

WePress

WePress in 2021

We respectfully acknowledge that WePress is a community art space on the occupied and unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. We are grateful to be here uninvited, to live and work alongside the people Indigenous to these lands and who have stewarded the land since time immemorial. In 2021, we worked alongside and learned from many Indigenous folks in and beyond the Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood in ways that center decolonial relationships between people and with the land.

As for many community-based organizations, 2021 was another challenging year for WePress. We have faced many changes but continue to reflect, learn/unlearn, and build new relationships.

Nina Yañez and aly de la cruz yip left the Collective this year and when Luca Cara Seccafien stepped back last Fall (and has now left the Collective as well), the remaining Collective members decided to move into the transitional phase we are now in. We are forever grateful for the enormous amount of work that Nina, aly, and Luca poured into the creation of WePress.

WePress remains committed to the difficult but worthwhile endeavour to strive for more collective ways of working; more support for those marginalized by the society we live in; more equity; and better structures, conflict resolution processes, and accountability while continuing the work to provide free art-making supplies and opportunities in welcoming spaces in the DTES. We will be working through a transition phase to determine the future and sustainability of WePress.

We also want to remember and pay our respects to all of the family and community members lost this year. May they rest in peace and their spirits be with us to continue this work.

Highlights of 2021

- 6 artists hired to create 'how-to' zines (also translated into Traditional and Simplified Chinese) to include in the art kits;
 - colouring sheets and colouring zine by Heidi Nagtegaal
 - beading zine by Haisla Collins
 - how to paint and sew patches by Hollis Nelson
 - how to draw mythological creatures by Derek Armstrong
 - how to Chinese brush paint by Grace Chan
 - how to sew finger puppets by Rosa Chan
- ~3000 art kits assembled and distributed through our DTES Community Partners;
- 20 members of the community hired to assemble art kits;
- 19 online and in-person workshops delivered;
- 9 artists supported through Radical Care Artist Residencies;

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- 17 new artists and community organizers engaged as workshop facilitators, contractors, and artists-in-residence;
- Developed new relationships and deepened existing relationships with other community organizations in the DTES engaging in mutual aid work, and in the process of integrating art-making (e.g. art kits) with the provision of other services, such as harm reduction outreach and food deliveries and distribution to those who experience food insecurity; and
- support from 35 new and regular volunteers (including Board members).

Programming Details

Free and by donation workshops (online and in-person)

We create opportunities for equity-seeking artists to share their expertise and be paid for that work by providing administrative support for workshops. In 2021, some of the workshops we offered were:

Slow Print for Queers: Collective Member Luca Cara Seccafien planned and launched a 13-week collaborative printmaking project during which participants made multilayer linocut prints in collaboration with each other from a distance (January to March). This project was a collaboration through Luca's FUTURES/forward mentorship in Community Arts with the International Centre for Art for Social Change, and Judith Marcuse Projects. Under the mentorship of Sharon Bayly, Luca facilitated this project, a pilot for future collaborative print projects.

Exchanging Words: We collaborated with Aboriginal Writers Collective West Coast (AWCWC) and the Warriors Against Violence Society (WAVS) for the first time to deliver poetry readings and workshops by Indigenous poets and artists. With funding acquired by WAVS, AWCWC hosted and WePress provided in-kind technology support and the webinar platform. The series culminated in a *Before Canada Day* online reading featuring Norine Braun, Wanda John-Kehewin, Jonina Kirton, Chris Bose, Columpa Bobb, and Joanne Arnott that was hosted by Russell Wallace. Financial support was also provided by WePress.

Printmaking Demo & Talk with Marlene Yuen: We collaborated with Griffin Art Projects to offer a letterpress printing demonstration and artist talk streamed live over Zoom on Sunday, March 7. This was part of *Whose Chinatown? Examining Chinatown Gazes in Art, Archives, and Collections*, which included Marlene's handmade books, including *Ho Sun Hing Printers*, a recent letterpress and risograph book about Canada's first Chinese-English print shop. Collective member Linda Uyehara Hoffman also spoke about the history of WePress Community Arts Space Society and the Ho Sun Hing Letterpress Project and Luca Cara Seccafien helped Marlene create the letterpress demo video.

Captioning, Transcription and Non-Auditory Access Workshop. WePress collaborated with grunt to offer this workshop that was written by Kay Slater and designed to help artists and community

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creators take a tangible first step towards building accessibility into their practices. Held on Monday, August 30 and Wednesday, September 1.

Love Letter to Self: Fictional Self-Portraiture Through Drawing: In collaboration with the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival, WePress offered a free online workshop led by semillites hernández velasco on Saturday, October 30 that taught tips and tricks to start drawing self-portraits.

Rubber Block Handprinted Patches: In collaboration with EMBERS Eastside Works, WePress helped provide a free block printing workshop at the Eastside Works space on December 8.

Art Kits + Zines

WePress continued distributing art kits by hiring artists to create how-to zines and community organizers (peers) to assemble the supplies. These programs provide art-making opportunities regardless of a person's access to advanced education, specialized training, and economic privilege, and help fulfil the need for art as a means for survival in the DTES. We partnered with many DTES groups to distribute the art kits, including Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, Health through SPIRIT, Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), Aboriginal Front Door Society (AFD), Skundaal Bernie Williams and her team, DTES SRO Collaborative, Kílala Lelum, PACE Society, Ray-Cam Cooperative Centre, Smoke Signals and Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre Society, WISH Drop-In Centre Society, Vancouver Women's Health Collective, Watari Counselling and Support Services Society, Erica Grant and her team, Jacob's Well, Carnegie Community Centre and Cultural Sharing and Oppenheimer Park, Hives for Humanity Society, Megaphone Magazine, Powell Street Festival Society, Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society, Eastside Community Action Project, DTES Neighbourhood House, EMBERS Eastside Works, and Gallery Gachet.

Virtual Art Drop-ins

From January to May, we continued to hold a weekly virtual art drop-in on Monday evenings hosted by Hollis Nelson. The art drop-ins were mainly for the collective, board members, volunteers, staff, and by invitation to make sure that we could create an intimate setting. Folks dropped by to check in with friends, meet one another, and make art together.

Radical Care Residencies

We provided low-barrier financial support for the CARFAC equivalent of 6 weeks for artists who consider concepts of community-care in their work, make work challenging or breaking colonial systems, whose work or livelihood is deeply impacted by intersecting systems of oppression and exclusion, and/or are otherwise underrepresented (emerging and/or marginalized artists).

WePress Community Kitchen

WePress remained committed to the ongoing COVID-19 Response work in the DTES to support the unhoused and precariously housed. The WePress Community Kitchen continued to cook 200 hot nutritious, delicious meals per day, 5 days a week at the Vancouver Japanese Language School &

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Japanese Hall (VJLS-JH) kitchen. Many thanks to VJLS-JH for highly subsidizing the use of their kitchen and being a great partner in this work. Our meals were delivered to and distributed by Aboriginal Front Door, Overdose Prevention Society, Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (WAHRS), Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), Hives for Humanity, PACE Society, and the CRAB Park Encampment. We are grateful to all of these amazing groups and Fiona York for collaborating with WePress and for their hard work on the frontlines.

DTES Community Kitchens (DECK) Network

We also helped support the Downtown Eastside Community Kitchens (DECK) network that was established in 2020. Groups doing food security and sovereignty work continue to meet bi-weekly virtually to share information and resources. At the same time, WePress held a DTES Capital Grant to help DTES groups purchase cooking and gardening equipment. By staying engaged through the DECK meetings, we were able to stay informed of equipment needs in the neighbourhood.

Chinese Seniors Project

This ongoing program began as a collaboration of many artists and the Chinese Seniors and involves the continuing work to publish a book sharing the stories, photos, and art of Chinese Seniors in Chinatown that were collected through community workshops in 2018. During 2021, we are grateful that Jane Shi worked on this project and helped keep it going.

Developing an Arts and Culture Mutual Aid Network

In 2021, we started our project, *Centering the Margins: Creating Social Change through Art and Advocacy* which is funded by a 3-year Vancouver Foundation Systems Change Test Grant. The beginnings of the pandemic revealed that our contributions as an arts organization are much stronger and more meaningful when we work closely with organizations and groups doing work on food security / sovereignty, housing, and harm reduction as a network of mutual aid. As a result, we are working on mutual aid and low-fi methods of bringing artmaking to intersectionally marginalized communities and have been doing outreach through ongoing programming as part of this project.

Aspirations and plans for the coming year

- Continue but adjust our ongoing programming to meet our ever-changing situation.
- Remain a part of the mutual aid network in the DTES.
- Continue trying to figure out how to create a way of working collectively in a healthy and sustainable way.

Thank you

Thank you to our donors: Judy Hanazawa, William Lim, William Pearson, Vanessa Kwan, and Randy Iwata. [Please donate to WePress.](#)

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Thank you to our [funders and partners](#), including the BC Arts Council, Province of British Columbia, City of Vancouver, Canada Council for the Arts, Government of Canada through the United Way Lower Mainland, Community Foundations of Canada / Vancouver Foundation, Community Food Centres Canada, and Career Launcher, Province of British Columbia, Vancouver Foundation, HAVE Culinary Training Society, EMBERS Eastside Works, Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre, Community Impact Real Estate Society, Affordable Housing Advisory Association, Powell Street Festival Society, Gallery Gachet, and Opus Art Supplies.

Special thanks to all the groups supporting the DTES Community Kitchens (DECK) Network and especially the groups who distribute our meals from the WePress Community Kitchen, including Aboriginal Front Door, Overdose Prevention Society, Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (WAHRS), Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), Hives for Humanity, PACE Society, and the CRAB Park Encampment and Fiona York. Also, many thanks to the informal mutual aid network of the DTES that supports the unhoused and precariously housed and the work of WePress.

Special thanks from staff to our Board members, Julia Aoki, Sharon Belli, Shauna Butterwick, Ann Hepper, and Kate Hodgson, for their ongoing support of the work of WePress.

And thanks, as always, to all our volunteers and supporters who make WePress what it is!

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