

what the hELL she doin'



“What the hELL she doin!” is a collective of four female-identifying artists from across the African continent and its Diasporas. Common to our respective practices are touchstones, which include but are not limited to: the body and what gets embodied, remembering and dismembering, standing and leaving, invisible creolization, and labor as geography.

Collectively we use “things” from our own black and brown domestic spheres; not to examine the notion of home, instead, we use the materiality of our domestic in paradigm-namic ways to explain the rest of the world. A colossal reversal of knowledge and meta-text production that is commonly understood as happening outside of the domestic sphere. “What the hell..” is what we most often hear whilst doing.

Our aim as an enduring and powerful collective is to shift narratives and impact critical situations commonly long thought of as not being critical. Our objective is to gather theorists, writers and other artists to objectively contextualize our endeavors and shift discourses to a deeper level. As a collective, we look forward to more agency, stamina, and meaningful impact. We wish to thrive in an art world cannon where cross Atlantic, cross-diasporic voices can be experienced with a whole earth view devoid of marginalization.

We have compiled a booklet for Self-care and autonomy. You will find some advice, take it or leave it no harm no foul. This is intended to help for those times when you’re navigating the sea of shit in which we sometimes sadly more than often find ourselves in.

Please note this advice comes from our varied experiences as artists, art educators, curators, cultural producers and our lived experience as women of colour.

<https://www.whatthehellshedoin.net/>

Sonia E Barrett’s advice for artists



Oshun’s Smile, Sonia E. Barrett  
wood prototype for metallic casting, 120 x 30 cm, 2020

These are the things I am still learning to do today wherever I work be it the Caribbean, The African Continent or Europe.

These are the things that should perhaps always be a stretch and that is ok

From an embodied practice:

Being a black female artist comes with a number of burdens but you don’t have to manifest them in that way. I think Rinproche is helpful:

“Even if you have a lot of work to do, if you think of it as wonderful, and if you feel it as wonderful, it will transform into the energy of joy and fire, instead of becoming a burden.”

- Tulku Thondup Rinpoche

If you cannot think it as wonderful, (and I often fail at this) then practice self-care like your life depends on it. (It might your artistic life at least maybe even your life-life) (and I often fail at this too)



From starting the AIPCC a space centering black creativity and thought.

Do whatever it takes to claim space, more than you think you need, then share it. Holding the space even when people cannot show up this time is also the work, honor that. Don't hold yourself to prevailing standards of instituting, don't focus on funding focus on people, what you already have what you can already give. Others will see it can be done and will institute too. In this way your efforts will be doubled and redoubled in ways you cannot imagine.

From my practice of performing furniture to look beyond objectification:

Don't be afraid to look foolish, in my practice of listening to chairs I know I appeared to be "unhinged" but it was coming from a place of pure love and deep listening and so I trusted it. Trust the impulses that come from your internal deep spaces that may not make sense in the external spaces you are in; those external spaces might not be intended for you anyhow.



Table Nr. 8, Sonia E. Barrett  
Gold leaf tray, ceramic furniture wheels, styrofoam, wood table legs 30 x 60 x 160cm, 2012

My experience and response as a female artist of colour: Usha Seejarim

- Live your truth. Be authentic and trust your own voice, even if it goes against the grain at the time. Working with integrity stands for more than you realize.
- Endure. Stay with it. Push, pull and challenge the status quo. There is something to be said of Staying Power.... Keep moving, and build the momentum.
- Having just advised to build momentum, it is equally important to be still, be quiet and connect within.
- For a long time, I spoke with a small voice. I have learned to trust my position and build the confidence to speak up, to express myself and to point out the hypocrisies and contradictions. I have learned that when this voice is concise and expressed from a place of clarity, growth, equality maybe even criticism, it will be heard loudly.
- Find the balance of being selfless and practice self-care. Give, share, love and teach others but also know when to look after yourself.
- Acknowledge your Creative Capital. The fact that you do so many diverse things should not be a problem; it is an asset. And all these separate and distinct skills and expertise contribute to who you are. Embrace them and let your unique magic shine through your multi-faceted self.
- Be proactive; set the agenda, drive the conversation, claim your power and direct your own course.
- Question, be critical, challenge.....and then act on it!
- Do what it takes to get into “the zone” of creating. Work from a studio, give yourself time to work, to play, suspend judgement until the work is more developed, enjoy being alone and fall in love with your own work.



Wash Cycle, Usha Seejarim  
(Film Still), Video, 00:05:49, 2021

#### Advice from Immy Mali

- Make sure you understand all the gibberish in the contract before you agree to them.
- Have dinner with a random family if you go to a place; it always reveals weird things and interesting things. It doesn't really have to be a family it can just be people you've met there.
- Be spontaneous!



Searched Archive, Immy Mali

Video Still, Blood, Paper Stool & Performance, 28.4 x 28.4 x 29.8cm, Performance duration variable 1hr - 3hrs, 2016

10 points to remember, use, re-remind yourself to use - Syowia Kyambi

1. Get it in writing, even when it was a phone call, write an email with an update on what was discussed
2. Infiltrate and constipate
3. Professionalize yourself, raise your own standard, and don't assume that the institution is professional
4. Discomfort is your best friend. Sit inside of discomfort
5. Don't ask don't get
6. Develop your autonomy. Practice it. Start by asking whose trajectory are you role-playing in? Then look at the nuances then it's time for navigation to the place you want to be in.
7. On my studio wall I once wrote, get the tools you need to navigate the sea of shit
8. Be conscious of the language you use, make it deliberate, define your own as needed
9. Surround yourself with positive people; mix up your peer group
10. Audience is fluid



Between Us, Chapter I, Syowia Kyambi  
Video Still, Installation Performance, Duration 2hr -30min, GoDown Art Centre, Kenya, 2014

Thanks for your time. Good luck with creating, building upon your self care practice and autonomy!

