therefore I think,” she writes. A surrender of the flesh to the ethereal divine is articulated in Brittney Leeanne Williams’s work, where she ponders the embodied response to receiving angelic directives. In *Interruption 7*, a figure is cloaked in a deep, blue-gray cloth and drowned in a rich red scape. The body appears to be both in free fall and simultaneously puppeteered by something outside of the body, or perhaps so deep within it in a new realm of consciousness.

In this realm, too, Clémence Gbonon’s bright and bold abstract paintings show the complexities of Black femmes’s interior and exterior lives. In *I Dream I Cross the River in One Stride*, a bare-bottomed figure sprints across the painting, teasing as if to say with confidence, “You’ll never [catch up with me!](#)” A pink chair and a few pairs of heels—objects of daily life—for me, evoke notions of both indulgence and hyperindividuality. Gbonon’s incredible, layered, and nuanced compositions make me wonder, “At what point is the language of our experience translated, and when do we deny translation?” The exhibition delightfully weaves O’Grady’s musings on how to discuss and portray Black femme bodies. Works in “I Dream I Cross the River in One Stride” refuse peripheral viewing; each commands attention and demonstrates a Black femme visual tradition of surrendering to complexity.

📍 “I Dream I Cross the River in One Stride”

Through 3/28: Tue–Sat 11 AM–6 PM, Mariane Ibrahim, 437 N. Paulina, [marianeibrahim.com/exhibitions/113-i-dream-i-cross-the-river-in-one-group-exhibition/overview](https://marianeibrahim.com/exhibitions/113-i-dream-i-cross-the-river-in-one-group-exhibition/overview)

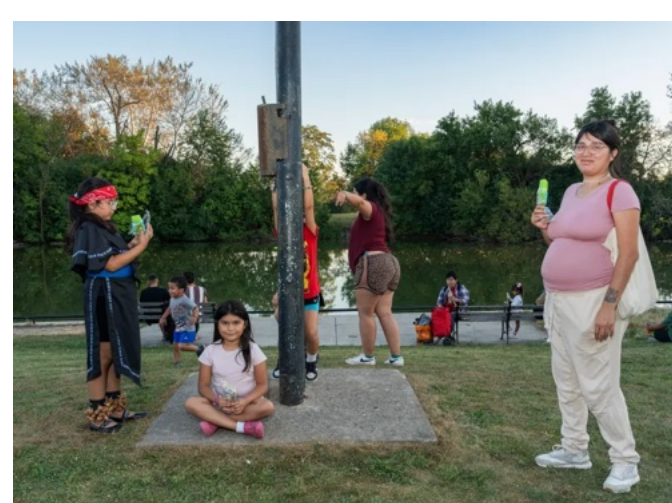
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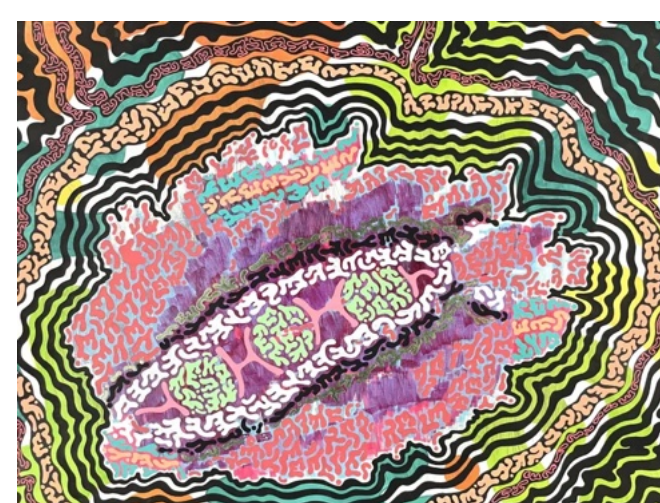
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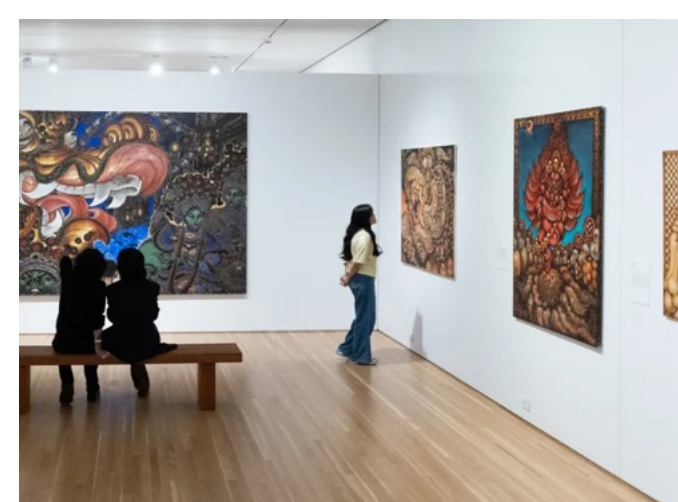
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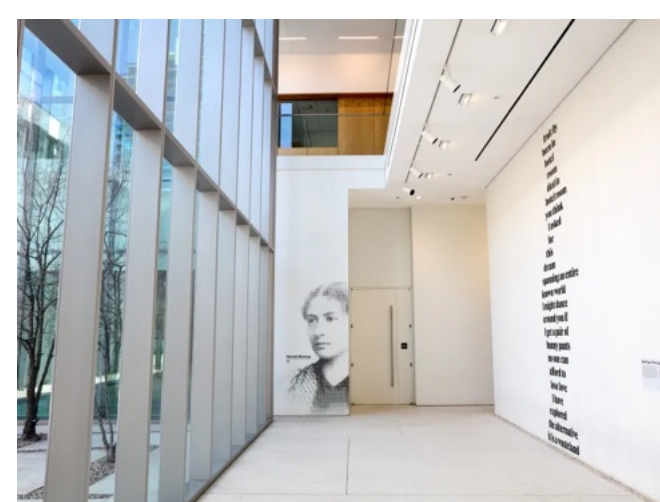
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