

April Hope Miller

Us

Bush Theatre Protest Series

I see us.

You see other.

I see an identity cut from different cloth. A mosaic of fabric scraps woven into a tapestry of all that survived design.

You see what the limits of inherited perception will allow. A being hunched over with the weight of a power so heavy sinking so deep, it lays to rest in the very strands of our DNA.

You see a ghost, an apparition that lives in the foundations of your world order, gnawing away, threatening its collapse, catalysing its rot. And you stand against the rot. You stand for all that is right, for all those who can't.

Yet you fear what you don't understand. Us. But what do we look like? You seem to know enough to tell us you didn't think we looked like that. What, then did you expect when you stared into the depths and stood face to face with that which you won't understand?

You watch us skate round the periphery of your inner circle, eyes glazed amber with a tarnish of disdain, sticky like resin, blinding your ability to see a people worth defending. Too much of an outsider to fit in. Too much of an insider to break out.

Some question our exile to the depths of this no man's land. And I watch you wet your lips, dismissing our otherness with an involuntary smack of saliva, softening, sliding the obligation of us away to the corner of your mouth, safe from the subject of your words. Our otherness, buried in the flesh of he who has everything, must be cut out. After all, we are the ink spill that bleeds through the pages of history.

And hasn't it taught us that it can only be your pound of flesh or ours? And so with flesh cupped in palms, you justify, you accept. You blame us for horrors, not our own. Presume the faculties of our mind, because isn't it easier to think our blood must always come at a cost? Wouldn't a world without be so much simpler, so much quieter?

Well, I have been uncharacteristically quiet. Here I stand. Smothering frustration in metaphor, parcelling truth into inference, making the unpalatable easier for you to swallow. You have sewn my lips shut. Insatiable, predictable, silencing you. I press my fingers to lips and trace past the seams of my weakness, the pads of my ancestors' footprints pulsing against the confection buried in my skin. And I wonder, can they feel my distance? Do they hear my silence?

History has taught me to fear, but the present has taught me to hide. For it is a frenzied sea of hatred so vast, so complex, so devastating. How can anyone stay afloat?

So perhaps - So perhaps it was my own hands which pressed needle to skin. Because who the hell am I? Isn't my voice the last thing anyone wants to hear? And there it is, glowing hot

in my mouth. The responsibility, the pride, the tradition of us tearing at the stitches of my cowardice, rattling through dishes passed down by grandmothers, ringing out in song, in laughter, around tables where voices crescendo into a symphony of interruption.

And with each breath, I will that heat to turn to fire. A fire ignited by generations of women who have stood before candles to wave in light and peace and hope. And I want that fire to pour out my mouth, to burn with the potential to thaw the glaciers off your prejudice. The hope to part the sea of opinion, the courage to make numberless those who stand up for us.

And with bagels adorning wrists like bracelets, hath I not the strength to make you see us?

Not as a government, not as the enemy, but to really see
Us.

Credits:

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Directed by: Katie Greenall

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End slide reads:

Bush Theatre Protest Series

We believe the connection between art and protest is vital.

The Bush Theatre's Protest series is a platform for artists to shed light on injustices that persist in our world.

bushtheatre.co.uk/protest