

## Radical Self Care and Sustainable Artmaking

EXHIBITION DATES: 3-14 October 2022

EXHIBITION CELEBRATION: 5-7pm Thursday 13 October

GALLERY HOURS: 11am-5pm



GEORGE  
PATON  
GALLERY

## Radical Self Care and Sustainable Artmaking

Zahraa Alkahtani, Helvi Apted, Jasmine Brooks, Stephanie Hicks,  
Rebecca Jones, Kate Just, Sorcha Mackenzie, Fiona Martin, Jacinta Maude,  
Linda Studena, Samantha Thompson, Michelle Tonkin and Doug Webb  
Coordinated by Kate Just

### IMMACULATE HEART COLLEGE ART DEPARTMENT RULES

- Rule 1** FIND A PLACE YOU TRUST AND THEN TRY TRUSTING IT FOR A WHILE.
- Rule 2** GENERAL DUTIES OF A STUDENT: PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR TEACHER. PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS.
- Rule 3** GENERAL DUTIES OF A TEACHER: PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR STUDENTS.
- Rule 4** CONSIDER EVERYTHING AN EXPERIMENT.
- Rule 5** BE SELF DISCIPLINED. THIS MEANS FINDING SOMEONE WISE OR SMART AND CHOOSING TO FOLLOW THEM.  
TO BE DISCIPLINED IS TO FOLLOW IN A GOOD WAY.  
TO BE SELF DISCIPLINED IS TO FOLLOW IN A BETTER WAY.
- Rule 6** NOTHING IS A MISTAKE. THERE'S NO WIN AND NO FAIL. THERE'S ONLY MAKE.
- Rule 7** The only rule is work.  
IF YOU WORK IT WILL LEAD TO SOMETHING.  
IT'S THE PEOPLE WHO DO ALL OF THE WORK ALL THE TIME WHO EVENTUALLY CATCH ON TO THINGS.
- Rule 8** DON'T TRY TO CREATE AND ANALYSE AT THE SAME TIME. THEY'RE DIFFERENT PROCESSES.
- Rule 9** BE HAPPY WHENEVER YOU CAN MANAGE IT. ENJOY YOURSELF. IT'S LIGHTER THAN YOU THINK.
- Rule 10** "WE'RE BREAKING ALL OF THE RULES. EVEN OUR OWN RULES. AND HOW DO WE DO THAT? BY LEAVING PLENTY OF ROOM FOR X QUANTITIES." JOHN CAGE
- HELPFUL HINTS: ALWAYS BE AROUND. COME OR GO TO EVERYTHING. ALWAYS GO TO CLASSES. READ ANYTHING YOU CAN GET YOUR HANDS ON. LOOK AT MOVIES CAREFULLY OFTEN. SAVE EVERYTHING-IT MIGHT COME IN HANDY LATER.  
THERE SHOULD BE NEW RULES NEXT WEEK.

*Radical Self Care and Sustainable Artmaking* is a collaborative exhibition between teacher and feminist artist Kate Just and Master of Contemporary Art students at the Victorian College of the Arts.

The exhibition works from two prompts (1) a poster by Sister Corita Kent, a feminist nun, printmaker and political activist, which espouses a set of rules for making art and (2) the quote by feminist writer Audre Lorde 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.'

Sharing discussion, discourse, collaborative making and readings, and then working together to formulate art in response, teacher and students privilege self care and sustainable approaches to art making in a neoliberal world.

#### IMAGE

Sister Corita Kent

*Immaculate College Rules for Making Art*  
1967 – 1968. Digital poster

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this show takes place, the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people. We acknowledge that this is stolen land, and that sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

### GEORGE PATON GALLERY

Level 1, Arts and Cultural Building, The University of Melbourne

11am-5pm Monday to Friday | [umsu.unimelb.edu.au/gallery](http://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/gallery) | [gpg@union.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:gpg@union.unimelb.edu.au)

## **Witness the Contemporary Relevance of Self-care**

**Xinyu Song, 2022**

The concept of self-care can be met with disdain by some critics who tend to see it as an extravagant or lazy affair.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, for those proponents and practitioners of self-care, often echoing a famous quote was integrated into the feminist canon from activist and writer Audre Lorde's 1988 book of essays, 'Bursts of Light': "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."<sup>2</sup> Lorde amplified the intersectionality of self-care and civil rights in this book as she dealt with cancer. Her advocacy and that famous quote have been one of the prompts for this exhibition. Another prompt is a poster by Sister Corita Kent, a feminist nun, printmaker, and political activist, which espouses a set of rules for making art.

Self-Care has its roots in radical activism as a term dating back to the US civil rights and women's rights movements of the 60s and 70s. Activist organizations upset by how America's health care system was failing marginalized communities set out to give those communities free or low-cost services to better care for themselves. In the late 1960s, the Black Panther Party created the first people's free medical clinic as an alternative to hospitals and private care practices.<sup>3</sup> The women's rights movement of the 1970s also provided underserved communities feminist health centres, activists preached self-care within those communities and practiced it themselves. Radical self-care as a Black feminist ideology/praxis has denoted a necessitated self-care act rooted in the principles of self-determination, self-preservation, and self-restoration, as well as a call for greater access to resources. It has historical roots and was seen as a much-needed practice among activists who sought to propel social justice efforts while preserving their well-being.<sup>4</sup> Within the medical domain, self-care is discussed as a set of behaviours and strategies that one can engage in to improve or sustain their health status. The medical community latched onto this term in the 1950s, before the Black Panther Party popularized and politicized it in the United States during the height of the civil rights movement. It became a claiming of autonomy over the body as a political act against institutional, technocratic, very racist and sexist medicine that came after the rise of the women's movement and the civil rights movement.<sup>5</sup> Control over one's health and the body were taken by women and people of colour as a corrective to the failure of the patriarchal medical system to adequately meet their needs. Michaeli (2017) notes that radical self-care is political because it recognizes that the "self" "is grounded in particular political histories and present situations of violence and vulnerability".<sup>6</sup>

Kate Just, the teacher and coordinator of this exhibition, expressed her intentions for curating this exhibition during the first discussion. Kate's reflections revolved around how little content there is often around care and sustainability in a real-world context. In her decade-long teaching career, she has seen students learn about the industry professionalism, grants, how to get dealer, how to make money, whether their work is critically viable, whether others think it is valid, interesting, or good, or what they can do to improve it aesthetically or technically. Yet little attention is paid to the purpose of the student's artwork, which may be therapeutic value, social or political change, personal enrichment, pleasure, nurturing, and sustainability. The radical self-care that is the subject of this exhibition can drive conversations and get artists to consider how

self-care can play a role in their art practice or the art world, and what models or rules or other ways of thinking about sustainability can inspire. It would be a way forward for artists' practices to become something enjoyable, pleasurable, and self-sustaining.

Each of the artists participating in the exhibition had a different response to self-care. The exhibition features works that thoughtfully engage with ideas of sensuality and touch, ecological sustainability, queerness, food, love, time, cultural knowledge and power, friendship, kinship, solidarity and much more.

With her artwork  *Holding Tight* , Linda Studena illustrates her self-care rule of 'articulate what you feel'. She expresses her feelings about a particular moment in clay squeezed out of her hands and creates ceramic pieces that serve as monuments to those moments. This artwork expresses the idea that when one works with materials, the material leaves some imprint of subjective emotional self or personality that is perceived by the world.

Michelle Tonkin's artwork articulates her own feelings about self-care, which is make love your practice. The intention behind this artwork  *Make Love Your Practice*  is for people to find a way to just feel love, no matter how this love is triggered. When the balloon is filled with love, it becomes a momentary framework for the intention of love.

For Rebecca Jones, who as an artist is constantly being influenced by the culture of what's going on and needing to make connections and how that outpour and so it's a constant worry of information. So, by having to be still give her a moment to consider the theory behind it, the historical reference and how it has manifested into our contemporary world.

Zahraa Tariq Alkahtani's understanding of the universe as an artist comes from a religious point of view. Raised in a religious family, she follows the teachings of Islam itself on the balance between life and spirituality. The artwork  *Affiliation*  explores the connection between body and soul, using sand and earth as a spiritual practice, and maintaining spiritual connections.

Helvi Apted's video  *Taste Culture*  was recorded at the Finnish Society of Melbourne. As a Finnish-Australian artist, her focus in this project is on Finnish national identity. She believes that self-care in her art practice represents grounding yourself in your culture by finding ways to engage with it.

Stephanie Hicks' work  *Thresholds*  is a clever use of gallery space, placed in the only windowed corner of the gallery. She was inspired by Adrian Marie Brown's ideas of gratitude in relation to self-care, being connected to a sense of curiosity about the world, which reflects our relationship with nature, rather than separation from it.

*Relax*  is a series of soft sculptures by Samantha Thompson, who prefers to think of them as a rest stop - even if they are not particularly comfortable. This view of rest can also be linked to Brown's pleasure activism, which promotes all pleasure without guilt or shame.

Jacinta Maude has used an old filing cabinet to create a  *Life Support*  work of art. The plant in this work of art is a metaphor for the artist's own personal self-maintenance and is regularly watered

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on a daily basis. Jacinta sees self-care as a small thing, a progressive form of self-care. Interestingly, she imagines the rust on the old filing cabinet as neglecting to look after herself, but the plant that symbolises her body can still thrive.

The intention of the video work *Bath* made by Fiona Martin is to demonstrate the necessity of taking time for oneself to do unnecessary but enjoyable things that often seem indulgent and selfish. Similarly, Brown addresses how the concept of pleasure has been perverted as excess and addiction. Pleasure isn't a narcotic to numb; it's nutrition to empower. Radical self-care was and continues to be an act of investing in oneself within a system that withholds acknowledgment and resources from minoritized groups.<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, self-care remains particularly radical for those who face structural inequalities. Self-care replenishes power-fullness through radically claiming pleasures of savouring, soothing, supporting, connecting, celebrating, feeding, luxuriating, loving, liberating, and being fully human.<sup>8</sup> Self-care fosters satisfaction, resilience, joy, and courage. Grantz (1990) suggests that self-care is influenced by cultural norms or context, specific to the individual and that self-efficacy, sense of control, knowledge, and values also impact our ability to initiate self-care.<sup>9</sup> It is radical because it is the act of fully engaging in self-care and ourselves. We know ourselves the best, what we are feeling, and what we need.

<sup>1</sup> Mike Murawski, "POWER UP: A STORY OF HOW ONE ARTWORK SPARKED LOVE & CONNECTION",

Art Museum Teaching, reviewed September 10, 2022, <https://artmuseumteaching.com/2017/03/10/powerup/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mindy Brooks-Eaves, "Self-Care A-Z: Summer Season of Self-Care – Liberation Through Pleasure & Power", The New Social Worker, reviewed August 29, 2022,

<https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/self-care/summer-self-care-liberation-through-pleasure-power/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Lesson 5: Radical Self Care", John M. Flaxman Library, Learn & Unlearn: Anti-racism Resource Guide, reviewed September 2, 2022, [https://libraryguides.saic.edu/learn\\_unlearn/wellness5](https://libraryguides.saic.edu/learn_unlearn/wellness5).

<sup>4</sup> Martha Tesema, "How You Can Honor the Radical History of Self-Care", Shine, reviewed September 9, 2022, <https://advice.theshineapp.com/articles/how-you-can-honor-the-radical-history-of-self-care/>.

<sup>5</sup> Janan P Wyatt, and Gifty G. Ampadu, "Reclaiming Self-Care: Self-Care as a Social Justice Tool for Black Wellness," Community Mental Health Journal 58, no. 2 (February 1, 2022): 213–21. doi:10.1007/s10597-021-00884-9.

<sup>6</sup> Janan P Wyatt, and Gifty G. Ampadu, "Reclaiming Self-Care: Self-Care as a Social Justice Tool for Black Wellness," Community Mental Health Journal 58, no. 2 (February 1, 2022): 213–21. doi:10.1007/s10597-021-00884-9.

<sup>7</sup> Alina Cohen, "7 Artists on the Self-Care Rituals that Keep Them Creative", Creativity, reviewed September 4, 2022, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-7-artists-self-care-rituals-creative>.

<sup>8</sup> Angelica Puzio, "Have we been doing self-care all wrong?", The Washington Post, reviewed September 12, 2022, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/self-care-meaning-history/2021/10/01/c4f8a1ea-2232-11ec-9309-b743b79abc59\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/self-care-meaning-history/2021/10/01/c4f8a1ea-2232-11ec-9309-b743b79abc59_story.html)

<sup>9</sup> Roberta Waite and Iheduru-Anderson Kechi, "Race-Induced Trauma, Antiracism, and Radical Self-Care," *Nursing Inquiry* 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2022): e12501. doi:10.1111/nin.12501.

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## LIST OF WORKS

### GALLERY ONE

#### **Linda Studena**

*Holding tight - handheld*, 2022

Earthenware/Stoneware, glaze, plywood, platinum spray paint

Dimensions variable, shelf, 120 x 20 x 1cm

#### **Doug Webb**

*Tuesday morning*, 2022 Silk screen Print on paper. 29 x 21cm

*Resistance/Persistence*, 2022

Wooden pedestal, doily, prep bottles, weeds (*Arctotheca calendula*), 90 x 27 x 27cm

#### **Sorcha Mackenzie with Liam Frith**

*I'm With The Band*, 2022

Video Installation, piano, rug, lamp, table. Dimensions Variable

#### **Doug Webb and Jasmine Brooks**

*Rules for Radical Self Care*, 2022

Cyanotype and silk screen print. 75 x 57cm

#### **Jasmine Brooks**

*Soul Food*, 2022

Paper mâché, paper mâché clay, acrylic spray paint, digital illustration, and collage on paper.

#### **Michelle Tonkin**

*Make Love Your Practice*, 2022

Natural latex balloons, air pump, posca marker, MDF, tape, balloon clips, archival photographic prints.

Photographer: Tobias Titz

Dimensions variable

Note: Viewers are invited to inflate balloons, with the intent of love.

## **GALLERY TWO**

### **Rebecca Jones**

*Be Still, 2022*

Projection, 3 min 45 sec.

### **Zahraa Tariq Alkahtani**

*Affiliation, 2022*

Sand, projector. 250 X 150cm

Note: This is an artwork, the viewer is invited to remove their shoes, sit down, and play with sand.

### **Helvi Apted**

*Taste Culture, 2022*

Video recorded at the Finnish Society of Melbourne. Music track "Sankarin Tango" (Finnish Tango) 2019, Martti Suosalo and Petri Alanko.

Note: Viewers are invited to use the tongs to select a piece of Finnish confectionary to eat (occasionally sweets will be unavailable).

### **Stephanie Hicks**

*Thresholds, 2022*

Found organic material Dimensions variable

### **Samantha Thompson**

*relax, 2022*

Soft sculptures using acrylic paint, reclaimed cotton and stuffing, thread.

Dimensions variable

### **Jacinta Maude**

*Life Support, 2022*

Repurposed filing cabinet drawers, rubber plant (*Ficus elastica*), watering can, water, pump/timer, plastic hose, powder coated rod, hook, and charger cord. 73 x 63 x 63 cm.

Note: Once a day, at 1.00pm the water pump will activate watering the indoor plant for 30 seconds.

### **Fiona Martin**

*Bath, 2022*

Single channel video. Approximately 10 minutes.

### **Kate Just**

*POWER UP, 2022*

Hand and machine sewn banner, mixed fabric offcuts, linen, thread. 165 x 55cm

Note: This is a participatory work. Viewers are invited to sit down, select scraps from the tub of fabric and sew them into the letter areas that spell POWER UP! If the letters fill up, feel free to add adornments to the letters or background area.

