What is WMM—

Seeing the world through a new lens.

The Women’s Mobile Museum (WMM) is a collaboration between the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center (PPAC), the South African visual activist Zanele Muholi, and 10 Philadelphia artists who identify as women and femmes. It is an ambitious project that comes at a time when women are re-examining the barriers they face to achieving political and economic legitimacy and to effecting social change towards equal rights. It includes an artist residency for Muholi; a year-long, paid apprenticeship in the media arts for the participants; an exhibition that will have toured three locations in Philadelphia; and a culminating exhibition at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center January 24–March 30, 2019.

When Muholi accepted PPAC’s offer of an artist residency, they generously proposed to work with Philadelphia women and share with them their legacy of tools, experience, and knowledge. They also invited the South African teaching artist Lindeka Qampi and Autograph ABP London Curator Renée Mussai to help train and mentor the artists.

The Women’s Mobile Museum is a vehicle in the metaphorical sense. It is both a manifesto and a delivery system for reclaiming the space and function of presenting art. It challenges the current hierarchy of the art world and, more broadly, of the intellectual world. The artists of the Women’s Mobile Museum envision a decolonized art museum that welcomes all people. Who is art for? Us too.

Publisher: Philadelphia Photo Arts Center
Editors: afaq, Anna Badkhen, Danielle Morris, Shasta Bady, Andrea Walls, and Lori Waselchuk
Photo Editor: Shana-Adina Roberts
Design: J2 Design

I Whisper In Silence My Presence by Shana-Adina Roberts
Next page: Flagged by Andrea Walls
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Occupy and Share

Zanele Muholi’s Women’s Mobile Museum began with a challenge to the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center (PPAC) to create a museum that would break down barriers to access, acceptance, and representation for women in art institutions in Philadelphia.

Muholi and I have known each other since 2003, when I was an instructor at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg, where Muholi was a student. I cannot forget their earliest images—unflinching, compassionate portraits of loved ones, of friends from within their Black LGBTQI community; photographs of physical scars on bodies, evidence of the aftermath of gender-based violence. Every image was an urgent plea to see the women they loved, and know that the artist and subject’s very existence placed them in danger. These early images prefaced Muholi’s collaborative portraiture project, Faces and Phases, which forces public discussion about the homophobia, prejudice, and extreme violence perpetrated on this community. Muholi describes their artistic practice as visual activism—their work looks at Black existence, resistance, and insistence.

In 2016, Muholi accepted PPAC’s invitation to an artist residency in Philadelphia. Since their practice includes sharing resources and opportunities with women, girls, and gender nonconforming people, Muholi asked to collaborate with Philadelphia women who have been unable to access arts education or opportunities. As we planned the project over transatlantic phone calls, Muholi’s ideas flowed more urgent and radical than ever: train women in photography, video, museum studies, public speaking, archive research; empower their stories, their histories; teach self-love; challenge their representation in and access to museums; create a museum that can travel to communities underserved by the city’s arts institutions; create opportunities for the women’s photographs to be seen and included in collections, archives, and museums.

Muholi named the project the Women’s Mobile Museum (also known as WMM) and hoped that ultimately, it would build artistic careers and provide jobs. Muholi insisted that every contracted creative position in the project—artist, curator, coordinator, graphic designer, and filmmaker—must agree to mentor participants. Finally, they wanted the Women’s Mobile Museum to partner with other arts organizations to create opportunities for the women participants to travel and present their work in exhibitions and lectures.

PPAC welcomed Muholi’s vision. We recognized that the social and political climate—locally, nationally, and globally—critically needed a project that would amplify women’s stories and creative work. PPAC is a small arts organization, but we felt emboldened to take on this project. We had just completed The Philly Block Project with Hank Willis Thomas in 2016—an 18-month project in which Thomas collaborated with residents in PPAC’s immediate neighborhood of South Kensington to create a contemporary series of portraits that documented its people and its history. Muholi’s Women’s Mobile Museum would focus less on public engagement. Instead, it would require sustained and intimate interaction between practicing artists.

Most of the Women’s Mobile Museum’s work took place in a studio near PPAC’s premises. We brought on board Dr. Kathleen Walls, a psychologist, to help the participants cope with the stressful demands of the project and the changes that they would experience. We connected with two community partners in two Philadelphia neighborhoods, the Juniata Action Committee in Juniata Park, and Diversified Community Services in Point Breeze. First, these organizations helped PPAC recruit participants for the neighborhood; then, in the later stages of the program, they would provide community exhibition spaces for the Women’s Mobile Museum’s traveling show.

“Radical social change had to be viewed as a two-sided transformational process, of ourselves and of our institutions, a process requiring protracted struggle and not just a D-day replacement of one set of rulers with another.”

—Grace Lee Boggs

WRITING & PHOTOGRAPHY: Lori Waselchuk

PHOTO (BELOW): Left to right: Andreas Walls, Tash Billington, Danielle Morris, Lerato Domes, afaq, Danielle Barnes, Zanele Muholi

Radical social change had to be viewed as a two-sided transformational process, of ourselves and of our institutions, a process requiring protracted struggle and not just a D-day replacement of one set of rulers with another.”

—Grace Lee Boggs
PPAC wanted WMM to be a co-op and curative space, a true collaboration with women who have not felt welcome in arts institutions nor have had the financial resources to engage with photography before.

PPAC reached out citywide to recruit interested applicants. Our application was simple: we wanted the women to describe themselves and explain why they were interested in the program. Applicants could type, handwrite, or even phone in their answers. We didn’t ask for a portfolio or resume. We wanted to make sure to clear away as many barriers to participation in the program as possible. We interviewed each of the 59 applicants in person.

When the project launched last February, only two of the 10 women we had selected to take part in the program had worked with a DSLR camera before. Several of the participants had never visited an art museum. All had felt that their creative ideas and interests were not encouraged within their communities. For the first three months, we trained in photography and video. We studied photography technique, theory, and history. We attended lectures and artist talks. We heard lectures from guest artists and learned about professional sustainability and development from Artists U. We participated in a community parade in Juniata Park and set up a free family portrait studio in Point Breeze.

From the beginning, the Women’s Mobile Museum engaged directly with the politics of art and institutional representation. The politics are complicated and painful, so I sought advice from my friend Anna West, a poet and radical educator in Baton Rouge, LA. In our conversation she asked, “What happens when art becomes the false point of contact—when audience is made to believe that they have experienced the ‘other’ in a museum?” West continued, “It is a dominating encounter, managed by the institution.” The questions WMM poses are similar: Who is art for? Who is represented in our art institutions? How can we challenge the mainstream curatorship that mediates by way of colonial gaze? We visited major art museums in the city and met with curators. We visited historical collections and spoke with archivists. By exploring Philadelphia’s institutions, we formed a clearer picture of what lives and experiences were obscured from the record, and a stronger sense of how our work might assert and reclaim them.

In May, Muholi arrived in Philadelphia for an intensive six-week workshop with the WMM artists. Renée Mussai, Head Curator at Autograph ABP London, joined Muholi to share her curatorial practice and visit the two community exhibition sites with WMM artists. A second teaching artist, Lindeka Qampi, arrived in June, and the women presented their work in weekly critiques. By August, we were building our exhibition and preparing to launch our first community exhibition of the mobile museum in Juniata Park in late September.

As we prepared for the first exhibition, we began to explore how to make the museum accessible. Sister M. Elaine George, the president of the Juniata Action Committee, is a teacher at the St. Lucy Day School for Children with Visual Impairments. She trained the WMM artists to develop tools to help visually impaired people experience the photographs. We created an audio tour, built tactile representations of the photographs, and directed live modeling, using props featured in the photographs.

It was also during the summer that WMM artists began to feel the pressure and the fears of showing their work in public. Deadlines, critiques, production decisions and marketing placed high demands on the artists’ time, and compounded the self-doubt and nerves that every artist feels before presenting work in public. Yet the opening of the first community exhibition at the Juniata Park Boys & Girls Club marked a new experience in the apprenticeship: meeting and sharing stories with museum visitors. WMM’s first visitors were two boys, one teenager and the other a few years younger, and their puppy. They wandered in to see what was happening in their clubhouse. It was a warm day and both boys were shirtless, but the younger one put on his shirt, noting that there were “ladies” inside. They explored the museum and stayed throughout the afternoon. As the women shared their work with family, friends, and local community members, they were met with enthusiasm and appreciation. For many viewers, the Women’s Mobile Museum marked their first time they experiencing a museum and meeting real artists. The artists saw that their exhibition was a site of connection.

After three weeks in Juniata Park, the women moved the exhibition to Dixon House in Point Breeze. They occupied one-half of Dixon House’s gymnasium. The other half remained open for job fairs, baby showers, and a voting station for the 2018 national election. One woman came to vote, but stayed to tour the museum. In her visitor comments she wrote: “I felt the art touch my soul to look beyond and see.”

In December, the project moved for the first time into a traditional museum with an exhibition in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Through its presence in this historic space, the Women’s Mobile Museum affirmed its artistic achievement.

In entering the Women’s Mobile Museum, the 10 women trusted PPAC to share resources, skills, and knowledge, and provide a safe space for them to grow as artists. As the project progressed, the artists also trusted PPAC to hear and learn from difficult conversations and critiques. This project required that PPAC reckon with institutional blind spots, and meet its missteps with honesty and vulnerability.

Ultimately, occupying and sharing space are fundamental tenets of the Women’s Mobile Museum. The project requires that we give enough of ourselves, co-create a safe place to be ourselves, understand our connections, and experience solidarity. This process continues. It cannot be rushed. It requires courage and inner strength. It is often painful, and it is urgently necessary.
The first thing I ever saw was how hard it would be...

I seem to remember things from before I was born—the half-life of evolution, of being 9 months in mother’s womb during that most tumultuous year: 1963. There was so much sorrow and so little ease in that time before I learned to breathe. I splattered into this world 16 days after the assassination of JFK, having also endured, as embryo, then fetus, the murder of Medgar Evers, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, which is to say the murder of 4 Little Girls named Addie Mae Collins, Carol Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, and Carole Rosamond Robertson. Of course, there was a single redeeming moment, the sanctifying amniotic dream sequence of the March on Washington. One day to give us hope, followed by the ultimate grief strike that expelled me toward the cusp of winter. The assassination of John F. Kennedy was the one thing mother could not abide. It was too much to carry us both: the weight of all that pain and the formation of my name—the translation of which means: Strong / Beautiful / Walls—a fortress of a name.

With this destiny articulated and set, I began to ‘see’ the world through each contraction, each withheld breath, each gasp and dark reverie. Each time mother pulled away from any connection to a world that was waiting to brand and abolish her children, the gulf between us grew and would, ultimately, beg a crossing, a Middle Passage—a ceaseless test of endurance that necessitates the constant construction of a new language—the kind that churns and reinvents itself, embedded with many, many terms for which there are no translations.
This is when I first began to wade in the generations-deep waters of melancholy. This is how I acquired an overwhelming capacity to feel and clock time through suffering. I believe, is how I became a poet. How I first learned to see and know where I stand and what it costs to take up space as a light-skinned Black woman in Philadelphia, in America. It’s a matter of absorption and reflection—of sensitivity to darkness and light.

As a poet, I’ve always “looked” at things through a linguistic lens—"seeing" and processing the world through a relationship with language. Poetry helps me achieve an emotional equilibrium that eludes me in 21st-century contexts. I’ve found comfort on the page, in the translation of intuition and experience into words; words into specificity and meaning; and meaning into understanding and action. This is a slow and deliberate process, layered and non-linear, like assembling a 5,000-piece puzzle of an abstract painting, reaching for and connecting fragments to reveal a complex landscape of color and hue and symmetry—nuance and metaphor as expressive equivalencies for texture and brush strokes.

But, lately, I’ve felt alienated from linguistic expression. As the culture becomes more captivated with technology and more adept at communication through iconography and meme-ography, with a distinct preference for expediency and brevity and a predilection to trade in economies of distraction, I find myself at a loss. I am missing the depth of reflection and thought that comes from long, languid, and seemingly aimless conversations that allow ideas to unfold, nuances to be revealed, and subconscious quandaries to be clarified and expanded upon, holistically, in their own good time.

I’ve been experimenting with visual arts and photography as a way to express myself creatively during my temporary estrangement from literary pursuits. Still, when I look at a photograph or a painting, I am drawn to the poetry first—the saddest lyric and the arc of the story precede any particular awareness of line or color or pattern or space. I experience life and art, primarily, as an ongoing, inter-weaving, personally and profoundly felt narrative. With this in mind, I find myself wondering what it even means—to see.

I am learning to interrogate this question differently as I develop my practice as a visual artist and photographer. My apprenticeship with the Women’s Mobile Museum has challenged me to develop my “eye” for visual storytelling. The process has helped me realize that what I had been calling sight has nothing to do with my eyes or with the physical act of seeing or with visual culture. When I say “I see,” what I really mean is: I feel, I understand, I acknowledge it to be so. My ability to “see” has always been more emotional than visual, more conceptual than optical, more abstract than exact. So, when Zanele Muholi first asked me to frame and compose my shot, to see the photograph, to know what the picture should be before I click the shutter—I was confused. Not only did I not yet know what I was looking for, I did not even know, exactly, what I was looking at.

To further complicate matters, I am a life-long myopic, which means I can only see, clearly, those things closest to me. I must squint or wear artificial lenses to focus at a distance. This, too, is a perfect metaphor for what and how I see. The world, as I see it, is not and has never been clear. It’s, mostly, not
“I guess this is what comes of being incubated and born to a world that has always been hostile to my existence and to the existence of the people who matter most to me.”

sharp, has few definite lines or borders, and is most often blurred with brackish tint—an epic, unedited, noir film with omniscient, though cryptic, narrator.

I guess this is what comes of being incubated and born to a world that has always been hostile to my existence and to the existence of the people who matter most to me. In response to the erasure that accompanies such systemic oppression, I’ve developed a forensic capacity to see what is gone, what is absent from the scene—like indigenous language and histories as defined through griot culture and collective memory. In seeing what is missing, what hurts, what’s been taken or lost or disappeared, I see what I/we need: a refreshed and referential context that questions neither our beauty, our worth, or our humanity.

The inherent agitation of my mind, coupled with a life-long myopia, makes it a precarious experience to pick up a camera and point it in any direction. It’s as if the lens is a kaleidoscope and my eye is a magnet, picking up pieces of things—the fragments, the broken bits of people, places, and the stories that hold them/us together.

This is how I’m learning to see—

like a kintsugi artist rejoining errant shards of pottery with molten slices of gold. I am trying to make sense of rupture in ways that do not discard or erase the body where it breaks.
Andrea Walls

North From Here: A Series of Disembodied Portraits

This series of photographs responds to the global experience of forced displacement...

The images included here represent my immediate and visceral response to news of families being separated at borders, mothers being criminalized as they risk everything, seeking safety for themselves and their children—children who are jailed, lost, trafficked, or given away by representatives of a nation that proclaims itself to be the only true destination for anyone seeking independence, liberty, justice and freedom.

In constructing these visual stories, I am thinking of what it means, what it costs, to leave (or be ejected from) home, to move toward some abstract promise of “freedom;” and to endure the hostile distances between. I am thinking of the things we leave behind or that are taken from us along our various escape routes, including aspects of our identity. I am thinking of all the bodies, lost souls and ghosts still following “The North Star,” traveling along some rendition of The Underground Railroad. I am thinking of the original and contemporary Fugitive Slave Laws that brand and punish certain bodies as “illegal,” and therefore expendable. I am thinking of the risk of believing in things we have heard exist, somewhere, North From Here.

This series of photographs responds to the global experience of forced displacement of both wild and human populations. It recognizes the capitalist structures and priorities that facilitate and enforce generational cycles of war, famine, resource depletion, and poverty, while making escape from these conditions illegal and life-threatening. It recognizes the ways in which power structures perpetuate violence through gender indoctrination, economic and racial caste systems and through the same educational and linguistic traditions that rationalized and promoted chattel slavery.

Because I wanted to address the emotional trauma of these experiences without visually inscribing that trauma onto the bodies of black and brown people, I staged a series of disembodied portraits to carry the weight of the narrative. I consider them forensic in nature: evidence of existence, evidence of disappearance, evidence of the theft and loss of life and/or dignity.
my work seeks to return, disrupt and disarm the western gaze. In taking control of my own image, I no longer have to choose between erasure and exotification. I use fabric to represent identity and the barriers I ‘face’ because of it. Here and every day, I battle with religion, culture, blackness, love, gender, nationality, and what it means to be seen as other in a world of everyone else.

untitled [zola] / [zola] untitled

in taking control of my own image, I no longer have to choose between erasure and exotification.
if i speak to god and you speak to god and we are both left unanswered does it mean we are finally having a conversation with each other
the stars are just as far from each other as they are from me. some days this eases my lonely some days this feeds her
my mother was my first country
country is not a word for home
and when i say black lives matter i mean that they do i mean that the first time i heard it was from my own mouth that i was never welcome here until i let myself in

i am angry and i am not wrong i am angry and no one has died from it that's the saddest story that someone new has to die from it before they believe me what i say questioned more than what they've done for me to say it

the imam says to hide our sins but i cannot accept that she is one
if you put bones in a fire
it is called cremation
if you put me in a fire
it is called the law
my country cremates me
my family lights
the flame
i do not see god during
the execution
if you die willingly
it is still an execution

i know everyone who is not a man has had cause to run from one
although love is not victimless it is not a crime
When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected, whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their Declaration of Independence.
exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & Perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has mercifully warfare, undistinguished destruction of a free people.

He has wanting time to extend over us. We have native justice and of them. We have deaf justice and a We denounces them.

We the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine
These images open a door to my inner self. They go a little deeper into what is for me self healing, self acceptance, and self love. The same consciousness that connects me to the universe, my ancestors, and my land, gives vibrancy to my soul. This evokes in me an exquisite parade of feelings, from loneliness to enlightenment.

I am inspired by Frida Kahlo’s use of frames in her self portraiture, Felisa Rincón’s use of fans, the teachings of Buddhism, my love of botany, and my choice of healing through Reiki. My work reflects all the spiritual influences that affect my life. Missing my father and my grandparents, who taught me my love of plants and trees. The rose bushes that my grandmother cultivated in my childhood. Ferns that are hard to grow, but as gentle and delicate as I sometimes am. Coffee grounds that express my love for my homeland, and the sadness that I cannot be there.

In making this work, I have envisioned and rediscovered myself with a new sense of freedom that I have never had before. Here I am being kind and generous to myself. I am unashamed to explore how I’m feeling and who I am. This feeling of belonging and being present is something that I have only been able to find through photography. This journey of hating my body and disliking my skin becomes a past experience. This series is about being born from there.

Earthly

I am to define my identity through self-knowledge and through my art.
Self Portrait at Home
Connection

Tribute to Frida Kahlo
Two years ago I meet my friend Rita very early in the morning to go for a walk along Forbidden Drive, with the intention to exercise and talk about life. It was a beautiful day, with clear skies—not too hot or too cold. The river water was calm, but sparkling with the sun's rays hitting it. While we were walking we talked about life and the future. During the conversation we talked about how a positive mindset can be transforming. She wanted to show me how I can change my future with my thoughts.

We did a meditation exercise and she asked me what I would like to do in a few years? How do I see this opportunity? I responded that I would like to do something, maybe a new job; but I was not sure. I see myself in a place that I am able to create and I am accepted, loved, and appreciated. But, definitely, it has to be something that I love. I remember saying that I see this place, maybe with lots of pictures, bright colors, and people that understand my love for the arts. I felt in my heart how good will it feels to be in this space and the sensation of happiness. After this mental exercise, I was not convinced that it works, to be honest. But I felt very happy, hopeful, and alive! At least I felt happy, so it was worth it.

I totally forgot that mental exercise and probably a few months after that walk in the trail, Starla invited Rita to a vision board party. A vision board is a collection of images and phrases that help you connect with your future self. When I was looking through magazines, I selected things that resonated with my teenage years. Things that I always wanted to do, but I didn’t have a chance, or the courage.

The desire of being a writer, a photographer and a model was still burning inside, so I decided to add it to my vision board. For my vision board, I selected pictures of photographers taking pictures of a model then I placed my picture over it.
Modeling was something that I always wanted to do since I was a child. I used to dream of being part of the Spanish magazines. But I notice that no one looked like me. I had very curly hair. I was very skinny and extremely shy and knew that having an overbite was not going to make me a cover model. Not in this “perfect” society. Only beautiful and outgoing women are given this opportunity. My parents were willing to enroll me in modeling school, but then things got rough and the money was needed for food. So that was the end of it. Now I am not only the photographer, but I am also the model in my pictures—even though I am perfectly imperfect. Now I get to create beautiful art using my body.

I stuffed my vision board in my closet for months. I didn’t look at this vision board for a long time and when I took a look at it, it just strike me that some part of the vision board was transformed into reality. Many months passed since that vision board party, when I got the Juniata Newspaper for my boss and I took a glance and I see the ad for the Women’s Mobile Museum—I decided to apply. It was the hardest decision I have ever taken because it means that I have to be vulnerable to all my insecurities. But this time around I was not going to let it go.

As a result, I got the blessing to meet 10 extraordinary women, plus more, because I have met more wonderful people along the way that brings joy to my heart and always make my day seeing and talking to them. People that has accepted me how I am and share the same love for art and photography. I can’t leave out an important detail of the vision board: I now have “A ticket to write”. I am developing my skills as a writer and poet. Sure there are parts of the vision board that hasn’t materialized yet, but now I’m sure they will.

I have had so many positive experiences in this mobile museum. I been able to learn photography, gain knowledge of the curatorial process and visit places that I never imagine. I also gain confidence in myself, as well as, not being so hard on myself. I have been able to grow spiritually as well, but my hopes are to inspire younger generations to believe that everything is possible.
Reflecting Healing
Acceptance
You hear a groan you hear
a lament of my soul crying
because I no longer have you.

You think it’s because of you
that every day little by little I die.

Yet this pain that kills me inside
is not for you, but for losing
my soul, myself, my inner child.

I have no strength left to fight
but today, for me, I will move
a mountain.
Tash Billington

*Philly Natives*

We define ourselves.

RECOMMENDS:
The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom by Don Miguel Ruiz

INSTAGRAM:
@bills_in_tons

Kevin
**Artist Statement**

*Philly Natives* is an archive of street portraits of people born and raised in Philadelphia. The series pays homage to those who have survived various obstacles and injustices such as poverty, violence, racism, classism, over-incarceration, and the public school-to-prison pipeline. This series represents a rejection of the outsider’s gaze. We define ourselves. I use photography and conversation to acknowledge the beauty and resilience often overlooked in the people of this city.
Philly Streets

I’m feelin low, don’t wanna get high
Wanna hijack a plane to reach the blue sky
It’s no joke take a look in both of my eyes
If my cuzin call I’m goin for a fast ride
Couldn’t tell you all this anger built up inside //
Anger smells like fire, alcohol & weed
Even smell like rotten food left in the streets
Taste bittersweet, like food cooked incomplete
Sounds like Lies, Sounds like Cries //
When people lie to me, I don’t lie back
Truth or silence my reply back
I choose to bring the truth cuz truth resembles
Freedom
Born in these Philly streets,
lack of luv
One thing you won’t find is a lack of thugs
Uh... Remember family wasn’t there for me
My sister left her 40 inch tv
I turn around, all I see is me
Uh... I ain’t tryna leave these Philly Streets
I might be needed in these Philly Streets
Shana—Adina Roberts

Black Incandescence

The head of a man is all that is detected. The man has the skin of a fudge brownie. He sleeps on his side. His nose is defined by light.

There is a societal pressure on us to be submissive in order to shirk off these caricatures they try to make us out to be. We are repeatedly burdened with having to prove our innocence to our attacker and yet still having the label of ‘aggressive’ placed on us, regardless of our actions. We try to remain calm and find happiness in the lives we’ve struggled to make for ourselves, while these lives are perpetually threatened.

Sleep is an important aspect of this series of photographs. Rest should be a time of peace, but for many Black people in America, the constant threat makes it impossible to feel at ease. How we feel is so often overlooked; I want our feelings to be emphasized. I use direct light, to create texture, reflect on the absence of light, and experiment with shadows to portray our experience.

I have attempted to create an environment where trauma, both emotional and physical, are acknowledged and healed. The trees are guides in the healing process: they allow for a still and meditative space. Trees emit fresh air; breathing is a significant part of meditation. Portrayed almost timelessly, the people in the photos are given an unlimited amount of time to reflect, a space where they can be self-possessed. The surreal environment I’ve created is a place where Black people are projected as Gods, where they can exist at their own convenience and be appreciated.

This body of work is a visual reflection of our turmoil and resilience. It’s hard to remain calm when acts of violence are constantly inflicted upon Black people. When I hear about a Black man being shot, or a Black teen being lynched, or a Black woman being harassed, it feels like it is happening to me, because it could be me… ‘Violent’ and ‘criminal’ are amongst the many derogatory words we are called too often.
POETRY:
Shana-Adina Roberts

Things you heard as a child you now say.
You mimic them as you slap your hand across their face.
As you put your hand on your hip.
As you separate yourself from the other.
You silence them with your voice.
When you turn back to say it again.
Untitled Photo of Mustafah Sleeping
Previous page: The People
Untitled (Erica)

Perception
Strain
Instead of a minute
It was 2 hours
when you told me to lock the car doors
that did not mean
I love you or I care for you
It meant
I’ll forget you when I’ve had a glass
So protect yourself
And when I have a second, surely your seat gets warmer
As mine does
And when 2 hours turn into 2 days
Certainly, your stomach will be filled with possessions
And the tv will distract you
And you will only have you
in the car
the apartment
the room
the house on thanksgiving
Christmas
New Year’s eve
And in 2 hours and 2 days loneliness will become your companion

Shana-Adina Roberts

8988

The Thinking Place
Voices Matter

Why Your

In late 2018 Britain, the Tate gallery announced that it is to temporarily rehang the last 60 years of its gallery displays with only female artists; while the UK Government Art Collection is only buying works by female artists to mark the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which granted some women the right to vote. Both institutions cite the desire to remedy an institutional bias towards—or obsession with—“male genius” as their reason. In addition to addressing gender representation within their permanent collections, these organizations, in tandem with peer institutions worldwide, are also slowly waking up to the urgent need to diversify the galleries and collections responsible for the preservation of our nation’s (art)historical narratives and cultural treasures, institutionally privileged and prejudiced, traditionally look not only spectacularly white, but also “spectacularly masculine.” In addition to addressing gender representation within their permanent collections, these organizations, in tandem with peer institutions worldwide, are also slowly waking up to the urgent need to diversify their workforce, and their general artistic programming in relation to “race”—though not nearly fast, radically, or consistently enough—this is happening more than 30 years after the feminist-activist art collective Guerrilla Girls first pledged to fight gender and racial inequality within the greater arts community. It is shibboleth that contemporary cultural and political landscapes, slow-burning recognitions, and women’s marches and #MeToo related movements unfolding globally, proclaiming our visual rights, presences, and identities as necessary now as it was then.

Two years ago, sometime in early 2017, Zanele Muholi asked me whether I might consider collaborating and supporting a new initiative they were in the early stages of developing. The project, entitled Women’s Mobile Museum (WMM), would enable a constituency of women from culturally diverse and disenfranchised socio-economic backgrounds in Philadelphia to engage in the visual arts, create new work, be trained in photography, and, importantly, be paid to do so: an apprenticeship, as it were, to coincide with an artist residency Muholi had been offered at PPAC, the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center. Muholi, a close friend and one of the most courageous, most complex, and most important artists working in photography today—we were at the time in the middle of curating their traveling solo show and monographic publication, Somnyama Ngonyama—has long been committed to developing a visual activism that empowers black, female, lesbian, queer, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals in South Africa and beyond through collaborative, participatory, inclusive engagement that aims to support and recognize those who are too often marginalized. As I write, they are busy setting up a Mobile School of Photography in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, to benefit 10- to 12-year-old girls.

One time, during the program’s fundraising campaign led by PPAC, I was asked to Skype into a presentation given by its director, Sarah Stolfa, to a group of patrons of a prestigious US funding body. In the middle of the night, I delivered a mildly delirious five-minute stream of consciousness—entirely void of commas, full stops, or moments to breathe, for it was way past midnight my time—on why there is no contemporary practitioner more perfectly suited than Muholi, whose practice is governed by the same three R’s—race, rights, representation—that has also defined much of my own curatorial activism at Autograph, London—on why there is no contemporary practitioner more perfectly suited than Muholi, whose practice is governed by the same three R’s—race, rights, representation—that has also defined much of my own curatorial activism at Autograph, London.

For myself, and for one another.
PART III – EYES THAT COMMIT / TRUST YOUR VISUAL VOICE

What I remember most vividly about my initial visit in early May 2016 is being moved beyond words after seeing project’s participants for the first time, and witnessing a range of deeply personal presentations by each of the 10 women selected for that year. That eye-opening evening ended with a riveting, unexpected spoken word performance by a young woman who instantly captured the audience with her compelling presence and message. I was deeply touched when Andrea ‘Philly’ Walls taught me about the horrors of living memory as she spoke quietly about the police-engineered bomb attack that killed eleven people in a residential West Philadelphia neighborhood on May 13, 1985. In her story, Andrea evokes the MOVE bombing, I saw the unspeakable pain of remembering a day when precious lives of adults and children were lost to a malicious act sanctioned by official bodies in charge of deadly explosives. Andrea’s story expressed, so powerfully, and with such dignity, its lingering afterlife, its reverberations in the present.

Inspired by Muholi, we contemplated the relationship between different personal and collective traumas—inflicted by the legacies of apartheid, slavery, colonialism, or the ancestral institutions of sexism, racism, homophobia, or Islamophobia; the experience of forced exile, displacement, poverty, or education systems, or PTSD. Later on, after my departure, Lindelka Qampi—one of the WMM artist-mentors from South Africa—would speak about using photography as a therapeutic tool to break the silences surrounding sexual violence, generously sharing with the group her personal narrative as a survivor of rape, and her striking self-portraiture.

We talked about the notion of home and belonging—and the importance of a shared language. Muholi introduced us to her mother tongue, isiZulu, with its intrinsic pronunciations, and clicking sounds, while reminding the group to always consider 5W1H, or the mantra 5 Ws and 1 How, when developing their projects. The abiding message: be specific, and forensic—and then turn the camera to what matters to you most, what you most fear, and most love.

PART IV – SHARING SPACE

In these conversations, a recurring theme emerged that seemed to connect all 10 artists of the Women’s Mobile Museum program: gentrification. The distressing story of Maddy Ashley Torres’s demolished family home became the genesis for the conceptual realization of the mobile museum’s architectural structure: dominated by beams of hard wood—construction timber, raw, untreated. No colors or patterns to distract from the art works the structures would hold, the natural hardwood contrasting with their high production values and dark-stained frames.

It was important, too, that the mobile museum design, which was developed in close collaboration with Philadelphia-based artist Petra Floyd, engaged as the project’s lead designer, was built in a way that evoked the white walls of a gallery to display each artist’s works respectfully, yet also allowed for an openness in its structure—inviting a conversation among the works and among the artists. The mobile museum’s architectural structure: dominated by beams of hard wood—construction timber, raw, untreated. No colors or patterns to distract from the art works the structures would hold, the natural hardwood contrasting with their high production values and dark-stained frames.

...
These temporary walls would not only hold the women’s art in a framework that reflects the sense of gentrification and urban development each of the participants mentioned in their presentations, but also evokes the notion of identity-under-construction: a structural, intersecting conversation that is ever-evolving, often unfinished, shifting, and sometimes broken. Constantly in flux, fixed, unfixed, personally, culturally, psycho-socially. And finally, the structure would also reflect the idea of change, of transformation—because what is the purpose of creative practice if not to transform? To elicit the kind of affective labor necessary to touch, stir or shift something within us; to inspire us to feel, sense, act.

**PART VI – THE WORKS**

Three evocative self-portraits depict the artist Muffy Ashley Torres amidst the ruins of her family home destroyed by the collapse of a new development, crushed under the seismic waves generated by relentless neighborhood gentrification. Here she is, her body wrapped in protective plastic sheets, precariously positioned between wooden beams; sitting on top of rubble, cradling a brick, contemplating the future; and, finally, resting on a silk patchwork blanket, surrounded by yellow cut sunflowers, brown skin warmly lit, arms wrapped around her body, caressing herself: a deeply personal tale of displacement, endurance, and perseverance.

A lone figure perched over a sink, water running from the tap behind, an orange comb burrowed at the nape, gently resting its teeth against the back of the neck, in a darkly lit kitchen—a hand raised painfully absent.

In a series of self-portraits entitled UNSAT, Davelle Barnes, a US army veteran, explores the difficulties of serving under the discriminatory “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which between 1993 and 2011 prohibited qualified gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans from openly serving in the armed forces. Her work addresses post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), body politics, as well as the environmental impact of war.

In one frame we encounter her semi-uniformed body recumbent on the ground, eyes half shut, gazing into the distance, a camouflage binder pressed against her naked chest; in another frame, a standing figure salutes their own reflection in a pool of oil surrounded by cracked slabs of concrete, as if seen through a broken mirror.

The small figure of a boy against a burning sky, hands in the air, triumphal; a photograph of a young man, the artist’s late brother, on the shore, enveloped by the sea... a tale of family, of loss and love: glimpses into Carrie-Anne Shimborski’s personal-poetic archive urge us to cherish those closest to us and to remember, always. Because forgetting equals death, and if nothing else, a photograph can promise (visual) immortality...

In Shana-Adina Roberts’ disquiet portraits of friends and lovers, layers of light illuminate intimate encounters, rendering fleeting presences as visible markers of our existence and togetherness. Trees become alive through movement, texture, and feeling. In the confinement of the home, Roberts’ camera unveils, and obscures—protects, deflects. It reveals back to us, in the irradiated eyes, lips, and skin of Roberts and her kin, the passionate turmoil, the sweeping pain and survival.

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**PHOTO (RIGHT):** Installation view of the Women’s Mobile Museum at The Juniat Park Boys & Girls Club, September 2019.

**PHOTO (LEFT):** Installation view of the Women’s Mobile Museum at The Juniat Park Boys & Girls Club, September 2019.

In Shana-Adina Roberts’ disquiet portraits of friends and lovers, layers of light illuminate intimate encounters, rendering fleeting presences as visible markers of our existence and togetherness. Trees become alive through movement, texture, and feeling. In the confinement of the home, Roberts’ camera unveils, and obscures—protects, deflects. It reveals back to us, in the irradiated eyes, lips, and skin of Roberts and her kin, the passionate turmoil of being/seeing, at once acutely present and painfully absent. Black Incandescence.

In a world where you are deemed invisible, you have to become your own muse: this sentiment, recalling the words of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, is evoked powerfully by afaq’s insistence to will herself—her Sudanese, queer, Muslim self—into the world until it loves her back. Disarmingly close-up, unapolgetically unafraid to be vulnerable and powerful; defiantly returning the gaze, or directing her focus elsewhere, this exquisite portrait is framed only by afaq’s own, piercing eyes. To give yourself permission to be seen, to become the representation you long to see. Beauty and desire, pain and survival.

**Ralltowed:** a ghostly figure shrouded in white walking along train tracks, a solitary spectre from another time and place: Andrea Walls’ compassionate eye conjures the past to comment on distressing socio-cultural politics unfolding in the present. Here, the camera serves as a trusted accomplice in an attempt to process the ongoing violence inflicted against people, against the environment: the global experiences of forced displacement of both human and animal populations. Each portrait a scripted act of resistance, Walls’ composite/disembodied images beg the question: how do we expect our children to grow up sane, when we continuously encourage them to play at murder? As a nation what kind of humanity do we preach, when we allow families to be torn apart at borders, incarcerated, disappeared?!
These charged, constructed images are underscored by the immediacy of Tash Billington’s uplifting documentary photographs from her Philly Natives series, portraying “ordinary” people—friends, lovers, neighbors, strangers, passers-by—as local warriors and everyday heroes, their portraits proclaiming, in a language of which only the camera is capable, that their lives matter, and that even if society at large may not always recognize them, that they are seen.

Similarly, Shasta Bady focuses her lens on commutes in what she describes as “a love affair with constant motion and the unknown.” For Bady, the train symbolizes a sense of independence and inherent freedom, the freedom to be mobile, to transition from one space to the next, while also acknowledging that for many years unrestricted access to public transportation was historically denied to people of color in a racially segregated America. Her candid portraits reveal a group of strangers united by collective movement, quietly celebrating a space of diversity and individuality without judgement, or interference.

PART VI – IN CLOSING. WHO IS ART? Freedom: the freedom to create, the freedom to speak, the freedom to heal. The freedom to return, to keep dismantling the [master’s] house. “Who is Art?” You Are alas, Andrea, Carrie, Danielle, Davelle, Iris, Lindka, Muffy, Muholi, Shana, Shasta, Tash.

Thank You.

Renée Mussai

London, December 2018
Zanele Muholi

Somnyama Ngonyama
Hail The Dark Lioness

I’m reclaiming my blackness, which I feel is continuously performed by the privileged other.
These portraits were produced during a six-week residency with the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center. They form part of their ongoing series of black and white self-portraits *Somnyama Ngonyama* (meaning ‘Hail, the Dark Lioness’), which confront and challenge the politics of race in the photographic archive.

In contrast to their life-long project of documenting members of the black LGBTQIA+ community of South Africa, for this body of work Muholi turns the camera on herself. The self-portraits in the series are taken while traveling in South Africa, America, Asia, and Europe; they reference fine art portraiture and fashion photography, using a range of materials and every-day objects. In their own words,

“Experimenting with different characters and archetypes, I have portrayed myself in highly stylised fashion using the performative and expressive language of theatre. My face becomes the focal point, forcing the viewer to question their desire to gaze at images of my black figure. By highlighting the contrast of my skin tone, I’m reclaiming my blackness, which I feel is continuously performed by the privileged other.”
RENEE MUSSAI: You were initially offered an artist residency at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center (PPAC), yet, instead of simply accepting the opportunity to be in residence, you proposed a year-long multifaceted mentoring and apprenticeship project to benefit a constituency of aspiring women artists. What made you do so?

ZANELE MUHOLI: I accepted the residency but with a specific goal in mind: to open it up to other women who I know are deserving but cannot necessarily access such spaces, even though their work might be on par with established artists. Several factors—including lack of funding, knowledge about opportunities, support, etc.—tend to keep them shut out. I felt it would be more meaningful to enable them with exposure, and be introduced to other photographers, experts such as journalists and curators, and spaces such as galleries and museums. The idea was to learn through field trips, provide access to professionals, learn how to write proposals, showcase, curate, market, and sell their work. It helps to be educated about art history, which is not offered to many members of my community.

RM: While the Women’s Mobile Museum (WMM) is a debut in the US, in terms of collaborative community-based practice, this is not the first time you have instituted an outreach program to benefit others. We have spoken on several occasions about your long-standing commitment to open doors and unlock spaces—especially within the so-called “art world,” a space too often out of reach for many from complex socioeconomic and culturally or sexually diverse backgrounds.

ZM: Yes, it isn’t the first time I have done this. My convictions are informed by my own direct experiences: historically, we—as black people—have a disenfranchised and painful past. Immersing myself in visual arts has been therapeutic. Being able to start reversing the effects of inadequately archived or undocumented black visual history is a cathartic way of healing wounds, while at the same time claiming those inaccessible spaces.

RM: Your outreach focus is usually on women, and members of LGBTQIA+ communities—I am thinking of FEW, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women, for instance, or the queer media platform Inkanyiso; you were instrumental in setting up both organizations. So in many ways, I think opening up your practice to others constitutes an integral aspect of your socially engaged practice as a Visual Activist.

ZM: Yes. I like to stress that I do not work alone, and that the principle of collaboration guides my work. I have turned my home into a hub for queer writers, especially for those individuals featured in my works. Community leadership was important to me at a time when the queer South African community was witnessing an epidemic of hate crimes, “curative” rapes, and brutal murders—that’s when I decided that visibility and having a voice mattered. My first opportunity at empowering others was in 2004, when I trained fourteen black lesbians in photography. WomensNet offered us a space in which to exhibit our works... The inaugural exhibition was entitled Indawo Yami—meaning, My Place/Environment, since the theme was for them.
to photograph their experiences and surroundings. I continued to train [the women], and we produced two calendars, in 2006 and 2007 respectively, under the auspice of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), which I co-founded. Although confidence was growing, I realized that there weren't any positive visuals of black lesbians in the mainstream media, and so I started Inkanyiso, which translates from isiZulu to “light” or “illumination.” Inkanyiso has become the voice and visual documenting the existence of the everyday black lesbian [in South Africa]; the organization has since grown and we have facilitated, trained, and collaborated at home and beyond.

RM: Has the community-based work felt different in the United States—and if so, how did the experience differ between here [Philadelphia], and there [Durban, Cape Town, or Johannesburg]? ZM: Well, geography certainly doesn’t change shared concerns, but if I were to speak on anything, I would say language was perhaps a barrier for me, because sometimes I cannot articulate as passionately in English as I would if I were delivering in Zulu… I think in Zulu and emote with my whole body—which may sometimes be perceived as aggressive or/ and make people feel uncomfortable, but that’s not the intent. We are just emotive with our expressions, as people. Other professionals who were present in Philadelphia for the project helped bridge that gap.

RM: Please tell me a little more about your vision for the Women’s Mobile Museum—what did you have in mind when you first suggested the idea? ZM: My vision was that a group of women are given access—to resources, to people, and to share knowledge and be able to create without worrying about affordability, or feeling that they were being boxed in. That way I felt they would be able to express themselves through photography with sincerity and authenticity.

RM: As the name implies, the program was aimed at women exclusively, but I also know from our conversations that first and foremost your desire was to “work with a group of humans.” ZM: Yes, I was comfortable to express myself and name the project that way, although my own preferred pronouns are they/them. I wanted it to feel inclusive, yet specific at the same time.

RM: I remember the day in May 2018 when you and Lerato [Dumse] arrived in Philadelphia from South Africa, and met the 10 participants for the first time at PPAC’s education studio. I had already been here for 24 hours, and the night before had witnessed their deeply moving presentations. Everyone was anticipating your arrival. You were warm, open… and the group seemed to relax in your presence very quickly. How did it feel, to see your vision realized, embodied, if you will, by this incredible ‘group of humans’ gathered to meet you? ZM: That day, I was so jet lagged, and I was also recovering from an illness, hence I was a bit drained. 2018 had not been a good year for me, as I also lost some loved ones and was in mourning… When I walked into that room, however, I met people with great energy who were welcoming, and I felt it healed my wounds. Being amongst people who looked like me, sharing the space, made me feel at home.
Suzwe I, Philadelphia, 2018

Isiqhaza I, Philadelphia, 2018
RM: This was evident, and lovely to see... That night I was blown away not only by their courage, and their talent, but also by how different and yet how committed to one another the women were. This, I believe, has been one of the key strengths of the program—the kind of collective spirit, support and care that has become a pillar for the WMM artists, extending far beyond the shared space of art-making...

ZM: That was precisely the point of starting the Women’s Mobile Museum. The idea was to bring people from different walks of life who share a common cause into the same space to share their experiences. We call this Ubuntu in South Africa—a spirit of humanity that is ingrained in us. We believe that umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu, literally meaning “a person is a person who thrives through, or because of, others (community).” I am because we are.

RM: Beautiful. Several things happened that week, in May 2018: seeing you work with afaq on her first self-portraits was inspiring and wonderful to witness. That same week, you and I worked together on staging a new portrait for Somnyama Ngonyama—you wrapping yourself in my pleats, once again. Three “Bester” portraits emerged, and several other images, too. Can you speak a little about these works, please?

ZM: Bester [Muholi] is my late mother’s name (1936-2009). I go everywhere with her spirit. As I have mentioned, 2018 had already been a challenging year for me and all I could think of throughout was the rock that was my mom. I feel challenged as I try to respond to this question... It almost feels like I am coming out again. It makes me think of my ancestors and where they have walked, and what they have endured. Those pictures are a reincarnation of my mother: I am her and she is me. She lives in me forever. Whenever I cannot sleep or am contemplating deeply, she shows up for me. She is the woman whom I love the most. I get deep in conversation with her whenever I am in awe, or upset. She is the one whose story was never told because she was black and poor—a domestic worker, a breadwinner, and a single mother of eight. She lost her husband, my dad, when I was only a few months old. I feel the need to speak his name as well—Tanji Aswell Mahone, a Malawian tradesman who came to South Africa to work and faced xenophobia, racism, and many other unjust experiences.

But, without speaking in depth about my late parents, who are referenced extensively in Somnyama Ngonyama, this is my way of encouraging every person to value their voice, their visual narratives, and create content that speaks to them; to acknowledge their roots, their families; and to recognize the worthiness of their black bodies in many spaces... By that I mean how black existence contributes to our economies. Black bodies are at ‘work’ all the time—engaging in research projects, experimental initiatives, in galleries, universities, laboratories, as artists, thinkers, and intellectuals. It then boggles my mind why those in positions of power do not acknowledge us positively... It saddens me and makes me want to work harder to bridge the gap on both sides.

RM: Which is why we must continue to work tirelessly for the cause. Can you speak a little about the six-week artist residency between May and June 2018—were there any activities that you felt were particularly inspiring for yourself and/or the program—turning points, perhaps, or defining moments?

ZM: The fact that I was already burdened because of illness and grief made my time in Philadelphia somewhat challenging, but, nonetheless, it was an experience that I enjoyed. I particularly cherished visiting The Colored Girls Museum, as it is a concept I would like to see for my community in South Africa. I also enjoyed capturing portraits under the bridge, where I worked with Andrea Walls and Lindeka Qampi.
RM: I understand that bringing together friends and allies with different skills, sharing expertise and experience and, crucially, continuously learning from and with one another was a critical aspect for your vision for program.

ZM: It’s very important for people to know that I don’t work alone. Ubuntu guides my work philosophy. Most of my visual activism projects are done with the collective—Inkanyiso.org. And yes—for WMM, I wanted to work with two artists whose cause is closely aligned with our own: PhotoXP co-facilitators Lindelka Qampi, and Lerato Dumse. They both came on board with a lot of expertise. [Dumse] is a young South African photojournalist; she has produced and edited a number of articles for Inkanyiso and is the proprietor of DuLove Media. [Qampi] is a South African award-winning photographer and mother of four, who shared her experience living as black female photographer in South Africa. She has also presented a personal narrative of being a survivor of sexual violence, sharing how photography became the vehicle to her healing.

RM: We spoke at length during one of the seminars at PPAC about how different traumas affect us as individuals in different spaces—the trauma of everyday micro/macro aggressions in relation to sexism, domestic or cultural violence, mental health and well-being, poverty, displacement, homophobia, xenophobia—whether channeled through the apartheid system, systematic discrimination, or the kind of institutionalized racism ingrained in American and other societies globally. One of the big questions you posed to the group was how one might share space, collectively process emotional trauma, and support each other.

ZM: Yes, and the response led me to understand that the black experience of oppression is just as daunting everywhere, and that the resulting traumas, although varied, are similar. Expressing oneself through visual arts has led many to finding a voice that says: I am here, I exist, and you will acknowledge me.

RM: One of the notions we continuously return to in our ongoing conversations is freedom: The freedom to create, the freedom to be seen, to be heard, to be respected, acknowledged. The freedom to “infiltrate” spaces one might have never imagined to be yours to occupy. It’s so important that these women’s voices are heard, that the “art world” recognizes them, acknowledges their existence.

ZM: Yes, you are correct. More so especially in these trying times where racism, sexism, patriarchy, xenophobia, queerphobia, homophobia are rife. We need to create meaningful artworks that are human rights-based to make a difference...

RM: What do you envision as the legacy for the Women’s Mobile Museum?

ZM: For me, its legacy is to empower black human beings and people of color in Philadelphia, especially those in need of visual literacy, and to foster arts activism across the USA and beyond. Hopefully, the participants will go on to show their works, write books, and be able to market their work, thus generating an income for themselves and teaching others. I hope to see the WMM exhibition(s) travel, and to see more collaborations between different institutions and amongst participants.

RM: Anything else you would like to share, before we close?

ZM: I would like to just say let us share the knowledge without fear of being vilified or losing anything. Let us share brilliance, let us share wealth, let us publish more books featuring the works of black people by black people—for us, by us, on us—for posterity.

Zona I, Philadelphia, 2018

Zanele Muholi —— PORTFOLIO

WOMEN’S MOBILE MUSEUM
Davellle Barnes

UNSAT

A veteran artist on a mission.

UNSAT is a visual response to the racist, body-shaming rules and regulations I was subjected to during my time in the United States Army. This body of work developed as a collaboration between artists Lindeka Qampi, Zanele Muholi, and myself. As we navigated through the gentrified blocks of Kensington, Lower Northeast Philadelphia, I was reminded of the rapid construction of military forward operating bases in Afghanistan; it felt as though the war was following me.

In the photograph entitled Personal Statement, I appear cold and detached; my body on the ground, chest covered only by my camouflage binder. This image represents the silence of having served under the discriminatory Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) policy, which between 1993 and 2011 prohibited qualified gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans from openly serving in the armed forces. In Present Sky, I salute to signal to the world: black women are participating in war at record numbers despite the public perception created by the mainstream media which favors hero stories about white men. Oil and Concrete is a reflective portrait to illustrate the ‘hurry up and wait’ culture of the military, and the environmental impact of war. Front Leaning Rest symbolizes the strength and resilience to keep pushing despite battling with P.T.S.D.
POETRY:
Davelle Barnes

Soldier No Longer
And one day
packing
leads to
panic attack.
You are an expert at
stuffing and packing
no longer.
You trade in your
M16 for a camera
and an ink pen.
Here there
are no enemy combatants.
Just art and community.
Just your conscience
and freewill.
You are a soldier,
no longer.
Too Often

Too often we soldiers discover we are breakable for the first time in Anesthesia, we wake up stitched together with the fibers of our past beliefs.

Too often us soldiers don’t realize the woman in the middle of the road has a soul until we return home and can no longer find our own.

Too often We as soldiers don’t notice we have a story until we read many others that move our eyes maybe even our lips but never touching home.

That will always be warzone.

Too often us soldiers have unpacking to do, have duffels lasting longer than our love ones.

Stuffed with regrets heavy and enduring. Carrying sorrow well beyond our service obligation.

Too many soldiers possess gifts drilled out of our feet and skulls in the name of discipline, valor and the science of military psychology.

Too often the rhetoric outlined in the uniformed code of military justice punishes our humanity in the spirit of freedom.

Too often. Too many. Too much.
Lindeka Qampi

Inside My Heart

Using different art forms—poetry, lens-based media, and visual arts—to create a dialogue around self-expression.
My work addresses the experiences of violence. I use visual poetry as a tool to break the silence of being a survivor of rape. I turn the lens onto myself in order to manage past experiences and emotions, which I have tried to suppress psychologically.

I am using different art forms—poetry, lens-based media, and visual arts—to create a dialogue around self-expression, as both a form of therapy and a way of zooming out my voice to the voiceless survivors who are still facing fears of violence. I use props in my images to highlight the gravity of the subject matter; recycling as a metaphor of bringing back life and creating a space of dignity for identity expression.

This latest work is a continuation of a series of images developed through my ongoing exploration of self-portraiture.
Idyolo LolaHloko
Shasta Bady

As Above, So Below

It's a love affair with constant motion and the unknown...

SEPTA serves a diverse community of riders. Access to Philadelphia's public transportation system is today open to a majority of the population—with the exception of people with disabilities, who still cannot access every station.

As a black woman simultaneously riding and documenting, I see another aspect that links my present occupation of the trains to our history of segregation. Access to public transportation was denied to people of color: a series of Supreme Court decisions have dictated who can ride and where to. Thirty years after the Civil War, the Withdraw Car Act of 1890 was the first official law mandating segregation on trains in Louisiana. In 1896, Plessy vs. Ferguson upheld racial segregation laws for public facilities, and more than half a century later in 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education decided that "separate facilities are inherently unequal." In 1956 the Supreme Court finally ruled that segregation on public buses and transportation was against the law. I am a daily passenger. No ride is ever the same. The trains give me a sense of independence. The trains are consistent, they run on a schedule. What I don't know is what I will experience or whom I will encounter on each journey. It's a love affair with constant motion and the unknown... and meeting new people whose lives would otherwise not intersect with mine.

As Above, So Below is a sanguine study of public transportation in the city of Philadelphia—a photographic exploration of its architecture, its passengers, in a space of continuous movement.
Accident
It only took 31,649 lbs of spinning metal
Through cotton & flesh
A literal knock
Of Sense
And sight
four rubber tires
Opening,
Now closing,
my own doors
The timed doors
The electric voice
The kinetic energy of
100 passengers
Steel meeting steel and
train cars uncouple like marriage
In the midst of madness
Chasing it is not recommended
Alter the playing field
& I prefer a life of watermelons over watercress.
grasp nothing for too long
Here in these cars...
Reverence & resource
are partners for survival
Someone’s exit is another person’s
Entrance
Into
Alternate routes
Here in these cars...
We carried nothing
and now, heavy
We are here
Curio - Child of Eshu
POETRY:
Shasta Bady

Like the needle/he made
time for what he could.

So young and full of life, she can’t afford school,
What happens to her
Passion

Curious and awkward
He decided to participate.

Fearless
Committed,
preserved vulnerability.
He was lovely to touch
And
Unable to grasp.

Innocent
Exhausted
Cradled against her
Shoulder without
Reservation
In deep
Sleep
Loud conversations
Bolstering boom box
Emergency vehicles
She slept peacefully

He carries
Emotions
Tries to run from
Holding
the most unstable treasure.
His son.

Mother died without anyone.
They will never be the same.

Essentials for survival:
Powerful in stature,
Selling his body
Cloaked
in hopelessness

Cigarettes and alcohol
some relief
Until love arrives

FIELD NOTES
—a poem of passengers

like the needle/he made
time for what he could.

Mother died without anyone.
They will never be the same.

So young and full of life, she can’t afford school,
What happens to her
Passion

Curious and awkward
He decided to participate.

Fearless
Committed,
preserved vulnerability.
He was lovely to touch
And
Unable to grasp.

Innocent
Exhausted
Cradled against her
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Reservation
In deep
Sleep
Loud conversations
Bolstering boom box
Emergency vehicles
She slept peacefully

Cigarettes and alcohol
some relief
Until love arrives
These photos are part of my personal-poetic archive, glimpses of the men I love and the places I treasure. They represent my own time capsules. My brother Peske, whom I lost to addiction. My lover Delmar, who loves me, or loves me not. My son, Luca, my forever love... reminding me on the daily to capture as much as humanly possible. The river is my peace. Sunsets appear painted by hand, skies with colors so fierce they calm the storm within.

— Andy Warhol

Carrie-Anne Shimborski

Thirty-Seven

The best thing about a picture is that it never changes, even when the people in it do.

— Andy Warhol
Muffy Ashley Torres

Fundación Fuerte

Love is a genetic force that flows through my veins and allows me to walk this earth in abundance, even in heartache.
For my family, loss has been a recurrent theme. Shortly after losing our beloved abuela, we also lost our home. A development collapsed onto our family house and made it uninhabitable. Our house was home to many and its doors were always open. Mama Agustina taught us to share by taking in loved ones and those who needed more love. This work is dedicated to her.

Within this pain, we are aware of how privileged we still are. Since Hurricane Maria struck Puerto on September 20, 2018, our extended family has also felt extreme loss. Loss of property, electricity, and resources, but they hold on with an incredible amount of hope. I want to honor their experiences, as well as our own.

Living in separate housing, we are displaced. Now, our home has been demolished. We intend to rebuild, despite the aggressive offers to buy our land. My family is among many who are resisting to sell to those who prey on lower income neighborhoods in order to make profit.

These photos channel the emotions of our entire family’s resistance.
Beast Within

Pain is a siren with no stop button, a ravenous beast within, eating away at all my good parts, leaving just crumbs.

When I excuse myself for the first time, it burns. When I explain that I have lupus, I feel my skin peel to expose a vulnerability over which I have no control. Once exposed, I am stamped with a permanent identifier of being "sick." I am no longer dependable, which is sometimes true. Especially when the beast feasts. Confined in my bed, I push everyone away as my will to get up and fight fades.

Because my pain is furious and relentless, I try my best to rise above it. Only to fall over, undoing all the rest and letting it feed once again.

Maybe it is just an internalized perception, but after I tell most people about the struggle, they reduce me to a simplistic understanding of being "sick." And once they do, the vicious cycle begins. It happens in the realms of my family, work, and creative life. This is when I re-enter the ring and work 10 times harder to prove my identity apart from my diagnosis. Because my pain causes me to miss so much, I feel the need to catch up at an unreasonable pace. Inevitably, I crash.

Picking myself back up gets tiring and others rarely understand what it takes. In a society that values productivity above all else, my worth is null.

How do you deal with a person who cries as much as I do? You turn up the volume on your headphones and look away.
How do you profit from my pain? You monetize any healing that I deem necessary and guilt me when I cannot afford it. My healing should not be dependent on whether I can make it to all of the appointments I have set up this week. My pain should be understood by the doctors who doubt me. Healthcare should be accessible, without jumping through hoops with walking cane in hand. How hard is it to listen without inflicting more pain?

If only people could be kind, without being condescending, If they could open their hearts, without pointing fingers to blame.

Instead of offering another diet I cannot afford, you can help me lift this up the stairs. Instead of making me pity-porn or your resilient poster child, give me credit where it is due. I am more than my pain. I am not this gnawing beast. Once you choose to understand, you realize how the cycle hurts. There is this constant pressure to make something. Deadlines, meetings, sacrifices, and money all to exhaust me into another flare up. That is when I turn to art.

I gather what’s left and bury it deep, tend and work to heal all else. When the rain clears and siren fades, the beast sleeps and I can create again.

Art is patient and forgiving. It allows me to pick up where I left off, with no judgment. Art is always there to soothe. It reminds me that others, like me, have felt my suffering. Art proves to be triumphant. The beast cowers to my expression. When I am able to convey my pain, then paint a life without it, I can breathe again.

Because when the beast is understood by others, it loosens its grip and I can finally shine through.
These images are the backdrop of my childhood and the roots of my existence.
For Vera, Tracye, Thomas, Hilda, Michael, and Jerome. I am because of you.

*Larchwood* takes place in a space where time doesn’t exist as we know it. Memories manifest themselves and play in an infinite loop. The people and feelings that generated, and were generated by these happenings thus live forever.

This anthology is Black memory. The inheritance of worldly, emotional, and intellectual possessions have shaped my life. Familiar scenes from a Black childhood have become ritual, decor is shrine worthy, and nostalgia is a spiritual connection to another plane of existence.

The household, and the walls that contain it, has produced and protected my sense of self. *Larchwood* is a portrait of my home. These images are the backdrop of my childhood and the roots of my existence. This is an acknowledgment and a profession of thanks to the hands that raised and raise me, and all that was poured into me by generations of strength and the will of survival.
i hate my arms
for not being long enough to reach you
and my body
for being too far away
but never you
for not reaching back

you asked for my heart
so i wrapped it in silk
and dipped it in gold
so it was beautiful enough for you
but strong enough to withstand
the trauma of careless hands

i called
wanting time you didn’t have
and attention you couldn’t afford
your mailbox was full

i’m funny
hilarity woven carefully into my lingo
a bellyache begotten belly ache
sides split in half
looking for completion in the ribs of others
don’t forget to breathe
can you tell i’m being serious
— just kidding
i heard my name
dripping in a mutilated half southern accent
smooth as silk
but heavy with jim crow
and cornbread
and collard greens

ghetto
like the title we never asked for
cool
like a summer breeze

“danielle”
off the lips of my grandmother
liquid gold
sweet as honey
music to my ears
In elementary school, I remember casual conversations between kids about how hungry they were, and how they hadn’t eaten because their parent or guardian worked late. I remember them not getting to school in time for breakfast, having to wait too many hours for lunch and lunch not being enough. We learned about the food pyramid, and then taught ourselves that it didn’t apply to us. As we grew older, trips to the corner store and the Chinese store became more necessary. Growing kids got hungrier, but that didn’t mean that parents and caretakers suddenly had the time or money to compensate.

Into adolescence and young adulthood I fervently chased beauty standards that weren’t meant for me. I tried to find acceptance in a country that is constantly teaching me not to love myself, and teaches everyone else that I am less than. We’ve grown up with a flawed sense of self and waning self-love at the hands of oppression. When we laugh and express joy we are too loud. When we are upset, we are irate and unnecessary. Our individuality is “ghetto” and unprofessional except when capitalism gropes it—and then we must be thankful that people are finally taking an interest in us. We are silenced while our culture, image, and stories are being mined.

This recipe for unhappiness follows us throughout life. It has cooked up a brand of distress that I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemies. It has caused complacency through lack of hope. This misery is centuries in the making. This is not an accident. This is not bad luck. This is purposeful and well orchestrated. It’s no secret that capitalism does not work without a cheap labor force. Wage disparities keep the rich, rich and the poor, poor. By keeping people in positions that require them to work hard as they remain unable to better their life, corporations are able to sustain a pool of cheap labor. Black people have long been categorized as livestock, cheap workforce. Why would this day and age be any different?

So where does that leave us? Tired, heartbroken, self-loathing, pushed out, and quiet. We’ve adopted the “hush-hush” method of dealing with issues and trauma that has been bestowed upon us by previous generations. Because complaining won’t get you anywhere, right? However, the same generations that equates silence with strength also gave us such gems as “a closed mouth does not get fed.” We cannot be silent, we cannot pretend that nothing bothers us. We cannot just continue doing what we’re doing because what we are doing does not work. Black america is suffering, and nobody can save us but ourselves. The emotional literacy that has not been afforded to us is necessary for us. We have not been dealt a bad hand, the entire game is rigged.
Bottom Left: xan
Bottom Right: west philly on a sunday
For many artists, creating a professional life and fully living the lifestyle they desire can be difficult. I know and work with many artists, and enjoy helping them explore, clarify, and connect with their art while working through their uncertainty, disappointment, resistance, and life changes. I also help individuals through their processes of deciding if they are going to share their artistic expression with the world and in what way. Thus, when asked to work with the Women’s Mobile Museum, I knew that both the participants and the organizers would need courage to forge through this project.

As I read the grant, I remember immediately feeling the need to be available for more than just advising on the grant, and to offer ongoing support to the women and project leaders throughout the process. The inclusion of a mental health clinician proved to be a proactive step for the Women’s Mobile Museum and could be a model for other programs that are designed to have a lasting impact on the lives of its participants. A clinician can be utilized to assess the social, emotional, and mental health components, as well as the stressors and changes that arise over time. The clinician can also be utilized throughout the program in a variety of ways, such as providing support as needed, conducting processing groups, managing relationship dynamics, providing and teaching healthy coping skills and stress relief, and helping the members move through resistances individually and collectively, as well as personally and professionally. For instance, there were assignments and activities—such as self-portraits, artist statements, and panel discussions—that at times the participants unexpectedly met with resistance. Once the clinician identified and named the resistance, the women actively explored the self they were about to embark, I found myself filled with excitement about what would unfold along with anxiousness of the ambiguity. What was a Women’s Mobile Museum? What did it look like? Would the women get along? How would their lives change? How would the world receive them? As the questions swirled in my head, tentative answers followed. I began grasping for changes that seemed certain: the participants would acquire new information and new skills; they would be pushed to explore new ways of creating; they would learn new ways of expressing themselves. The project would be a vehicle that could lead the women to new ways of being and interacting in and with the world. These women would literally see the world through a new lens, while others would be looking at and seeing them differently as well.

With all of these changes afoot, at some point, it seemed inevitable that the Women’s Mobile Museum participants might ask themselves: “What have I done and what am I doing here?” When they reached the edge of their comfort zone, they would have to decide if they would continue down the new path, push the limits and expand their comfort zone, or turn back around and stay in the familiar. Only time would tell what they would decide. My background in systems thinking reminded me that one change in the system causes changes throughout the system; therefore, when an individual does something new or different, there is going to be a ripple effect throughout their entire life. With all of this in mind, I quickly felt the need to be available for more than

The stress I imagined increased as I thought about the demands of the year. The women would actively participate in a challenging class and project schedule, work with international artists, and be thrust into the public eye. As one who has participated in, as well as taught, intensive programming, I am acquainted with the internal challenges, conflicts, and growing pains that accompany such a journey. I am also aware of the need for support during a program of such intensity, and the disappointment that participants frequently experienced because those closest to them often didn’t or couldn’t support the participants in the ways that they needed.

At the same time, as I intellectually and emotionally imagined the path upon which the women were about to embark, I found myself filled with anxiety about what would unfold along with anxiousness of the ambiguity. What was a Women’s Mobile Museum? What did it look like? Would the women get along? How would their lives change? How would the world receive them? As the questions swirled in my head, tentative answers followed. I began grasping for changes that seemed certain: the participants would acquire new information and new skills; they would be pushed to explore new ways of creating; they would learn new ways of expressing themselves. The project would be a vehicle that could lead the women to new ways of being and interacting in and with the world. These women would literally see the world through a new lens, while others would be looking at and seeing them differently as well.

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What does the term museum call to mind? To me, it has always been a formidable building displaying historical artifacts or works by well-known artists—an attempt to preserve the past. Museums explain the history (not herstory) of where we have come from, but rarely ask ‘Where do we go from here?’ Works of art are left for personal interpretation with only the artists’ names and titles of work inscribed.

The Women’s Mobile Museum (WMM) challenges all my preconceived notions about museums. This museum is a display of women’s stories. Their stories are not of the past, but of current/recurring social and cultural experiences. These works of art seek public understanding and individual interpretation. The artists themselves staff the museum, providing the opportunity for interactive discussions with visitors, and encourage a deeper understanding of the works.

Museums are usually located in the heart of a city, the attractive and economically favored center of tourism. But the Women’s Mobile Museum is housed in neighborhood community centers, inviting those who do not ordinarily frequent museums to have the experience of communing with art. When the residents of Juniata Park, a neighborhood in northeastern Philadelphia, learned that a museum was coming to their community, their spirits were lifted: to them, the museum meant “we are somebody and our neighborhood has arrived!” Neighbors who answered the invitation and visited the museum were transformed by the depth of the experience cutting to the heart, truths about who we are and whom we need to become. Powerful photographs etched messages of rising above challenges and hurts to healing and hope in hearts and minds.

I am a teacher at the St. Lucy Day School for Children with Visual Impairments and Archbishop Ryan Academy for the Deaf (grades pre-K through 8). Museums are difficult experiences for people who require different forms of accessibility. Visual displays are behind glass or ropes—barriers to people whose only access to visual work is through sound and touch.

Early in its development, the Women’s Mobile Museum embraced the challenge of making photographs accessible to my students at St. Lucy Day School, which is a mere block and a half from the Juniata Park Boys and Girls Club, where the museum was installed. WMM photographers participated in a workshop to learn how to make photographs accessible to those who are blind by creating tactile graphics, audio descriptions, and object displays. The artists trained in 3-D modeling through live models and visitor staging of photographs.
Students from St. Lucy Day School were welcomed not only by WMM artists, but also by the accessibility to exhibits. They enjoyed encountering the photographs in ways they could understand. Teachers read the artists’ statements and photograph descriptions conveying the content in American Sign Language. Braille labels identified works and corresponded to audio descriptions. Headsets broadcast the photographers’ voice recording of their artist statements and personal description of photographs. These descriptions included prominent features of the photos, photo effects the artists had employed, as well as the emotion or message the images conveyed.

Interaction with object displays brought further understanding and delight. In the self-portrait taken by Zanele Muholi, *MaID, Philadelphia, 2018*, Muholi’s head and body are covered with rough rope and she wears safety goggles. The children found the same rope and goggles they could touch in a box in front of the framed photograph. They delighted in taking turns wrapping the rope around their shoulders and wearing the goggles. One student commented how thick and scratchy the rope was.

Andrea Wall’s video collage, *In The Wake*, included rich music, voiced poetry, and vivid descriptions aiding an understanding of images the students couldn’t see. Kindergarteners playfully rearranged the smooth pebbles and plastic toy soldiers Wall had arranged in her tactile box to mimic her piece, *Global Toyman Symmetry*. Every child curiously explored Danielle Morris’ tactile sculpture of a mannequin’s arm decorated with four different watches to mimic her piece, *chrono*. And no one missed the chance to hug the same stuffed pink dog that was featured in Iris Maldonado’s self portrait, *Memories*. The all-time favorite experience for the children was Shasta Bady’s multimedia installation, *As Above, So Below*, where they could sit in a real subway seat and listen to the sounds of Philadelphia’s Frankford Market Line run along its tracks, voicing all stops. Throughout their visits the children asked questions and had conversations with the WMM artists.

I commend the Women’s Mobile Museum for bringing to life what I hope is the future of all museums: a traveling exhibit that showcases works of the not-so-famous; a fair representation of women’s perspective; a space for current artists who are the prophets of our day calling forth transformative understanding and individual response; accessibility to all (especially those who are blind or deaf), and encountering the artist as well as the art. This would truly be revolutionary.
Contributor Biographies

afaq is a philly-based daughter, with grandmother tendencies. assembled in yemen (from sudanese parts) afaq considers herself a global citizen of her own country, she is an artist, activist, and educator who seeks to love the world until it loves her back.

Shasta Bady is an aspiring scientist, visual artist, and sporadic papermaker. Her influences include Lyndsey Addario, Sebastiao Salgado, and Malick Sidibe. She enjoys exploring the subtleties of light, color, and staying available to visual spontaneity. Through her art she aims to celebrate the depth of our connectedness and commonalities.

Tash Billington is a Philadelphia native who uses art as a way to heal, motivate, and give back to underserved communities. Tash specializes in visual art, spoken word, and engaging with community members. She is best known for assisting on large-scale public mural projects. She can often be seen operating aerial boom lifts or maintaining a smooth flow during community paint days. Tash is currently working with Philadelphia Mural Arts, the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, and Amber Art and Design. Her motto is to enlighten, inspire, and elevate.

Davell Barnes is a meme creator, a film ethnographer, a social poet, and a dapper rapper. Barnes is a multidisciplinary teaching artist is a 2018 Women’s Mobile Museum Project Apprentice at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, a UPENN CAMRA Fellow, a Philly-CAM Digital Media Literacy Fellow, and a Warrior Writer. Drawing from her intersecting identities and lived experience, the former Army Sergeant is quickly becoming a veteran media maker.

Sister M. Elaine George, IHM is the current president of the Juniata Action Committee, which partnered with the Women’s Mobile Museum project. This organization assisted with arranging meeting times and places for candidates to apply for the program, locating a site for the mobile museum, and encouraging neighbors to visit the museum. For the past 27 years, she has served in ministry at St. Lucy Day School for Children with Visual Impairments. Work includes production of braille materials, tactile graphics, and models.

Iris Maldonado grew up in Farjardo, Puerto Rico. She graduated from Thomas A. Edison High School in Philadelphia. A single mother of three and grandmother of three beautiful children, Maldonado is a Reiki practitioner, poet, and photographer. She holds an associate degree in Human Services. Her passion for helping people motivates her work as a peer support coach. In her work, she helps people to be the best they can be and inspires them to not let their limitations separate them from their goals. Having discovered the medium at a young age, photography helps her to see things from a different perspective; she particularly enjoys how photographs can freeze time, feelings, and memories in one frame. Her photographs come, in her own words, ‘from the eyes of her soul’.

Danielle Morris (’1999, Philadelphia) is a self-taught photographer who mainly works in street and self-portraiture. With a conceptual approach, Morris absorbs the tradition of remembrance art into daily practice. Her works are often about the contact architecture and the living elements of feminism. Morris focuses on the idea of the feminine in “public space” and more specifically on spaces where anyone can do anything at any given moment: the non-private space, the non-privately owned space, and space that is expressed through proximity to her subjects and their otherness to her sense of femininity. Morris was a contributing artist to the 2018 SPACES Residency, “Home Court” lead by visual artist Shawn Theodore. She has exhibited at The Barnes Foundation through Let’s Connect Philly, where she placed in the top 20 of the participating artists. Morris is a former assistant teacher of photography at the Village of Arts and Humanities.

Zanele Muholi is a South African visual activist and photographer. Muholi’s self-proclaimed mission is “to re-write a Black queer and trans visual history of South Africa for the world to know of our resistance and existence at the height of hate crimes in South Africa and beyond.”

Muholi co-founded the Forum for Empowerment of Women (FEW) in 2002 and Inkanyiso (www. inkanyiso.org), a forum for queer and visual (activist) media, in 2009. Muholi studied Advanced Photography at the Market Photo Workshop in Newtown, Johannesburg, and in 2009 completed an MFA: Documentary Media at Ryerson University in Toronto. In 2013, they became an honorary professor at the University of the Arts/Hochschule für Künste Bremen. In 2017, Muholi was bestowed France’s highest cultural honor, the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts des Lettres. Recent exhibitions include the traveling show Somnyama Ngonyama (2017-2020), which premiered at Autograph, London, and currently on view at Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta. Their latest monograph was published in 2018 by Aperture Foundation, New York. Their work was shown at Persephone, New York (2014); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2017); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2015); they were also included in the South African pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale (2013); the São Paolo Biennial (2010); and documenta 13, Kassel (2013).

Renée Mussai is Senior Curator and Head of Curatorial, Archive, and Research at Autograph, London. A scholar-curator with a special interest in African, Black European, and diasporic lens-based practices, Mussai publishes and lectures internationally on photography, visual culture, curatorial activism, and cultural politics. She has been a regular guest curator and former non-resident fellow at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, and is presently a Research Associate in the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, University of Johannesburg, and part-time PhD candidate in Art History at University College London. Her writing has appeared in numerous artist monographs, anthologies, and journals; recent exhibitions (and publications) include the critically acclaimed and internationally touring gallery installations, ‘Black Chronicles’ (2014-2019), ‘Zanele Muholi: Somnyama Ngonyama, Hail the Dark Lions’ (2017-2021), and ‘Photo Boswell: The Space Between Things’ (2016/19). Mussai holds under- and postgraduate degrees in Photography from the University of the Arts, and previously studied at the University of Vienna, Austria.

Lindeka Qampi is a self-taught photographer who primarily works in the genre of street photography. In 2006, she made photography her career after joining a consortium of photographers known as Illo Lubantu. Since 2012, Qampi has worked as a project facilitator alongside fellow South African photographer and visual activist Zanele Muholi. In 2014 they co-organized Photo XP at Aurora Girls School, Soweto, introducing photography as a life skill and empowering tool to young women. In 2015, Qampi began photographing herself and immediate family with a new series of work entitled Inside My Heart. Qampi’s work has been exhibited internationally and is part of the collections in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the University of Cape Town, between urban and space that is expressed through proximity to her senses.

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Shana-Adina Roberts is an artist from West Philadelphia. She is a multi-disciplinary artist who continuously explores and discovers new ways to express herself. Her work moves from the figurative to the avantgarde. For Shana, the creative process naturally forms a part of who she is, and always has been. She is an artist who is interested in creating art that speaks to her experience and can speak for her.
Carrie-Anne Shimboriski is a Philadelphia native, abstract painter, Master Doodler, and an emerging photographer. Throughout her work, Shimboriski seeks to capture the raw, real, and present emotion of her subjects. As a self-taught artist, Shimboriski has created numerous pieces of artwork; however, her greatest creation thus far is the light of her life, her son Luca!

Muffy Ashley Torres Born in and 'repping' Philadelphia while having her heart on the U.S./Mexico border, Muffy Ashley Torres is a multifaceted, self-taught artist. With a diagnosis of a chronic illness at a young age, she "found in art a way to navigate and deal with the physical pain I often endure. Through photography, I embrace the opportunity to freeze moments and make a statement against the current socio-political climate... I believe visual art has the ability to strike emotions that can pave the way for a revolution and capture the beauty within the struggle. Striving for social justice through the process of learning and unlearning whom and what society has deemed significant for too long, I find my greatest motivation in resistance: dancing in and out of the closet, I hope that the art I create resonates with others who often struggle with being unheard."

Andrea “Philly” Walls feels brutalized by stories of global injustice, including poverty, human displacement, and violence against the environment. She makes art across genres as an act of resistance. She is grateful to the Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation, The Hedgebrook Community for Women Authoring Change, and the Women’s Mobile Museum for their ongoing support and sustenance. She is pleased that her poetry and visual art have found homes in publications she admires, including Callaloo, Waselchuk is a visual storyteller whose photographs have appeared in print and online media worldwide. Her work is exhibited internationally and is part of many collections including the New Orleans Museum of Art, Portland Museum of Art, and South African National Gallery. Waselchuk also curates and coordinates exhibitions and special projects that prioritize creative social engagement. Most notable of these is Grace Before Dying, a collaborative photographic documentary about a hospice program in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Waselchuk coordinated The Philly Block Project, PPA’s 16-month visual collaboration with Hank Willis Thomas and residents of the South Kensington neighborhood. Waselchuk is a recipient of the 2014 Leeway Foundation’s Transformation Award, the 2012 Pew Fellowship for the Arts, the Aaron Siskind Foundation’s 2009 Individual Photographer Fellowship, and the 2004 Southern African Gender and Media Award.

Kathleen Walls, Psy.D. is the Project Advisor for the residency portion of the Women's Mobile Museum. A clinical and systems change psychologist, Dr. Kathleen Walls delivers leadership development seminars, assessments, strategic direction, meeting facilitation, and executive coaching nationwide to a wide range of civic, educational, healthcare, and business enterprises. Dr. Walls graduated from Temple University and earned her M.S. and Psy.D. degrees from Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, PA. Dr. Walls has enjoyed a triad psychologist career—as college professor, psychotherapist, and strategic advisor to leaders and organizations on their people, process, and performance challenges. She lectures, consults, coaches, delivers interactive seminars and motivational speeches on self- and systems-mastery. She is a passionate practitioner and learner: Dr. Walls embraces and facilitates cross-cultural exchange, integrates spiritual and holistic healing paradigms into her leadership development practice, and mentors young rising professionals.

Lori Waselchuk is a visual storyteller whose photographs have appeared in print and online media worldwide. Her work is exhibited internationally and is part of many collections including the New Orleans Museum of Art, Portland Museum of Art, and South African National Gallery. Waselchuk also curates and coordinates exhibitions and special projects that prioritize creative social engagement. Most notable of these is Grace Before Dying, a collaborative photographic documentary about a hospice program in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Waselchuk coordinated The Philly Block Project, PPA’s 16-month visual collaboration with Hank Willis Thomas and residents of the South Kensington neighborhood. Waselchuk is a recipient of the 2014 Leeway Foundation’s Transformation Award, the 2012 Pew Fellowship for the Arts, the Aaron Siskind Foundation’s 2009 Individual Photographer Fellowship, and the 2004 Southern African Gender and Media Award.
WOMEN'S MOBILE MUSEUM

2019