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When was the last time art spoke to you? Thanks to Buffalo Arts Studio (<http://buffaloartsstudio.org/>), you could experience language in new ways.

On Friday, July 27, Buffalo Arts Studio hosted an opening reception for its two newest exhibits. *Connections* is the studio's Summer 2018 project that aims to connect artists and underserved communities, providing access and representation to diverse audiences with a new series of exhibits.

One of those is *Lux*, an exhibit by Muhammad Z. Zaman (<https://zamanarts.bigcartel.com/about-zahin-zaman>), a self-taught calligrapher and two-year resident of Buffalo Arts Studio who uses his background, society, and written language to create inspirational pieces of calligraffiti. "*Lux* is a Latin word which translates as 'light,' which is basically a metaphor for hope for a better tomorrow," said Zaman. In his art he utilizes characters from three languages to tell about his life: Bengali, the language of his mother country, Bangladesh; English, the language he learned when he arrived in Buffalo at the age of 11; and Arabic, the language of his religion, Islam. Zaman was named the 2018 Emerging Artist through Buffalo Arts Studio's partnership with Open Buffalo, (<https://openbuffalo.org/>) and this is his first major exhibition.

Liz Lessner (<https://lizlessner.com/home.html>) is a sculptor who uses gestures to evoke sensory experiences with her work. Her current exhibit, *common wealth—salves for precarious times; the interstices of labor and care*, features alpha gypsum and fiber glass molds with steel supports. Her pieces serve as artistic representations of patient/caregiver interactions, with emphasis on the personal aspects of an underexamined professional field. Per the artist's intention, each piece embodies "very specific gestures of care and labor" which call for the viewer to reflect on interpersonal gestures in daily life, as Lessner explained during the reception. She drew inspiration from a process of conversations with and observation of professionals with Aspire WNY's iXpress Art Program (<https://www.aspirewny.org/ixpress-art-program/>) and Diversified Labor Solutions (DLS) (<http://www.dlswny.com/>), courtesy of the Cantalician Center for Learning.

The coexistence of the exhibits inspires themes of unity, humanity and communication, which are integral parts of Buffalo Arts Studio's motivations behind *Connections*. "I'm really excited that we have this time in Buffalo this summer to have this exhibition to help people feel the power of art and to feel connected," said Shirley Verrico, curator at Buffalo Arts Studio. "At this moment in time, I think for both of these artists, there are messages of connecting across difference; authentically, meaningfully, and at a very human level."

While the two exhibits may not correlate visually, they share the theme of communication, with Zaman's language being written and Lessner using the language of touch and physical communication. Both are very personal accounts of the artists' intentions and introspections of the modern world. Lessner's emphasis on the "interplay of labor and care," as she described her artistic portrayals, speaks to finding intimacy and genuine connections within a society that tends to place economy over fundamental human needs, such as those provided by professional caretakers. "They develop these very intimate, intense relationships with [their clients] ...and in our current political times we should talk more about that," she said.

Amid uncertainties within society and government, Zaman was inspired to permeate the shadows cast by the world's problems by incorporating themes of light and optimism into his work. "I was thinking about stuff that's happening today and what can I do about it, and *Lux* came to my mind, giving people hope, giving people something to look forward to," he said.

Although each artist's statements and visions reflect modern times, there is history within the pieces of these exhibits. *Lux* holds messages within its works that are both personal and monumental. Written language is as much a medium in Zaman's work as the paint he utilizes to manifest each word and script. His past, his current perspective, and his hope for the future all combine to relay messages to viewers, creating an exchange of stories and perspectives between the artist and his audiences. His art is reminiscent of historic Muslim architecture, in which words were incorporated into the walls, ceilings and pillars of buildings and structures.

The historical context of Lessner's interstitial castings is, intuitively, touch; after all, it is *the* first language of humankind. In an aesthetic sense, however, the casts are reminiscent of ancient Greek forms, a direct inspiration the artist sought to achieve. The pieces of her exhibit combine the hardness of plaster with the softness of forms resembling human skin and contact, creating a balance of strength and fragility. The contrasts in materials and manifestation, as well as parallels between past and present art forms, are quite intentional. "I personally am drawn to contrast in my work and I'm looking to pull that out," said Lessner.

Both artists pull from their observations of daily life to create inspired pieces. Lessner's pieces are portrayals of fleeting moments of human interaction, an ephemeral quality that she injects into her work. Zaman's colorful pieces are inspired by everything from textiles to nature, a testament to the mind's ability to receive, process and repurpose information in innovative ways. He also uses materials to tie each piece into the exhibit's overall theme.

Specks of 23-carat gold adorn grayscale pieces, bringing the theme of light to the forefront as the canvases glisten under the gallery's lights to visually

translate the exhibit's theme. "Because this exhibition is called *Lux*, the gold is a metaphor for light and hope," said Zaman. Geometric stylings also contribute to *Lux*—round canvases display four pieces named for lunar phases. Lines frame some works while others are bordered by a void. Some take up an entire canvas, trailing into an infinite expansion of characters and color.

One such piece is *Aftermath*, a large 'tapestry' that greets viewers upon arrival. Centered in the gallery's doorway, it is an immersive piece that pulls you in as you walk down the hall. This is arguably the focal piece of *Lux*, where colors and metallic elements combine with abstract shapes and letters to represent triumph through adversity, perfectly embodying its title.

One aspect of *Lux* that I especially enjoyed is the ability of each piece to demand attention to every detail, line, color, character and component. I found myself engaging in something of a 'word search,' trying to decipher letters and characters and relate them to the title and theme of each work. Despite my inability to translate the Arabic and Bengali characters, I still felt as though my intuition understood what my eyes were seeing, using the works' titles and distinct visual elements as guides to understanding Zaman's work with his perspective and intentions in mind.

I viewed Lessner's pieces in a similar manner. An understanding of her artistic objectives helped me form my own interpretations. Her interests in gestures and relationships are clear, although she leaves implied and literal space for viewers to form personal connections with her pieces. "I like the idea that through this process of abstraction, you're left with an outline of what might be happening and then you fill that in with your own interpretations and experiences," she said. The theme of an outline is translated in Lessner's use of hollow casts as opposed to creating solid sculptures, which would take away the viewer's ability to interpret each piece personally. The accessibility of her casts makes the exhibition more interactive than one might initially realize.

I was particularly inspired by pieces in which the supports of the sculptures (which Lessner also created) create contrast which can be interpreted as resistance,

an outreach or simply space between the 'patient' and 'caretaker.' For example, with the piece *Pylon*, one part of a stand extends forward with a reaching hand, while the support of the face leans away; a connection is nonetheless made between the two figures.

Both Zaman's and Lessner's exhibits contain pieces that reflect the artist's personal statements and motives, as well as Buffalo Arts Studio's mission as an organization. "We really work hard to make everyone who walks in the door feel welcome at any entry point—that's just really important to us," said Verrico. "We feel that the arts are for everybody." The communicative qualities and accessibility of both exhibits accomplish this mission. Though individual translations may differ, the message of unity through language—written, physical, and otherwise, will come through to all.

The exhibits run through September 7 at Buffalo Arts Studio, Suite 500 of the Tri-Main Center at 2495 Main Street.

Muhammad Z. Zaman: Lux

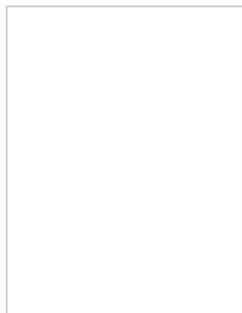
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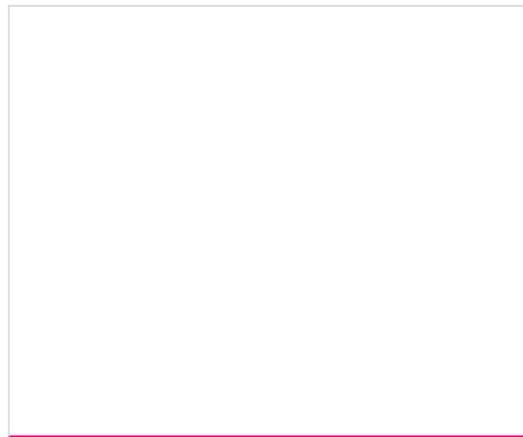
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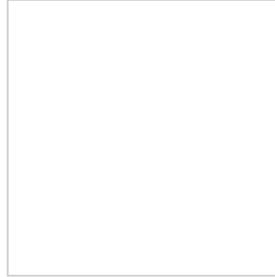


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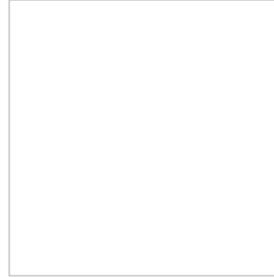
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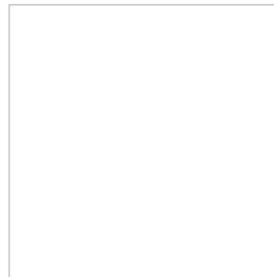
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