TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

A TRANSCULTURAL ART EVENT

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE
“Take Care of Your Self: A Transcultural Art Event”
July 7–14, 2017
Montreal, Canada.

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Take Care of Your Self. How many times a week do we hear or say these words in passing? If we all took the time to care for ourselves, how much stronger will we be? More importantly, how much stronger will our communities be?

Self-care is a community act. For those of us experiencing loss and displacement, self-care is a necessary act. The politicization of self-care has emerged from the collective witnessing of structural racism and oppression on both social and global levels. It is an intervention, as well as a rupture in the ongoing struggles for rights, freedoms and wellbeing. It is in those ruptures that interesting things manifest, just as in the margins.

The works in the exhibition are not meant to heal as much as they are (or were) tools in the process of healing. Healing happens from within, and its hard work. In healing work, it is often said that things will get worse before they get better. The work on these walls are reflections on struggle, whether personal, political or social, by artists of diverse communities. Arab, Black, Indigenous, Brown, Muslim, “Other”: We hold this space by grieving and healing together. We celebrate struggle and otherness, because oftentimes, those two experiences are synonymous. We empower our traumas by our healing, because that’s the only way we know how to.

This exhibit is a testament to how notions of self-care, self-determination and healing have conceptually informed the work of artists dealing with complex issues of struggle since the founding of the Black Panther Party and the art of Emory Douglas. Finding the intersections of all of our struggles is crucial, whether on racial, gender, structural, and/or class lines. There is no hierarchy to struggle, and the margins are rich with our complex, intersectional diversity.

“Take Care of Your Self” is a deliberate act in the politicization of self-care in order to better resist, or persist, in the struggles for rights, freedoms and wellbeing. Illustrated by the works in this exhibit, the heavy subjects of trauma, loss and displacement can transform into opportunities for healing and empowerment, foregrounding the concept of self-care at the forefront of the discourse on struggle.
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Emory Douglas

Emory Douglas is the former Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party. His artwork is iconic of the struggle for self-determination, freedom and resistance during the civil rights era in America. His work is also significant on a current and global level. His multiple collaborations across borders from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the Maoris in New Zealand have been monumental in forging alliances in solidarity across cultures, and in the development of international liberation art.

Paperboy remix, 2013 / Screenprint
“Protect the children”  
From the series Akwél:ya-ne I Kayá·tale' (My Heart I Portraits)  
Mixed media on watercolour paper, 2016  
11”x15”

Photo of Sasha Lee Brown’s niece and nephew at the 43rd annual anniversary of the occupation of Wounded Knee.

Monique Bedard (Aura) is Haudenosaunee (Oneida) artist who grew up in a small town in Southern Ontario. She has been deeply and passionately involved in visual arts for 13 years. “I have the passion for community engagement, and collaboration where stories are shared through the art making process. It is my aim to empower people by focusing on our strengths. My goal is to build art projects that lead to a deep sense of understanding while connecting through unity, collaboration and transformation.”

http://auralast.wixsite.com/auralast  I  @auralast
ROÏ SAADE

In Beirut, Dalieh is the city's last natural outcrop and shared space where the public can freely access the coastline for their own recreational purposes. But today, this last remaining informal space is on the edge of disappearing, as the land is being given over to big developers with plans for the construction of a private resort. There's a wide range of nationalities and ethnic groups who share the space, most dominant, Kurdish, Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese. Dalieh represents resistance against the “growth machine” of Real Estate tycoons as the last standing natural outcrop in Beirut and a reminder of our right to the sea.

@roisaade / www.roisaade.com

“Untitled” / From the series Epic of Dalieh / Photograph, 2015

Born and raised in Lebanon, Roï Saade is an independent visual designer working in both graphic design and photography. Roï uses photography as a tool to access unfamiliar places, challenging himself to connect with strangers while interchangeably observing life from a distance in its form and content.
"Ana Mish Ana" is a photography project that sheds light on Palestinians' individualities by using the kuffiya, the iconic scarf, to conceal identity. The project aims at decolonizing the representations of "The Palestinians" and to underline the empowering uniqueness of every human, by enabling the viewer to see individuals underneath the stereotypical image of the freedom fighters.

Mahasen I
Photograph, 2017
12”x18”

Mahasen II
Photograph, 2017
12”x18”

@ahmadnasereldeen
JOSEPH CUILLER

“Black Abstractions is an ongoing public installation series that explores Blackness as a place, space, subject, and material to discover a new language of resistance to the politics of domination in American society. Prints featuring socially engaged poetics overlaying digital approximations of painterly textures abstracted from historical photographs of the Black experience are wheat pasted in Black communities.” The silk prints exhibited are from the same series.

“Genocide, Black Abstractions Silk Series” / inkjet on silk / 36”x42” / 2016

“Black Abstractions” Inkjet print / 2016

Joseph Cuillier (1988, New Orleans, LA, US) is a Harlem based socially engaged artist, designer, and educator. He is the founder of the project The Black School, an experimental radical Black art school.

@josephcuillier
http://www.josephcuillier.com/
JESSICA POWLESS

The meaning of the word Yótku is "she has supernatural powers." I named this piece with the intention of celebrating the resilience and incredible strength of Indigenous women.

"My name is Jessica Powless, I am wolf clan from the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. I try my best to stimulate conversations that should happen within our communities. These pieces promote self-love and are reminders of how great and resilient our people are, and also break down lateral oppression. I try to stimulate thoughts that come from our identities as indigenous people, to attempt to get others to see life through the people who have survived tragedy both historic and present. My people are dynamic and creative; I hope that I capture the essence of my people to the best of my ability."

"Yótku" / Digital print, 2017
"When I was six years old my father disappeared. His name was Mansur Rashid Kikhia and he was a Libyan human rights activist and peaceful opposition leader to Qaddafi’s regime. My family was living in Paris when my father flew to Cairo for a human rights meeting and never returned. As a result, I grew up watching my mother, Baha Omary Kikhia, a Syrian American, search for him for nineteen years as we moved between France and The United States. I have always been fascinated by my father’s determination and my mother’s perilous journey, and her ability to protect four children amidst the drama. While she suffered alone for over 20 years, she provided me with an abnormally normal life filled with joy, creativity, and self-expression. Art saved our lives."

https://www.mansurkikhia.org/
"#Arabs4BlackPower is a group of artists, academics, mothers, fathers, students, refugees, and community organizers with ties to Arabic-speaking regions, declare our unwavering solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). We fully and wholeheartedly endorse the policy demands put forth by the US-based Movement for Black Lives Platform and its transnationalist vision for Black power, freedom and justice. We join the M4BL in reiterating the necessity of shared struggle and collective liberation of oppressed and Indigenous people globally. For liberation to be real and genuine, we all need to get free."

Leila is a Chicago-born, Palestinian author and artist. Her debut graphic novel, Baddawi (Just World Books 2015) was shortlisted for the 2015 Palestine Book Awards. Her creative work primarily explores issues related to diaspora, refugees, history, memory, and borders. Leila has been involved in organizing around the Palestinian cause and the city of Chicago since 2011. She is currently a core member of For The People Artist's Collective. She is also the founder of Bigmouth Press & Comix.
“Shams is a little girl made of glass. One fateful day, Shams breaks into a million pieces. The illustrated book Shams shows Shams’s transformation from a fragile little girl into a survivor, with the help of her own imagination and the guidance of Shifaa, the healer. A story of trauma and human resilience, “Shams” is a timely tale meant to empower the survivors of an abnormal experience, whether political or personal.”

Sundus Abdul Hadi is artist-curator of Take Care of Your Self, the co-founder of We Are The Medium, a mother, and is currently completing her MA in Media Studies.
“Hi my name is Suhad. I was born in Oman, grew up in Amman, lived in St. Louis for 10 years and currently living in The Bay. I'm a mother, visual artist and community organizer.

I never felt entitled to visit Palestine and didn’t know anyone who lived there until I went there on a delegation in 2013. After a 7-hour gruelling interrogation on the border, and on my very first bus trip to Ramallah, all five Palestinian passengers looked at me funny when I said “My parents are Palestinian, but I’m Jordanian.” They forgave my ignorance and insisted on paying my bus ticket. When we parted ways, the eldest turned to me and said with the kindest voice “welcome home.” Those two words sparked an overwhelming realization of my Palestinian-ness. I was a 34-year-old woman who has never been home before, not until then anyway. Every day of the following years I attempted to learn how to think of Palestine as a Palestinian, not as an ally.

Knowledge expands the soul and diminishes unrealistic social fears. So from all the knowledge I acquired over the past five years of organizing for Palestine and later for the Palestine contingent within Ferguson, I feel like I have less fears around putting my heart on a paper, literally. I’d like my art to continue to challenge my religious foundations and expand on my understanding of self-love, femininity and feminism.”
“Al-alam”
Live performance and installation, 2017

“Al-alam is the Bontoc word for fern. It is a symbol for healers but also for healing and survival.

Al-alam is an installation and live performance of a hand poke tattoo ceremony done by Julay of the People's Ink to mark Allos' healing journey as a trans Filipinx in a space where POC masculinity is invisible, and unhealthy white masculinity is perpetuated. This installation serves as an intentional public display of one of the material attempts of decolonization work as a diasporic race. We are at the threshold of interrogating our own work as it occupies the violent contradiction that we are colonial subjects of US imperialism, but Settlers of this land. In our political and artistic practices, we ask how we can heal and survive responsibly and truly liberatory.”

@thepeoplesink
“In a world plagued by destructive forces, how often women use their hands for mending. Hands that paint protest & send letter to organize demonstrations of resistance, hands that cook & apply the medicine, massage bruised bodies with touch, hands that five times daily pray & beg & pray for peace. From the field to frontline, the corner-store to the kitchen these same hands work tirelessly to accomplish the often invisible and still never-ending list to keep bodies sheltered, clothed, and comforted. My work acknowledges the need for self and community care amidst our collective duties. While the need for self-care spans across the spectrum of race, gender, colour, and class believe for women of colour, particularly low-income mothers of colour, self-care can be considered radical. My paintings contribute to the collective imagining of self-care as a beautiful act of resistance particularly when performed by the societally made most marginalized.”

NARMEEN HASHIM
Narmeen Hashim is a mixed-media artist, urban researcher, and community arts educator based in Ojai, California.

@themeeningoflife
NITI MARCELLE MUETH

"Thanks to all the immigrant parents out there who birthed us, loved us, supported us and raised us to each to be a proud child of an immigrant."

-Ailsa Fineron
#proudchildofanimmigrant

Niti Marcelle Mueth is a 21-year-old artist (graphic designer, illustrator, painter and screen printer) based in Montreal, Quebec. She points the importance of self-acceptance, unity and portrays social injustices that are close to her heart. She organizes with Woman Power Mtl, and her second solo exhibition called We gon ’be alright, highlights feminist works and women in all their diversity.

@nitimueth
https://www.behance.net/nitimuemh
“My mother is an Afghan refugee who fled Afghanistan during the Russian invasion in 1978. She ended up in the desert of Santa Fe, New Mexico where she lived for over two decades. After suffering a series of great personal losses and following the events of 9/11, my mother “fled” the United States. Selling everything she owned and packing her life into a backpack, she spent three years traveling Central and South America by bus seeking peace of mind from her PTSD and solace amidst the political tumult of the United States and the War on Terror. Eventually, she rooted herself in a small village in Brazil. A place that was seemingly devoid of antagonism towards the Muslim world and freedom of expression for women. A culture that lived in celebration and joy. Brazil symbolized the ultimate in self-care, a space to heal traumas and live with anonymity and dignity.”
"How do you lift your spirits when you are feeling down?" This question was posed to Adham and Nivin, two young Syrian refugees who now live in Canada. Through this project, the artists wish to recognize the strength of refugees and to encourage the political act of self-care as a path to collective healing.

Azza Abbaro is a third-culture-individual and Art Director / Graphic Designer. Azza was a Co-Creator and the Art Director behind AQSAzine, a publication showcasing art, poetry, and prose of transgender and Muslim women.

Serene Al-Ahmad is a translator, filmmaker, and video editor. She is currently working on her first feature documentary dealing with constructions of nationalism and place in the minds of the exiled and the displaced.

http://www.azzaabbaro.com/
http://serenehusni.tumblr.com/
The poster for In Visible Colours was designed/painted by Nora Patrich for the groundbreaking film festival and symposium "In Visible Colours" held in 1989 in Vancouver, BC. The festival featured films and video works by International Women of Colour and Third World Women. Patrich's image represents solidarity activities for women.

Nora Patrich had to endure the harsh reality faced by Argentines during the infamous "Dirty War", when the junta tried to wipe out a whole generation of people because of their political beliefs. Fearing for her life, after her husband Haracio Machi was assassinated by the security forces, Nora fled Argentina in 1977 with her two-year old son Nicolas and her daughter Laura, who was then barely two months old. Exiled, Nora formed part of the wave of South Americans that would invade the world in the seventies. Finally having arrived in Vancouver in 1982, she became an important part of the feminist community and Latin American activist. Influenced by the Spartacus movement, an important art movement in Argentina, she continues her practice dividing her time between the studios in Vancouver and Buenos Aires.

In 1989, InVisible Colours (IVC) was made, not found; it was historically produced and was historically productive. With over 100 films and videos from 28 countries, it emerged amid contestations on nation building and the making of a global neoliberal order, as much as the socio-political upheaval of the late 1970s and '80s that foregrounded race and gender and the politics of cultural difference. As much the transnational feminist discourse and the marginalization of women of colour therein, IVC was primarily about the contested history of the modernist aesthetic and modernism in the visual arts and the making of the contemporary condition—as a historical marker—for the decolonized world. Who was defining this marker?"

- Zainub Verjee Co-director and Co-founder
Changemakers is an ongoing mixed-media project created by Shanna Strauss and Kevin Calixte that features Black women in Montreal who contribute to positive change in their communities.

“Annick MF is a Mama, master's student and creative maker. In her creative and academic work she dissects the politics of race and gender through which she must move on a daily, and as a mama she redefines those politics so as to make room for her child to bloom.

“As a black girl, I'm used to my mere existence being a revolutionary act; but in preparation for the arrival of my son, I had to actively engage in the revolutionary acts of loving and trusting myself - because the politics that surround my skin, gender and civil status would have made me believe that we are not worthy of love and life.”

- Annick MF

www.shannastrauss.co
annickmf.com / diaryofamatriarch.wordpress.com

SHANNA STRAUSS & KEVIN CALIXTE

“Annick” from the Changemakers series
Photo transfer, acrylic, fabric, wood burning, woodcut on salvaged wood / 22" x 33" / 2016
“Black Lives Matter”
*Found in Transliteration* series

Mixed media on wood panels, 2017
"As an Outreach Worker with Iraq Body Count, in 2015, I interviewed Iraqi individuals who had lost loved ones in Iraq (2003- present day). At home, unable to cry nor verbally articulate the depth of sadness and anger I felt, I turned to drawing to self-support. Born in Baghdad, of Iraqi origins, the impact was deep. This way, I released intense emotions I was sitting with, and later, integrated them as part of my Self.

I drew figures. Bodies Some counted and recorded. Some forgotten. A number. Some alive, some aren’t. Whole and visible, surrounded by loved ones. Some fading and forgotten. My mind stilled as I painted. As a wet layer dried on one sheet, I added some diluted tea and ink on another, and so on. The continuity was comforting, and the never-ending layers of war and destruction seemed to mirror the relentless cycle of violence in my beloved Iraq."

https://www.iraqbodycount.org/
DANA EL MASRI

Shim El Yasmine I “Smell the Jasmines”, 2017
Installation: Jasmine Flowers, Vine Leaves, Cotton, Jasmine Absolute (Grandiflorum), Silk, Metal Wire

Jasmines are a metaphor for renewal and self-acceptance. They symbolize hope and freedom, as demonstrated in Tunisia’s ‘Jasmine Revolution’ (2011). Their powerful scent contains aromatherapeutic properties - ones that are healing, calming, and aphrodisiacal. Jasmines contain 2.5% “Indol” – an ingredient with an unpleasant odour found in fecal matter. Yet when highly diluted, “Indol” has floral notes. Jasmines thus represent paradoxical juxtapositions in life: the unpleasant within the attractive, the pain within beauty, the darkness within light. As human beings, accepting the ‘darker’ or ‘undesirable’ aspects of ourselves is one of the most important steps to recovery and self-care. As this exhibition runs, these jasmines will wilt, showcasing the life/birth cycle. Close your eyes and listen with your nose as they sing their passionate song before extinguishing themselves in a dramatic death.

Dana El Masri is an independent perfumer, writer, and musician. Her work focuses on scent, music, culture, and the intersections among the three. Dana is the winner of the UK’s Jasmine Literary Award, and is currently working on new perfume for her brand, Jazmin Sarai, in addition to collaborating with artists and conducting research on scent and Arabic music.

@thescentinel
www.jazminasarai.com
ALIYA ORR
[LIGHT SOCIETY]

Light Society is a research practice in applied magic. It is a collaboration between Sakchin Bessette and Aliya Orr that explores common interests in mysticism, magic, and confusion through staged experiments that entangle light, space, and human beings in shifts of perception. Artist, designer and researcher Aliya Orr has worked for a decade across spatial design, generative and interactive experiences, and moves between the worlds of technology, spirituality, and the environment.

"Clouds Are For Dreamers, 2017"

Installation: Prism, Mirror, Miscellaneous Objects

An elliptical prism, sand, stone, banana. A motor, pole, cables, ties, screws, a beam of light. All rotating at three turns a minute in a turning world around the sun. A fragile balancing act suspended in a dynamic state with the capacity for revelation. Always moving, sometimes revealing, never quite the same.

www.lightsociety.ca
APRIL BANKS

Tea Afar is a nomadic storytelling experience that exchanges traditions across borders. Over tea, we share stories about one country. Three storytellers and a tea master take us on a full sensory journey via photography, music and food. Each event is unique, intimate and undocumented.

April Banks presents Tea Afar: Syria at Marché des Éclusiers in Montreal as part of Take Care of Your Self.

April Banks is a Los Angeles based conceptual artist, traveler, and the producer of Tea Afar. Driven by immersive observation and questioning, her obsession with research shapes shift between photography, installation, writing, and collaborative experiments.
"ODE TO MYSELF" BY SOUKAYNA

Dear child,
when was the last time you really looked at yourself?
When was the last time you noticed the sun kissing your beautiful brown skin, covering it in gold dust.
When was the last time you hugged your body and its rolls and its scars
and its stripes and its curves,
the way your mother held you as a baby.
Holding you so close to her beating heart, that at that moment, nothing felt more real and honest.
When was the last time, my child, you allowed yourself to be scared?
To be vulnerable.
The world isn't always wonderful,
it is scary and ugly and filled with pain and misery!
But you, my child, are beautiful and strong and soft and loving and you are my world.

When everything seems to fall apart and hope lingers between every string of my soul, you my child, are all that I have left, and you are my world.
When hunger strikes and my body fights,
when the voices grow louder and my spirit gets weaker, you!
beautiful, beautiful child, you are my world.

And I am sorry.
I am sorry I let you down so many times.
I am sorry I hurt you, covered you in bruises, left you starving hungry for love but only feeding on pain.
I am sorry my child.

I am sorry I wasn't there when you needed me most.
But I promise!
I promise my child, that I will love you and hold you and cherish you the way you deserve to be cherished.
That I will walk through fire just to hold you.
That I will turn every single one of your tears into a diamond, so you know just how precious you are.

Glass will shatter,
the world will tremble knowing that every morning you wake up more and more loving, and stronger, and alive.

You, my child, are the most authentic and honest being that there is because you, my child, are unique.

You carry your own struggles, your own words, your values, your story and your hope.
You, my child, are one in 7.3 billion, and that is enough for you to matter!

You, my child, are loved.
You are loved beyond comprehension.

You, my child, are loved, like love was meant to exist for you.
"WOMEN" BY JESSICA POWLESS

In this world indigenous women are only looked at as exotic/
used for erotic dysfunction/
since the beginning of races mixing n meeting our women were
enslaved by their hand for our skin;
our hair; our eyes; our lips, noses,
our power they did not know about/
stealing of our grandmothers wombs was only the beginning/
and the sterilization of their daughters was the continuance/
the continuance of genocide that had bred patriarchy of
men who knew better/
now we battle domestic violence and ignoring of
our women's wisdom/
today we are still sold to the highest bidders in the world/
still exotic objects used for erotic dysfunction/
our daughters are watching the moves of the world/
preparing themselves for the worlds opinion about them/
we are the womb that carried the existence of
the western hemisphere/
we are the food they ate to survive/
we are the medicines used to heal/
we are the water they drank/
the moon they watched/
the earth they still stand on/
lets start acting as if we remember/
pick each other up instead of beating each other down
with western philosophy/
too many of us killed/
too many of us missing/
too many of us unsolved/
lets wake up together.
THANK YOU, SPONSORS:
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Marché des Éclusiers

THANK YOU, THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY:
Sophia Sahrane (CSU BIPOC Committee)
Elizabeth Miller
Yasmin Jiwani
Communications Department, Concordia University

THANK YOU, COLLABORATORS:
Annick MF, Jess Glavina, Teanna Munro
Ahmad Naser-Eldein
Stefan Christoff
Marwa Mubarak
Eleni Giannopoulos
Wyzah Musk
Omnivore
“Take Care of Your Self” is presented by The Medium, and is artist-curator Sundus Abdul Hadi’s Research-Creation project in completion of the MA in Media Studies at Concordia University.

The exhibition is inspired by Muhammad Ali and the legendary boxer’s message of co-existence, social justice and empowerment.

Dedicated to my family.
Yassin, Shams, Yusra, Mama, Baba, Tamara.

Thank you to the artists who gave me the privilege and trust to be responsible for their work and their stories.

All photographs and information courtesy of the artists.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR SELF.