

# **Sharing Stories: The Case for Art**

**a<sup>2</sup>ru 2021  
Annual Conference Report**



# Sharing Stories

This year's conference focused on the power of the arts. Despite the challenges of teaching virtually, many art practitioners and researchers were able to renew their passion for their disciplines, discover new modes of learning and teaching, and form a community within their classrooms. The power of art was also highlighted in a variety of social justice issues inside and outside of the academy. The curriculum in numerous arts disciplines was challenged, with students and instructors rejecting the automatic inclusion of the Western Canon. Murals were a powerful form of expression for artists involved in anti-racism efforts. Art, as many sources over the last two years have pointed out, is important and especially so during a public health crisis.



*"I am Archangel Gabriel..."*



Instead of giving a traditional PowerPoint, all presenters were asked to take on the role of storyteller and tell a story in 5-7 minutes (with more time allotted for groups). When asked about her vision for this year's annual meeting, a2ru Conference Director, Charisse Willis, commented: "As an arts organization advocating for students and faculty to have the opportunity to express their creativity in academic institutions, I felt that our conference should also be a place that allowed for and prompted creative expression." The format, especially the timing, was challenging, but storytellers rose to the occasion and the response to the conference has been quite positive. Ultimately, we achieved our goal for this year: to provide a space for participants to creatively explore the recent changes that have taken place both in the arts and our communities, and to make a case for the importance of their disciplines and the direction they should take.







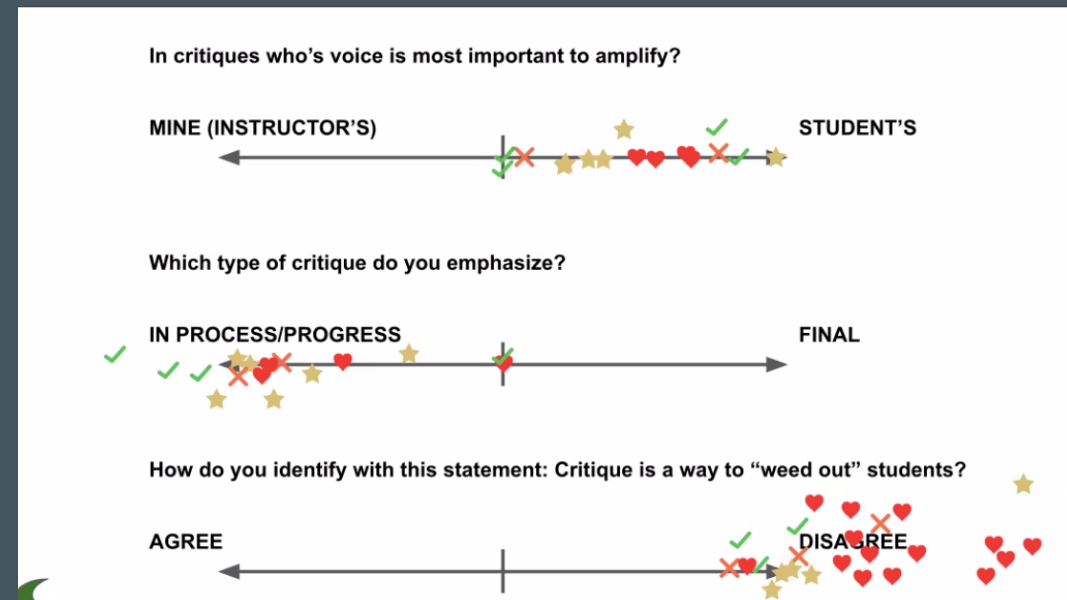
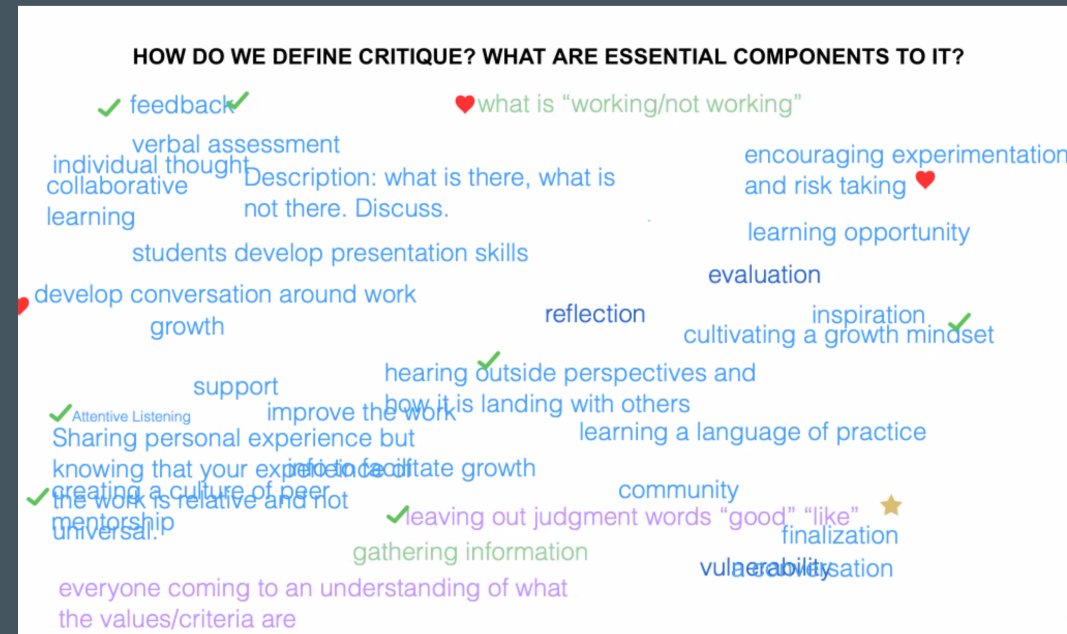
# Pre-Conference

This year's pre-conference was a two-part workshop focused on Justice and Pedagogy. Part I, Foundations of Equity, focused on reframing the arts and pedagogy. Courtnie Wolfgang challenged the attendees to "undo curriculum" and "radicalize their pedagogy." Emily Sara focused on "cripping spaces," reminding us that accessibility should be in every curriculum. She also discussed queering research, and asked the audience to question what counts as research and who gets to make the decision.

In Part II, Dismantling Critique, Lily Cox-Richard and Wesley Taylor skillfully walked participants through an examination of critique. They explored what critique is; why, when, and how it is useful; how it is harmful, etc. It was a great investigation of a practice that affects so many of us.

Both workshops prompted a re-evaluation of what we accept as "standard" and provided a great start to this year's unique conference.

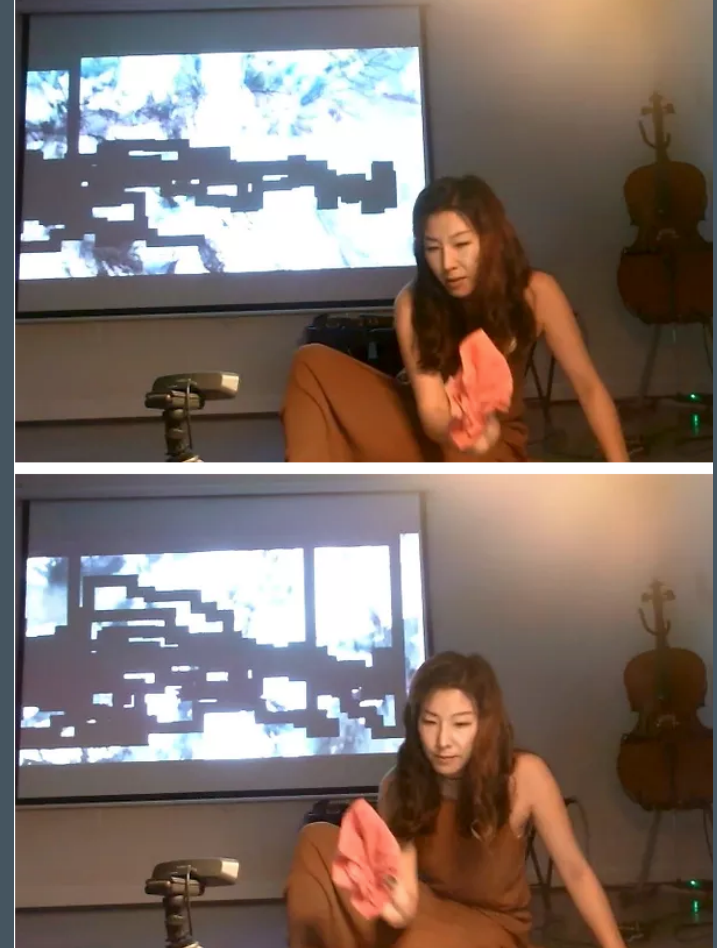
Thank You:  
Lily Cox-Richard  
Nicole Killian  
Emily Sara  
Wesley Taylor  
Courtne Wolfgang





# Interludes

Each day of the conference featured a 15-minute interlude. In addition to giving busy attendees the opportunity to take a quick break from their day, interludes provided an exception to the time limit of regular sessions. Collaboration is highly valued at a2ru, and we wanted to make space for storyteller groups wishing to share their narrative. If you missed any of these great sessions, we encourage you to watch the recordings. The Mindful Art Pause is particularly great for those looking to make time for themselves!

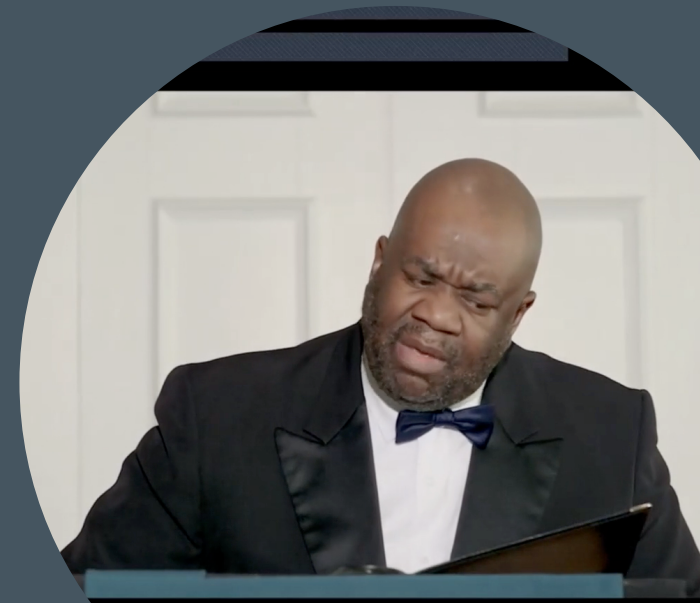


Created by the Mindful Art Pause team:

Susan Daiss  
Memorial Art Gallery  
Medical Humanities, URMG

Patricia Luck  
Medical Humanities, URMG  
Certified MBSR Facilitator  
Mindful Practice<sup>®</sup> Facilitator

Gaelen McCormick  
Eastman Performing Arts Medicine





# Steps Toward Change

## Rewriting the Story: Practical Strategies for an Anti-Racist Classroom

We were very excited for year two of our Steps Toward Change series. The discussants in 2020's Art for Politics' Sake pedagogy roundtable had a thought-provoking conversation about changes that needed to happen in the arts discipline, and this year's roundtable was focused on establishing practical strategies for accomplishing some of those changes. Many of the discussants in this year's round-table had attended the Justice and Pedagogy pre-conference workshops; they drew connections between the workshops and the round-table. As Cathy Braasch noted, it was great to see the discussants taking notes throughout the roundtable; it's evident that everyone came away with new ideas and strategies.

# hair stories from black people

Ines Donack

## Telling the BIPOC Story: Activism During COVID-19

The student panel featured four current and recently graduated students who, in some way, combined art and activism during the last two years. Listening to the students' experiences with racism, and their work to combat it, was both frustrating and inspiring. While we wish they did not have to, it is great to know that there are students committed to fighting for social justice through and for the arts. By including these panels in our conference, we hope to encourage the a2ru community to not only take note of the work that needs to be done, but to also take up that work.

### ANTI-RACIST STATEMENT

Basement Arts recognizes the injustices and inequalities being faced by BIPOC theatermakers in the theater community. We applaud and uplift statements such as those made by [We See You White American Theatre](#), and we fully commit to being an anti-racist organization to ensure that future groups who come through Basement Arts will lead and participate with justice, integrity, compassion, and love.

We also want to fully acknowledge our part in historical oppression throughout our time at the University of Michigan. Such offenses include appointing members to organizations with a history of offensive racism such as the Order of Angell, our failure to challenge white supremacy culture and privilege, and our failure to acknowledge the land we are so grateful to work on.

This land has been stewarded and grown by Niswi Ishkodewan Anishinaabeg: The Three Fire People who are Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawami along with their neighbors the Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee, and Wyandot nations. Michigan is named for Michigami, the world's largest freshwater system that has been used and cared for by these nations and more. We acknowledge that our organization stands on land that has been gained through the exploitation of Indigenous peoples, and we commit to uplifting stories and voices of Indigenous peoples to aid in their struggle for justice.

Our long-term vision at Basement Arts is to put the voices and stories of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized communities first in both the content we produce and the spaces we create with artists. Basement Arts believes in

- the power of theatre as an art form
- an artistic process informed by robust conversations with people from diverse perspectives
- the pursuit of excellence through ethical leadership and through accountability to each other, the field at large, and the audiences we serve
- supporting and nurturing artists
- operating with integrity throughout all aspects of the organization

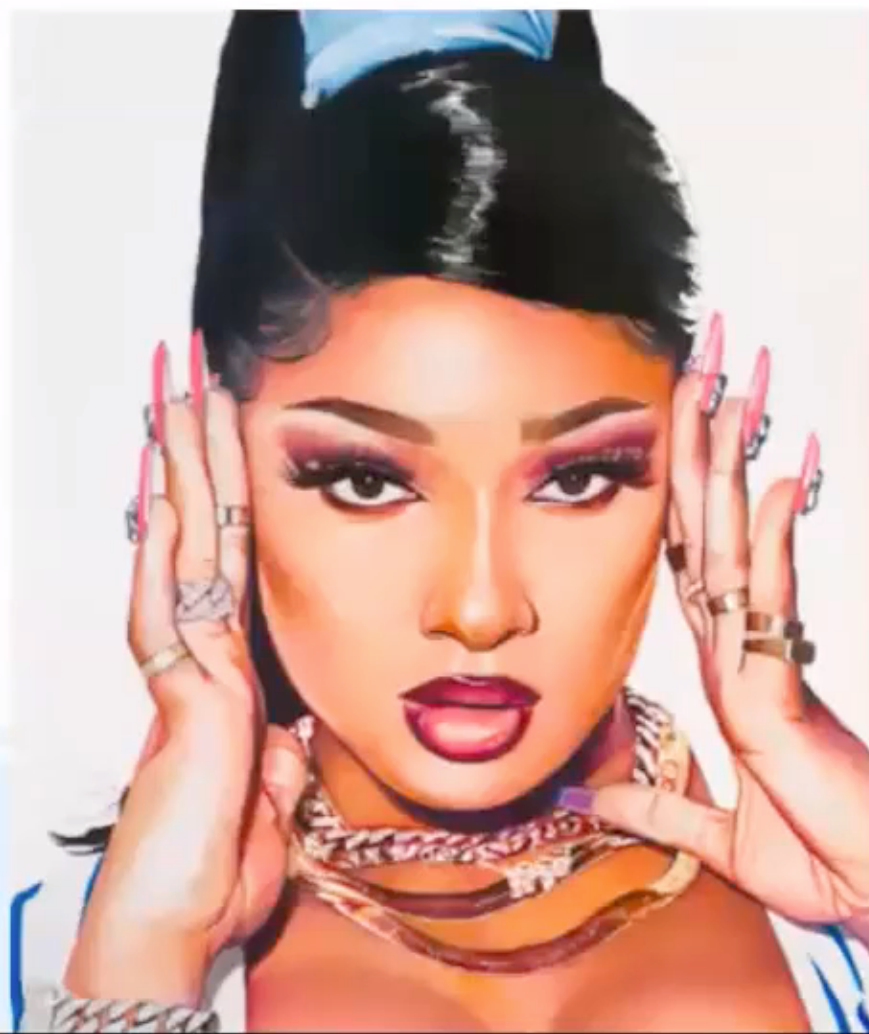
Basement Arts is committed to a change in process. We want to create a process that honors more equitable principles. Listed below are just a few of our principles that we strive to uphold:

- Beginning rehearsal processes with land acknowledgement
- Creating strict protocols for disrupting any and all racist incidents that occur during rehearsal or performance processes
- Curating seasons with at least one show dedicated to centering/uplifting BIPOC voices
- Infusing community engagement into the process as a requirement
- Appointing a qualified DEI Advisor who will be available to any and all in the organization for guidance on cultural context in shows, workshops for anti-racism, dramaturgical work relating to DEI, etc

Our lists are not complete. Basement Arts has a responsibility to our community to be as thorough with our work as possible. Our



# MY WORKS OF ART



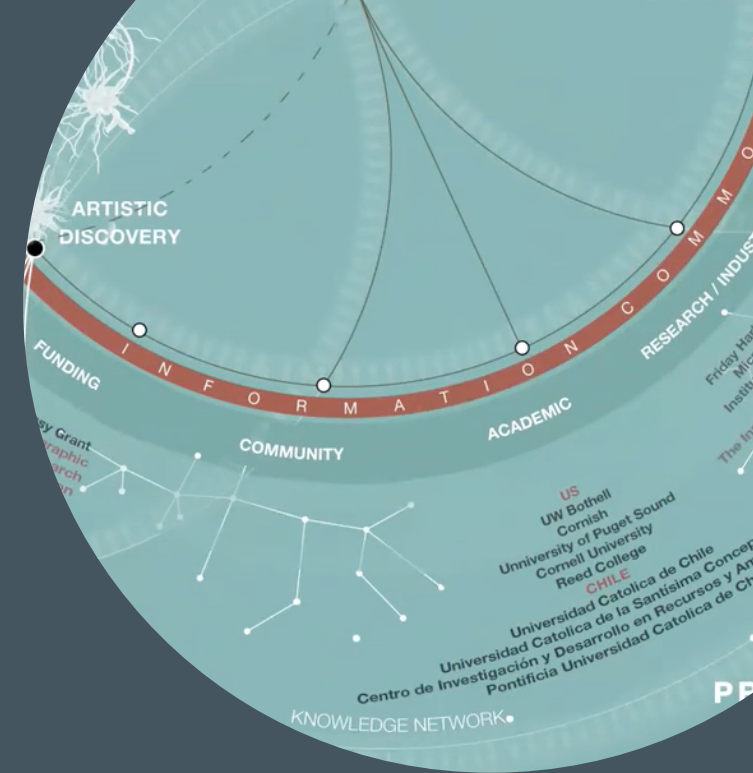


# Ground Works

"Understanding Vibrant Ecologies of Research" was a panel discussion on ecologies of research that enable arts-based knowledge production to thrive alongside that of other disciplines. Panelists were authors of submissions to "Vibrant Ecologies of Research," a special edition of Ground Works, a2ru's peer-reviewed platform for arts-integrated research.



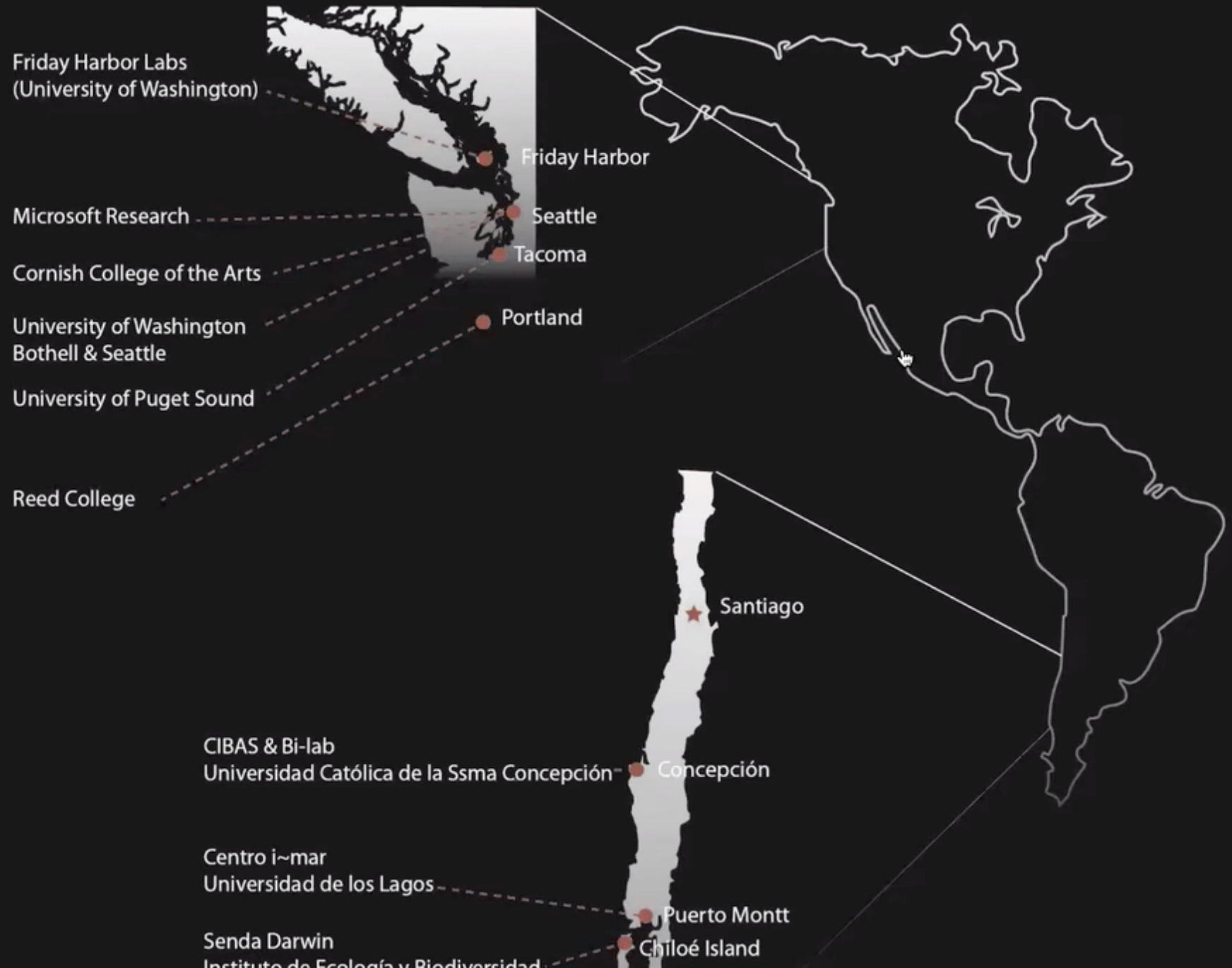
Each panelist's interdisciplinary project comprises a unique configuration of interdisciplinary collaboration with the arts and is grounded in all the nuance of a particular place--its climate, politics, concerns, and resources. Attendees engaged in lively discussion via the Zoom "Chat" function to learn more about how each project worked within that specific ecology.



Panelists included Eric Benson of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Mary Beth Leigh of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Genevieve Tremblay of SECOS Millennium Institute in Coastal Socio-Ecology (Chile). The panel was co-hosted by Aaron D. Knochel, Editor of "Vibrant Ecologies of Research," and Veronica Stanich, Managing Editor of Ground Works.



# Rooted in two territories





# Keynotes

## Performing Public Health Panel

Performing Public Health (PPH) was an initiative within the University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine's (UFCAM) COVID-19 Arts Response. The keynote was presented in an open conversational format, with teams commenting on each others' work and sharing photos, videos, or PDFs as an expanded archive of the project.

### Performing Public Health



Remote Cultures



Advisory



Unique Precarities

## A Case for Creative Cultural Leadership

In his conversational-style keynote, Minneapolis College of Art and Design President Sanjit Sethi outlined his "case for creative cultural leadership" which centered shared power, resilience, and vulnerability as values for current and future leaders. He stressed that creative cultural leadership is based on critical inquiry and prompted the audience to deliberately examine the assumptions they make about higher education. Only then can we determine the necessary steps to transform these assumptions.



## Staging Incarceration: Artmaking In & About U.S. Prisons

In this session, several artist-scholars shared their experiences making theatre with or about incarcerated individuals in the U.S. prison system, through personal stories, process narratives, and clips from rehearsals and performances. They described the unique challenges of working within the carceral system, and how these experiences have changed their personal and political understandings of time, justice, the ethics of incarceration, and what it means to be human.

# Keynotes

## In the Circle of Sound

A team of artists, community organizers and educators from the University of Orange, a free school of restoration urbanism in Orange, New Jersey, shared how their Music City program both celebrates and amplifies the existing musical richness of the city and meets the expressed needs and desires of Orange residents for musical education and performance opportunities. The team included stories and media from their work, and described how their programming adapted to the limitations on live performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Athens Hip Hop Harmonic

The Athens Hip Hop Harmonic group, with members from the Athens hip hop community and University of Georgia music department, gave background on how their partnership began. Despite experiencing setbacks from the pandemic, the group was able to find a way to collaborate and record together. During their conference session, they premiered co-created, boundary-breaking works by three pairs of Hip Hop artists and UGA faculty composers.



# Pieces of Paper (2021)

Co-created by Caulfield (lyrics and track) and Emily Koh (music and track)

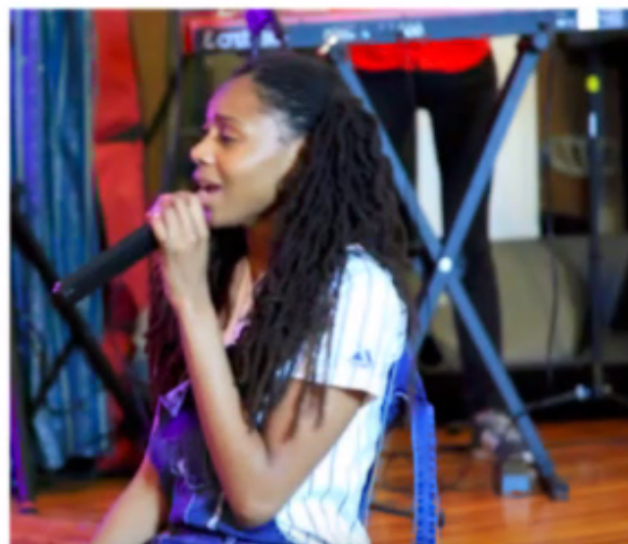


## Moon Face, Tiger Stripes (2021)

Co-created by Tifara Brown (spoken word) and Daniel Karcher (music)









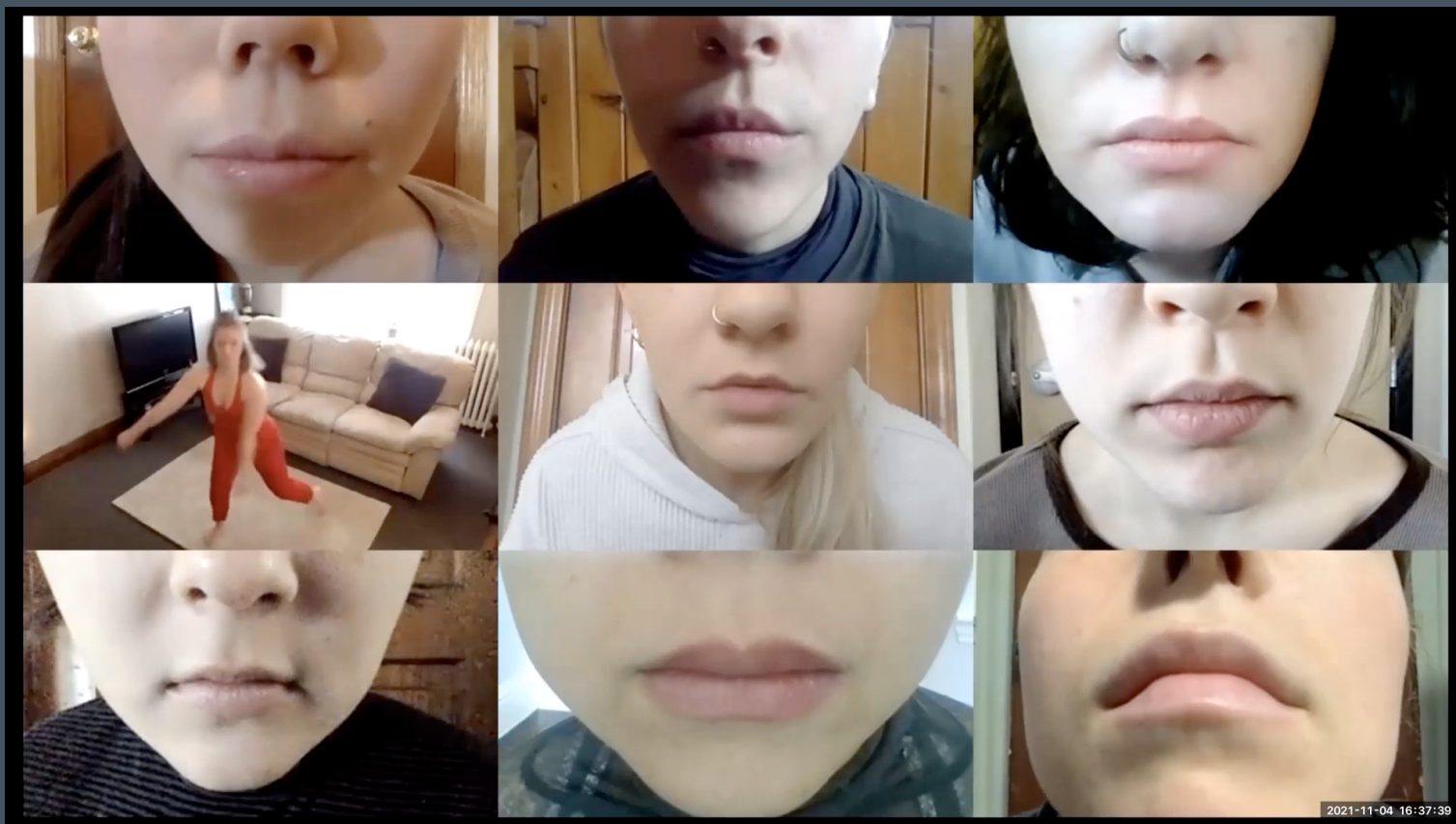
This year, 86 storytellers from 32 different institutions were able to share 43 stories with 133 listeners. In addition to independent attendees, we saw 53 institutions represented.

Members: 99

Non-Members: 50

Graduate Students: 41 (35 member, 6 non-member)

Undergraduate Students: 29 (22 member, 7 non-member)



We are especially grateful for the schools that sent large groups of faculty, staff, and students to Sharing Stories: University of Wisconsin-Madison (26); Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (22); University of Georgia (20). Thank you for your support.

We appreciate everyone who took the time to attend this year's conference. Thank you for sharing your stories, for listening, and for contributing to our community. We hope to see you next year.

# Storytellers

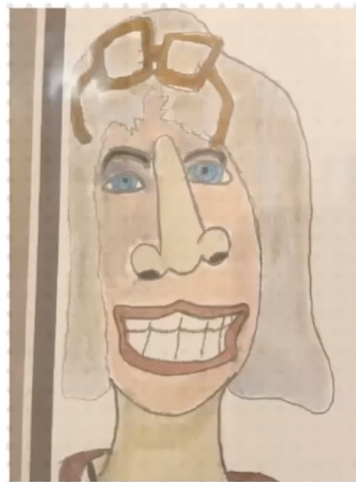
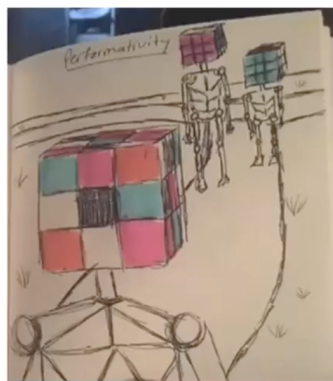
Institutions Represented

Boston University  
 Butler University  
 Purdue University  
 Diné College  
 Colorado College  
 Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile  
 Independent

[illegible]

New Medication

My body feels like Static. This is it NORMAL.

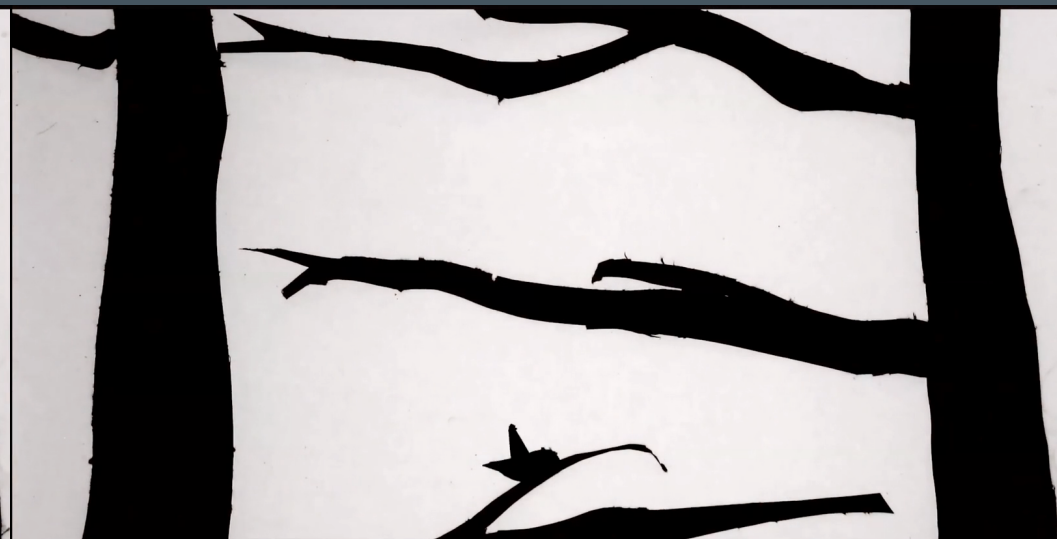
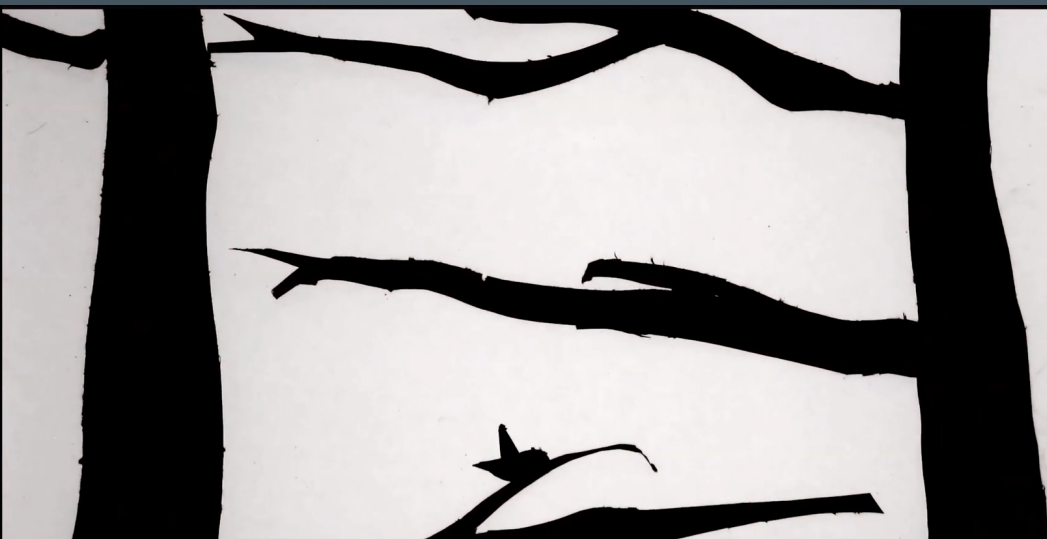
A word cloud on a dark grey background featuring the names of various academic institutions. The text is arranged in a circular pattern, with larger fonts for more prominent names. The institutions listed include MIT, Rhode Island School of Design, University of Georgia, Monmouth University, University of Florida, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Tennessee, Oregon State University, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Tufts University, University of Alaska, The Pennsylvania State University, University of Montana, The University of Alabama, Rutgers University, The University of Kansas, Boston College, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, University of Cincinnati, University of Nevada Las Vegas, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Houston, University of Maryland, Virginia Tech, Cuyahoga Community College, Harvard, University of Iowa, Dartmouth College, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rowan University, University of Michigan, and Aalto University.

MIT Rhode Island School of Design University of Georgia Monmouth University University of Florida University of Wisconsin-Madison University of Tennessee Oregon State University Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile Tufts University University of Alaska The Pennsylvania State University University of Montana The University of Alabama Rutgers University The University of Kansas Boston College University of North Carolina, Charlotte University of Cincinnati University of Nevada Las Vegas University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign University of Houston University of Maryland Virginia Tech Cuyahoga Community College Harvard University of Iowa Dartmouth College Rochester Institute of Technology Rowan University University of Michigan Aalto University

# Listeners

Institutions Represented

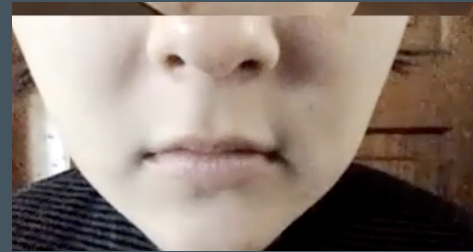




## Image Credits\*



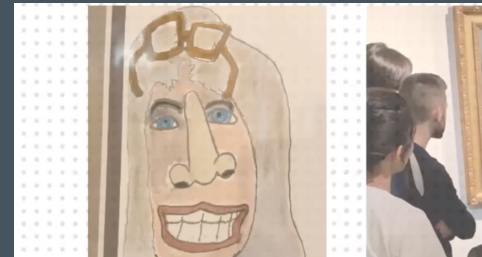
Endi Poskovic, Nicole Horne, Alyssa Huang, Emily Mann, Thomas Wu  
Experiments in Animation & Storytelling: Searching for Visual Translations Between Analog and Digital Realms



Li Chiao-Ping Dance  
Here Lies the Truth, part ii



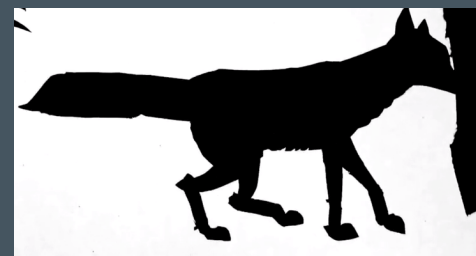
William Doan  
Sticks and Stones



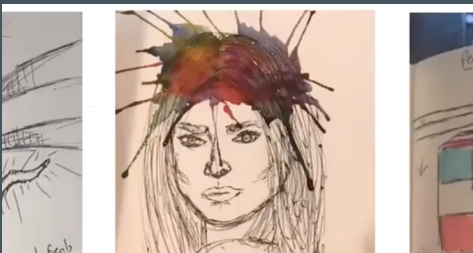
Gaelen McCormick,  
Susan Daiss, Patricia Luck  
The Mindful Art Pause



Yvonne Houy, Ph.D.  
Light and Shadow, Trauma and the Arts, Or: Art-Informed Higher Education of the Future



Sigrid Zahner, Andrew Buchanan  
Brick Meets Pixel



Alexandra Allen  
Disability Studies and Art Making  
as Practices of Care

\*Unless listed here, images are attached to relevant session descriptions.



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