The HEALING COLLECTIVE

Thursday, May 10th, 2013

Ash Haywood & Fiona McGovern

Marie Boucher, Kameryn Carter, Ma Doese
Imani Lewis-Shirley, Eden Static, Rabb Tianno,
The Wilson
Over the past year-and-a-half that the Healing Collective has formed & altered, we have drawn on a vast lineage of Black feminists at Bennington College & beyond. Throughout our time here, we have witnessed extreme violence, dissatisfaction, & sadness both inside & outside of our own experience. This project is a reminder of how Black feminists are able to seek refuge in each other, as a tonic for loneliness & despair. In its most sincere & surprising moments, this work is made of the intimacy in our laughter, in our food, & in our music.

Through our understandings/impressions/practices, healing is not a linear pathway. It does not signify erasure, it does not imply that the wounds never existed. Healing work brings also reveals old wounds, what we thought long-told, hiding in deep recesses within our bodies. In our work, healing is multi-faceted & has many histories. We are using the knowledge of Black women’s labor to create our own methods of acknowledgement.

We prioritize survival; & in the midst of this survival, we seek to find healing moments of joy, & tentative eroticism. This work is sacred, though it is not private. We invite you to this space so you can participate in our affirmation of love of each other; so that we can make visible the incredible legacy of survival that we are carrying on.

This evening is an offering of thanks to all the Black feminists who have come before us, who have built this world for us to dwell in, who have been our means of survival.
"Above all else, Our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as human persons for autonomy... Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work. This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough."

- The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)

"For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women. Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative."

- "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Audre Lorde (1979)
Caramel Woman Blues

Killing Me Softly
(after Roberta Flack and the Fugees)

(after Cheryl Clarke)

storyteller
(for Grace Paley)

I like you both.
I want to take you together
to a diner.
After, I know a place where Anna Magnani plays
every night.
No subtitles.
Then a place beatniks swing til dawn.
I'll sit between you both
my arms around you
at the same time
you'll rest your heads on me.

At dawn we'll make a closed circle
and say every word
stolen from us
and still forbidden
very loud.

All you need is a clap to get into this song.

Wild children
hungry women
with no rhymes
I'll rob your dreams with purple poems.
I'll cook cornbread in an iron skillet,
and matzo brie.
Mati

(after Gloria Wecker and Omise'ke Natasha Tinsley)

"figuratively mi mati is "my girl," but literally it means mate, as in shipmate — she who survived the Middle Passage with me"

—Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage
by Omise'ke Natasha Tinsley (2008)

Love On Me
(after Lucille Clifton)

me and you be sisters,
we be the same.
me and you
coming from the same place.
me and you
be greasing our legs
touching up our edges
me and you
be scared of rats
be stepping on roaches.
me and you
come running high down purdy street one time
and mama laugh and shake her head at
me and you.
me and you
got babies
got thirty-five
got black
let our hair go back
be loving ourselves
be loving ourselves
be sisters.
only where you sing
i poet.

—sisters by Lucile Clifton (1987)
For Eliane Philip on her birthday
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is absolutely impossible without the support of a broad community in and outside of Bennington. For these we have forgotten to thank, our love is with you regardless.

First, a very big thank you to the members of the Healthy Collective. Each and every member has grown the depth of our work to another level and made this experience a nurturing one.

Kameryn, you are a founding member and the work would not be what it is without your light, your brilliance and your off-handed musical suggestions. We love you forever and forever and we are beyond thankful to have you as our friend.

Imani, you are the greatest joy! There’s no denial of your talent and the damn drive of you that has kept your light shining. We love you, your voice, your spirit and your bright smile.

Isabel, you have amazed us. With an always affirming spirit, your cello playing has enriched our music. We love you and are excited to be here for you tomorrow night.

The, you are a force to be reckoned with. My goodness, you are an incredible musician and we are honored to share the stage with you. We love you Jillis and can’t wait to see you grow in the next three years.

May, you have been our anchor. In moments during rehearsal when eyes are searching for direction, you have been there to give it. We are happy to be a part of your first year at Bennington. We love you.

Marcus! Your talent was underestimated and now we have no question of how far you will go. We love you and are ready to be completely supportive of your future endeavors.

Eden, we are ready to hand the torch over to you. The Collective is proud to be a descendant of Bennington’s Black legacy and we know that you will greatly contribute to that legacy.

Your encyclopedic knowledge, your curiosity and your openness to explore new terrain is exactly what is needed for this work to continue. We love you.

THANK YOU to our cooks Alex, Xim and Sophie.
THANK YOU Dylan Ostland and Jayden White for giving us a hand tonight.
THANK YOU Curt Wells for making magic.
THANK YOU Gary Beibel for literally everything.
To our mentors and teachers:

Kitty Brazelton - Thank you for being such a committed mentor to us. We have always been able to count on you. We thank you for giving us the space to experiment, to be awkward, to fumble and trip over ourselves and pick ourselves up again with dignity. We love you Kitty. This four year process has been a two-way street, and we hope to continue to support and nurturing each other.

Lydia - you have opened our eyes to so much. Namely, you first established the legacy of which we are proud to be a part of ten years ago. There is no conceivable way we could have come to this work without your guidance, your syllabus, and your constant support. For years, you allowed us to come into your office at nearly any moment and release all of our thoughts, our ideas, our frustrations, our worries, our excitement and our joys into your space. You have given so much invaluable nurturing to us. Last year, when the Healing Collective debuted, it was your thrill that gave us the confidence to move forward with the work. We love you more than words can express. You've told us when to take a step back, challenged us to move beyond what we can see. (Thank you also for giving Fiona her first introduction to Sister, Outsider).

Oceana - for always being supportive of the many facets of the Healing Collective. Thank you for giving the physical space and supporting us fiscally with our library opening. Thank you for supervising Ash's independent study this Field Work Term. Thank you for providing so many resources throughout our four years at Bennington.

Camille - You have provided boundless support and enthusiasm for this work, you have valued our own knowledge and contributions and given us your own. Thank you for giving us the space to think through our work with you, both in one-on-one meetings or in the space of the classroom.

Samantha - Thank you for being a giant support to this work in our last term at Bennington. Thank you for sharing your resources and knowledge. Thank you for hearing us out. Thank you for being there for students.

love from Ash

Thank you to my original Merck family. Jeannelle Ortiz, Katie Yee, Dorja Rose, Alex Burgess, Gabby Bank, Brisa Galarean, Jenna Gustafson, Catherine Morley, Lacey Younyst, Isabella Pauley - I love you for all the joy you have given me and for allowing me to cry in your beds far too often. This family is not nearly as cohesive as it once was, but the love is absolutely still there.

Susie Ricks - Since the day I arrived, you've given me a home in the Jennings Music Library. I cannot imagine Bennington without you. I love you SO much, Susie!

Alison Hale - Thank you for never allowing me to give up. You've reminded my love for music and I am so honored to be your student.

Laura Payne - Thank you for allowing me to explore the archives and for checking in with me throughout the years and being so caring.

Erika Nishihara - Thank you for being my advisor for majority of my time at Bennington. I'm grateful to be your advisee and a part of your teaching legacy.
Jeanelle, once again, thank you! You are my best friend, my rock, my partner-in-crime. I love you for intentionally choosing me and never leaving my side. I can only say this in writing, otherwise I'd sob.

Fiona, this is the greatest gift I could have ever received. My co-collaborator, thank you for giving so much of yourself to the collective. This is only the beginning. I love you.

Juniper, you've kept me humble. I am so grateful to have you.

Thank you to Margorie & Nicole Jean-Pepin
Thank you to Becca McGovern all for hosting me & raising me.

Image by Tschabalala Self
Unfinished (2016), fragment
Thank you to my predecessors: Rachael Meyers, Kat Jagai, & María Villá.

In so many ways, you have given me the strength & guidance to move forward with this work. You fostered me into myself, let me grow with & outside your love.

The Townhouse,
for the past two years, you have been my rock - my place of rest & affirmation. Thank you for holding me always, giving me so much hope for collective community & for the future.

imagi: Tschabalala Self, Untied (2016), fragments

Tom Bodgan, thank you for giving me the strength & perspective to sing every day, to realize how necessary this work is. Thank you for truly seeing. Thank you for your kindness & your grace.

Wesley Brown, Laura Hussbaum-Barberena, Heather Vermeulen, & Stefania Heim for generously providing necessary & essential knowledge in a very limited time span. My thinking would not be what it is without y'all.

To Chloe, Dani, Ferne, & Joana for being a part of my everyday. For how much care you give to me. I'm so proud to be in your worlds & so happy to share space/home with you.

To Nam, for your light & your power.
To Celia & Nila, for giving constant love & wisdom despite our distance.

To Mary Alice, for your fierce belief in me, your unwavering thoughtfulness, & your expansive love, I cannot thank you enough.

To Lushik, for your steadfastness & brilliance, for challenging me in every capacity & caring with unparalleled warmth. For all your love, I love you back.

To Bella, my big love, for your affirmation & support of my thinking, identity, work/self, for your generosity, for helping me unearth/access joy.

To Ash, of course, I am so grateful to be making this work with you, & I'm so in awe of you every day. I admire your persistence, humor, joy, & warmth. I revel in how you show care to others. It is an honor to collaborate with you & a privilege to be your friend.
Thank you
for sharing this
evening
with us!!