



Expressions in Urban Education

Roots: Poetry, Performance, and Photography

Abstract

The editors of Voices in Urban Education (VUE) first became connected to “artist” Divinity Nix-Sow when she submitted a series of photographs to the student art competition for our special issue focused on community healing, sustenance, and resilience at the intersections of technology, art, and social justice. Alongside her photographs, Divinity emailed us the following:

Hi, my name is Divinity Nix-Sow! I'm from Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. I am a poet, natural hair stylist, model, and overall activist! The theme of this issue really stood out to me because it represents everything I stand for. The photos I'm choosing today are from my Black History Month natural hair shoot! I've been a stylist since I was 15. I am self-taught and my business recently turned 5 years old! I also recently wrote a poem called Roots which inspired the entire theme of my photo shoot. I wanted to honor and pay homage to where I started and where I come from. So, I collaborated with my photographer and traveled across NYC for 2 weeks to style all of the models' hair. I shot this in my neighborhood beauty supply store, which the manager let me do free of charge! It's truly something special when you can take one little idea from your notes app and turn it into reality.

Our editorial team was blown away by the power of Divinity's poetry, performance, styling, and photography. We have included one of the photographs to introduce the Expressions in Urban Education section of this issue. The full collection of photographs are also included here, along with her poem, Roots, which appears in both written and video format.

Keywords

[activism](#), [poetry](#), [performance](#), [photography](#), [Black History Month](#)

How to Cite

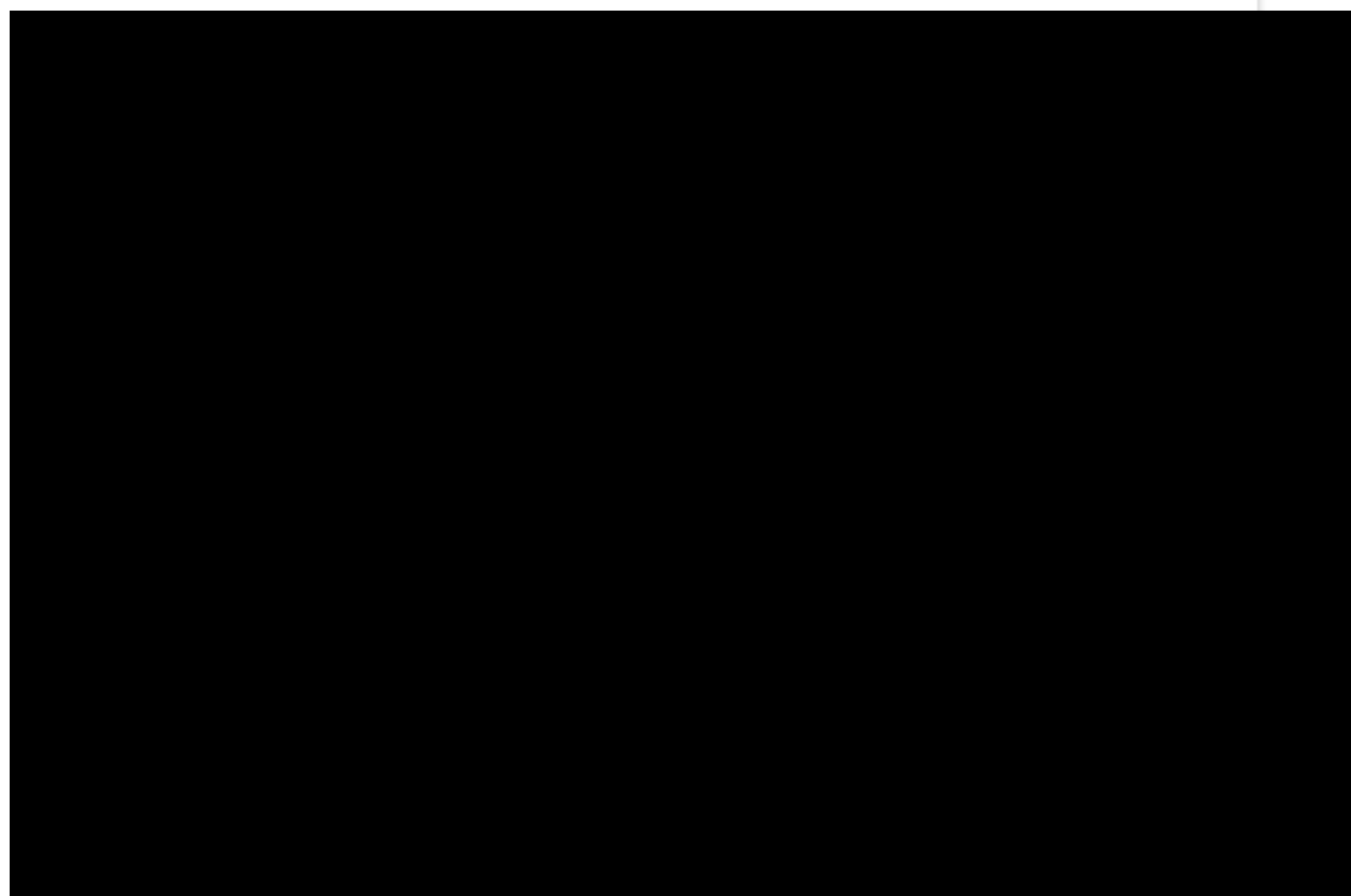
Nix-Sow, D., (2024) "Roots: Poetry, Performance, and Photography", *VUE (Voices in Urban Education)* 52(2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.35240/vue.203>

953

 Views

0

 Downloads



Roots

How do you find the square root of...

My white colleagues can find their lineage dating back to their

"I'm so ashamed"

"I can't believe they did that"

"I'm sorry on their behalf..." slave-owning ancestors all with a Google search

But when I type my last name – Results Not Found

Do you know the process of uprooting plants? Carefully removing them from the soil – *being mindful of their roots* – then replanting them in a new location with fresh soil

My ancestors were uprooted!

Not mindfully. DAMN SURE NOT CAREFULLY.

Their blood, sweat, & tears became the fertilizer of American soil

Their hopes and dreams soiled

ALL for the sake of a white man's spoils

They shamed us for having napps kinks and coils

I CAN'T HELP IT MY HAIR GROWS TOWARDS THE SUN

I AM ROYAL

The Crown Act? An example of a history so wack

We had to fight for our own hair to be free!

Our afros represent how the trees grow

Strong tall and a force to be reckoned with

DEEPLY ROOTED even through the wildest of storms

It was embedded in our DNA to be resilient and calm

BUT HOW DO YOU REMAIN CALM WHEN IT FEELS LIKE THEY PULLED THE PURGE

ALARMS

WE'VE BEEN ASKING FOR THE SAME THING DECADE, AFTER DECADE, AFTER DECADE!

THE SAME BLACK CRIES FOR JUSTICE & FREEDOM IN DIFFERENT FONTS

From the broken English poetry of Fredrick Douglas, the peaceful protests dating back to Selma,

to the last breaths of George Floyd

WE ARE THE ONES YOU CANNOT AVOID

Officers who can't fill their empty voids

Hunt down my people for the sake of their own enjoy!

WE ARE NOT YOUR PRACTICE TARGETS OR TOYS

Our children deserve to live in a state of joy

Discreetly pulling and banning our books from the shelves

Trying to erase the fact that they tried to give us hell

Today and forever, I am lifting the veil

For the ways of the wicked shall not prevail

I will not be stripped from my roots

I AM MY ANCESTORS REINCARNATED

I speak for the ones relearning who they are

Our battle scars do not define who we are

They're constantly trying to make us forget who we are

I am the messenger here to remind you

The voices of your oppressors do not define you!

WE ARE THE BLACKPRINT

THE CREATORS, THE CURATORS, THE INSPIRATION, THE INNOVATORS

SOUL FOOD THAT'S US!

HIP-HOP THAT'S US!

JAZZ THAT'S US!

CHA-CHA SLIDE THAT'S US!

TWO STEP THAT'S US!

TELEPHONE THAT'S US!

TRAFFIC LIGHT THAT'S US!

HOME SECURITY SYSTEM THAT'S US!

DOWN TO THE PEANUT BUTTER THAT IS US!

There are black roots in everything that we do! It's time to give flowers when they are due

I will continue to plant the seeds of truth

To feed my people from the labors of all my fruit

So they can be inspired to plant gardens too

For it was always in our nature to come home to our roots



Figure 1. Stylist, photographer, and model, Divinity Nix-Sow, on the set of her Black History Month natural hair shoot.



Figure 2. Models for the Black History Month natural hair photo shoot browse weaves at their neighborhood beauty supply store in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn.



Figure 3. Models put on earrings at the Black History Month natural hair photo shoot.



Figure 4. Divinity Nix-Sow sprays her hair on set – “I am the messenger here to remind you, the voices of your oppressors do not define you.”



Figure 5. "We are the Blackprint – THE CREATORS, THE CURATORS, THE INSPIRATION, THE INNOVATORS."



Figure 6. "Strong, tall and a force to be reckoned with. DEEPLY ROOTED even through the wildest of storms."



Figure 7. Models represent the joy and beauty of Black hair, as well as the culture and community that can be found in Black hair spaces.





Figure 8. "There are black roots in everything that we do! It's time to give flowers when they are due."



Figure 9. "I will not be stripped from my roots. I AM MY ANCESTORS REINCARNATED."



Figure 10. "I can't help it my hair grows toward the sun. I AM ROYAL."

Share



Authors

Divinity Nix-Sow 

Issue

Volume 52 • Issue 2 • 2024 • Centering Community Healing, Sustenance, and Resilience in STEM and Computing Education Through Art and Social Justice

Dates

Accepted	2024-06-19
Published	2024-07-31

Licence

Identifiers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35240/vue.203>

File Checksums (MD5)

