

Creatrix; a woman who creates, brings forth physical realizations of the creative force and delves into the mystical. I am an artist in every sense of the word, but Creatrix is what I have now found truly fits. I love colour, form, wildness, and energy because I was raised in turbulent beautiful spaces throughout my life. I embody my art and my art is a snakeskin of me. Shedding new ideas and transforming as I grow.

As soon as I could talk and walk, I wanted to draw. Every schoolbook I had was covered in patterns, illustrations, graffiti, and poems. I painted my own backdrops for kindy photoshoots and directed family photos. I felt such a deep need to process the world through mark making. My artistic lineage was passed down through generations of makers. I remember watching my Nana's hand crocheting blankets and my Dede (my mother's mother) sewing outfits for me and all my cousins, my grandad smoking cigars and teaching me about the roots of Reggae as he placed the needle on another vinyl. Their daughter, my mother, writes stories, sews, and creates homes that feel like a living artwork. I would draw pictures of dresses or costumes and she would make them come to life for me, helping me to trust that whatever I could dream could be. I simply had to know what I was asking for. This thread of adventure, dream and adaptation, no matter your surroundings, is deeply in my bones.

When I first saw Frida Kahlo's *La Dos Fridas* [1939], I was 8 years old and looking through a book in the library on Mexican Women Artists. I cried for the the two Fridas with their hearts outside their chests, tangled, bloody dress, scissors in hand. I wanted to do that; make people feel, see and dream new dreams. Later in primary school we went to the Queensland Art Gallery. I wandered off from my group and spent the entire day alone consuming every corner of the works.

I got in a lot of trouble but never cared very much about that detention. I had too much to dream about. I traced my fingers (sorry QAG) over a Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori painting, wanting to feel what she felt and see if the paint felt the way it made me feel. It was like flying over country, bright orange and blue, so rich you could taste it. I laid in an artwork that I never found the name of and watched a video work of flowers blooming on the ceiling. These small threads create the weaving that helped me form my own voice. I had to make art that hit that hard. Straight to your gut-change your life-quit your job-move country art. Art that inspired you to leap into life.

All my artworks come to me in dreams first, then they trickle into reality. Sometimes the title even comes through very early and I play with the words. Not in the sense of spelling them or how they are written in the sense of how over time they transform into objects. Whose mouths birthed them? What country was that? How did it change? What are its new meanings? What are its old meanings? These questions become a web. I ask a lot of questions in life and don't believe I'll ever lose my curiosity for this world. I also ask, does the world need to see this? And if so, does the world need to see it from me? If I can say yes with my chest, a hearty, loud bassline affirmative yes, then the rest flows through me with ease.

Very early on in my creation process, I associated my artworks with one root colour. *EYE HEAR U MAGIK* [2020] is Azure blue. *Heala* [2018] is the colour of Yams. *STILL I RISE* [2016] is bright Magenta. Every single one of them has their own personification, smell, taste, and energy. I can almost hear their voices or their responses on whether they want to be put in certain shows. Like a gaggle of loud aunties or sisters, they each have their own opinion. Many of them get

to travel and reach new audiences and have their own connections with the world past me. I simply had to birth them. I suppose my doula training makes sense even in my art making. I nourish, assist, and develop them, help them thrive then let them go. I really believe these seeds of ideas come from a deeper creative force. Almost like a radio channel anyone can listen to if they tune into the right station.

When she was a kid, Hannah Brontë's perfect day was one in which she could be *like moss*. Purposeful but resting, growing yet still, absorbing the sun. This instinctual longing for alternative ways of being in the world is central to her work as an artist today. Brontë uses language—inspired by the nexus of poetry, visual art and music—as a mode of public address. Driven by her pursuit of feeling, Brontë manifests her own experience, her hope and emotions as discipline and form. In the process, her work builds alternatives to the here and now.

Neon Oracle takes its name from the origins of neon—*Neos*—the Greek word for new, and the spectrum of luminous colours Brontë chooses for her works. 'Oracle' refers to the ways in which Brontë's work envisions possible futures in the midst of an overwhelming present. The exhibition presents over 30 text-based signs and banners made and iterated by Brontë over the past decade, revealing them as the foundation for her practice, where they have appeared as titles, dialogue, and lyrics, and acted as the inspiration for her works in video and installation, music, and performance.

Brontë uses the word-as-sign to inspire collective action, occupy or create space and inspire social and political change. In 2020, her sign series *AFFIRMATIONS DURING THE Apocalypse* was displayed throughout the Brisbane CBD in the first pandemic year. Installed in place of advertisements on Telstra phone booths, one sign proclaimed, MY LOVE, IT'S DESTINY CALLING, WILL YOU ANSWER? An immense sign across the Story Bridge read THIS IS THE SIGN YOU WERE LOOKING FOR DARLING. Brontë's all-femme performance art and hip-hop parties, *FEMPRES\$\$* made space for women of colour in the paternalistic club scene. Where there isn't a future, she builds one.

List of works

Hannah Brontë

Bubba I am so proud of you, inkjet print, 2021
baby look up 1, inkjet print, 2020
baby look up 2, inkjet print, 2020
Cuntmafia, inkjet print, 2013
Destiny's daughter, inkjet print, 2022
Divine, inkjet print, 2019
don't stress sis, inkjet print, 2019
Every body is sacred, inkjet print, 2020/2022
Feel it breathe it let it go 1, inkjet print, 2020
Feel it darling 1, inkjet print, 2020
Feel it darling 2, inkjet print, 2020
IATWOMD, inkjet print, 2018
If you could write, inkjet print, 2021
Its ok to thrive Bub, inkjet print, 2020
Nana said, inkjet print, 2019
now that you're trapped on planet you, inkjet print, 2020
Rest is resistance, inkjet print, 2020
Show me how it gets better, inkjet print, 2021
Slowly slowly gently gently, inkjet print, 2021
The futcha is ancient, inkjet print, 2019
the truly inner revelations, inkjet print, 2020
There is medicine, inkjet print, 2022
There will be many funerals, inkjet print, 2022
Thicka but wiser, inkjet print, 2017
This pussy be yankin, inkjet print, 2010/2022
We are all spiritually equipped, inkjet print, 2020/2022
Times are gettin freaky, inkjet print, 2020
You strong bubba, inkjet print, inkjet print, 2021
You wan run away my darling, inkjet print, 2017
baby you are infinite, inkjet print, 2021
Neon Oracle, digital print on cotton, 2022
EVIE, Vinyl banner, 2018
HIGH SELF ESTEEM PUSSY, Vinyl banner, 2018
MATRICKS, Vinyl banner, 2018
All works courtesy the artist

Twenty10

ASPEN, *T + Hot*, paper collage, 2022
ASPEN, *Alone*, paper collage, 2022
Chrys, *Hey BBY*, paper collage, 2022
Chrys, *Hygiene*, paper collage, 2022
Chicken nummy, *Destroy gender*, paper collage, 2022
Chicken nummy, *Gay Icecream*, paper collage, 2022
Felix, *PANSY*, paper collage, 2022
Hoodzy, *My energy belongs to me*, paper collage, 2022
Hoodzy, *In private I exhale, in public I choke*, paper collage, 2022
Icarus, *CARVE OUT*, paper collage, 2022
M, *Growth*, paper collage, 2022
M, *Lesbianism*, paper collage, 2022
Raushan, *Food I*, paper collage, 2022
Raushan, *Soft Snake*, paper collage, 2022
Raushan, *I Wish*, paper collage, 2022
River, *New False*, paper collage, 2022
Telaan, *PRIDE*, paper collage, 2022
Telaan, *Our day will come*, paper collage, 2022
Telaan, *Too big for your plot*, paper collage, 2022
Telaan, *Somedays Carefree*, paper collage, 2022
Telaan, *Used to be afraid*, paper collage, 2022
uglyseren, *hayat*, paper collage, 2022
uglyseren, *I miss when my friends use to hug me*, paper collage, 2022
All works courtesy the artists

José Esteban Muñoz imagined queerness as the insistence on the potential of another world. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz describes queerness as 'a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing". Queerness is, Muñoz emphasises, collective and built upon hope; a strategy to imagine new futures. In their optimism, futurity, and tissue of citations, we can understand Brontë's signs as a project of queer utopianism.

Brontë's signs are affecting, bold and direct like the protest placards they materially draw upon. Their wry humour sings out to us, and their beauty and self-wisdom draw us in. They affirm our instincts and encourage our desire for change. Some stand in opposition to the values of the status quo, such as power [*I'd rather be a snake than a ladder*], productivity [*Rest is resistance*], or connection [*don't stress sis the internet isn't real*]. Other signs act as rejoinders to what it represses: sovereignty [*the futcha is ancient*], interiority [*the truly inner revelations cannot be live streamed*], failure [*you wan run away my darling*], and intuition [*if you could write a love letter to your intuition what would you say?*]

Brontë's incantation of feeling originates in her subjectivity and her broader relations. Many of Brontë's signs are citations drawn from pop culture, which she lays out like points on a map for future social relations. Contessa Stuto's feminist, queer collective is honoured in *Cunt Mafia* [2013]. The banner work *EVIE* [2018] takes from the lyrics of Tommy Genesis, who claimed 'Fetish Rap' as the name for her self-styled brand of counter-exploitative verse. *Rest is resistance* [2020] is appropriated from the American artist Tricia Hersey. Hersey's manifesto

and her associated organisation, The Nap Ministry, examines the liberating power of rest and labels sleep deprivation as a racial and social-justice issue. By claiming 'rest as a form of resistance', Hersey seeks to disrupt a system that views human bodies as a tool for production and labour."

There's a stigma around caring for yourself. Unless it's attached to capitalism, then it's okay. You can pay \$200 for a facial, and then you're taking care of yourself. But if you're caring for yourself with something as deep as sleep, which is one of our most ancient and primal needs, if you're doing that in public, caring for your body, that's shameful. I tie that back to capitalism and to white supremacy and these notions around not seeing humans as divine and not seeing our bodies as belonging to us. "

Similarly, by using speech and statements as the site of subjective and ideological activity, Brontë's signs stand as forms of resistance to the conditions of labour and capitalism, reclaiming the body as a vocal site of resistance. That she does this with a wink is key to their dissonance [see the Pizza Hut font used in *EVIE*, 2019]. Her citations form the building blocks for new relations and the possibility of new worlds. Together, they show the depth of Brontë's pursuit of feeling as a discipline and a form and illuminate paths towards a liveable future.

Each inscription marks a point of encounter between Brontë and the world. During the development of this exhibition, Brontë led a flow-writing workshop with members of Twenty10, a NSW-based LGBTQIA+ service for young people. They listened to music, meditated, talked, shared a meal, and wrote. She asked them to find words that made them feel invincible and to choose lyrics that made them feel they could step outside the

door exactly as they are. Side by side, they wrote messages of hope to themselves. The affirmations they made that day appear in *Neon Oracle* installed by these young artists, who are themselves a new generation of agitators and truth-tellers.

The poet and cultural theorist Fred Moten, writing on improvisation, comprehension and utterance, recalls a comment made by the jazz musician Charles Lloyd, 'Charles Lloyd, asked to comment on a piece of his music by a radio interviewer, answered "Words don't go there."

Words don't go there: this implies a difference between words and sounds; it suggests that words are somehow constrained by their implicit reduction to the meanings they carry—meanings inadequate to or detached from the objects or states of affairs they would envelop. What's also implied is an absence of inflection; a loss of mobility, slippage, bend; a missing accent or affect; the impossibility of a slur or crack and the excess—rather than loss—of meaning they imply.' "

Environmental devastation, the grind of a connected world, labour for love or money, and personal and collective grief; words alone can't stretch to the breadth of feeling it takes to live. But Brontë queers words and phrases, finding their 'slur, crack and excess meaning.' She gives them inflection through scale and colour, emphasising their accent and affect with capitalisation and typography. No longer words but signs; they accumulate as a luminous web of encounters, emotions, and interactions. This is a verbal art that breaks open a new sense of the social. Not merely words to live by, but worlds to live in.

- i. Hannah Brontë, *AFFIRMATIONS DURING THE Apocalypse*, 2020, site-specific banner. This project was co-commissioned by the Institute of Modern Art and Brisbane Festival.
- ii. Muñoz, J. (2019). "Feeling Utopia". In *Cruising Utopia, 10th Anniversary Edition: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (pp. 1-18). New York, USA: New York University Press.
- iii. Hersey, T. (2018). The Nap Ministry. www.thenapministry.wordpress.com
- iv. Hamblin, J. (Host). (2020, May 1). You Are Worthy of Sleep. [Audio podcast episode]. *Social Distance*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/you-are-worthy-of-sleep/610996/>.
- v. Moten, F. (2003). "Sound in Florescence (Cecil Taylor Floating Garden)". In *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (pp. 41-48). University of Minnesota Press.



Hannah Brontë, *There will be many funerals*, 2022. Courtesy the artist.

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We pay our respects to the elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

neon oracle hannah brontë

20 SEPTEMBER – 11 NOVEMBER
UTS GALLERY

Visions birth into reality

glimpses of the

shapeshifting revolution

body as altar

as humidity

rest thick as miracle

believe in

expect

you

whatever baby

stand in it

you are the

neon

oracle