

Writing Club: On Embodied Narratives with Antoinette Cooper December 2024

Embodied Narratives: Memory in Motion

When we gather to witness art that speaks of journeys—physical, ancestral, remembered and forgotten—we create a space where stories can rest, where memories can surface, and where movement can pause. These artworks by Jacob Lawrence and Christopher Cozier explore how migration lives in our bodies, how displacement shapes our stories, and how art holds space for both individual and collective experiences.



Installation view of the gallery “Jacob Lawrence and Christopher Cozier” in the exhibition “Collection 1880s–1940s” March 29, 2024–ongoing. Photographed in April 2024. IN2553.520.1. Photograph by Jonathan Dorado.

The Body Remembers

Begin by settling into this space. Feel where your body makes contact with your surroundings. Take a few breaths, noticing how your body holds you in this moment. Identify a part of your body that carries a story. What small part of yourself wishes to be known today?

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Jacob Lawrence painted [*The Migration Series*](#) as a child of migrants himself, each panel a heartbeat in the great movement of Black Americans seeking freedom. His figures carry more than suitcases; they carry dreams, memories, and the weight of the act of leaving in their very postures.

Prompt 1: Witnessing the Single Step

Choose one figure from Lawrence's *Migration Series* and try to mirror their posture while reflecting on the following questions—you may choose to hold these reflections in your heart or write them down.

What does your body know about journeying? What do you pack when you cannot pack everything? What travels in your bones instead of your bags?



Jacob Lawrence. *Child labor and a lack of education was one of the other reasons for people wishing to leave their homes.* 1940-41

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Jacob Lawrence. *The migration gained in momentum.* 1940-41; Jacob Lawrence. *One of the largest race riots occurred in East St. Louis.* 1940-41; Jacob Lawrence. *Industries attempted to board their labor in quarters that were oftentimes very unhealthy. Labor camps were numerous.* 1940-41; Jacob Lawrence. *Although the Negro was used to lynching, he found this an opportune time for him to leave where one had occurred.* 1940-41

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Prompt 2: When Stories Move Together

Let your gaze take in several panels at once. Notice how your attention shifts, how your breath responds to holding multiple narratives simultaneously. Lawrence painted sixty panels because no single image could hold the fullness of this great movement of people. Reflect on the following questions in the same way as the first prompt.

How does your nervous system respond to witnessing multiple journeys at once? What emerges when stories move together? What stories travel with you, whether in suitcases or paper bags, in teardrops or held in breath?

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Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night*. 2006-14

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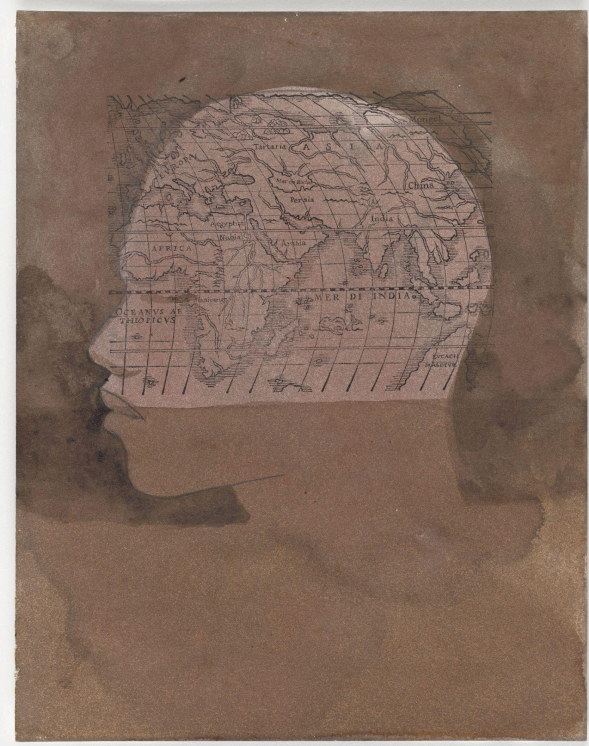
Christopher Cozier's [*Tropical Night*](#) series emerges from his own experience of movement between Trinidad and New York, between home and abroad. His work offers a different rhythm of migration—more fragmented, more personal—exploring how displacement lives in the spaces between departure and arrival, between memory and myth. Through shadows and silhouettes, through moments of both stillness and tension, Cozier reveals the complex psychological landscape of migration, where safety and threat often coexist.

Prompt 3: Pausing in the *Tropical Night*

Notice how Cozier's figures exist in moments of pause and contemplation. Write about the space between here and there, between leaving and arriving.

If your journey could speak, what would it whisper? What would it shout? Where does your story rest when it's not ready to be held?

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Prompt 4: Between Memory and Movement

Looking at several Cozier pieces together, notice how they speak to each other across space and time. What emerges in the spaces between these stories? What ancestral wisdom travels in your breath? What moves with you even when you're still? Write down your observations in a way that makes sense to you.

Prompt 5: Gathering the Breath

Like the pause between waves, or the earth between toes as we land, take a moment to hold what has moved through us.

What gives your feet permission to rest? Write about a moment when you felt the ground steady beneath you. What wisdom does your body share when you give it time to speak?



Jacob Lawrence. *They did not always leave because they were promised work in the North. Many of them left because of Southern conditions, one of them being great floods that ruined the crops, and therefore they were unable to make a living where they were.* 1940-41; Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night.* 2006-14

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(Spanish Translation)

Narrativas corporizadas: recuerdos en movimiento

Cuando nos reunimos para apreciar obras de arte sobre viajes —ya sean físicos, ancestrales, recordados u olvidados— creamos un espacio donde las historias pueden reposar, los recuerdos pueden surgir y el movimiento puede hacer una pausa. Estas obras de Jacob Lawrence y Christopher Cozier exploran cómo la migración vive en nuestros cuerpos, cómo el desplazamiento moldea nuestras historias y cómo el arte es un espacio seguro para las experiencias individuales y colectivas por igual.



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El cuerpo recuerda

Primero, acomódate en este espacio. Siente el lugar donde tu cuerpo se conecta con tus alrededores. Respira un par de veces y presta atención a cómo te sostiene tu cuerpo durante este momento. Identifica una parte de tu cuerpo que cuente una historia. ¿Qué pequeña parte de ti quiere presentarse hoy?

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Jacob Lawrence, en su virtud de hijo de inmigrantes, pintó la [*Migration Series \(Serie Migración\)*](#) y cada panel representa un latido del corazón de las personas negras estadounidenses que emprendieron un gran viaje en busca de la libertad. Las figuras representadas no solo portan sus maletas, sino que cargan en los hombros sus sueños, sus recuerdos y el peso de su partida.

Consigna de escritura 1: ser testigo del único paso

Elige una figura de la *Migration Series (Serie Migración)* de Lawrence e intenta replicar su postura mientras reflexionas acerca de las siguientes preguntas; puedes optar por conservar esas reflexiones en tu corazón o puedes escribirlas.

¿Qué sabe tu cuerpo de viajar? ¿Qué empacarías si no puedes llevarte todo? ¿Qué viaja en tus huesos y no en tus maletas?



Jacob Lawrence. *Child labor and a lack of education was one of the other reasons for people wishing to leave their homes.* 1940-41

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Consigna de escritura 2: cuando las historias se mueven juntas

Deja que tu mirada se pose en varios paneles a la vez. Nota cómo cambia tu atención y cómo reacciona tu respiración al presenciar varias narrativas a la vez. Lawrence pintó sesenta paneles porque no era posible representar la totalidad de este gran movimiento de personas en un único panel. Reflexiona acerca de las siguientes preguntas , tal como lo hiciste en la primera consigna.

¿Cómo reacciona tu sistema nervioso al presenciar múltiples viajes a la vez? ¿Qué surge cuando las historias se mueven juntas? ¿Qué historias viajan contigo, ya sea en maletas o bolsas de papel, en una lágrima que cae o en un suspiro?

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Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night*. 2006-14

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La serie *Tropical Night (Noche tropical)* de **Christopher Cozier** surge a partir de su propia migración de Trinidad a Nueva York, de su hogar al extranjero. Su obra presenta un ritmo de migración diferente —más fragmentado y personal— y explora cómo el desplazamiento reside en el punto medio entre la partida y la llegada, la memoria y el mito. A través de sombras y siluetas y conjugando momentos de tranquilidad con otros de tensión, Cozier revela el complejo paisaje psicológico de la migración, donde la seguridad y la amenaza suelen convivir.

Consigna de escritura 3: hacer una pausa en la *Tropical Night (Noche tropical)*

Observa cómo las figuras de Cozier existen en momentos de reposo y contemplación. Escribe sobre el espacio entre aquí y allá, entre la partida y la llegada.

Si tu viaje hablara, ¿qué susurraría? ¿Qué gritaría? ¿Dónde se guarda tu historia cuando aún no está lista para ser contada?

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Consigna de escritura 4: entre la memoria y el movimiento

Observa varias obras de Cozier al mismo tiempo y nota cómo se comunican entre ellas a través del espacio y el tiempo. ¿Qué surge en el espacio entre estas historias? ¿Qué sabiduría ancestral viaja en tu respiración? ¿Qué te acompaña incluso cuando no te mueves? Escribe tus observaciones de modo que tengan sentido para ti.

Consigna de escritura 5: tomar aire

Al igual que la pausa que surge entre las olas, o la tierra entre los dedos al aterrizar, tómate un momento para pensar qué viajó a través de nosotros.

¿Qué le permite a tus pies descansar? Escribe sobre un momento en que sentiste el suelo firme bajo tus pies. ¿Qué sabiduría expresa tu cuerpo cuando le das tiempo para hablar?



Jacob Lawrence. *They did not always leave because they were promised work in the North. Many of them left because of Southern conditions, one of them being great floods that ruined the crops, and therefore they were unable to make a living where they were.* 1940-41; Christopher Cozier. *Tropical Night.* 2006-14