NOT YET DEAD

a solo exhibition by Carbon

opening: 13:00, 11/02/2023
performance starts: 13:30
“Everything that is personal is political and what is political is public.”

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Not Yet Dead is a multimedia, performative exhibition centering on a performance art piece led by Carbon. Made through collaboration with various queer artists, the exhibition springboards from Carbon’s poetry on themes of disability, gender and race. Elements of the exhibition include a black and white short film with superimposed animation; a musical album of spoken word poetry; and the same poems re-imagined as posters with collaged elements.

In the main gallery space, Carbon wheels around a wheelbarrow filled with rocks, repeatedly, until exhaustion. Not Yet Dead is about endurance and enduring. It is about the inner world of the artist and the interconnectivity of our communities. It’s a comment on how we treat one another and how the world treats those on the margins.

The performance reflects on how we have been raised and raise ourselves, journeying through the chaos, complexity and comforts of existence. This is a treacherous journey through a suicidal, neurodivergent, and bipolar brain, coming to understand one’s own disabilities, as well as musing on the joys and difficulties of transgender life, all while living as a black person in (supposedly) post-Apartheid South Africa.
Carbon (they/them)

Carbon is a black trans artist, activist and academic. A proud member of the Trans Collective, Carbon organizes for the liberation of all (deliberately) marginalised people in supposedly post-Apartheid South Africa, with a particular focus on neurodivergent people and black transgender people.

Their multidisciplinary artistry includes videography, photography, podcasting, poetry, paintings, performance art and digital drawings. As a recipient of the Astraea Global Arts Fund, Carbon has exhibited work at the Queer Feminist Film Festival and has poetry published in the Sol Plaatje European Awards anthology and performed poetry at The Open Book Festival. Carbon works at the intersections of gender studies, media studies and information systems, with extensive experience as a guest lecturer in gender studies for institutions such as University of the Western Cape Anthropology department and the SIT student study abroad programme.

Currently, Carbon is a Creator of the Create Initiative hosted by CREA. Not Yet Dead is supported by CREA through the Create Initiative.

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Not Yet Dead
the performance

To watch the performance documentary, visit: bit.ly/NYDperformance
Not Yet Dead.
the album.

To listen to the album, visit: bit.ly/NYDthealbum
moving yet stuck.
the animation.

To watch the animation, visit: bit.ly/NYDmovingyetstuck
Not Yet Dead.
the poems.
You’ll sit in the dark...
You’ll sit on your own.
You won’t know if the sun’s out
You won’t know if you’re alone.

You do this because it’s comforting.

But when you’re ready,
you must emerge.

It’s in depression’s discomfort
that you heal.

— slip out from under the covers.
I always found it strange that they could give their whole day one colour, one number, one rating, one mood. One.

— bipolar brain
I am so afraid of mania.
Euphoria that gives birth
to its own demons
An underestimated foe.
Depression can end in death,
But mania is life
destroying.

— I am so afraid of mania
When my demons visit
I say "hello".
I wonder why they don't visit no more...

When my demons visit
I say "hello".
I wonder why they don't visit no more...

When my demons visit
I say "hello".
I wonder why they don't visit no more...
Letter to the great friend

Friend,
where are you?
I’ve been missing you over this week

Life continued —
the birds sang,
the people tweeted,
the sun washed over me.
My soul ignited — a foreign concept.

I enjoy the emptiness —
it’s all that I know.
But here I am, filled with life’s riches —
heavy,
Weighed down.

Come back friend.
I miss you.
Friend

It is the friend that brings me immense immeasurable immersible joy

And even though I’ve met mania many times, it’s the one friend I never recognise.
Old friend

My old friend,
I see you have returned;
Your arrival induces tears.
I know what emptiness you bring.

My old friend,
festering in the solitude of bedrooms
In the minds of the depressed
and the souls of the strong hearted
is where you flourish.

Friend, it has been months;
I thought you were gone for good —
a feeling of the past
only to be reflected upon.
Oh, the ignorance of bliss

Old friend
tell me,
I think I deserve to know:
Will you go today?
Will you leave tomorrow?
Or will I always be burdened by your presence?
We don’t run

How do you run from a bully that is you?

How do you ignore the piercing words cracking your foundation when those words come from within?

The truth: we don’t run, we ignore.

Remain silent. Tell no one of the taunts that chip you away. Caving in on yourself making you a smaller person.

Til one day, you disappear and the voice wins.
Best friend
perched on shoulders
hidden
by long reeds

Conversations held at
moon’s glory hours.

He steps out of the dark
makes a proposal:
a trade;
a body for a released soul.

Win-win
“Okay,
take me.”
It’s suicide season and I’m up next.
Today is the end
No tomorrow.
Dead end.

Today is the end.
The last plea.
Today is the end.

Last apple eaten,
last breath taken.
Today is the end.

The fuel, exhausted.
Thoughts no more.
Today is the end.

Last tear dropped
filling the emptiness.
No later to come
from the soul forgotten of happiness.

Known only by one
who silently drifts
feigning another.

Today is the end
of words escaped,
awkward encounters
left with words remembered.

Today is the end.
A single pierce.
A light touch.
The end.
One of us is lying
And the other one is dying
So who's it going to be?
White screen;
thumbs paused in motion:

Brain vomit —
no spell check,
send.

Guilt.
Wait! Come back!
Regret.
Where are you?
Ctrl-z.

Awaiting,
expectations
nerves.

Praise me.
Time lapse.
Calm.
Relieved.
Proud.

I did it!

No applause.
Same as before:
alone.
For those still earthly bound...

...you failed me.

When I sought help, pleading
in all ways that I could
you feigned ignorance.

If my body perished
but my soul released,
let the burden
of my heavy corpse
lay across your shoulders
carried for the rest of your days.

As the corpse is lowered
to become
one
with the soil,
let those seconds be like days
on your guilty conscience

knowing the days I spent
Shouting
for attention
Crying
heavy tears.

I hope your water
becomes the tears
I shed alone

I hope your tea
is as thick as
my curdled blood
which flows no more.

You will never forget.
My body
forever with you be.
Death

greatest fear,
inevitable fate.

Death, Multiple gateways
all existence’s final path.
How could I not enjoy what I shall become?
What I am destined to be?

Death,
The ultimate freedom,
no bounds of earthly limitations
of food or gravity.

Death, a pure serenity,
the harmony,
the final dance for a soul unleashed.

Death: a lovely place.

No hate,
No judge.
Just you and the universe
In eternal dance.
“It’s a girl!”
they cried at childbirth.
I cried too
exposed to this cold cis-centric chill;
the bite of the bitter binary.

They “aww’ed” and “ooo’ed” at my cries
dismissing me;
the adjustment one makes from one world to the next.

But the cries went on.
They quietened down as time went on —
so soft I couldn’t even hear them...
but that feeling hung on.

The cries crescendoed
and couldn’t stay in.

I yelled out
“A girl? No. You were mistaken.”
“It’s a boy now,” they wish they could say
“But it’s not that simple...” I try to protest
The cries are lulled into submission, yet again.

If only I could make it easier,
just let them announce one simple sentence —
one simple sentence to encapsulate my being
and then be told who I’m allowed to be.

But you see, that’s the first problem,
the simplicity they seek;
gender was never simple not a two way street —
more like Arc de Triomphe where many avenues meet.
Gender is not a spectrum.
It’s not one dimensional
nor is it even two or three...
It’s not even a universe.
Gender is a multiverse.

— you can’t even imagine the vastness
My body is a commodity that I do not own.

My body is a commodity that I do not own.

My body is a commodity that I do not own.
I found a box today
shallow box
made from cardboard.

I found a box today
My head tilted as I inspected it —
Is it safe?

To climb
or not to climb?
This is not a question.

Right foot, left foot
into the box I went
creaking slowly with my aged knees
I bent down and lowered
Sat.
I am in the box.

Pride.

I sat in a box today
as they instructed me time and time again.
I sit in this box.

I sat in a box today
and it broke.
I tried.
I’m sorry, I cannot fit.
Frigid.

I like my fridge the way you like your gender:
inspired by 1950,
small,
restrictive, no space to move;
incongruent with my blackness
suited for ytness.
retro — cool;
gentrified.

many times i've stared at this pink fridge
wondering why my black mother buys so much
meat
understanding why my black mother must buy
so much meat

my monthly sudoku puzzle
no space, packed, stuffed —
the metrorail.
Dear cis people, particularly cis allies:
We birth babies, not boys or girls.

How can you be an ally that “reveals” the gender of a child that has not taken a single step?

How can you be an ally that builds barriers around a being before they draw a single breath?

Leading your trans child to trudge through the trenches of trauma, with the promise that you will accept them later.

Dear cis people, particularly cis allies:
You are married to the cistem.
You are married to oppression.
You are married to oppressing.
To those who pillaged and plundered for spices

Salt alone is not seasoning.
Adding pepper is not spice.
We were traumatised together,  
But we never healed...  
Neither together nor alone.

— Our souls died with Rhodes Must Fall
Just as “Rainbow Nation” is to our parents, self-care and safe spaces are to us. — the lies we must believe to make sense of senseless violence.
“Self-identify”
“Intersectional feminism”
“Lived experience”

How telling it is that we need to say the same word twice.

— tautology
In moonlight black bois look blue
feel blue
are blue.

At new moon black bois
find form
find rhythm
fit in,
Renew.

At midday black bois
look free
play free
on their land,
their stolen land.

At dusk black boys
are dancing dark
form outlines.
After dusk a black boi is outlined.

At night
parents seek out their hooded figure in the dark
a flash of freezing thought,
a cold truth.

"Your black boy did not make it through tonight"
In one yung eve
your black boy is no more...

At midnight these black bois
become blue
feel blue
are blue.

*McCraney, Tarell Alvin. "In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue". 2003
Ancestors

To my ancestors:
It's awkward because we haven't spoken in so long
We haven't spoken at all
But I want to speak to you
I need you
How do I access you?
We are descendants of many things descending into nothing.
they raised us to believe that there is Everything.
so we grew up and asked for Everything.
and we were denied Anything.

now, you're lost.
you try to negotiate
even though you were Lied to
from the beginning:
"surely there must be something!"
you search for Anything.
because why live if there's Nothing?
why continue for Nothing?

But quietly,
in a voice you choose to ignore
you know that there is —
We raise broken people

We birth mirrors
We raise mirrors
We break mirrors,
(un)intentionally beat their bodies to the floor
Repeatedly,
on a daily basis
without even knowing it.

We raise mirrors,
We raise shards.
We raise shards of mirrors into adults
that mirror who we are.

These adults —
these broken glasses —
pick up their shards and choose:
   Do I use my broken self
to jab and stab others
as my unresolved pain pierces and pricks at my hands?
Or,
do I pierce and prick my hands
to try make my mirror anew?
I think about my father;
his shattered shards on the shoreline
and wonder who splattered his spirit into splinters...

Shards of glass become grains of sand,
Pinpricks pierce deep into my toes –
I was born walking on his serrated seashells.

Anger disintegrates.
It splinters and shatters my father’s mirror
into sands of the shoreline.

A coastline paradox:
there are many answers,
but there are none.

He has walked a prickly path I must follow
Barefoot and barren and broken
Across the shore I must trudge.

“Dad, who hurt you?
Who broke you?
Who pulverised your person into powder?”

Now that I see through the looking glass of my own
with the bits of you flickering between the dust –
it’s painful to breathe.
My skin corroded
from the fear that I have
of being powdered with these bits of you.

“Father, who hurt you?
Who broke you?
Who pulverised your person into powder?”

Until one day,
I stop.
And I make my own path through his sand.
Pristine perfect pink, a sly snake waiting to unleash its venom one sound at a time.

Intended to be man’s greatest achievement — the processor, intercessor of thoughts and feelings felt by receivers’ ears.

My tongue I do not trust. The tongue limits what the heart purveys choking true feeling placed into forbidden territory, never to be received again.

For it twists the words, warps and breaks, shears and splutters — hurts more than good.

My tongue I do not trust; yet with this same tongue I am left.

My tongue I do not trust
It doesn't get better, you get bitter. And get better at living life at half mast.
Slowly.
Piece by piece.
Day by day.

With days skipped,
missed,
slept through,
Or otherwise forgotten.

With hypermanic efficiency
or depressive counter efficacy

With one shower in the week
(and no showers in the next)

With matching socks
then same-socks-for-a-week

In jumbled mess
In no particular order
But somehow, all back together.

— how bipolar brain puts their life back together (again)
What’s that?
Their muscles churn,
breaking their dormant state.

A crack opening on face;
tectonic shift of cheeks;
an upturn of corners,
a slow blink of eyes

Refreshing the image before:
Brighter, vivid.

A glowing,
A soul radiating,
A cheerful melody,
the jubilant prance of my heart.

It feels good
to have home
back on my face.
Do you recognise yourself from five years ago? three? two? or one?

Sometimes what keeps me going is seeing I’m growing.
Saif

Poetry editor
Saif is a multimedia artist and writer from Durban, KwaZulu Natal. They have been publishing poetry since the age of 14 and have developed their writing into rap, screenplays and photojournalism. They are an activist, passionate about decolonisation, reindigenization and panAfricanism. They come from a lineage of storytellers turned Queenpins. They are currently based in Cape Town, South Africa.

Instagram: @ddysaifey

Maneo Refiloe Mohale

Poetry Editor
Maneo Refiloe Mohale is a South African editor, feminist writer and poet. They have been long-listed twice for the Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Anthology Award, and their debut collection of poetry, Everything is a Deathly Flower was published with uHlanga press in September 2019. The book was shortlisted for the Ingrid Jonker Poetry Prize, later winning the 2020 Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry.

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Aria DiCesaris

Animator
My name is Aria DiCesaris and I am a freelance animator. I graduated from Chapman University in 2021 and have been kicking off my career with freelance work on projects like Not Yet Dead. I have always loved the art of bringing characters and creatures to life and working on this project was a wonderful way to bring that passion forward! If you'd like to see more of my work please follow me on Instagram at @aria.makes.art

Instagram: @aria.makes.art
Eleanor Early

Animator, storyboard artist and character designer

My name is Eleanor (El) Early (she/they) genderqueer asexual lesbian. I grew up in the USA, in the state of Utah. In 2022, I graduated with a BFA in Animation at the School of Visual Arts. Currently, I live in New York City, and work as an after school art tutor.

I’ve always had a passion for projects that tackle dark themes, surrealist storytelling, as well as comedy and horror. I specialize in storyboarding, animation and character design.

Instagram: @elleiielle

SQ Eternal

Music Producer

SQ Eternal is a non-binary independent music producer and rapper from Durban, South Africa. They work across multiple genres, often blurring the lines between them. Along with releasing several projects of their own, they have collaborated with various artists creating everything from RnB and Hip Hop to Electronic and Deep House music.

Thami

(he/they)

Musical Artist

A multidisciplinary geek with a particular love for music, Thami is an instrumentalist and songwriter with a passion for arrangement and composition. With over ten years of experience in classical guitar and a never-ceasing wish to experiment, they are able to conjure and alchemise emotion through song.

They believe that all art is an extension of the incessant call from our souls to create; it is something we cannot help but do, lest we begin to lose touch with a fundamental tenet of our beings. Our lived experiences, our joys, our anguish — they are the bricks and mortar that we use to erect tabernacles to our existences. This is art; this is what the artist is called upon to do.

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Meloe Gennai
*Mentor*

A poet, Meloe Gennai works with image and writing in movement in a performative practice that aims to centre imaginaries from disabled, transgender and afro-descending cultures.

Their artistic practice is deeply rooted in an activism informed by his early upbringing in the western Black radical tradition; and by rituals of positionality in interactive performances.

They are active internationally through X collective X, an organization of collectively publishing poets and artists.

Instagram: @meloesapphire
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