

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Ceremony Must be Found: Ritual as Artistic Practice

On view January 18 - March 2, 2024

Opening Reception: January 18, 6-8 PM

Curated by Anna Cahn

Artists: manuel arturo abreu, Marielys Burgos Meléndez, Dana Davenport, Caroline Garcia, Catalina Ouyang, Vivek Shraya, Qualeasha Wood

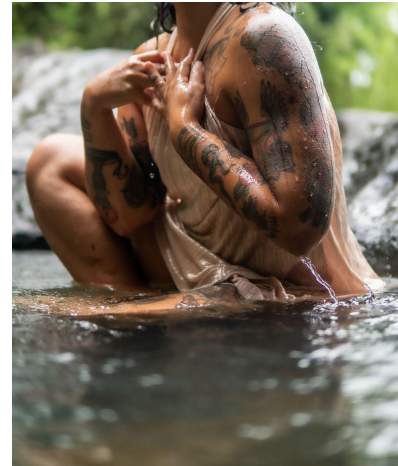


Image: Marielys Burgos Meléndez, *Invocations: Oshún (Río Espíritu Santo, El Yunque, Puerto Rico)*, 2021/2023, Multimedia Dance/ Ritual Installation, Dimensions variable, Concept, Ritual, Text & Narration: Marielys Burgos Meléndez, Photography by Paola López

The Ceremony Must be Found: Ritual as Artistic Practice explores the potential of ritual as a site for decolonial, feminist, and queer politics. Working across different media such as performance, dance, text, video, photography, sculpture, and installation, artists imagine what contemporary ritual means to them. The exhibition draws inspiration from feminist thinkers' approaches to ritual through the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Sylvia Wynter. The exhibition title references Wynter's 1984 essay, "The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism." Artists in the show invoke their own acts of ceremony—countering hegemonic modes of knowledge production with alternate approaches to identity formation. Shown together for the first time, these artists consider the ways in which ritual enables the crossing of physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual, and political borders. Guided by the liberatory practices of Anzaldúa, hooks, Gumbs, and Wynter, works in the show are examined for their enactment of ceremony, altar-making, ritual, and autopoetics.

manuel arturo abreu's site-specific installation, *Untitled (Herramienta de concha)* (2024), coats the gallery's periphery with crushed oyster shell powder, creating a protective border that permeates through the entire space. Similarly rooted in the importance of ceremony, Marielys Burgos Meléndez's installation, *Invocations Oshún (Puerto Rico)* (2021/2023), documents a ritual performance she created in her homeland of Puerto Rico, while Dana Davenport's practice grapples with issues of diasporic identity and examines Korean-owned African American beauty supply stores and the shared ritual acts of braiding and beading. abreu, Meléndez, and Davenport's works all explore ritual—addressing the experience of dislocation, diasporic memory, and personal history.

Many of the artists introduce their own practices of autopoetics—echoing the kind of radical expression made popular by feminist writers like Anzaldúa and hooks. Their seminal texts interweave the personal and political, the theoretical and practical. Caroline Garcia's video, *Queen of the Carabao* (2018), for example,

explores her return to her father's ancestral land and is interspersed with poetic text that takes the form of karaoke song lyrics—a popular pastime in the Philippines. Garcia continues her investigation of ritual and text with a new augmented-reality based work, *Force Field* (2023-24), which activates a virtual Orasyon—a mantra recited before battle/training in Filipino Martial Arts. Vivek Shraya's photographic essay, *Trisha* (2016), also explores the use of autopoetics and personal history. The artist juxtaposes vintage photographs of her mother with self-portraits and prose, as she reckons with her embodiment of trans-femininity through intergenerational relationships. Additionally, Qualeasha Wood's tapestry, *BSoD* (2023), examines virtual identity and Black femmes' representation on the internet, using selfies and encoded text as a digital proxy for her body. She overlays these digital images with emojis, computer error messages, and desktop image folders—simulating the ways in which one ritualistically constructs their virtual avatars. Catalina Ouyang's sculptures similarly reflect upon how ritual constructs identity and explores the relationships between violence, desire, gender, and race, and their inscription onto flesh through mythology and history.

The key curatorial questions of the exhibition explore how artistic practices can channel ritualistic states of consciousness for both artists and viewers, and how rituals allow bodies to occupy liminal states that initiate moments of transformation and self-actualization. Here, the artists propose ways in which ritual may be practiced as a method for resistance, experimentation, and personal exploration.

Public Programs

All events and programs are free and open to the public at EFA Project Space (323 West 39th Street, 2nd floor).

Opening Reception

Thursday, January 18, 6-8 PM

Baking as Ritual: A Reflection Lead by Gaëlle Aminata Colin

Thursday, February 1, 6:30-8:30 PM

During this reflection, Gaëlle Aminata Colin will explore baking as ritual by connecting her personal baking practice and her work on food as a space for joy and community.

[RSVP via Eventbrite](#)

Writing as Ritual: A Curatorial Seminar Lead by Anna Cahn

Saturday, February 17, 1-3 PM

During this special curatorial seminar, Anna Cahn will lead a group discussion and writing workshop that reflects upon the idea of writing as a ritual practice.

[RSVP via Eventbrite](#)



Performance and Catalog Launch

subharmonic inquiry: A performance by manuel arturo abreu and Jonathan González

Thursday, February 29, 6:30-8:30 PM

abreu will present a virtual reading in accompaniment to their poetic intervention in the exhibition.

Performer Jonathan González will simultaneously activate abreu's installation in the gallery in real time. The intervention will question language's ability to represent ritual practices and reflect on how bodies move through temporal environments and borders.

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES

Naomi Lev, Director and Chief Curator, EFA Project Space
[212-563-5855](tel:212-563-5855) x244 / naomi@efanyc.org

EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it and the communities that arise because of it. By providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists, curators, and other participants to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas. The program is based on Open Calls as well as invitational exhibitions and projects. It is a home for emerging, mid-career, as well as established curators and artists. We focus our attention on community engagement and public programming. www.projectspace-efanyc.org **The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA)** is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space, and EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. EFA is a catalyst for cultural growth, stimulating new interactions between artists, creative communities, and the public. www.efanyc.org EFA Project Space is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and additional funding from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.