Making Art Conscious: A Discussion About Youniverse

hannes bend 12.7.16

The Youniverse exhibit at the cultural institution apexart centers around consciousness, creative and contemplative practices. It offers experiences to the public from about fifty practitioners for free until December 17. There will be transformative technologies (including a Soundself game and virtual reality meditation) for daily visits, bi-weekly breath work and sound baths, workshops and 1-on-1 sessions. The full program can be found under https://apexart.org/exhibitions/bend.php.

This interview was conducted for Reality Sandwich with exhibition organizer hannes bend and project contributors Katie Down, Robin Arnott, La Vonne Natasha Caesar, Debbie Attias, Maria Mishureno, MJ Caselden, Rebecca Conran and Katrine Knauer.

hannes bend: How do you envision and enact community in the city and beyond?

Katie Down: Through thoughtful discourse, listening, and holding space for mutual respect and understanding, we can begin to work with diverse communities towards fostering a deeper connection and healing the wounds of derision and anger.

Rebecca Conran: I would like to see us create more community programs that focus on us asking one another: how are you doing? What do you need? And then practicing active listening with one another. What is required for this is a strong group leader who can hold space for all types of people to come together and share.

La Vonne Natasha Caesar: I strive to envision and enact community within, even as I move through this city and far beyond. At this point of my journey, my inner understanding is that my work is not geographically bound but vibrational, and that my vision and action of community begins with the inner work necessary to live and move as an embodiment of the vibration that perpetuates and fosters Togetherness, Oneness and Love. I set this as the intention that my actions embody, whether I am making tea, teaching a woman’s circle or connecting with another being in the framework of a private session. In a macro sense, I do feel I am attempting to genuinely enact on an individual scale the larger vision I hold space for as Us/All The Human

Is there a communal focus, maybe practicing a modality together?

Katie Down: Metta meditation is very effective and in a group can be very powerful. I find that through communal art-making (dance, art, music, etc), the illusion of independence is shattered and the importance of interdependence is illuminated.

Rebecca Conran: In my Moon classes this is part of the dialogue, and each participant gets to share their current struggles. They all see that the human experience is the same no matter who you are. We are all struggling with fear, feelings of unworthiness, financial security, home stability, and the ability to love and be loved. Our society has become very divided, even within the spiritual community. There is an us vs them feeling at times. We need to seek to truly understand the suffering of others in order to help people to heal. We also need more community discussions, especially in rural areas that encourage unity and understanding because unfortunately we live in a time when rich and powerful people have successfully pinned disenfranchised people against another as a way of controlling us. We need to create more programs based on listening to others and really asking: what are your basic needs that need meeting?

La Vonne Natasha Caesar: I was raised by a Seventh Day Adventist minister, so I always remember my dad saying, “wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in my name I am there.” I think it’s the same with the magic! When we deliberately come together with aligned intention and purpose, so much magic can happen! Change happens this way: inner, outer shifts, spiritual and sociopolitical evolution and growth are triggered and accomplished when the focus shifts from “the cult of ME” to the good of all. While individualized healing is often still necessary to release heavy blockages, mindfulness techniques and modalities inevitably increase in effectiveness when practiced in group. In women’s circle we sip tea and share. The main modality used is community and yet I have seen much powerful healing occur. The magic is in the togetherness!

A friend mentioned to me the idea of moving to a more ‘rural’ America to foster communication and connection. As a non-American, I have little travel experience outside NY and Oregon. Where do you see the benefits and challenges to communicate and introduce contemplative and creative practices? And if so, which ones?
Katie Down: To further reflect on what the previous question posed, I’d like to see artists come together en masse to provide non-judgmental platforms for self expression and communication through the arts as a lens into what we define as “other,” and help facilitate mutual understanding and compassion through creative expression and joy. As a music psychotherapist, I try to hold space for societal trauma, personal trauma, and anxiety when asking ourselves and others to take risks, and open up to deep listening as we strive for connection and communication with our perceived adversaries.

Katrine Knauer: My business partner and I traveled across the United States this past summer, from San Francisco to NYC.

We stopped in many spots along the way, either selling our herbal concoctions or doing workshops. We found people to be very open, and strangely, in some cities where we expected more openness, it was a bit challenging to connect. I think traveling and connecting with people is an important part of my practice and I hope to always have opportunities to do so and share.

Maria Mishurenko: I believe that we as artists could focus more on interactivity and simplicity of our works. Even if the medium is not supposed to be interactive, we could probably find a way to accept feedback and communicate with people. Interactivity also may involve co-authorship — when a person interacts and changes the work of art someway, he becomes a co-author and the emotional impact increases enormously (I think Malia’s workshops are the beautiful examples of this). I believe, that we can be «art facilitators», not just the artists, and take a responsibility to create spaces for sharing and discoveries.

I see the bubble as more of a community awareness than a self awareness, but agree with you that it is always changeable. Our media has a lot to do with how our respective ‘bubbles’ are shaped – I think we can use our practices to work to transcend the dualities.

La Vonne Natasha Caesar: The seer Almíne teaches that, “…the Silence of the Mind is not something that you have to diligently create, it is that which reveals itself when you cease to oppose life.” The energy of “ceasing” is a simple allowing, surrendering energy, as when the meditation teacher says, “release the breath.” Just stop working, even toward “enlightenment” or realization. Simply shift into that receiving divine feminine perspective and take in the awareness that it’s already happened. It’s already happening. The Peace we desire to achieve (by means of this breathing technique or that body movement) is all here. Now. Alive within all of us! The calling is to see this, to truly feel it, and to celebrate its glorious existence: the energy of the divine pulsing in and through us right now.

Even our bodies can be numbed while we remain conscious. Do you sense it is more truthful to say all we really have and are is awareness, and all other “stuff” are gifts?

Robin Arnott: Yeah, you said it better than I could.

Debbie Attias: There are different levels of awareness. I believe the more aware we are, the greater the gifts.

La Vonne Natasha Caesar, “Truth is one but paths are many.” There are infinite paths within which we can explore the Divine: The Eye/I who looks is the same as that what Eye/I seer. We are “that” which we observe to be, and we are able to experience all that we believe we can experience. As our knowledge and understanding of the magic of the universe / realm and body we inhabit grows, so will our ability to deliberately experiment and “play” with the gift(s) of consciousness. We sense this truth when we still our minds, when we release our breath or silence our thoughts, and in all the sacred practices that remind us to release our minds and feel. What arises in that feeling silence is the remembrance of “tat tvam as,” the declaration we find in the Upanishads. Thou are that! I am That….That’s the miracle!

What motivations and intentions do you have with your work?

Robin Arnott: For me, the motivators of Maya are still perfectly present. I want to be of value to my community. I want to do things that people think are cool. But the most earnest motivator for me is to be of service to global awakening, which includes my own awakening. My work teaches me as much as it does other people.

MJ Caselden: Personal Anecdote tied to your question:

I remember participating in a sound bath a few months ago. I felt like I was looking at myself in a mirror. I could see so many things that had been stressing me out about my life lately: ways that I had been measuring my own success in pessimistic ways.

I came out of the experience allowing myself so much more self-acceptance, and just feeling generally better about my life. I carried that into the rest of my work activities, relationships, etc. I feel that in this way, the practice can encourage participants to take the time to look into themselves, and find their own paths to self-healing. I hope that what I offer will bring these types of experiences to others. Responses so far suggest that for some, it is happening.

Debbie Attias: My intentions are to stay awake and aware, to stay focused on a positive vision for the future, to share light, and do what I can to help create more harmony in the world.

La Vonne Natasha Caesar: A Course In Miracles defines a “miracle” as, “a shift in perspective.” And it is the gentleness that life opens and invites us into with every falling leaf and opening flower. This perspective of mirrored oneness. I Am That, swallows and dissolves any bubble, boundary or myth of separation. Often the prayer for shift is unconscious and the answer can arrive, as it did to my life, with the trauma of a coma and a blow to the head! But the beauty of physical, mental or emotional trauma is the gift of an experiential journey that cannot be argued or denied. The alchemy of transforming your trial into triumph is Jñána, the Sanskrit term for true knowledge that is arrived at through experience. My intention with my practice is to facilitate for others a physical vibratory experience of the receptive feminine energy vibration of Oneness that is the original Womb where and from which all things are made. It is the vibratory experience I entered into upon leaving my body via a near death experience and grounded in the very physical healing journey of re-entry into the physical brain and body. I am holding space for this vibration whether doing bodywork, shamanic work energy work or making a cup of tea. It is a gift and honor to share this unnameable, infinite Light and to learn from every human story that is drawn into my experience. We are together on this path. Let’s us fill it with the unique vibe we radiate and hold.

http://realitiesandwich.com/321073/making-art-conscious-a-discussion-about-youniverse/