

Henry

Ritual: Form & Function in Scholarly and Artistic Practice Winter/Spring 2022

Program Overview and Description of Each Session

Compiled by Brittney Frantece, Artist Fellowship Coordinator

The “Ritual: Form & Function in Scholarly and Artistic Practice” conversation and workshop series was developed within The Artist Fellowship Program at the Henry Art Gallery as a way to bring University of Washington graduate students into dialogue with faculty and Henry exhibiting artists around concepts of ritual and how ritual practices inform relationships between artistic and scholarly work. “Ritual” sessions invited participants to engage traditions, confront violent legacies, imagine worlds, and rewrite narratives in both artistic and scholarly contexts. A group of six interdisciplinary University of Washington (UW) graduate students/artists from across the arts, sciences, and humanities disciplines participated, learning from each other's creative practices and the ways in which they infuse their practice into their academic work. Henry visiting artists and UW professors who have made it their career to engage in creative productions alongside their disciplinary work were paired according to shared thematic or creative interests and co-facilitated sessions for the students. The facilitators developed discussion topics, activities, and workshops that assisted students in furthering their personal and communal ritual practices. The goals of these communal learning sessions were to engage participants with one another around their creative practices and the underlying themes and philosophies that guide their process, as well as to collect tools, skills, and ways of thinking about ritual that they could apply to their ongoing scholarly and artistic practices, and personal development.

Each session had an organizing theme developed by the artist and faculty co-facilitators that encouraged participants to think deeply about the form and function of rituals. The group discussed routines and traditions, ancestral memories and embodied mantras, care within scientific practices, and alternative practice in archival research. The conversations remained open-ended, privileging a multiplicity of experiences, interdisciplinarity, and dialogue over streamlined and final conclusions.

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Sessions Descriptions

Session 1: Introduction

During the first session, members of the cohort talked about their research interests as they relate to how they think about rituals. This introductory session served as a basis to build an open space for communal learning. The cohort talked through how their work in their respective disciplines can be made more expansive through creativity, deeper questioning of rigid academic methods, and practicing rituals for the sake of spirituality and self-preservation. The cohort also thought about the plurality of rituals and how they can think about the different modes, functions, and forms of rituals, even beyond (but certainly including) a spiritual sense. Rituals can help focus; rituals foster deep connection to loved ones and ancestors; rituals allow for exploration of other worlds and imagination.

Session 2: Meditation Practices and Transcendence

In our second session, visiting sculptor, ektor garcia, and dancer and performance studies scholar, Naomi Bragin, demonstrated the depth of care and intention that are embedded in their work and in their daily activities. Alongside discussing their creative practices and their disciplinary work, they offered space for the graduate students to share and discuss how their everyday routines—like taking selfies, shutting off of an alarm clock, setting up a desk space, the care that is provided to kin—can be seen as rituals that hold intention and deeper meaning. We left this session thinking about how to maintain the principles of ritual in an activity that has become an everyday routine.

ektor garcia is the solo artist presenting in [matéria prima](#), an exhibition created by the artist for the Henry and on view at the museum April 2, 2022–September 4, 2022. Naomi Bragin is a Professor of Interdisciplinary Art and Sciences at UW Bothell.

Session 3: Transcendence as a Process of Connecting to Ancestral Realms

For the third session, dance artist and founder of the dance company El Sueño, Alicia Mullikin, and Chicana/Latina feminist scholar, Michelle Habell-Pallán, led the group to think about empowerment through body movement and mantra rooted in ancestral, familial, and communal memory. The cohort went through a movement exercise that invited them to experience their memories like a galaxy of stars that they are floating within, taking the memories one at a time and allowing feelings about those memories to come into awareness. After group reflection on this activity and discussion on a passage from Gloria Anzaldúa about creativity and embodied practice in academic disciplinary work, the cohort created personal mantras focusing on power, self-hood, and community.

Alicia Mullikin presented [EL SUEÑO: THE FLOWERS THAT BLOOM](#), an exhibition at the Henry on view November 18, 2021 - April 17, 2022. Michelle Habell-Pallán is a professor in the Gender, Women, Sexuality Studies department at UW Seattle.

Session 4: Touch, Ritual, and the Care Work of Science

For the fourth session, the cohort thought about how care can operate in science disciplines, and what care looks like in each of their respective disciplines. The cohort talked with two of three *Learning Endings* project collaborators, Patty Chang and Astrida Neimanis (Aleksija Neimanis is also a member of this project but was not a part of the session) and with queer, feminist environmental studies scholar Cleo Wölfe-Hazard. The session included a game of memory with images that Aleksija, a veterinary pathologist, had taken of deceased marine mammals before necropsy was performed. The images record a pause and communion with the animal and invited the cohort to consider how scientific practices, including animal necropsy, which can easily be constructed as emotionally cold, can be approached as a form of ritual that is rooted in care and curiosity. During conversations about the memory game, the cohort reflected upon how they interact or don't interact with oceanic life in their respective disciplines and how the appearance of death and mourning affects people in different ways. Afterwards, we discussed the value of interdisciplinary collaboration and how interdisciplinary modes of research, especially humanist disciplines, can have an impact on traditionally scientific disciplines. The cohort thought about the ways they have to move away from canonical discourse in their research in order to better serve the communities that their work seeks to serve.

Learning Endings is a multi-part project developed from the collaboration of cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis, veterinary pathologist Aleksija Neimanis, and artist and educator Patty Chang. The Henry presented the program *Sounding Care* that took place in June 2022, and which anticipates their *Shoreline Walk* at a site of a local marine mammal stranding in September. Cleo Wölfe-Hazard is a professor in the School of Marine & Environmental Affairs at UW, Seattle.

Session 5: Reflection

For the fifth session, the cohort reflected on their time in the series to date. They thought about stand-out moments from each of the sessions, discussing lingering ideas and questions that were not addressed in the sessions or that developed post-session. Many in the cohort told stories of other memories that they encountered when they revisited the galaxy of stars that Alicia Mullikin introduced them to in Session 3. They thought about the memory game in Session 4 and how they felt about engaging images of dead marine mammals. After reflecting on the sessions, the cohort thought about how the lessons learned throughout the series might apply to their life and work now and in the future. The participants discussed ideas about the complicated and harmonious magic held in collaborative work. They brought up past moments where collaboration has been unethical and harmful, as well as moments where they were exposed to new frameworks and experiences that might not have happened if not for collaboration. The session ended with brainstorming ideas about future projects in which they could exercise some of the ideas shared throughout the entire series.

Session 6: Repertoire as Embodied Knowledge, Archiving and Research

The series ended in conversation with three of the four members of Black Collectivity out of Necessity dance research group: Akoiya Harris, David Rue, and marco farroni (Nia-Amina Minor is also part of the group but was not in session) and with curator and Black and Performance Studies scholar, Jasmine Mahmoud. Together they led the cohort through a three-part dance step and full body meditation. The cohort was asked to take notice of the ways their bodies move from one position to another. They were asked to listen to their heartbeats, noticing internal rhythms. Then they moved and danced to that internal rhythm. They reflected on what it felt like to move in such ways while being around others, witnessing others' movements to their individual internal rhythm. Afterwards, the co-facilitators discussed archiving and research. By being introduced to Diana Taylor's work, through her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), they thought about the limits of the archive and the possibilities of repertoire as embodied knowledge, and looked at the research practices of Zora Neale Hurston and Kathrine Dunham. They considered questions that asked about the repertoires of their lives that their bodies hold that may not be accessible to traditional archival practices.

David Rue, marco farroni, Akoiya Harris, and Nia-Amina Minor are members of Black Collectivity out of Necessity, a group dedicated to creative research of Black dance in Seattle. The Henry is supporting their research practice. Jasmine Mahmoud is an Assistant Professor of Theatre History and Performance Studies in the Drama Department at UW Seattle.