

[Damali Abrams Shares Self-Healing Strategies as a Radical Act of Resistance](#)

Hope-Lian Vinson speaks to Damali Abrams The Glitter Priestess about creating spaces for healing and transcendence as site for liberation.

Damali Abrams is a Guyanese-American artist whose work engages with self-help as a radical means towards self-healing in response to the sociopolitical forces that undermine Black wellness and preservation today. Using performance as a vehicle for herbal remedies, Abrams promotes self-care as a ritualistic act, bringing together Afro-Caribbean mythologies and Black American pop idols to inspire sites of joy, celebration, and collective healing. Abrams' role as the Glitter Princess challenges audiences to take part in alternative and even transcendent realities where the threshold between realism and idealism blur. In a community where tragedy takes precedent, the use of the Black imaginary functions as a tool for liberation for the Black community and its survival today.



And She Lived Happily Ever After by Damali Abrams image courtesy of the artist.

HOPE-LIAN VINSON: In the oversaturation of violent media depicting police shootings, what has been your process in promoting self-healing as a response to social ills in your artistic practice?

DAMALI ABRAMS: In addition to offering healing remedies through GlitterPriestess.com, I am also offering workshops at community organizations and I have created a performance piece where I share herbal remedies to soothe anger and anxiety, which was performed at the opening of *¿Qué Pasa, USA?*. My approach is to share what works for me in my own self-care and healing practice. All of my art is about healing as well.



Glitter Priestess Mad Tea Party by Damali Abrams image courtesy of the artist

HLV: Since its popularity in the late 20th century, self-help is criticized as an industry which survives off the ineffective methods and misleading claims of self-sufficient practices. As an artist whose works revolve around self-help, what role do you see your performances having in relationship to the global movements of today, specifically with black empowerment, liberation, and healing?

DA: I see my work as a contribution to those contemporary global movements. My work incorporates a critical eye towards mainstream self-help while simultaneously acknowledging its revolutionary possibilities. When I was in grad school, performance artist and faculty advisor, Faith Wilding, guided my research towards the roots of contemporary self-help culture; going back to movements in the 1970s like the Black Panther Party and feminist consciousness-raising groups.

Any political movement can only go as far as the individuals involved in it. If we have low self-esteem or low self-worth and feel undeserving of progress due to internalized oppression, it is very difficult to move forward individually or collectively. Similarly, if we are afraid to be vulnerable or have unresolved emotional issues, it becomes difficult to work with others. That is why I focus so much on self-healing. Being healthy is a radical act for groups of people who have to fight for the right to exist, now and historically as well.



GO by Damali Abrams. Image courtesy of the artist.

HLV: Your current work brings together pop celebrities, mythology, and Afro-Caribbean folklore to create fantastical sites that invigorate the imagination. How do you see these sites manifesting and evolving over time?

DA: My intention is to create immersive environments where we can completely transcend our current socio-political and personal realities; I want those environments to be spaces for healing, dance parties and meeting spaces. I have spent the past few years applying for residencies and funding for immersive video installations. LMCC (Lower Manhattan Cultural Council) approved the project for their Governors Island residency, but the space was not conducive to that work and instead inspired me to create the collage and video installation *That Old Black Magic (Happiness Spell #1)* which is in the exhibition *¿Qué Pasa, USA?*. I am still looking for a space for the immersive installation.

HLV: What are the limits and possibilities of imagination in your work? Looking at your Youtube channel, some of your performances—whether it be self-help videos or a demo for glittery shoes, reminding me of Dorothy and her teleporting slippers—ask audiences to participate in virtual reality, or at least in a transcendent one. What role does optimism or transcendence have in your past or current work?

DA: My work is totally about transcendence. Thank you for noticing that. I think the only way real change can happen, whether on a personal level or a societal level, is by transcending our perceived limitations so that we can begin to imagine alternative realities. If Harriet Tubman never had visions of freedom, she would never have thought to escape, let alone go back for hundreds of others. The intention with this work is to create a space of liberation for the imagination. A space where we can

transcend tragedy and injustice in order to begin imagining alternative futures, then manifest them!