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in search of ourselves, we find each other

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in search of ourselves,
we find each other

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Abstract

in search of ourselves, we find each other is a fully collaborative, multi-platform exhibit centered on developing and locating relationships to both self and community.

Challenging societal individualism, the exhibit focuses on collective, relational creativity using Indigenous methodologies for community. It is about me. It is about you. It is about us.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge all the artists who participated, I cannot find ways to thank them enough for the opportunity to learn from them, to work alongside them, to curate their work. My relationships to them helped foster this exhibit.

I would like to acknowledge all the people who have cared for me and offered support throughout the years. I have a lot of hands in a lot of pots and I tend to burn my candle at both ends, but community support is real and necessary for me to feel like I can sustainably create and exist, in a joyful and impactful manner.

I want to acknowledge all the Indigenous educators, researchers, makers, people who made me feel validated and seen. At every point of exhaustion within institutional spaces, I had one of them in my life picking me up to show me where I could go, what I could do, and how I could carry my cultural understanding close. Without them, the work would not be what it is and I would probably not even be here because it was them who built these pathways for me.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my ancestors, family, and friends as well. I don't have the words to express how much they mean to me or how much of me is just an extension of them, but my work here and with others is always in honor of them and what they have given me: unconditional love I carry with me at all times.

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Introduction

Constantly existing in the in-between makes one question themselves. This is especially true in the institutional and academic space, where knowledge is compartmentalized, categorized, and hierarchically valued based on its centralization to western thought, agreed upon by those who have historically held power. In turn, those who come from intersectional ways of knowing – racial, cultural, regional, ability, class, gender, etc. – are made to question their knowledge in the institutional academic space. In hopes of succeeding within this sphere, attention is pulled away from their own communities to learn and indoctrinate themselves in centralized knowledge, thus creating a rift. No longer able to relate with their original communities, but still considered *other* within the institution, theirs is a liminal existence.

This is where I found myself during the beginning of my time at the University of Arkansas. Hundreds of miles from my community and support network, my family and friends, and the land with which I had formed my knowledge, I was thrust into an education that seemed antithetical to my own values and beliefs as Tsalagi and Mvskoke – a value system of production over connectivity and a belief of the individual over community. I became increasingly numb to my own history to try to exist comfortably within this colonial system.

Eventually, I broke, as one does when mental and emotional fatigue of otherness accumulates over the years. When you are broken, you do not turn to the institution that upholds the very systems of oppression that broke you. When you are broken, you turn back to those that nurtured you in every moment, so I turned back to my Tsa-la-gi and Mvskoke communities. Leaning into community helped me clearly see the separation that institutional knowledge had begun to create. This moment of clarity not only helped me recognize where I could begin building bridges of understanding and intersections for myself, but also where I could implement Indigenous community methodologies in my practice to start carving out pathways for those that would come after me who also come from decentralized understandings.

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centered on developing and locating relationships to both self and community. Challenging societal individualism, the exhibit focuses on collective, relational creativity using Indigenous methodologies for community. It is about me. It is about you. It is about us.

Art Practice Influences. Artists I look to for guidance, permission, and validation in my work are those that engage synonymously with community and reciprocity. I am deeply indebted to Marie Watt (Seneca Nation) as an Indigenous social practitioner and artist. Not only has she validated Indigenous methodologies as a whole through her public sewing circles, but she has also used this as an opportunity to create bridges of understanding between broader communities who may not have had a previous understanding of Indigenous way of knowing and being. She has also, personally, taken time to help me navigate my own work in a way that emphasizes reciprocity in our relationship and I am appreciative to be able to see that within the capitalistic, fine art world.

Another influence on my work is Jeffrey Gibson (Choctaw/Cherokee Nation). Their colorful take on traditional beading, using accessible materials and pop culture references, ties into the idea that though we live by old traditions, we can create new traditions, presently. Developing new traditions that are inclusive, thoughtful, progressive, and still honor our ancestors, is the approach Gibson seamlessly weaves into their practice and an approach I hold closely as I move through my own work.

Both of these artists have helped emphasize the values of giving back through a visual language, the importance of creating an archive of work that Indigenously locates us in this present moment, and the importance of offering a platform for knowledge that does not intrinsically come from western thought. These value systems are present throughout *in search of ourselves, we find each other*.

Research and Theory Influences. Any knowledge or understanding I have come to and am able to facilitate came from the culmination of those who came before me, so that I, too, may re-contextualize and improve upon for the next generation. Researchers who have impacted my way of thinking come from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds,

but I want to highlight those who are steeped in their Indigenous cultural communities.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi) and Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree and Saulteaux) helped me come to understand the complexities of decolonial theory and how to frame Indigenous methodologies within a visual, sound, and archival practice. Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) gave me the language with which to articulate my Cherokee understanding of place inherently tied to experience with others. Robin Wall Kimmerer helped me grasp, more fully, the reciprocal nature of a kinship between myself and the land.

Their knowledge and the knowledge of their ancestors is present as I lay down the foundational frameworks of the exhibit.

Writing Influences. I would be remiss if I did not highlight the poets that have helped me better understand the full scope of my practice. These poets have validated me in my musical work interweaving sound and words. They have helped me understand the ways in which differing forms – musical, lyrical, poetic, etc – can help create new understandings beyond qualitative and quantitative. These forms emphasize an empathetic understanding.

Joy Harjo (Mvskoke) is a poet from Oklahoma with whom I have felt an immense kinship in her writing and experiences. Her poems are a culmination of my own understanding of the world. They act as reminders of the immense value that community and cultural ways of being hold. Through her poetry, she shares Mvskoke methodologies for understanding the world and each other. As a publishing author, it is not only for her cultural community, but it becomes part of a larger, public sphere that starts to intervene with western hegemony.

Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota) is a poet who helped me recognize the power and beauty in telling the truth. She writes in a decisive way about her history and experience, carefully placing each word on the page, understanding both the importance that each word holds in that specific place and how we might interact with it. She writes about the parts of ourselves that we do not always want to recognize and how to be vulnerable. In her poem, *WHEREAS my eyes land on the shoreline*, she says to her daughter, “Stop, my girl. If you’re

hurting, cry.”¹ This one line forced me to critically think about assimilating into a fine arts status quo, to think about what it is I allow that will then be allowed by future generation, to be comfortable feeling sad about the ways in which I lost myself in colonial institutions, and to move forward creating in a way that felt authentic to myself and my understanding of the world. These poets helped me wonder what could be. This wondering helped me imagine a different future for my own art practice, for my own relationship to the world, coming to full fruition in the exhibit.

¹ Long Soldier, Layli. *WHEREAS*. Graywolf Press, 2017.

Frameworks

The frameworks for in search of ourselves, we find each other come from Cherokee, Muscogee, and inter-tribal epistemologies. Some are based on personal cultural understanding and others are based more broadly on the wider scope of Indigenous research methodologies presented by knowledge keepers in their specific tribal communities. Every framework exists in a circle, each being dependent on one another, and should be approached non-linearly.

Self-Location. We are all searching for ways to locate ourselves as we move through the world. In the search for self, we point to places that ushered us into new knowledge. We point to moments and experiences that gave us deeper understanding. We point to the people who carved pathways for us to be where we are now. Finding the ways in which we locate self helps build our unique understanding of the world.

I think that using the term “self-location” can be misinterpreted, but essentially I am talking about how we know ourselves and how that is inherently tied up to how we interact with the world. I acknowledge the implications associated with the term location, it’s relationship to mapping, and what both of those words have historically meant in terms of colonization, expansionism, and genocide. However, when I use the term location, I am implementing it Indigenously and joyfully. I think of Mishuana Goeman’s book, *Mark My Words: Indigenous Women Mapping*. In it, she speaks about the ways in which Indigenous people have created “maps” for themselves, but not through westernized archival and documenting processes. We pass down our histories and beliefs, our understandings of the world, through songs, stories, dances, and ceremonies, that are tied to specific places, experiences, objects, times, and people.²

Just as I locate myself through these different aspects, I choose to offer you the same opportunity. Alongside me and the people, places, experiences that inform who I am, I ask you to locate yourself throughout this exhibit and its various platforms. I ask you to become part of a community who shares this experience with me. I ask you to take the time to know yourself,

² Goeman, Mishuana. *Mark My Words*. U of Minnesota Press, 2013.

how you became who you are in this present moment, and recognize the place you hold in the world. By taking the time to understand who and how you are, I believe that you will see that locating self isn't singular in any regard, but an endeavor filled with a wide breadth of interconnected relationships. U.S. Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo, speaks best to my understanding of location in her poem, *Remember*.³

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

Perception. Perception is the moment in which we realize there is something different, an awareness of otherness, but is, simultaneously, the realization of sameness, an intrinsic or inherent tie to something or someone. It is a sort of metaphysical beginning understanding of self. Perception is realized through multiple avenues and varies person-to-person. It is influenced by intersections in our ways of knowing and being. In this state of awareness, questions are formed in which we begin to ask ourselves where we come from, where we

³ Harjo, Joy. *Remember*. 1981.

belong, what we believe, what we value, who we honor, who supports us, what we steward, what we hope for, and what we dream, to name a few.

Perception can come in many moments, through many channels. I believe perception of self happens in experiences with other people, present or non-present. When I say present, I mean we can perceive ourselves in relation to another person who is physically alongside us. When I say non-present, I mean that a person is not physically alongside us, but still able to communicate with us, like in a writing, a song, a movie, or even now, in this writing. The person is not with you, physically, but their knowledge, presence, legacy, etc. has helped you become more aware of self.

Throughout this exhibit, I ask you to take time to think about the ways in which you perceive yourself and how that aligns with the ways you are perceived when you are in relationship to other people, places, and experiences.

Community Relations. In searching for self, one begins to think about the relationships that are built with others, person-to-person. Within the framework of community relations, this is built on those person-to-person relations, grounding self in the knowledge that comes from investing and participating in broader, community understanding. In terms of Indigeneity, I like to think of my community in the forms of familial, tribal, intertribal, and allies that uplift decentralized knowledge, in the form of a circle that grows larger and larger, with some more centralized. Of course, I see myself existing in many spheres of community that are intersectional, and with each, varied community comes a varied understanding and place within it.

By being in relation with community, by participating within it, we are able to use it as a mirror to reflect back to us all the parts of ourselves we cannot or choose not to recognize. The ways in which we intersect or do not intersect, the ways in which we can grow, our strengths and weaknesses, inequities and privileges. By building relations with others and growing understanding of ourselves, we begin to build bridges of empathetic understanding between one another, that overlap into other communities that we interact with, as well.

The idea of collectivism over individualism is an important aspect of this exhibit, too; not only the focus on a responsibility to the whole, but also the belief that the most important work comes within and alongside community. Together, we learn about ourselves. Together, we build empathetic communities. Together, we hold each other accountable. Together, we create. Together, we grow.

Past and Future Honoring. Past and future honoring is the practice of looking backwards and forwards, simultaneously. This is based on the Iroquois teaching, adapted by many tribes, of Seven Generations, in which we honor seven generations before us and seven generations after us with what we do, presently.

Honoring those who came before can look like implementing traditions, ceremonies, ways of knowing that were built on ancestral knowledge. Honoring those that come after looks like continuing to build on ancestral knowledge, while also building new traditions in the mindset that you, yourself, will someday be someone's ancestor.

This practice of looking forward and backward is one that is evident throughout this exhibit. After reading Jeffrey Gibson's exhibition catalogue, *Like a Hammer*, in which he wrote extensively about building new traditions, I began to implement "new traditions" in my own praxis.⁴ Weaving within and beyond this exhibit are questions I ask myself about how to create new traditions for future generations of Indigenous artists while simultaneously honoring the ancestors who built traditions that got me to where I am today.

Reciprocity. Reciprocity is the cyclical nature of giving and receiving. From both a personal and research-driven perspective, Indigenous reciprocity is a state of being and is immeasurable. It is honoring, caring, keeping, protecting, loving, platforming, and everything between and beyond.

Though immeasurable, we must still find ways to honor the gift. For instance, reciprocity in my relationship with my father who held stories from our ancestors, and in turn, passed them down to me. I find ways to honor that gift of cultural knowledge through creating

⁴ Lukavic, John P. *Jeffrey Gibson*. Prestel, 2018.

objects, spaces, sounds, and songs that those stories can be embedded within. It is not a 1:1 exchange, but one that takes on a different level of intention, embedded in knowing your community and yourself.

Another aspect of reciprocity is honoring those who helped you come to new understandings, supported you, offered you opportunities, etc., by giving credit to their knowledge and relation, as well as offering a similar support back to them or to more who may need it. This is evident within the exhibit, paying homage and platforming othered knowledge through collaborative work with people who have helped me come to new understandings, while implementing Indigenous methodologies.

Platforms

The digital platform exists as a website indefinitely at insearchofourselves.com (figure 1). It acts as a gallery, with nuances similar to navigating and wayfinding within a physical space, that contain five collaborative works embedded into it. Though it functions as a physical space, it is also meant to be a more accessible public space for those might have not previously had access to fine art spaces.

The physical space was located at Perrodin Supply Co. in Springdale, AR, from April 2, 2021 to April 16, 2021 and was used for a curated exhibit and accompanying programming (figure 2).

We Find Each Other, 2021. A documented performance of my sister, father, and I at an outdoor basketball court that incorporates a collaborative sound piece (figures 3-5). It was filmed at Verdigris Middle School in Verdigris, OK, by Kyle Bell (Mvskoke). The sound piece was created in collaboration with Tulsa, OK, musician, Chris Combs.

Wearing basketball jerseys with single lines of a villanelle on the back, we take them off and put them on in order, line by line, as I recite the poem. Large, foiled prints hung on the chain link fence in the background of the video read, “in search of ourselves, we find each other.”

Throughout this performance, sound piece, and poem, I thought extensively on the moments in which I first felt strong kinship with others, when I first saw myself reflected in a space and represented in a form of excellence. The space I think about, often, is the basketball court.

I grew up watching basketball with my father and mother, both of them enjoying the sport and teaching me at a young age. I watched college and professional basketball from early on, it being a staple in the household and a version of it being viewed or listened to at most times. I, myself, started playing when I was four years old, travelled nationally with a team in high school, and played until I was twenty, a sophomore in college. It has always been part of my life, in some way or another.

Basketball is not just an important sport in my family, but important across Native America. Becoming popular in the early 20th century, it was initially used as a tool of assimilation for Native American boarding schools to make the students fit into settler colonial societal norms. They rejected that version and used it as an extension of their own cultural sports.⁵ In a time when so much was forcefully taken, when they were stolen from their families and forced to adhere to western values, these Native students would use the sport as a reprieve, as a moment of Indigenous survivance, a term coined by Indigenous researcher and educator Gerald Vizenor.⁶ I think about this when I think about how my dad was adamant about me playing and about me watching other Native people play. I think about how he would drive me to Sequoyah High School in Tahlequah, OK, over an hour from where we lived, just to watch other Natives play. He wanted me to have that for myself, to know I could use basketball similarly to how my ancestors used it – not to fit into some mold of a model citizen, but as an Indigenous act of joyful excellence.

These moments on the court were where I learned to navigate myself and others, where I perceived myself, where I understood how I intersected with others. The game is about camaraderie, it's about teamwork, it's about understanding your role, it's about being excellent in your role and working with others toward a common goal. It's a sport that facilitates so many wonderful ways of interacting with others and placing the whole over the singular. However, these moments are intertwined with painful growing periods of getting to know others, learning team dynamics, learning rules of the game, inordinate amounts of time invested, and, occasionally, leadership flaws.

Aside from the joyful, it parallels my experiences as an Indigenous person existing in academia and institutions. I have invested so much time working within these systems to find some sort of sustainable success, feeling pressure to be excellent in my role as a minority

⁵ “How Native Americans Made Basketball Their Own.” *Zocalo Public Square*. <https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2020/04/15/how-native-americans-made-basketball-their-own/ideas/essay/>.

⁶ Vizenor, Gerald. *Survivance*. U of Nebraska Press, 2008.

student, while trying to understand the space itself and educate others on my own experience. However, I realized that going along with what was given to me was me assimilating into what made the institution comfortable and happy, but I wanted to subvert and intervene. Like those who came before me subverted a colonizer's sport into a way in which they could be closer to culture, I chose to subvert my time in academia to create and exist joyfully, to make what I want to make, and to build up community over singular success.

We Find Each Other exists as a nod to the parallels between basketball and Indigenous community. It is about collective understanding and success, perceiving yourself in relation to others, Indigenous joy and excellence, and it is about subverting oppressive systems in place.

At the Creek, You Live Forever, 2021. An interactive visual and sound piece in collaboration with my father. It was recorded between Caney Creek and the Bathtub Rocks in Tahlequah, OK, the places my father grew up going to with my *duda* and *ulisi*, as well as his nine siblings (figures 6-7). In this piece, he tells stories centralized around the creek he went to as a child with his family, alongside collaged images of him fishing at Caney Creek, transcriptions of the stories, bright colors, and other associated sounds.

This piece is about questioning how we archive, what we archive, and why we archive. It is steeped in oral tradition through storytelling and sensory experiences. In many Indigenous oral histories, one isn't just confronted with the story, itself, but many aspects within the story that make it memorable, examples being colors, directions, landscapes, people, animals, plants, actions, sounds, weather, solar systems, etc. Therefore, when we locate our values, we aren't just remembering an orally passed-down story full of morality via language, but it is now inherently tied up in many aspects of our daily lives that are constantly intersecting with one another. When we archive our histories and cosmologies, we aren't just archiving texts and language, we are using the living world as an archival tool that extends from the present to both the past and the future. It is not an archaic method, but one that enables Indigenous futurisms.

Archiving my fathers stories in an interactive way is how I wanted to retain this Indigenous method of archiving, while still adapting new, futuristic methods in implementing the internet as an archival tool. You do not only hear his voice, read his words, or see his face. You hear sounds he and I associate with these spaces and experiences, you enter the pieces within it through visually associating a specific item or action with the story, and you listen to his words alongside a handwritten transcription over a gradient colorway associated with that environment.

This method of Indigenous storytelling was very intentional in this specific piece because it meant in order for one to understand and interact with the piece, one had to intersect their understanding with Indigenous ways of knowing. It was another way of intervening with and subverting a settler colonial endeavor – archiving to extract and destroy – and using it as a tool to create new spaces for Indigenous peoples to maintain cultural practices and traditions.

NDN Tacos For Dinner, 2021. A transcribed conversation over a dinner of Indian tacos with Lydia Cheshewalla (Osage), KB Huber (Otoe), and myself, formatted into a small edition of RISO-printed, pamphlet-stitched publications (figures 8-9). It is accessible both on the website and in a physical format.

This work focuses on the importance of gathering with others, centralizing the action of sharing specific foods to help contextualize the Indigenous experience, and the nuance of dialogue when people are having authentic experiences. Over the course of a dinner, Lydia, KB, and I discuss regional spaces and friendships, historical traumas, various, inter-tribal understandings and traditions, Indian tacos, and we make a lot of jokes.

This work was important in the context of the exhibit, as a whole, because it allowed me to use the archive to intervene with the public, again. The dinner and accompanying conversation allowed us comfort, in which we did not feel pressure to code-switch. This allowed us to have invested conversation implementing genuine perspectives, unaltered by western homogeneous expectations. By recording and publishing it, it allows people to enter

into an authentic conversation that they can locate themselves in relation to. How closely or not closely one relates with the publication will reveal intersectionalities in relation to an Indigenous experience.

By being in relation to diverse people, we are in relation to diverse understandings of the world. Diverse understanding forces us to locate and understand our own perspectives, so that we may understand how we intersect, what we can learn, how we can empathize, etc.

***O'Pb/OhSG~Aθ* (Grandmother/Directions), 2021.** A video and audio documented improvisational musical performance with cellist, Matt Magerkurth, on a stormy day in Bunch, OK, where my Tsalagi grandmother's family had allotted land, and where my fathers family was began (figures 10-11). Using a non-linear musical theory based on observing, describing, and conversing with a specific landscape, I wrote the beginnings of this piece.

O'Pb/OhSG~Aθ (Grandmother/Directions) is a performance centered on honoring those who came before by being present, observant, and deeply listening, honoring land as kin and ancestor through deep listening and observation, and honoring those who come after by creating new traditions. I wanted to honor my grandparents for the pathways they built for me to be where I am, making the work that I do. I am appreciative of their sacrifices and knowledge that has been passed down. I wanted to share the space in which they met and built a family so that I could be with them and the land that made us. I wanted to share this moment in time in conversation with the land and my ancestors through the way in which I feel most naturally communicating and using a tool that might not have been as accessible to me had it not been for their sacrifices – through music. I wanted to record this moment so that future generations of Indigenous people can feel validation in subverting the ways in which we communicate our Indigeneity with each other and with the broader world, as well as comfort in building new traditions and cultural practices.

***It Was Always Us!*, 2021.** A group exhibition I curated as part of my overarching thesis exhibit, *in search of ourselves, we find each other*, and reflects a line in the villanelle recited in the piece, *We Find Each Other* (figures 12-18). It exists online and existed physically for two

weeks at Perrodin Supply Co. in Springdale, AR, from April 2, 2021 to April 16, 2021.

The basis of this exhibit is reciprocity in the relationships we have to the people, places, and knowledge that help us self-locate. Reciprocity is implemented through the action of platforming their work. Every artist that participated in this exhibit played an important role in my life that has allowed me to better understand myself and my relationship to community, and I, in turn, wanted to offer the community an opportunity to locate themselves in relation to the artists, to their singular work, to the collective body of work and its discourse, to the space, to the programming, etc. It was an opportunity to bring people together as a curatorial endeavor as opposed to specific works. Each of the artists chose their own work to include that they felt best represented their knowledge and value systems at the current moment. The work comes together to be in relation with each other, creating new dialogue and intersections with the viewer in this specific place, at this specific time. It creates a new point of location we can use to understand ourselves and each other. It is a new moment of location for us to point to, collectively.

The programming for the exhibit ran synchronously with the open dates of the exhibit in the physical space and incorporated conversations and performances with the participating artists and a gallery walk-through in which I revealed memorable aspects of the relationships I had with each of the artists. It was used to intervene with inaccessible conversations surrounding art and refocus on the importance of good relations between art, artist, and community.

The artists involved included: Ziba Rajabi, Yatika Starr Fields, Bradley Dry, Zora J Murff, Blake Walinder, Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhran, Brody Parrish-Craig, Minah Kim, Matt Magerkurth, Leah Grant, Rachel Rose Dazey, Anthony Kascak, MacKenzie Turner, Nick Norman, Amber Perrodin, Lydia Cheshewalla, Cynthia Post Hunt, and Acadia Kandora.

Community Questions

Following the physical exhibit, I took questions from participants. Below are a few of the questions I received, as well as my answers.

What is the significance of occupying digital space vs physical space with your work as an artist and a curator? This exhibit does both, very intentionally. I wanted to offer a physical space for people to be in proximity to the work in a specific place, at a specific time. This allows people to have a more nuanced sensory experience in which they can understand themselves in context to both the work and the space it was housed in. I also wanted to foster community in a specific community, finding intersection between the academic community at University of Arkansas and broader, regional community. The physical space allowed me to create a space these differing groups could intersect.

Occupying digital space worked similarly to occupying the physical space, but with a broader impact that was more accessible to not only the region, but globally. The beauty of digital spaces is that we can have sensations similar to a physical environment, but it gives us more allowances in interaction. I wanted the viewer to be able to feel like they have to navigate a space very specifically, but find small moments to work around something, as they would in a physical space.

The physical space also held only the curated exhibit, as opposed to incorporating my collaborative work. This was intentional, too. I saw the physical space as an opportunity to honor those who helped me be who I am today, but I also saw it as an opportunity to use the discourse happening between their work in the space as part of a broader conversation with the collaborative, digital work. The digital work used me as glue, the thing that held the conceptual frameworks together, and I think that happened between the digital art and curated space and physical curated space. They each spoke to each other and about each other by holding different spaces while my personhood came through and kept it together.

Is it important for artists to think of themselves as curators in their digital lives? I think I have a more complicated view of this. I want people to have authentic, genuine

experiences with one another, unhindered from perceived social standards based in western, hegemonic thought. I think the idea that someone should curate their life is another way of putting up a facade that people have to learn to engage with and out of that comes problematic discourse. I want to truly know people so we can have a better understanding of society. I want to understand the vulnerable parts of all of us so that we can heal, collectively. I don't think healing or empathetic understanding comes from curating a specific view of yourself, people need to see you for who you are.

I say all of this, but I am already thinking of ways to intervene with social platforms. I think on the mapping aspect of locating. What are the touchpoints, the way we are supposed to navigate each other in these spaces? How can we curate something that doesn't exist singularly to inform some idea of self we want to portray, but how do we curate a social platform that only exists through the interactions with one another?

Why was it important to show this group of artists? The group of artists in *It Was Always Us!* and the collaborators within *in search of ourselves, we find each other* are all people I think on in the present moment and carry weight within the broader exhibit's conversation and interventions. The artists are friends, colleagues, peers, family while the exhibit underscores what a community is, what it could be, and how we build our own communities to invite others in. It brings together the people in my life I see as some of the most influential to how I understand myself in a community context. This group of artists are passionate and skilled at portraying their understandings of the world through their work and brought together, create a multi-faceted, diverse dialogue for people who interact with the exhibit.

how do you honor the work online and in the space? I honor the work online and the work that existed in the gallery by maintaining it and my relations, taking care to check-in with the work and the artists who participated or collaborated. Honoring something doesn't just happen in a single moment, but takes on different forms over an invested amount of time.

How you plan to continue building community with these folks or other folks in the future and would it take a similar form? I plan on continuing building community with these

folks and others by continuing to find ways in which we intersect, connecting people who need a broader community, checking-in via phone calls and texts, having dinner with people, making jokes on the internet and sending dumb memes, dreaming with people about what could be, imagining what we could do together, and making things happen alongside them. The form changes, communities change, but I want to always be finding ways in which to create sustainable community and moments to come together.

Conclusion

in search of ourselves, we find each other is a labor of love, friendship, and community care. It was a difficult process to learn so much about myself in the process of learning so much about others. There were times of failure and success in the process, but any moment of disappointment or hardship was overcome tenfold by the sheer amount of joy in the interactions that occurred between myself, my family, my friends, my peers, etc.

I believe collectivism in creativity is not always considered valid in fine art and academia. I hope this work validates future endeavors of those who wish to work in a praxis of community. I believe intervening with and subverting colonial structures and systems is imperative if we are to not only survive, but create a sustainable, equitable future for all peoples. I hope this work helps you interrogate the ways in which people conform and the ways in which people can disrupt. I believe joyful making is valuable when it comes from diverse people, despite fine art and academia valuing anger and trauma from these communities above all else. I hope this work creates a pathway for people who want to tell the stories of their communities, those who want to create new traditions, those who want to be good ancestors, and those who want to look to the future through a lens of their cultural understanding.

in search of ourselves, we find each other was always meant for us.

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Appendix: Figures



Figure 1: insearchofourselves.com opening page
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 2: *It Was Always Us!* at Perrodin Supply Co.
Image Courtesy of the artist



Figure 3: Screenshot of web page for *We Find Each Other*
Image courtesy of the artist



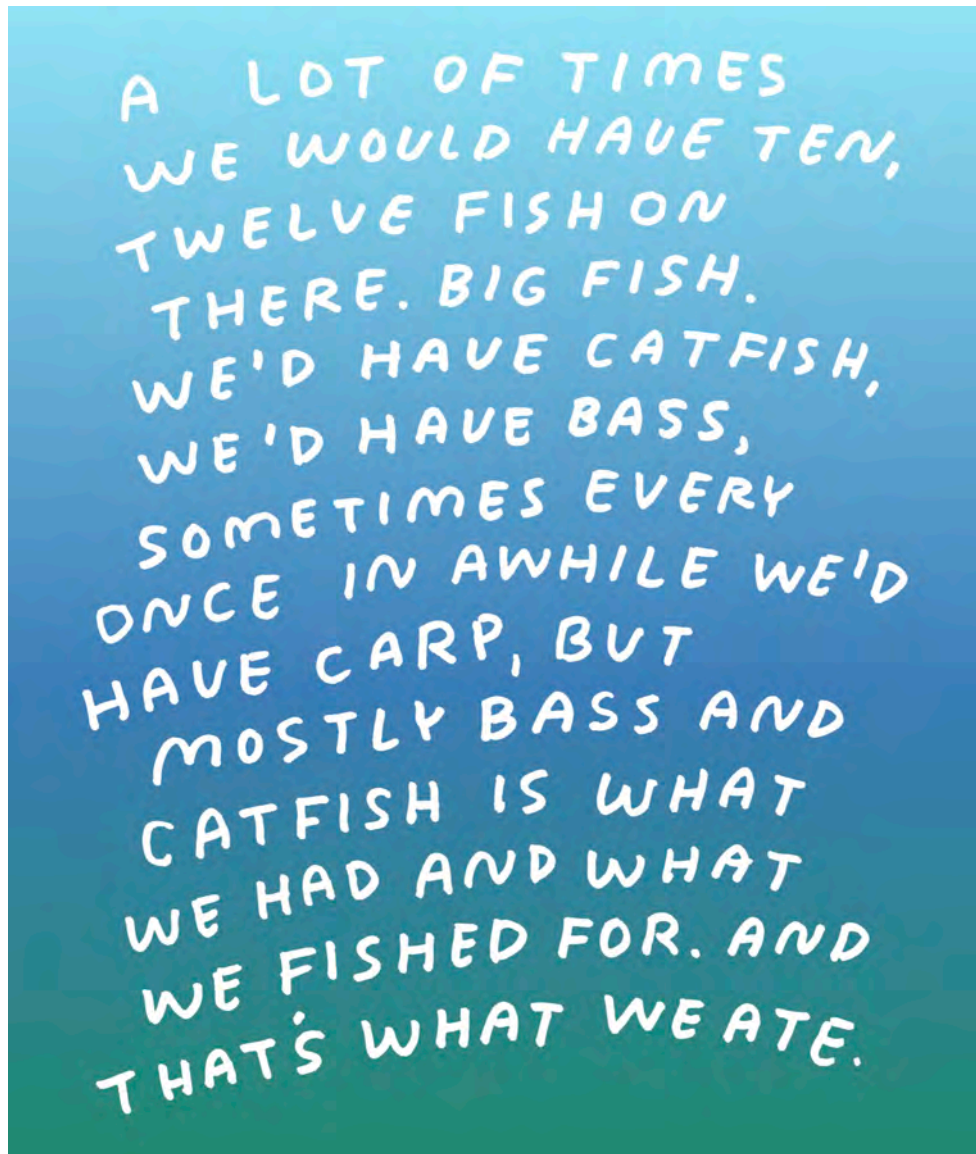
Figure 4: Video still from performance of *We Find Each Other*
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 5: Video still from performance of *We Find Each Other*
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 6: Screenshot of web page for *At the Creek, You Live Forever*
Image courtesy of the artist



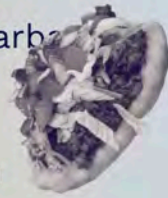
A LOT OF TIMES
WE WOULD HAVE TEN,
TWELVE FISH ON
THERE. BIG FISH.
WE'D HAVE CATFISH,
WE'D HAVE BASS,
SOMETIMES EVERY
ONCE IN AWHILE WE'D
HAVE CARP, BUT
MOSTLY BASS AND
CATFISH IS WHAT
WE HAD AND WHAT
WE FISHED FOR. AND
THAT'S WHAT WE ATE.

Figure 7: Screenshot of web page for *At the Creek, You Live Forever*
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 8: Photo of publication, *NDN Tacos For Dinner*
Image courtesy of the artist

a culture that knows how to be in relation with the world, actually isn't antiquated. It's really modern and necessary. Being out of that harmony is what has created climate change and also like classism and racism and all that other garbage



Kalyn

That's still crazy that they straight up called you antiquarian. Who was it? It was in your fellowship, right?

Lydia

So it was that guy who was trying to say the second Holocaust is coming and it's coming for people who look like him. And I was just like, "Whoa, are you being for real?" Because I mean, it's really, it's actually concerning. I don't believe that for a second, but it's concerning to think

Figure 9: Screenshot of web page for *NDN Tacos For Dinner*
Image courtesy of the artist

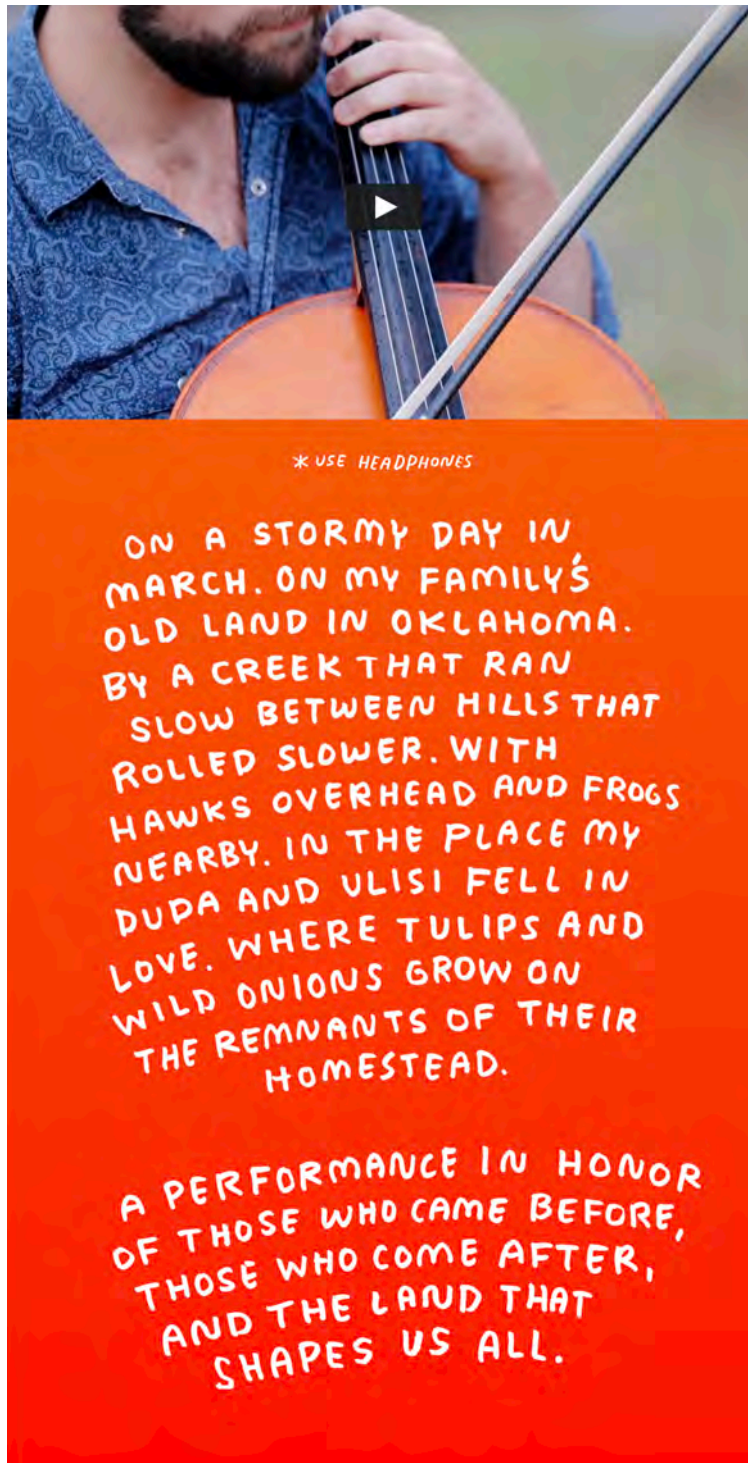


Figure 10: Screenshot of web page for *O'Gb/0hSGA0*
(Grandmother/Directions)
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 11: Video still from performance of *O'gb/ØhSG'AØ* (Grandmother/Directions)
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 12: Gallery photo of *It Was Always Us!*
Image courtesy of Sara Segerlin



Figure 13: Programming gallery photo of *It Was Always Us!*
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 14: Programming gallery photo for *It Was Always Us!*
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 15: Installation photo of Lydia Cheshewalla's piece, *Water Clock for a Hopeful Heart (by the time this vessel breaks, you will be in my arms)*, 2021. Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 16: Installation photo of MacKenzie Turner's piece, *I'll Be Holding*, 2021.
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 17: Screenshot of exhibit web page for *It Was Always Us!* viewing Ziba Rajabi's piece, *To Ooze*, 2019.
Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 18: Screenshot of exhibit web page for *It Was Always Us!*
Image courtesy of the artist