

Elizabeth Karp-Evans, "Precious Okoyomon Finds New Spaces for Radical Thought," *Cultured*, November 26, 2019

CULTURED

ART (/ART) YOUNG ARTISTS 2019 (/YOUNG-ARTISTS-2019)

Precious Okoyomon Finds New Spaces for Radical Thought



I was afraid of nothing/ I was a lamb with no shepherd/ _ no fangs, reads a stanza from "The Benediction of the Lamb" by Precious Okoyomon. Within these lines lie the power, vulnerability and reticent sweetness that effuse from Okoyomon, whether performing in front of hundreds or meeting someone for the first time. One is struck by her sincerity, on and off the page. "There's no real end or beginning to things. I never take a break from poetry," she tells me from Paris, where she is finishing her first full-length book of poems, *But Did You Die*, forthcoming this spring from the publishing house WONDER. Equal parts performer and poet, Okoyomon's work is a multidisciplinary query into identity, particularly experiences of black queer life. This is done in such a way—remorse at lessons unlearned, references to Drake and Beyoncé, failed language and hate fucking—that pain, beauty, humor and growth are accessed in equal parts, allowing the audience's own emotions to manifest deeply. "I'm interested in carving out space from traditional academia to allow more freedoms, to allow radical thought building," she says.

She is not alone in her methodologies. Okoyomon is co-director of The Home School in Hudson, New York, a program started in 2014 by poets Adam Fitzgerald and Dorothea Lasky with the aim to consider poetry alongside other modes of art-making. "We teach in the lineage of Fred Moten, who was actually on the faculty last year," Okoyomon tells me excitedly. She also found time this year to present *The End of the World* at London's Serpentine Galleries, in architect Junya Ishigami's Pavilion. Written and directed by Okoyomon, the play revolves around four angels who have fallen to earth with dire consequences. The piece probes the audience's visceral notions of anti-blackness via an apocalyptic paradise brought to life by Yves B. Golden's score of both trap and classical music. "I give a lot to the world and I'm careful about what I allow into my space," says Okoyomon, in her considered, bright tone, "but I'm constantly connecting to people."