

ARTIST AS FIRST RESPONDER PRESENTS

BLATANT

A ZINE ON ART, BEAUTY AND RAGE • VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 1 • AUGUST 2020



#BLACKAUGUST

ASYA ABDRAHMAN • BUSHMAMA AFRICA • LUKAZA BRANFMAN-VERISSIMO • LYNNÉE DENISE • ASHARA EKUNDAYO
REGINA EVANS • HOUSE/FULL OF BLACKWOMEN • RA MALIKA IMHOTEP • JOCELYN JACKSON • JESSICA CARE MOORE
COURTNEY DESIREE MORRIS • SONYA RENEE TAYLOR • SAM VERNON • ADREINNE WAHEED

A BEGINNING ASHARA EKUNDAYO

This is BLATANT—a new, limited-series art journal in the tradition of political zine-making—rapid, guerilla, scrappy, and accessible—that shares current, urgent, anecdotal short stories, recipes, poetry, photography, visual art, and sound work made by Black, Indigenous, Brown, Womxn of Color, Femmes, Trans people, Siblings, and Gender-Expansive folk who are exploring the collective recalibration that our planet is calling for, and that our global struggle for freedom and liberation demands. BLATANT highlights the work of local, national, and international artists whose creative practices heal communities and save lives.

Since before the onset of the COVID19 pandemic I had been in a space of transition with my artistic/curatorial practice and had just begun to settle into the idea of retreat and research for my upcoming art book. These ruminations had been fueling my latest platform, Artist as First Responder™ which I've deemed a designation, a destination, an interactive conversation, and a premise that when there is a crisis, disaster, or urgent need, it is our creative/artistic self who emerges to forge solutions – indeed interventions.

My practice as a “first responder” is rooted in Black radical feminist thought and therefore has always been to uplift the work of Black people in direct response to the silencing experienced across public and private sectors. I am a Black womxn, and I insist that we not be “snatched up” and carried away out of the sight of our children, our elders, and our own reflection. Black womxn have been, and continue to be the primary stewards of movement building and revolutionary, liberatory design. That being said, Volume 1, Edition One of BLATANT exclusively centers the lived experiences and creative arts practices of Black womxn and Femmes.

I could not have predicted that the term and poignant realities of #FIRSTRESPONDERS across the globe would also lay bare and further expose the intersectional disparities inherent inside of the current structure of racial capitalism and institutional design. I cannot, therefore, speak about art-work, our well-being, and the creative economy, without speaking about anti-Blackness, colonialism, white supremacy, and how the impact of this coronavirus and the Movement for Black Lives run parallel in energizing the Blatant truths of beauty and rage. This activist movement is not only trauma-informed, it is also rooted and animated by joy, pleasure and LOVE.

In the months leading up to this issue:

- The World has been on a semi-lockdown for 5 months - since March.
- Over 1.3 million people have applied for US Unemployment Benefits
- The Death toll from COVID19 in the US had surpassed 166,000/745,000 Worldwide
- It has been more than 160 days since Louisville, KY police murdered Breonna Taylor. Still No arrests/Still No charges

As this Black August, Inaugural Issue was going to print, the world mourned the passing of civil rights icon Representative John Robert Lewis whose lifetime journey of modeling “good trouble” inspired three generations to use all of our creativity to train, fight and win! This issue is dedicated to him, to all of the Black womxn currently imprisoned and entangled inside of the prison industrial complex, and to my Black mother Alice Washington who taught me to understand and appreciate the value of art and land and myself.

As I welcome you into these Blatant conversations and considerations of Artist As First Responder, I urge you to listen to Black Women and Artists in the community when we speak. Act when Black women and Arts Workers organize to inform you. Honor Black women and Black Artists and our creative, intellectual and psychic labor.

May Our Ancestors Be Pleased,
Ashara

IG: @artistasfirstresponder | @blublakwomyn
www.artistasfirstresponder.com



“subscribe” Ashara Ekundayo, magazine and newsprint collage, 2020

WHAT IS BLACK AUGUST?



Black August originated in the California penal system to honor fallen Freedom Fighters, Jonathan Jackson, George Jackson, William Christmas, James McClain, and Khatari Gauden. Jonathan Jackson was gunned down outside the Marin County California courthouse on August 7, 1970 as he attempted to liberate three imprisoned Black Liberation Fighters: James McClain, William Christmas and Ruchell Magee (The Soladad Brothers). Ruchell Magee is the sole survivor of that armed liberation attempt. He is the former co-defendant of Angela Davis. Other historical facts from August include the Black resistance—from the Haitian Revolution, the Nat Turner Rebellion, the Fugitive Slave Law Convention, the

foundation of the Underground Railroad and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the 1963 March on Washington, and the Watts Uprising. Also, we acknowledge the births of Marcus Garvey, Russell Maroon Shoatz, and Fred Hampton and the bombing of the MOVE Organization and the deaths of W.E.B du Bois, Michael Brown Korrryn Gaines, and John Crawford.

“Black August” is honored every year to commemorate the fallen freedom fighters of the Black Liberation Movement, to call for the release of political prisoners in the United States, to condemn the oppressive conditions of U.S. prisons, and to emphasize the continued importance of the Black Liberation struggle. Observers of Black August commit to higher levels of discipline throughout the month. This can include fasting from food and drink, frequent physical exercise and political study, and engagement in political struggle. In short, the principles of Black August are: “study, fast, train, fight.” More info at:

<https://liberationschool.org/study-fast-train-fight-the-roots-of-black-august/>

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Respect and acknowledgment to the Ohlone people on whose land this conversation and artwork were convened upon and where the production team lives as residents of Oakland, CA, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

FOUNDER, EDITOR & CREATIVE DIRECTOR—Ashara Ekundayo
EDITORIAL PRODUCTION MANAGER—Unique Holland
GRAPHICS & LAYOUT EDITOR—Justin Carder

BLATANT ZINE, a publication of Artist as First Responder is supported by:
Girls & Womxn of Color Collaborative
African American Art & Culture Complex
Akonadi Foundation
The San Francisco Foundation
Wakanda Dream Lab at Movement Strategy Center
QUIET
Women's Foundation of California
ReCAST Grant at City of Oakland Human Services Department
Omi Arts
Copyright 2020 AECreative Consulting Partners and Girls & Womxn of Color Collaborative

CREDITS FOR TITLE LOGO DESIGN BY:

Nik Brovkin • overthebreaks.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Asya Abdrahman (she/her) @asyaabdrahman
Bushmama Africa (she/her) @b_u_s_h_m_a_m_a
Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo (she/they) @bluekaza
Lynnée Denise (she/her) @lynneedenise
Ashara Ekundayo (she/they) @artistasfirstresponder
Regina Evans (she/her) @reginasdoor
House/Full of BlackWomen @HouseFullOfBlackWomen
Ra Malika Imhotep (she/ her) @tar_babyyyy
Jocelyn Jackson (she/her) @justskitchen
jessica Care moore (she/her) @jessicacaremoor
Courtney Desiree Morris (she/ her) @creolemaroon
Sonya Renee Taylor (she/ her) @sonyareneetaylor
Sam Vernon (she/her) @samevernon
Adreinne Waheed (she/her) @waheedpix

COVER

“Ancestors Prepare for Battle (2016)” by Courtney Desiree Morris.

BLACK AUGUST IMAGE

“Crossing (2016)” by Courtney Desiree Morris.



WOMEN'S FOUNDATION CALIFORNIA



AKONADI FOUNDATION



SFF San Francisco Foundation



AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE COMPLEX

#BUYBACKBLACKDEBT

SONYA RENEE TAYLOR

A few weeks ago I posted a video on Instagram in which I told the white folks who follow me, **“If you are white & feel tender after my videos, GOOD! It means your coat of whiteness is thinning! AWESOME! Shedding whiteness will feel raw, as it should. White supremacist delusion is a humanity anesthesia.”** I then went on to suggest a transformative project they could take part in. I asked white people with access to wealth to personally engage in interrupting the impacts of systemic racism on the lives of Black folks by using their wealth (gained in part as a result of white violence) to mitigate systemic debt from Black Lives.

For years, folks have argued with the government about the need for reparations while “liberal” white people who have benefited directly from systemic racism have continued to wring their hands in faux concern purporting to have no idea what they can do to help. The answer is quite simple. Use your debt to pay off the economic outcomes of white supremacist policies and practices in the lives of Black folks. In early 2020, I cleared every debt I had except the debts tied to white supremacist delusional structures (i.e. IRS and student loans). **I owe \$110,000 dollars in student loans for degrees that when considering the Black woman wage gap, I would never make as much as any white counterpart to pay back.** Millions of Black people are caught up in white racist systems that were constructed to ensnare us in debt, deny us resources, and ruin us financially. From subprime mortgages, to redlining, to predatory for-profit colleges and loans with astronomical interest rates to IRS debt and government liens. These systems live in our homes, rob our dreams, keep us trapped, steal opportunities. I want wealthy white folks to get RADICAL about wealth redistribution because Black debt causes death.

“I asked white people with access to wealth to personally engage in interrupting the impacts of systemic racism on the lives of Black folks by using your wealth (gained in part as a result of white violence) to mitigate systemic debt from Black Lives.”

Heart-related ailments are some of the most fatal conditions for Black women. Black women die of STRESS!

#BuyBackBlackDebt is a project of interracial spiritual and economic relationship building and healing. The goal is not simply to pay off the random debt of Black folks but to re-establish the possibility of human connections and relationships through disrupting active institutions of white supremacist delusion in Black lives. I see this project as a local, family and community-organized process that benefits the lives of Black folks in their proximity.

Wealth is generational and familial. It is passed down through lineage. I hope to restitch the garment of humanity by weaving Black and white lives in depthful and transformative ways...lineal. Such that Black people become the heirs to white wealth alongside white family members. Such that white people become the heirs to Black love. Such that white people with financial resources immediately consider supporting the Black people in their lives because they have Black people in their lives. Where those relationships do not exist, they begin building them because it is through relationships that we heal and white people have much in themselves to heal. Be clear both parties are clearing debt at the intersection of the spiritual and material realms.

THIS PROJECT IS NOT A GIFT! White people are not gifting or donating or any other language steeped in white saviorism. White people are being gifted the opportunity to clear up their own spiritual indebtedness by mitigating the harm whiteness has done to Black people via institutions of white supremacist delusion. #BuyBackBlackDebt is, at its core, about the possibility of authentic reparative relationships. It is my tiny offering of radical self-love in practice.



**JUSTICE FOR
BREONNA TAYLOR**
JUNE 13, 2020 THE BLACK
EXCELLENCE MARCH,
BROOKLYN BRIDGE
ADREINNE WAHEED

SOUND

**ADJUST YO' EYES
FOR THIS DARKNESS
SOUNDTRACK**
LYNNÉE DENISE

ADJUST
YO' EYES
FOR THIS
DARKNESS

“Adjust Yo’ Eyes For This Darkness” pinned by Amsterdam-based deejay and music scholar Lynnee Denise, is a “joy-informed” intentional Call To Action to celebrate the technology of Black women at the intersection of spirituality & social justice across the African Diaspora. We been knowing that *Dance is a Liberatory Tactic!*



To listen to the soundtrack, open the camera on your smartphone and hold over the QR Code to access the link

THE NORMAL WAY TO DIE OR FUCK COVID19

JESSICA CARE MOORE

You cannot escape the knife
When it is laughing at your neck

The neck of the poem is falling off
The bone of your head. Sucking like
Babies do overcooked chickens.

I ask you to simply not drink the blood
Of the paragraph. Allow it to breathe on
The page before you kill it and
leave it
For dead.

Why must it be messy, death.
Why must we die alone this way?
On the page
In these vibrant cities

No funerals for trees
No way to describe the internal bruises
No burning bush promises
No holy water to bless hands
No embrace to share electricity

Death doesn't feel normal
When the living can't express
How much they die too.

There are daily ads for
Obituary programs on local Detroit stations
500 full color with staples for
one hundred dollars.

I want to shoot the television
All the channels play the same story

Instead, I planted a garden
Black eyed peas, collards, beets.

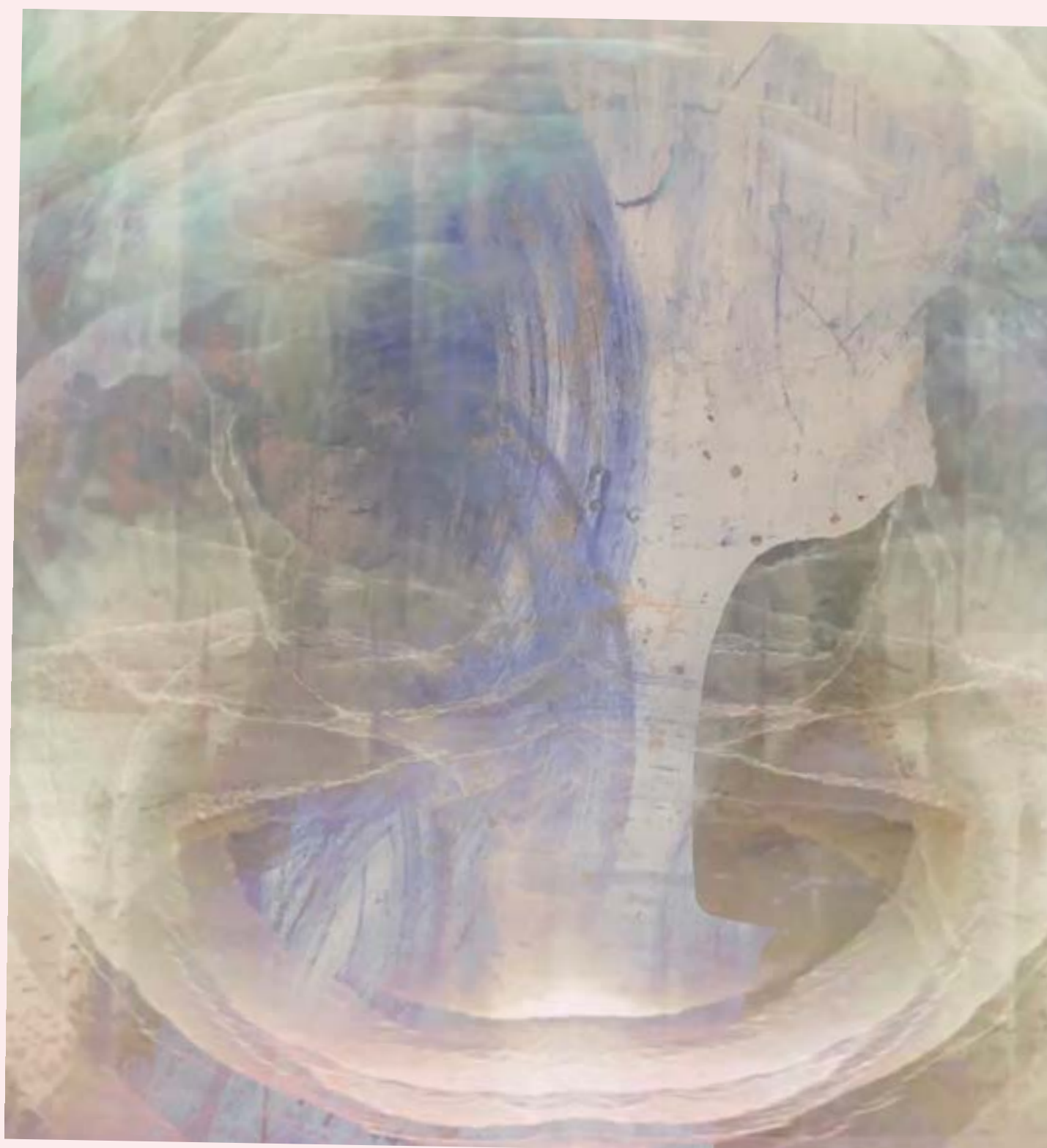
Grow something, anything
Perhaps poems will outlive

all this fear.

There is no such thing
As a normal way to die.

There is no such thing
As a poem that kills.

But sometimes, they do.



ÉN:SKA—ONE THE FALL OF SKYWOMAN

ASYA ABDRAHMAN



To watch the film, open the camera on your smartphone and hold over the QR code to access the link.

I explore the meaning of restoration, generation, and regeneration through an experimental art making process. My productions, sculptures, paintings and writings spring from a lifelong experience with self-healing. This experience, present even in my earliest memories, has greatly influenced my creative endeavors. My work is a verbal and visual metaphor for rehabilitation and recovery for the self and the environment.

The dire need for restoration, rehabilitation and regeneration in this age of zoological pandemics caused by human environmental destruction compels me to respond as an artist via the ancient call and response of creating the world we dream to be human within. It is a call to remember oneness. We are one with our environment. —Asya Abdrahman

SPELLS FOR AFRICANS DURING THE
REVOLUTION
BUSHMAMA AFRICA



BY ANY GREENS NECESSARY

JOCEYLN JACKSON



SERVES 4 TO 6 SOULS

Begin with the intentions to love and nourish. As you collect your ingredients and prepare the food, think of all the ways your pot of greens will celebrate and support your family and your community. Each time we spend time at the hearth, we have the opportunity to transform our relationship to place and people. When I watched my Grandma make greens, the steam from the pot rising up into her face as she tasted for doneness, she taught me that lesson.

Make your way to your own garden or a neighbor's garden or a community garden and harvest a handful of collard greens. Then visit the farmer's market and go over to your favorite local farmer's stand and purchase three bunches of their freshly picked collard greens. Take time in the garden and at the farmer's market to share your story of collards or other seasonal produce and experiences. All of this talking and learning and caring will make its way into the pot with your collard greens.

- 4 BUNCHES OF COLLARD GREENS *(feel free to add in beet or turnip tops, kale, or mustard greens if you like)*
- 2 TABLESPOONS OLIVE OIL
- 1 MEDIUM YELLOW ONION, CHOPPED
- 3 GARLIC CLOVES, CHOPPED
- 3 CARROTS, CHOPPED
- 2 CUPS VEGETABLE BROTH
- SALT AND PEPPER TO TASTE
- 3 TABLESPOONS APPLE CIDER VINEGAR

As my Aunty says, "clean them greens to your own satisfaction" by removing the large stems and washing them in a bath of salt water or vinegar water. Stack 4 to 6 greens on top of on another, roll together and slice into half inch ribbons. Set aside.

PUT two tablespoons of olive oil in a heated deep cast iron pot.

ADD chopped yellow onion to the pot. Salt slightly to help the onions release their moisture. Saute on medium heat until translucent. Stir occasionally.

ADD 3 chopped garlic cloves to the onions and stir occasionally. Cook over medium heat for an additional 3 minutes. Add 3 chopped carrots and the sliced greens to the pot.

POUR vegetable broth over the greens. Add salt and pepper as well. Don't stir. Place tight lid over the pot and let steam over low heat for 20 minutes. Lift the lid and stir. Add additional broth if your potlikker is low. Replace the lid and cook for an additional 20 minutes. Lift the lid, add 3 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar and salt to taste, stir and replace lid for another 15 minutes or until delicious and tender greens show up.

When my big family gathered around to eat Grandma's delicious pot of greens that tasted so much like home we always sang a blessing first. A song of gratitude. Go ahead and serve the collard greens right from the pot. Serve them with the blessing that all who are nourished by this offering will have even more strength to love and cultivate their community. And don't forget to drink down a jigger full of that potlikker too.

Intention: Light the white light/say their names/ we must rise where they stood/ putting flowers there/ letting tears anoint the spots where they took flight/the places where dark matters took place/take up arms/ take up space/ speak for the spoken/live for the dead.

Ogun

Protect us from tragedies and accidents.

Protect us from all evil and harm.

Do not permit the iron to hurt us.

Be the one in charge Ogun to guard, protect us,

And that we have peace.

Ogun is the chief of the warriors, the God of War, blood, and iron. He is the guardian of the forge, and the patron of civilization and technology. Not just a martial deity, Ogun is the archetypal force that drives technology. He is responsible for tools of progress like farming implements and surgeon's knives.

It is Ogun that clears the roads with his machete.

Ogun clears obstacles that get in the way of spiritual growth. He is petitioned for help with seeking employment, defense against enemies, or for protection.

Ogun Ritual for the Clearing of Obstacles

Light a 7 Day Ogun candle (or 7 green and black candles).

Take a knife and dip it in red palm oil or palm wine. Ask Ogun to remove spiritual and material obstacles from your path (you can state what the obstacles are). You can also ask Ogun to destroy your enemies. In these times it's best to use this ritual to protect yourself against racist, white supremacist, noteps and others who want to continue to oppress, kill, mame and silence us. The time is now. Step into your power.

BELOVED: AN INSISTENCE

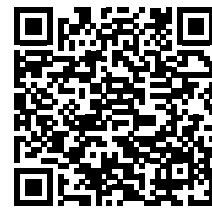
REGINA EVANS



Beloved: An Insistence is a cascading flow of love, care, artistry, and creative inspiration. We exist to bequeath and present visual beauty to the Beloved who are currently being seared by the brutalizing grip of child sex trafficking. In doing so, we utilize city streets and sidewalks as our foundation to install garden altars, lighting design, street pole art, sidewalk art, and murals. Within our installations, we embed resources, food, water, etc. During this time of COVID we also embed PPE such as masks, gloves and hand sanitizers. *To join our Insistence, please contact Regina Y. Evans at evans.regina@gmail.com.*

ASHARA EKUNDAYO IN CONVERSATION WITH REGINA EVANS

Edited for length and clarity. Scan QR code for Soundcloud recording of full interview.



REGINA My name is Regina Evans, and I am from Oakland, California, primarily my work is as an abolitionist in the fight against child sex trafficking. The way that I do my work is through entrepreneurship and also through theater [as a] playwright and actor. I do a lot of healing work through fabrics and materials ... ancestral ways of sewing. I'm also an installation artist and an altar artist and one of the things that I do, which we are doing tonight, is actually raising awareness of the fight against sex trafficking by building a block-long altar on the track.

The track is an area where young girls and boys, women, and men, are sold into rape for sale and trafficked. Trafficking has three elements: force, fraud, and coercion. I've been building altars on the corners... in front of houses, in front of businesses, quietly, for many many years... going out by myself at night and just building altars and putting up signs just trying to shift the spiritual atmosphere, and also to bring some inspiration to the girls, so that they know that they are seen, that somebody sees them.

I am a survivor of trafficking as well, which is why I do this work. It's traumatizing but I couldn't think of anything else better that I would like to be doing in this world than loving on these children and creating relationship with them.

ASHARA It doesn't seem from my talking to you the last couple of times that there's been any slowing of this trafficking activity. Is that correct?

REGINA What we're seeing with COVID is actually a spike, and that's happening around the nation. The john's are asking that [the girls] wear masks, and that they have hand sanitizer. And now, in fact, if you look online the pictures of the girls are in masks and the adverts for them will say they have masks, and they have hand sanitizers so they're literally ... it's become part of the scheme now.

We pass along the masks and the hand sanitizers for their safety to keep them safe as much as possible. So no, it has not abated -- it has in fact spiked.

ASHARA Are their pimps passing out hand sanitizer and masks to them?

REGINA When Mama Amara (Tabor Smith) and I went out one time, [the pimps] were like, "can we have one, too? It's free?" We replied, "yes it's free ... and you can have some too." Because these are young Black men, we want them healed too.

It kind of opened up a door for us to not have any problems while we're talking to the young women. And in fact, Mama Amara was drawing a veve on the sidewalk, and they got out of the car and walked up to her and said "what's that?" and she said "it's healing art", and he visually just backed down and said "is that for me too?" and she told him "yeah it's for you too."

She describes that as a magical moment. I saw it -- I didn't hear the words -- but I saw his body. It was just a beautiful moment. You know, you have to talk to them as well. These are our sons. And so, the PPE has given us access to them.

ASHARA The altars you're building tonight. You said they're on four corners?

REGINA We're building an altar along the front of the building the length of the building. We have placed an artist and paired them with an activist.

ASHARA Who are the artists?

REGINA The artists are Anisa Bella, the Oakland Nine, Derrick Bell, who has done a whole series of paintings on trafficking, and so he's going to be live painting, and Leo Mercer of the Mercer Brotherhood. The Activists on the border are MISSSEY, DreamCatcher, SHADE, Twilight Treasures and the Oakland Frontline Healers. All those groups have been working in Oakland for a very very very long time. So I just paired them together. Spiritually it felt right.

Tonight we're asking the community to really just do a love drive by -- to drive by in their car to shine a light and say out gentle but determined words of affirmation, honk their horn and do a drive by of love and I'm asking people to shine a light on the problem.

ASHARA

Is there anything else you want me to know about this work?

REGINA

I think the main thing is for people to see these children as their own. After I do my play, I ask two questions. The first question is this: "what would you do if you knew a child who was being sex trafficked?" and you get some very reasonable answers ... call the police, maybe call the DA's office and make a report.

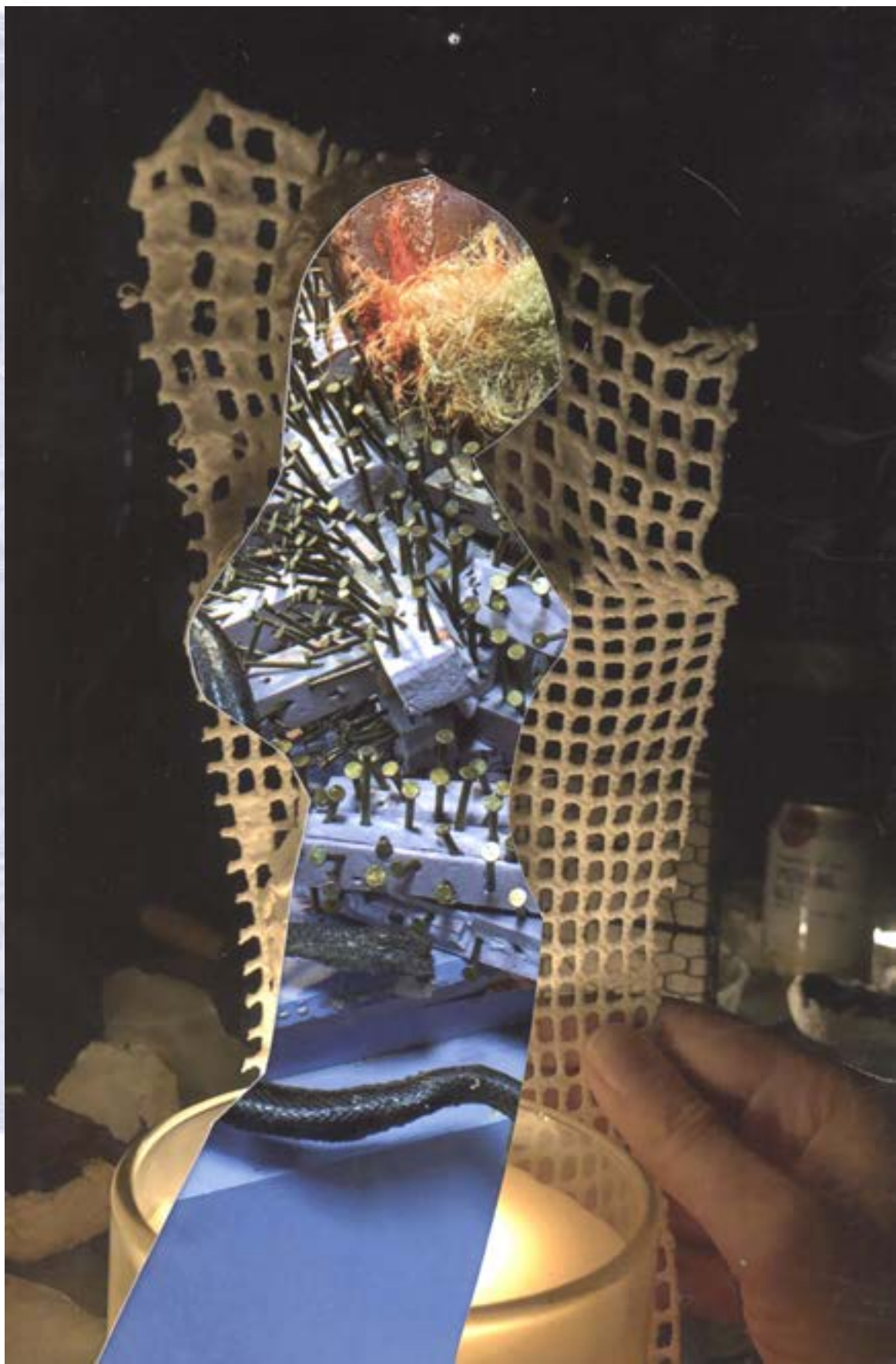
I ask the second question, "what would you do if your child was being trafficked?" Trust me, that answer is different. People want to break out a machete, send out a posse after the person. I'm not trying to have you go out and chop up somebody with a machete, but keep that energy for that person, that child that is not birthed from your womb, as well. We need that energy because that energy is what is going to knock the head off of this beast that is literally destroying our children.

Even if everybody just prayed every day. Even if everybody just prayed and asked the ancestors to help these girls. That's powerful.

FILM

RENT STROKE
HOUSE/FULL OF BLACKWOMEN



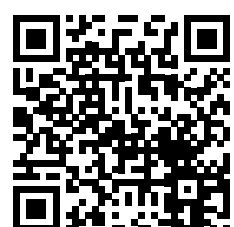


FALSE CALM SERIES (ONGOING)

SAM VERNON

An improvised collaboration Composer/Musician/
Videographer Alexa Burrell aka Lexagon, Singer
Tossie Long, Founder Deep Waters Dance Theater/
Choreography/ Creator of House/Full of Blackwomen
Amara Tabor Smith and Co-creator Theater Director/
Producer Ellen Sebastian Chang. Rent Stroke May
Day 2020 is a Section of Episode 14: The New Chitlin
Circuitry; a reparations vaudeville.

House/Full of BlackWomen is a site-specific ritual
performance project that addresses issues of
displacement, well being, and sex trafficking of black
women and girls in Oakland. Set in various public
sites throughout Oakland over a Five-year period, this
community-engaged project is performed as a series of
“Episodes” that are driven by the core question, “How
can we, as black women and girls find space to breathe,
and be well within a stable home?”



To watch the film, open the camera on
your smartphone and hold over the QR
code to access the link.

NEED: AN INVOCATION FOR BLK WIMMIN'S LIVES

RA MALIKA IMHOTEP

I wrote *Need: A Chorale For Black Woman Voices* because I felt I had to use the intensity of fury, frustration and fear I was feeling to create something that could help alter the reasons for what I felt. Someone had to speak, beyond these events and this time, yet out of their terrible immediacy, to the repeated fact of the blood of Black women flowing through the streets of our communities—so often shed by our brothers, and so often without comment or note. Or worse, having that blood justified or explained away by those horrific effects of racism which we share as Black people...We need each other too much to be destroying each other. We need each other too much, genuinely, as Black people unafraid of each other... We need to talk about what we do to each other, no matter what pain and anger may be mined within those conversations. This poem is as good a place as any to begin. We are too important to each other to waste ourselves in silence.”—Audre Lorde, 1979

Reflecting on the assault of Ianna Dior in Minneapolis the week that this current international wave of Black Uprisings began, Black leftist feminist writer and scholar Imani Perry asked: “How do we become fit for our Freedom?” How do we refuse and interrupt the practices of violence that render Black women, trans + cis, vulnerable to mistreatment and murder at the hands of our own “skinfolks.”

This question has stuck with me as the list of the names of our dead keeps growing past comprehension. In this moment when so many of us take to the streets in defense of Black life against the State, it seems we have no language and little practice at moving in honor and defence of those, most often Black and Femme, that have been defined by patriarchy as excessive and disposable.

As we steadily make urgent demands of the State, we must also ask “how do we become our most free selves? Who must we most urgently embrace with our radical visions of love in pursuit of this freedom? During that glorious second wave of feminism, a group of Black lesbian socialist feminists based in Boston came together as first a consciousness raising group, they then became a study group before blossoming into the political organization we know named The Combahee River Collective. In 1979 they published a statement that asserted:

“If Black women were free, it would mean everybody else would have to be free because our freedom necessitates the destruction of all forms of oppression.”

And they wrote those words in the face of a crisis. They wrote “Black women are inherently valuable” as the worked and marched to address a series of violent and unacknowledged murders of Black women, material evidence that suggest the opposite. Also in 1979, Audre Lorde wrote *NEED: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices*, a lyrical response to that same political moment that sought to give voice to the victims of those heinous crimes and to decry the normalization of the murder of Black women. What was initially a poem became a piece of political theater circulated by Kitchen Table Press and geared towards initiating the difficult conversation about the too easily accepted dynamics of harm between Black men and Black women.

Within the introduction of *NEED*, Lorde offers a perfect description of the problem, “as aggressive acts of white racist violence intensify around us, aimed primarily but not exclusively, at black men, violence against Black women intensifies within our own communities. “And we cannot, she charges, hide this wasteful secret under a cloak of false unity. “Black women will no longer accept being slaughtered like sheep on altars of Black male frustration” and I add, insecurity.

It strikes me how everything Lorde and ‘nem were saying then, in 1979, hold true in our now. I do not even know all their names and hesitate to begin to name them for fear I will be leaving someone out. But I do know that I felt gutted by the concurrent losses of Oluwaytoyin Saluu, Riah Milton and Rem’Mie Fells.

I do know, heeding the words of Imara Jones that the defense of Black woman’s lives whether you’re trans or cis is a shared struggle. I know that one form of oppression that we must urgently unlearn and dismantle is that of biological determinism, transmisogyny and all other fruits that fall from patriarchies branches.

Inspired by a conversation on Black trans* feminisms between Marquis Bey and Kai M. Green, I assert that the Black feminist tradition we are a part of is one that calls for a complete overturn of the terrain -- meaning that this work, this heartfelt drive towards freedom is not, at all, about winning acceptance into the category of “woman” as defined and standardized by whiteness but about rejecting the “pedestals” of neat binaries and tokens of legibility all together. Because these tokens and pedestals we were so reluctantly offered are in fact protected and legitimized through patriarchal violence.

Together we have studied with the work of black feminist theorist Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman. We have thought deeply about what it means to be “ungendered” and what it will take to “undo the plot,” this month we turn to a foundational moment in the history of contemporary US Black feminisms to listen deeply to the call to address the harm we as marginalized people sometimes embody and direct towards one another. We open ourselves to listen to what our grief has to teach us about radical possibility. We listen to imagine a future in which the blood of Black women (trans + cis), black femmes and otherwise gender non-comforming Black folks is not the tithe we pay to revolution. We listen so that we may know, (following Ni’Ja Whitman) that “to ungender is to perform the magic of living” -- we listen so we may undo the plot against us and dream up the practices of radical love our freedom necessitates.

Let the church say axe!

Ra Malika Imhotep

For The Church of Black Feminist Thought

July 19th, 2020

THE CHURCH OF BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT is an embodied spiritual-political education project bringing the words of black feminist thinkers into conversation in physical + virtual space, and a container for critical reflection on the text that help us to survive. Since January 2018 we have been meeting monthly in Berkeley, Oakland and now translocally via Zoom, with an intergenerational group of artists, writers and organizers committed to being in rigorous, intimate relationships with the work of black feminist writers and artists. The invocations shared at each convening serve to call in each constellation of resources and provide context for the work we do through small group study, free writes, and open dialogue.

AS BRIGHT AS OUR LIVING BODIES

LUKAZA BRANFMAN-
VERISSIMO



36" x 36" | Black gesso, acrylic, spray paint,
colored pencil | 2019



FILM NIA WILSON STATION COURTNEY DESIREE MORRIS



This video performance is part of Nia Wilson Station, a digital mourning ritual for Nia Wilson, who was murdered at the MacArthur BART Station in Oakland on July 22, 2018. For details about the project visit www.courtneydesireemorris.com. To learn more about Nia Wilson and how you can help keep her memory alive visit www.niawilsonfoundation.org.



To watch the film, open the camera on your smartphone and hold over the QR code to access the link.

SHOW UP FOR NIA WILSON FLYERS
LUKAZA BRANFMAN-VERISSIMO