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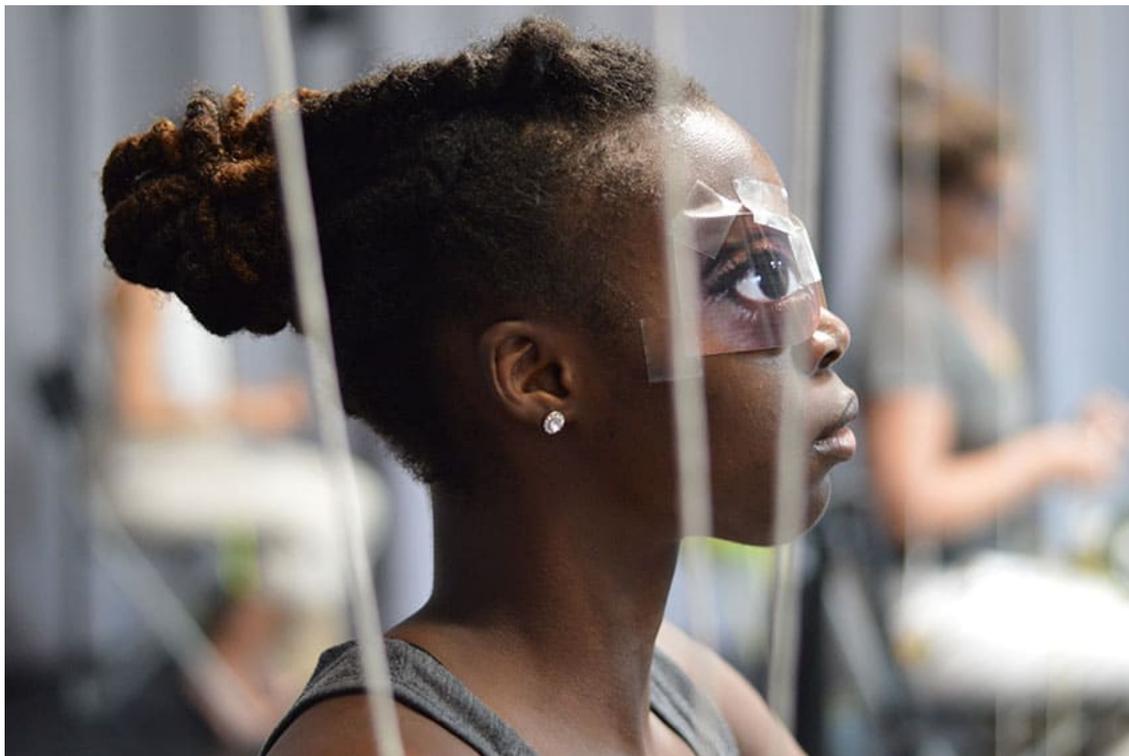
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## DELIRIOUS Dances

Posted: Thursday, October 17th, 2019 at 3:08 pm in [News](#)

by Edisa Weeks

multi-disciplinary artist and Director of [DELIRIOUS Dances](#)



*THREE RITES: Life* by DELIRIOUS Dances/Edisa Weeks, performer J'nae Simmons. Photo by Rebecca Fitton.

The United States Declaration of Independence states that, “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

As a child I believed in these three unalienable rights, however as I grew up I began questioning how our government guarantees Life, Liberty and Happiness? In an era of Citizens United, NAFTA, Black Lives Matter, Me Too, health insurance, unratified treaties with Native Americans, the internment and deportation of Latinx people, and the longest war in America’s history, how and for whom are life, liberty and happiness being protected, promoted and pursued? These questions have resulted in three performance rituals (rites) that interrogate the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness in America.

The US Declaration of Independence also states, “*That to secure these rights [life, liberty happiness], Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*” I’m paraphrasing James Baldwin and a long legacy of activists when I say that, because I LOVE America, I will critique America, and demand that America lives up to and fully embodies its ideals as articulated in our Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence!

This past summer I had an NPN Phase II Development grant and a Choreoquest residency at Restoration ARTS in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, NY to workshop *THREE RITES: Life*. The residency culminated in two work-in-progress showings on Friday and Saturday, Sept. 6 & 7, 2019. *THREE RITES: Life* is a durational performance installation that advocates for a radical revolution of values, where corporations and citizens become better stewards of the earth.

In researching *Life*, I was saddened by the statistic that the average American consumes four to five pounds of trash a day, and it was angering to realize that our current environmentally destructive use of fossil fuels and disposable products such as soda cans, plastic bottles, plastic bags, plastic packaging, etc., was carefully cultivated by corporations.



Decapitating Sunflowers. Performers: J'nae Simmons, EmmaGrace Skove-Epes. Photo by Rebecca Fitton.



Artificial Flower Offerings. Performers: J'nae Simmons, EmmaGrace Skove-Epes. Photo by Julie Lemberger.



Artificial Flower Offerings. Performers: J'nae Simmons, EmmaGrace Skove-Epes. Photo by Julie Lemberger.

In *THREE RITES: Life* two performers blindly and repetitively decapitate sunflowers and attach pieces of trash to the sunflower stalks, to create artificial flowers. I choose sunflowers because, depending on your cultural background, they symbolize long life, good fortune, vitality, a bountiful harvest, adoration and loyalty. In *THREE RITES: Life* they represent the lives and ecosystems that are being destroyed by our consumption habits.

During the Choreoquest residency the performers and I developed The Manager and the Shadow/Trickster characters. The Manager has several tasks. They invite the audience to color in the mural and help build a “model city” out of trash. When the dancers, whose eyes are sealed shut, begin moving, the manager makes sure they do not crash into a wall, pillar or audience member. The Manager also invites people to wear a Consumption Coat, which has five pounds of trash attached to it, so as a person walks around the installation they can visualize and carry the weight of five pounds of trash.



Consumption Coat. Photo by Julie Lemberger.



Edisa Weeks wearing the Consumption Coat. Photo by Julie Lemberger.

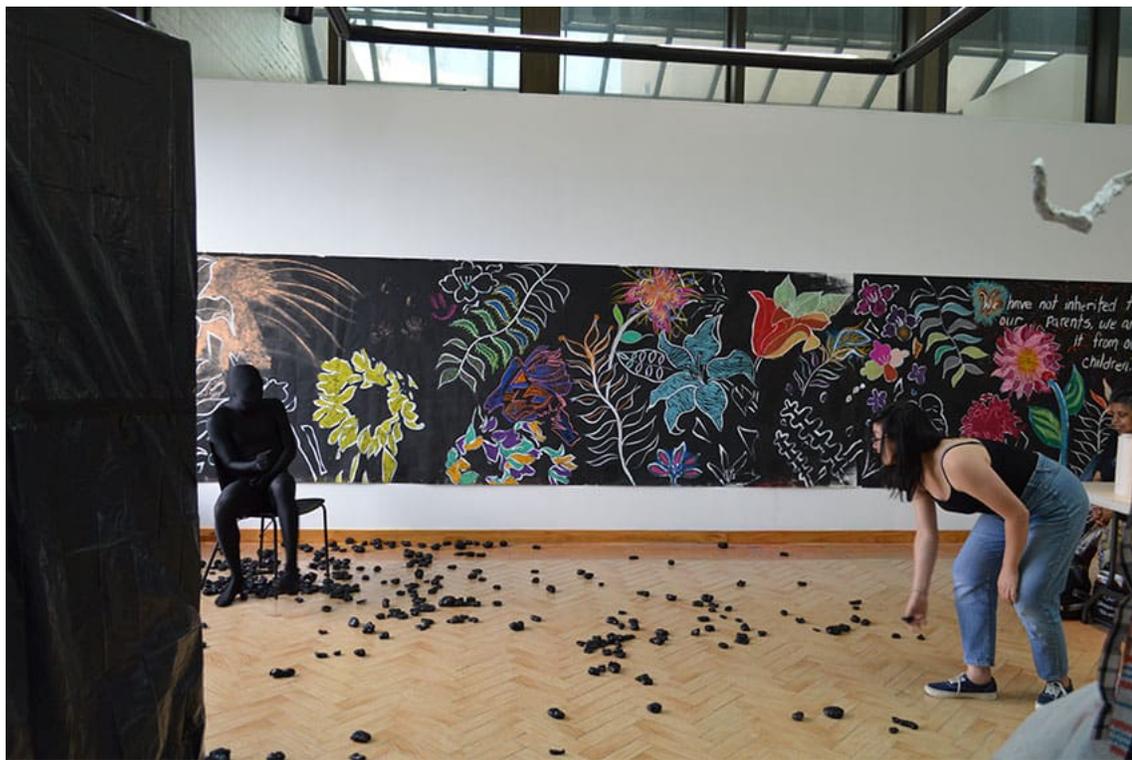
The Shadow character is still evolving—right now they are a combination of Eleguá, Loki, and the collective subconscious. The Shadow moves freely through the installation, and as a trickster and change agent, they create havoc in the effort to get people to “do the right thing.”



Shadow with audience. Photos by Julie Lemberger.



Shadow with audience. Photos by Julie Lemberger.

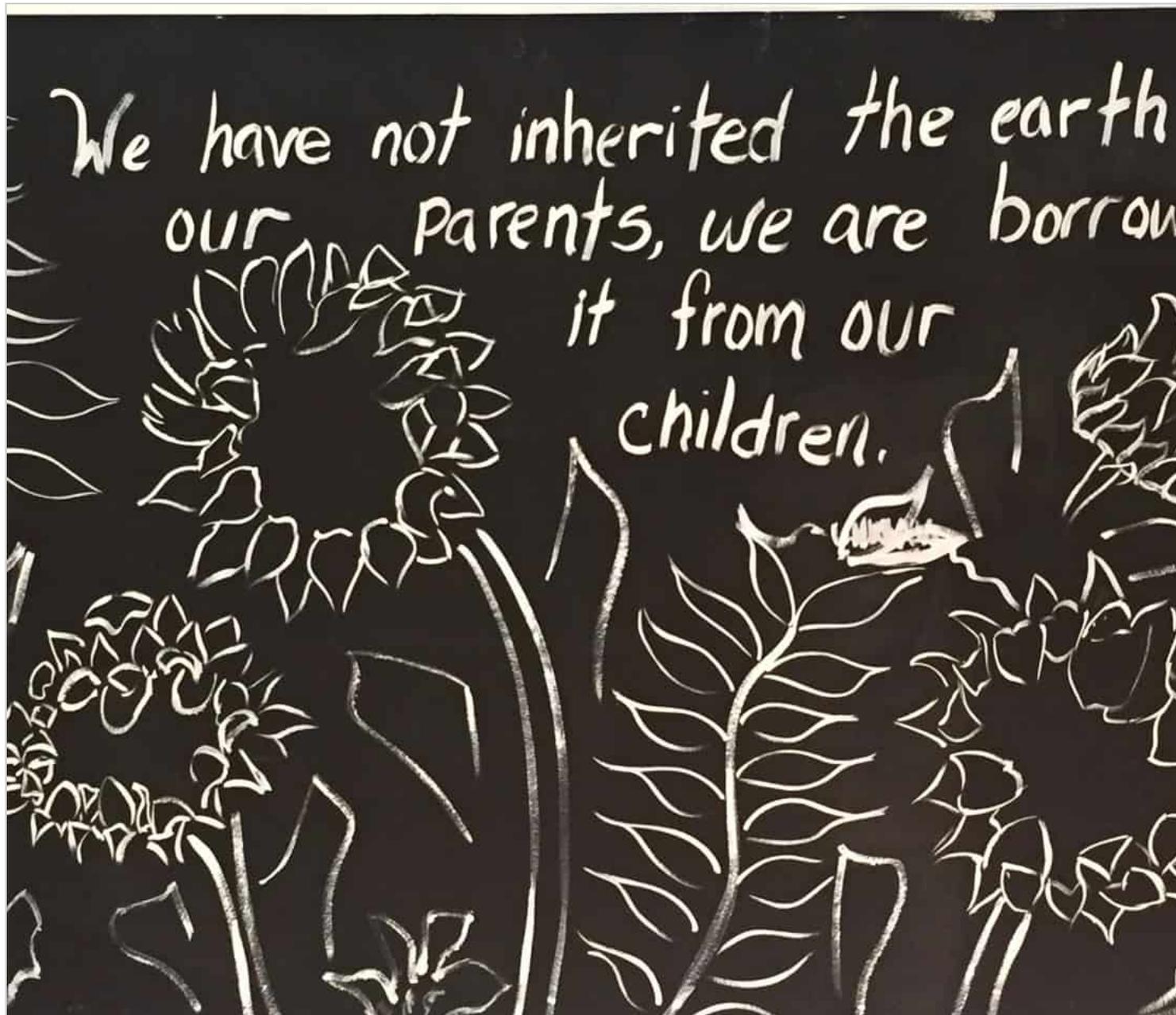


Shadow with audience. Photo by Rebecca Fitton.

The installation included an amazing black and white mural by Sophia Dawson, which the audience colored-in with chalk. The mural integrated quotes by environmental activists such as:

*"We have not inherited the earth from our parents, we are borrowing it from our children." — Wendell Berry*

*"If you change the environment, you change the people." — Richard Buckminster Fuller*



Mural by Sophia Dawson in collaboration with the audience. Photo by Edisa Weeks.



Mural by Sophia Dawson in collaboration with the audience. Photo by Edisa Weeks

Each showing concluded with a workshop. On Friday John Gershman, Clinical Professor of Public Service at New York Univ., led a discussion on the Buen Vivir Movement, which started in South American and loosely translates into English as “good living” or “living well.” Buen Vivir advocates for a shift in values, where corporations and the Gross Domestic Product do not determine a nation’s success. What determines a nation’s success is the well-being of its citizens—how many people have access to health care, education, food, affordable housing, and are living above the poverty line. It redefines values, so humans are not owners of the earth and its resources, but we are stewards of the earth.

On Saturday Pamela Issac, with Materials for the Arts, taught a creative re-use bead-making workshop out of plastic straws and fabric.



Buen Vivir discussion with John Gershman, Clinical Professor of Public Service at New York University. Photo by Julie Lemberger.



Creative Re-use Bead making workshop with Pamela Issac from Materials for the Arts. Photos by Rebecca Fitton.



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*THREE RITES: Life* is an appeal for people and corporations to be better at taking care of ALL LIFE on earth. The earth has a finite number of resources, and corporate policies based on the endless consumption of resources are destroying life. If we don't become better stewards, we will eventually be suffocating in our own waste.

You can watch a short video of the *THREE RITES: Life* showing [here](#):



### THREE RITES: Life (excerpts)

from Edisa Weeks

04:55



Edisa Weeks

\*

*THREE RITES: Life, Liberty, Happiness*, is a seven-hour interdisciplinary interactive experience by DELIRIOUS Dances/Edisa Weeks, that integrates live music, dance, text, two visual installations, community discussions and shared meals to humorously and poignantly examine how America has protected, promoted and pursued life, liberty and happiness, and how these rights manifest in the body. The individual performance rituals (rites) can be performed separately or all together. *THREE RITES* is produced by Mar'ya Wethers and presented by 651ARTS. It will premiere in Brooklyn, NY in Fall 2020.

Founded by multi-disciplinary artist Edisa Weeks, DELIRIOUS Dances seeks to erase the barriers between art and life, between performance space and audience space, and between mediums. We are interested in finding ways for the audience to interact with and influence the experience of a work. We believe that art revitalizes the everyday to reveal something new about ourselves, and the revelation is an energy, a spark that has the power to change the world.

#### ***THREE RITES: Life***

**work-in-progress showing**

**Skylight Gallery at RestorationART in Brooklyn, NY**

**Fri. Sept. 6 and Sat. Sept. 7, 2019**

Concept: Edisa Weeks

Choreography: Edisa Weeks in collaboration with the performers

Performers: Devin Oshiro, EmmaGrace Skove-Epes, J'nae Simmons, Johnnie Cruise Mercer

Muralist: Sophia Dawson

Buen Vivir Discussion: John Gershman  
 Creative Re-Use Workshop: Pamela Issac with Materials for the Arts  
 Videography and Editing: Darryl Hell Montgomery  
 Photos: Rebecca Fitton & Julie Lemberger  
 Producer: Mar'ya Wethers  
 Community Programs Coordinator: Rebecca Fitton  
 Creative Advisor: James Scruggs

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Patterned after NPN's model performing arts program, the Visual Artists Network was launched in 2007 as a pilot, and in 2009 the program was formally established through the induction of the VAN Partners, fifteen leading contemporary arts organizations from across the United States.

The boundaries between the performing and visual arts are more than blurred: "Performance art" on the stage and "installations" in a gallery. Using the residency model of a touring performing artist, VAN is a way for the visual artist to engage in community.

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