

TODD GRAY

6<sup>th</sup> May to 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2017



The seeds for the ideas I planned to pursue at Nirox were planted in Italy, at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency I attended in 2016. The perfectly maintained 16th century gardens on the villa property I photographed represented the values, aesthetics and desires of a western colonial power. Making photographs of the natural habitat in the Cradle of Humankind at Nirox would be a significant contrast and counter point -- especially so when combining the images I took of Michael Jackson, the most recognized man of African dissent, while working for him in the 80's.

The impact of my residency in Nirox was nothing short of profound. While there I read a book by Francis Nyamnjoh, "Drinking From the Cosmic Gourd: How Amos Tutuola Can Change Our Minds" about Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola and his seminal work "My Life in the Bush With Ghosts". I opened up and cultivated previously untapped streams of creative energy, responding to the land and art works in the sculpture park, as well as considering my own connection to the continent as an African American. I started to draw. Drawing became a new way to investigate meaning making and finding alternate creative pathways (apart from Cartesian logic) that did not all start and end with synapses firing in the brain. At Nirox I started vibrating and harmonizing with the ancestors.

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