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What makes you the right person for this research?

I am an artist and a mother, a Black, female, immigrant. I am Caribbean, part of the African diaspora and the global majority. I was born and bred in a former colony (Trinidad & Tobago), and now I live in its former coloniser (Britain). I have been marginalised, yet I am also part of academia. Both countries have taught me how close joy is to pain, resistance to powerlessness, and compassion to disconnection. I am culturally competent. My creativity and experience can help others design their own path through discomfort and trauma to sustainable joy.

I am a fine artist, a designer, a researcher, facilitator, writer, and project manager so although this is an ambitious project, I can make it happen. I planned, produced and sold 75% of the collection from my first solo UK exhibition in twelve months. I have worked internationally across public, private and charity organisations in marketing, conflict resolution, policy engagement, volunteer management, project co-ordination, and teaching. I have worked in creative industries that cross disciplines, cultures, religions, ages and races. A decade of [Life Story Art](#) has fine-tuned my ability to interview subjects, conduct research for art commissions, design for specific 'audience response', and use art to inspire joy and love. I am an academic and Associate Lecturer with publications and conference appearances around social change curation, colourism, arts for social change and inclusive practice. (You can download my [Social Change Curators Manifesto here.](#))

Carnival of Compassion pulls all this knowledge and skill together to honour my ancestors' legacy by presenting an aspect of Black culture (Carnival) and an essential 'soft' skill (Compassion) as key solutions to major world problems. I feel deeply that this is urgent and necessary work, especially for future generations.

I took 43 years to figure out that I am happiest when I use my creativity to bring joy. Carnival of Compassion is my most ambitious effort to date because it goes beyond me. It is collaborative, participatory, provides agency for marginalised groups, and opportunities for Carnival scholars and Caribbean creatives. With your

support, I could raise the profile of Caribbean Carnival culture and join two rare academic groups, both extremely underrepresented in the Global North - Black female Caribbean Professors and Carnival scholars. This research creates dialogue between artistic process and academic practice in an accessible way to a broad spectrum of people. It highlights the voices of under-represented people with an emphasis on building connection, not issuing correction. The potential for social change impact is significant. This is not just about Carnival. It's about us, reconnecting with each other.

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Why did you choose this project?

In 2016, I had enough.

UK hate crimes against immigrants increased, another young girl went missing in Trinidad, US Police murdered three Black men in three days, and people were arguing that all lives mattered while every news report proved that some lives seemed to matter less than others. As I sobbed on my kitchen floor, I wondered – Why don't we care anymore?

Watch the full story of how I came to be cultivating compassion through Carnival - <https://youtu.be/Do1d06xwo1w> (opens a YouTube video)

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What impact should we expect from this project?

It is my goal to ensure this project has a positive impact on multiple levels with a variety of individuals and organisations. This impact can be broken down as follows -

The Public

While the demographic for my public audience/participants may become more specific for this (doctoral) phase of the research, the desired impact should remain the same i.e. Participants/audience members will:

- Have a clear understanding of what it means to be compassionate
- Reflect on whether they act with compassion and how they might do this more
- Recognise that compassion is possible everyday and in simple ways that they can control
- Discover a way to reclaim their personal power in a world that often makes us feel powerless
- Consider that their acts of compassion can and do contribute to making the world a better place
- Collect ideas of ways they can show compassion to themselves and others
- Think about how they show themselves compassion
- Realise that being compassionate makes them feel good, feel joy
- Feel inspired to act with greater compassion when opportunities to do so arise

The Artists

The artists recruited to collaborate with me on this project will all be Caribbean or of-Caribbean-heritage because they must have lived experience of the “euphoric oneness” in Caribbean Carnival. Through this project, they will:

- Gain visibility, a rare opportunity for emerging artists from an under-represented community

- Co-create knowledge through practice-based research
- Develop their work through practice sharing across art disciplines (this benefits me too!)
- Showcase the incredible, but often dismissed, social change power of their Carnival culture
- Get rare insight into how an audience receives and responds to their work
- Engage with the concepts and behaviours of compassion in an in-depth manner that few have a chance to experience
- Have fun while learning to inspire joy, resilience, compassion and community with their artform
- Be paid for their time and expertise in creating a *Carnival of Compassion* artwork

Academia

While my research will heavily benefit the University of the Arts London (UAL) because I am currently based there, I expect *Carnival of Compassion* to impact academia by:

- Highlighting the importance of research into so-called 'soft' skills and adding to its normalisation
- Contributing to the very small pool of Carnival scholars in the world
- Diversifying the current pool of knowledge in the UK and Europe where there are very few Black female Caribbean academics at this level
- Making research that is widely accessible and relevant to those outside of academia, which in turn keeps academia relevant and accessible too
- Exploring experimental approaches to teaching and learning that could benefit UAL students
- Nurturing one of the few UK-based experts in Caribbean Carnival - an artform UAL currently has almost no representation in despite being the #2 arts university in the world.
- Improving academia's, and more specifically, UAL's reputation as actively anti-racist. This could be further strengthened by purposefully supporting this BAME research and progression with a view to increasing the miniscule number of Black female Professors in the UK.
- Connecting higher education to new networks and communities that were previously inaccessible without a more diversified research approach. This could be particularly helpful for UAL.

Partner Organisations

The impact for organisations that sponsor this project with their time, energy, expertise, resources and/or funding would be:

- First access – as a partner in the research, the supporting organisation can access and influence any ground-breaking research in detail, before anyone else in their field
- Good will in a socially conscious market – Being publicly associated with a potentially high-profile project that provides agency for the marginalised, promotes under-represented cultures, and aims to improve social cohesion signal a commitment to social responsibility that can enhance corporate reputations (and bank balances!)
- Improved inclusive practice – this project creates unique, mutually beneficial opportunities for knowledge exchange around equality, diversity and inclusion between higher education, industry and community

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What questions are you asking?

Big Picture Questions

1. Can an aspect of Black culture [Carnival] and a so-called 'soft' skill [Compassion] empower its audience to reconnect, re-engage and take control of shaping our societies from the ground up?

2. Can Carnival of Compassion link joy to compassion in my audiences' minds so that compassion becomes normative behaviour as they seek their own joy?
3. Can Carnival of Compassion teach us how to deliberately use culture to effect positive social change?
4. Can Carnival of Compassion simultaneously create and share knowledge with its audience about intersectional definitions and experiences of compassion without explicitly 'teaching'?
5. Can I create a prototype for how we fight social injustice through joy (rather than pain)?
6. Which elements of this research can and should be moved to post-doctoral research?
7. How can I ensure this research benefits the people it came from?
8. Can Caribbean Carnival economies create growth by 'commodifying' this knowledge?
9. Which industries would benefit most from this type of transferrable knowledge?

Tactical Questions

10. Can I effectively recreate the collective euphoria in Caribbean Carnivals with an art event/workshop/experience? And if I do...
11. Will the recreated euphoria be an effective trigger for compassion?
12. How have artworks motivated people to take action in the past?
13. Can the event/workshop/experience influence behaviour beyond the short term?
14. How can I measure the success of the event/workshop/experience?

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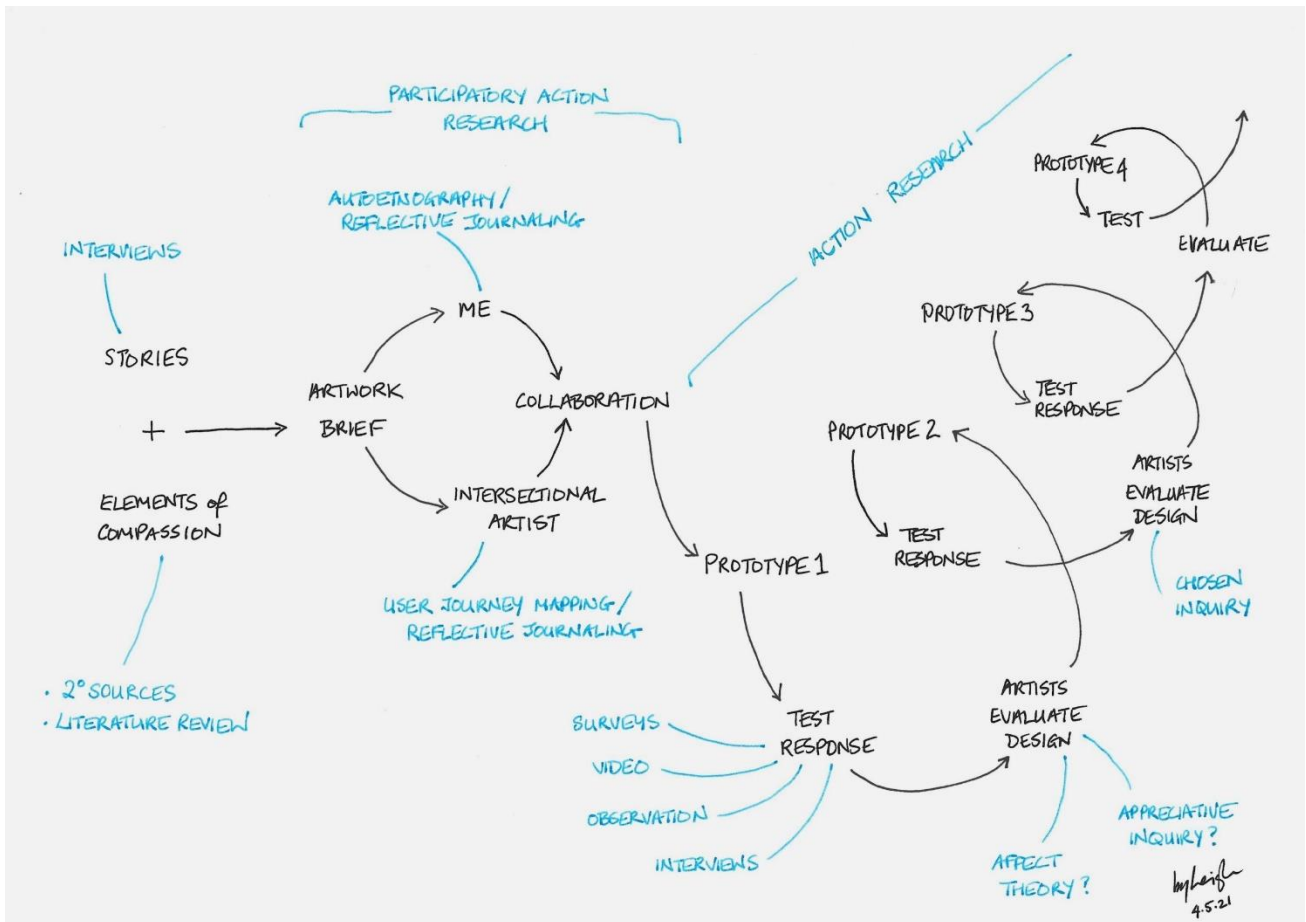
How does your art practice contribute to this research?

As a Life Story artist, I capture a subjects' special achievements, challenges, and personalities on canvas - www.byleigh.com/best-gift-ever – creating a daily visual reminder that they are capable of greatness. Using these skills, I propose to collect *stories* of how marginalised people experience compassion and match each story to a key *characteristic* of compassionate behaviour. Next, I will collaborate with Caribbean or Caribbean heritage artists who have lived experience of Caribbean Carnival to translate these story-characteristic pairs into multidisciplinary artworks. Together these artworks create an arts intervention built on Caribbean Carnival rituals. This journey through compassion that meshes my Life Story Art practice with the euphoria-producing rituals of Carnival is my "Carnival of Compassion".

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What is your proposed methodology?

Below is a diagram of my proposed methodology. Please click the image to enlarge (opens a web page).



My methodology builds inclusivity and the impetus for social change into the research from the start. It begins with secondary research into the characteristics of compassionate people. Simultaneously, people from varying intersections of race, religion, and experience will be interviewed to collect oral histories that highlight how marginalised people define and experience compassion.

Next, each compassion characteristic is matched to a compassion story. This informs a creative brief that will guide the collaboration between me and my Life Story Art, and another intersectional artist and their unique practice. To collect data on this transformation from verbal to visual, I initially thought all artists could reflectively journal (Gray and Malins, 2017) about their creative process; but it would be more inclusive and compassionate to ask collaborating artists what reflective methods they prefer.

The artwork produced triggers an iterative Participatory Action Research cycle (Kesby, Pain and Kindon, 2010). Each iteration will be tested with a diverse sample audience whose responses are collected via video, observation, interviews, and surveys that require them to colour-in their emotional response to the artwork on a version of Wilcox’s Feelings Wheel (Nguyen, 2021). This feedback is analysed, and the artwork re-designed to better elicit compassion, producing iteration two.

Together, these artworks create the Carnival of Compassion. The audience response to this body of work will determine whether the artworks are more effective together or apart.

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What challenges do you anticipate, and how might you mitigate them?

This work presents several challenges. Below are three examples -

- a) Ethics: balancing the cost to develop an artwork with a participant's right to withdraw their input could be addressed with guidance from UAL's ethics experts and a consent form specifically designed to handle this.
- b) Intellectual Property: *protecting research ethos and work while meeting private funding partners' commercial needs could be difficult but conferring with PhD graduates who managed corporate collaborations could reveal solutions.*
- c) Cultural Exploitation: Although I was born and raised in the land of Carnival, 18 years in the UK now places me "on the outside". Tapping the Caribbean's knowledge economy to serve the UK population is problematic if Caribbean countries do not also benefit. Potential solutions are:
 - adapting Carnival of Compassion for Caribbean audiences and sourcing funding to make this happen
 - ensuring that Caribbean and Caribbean-heritage artists receive priority when allocating paid collaborations; and
 - knowledge sharing through journals, conferences and other platforms owned by Caribbean countries so they are not dependent on UK institutions to access this research.

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I can't picture it. What will your intervention look like?

For example, audience members will be supported to make a costume as they make their way through the experience. Along their route, the art might come to life with audio or video. They might step into the 'set design' of someone's life. They might add their own compassion stories via Instagram hashtags, or collectively create an artwork by recreating the mud and paint slinging of J'ouvert on a wall-sized canvas or maybe each other?

You can see some of my visual references on my academic blog here - <https://www.byleigh.com/visual-references-1/>

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I have more questions. How do I contact you?

I would love to meet you virtually or in person to chat about this research and how it can be mutually beneficial for us, but if that can't be arranged, please find me on s.ross@arts.ac.uk or stacey@byleigh.com

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References used in this FAQ

Gray, C. and Malins, J. (2017a) *Visualizing Research : A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 104–105.

Kesby, M., Pain, R. and Kindon, S. L. (2010) *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods : Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London: Routledge.

Nguyen, J. (2021) *How to Use the Emotion Wheel to Better Understand Your Feelings*, mindbodygreen. Available at: <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/emotion-wheel> (Accessed: October 26, 2021).

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