STATEMENT

Do we create our fate or is it sealed into our palms; is a name an inscribed title to a set life plan? I was born in a cramped bush hospital in the hottest month of the year to a Dutch-American mother and a Tiv-Nigerian father. They created a name for me from two Tiv words: “de” and “nenge” meaning “wait and see” in defiance of all who opposed their union. Using science fiction as a launch pad, I create interactive performance/installations that link physical and cyber space to critique representations of identity. Hybrid, iconic self-portraits serve as seductive guides in sculpted environments that each form a visual haiku to address human adaptation and communication. These works are portals, turning attention to rituals where objects are catalysts for change, mapping symbols in the process of metamorphosis like rest stops on a journey. I play with perceptions by tickling the senses, redefining the parameters of bodies and spaces to propose new models of desire, need and interaction. Informed by Nigerian theatrical traditions, the barrier between performer and audience--the viewer and the viewed--disappears. My hands are the teeth of my art, tearing through to marrow.

• La Morena invokes Eleggua, Yoruba god of the crossroads, and the Virgen de Guadalupe in an (ir)reverent meditation on brown/mixed race femininity. She sings songs of passion and violence (La Pistola y El Corazon by Los Lobos; Cole Porter favorites; etc.) as blood oozes from her corset bodice. The passion of La Morena seduces with an installation resembling a life-size reliquary or a diorama (often found in natural history museums depicting “native” peoples in their “natural” habitats). Some people think the figure is fake until I move; others refuse to kneel; and some bow their heads and actually pray. La Morena serves as an homage to La Virgen de Guadalupe, the most widely revered brown female in the world. Religious or not, accessing the art means become part of an act of devotional ritual. I am interested in staging “appearances”--just as the Virgin Mary always seems to appear in the most random of places around the world. Locations I am seeking out include galleries, abandoned storefronts, the window of a department store, and so on.

• “A spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down...in the most delightful way.” Dragonflygirl resists easy stereotypes of race and gender, hovering in a succulent virtual fantasy of purple mangos and swirling flowers. When her body is stroked with the mouse, her two heads giggle. Click on her and you are transported to Hyperotic, a choose-your-own-adventure erotic story site written by my alias Dionysia Jones.

• The experience of displacement becomes a point of power in Kasevikundu’s Hut (see Mutatis Mutandis series at Dillard University) which offers a chance to step onto the simulated earth of my grandmother’s thatch-roof hut. Is home a web address, a physical place...or both? Can intimacy be measured in megabytes or the memory in body cells be altered like cells in HTML coding?

• Primitive rituals become interactive web sites to explore psycho-emotional concerns in the cyber realm. Virtual Exorcism helps individuals release outmoded baggage and is the online equivalent of Mutatis Mutandis*, a performance/installation that includes a bonfire into which the audience tosses slips of paper containing written wishes of things to release from their lives.

• Sculpting Sound, a site-specific residential commission for Steve Miller, utilizes the concept of synesthesia to turn a spoken sound wave into a form that is read, not heard. Whimsical and slightly scary, these works tease the borders between community and individual; analog and high-tech; culture and geography; reality and fantasy.

--Please visit www.denenge.com for still images and interactive works.