

COMMUNITY **ARTS** PARTNERSHIP



Community Arts Partnership CAP Artspace
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Bree Barton, “Naming the Unnamable, Youth Stories of Resilience & Survival”

Link to a quick 1 minute video scan of the room (to get a sense of the exhibit): [HERE](#)

QR CODES to see 6 films, audio files and a text story [HERE](#)



“Naming the Unnamable,” curated by local author Bree Barton, is an unflinching body of work that explores the personal journeys of ten young local artists through short film, audio recordings, written text, and visual art.

Youth who self-identify as queer, BIPOC, and neurodiverse take center stage, as well as those with experience of homelessness. Several of the participating artists are members of the Youth Action Board (YAB), a group of youth with experience of homelessness in Ithaca and Tompkins County.

“Bree says: “These young people have a gift. They know how to unlock the power of art to inspire, heal, and connect. To say the last three years have been difficult for young people doesn’t begin to do it justice. And yet, during a time of immense hardship and unprecedented rates of depression and anxiety, these youth have survived. Naming the Unnamable gives them a forum in which to speak the truths we so often think of as unspeakable. My hope is that it also gives our community the opportunity to rise up to meet them.”

Barton conceived the project

after touring the country with her most recent book, *Zia Erases the World*, a middle grade novel inspired by her childhood depression. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, she met myriad students who talked openly

about how they'd struggled—and how they'd survived. Barton envisioned creating a space where young artists could shape their own narratives through different mediums.

“I’ve always been interested in storytelling as a path to healing,” said Barton. “For me, that meant writing. For others, it might be drawing or filmmaking or collage. I gave these young artists a simple prompt: if you could tell us the story of your mental health journey over the last few years, what would you create?”



BERETTA. (*images right*), a member of YAB, makes art to capture “moments in life that often go overlooked, unseen, and under-represented due to the stigmatizing nature of themes such as trauma, substance dependency, mental illness, homelessness, and poverty.” The exhibit will showcase her digital collages and the eulogy she wrote for her best friend, a project she dedicates to his memory “and all the other folks we've lost in the street community before they could find comfort and home and peace.”

Hannah, a junior at Ithaca College, will share “*an exploration of the psychological impacts of trauma through sound.*” Hannah’s sound art heavily reflects their personal traumas, as well as that of their peers. Their goal is to “create a self-reflexive environment where the listener can learn from others’ traumas and sit in the uncomfortable. It’s about keeping an open mind to what others may be going through.”



Rayan will premiere her short film, *Samir*, the Somali word for “patience.” In *Samir*, Rayan recreates her experiences living in the Awbare refugee camp in Ethiopia for almost seven years. “This is a really personal project to me,” she said. “It has a lot of memory and meaning behind it.” In the film, which will play on loop in the gallery during open hours, Rayan reads from one of her “most precious journals” to capture the loneliness and isolation of that difficult time.

For high school sophomore **Elise**, this project has been a “rollercoaster of emotions.” The exhibit will feature her self-portrait and other art pieces, as well as an essay she wrote after losing her dad to suicide. “*Although it’s very difficult to talk about my story and my dad,*” *Elise said, “I find it very refreshing to express my own feelings through art and writing. I hope my work can inspire someone to do the same.”*

Barton hopes the artists’ willingness to engage with difficult themes will catalyze important conversations around mental health. Her goal is for more people, of all ages, to find healthy ways to share whatever it is they’re going through—and to ask for resources and support.

“It’s all about naming the unnamable,” said Barton. *“Whether you do it through words or other forms of self expression. These young folx are wildly creative and courageous, and I cannot wait to share their work with the community. They are shining a light in a dark room. In the face of unimaginable loss and trauma, they show us that we, too, can survive.”*

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