

Applied Queer, Trans, Feminist Studies Lab

Social Justice in a Name (2022)

This mural project sought to explore and connect a wide range of Feminist and Queer Studies topics central to GITA's mission, in order to stimulate reflection, action, and inspiration, bringing these urgent conversations to a broader community. This lab worked by merry art and social justice with the purpose of understanding intersectionality and oppressions for marginalized groups while realizing the impactful way art can contribute a voice to those same groups. The Lab was facilitated by artist Ralph LeftHandbull and artist/activist Nastasia Santana. The Lab participants were, Angelina Gallagher, Logan Brown, Aim Warren, Aim, Luna Soleil, Lorraine Seals-Williams, Lorraine, Hang Pham, Hang and Johnson, Elizabeth.

The Gender Institute for Teaching and Advocacy designed an applied Queer|Trans|Feminist Lab to reflect on queer and feminist theory, utilizing academic curriculum and students' own lived experiences to provide perspective through artistic activism. Nine students reflected on the concepts, methods, and theories examined in this lab that connected with each of the letters of the acronym of GITA (Gender Institute for Teaching and Advocacy).

G: Gender, Growth

I: Intersectionality, Indigenous Justice

T: Transgender Rights, Transformative Justice

A: African-American (Black) Feminisms, Abortion Rights

G and T:

Policing of people's bodies. There are methods used in our lives that force us into performing gender "correctly". Through socialization, marketing, and even law, people are not always given choice and respect when it comes to their bodily autonomy. From bathroom policies to actual law preventing gender affirming surgery, leaders, laws and policies and our common social and cultural agreements continue to keep people and our surrounding spaces in a gender binary world by enforcing roles, expressions, and expectations.

I:

Leaving space for identities and knowing the meaning and impacts of intersectionality.

Central to feminisms is the idea that people are affected by various forms of oppression. Some people can be more impacted than others, but all are impacted in a way or another. In daily life, the effects are felt through microaggressions, prejudice assumptions, or violence directed toward individuals by virtue of these systems of oppression. Intersectionality is a tool to see how various forms of oppression coalesce and target various individual aspects of the self.

A:

Systems of power and how we can dismantle them. Systems of power manifest through institutions as large and influential as the legislative, judiciary, or executive branches of government, or smaller spaces like schools, hospitals, or places of business (larger corporations like film industries or small businesses such as shopping malls, Target or Kohl's). These institutions can possess authority, cultural/societal powers, or great significance that can make it difficult to thwart their collective and individual conditioning on those in or around them. These forces can be inaccessible, exclusive to certain identities, and strong standing in collective discrimination.

The artistic portion of this lab was meant to capture these concepts and theories and provide a way for others to see a visual representation of the discussions during the Applied Queer|Trans|Feminist Lab. Some important themes to note from these pieces are the uses of

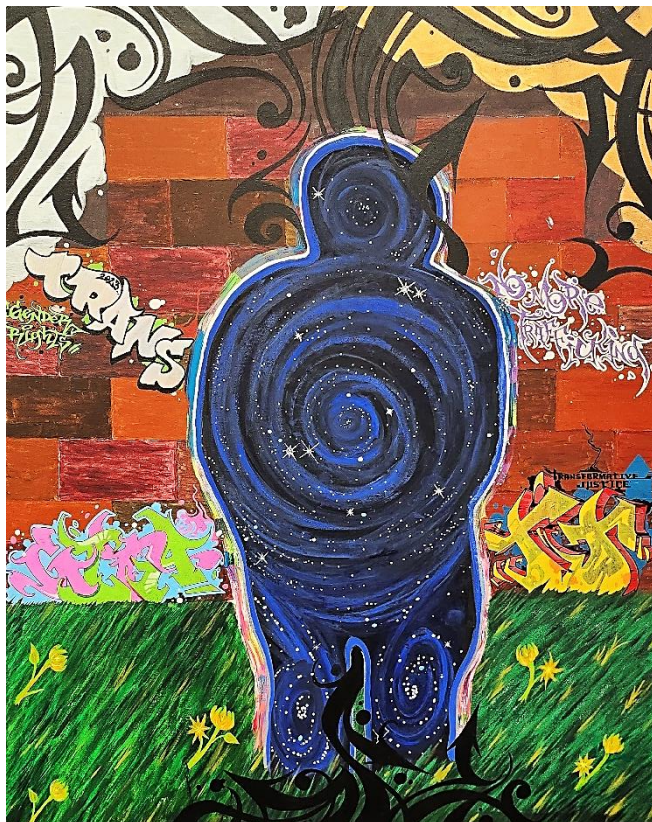


colors and the composition of each color in relation to the piece and its underlying meaning. The clear messaging of androgyny and the non-binary in this piece are seen through the common gender binary representation of pink and blue, meshing to form a cohesive purple. The way the figures are surrounded by blooming growth in symbolic earthly and floral designs portrays the beauty of embracing identities and potentially the growth that comes with embracing and fostering others. All these beautiful colors and symbols surrounded by the tangled and oppressive barbed wire and clouds, darker and muddy compared to surrounding colors, showing the intruding forces of oppression within the work.

The following piece extends on the prior to show intersectionality at the crossroads of the many building blocks of individual identities. Each component branching off a single sturdy piece of wood to show the many that comprise the whole person. This work also contains



similar colors from the last piece, holding strong in their representation of gender and its enforced categorization. The way that the words on the crossroads sign begin to cross over one another showing their connection to each other, the underlying message being that one person cannot face hardship from only a single form of oppression, but that they exist simultaneously. The theme of growth, yet also identity entanglements, is portrayed in the overgrowth of vines. Still people grow, change, and thrive in the face of adversity, ultimately forming into a whole being by overcoming and facing hardships, embracing, and changing aspects of the self, and finding community when others reach a similar crossroad together.



Within this third piece, there is a universe of expression occurring as the barbed encroaches upon it to drown it out. Many forms of oppression exist just to keep self-expression at bay, but an entire universal story exists inside every body, and no harmless form of demonstrating that should go snuffed out. Again, as with the prior pieces described above, there is growth, yet this growth remains settled, not wrapping around its surroundings or swallowing them. This person knows their story and is determined to show the solar system within them. They walk through expansion with confidence and cosmos to share.

The final artwork of this lab may require little explanation, but the focus of this work was to draw on dismantling the institutions that place effort, support, and intention on oppression. This painting also provides a feel for what the world would be like if these systems were given room to thrive. For instance, if these

flames are fanned, these fires may engulf the society from which they stem, yet if dismantled, their power will be taken away, they will turn to ash and the flames extinguished.



In all, there are important steps to take when understanding and working on social justice issues. Whether you are passionate about an issue and simply want to provide another voice, or you are impacted by an issue and must fight for your survival, this lab has displayed an effective and meaningful way to express your truth. First, always educate yourself as it pertains to topics of passion and interest. Knowledge is power and a great foundation to work towards the most practical solutions. In other ways, knowing what supports your opinion and the potential counter arguments people could throw at you only give strength to your voice when speaking up. Next, find your space. The places where others support you and build you up, ready to aid in a mission of liberation against oppressive powers, is the place where you generate traction. And last, never underestimate the power of intersecting oppressions and always bear in mind that no one person is affected only by one form of oppression. Some may be affected more than others, and some individuals are at greater risk, but never can there be only one force at work in people's lives. Addressing these social justice issues with all these points in mind will push a voice forward, especially when expressing the self through art. With knowledge, a safe space, and the understanding of

intersectionality, one's art on a social justice issue will not only speak to the hearts of many who have been negatively impacted by oppression, prejudice, and discrimination, but it will speak in a way that breaks language barriers, that is clear and apparent to onlookers. Art will show *and* tell the lived experiences of those who fully seek to convey and portray what it looks like, feels like, and means to be affected. In the end, this is a form of protest that can speak beyond borders, sparking knowledgeable and inspired action in unique forms, leading to a world where people authentically express their truths.

Research and writing by GITA student-staff: Klorinda Marshall