

Hi, my name is Indira Allegra, I am a queer, disabled, non-binary black femme/themme of Cherokee and Irish descent. When I say 'I' it is shorthand for the confluence of human and non-human ancestors and teachers who make my existence possible. I use they/them pronouns. I was born in unceded Anishinaabe territories of the Ojibwe, Odawa and Botawatami known also today as Detroit, Michigan. I am a thinker, artist, writer and educator currently living in unceded Chochochenyo Ohlone territories also known as Oakland, California. Before working as an artist professionally, I served communities who were important to me as a sign language interpreter, union organizer and domestic violence counselor and have many years of experience working in the service industry. I grew up working poor and though I have spent much of my life as a city dweller, I enjoy finding ways to be in ever deeper communication with my environment be it densely populated with humans or not.

My work explores memorial as a genre and a vital part of the human experience. I spend much of my days imagining what memorials can feel like and how they can function. I do this through performance, sculpture and installation - with sculptures at times initiating performances, performances creating sculptures and sculptures expanding into installation environments. I'm deeply informed by the ritual, relational and performative aspects of weaving and use this to explore the repetitive crossing of forces held under tension be they material, social or emotional. Additionally, it is important to say that I believe everything is animate and also that there is no such thing as a 'blank' or 'open' space geographically, visually or ideologically.

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Notice how I introduced myself. I started with who I am and not what I do. I positioned myself within a complex network of relations, geographically, temporally and ideologically. I acknowledged the presence of teachers, ancestors and influences in my life as well as what I enjoy doing in addition to what I do for work. It is with this quality of awareness that I believe we must approach performance. We have to have an understanding of where we are coming from in order to know how to perform with an object or to create a site specific work. Imagine you are a dancer and you've been asked to create a duet with another dancer but you have no information about this person's training, how their body is feeling that day or any injuries they might have. They don't know anything about you either. It would be stressful to establish a mode of working together without putting yourself or your partner at risk for harm. Without this information you miss out on a vital part of the story of the work you are creating together.

When I am creating a site specific performance, I introduce myself to the space as a way of acknowledging the animacy of the site. And yes I mean this literally. I do this as I respect that all sites come with their own narrative histories which started before I arrived and will continue after I am gone. When doing research pertaining to a site specific project I feel my work is strengthened by asking the following questions:

1. Who are the indigenous people of the land I am visiting/working on?
2. Who is not native to the area but is born and raised in the area?
3. What are the qualities of the landscape and climate am I working with?
4. What are the qualities of the encounters I am having with plants and animals in the area?
5. What is the history of industry in the area? Sexwork? Textile production? Ranching? Shipping?
6. What kinds of institutions existed here? Medical? Military? Educational? Religious?

7. What histories or individual narratives "haunt" the space?
8. When do I feel comfortable and welcome here? When am I welcomed but feel uncomfortable? When do I feel unwelcomed and uncomfortable? When do I feel unwelcomed but comfortable? How do I know this to be true for me?
9. Who (or what) wants to speak or communicate with me? How do I know this?
10. How can I demonstrate an ethic of care and reciprocity with the place I am working with and whomever/whatever wants to speak with me? Is this possible?

Answers to these questions can emerge through interviews I have with people, access to newspaper or academic archives when necessary, internet searches for images, books, videos and my own subjective emotional and somatic experiences as an artist in the form of dreams, emotional and physical impulses and experiences of mental clarity and confusion. Remember how I talked about being deeply informed by the ritual, relational and performative aspects of weaving? I believe research is a way of centralizing the experience and understanding of relationships in the making of a work rather than the centralizing the production of the object itself. This is not to assume that all relationships can be harmonious - it may be that you need to make a work to metabolize/think about what feels antagonizing about a site. Your daily return to your questions - to this work of relationship building - becomes the ritual which holds the portal open for the creation of the work. Relationship building is like weaving - it takes time and you can't see the whole thing as you are building it. You can only see what you've developed in the past, but not what things will look like in the future. You build on the tension which exists in a space to tell a story. And the tension in the space emerges in the answers to these questions also. These are historical or narrative patterns which I understand as the crossing of forces held under tension be they material, social or emotional.

To perform with objects requires another kind of introduction and relationship building. I handle objects with care and with an intention to preserve the integrity of the body of the object I am performing with. The looms I use in the BODYWARP performances were made in the 1940s so I had to spend a great deal of time doing what I call 'asking' with them in order to learn how they would allow me to work with them. I did this by making skin contact with the looms first - running my palms along their breast and back beams, their castles and treadles to get information about the strength of the wood in different places and areas of splitting in the wood as well. If the process sounds sensual in some ways, it is because it is for me. BODYWARP was in fact borne out of a desire to give space for my desire to experience the stretch and roll of thread on the loom. Like other desire practices, I believe that establishing a language of consent between all performers is important for the longevity of the relationship.

Having established skin contact - I introduced my skeletal weight to the looms - laying my body across them individually and together in static poses. I wanted to feel if they could hold me and for how long in certain shapes. Once a somatic trust was established with the loom - I began to introduce my muscular energy, increasing the amount of force or bodily torque I offered each loom each day. I had to listen for the response of the loom in the form of the sounding of the wood. Through the ritual of 'asking' on a daily basis with my skin, bone and muscle, I learned that a high 'chirp' or 'creeeek' was the loom's way of communicating a permission for the shift of my weight. A groan was a way communicating the loom's twisting motion and a caution that I could continue - but slowly. A flat 'croaking' sound was indicative of a crack in the wood which was sure to happen should I continue.

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To close, I would like to offer that I believe a focus on relationship is a methodology which the field of craft can offer as a valuable resource to other kinds of artists who may not regularly integrate craft processes into their studios. As a valuable resource to you - fellow traveler - I will offer two texts which have been foundational for my practice: *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* by Sara Ahmed and *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* by Mel Y. Chen. I'll summarize their descriptions for you here. In the first text, Ahmed focuses on the "orientation" aspect of "sexual orientation" and the "orient" in "orientalism", Ahmed examines what it means for bodies to take shape as they move through the world directing themselves toward or away from objects and others. She talks about a queer phenomenology which reveals how social relations are arranged spatially and how queerness can disrupt and disorient us in our relationships to objects at reach (or out of reach). In the second text, Mel Y. Chen thinks about how matter that is considered insensate, immobile or deathly, animates cultural lives. This text is important to me as it kind of investigates this kind of slippery division between the living and the dead or that which is beyond the human or animal revealing the hierarchical politics which serve as ideological supports for each category. So, what kinds of ideas support an assumption that we have that human life is above non-human life or shape our idea of what is living and what is dead. So. Check it out.

Somatic resources I recommend in the development of your performance work include - you guessed it - meditation (there's no way around it folks), body scanning and movement practices which involve the coordination of breath and a change of position. I have an eclectic background of dance, stage performance, sport, improvisation, circus and what else we got - oh yeah, yoga, in my background but you can make work with whatever movement is already alive in your body. Performative craft is for anyone committed to the durational practices of curiosity and vulnerability necessary to learn how to make work with sites and objects. All bodies - no matter one's current ability, level of training, shape or size can make performative work.

Keep reading. Keep feeling and keep making work. Best of luck to you in all your endeavors!