

WePress

WePress in 2022

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 (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We are grateful to be here uninvited, to live and work alongside the people Indigenous to these lands who have stewarded the land since time immemorial.

Highlights of 2022 Summary

- 2 online and 2 in-person workshops delivered by semillites hernández velasco;
- 11 artists supported through Radical Care Artist Residencies;
- paid 2 artists hired to reprint their 'how-to' zines and worked with 2 artists to complete their zines:
 - colouring sheets and colouring zine by Heidi Nagtegaal;
 - beading zine by Haisla Collins;
 - making hand puppets by Rosa Chan; and
 - Chinese brush painting by Grace Chan;
- 15+ members of the community hired to assemble art kits;
- 350 art kits distributed through our DTES Community Partners and ~1500 art kits started and will be completed and distributed by summer/fall 2023;
- 33,500+ hot, delicious, nutritious meals prepared by the WePress Community Kitchen and distributed them with our 8 partner organizations – Aboriginal Front Door (AFD), Overdose Prevention Society (OPS), Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (WAHRS), Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), Hives for Humanity, PACE Society, Smoke Signals, and the CRAB Park Encampment and Eastside Community Action Project;
- Moved to our new space at 185 E. Hastings Street;
- Survived the flooding of our new space;
- hired 15+ artists to help WePress with its move and clean up after flooding as a way to support artists financially and socially;
- Collaborated with Powell Street Festival on *Daruma Kuyō*, *Hanami*, and *Minori* events, and on four Paueru Mashup (dance) Workshops in Oppenheimer Park in July;
- Collaborated with Gallery Gachet and UBC ART & Justice on [Community Postcards: A Printmaking Workshop](#) – helping them to connect with Haisla Collins and lending block printmaking equipment and supplies for the workshop;
- Supported Watari and VANDU with their collaboration event for *Day of the Dead* on November 2nd;
- Supported DTES Arts Collective (Street Artists working with Overdose Prevention Society);

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- Financially supported TJ Felix and VIVO for TJ's show, [Things An Injuns Gotta Do To Pay Rent On Stolen Land](#);
- Developed new relationships and deepened existing ones with other community organizations in the DTES engaging in mutual aid work;
- Received support from 29 new and regular volunteers (including Board members); and
- Working on an organizational re-set, including funding, planning, and work to hire a Program and Managing Director and an Accessibility Coordinator.

Programming Details

2022 was another roller coaster year, filled with highlights and challenges.



Winter

The year started with the excitement of receiving the keys to our new space at 185 E. Hastings Street, and a collaboration with the Powell Street Festival (PSF) on their *Daruma Kuyō* new year's event at CRAB Park, with the WePress Community Kitchen helping cook 200+ hot Japanese curry rice meals for the A Vancouver Downtown Eastside Community Arts Space on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations

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event and people living at the Park. The WePress Community Kitchen has been cooking 800–1000 hot delicious, nutritious meals at the Vancouver Japanese Language School & Japanese Hall (VJLS-JH) kitchen since June 2020. We are continually grateful for the support of the VJLS-JH with highly subsidized kitchen rent to support cooking meals for the unhoused and precariously housed. Our meals are distributed directly to the residents of CRAB Park and through our partner frontline DTES organizations, Aboriginal Front Door (AFD), Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (WAHRS) and their street outreach program, Overdose Prevention Society (OPS), Hives for Humanity, PACE Society, and Smoke Signals. We also continued to attend the DTES Community Kitchens (DECK) Network meetings, now hosted by El Purdey from Watari.

The screenshot shows a webpage for a workshop titled "Draw A Song For Me (Drawing Self-Portraits Through Songs)". The page features a vibrant illustration of a person with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue t-shirt, sitting at a desk and drawing on a tablet. The illustration is set against a background of musical notes and a green speech bubble that says "draw me a song". A yellow starburst graphic indicates the event date: "SATURDAY APRIL 16th 1-3pm". The page includes a navigation bar with links for "EVENTS + WORKSHOP + MORE", "ABOUT US", "SUPPORT US", and "CONTACT". The main text on the page reads: "Draw A Song For Me (Drawing Self-Portraits Through Songs) Saturday, April 16th, 2022 from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm Pacific Standard Time". It also mentions that the event is online on Zoom and provides information about the location: "on the unceded and occupied traditional territories of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and səliłwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations". A registration link is provided: "Register [here](#) to receive the Zoom link." The page also states: "All levels welcome and encouraged. This event is free. Donations are welcome." A section titled "About the Workshop" describes the activity: "In this workshop we will be combining music and drawing. We will be taking inspiration from a song that speaks to us and draw ourselves through that song. This exercise invites us to use lyrics as prompts to create narratives from our own experiences. The goal is to start a zine that combines the elements of a song (lyrics, title, beat, genre) with different elements of ourselves. While songs can be oddly specific or general, we will be taking aspects from our lives to re-imagine the song and make it specific to our own context." At the bottom of the illustration, there is a red speech bubble that says "create a zine by taking inspiration on a song you like" and "no experience required, online through zoom". The page is posted by WePress on April 10, 2022.

In February, semillites hernández velasco led a [Draw A Song For Me \(Drawing Self-Portraits Through Songs\)](#) workshop that was really wonderful and loved by participants. We also supported four Indigenous and low-income artists through our Radical Care Residency program. This provides low-barrier financial support to artists addressing community care and/or those deeply impacted by intersecting systems of oppression and exclusion.

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Spring

COVID-19 continued to negatively impact our in-person programming, so we were not able to re-start our Open Studio drop-in art-making sessions. However, we hired 15+ DTES artists who met in small groups to help WePress pack up all our art supplies and equipment at the space we used to share with Gallery Gachet. Some of them also helped with the big move (with the heavy lifting done by professional movers), completed at the end of April. While our art kit assembly project was interrupted by the move, we were still able to provide some colouring kits, watercolour kits, and sewing art kits to some of the people living at CRAB Park.

The WePress Community Kitchen continued to cook hot meals at (VJLS-JH) kitchen and distribute them to the unhoused and precariously housed. Unfortunately, one of our founders, Luca Cara Seccafien, decided to leave WePress permanently after their leave. We are forever grateful to Luca for all the time, energy, and hard work they poured into creating WePress.

We financially supported another artist who used to work in our kitchen and is a young Indigenous land defender through our Radical Care Residency Program. We also collaborated with PSF again on their *Hanami* Cherry Blossom Picnic at Oppenheimer Park, again cooking 200 Japanese curry rice meals with their volunteers to serve at the event. Semi ran another [Draw A Song For Me \(Drawing Self-Portraits Through Songs\)](#) successful online workshop.

In May, members of the WePress Community Kitchen participated in the DTES Food Sovereignty Strategic Planning session held at RayCam with over a dozen organizations, including community kitchens, hamper-making programs, and community gardens. It was a powerful gathering and the vision created has been captured by graphic facilitator, Adriana Contreras Correal. Art-making is embedded in this community organizing, and food security is essential for access to arts programming.

Summer

While the WePress Kitchen continued its work feeding folks in the DTES, including working with Food Runners to add vegetables from food rescue efforts into our meals, we supported DTES Artist Collective (Street Artists like Smokey D.) through the Overdose Prevention Society. We also collaborated with PSF to host four Paueru Mashup dance workshops in Oppenheimer Park every Monday in July, and helped bring cold water and frozen juice, freezies, and popsicles to participants and those spending time in the Park.

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Unfortunately, there was a fire in the housing above our new space and the Fire Department had to put it out, which resulted in serious flooding in our space at the end of July. We were fortunate that most of the water came down in an area away from our two letterpresses and 3D printers, so they weren't damaged, and most of our supplies and equipment were in bins / under plastic sheets (preventative measures we learned from a flood at our old space!) and our landlord is fantastic and looked after the major initial clean up. However, we still lost a bunch of supplies and spent August and September hiring DTES artists to help us clean up. Since our art kit assembly was again delayed, this was a way to provide some financial support to WePress artists.

Also, we were able to support six more artists through our Radical Care Residencies, including artists we connected with through Aboriginal Front Door and their new hub at 390 Main Street.

Sadly, we currently do not have the capacity to continue the Chinese Seniors Project as a regular program, but will continue as best we can to support 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. We are grateful to Jane Shi who anchored this throughout the pandemic.

At the end of the summer, we also had some challenges at the Kitchen and staff turnover. In general, WePress's programming expansion to respond to the emergency needs of the DTES has been detrimental to our organizational structure and the work we started to develop policies/guidelines and accountability processes to support a healthy, accessible, and safe workplace environment. It has placed enormous strain on our Collective, leading to burn out and significant turn-over. It is a crucial time to focus on scaling back our activities to levels we had established before the pandemic, and to initiate an organizational re-set.

Fall

We have started a process whereby we continue to meet our funding obligations while determining how to scale back our programming and create a plan for the future of WePress. We are still in the process of completing 1500 art kits with how-to zines, some of which we hope to distribute over the holidays and the rest of which should be completed by February 2023. The art kit assembling sessions are community-building, fun, and employment opportunities all rolled into one – providing social inclusion, paid work, a sense of purpose, hot meals from our Community Kitchen, snacks, drinks, and a chance to connect with other artists. The art-making across the DTES that results when our art kits are distributed is still an important part of WePress, even as we work on this re-set.

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Leading up to their *Day of the Dead* event on November 2nd, we collaborated with VANDU and Watari by providing artist supports and funds for art supplies. We also supported three more artists through our Radical Care Artist Residency program. Over the past month, we have been working to scale down the WePress Community Kitchen, preparing closer to 600 meals per week. We continue to work collaboratively with the DTES Food Sovereignty Collaborative and Hub, which has now moved into 320 Alexander Street (the old Evelyne Saller Centre), and we are excited about how this connection will help support the future of WePress.



Beading Art Kit – we are assembling 500 of these kits to share with the DTES community

A large part of this Fall has been taken up with grant-writing – including moving to the professional Visual Arts Operating stream of the BC Arts Council, learning about the new CADAC system, and

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submitting a BC Arts Council Arts Impact Grant to support the hiring of an Accessibility Coordinator. To envision the future of WePress, concepts of accessibility must be integrated from the start. We need to be sure that we are minimizing barriers to being a part of the WePress organization – as part of the visioning work and as staff and board members. We also want to minimize barriers to the WePress space itself and to our art-making programs. And we want this for everyone who connects with WePress, but prioritizing those who have been marginalized by systems of class, sexuality, gender, race, culture, disability, mental health, addictions, and colonization.

WePress is currently initiating a visioning process for the restructuring of our organization, including the work to formalize policies and processes. This will be crucial for the long-term sustainability of a group that supports the art and cultural practices of equity-seeking groups. It is urgent to do this work now, while WePress has some financial security to be able to dive into this critical and challenging work.

Many Thanks

Thank you to our [funders and partners](#), including the BC Arts Council, Province of British Columbia, City of Vancouver, Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Canada through Community Food Centres Canada, the Province of British Columbia, the Vancouver Foundation, HAVE Culinary Training Society, Affordable Housing Advisory Association, Powell Street Festival Society, Gallery Gachet, and Watari Counselling & Support Services Society. 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 (AFD), Overdose Prevention Society (OPS), Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (WAHRS), Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), Hives for Humanity, PACE Society, Smoke Signals, and the CRAB Park Encampment and Eastside Community Action Project. 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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