

PROGRESSIVE IDEATIONS

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by

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Authorization to Submit Thesis

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Abstract

This is a thesis investigating the body as medium and how to hold space for others while finding voice. How do we identify ourselves spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and how does being a female shift that conversation, if at all?

My whole life, I have been taught to act and think a certain way, partly from societal influence and partly from family. “Rebellious” at an early age I fought back to have my voice heard. Instead of viewing me as passionate and independent, I was accused of being stubborn. But stubborn personalities rarely show growth, and evidence within my own personal lineage displays something other than a difficult headstrong disposition; perspective is everything.

Art allows us to find harmonious ground within our personal identities, personal practices, and/or personal experiences. Art is personal and the avenue which I have previously pursued to express artistic merit has been an emotionally cathartic occurrence. That at one time my studio practice was solely for me with the hope of purging all unhelpful psychological learned ways and traumas; that it would one day morph into something else with the momentum of healing others. I practice making art with a considerable amount of introspection. So much of the body of work investigated while in graduate school has been with the hopes of articulating visually, the space between transitions. There is a continuous thread of referencing the dark experiences with the forward motion of living from a place of joy. The continuity of such journeys has been from the perspective of being born a female in this lifetime. It hasn't been until recently that, on a deeper level, I've been able to shed fear-based reasons for staying away from feminism. Connecting to the female energy that resides from within allows me to then extend into deeper association with a possible audience. I'm committed to holding space for others.

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Art As A Healing Medium

In the service of art is an opportunity for empowerment through vulnerability; the place that makes you squirm with discomfort and yet find enticing. I believe that place creates space for connection and invites wonderment. The work that we display vibrates and creates ripple effects as viewers come and go. I'm a seeker of truth and love that exists within me. This journey within reveals that there are no limitations to who we are and how much transformation of our self is possible. This is how I define spirituality. Spirituality is the main focus in my work.

Due to the suffering in my own life, the darkest places I have reached, I want to help people feel empowered to move through their darkness and move beyond their hardships. To understand the spiritual significance of what happened to me has been an intense investigation and a research I suspect that may continue for some time to come. It is the essence of breathing beyond my body. A tide that flows in and out and surrendering to something greater than myself. It's like slipping into a warm bath where the water engulfs your physical body, yet the sturdiness of the tub is at your back supporting you. The moment you check a box to define or label yourself, you separate yourself from possibility and everyone else. Doing that states that you are only what's next to this box. But when you feel the water rushing over your toes, you notice the water is both touching your feet and is touching the shore on the other side of the world. What my spirituality has become is connecting back to the root of who I am, the truth of who I am, and unlearning what I've been taught. I was raised Christian but found a lot of connection in Buddhism and various energetic healing techniques. The practice of yoga encourages a come as you are today mentality; the poses you were able to achieve yesterday may be in flux today, and that's ok. With any practice, to deny how your physical body, energy or emotional state, and how they all fluctuate, would be to deny the essence of who we are as humans. If denial is persistent, this causes any sort of practice to suffer.

Physical pain and emotional pain are nothing compared to spiritual pain. Born from those trials, if an individual fights for it, comes a strength that is beyond measure. I had to choose to stop the pain and unwind what I had been conditioned to believe. I have pushed radically for change and growth throughout my life. When I began to increase hunger for the truth, diving deep within as well as looking from within, I began to see the progress I was seeking after.

There is a fine line that artists walk; the cathartic experience of creating art can blur into therapy. Understanding this subtle shift allows any artist to relax into their own flow of creativity. Artists often use their experiences as a catalyst to create. We then use our common background as a way to connect. When someone relates to a work of art, that person resonates with it saying I'm not alone. When art is solely swimming in the frequency of pain and suffering, that's when it becomes unhealthy and doesn't help heal the issue. As someone who has always looked for the silver lining, I want to find the strength within the materials and interweave hope into the work to connect with the viewers or audience through intuition and empathy.

When I consider the meditation within my work, I think about the idea of slowing down time within a person's experience. Music transcends us to another place of existence and is used strategically to assist the viewer in that journey. Breathing techniques also have the power to alter our experience as oxygen rushes to our brains and circulates blood, our muscles begin to relax shifting our physical and emotional state. When you're able to slow down and listen, you recognize what it is you're carrying. I often hear people say 'I thought I was over that,' or 'I didn't think that still bothered me.' Throughout my investigations I have realized there is always more and a deeper level of releasing. Talking about a situation that was bothersome only a few times, or waiting for a year to go by, doesn't mean you've fully purged the issue.

The first step to doing so is acknowledging how you truly feel and not being afraid of those feelings that are uncomfortable. Our ego becomes fearful of what is uncomfortable but if we allow the emotions to pass through us and release from us instead of repressing them, we quickly find that the hard work of processing is much more rewarding than hoarding unhelpful feelings. Certain emotions like anger are great indicators telling us where to set boundaries.

With forgiveness, picturing the person that hurt you and saying "I forgive you" is difficult because our ego holds onto the anger of 'you hurt me.' In the midst of picturing this person's face, writing out feelings multiple times and then burning those papers are a ritual that many find helpful in working through that anger. Meditations, healing sessions, exercising, verbalized specific prayers and still, sometimes our minds boomerang right back to obsessing over the situation. You have to persevere and continue to do the work. It may feel arduous but there is freedom that can be found.

Creating ritual is a specific set of gestures, spoken phrases or songs that sometimes include objects that is a visual anchor or pillar for the ritual. These rituals are performed in a particular place or setting. Often rituals are performed according to a logical sequence. This intense exploration of how to forgive was fine tuning diverse rituals to release what I knew was not serving me. This development has influenced my studio practice and theatre work.

Taking into account my knowledge of rituals, breathing techniques, and meditation, I release control of being the sole performer and embrace what others have to give in contribution. This is an investigation of taking personal experiences and transforming them into something more universal. The larger the group, the greater the atmosphere we can create. The emotions that motivated the work are pivotal but not all encompassing. The emotions found within the work are gathered by the viewers/audience and created in collaboration. I've always been interested in creating an experience and a specific atmosphere reminiscent of what I've encountered through meditation. In order to do this effectively, I've been working on directing these atmospheres.

Skirting the Lines of Femininity to Blatant Discovery of Female Authentic Voice

I have been inspired by various artists involved in diverse waves of feminism. The strength and determination in which they address the edges of identity politics to the blatant in your face rawness they lay bare, has made aware of the space and kind of voice I can occupy in my own artistic practice.

One work of art that has impacted me greatly is Shirin Neshat's *Turbulent* (1998). Walking into the gallery the viewer is immediately confronted with a bench and two videos playing, one to the left and one to the right. The video on the left is a man singing to a group of men and the video on the right is a female singing to an empty auditorium. The man sang first and the women stood silent. The viewer turns to the left to face the video of the man. When he was finished, the female began to sing and the viewer then turned right. The male sung technically and the female explored her voice. The participation required from the viewer in order to witness the piece in its entirety, as well as the female's exploration and expressiveness, has stayed with me for over a decade.

Exploring sound and using spoken word with a purpose is something that I go about choosing diligently. Challenging what I'm bound to and discovering what my choices are, I find connection to the strength that resides within and then create work with subtle and blatant nuances of

body language. With the power that music and sound have over the viewer's experience, this also reflects and culminates within the performer who then physically translates that energy causing a transference for the viewer. This specific language combined with interaction of precisely made performance garments, an example is the video *I'm Bound Female*, allow a performer, myself as a performer and the viewer to contemplate what they're witnessing and involved in.

Perhaps it's the environments I stage in my performances or the symbolic projections of the clothing worn by the performers, but I often find audiences assuming they should be

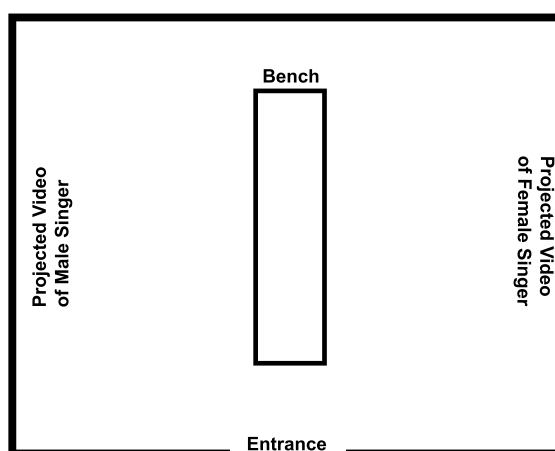


Figure 1: An example of a possible gallery setup for Shirin Neshat's *Turbulent* (1998).

deciphering my work through a lens of feminist expectations. Instead, I would encourage them to challenge their involvement towards this limited thinking in the prejudice of feminine expectations.

Through my spiritual practice, I have become grounded in the understanding that we all embody male and female energies. In the past it has been easier for me to connect with the masculine energy that resides within me than my divine feminine energy. The male energy takes direct routes and is focused. Female energy is creative and spontaneous. Both are equal and powerful. When we are unbalanced, we veer towards one side or the other. Influenced by society's projections that the feminine is weaker, I learned, as many do, that presenting a strong, less emotive self would protect me from being judged as weaker. But this false front didn't protect me, it caused more problems than it was helpful because I wasn't effectively dealing with the emotions I was holding onto. It's been a lifelong interest of finding the authentic self as well as the voice, not the expected voice. The success of doing this effectively has been through discovering the balance and wholeness of who I am at the core. Investigating feminism and what it is to me is just a part of me seeking that truth.

I'm not interested in making categorical feminist work, but I have something to say about what's expected of me as a female and the role I'm supposed to play. *I'm Bound Female* is exactly that discourse. A female in white, another female in a bridesmaid's dress, and the woven sleeves on each garment are directly speaking about the web that we entangle ourselves in and are expected to weave. The separation of the women is a precise message of female interaction or lack there of. I don't identify with what society says and the figure in white entering in the water is baptizing her of that stipulation coinciding with new life for spring-time. Provoking myself into making such works have allowed me the space to connect to the feminine within me and designated an opportunity to connect with other females providing them with the same cathartic space.

In works that I create that are feminist based, I'm often reclaiming and reconsidering what is sacred. I showcase what exists versus the perception of feminine culture. I can speak from a feminist perspective, represent those people, and give them voice. It doesn't mean that I myself am solely from that view.

Empowering myself and moving towards providing a space to sanction others has not been an easy journey. But I have learned by doing and want to give other women an opportunity to do the same thing. *NO* is a project that I've started by asking women to be video recorded while simply saying "no." By saying "no" continuously unlocks the human



Figure 2: Still images from *I'm Bound Female*, video. April 2016

state, breaking down any barriers and allowing me, the facilitator, to witness and then support whatever emotionally surfaces for the participant.

Growing up, it wasn't encouraged that I find my own voice. It was important to follow rules, do what I was told, and project myself as others expected. *NO*, for me, starts with being forced to hug and kiss someone I barely knew as a little girl. I "should" do this because it's sweet and the adults all knew each other so that act would make everybody happy. Never being asked if I wanted to give this person affection, but being told I had to because it was nice. So often I have said no and my body language did not mimic what I was saying. This allows the other person to take advantage of that uncertainty. With the project *No* I'm providing a space for women to hear themselves say it and believe it.

So far, what's been gathered from the participants is a similar story. They come in, a bit nervous yet excited and not sure what to expect. I tell them to look at me, not the camera. The camera is just capturing or documenting this experience. While looking at me, I encourage them to picture every person they've ever needed to say 'no' to, but didn't. Or picture the person they try to say no to but are run over anyway. Maybe it's a sexual partner, or maybe it's a family member who didn't respect their boundaries. It's also encouraged to take a breath between each 'no' and I reassure them that I'll be guiding them through the process.

When the recording begins and the first no comes out, a weary look washes over their face as if they are uneasy with the simple task. Around the fifth no, the participant realizes that they have uncertainty in setting this boundary. As they continue to breathe between each no what's been lingering under the surface comes up. Their breathing



Figure 3: Still images from the Project No, 2016

changes and tension in the neck and shoulders is clear. As the muscles become tense, the breathing is shallow and only from the tops of their lungs. Sometimes the eye gaze begins to shift, as if they're unsure of their safety. I nod and recognize what's happening but assure them with my breathing that they are safe and I'm still holding space for whatever comes up next. Their skin becomes red and eyes begin to water. My breathing at this point becomes a soft tempo, almost shallow to allow them to purge whatever they need to. This, within my body language, displays a solid ground. Every once in a while I'll take a deep breath to display that I'm still with them. The no's that are expressed here are powerful and full of emotion. The height of this climax is pure emotion. A pure purge. As they begin to descend my breathing becomes deeper, slow and methodical, again to display calm energy and warm body language. The no's after this climax are more grounded. As if they believe it more. This practice, is usually between 4 and 7 minutes. Depending on each female and what they need to release. The ripple effects of these experiences are different for each female. One participant in particular began practicing setting boundaries right away with her mother and noticed a shift within their dynamic to a healthier relationship.

Finding a Method

As an artist I'm organizing creation, envisioning something greater than myself. It's important to me that I become as developed and skilled as possible so that I gain as much knowledge about various types of mediums to set myself up for any creative opportunity.

Choosing a method to display completely depends on the piece itself. Just as I choose materials carefully, I contemplate how the method of the work will speak the loudest for the concept. Photographic documentation, photography, video documentation, video as art, performance art that may or may not include sculpture or drawing residue, directing performers to create art, or exploring theatre and the power of clear narrative are all variations and opportunities for process, concept growth and technological expansion within my studio practice.

Hiding from performance art behind a video was a compromise with *Death of the Ego*. It started with a poem I wrote in fall 2014 upon my arrival to Moscow, Idaho with my first semester in graduate school. The poem was read as a voice over for a video that had comprised of three sections: *Death of the Ego: Painting*, *Death of the Ego: Tree*, and *Ceremonial Release* that ran a total of 10 minutes, 43 seconds. This piece was an attempt at exploring the power of video art with multiple running visual narratives simultaneously.



Figure 4: Still images from *Death of the Ego: Painting*, video. December 2014

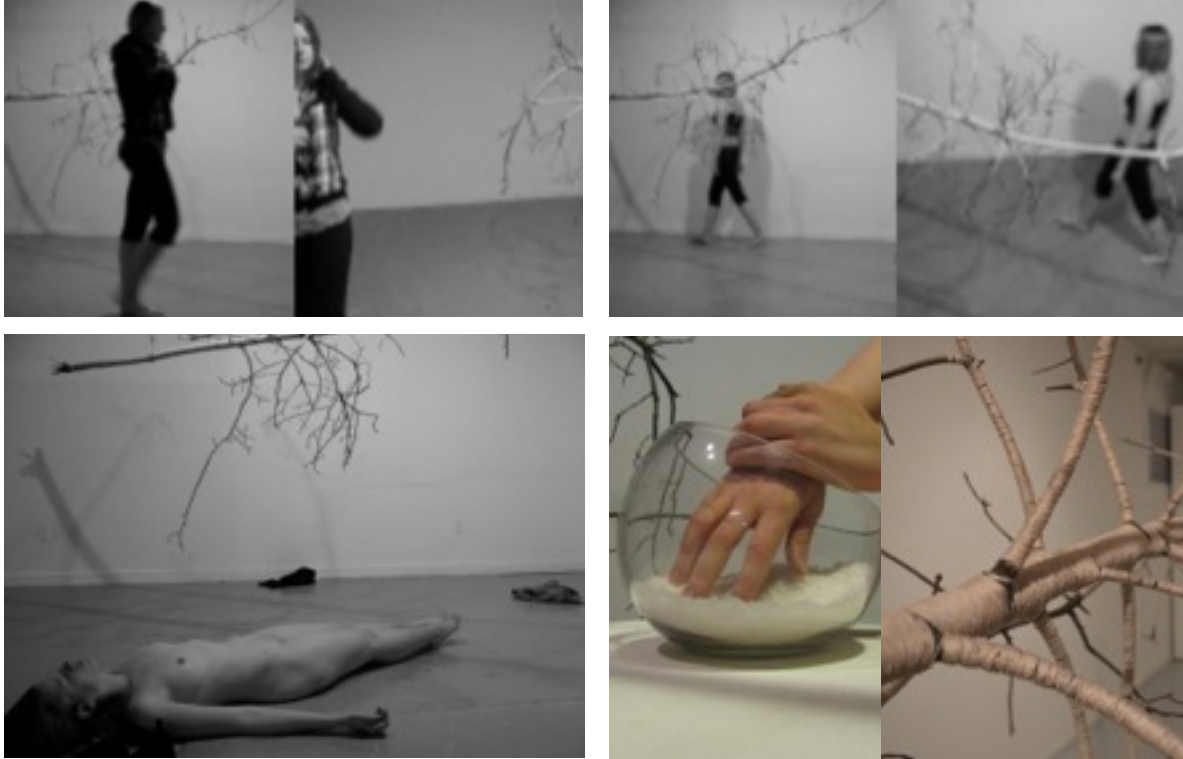


Figure 5: Still images from *Death of the Ego: Tree*, video. December 2014

One issue with multiple running narrative is that it is overwhelming for the viewer. Two running images side-by-side with a complex and emotionally heavy poem being recited is a lot to take it.

Video and photographic stills of performance pieces were a way for me to avoid the viewers because of the direct separation. In order to explore performance I needed to start giving myself permission to be vulnerable in front of people and demanding that I create my own safe space. Pushing my boundaries of what I feel afraid of is a habit I've worked hard to construct. I've been cultivating on how to successfully combine elements and allow them to come together to discuss identity and the shift of transformation one goes through to find the truth. I was nude in the video and didn't feel comfortable enough in my body to be on display like that in front of people. I wasn't sure if this work was something



Figure 6: Still image from *Ceremonial Release*, video. December 2014

I wanted to continue to investigate; I thought it was a piece I needed for my own healing and didn't want to show it to anyone. The words that were spoken felt so raw I wasn't sure I knew how to navigate criticism of it yet. Experiences of the past are what put me behind closed doors, with the only onlooker being my supportive husband. I was hiding vulnerabilities but still sharing the innermost part of my heart. These are insights to detail but not revealing everything while exploring relationships

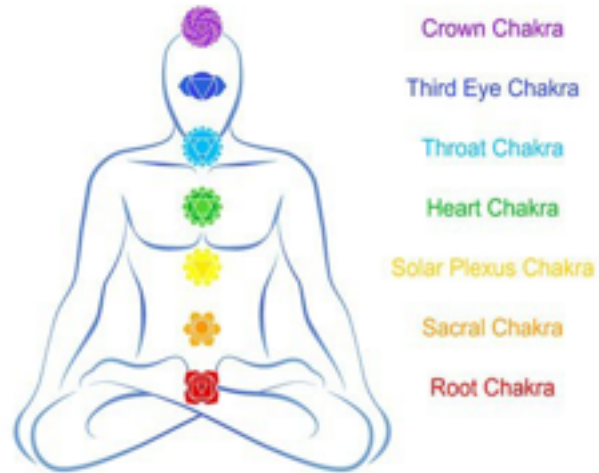


Figure 7: Image of the Chakra system from the article "Find Out Which of Your Chakras Are Out of Balance and How to Re-Align Them." Published by Collective Evolution.

of colors and materials to the human body, my body. What was articulated in the video is the space between transitions while articulating the narrative of that passage of change.

Adding in the human component to *Death of the Ego*, and creating a performance, was an opportunity to promote connection of the topics I believe to be universal. I extracted what I felt was the strongest portions of the poem and began constructing a performance that explained the visual narrative of the transformation. This transitioned into a live performance giving the viewer less layers of information to look at; simplifying imagery allows me to find the strength within the limited materials being used and find a way to elevate the spoken word with visual narrative.

In the performance, I wear a simple red dress, lay on my back on a large canvas (6 ft. x 20 ft.) gradient in color with text written on top, and lay under a sheet of Kozo paper that is 6 feet long. This work is about the spiritual transformation and metamorphosis, so I needed to consider how to express this narrative through color association of the chakras. The red dress is the root chakra, the painted canvas starts with red, shifts to orange, green, and then blue. My feet face the red to ground me, my head facing the blue to open my throat chakra to allow communication to flow easily. On top of the color gradation, there is a spiritual text written in white. There is inversion involved with the text but is not very cryptic in the sense that it's easily legible. The Kozo paper is semi-transparent and has a great deal of text written on it. It starts with heavily inverted and dense text but towards the bottom there is more space with visible and legible text.



Figure 8: Still images of *Death of the Ego (performance)* May 2015.
 Acrylic on canvas. 18 ft. (w) x 6 ft. (h). Ink on Kozo paper. 25 in. (w) x 74 in. (h).

When the viewer entered the gallery space, I stayed still for a half hour laying on the floor, under the paper before beginning to read. This visual looked like a dead body. I begin reading the poem that's written on the back of the Kozo paper, as I read it, the paper travels up over my head and my body revealing a new me. After I completed the text, I lay there without any protective barrier, I get up and walk away.

This piece was difficult for me to perform. I experienced each word and allowed the vibrations of the phrases to pass through me. It revealed so much of what I went through and is gut-wrenching for me emotionally, which is then taxing on my physical body. People perceive performance art as quick, and easy but do not understand what goes on behind the scenes, or in this case, under the Kozo paper.

Transforming Performance Art Into a More Defined, Disciplined Medium and What Benefits a Performance Artist Can Gain From Theatre

It felt like I stumbled into performance art at first, in hindsight, I sought it out after intense investigations. I began to paint for the first time in what felt like years after undergrad. I knew the work I was making wasn't very good but still continued with the hopes of finding my way through the creative energy I had. One evening, while home alone, I began mixing paint on my hands and loved the tactile energy of being connected with the medium, it was a visual signal that became more important as those visceral signals intensified. Rather than finish what I was working on, I grabbed the camera and took a photo of my hand dripping with the paint. When my boyfriend (now husband) came home he took photos of what I had painted on my body then compiled the images to tell a narrative.

I didn't think I was exploring performance art but rather thought it was photography and labeled the series of work body paintings. What was captured was a glimpse into performance. What ultimately gets displayed from this series is an organized documentation. The narrative the art piece was telling me, was that I was subconsciously holding onto the second skin or barrier I had put up long ago to protect myself. The fact that I was using my nude body in the work turned out to be a healing experience.

I wasn't sure how far I'd dive into performance. In my opinion, so much of performance art felt cryptic and difficult to understand. Its aesthetics can be strange, the performer sometimes seems unprepared causing the work to be unclear, and sometimes there are a lot of confusing aspects that are hard to break down. I personally decided to explore it further because video documentation, and video as art, could only capture so much. Connecting with the viewer is so important to me and my practice. I continuously find ways of expanding this connection with the viewer. There are missing elements that the camera couldn't catch that I found to be key to a performance, for instance, breath, the sound of materials against each other, or the sound of the footsteps a performer takes. The human breathing

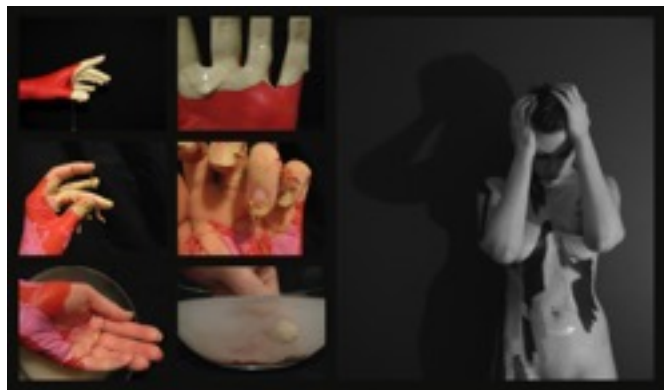


Figure 9: *Hands* (performance) 2010-2011.
Acrylic, photography, Photoshop and InDesign.
Printed Size: 29 in. (w) x 17 in. (h).

is the essence of why using the body as a medium is so telling. If one is talking about a difficult experience, they breathe from only the top of their lungs and tighten up their shoulders and neck muscles. If they're talking about falling in love they might be breathing from the bottom of their lungs or even their diaphragm. Their eyes smile and their body language shifts. Body language reveals so much, and the multitude of narrative within the breath alone.

I create because art saved my life. It's what I used to pull me out of the swamp and deep, dark unhealthy places of myself. I want to provide and help facilitate a space for others to find their own beauty too.

To create only from the stream of consciousness is limiting and denies the skills that a performance artist has. An artist must trust their creative instincts and to truly listen to it is to have a great skill.

Listening to your instincts, saying yes and going for it have to be what both an actor and performance artist do. If there were the tiniest element of hesitation, it can be picked up by the viewer. The artist must believe, wholeheartedly, what they're doing. They cannot pause to question themselves, and must be comfortable with themselves being on display. The artist must embrace exactly who they are during the performance and allow themselves to disappear within their work, allowing the work to be at the forefront, not their ego.

For me, the importance of ritual before a performance is one and the same as the performance. Meditation is a huge component of my life and work, entering into the space to meditate has become a ritual for me. I'm also very selective of what food and drinks enter my body before a performance. Caffeine triples anxiety, dairy is loaded with hormones and therefore alters your body's hormonal state, sugar jolts your system causing you to crash soon after, all potentially causing mood swings. It's important for me to avoid all of those things to create a steady streamline and enable me the focus on the work itself.

After performing poetry in *Death of the Ego*, I assessed the art and began to understand what was needed from me as an artist. Taking an acting class to work through the fear of being on display proved to be beneficial. In that class, there was an exercise that really resonated with me; 'give yourself a reason to move slowly around the room.' After some time passed we were encouraged to divide our speed by two; 'give yourself a reason to move slow as molasses.' This inspired a challenge of a different meditative experience and determined to challenge myself with a meditative piece. Slow movement creates space for physical, emotional, mental, and energetic awareness. *To Embrace the Light, to Raise*



Figure 10: Still images from *To Embrace the Light, to Raise the Vibration and Radiate Throughout* (nicknamed *Red*) (performance), October 2015

the Vibration and Radiate Throughout (nicknamed *Red*) is a piece with projected variations of red light onto a space with white walls, projected the sound of footsteps moving at a fast pace, I moved at an exceptionally slow pace while wearing white, laying on the ground with a large sheet of white paper writing the phrase of the title with soft charcoal, moving in a clockwise direction. The phrase is also the final line in *Death of the Ego*. As I moved, my clothing and skin embraced the charcoal residue.

The performance took a total of 44 minutes to complete and to prepare myself, I entered the space early to meditate for three hours prior. Within this meditative state, I pushed myself into the state of mind of moving ‘slow as molasses’ and allowed myself to follow physically. This piece was difficult to do in front of an audience but was even more difficult without one. As people entered, I began to allow myself to gauge who was entering into the meditative state with me. That energized me and assisted in maintaining focus.

What I did not expect or anticipate was the bruising of my body. My hips, pubic bone, and upper left thigh were bruised from holding the weight of my body up while moving in circular motions on a cement floor. My left shoulder was sore from holding my weight up as well. This highlighted the importance of self-care. Just like a painter thoroughly cleans a brush, a performance artists must take care of their physical body with appropriate exercise and eating habits. Your body is a tool or vessel for the art, it must be taken care of. And just like a painter would explore the limitations and strength of techniques within painting, it’s important that a performance artist understand the range of their voice and physical movements thoroughly.

The idea of slowing down time within a person’s experience is what I think about often when I consider the meditation within my work. I also encourage the viewers of my work to take the same journey.

The importance of performance garments is of equal value to any other material being used in the performance, including projected video or sound. Wearing white emulated



Figure 11: Still images from *To Embrace the Light, to Raise the Vibration and Radiate Throughout* (second performance), November 2015

part of the title which discusses embracing. This phrase is also part of a prayer I ask for: to physically, emotionally, and energetically receive. The material and limited color was chosen specifically to correlate with concept. The additive sound of the footsteps is a harsh juxtaposition of slow movement and quick sound, forcing the viewer to recognize the uncomfortable state of the space between. This is not the vibration I want to ripple outward. I don't want to force anyone to do anything but would rather invite people in, something really powerful and poetic happens with that space. Because I've used myself as space, viewers are able to empathize through drawing on their own experience to relate to my own. The viewers that are exposed to the practices of meditations received this piece completely different than those who don't. Those who practice meditation were able to slip into it with me, those who don't didn't know how to receive or handle themselves in an altered state.

After this performance was complete, I needed to fully take into account what I would like the viewer to walk away with. It started to heighten my intention with taking responsibility for exactly what kinds of vibrations I put out into the world. This piece was performed a second time but without an audience, without the projection of red light or the sound of the footsteps. Making these adjustments presented an opportunity to consider exactly what was needed and what choices to make moving forward. Without having an audience there was room to alter the concentration of pace which turned out to be liberating. Though this piece still took approximately 1 hour 23 minutes long to complete, without the audience holding me accountable, there was room to break my own rules. Admittedly, I am too organized and aware of the pattern of conundrums I'm constantly getting myself into. I anticipate a set of rules the audience is expecting from me as a performer, then try to break out of these barriers. The audience is more willing to accept my set of rules or none at all, thus, I am projecting onto the audience at some degree.

Performance art exemplifies a conceptual understanding of what the artist wants to explore. Through the use of visual compositions of the body, and auditorial compositions

through voice and breath, the artist uses these as a form of language combined with any other materials of their choice. Context changes everything; art performed in a gallery, outside in nature, in an office, or even in a theatre venue is art because it has the potential to become a creative space through artistic intervention. An artist must be comfortable within their own vulnerability and not shy away from whatever emotions get stirred up within the act of creation. To generate an intimate space where you are fully on display, an artist must ask themselves who they are and what it is that they are trying to construct. Performance art demands that you are entirely immersed within the art with 100% vulnerability. It's your choice how much of that you want to reveal as a performance artist. Vulnerability is the state of being exposed to the possibility of being harmed. This translates to most as being weak, but some say it's about being open and completely present which allows us to take action, opposite of fear. It is shaky and uncomfortable but truly the safest space to create and effect change.

Konstantin Stanislavsky, a seminal Russian theatre practitioner widely recognized as an outstanding character actor and the many productions that he directed assembled a reputation as one of the leading theatre directors of the late 19th, early 20th century. During his lifelong investigations within theatre, he developed a system of acting with a set of techniques meant to create a realistic portrayal of a character with the underlining goal of having a strong understanding of that character's motivations, obstacles, and objectives in each moment. The idea is to portray the character on stage for the audience to glimpse into their life: what if this character were a real person and we the audience are a fly on their wall?

There are core elements to the Stanislavsky system that are implemented after an actor studies the script thoroughly. The actor also needs to have an understanding of each scene and how that will affect their character. For instance location, time, and what is going on in the world in which the character lives will impact the psychological motives of the character. Living in Germany in 1939 during the winter will impact the character and their psychological state completely differently than living in Hawaii in 1990, for example.

To assist in identifying with the character, an actor would ask themselves questions to relate to that character as much as possible rather than just impersonating what/who they think the character is. An example, 'what if this were happening to me right now? How would I react? I remember feeling guilty during this time in my life, slip into that emotion and use the words of the playwright.'

Understanding the psychological responses of a character is derived from understanding their internal monologue. To fully comprehend this, the actor must fully grasp the objectives and methods of a character. This technique helps each action feel as if it comes spontaneously, rather than being driven from the structure of the script.

Given Circumstances, a principle from Stanislavsky's methodology for actor training, are all the facts of the world that the play exists in, that the imaginations of the actors could find useful. Using this terminology with theatre students for workshops that were held to prepare them to be extensions of my work, proved to be effective, and for the art students participating, it was a shift in language of concepts.

Theatre needs a narrative, a connective thread streamlining from the beginning to end. Yes, art may contain a narrative, but depending on the art, is not required and that is what changes the conversation from performance art versus theatre. Theatre artists ask themselves what is atmosphere within the narrative? How can you use your experience to feed the characters experiences and emotions? In theatre you become someone else using your emotional memory to assist in that development, memorizing lines written by someone else, and understanding steps within a walking pace that are the characters'.

In performance art, you are completely yourself and can allow spontaneity to enter the space. How can you create the atmosphere? How can you use your experience and emotions to fuel the work? By shifting light, incorporating music, the energy you embody, the tone in which you speak are all possibilities in shifting an atmosphere. This is perhaps why the Stanislavsky system is so pertinent to the work of a performance artist. It's an opportunity to dive deeper into the self and ask questions from another point of view. Actors must understand the characters through and through. Artists must understand themselves in order to be the best they can be and create the strongest work possible. I'd also assert that actors and directors must know themselves as deeply as I'm suggesting a visual artist must.

Understanding who I am and what I stand for has been the most grounding and empowering platform for me to step into performance art. So far with my performances, I have chosen to create an artifact while performing and leave sculptural or pictorial residue. Allowing the audience to witness the ritual of creation and to witness the meditative state while creating presents an opportunity for both parties to explore possibilities enabling viewers to participate. Not all performance artists create something within their performances, however, we all create an atmosphere and experience.

With performance art, the audience becomes part of the art with their role bearing witness. Space becomes activated by the onlookers and the artist may even feed off their energy. But the same exact performance can happen without an audience and it's still considered art.

Theatre needs an audience as it provoked entertainment. The audience is considered one of the most important aspects. It's a group of individuals gathered together at a certain time and place with no purpose other than to see the performance. This assists in creating a circular flow of energy, as the performer affects an audience and the audience affects performer. Audience members for a theatre performance have an artistic self-awareness.

There is a collective communal event in theatre that does not happen with performance art, possibly magnifying the energetic flow between actor and viewer. Everyone arrives at a particular time, is seated, and the show begins. In performance art, often the audience will come and go, not staying the duration. The art stimulates the audience and encourages them to ask themselves what the artist is doing, how they're communicating their visual language, and how does that language speak to them. One of fine arts' motives is to ask questions and create a ripple effect of encouraging the audience to do the same.

There's something about a human and their nervous ticks or random sneezes that alter our experience and it's the organic nature of the human being is why we attend theatre instead of movies. Within the same organic choice, an artist who is investigating atmosphere and 4-dimensional ways of making may choose their own body as a medium. All that goes into a human being, fluids, muscles, cells, ligaments and tendons, bones, fingernails, teeth, etc., moreover the experiences we all attribute to growth after hardship is universal and possibly why an artist turns to using their body as a medium. We as artists long to connect on a deeper level with our viewers. Our viewers desire that same association, that's why they seek art out with an authentic human connection offered.

I hold my relationship to the viewer as one of an emotional bridge. For visual art, performance art and theatre, I view my goals for connecting with the audience as the same. I value that relationship within the same vibration and hope the viewer or audience member walks away with a sense of curiosity and engagement.

I found that carefully orchestrated performances benefit from structure analysis, a process that directors and dramaturges investigate scripts with. Things like beats, units, given circumstances or super objectives come from the lead artist: here's the concept and

this is what we're working towards. I imagine that Mathew Barney had something similar to organize his video performances. Works like *The Cremaster Cycle* which is a project consisting of five feature-length films that explore the processes of human creation. Not only do you need to understand the narrative of these works for filming, but also for directing your performers.



Figure 12: Still image from *Milk* (performance) May 2015

When Marina Abramović stepped into the role of director for *The Artist is Present* at MoMA, she trained dancers to recreate past works that she had done, some in collaboration with Ulay and some solo pieces. She views a body as a body and doesn't carefully prescribe whether the performer is male or female.

Performance art may bleed into theatre, and theatre may bleed into performance art. Traditionally, performance art is interdisciplinary and may be scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated; spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation or observation. Some performances are so private or sacred, the only way to document that they happened are through photography or videography. One artist that blurs the lines of theatre and performance art successfully is Dimitris Papaioannou. He started out in fine arts and merged into dance and set design. From there he knit everything together and began to explore what art and theatre could be. In 2011 he created a piece called *Inside*, a piece for 30 performers where each showing lasted a total of 6 hours. Where I see myself venturing is somewhere between Abramović and Papaioannou.

Being able to define each piece and why its presentation works best is only the beginning. Whether video, video documentation, photography, photographic documentation, performance art, or theatre based work, each process is chosen after careful consideration. For instance, *Milk* is best left as photography. To perform this in a gallery space would do one of two things (in America,) make the viewer incredibly uncomfortable or sexually stimulate them. This piece isn't about either of those things. To best communicate that concept, the printed photograph allows viewers to picture a tub of milk with a performer

gracefully bathing in it. This piece, in particular, is about new life, a new beginning, a rebirth of sorts. To bathe in front of an audience would cause that message to be lost.

I am only at the beginning of a very long journey of understanding the overlaps of theatre and performance art, while also still trying to understand structure analysis for plays. The important thing in all art, in life, is this: to remain true to yourself. This exists within both theatre and art. Within each idea is a catalyst for finding oneself if you follow your instincts. How can performance art influence theatre? Does it have a place in theatre? I believe that blurring the lines of theatre and performance art can open the doors for a multitude of possibilities.

Preparing Carefully Orchestrated Performances

"I radically love you because I see you as the baby you were, before you were inculcated into this system; before your fear was radicalized into a desperate violent need to survive. Come find me. Come find the womb, the safety which transcends the ego created into such hatred and what is hatred but fear which has no language. Come find the words of my tender heart which is yours, has always been. I dare you! I'm not leaving."

-Kelly Madonna Eviston Quinnett

When women come together, let go of judgement, and allow themselves to be together as women, truth reveals itself from within each person. Just breathing together reveals ritual and forms deeper connections. I believe it's part of my duty to connect with one another and assist in teaching, so that the ripple effects of generational epigenetics, what society has taught us with limited thinking or herd mentality can begin to shift and heal.

Continuing this idea that body language reveals so much, and there's a multitude of narrative within the breath alone, I'm also asking the viewer to look at breath as a metaphor. When I inhale, I'm making the work, and when I share the work, it's the exhale. The viewer then takes in that work (inhale), asks questions (exhale), and ponders over it (inhale). As the work is shared, we are breathing in that space together. I value connecting with people on a high level. Inhaling and exhaling the ideas is a circular breathing network. And when I take in your questions, I'm breathing in your exhale. It's a constant exchange of breath and energy.

Performance art isn't complete until it's been performed. Orchestrating or directing performance leaves a fine line to walk before it becomes theatre. Having a complete understanding of how to assess given circumstances and objectives while leaving room for the performers to find their own way, is imperative to the work. In order for this work to come to fruition, I completely needed to release control and allow space for collaboration.

As a performance artist, I can make a decision in the middle of a performance that completely shifts the direction of the work. But directing performance art, it's important to effectively communicate that those decisions are ok, I ask that performers maintain awareness of the concept within the work. That's our agreement within the collaboration.

The concept deriving from the idea of releasing control as a performance artist and beginning to direct performers in the art; workshops were held for eight female performers

with the intention of teaching them/collaborating with them to be extensions of my art. An overall concept was created and then separated into segments within this carefully orchestrated performance. The workshops explored various prompts within a theme of the concept from each segment. It was important to recognize and explain that each exploration was *not* a rehearsal. Each decision the performer explored could be different during the next workshop. It was about finding true expression of their body language, of using their physical form as a line to convey each concept. Workshop notes are below.

FIRST WORKSHOP 3/25/17

Conducting a choir of exhales:

(Releasing control and allowing collaboration to come to fruition. [My objective.])

Prompt: As a conductor for a choir, I lead the inhales and exhales and quickly found out that focusing on just exhales was causing the females to hold their breath. When I cued someone it seemed to be smoother with an inhale and exhale instead of just the exhale. Connecting with whole groups before cuing someone in helped create a sense of collectedness.

Conducting a choir of OM's:

Breathing together as a group and taking two breaths before beginning allowed people to get in sync. For me as the conductor, observing 6 people and where they were in their OM, with the 'O' or the 'M' portion of the OM, is difficult. I quickly realized I needed to heighten my level of detail absorption at a wider range.

After observing and conducting various ways of breathing as a group, I then gave prompts for the group to react to. Using their bodies to express what comes to their minds and embody the concept of what's being asked. I asked these questions to allow space for them to react in a truthful way.

1.) UNTOLD STORIES:

What does it mean to be silent? How does that look? How does that feel? How do those feelings of frustration of being silenced move in your body? The line within your body...how does that translate?

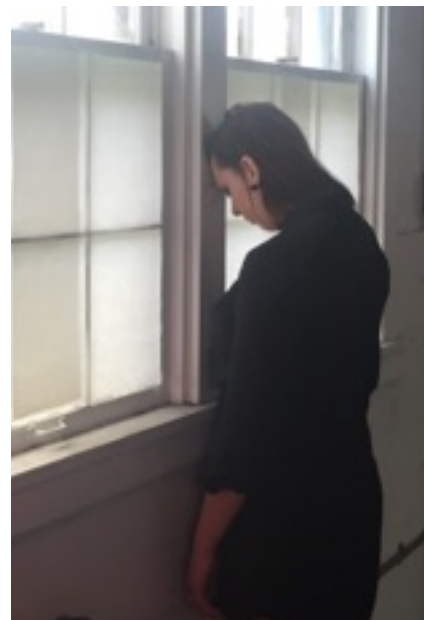


Figure 13: Still image from the first workshop.

This story is untold, tell it with your body.

See what's being communicated within your 'sister,' how do you hold space for her? How does she hold space for you?

Someone else has decided that their ideas for your life are better than yours, how does it feel being told what to do? Feel the weight of those ideas. Feel the weight of those chains.



Figure 14: Still image from the first workshop.

What does this emotion sound like? Taste like? Smell like?

2.) WARRIOR:

Connect to your strength within. You are a divine female warrior, what does that mean? What does that look like? Have the intention that with each inhale you connect with that energy, and with each exhale you release those ideas that are not yours.

What does this emotion sound like? Taste like? Smell like?

How big is this emotion? How big is your energetic body?

3.) CREATE A RITUAL:

Create a ritual that honors yourself, your soul.

What does that look like? What does that feel like? What does that sound like?

Create a ritual that honors each other.

4.) TO EMBRACE THE LIGHT:

Moving slow, with purpose, write the phrase "To Embrace the Light."

Just being the facilitator, felt both wrong and right. Holding space for these females as they explored each prompt gave me a rush of energy and left me feeling secure in these investigations. What felt wrong about it, was that I wasn't involved. Here I was holding space *for* them, not *with* them, and this separation felt a lot like the reasons for exploring video before exploring performance. It was clear that this research were results from my own personal journey, to not join in would be to deny those discoveries throughout my own history. This revelation shifted the course of the next workshop.

SECOND WORKSHOP 4/1/17

Reaffirming that the workshops are not rehearsals, we progressed forward with

touching on ideas from the first meeting. With a memorized invocation previously sent to the performers, we began moving about the space at our own pace with purposeful breathing, meaning each inhale has an intention of connecting to the truth of what is our true essence and each exhale has the intention of releasing all that does not serve us. This creates a space for us to claim as our own and shut out all distractions. Each performer was encouraged to move and speak only when it felt right. Connecting and listening to our instincts are key for this performance, as with any, whether it's theatre or performance art.

The invocation:

I am that I am
 I'm not the body
 I'm not the thoughts
 I'm not the emotions
 I am the soul
 I'm a spiritual being of Divine intelligence
 Divine love and Divine power
 I am the soul
 I'm connected and one to my higher soul
 I'm connected and one to the Divine spark within me
 I'm a child of God
 I am one with God
 I am one with all
 There is only Oneness
 And so it is
 Amen
 And so it is

Explaining how to have a continuous voice, the ripple effect of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" was used, but again, not stressed. The goal of this segment was to have continued voice, but a variation within that voice. Search out for opportunities of echoing another performer, for moments of shift in tempo or volume.

After walking and exploring in this space of

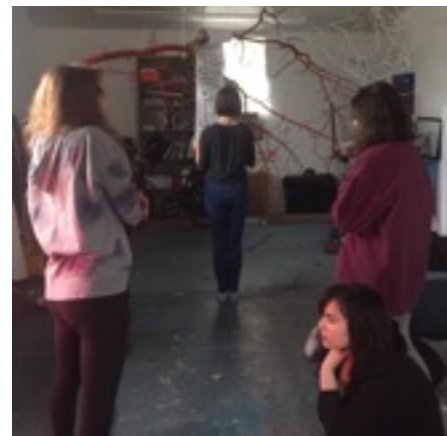


Figure 15: Still image from the second workshop.

continuous sound for approximately ten minutes, I then encouraged someone to come close. They then invited someone in, who invited someone in, and so on. We were in a circle and the speaking slowed and then stopped. We all took a breath together. Exhaling together. Took another breath together and exhaled together. We then spoke the invocation at the same time and then exited when it felt right.

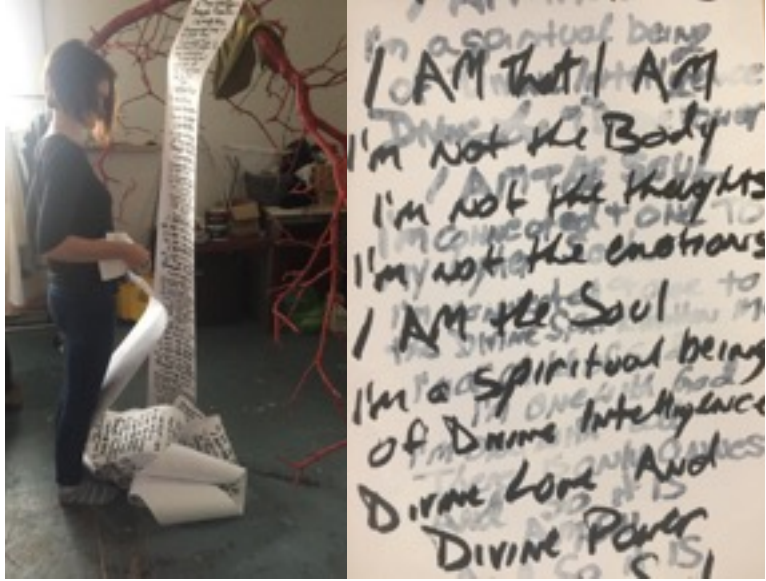


Figure 16: Still image from the second workshop.

Figure 17: Detail image of the scroll.

THIRD WORKSHOP 4/15/17

This workshop felt more like a review of concepts than exploring possibilities. Each performer tried on their garments to make sure they fit them appropriately. What was clear during this workshop was each female holding space for their fellow performers. They weren't relying so heavily on me to hold space for them. They were taking care of each other and guiding each other.

The following list of cues was given with intentions for the performers to review.

NIGHT ONE: Performance garments:

Taylor: Circle plastic skirt. Please wear a black tank and black yoga pants.

Marlena: Circle plastic skirt. Please wear a black tank and black yoga pants.

Danielle: Circle plastic skirt. Please wear a black tank and black yoga pants.

Maggie: Circle plastic skirt. Please wear a black tank and black yoga pants.

Whitney: Plastic straight skirt. Please wear a black tank and black yoga pants.

Lauren: Short sleeve white shirt. Please wear a white or nude bra and black yoga pants.

Kymber: White skirt & extra long sleeves (garment from I'm bound female.) Please wear a nude/white bra and underwear/boy-shorts.

Cydnie: Plastic wedding gown.

Lindsay: White dress, black leggings, army coat/petticoat.

Please wear a lipstick that smears easily. Bare feet.

List of cues and encouraged intentions:

- 1.) Untold Stories: How does it feel to have your life choices taken away from you? How does that translate in your body? How does that emotion sound? Smear the lipstick at the climax of this emotion. Interact with audience if you feel drawn to do so.
- 2.) Cydnie enters slowly to read the scroll.
- 3.) Kymber mixes clay on Cydnie's train. Embrace how dirty this is. What does this clay represent? Why are you messing up the white gown?
- 4.) When the mixing has shifted/slows, Lauren grabs scissors from Lindsay and cuts off Kymber's sleeves & Cydnie's train.
- 5.) Feeling the weight release, how does this translate in your body language? How does this change your breathing? How does this emotion sound? Each inhale connect with your true essence of who you are, each exhale releases that which does not serve you.
- 6.) Finding your voice. Humming, Oooo-ing & Ahh-ing, find your voice. Connect with your ancestors
- 7.) Kymber washes her hands in bowl of water, dries her hands on her skirt.
- 8.) Pass around makeup wipes and clean the lipstick off your sisters' faces.
- 9.) Leave when it feels right to you.

***It's important to have intentional breathing throughout the whole performance. Only move when you feel the need to move. Be 100% true to yourself.

NIGHT TWO: Performance Garments: All in black tank and black yoga pants.

List of cues and encouraged intentions:

- 1.) Purposeful breathing. Enter the gallery, put your things down, and find yourself in the space.
- 2.) Perform my DNA: but to the video *I'm Bound Female*. All performers hold space around the paper.
- 3.) All join in: When *My DNA* video comes on, all join in with writing text. "To embrace the light, to raise the vibration and radiate throughout." Or write the *I AM* invocation.
- 4.) Purposeful exhales. Have the intention of filling your lungs equally and evenly. Allowing only love in. Each exhale releases what doesn't serve you.
- 5.) Merge into *I AM* invocation. Choosing to speak on when you feel it's right.
- 6.) End in a circle.

7.) Take 2 complete inhales and exhales.

8.) Chant Om. However many times the group feels called to do.

9.) Disperse: when it's complete for you.

***It's important to have intentional breathing throughout the whole performance.

Only move when you feel the need to move. Be 100% true to yourself.

To Look Within, To Look From Within

Performance art is not complete until it's performed. No matter how much planning goes into it, there's the freedom of making a radically different choice before entering the space or even in each moment of the performance. A successful performance can only be achieved when the performer is following their instincts and reacting authentically to the other performers around them.

Where the lines blur between theatre and performance art, the viewer may be reminded that the performance feels a lot like theatre especially when there's lighting and sound involved.

PERFORMANCE 4/21/17

The performers began as movable sculptures just after 5 o'clock. The space contained the installation of *I Am That I Am*, the projected video of *I'm Bound Female* and *My DNA*, and a metal clothing rack holding the garments. Initially, the plan was to not play the video at all during the opening but as I began to move about the space before anyone arrived I realized that it would be a great additive element, especially because Kymber would be wearing the garment from *I'm Bound Female*. As the movable sculptures shifted around the space, we paused the video on a red frame that appears in *My DNA*. This extra red light, combined with the red light above *I Am That I Am*, allowed the plastic garments to reflect this light from multiple angles.

I entered the space around 5:25 p.m. to allow time to begin a narrative. I entered carrying scissors and made sure I passed along the wall to drag them against the light. I sat down in the corner on a stool, picked up separate knitted sleeves and began aggressively holding them. After watching the other females for some time, I then began to rip at the sleeves with the scissors. Around the same time I began to tear at the sleeves, Cydnie entered in a white gown with a long plastic train. She entered slowly and cut across the middle of the floor, allowing her train to wrap around some of the performers.

In our cue list I had specified that Lauren would be handed the scissors by me but I had cut my finger in the process of tearing the sleeves apart and became distracted with the blood as well as the action of cutting them. Lauren noticed what had happened and approached me. She took the scissors from me like a mother softly scolding a child.



Figure 18: Still images from *To Look Within, To Look From Within*, (performance) April 21, 2017

“It was like I was saying, that’s enough of that,” she confided to me when the performance was complete.

When Lauren cut Cydnie’s train off, it was a liberating experience for me and the other performers. It was the cue to shift our energy and we didn’t hesitate in the change. I took my jacket off and could feel my temperature shift. We lingered in the altered state

of relieved breathing and slowly began to find our voices. What released from my body and vocal chords was something ancient and pure. I have no idea where the song came from, but I wasn't afraid to sing in front of all those people, even though this fear is something I wrestle with often. I even found myself pushing louder and louder the melody I had discovered.

I disappeared into the performance and didn't notice how crowded the gallery had become. I could hear voices from those who were interested in the other work displayed but entered into a place that wasn't located in the gallery and locked myself into a present state with the other performers.

We circled up on our knees and continued our song, even rocking back and forth allowing the music of our voices to engulf our beings. We were holding hands and I noticed some of the performers kissing each others' hands. When our voices decreased I got up and kissed everyone's forehead. Everyone stood and we took in one last breath together. I then left the space. Slowly, everyone else followed on their own terms.

When the performance was over, Danielle returned all of the garments, one by one, to the metal rack. And the video began to play again.

PERFORMANCE 4/22/17

I arrived more than an hour early to meditate in the gallery before the performance; I've learned that taking this time is imperative to me and a way of activating the space.

I wore a white tank top and a long white skirt, the other performers were in all black. I sat on the large paper 5 minutes before the performance was scheduled to begin and with my back to the viewers allowing my rib cage to expand and contract. It was important for this performance to project the videos (*I'm Bound Female* and *My DNA*) from a projector on the floor, that way our bodies embraced the light and our shadows would be against the wall. When the other performers came in, they were breathing purposefully and with intention, it was audible for the audience. This performance didn't have as many viewers and they were quietly observing. The silence allowed for every breath to be heard. My body began to move with my breath in a lyrical way. I offered myself wholly into this performance, more than the previous one. This one felt less planned and required me to be even more present, listening to my instincts. I envisioned



Figure 19: Still images from *To Look Within, To Look From Within*, (performance) April 22, 2017

my energy being purified with every exhale and every inhale accepting the love the Universe had to offer.

When I rolled onto my belly facing the viewer, the video began to play. I grabbed the charcoal and scraped it along the paper. The first marks were seductive to me and quickly laid the pigment down. I wrote text, traced my body, and then smeared the text. I followed the energy of my breath. When my breathing would increase I wrote faster and when my breathing slowed I made large marks that encompassed my wingspan.

As the video *I'm Bound Female* came to its ending, I began to offer the space visually to each performer, reaching out to them individually and making eye contact with everyone. When the video *My DNA* came on, they joined in, in writing text with me.

Instead of writing the entire time, I began to draw in the air the shapes I was drawing on the paper. Again, this movement was lyrical and could be considered theatrical. The charcoal on my hands became the charcoal I was holding and the shadow on the wall was now the drawing.

Towards the end of the second video, I stood and walked in a circular motion around what the other performers were writing. I bent down and first invited Cydnie to stand with outstretched arms. Then a progression of this followed. As each performer stood, I connected with them in nurturing breath, posture, and touch. We were then all moving about the space on top of our drawing, filling the room with our breathing. When the moment felt right, another performer and I both whispered “I am that I am” at the same time, proof that we were in sync. Just like our writing together, we then wove our verbal words together with the I Am invocation, some of us echoing each other. It was beautiful to walk at our own pace, to weave together our words and footprints.

We began to circle up and still reciting at our own pace. When everyone became silent, we all said the I Am invocation once through together. Took two breaths together and then chanted OM. Our voices echoed in the gallery and the OM was pure and full. I remember feeling the vibration throughout my whole body as I vocalized the sounds. We took two more breaths together and I then walked around the circle of women touching everyone’s back, as if to thank them, and then left the space. The performers left the space on their own terms, when they felt it was complete, leaving our charcoal footprints behind.

Conclusion

These investigations have lead me into a path of getting a second M.F.A. in Theatre Directing. Through directing I plan to use that space to blur boundaries even further between performance art and theatre as well as provide a space for actors to explore their imaginations while connecting to the truth of what they have to offer. Once I graduate from that degree it's my intention to explore experimental theatre in hopes of discovering more inspiration and influence for performance art.

Community by way of deep hospitality or holding space for each other, it is there that change is possible and desirable. We must be evoked and challenged by a desire for a deeper sense of knowing. Change lies within, and only within. I will continue to push for growth, enriching understanding between people, and I will hold space for you to find your voice.

Death of the Ego

1.)

I have barricaded my broken mind,
broken heart—tattered soul.
Bruised and fragmented,
I have fallen too many times, too hard.

This sense of self—The I Am
I identify with you oh Sylvia
oh Vincent
oh Ludwig

Ohhhhhh life
Oh Tree of Life
Sweet Life

unfolded and unfolded
I am folding, I AM
enfolded in you. At your mercy.
At your flight
of Life.

2.)

Fly

A crow
darts through the spastic thoughts of wind
like a dream cast through sped up time
messages burst
in a stream of consciousness

How am I to know
which ones to catch?

Dream on
transparent thoughts,
Roll on painted marbles
—Hinders my ability
to finish
one
complete
idea.

Rolling theories
speak so swiftly
Softly darting through against time.

3.)
I died the day you left your body
I did not know it then
but it certainly was the
beginning of an end
of an identity.

Pop-
-The sound of a book hitting the hardwood floor.
Just enough to startle or break my concentration
The silence was peculiar
it made me pause

Thunder in the background
(storm's coming)

All that was held in blew like
champagne bottles bursting corks
booze flying
only to fall like rain
in place of tears
I wasn't sure if I could cry
should cry
wanted to cry.

Droplets hit my skin
burns like acid

Cry for what never was
what never will be
and for exactly what was

So much pain to sift through.
So thick and complicated.
I had to kill you
quite like Sylvia.
the dark shadow of you
I suffocated in the back of the closet
Along with the haunting memories.

4.)
heal lhēll
verb
to become sound or healthy again
to alleviate (a person's distress or anguish)
to correct or put right (an undesirable situation):

[Sound,
to become sound.]

The sound of my heart beating: thud-thump, thud-thump, thud-thump.

The breath of life,
the life I was so willing to abandon.

The sound of the acid soaking through,
until it rips down deep beyond flesh and tissue.

Investigate all possibilities,
all outcomes

Strip what doesn't belong.
The sound of the layers falling
all masks off
all walls down
until brick by brick

I am exposed.
raw.

5.)

[Alleviate,
to make less severe.]

The Salt of the Earth
Sacred Ground
Cleanse Me
Purify Me

[To correct
or put right,]

Lift me up:

I want [to hold the light]
to raise the vibration
and radiate throughout

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