



Commission on  
Human Rights

Department of  
Cultural Affairs

MEATPACKING  
DISTRICT

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**NEW INTERACTIVE ART INSTALLATION “MAY WE KNOW OUR OWN STRENGTH” ILLUMINATES STORIES OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

*The installation from the NYC Commission on Human Rights and Public Artist in Residence Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya integrates visual art and technology to create a large-scale sculptural representation of the stories of survivors; this powerful piece will be on display from April 1 through May 15 in Meatpacking District*

**NEW YORK** – The New York City Commission on Human Rights announces the latest work from Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya entitled “May We Know Our Own Strength.” Located in Meatpacking District in partnership with the local Business Improvement District (BID), the interactive installation will transform the accounts of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence into large, room-scale sculptures. The installation employs sixteen internet-connected printers, placed in a high-traffic storefront window, that will relay anonymous survivors’ stories provided through an online submission form.

This installation is inspired by young South Asian New Yorkers who, in summer 2020, broke their silence and began sharing stories of sexual assault and gender-based violence on social media. The wave of disclosure spread to other Asian and Pacific Islander (API), Arab, and Muslim communities and was called the “#MeToo” movement of the South Asian community by South Asian community organizations in New York City. These young people triggered a national movement of South Asian community members, advocates, and leaders sharing their stories and demanding accountability for sexual assault and gender-based violence.

New Yorkers are invited to submit stories anonymously through the website [MayWeKnow.NYC](http://MayWeKnow.NYC). Each submission immediately activates a printer and lights a corresponding incandescent bulb, visible from a storefront window at 401 W. 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which was donated by

the building owner Taconic Partners, and in the 24-hour online livestream, creating a visual representation of how many stories are received at a given time. An organic pool of anger, grief, shame, doubt and hope and other emotions will emerge from cascading ribbons of paper. At regular intervals, Phingbodhipakkiya will enter the installation and seat herself at the base of the growing heap, beginning a brief ritual to affirm human dignity and courage in the face of adversity. She will then weave these printed stories into a collection of intricate hanging paper sculptures, growing abstract shapes and natural textures, and affix them onto an arched trellis made of wood.



Photo credit: MK Luffin

While this installation was being created, six Asian women, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park and Yong Ae Yue, were killed by a white gunman in Atlanta, GA. As a memorial to their lives, Phingbodhipakkiya will hold a nightly vigil during the installation's run. Every evening at 8:00 PM, the names of all eight victims will print out before an eight-minute moment of silence begins, with all 16 incandescent light bulbs shining into the darkness.

“This installation is about the transformative power of collective healing,” said **creator and Public Artist in Residence Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya**. “We’re experiencing a watershed moment where Asian youth are coming forward with their stories of sexual assault and gender-based violence. Their courage is truly remarkable. Experiencing assault can tear you into pieces on the inside, leaving you feeling helpless and alone. In those moments we can feel hollowed out, crumpled up, put in a box. Reduced to nothing more than a single strand. It takes compassion and community to find our way back, to piece together our shattered sense of self.”

“The title of the installation, ‘May We Know Our Own Strength,’ expresses my hope for survivors, and everyone who bears the weight of trauma,” said **Carmelyn P. Malalis, Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights**. “The effect of the compounding traumas of gender-based violence and anti-Asian racism cannot be overstated. The murders of

six Asian women in Atlanta have brought this painful truth into sharp focus. Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders in this country are feeling fear, anxiety, and heartbreak, among other emotions. As a Filipina American, I know that it means being afraid for our parents, grandparents, children, and ourselves. To be a survivor on top of that is a heavy burden for anyone, but especially a young person to carry. This installation allows survivors to let go of some of that burden, gives a voice to those who suffer in silence, and uses their stories to take up physical space, reminding all of us that there is power in our shared experiences.”

**Phingbodhipakkiya** added, “In ‘May We Know Our Own Strength’ I have created a space where private sorrow can still see the light of day. Where people can safely share their secrets and see them evolve before their eyes, getting folded, twisted, shredded and then sculpted and rebuilt into lush, overflowing, intricate vessels of hope and belonging. Through this installation we spin our strands of personal suffering into an unbreakable thread of courage and renewal and give our community a long-awaited moment of cathartic release.”

“NYC Public Artist in Residence Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s ‘May We Know Our Own Strength’ transforms the all-too-often invisible experiences of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence into something that must be acknowledged and addressed,” said **NYC Cultural Affairs Commissioner Gonzalo Casals**. “As we collectively face increasing violence caused by racist and sexist ideologies, the NYC Commission on Human Rights’ collaboration with Amanda demonstrates the power of art to foster healing, community, and belonging, and to give us new ways of seeing and connecting with the experiences and needs of our fellow New Yorkers.”

Central to the artist’s vision for the installation is the creation of a tangible resource for young people who may be struggling with doubt, identity and self-worth. In order to reflect a diverse array of voices in this space for healing and growth, Phingbodhipakkiya worked with the Commission’s Youth for Equity and Solidarity Council to create audio recordings of affirmations, similar to those used in mindfulness and meditation practices. Members of the Council will record the affirmations, which the artist will couple with new artwork for videos. The videos will be available for free download at [MayWeKnow.NYC](https://www.maywewknow.nyc). Youth for Equity and Solidarity (YES) is the NYC Commission on Human Rights’ council of young leaders who advise the Commission on how to expand its engagement with young people. The YES Council helps guide the Commission’s youth programming and events by providing feedback on workshops and trainings, informing the Commission of issues and incidents related to bias and discrimination, and planning youth-related events.

The Commission recorded 205 incidents of anti-Asian discrimination in 2020, a sevenfold increase over 2019. In addition to collaborating with Phingbodhipakkiya, the Commission is engaged in robust community outreach and education, including rapid response to bias incidents, multilingual community town halls, bystander intervention trainings, and referrals to services, including mental health services. To foster community building following the misogynistic, racist, and xenophobic attack in Atlanta, GA, the Commission is also hosting a series of dialogues that strive to create healing. In partnership with the New York Peace Institute and other trained circle-keepers, these healing circles offer spaces for Asian New Yorkers to commune, share resources, and process the trauma resulting from COVID-19-related bias and anti-Asian violence.

The installation is located at Taconic Partners' 401 W. 14<sup>th</sup> Street in the Meatpacking District and will run from April 1 through May 15. While the project's focus is API youth, anyone may contribute their stories of survival through [MayWeKnow.NYC](http://MayWeKnow.NYC).

“Public art has become an essential interactive element for our neighborhood, drawing in visitors and locals alike on a daily basis,” said **Jeffrey LeFrancois, Executive Director of Meatpacking Business Improvement District**. “We are honored to host Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya and partner with NYC Commission on Human Rights to bring this powerful installation to the Meatpacking District and raise awareness around the recent attacks on the Asian and Pacific Islander community. This piece also aligns with our efforts to promote diversity and uplift creative talent.”

The interactive installation is the second major public art project Phingbodhipakkiya created in residence with the Commission, the first being the Commission's “[I Still Believe In Our City](#)” campaign. Imagery from this campaign has been used at demonstrations and vigils across the country organized in response to the acts of racist violence facing Asians and Pacific Islanders, and was most recently featured on the cover of [TIME Magazine](#). The Public Artist in Residence program is sponsored by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.

This installation was also made possible through the NYC Commission on Human Rights' partnership with the Meatpacking District BID, a not-for-profit business alliance for the neighborhood whose mission is to support the business community and to keep the area clean, safe, and beautiful for locals and visitors, and Taconic Partners, a fully integrated real estate company with over 13 million square feet of commercial office and mixed-use space.

The New York City Human Rights Law prohibits discrimination and harassment based on race, gender, national origin, immigration status, age, and over 20 other protected classes in housing, employment, and public accommodations. If you have experienced discrimination, call the NYC Commission on Human Rights by dialing (212) 416-0197, or visit the Commission's website at [NYC.gov/ReportDiscrimination](http://NYC.gov/ReportDiscrimination).

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“‘May We Know Our Own Strength’ is a powerful interactive exhibit that will give survivors a voice, and create a space where they feel supported, uplifted and empowered in sharing their stories,” said **Cecile Noel, Commissioner, NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence**. “We are proud to partner with CCHR and DCLA and to lend Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya our support in telling survivors of all domestic and gender-based violence that help is here for them and that they are never alone.”

“At Girls for Gender Equity, we believe it is vital to amplify and center the experiences of youth survivors of gender-based and racialized violence,” said **Michelle Grier, Chief Program Officer, Girls for Gender Equity**. “As a Black femme survivor-led organization, we know the impact of the erasure of survivor narratives and the importance of using art as a way to engage in healing, to build public awareness, and to dialogue with communities. Phingbodhipakkiya's ‘May We Know Our Own Strength’ honors the experiences of Asian

American and Pacific Islander survivors at a critical moment in our country and city. This installation is an invitation to witness, learn, heal and act.”

“One of Malikah’s priorities is to create intentional spaces for women to share their stories,” said **Deena Hadhoud, Community Manager, Malikah**. “Not only is storytelling a form of healing that helps our communities feel seen in each other’s experiences, it also encourages the development of authentic sisterhood in a way that allows us to navigate this institutionally oppressive world together. Stories are also a powerful advocacy tool that helps us organize and win the hearts and minds of folks who hold the power to make concrete changes and improve material conditions for our communities. Malikah values storytelling in all of its forms, including visual art, and we are so excited to have our community participate in this interactive installation.”

“At Sakhi, we know that there is no one picture of a survivor and age is by no means a limiting factor when it comes to folks’ experiences with violence,” said **Fyzah Tajdin, Youth Advocate & Counselor, Sakhi for South Asian Women**. “As young people are the future of our movement, equipping them with the tools to create a more safe, just world is essential. Speaking out against violence and radically shifting the way that we connect to one another as survivors sets the foundation for the youth who lead our movement. Installations like Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s ‘May We Know Our Own Strength’ offer oft-silenced or heavily-criticized survivors’ voices a public space for understanding and solidarity. As Sakhi seeks to demonstrate that no survivor ever has to be alone, we feel grateful for projects like Amanda’s, which believe in the power of community and inspire our imaginative powers.”

“Every individual’s healing journey is unique,” said **Shan Huang, Associate Director, Special Programs, Womankind**. “As community members, we can all play a role in this ongoing process by recognizing each other’s experiences and offering support and care with understanding and compassion. As an organization that works with survivors of gender-based violence every day to overcome trauma and build a path to healing, Womankind commends the ‘May We Know Our Own Strength’ art installation as a space for survivors to share their stories through various expressions. It serves as a reminder to all of us that there is always space to share, to listen, and to create connections because our resilience is our strength!”