

galerie frank elbaz.

# partus/chorus

Doreen Lynette Garner

Eniola Dawodu

Ja'Tovia Gary

May 28 - July 30, 2022  
Opening on Saturday, May 28, 2022

*She made no request to become the Mother.  
However. Partus.  
The Mother brought us forth. Sequitur.  
We follow. Ventrum.  
from the belly. The Mother brought us forth.  
We follow. from the womb.*

*She was the mother of all living things<sup>1</sup>. We were wounded for the Mother's transgressions, and she bruised for yours and mine<sup>2</sup>. The Mother performs a psalm of our iniquities, a Blackened enfleshment as we become undone and (re)form within the Mother's womb. We join her chorus. We sing of the Mother's condition, and, in turn, of our own. Bone of her bone. Flesh of her flesh. Tear of her tear. We spill. We raise our hands. We shout YES to the female within,<sup>3</sup> for the Mother lives within us. She lives there, even with the knowingness of objects not being able to withhold that ontological and corporeal geography.*

*For even as some forget the Mother, no one can forget that they were afraid. They were fearful, and we were fearfully made<sup>4</sup>.*

*The transferal of her dispossession to her child is the Mother's only claim<sup>5</sup>. Through the child's dispossession there is no destination, but rather ghostly fingerprints that trace back to her womb. It is a melodic cry so loud and so haunting that*

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1 Genesis 3:20.

2 Isaiah 53:5.

3 Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65-81.

4 Psalm 139:14

5 Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016): 166-173.

it would only be a mistake to forget her. Since her capture, The Mother has no specified gender, but rather only her body that has been broken for you and for me. Held by *the hold* she was urged to submit to the law which presupposes her as an object of Black life-worldmaking. An *object* of our afterlives. A *figure* of our afterlives. A *spirit* of our afterlives. A *righteous anger* rebuking our afterlives. A *love* sustaining us within our afterlives.

We join her chorus. We sing of the Mother's condition, and, in turn, of our own. Curated by filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist Ja'Tovia Gary, *partus/chorus* is a three-woman sculptural exhibition. Sculptor and performance artist Doreen Garner, textile artist and costume designer Eniola Dawodu and Gary herself, offers an amalgamation of the memory and song of the Mother's figurative interiority that forms this world and serves as the catalytic potential to author a new thing<sup>6</sup>.

-Zalika Ibaorimi

Gary's thematic point of departure for this exhibition is the legal doctrine *partus sequitur ventrem*, as instituted during the period of chattel slavery in the United States, summarized: as goes the womb, meaning the child's status as slave will be dictated by the mother's status. The Black womb as a site of transformation, of both creation and destruction, and a portal by which historically subjects have become objects, are central themes that underscore the exhibition. Drawing from Black feminist scholarship, Gary considers the womb's worldmaking potential, the embodied knowledge associated with Black gender expansiveness, the power of the matrilineal, and liminal spaces as guiding principles that organize the show.

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 43:19.