



Main Space

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Your Hands and Eyes Keep Us Alive

Cleopatria Peterson in collaboration with Clara Lynas, Kaya Joan, and Forest Van Winkle
September 8th – October 2nd, 2020

Your Hands and Eyes Keep Us Alive is a love letter: from me to you, to my friends, to the zines, and to the stories we tell. A zine is a self-published print publication, they can take a variety of forms, be it the paper, the genre, or medium. The best part about a zine is that everyone can make them.

I may be the curator in residence, but collaborator might be a better title. The work that was created for the exhibition would not have been possible without my collaborators: Clara Lynas, Kaya Joan and Forest Van Winkle. This also includes the people who had made the work before me with the zines archived in the library. In responding to the publications in Xpace's Zine Library, I sifted through their history and grabbed what spoke to me one way or another. I read, I learned, I experienced.

Then, I wrote it all down. I didn't know how else to respond to the work, writing is the only comfort I've found in the pandemic, and it was through this I began to have a conversation with the work, but also myself.

I could get into my fragmented identity, the ones that make my presence in a gallery even more important, but let's just accept that I have and will continue to be denied space as long as I live. The pandemic rushed in and everything I had spent a year working towards left with it. This is out of anyone's control, but through something like this, you learn that an institution is not your friend; it will always put capital over your wellbeing, especially if you are on the margins. An

institution is not the mentors and people, the work, the community that come out of it. This exhibition was my way of giving space to myself, but also my communities, friends and people I admire. This is probably the most selfish I've been in making art, filling a gallery with my thoughts and writing, sharing personal windows into my identity, but it comes out of the loss of space and the inability to make art for six months. In the end, stories are what keep us alive.

Despite responding to work from as far back as 1980, it was impossible to not speak to the present. Zines are a way to hold time. Our exhibition will come down one day and only your experience and our intention will remain. As I write this, we are experiencing a pandemic, police brutality is higher than ever, and as a result, the death toll rises and rises. But there are protests, there is community, and we are on the edge of change. We just don't know what will happen when we jump or fall. In looking through these zines, I struggle with change being possible; there are histories here that are still the present. There are also things we left behind in the past. We have the power to make change. I think we need to be reminded of that. I've seen collaboration and community excel in light of how hard it has been to exist in this world.

My reasons for wanting to work with Clara Lynas, Forest Van Winkle and Kaya Joan are purely because I wanted to collaborate with them. Due in part to the abrupt cancellation of a graduation show, I wanted to give everyone space for their work, and I was interested in what could arise from the large gallery space. I did not know what we would create, but our work in its differences has managed to speak to each other. Themes of touch and desire, our ancestors and ourselves, our histories and how stories are a portal. These themes have all arisen in conversation with another. Paint, wheatpaste, sewing, and textile. All of our backgrounds wove into one.

This is such a large collaborative project; we are creating with each other and those who came before us. They are the people who make it easier to survive. I was excited to see how they would approach having free reign to such a large space. I'm glad I got to experience their work, their practice and kindness. Their warmth and joy.

While working on this exhibition I read an essay where Hil Malatino writes about experiencing trans archives:

"I'm haunted by these archival specters, and by my sense of duty to them. Because, in some small way, by existing—however minimally or maximally, however "part-time" or "full-time" they were—they have made our existence possible. Because our lives are, in

some opaque and difficult to capture way, entwined. Because I want to do justice to their struggles and joys. Because, in my own way, and with all of my own projections and fantasies intact, I have fallen in love with them. To love the dead is for them to remain with you, introjected, present.”¹

Through Malatino’s words, I found the thesis to *Your Hands and Eyes Keep Us Alive*, and the love I have for what has come before me. Every story you read shapes you, even if it’s a bad one. Someone put their intention into the work, and no matter how you receive that, by interacting with it you bring breath to a work. To a person who you don’t know or someone who has passed.

So much of the work, be it my own, or my collaborators responds to this. I asked Clara Lynas, Forest Van Winkle, and Kaya Joan their intention with their work.

Even In My Dreams (Zine Quilt) by Clara Lynas

Drawing from the archives, I have created a mural in the form of an interactive quilt, interconnecting my own stories in response, reflection, and conversation with those I have read. A quilt, a zine, a story, is something that, by nature of its making, has been held by many hands, and is intended to be held by many more. In stitching together an account of how we connect to stories, how we live in them, I also wish to hand down a blanket to crawl under and keep warm.”²

Secret From Two Wombs Ago by Forest Van Winkle

“Sometimes stories are forgotten on a shelf somewhere, but they’re never really lost. With discarded material, I tell my way back to them. In a way that is shared, the material and I have histories woven into us that are sometimes too quiet to discern. Some of my stories were misplaced before I could hear them. But somehow, I don’t think the stories that I whisper to myself as I sew are much different from ones I might hear at the feet of a grandmother. Sometimes I remember that I am the story she told.”³

¹ MALATINO, HIL. “Something Other Than Trancestors: Hirstory Lessons.” Essay. In *TRANS CARE*. S.I.: UNIV OF MINNESOTA PRESS, 2020.

² Cleo Peterson in conversation with Clara Lynas

³ Cleo Peterson in conversation with Forest Van Winkle

They Hold Infinity In Their Blood. by Kaya Joan

“Story is a portal, and I am in love with all the portals I encounter. The ones in my blood that take me to my ancestors, the ones tagged onto concrete that urgently challenge Babylon, the ones in little paper books passed between the hands of my community and kin, all these methods of projecting into worlds where all is possible. I want to create the infinite sense of wonder and safety I feel when I am held by all these stories.”⁴

We are all made of a multitude of stories. They keep us alive, they give the dead a voice in the present so we can learn to go forward. I hope that by telling my own stories in response to the past, I'll live to see many years to come. Maybe I or my collaborators will live rent free in your brain. I hope that if you engage with the work you start to tell your own stories if you were afraid to do so before, that your zines end up in their own library, hopefully in the Xpace Zine Library. I hope twenty years from now this work can act as a touchstone for somebody and someone else will come along and engage with our stories and that's how we will be kept alive, through your hands, and your eyes.

- Cleo Peterson

⁴ Cleo Peterson in conversation with Kaya Joan