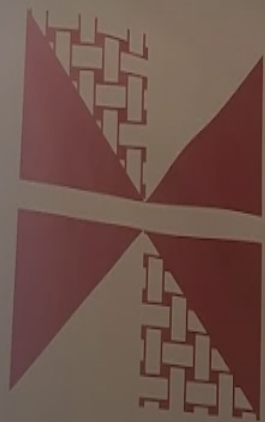


MARIPOSA MUSEUM & WORLD CULTURE CENTER
OAK BLUFFS, MARTHA'S VINEYARD

PRODUCTION TREATMENT



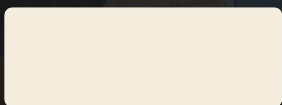
MARIPOSA
MUSEUM & WORLD CULTURE CENTER

A PRODUCTION TREATMENT

The Stories We Carry

A 50-minute documentary on memory, belonging, and imagination.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Written by Nicole Yarde

PRODUCTION TREATMENT · SCENE-BY-SCENE BLUEPRINT

Overview

This is the production treatment: a scene-by-scene blueprint for the finished film, its narrative arc, its key sequences, the specific images and sounds, the interviews and archival materials, and how they assemble in production and post. A film like this is not scripted in advance; its strongest moments (the face that will not stay anonymous, the sound a child finally lands) are discovered in the room. What follows is the vision made precise enough to build, and the evidence that the story is ready.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What do we owe the stories we inherit?



THE PREMISE

On an island that has been a Native homeland for ten thousand years and a Black refuge for more than a century, a small museum named for the butterfly becomes the keeper of what one community refused to lose, and the room where strangers learn to see one another.

THESIS

Through three histories that share one island (the Wampanoag people, the African American community of Oak Bluffs, and the Mariposa Museum), the film traces how stories, language, and acts of imagination are carried across generations. Rooted in continuity, refuge, and joy, it asks what a community chooses to preserve, what it refuses to lose, and what it passes forward. It lands on stewardship: the responsibility that arrives with a story once you have received it.

How the Film Looks, Sounds & Cuts

The film is shot in available light and favors the early hours, when the water and the cliffs do the work. Natural sound comes before words: tide, beach grass, a screen door, footsteps on a gallery floor, the breath before someone speaks. Wôpanâak is spoken and, with the consent of Wampanoag language partners, left untranslated. Point of view belongs to the Visitor, an unnamed presence the camera sometimes follows and sometimes becomes.

THE FOUR MOTIFS, AS A SYSTEM

The four recurring images are not decoration; they are how the film cuts. First light on the water opens each act. The butterfly marks transformation and return. A pair of hands recurs as the work passed forward. A child appears once in each act: in the language class, first into the cold water, at the making-table. The child is a role rather than a single performer, staged to rhyme across the acts so that inheritance is visible without committing the film to one participant, casting, or release.



i First light on the water

where each act begins



ii A single butterfly

transformation, return



iii A pair of hands, making

the work passed forward



iv A child at the waterline

in a class, into the water, at the table

RHYTHM

The film moves from observation toward encounter. Act One is patient and elemental, letting the audience settle into the island's oldest rhythms. Act Two broadens into community life, gathering voices, movement, and historical texture before narrowing again at the point of forgetting. Act Three slows inside the museum, where attention itself becomes the subject. The pacing carries the argument: a story is inherited slowly, and only by those willing to stay in the room long enough to receive it.

HOW IT CUTS

Three present-tense anchor sequences rhyme across the three acts: the Wôpanâak class, the Inkwell dawn swim, and the artist at work. Each shows a community reaching for a future through a single repeated act (speaking, gathering, making), and the edit lets them answer one another across the runtime. The act breaks are bridges, not resets: Act One hands to Act Two through a person crossing a threshold, and Act Two hands to Act Three through the gesture of someone going back to the record.

THE PAST IN THE FILM

The past is handled with restraint. Archival photographs, letters, maps, and records are allowed to hold the frame long enough for the viewer to look rather than only recognize. Historical materials are shot with the same available-light care as the present-day footage and, where possible, rephotographed in place rather than dropped in flat, so the record and the living island share one visual language. There are no reenactments. Where the record is silent, the film stays silent with it.

THE VOICE OF THE FILM

Narration is sparse and recessive by design: a single steady voice that poses a question and then gets out of the way, never explaining an image the audience can already read. It is present at the seams and absent at the close. The recessiveness is a choice, not an omission: the argument is carried by scholars, culture-bearers, and primary sources speaking for themselves, and by the images.

MUSIC

The film resists score. Its sound is the island's own (tide, room tone, footsteps, a reading aloud, a class), and there is no music over the final frame. Silence is treated as a sound the film has earned.

Before the Name

Sound before speech. One question, and then a title card.

First light on the water. No narration, only sound: the pull of the tide, wind in beach grass, a screen door, a gull. The camera, which is the Visitor, walks. We catch a pair of hands at work without yet knowing whose; the hundred-foot Aquinnah Cliffs catching the early sun; a single butterfly; a child at the waterline deciding whether to go in. A few words of Wôpanâak drift over the cliffs and are not translated. Then one line of narration, and only one, poses the question the whole film will answer.



The hundred-foot Aquinnah Cliffs, catching the early sun.

What do we owe the stories we inherit?

ON SCREEN

Dawn footage of the Aquinnah Cliffs and the south shore; a close-up of hands; a single butterfly; a child at the waterline; the title card over black.

WE HEAR

Layered natural sound, a few untranslated words of Wôpanâak, and one line of narration.



Sankofa: go back and fetch what you risk leaving behind.

ACT ONE · MEMORY

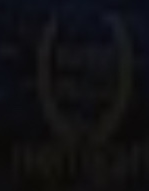
≈ 14 MINUTES

I

MEMORY

The First Light

We begin in abundance, not injury: Noepe, homeland to the Wampanoag, the People of the First Light, for ten thousand years.



NARRATION (SAMPLE)

The words are older than the island's English name. They move from one mouth to the next in the present tense. What survives is not only the sound but the decision, repeated, to keep speaking it.

Long before the name Martha's Vineyard, this was Noepe, land amid the waters. A culture-bearer guides us through a world that is whole: fishing grounds and planting ground, the giant Moshup whose stories shaped the island, the Aquinnah Cliffs whose colored clay holds ancient time in its layers, a child learning to shape the old words again. This is the ground everything else will stand on, and these are the people who remained.

Survival, here, was itself an act of imagination. Through generations of pressure on Wampanoag land and self-government, the people held a future in mind that the present did not yet permit, and carried it, unbroken, to federal recognition in 1987. The narration stays out of the way; the language, heard in a present-day classroom and on the cliffs, makes the argument.

One present-day sequence anchors the act. In a bright community room, children and adults work through a Wôpanâak lesson, repeating words that were silent for the better part of a century. The camera stays on a single child shaping a difficult sound until it lands. We do not subtitle it. The

point is not comprehension but transmission: a language handed from one mouth to the next in real time.

Act One has belonged to those who remained. It closes on someone who arrived, and who carried both stories in a single body. In 1862, Dr. Samuel Birmingham, a New Bedford physician of African and Wampanoag heritage, leased a tent in the Oak Bluffs campground and built what was very likely the first Black-owned cottage on the island. The camera stays on the lease in his hands and does not explain what those hands are about to begin. The act ends here, on a threshold rather than a conclusion: one man, two inheritances, a door he has just opened and not yet walked through.

We do not resolve him. We hold him as a hinge, the place where two stories meet without dissolving into one. The Wampanoag did not arrive and do not return, because they remained; this is their ground, and it stays their ground. What is about to grow around Birmingham came, and came for refuge. They braid. They also remain distinct and sovereign.

INTERVIEWS

An Aquinnah Cultural Center language keeper; a Wampanoag weaver or artist on inherited craft; a Native & Indigenous studies scholar on sovereignty and place.

ARCHIVAL & VISUAL

Historic photographs of Aquinnah and the cliffs; the 1862 campground tent-lease in close-up; early cottage and Smalley family portraits; present-day footage of a Wôpanâak class, weaving, and fishing.

WE HEAR

Spoken Wôpanâak, untranslated, with partner consent; wind, surf, and the sound of a classroom.

HUMANITIES INQUIRY — *Native American and Indigenous studies. Wampanoag presence is treated not as prehistory but as ongoing sovereignty, and language revitalization as a living intellectual project rather than a rescue. The act's claim: continuity is itself an achievement, with place-based knowledge as the throughline.*

ACT TWO · BELONGING

≈ 18 MINUTES

II

BELONGING

The Haven & the Forgetting

Again we open in joy, because joy is the reason people came. Then the turn, when a refuge was nearly erased.

We walk through the door he opened. A community takes root around that first cottage, and we are still in joy. Black and Wampanoag families live a few streets apart, intermarry, raise children who carry both histories at once, among them Julia Smalley, a Wampanoag cottage owner, mother of Amos Smalley, the harpooner some historians believe may have inspired Melville's *Tashtego*. And still the strands stay separate: this act belongs to arrival and refuge, as the last belonged to continuity, and the film never lets one stand in for the other.

Then the haven proper. Charles and Henrietta Shearer (he born into slavery, both Hampton-trained) turn a laundry into one of the first and most important inns to welcome Black guests, because segregation sharply limited where

Black travelers could stay. The Highlands fill with cottages, and the film lingers in their particulars: a screen door easing shut on a shaded porch, towels bright on the morning sand at the Inkwell, the dawn swim a returning family still keeps with a child the first one into the cold water, laughter carrying between houses as the light goes long. The Cottagers raise money and raise one another. Dorothy West writes her neighbors from her porch. Every one of these began the same way: someone imagined a refuge that did not yet exist, and built it. None of it is filmed as nostalgia; it is the evidence, proof that what was built here was fully alive. The act stays inside that belonging long enough for the viewer to feel at home in it, so that the turn, when it comes, costs them something.



REFERENCE IMAGE *People & Places of Oak Bluffs, the photo wall at Shearer Cottage.*

And then the turn. By the 1880s the campground had begun pushing out its tenants of color, and for much of the twentieth century the campground was white. The island's first documented community of color was largely erased from memory: not destroyed in a single act, but let go of, a little at a time, until almost no one was left to say it had been there.

Act Two could end on that silence. It does not. It ends on the first hand reaching back into it. Someone has gone back to the record, and the record answered: a name surfaces that has not

been spoken in a hundred years. The camera stays on the page, not the face. We do not yet say what the name will become. We only see that someone went looking, and that the forgetting was not the last word. The forgetting was real. So is the hand now turning the page.

We name the present cost honestly and briefly, too. The cost of the island now presses on families whose place here was hard-won, so that a community recovered on the page is not yet safe on the ground. What was built here can still be lost. It survives only if someone keeps it.



The Oak Bluffs story, recovered and returned to the wall.

the forgetting was real, so is the hand now turning the page.

INTERVIEWS

A long-standing Oak Bluffs family or the Cottagers on return and tradition; the Martha's Vineyard Museum historian who recovered the campground community; a scholar of Black leisure and geographies.

ARCHIVAL & VISUAL

The Shearer Cottage Green Book listing and guesthouse photographs; the Shearer Cottage archive wall; Cottagers Corner records; Dorothy West's papers, with readings; campground maps and family photographs; footage of the Inkwell dawn swim and Circuit Avenue.

WE HEAR

A reading from Dorothy West; the Green Book listing read aloud; surf and morning voices at the Inkwell; the quiet of a reading room.

HUMANITIES INQUIRY — *African American history, Black geographies, and the public history of leisure: Oak Bluffs as one of the country's foremost Black summer communities, and a case study in how a real community is erased from the record and then recovered. Scholarship as stewardship.*

ACT THREE · IMAGINATION

≈ 16 MINUTES

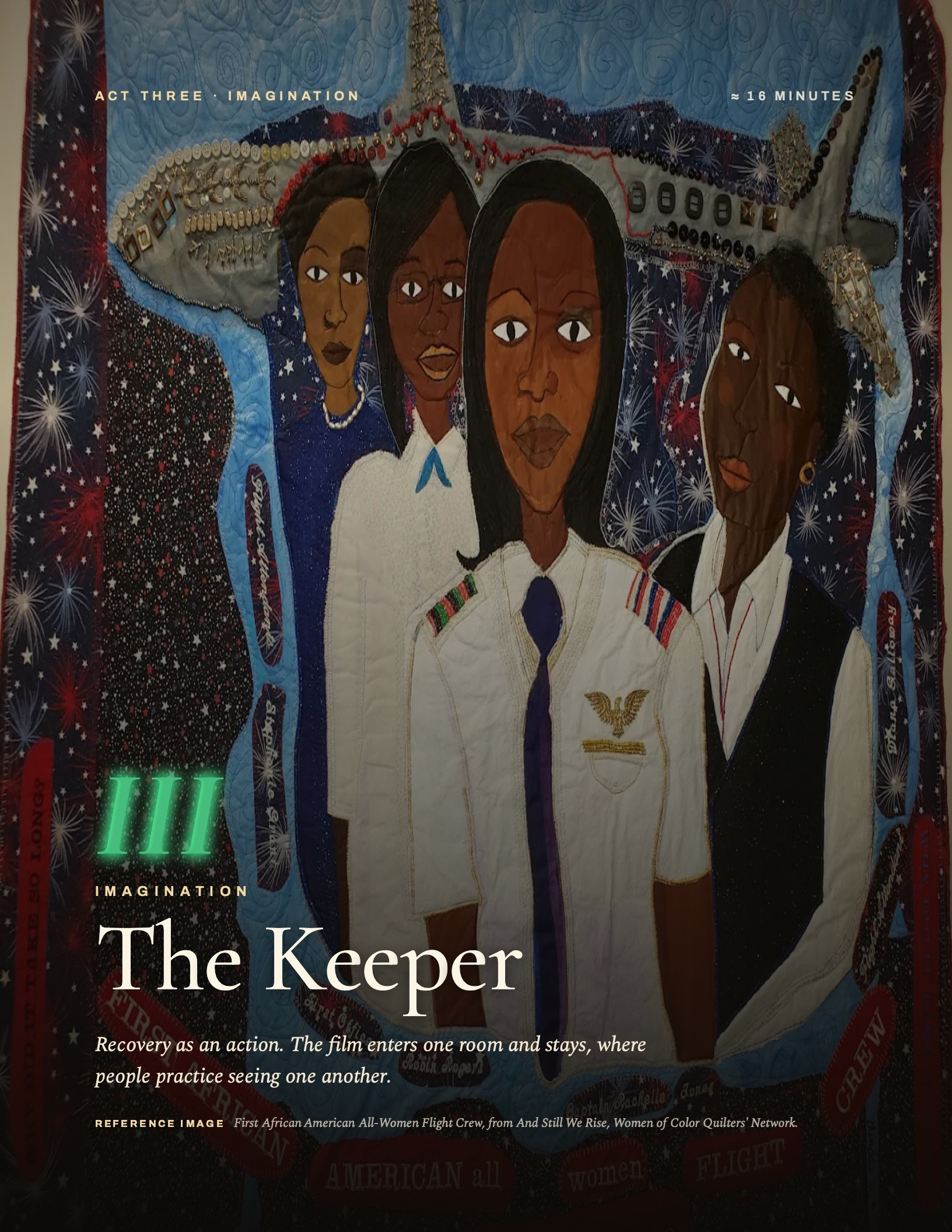
III

IMAGINATION

The Keeper

Recovery as an action. The film enters one room and stays, where people practice seeing one another.

REFERENCE IMAGE *First African American All-Women Flight Crew, from And Still We Rise, Women of Color Quilters' Network.*



Recovery is an action, and we have just watched it begin. Now we watch it widen. The historian's box is one hand; there are others, and the act opens by finding them. Families keep the memory walkable along the African American Heritage Trail. The Aquinnah Cultural Center holds the island's oldest story in the first person. Each is someone going back for something the present nearly let slip: the same motion, in different rooms.

Into this arrives the Mariposa Museum. Named for the butterfly, the sign of transformation and of return, it opened in Oak Bluffs in 2019 as the island's only museum devoted to artists of the African diaspora, and drew thousands in its first summer to an exhibition called *And Still We Rise*, organized with the Women of Color Quilters'

Network. The museum is small: fifty-seven Circuit Avenue, a few blocks from the beach, the kind of door you could walk past if you weren't looking. But by now we know what the act of looking costs, and what it returns. Inside, the light changes.

This is where the film slows down and the camera earns the Visitor's name. It has spent thirty-five minutes moving through landscape and history. Now it enters a room and stays. The Visitor moves through the gallery the way a person moves through a gallery: pausing, stepping closer, stepping back, standing. The narration gives way. What fills the screen is what fills the room: art, and the space between the person and the thing they are looking at.



Fifty-seven Circuit Avenue: the gallery the Visitor enters and stays in. Inside, the light changes.

This space is the museum's argument. Not preservation alone, because its work extends beyond preserving what was. Not education, because education can sound like something handed in one direction, and here the looking belongs to everyone in the room. Something closer to practice. The museum is where people practice seeing one another: through someone else's imagination, through another century's witness, through a quilt stitched by hands the viewer will never meet. What crosses the bridge, if the encounter works, is not information. It is recognition, and recognition is where stewardship begins, because people rarely protect what they have not learned to see.

One sequence shows imagination as labor. In a corner of the gallery or a nearby studio, an exhibiting artist works on a piece, and the film watches the decisions accumulate: the choosing of a color, the stepping back, the long pause before the next mark. Set beside the language

class of Act One and the dawn swim of Act Two, the scene completes the film's argument: that making, like language and like gathering, is how a community reaches for a future before it exists.

One encounter shows what this means more plainly than any thesis can. The Visitor stops in front of a portrait, reads the placard, looks again, and stays longer than they meant to, because something in the face on the wall refuses to stay anonymous. For a moment there is only the looking, and the room goes quiet around it. They did not know this story existed. Now they do, and they will carry it out the door and onto Circuit Avenue, where it will change, even slightly, how they see the next person they pass. That is the act. It is what the language keeper has been doing with Wôpanâak, what the Shearers did with a guest room, what Birmingham did with a tent lease. Someone saw something before it existed and reached for it. The museum makes that reach possible for anyone who walks in.

The close is small on purpose. We return to first light on the water. The culture-bearer's hands, the artist's hands, a child's hands. The child takes the brush. Her hands already know the motion. The last frame is the open door and the water beyond it, and no voice over the top of it.

INTERVIEWS

Mariposa leadership on the museum's mission and its 2019 move to Oak Bluffs; a Mariposa exhibiting artist, filmed making work; a scholar of African diaspora art history or museum studies.

ARCHIVAL & VISUAL

Footage and opening-night photographs from *And Still We Rise*; the Women of Color Quilters' Network quilts; gallery interiors and visitors at 57 Circuit Avenue; an artist at work; the closing sequence of hands and the open door.

WE HEAR

Room tone and footsteps; sparse closing narration that stops before the final image; no music over the last frame.

HUMANITIES INQUIRY — *African diaspora art history and museum studies: the museum as a contact space where strangers meet across difference and learn to see one another. Diaspora visual culture is the medium, public memory is the stakes, and stewardship is the conclusion.*

Scholarship & Sources

The film is carried by scholars and primary sources rather than by narration. The connective prose evokes; this page proves. Where a holding is not yet confirmed, it is named as a research target rather than asserted as secured.

ACT ONE · WAMPANOAG HISTORY, LANGUAGE & CONTINUITY

The Aquinnah Cultural Center; the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah); the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project; tribal educators; and scholarship on Indigenous sovereignty and language reclamation.

ACT TWO · BLACK OAK BLUFFS: REFUGE, BELONGING & RECOVERY

The community and its recovery. Andrew Patch's research for the Martha's Vineyard Museum, including the Museum Quarterly account "The First Cottagers of Color in Oak Bluffs" (2021); campground and lease records; and the *Vineyard Gazette's* 2022 reporting, "A Community Rediscovered."

Leisure, refuge, and belonging. Shearer Cottage, listed in the Negro Motorist Green Book; Inkwell Beach; The Cottagers, Inc.; the writing of Dorothy West, including *The Wedding* and her Oak Bluffs columns; and the Martha's Vineyard African American Heritage Trail.



REFERENCE IMAGE

A story quilt from *And Still We Rise*, Women of Color Quilters' Network.

ACT THREE · ART, MUSEUMS & PUBLIC MEMORY

Museum studies and diaspora art scholarship, including the museum as a contact space. The Mariposa Museum, its 2019 exhibition *And Still We Rise* with the Women of Color Quilters' Network, and its programming offer contemporary examples.

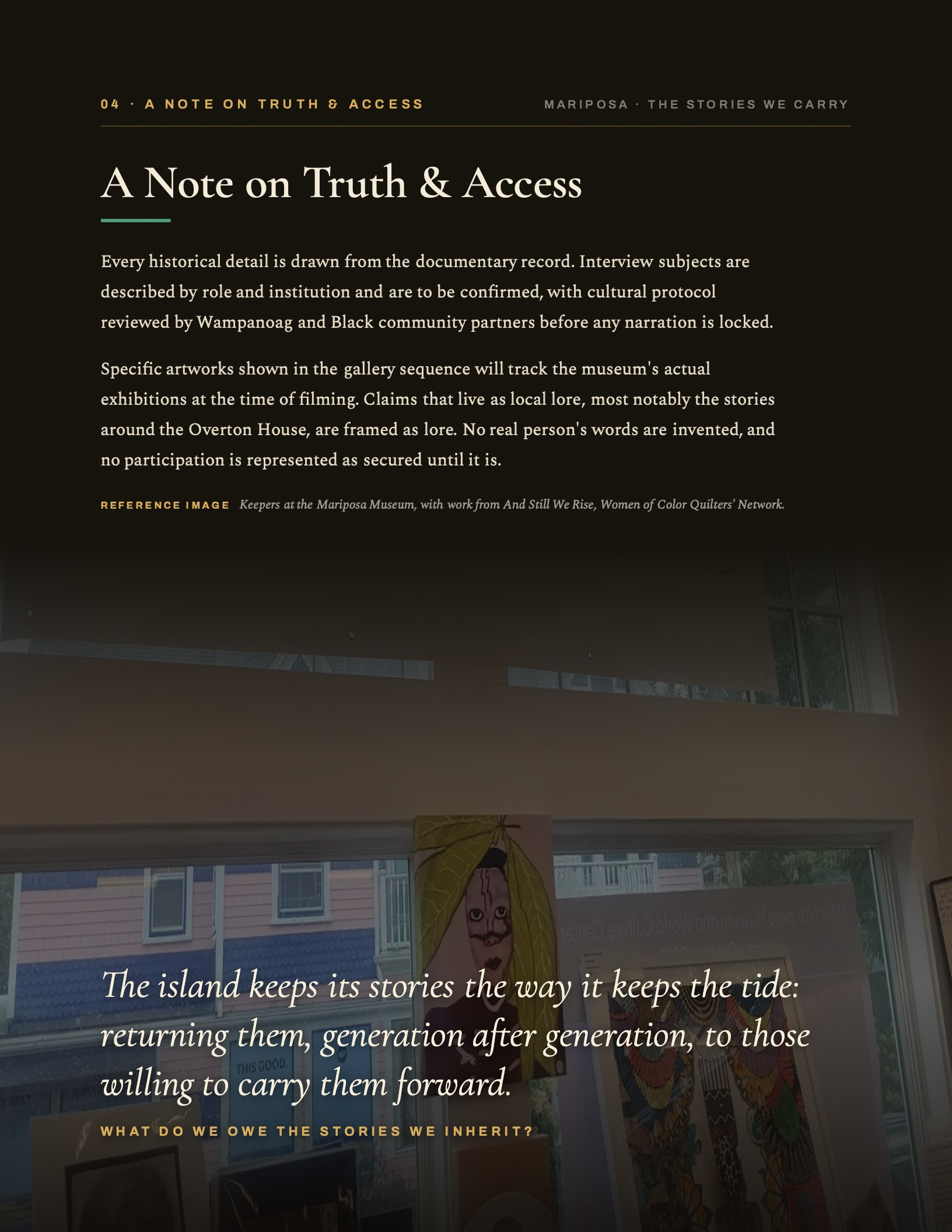
Scholarly fields by act: Native American and Indigenous studies; African American history, Black geographies, and public history; African diaspora art history and museum studies; with memory studies and cultural heritage throughout.

A Note on Truth & Access

Every historical detail is drawn from the documentary record. Interview subjects are described by role and institution and are to be confirmed, with cultural protocol reviewed by Wampanoag and Black community partners before any narration is locked.

Specific artworks shown in the gallery sequence will track the museum's actual exhibitions at the time of filming. Claims that live as local lore, most notably the stories around the Overton House, are framed as lore. No real person's words are invented, and no participation is represented as secured until it is.

REFERENCE IMAGE *Keepers at the Mariposa Museum, with work from And Still We Rise, Women of Color Quilters' Network.*



*The island keeps its stories the way it keeps the tide:
returning them, generation after generation, to those
willing to carry them forward.*

WHAT DO WE OWE THE STORIES WE INHERIT?