

Carving Communal Space with CelebrateWomxn845

by Elizabeth Wiley | March 2020

Three weeks ago I met the creator of CelebrateWomxn845, Jamie Sanin.

Three weeks ago we were sitting and laughing in a beloved local café.

Three weeks ago? Things were different.

Now, I sit at home on day five of self-quarantine, in the wake of COVID-19's sweep of the globe. Each day I've sat at my computer, returning to an article I started on March 1st, 2020. An eternity ago. An article describing CelebrateWomxn845, who it is, what it does, how special and unique it is. But every time I sit with the intent of finally finishing this article, it never seems right – somehow stagnant, non-dynamic – the polar opposite of what Celebrate is. So what gives?

I think it is because I have been trying to write about Celebrate as it existed on March 1st. And though much of this vessel is just as it was three weeks ago, so much has changed. But, before I get ahead of myself let me introduce you to CelebrateWomxn845.

Celebrate is an organic network of womxn, femme, and non-binary creative minds all across New York's Hudson Valley. Artists, writers, musicians, dancers, stand-up comics, you name it – Celebrate is the basin that brings all these bodies together. It is, in a sense, a body itself. Ever-changing, always maturing – breathing, beating.

CelebrateWomxn845 is the brainchild of Hudson Valley native, Jamie Sanin. It was birthed from the desire to curate an all womxn art show. Having worked in the art field most of her life, Sanin was very aware of the under-representation of womxn artists. So when a friend offered up open gallery space, Sanin seized the opportunity, and sent out an open call for womxn artists across the Hudson Valley. The response was unexpectedly grand. Sixty womxn, in myriad artistic disciplines, were showcased in Celebrate's first exhibition. Growing and evolving ever since.

In talking to Jamie about Celebrate there is a recurrent theme of community. And though she never said these *exact* words herself, community is the backbone of CelebrateWomxn845. Celebrate is not an event space, not a static art collective, but it is made up of, and made for the community. It may not be a physical space, but it *holds* space for all these creatives. Through gallery shows, open mic nights, and even signal boosting art calls on their social media, Celebrate is providing an outlet for these often-extinguished voices. For the past two years it has been breathing life into the creative scene of the Hudson Valley, diversifying it.

But this week? Our community shifted.

This week we were told not to go to work.

This week we were told to distance ourselves from others.

CelebrateWomxn845 had an open mic planned for March 19th. And while businesses were closing, and events being shut down all across the Hudson Valley, Celebrate showed up for their community. The open mic was held virtually; people from all over came together while in the comforts of their own bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens. Space was still carved out for those who craved it and needed it most. And in that there was healing, some solace, peace, laughter.

Three weeks ago Jamie said to “not let uncertainty cause inaction.” And in the most uncertain of times, Celebrate was there, reminding us all that we still have each other, we can still come together, support one another, and raise each other up. Put the pen to the paper and make something, even if it feels shaky to start. Trust yourself, and have faith in others. No matter the circumstance, no matter how unfamiliar or scary the world feels right now, your community has your back. Give to it as it gives to you.

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CelebrateWomxn845 will continue their virtual open mics every Thursday for the foreseeable future. They also recently released an open call for work which will be compiled into a digital zine, coming out in April 2020. Details for each can be found on their website, www.celebratewomxn845.com

On Instagram [@CelebrateWomxn845](https://www.instagram.com/CelebrateWomxn845)



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