

ON LOSS AND RESILIENCE

Laments as embodied archives: a reflection on artistic practices of grief

We come together for a full day of sharing stories, space and practices of mourning through bodies, singing and gathering.

As an echo to her current exhibition ‘No Body’s Body’, Hoda Siahtiri brings together a community of artists, practitioners and allies drawn to and engaged in practices of lamentation as forms of knowledge sharing, condolence, release and reconciliation. As an important form of storytelling and emotional release, lamens hold a significant part of individual and collective memories. How does the body hold those memories, how to give form to the sorrow of grief, how does releasing pain become a practice of love? During a day-long assembly of voices, we create space for sharing, reflecting and re-membering.

The event is made possible by ARIA (Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts).

PROGRAM

Part 1 | talks

10:30 - 11:00 Welcome

11:00 - 11:20 Hoda Siahtiri, Singing The Silences

Inspired by the lamenting tradition of Bakhtiari women, Hoda Siahtiri raises questions about rights to grief in our hyper-productive era. She will unravel her discoveries and confusions in the process of mourning through the frame of the exhibition No Body’s Body. She will discuss how practices of grief can turn into individual and social acts of resistance and resilience, and how lamentation can become a living archive of personal and communal histories threatened by elimination.

11:20 - 11:40 Fleur Pierets, on loss and queer activism

Fleur Pierets will talk about the work she and her wife Julian Boom did as a female artist couple. In 2017, they started 22–The Project, a performance art piece in which the couple would marry in every country that legalized same-sex marriage. There were 22 countries when they launched the project in 2017; since then, the number of countries has grown to 28. After the 4th wedding, Julian was diagnosed with brain cancer. She died on January 22, 2018. Fleur will tackle the importance of completing this wedding performance piece through her children’s book “Love Around the World”. She will also discuss her online publication Et Alors? Magazine devoted to LGBTQ+ politics, art, fashion and identity, and address her need to keep on working as a human rights advocate by launching bridge building projects.

11:40 - 12:15 Conversation with Hoda Siahtiri and Fleur Pierets

12:30 - 13:00 Eliana Otta, Introducing Fertilizing Mourning (online)

Eliana will present a brief tour through the process that led her to propose the notion of Fertilizing Mourning, as an invitation to collectively create the kind of mourning practices that human and more than human losses demand from us today. Inspired by antique Amazonian agricultural techniques, this proposition demands us to rethink the relationship between life and death, deconstructing dichotomic oppositions towards crafting a regenerative offering from the Global South to a world in flames.

13:00 - 14:30 Lunch break

14:30 - 15:00 Gabrielle Goliath, A life work of mourning (online)

The histories, life worlds, and present-day conditions of Black femme life are bound to historical formations of colonial power, placing it in proximate relation to a racial-sexual violence paradigm that governs and organises the social world. Tethered to the libidinal violence of imperialism, race and rape inexorably converge; this is the object-making, death-dealing violence of the historic traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, which continue to single out and mark certain bodies as rapeable, violable, disposable, and killable. In this presentation, South African artist Gabrielle Goliath will speak to the tenuous but insistent labour she calls the “life work of mourning”, realised in her work as a performed reinscription of Black femme life, on terms other than negation and death.

15:00 - 15:30 Bint Mbareh, Singing it out of me: Palestinian personal and collective mourning

Bint Mbareh searches for rituals extending from the body into the different types of labor that reflect back onto the body what it is, where it lives, and what the time is right now. She looks at Palestinian mourning practices as practices of resistance and resilience. The examples she examines are the practice of coloring one's clothes to mourn loss, casting a wedding instead of a funeral for a martyr, and the songs sung for these occasions. She delves into these practices, which she uses as the starting point for her own work in film and performance.

15:30 - 16:00 oracle, Touching the Missing

The symposium coincides with a process of looking through the until recently untouched notebooks of Michel Yang, the third founding member of oracle who died in August 2020, accompanied by oracle. How to accompany death? What tools does an artistic practice like oracle offer to accompany death? In their presentation, oracle will improvise a meandering through this material. Voice will be present, as will be texts, practice and the missing.

16:00 - 17:00 Break on the terrace

Part 2 | performance

17:00 - 18:30 Raoni Muzho Saleh, Moaning Mourning, Mourning Moaning, to Moan in Order to Mourn and to Mourn in Order to Moan

What does it require of us to listen to that moaning breathing breathe-ren that we already are? What are we trying to open up, to reveal, to cut through by attending to our neverending wailing? What are we performing when we gather for this rehearsal of moaning? When we gather in our mourning, in this endless polyphonic moaning, our sonic lamentations cut through the unapproachable futurity of justice. When we let our mourning sound through a continuous rehearsal of the moan, the futurity of justice is fearlessly approached. It is our politics and intimacy of justice, of an utopian longing, that is practiced within each rehearsal and performance of our mourning. To shame someone's ever precious moaning/mourning into hiding or extortion is therefore an active deferral of the futurity of justice. In this short time together, we will practice to listen to the wounds, from which we are sounding from, through the sharing of our moaning. We will practice to tap into the sensuality of our wailing sonic landscape. We will practice leaning into and brushing up against the (imagined) stories that one another's whining is sharing with us.

Gabrielle Goliath works with and within the histories, life worlds and present-day conditions of black, brown, femme and queer life, refusing its terminal demarcation within a racial-sexual paradigm of violence that governs post-colonial/post-apartheid social worlds. For Goliath, this is the life-work of mourning – as conditions for hope – “to imagine and seek to realize the world otherwise is to bear with us those lost to or still surviving an order of violence we hope to and must transform”.

Bint Mbareh is a musician and researcher in Palestinian folkloric sounds and their superpowers when used in community. She has conducted research to challenge colonial notions of “progress” and the colonisers’ claim to “the future” by bringing to light/life a collection of rain-summoning songs that she gathered in her field research. The songs established that the Gregorian calendar was a reduction of a more complex indigenous calendar that Palestinians were accustomed to, and they also asserted the fact that rain summoning music aided natives in collaborating with nature to alter the seasons to their needs and towards a more generative cycle. Death is regenerative in several ways, physical and spiritual, and Bint Mbareh searches for the sonic iteration of this regeneration/revolution caused by death.

oracle is an eyes-closed body-voice improvisation practice reading diverse spaces: train stations, parks, institutions, forests, public libraries, urban gardens and private living spaces. The name oracle bridges an expansive notion of voice and ineffability, encompassing agency, ambiguity, obscurity, divinity, communication, medium, utterance and wisdom. The practice can offer space for grief, angst, doubts, ancestral or unconscious knowledge; making audible what usually remains hidden, but is nevertheless carried in the voice. oracle was created by Caroline Daish, Justine Maxelon and Michel Yang in 2015 as a need to collaborate, vocalise and heal. Michel passed away in August 2020, accompanied by oracle, friends and family.

<https://oracleoracleoracle.com/>

Caroline Daish is a performer / maker who studied Education (SACAE) and Arts Management (Adelaide Uni). She was Associate Director at Restless Dance Theatre alongside Sally Chance. Caroline creates self-devised performance in collaboration with other artists with a specific curiosity for sound and empathy.

Justine Maxelon is a Brussels-based performer and maker who mainly works collectively around notions of listening, care and the relation between voice, body and its surroundings. She is a practitioner of things. As a core-member of State Of The Arts and Engagement Arts, she is involved in activism and focuses on the thinking around and implementation of fairer arts practices. Together with Ann Weckx and Rasa Alksnyte she is currently setting up a pilot project called de Ambulanten: kunst voor zorg voor kunst that focuses on the intra-section between art and the care sector.

Eliana Otta is an artist with a Master in Cultural Studies, who inquires about our relations with nature and precarious labor in neoliberal, extractivist economies, and also gender inequality, intersectional feminism, poetry and politics. She addresses these questions creating spaces for conversation, trust and curiosity through shared intimacy, with projects that involve pedagogical, curatorial and editorial work. Her current PhD project *Lost & Shared: Approaches to collective mourning, towards affective and transformative politics*, aims to investigate the ways in which art can enable the collectivization of mourning, creating dialogues between theory and affective labor, through collective experiments that connect emotions, critical thinking, body and space.

Fleur Pierets is a Belgian artist, writer and award winning LGBTQ+ activist whose work questions the construction and mainstream understanding of queer identity. She is the founding editor of *Et Alors? Magazine*. Fleur wrote a book called *‘Julian’* about her life with Julian, 22-The Project and grief. The book is intertwined with stories about gay artists and the loss of their partner, and a series of insights on lesbian life and LGBTQ+ human rights. Fleur still works as an artist, a writer and a human rights speaker.

Raoni Muzho Saleh (1991 AFG/NL) is a choreographer/performer based in Amsterdam. He graduated from UvA in 2015, bachelor in Literary and Cultural Analysis and from SNDO, bachelor in Choreography. Born in Afghanistan and raised in Pakistan, his work is shaped by fugitivity as a revolutionary movement. By dancing through the gender spectrum, he has generated a movement practice of becoming other, becoming something unknown to oneself. His recent works are materialisations of “the backspace”, a concept that provokes transformational multiplicity and aims for freedom from the oppressions of solid subjecthood.

Hoda Siahtiri is a multidisciplinary artist based in Brussels. She would like to call herself a disease, someone who narrates stories muted somewhere in the past. Hoda studied Cinema in Tehran and holds a Documentary Film Directing master degree from Docnomads. She has directed a number of short films shown in international festivals. In 2017, she joined the artistic research platform *a.pass* and since then, she has been putting forward her ideas through the medium of performance and audio-visual arts. Since 2020, she is a PhD researcher at Sint Lucas Antwerpen and University of Antwerp where she is working on her project *Singing The Silences*.