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## ***VOLTA VOLTA: An Artist's Statement***

Alexis Hithe

### **Reclaimer**

While the cinematic work of Erick Msumanje's MFA thesis statement was completed in 2017 at UC San Diego, *VOLTA VOLTA* (*VOLTA* for short) presents itself an opportunity to decode space in all forms, including perspective. This written work by Alexis Hithe, a friend and colleague, will serve as *AN* artist's statement—if not *THE* artist's statement—and a container for the two artists to reclaim the outdated, solitary space of “the artist's statement” as a critical, collaborative one, more suitable to the collectivity of the Black creative spirit.

### **Ritual Space Decoded**

Collective memory as an essential component to the survival of African people, enslaved and brutalized, dispersed and disoriented, finds an expression in *VOLTA VOLTA*. This expression begins quietly, gently, as we see images of Black bodies engaged in ritual spaces, such as young women dressed in white for a church ceremony, and ritual exchanges, like a man shaving himself in a small handheld mirror. These moments of the first half of the film are treated with delicacy and patience to match their reverence, allowing for the viewer to sit through any restlessness that surfaces as the camera observes with a steady gaze, and to arrive at a place of *knowing*.

Perhaps this knowing is elusive to some, playing hid and go seek right before the eye in the digital space, until the second half of the film comes, with a

loudness and confidence in both image and sound. Again, ritual spaces and ritual exchanges are brought forth: like a woman beneath the foot of a cross, child in arms and a bull-man steadily drawing in a rope from the dark beyond as drums thunder, respectively. But it is in the dim theatric space—a space that can read as digital in its vast darkness—in which the images of the second act find themselves, that *VOLTA VOLTA* reinterprets itself. Rediscovered itself. Reimagines *itself*. And in doing so points back to the fact, to the *knowing* that comes at the beginning for some but not others, the collective memory of rituals carried through Black bodies for generations, that Blackness is an existence that transcends time and space to connect the past forward to the future, and the future back to the past, and the present with both. The body is the container for this, as the film is a container for the knowing of this. As the film makes reference to itself in digital and conceptual space on multiple layers, these truths are essentially decrypted from the Black body engaged in ritual, and *VOLTA VOLTA* remembers itself. *VOLTA VOLTA* is a film that lives.

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Story-making and history-telling, Alexis Hithe creates conceptual and experimental work that focuses on the Black experience and its imaginings. A graduate of University of California, San Diego's Visual Arts program, Alexis draws inspiration from her childhood in the Mojave Desert of southern California and takes a non-traditional approach to filmmaking; she believes that truth emerges somewhere between doing and dreaming, and practices radical patience as a part of her art process.