WBC
WASHINGTON-BALTIMORE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF GROUP RELATIONS

akri
Endorsed Conference

LEADERSHIP, POWER AND ***RESPONSIBILITY:***

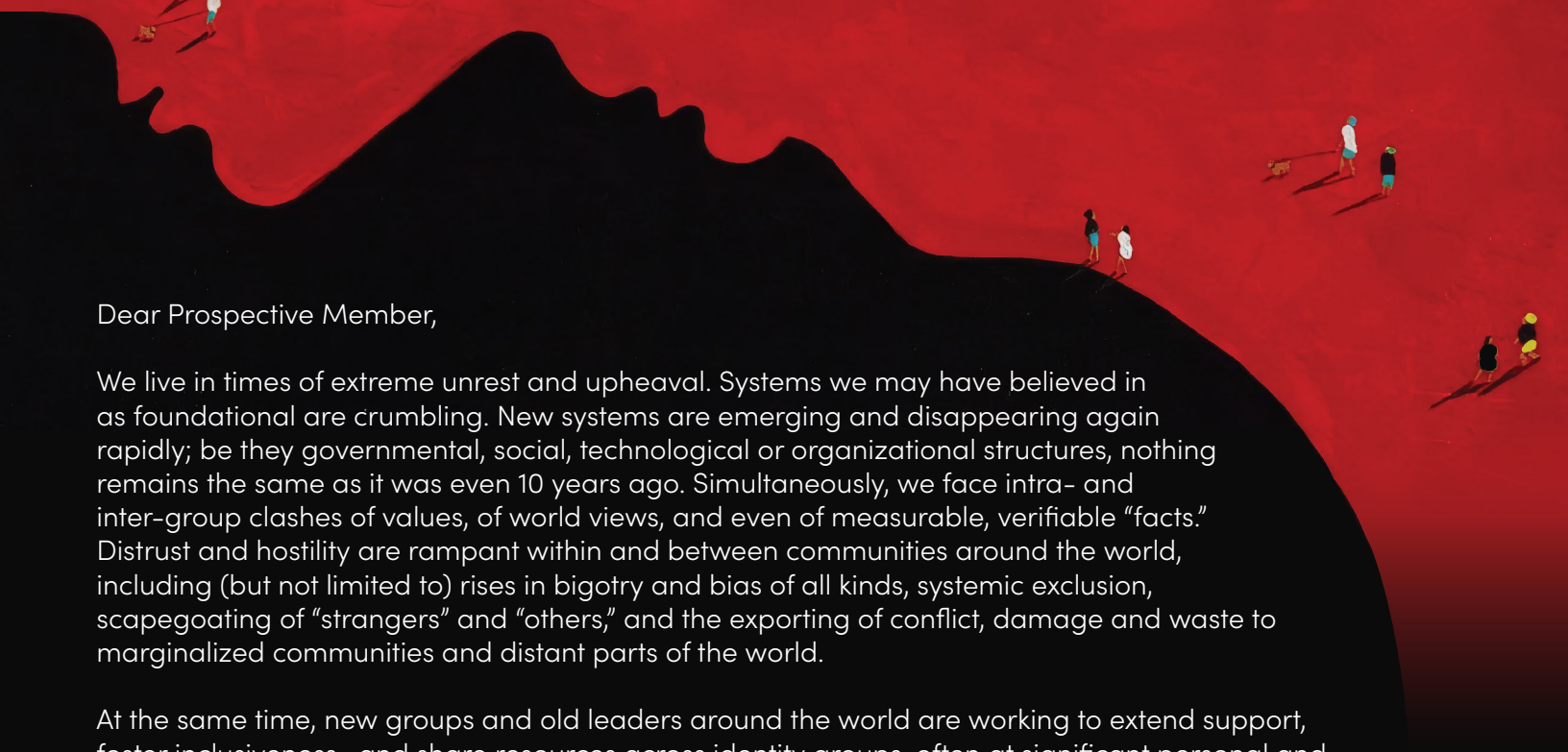
EXPLORING AUTHORITY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

An Online Experiential Event

November 5th – 8th, 2026

Register at **www.wbcgrconference.com**





Dear Prospective Member,

We live in times of extreme unrest and upheaval. Systems we may have believed in as foundational are crumbling. New systems are emerging and disappearing again rapidly; be they governmental, social, technological or organizational structures, nothing remains the same as it was even 10 years ago. Simultaneously, we face intra- and inter-group clashes of values, of world views, and even of measurable, verifiable "facts." Distrust and hostility are rampant within and between communities around the world, including (but not limited to) rises in bigotry and bias of all kinds, systemic exclusion, scapegoating of "strangers" and "others," and the exporting of conflict, damage and waste to marginalized communities and distant parts of the world.

At the same time, new groups and old leaders around the world are working to extend support, foster inclusiveness, and share resources across identity groups, often at significant personal and collective risk.

In such times, we are subject to anxiety, confusion, shame, and guilt. These are emotions that are always present in our unconscious lives, but that are magnified and multiplied by challenges to our beliefs, values and our ways of life, including food, water and housing insecurity, polarized political landscapes, violence, and war. We look to "traditional" leaders—in government, in religion, in our legal systems—to ensure access to the basic (or not so basic) necessities we rely on. So what do we do when we no longer have faith in our leaders? What do we do when the systems in which we participate are not meeting our needs or expectations? How do we respond when our systems continue to serve our own needs well enough, while other people or communities suffer? And how do we approach our own responsibility—both individually and collectively—for the conditions in which we find ourselves?

A group relations conference is an opportunity to explore these difficult questions through the lived experience of participating in groups together. Working in what we call the "Here and Now," we have opportunities to explore the ways in which our individual fears and wishes intersect with those of others in real time, creating patterns of group behavior in which the often hidden drivers of leading and following, collaborating and competing, joining and splitting can emerge into awareness, leading to new understanding and insight about how we all contribute. Whether what emerges is something we want or something we reject (or both) we learn to see how we each impact the systems we are in and in turn are impacted by them.

In this short Life that only lasts an hour,
How much - how little - is within our power
Emily Dickinson

I believe an essential component in exploring these vital issues is being open to new learning, even–or especially–when that learning presents challenges, difficulties, or discomfort. Yet when is real change achieved without some disruption to our preconceptions? Join us as we learn together!

Sincerely,
Sarah Rosenbaum
Conference Director

Primary Task

The **primary task** of this conference is to provide opportunities to learn about the often unacknowledged dynamic forces impacting group life at all levels of human society, with a focus on issues related to authority, power, leadership and responsibility.

Conference Learning Method

The learning approach for a group relations conference was initially developed at the Tavistock Institute in London, and has been modified and refined over the years through many organizations around the world to arrive at its current format.

Instead of learning through didactic lectures or training from "experts," the group relations conference utilizes an experiential learning format, in which the formation, re-formation, behavior and interactions within and among groups is itself the study material. A staff of experienced "consultants" is provided to help guide this learning through a series of both "here and now" experiential events, and reflective events in which we have the opportunity to look back and deepen our understanding of what we have co-created.

Information from our own thoughts, emotions, and actions, as well as those of the other participants, forms the raw material for study, providing a living microcosm of the forces and dynamics at play in the larger world(s) in which we live. There are many layers to these dynamics that are available to study, and this method highlights in particular the dynamics that emerge around the exercise of authority, power and leadership in group life. Personal and collective identities also have a significant impact on how these dynamics manifest and how they are experienced.

Every aspect of group life, including the emergence of group dynamics, is also impacted by technology. Today we have the opportunity to come together across times and distances that were impossible until the last few moments of human history. Yet, we join through avatars, electronically mediated voices, truncated images of our full human selves, without senses of touch or smell or taste, which can both amplify and deaden our lived experiences of each other. This conference will occur entirely online, allowing for exploration of the impact of this brave new virtual world on our group experience.

Who should Attend?

A diverse membership creates the context for rich and meaningful learning. Participants from a wide range of professions — including mental health care, community advocacy, pastoral work, organizational consultation, education, art, law, leadership, management, technology, and human resources — have found group relations learning deeply applicable to their work.

Learning through experience about the overt and covert functioning of human systems requires the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, division, paradox, and anxiety. At the edges of difference, our fears can lead us toward defensive interpretations that protect us from discomfort but limit understanding.

This conference is designed for those who want to remain engaged — to deepen their ability to participate in nuanced dialogue, exercise thoughtful authority, and work constructively within complexity. No specific professional background is required; however, emotional resilience and curiosity are important resources for this kind of learning.

Note: *Because this kind of immersive learning experience can be emotionally stressful, it is recommended that individuals who are currently experiencing a period of personal stress, illness or upheaval postpone participation in this type of event.*



CONFERENCE EVENTS

The conference is organized as a series of events that provide opportunities to learn through experience in a variety of contexts. The events will begin and end promptly at the times designated. Optional spaces for informal interactions with others will also be available. A detailed schedule will be provided to registered participants the week before the conference begins.

OPENING AND CLOSING PLENARIES begin and end the conference, providing an opportunity for members and staff to express and explore their thoughts and feelings on crossing into and out of the conference space.

SMALL STUDY GROUPS provide an opportunity to learn about dynamics in smaller groups, similar to teams and committees. The small study group consists of 12 or fewer members with one or two staff as consultants.

LARGE STUDY GROUPS include all members in the conference and provide an opportunity to study the dynamics that arise in larger groups, where it is more difficult to know or see every member and where group myths or assumptions can arise quickly and powerfully in ways more similar to that of a crowd. A team of consultants will work with the large study group.

REVIEW, ROLE & APPLICATION GROUPS provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and roles within the conference and to begin the process of applying conference learnings to "real" life beyond the conference.

INSTITUTIONAL EVENT

This "Event" is actually a series of experiences that provides members with opportunities to form their own groups, determine their own group task(s), and establish their own leadership structure and processes for managing boundaries. Members can further experience inter-group dynamics and the impact of interacting with other subgroups on the conference as a whole, including the conference consulting staff, who all participate in this event.

SILENT EVENT / SENSING MATRIX / SOCIAL DREAMING

The task of these events is to explore the state of the conference system through silence, through creative expression, through the body and through dreams and associations, and to offer spaces where a different kind of integration of complex learning and dynamics can occur. The specific methods for each event will be presented at the beginning of each session.



CONFERENCE STAFF

The conference staff administer and manage the conference as a whole and take up consulting roles during conference events. As managers and administrators, staff attend to the conditions of conference events, particularly in relation to time, task and territory (technology). Staff do not manage the members' behavior, but rather aid the group in finding the often hidden meanings of behavior, as these meanings pertain to the group as a whole. Members are free to engage their learning in whatever ways they authorize themselves and each other, within the boundaries of the conference institution, and of higher authorities such as state and local laws wherever members find themselves.

As consultants, staff articulate the primary task, and work within the design of the conference to fulfill their primary function of facilitating member learning about group dynamics, in particular making less conscious and rational aspects of group life more visible and available for study. In all these roles, staff are actively involved in the life of the conference. The ways in which staff work are open for examination and form an integral part of the dynamics that are co-created in our temporary institution.

Staff for the conference will be drawn from the list below, and may include others not listed. A final list of staff and their roles will be provided at check-in at the opening evening of the conference.



DIRECTORATE AND ADMINISTRATION



Sarah Rosenbaum, Ph.D. (she/her)
Conference Director

I am a clinical psychologist in private practice, providing individual, couples, and group psychotherapy, organizational consulting and executive coaching. I am a Fellow and past president of the A.K. Rice Institute, and long-time member of the New York Center. I am also a co-creator in Group Relations International, where I serve as senior training faculty. I teach "Foundations in Group Relations Theory" for an international audience.

For me, the question of responsibility in my leadership and my followership has been weighing heavily recently, as I struggle to balance various aspects of my identity and social roles as a white Jewish woman in the current mid-east crisis, married to an immigrant with biracial children, living a middle-class life while more and more people slide into poverty, using fossil fuels, and providing treatment in a healthcare system that does not really support mental health services yet. But most urgent for me right now is the question of what I am (un)willing to risk or sacrifice to preserve democracy as I know it.



Leo Wilton, Ph.D. (he/him/his)
Associate Director of Conference

I am a Professor in the Department of Human Development at the State University of New York at Binghamton, Lifetime Member of the Association of Black Psychologists, and President of the A. K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems (AKRI). Relatedly, "Oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and move to transform it." These words by civil rights activist Ella Baker provide a context for my entry, as a Black psychologist, into the conversation about social responsibility and transformative social justice.

My commitment to addressing complex structural inequalities in society is rooted in a longstanding passion for this work. I came of age as a first-generation college student who identifies as an African American gay man, Black internationalist, and Pan-Africanist, who grew up with experiences of pervasive economic disenfranchisement based on social class.



Rebecca Abell, Psy.D., CGP (she/her)
Associate Director of Administration

I am a clinical psychologist working at the outpatient clinic of a hospital in Washington, DC, where I primarily facilitate therapy groups. I consider the WBC, where I serve as Membership Committee Co-Chair, my group relations home. I am also a member of AKRI and CSGSS and a GRI co-creator. I live with many types of privilege -- White, economic, educational, thin, to name a few -- and work with many people with less privilege. I live with anxiety, guilt, rage, tension, and sometimes ignorant bliss about doing enough to create the type of world in which I want myself and my kids to live. I am the most in touch with my conflict around the environment, healthcare inequality, and weight stigma.



Maheela Naqvi, Psy.D. (she/her)
Assistant Administrator

I am a clinical psychologist in private practice working mainly with individuals based in California. Additionally, I provide individual therapy to Pakistani international students and young professionals based in various countries. I am continuing to explore the group relations space after attending some conferences as a participant. This is my first time holding an administrative role in a GRC and I am curious to experience the conference through this role. For me, the theme of social responsibility feels fraught with themes of belongingness, ownership, empowerment and safety. My identity of being a visa-holder colors these views. I am often thinking about my membership in the spaces which I occupy, what reinforces or threatens or my membership in these spaces and, what mechanisms allow me to feel empowered/agent enough to engage in making meaningful change.

CONSULTING STAFF



Mika Awonahara, Psy.D. (she/her)
Consultant
I am a clinical psychologist by training. After completing my postdoctoral fellowship at the Austen Riggs Center, I spent many years working at College Counseling Centers while maintaining a part-time private practice. I am also a former president of the Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems (CSGSS). I have largely left institutional life (and strife) when I transitioned into a full-time private practice in Montana (although no one can be completely removed from society/social systems/institutional dynamics...)

I have landed in a peculiar place with many paradoxes: one being that I have found myself the most welcomed by people who espouse several core values which are antithetical to mine, at least on paper. As an independent practitioner, I often grapple with embodying and expressing leadership and responsibility in my work role. As a private citizen, I often wrestle with knowing how and when to exercise my voice in the service of fostering and maintaining connections across differences that can seem irreconcilable.



Diana Castañeda, LCPC (she/her/ella)
Consultant
I am a psychotherapist in private practice in Chicago, specializing in trauma. I am a Certified Consultant of the A.K. Rice Institute, board member of the Chicago Center for the Study of Groups and Organizations (CCSGO) and a member of the Washington-Baltimore Center. I am also a co-facilitator for a consultation group for the Chicago Center for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. I cannot separate the theme of social responsibility and culture. There are cultures around the world, including the one that I was born and raised in, where collectivism is the air that we breathe and the idea of social responsibility is not a choice that gets pondered. I have found it hopeful to witness the ease with with those of us that grew up with some version of "hoy por ti, mañana por mí" can take up burden-sharing.



John Frazee, MS (he/him)
Consultant
I am a coach and organizational consultant in private practice and previously worked as a corporate executive and journalist. As a member of AKRI and the New York Center, I served on the AKRI board as treasurer. A child of the 50's and 60's, I remember when post-World War II American optimism crashed into the televised reality of Black life in the South, and the civil rights era that bloomed. I am now curating a resource list for those who want to think about what white supremacy does as a system in our larger context. The mental gymnastics of erasing enslavement, book-banning, eliminating aid for the hungry, attacking due process all make me anxious, angry, and sad. Those feelings could immobilize me. As a privileged older white male who can, my obligation is to stay able to think.



Anita Prasad (she/her)
Consultant
I am a grassroots community development and social justice practitioner whose work has been shaped by decades of solidarity work alongside communities navigating poverty, homelessness, mental health and addiction, food insecurity, displacement, and ecological injustice. A first-generation Indian immigrant to Canada, my experience spans global and local, urban and rural contexts - working at the intersections of structural inequality, community power, and systems change. I am the Executive Director of Working for Change, a survivor-led social justice organization working to build economic and collective power with communities living in poverty. I also serve as President of a housing justice Community Land Trust responding to Toronto's homelessness crisis, I am on the leadership team of Toronto's Group Relations Organization – Insight for Community Impact, and am a member of the Board of Directors at AKRI.

Group Relations has fundamentally reshaped my understanding of social responsibility. Rather than locating injustice solely in structures, I have become increasingly interested in how power, authority, difference, and exclusion are reproduced through the unconscious life of groups and institutions—including those committed to social change. This has deepened my own practice of leadership: to exercise authority without reproducing domination, to remain accountable for the power I hold, and to create the conditions in which others can more fully exercise theirs. For me, the work of social transformation requires staying engaged with complexity, conflict, and contradiction, recognizing that we are always participants in the systems we seek to change.



Jonathan Rust, Ph.D. (he/him)
Consultant
I am a counseling psychologist and psychoanalyst and work as an Associate Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz as well as maintain a private practice providing individual and couples psychotherapy. As a professor, I have been a faculty member in SUNY New Paltz's graduate counseling program where I trained and taught the mental health counseling and the school counseling students. As I former school counselor, I was responsible for developing and coordinating the masters in school counseling program at New Paltz. Relevant courses I've taught include Multicultural Counseling and Group Dynamics and Counseling. Further, I am a member and certified consultant of the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems and its affiliate the New York Center for the Study of Groups, Organizations, and Social Systems. Additionally, I currently direct the annual Spring Group Relations Conference at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Social responsibility has always been a theme in my work as a school counselor, college professor, and psychotherapist, where I've centered the importance of culture, social identity, and systemic societal power dynamics as they relate to mental health, equity, and opportunity. Our recent societal turmoil has caused some cognitive dissonance for me as I struggle to hold true to my beliefs and strivings for social justice, to understand the profound social push back against these values, to keep faith and hope in the future as well as to see my part in these greater societal phenomena and to understand and have compassion for those I experience as the 'other.'



NJ Traylor, MBA (she/her)
Consultant
I am a psychoanalytic candidate at the William Alanson White Institute and Vice President of the New York Center. I hold an M.A. in Organizational Psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University and am an alumna of West Point. Before graduate school, I served as a logistics officer in a U.S. Army Special Forces Unit on two combat deployments — where I first learned how power organizes bodies and who gets to belong. As a mixed-race queer woman training to practice, I am drawn to a psychoanalysis and a group relations practice that refuses to separate the personal from the political — one that takes seriously how colonial, racial, and heteronormative structures shape not only what happens between us but what we can feel and imagine. For me, social responsibility means staying in the discomfort of that work, especially when the systems I benefit from and the systems that have harmed me turn out to be the same ones.

CONFERENCE DATES AND APPROXIMATE TIMES*+
(all times USA Eastern Time)

Thursday, November 5th	Check-in & Technical Orientation begins at **4:20 pm**
	Conference Events **5:00 pm – 9:40 pm**
Friday, November 6th	Conference Events **11:00 am - 9:00 pm**
Saturday, November 7th	Conference Events **11:00 am - 9:00 pm**
Sunday, November 8th	Conference Events **11:00 am - 8:00 pm**

**Note that the online Member Lounge rooms will be open for informal gathering for (at least) 30 minutes before and after the formal conference events of the day, beginning Thursday night. Breaks of various lengths will be scheduled within each day.*

+Conference dates will not change, but exact beginning and ending times may shift slightly from these parameters. Please plan accordingly. A final schedule will be provided at check-in.

The conference is designed to be a single integrated educational experience with each component building upon the next. Individuals who know in advance that they are unable to attend all sessions are discouraged from applying to the conference. Anyone who must leave for any reason is requested to inform the administration.



REGISTRATION FEES

We are offering a sliding scale ($250 to $700) to promote financial accessibility to the conference. Our sliding scale is rooted in a commitment to shared responsibility and widening access across differences in financial privilege. We invite you to choose the highest amount you can afford while honoring your own needs. The Standard Rate reflects the estimated cost of offering the conference. Pricing structures may be updated as needed to support the sustainability of the conference. Please use the Sliding Scale Chart below to help determine an appropriate price point.

Sliding Scale Chart: Below are the recommended rates for the sliding scale.

Sustainer & Institutional Rate	Standard Rate	Access Rate
Early Bird Rate (by September 15th, 2026)		
$500 - $700	**$500** WBC Members **$400** AKRI / AKRI Affiliate Members **$450**	**$250 - $500**
Regular Rate (AFTER September 15th, 2026)		
$600 - $700	**$600** WBC Members **$500** AKRI / AKRI Affiliate Members **$550**	**$350 - $600**
	Recommended if:	
My workplace, school, or a grant is paying for me to attend the conference I am comfortably able to meet all of my basic* needs I may have limited debt and it does not prohibit attainment of basic needs I own my home or property or rent a higher-end property I own or lease a car I am employed or do not need to work to meet my needs I have access to financial savings I have expendable** income	I may stress about meeting my basic* needs but still regularly achieve them I may have some debt but it does not prohibit attainment of basic needs I own or lease a car I am employed I have access to health care I might have access to financial savings I have occasional financial support from family or employer I have some expendable** income	I frequently stress about meeting basic* needs or don't always achieve them I have debt and it sometimes prohibits me from meeting my basic needs I rent lower-end properties or have unstable housing I do not have a car or have limited access to a car I am unemployed or underemployed I qualify for government assistance (e.g. SNAP) I have no access to savings I have no or very limited expendable** income

** Basic Needs include food, housing, health care, and transportation.*
*** Expendable Income might mean you are able to buy coffee or tea at a shop, go to the movies or a concert, buy new clothes, books, and similar items each month, etc.*



Scholarships

If you cannot afford the lowest end of the sliding scale ($250), you may request additional assistance. Some limited scholarships may be available on a case by case basis. Requesting a scholarship will not impact your acceptance into the conference. To request a scholarship:

- Email Administration at **wbcgrconference@gmail.com**
- Include some details describing your circumstances and the level of support you are requesting
- Scholarship requests are confidential and reviewed on a rolling basis. More assistance may become possible as member enrollment increases.

We will respond within 1 week with available options.

For questions or to request clarification, please email Administration at **wbcgrconference@gmail.com**

REGISTER HERE

Related Reading

We Are Not Responsible

Harryette Mullen

Continuing Education

Credits: Up to 22.25 CE Hours for Psychologists

Rutgers Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. Rutgers Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology maintains responsibility for this program and its content.

Confidentiality

Staff will not report the behavior of any individual member to anyone outside of the conference. Because this is an event that happens in virtual space, with as many different physical locations or "territories" as there are participants, maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the activities of the group is a SHARED responsibility. We expect all participants to take steps to ensure as much as possible that only those participants who are authorized to be present (staff by taking up their roles as hired, and members by registering and being accepted into the conference) are privy to any activity during any conference event. NO recordings or real-time transcriptions of conference events are permitted.

Post-conference aggregate reports that do not identify individuals are provided to the board of the sponsoring organization. Individual behavior will not be reported unless there are significant concerns for (1) the continuing health and safety of a participant, or (2) the ethical or legal responsibilities of the sponsoring organization. It should be noted that none of these confidentiality parameters supersedes the individual licensing requirements of either staff or members who are mandated reporters.

Special Note

The conference is an educational endeavor and does not provide psychotherapy or sensitivity training. Although the experiential learning available can be stimulating and enriching, it can be emotionally stressful and confrontational as well. Thus, applicants who are ill or experiencing significant personal difficulties or are intensely emotionally triggered by views different from their own should forgo participating at this time.

Registration and conference membership may be refused or rescinded at the discretion of the conference staff.

Withdrawal Policy

Fees can only be fully refunded (less $100 administration charge) if written notice of cancellation (via email) is received by 6:00 PM EST on September 14, 2026. Withdrawals between September 15th and October 24th will receive a 50% refund. Withdrawals on or after October 25th will not be refunded. Under certain circumstances, credit MAY be given toward attendance at another WBC-sponsored conference.



Erikan Ekefrey
Face-to-Face-Joyfulness 2025

Acrylic on Canvas
Image used by licensed permission

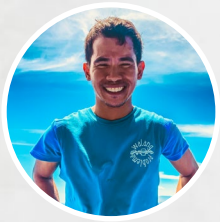


Erikan Ekefrey is a Nigerian contemporary artist whose passion for painting began in childhood under the guidance of his father, a renowned painter. Born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria, he developed his artistic skills by assisting with his father's large-scale works before pursuing his own creative path, leading to international recognition.

Known for his vibrant acrylic, Erikan's work explores several styles such as contemporary African, figurative, abstract and miniature styles. Since his first international exhibition in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2012, his artwork has been exhibited across Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia, and is included in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Equatorial Guinea.

Through his distinctive visual language, Erikan Ekefrey continues to celebrate the richness of African culture while exploring universal themes of identity, tradition, and the human experience.

www.ErikanArtwork.com
https://linktr.ee/ErikanArt



Carlo Hofilena is a Filipino graphic designer based in Manila, Philippines. He has been involved in the Group Relations Conference sphere since 2017 up to the present.

He has worked closely with conference directors to visually articulate the annual themes of GRC events into downloadable brochures, website and social media. Carlo worked with the GRC Conference Series at Boston College, Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems (CSGSS) and A.K. Rice National Group Relations Conference to name a few.

Aside from being a freelance graphic designer for 10 years, Carlo enjoys freediving, running in trails, gardening, and spends time in the gym for his daily dose of dopamine.

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