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Victoria Udondian, *Akaisang*, 2020, photo courtesy of the artist

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**Buffalo Arts Studio presents “Blue Jeans and Black Hair: Decolonizing Fashion”**

**Friday, October 24, 2025, 6:00 pm**

**Part of M&T Fourth Friday at Tri-Main**

Buffalo, NY — Buffalo Arts Studio presents the panel discussion *Blue Jeans and Black Hair: Decolonizing Fashion*, featuring artists, academics, and activists discussing fashion within its colonial context, acknowledging that the fashion-industrial complex is and has always been a colonial enterprise. Even as it appropriates Indigenous, Black, and/or Brown aesthetics, culture, spirituality, and technologies, the fashion-industrial complex actively employs destructive environmental policies, exploitative labor practices, and unequal profit distribution.

The panel conversation is part of Buffalo Arts Studio’s 2025/26 project *Unruly Spaces*, a series of exhibitions, workshops, and panel conversations examining systems of exclusion and erasure. The project supports the

creation of new work that critically addresses contemporary issues surrounding colonialism, immigration, and cultural identity. It will be held on **Friday, October 24, from 5:00 to 8:00 pm** as part of M&T Fourth Friday at Tri-Main. **The talk will start promptly at 6:00 pm.**

Two concurrent exhibitions anchor the fall portion of Unruly Spaces, running from August 22–November 7, 2025.

- In the front gallery, artist Davana Robedee (Syracuse, NY) presents *Biformity*, large-scale textile works using labor-intensive stitch-resist shibori techniques and indigo dye as a method of drawing to examine the universal relation between body and spirit alongside her own deeply personal experience with a chronic illness. Each work is planned and executed over many months as Robedee grows and extracts the pigments from plants she cultivates.
- Sam Modder (Tampa, FL): a Nigerian-Sri Lankan artist who works figuratively in pen, collage, and digital media to portray larger-than-life Black, female characters taking up space in real and imagined worlds. Modder positions the work within the speculative practice of the Black imaginary—centering Black dreams and fantasies to create alternate spaces of both comfort and confrontation. The spaces she creates are less utopian and more speculative test lab, decentering broken realities and focusing instead on the imaginary to help understand and rethink oppressive structures.

Looking ahead to January 2026, Unruly spaces will also feature artist Victoria Udondian (Buffalo, NY), whose work questions notions of cultural identity and post-colonial positions in relation to her experiences growing up in Nigeria, a country flooded with cast-offs from the West. Her artworks examine the complexities of migration and racial and cultural identity in the global context, interrogating the shifting cultural identities within a global trade system characterized by the movement of goods and people from one part of the world to the other.

### **About the Moderator**

**Rahwa Ghirmatzion** is a Senior Policy Fellow at the Just Solutions Collective, a national climate organization that partners with communities disproportionately impacted by climate change to turn their priorities and ideas into policies and laws. She works on holistic, resilience, place-based implementation strategies that promote equitable community development, climate justice, public health, affordable housing, and energy democracy. Ghirmatzion was the recipient of the 2022 ALIGN Movement Builders Award, the 2021 Clean and Healthy NY inaugural Cecil Corbin-Mark award for Environmental Justice, and the 2020 National Organization of Women (NOW) Community Award.

### **About the Panelists**

**Victoria Udondian** is an artist and professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo whose practice is rooted in her interest in textiles and the ways clothing shapes identity through the histories embedded in everyday materials. Originating from Nigeria, where cast-offs from the West saturate local markets, Udondian uses the second-hand clothing industry as a lens to examine how discarded garments and foreign-made goods complicate cultural identity. By tracing the global circulation of these garments and their layered personal and social histories, Udondian creates hybrid costumes that merge Nigerian and Western myths and narratives. These works function as sculptural forms and are further animated through photography and performance.

**Erin Habes** is a fashion educator, creative strategist, and community leader based in Buffalo, NY. As a faculty member in Fashion & Textile Technology at Buffalo State University, she has mentored countless students and serves as director of the university's signature RUNWAY fashion show. A study abroad enthusiast, Habes leads transformative global learning experiences, including programs in Ghana, Italy, China, and New York City, that

expand students' cultural perspectives and creative practice. Recognized for her commitment to equity, creativity, and innovation, she bridges education, industry, and community engagement—empowering students and brands alike to harness fashion as a catalyst for change.

**Dr. Shantell Reid** is an Assistant Professor in the Fashion and Textile Technology department at Buffalo State University. Dr. Reid earned her Ph.D. in Apparel Merchandising and Design from Iowa State University and holds a Master's Degree in Creative Studies from Buffalo State University. Her research focuses on addressing garment sizing inconsistencies, exploring garment sizing adjustability, and promoting sustainable garment construction practices. Driven by the vision of a future where fashion truly embraces and celebrates all body types, she engages in research and advocacy work to challenge stereotypes and instigate positive transformations within the fashion industry.

**Yayi Dia** is an entrepreneur, model, strategist, and creative who has been building businesses since the age of 15. With five years of experience as a teen hair braider turned business owner, Dia's entire life and creative career have been based on the experience of black beauty and fashion. She brings her expertise in self-branding and cultural storytelling to the Los Angeles beauty-tech brand, LOO-SHA Inc., and works as the Media and PR Manager for Buffalo Fashion Runway in 2024.

### **About Buffalo Arts Studio**

Buffalo Arts Studio (BAS) connects diverse communities through visual arts, offering inclusive exhibitions, educational programs, mentorships, and public art initiatives. BAS provides vital resources for visual artists, including affordable studio space and paid opportunities. Through its programs, BAS serves as a catalyst for self-empowerment, innovation, and regional enhancement.

This exhibition is generously supported by The Cameron and Jane Baird Foundation, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, DownRoot Fund, part of the Crossroads Community Fund, Erie County Cultural Funds, M&T Bank, Ovation Stand for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and through the New York State Council for the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.

Buffalo Arts Studio is located in Suite 500 of the Tri-Main Center at 2495 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14214. For media inquiries, interview requests, or high-resolution images, please contact Sydney O'Shei at [sydney@buffaloartsstudio.org](mailto:sydney@buffaloartsstudio.org) or 716-833-4450 x 114.