The Art Matters festival takes place on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'keha:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of these lands and waters. Tiohtia:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Fine arts and academia have an ongoing history of oppression. The Art Matters festival exists at the intersection of their colonial legacies, and is woven into the fabric of structural and systemic violence(s) that uphold such institutions. This structural and systemic violence includes, and most often represents the prioritization of certain bodies and their interests based on race, ability, sex, gender, sexuality, nationality/status, class, education, culture, religion and more. For instance, in the history of fine arts, certain movements have mobilized racist aesthetics to depict and interpret the experiences of colonized peoples while using such depictions to justify colonial rule (and, subsequently, neo-colonialism/global capitalism).

Everyone is capable of (re)producing systemic violence to ascend hierarchical structures. The following questions encourage "us" to consider positionality, intention and impact in art practice(s) to move toward iterations of the Art Matters festival that acknowledge the historical legacies of fine arts and academia while manifesting a present and future that prioritize the voices, experiences, knowledge and safety of those who have been excluded and/or oppressed by these structures.

The following questionnaire aims to foster reflexivity within and beyond the Art Matters community by giving examples of how oppression may manifest in individual and collective art practices.

1. Are you able to perceive the difference between intention and impact?
2. Are you willing and able to prioritize the voices of those experiencing the impact of your work?
3. Does your work allude to forms of violence that are systemically perpetrated against certain bodies? If so, does it contribute to their reproduction and normalization?
4. Do encounters with your work evoke/provoke trauma for the bodies you seek to represent?
5. Does your work sensationalize traumatic events for the sake of shock value?
6. Do you experience systemic privileges?
7. Are you telling someone else's past, present, or future story in your own voice while your own embodied experience and cultural references differ from this person's? Does this act contribute to the commodification, marginalization, and fetishization of a given culture, its symbols, aesthetics, etc.?
8. Are you transposing racialized narratives onto white bodies, or transposing white narratives onto racialized bodies?
9. Does your work include stereotypical imagery that is uncritical of its origins?

10. Do you use words like "intersectional" and/or "anti-oppressive" to justify problematic themes in your work?

Answers:
1. We hope so.
2. You better.
3. If yes, that is part of systemic violence.
4. If yes, see 3 + this makes your work and the space of exhibition inaccessible
5. If yes, see 3 + 4 + you are taking advantage of marginalized people's experiences and trivializing them.
6. Surprise! It's always yes. Follow up question: which ones?
7. If yes, that's appropriation.
8. If yes, that's whitewashing.
9. If yes, see 3.
10. If yes, that's deflection.

Bonus question: Whose shoulders are you standing on? Please consider the implications of your answer.

If you are unable to uphold and represent the values of the festival, please think of how you can leave your position and give space for those who have experienced systemic oppression in order to tell their own stories.

We invite QTBIPOC to expand upon this statement and questionnaire as they see fit at any point in time by contacting the Art Matters Outreach coordinator.

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Florence Cing-Ghai Yee
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