

Title: *I Am Here* (2022)

Keywords: ritual, performance, Ghana, queer, alliances



video stills from *I Am Here* (2022)

Links to video (private):

2D video: <https://vimeo.com/692796739/f45f09751d> (2mins 35secs)

360 video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyLY5gXqZV8&feature=youtu.be> (5mins)

Note: any of the two versions above can be shown. I recommend the 2D video for a screening or the 360 for an exhibition (the ideal way to view the 360 work is through a VR headset, but it can also be experienced online).

Abstract (500 words):

This is a ritual of gratitude.

This is not just a performance. It is a meditation.

An act of presence, generosity, and connection.

Think about why you are here

and where is here

(what is here?)

Think about what you have sacrificed – and gained – because you are here.

Being here for each other.

In this very moment, full of possibilities and togetherness.

In these challenging times for LGBTQI+ people in Ghana, we are homaging one of the most powerful voices in the country. Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi (also known as crazinisT artisT) is a transgender multidisciplinary artist, friend, mentor, mother and activist, who calls herself a 'transvatar'. The mantra 'I am here' reflects our gratitude to her as a generative force of inspiration, love and activism for the local and international communities of all walks of life.

The ritual took place in January 2022, in the botanical garden of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana. In this place, together with the shrieking sounds of bats, we are uniting our bodies and souls in a spiritual and political act of resistance, connecting and grounding our individual and collective intentions.

In this 360 experience, we invite the viewer to take the place of Va-Bene and reflect on their own potential as agents of social change. This is not a performance but a meditative ritual of presence and solidarity.

This work was developed as part of a month-long residency at pIAR (perfocraZe International Artist Residency), the residencies that Va-Bene has founded in her studio-house. The participants include artists in residence, regular assistants, interns and the extended family gravitating around pIAR. *I Am Here* is a collaboration between Giulia Casalini, Niya B and Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi [crazinisT artisT].

Full Credits

Participants:

Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi, Eric Acquah, Kwame Brenya, Giulia Casalini, Richmond Donkor Kwesi Gifted, Charley Mortensen, Valentina Peri, Martin Toloku

Costumes:

Marcella Nuerkie Akuetteh (Naa)

Assistants:

Martin Toloku, Mawuenya Amudzi, Sunny Pfalzer, Wonder Fiatsi

Filming and editing:

Niya B

Developed at:

pIAR - perfocraZe International Artist Residency

Because of the anti-LGBTQ+ political climate, the residency is currently raising funds to buy the land and property in which they are situated. More information at: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/xx48d3-save-piar?member=18558207>.

To know more, and to offer support to LGBTQI+ communities in Ghana, check out LGBT Rights Ghana: <https://linktr.ee/lgbtrightsgh>.

Note: I can present the project and its concept also online, during the conference (my third PhD chapter is dedicated to the live art of Va-Bene).

Biographical note

Giulia Casalini is a curator-artist and transfeminist community organiser based in London. Her curatorial methodologies focus on performance, transnational collaboration and participation. Her PhD study (Techne-funded at Roehampton University) analyses 'queer-feminist' live art in an attempt to decentre the Euro-Anglo-American aesthetic canons and discourses. https://linktr.ee/queer_femme

*Note: as the initiator of this project, I am applying on behalf of our collaborative trio.
Other artists' bios:*

Niya B is a transfeminist artist, working at the intersections of visual art and performance. She explores themes related to ecology, posthumanism, (trans)gender politics and equity in health and wellbeing. Niya seeks to establish intimacy with her audience, creating a meditative space of vulnerability, affect and interdependence. <https://www.niyab.com/>

Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi [crazinist artist] lives in Kumasi, Ghana, and works internationally. With rituals and a gender-fluid persona, sHit employs sHit's own body as a thought-provoking tool in performances, photography, video, and installations, confronting issues such as disenfranchisement, social justice, violence, objectification, internalized oppression, anti-blackness and systemic indoctrination. <https://www.crazinistartist.com/>