THIRSTING FOR ART

thirstDays aims to inspire diverse artistic expressions every month for a year

By Brit Blachmann
Photos courtesy of organizers

"I think of love as being a necessity to a functioning culture—love, intimacy, and compassion. The idea of trying to work with these abstract notions gets translated into people becoming more connected, not just in terms of tolerating each other, but in terms of accepting, respecting, and having compassion."

This is how Downtown Vancouver-based artist Jaye Jalloh describes the conception of thirstDays, a monthly series of interdisciplinary art programs stretching over one year, hosted by VIVO Media Arts Centre.

Working in photography, video, installation, performance and text, Jalloh is prolific. His art has been exhibited in an incredible variety of settings worldwide, from local storefronts and community centres to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Centre Pompidou in Paris, and many more. In 2004, Jalloh won the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in Canada. He has also recently been nominated for the 2016 Scotiabank Photography Award.

For thirstDays, Jalloh has invited 25 curators to plan 12 individual programs based around the themes of love, intimacy and compassion—a deliberate modification of the word compassion within a geopolitical context. The concept is that one program will flow into the next, connecting each installment of the series, and thus connecting each participant and observer to the project through different topics and points of engagement.

The same thirstDays implies a seed and longing for something to be quenched. In this particular instance, the thirst is for culture and inclusivity. The deliberate overlap and interconnectedness of thirstDays is intended to recontextualize an activity that Jalloh has perceived in the city.

"I thought of Vancouver’s lack of openness. We’ve got natural beauty and wonder, but our culture is lacking a lot of things. This is partly the hangover of the Victorian Period still lurking in all the dominant ways, and superimposing itself on immigrant populations, as well."

About the curator-in-residence

Though based in DTES, Jalloh has lived in different cities across Canada, the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. As the grandson of Lebanese immigrants, his time spent in Beirut has been especially
influential in shaping his perceptions of identity, ethnicity, and belonging.

Salimun's practice fluctuates between the personal and meditative, and more confrontational and politically motivated works. Speaking to this push and pull, Salimun says, "I can see the value in combining both of those approaches and viewing them next to each other and having the readings play off each other." As a result, this philosophy of combining approaches to social, cultural, and political issues has bled into the format and structure of the(3) Days.

The curators come from a variety of backgrounds, professions, and interests. For many, this is their first time curating a program. Salimun explains, "I think combining people from different disciplines and genres—historically, I've thought of people in one discipline as being more valid than those with a broader perspective or as an artist, but the people who did their job saw the value of a broader perspective. I think there are many gaps as possible." The curators reflect a culturally diverse and intergenerational mix of established and emerging artists, activists, academics, and writers. Each set of curators will interpret the themes of the(3) Days and invite between two to 10 artists to perform on the evenings assigned. They have been given certain parameters to work within—but are by no means limited to—-including the date and time of the events, the writing of curatorial statements and program descriptions, collaboration with several artists, and a thematic overlap with the previous program. This 12-month collaborative effort will result in a publication and a conference in Spring 2017.

Setting a precedent

In the smallest terms, the(3) Days is considered a curatorial residency at VIVO Media Arts Centre, funded through the Canada Council Initiatives Grant for Media Arts Organizations. Salimun and Hyla Ferranti VIVO's Curator of Events and Exhibitions, applied for this project together, collaborating and sharing the burden of administration.

The scope of this project is enormous, though it aims at setting a new precedent for Vancouver arts organizations. Ferranti explains, "It is all about endurance. We'll see how it develops over a year. This (type of project) is something that doesn't happen that often because it requires a lot of energy, and a lot of funds." the(3) Days will be a financial challenge, but it is all about endurance. We'll see how it develops over a year. This (type of project) is something that doesn't happen that often because it requires a lot of energy, and a lot of funds."

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Sandra Semchuk, in Every Free Breath, Sourcebooks video projects, 2015.

Different disciplines and backgrounds, making decisions through consensus. "Everyone else (in Vancouver) has some given up this structure for different reasons," says Salimun, "but it is admirable in a lot of ways." Ferranti expands on this idea. "I think VIVO has a history of people gathering and working together towards something they really care about. The fact that VIVO is a collective, with all the problems that can have, is a statement about a certain way of working."

Thus, VIVO's management model of collaboration and seeking consensus through chiasm is one of the subtle themes being translated through the lens of the(3) Days. "I do think it is an experiment," explains Ferranti, "and it is definitely unpredictable at this time. That's the exciting part of the program."

Physical and historical space

This first installment of the(3) Days was a spatial off-site gathering and celebratory feast at the Native Education College February 25 titled "Economical Activism: 100 Years of the Gifting Talentonpatwris (to give thanks)." It was curated and performed by Tey Tiatat Geese Wyss and Aaron Rice, and featured Lindsay Katsakas, Sabina Mike, and Nicole Mandrak. Incorporating the traditions of several indigenous cultures, it sought to create a foundation of awareness, respect and gratitude for the rest of the(3) Days series.

Salimun and Ferranti both place special significance on the beginning and ending of work. The first(3) Days will be January 26, 2017, curated by Ferrari and Stacey He, and will feature a work by Salimun and others. A conference will follow in early April, 2017, which will allow participants and audience members to reflect on the together to the next(3) Days series.

The next(3) Days is March 7 at VIVO Media Arts Centre, curated by Juneson Nii-Nii and Ashok Mathur.

All events in the(3) Days series are free, accessible, and open to everyone. Each program will distribute physical documents of curatorial statements and written descriptions that can be assembled as a publication. the(3) Days will stream on-line at 120.5, www.megaphone.com, which also features a blog and video. In residence Sara Hogue, The abundance of information and documentation shared with the public is a way of actively engaging the audience in the series. making the(3) Days not just physically and economically accessible, but also digitally accessible.

Speaking to the intentions of the(3) Days, Salimun states, "With this project and working in Vancouver it is very important to work within this physical and historical space in a way that acknowledges the history and past. Not just its violent colonial, oppressive past, but also the previous cultures, and the power of the nature that sustains us here. So we see that as a grounding, and build upon that in the projects that we do, whether they are internal, meditative projects, or have political objectives. I'm hoping the(3) Days will take this form, and continue to trajectory towards acknowledging these different levels, and our responsibility within them."