

WE DEMAND POWER OVER OUR BODIES!

REPEAL ALL ABORTION & CONTRACEPTION  
LAW-FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND!

WOMEN'S STRIKE  
COALITION





**TORCH '72/2020**  
January 20 – April 3, 2021  
University Art Museum  
University at Albany  
State University of New York

Poster image: *We Demand Power Over Our Bodies*, 2021, printed silk, printed chiffon, courtesy of the artist  
Cover image: *TORCH '72/2020 \*feat. Fanta Ballo* (stills), 2021, 2 channel video projection, courtesy of the artist and Social Action Archive Committee

# TORCH '72/2020

Shane Aslan Selzer

**UAM**  
University Art Museum  
University at Albany



*Torch '72, 2020*, plastic mount slides projected from, slide carousel, photographed by Patrick Dodson for Social Action Archive Committee, courtesy of the artist

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**AMY ZHANG** graduated from UAlbany in December 2020 with a business major and sociology minor. Zhang held a range of leadership roles in the undergraduate student government, the Asian American Alliance, the NAACP’s UAlbany chapter, and the Presidential Honors Society. Born and raised in New York City, Zhang is the daughter of immigrants and a first-generation college student.

**BRANDY ALY** is a senior at UAlbany and proud Equal Opportunity Program student. Aly is the president of the Exquisite Epsilon Nu chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and Fuerza Latina. She is also a student assistant at the community and public service office. Her hobbies include writing and watching crime shows.

**SIMONE HASSAN-BEY** is an Honors College senior, majoring in business administration and minoring in Korean language studies. She is the President of Pride Alliance and the founder of the Yoshi Kim Memorial Scholarship program.

**FANTA BALLO** is a senior at UAlbany, majoring in economics and minoring in theatre. She’s part of the J-board on Phenomenal Voices. Ballo’s work has been published in numerous publications and online, with one of her works getting reposted by

Shawn Mendes. Ballo is the inaugural recipient of a Wonder Grant from the Shawn Mendes Foundation. Her hobbies include writing, poetry, and basketball.

**MELISSA BUNNI ELIAN** graduated from UAlbany in 2010 with a journalism degree. During her time at UAlbany, Elian was president of University Photo Service. Her work has been published in CNN, *The New York Times*, NBC News, *Quartz*, ESPN, NPR, *BuzzFeed*, and *Glamour*. In 2016 she worked as a photo editor at NBCNews.com during the presidential election. Elian was the recipient of a Pulitzer Center grant taking her to South Africa in 2017 and is a 2020 graduate of Columbia Journalism School.

**SHANE ASLAN SELZER** is a practicing artist and founding editor of Social Action Archive Committee (SAAC). Selzer has exhibited at Tabakalera in San Sebastián, Spain; Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster, Germany; and Julia Stoschek Collection in Düsseldorf and Berlin, both in Germany. Selzer coedited *What We Want Is Free: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art* (SUNY Press, 2014) and was a contributing editor to *Asiko: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa*, (CCA Lagos, 2017). Selzer teaches at Parsons, The New School for Design in New York and lives in Brooklyn, NY.

**INTERVIEW EXCERPT FROM  
OCTOBER 7, 2020 WITH  
MELISSA BUNNI ELIAN (UALBANY, 2010)**

**MELISSA BUNNI ELIAN:** The Student Center is a special place for me because that’s where I grew. I found the University Photo Service (UPS) and got really involved, and when I was graduating I remember thinking, I need to find something like this in the real world. I was a pre-med student when I joined UPS and I knew I wanted to make photographs, but I didn’t know I could make a career out of it yet, so I stayed pre-med and the club really opened me up to documentary photography and eventually I switched my major to journalism.

Torch ’72 was my first experience with photo-journalism, to be honest. I was in that room a lot and I went through all the yearbooks. That one really stuck out, you could tell it’s been gone through a lot—it had a different texture, it’s bigger than the others. It had a really strong political bend and that definitely inspired how we approached ours. It also made me realize that I needed to make sure I worked on diversity, including race, but also like, we need art kids, we need sports kids. The yearbook is all about documenting student life so if you’re not in those worlds, how do you get access? So that was part of my mission, I was inspired by that yearbook. I went over that book all the time. And I actually got to meet the editor, that’s the beauty of being in the office so much. One day Ron Simmons randomly walked in and I don’t even remember what we talked about but I remember being like, “Oh wow, we love you. We reference your yearbook all the time. Look how destroyed it is from us touching it all the time!” And he really enjoyed that. He really did. I wish there had been more people in the office but it was just me at the time.

Image: TORCH ’72/2020  
\*feat. Fanta Ballo (still), 2021, 2 channel video projection, courtesy of the artist and Social Action Archive Committee

**SHANE ASLAN SELZER (EDITOR, SAAC):** For you as a media maker, when you look at Torch ’72 as a historical document, particularly with the Vietnam war section, which is mostly Albany Student Press (ASP) images that Ron Simmons got the rights to use. How do you feel about his use of death imagery via war photography, and how is death spectacle being used again now, where we’re trying to sift through images in different ways? The way Ron Simmons keeps repeating the image reminds me of what is happening now with social media feeds and cycling through an image until it becomes a symbol.

**MELISSA BUNNI ELIAN:** So, the difference between then and now is that right now, we’re really desensitized to these images. If you look at entertainment, like how many people have we seen die for entertainment, movies and all that stuff, there’s less shock value. So, when he did it, we were still shocked. We didn’t have a term for it. Ron Simmons was a pioneer for using that method. That was a big thing about coverage of Vietnam, it was the first war where we had live satellite feed watching the horrors. So, in that sense it was effective because it was the first time anything was ever shown in that graphic nature. And it also led to increased censorship of media in subsequent wars. Because if we didn’t see those things, Americans wouldn’t have been horrified. The difference with today, particularly with Black pain, is that we’re too used to it. It’s kind of like, oh this is the way it is, and it has less of an effect. I think it’s still jarring, but it just keeps happening. When it comes to Black pain, we’re so desensitized to it. How that affects me and my approach is that I focus on joy, healing, everyday life and the universality of it, because that’s not less common. So, I’m trying to appeal to people’s humanity through our similarities. I’m not saying that it’s not important to see the hardship that people are going through. I just do it in tandem. I don’t shy away from those things.



INTERVIEW EXCERPT  
FROM NOVEMBER 11, 2020  
WITH SIMONE HASSAN-BEY (UALBANY, 2021)

**SIMONE HASSAN-BEY:** I would love to be on campus right now. Being President of Pride Alliance, we had so many different plans that we were hoping to implement, and it was so much about community, having these conversations, especially with the summer that we’ve had, all of these different racial and social justice movements, moving up and gaining so much traction during this time, you know, it would have been really great to be able to meet in-person and to hug each other in-person and talk about this stuff in-person.

There is a large disconnect when it comes to Zoom calls—someone’s camera can be going out, audio can be going off, all different types of things happen. Some people have hit the point of Zoom fatigue as well, where they just don’t want to join in on these Zoom calls anymore. Cause it’s just too hard. And we’ve seen, in a lot of our programs this year, a much lower turnout. It’s understandable. You’re on Zoom all day you know, it’s hard to want to continue to engage in that because it just feels so impersonal and to have these very vulnerable conversations, I know it sucks for a lot of people.

I wasn’t a fan of the idea of having in-person classes or in-person events this year because I really want to make sure that people are safe, particularly with our LGBT community on campus. There are a lot of people who are immunocompromised and are vulnerable to catching this virus so it just felt really important that we respect that. I wish there was more of a consciousness around that.

The fact that we’re approaching the one-year anniversary of COVID-19 and our first lockdown, essentially—it just feels really crazy. I’m not really sure. I wish that we could have the moments that were displayed in the yearbook. That is really the best connection that I can bring to it. Like the protest moments where it’s very socially aware, but then also the moments with Marsha P. Johnson and people just having a good time. I really wish we could have those moments. Especially being a senior. I really wish that I could be around my friends and continue to have these conversations. I miss being involved with my Korean friends who also all had to go back to Korea as well. I miss the in-person interactions that I would have with people day to day. My friends, you know, people that I would just meet on campus, friends of friends, those kinds of things, the parties even, I miss all of it.

You know, it reminds me of the quote that’s in the yearbook, “Do we have your attention now? With everything that’s going on. Do we have your attention now?” I think that still rings true.

Together Our Resistance  
Channels Hope (TORCH), 2021,  
printed nylon, installation views,  
courtesy of the artist



INTERVIEW EXCERPT  
FROM OCTOBER 21, 2020  
WITH BRANDY ALY (UALBANY, 2021)

**BRANDY ALY:** *We Demand Power Over Our Bodies*. The banner reminds me of the Black Women’s March that the Student Association held the other day. They were talking about this back in 1972, and we’re talking about it now, and it’s still relevant. These things are still happening. It’s interesting to know that we’re still talking about the same things, wanting power over our bodies, wanting power over ourselves. It’s frustrating too. Because you wonder when the change is going to come—if they couldn’t do it, how can I do it? You know, what makes me so special? Why is what I say going to truly make a difference? Let’s focus on what you can do. Let’s look at all the great things that we can accomplish. So yes, it is frustrating to know that we’re still fighting, but it’s beautiful to see that we’ve been fighting. Now we won’t stop fighting until we get what we need. So, I like that the conversation is not over. It may have started a long time ago, but we’re still talking and we’re still moving towards it. And it’s not like there isn’t progress because there is progress, but we’re just not at the finish line. And that’s okay. Because we still have a long way to go.

INTERVIEW EXCERPT  
FROM OCTOBER 29, 2020  
WITH FANTA BALLO (UALBANY, 2021)

**FANTA BALLO:** The pieces where you talk about the most painful stuff are, most of the time, the most relatable, because everyone goes through stuff that no one knows about. When you can relate to people, your work becomes something that people can actually listen to and pay attention to. And for me, it would be too much if I had to talk, not perform, but just talk about all this stuff I go through all the time. Not only am I performing it, I’m telling myself, this is my story, but if anywhere it resonates with yours, it becomes ours. And with a lot of my poems, that’s exactly what it is. This is my poetry, but if anywhere, anything I say resonates with you, it becomes ours. And you can share that and you can take it away with you.

\*Fanta Ballo recorded the original work, *Pain* for the video *Torch ’72/2020*

**SHANE ASLAN SELZER:** I just want to read this one quote to you. It’s from the beginning of the Torch interview with Lauren Simone at the bottom of this page.

“It’s one thing to admit that you’re gay by marching in a parade with 7,000 other gays. It’s another to ride home alone in a crowded subway car with a gay is good button. Know what I mean?”

INTERVIEW EXCERPT  
FROM OCTOBER 16, 2020  
WITH AMY ZHANG (UALBANY, 2020)

**AMY ZHANG:** Spectacle of violence. So, that was one of the things I did notice. Just like looking through the entire yearbook, it was really apparent that there were a lot of emotions. You could feel it in a lot of the photos. It’s like, it brings out a lot of emotions. But then it’s showing joy in college life, you know, what that’s like, cause a lot of the images you see with the college, you could see that right now, if you go on campus well, before COVID times, you kind of see people hanging out, you see them in the fountain.

So, you have that juxtaposition of the joy in college life with the images of the protests and the actions and you know, all of that. That was really interesting, to place it like that because that’s so similar to what we’re doing today. A lot of the things written in there, I was like, this is exactly what we’re saying. There was that part about, what it was like for the Black brothers and sisters, and I see a lot of the themes are the same. That is exactly what we’re saying today, that liberation will never be achieved through systems of oppression. And oftentimes capitalism is the breeding ground for the issues that organizers are fighting against or is the very system that we’re fighting against. So, a lot of the themes that I’m seeing, especially with the fact that they’re highlighting so many different groups, is that they have to organize, they have to fight. It’s showing that sense of collective liberation and that intersectionality. What we’re doing today is just that a continuation of the conversation started long before we existed. So that’s kind of my first glance. That’s what I took from that.

Then in terms of the pictures of the beheaded person and all the violence from the Vietnam War. There’s part of me that knows these photos are the photos and visuals that every organizer would want to be seen across the world because words can only do so much, you know. That’s what people said when they first found out about the Holocaust. The people who first found out about it said you need to take pictures of this because people down the line will deny it. So, there’s that angle of it’s important to have these visuals seen by people because you know, when you see it versus reading about it, it’s so much different, but there’s a delicate balance of that. And understanding that this was somebody that went through so much pain and trauma, and you’re watching, you’re literally looking at somebody who was beheaded, so it’s a little hard because with all the tough, recent videos of Black people dying on camera, I personally could not, I could not watch.

It definitely needs to have some type of trigger warning or sensitive content alert for exhibition display, but also being mindful to never use these images for any type of capitalism, but to keep it very much about commentary for learning purposes. It’s the delicate balance of educating and bringing awareness while attempting not to add to the desensitization of violence against marginalized communities.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST:

- Together Our Resistance Channels Hope (TORCH)*, 2021  
Printed nylon  
5 x 3 feet each  
Courtesy of the artist

*TORCH ’72/2020 \*feat. Fanta Ballo*, 2021  
2 channel video projection, 13:25; color; sound  
Courtesy of the artist and Social Action Archive Committee

*We Demand Power Over Our Bodies*, 2021  
Printed silk, printed chiffon  
58 x 78 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

*Torch ’72, 2020*  
Plastic mount slides projected from slide carousel  
Photographed by Patrick Dodson for Social Action Archive Committee  
Courtesy of the artist

*Social Action Archive: February 2015 Broadsheet*, 2015  
Ink on paper  
33 x 22 ¾ inches unfolded

*Social Action Archive: University Libraries, University at Albany, SUNY*, 2015  
Digital video projection, 11:19; black and white; sound  
Courtesy of the artist

- Torch ’72 Yearbook*  
2 copies, published April 1972  
12 ¼ x 9 ¼ inches (closed)  
Courtesy of the Yearbook Collection, 1900-2014. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University at Albany, SUNY

*Albany Student Press*, April 28, 1972, page 3  
*Albany Student Press*, April 28, 1972, page 12  
*Albany Student Press*, April 18, 1972, page 12  
*Albany Student Press*, April 14, 1972, page 17  
*Albany Student Press*, April 14, 1972, page 12  
*Albany Student Press*, April 11, 1972, page 2  
Facsimile reproduction  
17 x 11 ½ inches  
Courtesy of Student Newspaper Collection, 1916-2019. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University at Albany, SUNY

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