

# thirstDays: "love, intimacy + (com)passion" in difficult times

Elisa Ferrari, Tarah Hogue, & Jayce Salloum

*Dedicated to Beau Dick Gigame Walas Gwa'yam*

*thirstDays is a project conceived as the rain falls and covers us in a slick substance transduced from the skies, moist. How can this, how can we, contribute to the establishing of a momentum that may have once been here in waves or pieces but over time was squandered, and defeated, with the imposition of capital triumphantly declaring its colonial (un)consciousness in our enclave by the water. Surrounded by a possible serene beauty, grief and sadness, love and hate, what encounters do we inscribe into our psyches and into our beings, what can art do to fulfil a mandate of hope and agency. What can we contribute.*

**Tarah Hogue:** Let's start by talking about how the project got started and how the theme of love, intimacy, compassion became important for you.

**Jayce Salloum:** In 2012 Sharon Bradley, the Video Out Distribution Coordinator (2010-2014), proposed to nominate me for a Governor General's Award. Her and Amy Kazymierchuk, the VIVO Programming Coordinator (2010-2012), thought it would be good to do some kind of program in conjunction with that nomination but I had no time at that moment. When I received the award in 2014, VIVO (Elisa Ferrari, Exhibitions & Events Coordinator) again invited me to do a project of some type. I felt the need to do something in gratitude, not as an obligation, but because I had worked with VIVO since the 80s and visited them since the late 70s and respected their work throughout. I tried to think of what I could do that would contribute to the culture of the moment, that could have some type of impact that wasn't just a one-off thing. In Vancouver I've felt there is a lack of general compassion and people seem to be very isolated. In this rain they take shelter wherever they can. They seem to inhabit layers of *impermeables*. Looking for density and thinking of exigency, I felt the need to propose something durational—with *thirstDays*, that's become my favourite word of the year, *durational*.

TH: Elisa, as the partner at VIVO, what was your perspective at the beginning of the project?

Elisa Ferrari: I learnt about Jayce's work through Rene Gabri when I attended university in Venice in 2007. His video interview with Soha Bechara really resonated with me and is a work I often return to. I also knew of Jayce's interest in the politics of archives both through his work and his ongoing support of VIVO's Crista Dahl Media Library and Archive. In 2014, following the Governor General's Award, I invited him to develop a new project. At that time, the organization was going through a self-reflective phase and relocating to a new neighbourhood, Renfrew Collingwood. It was a disruptive time. When Jayce proposed *thirstDays*, I saw this project as an opportunity to re-think how communities and individuals gravitate around an organization, how this engagement changes over time and how an organization might re-gather, especially after moving to a new area of the city after more than twenty years on Main Street.

JS: I didn't want to burden VIVO too much as each event required massive administrative and technical support, so we kept it to one event a month. Thinking further about the idea of lack, and what is needed to nourish and feed us, is how I came to the title of *thirstDays*. Inclusivity and collaboration being important parts of the project, I invited a diversity of people who I could envision working together, selecting artists who had never curated before, pairing younger artists with older artist/curators/writers—combinations of curators took place in a multitude of ways. Sometimes people were paired up with complete strangers. And then there was a lot of discourse that had to happen, between the two of them and with the artists they chose for their program. I wanted to create a framework that the curators would reflect upon but also give them enough openness for their own interpretations. Each instance was radically different but had threads that continued throughout the whole year. We didn't initially budget for a writer but, at some point, we realized we were going to need a writer for blog posts about the programs, so we invited you (Tarah), to this table.

EF: How did this experience of writing for *thirstDays* develop for you, Tarah?

TH: I was initially excited by the focus of the program being about intimacy and compassion and the collaborative structure that you had set up because

these are things I'm invested in within my own work where I more often work collaboratively than individually as a curator.

I've also been thinking a lot about the durational nature of this project. Every time you go to an exhibition or some sort of program, your experience of it is affected by so many factors: how you're feeling that day, who you're there with, how much sleep you got last night, all of those things. I would always come to VIVO after working all day and needing to be, as the responder, very present in that moment. My desire to be generous to each of the programs and the work that had gone into them made me reflect about how my writing could be compassionate and intimate alongside these works in progress, which in turn made me think about writing differently because it's easier to be at a distance from things than it is to be really close to them.

JS: From the beginning you took a personal tack to the writing, you could have taken any number of positions to set the tone for the year of responses. Can you talk a bit about how you came to that approach?

TH: I think it's because of the way that you set the program up. That first event really set the tone: we were coming in to do this year of programming and we had to give ourselves to that process and proceed with good intention. As a writer, I become implicated within that and feel responsibility towards the work that is going on. When the impetus to gather is to create a temporary community of sorts, there's an emotional labour and perceptivity toward others that is involved. My approach to the writing just flowed naturally from that. The first event also introduced the idea of reciprocity, which has framed many of the other programs, as well as the idea of ceremonial activism as being something that's participatory.

JS: To make an impact, you have to have density, you have to have weight as there's an urgency, and to fill it, it has to be something that's substantial. That's also the nature of the year, the nature of bringing people together, and bringing together allies and people with affinities—and people who didn't know that they had affinities, as in strangers and others—together. The ceremonial added to that, and the opening event felt like magic. We were very relieved to get the first program underway, to have it actualized and become physical and spiritual simultaneously.

In this context it's usually taboo to talk about *love, intimacy, compassion* and

*spirituality*. In the art world or academia if you talk about these things people will tend to write you off. Instead, we hoped to find a way that people would unintentionally engage and deal with unfamiliar levels of their being that rhetoric usually prevents them from engaging with. The idea and acts of *ceremony* were a subtle and ambiguous way to be able to comprise this.

I also wanted to include an abundance of Indigenous participation, so over half the curators had some identification with Indigeneity, and then encouraging them to curate Indigenous artists, especially local Indigenous presence as much as they could, or at least consider it. And thinking of suturing, morphing, expanding *communities* and audiences, and building a momentum. This way people came in contact with other people they normally wouldn't have, including other disenfranchised and marginalized and diasporic communities. Even though the notion of "community" is fraught—I mean, groups of people, bringing *peoples* together, let's say.

TH: Ceremony is also about *this place*, it's about recognizing how the place that we are in nourishes us and giving offerings back to that, to the land, and to the waters. I think that that kind of consideration really pervades all of the programs.

EF: I want to return to our discussion of the collaborative process. In *thirstDays* this process contrasted a solid structure with the necessity to come to terms with the impossibility of control. In working collaboratively it often happens that some of the work that is being done remains invisible. I'm left wondering how you recognize this work, how you make sure it is accounted for, and how its importance to the project's realization is retained over time?

TH: Miko Tanaka writes about citation as a feminist practice. It's very much about recognizing and giving presence to those forms of labour that move outside of a capitalist structure and the way that we often encounter work in the art world. A lot of the programs moved to create these sorts of citational networks in different ways. In *Harbour/Haven (thirstDays No. 03)*, the *Trans-Versus* (2016) performance took place in front of Manuel Pina's video work, *Naufraños* (2015). Similarly, the *Acá Nada/Acá Elsewhere* (2016) video portrait of the aka collective pictured all of the members of the collective, including Monica Reyes, the gallerist who supports the work they're doing. This evidences that kind of labour as well as pointing to how the formation of subjectivities from elsewhere morphs in relation to this place.

The durational nature of the project created the conditions for a citational network to emerge. The artists, artworks and public came in and out of various programs throughout the year, interweaving these conversations with one another and creating a groundswell over the year. Many people commented on this aspect of the project. I think the level of thought and labour was evident to people who witnessed it.

JS: There were fifty new productions made through the year with the modest production and artist fees that we had. I think you're also referring to the nature of labour of this type of practice, which needs to include all the support staff standing behind what we see. We tried to acknowledge that at the beginning of each program. This is a loving labour of care and dedication, a stretching of people's energies and time, in all that they put into it.

EF: Over time the project morphed and resonated with what was happening on a sociopolitical level elsewhere. For example, *Dying of Thirst* centered on water protection and women's voices at a time when the Dakota Access Pipeline protest (#NoDAPL) at Standing Rock was gaining more support. *Against Rupture* took place just before Black Lives Matter requested that Pride Toronto remove police floats from the parade as a sign of respect for black bodies that are under the constant threat of police brutality. These are just two examples of how the series slowly became attuned to the activities of other movements.

JS: During the programs it seemed that when you came into or sat down inside the space, what you carried from outside, like the events of the day, the news, what was happening in the world, seemed to resonate even louder than ever. They started to bounce off of each other, what was happening in front of you, what was happening outside of this particular space came together in unexpected ways.



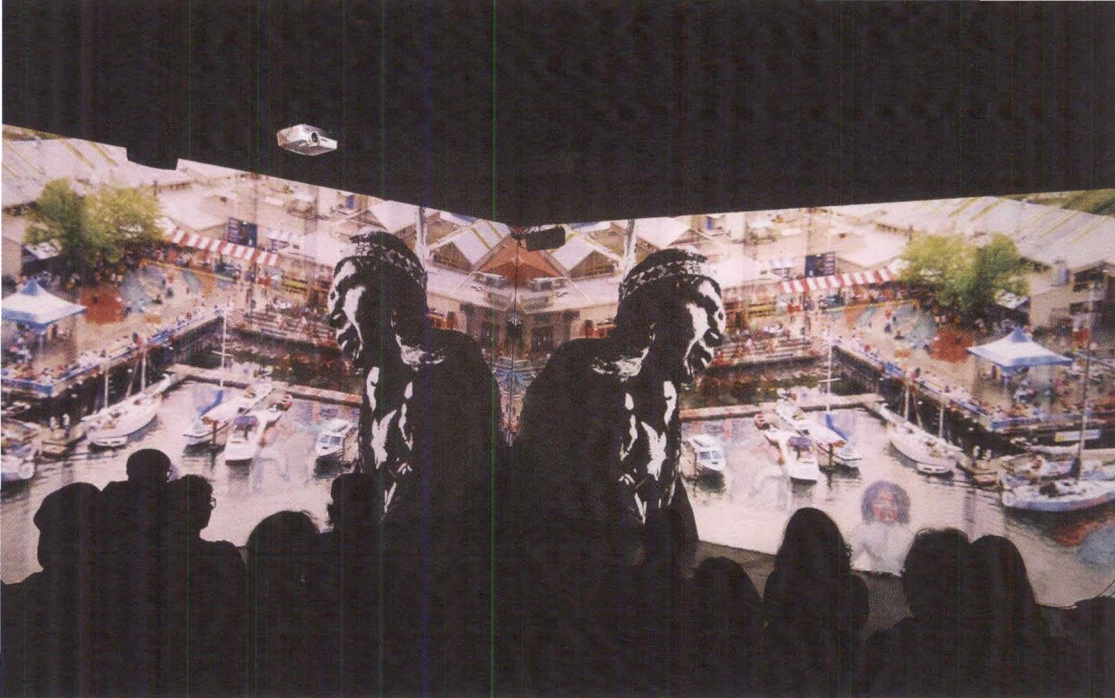


*thirstDays No. 01: Ceremonial Activism 101: The Gifting/Taiontenonhwera:ton (to give thanks),*  
Cease Wyss & Aaron Rice with Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde & Nicole Mandryk,  
Native Education College, February 25, 2016, photo: Brendan Yandt

*thirstDays No. 03: Alessandra Santos performing in The Real, The Virtual, and the We, April 28, 2016,*  
photo: Brendan Yandt

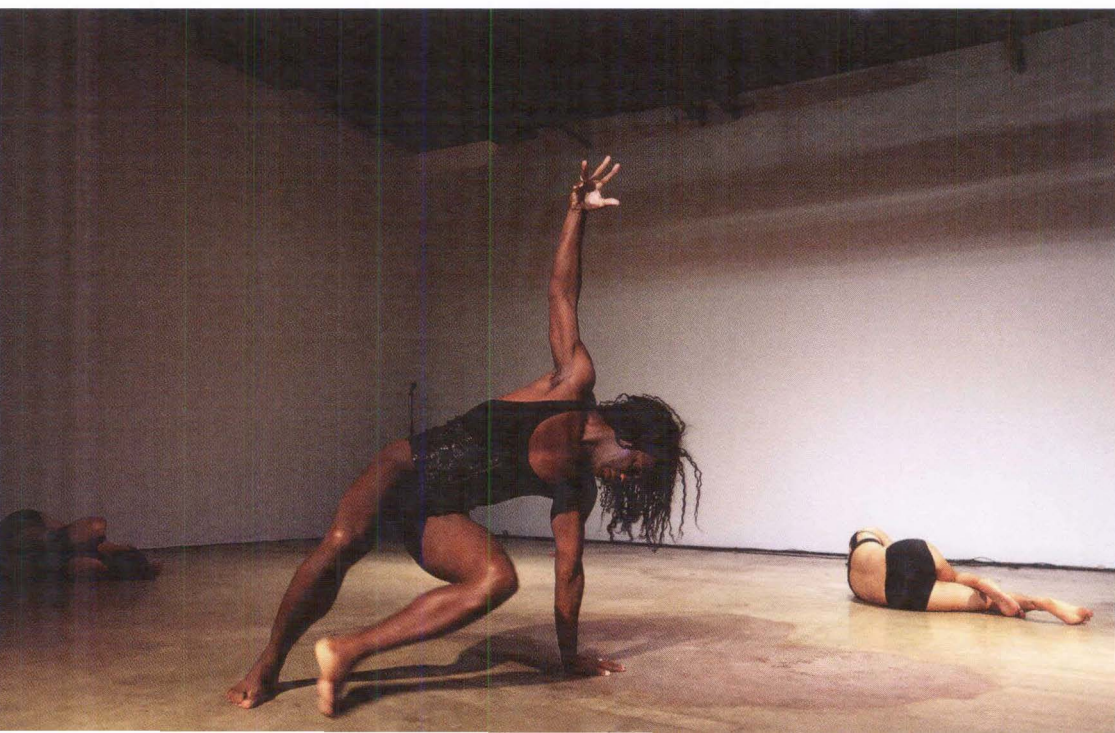






*thirstDays No. 04: Remixing/Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver* by Irwin Oostindie and Ronnie Dean Harris, video screening, May 26, 2016, photo: Brendan Yandt

*thirstDays No. 05: Ravyn (Jelani Ade-Lam) Wngz, kumari giles & Sze-Yang Ade-Lam, ILL NANA/DiverseCity Dance Company performing in FIRE*, June 30, 2016, photo: Brendan Yandt







*thirstDays No. 06: the fridge before the feasting for *As You Live Here*, curated by Urban Subjects, July 28, 2016, photo: Jayce Salloum*

*thirstDays No. 07: The Ladies' Tea Party led by Cassandra Eastman & Eunice McMillan, Oppenheimer Park, August 18, 2016, photo: Brendan Yandt*





# VERSAE ARCOLONION

CONVERSATIONAL  
STRATEGIES BEARING  
WITNESS TO THE DIALECTICS OF  
DE(KOLONIAL  
INTERPERSONAL  
RECONCILIATION)

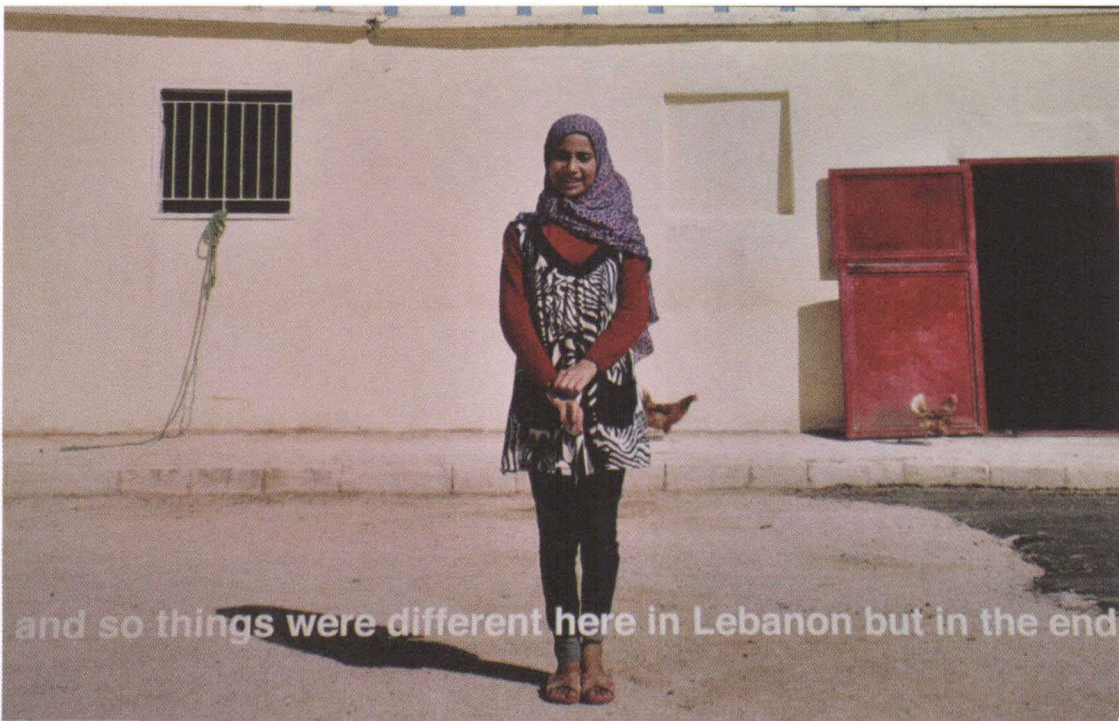
*thirstDays* No. 08: *VERSAE ARCOLONION*, image from performance notes:  
Chandra Melting Tallow & Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, September 29, 2016





*thirstDays No. 09*: Lori Blondeau performing *offerings*, October 27, 2016, photo: Alisha Weng

*thirstDays No. 10: Reem's Story* by Dima Alansari & Eric Sanderson, video, November 24, 2016, photo: Alisha Weng







*thirstDays No. 11*: the welcoming table for *Eat Rice Yet?*, curated by Henry Tsang & Diyan Achjadi,  
December 15, 2016, photo: Alisha Weng

*thirstDays No. 12*: Guadalupe Martinez performing *Triangulation of Desire/*  
*Return to the Pleasurable* (A032, A061, A097), January 26, 2017, photo: Alisha Weng

