

Art and Social Justice Education: Culture as Commons (2012).
Therese Quinn, John Ploof, and Lisa Hochtritt (Eds). New York: Routledge.

Mequitta Ahuja: *Afro-Galaxy*
Romi Crawford

"I have often wondered why the farthest-out position always feels right to me."¹

In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) the writer Audre Lorde solves the riddle of her own identity by claiming a writing form, "biomythography," that allows her to draw on multiple dimensions, the facts as well as the imaginings and fictions, of her persona. The aim was to create "a new literary genre, empowered by feminism, that exploded male-centered definitions of history, mythology, autobiography and fiction."² In effect, she mines from a decisive ideological stance, the "farthest-out position," to generate a new sense and representation of self that "feels right" to her. She positions herself on the outer reaches, towards the darker matter, of her identity in order to take in a better perspective—of a pliable and open, rather than a fixed and resolute self.

Artist Mequitta Ahuja actively refers to Lorde's concept of "biomythography" to make paintings that interject aspects of a communal or shared history, personal mythologies, and the social imaginary into the discourse of self portraiture. She describes *Afrogalaxy* (2007) as an "automythography collaborative." While the painting starts with a photograph that she takes of herself, the end result, an enamel on paper rendering of an exuberant Afro-shaped

orb that seems to weigh down the bent torso of a finely costumed figure, is in fact a group effort.

Ahuja, the founding Program Designer and Director of the Blue Sky Project, worked with a group of eight teenagers, who served as co-collaborators on the work. Operational since 2005, The Blue Sky Project is an eight-week artist residency with the goal of bringing two disparate factions together, professional artists and Dayton, Ohio teenagers, in the making of contemporary art. Artists such as Ahuja are open to an extreme manner of experimentation and risk as they attempt to make work that incorporates the creative impulses and suggestions of an unknown youth cohort.

For Ahuja, a well-positioned artist, praised for her painterly abilities, who has a recognizable aesthetic, and who is known for her assertion of ethnic/racial motifs (such as hair and costuming), to reposition herself and her practice, each summer at The Blue Sky Project, suggests the best type of ecological smartness. Ahuja's project encourages us to consider how we can activate renewed interpretations of our work. This in turn helps us towards having renewed interpretations of our communities, our world, and even ourselves.

We live in a moment of smart houses and design, aesthetics that try to take into account the preservation of our world. Yet, projects such as *Afrogalaxy* point to the possibility of generating new creative forms and modalities that force us into alternate positions, which reallocate the normative terms of creative/scholarly authority. We educators, artists, and citizens, are responsible for generating these new forms, programs, and platforms that will bring us into strange and unexpected relations with one another. This facilitates our "feeling right" about others within the galaxy and it helps us to "feel right" about ourselves.

¹Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name - A Biomythography* (The Crossing Press, 1982), 15

²Darryl L. Wellington, *The Crisis*, March/April 2004.



Mequitta Ahuja, *Afrogalaxy*. Courtesy of the artist and Blue Sky Project