



Grassroots Political Education

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Report on Institute 2015

The IWS conducted its second international training event November 6th-8th on the beautiful campus of the Brooks Institute, in Ventura, California. Over twenty Participants –feminist activists, educators, filmmakers/photographers/artists, and non-profit leaders – came together for three days of interactive learning and group surfing. This year's themes, "Storytelling, Sustainability, Building a Movement," focused a weekend of dynamic discussions, workshop presentations, and collaborative organic intellectual and creative work. A pre-circulated curriculum provided points of departure for collective engagement.

Interwoven into our time was a range of "skill shares" by Participants. These took the form of presentations, remarks, practical how-to sessions, and artistic performances. Skill-shares served to connect and inspire us all as well as to share expertise, social networks, and political strategy.

Friday: The Friday evening sessions, co-facilitated by artist/educator Mira Manickam, of BrownGirlSurf Oakland, and Institute Director, Professor Krista Comer, set the weekend tone. Manickam designed and led an inspired series of "Bring Yourself" exercises, including the creation of a group Coral Reef mural. The idea was to offer all of us a chance to reflect immediately on why we came, what we were bringing to share, what we hoped to learn, and to do this with an eye to building the Institute as a living ecosystem (a coral reef) which belongs to all of us – WE are the Institute, it is not an abstraction, but a living set of collaborative relations and activities.

Saturday: An early-morning group surf at a nearby spot began Saturday's Institute. The fact we created a rare female-majority presence in the water and, as local guys there put it, a "good vibe," was quite a novelty. The strength of that experience took us in high spirits into a day of workshops, Participant skill-shares, and interactive learning. Dina Gilio-Whitaker led "Unerasing the Native in Surfing and Sustainability," offering historical perspective on indigenous people in southern California and insight into settler colonial rationales. Dina also offered a political lesson in missed opportunities for recognition of place-based alliances between the

Save Trestles campaign (preserving waves and watershed) and the Juaneño Band of the Mission Indians (honoring Panhe, a sacred ancestral site). Michelle Habel-Pallán, in “What Happens is . . . Dialogue: Activista Praxis,” shared with us the feminist of color philosophy and practices of “con-vivencia.” With her collaborators, Michelle’s Women Who Rock Public Humanities project at University of Washington provided a working model for thinking about community building, the ethics of story-gathering, the importance of documenting our work, and productive relations between activists and scholar/allies.

Sunday: Early-morning group surf reminded us of why we come together at all – an aggrieved small group of men in the water directed hate speech at the majority-women surfers in the line up for surfing in space the small group believes it controls. None of us got out of the water, conceded the space, or escalated hostilities. This reminder of sexism threading through settler possessiveness over a local surf place carried us more soberly into a last day of discussions. Our focus for the day was sustainability as well as sustaining movements, including sustaining the Institute as an activist collaborative venture. Tara Ruttenberg, of the University of Peace, Costa Rica, led us toward transitional feminist development philosophies, moving us beyond “sustainability,” since capitalism cannot be sustained. An extended group-think on sustaining the labor and social networks of the Institute finished our conversations. Participants both called for an Institute III and for this year’s “Participant Skill-Shares” to be developed further. They were among our group highlights!

Participant Skill Shares

- Lynn Bryant & Mercy Cormier, from Balikbayod, a project of the San Francisco Filipino Cultural Center. Balikbayod is a transnational surf organization working between the Bay Area and the Philippines to bring recycled boards and educational initiatives to underserved Filipinos.
- Christina Baldwin, from East Sussex, UK, assembling a photographic archive of women surfers in the MakingWavesGlobal project.
- Lauren Callahan, artist, showing Riot-Girl inspired pieces about skating, skate deck art and design, surfing.
- Margaret Cariño-Condon, of Salud y Cariño after-school program, Santa Cruz. Program brings healthy living (including yoga/surf) to underserved girls.
- Nicole Grodesky, Presentation to build social media expertise and exposure: “Digital Marketing: Tips & Tricks”
- Alison Rose Jefferson, PhD. Public historian, brief remarks about public service films and commemorative curatorial projects.
- Mira Manickam, hip hop artist, performing “If You Love to Ride,” and a sneak peek of theme song from the upcoming documentary, *It Ain’t Pretty*.
- Beth O’Rourke, filmmaker, visual artist, sneak peek of short film “The Story of Cori Schumacher,” from SeaLevelTV.
- Camille Ramani, Operations Specialist for Brown Girl Surf.

- Margaret Seelie, educator and founder of *The Other Side of Surfing*, a curator site for “other” kinds of stories than those found in global surf mainstream.
- Elizabeth Pepin Silva, filmmaker. Selected scenes from film on tour now *La Maestra: The Teacher* (with Paul Ferraris) about Mayra Aguilar of Baja, Mexico.
- Dayla Soul, filmmaker and producer, select scenes from *It Ain't Pretty: A Film about the Women Who Surf Ocean Beach* (feature documentary in production).
- Sarah Soul, queer psychotherapist and activist, with practice devoted to social justice issues and elite LGBTQI athlete performance.
- Tala Khanmalek, doctoral candidate, UCB Ethnic Studies. Sailing & Waterwomen Solidarity, Traditional watercraft, cultural conservancy, wellness and communities of color, healing justice movement in Bay Area.
- Carly Thomsen, Rice CSWGS postdoc, On the powers of feminist activist/scholar collaboration and knowledge production.
- Dionne Ybarra, Project Wahine (absent but present). Sharing Feminist Stoke and Solidarity from her and IWS “Across Generations” Collaborative Projects.