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Photo: LaNeshe Miller White

The Painted Bride's Incubated Artists Take Time to Heal

by Maddie Hopfield

In July 2020, when writing about Painted Bride Art Center's [Building Bridges: On the Rise](#) showcase, I [asked](#): Are decentralized, virtual arts organizations the wave of the future? So much has happened since then. The question itself has shifted in my mind, not gone but evolving. These days I do not wonder so much about the formal establishment of the art institution itself but rather about people, about communities, about folks continuing to come together to share art, resources, and make meaning with each other.

Now, on this Sunday in May, I gather with other audience members who witness and participate in the newest offering from the Painted Bride: *Grace Period. A Community Ritual for Collective Healing*. The evening features artists from the original 2020 cohort: Annielille Gavino*, Caitlin Green*, Anthony Carlos Molden, Ursula Rucker, and James Allister Sprang. We meet in front of Germantown Espresso, across the street from Molden's latest sculpture, "Spirits Lighthouse," which will live there permanently.

The piece peers over us, perhaps 8 feet tall, composed of three car tires painted with thick, winding lines of gold and neon. These trimmings are symmetrical but not mechanical, the way one might decorate a cake. The centers of the top tires contain a piece of glass that creates the illusion of two stacked eyes. Molden later describes how he sources all the materials for his sculptures from trash around Philly: repurposing discarded tires or solar-powered lights found on walks, a "creative cleanup." This process is so refreshingly in contrast with the ethos of larger-scale art production—Molden's practice itself exists as part of a local ecosystem, as part of a neighborhood.



Photo: LaNeshe Miller White

Throughout the night, the multifaceted vocal artist Ursula Rucker is our emcee. She cracks jokes about how she has been inside too long to remember how to interact with people, even as she holds space for grief and pain. In her opening meditation *Grace Poem* she implores us: "Let's start over and over, [...] with grace." James Sprang follows Rucker by reading names of those who have died in the past year, his own musical composition providing a soft, gentle backdrop. With each repetition and each name, I feel the loss endured by so many throughout the past year: the loss of time, of loved ones, of innocence, of pieces of ourselves so drastically altered.

Later, as Caitlin Green* and Ani Gavino* dance a new duet, their movement outstretched, sensual, and unhurried, I reflect on the role of the body in processing trauma, how often our physical beings demand more time to heal than external factors will allow. Green repeatedly stretches her right arm carefully toward and away from something, with full presence, with grace. Gavino expands and then collects her limbs inward again. In the music, another composition of Sprang's, a vocalist sings, "All... you need... to do... is go home." Over and over. This road toward healing will be long. A light breeze picks up as the piece ends, with Green and Gavino walking into the distance.



Photo: LaNeshe Miller White

Throughout *Grace Period*, we are invited to partake in the ritual of remembrance ourselves. Some rise up to the mic and speak the names of loved ones lost, some read poems, some remain seated and simply nod, closing their eyes in a private moment of feeling. Tears well up in my eyes as I listen to reflections of lives lost not only in this past year, but lost years and decades ago as well. It has been so long since I've been with others in mourning, physically present and not tucked inside a screen. I come away from this event thankful for the work the Bride and its incubated artists continue to do, and even more excited for an arts culture in which the lines are blurred: between community and ritual, between performance and mourning, between healing and witnessing.

*Ani Gavino is a member of the editorial board, and both Caitlin Green and Gavino are writers for thINKingDANCE.

[Grace Period. A Community Ritual for Collective Healing](#), Annelille Gavino, Caitlin Green, Anthony Carlos Molden, Ursula Rucker, James Allister Sprang, Germantown Espresso Bar, Painted Bride, May 16.

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