

Qualeasha Wood

code_eden

November 10, 2025 -
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In her textile practice, Wood brings together traditional craft techniques and contemporary technology. Her own image acts as a point of departure for works that explore racial, sexual and gender identity as they relate to the Black femme body. Woods' tapestries combine cybernetic and analog processes; in her work, a pixel is equivalent to a stitch, each stitch an analogy for the past, present and future of Black femmehood, both on- and off-line, pre- and post-internet.

guest curated by
Leandra-Juliet Kelley

ROWAN UNIVERSITY
ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

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code_eden

explores the vibrant worlds crafted by digital architects — realms that thrive beyond the looking glass and behind the screens of technological devices. Featuring Wood's textiles, tuftings,

and new video works, *code_eden* transports viewers to the artist's meta-paradise. The show serves as a companion to Wood's premier museum exhibition *code_anima*. Where *code_anima* examined identity and the process of individuation, *code_eden* delves into bespoke online habitats. These spaces serve as both places of refuge and modes for self-expression, while the grounds beneath retain roots of temptation inherent to their corporate infrastructures.

Wood's technical skills are evident in the digital collages of her tapestries as well as the colorful scenes of her hand-made tuftings. The materiality of these textiles (the warp and weft) are embedded with a "code," serving as a symbol for the inner workings of the dual experiences felt by Black people, particularly Black

of work draws inspiration from the concept of 'deus ex machina'—a narrative device that introduces an unexpected, external force to resolve a complex situation. This device allows us to highlight the paradoxical position of Black women in society—cast simultaneously as both saviors and scapegoats within a white supremacist framework."



Deus Ex Machina (What Was I Made For?), 2024

Woven jacquard, machine embroidery and glass seed beads, 62 x 84 inches.
Courtesy Mark J Bevington collection, Photography by Thomas Mueller.

women, as well as the multifaceted online identities that mirror or oppose our physical existence. In *Deus Ex Machina (What Was I Made For?)* (2024), Wood explores ideas of divine intervention and self-determination through imagery of fauna and iconography of virtual and religious sacraments. Wood writes, "This body

In the tapestry *i believe there's meaning / i believe there's nothing* (2024), Wood layers selfies and reflections with digital portraits of her virtual avatar as green gem icons from the *The Sims* video game hover throughout the piece. Wood expounds on this methodology, writing,

Blending human and technological capabilities, Wood's artistic practice reveals the emotive side of life's "technical gestures."¹ Her digital edens are dynamic spaces where she engages, shapes, and activates her cyber surroundings, evoking what theorist Gilbert Simondon describes as "the relational activity" between a person and their environment.² The result is a continuous and mutual feedback loop that spurs personal and environmental evolution—"The energy of the technical gesture, having passed through the environment, returns to [the person]," allowing them to modify themselves and "evolve."³



i believe there's meaning / i believe there's nothing, 2024

Woven jacquard, glass seed beads, and hand embroidery, 53 x 74 inches.
 Courtesy the artist and Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London, © Qualeasha Wood 2025.
 Photography by Ian Byers-Gamber

“By using the mirror as both a literal and metaphorical tool, these works question the nature of self-perception and external validation, emphasizing the fractured and often contradictory identities that Black women navigate.” This idea of contradictions continues in *i believe there's meaning / i believe there's nothing* with pink, flowing text that reads “land of the free, home of the brave,” a traditional slogan of the United States

and an apt description for the wild west that is the internet. The phrase includes an asterisk, which leads the viewer to “terms and conditions may apply,” highlighting the provisional nature of physical and virtual existences. Wood includes an “Edit profile” option at various points on the tapestry. At any point, one can alter their eden, shifting the design to simulate, oppose, or be completely untethered from “real” life.

In *code_eden*, Wood’s autonomy is on full display with artwork that examines the ways “black women are seen and not seen by the dominant society and [...] how they see themselves in a different landscape.”⁴ Wood’s artworks tackle concepts of visibility and invisibility on multiple levels—the unseen code behind the glossy

surface of digital spaces as well as the virtual presence of those often invisible IRL. As Evelyn Hammonds writes, “visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen.”⁵ In this sense, Wood takes on the role of theorist as described by Hammonds, by asking “how vision is structured”



playdate, 2024

Tufted wool and acrylic, 51 x 55 inches.
 Courtesy the artist and Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London,
 © Qualeasha Wood 2025. Photography by Athenaeum Editions.



Into the Blue, 2023

Tufted wool and acrylic, 50 x 64 inches.
 Courtesy of Arte Collectum, Sweden.
 Photography by Todd-White Art Photography.



and exploring "how difference is established, how it operates, [and] how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and speak in the world."⁶

Wood's tuftings, such as *Into the Blue* (2023) and *playdate* (2024), visualize the journey of adolescence and introspection through bold colors and pillowy textures. In *playdate*, the child-like protagonist plays with two Barbie dolls of different races. The dolls are nude, residing in an iteration of Barbie's dream house. Wood writes, "The tuftings examine my own childhood relationship to innocence, whiteness, and sexuality by referencing my childhood memories spent playing with Barbie dolls. The work also references the Doll Test, a psychological study conducted by Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark (circa 1940s), which revealed the internalized racism and self-hatred that segregation and societal racism ingrained in young African-American children, who overwhelmingly chose white dolls over black dolls." The figure of Wood's tuftings often looks

upon her environment inquisitively, with a sense wonder and quiet strength. *Into the Blue* replaces Barbie dolls with rubber ducks as the figure's hair, styled in her signature puff balls, float above the bath water while her eyes peer at the viewer. As the title suggests, *Into the Blue* explores the open and uncertain waters of adolescence and the depths of one's identity, mirroring the ocean that is the data-verse — ebbing and flowing with information, a place of endless exploration.

Qualeasha Wood / code_edén examines the artist as a world-builder. Wood breaks digital and physical boundaries, confidently exploring the paradoxes that shape our worlds. Codes, memes, pop culture, and glitches are captured like butterflies, transformed and released in her ever-changing domain. Wood's multimedia art practice cultivates digital landscapes, demonstrating one's ability to mold the technical into organic expressions of life.

- *Leandra-Juliet Kelley*

¹ Gilbert Simondon, "Culture and Technics," *Radical Philosophy* 189 (January/February 2015): 19.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Evelyn Hammonds, "Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2-3 (1994): 141.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Qualeasha Wood (b. 1996, Long Branch, NJ) lives and works in Philadelphia, PA. She received her BA in 2019 from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI and her MA in 2021 from Cranbrook Academy of Fine Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI. In 2025 Pippy Houldsworth Gallery presented *Malware*, Wood's second solo exhibition at the gallery. She is currently included in *Design and Disability*, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; *Virtual Beauty*, Somerset House, London; and *Voyager 2000: Worldbeing & Wonder*, Firstsite, Colchester. Later this year she will be a part of *I Still Dream of Lost Vocabularies*, Autograph, London. In 2024 she presented her first solo institutional exhibition, *code_anima*, at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Art + Culture, Charlotte, NC, which will travel as *code_edén* in the autumn of 2025 to Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum, Glassboro, NJ. Other recent solo and group exhibitions include Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN (2025), travelled from The High Museum, Atlanta, GA (2024-5) and The Brooklyn Museum, NY (2024); The Peeler Art Center at DePauw University, IN (2024); Salon 94, New York, NY (2024); Art Institute of Chicago, IL (2024); Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA (2024); Kendra Jayne Patrick, New York, NY (2023); Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2021, 2023); Hauser & Wirth, Somerset, New York, NY and Los Angeles, CA (2022-3); MoMA PSI, New York, NY (2022); and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (2022). Her collections include Art Institute of Chicago, IL; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; The Rennie Collection, Vancouver; The Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, RI; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA; and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX.



Leandra-Juliet Kelley is an art historian and curator based in Durham, North Carolina. Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Leandra earned a BA in Ethnomusicology from Earlham College where her love of art and music culminated in a documentary on Cincinnati's electronic music scene. In 2014, Leandra earned an MA in Ethnomusicology from King's College London (United Kingdom) with a dissertation that integrated interviews and a photographic series of the local grime music scene.

While abroad, Leandra traveled extensively throughout the UK and Europe, residing in Rome, Italy for a time. Upon returning to the U.S., she lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, working for the Cincinnati Art Museum, Taft Museum of Art, and Contemporary Arts Center, before relocating to Charlotte, North Carolina in 2016. After working at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art for 3 years, Leandra returned to the UK in 2019 to earn a MSc degree in the History of Art (Theory & Display) from the University of Edinburgh (UK). Once back in Charlotte, Leandra worked as the Director of Collections + Curatorial Affairs at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture until 2024. While at the Harvey B. Gantt Center, she curated exhibitions such as *Visions: A Study of Form* (2023), *Kennedi Carter: Sight Unseen* (2023), and *Qualeasha Wood: code_anima* (2024). Leandra currently resides in Durham, North Carolina as she pursues a PhD in Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke University.





Acknowledgements

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Front Cover:

Kirk Franklin Type Beat [detail], 2024

Woven jacquard, glass seed beads, and machine embroidery, 59 x 83.5 inches.

Courtesy Mark J Bevington collection, Photography by Thomas Mueller.

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