

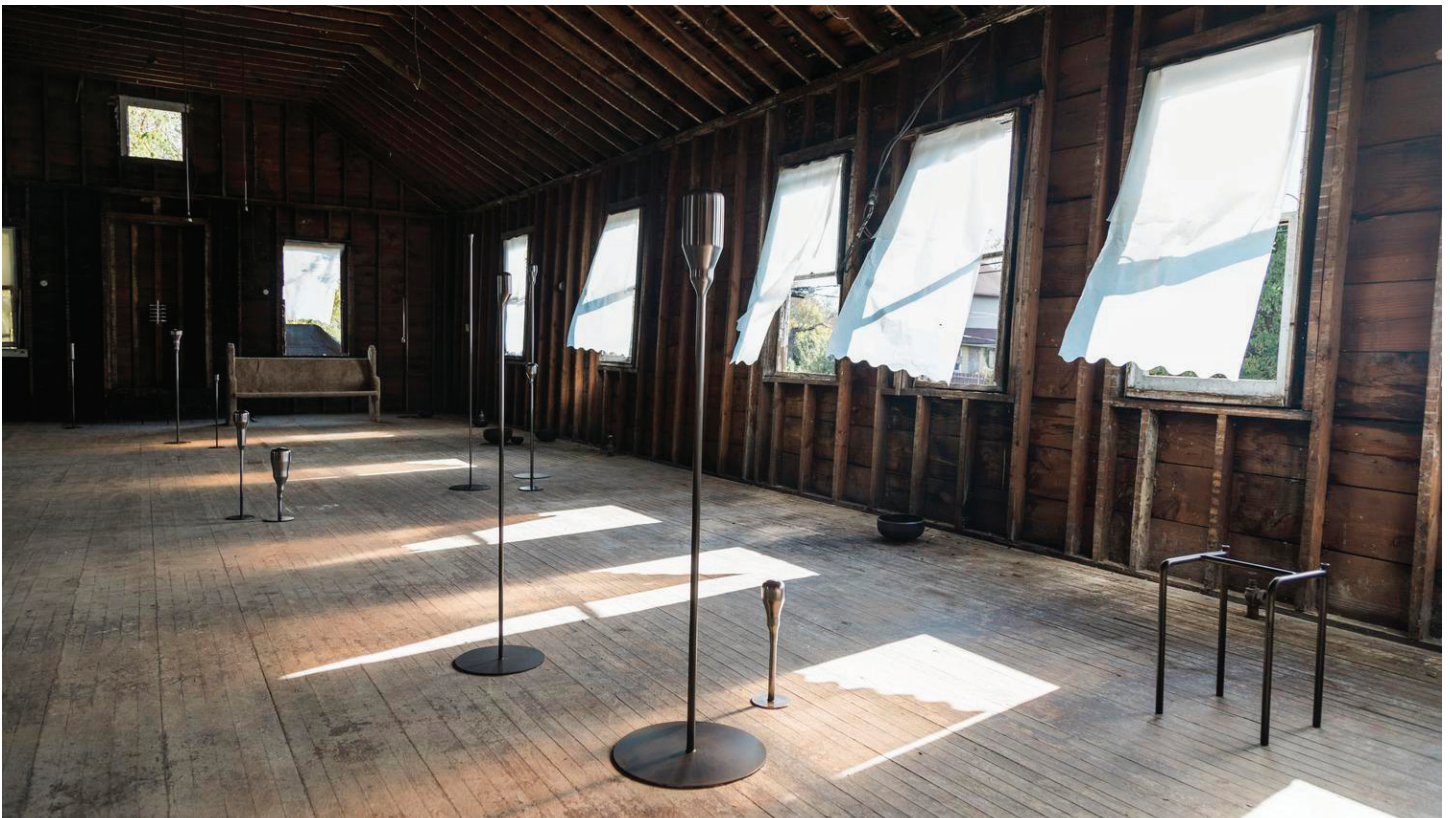
## Bulk Space

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May 2, 2021

Alberte Tranberg's *Laying the Second Brick* (October 23–November 13, 2021) is the artist's most recent project in collaboration with BULK Space. Tranberg's exhibition was held at the BULK Sanctuary where she intertwined her works within the framework and history of the structure while also interfering with the natural elements on site. All of the projects that have taken place in this space have actively considered its history, presenting works that utilize, compliment and converse with time's palpable presence. The work of *Laying the Second Brick* was met with the cooling air of autumn rushing into the open windows to manipulate the handmade

curtains, a tactility that was underscored by the metallic material the works were formed from. It was possible to feel and hear the works as much as see them; their ambiguous forms tread the line between an art object and a living body actively responding to its environment similarly to the sanctuary itself, which, with all of its vulnerabilities exposed, also feels undeniably alive. The dynamic of objective function in relation to the state of being a living breathing entity translates just as well to the project of BULK Space in general, and the highly organic nature in which the project continues to grow.



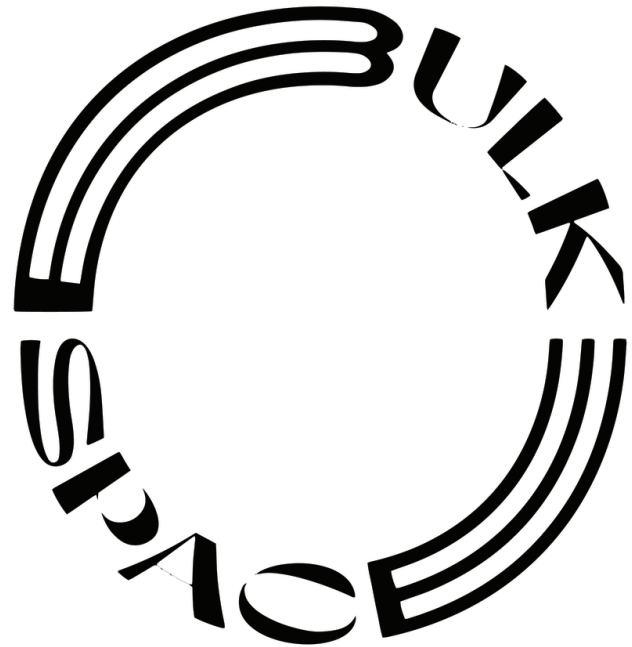
Installation View of "Laying the Second Brick" at BULK Sanctuary Photo Courtesy Clare Gatto

The complexities of BULK Space could most appropriately be described through the analogy of a rhizome that forms and grows horizontally from a bud, expanding and gathering nutrients from the soil to allow for new shoots to grow upward. The plants that grow from the rhizome above ground start to slowly cover the land as far as they can go in order to nourish the life of their surroundings. BULK space is amorphous and adaptive. It formed from the organic assembly of Jessica Allie, Clare Gatto, Meg Kelley, Jova Lynne and Sara Nishikawa, who worked in the city as satellites to one another before recognizing that they all were individually working towards a common goal to bring professional opportunities to marginalized artists.

These five women/non-binary artists and curators decided to come together with a commitment to create platforms for their peers on the margins through as many ways as possible. Since 2017, they have organized talks, exhibitions, performances, workshops, publications as well as participated in already established initiatives around Detroit, the United States, and abroad. They assert their mission “as a creative laboratory, [to] identify and develop essential resources for all of [their] participants, allowing connection with the community to drive conversation and collaboration.” BULK’s goals are tackled from many meaningful angles, with each facet of their project informing and supporting the next. One major focus lies in the renovation of their brick and mortar on Detroit’s westside. They see the rebuilding of this seemingly forgotten space as a metaphorical as well as practical approach to assuming their autonomy, through “empowering underrepresented artists to restore and activate what was once a sacred space, [and] honoring the power this structure inherently holds.”<sup>1</sup>

From the start, the group set out for BULK to symbolically become a sanctuary for artists and curators to engage with their community in the creation of new structures of power. They aim to initiate systems that promote collective accessibility with intention to supersede the inequalities that cur-

rently exist in various institutional settings by curating projects and creating spaces for rigorous, exploratory art-making by historically underrepresented artists. Since their coming together, they have also sustained an ongoing mission to provide access to equipment and high caliber works of art to the community.<sup>2</sup>



*Bulk Space logo designed by Lauren Williams*

The formation of BULK is an important detail of the project as it demonstrates how suddenly and quickly a grassroots initiative can come about. Meg and Jova were founding members of FLEX Collective (2017) and together, they started BULK Space as a location to hold events, exhibitions and residencies in Detroit. While at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Meg and Jova decided to start a residency studio under the umbrella of FLEX Collective, a network of artists dedicated to “flexing” their skills around the world. As FLEX, they started the studio residency and quickly invited Clare, their dear colleague and friend into the collective as a member of their organizing team.

Jessica and Jova met at the Black Artists Meet-Up Group that was founded by Jova, Taylor Renee Aldridge and Ash Arder. At that time, Jessica was working in Detroit on the development of her newly founded project Shylo Arts, doing site specific installations while simultaneously functioning as the program director of ProjectArt Detroit. The collaboration between Jessica and FLEX began with her being invited by FLEX Collective to organize a new exhibition *Plurals of Birds* at Bulk Space's first physical iteration on Grand River. Their like-mindedness quickly became apparent; they all realized how beneficial it would be to work more closely with Jessica and Shylo Arts, and decided to invite her to become the final addition to the core FLEX team. Due to the semantic confusions that would commonly happen when using both the names FLEX and BULK, as well as now Shylo Arts, the group decided to drop the names FLEX and Shylo Arts, and work under the single name of BULK, which appropriately represents their mission to take up a lot of space and

share that space with underrepresented artists far and wide. Shortly after, Sara who is also a Cranbrook alumni became a collective member of BULK because of their similar interests in coordination within the arts community.

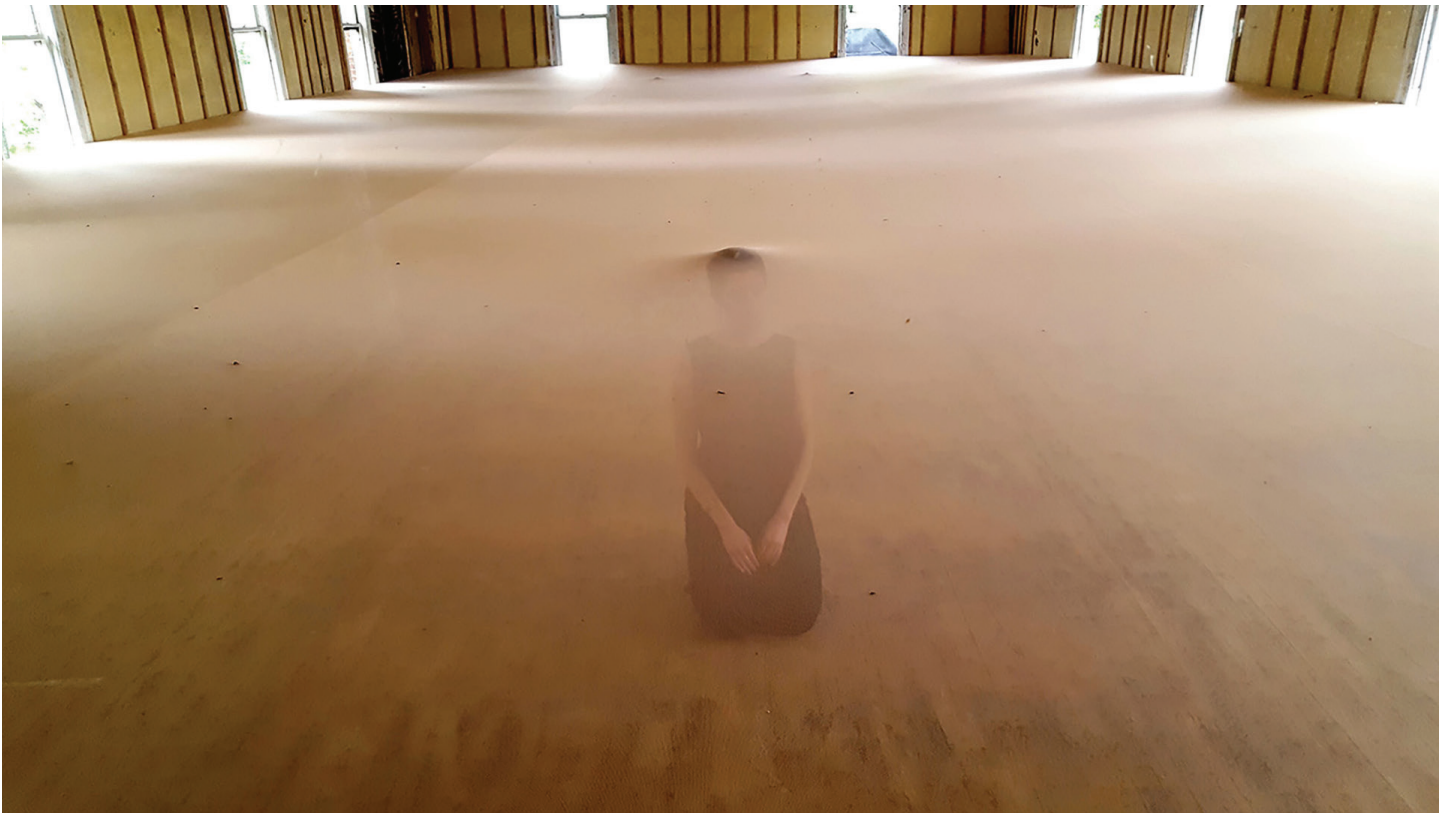
“On the corner of Muirland and Midland, you will discover BULK Sanctuary, a site-specific installation space designed to engage emerging interdisciplinary artists seeking to create sensory experiences thriving beyond the canvas. Previously known as Shylo Arts Detroit, this space is undoubtedly unique, as it was originally constructed in 1925 as a Beth Israel Congregation Synagogue, built to serve a once predominantly Jewish community. Over time it became Shiloh Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, officially closing its doors in 2012. In 2017, the remnants of this structure were reimagined as a creative sanctuary for artists traveling throughout Detroit.”<sup>3</sup>



Bulk Sanctuary at Muirland and Midland, Detroit

Before becoming part of BULK, Jessica Allie worked steadily on developing her vision for Shylo Arts. She curated and coordinated with artists to produce three projects; in 2017, Kambui Oljumi produced the film *Where Does the Time Go*, which starred Igungi Mutu and Jessica Allie herself. The film debuted at the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center, accompanied by a live musical score by pianist Chris Pattishall and trumpeter Adam O’Farrill. In 2018, Manal Shoukair presented *E L E V A T E* as an immersive installation exploring the artist’s relationship to her own religion and identity. Lastly, in 2019, Tony Rave presented *Family Matters*, a one night installation where the artist created an expansive alter filled with traditional christian objects painted in black face which was designed to critique many Black Americans relationship to the church. *E L E V A T E* and *Family Matters* took place within the project’s sanctuary.

It is only natural that the coming together of these five highly active arts professionals would lead to an explosion of new initiatives. Starting in 2019 when BULK Space began to function with the full team in place, there have been efforts in every direction possible to expand their reach, collaborate, and offer professional opportunities to artists. It is a challenge to unpack and understand the complex web of activity that has taken place in just three years. Despite the group forming in Detroit, the project was never meant to be Detroit specific; the members now live throughout Detroit as well as the United States, which further promotes their ability to offer opportunities to marginalized artists from all over the world.



Manal Shoukair *E L E V A T E* Photo Courtesy the artist

BULK began their work as a group through the initiation of the BULK Space Incubator Residency in collaboration with Talking Dolls. With the support of good friend and Cranbrook cohort Sarah Blanchette, their mission for this project was to provide innovative and experimental artists with studio and exhibition space. They recognized the state of the arts in Detroit to be in a precarious place because of the lack of resources available to local artists. This three month residency brought some of these resources to town for artists who wanted to push the boundaries of their traditional mediums. The project was supported by the Knight Arts Challenge presented by James L. Knight Foundation. Due to its success, BULK was able to sustain and grow it into what is now the annual BULK Space Artist Residency (BSAR) that supports artists and writers through honorariums, regular meetings, studio visits with guest curators, writing and professional practices workshops and opportunities to develop and present public programs.

The dynamic nature of BULK's programming is underlined by each new project they host, organize or support. The most recent collection of events, organized by the 2021 residents, included a performance and audio/visual installation by Saylem Celeste, a workshop by Aiko Fukuchi, an experimental performance presented by Vanessa Reynolds (Venusloc) with support from German based Your Mom's Agency, and an online poetry/sound collaboration by Calvin Walds and a number of various performers. Not only were these events dynamic in their kind, but also in the conversations they touched on. Saylem Celeste's *Fort Premonition* called attention to Waawiyatanong, the re-claimed name originally given to the land of Detroit by its early Indigenous people. Aiko Fukuchi's workshop *Connection Carries Us* was intended to support new connections, expand interdependence, and cultivate care within queer community in Detroit. Vanessa Reynolds' *Dense Infinity* provided an opportunity to experience what it may feel like to leave the planet and explore the landscape of an ultramassive black hole. And Calvin Walds'

*The Sonics of Relation* explored harmonies that can happen between different creative genres to better understand the possibilities, and limitations of language and sound.

Since their first exhibition *Show Us Some Love* at Dubois Basement on February 14, 2020, they have pursued collaborations on nearly a monthly basis. *Show Us Some Love* was a special one-night group exhibition highlighting artists working in and around Detroit that also functioned as a fundraiser to support their artist residency. For the exhibition, they asked some of their closest friends including Danny Sober, Nick Pizana, Matt Eaton, Ricky Weaver, Noura Ballout, James Benjamin Franklin, Cyrah Dardas, Chelsea Flowers, Rachel Pontious and Lorana Cruz to donate unique works of art which they auctioned off. A portion of the earnings went to support BSAR, while the rest went back to the artists. BULK has most recently launched the Ideation Residency, which accepts rolling applications from marginalized artists around the world.



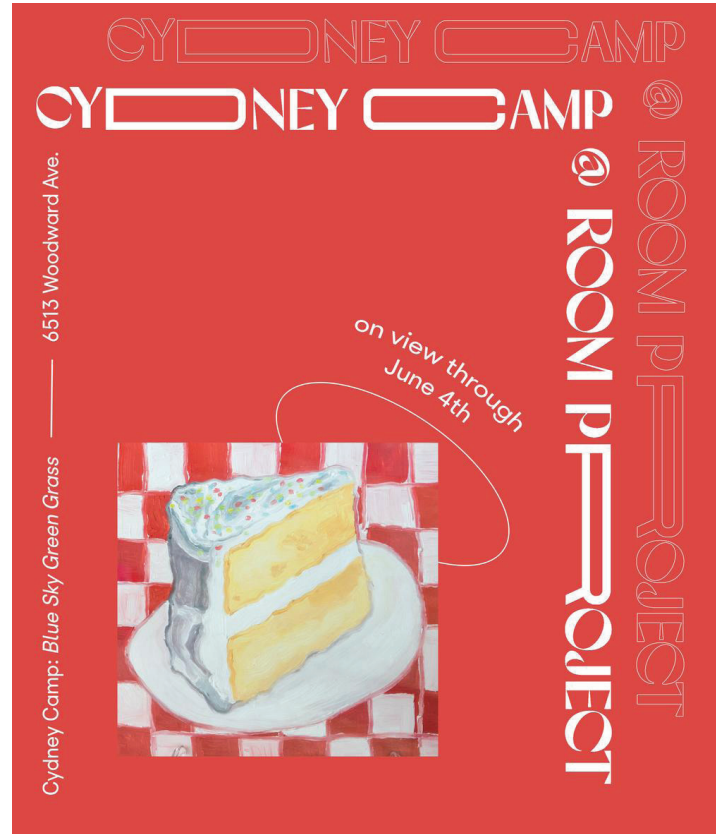
Installation View of "Show Us Some Love" at Dubois Basement

The BULK team has figured out ways to occupy many different locations throughout the city in their collaborative efforts, adapting to each place in order to utilize the resources available around them, in the realms of both digital and in-real-life. While *Show Us Some Love* was in-real-life at the

the Dubois Basement located in Eastern Market, they then participated in the inaugural internet-based art exhibition Art Mile Detroit through the digital presentation of works by Chelsea Flowers, Cyrah Dardas, Laura Gibson, Ricky Weaver and Gerald Collins, returning for the following year to present works by Ricky Weaver, Kristynn McKinney, Maya Davis, Rachel Pontius, and M Pofah, all based in Detroit. BULK continued to explore the possibilities of internet-based projects through their collaboration with Room Project to organize a six-week online writing workshop called *Writing for the Contemporary*. The workshop spanned the intricacies of contemporary writing for institutional spaces and developed artist's writing in their own practices.<sup>4</sup> The BULK team recognized the many settings writing is necessary within the art context and formed the course around different types of writing to help with accessibility when approaching these varying entry points. This workshop prioritized efforts to create a safe space for participants to discuss topics related to being a women, LGBTQ, Trans and Gender non-conforming, Black, Brown, Indigenous or Disabled as well.

This successful collaboration with Room Project led to a second invitation, which involved working to produce *Blue Sky, Green Grass*, an in-person exhibition by Cydney Camp. The exhibition was presented in the front window space of Room Project, located on Woodward Avenue in New Center and centered around two paintings by Camp, *Juneteenth (Teenth)* and *Gardening Man*.

Returning again to internet-based platforms, BULK Space also participated in the 2021 Printed Matter Virtual Art Book Fair to present 10 original publications and 3 Detroit-based publishers. Each of the ten projects highlighted the nature of digital dissemination of performative works.



BULK Flier for Cydney Camp's "Blue Sky Green Grass" at Room Project

To further highlight the diversity of their curatorial approach, BULK invited Mexican-American artist Lorena Cruz Santiago to hold an in-person workshop to share traditional weaving techniques. *Tejidos: Mixtec Basket Weaving* was a BSAR and Sidewalk Detroit Festival event hosted at Arts & Scraps on Detroit's eastside. Cruz taught community members traditional techniques of basket weaving as a way to preserve indigenous arts from the Mixtec region of Oaxaca, Mexico. Along with a short history of the tradition, a pamphlet zine included instructional illustrations along with information that introduced Cruz's artistic practice and her basket weaving teacher's story.



Printed Matter Virtual Art Book Fair. 10 newly BULK Space published zines, 5 books from our community partners, Paper Street Press and Anheho Anheho, and Nox Library's Pressed Coffee Conversations. February 25 - 28, 2021



Lorena Cruz - Tejidos Mixtec Basket Weaving Workshop /Sidewalk Detroit (workshop) July 10, 2021

BULK continues to involve themselves in the organization of happenings within the arts community, with each new initiative being a refreshing and important addition to what is already going on in town. Jova and Jessica recently organized *Atlassian*, a Black Employee Workshop that held a series of conversations with the employees in order to merge the gap between technology and the art sector, and navigate those spaces with greater confidence. *Venusloc F.Y.G.* is a short film and publication supported by BULK that served as a response to police surveillance disproportionately affecting Black neighborhoods in Detroit. Some of their other current projects include continuing to offer mini-grants to local artists as well as the initiation their new Ideation Residency, which they are working on with Brilliant Detroit.

Each member of the BULK team brings skills and qualities that compliment the others. They all approach the work and the artists practice from a very different, yet complimentary, place. As projects are proposed, accepted, organized and completed, the roles of the members fluctuate. “As individuals, we come to the team to propose a project and as the project develops, that individual sort of directs the project and the other members of the team show up in whatever way they can to help and support. That is probably why we are able to do such a wide range of projects and have such a multi-faceted approach to program development. It also allows us to have new experiences all the time to grow our professional skills and resume.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to this core group, they have interns that support them as well as many collaborators, either one time or recurring.



## BULK Space

As if weaving an intricate tapestry, BULK has actively engaged in meeting people, collaborating with new artists and organizations and connecting people to one another through professional opportunities. With their earliest years being influenced by challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, they have learned from the start the importance of being adaptive and flexible. They have made it an inherent aspect of their practice to brainstorm the infinite possibilities avail-

able to make an idea a reality, in turn, making their tapestry of programming more and more complex. BULK's approach to program development blazes a trail for us to witness a new way of existing as a cultural organization, they understand that the best way to stay active in challenging times is to be like a rhizome, approaching problems from every angle possible with the only goal being to continue to grow with tenacity.



*BULK Sanctuary Renovation - The BULK sanctuary presents an interesting challenge to artists who choose to take it on as a space for their exhibition. The renovation of the space thus far has been made possible by collaborations with University of Michigan's Architecture program and Elsie DeChard of E.N.D Studio <sup>6</sup>*

You can learn more about BULK Space and stay updated on their newest projects at their website or sign up for their newsletter: <https://bulk-space.com/feed>



Photo Courtesy Jacob Lewkow Photography

1. "BULK SPACE," Last Updated 2022, Allied Media Projects, <https://allied-media.org/projects/bulk-space#:~:text=BULK%20SPACE%20is%20a%20sanctuary,that%20subvert%20current%20institutional%20inequities>.

2. "BULK SPACE"

3. "About BULK Sanctuary," Last Updated November 2020, BULK Space, <https://bulk-space.com/About-BULK-Sanctuary>

4. "Room Project Workshop Page," Last updated November 2020, BULK Space, <https://bulk-space.com/Room-Project-Workshop-Page>

5. Jessica Allie, Clare Gatto, Meg Kelley, Jova Lynn, Sara Nishikawa, interview by Ashley Cook, Runner Magazine, Detroit, Michigan, March 5, 2022.

6. SPOTLIGHT: BULK Space, interview by Amanda Roach, LVL3, February 11, 2021, <https://lvl3official.com/bulk-space/>

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