

AUG  
2021

In sharing and holding space with other living, breathing beings to make art, I work to create alchemical conditions for people to be themselves in a violent, dehumanizing, often cruel world. In some sense, that is all I can purport to offer in participatory or collaborative processes. By providing a space with sparks and prompts that challenge, magnify, see, or subvert the everyday and the issues we face, some kind of transmutation happens—in the same way that encountering any artwork changes us in small or profound ways, simply because we meet a new idea. In every collaborative project, energetic bodies with histories and personalities dance with each other, constellating their individual selves and the collective in mysterious ways. That we are changed over and over again by our encounters is the beauty of this alchemy.

It might help to begin with some personal definitions. ***Art, for me, is anything someone calls art.*** Social forms of

art are borne from ways of making that involve people other than) the artist(s) who conceptualised the work. The spectrum is infinite, and can include: an interactive installation where women visitors are invited to take a photo of their bums in a private booth (Amanda Heng's Singirl, 2011); a two-hour event where a group of children write statements on what freedom means to them; a seven-session photography project with housewives to reimagine their domestic lives; a five-month dialogical process with seniors to create a movement and oral history performance with a community museum; a three-year collectively-run space in a low-income neighbourhood, complemented with talks, discussions and workshops. The possibilities are infinite. All involve some level of interaction and contribution from people, with whom the work then shares authorship.



More definitions: curators are people who select artists to present work; this act rooted in the social is rarely seen or framed as an artistic action. The art world is a social space experienced and imagined by a person depending on their relationship with art and the people orbiting around them. Collectors tend to be richer people who usually buy object-based art rather than social forms of art, but often for investment purposes. Everyone is an expert of their own life. Everyone is an artist (said Joseph Beuys). Some of us dare call ourselves that. Some of us go to art school. Some of us spend time within contemporary art discourse and care about Claire Bishop, Southeast Asian art history and personal networks comprising curators, funders, artists and more. Some of us are privileged or lucky or dogged enough to make part or full-time income from our art practices.

Within this largely insular world exist spaces, usually temporary, where non-art-world experts-of-their-own-lives enter collaborative projects. They may look around and marvel, “What we’re doing is art too?” Does walking into a space that intentionally includes them turn on a switch for self-exploration, expression, eccentricity? Considering participatory or collaborative art spaces as intimate, semi-fictional paradigms for the real and imagined lives of humans is to see art as living alchemically between fiction and truth. To create together a social space that did not exist before is the

manifestation of fantasy or the creation of fiction. The moment it exists, it becomes a new reality, a kind of truth. Hence I describe my practice as living somewhere between real and fictional, that is to say, it is both at the same time. Less interested in the false objectivity of so-called truth, or the boundless freedom of fiction, I am thrilled by the possibilities and tensions arising from the potent meeting of both, resulting in an erotic magic. This eroticism is as expressed by Audre Lorde: “We tend to think of the erotic as an easy, tantalizing sexual arousal. I speak of the erotic as the deepest life force, a force which moves us toward living in a fundamental way.” How should we wake in the mornings? How is this related to collaborative art-making?

**Considering participatory or collaborative art spaces as intimate, semi-fictional paradigms for the real and imagined lives of humans is to see art as living alchemically between fiction and truth.**



I have not arrived at a framework or methodology that can be condensed, taught, or replicated. It is more intuitive and mysterious, an amorphous learning process requiring a potent mix of compassion, care, humour, humanity, serendipity, intention, respect, flexibility, humility, wit, play, risk, bravery and naughtiness. We are here finding words for something that resists definition. I do not know if members of such a space can describe this alchemy either. And I do

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not underestimate what it takes to be a member of such a space. Over the years, I have been humbled by the immense trust put in me by my collaborators and project participants. In some sense, stepping into such a space—whether for a few hours or several months—rests on the decision to experience something new. Perhaps we are actually, before anything else, creating conditions for people to first be curious, then feel safe enough to entertain their curiosity. I posit that to be yourself is to see, unhide, excavate, and allow, with an element of risk and a touch of serendipity. I posit that to be yourself is not to be a fixed thing, but to let oneself be vulnerable, be mutative, be many selves—twisted or weird as they may be. Cheesy as it sounds, I posit that to be yourself is simply and profoundly the most basic and highest order of being.

**a potent mix of compassion, care, humour, humanity, serendipity, intention, respect, flexibility, humility, wit, play, risk, bravery and naughtiness.**

# UNHIDING

Questions help, or can be a place to begin. For example:

What is the person who sat next to you in elementary school doing right now?

Who are you in love with?

Who cleans this art museum?

Who gets to say what is art or who is an artist?

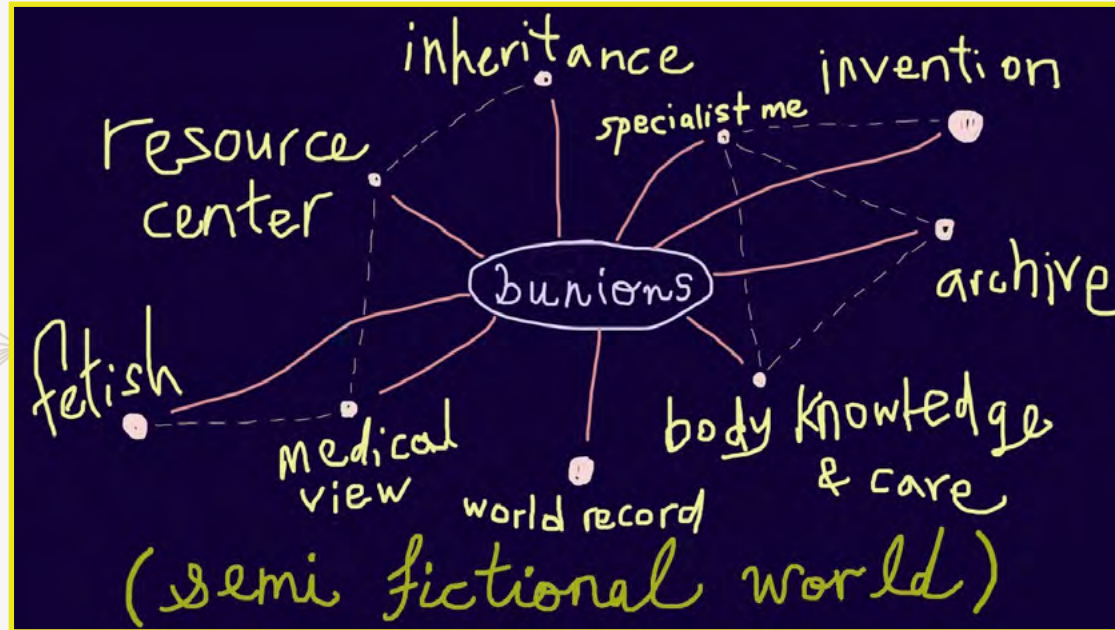
Which episode is your grandma watching in her 300-episode drama series?

Can I love the seeming aberrations that are my chronic bunions?

I have had chronic bunions since I was a teenager, which became a source of fascination. I tried to cure them in many ways, yet cherished them as my embodied connection to my grandmothers from whom I inherited them. The hallux valgus is often ignored or disliked, a metaphor for the hidden parts of ourselves or that which we disdain in others. [bunion2bunion](#), a transdisciplinary project, was a way to unhide the bunion from its invisible and misunderstood depths, birthing new perspectives towards beauty, defect, inheritance, fetish and more.



Salty Xi Jie Ng and paternal grandma Teo Siew Lan's feet,  
*bunion2bunion*, 2017



*bunion2bunion map, 2017*

The *bunion2bunion* multiverse included casts of my grandparents' bunions, collected writings on inheritance with accompanying *bunion2bunion* tote bags, a Hallux Valgus Resource Centre, bunion archive, bunion massage workshop, bunion awareness poster-making session, Bunion Measuring Apparatus invention by the Bunion Research Specialist (myself), performance of acts of care with my grandmother, and a Guinness World Record attempt to photograph the most bunions in a single group photo. To my surprise, I was found by men with bunion fetishes, who scour the internet for bunion content. They

bravely agreed to be interviewed. One of them, Adrian Weber, had spent years trying to understand his foot fetish and bunion obsession. He eventually came to Portland, Oregon, to be part of a *bunion2bunion* event, *The World's First Bunion Panel Discussion*. Describing it as a confessional and cathartic experience, he said it was the first time he spoke publicly on the subject. It is my hope that alienating reactions to fetishes and those who have them can be changed. In its many components, *bunion2bunion* was a way to allow the literal bunion and the bunion in each of us to be seen, breathe, and grow in different, surprising ways.

I've actually never really let my fetish out to play. For most of my life I struggled with shame and guilt regarding this attraction to feet and bunions. I kept it secret out of fear of being judged. The few times I did tell people about it, I was called "sick" and "a freak."

Ironically this burden ended up giving me one of my greatest gifts. Ashamed of myself and fearful of others' judgment, I also felt unworthy to judge other people. As a result I have become one of the most, open, accepting and tolerant people you will ever meet. Even as I move past my own guilt and shame, I remain non-judgmental toward others.

Having grown up, gotten married (and divorced), I'm no longer concerned with what "society" thinks of me. I want to be happy and this means living authentically and embracing/integrating all parts of me, including my sexuality. I know this won't be easy but I'm determined to find a happy and healthy relationship!

Excerpt from interview with  
foot fetishist & bunion lover  
Adrian Weber, *bunion2bunion*,  
Portland OR, USA, 2017

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Profession	Bunions
Adams, Amy	Female	43	American	Actress	has bunions
Agron, Dianna	Female	31	American	Actress	has bunions
Apple, Fiona	Female	40	American	Singer-songwriter	has bunions
Bachmann, Michelle	Female	61	American	Politician	underwent bunion surgery
Beckham, Victoria	Female	43	British	Businesswoman, designer, singer	has bunions
Campbell, Naomi	Female	47	British	Model, actress	has bunions
Campbell, Neve	Female	43	Canadian	Actress	underwent bunion surgery
Clooney, Amal	Female	39	British / Lebanese	Human rights attorney	has bunions
Cobb, Cacee	Female	39	American	Personal assistant	has bunions
Conway, Kellyanne	Female	50	American	Political adviser, pollster, strategist	has bunions
Davis, Viola	Female	52	American	Actress, producer	has bunions
Edelstein, Lisa	Female	50	American	Actress, playwright	has bunions
Elizabeth, Shannon	Female	44	American	Actress, model	has bunions
Fey, Tina	Female	47	American	Actress, comedian, writer, producer	has bunions
Gifford, Kathie Lee	Female	64	American	Television host	underwent bunion surgery
Glanville, Brandi	Female	44	American	Television personality	has bunions
Glazer, Nikki	Female	33	American	Comedian	has bunions
Guy, Jasmine	Female	55 or 53	American	Actress, singer, dancer, director	has bunions
Hatcher, Teri	Female	52	American	Actress, writer	has bunions
Hendricks, Christina	Female	42	American	Actress	has bunions
Hilton, Paris	Female	36	American	Businesswoman, socialite	has bunions
Holmes, Katie	Female	38	American	Actress	has bunions
Iman	Female	62	Somali, American	Model, actress	underwent bunion surgery

Foot fetishist & bunion lover  
 Adrian Weber's celebrity  
 bunion list, *bunion2bunion*,  
 Portland OR, USA, 2017





(From left) Foot fetishist & bunion lover Adrian Weber, yoga teacher and writer Cary Spaeth, Dr Jennifer Tuttle from Northwest Foot & Ankle, *World's First Bunion Panel Discussion*, *bunion2bunion*, Autzen Gallery, Portland OR, USA, 2017

Guinness World Record Attempt:  
Most Bunions In A Single Group Photo,  
*bunion2bunion*, Autzen Gallery,  
Portland OR, USA, 2017



# ALLOWING

In *Buangkok Mall Life Club*, I ran an art space in a retail unit in Buangkok Square for a few months during a time where Covid numbers were kept low in Singapore. Many passersby stood outside, curiously gazing in, but when invited would shake their heads and walk away.

*Perhaps something felt too off-kilter, slightly unbelievable*

if you went to the mall to pick up more groceries—we had a resident muralist painting a wall, often untidy clusters of items, an installation requesting objects leftover from heartbreak, and more. I suspect many who chose to enter were enticed by the Buangkok Exchange Department, the alternative economy we offered, where one could exchange items one-for-one, regardless of value. This hook was our tool for initial connection and developing relationships.

Shop assistants Crystal Ng and alex t.,  
*Buangkok Mall Life Club* storefront, Buangkok Square,  
Singapore, 2020



I performed a shopkeeper persona that was another side of myself I let out to play, not without the emotional labour that is rarely discussed when talking about social art processes. I wanted to be that person in the lives of my customers whose space they could visit when they were bored, or at the end of a long work day, finding comfort and familiarity on their way home. I would be that neighbour, if you will, who would remember that their son was about to take his PSLE, or that they were looking for a purple handbag, or ask about whether they were happy with the toilet air freshener they took the last time. Throughout the project, a big part of my brain stored minute details of customers' lives; I lived within these worlds. This was a key part of the work me and my team at *Buangkok Mall Life Club* performed. In that way, over time, our Legendary Customers

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(a title bestowed upon regulars with extraordinary traits/behaviours, such as contributing hundreds of items or prodigiously being first in line to examine new drop-offs) became our friends.



Legendary Customer Mdm Lim helped by Salty Xi Jie Ng, *Buangkok Mall Life Club*, Buangkok Square, Singapore, 2020



Legendary Customer couple Sabtu and Linda with their exchanged item, *Buangkok Mall Life Club*, Buangkok Square, Singapore, 2020

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Allowing is a form of being oneself. *We tried to allow, encourage and embrace as much as possible, letting the space be shaped by new desires emerging from mall usage.* These spanned a range of creative behaviour and acts of trust: studying objects with a scholarly determination; new murals and scribbly doraemon drawings; leaving a wheelchair and other bags at our space while going to the supermarket; being the self-appointed shop assistant—calling customers in, organising and tidying; resting for hours on our rocking chair with an infant; playing with toys; simply hanging out, which a visitor-observer described as “just wanting to be around other people.” By the end of our time at Buangkok, our Legendary Customers would hang out for hours, sometimes watching over our exhibition, not needing to say much. A companionable silence had settled gently in the space between us, at times erupting into jovial chat, but otherwise, we were an unlikely clan in an uncharted space with the hallmark of a makeshift community club that could hold all stripes.

Legendary Customers Linda and Diana fold plastic bags together, *Buangkok Mall Life Club*, Buangkok Square, Singapore, 2020



Legendary Customers Ya Mei and Tay Nguang Nai Nancy,  
*Buangkok Mall Life Club*, Buangkok Square,  
Singapore, 2020

# OFFERING

In this sense, allowing is to provide a platform that is flexible, welcoming and warm enough for others to enter and express themselves. *The Inside Show* was a variety show I made in collaboration with inmates at Columbia River Correctional Institution, a minimum security men's prison in Portland, Oregon. This would not have been possible without a prior two-and-a-half year program I co-facilitated with other artists, as well as the unwavering support of the prison's program manager. At the heart of the variety show concept was a platform that invited inmates to partake in ways they felt drawn to, hence accommodating different desires, aspirations, and abilities. Roles included scriptwriter, performer, host, interviewer, interviewee, cameraperson, lights handler, sound recordist, prop maker, cook, spicy taste-tester, non-spicy taste-tester. People joined because they had worked with us before, through word-of-mouth or were enlisted by an enthusiastic friend. Together we subverted dehumanizing prison norms by acting, in our time together, as an unlikely film crew making a show. We had roles to play that were different from the over-masculinized, tough roles these men typically found themselves having to put on to protect themselves and get through their sentences. In other words, we gathered around a creative process that is antithetical to the prison industrial complex.

(From left) David "Ohio" Phipps, Jason Melcado (hidden), Christian Scotty Freeman, Gabriel "Chino" Whitford, Michael "HM" Lovett, Eugene "Scooby" Brown, and Irvin Hines on the Microwave Magic set, making chocolate cheesecake, *The Inside Show*, Columbia River Correctional Institution, Portland OR, USA, 2019





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Top: (From left), Andrew “Turbo” Reeves, Mark Arnold and Robert “Flex” Gibson in Pocket Carrots skit, created by Mark Arnold, *The Inside Show*, Columbia River Correctional Institution, Portland OR, USA, 2019

Bottom: Collaborators with Correctional Rehabilitation Manager James Hanley, *The Inside Show*, Columbia River Correctional Institution, Portland OR, USA, 2019





Christian Scotty Freeman hosting Microwave Magic, *The Inside Show*,  
Columbia River Correctional Institution, Portland OR, USA, 2019

What emerged was an appreciation of creative labour, critical content and community. In acting in skits, or playing audience together, these men got to know and laugh with fellow inmates they might not otherwise have. Naturally, we experienced conflicts which plague any film crew: creative and personal differences, scripts not memorised beforehand, and so on. What was different was that we were on a quest within the difficult conditions of jail—

something that I, their free facilitator, would never be able to fully comprehend as I walked out the gates and drove back to my warm apartment after each session. Someone would, unfortunately, become involved in a fight and go to solitary confinement for weeks, or get sent to another correctional facility. The latter meant we would, heartbreakingly, never hear from them again. Things were volatile, yet—or perhaps because they were so—these men put



Top: Carlos Cotto performing his poem *If You Been Through What I Been Through; The Inside Show*, Columbia River Correctional Institution, Portland OR, USA, 2019

Bottom: (From left) David “Ohio” Phipps, Michael “HM” Lovett and Jason Melcado in Art Skillshare skit conceived by Ohio, *The Inside Show*, Columbia River Correctional Institution, Portland OR, USA, 2019

their hearts into our collective work. The resulting programs were varied and included: Microwave Magic (a cooking show inspired by the tradition of prisoners making ingenious meals on their unit’s microwave); skits reflecting on prison life; a panel discussion on Black gang culture; musical acts; stand-up comedy; a poetry performance; a braiding demonstration by the prison hairstylist.<sup>1</sup> Lurking close behind humorous moments were prison conditions that one could not unsee, should not unsee. The simple sets all located within a single classroom and the fact that everyone wore the same thing challenges audience experience: a greater suspension of disbelief is required, while pieces of prison reality are revealed but the whole picture is never fully shown. Even though the men’s uniform could not be replaced by any costume, several said they felt, *for the few hours each time we gathered in our designated sanitised classroom, that they were not in prison, that they could be themselves.*

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<sup>1</sup> Watch episodes [here](#).

# SEEING



Security officer Jim Crawford with his quote; *Words of Support*,  
Star Store Campus, Centre for Visual & Performing Arts,  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA, 2020

Social art projects then, are opportunities to see people, and for people to feel seen. After writing a manifesto connecting her labour as an artist and mother with that of maintenance workers, artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles performed with three hundred maintenance workers at the Whitney Museum of American Art, inviting them to consider one hour of their eight-hour shift as maintenance art. She was then appointed the first official artist-in-residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation, where she brought attention to its employees' invisible labour and discrimination they faced. Notably, between 1979-80, she shook hands with all 8,500 sanitation employees of the Department. In her footsteps, I often think about the silent labourers behind big organisations. In an art context, they are the janitors of the MoMA, or the security officers of the Louvre.

When I was artist-in-residence at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's Center for Visual & Performing Arts (CVPA), I stumbled upon a collaboration with the security and maintenance staff of CVPA's Star Store Campus in New Bedford, MA. After an epic tour of the dazzlingly equipped building, I realised the most interesting moment of my day had been talking to Jim, a security officer, about the art on the walls. *Suspended Sentence* was a sprawling text installation by Bill Seaman that comprised esoteric, poetically written sentences placed by oft-ignored objects like electrical boards and fire extinguishers all around the first floor. Jim commented, "I don't know Salty, I don't get it, I don't really think it's art." ***It struck me that perhaps Jim's thoughts ought to be on the walls.*** Perhaps that was the fair thing to do, since he spent a good part of his life watching these walls. The labour that he and his security and maintenance colleagues performed helped support the running of this academic art space, and yet they had largely been outsiders to art, its making and discourse. Similar to the oft-ignored objects Seaman tried to highlight, these men were part of a social ecosystem that could be more inclusive of them.



Security officer Mark Fareas with his quote; *Words of Support*, Star Store Campus, Centre for Visual & Performing Arts, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA, 2020

i couldn't believe it came out that good  
it took weeks to clean that whole thing  
during the heatwave, it was 107  
i didn't tell anybody but i almost did pass  
out on the floor | i ran my head under cold  
water | it dropped my temperature down  
i just kept doing that as i was working  
at the end i had to do some of it by hand  
on my hands and knees  
just to get it all off  
they couldn't believe i got it that clean

Maintenance officer Wayne Bralewski's quote describing a legendary makeover he achieved, installed outside the painting studio where it happened; *Words of Support*, Star Store Campus, Centre for Visual & Performing Arts, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA, 2020



Security officer Jim Crawford's nametag at the opening reception of *Words of Support*, Star Store Campus, Centre for Visual & Performing Arts, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA, 2020



Security officer Peter Baptista (left) conducts a Runes Writing Workshop at the opening reception of *Words of Support*, Star Store Campus, Centre for Visual & Performing Arts, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA, 2020

I interviewed five security and maintenance officers, then together with them picked out quotes to install on the walls throughout the building, some in the same position as Seaman’s text, deliberately confusing building users and questioning what gets to be art. These quotes ranged from

hilarious musings (“some art is over the top”, “most artists are crazy | how the hell can you come up with something like that?”)

to introspective thoughts (“like most people | i’m both simple and complex | i’m an introvert, but i like people | i’m a living paradox”)

and biting honest comments (“it’s hard to protect yourself from the chemicals at work”).

On the opening night of *Words of Support*, various activities spotlighted a few of the men, such as Jim’s conversation booth, Wayne’s polish gwampki<sup>2</sup> stand, and Peter’s Runes Writing Workshop. We each reflected publicly about the project. It was an opportunity for the community of students, lecturers, townsfolk, and more to gather and see these men differently within the context of their workplace.

<sup>2</sup> A traditional Polish dish of cabbage roll stuffed with rice and meat, topped with tomato sauce.

# EXCAVATING

I've always been drawn to working with seniors, particularly women. In 2016, I started *The Grandma Reporter*, a collaborative publication project on senior women's culture around the world. It was a way to gently excavate the complex inner worlds of elder women in a world that often renders them invisible, infantilised, or patronised. The first two issues, both done with the Hollywood Senior Center in Portland, Oregon, respectively explored style and the taboo subject of intimacy, which is broad and linked to many dimensions of health. Intimacy can be found in communion with self, caressing a plant, in deep conversation with a friend, a meal with family, or in physical touch, of which sex is just one component. With the intimacy issue, nine senior women and five younger women artists came together under a framework for the collaborative making of diverse content such as instructions for intimacy in everyday life, fantasy photo shoots, an intimacy manifesto, exploration of touch and movement, as well as a Senior Women's Erotica Club. We also conducted a survey with senior women on whether they wanted and would pay for companionship and sex with men. In this way, the project kept going, like tendrils extending and curling into themselves the more you water their roots.



Prompts for the Senior Women's Erotica Club, *The Grandma Reporter*  
Issue 2: Intimacy, Portland OR, USA, 2019



(Back row, from left) Sharon Cooper, Susan Green, Erika Dedini, Jacqui Jackson, Roshani Thakore, Maureen Phillips. (Front row, from left), Tammy B, Salty Xi Jie Ng, Crystal Sasaki, Valerie Wrede, Betty Canham, Mary. (Missing collaborators: Mildred Winters, Ellen Gee, Pamela Sky Jeanne),  
*The Grandma Reporter Issue 2: Intimacy, Portland OR, USA, 2019*

When the door opens to a hitherto silent cave, a lot can flood forth if we commit to collective study and creative expression. In their devotion to the project, these women were also trying to be seen by their own selves. With a 40-page newspaper publication, we organised a launch party at the senior centre with readings (affording the women a chance to be heard by others of their

community, including other women who had not wanted to join the project because they perceived intimacy as shameful or dirty) and a women-only discussion on intimacy (all women welcomed, including cis, lesbian, bi, queer, trans). The latter was a precious space where some forty women gathered tentatively yet passionately to talk about things that are rarely acknowledged and spoken about.



# Intimate Fashion Line



Fantasies of Mildred Winters, Sharon Cooper, and Tammy B styled and manifested by Salty Xi Jie Ng and Valerie Wrede

Project Assistant: Leslie Omis-Angeles

## SIMPLY SHARON

**Who are you?** At 84 years old (and proud of it), I feel 24 and want to dress or undress to please myself. When I look in the mirror, must I see all 84 years? No I don't and I won't. I see a woman who loves life and is pleased to dress to suit her mood. In this image I am the cover of my own romance novel. Reading romance novels is a hobby I enjoy immensely.

**What makes you feel intimate or sexy?** I look pretty damn good for my age so go away flannel nightgown and hello pretty nightie.

—Sharon Cooper

Read about Sharon's romance novel hobby on page 19

## ROMANCE BY THE SEA

**Who are you?** When I gaze at the moon, my thoughts turn to romance and I am filled with peace and serenity. A full moon has always fascinated me. Symbolizing love and beauty, its golden glow on land and sea turns the world into a magical place. I'm drawn to the color red, and the red roses on my negligee-type outfit feel romantic.

**What makes you feel intimate or sexy?** Wearing intimate and fashionable clothing and holding a glass of wine with a loving companion beside me would be one of my life's happiest experiences.

—Tammy B

Read Tammy's article on romance on page 23



## The way we choose to clothe ourselves is an intimate, everyday choice.

In a world that privileges younger, slimmer bodies, we asked older women to consider what intimate fashion means to them. Can they be their own trendsetters, looking and feeling good in their bodies, on their own terms? Each woman picked, altered, or created a personal outfit and dreamt up a fantasy scene that we digitally manifested. In this way, we collaboratively created not just individual looks, but worlds that reflect inner desires of aesthetic, function, and emotion. By situating these bodies in their chosen, idealized environs, we are calling for the positive benefits of fantasy and dress in self-identification.

—Valerie and Salty



## QUEEN OF SOUTHERN HERITAGE

**Who are you?** Cleopatra is sometimes portrayed with white skin. I want to portray Cleopatra the way I know she looked. She was a beautiful African woman. This Afro-centric picture takes me back to my heritage. I am from the South. The Magnolia is the Mississippi state flower. It's the most beautiful tree in the world. My mum used to make peach cobbler. I think of the sweet smell of ripe peaches as they are baking, bubbling in the oven. The beautiful jungle atmosphere relates to where my people are from. It's a space I've thought about often. Yellow is my favorite color. I feel relaxed in it, so I made the dress in yellow and green. Even though the picture might look busy, there is a sense of peace and

intimacy from being surrounded with the things I love, that portray my inner self. As I lay down for the portrait, looking at the sky, I had a spiritual feeling, and started thinking about things that make me feel real good, like my children and my friends. I felt a peaceful relationship with Jehovah.

**What makes you feel intimate or sexy?** When I'm dressed and groomed. When I put on my high heels, I feel like I'm stepping tall. No one has to tell me that I look good. I just feel sexy and confident.

—Mildred Winters

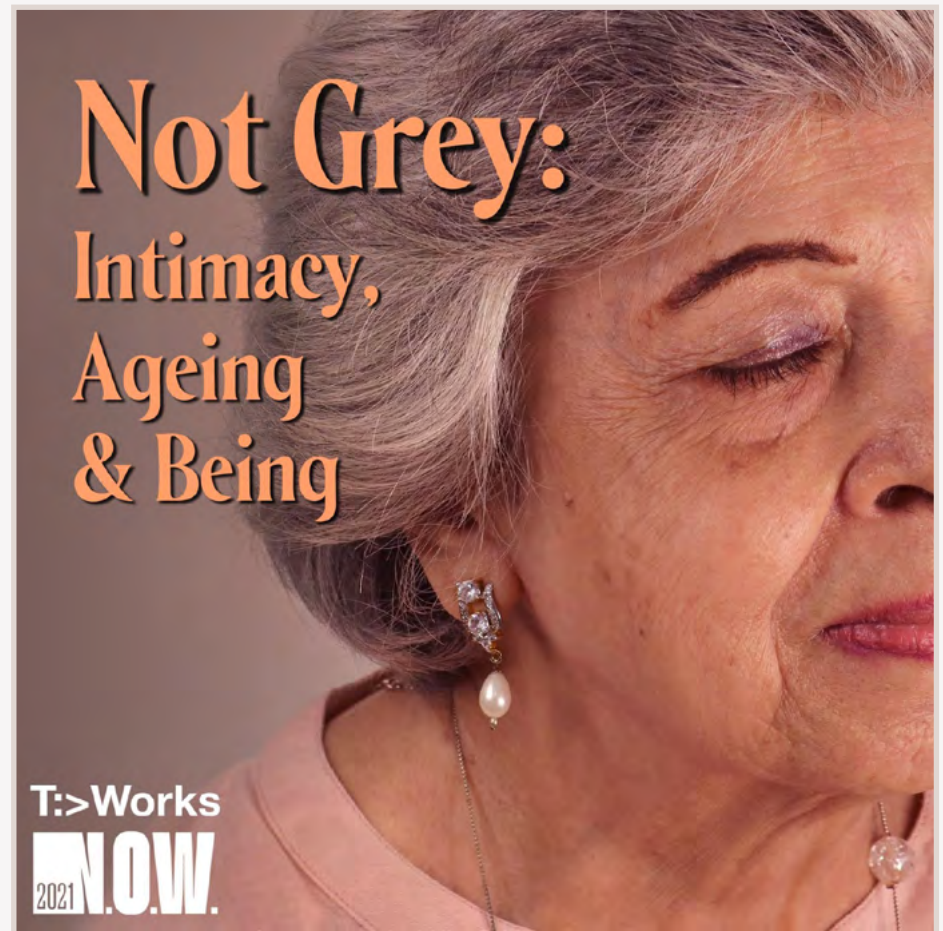
(From left) Collaborators Sharon Cooper, Sonia Peters and Mildred Winters, *The Grandma Reporter* Issue 2: Intimacy, Portland OR, USA, 2019



Women-only discussion on intimacy at launch event of  
*The Grandma Reporter* Issue 2: Intimacy,  
Hollywood Senior Center, Portland OR, USA, 2019

*Not Grey: Intimacy, Ageing & Being* is the Singaporean version of this, commissioned as part of [T:Works' Festival of Women N.O.W. \(Not Ordinary Work\)](#). It manifested as an intimate, interactive, virtual experience anchored in performance and film, accompanied by issue three of *The Grandma Reporter*. Coming forward in Singapore is arguably more difficult, but fifteen women did. They reflect on the wilderness inside a woman's soul, romance in later years, self esteem, waving goodbye with care, lost connection, sex, spirituality, lineage, finding truth, the life force that moves one to dance till one's last breath, a new lease of life, and more. As with before, I play multiple roles—that of facilitator, listener, young woman learning. One of the collaborators called me a midwife, which both rings true and is ironic given the decades I have to walk before I get to where they are. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that, as women coming together in an alchemical process that calls for vulnerability and honesty, ***we are birthing one another as we see, excavate, and allow, so as to cry, breathe, write, caress, dance, and sigh.***

I was recently asked if I have unfurled things about myself through my work, and whether I am able to be myself in the process. The question surprised me because the socially engaged artist is sometimes decentered and at other times exaggeratedly thought of as a magnanimous figure helping others in need. This work has given me the opportunity to live temporarily in vastly different universes with varying levels of leadership and authorship in collaborative expression. To responsibly address this privilege is not to become artist-as-saviour and erase the artist from social art processes in favour of authorship nobly surrendered to collaborators. It is to own the initiation, presence and level of sparking, guidance, or organising that the artist brings where others do not—and vice versa. It is to see the artist as being shaped by these encounters as much as collaborators are. Like a destined turn of the page, each project is an opportunity to confront something within—from my relationship with the prison industrial complex to whether I will experience the same desires, loneliness or resilience as my collaborators when I am 70. For me, ***“being yourself” is allowing oneself to be taken into the mysterious reaches of who you think you are, or could be.*** You go there, and then see what happens. Because our society rarely facilitates that, art must.



Pushpa Melvani, collaborator, *Not Grey: Intimacy, Ageing & Being*, 2021



Koh Lian Hiok, collaborator, *Not Grey: Intimacy, Ageing & Being*, Singapore, 2021



[Salty Xi Jie Ng](#) co-creates semi-fictional paradigms for the real and imagined lives of humans within the poetics of the intimate vernacular. Often playing with relational possibilities, her interdisciplinary work is manifested from fantasy scores for the present and future that propose a collective re-imagining through humour, care, subversion, play, discomfort, a celebration of the eccentric, and a commitment to the deeply personal. Her practice dances across forms such as brief encounter, collaborative space, variety show, poem, conversation, meal, publication, film, performance.

Salty has an MFA in art & social practice from Portland State University. She was recently artist-in-residence or artist fellow at the Singapore Art Museum, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, and Buangkok Square. Her work has been supported by diverse platforms from Singapore Art Week, Elsewhere Museum, No Star Arts Grant, and Kaman Art Foundation, to King School Museum of Contemporary Art, Singapore International Film Festival, and Hollywood Senior Center. She was the 2020-21 editor of [Conversations On Everything / Social Forms of Art Journal](#), a Portland OR publication.