

E Jane: *Where there's love overflowing*

April 1–May 14, 2022

Organized by Lumi Tan, Senior Curator, and
Sienna Fekete, Curatorial Fellow

The Kitchen

512 W 19th Street New York, NY 10011
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FORWARD

My mother will never forgive Diana Ross for stealing Stephanie Mills' part in *The Wiz*. She told me so in 2018 when I visited her at my childhood home in Prince George's County, Maryland. She even went to see Stephanie Mills on *my* birthday. That's dedication, that's devotion to a Diva. The elders in the Black community I come from already *know* about "Homegate" or the controversy surrounding Motown giving Diana the lead role as Dorothy in *The Wiz* when Stephanie Mills had already shown us she was the perfect Dorothy and had the voice to deliver us home in 1974, just four years prior to the film's release. Barry Gordy didn't do it though.

According to Wikipedia,

"Motown Productions acquired the film rights to *The Wiz* in 1977 and signed Stephanie Mills in anticipation of having her star as Dorothy in the film adaptation. Motown singer and actress Diana Ross asked Motown CEO Berry Gordy to cast her instead, but he declined, feeling that the then-33-year-old Ross was far too old for the part. However, she contacted Rob Cohen of Universal Pictures, who offered to have them finance the film if she were to play Dorothy, at which point he acquiesced."

Age has nothing to do with it as far as I'm concerned. We'll leave Hollywood ageism out of this show. My issue is the erasure this casting choice caused and the way it denied me of seeing Stephanie Mills' beautiful face and knowing intimately her voice for the first 28 years of my life.

I remember my father playing Stephanie Mills' version of home in the car when I was a preteen and he got so emotional...but I didn't understand why.

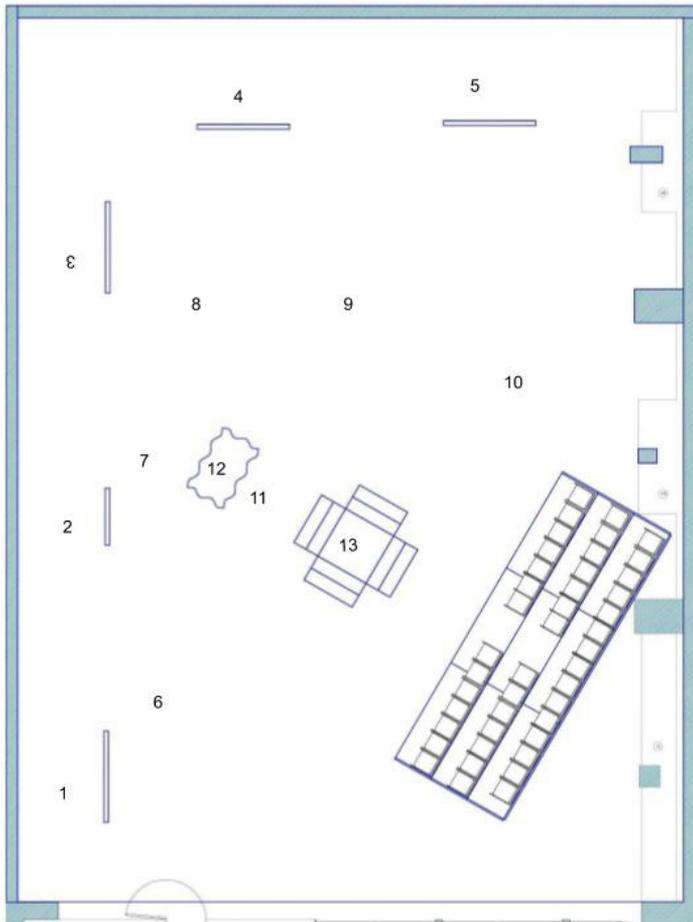
So I looked up Stephanie Mills possibly by accident while researching Whitney Houston who sang “Home” for her debut performance under Clive Davis at The Merv Griffin Show. I found a later version Stephanie sang at The Apollo. What I noticed first were her distinctive Afro features and her beautiful deep brown skin and then that voice! What would my childhood have been if Rob Cohen of Universal Pictures had trusted Barry Gordy’s decision and let us have *this* Dorothy for the world to see in technicolor? We’ll never know and an art show can’t fix that, but that’s what led me on this path.

In Denmark in 2018, I did a talk on the song “Home” while MHYSA and I were on tour. I played the Diana Ross version and the Stephanie Mills version hoping I’d make my point simply by playing them side by side. Diana can’t sing like Stephanie but she can still sing, and I don’t know if anyone felt the injustice that me and my mother feel when hearing these two versions. Someone in the audience asked, why don’t you sing the song? And I think I replied something like oh I’d probably have to sing Diana’s version because I don’t have the range.

In 2020 I started taking vocal lessons. My vocal coach told me to pick a song to practice and I immediately thought, I’ll try “Home” and I wanted to sing Whitney’s version...we settled on Diana’s version but it taught me a lot to sing it.¹

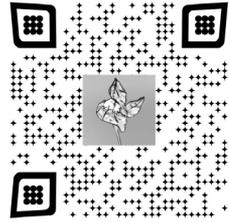
¹ I Diana can sing because that song is hard, the notes are hard and she hit all of them. I know now what a feat that is.

I guess I did get the diva I would need to think I could try to be a diva. But I would’ve been happy to live in the world where all my life I wanted to live up to the range, the beauty, and the grace of Stephanie Mills.



CHECKLIST

Use this QR code to experience AR elements by pointing your camera at the wall paintings and digital drawings. The app rd9vz.zappar.io will ask permission to access motion and orientation on your phone. No data is stored from granting this access. Refreshing the browser is recommended between works.



1.
1975, Stephanie Mills, 'The Wiz', Broadway, 2022
Gouache
2.
1978, Diana Ross, 'The Wiz', Motown Film, 2022
Gouache
3.
1983, Whitney Houston, Her Debut, The Merv Griffin Show, 2022
Gouache
4.
1988 Beyoncé, The Sammy Awards, Houston, Texas, 2022
5.
1999 Jazmine Sullivan, 'The Wiz', Hill Elementary, Philadelphia, 2022
Gouache
- **DivasSingingHome_archive_v2.mp4, 2022*
Duration: 23:38 min
AR element
6.
Living here in this brand new world might be a fantasy but it's taught me to love, 2022
Digital print on fabric
7.
It should would be nice to be back home where there's love and affection and just maybe I can convince time to slow up, 2022
Digital print on fabric

8.

Maybe there's a chance for me to go back now that I have some direction, 2022

Digital print on fabric

9.

Growing if you're listening god please don't make it hard for me to believe everything that I see, 2022

Digital print on fabric

10.

So I know its real its real to me and I know that we must look inside our hearts to find a world full of love like yours, 2022

Digital print on fabric

11.

MHYSA - WHEN I THINK OF HOME, I THINK OF A BAG (bag sculpture), 2021

12.

MHYSA - WHEN I THINK OF HOME, I THINK OF A BAG (Livestream), 2021

.MP4

Duration: 09:11 min

13.

Diva stage, 2022

Wood, lighting, electrical components.

All works courtesy of the artist.

To download the exhibition's score, visit [The Kitchen's website](#).

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

E. Jane (b.1990, Bethesda, MD) is an interdisciplinary artist and musician based in Brooklyn, New York. Inspired by Black liberation and womanist praxis, their work incorporates digital images, video, text, performance, sculpture, installation, and sound design. E. Jane's work explores safety and futurity as it relates to Black femmes, as well as how Black femmes navigate/negotiate space in popular culture and networked media. Since 2015, Jane has been developing the performance persona MHYSA, an underground popstar for the cyber resistance. MHYSA operates in Jane's *Lavendra/Recovery* (2015-)—an iterative multimedia installation—and out in the world. Jane considers this project a total work of art—or Gesamtkunstwerk—that honors and examines the life of the Black diva and of Black femmes in popular culture. In 2018, MHYSA followed her critically acclaimed debut, *fantasii*, with a live EU/US tour. Highlight performances include the ICA and Cafe OTO in London and Rewire in The Hague. Her second album *NEVAEH* came out in February 2020 on Hyperdub records in London. E. Jane received their MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 2016, and a BA in Art History with minors in English and Philosophy from Marymount Manhattan College in New York in 2012. E. Jane has also performed at The Kitchen, MoCADA and MoMA PS1 as one-half of the sound-performance duo SCRAAATCH; exhibited their solo work in dozens of international institutions and galleries, from MoMA PS1 and Studio Museum 127 to MCA Chicago and IMT Gallery and Edel Assanti in London; written the widely-circulated “NOPE manifesto,” recently featured in Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism*; won the 2016 Wynn Newhouse Award; and have been a 2019-2020 artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. They are currently a Harvard College Fellow in New Media as a part of SCRAAATCH.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

AR Design: Studio JUNBI (Kyunghee Jwa and Rodan Tekle) with Rad Mora, and Echo Tang

Production Manager, The Kitchen: Zack Tinkelman

Installation Supervisor: Joe Wakeman

Installation crew: Leo Janks, Nic Jerabek, Corey Eisenberg, Joe Galan

Neo Gibson, Emma Havranek, Steve Lazickas, Cody Lee, Hannah

O'Connor, Holly Overton, Sky Parnes, Aaron Robinson, Emily Vizina

Bag Sculpture production assistance: chukwumaa

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