

V IS FOR VOICES



WELCOME TO VOICES:

Voices is a new interdisciplinary performance arts project and campaign grounded in Black women's stories by V-Day to unify the vision of ending violence against women: cis women, trans women, and non binary people across the African Continent and African Diaspora. Our goal is to use art to embody and inspire solidarity-making in our collective imagination.

WE ARE THE POEMS WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR

NO MOVEMENT WILL SURVIVE WITHOUT OUR SISTERING

STATEMENT FROM THE ARTISTIC CREATIVE DIRECTOR

I WANT TO KNOW HOW TO REACH AND HOLD MY SISTERS SO MANY STORIES AWAY FROM ME. POEMS THAT ARE BUZZING MOUTHS. POEMS THAT ARE HANDS EXTENDED ACROSS BORDERS AND NATIONALITIES. POEMS THAT ARE FEET, DAUGHTERS DANCING IN THE DUST OF OUR PAST.

— AJA MONET —

Each of us become a poem, stanzas spilling unafraid. And yet, too many have faded in the silence, disappeared. We be gone, missing, lost and stolen. Each day we find ourselves in each other. Phrases and sounds scribbled on our breath. We are the poems we have been waiting for.

As we all struggle to balance the hurt and the healing of this shifting time, we need swinging machete sharp words, freshwater metaphors. We need images animated by our visions. I have seen miracles: the fierce fire of our fury, the magnificent making of our care. Our lives are larger than singing our suffering or picking at the scab of our scars. We are the prayers of our pleasure, the remedies of our rage, how we tend to our inherited wounds. What are our ancient practices humming back to us? Nourished by active listening, who are we loved and alive? We need truth telling courage.

It is with glittering joy and excitement that I share an entirely new art project and campaign I am creating and directing for V-Day, a global activist movement to end violence against all women (cisgender and transgender), those who hold fluid identities, nonbinary people, girls and the planet. Historically, V-Day was born out of campaigns, volunteers, and college students who organized annual benefit performances of a theater art piece by V (formerly Eve Ensler) called The Vagina Monologues to support anti-violence groups within their own communities. Each year, V-Day has grown and continued to support thousands of survivors, community leaders, artists, and organizers across the globe in the effort to end violence against women, girls, and the planet. V-Day is a shining example of how art is power and can be used to organize for transformational education and social justice.

While The Vagina Monologues has been performed by, with, and for diverse communities around the world, it is time for new art and new stories to be at the center of our movement against violence, poverty, racism, and patriarchy. It is with great enthusiasm that we announce that V-Day is officially shifting away from The Vagina Monologues as a center-piece for our movement work to create an entirely new piece called Voices, a project for which I will serve as Artistic Creative Director to feature stories by and for Black women on the African Continent and across the African Diaspora. The Vagina Monologues will continue to exist as a play outside of V-Day for millions of women to draw from worldwide.

Amidst the tumult in the streets and the upheaval in the world, we must remind ourselves that we are sacred and present in all things. Until we deeply reflect, until we are supported in the efforts of our healing, we will continue to live in fear, insecurity, and trauma. On any given day, social media mocks our shadow selves, constantly reinforcing our triggers and advertising our most destructive behavior. This new art piece and campaign welcomes another process, inviting us to re-vision and reimagine ourselves in relationship with one another. To organize and relate beyond our screens.

This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal. — Toni Morrison

It is important to center Black women's voices but not just because we are Black or women. Our representations of womanhood are only as powerful as our manifestations of solidarity. We cannot ignore or exaggerate our identity as Black women. No movement will survive without our sistering. When we can carry one another in our struggle and our joy, in our frustrations and our contradictions, we make more room in the world for healing justice, we find the groove beyond our grief. We reject perpetuating the harm we have endured. We refuse to.

Art is not so much about reactive expression as it is intentional presence. It is our unothering. We do not create because we have the answers. We create because we are possessed by our questions. Art for the people by the people and from the people is crucial and necessary. Art is how we do ideas. It is how we heal. Meaningful art serves and expands our consciousness. What can be more expansive than the consciousnesses of women united across the world? Making the unheard be heard and the invisible made visible. Great art shows us how to listen. It is where we discover our belonging and our purpose. The cosmic force of possibility.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS.

SUBMIT TODAY AT VISFORVOICES.COM

SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 14, 2021

VOICES!

VOICES WILL BE AN OFFERING TO OUR HIGHEST SELVES. A NAMING RITUAL. TO HEAR OURSELVES HEARING EACH OTHER.

As V-Day continues to organize across the globe for an end to violence against women, girls and the planet, we shift the focus from our vaginas to the visions of our voices. As we live and love, we must continue to revisit ourselves and examine our convictions about gender and therein race and class. We are more than our bodies though we may conjure through them. We want to create re-remembered value systems. We want to demonstrate how solidarity can be made. We want all those who claim to love us to listen, to collaborate, to imagine and create with us. There are many ways to share our voices. Some of us sing, some of us dance, some of us paint. Active listening is also how we speak.

In the midst of all that has tried our communities, I see a future where women across the globe are holistically loved and cared after. I see a culture transformed by gratitude for the labor, brilliance, and spirit of Black women. Even now, I witness Black women carrying stories on the frontlines of our dreams, in clinics and hospital rooms, at the market and grocery stores, in living rooms and even on Zoom calls. All across the world I witness as Black women per usual turn nothing into something, making miracles of madness, all while holding strength and grace. We create. We are boldly stepping into our power, commanding leadership in our lives, and demanding love in action. We are owning our vulnerability and manifesting our most intimate visions. We are more than the superficial imaginations of colonialism, whiteness, and patriarchy. We are the poetic philosophers of an unseen world. We are the very language of difference and magic.

For so long our anger has been weaponized against us, Black women are rarely if ever offered space to be complex, dynamic, flawed, and fierce. We are in a constant state of outrage. All around the world many of us are fighting for our lives while still fighting to defend those we love. We are struggling to protect our planet and our bodies. We endure and we continue to create. We are protagonists in the theater of our tragedy. But what about our contemplative lives? What do we wonder about? Who are we in our state of daydream and awe? Where do our minds go to wander? What imaginations look back at us in dishwasher, wringing clothes, rinsing skin in buckets of bubbles? We will always need art that reflects the revolutionary mindscapes of Black women, our journeys, our labor, our leisure, and our inventions. Our freedom.

This is an opportunity for women of all orientations, nationalities, and identities to come together to cherish, to support, and to transform the conditions that silence and disappear us. This is the evolution of heart work. We need new vocabularies and new expressions that speak from our deepest and most uncensored selves. We unite and connect through our differences. We celebrate the possibilities born of our creative coalitions. We are dedicated to a radical feminist future.

The most critical part of this Voices art piece will be the submissions. We are creating this piece with actual poems and visual art by Black women created in response to encouraged prompts. The strength will lay in the vulnerability and the integrity of the art shared. We are asking Black women from all across the world to submit poems, monologues, stories, and visual art which address the range of our experiences. The current submissions deadline will be December 31st, 2020

Now more than ever, we need this. We need art that is collective, functional and committing. Voices will be a dedication to the politics and artistic autonomy of both the process and project. If you love a Black woman, create more space for her to create. If there is a story she holds that can set her free, help her hold it. May all Black women write (or speak), free of grammatical straightjackets and forms that muzzle our telling. If there is a sister we know with a powerful story who cannot read or write it, offer to transcribe it for her. We need everyone willing and able in this effort.

MAY THIS ART PIECE BE A PATH THROUGH DOUBT, FRUSTRATION, AND DESPAIR. MAY IT BE A RECKONING AND A REVELATION. TELL YOUR PEOPLE. HELP US CARRY OUR VOICES SO THAT THEY MAY SHOW US THE WAY.

— AJA MONET —

MISSION

Voices is an art project for ALL women by Black women: we define womanhood as making solidarity. This campaign is dedicated to our domestic workers and our nurses, our nerds and our misfits, our deaf and disabled sisters, our aunties and abuelas, our queerdos and our trans sisters, our sexual autonomy and our sex workers, our shamans and our brujas, our organizers and our warriors, to all our sisters behind bars and beyond them. This is for us.

We choose to acknowledge that the gender binary is destructive while also naming that we still live in a world where gender oppression and gender violence is happening. We are committed to the end of all gender harm or violence and to protecting and supporting all women.

V is for voices, every day is V-Day, and each day is a new day to work to end violence against women, girls, and the planet.

WE ARE GUIDED BY THREE PRINCIPLES:

1. Voices: our experiences, stories, and realities.
2. Visions: our imaginations, dreams, aspirations.
3. Values: our cares, concerns, and community.

MEET THE TEAM

Aja Monet – Artistic Creative Director
Aja monet is a surrealist blues poet, storyteller, and organizer born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She won the legendary Nuyorican Poets Cafe Grand Slam poetry award title in 2007 and aja monet follows in the long legacy and tradition of poets participating and assembling in social movements. Her first full collection of poems is titled, My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter on Haymarket Books. Her poems explore gender, race, migration, spirituality and much more. In 2018, she was nominated for a NAACP Literary Award for Poetry and in 2019 she was awarded the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Award for Poetry for her cultural organizing work in South Florida. aja monet cofounded a political home for artists and organizers called, Smoke Signals Studio. She facilitates "Voices: Poetry for the People," a workshop and collective in collaboration with Community Justice Project and Dream Defenders. aja monet currently serves as new Artistic Creative Director for V-Day, a global movement to end violence against all women and girls. She is working on her next full collection of poems entitled, Florida Water.

Hollis Heath – Performance and Content Artist
Hollis Heath is an award-winning theatre activist, speaker, strategist and womxn's empowerment leader based in NYC. She is co-founder of Harlem KW Project, a theatre company that produced the Audelco award-winning play, "Renaissance in the Belly of a Killer Whale." Hollis earned her Master's in Educational Theatre in 2016 and has spent the last decade mastering in programming, content and curriculum to empower young women to own their unique voice and connect them with brands and organizations to increase their social capital. Brands she has produced events for with young womxn include Coach, Verizon, Refinery 29, Benefit Cosmetics, American Express, Jet Blue, Universal Records, Salesforce, and many others. In 2015, she was invited to join the Dove Real Beauty campaign as a Self Esteem ambassador and continues to tour the country delivering their content. Her work as empowerment leader has led to invitations to speak at the White House under the Obama administration. Currently, she serves as Director of Programs for a national organization working to support womxn ages 18-25 to identify purpose, own their authentic voice and curate the powerful lives they desire to lead.

Kayla Shelton – Campaign illustrator
Kayla Shelton is painter, illustrator and collagist based in South Los Angeles.

She has always been drawn towards portraiture, the human form and exploring interpersonal relationships in form. Her creative expression was born from her desire to record the culturally rich surroundings of her upbringing. This passion grew into adulthood, where she is now using portraiture to explore black identity, femininity, and sisterhood.

The inspiration she drew from her surroundings prompted her to pursue a career in the arts, where she could continue telling the stories of her people. Through her work she hopes to spark meaningful discourse around the stereotypes that surround black femininity and beauty within our culture. Her portraits and collages were recently featured in Magician, an exhibition on black portraiture at Fellows of Contemporary Art.

In recent years, her focus has shifted deeper into the digital and public art space. She has been using her vision in service of various community building initiatives in South Los Angeles; designing for local anti-gentrification, public health, and women's empowerment campaigns. She is currently working on a new series of portraits centered around elders and community leaders in Leimert Park.

Helen Pena – Digital Strategist
Helen is a Black feminist storyteller and cultural organizer from Miami, FL. She uses photography, graphic design and zine-making to interrogate the effects of colonization towards the Black female body. Her artwork explores race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and memory. In times of social uprising and struggles for justice, she believes the role of the artist is to be grounded in community, telling stories of solidarity and radically imagining life-affirming futures. In 2017, Helen co-founded (F)empower, a collective of queer feminists and abolitionist artist-activists. Throughout her years leading the collective, she has curated and produced several art shows, steered digital campaigns, led public art interventions, facilitated political education bootcamps, workshops, and panels, co-founded a community garden, a community bail fund, a Black queer diasporic party, and more. For 2 years, Helen worked in Digital Communications for racial and economic justice organization, the Dream Defenders. While there, she used art to amplify political organizing, by using photo, video and graphic design to breathe life to political campaigns, transforming their social media and digital presence. Currently, she is producing her first short film, Celeste, and is the Digital Strategist for Voices.

SPEAK

Silence is the best weapon for some, but not for me. I will not be silenced.

— oluwatoyin salau

Voices is a poetic performance piece and artistic campaign. We need you! The creative process will be just as crucial as the piece itself. This is an urgent call for submissions of poems and monologues written by Black Women for all women and those who love us. We are also accepting visual art submissions that we will curate throughout the campaign for performance and the solidarity-making toolkit. The performance piece will ultimately be in service of and for women to speak to the complexities of their experiences as well as an inclusive vision for change, justice, compassion and solidarity. We seek to encourage and establish a world that nurtures radical truth telling love. We welcome all poems and monologues that speak to our hurt, our hope, and our wisdom. Poems that cast spells and poems that animate the future we know is possible. We want paintings, portraits, collages, and illustrations that establish our visions for a world where we are heard. What are our examples of sisterhood? What is our call to action? How do we work together and expand one another? This project seeks to get out of the stories that have been constructed for us. What are the stories we have inherited and carried that have been hard to give up for the sake of transformative justice? What are the stories we still lean on today as a source of strength, inspiration, and guidance? What will be our new story?

We have created several prompts to inspire and animate our submissions. Please feel free to write in response to any of these prompts:

- Share a story where you have used your voice to speak up against violence.
- What are ways that you have been silenced?
- What are stories that demonstrate examples of solidarity and transformational justice?
- What are visions for a world where women are loved holistically?
- Praise a woman or several women in your community that are often unheard or underrepresented.
- What is an example of when someone has shown you solidarity and how did they show it?
- Describe a story where a man in your life showed support or care holistically?
- Tell the history of a scar on your body.
- Describe the first time you stood up to someone who abused their authority.
- Share a story from the perspective of your lover's arms.
- What is advice an elder woman has given you in your life that you have had to use and how was it useful?
- How has social media helped or hindered your voice?
- Whose voices do you carry with you?
- Tell us about a letter you never sent.
- How are you stealing your body back?
- What is power to you?
- What are things you do in the dark?
- Who are the women that have mothered you?
- How would your mother describe you?
- What do you want to scream to the world?
- Sing us a song of resistance.
- Describe the loss or grief and how you moved through it.
- Speak in tongues.
- What have others erased while you speak?
- How do you make life out of death? -or- how do you make life
- When was the last time you felt safe?
- Describe a community where you feel safe.
- Who would you be if money wasn't a concern?
- Can you describe the relationship between you and the sister you've never had.

- Share a moment when you were 'seen' or 'heard' by someone you least expected? How did you feel?
- What do you believe are your great-great grandmother's dreams for you?
- Share a time you witnessed another woman's courage? What did you see in her? Did you see it in yourself too?
- Write a love letter to your voice when it was silenced or misunderstood.
- If your voice had a personality and being in the world, what would it look like? What would it do?

GUIDELINES:
All submissions must be created by Black women: cis women, transwomen, and non-binary people across the African continent and Diaspora. We welcome all written forms of storytelling: poems, monologues, short stories etc. All work must be unpublished original work and never before publicly performed. 1000 word max. Languages: English, Spanish, & French. For visual artists, we welcome all files in .jpg or .pdf format. (300 dpi or higher recommended)

To submit, please go to: <https://voices.vday.org/speak/>