

Breathing across

A Traveling Exhibition Proposal for *Breathing in a Time of Disaster*

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Breathing across

A Traveling Exhibition Plan for *Breathing in a Time of Disaster*

Curators: Cassie Mira and Ching-In Chen

Cassie Mira, an artist, curator, and archivist, explores human interaction, liminal space, and transitional experience. Born and raised in a southeast Wisconsin hay field, she currently lives in the Pacific Northwest contemplating environment, water, and sound.

Ching-In Chen is a genderqueer Chinese American interdisciplinary artist and performer. Their work is informed by their study with theatrical jazz practitioners such as Sharon Bridgforth to create community-informed performance work. They currently organize with Massage Parlor Outreach Project.

Overview

“Breathing across” is a living archive, network, and traveling exhibition of personal storytelling, community gathering, and speculative dreaming that aims to build resilience and solidarity to steadily increasing environmental disasters through collective strategizing and radical sharing. A living archive emerges from the shared stories and creative responses of a continually growing network of community participants in the project *Breathing in a Time of Disaster* (BITD), which has now iterated through two cycles of public programming, artistic development, and public exhibitions. In each cycle, we begin the curatorial process by holding story circles where we invite collaborators to respond to a series of prompts including: “Tell a story about your relationship between body and breath.”

The project began in response to the material conditions of heavy rain storms and flooding in Houston, Texas (known as the Tax Day Floods) in April 2016 and Hurricane Harvey in 2017. As

reports surfaced about the disaster's public health impact, including air pollution, chemical and gas spills, and dirty floodwater, Ching-In and I noticed the sensationalized media coverage was omitting the creative and communal approaches communities neglected by governmental structures had developed concerning ecological change, disaster, and survival. We invited leaders and artists from communities most impacted by these environmental disasters, gentrification, and other public health challenges—including undocumented communities, prison-impacted communities, indigenous communities, Latinx communities, Asian American communities, African American communities, and trans, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit communities.

We continued the project in 2022 after experiencing several years of heavy smoke from wildfires which resulted in a “very unhealthy” level of air quality and the COVID-19 pandemic. We began with story circles in the Seattle area with local artists, and community collaborators, and added the voices of environmental justice leaders and scientists. Story circle sessions were conducted at Jack Straw Cultural Center and on the University of Washington Bothell's campus. After evaluating the exhibition of the first iteration of the project we recognized that Houston area artists had surfaced ritual as an important creative strategy for survival, so we invited Seattle area artists and community leaders to share their own public rituals about how they had responded to individual and collective moments of disaster. We also invited the Houston artists to participate and incorporated both the Houston and Seattle area rituals together in a multimedia installation in Jack Straw Cultural Center's New Media Gallery.

Returning to Houston

The vision for the first phase of *Breathing in a Time of Disaster* as a traveling exhibition is to scale the project by focusing on strengthening ties between the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas. The exhibition will continue to showcase new work by artists from a growing

community of collaborators we call “breath practitioners” who are committed to using their art to address issues of climate justice and create opportunities for ongoing dialogue and connection.

The Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston (MATCH), a state-of-the-art performing arts venue located in the heart of Houston's cultural district, has been identified as the most appropriate venue for implementing the exhibition. The flexible spaces and modern amenities make an ideal location for visual art, poetry, performance, and public programming.

Objectives

- To showcase the works of artists from the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas who are committed to using their art to build community locally, nationally, and internationally.
- To create opportunities for dialogue and connection, centering the most impacted communities' stories such as low-income communities, trans and nonbinary communities, communities of color, and who have experienced multiple marginalizations/oppressions.
- To practice accessibility as an integral part of project design and delivery.
- To forge ties between the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas artists by emphasizing empathy, collaboration, and strategy across regional differences.
- To provide a platform for reflection on the impacts of environmental issues and explore ways we all can contribute to a more just and sustainable future.
- To inspire visitors to take action on climate-related environmental challenges and to support efforts to mitigate the damage and danger.
- To build an archive of speculative dreaming that aims to build resilience and solidarity.

Gallery Content

The exhibition will feature works of art in a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, illustration, photography, sound, video, projection, altars, and installations. Each piece will explore the themes of climate change, social justice, and community engagement, with a focus on the unique perspectives and experiences of the artists from the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas. The exhibition design will be crafted to create a cohesive and impactful narrative that reflects the exhibition's goals and themes.

Formative story circles are conducted with artists, community members, and scientists together in the planning phase after a public call for participation is made. Past breath practitioners are encouraged to participate and submit new work. The stories shared at the planning story circles are recorded, transcribed, and may be exhibited. Breath practitioners are invited to use the common themes emerging from the shared stories to develop new work. The exhibition media checklist is then derived from submissions following these story circles.

Current and past breath practitioners with connections to Houston include Ching-In Chen, Cassie Mira, Aveda Adara, Rachel Afi Quinn, Jorge Galván Flores, Crysbel "Mariposa" Tejada, Dee Dee Watters, Elena Gonzales Melinger, Rosie Soto, Xitlalli Alvarez Almendariz, Koomah, STOO, Stalina Emmanuelle Villarreal, Leslie Contreras Schwartz, yucca, Stephanie Saint Sanchez, Aliah Lavonne Tigh, Melelani Petersen, and Ronald L. Jones.

Current and past breath practitioners with connections to Seattle include Cassie Mira, Ching-In Chen, Sam Prudente, Alia Mahdi, Henry Nguyen, Juan Carlos Reyes, Raelynne A. Woo, Carol Hsiao, JM Wong, Rosanna Sze, Stephanie Segura, William Giles, Emily Pinckney, Atlas Fernandez, shuxuan (baozi), Madison Gaines, Geneviève Hicks, Xanne Kosuki, Serena Chopra,

Diana Xin, Hafidha Acuay, Jiéyì Zhou, Julie Feng, Jesse Guecha, Arianne True, Ye Qing Jiang, Atlas Tan, and Judy Twedt.

Current and past participating scientists include Angelique Demetillo and Becky Alexander.

Public Programming

The exhibition will feature a range of public programming events, including story circles, panel discussions, workshops, and showcases of audio, film, visual installation, and performance.

These events will be designed to engage visitors in a dialogue about the themes of the exhibition and to provide opportunities for artists and community members to connect.

- **Story Circles**

While initial story circles will be used to develop the exhibition checklist, additional story circles will be scheduled as a part of the exhibition where audience participants can further engage by sharing personal stories and experiences related to climate change and social justice. Story circles will be held in person and online via Zoom, to be as accessible as possible. Trained facilitators will lead these circles to maintain a respectful and supportive space for all participants to share their perspectives. Story circles will be a crucial part of the exhibition, as they allow participants to connect on a deeper level and build empathy and understanding across different communities. Front-end story circles are oriented around the following prompts:

- Tell a story about your name
- Tell a story about your relationship with the place where you live or have lived
- Tell a story about your relationship with your body and breath
- Tell a story about a time you experienced healing from something difficult or painful

Additional story circles will be organized to facilitate conversations to evaluate BITD. Insights gained from these conversations will further inform how this project adapts in future iterations.

- **Panel Discussions**

On topics related to climate justice and social change. These discussions will bring together experts and community leaders from the Houston and Seattle areas to speak on challenges that are specific to their region and will be designed to provide insights into how different communities are impacted by climate change, and how they are responding to these challenges. Topics may include environmental justice, the role of the arts in climate activism, the connections between climate change and social inequality, and community-led action efforts. The panel discussions will take place on two weekends during the exhibition and will be free to the public.

- **Workshops**

In addition, the exhibition will offer a range of workshops that will provide opportunities for visitors to engage with the themes of the exhibition in a more hands-on way. These workshops may include activities such as poetry and art-making workshops, zine-making workshops, and climate justice advocacy and organizing workshops. The workshops will take place throughout the exhibition and will be free or low-cost to the public.

- **Live Performances of the Breath Chorus**

Participating poets and performance artists from Houston and Seattle areas. These showcases highlight how poetry and performance can be used as a tool for solidarity, healing, and social change. They will take place on two weekends during the exhibition and will be free to the public.

- **Rituals**

The exhibition will feature contributions of rituals from participating artists that may include incantations, meditations, call and response, prayer, performances, and other interactive experiences. These contributions engage visitors in the exhibition's themes and create opportunities for reflection, contemplation, and healing.

- **Listening/Watch Sessions**

Curators and available artists will host listening/watch parties during the final week of the exhibition. Guests will listen to community stories, watch audio, video, and written projections, and be able to engage with the curators and artists about their work.

Collaborations and Partnerships

The exhibition will be a collaborative effort between artists from the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas and local organizations and community partners. To strengthen community ties between the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas, the exhibition organizers will seek partnerships with organizations in both Seattle and Houston. Organizations identified as potential collaborators include:

- DiverseWorks, located at the M.A.T.C.H. (Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston), commissions, produces, and presents new and daring art in all its forms through innovative collaborations that honor each artist's vision without constraint. Exhibitions at Diverseworks foster civic participation and cross-cultural understanding.
- Houston Climate Justice Museum is situated within an ecosystem of profound climate activism. Houstonians in recent years have banded together after severe climate events; local organizations and mutual aid groups that sprouted up in the wake of Hurricane Harvey continue to operate—due in large part to ongoing disasters that do not wait for

recoveries to fully take place. The museum space is an opportunity to translate the work being done in the activist realm within Houston into the realm of art and social memory. The museum hopes to widen the path to sustainable life by supporting work that exposes and redresses historical disparities built into complex systems and to also continue re-forming how our cultural values are upheld and shared.

- Creature Conserve brings artists, writers, and scientists together to foster informed and sustained support for animal conservation. They believe the arts informed by science has the power to direct our attention to the ongoing loss of species and creative prevention.
- Houston Climate Justice Alliance (HCJA): HCJA is a coalition of organizations that work to promote climate justice and to advocate for policies and practices that address the root causes of climate change. HCJA could be an important partner in the exhibition, providing expertise and guidance on climate justice issues and helping to connect the exhibition to other climate justice efforts in Houston.
- Antena Houston is a local collective of interpreters and language justice organizers who believe in a world with language justice, where each person has the right to use the language(s) in which they feel most comfortable and that no language should be privileged above others. Antena Houston aims to help envision a world where nothing—including language—becomes a barrier to human rights, justice, and liberation. Their focus is on developing the capacity of movements and communities to create multilingual spaces where all languages are included equally.
- Organizacion Latina Trans in Texas (OLTT) is the home of empowerment groups by and for trans women, trans men, people living with HIV, survivors of sex trafficking and

sexual assault, gay and bisexual men, lesbian and bisexual women, people with experience with sex work, and allies of our intersectional work.

Marketing and Outreach

This project centers and prioritizes the voices and experiences of minoritized communities including Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Marketing and outreach efforts will be designed to engage these audiences. The exhibition will be promoted through social media, targeted advertising, and outreach to local media outlets. Special efforts will be made to reach out to communities that are most impacted by climate change, such as low-income communities and communities of color. Special efforts will be made for this project to be as inclusive as possible. See the Appendix for links to press articles and examples of show material.

Timeline

Overview

The exhibition would run for three months, from September to November 2024, and feature a variety of programming designed to engage participants and audiences in a deeper exploration of the exhibition's themes and to foster connections between communities in the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas. The story circles, public programming, and ritual contributions by participating artists will provide opportunities for audiences to share their own stories and experiences, reflect on the impacts of climate change, and explore ways in which they can connect to contribute to a more just and sustainable future.

Pre-Exhibition Planning and Preparation (June 2023 - December 2023)

- Develop exhibition budget and fundraising strategy
- Develop accessibility and accommodation plan
- Develop a marketing and outreach plan

- Identify participating artists and community leaders from the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas
- Draft invitations for collaboration with artists, partnering organizations, and community leaders.
- Collaborate with artists and partners to develop the exhibition concept and themes
- Draft marketing materials
- Publish Call for Participation
- Draft follow-up materials, including opportunities for continued engagement and actions on climate justice issues.
- Create story circle facilitator training materials and schedule story circles for in-person and online formats.

Collaborative Story Circle Sessions (January 2024 - June 2024)

- Finalize and distribute marketing materials
- Review participation applications
- Story circle facilitator training
- Scheduled story circles take place in-person and online over Zoom.

Exhibition Development (July 2024 - August 2024)

- Transcribe story circle recordings and create access copies
- Finalize exhibition logistics, including exhibition design and installation plans
- Receive and install artwork in the exhibition space

Exhibition Opening Weekend (September 2024)

- Friday evening: Exhibition opening reception and artist talk
- Saturday morning: Story circle facilitated by Seattle-based artists and community leaders

- Saturday afternoon: Public programming, including a panel discussion on climate justice
- Sunday morning: Ritual contributions by participating artists

Mid-Exhibition Programming (October 2024)

- Weekly: alternating between listening/watch sessions and facilitated story circles
- Public programming: artist talks, panel discussions, workshops, and performances
- Activations and educational programming for school groups and community organizations

Closing Weekend (November 2024)

- Friday evening: Closing reception and artist talk
- Saturday morning: Final story circle facilitated by Houston-based artists and community leaders
- Saturday afternoon: Public programming event, including a panel discussion on the impact of the exhibition and climate justice in the greater Seattle, WA, and Houston, TX areas
- Sunday morning: Final ritual contributions by participating artists

Post-Exhibition Evaluation and Follow-Up (December 2024)

- Conduct evaluation story circles of the exhibition and public programming
- Report the public impact of the exhibition and its programming to funders, partners, and collaborators

Evaluation Plan

Breathing in a Time of Disaster is a project by and for minoritized groups at its core, and strives to use methods and tools that are effective in being collaborative, democratized, and community-focused. Following the case study conducted by Imagining America's Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship (APPS) on *Story circles as ongoing and collaborative evaluation: Roadside Theater's "Story to Performance,"* our project will use story circles as the primary mode for conducting front-end, formative, remedial, and summative evaluation. The use of story circles as deep listening practices has its roots in community theaters such as Junebug Productions, Roadside Theater, and Cornerstone Theater. As Donna Porterfield has noted "Story circles are more about listening than telling. There is not enough listening going on in Evaluation. Reflection makes for good evaluation" (APPS 3).

After the first exhibition in Houston, we the curators observed the modes of art and performance that our participants created for a public exhibition and gained several insights including that many of the participants relied on everyday ritual as a creative strategy of survival. We used this specific insight to direct our second iteration at Jack Straw Cultural Center in Seattle by asking for artists to contribute ritual practices. Because we were so focused on getting the exhibitions ready, we did not have a developed evaluation plan ahead of time. As we learn from iterations, we are shifting to using story circles as a continuous evaluation practice rather than just at the beginning of each cycle.

Story circles will be used in all aspects of the project processes that facilitate content production, foster collaboration, inform exhibit design, and evaluate audience response and participation. Surveys will also be used as a supplementary tool for public events with larger audiences. As communities shift and change across distance and difference, the development of a continuous

evaluation process functions as a collaborative evaluation tool to help guide decision-making and evaluate outcomes. Valuing community input starts with designing environments and research materials that are both comfortable for and respectful of the audiences who provide their feedback. BITD addresses these issues by providing childcare and/or offering stipends to participants, hiring interpretation services, translating texts, providing access copies and/or captions for audio/visual materials, and conducting meetings in-person and/or online.

With mindfulness to support indigenous sovereignty, the blueprint for this project imagines what we desire our relationship and responsibility to each other to be, holding space for further developing what emerges from the archival, public programming, and exhibition practices. Our evaluation goal is to incorporate time for mindfulness in constructing the spaces that cross-pollinate writers, artists, and community members to re-imagine our possible relationships with each other and the environment.

Sample agenda for a summative Evaluation Story Circle

The first evaluation story circle was held at Jack Straw Cultural Center on January 10, 2023. All participants had spent a minimum of one hour in the exhibition.

(10 min) Intro, breathing & grounding together, project overview, and story circle explanation

(15 min) Q1: Please reflect on visiting the exhibition *Breathing in a Time of Disaster*. How were you impacted?

(15 min) Q2: What would you like to share about the curated space? Who and/or what was missing?

(15 min) Q3: Thinking about the contributions from both cities Houston and Seattle playing at the same time on the adjacent walls. What was your experience of these streams simultaneously?

(5 min) Breathing together, next steps, and closeout

Invitations for Participation

Join the Breath Chorus

Please visit <https://bit.ly/breathchorus> to register for project updates, learn about opportunities to participate, and join the Breath Chorus.

To join the Breath Chorus you will need to:

1. Make a recording with your name, neighborhood, and 1 minute of breathing and save it as a WAV or MP3
2. Visit the website above and upload your WAV/MP3 file

Public Call for Artists and Community Members

Breathing in a Time of Disaster, scheduled to take place in 2024, explores the poetics of breathing in a time of environmental crisis and the role of art in raising awareness, fostering community connections, and inspiring action toward climate justice.

We invite artists and community members to share their perspectives on climate issues, environmental challenges, and community resilience. Artists and community members will attend facilitated community story circles to share stories about their relationship to the areas they live in, the environment, and their breath. These community dialogs will inform the content and creation of a 3-month long exhibition in Houston, Texas.

Participants will then have the opportunity to create and exhibit artworks, performances, and rituals using the themes that arise from the shared stories. Participants will also have the opportunity to participate in related programming, including artist talks, panel discussions, story circles, and ritual events.

Artistic contributions can be in the form of pictorial, sculptural, audio/video recordings, live performances, workshops, or other creative expressions that engage with the themes of the exhibition.

This is a unique opportunity to share your voice, contribute to important conversations, and connect with a wider community of artists and advocates for climate justice.

We seek a diverse range of participants working in a variety of cultural areas, including but not limited to educators, scientists, parents and youths, social justice workers, and community-engaged artists and storytellers.

Eligibility:

Artists, performers, storytellers, and community members of all backgrounds and experiences are encouraged to join.

Submission of Work Requirements:

A brief artist statement or description of your proposed contribution (250 words max)

Artist bio or background information (150 words max)

Links to relevant websites or online portfolios (if applicable)

Contact information (name, email, phone number, mailing address)

Submission Process:

Please submit your application and materials as a single PDF via email to [email address] with the subject line "Breathing in a Time of Disaster Submission." If your submission includes large files, please provide a link to a file-sharing service or online portfolio. Submissions must be received by [submission deadline].

Selection Process:

Submissions will be reviewed by the curatorial team and selected for inclusion based on craft, relevance to the exhibition theme, and potential for community engagement. Selected artists and contributors will be notified by [notification date]. Artists must be willing to participate in related programming, including story circles and other programmed events. Participation in one facilitated community story circle is required to submit artwork for exhibition.

Important Dates:

Submission Deadline: [submission deadline]

Notification of Selection: [notification date]

Exhibition Dates: [exhibition dates]

Public Programming: [dates of related programming]

We look forward to receiving your submissions and engaging in a thought-provoking exploration of art, climate justice, and community connections.

Support

The development of *Breathing in a Time of Disaster* projects is made possible with generous support from Alternate Roots, Houston Arts Alliance, 4Culture, Jack Straw Cultural Center, the University of Washington Bothell Scholarship, Research, and Creative Practice (SRCP) Seed Grant Program, University of Washington Seattle Museology program thesis project scholarship, Imagining Trans Futures Research Cluster, The Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, and Marble House Residency.

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Appendix

Press

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Reels

- [Presentation Reel](#), video, runtime: 5:04
- [Arianne True's Ritual and Koomah's Ritual](#), video, runtime: 3:04

Sample rituals

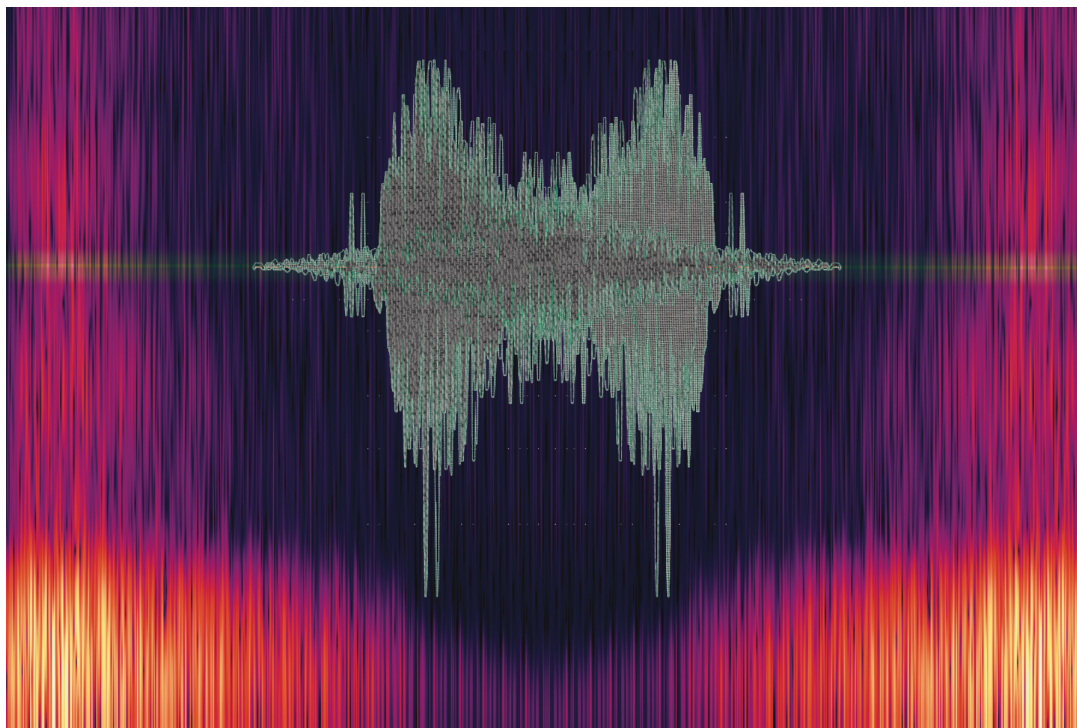
- Houston
 - [Aveda Adara](#), video, runtime: 2:27
 - [Melelani Petersen](#), video, runtime: 6:32
 - [Jorge Galván Flores](#), audio, runtime: 2:37
- Seattle
 - [Emily Pinckney](#), video, runtime: 4:15
 - [Stephanie Segura](#), audio, runtime: 1:07
 - [Atlas Tan](#), video, runtime: 1:41

Story circle excerpts

- [Arianne True](#), runtime: 2:20
- [Madison Gaines](#) runtime: 2:21

Flyers

Seattle - Jack Straw Cultural Center - New Media Gallery - Postcard Front



Seattle - Jack Straw Cultural Center - New Media Gallery - Postcard Back

JACK STRAW CULTURAL CENTER	JACK STRAW NEW MEDIA GALLERY Jack Straw Foundation 4261 Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105 (206) 634-0919 ~ www.jackstraw.org By Appointment: Monday-Friday, 10:00AM-5:30PM	OPENING: Friday, October 28, 7pm In person	NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION US POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 4894 SEATTLE, WA
Breathing in a Time of Disaster		ARTIST TALK: Friday, November 4, 7pm In person and streaming on YouTube and Facebook Live	
A participatory breath ritual by Ching-In Chen and Cassie Mira October 28-December 23, 2022		YOUTH WORKSHOP: Saturday, Dec. 3 Email education@jackstraw.org for info	
Schedule a visit: jsp@jackstraw.org or (206) 634-0919			
<p>Breathing in a Time of Disaster is a public community ritual exploring the unit of breath through the intersection for meditation, health and environmental justice. In collaboration with climate data sound artist Judy Twedt, the artists invited Houston and Seattle area artists to contribute to a community breathing archive. Join the Breath chorus at bit.ly/breathchorus</p>			
<p>Ching-In Chen is author of <i>The Heart's Traffic</i> and <i>recombinant</i> (Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Poetry) as well as chapbooks <i>to make black paper sing</i> and <i>Kundiman for Kin</i> :: <i>Information Retrieval for Monsters</i>. Cassie Mira is a multidisciplinary artist, archivist, and curator. Her practice, based in new media, poetry, and performance, plays with human interaction and denatures gendered experience. She was a 2020 artist-in-residence at The Seattle Residency Project.</p>			
<p>This project was supported, in part, by a grant from 4Culture. Support for Jack Straw Artist Programs comes from Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, 4Culture/King County Lodging Tax, WA State Arts Commission, National Endowment for the Arts, ArtsFund, Raynier Foundation, Humanities Washington & the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, and individual contributors.</p>			



Houston - formerly floodLand - Postcard Front and Back

**breathing
in a
time of disaster**
a community ritual featuring art and performance

Thursday July 18, 2019
installations: 10am - 10pm
performances: 6pm - 9pm

1743 Kipling St Houston, TX

installations, performances & offerings by
Aveda Adara ~ Cassie Mira ~ Ching-In Chen ~
Crysel "Mariposa" Tejada ~ Dee Dee Watters
~ Elena Gonzales Melinger ~ Rosie Soto ~
Xitlalli Alvarez Almendariz ~ Koomah ~
STOO ~ Stalina Emmanuelle Villarreal ~
yucca ~ Stephanie Saint Sanchez ~
Ronald L. Jones ~
videography by Mel Petersen

This community ritual is part of 'formerly floodLand,' a project curated by Ching-In Chen
'formerly floodLand' is funded in part by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance