

In 2015, *Proud Rebels* (Rebelse Trots) opened at the CBK in the South-East of Amsterdam. This project revolved around an influential black feminist movement that took place in Amsterdam in the 1980s. During the two-year research period that preceded the exhibition, I tracked down the heroines of the movement and placed them into the spotlight once again. The research resulted in a series of embroidered portrait-cloths and a short film, which contained depictions of black women who have played important roles throughout global history. One of those women was Queen Nzinga Mbande, who has in turn been given a seat at the table for *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner Too?*.

Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979) is an iconic piece within art history, and one for which I have great admiration. However, during my research of *The Dinner Party*, I realised that this work places an excessive emphasis on hetero-normative, white feminist, Western (art) history and lacked heavily in other historical perspectives. This motivated me to expand the *Proud Rebels* project, and place these black heroines of the 1980s in a more global, broader context of rebellious black women. I decided to construct a table in honour of 38 black women and women of colour, who were never granted their rightful and **deserved** place within Western history.

In contrast to Judy Chicago, I have included a number of contemporary heroines in the table's seating arrangement. This is a symbolic gesture to indicate that the battle against racism, inequality and oppression is by no means overcome and still remains today. The recently established *Black Lives Matter* movement is an outcome of the centuries-long struggle that black women have endured, and is a direct connection to Ruby Bridges and Amina Tyler, who are also seated at the table. Ruby was six years old when she was allowed to attend an all-white school in the racist south of America, after passing a test. However, she endured a lot of torment from the white students, such as finding cockroaches placed in-between her sandwiches. Ruby went on to form the Ruby Bridges Foundation in 1999 to promote equal rights and combat racism. Amina Tyler is a Tunisian women's rights activist who protests for the autonomy of her own body. In response, a fatwa has been issued against her: 100 lashes and stoned to death. She still persists.

The title *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner Too?* can be dually interpreted. On the one hand, it is a nod to Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. However, this time the invited guests are the previously uninvited, absent black women and women of colour. On the other hand, it serves as a reference to the famous film *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?* (1967) with Sidney Poitier in the leading role. In this film, Poitier's character is in an interracial relationship with a white woman. He is invited to have dinner with his future in-laws, but remains the uninvited guest throughout the evening. He is deprived of any agency, as not once do we get to see his perspective of this complicated situation. This exemplifies what Sara Ahmed, feminist writer and independent scholar, wrote: "Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home." I hope that with this table, I have created a place where all feel welcome and at home, regardless of ethnicity, cultural background, age, socio-economic position, gender and sexual orientation.

Serendipity has been an important component of my research. Some of the women were

initially only mentioned to me in passing, or as a footnote. By following my own intuition and delving deeper, I stumbled upon beautiful women with incredible life stories. Unfortunately, the trail sometimes led to a dead end, such as with Rebeca of Curaçao - born or died in 1795. I scoured the internet and asked various Curaçao residents if they knew anything about the story of her life. To this day, no information about Rebeca has turned up.

Aside those present at the table, there are still so many more women who deserve a seat. I have chosen to include many women whose story was previously unknown to me; whose story has never been told to the general public. I have deliberately included women whose bodies have been literally destroyed by the coloniser in order to prevent them from receiving a martyr or hero-like status. I have paid close attention to geographical locations and aimed to involve as many different countries, cultures and continents as possible.

As opposed to *The Dinner Party*, I also involved men in this project. I collaborated with fashion designer Melanie Brown, and designed tunics which were produced by women of the Gildelab, an Amsterdam based makers-community for textile and leather. The inside lining of every tunic is printed with a story of one of the heroines. Men have been invited to perform a haka in honour of these women. While wearing the tunics, they are literally carrying these women's histories on their bodies. A haka is a sacred ceremonial dance, belonging to the Maori. I have requested and received permission to perform this dance. The dance is in dedication to the women, and to all women who are still fighting for equality today.

For the glass vessels, I was inspired by the ceramics of (pre-Christian) South America and Africa. In many indigenous cultures, communal eating is seen as an important collective activity, and the Western concept of each having an individual plate and glass was initially unknown to them. This is incorporated in the design of the glass vessels. I chose to use glass because it is one of the oldest mediums, and I have used glass beads in the embroidery of the table runners. In this regard, glass, in its fluid molecular nature, with both transparent and opaque qualities, symbolises the right to opacity that marginalised people have; it is the right of the oppressed to be obliged to copy the aesthetics of the (colonial) oppressor. French-Antillian poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant describes the importance of this right in his book *Poetics of Relation*. He argues that the right to opacity is more fundamental than the right to difference, because the right of opacity is essential within the right of difference. Furthermore, the right of opacity also implies the right to being misunderstood, to not being reduced to the epistemological violence of implicit understanding and judgment.

As Saidiya V. Hartman – professor at Columbia University, theorist of silences around Trans-Atlantic slavery in the absence of archives, and keen Glissant reader – notes in her book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*: "The right to obscurity must be respected, for the "accumulated hurt", the "rasping whispers deep in the throat", the wild notes, and the screams lodged deep within confound simple expression and, likewise, withstand the prevailing ascriptions of black enjoyment."