

INK NEWS

Volume 42 Issue 4, April 2021



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Although there were no new DreamMaker presentations at the March board meeting, there was plenty to talk about. The board is reviewing and finalizing the recruitment package for the new Executive Director. I really am retiring at the end of the year. I won't go away, but I'll be working on finishing old projects, starting new projects, and making art. I think I may only be retiring from my salary.

We are so-o-o close to being in a safer place, where we can mingle and soak in art – visual, theater, music, poetry, performance, you name it! So, let's not bungle this by moving too quickly. I got both my Moderna vaccines and encourage everyone to get any of the vaccines.

April showers bring May flowers, so I hope it rains.

We are planning some fun fundraisers, so stay tuned.

On to the NEW normal!

Mission Statement

The Ink People changes lives by connecting our communities with resources for cultural development. We encourage people to exercise their humanity, build civic discourse, and engage their creative potential.



APRIL 2021

FEATURES



2: Ink Spawn

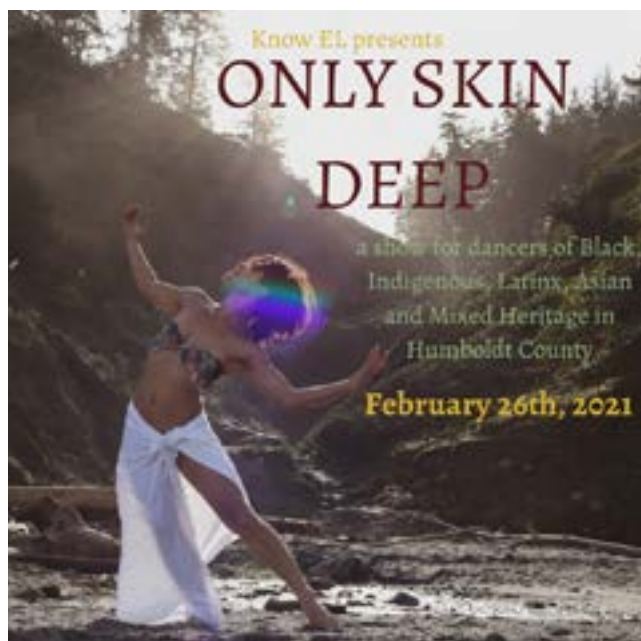
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ONLY SKIN DEEP

A new DreamMaker project

Rachel Sanders is the dancer and choreographer behind the performance series “Only Skin Deep,” the Ink People’s newest dance-oriented DreamMaker project. Ink News checked in with Sanders on Zoom this month to find out more about how her project got its start.

“I basically had this idea to do a dance show that was centered around dancers of color in Humboldt County,” Sanders explained. “I wanted to focus on dance, because I feel like sometimes it can get overlooked. I wanted to have the central focus be uplifting and amplifying the voices of our local artists of color.

“Part of the reason I wanted to do this was to let artists of color speak their own minds and voices and hearts. People of color have a very rich history in the performing arts, but oftentimes they were manipulated and abused into certain pathways, certain genres, going back all the way to minstrelsy. Not like we’re going to undo all of that, or unpack all of that, with this show or anything — but I do feel like it’s important to let artists of color speak for themselves and express themselves how they want to. That’s where the series title comes from as well. My skin color is just that — there’s a whole lot more to me.”

Sanders wants to use dance to tackle the experience of having mixed heritage as well. “Not being able to check one box or another and like having, like, this disjointed identity: I think that describes a lot of people. Addressing that unique experience in our modern culture is kind of important.”

The first “Only Skin Deep” performances took place last September and February; a third is planned for this fall. Previous events focused intensively on dance, but Sanders is planning more of a variety show this time around, with music videos and recordings of musical performances joining the roster.

The financial success of the first performance last September made it possible for Sanders to pay participating artists for the second event. “I could actually start out by sending each of the participants \$50. It’s a small amount, but it can mean a lot for a performer: it might help them to purchase or rent a new camera, or a new costume, or stage lights for their home studio.

“I want ‘Only Skin Deep’ to be something that can create income on a seasonal basis for the participant artists,” Sanders continued. “I’d love for the show to be able to generate the funds to make itself better.

Art Institutions, Cultural Resumes, & Cultural Wealth

Nanette Kelley

In the Regional Perspectives series, Humboldt County artists and creative workers share their ideas about art and culture today.

The art industry values both an Artist Resume and a Curriculum Vitae (CV), which highlight exhibitions, academics, publications, grants, and fellowships awarded. However, what about an artist with community cultural art expertise and no paper trail?

A cultural resume includes collective knowledge of place, community, family, and traditions. In fact, the cultural resume of a community elder or other knowledge keeper is more important than the industry standard. A community's collective knowledge base and skill sets can ultimately be the basis for the survival of an entire culture.

The term cultural resume is used here within the context of cultural knowledge: systems which represent cultural sovereignty, an aspect of self-determination, including the inherent right to protect, preserve, and revitalize one's culture.

Artists who may lack a western academic background or exhibition history, yet possess expertise in their own cultural knowledge systems are not beholden to Euro-style art academia paradigms. They are the lineal descendants of those with ancestral knowledge from time immemorial.

Lily Kharrazi, Director of Special Initiatives at the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA), explained that when applying to art institutions and funders, a strong cover letter detailing those intangible cultural assets and expertise is one way to highlight cultural knowledge.

She stressed, in addition, that at this time of social upheaval, policy issues regarding art institutions have become more conversational, so there is an opportunity to challenge the dominant voice because "the funding world needs to do better."

It is essential for art organizations such as funding sources, museums, and galleries to be racially equitable and to accord applicants whose strength lies in their cultural assets the same merit as applicants who are well-documented in western art forms. Ra-



cial equity includes viewing a culture through a positive lens, rather than in terms of its deficits. In fact, a prevalent form of contemporary racism is deficit thinking. Plainly stated, deficit thinking inhibits equity when one focuses on the injustices perpetrated against a culture instead of its cultural assets. The use of a deficit lens undermines accomplishments, knowledge, and intrinsic value.

According to UNESCO, the definition of local and Indigenous knowledge refers to “the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings.” In other words, a people’s connection to their land has cultural value. It represents community cultural wealth. Therefore, art orga-

nizations need to shift their viewpoint from seeing disadvantages toward acknowledging cultural wealth.

With recent cultural imposters in the news, including entertainers and academics who claimed to be another race to gain recognition and resources, organizations may want to consider performing cultural wealth checks. Just as banks do credit checks for capital when lending money, an institution or a grantor should do a cultural wealth check on an applicant. I have personally been on grant panels and argued with ill-informed panelists regarding applicants who teach specific “cultural arts,” yet offer no evidence of the appropriate cultural knowledge base. Imposters

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Project Sojourn Blog: King Salmon, Nov. 2020

Jenny Downs

Just before the pandemic announced itself, I visited the southern California desert. Near Salton Sea, I held hands with my beloved to explore Bombay Beach, where, mixed with the obvious signs of decay, there were captivating symptoms of resilient life. Beneath the scorching sun we found oddly lovely art installations, bountiful gardens and a “drive-in” theater, where rusted-out classic cars served as seating. I photographed him exploring like a boy, grinning from within an ancient red Buick. He snapped one of me, happily leaning against his old blue Ford truck. An unspoken wonder flowed between us in response to this unusual tourist attraction.

A few weeks later, the shelter-in-place order came. With that, the pandemic struck my life intimately. A suddenly cold phone call informed me that this long-distance relationship would not be a reliable source of support as the world moved into the coming unknown.

For months, while the pandemic was changing everything, I sewed masks, attended Zoom meetings, and remembered that tender moment in Bombay Beach. I squeezed my hand around a growing desire to find and describe the strength of the human spirit we had engaged with in that unusual town. It had infected both of us with the joy I still see in those vacation photographs. I grew infatuated with the intersection of creativity and resilience.

I know I am not alone in feeling myself a captive of this virus. Like many of us, I did



what I felt was right by keeping close to home through the long months. Still, a wanderlust has been rising in me. I used mine to dream and to plan for a poetry project that would take me back to the desert and anywhere else in California where resilience is the fabric of the community. I am entranced by the spirit's urge to thrive and the way that creativity always seems to reside at the heart of this.

I converted my tiny Scion into a camper so I could seek out and be ready, when the time came, to explore the poetics of resilience. I am allowing my curiosity for curiously named places to be my guide. My task as a Sojourner is to collect what I find, mix it with study and wisdom, and like an alchemist convert this into my art. I am thrilled to share this journey and its poems. The first one is from our very own community of King Salmon.

ONLY SKIN DEEP

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I would also love for funds raised through donations and ticket sales to be enough to not only pay the artists, but also to donate to a local organization or charity. The first time, I paid all the artists and then I donated \$100 to Food for People on behalf of the show. This time, one of our cast members is working on an animal rescue project, so we may end up sending some proceeds to her cause.” Only Skin Deep became a DreamMaker project this year because, Sanders said, “I suddenly found myself in the middle of this whole project that got much bigger than I was expecting it to be initially — time- and energy-wise, but also skill-wise. I need to make sure that the finances are handled in a responsible way and that people are paid out in a timely manner.” Sanders is currently preparing for the next “Only Skin Deep” performance, which will be the first to involve a live dimension. “Everybody seems pretty down with creating and sending videos, so that’s how we’ve been doing it during quarantine. But I hope we can perform for an actual audience soon. I’m planning for the next show to be a hybrid of video and live performance.” She pauses, smiling at the prospect of dancing again in front of a live audience. “I’m really hoping to get some of the dancers back into the studio space with me.”

Check out the “Only Skin Deep” Facebook page to learn more about upcoming performances.

Art Institutions, Cultural Resumes & Cultural Wealth

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who build their resumes on deceit will undermine an applicant of real expertise. It is the responsibility of the organization to consider not only the cultural merit of the artist, but the expertise of the review panel as well.

At the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (NACF) symposium in March, artists and educators discussed and explored action steps for the Native Arts and Culture: Resilience, Reclamation, and Relevance convening report including highlighting best practices and common challenges for organizations regarding Native arts and cultural knowledge.

Each presenter made an argument that art organizations should value those with traditional ways of knowing. “Many of our elders do not have the academic background,” Shelley C. Lowe of the Harvard University Native American program said. She stressed concern for valuation practices, and explained it is not always fair to rank an applicant who has years of experience writing proposals and playing the recognition game in comparison to a small organization or an unreviewed, non-degreed individual with cultural expertise. For any arts community to be truly equitable, those who possess thousands of years of a collective cultural knowledge system and decades of experience working within their own communities need to be on both the review and the grantee sides of the community arts reckoning.

Nanette Kelley (Osage Nation/Cherokee Nation) is the 2021 California Arts Council Administrators of Color Fellow for the Greater Northern Region hosted at the Ink People Center for the Arts.

Seaside Advisory

Jenny Downs

The nails and window frames gathered what the ocean exhaled.
Pastel fence boards hung faded down Halibut Street. Friendly women waved hello while
I thought of the thousand sorrowful reasons a girl might never have learned
How to beware of the dogs.

Walking alone on Sole Street when the sun is shining is one way to learn acceptance.
A person could right her wrongs. A body could get in sync. Get so aligned
It would feel exactly like Hubble telescope images of ancient galaxies. Who knows?
They may yet be spinning themselves spiral.

On Perch Street, one of the women spoke. Not to invite me to stay on.
But to look me in the eye and say that until one has slept in a killer's grave
Anyone is likely as innocent as anyone. No matter how delinquent
Anyone might seem.

When I reached Crab Street another woman told me that hell yes
Is the only answer that is not no. Especially if I'm going to be an ongoing stabilization project.

On Cod Street, feeling solid, I watched a woman climb out through the round window
Of a shack built like a birdhouse. She dangled her legs from the roof. She smiled like Felix the
Cat.
Her voice, like a seagull, cried out. *If you are dissatisfied when you leave here- you cannot be
returned.*

Jenny Downs currently lives in Eureka, California, where she teaches at-risk teens to share the furious spirit of youth in their poems. Jenny has unofficially been a poet since her own adolescence and recently got hitched to this notion by earning her MFA in the Low Residency Program of Oregon State University, Cascades, in June of 2020. As part of Project Sojourn she is traveling to regional sites and writing poems about her experiences. The first poem in the series, "Seaside Advisory" was inspired by a recent trip to King Salmon.

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