

rations of existence as well as memorials to DOKU's and visitors' past lives. Meanwhile, voice-overs introduce a continuous stream of questions about the nature of humanity: "Where can 'the self' be found? What is the difference between game and reality?"

DOKU's condition of entrapment reminds me of Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that "man is condemned to be free"; just as humans must be responsible for making meaning out of their choices, DOKU must continually reinvent themselves in a world devoid of stable purpose. Yang echoes an existential estrangement, but ultimately adopts a more affirmative coping strategy, using virtuality as a space to probe otherwise foreclosed modes of being. Yang and DOKU might understand solitude as an opportunity for soul-searching, made explicit when DOKU appears wearing a hoodie printed with "To live fully is to be always in no-man's land."

Yang shifts attention away from external regimes of exploitation toward the internal, experiential consequences of self-destruction. Moving through snow, mountains, deserts, forests, and outer space, each functioning like a level in an open-ended game, DOKU repeatedly subjects themselves to extreme physical conditions. From hanging on

a cliff to shooting enemies on a battlefield, DOKU's virtual body is unconstrained by biological limits. The body becomes something to be destroyed and remade, with pain and suffering becoming the means for testing alternative forms of selfhood and existence. (As a OneRepublic lyric suggests, "Everything that kills me makes me feel alive.")

In *DOKU the Flow*, DOKU boards a luxury cruise ship called Desire. Slot machines clatter in casinos, spilling money onto the floor, while guests indulge in a sumptuous buffet of fine cuisine—scenes that reflect human pleasures built on capitalist excess, spectacle, and the compulsive, addictive logic of gaming and gambling. On the rooftop, DOKU sits alone in a theatre, watching footage from *DOKU the Self* where multiple versions of themselves flash by, described in the narration: "each 'I' appears in the scene according to the script." The meta-screen transitions to DOKU skateboarding through a neon-lit cityscape at night, sliding between two billboards that read "pain" and "boredom," echoing the repetitiveness and persistence of everyday emotions across iterated lives. As Yang extends the metaphor of the illusion of cinema into the 3D-animated realm, the self becomes an orchestrated

entity that can be edited, cut, and stitched together. Introducing themselves as both a spectator and a performer, Yang creates a continuous feedback loop where reality and simulation blur: the observer becomes observed, the subject becomes object, and identity is fabricated, rehearsed, and endlessly remade. In *DOKU the Self*, the Wheel of Life literally transforms into a casino roulette, reminding viewers that the conditions of birth are matters of chance, or systems and algorithms beyond individual control. While we cannot choose the circumstances we are born into, Yang suggests that we can decide how we act, whom we become, and how we define our destiny. Using the virtual world as an extension of reality, "DOKU! DOKU! DOKU!: samsara.exe" proposes that the meaning of life is not in winning or escaping the system, but in the journey itself—in playing a role, or a game, again and again.

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"Louise" — Sojourner Truth Parsons Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 3 October 2025 to 28 February 2026

by Andrew Witt

The title of Sojourner Truth Parsons's exhibition nods to the poet Louise Glück with a strange, unguarded familiarity, as if the show were already on a first-name basis. The title makes you wonder whether Glück's poetry is meant to illuminate Parsons's paintings, or whether the relation remains more fugitive and opaque. I feel like it's something closer to the latter, a secret held in a very particular way, the painter's private relation to the poet, an idea that hangs in the room, the kind of thing that resists full articulation. When confronted with an elusive relation like this one, there's the temptation to start trawling through Glück's poetry in search of a passage or line, some interpretative key to help guide our encounter, as if meaning were a matter of proper cross-referencing. But that doesn't seem to be the point. Maybe the secret should remain a secret. I find myself drawn to that possibility: that Parsons's work refuses the impulse to explain her work away by citing a line of poetry, refuses any neat literary correspondence between painting and poetry, insisting that if a relationship exists at all, it is an obscure and obstinate one.

And there is a simple fact worth stating outright: Parsons's paintings are dark. Some are almost entirely black. You think of night when you look at them, or some nocturnal state, because they inhabit night's atmosphere, its perceptual logic and a refusal to yield everything all at once. Her canvases are saturated with darkness as a material fact. In a series like *End of April beginning of May* (2023), darkness is the entire field, its structuring principle. The title refers to that seasonal threshold in the southern Catskill Mountains when winter gives way to spring, a tonal shift these paintings also hold. This series is composed of different shades of black, slight variations that reveal themselves only through sustained

looking. Working through these tonal variations, the viewer must stay with the paintings, must look and keep looking, until the blacks start to separate into other shades of blues, purples, and greens, the faint residue of other colours absorbed and held within.

We might speak of Parsons's series in the way we speak of Ad Reinhardt's late abstractions: through the intensification of vision that occurs in sustained encounter with a black monochrome. To look closely at Reinhardt's paintings is to realize they are never purely black, but blocks of near-black tones, variations of red-black, blue-black, and green-black. It seems like an obvious point, but those differences only start to register after time has passed, after your eyes have adjusted and recalibrated to the near-monochromatic surface. Any reproduction collapses them, flattens their slow revelation. And here, perhaps, it's worth admitting that this kind of attention, this form of sustained looking, feels almost anachronistic now, like a muscle we've let atrophy. The kind of patience Reinhardt demanded presupposes a viewer who still knows how to stand still. Parsons's paintings bet on the existence of that viewer or perhaps, more modestly, offer an invitation to become one briefly. There's something defiant in that gesture, especially in a culture that has trained us to scroll endlessly. The painting asks us to remain, to stay with the darkness until it begins to reveal itself.

And yet Parsons is not a practitioner of "pure painting," as Reinhardt might have framed it. The black of her canvases is not an abstraction emptied of reference, but a figural economy, a material condition. In the series *July Tree* (2020–2021), the canvas feels constructed rather than painted, built from collaged planes, blocks of colour, silhouettes, fragments of interiors, and the suggestion of unclothed female forms sharing a

space together. Her figures appear as though glimpsed across a courtyard or through an open apartment window, momentarily lit by a full moon, the dark glow of other lives moving behind glass. There is a voyeurism to this look. To look into darkness is to want something from it: the thrill of seeing another life that is not yours, or just proof that someone else is awake and that you are awake with them. Parsons's paintings understand that desire and urge.

Her nocturnal scenes stage a metapoetics of painting, a meditation on what it means to see through paint. Since we will never know the depth of Parsons's relationship to Glück, the darkness of the night becomes the condition for seeing elsewhere, not necessarily with clarity, but as a counterpoint to the rhetoric of illumination that so often structures the history of vision and poetic thought. The darkness, we might say, is not just what Parsons paints, but what she paints through: the condition of working through uncertainty, of staying with the darkness long enough for something else to take form.

Parsons's other works in the show include the patchwork composition *The beginning of the end of the garden* (2025). The work appears to embrace an incremental process: adding a square, extending the field, altering a hue that either deepens or recedes. And perhaps this, too, is where the work of painting resides, in that same twilight condition of making and remaking. To paint is to build a world slowly, layer by layer, one colour over another, one decision covering or revealing the last. There is only the insistence of a return—to paint, to paint again, to move through the night, and return to the canvas the next day.

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Sojourner Truth Parsons, *July Tree*, 2020–2021
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