Trans Heroes Coloring Book

Illustrations by the wonderful, amazingly talented
Emmett Stone <3

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~April Edition~
SOPHIE

SOPHIE, born on September 17, 1986 in Glasgow, UK, was a groundbreaking electronic musician, singer, songwriter, DJ, and producer. I have to admit, I didn’t really know about SOPHIE before her untimely death this past January, so I did a deep dive into reading articles about her, interviews with her and listening to her biggest hits like “It’s Okay To Cry,” “Immaterial,” “BIPP,” “Ponyboy,” “Hard,” “Faceshopping,” and “Lemonade.” And what I took away, was that I wish I could sit down and have a conversation with SOPHIE! She had this unapologetic and boundless aire, articulated through her sound creations and gender expressions, which all play with the concepts of (in)authenticity, (un)naturality, and (un)reality. She pushed folks to free themselves of preconceived notions of what “should” and “shouldn’t” be; in the world, in interactions with others, sounds, and material items, and within themselves. She detected and defied false limits and boundaries. And as a trans woman, she was conscious of how spectacular a gift it is to be trans and have one’s way of thinking and moving about the world open up to limitless possibilities and brighter futures because a trans lens and life has the ability to shake up and break away from all false binaries, what is “natural” or “authentic,” and be open to a never-stagnant world.

One point that I really appreciated her making in an interview is how trans people are superficially embraced, meaning society is starting to accept trans people more and more, but “only on a certain level.” I’m not sure the extent to which she would explain this statement, since her publicly known thoughts are minimal, but my mind goes to the workings of transnormativity; tied to respectability politics, tokenism, and white-washing/co-opting of spaces/movements/discussion. The roots of transness, genderqueerness, nonbinary, two-spirit, gender nonconforming in decolonizing spaces, abolishing the gender binary, tearing down capitalism, abolishing the police, and shutting down white supremacy is far from what DEI circles usually have in mind when tasked with creating “trans-affirming” spaces.

Anyways, I really appreciated this opportunity to learn more about SOPHIE, her music, and her impact on the music industry and countless individuals. In an article titled “Sophie Can Show You the World,” published by Vulture, Sasha Geffen writes, “the revolution, if it happens, will be multilingual — that to get out of this mess, people will need to communicate across languages, to learn concepts that can only be expressed outside the border walls of English. Sophie considers. ‘Maybe,’ she says, ‘it’ll be musical.’” Rest in power, SOPHIE.
Mykki Blanco was born in Orange County, California on April 2, 1986, then moved to North Carolina (where their family still lives), and then moved to New York. In 2010 they created Mykki Blanco and quickly became a queer pioneer in hip hop. Furthermore, they came out as a person living with HIV in 2015, which is recorded as the first time a hip hop artist claimed that experience since Eazy-E in 1995. From then on, they became known for their HIV/AIDS activism and have participated in multiple HIV/AIDS awareness events and campaigns (plus check out their music vid “Hideaway,” created for National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day in 2017). In November of 2019 they came out as trans and shared that they started HRT. They have so many beautiful messages to and about transness, including affirmation for those who come into their affirming gender after 30, the magic of being trans, and the beauty/freedom of being Black and trans. Check out their published diary written exclusively for Vogue to hear more of their thoughts around race, gender, and the arts industry.

I’ve always seen Mykki as this outspoken, don’t give a fuck about other’s oppressive opinions bad ass Black queer person. The first song I listened to by them was “Wish You Would” from their 2014 EP in 2014 when I was a baby queer freshman in college. And Mykki definitely still is a loud, defiant figure, but it was insightful to read interviews with them, to learn about their different journeys in building up that confidence and advocate role model. It was humanizing to read about their struggles with how vocal they wanted to be about their HIV status, queerness, Blackness, transness, weighing the backlash to their musical career. They later attest: “My career has directly benefited from the twisting and shifting of western society to deal with gender and sexuality” (aug 2019). They are acknowledging that they’ve been able to become big in the past few years because of this cultural shift, but I would argue they aren’t giving themself enough credit for being part of that shift, along with countless other Black TGNC folks. Thanks Mykki for leading the way!
I first started to follow Imara Jones after watching her short documentary, *The Future of Trans*, released last summer, which includes interviews with Angelica Ross, Alok Vaid Menon, Aria Sa’id, Chella Man, Dominique Jackson, Fatima Jamal, MJ Rodriguez, Raquel Willis, Patricio Manuel, Shea Diamond, Toni-Michelle Williams, and Isa Noyola. Def recommend checking it out! It’s about 20min and on youtube. There’s so much exciting possibilities with a trans future and a trans now! What do you see (or feel, as Alok prefers) as the future of trans? How can you or how are you embodying that future today? How do our transcestors’ work and existence play a role in or how are they in relationship with your dreams/realities of a trans future?

Here is Imara’s bio in her own words: “Imara, whose work has won Emmy and Peabody Awards, is the creator of TransLash Media, a cross-platform journalism, personal storytelling and narrative project, which produces content to shift the current culture of hostility towards transgender people in the US. She is also the first Journalist-in-Residence at WNYC’s The Greene Space where she hosts the monthly program Lives At Stake, and is the host of the TransLash Podcast. In 2020 Imara was featured on the cover of Time Magazine as part of its New American Revolution special edition. In 2019 she chaired the first-ever UN High Level Meeting on Gender Diversity with over 600 participants. Imara’s work as a host, on-air news analyst, and writer focuses on the full-range of social justice and equity issues. Imara has been featured regularly in The Guardian, The Nation, MSNBC, CNBC, NPR, Mic, Colorlines, and is a frequent guest host of the In The Thick podcast. Imara has held economic policy posts in the Clinton White House and communications positions at Viacom. Imara holds degrees from the London School of Economics and Columbia. Imara is a 2019 Soros Equality Fellow and on the board of the Anti-violence Project, and the New Pride Agenda.”

When I found Imara’s TransLash Media, I was so stoked! We will definitely be highlighting a few pieces found on their site throughout this year. Thank you Imara for providing multiple platforms for TGNC voices and stories to uplift TGNC folks and to humanize our experiences in this white cishet society.
Did you know that many of SAGA’s programs and many programs of national trans orgs were initiated by a Black, bisexual trans man named Alexander John Goodrum? Alexander was born on October 3, (a Libra!) 1960 in Chicago, IL. He started TQ organizing in 1980, then moved to San Francisco, and then finally to Tucson in 1996. Here, he founded TGNet Arizona; was a board member on the Tucson Commission on GLBT Issues and the Funding Exchange’s OUT Fund; and was instrumental in Tucson including gender identity on our non-discrimination law in 1999. And because of Alexander, SAGA has become the only trans-led org in Arizona to provide trans comprehension trainings, which originated from Alexander’s “Gender Identity 101: A Transgender Primer.” Unfortunately, we lost Alexander in 2002 to suicide. Rest in power Alexander. In commemoration of him and to honor Laverne Cox’s work, SAGA awarded Laverne an Alexander John Goodrum Catalyst of Change accolade in 2015.

I read Alexander’s “Trans Primer” and honestly, it made me frustrated how uninformed Tucson businesses, orgs, and individuals STILL are on just basic “etiquette” when talking to and about TGNC people. Like, Tucson literally has a history of these trainings starting in 1998 with Alexander’s work and we’re still giving trans 101s to folks who ultimately don’t wanna listen and learn, demonstrating that we need way more than sensitivity trainings to create change. Which is also why SAGA does not provide our trainings to the police. There is significant evidence that police reform (from DEI trainings, to body cameras, to community review boards) does not decrease the reported rates of police brutality, police homicide, police sexual assault, nor does it increase police accountability and transparency. Instead! It is used to distract from their state-sanctioned violence and silence community members who demand REAL change. So yea, you can’t make an inherently white supremacist, transmisogynistic institution anti-racist and trans-affirming.

On the flip, I still believe in the power of trainings/workshops - just in certain spheres. For example, SAGA has provided trans comprehension trainings to many individuals/organizations who have shown great empathy, eagerness to learn, and ability to be humbled. And this is what does make me hopeful for a better future. So thank you Alexander, for planting the seed of power in education towards trans liberation in Tucson, AZ and beyond.