



New York City Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Off-site Hearing - Oversight – Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change

Wednesday, May 4, 2016, 1:00 PM – Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Auditorium, Brooklyn Museum

Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl

I am Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, here today to testify on the impact that art and culture have on the social and civic fabric of our communities. I'd like to thank Chairman van Bramer and the members of the committee for highlighting this critical topic. I am joined here today by a number of colleagues from DCLA. The Brooklyn Museum is a fitting venue for today's hearing, given the *Agitprop!* exhibition currently on view.

My testimony today will divide the topic into two categories: art and cultural programs that explicitly address social justice, and the broad range of social benefits that result from engagement with culture. The first category encompasses programs that serve high risk populations, like youth involved in the court system or students in low-income communities. Examples include:

- Carnegie Hall's rightly lauded **NeON Arts Partnership** with the Department of Probation. Neighborhood Opportunity Networks – or NeONs – are centers located in all five boroughs that bring together community organizations, government agencies, local businesses, and residents to connect people on probation to opportunities, resources, and services. Thanks to Carnegie Hall, NeONs offers young people access to programming in a range of artistic disciplines, including dance, music, theater, visual arts, poetry, and digital media. This helps to develop creative, social, and emotional skills, and build positive peer relationships. I've seen this program in action firsthand – it's incredibly powerful to give these young people the chance to inhabit an identity beyond that of "court-involved youth." While in these programs, they are artists, creators, and collaborators. And studies back this up, showing that at-risk youth who participate in arts programming have improved social interactions and attitudes toward school, fewer court referrals, and better self-esteem. We plan to share examples of this research on the DCLA Facebook page after the hearing if you'd like to learn more.
- We have a strong partner in the City Council on supporting these programs. Council Member Laurie Cumbo's **Art as a Catalyst for Change Gun Violence Program** is one example, providing funding to engage youth with afterschool arts programming in communities afflicted by gun violence. The **Cultural Immigrant Initiative**, spearheaded by the Speaker and Chair Van Bramer, is another Council initiative making a major impact in our communities. This program celebrates the diverse forms of cultural expression that our residents bring from all over the world, bringing immigrant artists out of the shadows and onto the stage.
- Earlier this year, the **Administration for Children's Services** testified at a hearing held by the Council's Committees on Juvenile Justice and Cultural Affairs. That hearing highlighted a number of ways that the arts benefit some of our most vulnerable populations. These included writing and acting programs that empower youth to create their own stories and see them come to life; dance programs that build relationships and self-confidence while introducing participants to the fundamentals of movement; and music programs that let youth show off new skills to friends and families as they develop and grow their abilities. Cultural organizations that receive City support also welcome these youth offsite, providing access to performances and exhibitions that every New Yorker should have the opportunity to experience.

These are just a few examples of the important work our cultural community is doing in neighborhoods across all five boroughs. Through the Cultural Development fund and Cultural Institutions Groups, we support hundreds of other programs that enrich the lives of residents and bring the transformative benefits of the arts to every single neighborhood in our city.

As I've said many times before, we appreciate the economic value of the arts – attracting visitors from around the world to our cultural organizations. We also understand the personal value – the almost spiritual impact that a great work of art can have on an audience. Somewhere between these important cases for the arts, there is the social value of the arts. This includes what community-based cultural groups are doing all over our city each and every day. An appreciation for this full spectrum of benefits – from the personal, to the neighborhood, to the regional – provides a powerful argument for the arts. Under this Administration, my agency has launched or expanded a number of programs to measure and promote these benefits so that we can better understand and support the organizations doing this important work. All of us have an obligation to ensure that every New Yorker has the opportunity to experience the full breadth of benefits that engagement with art and culture bring.

- The de Blasio Administration's number one priority when it comes to the arts is supporting **arts education in our public schools**. I know that the Council shares this commitment. We announced an increase in funding – allocated in partnership with the Council - in the very first year of the Administration, and since then we've brought the White House's national **Turnaround Arts** program to four high need programs right here in Brooklyn. Turnaround Arts is a three year, intensive arts education immersion program that incorporates the arts as part of a strategy to improve education outcomes for underperforming schools. Participating schools are also partnered with celebrity artists to work with students and generate excitement for the arts. In fact, the celebrity artist partnered with P.S. 165 Ida Posner in Brownsville – Paula Abdul – was rehearsing a dance routine right here in the Brooklyn Museum with some of her students last month.

A robust arts education is the foundation of our city's creative life, and we look forward to building on this commitment with our partners in the Council. While we want to emphasize that we believe creative activity to be intrinsically good, the value to our city and our students is multifaceted. Mountains of evidence show the benefits that quality instruction in a wide variety of artistic disciplines can have on such diverse skillsets as problem solving, creative thinking, and even math and languages. Again, we will post examples of this research on Facebook. We owe it to the next generation to make sure they have the opportunity to paint, write, sing, dance, perform, imagine, and create.

- Another program that invests in the arts as a path toward greater social equity is **Building Community Capacity**, or BCC. This program seeks to strengthen the organizations and cultural networks that connect residents in targeted neighborhoods. BCC takes a collaborative and comprehensive approach to building cultural capacity by bringing together local stakeholders from across sectors for trainings, workshops, public programs, and more. We announced in January that East New York, Cypress Hills, and Brownsville will be the first neighborhoods to host this new DCLA program. We want local cultural groups to be deeply engaged in the community planning process currently underway there.
- Another way that the Council proves itself a powerful ally and agent for change in our communities is **SU-CASA**. This program was expanded this year to become the largest creative aging program in the country, reaching older New Yorkers in all 51 Council Districts. And again, we aren't just crossing our fingers that these programs have concrete benefits for participants. Research tells us that there are a number of very real benefits that our older adults gain from participatory creative programs. These include positive effects on age-related cognitive functioning and general health, decreases in anxiety and depression, and improvement in overall well-being. We also plan to post examples of this research on DCLA's Facebook page.

- Another Council partnership is the **Cultural Afterschool Adventures** Program. Recent increases in funding for CASA represent a major investment in arts education, providing kids all over the city with meaningful cultural programming at the end of the school day. Thanks to this and increased funding for other initiatives, DCLA's current budget is among the largest in the agency's history.
- A number of our other programs are based on the notion that there is an undeniable good – social, moral, economic – in opening up the arts for everyone. For example, our **Public Artists in Residence**, or PAIR, program has placed artists-in-residence at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Mayor's Office of Veteran's Affairs, and soon, the Administration for Children's Services. These artists are focused on addressing civic issues through creative practice, bringing new ideas and energy to City services. There is broad consensus that the arts belong in certain areas of the services provided by government, such as education. With PAIR, we hope to open the door for creative practice to have a role in addressing an even wider range of civic and social issues.
- As a government agency, we seek solid data to drive our actions. This is why we have championed the **Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP)**. This program based out of the University of Pennsylvania has made major progress in compiling a comprehensive report on what cultural services are provided in New York City. They are assessing where the services are and what impact they have on our communities. In this new study, SIAP is looking to capture the impact of not only the 1,200 or so nonprofits that are eligible for City funding, but thousands more cultural service providers that engage New Yorkers in the neighborhoods where they live each and every day. In other cities – most notably Philadelphia – SIAP has uncovered some remarkable results which we will share on Facebook. Communities with strong cultural engagement show signs of broader revitalization such as lower poverty without social displacement, better child welfare outcomes, and reduced signs of ethnic and racial strife. For an arts lover and government official, this is truly exciting stuff. We expect a report from the SIAP team later this year.

My staff and I have been able to cover a lot of new ground. This wouldn't be possible without the support and encouragement of a huge range of partners, including Chair van Bramer and his colleagues in the Council. So thank you again for the opportunity to highlight this important work and for the chance to remind everyone how much more there is to do. I'm happy to answer any questions you have at this time.



Testimony of BRIC

Before the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

By Leslie G. Schultz, President, BRIC

May 4, 2016

Good afternoon. I'm Leslie Schultz, President of BRIC. Thank you Committee Chairman Van Bramer and the members of the Cultural Affairs Committee for holding this hearing and inviting BRIC to testify. For nearly four decades, BRIC has been dedicated to making arts and media genuinely accessible and relevant. As the leading presenter of free cultural programming in Brooklyn, and one of the largest in New York City, hundreds of thousands of people attend our live programs each year, and many more participate via our innovative digital offerings. In our work, BRIC strives to serve audiences and artists who reflect the diverse demographics of our City, across ethnic, socio-economic, age, and gender boundaries.

BRIC believes that the arts have the power to move beyond representation and critique into work that directly enables communities to effect change, both in attitude and in action. As a catalyst for social and political change, art is unique in its capacity to provide the tools and platforms for community members to represent their own experiences and aspirations, to enable visionary thinking and practice, and to bring communities together to engage in challenging conversations that can lead to advocacy, action, and change.

Because of the long history and extensive reach of our programs, we have seen first-hand the impact that BRIC's programs have on our community. These art-based projects actively contribute to the struggles for equity and social justice in our city through a number of approaches.

Some artwork directly catalyze social action: we have seen Roger Guenveur Smith's one-man play about Rodney King spontaneously lead to a street-protest against police violence. In another example from our most recent gallery exhibition, we have seen how artist Sol Aramendi is working with day-laborers to create an app to report wage-theft and hold employers accountable.

Other works prompt reflection, and create the opportunity for people to consider the kind of future they want to create. We have seen artists, such as the accomplished Brooklyn painter and activist Juan Sanchez, testify to his ongoing struggle with the expectations that his work be political at all times. Sometimes, Mr. Sanchez stated, “Art can also remind us what we are fighting for,” meaning the space and time to reflect on the beauty, patterns, textures and inspirations in the world around him. This very approach is catalytic -- Sanchez’s envisioning of a different type of future is itself a call to action. The very lack of direct answers or imperatives can offer moments of reflection and questioning, which are modes of resistance against forces of inequality and oppression.

Art can also deepen our understanding of social issues in powerful ways, and provide a means for self-representation. We have seen this with the hundreds of community producers who learn to create their own media at BRIC, and tell their own stories on Brooklyn Free Speech TV.

Similarly, working with young people in the arts, has allowed us to witness first-hand this catalytic power of creative expression. As a part of New York City’s new, school-based Anti-Gun Violence program, BRIC is working with students from PS/MS 208 in Bedford Stuyvesant to develop an original mural for their school that draws from their personal experiences of gun violence.

Adding a further dimension to the mural project, students are documenting their discussion and process in a collaboratively-made video. This documentary will reveal how art-making necessarily involves dialog and debate, especially when youth are empowered to create and direct their own expression. BRIC’s educational programs reach thousands of students occupying the “art deserts” of our borough, introducing the creative and critical opportunities that come with art-making. Some programs are directly tied to urgent social and political issues and others take a more playful approach. However they all provide a uniquely empowering space for youth to create, collaborate, and direct their own representation and expression.

Art can catalyze change in a multiplicity ways, some of which are direct and some of which are less obvious but equally effective. Thank you for the opportunity to testify to this urgent issue. We encourage the City to continue providing support to the artists, arts, and cultural institutions that enable our society to envision and enact the more just and equitable future we all strive for in our city.

Testimony for NYC COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING | ART & CULTURE AS CATALYST FOR POLITICAL & SOCIAL CHANGE | May 4th at the Brooklyn Museum

Thank you to the NYC Council for inviting me to speak today.

I believe this country is unusual in the separation between the making of art, culture, and the social and political world(s). In most other parts of the world (as I've encountered and perceived), it has been understood, in the body, in the fiber of everyday family, community and civic life, and in the act of survival, that art in its multiple expressions not only can keep people alive, but also pushes and pulls towards healthier, more just, more expansive realities. If the arts weren't a catalyst for a change in human conditions, why would the late writers Mahmoud Darwish and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, for example, be denied visas to enter this country. It is because of the power, the imagined danger of their truths and renditions, their art.

Recently in my office as Chair of the Department of Art & Public Policy in the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, in trying to sort through 38 years of working in the field of art, imagination, culture and questions of equity, peace, justice, sovereignty...I pulled a book from my shelf randomly: A Directoryue of Arts and Activism, made in 1984. This is a conversation much older than even that, as those of us gathered here know so well.

The writer/scholar/artist, Toni Cade Bambara, wrote, in Voices of the Dream: African American Women Speak:

"It is a tremendous responsibility...a responsibility and an honor – to be a cultural worker...whatever you call this vocation. One's got to see what the welfare children see, what the scholar sees, to see what the ruling class mythmakers see as well, in order to tell the truth and not get trapped..."

For the last 38 years I have been engaged in this dance. What new are we bringing to the table today? How are we deepening, making more poignant, more meaningful, more brave the question. We know that art is a catalyst because art at its best is about exposing truths and transforming them in ways that stretch our imaginations, our compassion, empathy, and sense of the possible.

The legendary writer James Baldwin said that a writer's job is to change the language. And that is a hard job. And takes a long time. If we change the language, the culture will change. If the culture shifts, the language will change. We are talking about deeply intersecting human social imperatives, necessities. The very question of how or if art works as a catalyst for what is being called Social Change, is like asking does the body need food, water, air? Do plants need light? We are imaginative beings. We create. And that may be the strongest force for affirming the possibility of living more justly, more equitably, more lovingly. Baldwin also wrote, in The Creative Process: "The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides..."

If that is indeed the artist's job, then it is logical to think that remaking the world socially/politically, would absolutely depend on that process, integrally.

The essay concludes: "Societies never know it, but the war of an artist with his society is a lover's war, and he does, at his best, what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to himself, and with that revelation, make freedom real."

Is social change "freedom"? What is it and how does the culture created and sustained by groups of people, and their art, make freedom? How could something even suggested as "freedom" begin to be iterated without the seeds, planting, harvesting, of the creative self and the attending collaborative?

The question is not whether or not art is a catalyst for change. The question is will those deciding on resources make those resources available for artists in communities in this pained city to do what they know how to do? And to explore the scary places of unknowing that leads to better resolution, stronger building?

In 1983 the Center for Constitutional Rights attorney Michael Ratner approached the poets June Jordan, Sara Miles, and me regarding lack of awareness about U.S. policies in Nicaragua. He asked us to create a cultural project that might share information, move people on an emotional level to feel more connected to the policies we pay for. We created "talking Nicaragua" based on U.S. foreign policy and the testimonies of Nicaraguans. This one night theatrical piece was videotaped and offered as an educational tool throughout the country, and led to the formation of two major organizations.

In El Salvador in 1985, visiting women in prison during the war, just after a hunger strike and attacks by prison guards, the women received the U.S. delegation I was leading by making a skit for us. Why? Because through art they kept their sense of the possible, their irony, sense of history/herstory, sense of humor, sense of connection, kept their stories alive, and therefore continued to exist.

In 1982 a million people populated these streets demanding a change in international, and particularly U.S. priorities, away from nuclear arms and towards the everyday needs of people – food, education, housing, health care.... What was at the heart of that mobilization? Puppets, Poets on every street corner from the U.N. to Central Park, Linda Rondstadt, Rita Marley, Eddie Palmieri. Orson Welles. Sekou Sundiata. Did the artists stop nuclear proliferation? Did the marchers? No. But they re ignited their commitment, woke up the world, built new alliances, and pushed the powers that be and the conversation

After the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, an article appeared in the New York Times stating that all over the country people were sending each other poems. Not statistics. Not policy analysis. Poems. the late poet, scholar, activist, June Jordan wrote years ago, in the essay: "Problems of Language in a Democratic State":

“...I believe we will have to eliminate the passive voice from our democracy. We will have to drown out the official language of the powerful with our own mighty and conflicting voices or we will perish as a people...”

In 2002 I was asked by the Center for Community Change in Washington, D.C., to create a project that would bring media and public attention to the question of Welfare Reauthorization. Nine women from different community organizations in NYC who had been on public assistance, worked for months with me, the actor, writer, director Gwendolen Hardwick, and the musicologist, composer, performer Tiye Giraud, to turn their stories into a performance piece, “Stand with Sisters for Economic Dignity.” We took the piece to a Senate Room in D.C., combined with a policy analysis by NOW Legal Defense Fund, and a policy proposal introduced by Senator Patty Murray. Politicians, grassroots groups, and national organizations, women addressing economic dignity from around the country, all joined, supported by actors Tim Robbins and Danny Glover. The event was highlighted in television and print media and the women were awarded a Ms. Magazine Women of the Year Award at the National Press Club. Did the policy change at that time? No. Did public awareness and pressure increase. Absolutely. The women from around the country who came to join the event said, one after another, that they had gained a new tool for their advocacy work and only hoped there could be the resources to continue.

There are countless examples like these, from way back and so many, and new ones sprouting up, each day, such as the US Dept of Art & Culture, people powered -- of how art works as a catalyst for necessary changes in socio political understanding and realities. And also how often the only possible space for talking is the space opened by art. I experienced this in the context of Palestine/Israel and the U.S. implications.

This is old beautiful, sustaining news. What’s not so beautiful, and is exhausted and backward, is that it’s not a given, the acknowledgement that art, by its existence, opens up public space, pushes us out of denial, into the difficult, necessary domain of breaking boundaries, questioning, discovery, and building.

My question for those listening and talking here today is: what degree of ongoing destruction physically, materially and spiritually, will it take to act on what we know? And recognize what we don’t know? Our young people understand, live their art, even with little to no material support. That’s why they’ve created groups like Black Poets Speak Out. As long as we as a society continue to act as though our minds are separate from our hearts or arms; our spiritual needs separate from bread; our jobs separate from our neighbors or children; we can be separate from each other, as though the power of our imaginings and what we make as artists are separate from the basic workings of life, as though form could be separate from content – we will continue to dive headlong into the dull ache and ultimate implosion of no vision, no hope, the diminishment of joy, and actually believe we don’t have the resources to create a different terrain.

Let us start believing what we know and daring to engage what and who we don’t know.

Last year, this poem by Ross Gay, went out over the internet, through the Poem of the Week platform of a poetry festival called Split This Rock, Poems of Provocation and Witness. Hundreds of thousands read the poem. You tell me whether it was a catalyst. I will close by sharing the poem:

A Small Needful Fact

is that Eric Garner worked
for some time for the Parks and Rec.
Horticultural Department, which means,
perhaps, that with his very large hands,
perhaps, in all likelihood,
he put gently into the earth
some plants which, most likely,
some of them, in all likelihood,
continue to grow, continue
to do what such plants do, like house
and feed small and necessary creatures,
like being pleasant to touch and smell,
like converting sunlight
into food, like making it easier
for us to breathe.

@ Ross Gay

Submitted by Kathy Engel, poet, Chair and Associate Arts Professor, New York University Tisch School of the Arts, Department of Art & Public Policy



**TO: Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer
Members of the New York City Council Committee on Cultural
Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

**RE: Oversight: Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political
and Social Change**

DATE: 4 May 2016

Council Member Van Bramer and Members of the Committee, please accept my deepest appreciation to give testimony today regarding art and culture as catalysts for political and social change. The Asian American Arts Alliance has, for 34 years, supported individual artists and small arts groups across the five boroughs of New York, and social change has been deeply embedded in our work and values from our founding.

I'm proud that this work continues today, and I would like to give 3 examples of the Alliance's work regarding social change:

- 1.) Just on Monday, the Alliance co-presented an event at Fordham University for an audience of 250. "Beyond Orientalism: The Forum" addressed the prevalence of "yellowface and brownface" (or the portrayal of Asian/Asian American characters by non-Asians) on New York City Stages. More than 250 theatre artists and allies attended the high-level panel discussion of theatre artistic directors and critics and then broke out in small groups to put forth their suggestions on how to change the industry from within. This event was accompanied by a hashtag campaign #MyYellowFaceStory, that went viral on social media and that was livestreamed to viewing parties around the country. Together with our partners, the Theatre Communications Group, Asian American Performers' Action Coalition, Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts, and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, we are launching a national campaign to increase race equity in a field that also brought us the success of *Hamilton*. It can be done.

- 2.) Later this month, on May 17, the Alliance will partner with the Museum of Chinese in America to present a panel discussion to help inform immigrant visual artists. Speakers from Fractured Atlas, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and the Asian Women Giving Circle will share specific resources available to the immigrant artist from funders, artists, and the arts organizations. We are proud that this project is supported by the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, which was championed by Council Member Van Bramer, and we extend an open invitation to the Council to attend.
- 3.) Finally, in March, two of our peer organizations had a wonderful and creative partnership. Kundiman, an Asian American literary organization, came together with Adhikaar a social service agency that addresses the needs of the Nepali-speaking community from Nepal, Bhutan, and some parts of India. Together, they presented a creative writing workshop over four consecutive Sundays for Nepali and Tibetan women who work in the nail salon industry. The women are immigrants, sometimes undocumented, all far from home, and they shared their stories of living and working in today's America; the act of writing gave them agency and a voice that they didn't even know they had. The writers read work on different dates at Asian American Writers' Workshop, Rubin Museum of Art and the Queens Council on the Arts.

These are all examples of programs that have been driven not by major cultural institutions but by small, community-based arts organizations that are working directly in New York's neighborhoods. For all of us, public funding of the arts is especially important.

As I have before, I urge the NYC Council to increase expense funding for FY17 to the DCLA by \$40 million so that organizations like the Alliance can continue and expand our work. The diverse cultural workforce that lives and works in New York City is what makes us an international city—exciting, vibrant, and robust.

I look forward to working with all of you to make New York more just and more equitable.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The Fire This Time Festival
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www.firethistimefestival.com

The title of African American playwright and novelist James Baldwin's book "The Fire Next Time" was taken from a line of the negro spiritual "Mary Don't You Weep" which states, "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time." Baldwin's influential book about race relations in the 60's pays homage to the African American legacy and responds to our ancestors' call to each generation to take up the torch passed that will continue to lead us further into the future. It was with this in mind that I founded The Fire This Time Festival, a two week theatre festival at Frigid New York's Kraine Theatre in lower Manhattan that is dedicated to providing a platform for emerging playwrights of color to represent the voices of our generation and our evolution since the time of black theatre figures like James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson and Amiri Baraka.

The festival came into being in 2009 when myself and five other playwrights met in a tiny theatre on the lower east side to discuss our frustrations with an industry whose idea of black theatre did not reflect our ideas of black theatre. The plays that were prevalent on stages were those of our forebears like Baldwin, Wilson, Hansberry and Baraka, and any new plays being done fit into the standard of black theatre that they defined in the 60's - plays that dealt specifically with the African American struggle. These plays were so powerful that they consequently boxed us into a rigid standard of writing where we felt that our voices were not being recognized as authentic black expressions. We decided to dedicate ourselves to putting up plays that were relevant to where we are as a community today. Our motto is that any play written by a black playwright is a black expression even if it is a play about two white people in love.

Since 2009 we have chosen 6-7 playwrights a year who are of African, African American or other African Diaspora descent to write ten minute pieces which are compiled into a fully staged theatre showcase. We started with four days of sold-out performances and now produce three weeks of ten minute showcase, panels, readings, and open mic nights. In our featured program, the ten minute showcase, there are no restrictions placed on theme, style or content of the piece so the playwright can express themselves freely. By allowing our artists to express themselves freely we have seen pieces that range from adaptations of British classical novels, to pieces with sci-fi themes, to romantic comedies, to plays set in Brooklyn's hipster community, and in the dining room of a Muslim family. The styles range from straight dramas to avant garde to poetic. And in a time of incredible racial tension, our playwrights have addressed police brutality, institutional racism, homophobia, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the effect that slavery still has in our country. By allowing our artists to be who they are and express themselves freely, we get a true picture of not just the black community, but our society as a whole, and this trickles down and reflects in the audience who attends our work.

We count among our greatest achievements the fact that our audiences have diversified year over year, creating houses that reflect many different racial backgrounds. We see this as a tremendous success because, although we live in a city that likes to see itself as progressive, we still live in segregated neighborhoods, send our children to segregated schools and attend segregated theaters. This isn't always conscious as we have come to see black theater for black audiences and white theater for white audiences. By opening up what our playwrights can write about, we open up who can play those roles, and as a consequence we create a theater that truly represents the world we live in. This is important because in an art form that has struggled to diversify, it makes both our black artists and black audiences feel that they belong, and adds our voices to the storytelling landscape of theater, something that is necessary if theater is truly going to produce social and political change.

As the response from our audience, artists and industry grows we are seeking more ways to extend this revolutionary work to other communities through touring opportunities and educational outreach.

Of utmost importance to myself and my fellow producers is the ability to continually support artists involved in the festival as well as provide them with the education to self produce, two things that both empower and allow these artists to take up the torch on their own and continually contribute to the evolution of not just black theatre, but theatre as a whole.

The fire next time is The Fire This Time.

Kelley Girod, Founder, Executive Producer
Kelleyngirod@gmail.com

Testimony to the City Council on “Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change”

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak.

My name is Ryan Gilliam. I’m a community-based artist – I direct a company, Downtown Art, based in the East Village area of the Lower East Side. I’m also on the Steering Committee of Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts/NY, the board of the Alliance of Resident Theaters/NY, and a founder of FABnyc.

I have a long history of collaborating with teens – and I want to speak briefly about young people, activism, and history.

I recently worked with ten girls, ages 13-17, on BIRMINGHAM 1963, a performance based on oral histories of the struggle to end segregation in Alabama. The ten ensemble members, who are diverse racially, nationally, and religiously, played all the parts – crossing gender, race, and age to do so. They told the story – and in particular, the pivotal role young people played. Because it was high school age students and younger – as young as 9 years old – who were the front lines in that campaign... who went to jail, who faced the dogs and the hoses, and whose courage turned the tide in Birmingham.

A lot of people don’t know that story. They don’t know that the first major rent strike in NYC – which involved thousands of families – was led by a 16 year old girl. They don’t know that it was young factory workers ages 14-22, who organized the ‘Uprising of the 20,000’, the first major strike by women in the U.S.

After each performance of Birmingham, the girls facilitated a conversation with the audience. And they shared their own stories.

One company member described how students at her school were organizing around the Black Lives Matter movement – she was drawn to it but also hesitant. By being a performer in Birmingham, she said she’d found how she could be an activist and make a contribution.

All the young people in the audience and on stage spoke of the frustration of not knowing their own history, of not knowing how people their age had been involved. They were frustrated that their history class only offered a brief highlights of the civil rights movement, or focused on a few individuals like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. As one teenager said, ‘Why don’t they teach us history we can use?’

Some started to take on roles as educators themselves. One of our ensemble members surveyed her classmates to see what they knew, if anything, about Birmingham and segregation. Another was in English class where they were reading ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail’. The teacher asked their opinion on King’s

advocacy for nonviolent protest. In the ensuing discussion, our company member defended King, and to demonstrate the racism in Alabama, quoted the Governor, George Wallace, calling for 'Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.' Her teacher told her she was mistaken. Her teacher told her no politician would ever say such a thing. Wrong.

Recently, I've worked with high school students interviewing residents of the Lower East Side about pathways forward for our community. Many answer that we must look back at what we've done to organize in the past, how we moved forward then, how we succeeded, and learn from our past how to move forward now.

The responsibilities of teaching a curriculum in school can create limits on what young people can learn there. Even in art classes.

Community based cultural arts can engage young people as creative individuals, while providing the information that allows them a fuller understanding of their history and the history of their community.

Young people need to know the full breadth of their legacy. Arts and cultural organizations can be leaders in providing young people the 'history they can use' – in depth and detail, connecting the past and present, and embracing young people as full partners in creative change: creating art, creating community, creating the city.

Thank you.



City Council Hearing
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
Intergroup Relations

on

**ART & CULTURE AS A CATALYST
FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE**

Virginia P. Louloudes
Executive Director
Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York

May 4, 2016



Good afternoon. My name is Ginny Louloudes and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York, the service organization for New York City's 360 nonprofit theatres. I want to thank Majority Leader and Committee Chair Van Bramer, the members of the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, and, Anne Pasternak and the staff of the Brooklyn Museum for hosting today's important hearing Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Social Change.

From Ancient Greek Plays produced in the town square, to today's work by activist theatre companies, Theatre has always been a way for us to tell stories that hold a mirror up to society.

In a January 8th interview with *the Washington Post*, the Pulitzer Prize Winning playwright Lynn Nottage discussed the inspiration behind her play **SWEAT**: about the closing of a factory in Redding, PA.

"Sweat really began to take shape when I met a group of steelworkers who had been locked out of their factory. The majority were middle-aged white men who had signed on to the American dream. They fully believed that they were going to retire with healthy pensions. They found themselves locked out of the factory, their pensions frozen, without health care and back to square one, being asked to work for what they were making when they started. They said no.

*I found myself incredibly moved by their story. **We were all sitting in a circle, and I thought, We are finally in the same circle, where these men understand what it is to be marginalized and overlooked, and pushed out of society, which is something that we as women and people of color experience on a daily basis.**"*

Sweat has been praised and celebrated for its brutal and honest portrayal of blue collar life in 21st Century America. The play underscored the themes which became the battle cry of Bernie Sanders' Presidential Campaign.

By identifying with "the other," **SWEAT** has touched thousands of Americans, both black and white; blue collar and white collar, Republicans and Democrats. When a play bridges such a gap, and helps the audience



sympathize with "the other" we have achieved the first step towards change: UNDERSTANDING.

While ART/NY does not produce plays, our programs and services help our members "serve their diverse artists and reach their audiences well."

In this year alone: we have served 70,000 artists by providing;

- 9,000 hours of free rehearsal space to 98 companies;
- 400 hours of free consulting;
- More than 35 workshops on marketing, fundraising and financial management;
- \$113,000 in grants to 50 theatre companies;
- And \$1 million in cash flow loans to help groups with pre-production expenses;

As many if you know, the A.R.T./New York theatres are set to open this fall. Of the 22 inaugural tenants, 7 are doing plays based on Social Justice Themes including Transgender issues, gay rights, issues impacting women (from abuse to sexual trafficking, to equality). And beyond our own stages, there are dozens plays currently running or opening this summer addressing these issues as well.

Our playwrights are the conscious of our society. From Sophocles to Shakespeare; from Lorraine Hansberry to Larry Kramer; from Lindsey Farrantino to Jose Rivera, playwrights have told the stories that need to be told: from the human suffering of war to anti-Semitism; from racial discrimination to the discrimination of the LGBTQ community; from homelessness to the struggles many of our veterans have integrating themselves back into society.

Thank you for holding this important hearing.

I have attached a list of 165 companies, by City Council District, that have produced work about immigration, LGBTQ issues, sexual trafficking of young girls, racial discrimination and income disparity.



A.R.T./New York Member Theatres That Have Produced Social Justice Work

1 – Margaret Chin

Bond Street Theatre
Culture Project
Dixon Place
National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene (NYTF)
New York Madness
One Breath Rising, Inc.
Ping Chong + Company
Soho Repertory Theatre
The Flea Theater
The New Stage Theatre Company
The Talking Band, Inc.
Tribeca Performing Arts Center
Yangtze Repertory Theatre of America, Inc.

2 – Rosie Mendez

American Indian Artists (AMERINDA)
Concrete Temple Theatre
Downtown Art
Honest Accomplice Theatre
IATI Theater
New York Theatre Workshop
Pioneers Go East Collective, Inc.
Teatro Circulo
The Foundry Theatre
The Oasis Theatre Company, Inc.
The Public Theater
Theater Askew
Vineyard Theatre
Voyage Theatre Company
White Horse Theatre Company
Yara Arts Group

3 – Corey Johnson

Amas Musical Theatre
Atlantic Theater Company
Cherry Lane Theatre
CAP21
Compagnia de'Colombari
Cosmic Orchid
Fault Line Theatre
Fulcrum Theater

Gingold Theatrical Group
Innovative Theatre Foundation
IRT Theater
Kate Payne Productions
Labyrinth Theater Company
LaMicro Theater
Manhattan Theatre Club
Ma-Yi Theater Company
MCC Theater
NAATCO
Naked Angels
New Georges
New Ohio Theatre
Packawallop Productions
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre
Partial Comfort Productions
Peccadillo Theater Company
Playwrights Horizons
Primary Stages
Project Y Theatre Company
Pulse Ensemble Theatre
Quick Silver Theater Company
Resonance Ensemble
Roundabout Theatre Company
Scandinavian American Theater Company
Second Stage Theatre
Signature Theatre Company
Strike Anywhere Performance Ensemble
Tectonic Theater Project
TerraNOVA Collective
The CRY HAVOC Company
The Lark
The Play Company
The Queen's Company
WorkShop Theater Company
Theater Breaking Through Barriers, Corp.
Theater Mitu
Theatre for a New Audience
TOSOS
Urban Stages
Working Theater



A.R.T./New York Member Theatres That Have Produced Social Justice Work

4 – Daniel R. Garodnick

All For One
Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts
Bedlam
Epic Theatre Ensemble
Horizon Theatre Rep.
Mirror Repertory Company
Stageplays Theatre Company
TADA! Youth Theater
The Roundtable Ensemble
The Stuttering Association for the Young
Waterwell
The Tank
The York Theatre Company

5 – Ben Kallos

Crossing Jamaica Avenue
Hunger and Thirst Theatre Collective

6 – Helen Rosenthal

Ars Nova
Artistic New Directions
Lincoln Center Theatre
Manhattan Theatre Works
National Asian Artists Project, Inc.
New Worlds Theatre Project, Inc.
Nicu's Spoon, Inc.
The Healthy Oyster Collective
Untitled Theater Company No. 61
Women's Project Theater

7 – Mark Levine

Hands On Sign Interpreted Performances
Musical Theatre Factory
New Light Theater Project
Theater in Asylum

9 – Inez E. Dickens

National Black Theatre, Inc.
The Amoralists Theatre Company
The Movement Theatre Company

10 – Ydanis Rodriguez

Athena Theatre
Rising Circle Theater Collective

14 – Fernando Cabrera

Rising Sun Performance Company

22 – Costa Constantinides

Gideon Productions

24 – Rory I. Lancman

Labyrinth Dance Theater

26 – Jimmy Van Bramer

Retro Productions

33 – Stephen Levin

Asian American Arts Alliance
Bechdel Project
Collapsable Giraffe
Girl Be Heard
Roots & Branches Theater
SPACE on Ryder Farm
Theater 2020, Inc.
vibe Theater Experience

34 – Antonio Reynoso

Circus Amok
The Bushwick Starr

35 – Laurie Cumbo

American Theatre of Harlem
Caribbean Cultural Theatre
Colt Coeur
Elders Share the Arts
Encompass New Opera Theatre
Gold No Trade
Irondale Ensemble Project
Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies
Little Shadow Productions
Lone Wolf Tribe
Modern-Day Griot Theatre Company
New York City Players
New York Deaf Theatre, Ltd.



A.R.T./New York Member Theatres That Have Produced Social Justice Work

Ripe Time
Sinking Ship Productions
Target Margin Theater
The Civilians
The TEAM
Urban Bush Women
Wolf 359

36 – Robert Cornegy

Caborca

38 – Carlos Menchaca

ANIMALS Performance Group
Little Lord

39 – Brad Lander

Dream Street Theatre Company
Everyday Inferno Theatre Company
Guerrilla Shakespeare Project
Rabbit Hole
Semicolon Theatre Company
The Dirty Blondes
The Habitat Theater Company
Young Jean Lee's Theater Co.

40 – Mathieu Eugene

Operating Theater Company
Radical Evolution
Smoke & Mirrors Collaborative
The Associates Theater Ensemble

41 – Darlene Mealy

La Troupe Makandal, Inc.

43 – Vincent J. Gentile

Human Head Performance Group

45 – Jumaane D. Williams

Kyoung's Pacific Beat



May 4, 2015

Oversight: Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change
Presented to: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Hearing Title: Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change

Renamed Title: Art and Culture for Social Justice and Equity.

Submitted by: Dr. Marta Moreno Vega
President, Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute

The concept of the Caribbean Cultural African Diaspora Institute is born in 1976 from a letter written in the 1930's, sent to Nicolas Guillen of Cuba from Arturo Alfonso Schomburg of Puerto Rico referring to Langston Hughes, an African American living in Harlem. His request was for Nicolas to introduce Hughes to the Afro Cuban traditions and community of Cuba. Reading this letter during the Civil Rights and Black/Latino/a movements of the 70's of which I was/am part provided the clarity that the invisibility of African Diaspora cultures continued to be considered marginal in the cultural - art life of New York City. This exclusion was/is evident in the public educational school system and in higher education and apparent in the cultural institutions considered major in New York City.

The "storytelling" history of New York City and of the Nation is the story of Euro-centric – White American imposed culture. This process has enshrined an untrue Eurocentric aesthetic perspective and version of history as "superior and true" ignoring the narrative of Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, Latinos/as and others that don't fit into this constructed narrative. Without question the work of Lin-Manuel Miranda, a Puerto Rican playwright is challenging the telling of history in the play *Hamilton*, as have others before him.

The mission of the Caribbean Cultural Center – African Diaspora Institute emerging for the Black and Latino/a Movements of New York City is to provide a historical, cultural and art narrative that acknowledges and values the brilliance and creative contributions of our communities. We focus on the history of the diverse African and African Diaspora communities that are integral to the cultural fabric of New York City. The creative genius of artistic legends like Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, Jorge Soto, Rex Nettleford, and others too numerous to mention can not be ignored. This is the urgency that motivated the creation of most of the cultural arts organizations that emerged during the 70's that insisted on having our histories and aesthetics



recognized and valued as contributors to world history and the cultural and creative life of the City and Nation. In the process the call of racial, civil and cultural rights were at the Center.

Author Susan E. Cahan in the recent publication *Mounting Frustration The Museum in the Age of Black Power* notes that today still in the perception of funders, “white curators are the most objective evaluators of art because they don’t favor a particular cultural group (except perhaps their own, which is not seen as favoritism); in the steady rhythm of the token exhibition. The tendency to view whiteness as normative persists in the major museums, and even though it may be expressed in ways that are more subtle now than in the 1960s, the result is a similar kind of bigotry, Page 266.

The words of Shirin Neshat, Iranian artist resonate when we speak to art and culture for Political and Social Change or should we say Social Justice. In her TED talk she indicates that “Art is our weapon and culture is a form of resistance.” Her phrase resonates in the words of cultural art activist Bernice Johnson Reagon when she puts forth the cautionary words regarding how dominance functions, she states: “Name appropriation is key to this strategy of slowing down change. Terms born of community-based struggles are appropriated by mainstream society and redefined, so that multicultural diversity and multiethnic programs become another way of narrowing our access to resources.” P. 79, *Voices From the Battlefield Achieving Cultural Equity*, edited by Moreno Vega and Greene. 1993

Therefore, I question the naming of this hearing that excludes terms like Art and Culture for Cultural Equity, Art and Culture for Social Justice, Art and Culture for Equitable Distribution of Funds, etc., that provide clarity of the objectives of the hearing. Hopefully the point to address is what the end result should be to deconstruct “whiteness at the norm.” To deconstruct systems of inequity mentioned in the “Tale of Two Cities” as set forth by Mayor DeBlasio in his election campaign. It is clear that the desire for social change is part of our daily reality as people of color and other marginalized communities as we face the challenges of racism, inequity and invisibility. However, social change implies but doesn’t necessarily directly mention racial, cultural and economic inequity as a destructive practice to the majority of the city’s population. I therefore title my paper **Art and Culture for Social Justice and Equity** to remind us all what the goals should be – what my goal is as a cultural worker.

The United Nation in its international forum addresses the definition of Social Justice as follows:

Social justice requires strong and coherent policies in a multitude of areas. Fiscal, monetary and other economic policies, as well as social policies, incorporate specific objectives but must all be geared towards the overall social goal of promoting the welfare of a country’s citizens and



Caribbean Cultural Center
African Diasporic Institute
CCCADI

increasingly, in this age of global interdependence, the citizens of the world. The well-being of citizens requires broad-based and sustainable economic growth, economic justice... *Social Justice in an Open World The Role of the United Nations.*

Without question the resistance of Natives, Africans and African Americans, Latino/as, Asians and disenfranchised peoples have used their perspectives to consistently correct the historic misinformation and misrepresentation to insist upon our stories, our perspectives as active and integral participants in the formation of this nation's economic success and international power.

Native American artist, Peter Jemison reflects what has occurred to the First Americans and is occurring to others "...most Americans still know very little about Native Americans. Our art is the indigenous art of this country, in fact, He notes, "The continuing activities of our movement are forcing the system to reexamine the presence of historical contributions of all peoples to the fabric of America" Page 24, *Voices from the Battlefield*.

Visual artist Emory Douglas of the Black Panther Party instrumental in imaging the call for justice during the Black Power Movement of the 60's and 70's mirrors Jemison's statement that his art "gave public voice to the injustice of African Americans and told the story from our perspective." Atlantic Magazine. Com

The exclusion of these stories and perspectives continues to mis-educate and mis-inform all communities sustaining a system of hierarchy that values some and devalues the cultures and creative production of others. It serves to sustain an economic system of disparity that continues to drive the income inequity that places the 1 % as the driving force of the cities cultural and artistic life. The Fashion Gala of the Metropolitan Museum celebrates wealth and opulence while ignoring the level of poverty, homelessness and unaffordable housing in the City. The focus of this hearing must focus on social change as an active operative principle for social and economic justice for the residents of the City.

According to the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice, "Social justice is not possible without strong and coherent redistributive policies conceived and implemented by public agencies. Will this panel lead to policy changes for cultural and art equity? Redistribution of financial resources?

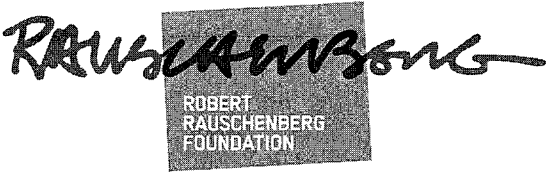
The collecting of stories by the Black Matter's Movement for their Los Angeles, Exhibition in May, the activism of the Rebel Diaz Collective " Our Vision is to Build Community Through the Arts", the wordsmith words of Junot Diaz condemning racists acts against Haitians in the Dominican Republic, the paintings of Yasmin Hernandez illustrating the Carpetas of the FBI against Puerto Rican Nationalists speaks to the power of culture and art as instruments of justice



as do so many artists activists and cultural workers. The voices continue to challenge inequity seeking a better tomorrow for us all.

In closing I ask for the hearing to examine it's role in creating social change, define what it will do to financially support cultural and art creative workers and institutions that are working on issues of social justices, cultural inclusion, affordable housing, educational inequity and historical and aesthetic narratives that drive a true historical understanding of our city's and nation's history. To encourage a public inclusive dialogue to change inequitable policies at all levels.

At CCCADI we are committed to social justice for all and are committed to making visible and including the cultural narratives of our communities and art as the voice for social justice for equity. New York City reflects a numerical majority of communities of color and other marginal groups whose cultural and art narratives must be represented, valued, and equitably supported to assure social justice for us all.



Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
381 Lafayette Street
New York, New York 10003

TO: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations of the New York City Council

FROM: Risë Wilson, director of philanthropy, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

DATE: May 4, 2016

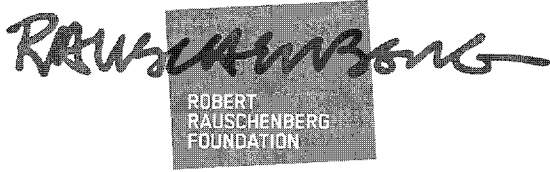
SUBJ: *Oversight: Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change*

In complement to my verbal remarks during today's hearing, this written testimony highlights: 1) how art and culture can shape our civic life, and 2) how public officials and private philanthropy can support artists and cultural organizations serving as change agents. My testimony is informed by the work of the New York Cultural Agenda Fund, a funder collaborative in which the Rauschenberg Foundation has been a founding member, as well as a career spanning almost two decades of supporting artists working to make a difference in the lives of their neighbors.

Lasting, systemic change requires both legislative AND cultural change. Novelist and essayist, William S. Burroughs, is credited with saying: "Artists, to my mind, are the real architects of change, not the political legislators who implement change after the fact." Including this statement is not meant to diminish the vital roles lawmakers and public officials play in civil society. Instead Burroughs' observation is a reminder that social change is more than the product of law. Artists and culture workers are often invisible leaders in the long arc of progress—generating the new ideas, values, and belief systems that ultimately produce new social behaviors.

In fact, law in its best expression is a codification of our cultural practices—turning our collective values and beliefs into a social contract. When those beliefs are faulty, we have laws that discriminate, oppress, and get in the way of a healthy society. And even when we make positive legal gains, if they are accomplished within a cultural frame that is not shared broadly, those gains are vulnerable to reversal. The near repeal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is an example of what can happen when tremendous legal wins are the product of long-term, rigorous activism but the underlying belief systems that made those legal protections necessary in the first place have not shifted. All *de jure* with very little *de facto* makes for temporary progress at best.

Art and culture can create the conditions that generate public will for improvements to our social structures and systems by altering the way we frame the story of an issue, expanding the number of people paying attention to who it impacts, and deepening our critical consciousness. For example, in Alameda County, CA there is a sheriff who is tasked with arresting more people this week than he did last, like most police officers around the country. But instead of developing crime-fighting tactics driven by stats and quotas, this sheriff uses theater to reduce the causes of crime itself. Sheriff Jorge "Piper" Ferreira has developed a one-man play of "17 different characters on both sides of an officer-involved



shooting,” which he performs in community centers and police precincts alike in order to foster conversations that can prevent the kinds of situations that result in either handcuffs or death.¹ His work re-frames 21st century policing—moving from a mandate to locate and punish criminality towards a mission to locate and preserve humanity.

As Ferreira’s work makes evident, **art and artists generate new civic practices. They can also inform the development of new public policies.** Here in NYC, the Theater of the Oppressed Legislative Theatre Festival features original plays based on the “actors’ lived experiences of discrimination in New York City.” The performances become a forum through which audiences and actors can collaboratively produce “alternative responses to these systemic problems on an individual, institutional, or policy level.”² These new ideas to address social challenges ranging from affordable housing to LGBTQ rights are ultimately presented to public officials so that NYC policies reflect the wisdom and will of its residents. In the realm of visual art, groups like Occupy Tate and The Natural History Museum have led high profile, creative assaults on the role of the fossil fuel industry in financing cultural institutions. Their efforts have led to a recent wave of art and science museums breaking ties with dirty energy by removing fossil fuel investments from their endowments. They are even credited with David Koch’s exit from the board of AMNH.

What is perhaps most remarkable is that **artists, and the cultural organizations who support them, continue to work for our collective good even as they face inequities within the art sector itself.** The New York City Cultural Agenda Fund in The New York Community Trust is a \$1.3 million collaboration of seven foundations seeking to ensure our city’s cultural activity remains vibrant and far-reaching. Through grants, research, and training programs, the Fund builds the capacity of arts organizations to advocate for equitable cultural policies and practices. In particular the Fund is concerned with a more equitable distribution of arts funding that recognizes the contributions of small and mid-sized organizations, their necessary inclusion (alongside artists) in neighborhood planning processes, and more broadly that the leadership of NYC’s cultural organizations, large and small, must reflect the actual diversity of our five boroughs (and not just comprise our city’s wealthy elite).

Institutions like the Brooklyn Museum, where today’s hearing takes place, play pivotal roles in our city’s civic life. Our tax dollars have been used to capitalize places like this museum as anchor institutions in our cultural economy. Besides serving their value as tourist destinations and important archives of cultural production, the scale of their facilities make them spaces where social and political ideas can be explored on an enormous stage. But grassroots cultural organizations play equally important roles. Often in partnership with local artists and community organizers, they lead the ground game of translating abstract

¹ Source: <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/blog/closer-look-artplace-summit-artists-table> (Accessed

² Source: http://www.tonyc.nyc/legislative_theatre (Accessed May 2, 2016)



political discussions into the context of their neighbors' daily lives. Even when operating outside the realm of politics these groups strengthen the social fabric of their neighborhoods by shaping residents' shared identity and sense of belonging.

Recognizing the vulnerability of these smaller entities in a funding landscape that does not yet reflect their full value, the Cultural Agenda Fund seeks to intervene by building the capacity of these groups to advocate on their own behalf and the residents they serve. Itself structured as a collaboration of seven philanthropies, **the Cultural Agenda Fund is an example of how private foundations can help interrupt the status quo:** providing seed funds to catalyze problem solving, identifying and encouraging new ways of operating through research and training, all while facilitating greater levels of collaboration among field leaders (as well as among their philanthropic peers).

A similar approach can be used to support artists directly, which the Rauschenberg Foundation applies through its Artist as Activist program. For the past two years the foundation has mounted an open call for proposals from artists applying their creative practice to a significant social challenge. **This summer the Rauschenberg Foundation will award more than \$750,000 to 10 artists and artist collectives who are leading large-scale efforts to address the epidemic of mass incarceration in black and brown communities nationwide.** The artists' projects not only seek to build greater awareness around this issue, but also to mobilize their communities to action, offering strategies for a world in which mass incarceration no longer exists. Tackling aspects as varied as the barriers to successful re-entry for men released from prison to the needs of children with incarcerated parents to the call to end solitary confinement-- this cohort will receive both direct grants as well as the opportunity to form a learning community who can compare notes and amplify the impact of their respective projects.

Art, artists, and cultural organizations have powerful roles to play in the processes of both cultural and structural change. The Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations should be applauded for organizing today's hearing. As it explores **the role(s) local government might play in supporting arts and culture working towards positive social change**, the Committee may find it useful to ask: *How might city agencies leverage the talents of artists as visionary thinkers and strategic partners in all aspects of civic life? Whether it is affordable housing or environmental degradation, homelessness or public safety, how can the city deploy the expertise of artists and arts organizations to surface new approaches to addressing longstanding challenges? How might public dollars be invested more deeply, and more directly in community-based cultural organizations actively engaged with the needs of their neighbors?*

Artists are in the business of imagination and innovation. What would it take to recognize them as critical assets in the business of social change?

Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change

To the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations:

The new term is “social practice.” However, artists have been political activists for a long time. Avant-garde artists have historically ignored national boundaries as well as aesthetic ones; Cabaret Voltaire, founded by Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball in Zurich, Switzerland in 1916, was comprised of artists from a half-dozen European countries who created sound poetry, made outrageous costumes, and employed film. These artists were political activists; Emmy served jail time for forging papers for friends who wanted to avoid the draft. The Russian Constructivist artists of the early 20th century famously organized mass performances in Red Square with the goal of changing public attitudes.

Here in the United States during the 1960s, George Maciunas, founder of the Fluxus art movement, wrote: “Fluxus objectives are social (not aesthetic)...Fluxus is against art as medium or vehicle promoting artists ego, since applied art should express the objective problem to be solved not artists’ personality or his ego. Fluxus therefore should tend towards collective spirit, anonymity and anti-individualism...”

Today, artist groups like Gulf Labor Coalition protest working conditions for laborers building the Guggenheim Museum’s new outpost in Dubai. Artists are outsiders, but this does not prevent them from feeling, thinking and acting upon the social and political conditions that affect us all.

How can such activity be fostered? A Blade of Grass Foundation, which is in turn supported by the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, provides support for individual artists and collaborative groups that produce works of social value. Although it is not a requirement, Creative Capital Foundation also supports activist works of art. And the Franklin Furnace Fund, a grant for emerging performance artists selected annually by peer review, often singles out artists who are trying to change the world.

Another way such activity can be fostered is for it to not be viewed as criminal. Before the Republican National Convention in New York in 2004, Mayor Bloomberg prophylactically arrested artists and activists who were planning actions and protests. An artist Franklin Furnace supported spent \$30,000 in legal fees clearing his name after he was arrested, and never got his “Magicbikie” art work (a bicycle with a cell phone on the handlebars of a bicycle that had a machine on the rear wheel that would spray chalk text-messages received on the sidewalks of New York) back from the NYC Police Department.

Activities such as graffiti—which was regarded as vandalism by the Giuliani Administration—have been used to create community since its invention here in New York City. Occupy Wall Street was an effort by activists, artists and regular people to

organize for social good. It deliberately eschewed hierarchy, and thus did not develop ringing sound bites and policy statements. But Occupy was on the front lines of helping people recover from Hurricane Sandy, demonstrating its fundamental purpose of social good. Such movements are constructive and as such deserve the support.

Artists may be counted upon to have their antennae out, feeling what the culture is up to, and turning it to social benefit. Many not-for-profit organizations have stepped into the funding gap in NYC public schools, engaging in art activities that enable students with different learning styles to excel. This in-school and after-school activity deserves support from the City Council; it has been proven that arts activity improves test scores among children--as well as spreading joy.

Martha Wilson
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I am Felicia Young, a social action artist and the Founder/Executive Director of Earth Celebrations, a non-profit organization I developed in 1991 based on the Lower East Side New York City to engage communities to effect ecological and social change through the arts. For the past 25 years I have engaged people and organizations throughout New York City and built grass-roots and city-wide coalition efforts through art projects aimed to impact ecological issues of waste management, recycling, community garden preservation, species and habitat conservation, river and water restoration, and climate change.

I established Earth Celebrations with a vision to provide a public forum engaging artists to work outside the traditional parameters of the commercial art world, and collaborate with diverse and marginalized communities to address and impact change on crucial environmental and social issues. Without a roadmap for this work or a developed field of practice to join, I set out from my position within the art world working at the Alternative Museum, a social and political art museum in New York, to explore these possibilities where art was integrated into community life and through a creative process of engagement bring about change on critical issues a community confronted. I utilized the theatrical-pageant public art form that integrated sculpture, painting, music, dance, theater, poetry, ceremony and performance, along with civic engagement and activism. This method provided an effective strategy for mobilizing creative community action and building broad-base coalition efforts to achieve common goals and bring about change on issues.

An example of a community-engaged cultural organizing project that was highly successfully was the Procession to Save Our Gardens that I cultivated with my local community on the Lower East Side for 15 years, which had layered and expanding impact, mobilizing a local and then citywide grassroots effort that led to the preservation of hundreds of community gardens on the Lower East Side and throughout New York City. I initiated the community-engaged art project in 1991 as a direct response to wanting to bring attention to the magnificent network of gardens that existed in my neighborhood of the Lower East Side, but under the looming threat of destruction by development plans and also propose the idea of their permanent preservation.

Many of gardens had at this point in time existed for 25 years, created by local residents in the 1970's and 80's, who got together in small groups and volunteered their time and effort to improve their own neighborhood riddled with rubble-strewn vacant lots that had become dens of crimes and drugs and sites where dangerous activities thrived. They cleared out the garbage and planted trees, flowers, and vegetable gardens. There were over 50 community gardens throughout the Lower East Side and the bulldozing of Adam Purple's Garden of Eden down the street from me back in 1986 had signaled the potential plight all the gardens might eventually face. The gardens were created as spontaneous act of urban improvisation. Local residents transformed their neglected neighborhood into a better environment for themselves and their community. They had become the hubs of positive community life and open space and nature within the city in this otherwise harsh urban environment, an irreplaceable asset to the overall community that had not been valued in quantifiable terms nor made public to the neighborhood and beyond to the city administration.

I proposed to the gardeners creating a large-scale art project with a day-long 8 hour procession visiting over 40 gardens between Grand Street and 13th Street and Bowery and Avenue D, a very large portion of the Lower East Side. Gardeners, local artists, residents and children in the neighborhood could create visual art, masks, giant puppets for the procession. Presentations of performance, dance, music, poetry and ceremonies at each garden could celebrate and tell the story of achievement, struggle and the effort to permanently preserve the gardens.

After the first year of the Procession to Save Our Gardens developed into an annual project because the community enthusiasm and will to do it again was there and it served the interests of the community on many levels. The project grew into a 9 month-long community building and creative production process with over 40 participating gardens and over 50 local organizations, schools, community centers, neighborhood block associations, 500 local artists, and several thousand participants that grew year after year. The community worked together over months creating visual art, songs, dances, performances, poetry, and contributing their numerous other skills to make this neighborhood project a reality.

Beyond acting out this creative vision and theatrical performance and ceremony publically in the streets and the gardens, we were in reality building the support and grassroots effort through the project and shaping the narrative of this drama, not in the world of art or theater, but in the daily reality and context of the most critical city issues

The project revealed the potential of these creative strategies for building and mobilizing a broad-based network, bringing together many local organizations, community centers, schools, and variety of individuals and disparate groups who did not often work together, for the common goal of preserving the gardens that benefited many people's lives in the neighborhood. The approach through visual art, mobile sculptures, performance, dance, music, song, poetry, and ceremony also engaged and built an effort that enabled the community to collectively express itself creatively and connect people to feel and experience the importance of the gardens on an emotional level. It provided an inspirational point of entry for diverse engagement of people and groups in the community who would normally not participate in political actions and civic processes and people beyond the gardeners who were more indirectly affected. It took the edge off fears, embedding the high stake goals within the immediate experience of creativity and imaginative play. It generated excitement with the potential of making what we can imagine a tangible experience that can be shared. The project actively demonstrated and built an alternative mode of action that was joyous, collaborative and creative. Beyond the goal of preserving the gardens, the process was also a message and the process was also a goal.

As the threat to the gardens increased we were able build upon the activated community network established through this large-scale community art project, initiating the Lower East Side Garden Preservation Coalition in 1994 and then the citywide coalition bringing together gardeners from Harlem, Bronx, Upper West Side, Brooklyn and Lower East Side. The activation of the coalition working through more traditional grassroots organizing methods and simultaneously with the ongoing community-engaged art project created a very powerful combination, each method significantly enhancing the achievements that alone may not have been reached. We had catalyzed an effective and creative effort building bridges from our low-income marginalized neighborhood, to people and institutions in positions of power, gathering increasing support from elected officials, philanthropists, lawyers, and celebrities. These efforts led to Mayor Bloomberg upon taking office transferring hundreds of gardens from their slated status to be destroyed by development plans to the parks department, temporarily protecting them.

Despite these massive achievements and their lasting impact on City of New York, this work was minimally funded through small grants through Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and New York State Council on the Arts' Manhattan Community Arts Fund and the Fund For Creative Communities and Department of Cultural Affairs Public Service Award, and small grants for community organizing. This was largely a massive volunteer effort of thousands of people within the community creating culture and reclaiming the arts to impact and bring about social, political, and ecological change. Community-engaged arts bringing about significant positive impact should be strongly supported at the grassroots and community level.



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Groundswell Testimony
New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change

Wednesday, May 4, 2016, Brooklyn Museum

Nazli Parvizi
Board President, Groundswell

Good afternoon. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nazli Parvizi, and I am board president of Groundswell, New York City's leading community public art organization. With me is Patrick Dougher, our Director of Programs.

Groundswell's mural projects engage artists, marginalized and under-served young people, and community members in creating visible and lasting change in neighborhoods across New York City.

Groundswell's mission is to bring together artists, youth, and community organizations together to use art as a tool for social change. Our guiding principle is that thoughtful community public art can open space for meaningful dialogue on a wide range of ideas and perspectives, while beautifying neighborhoods and engaging youth in processes of personal and societal change through their paid work with us.

All of Groundswell's mural projects unfold in four stages:

1. A community partner defines their objectives for a mural;
2. The mural team undertakes a research process that results in a visual language that addresses the objectives of the mural;
3. Using this visual language, the mural team Groundswell teaching artist develop a design that is approved by the community partner; and
4. The mural is painted by the team and dedicated in a public ceremony.

From nearly 20 years of developing this process and working in New York City communities, we have many stories about how art can help effect social change. For our testimony today, we would like to focus on a relatively new program from which we have seen profound and inspirational results in the space of just a few months.

Public Art/Public Housing

With the support of Council Member Torres, in January, Groundswell launched a program called Public Art/Public Housing. Through this program, we are collaborating with Tenants Associations at five NYCHA developments to create three projects at each development. The sites for this first round were selected from the 15 target developments of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety. We are at one development in each borough.

Groundswell's interest in working at NYCHA developments stemmed from our sense that these are communities with stories to tell, but which, because of the complexities of working at the developments, have been hard for us to reach.

With funding in hand and introductions to the tenant's associations from the NYCHA administration, our first meetings the TA's were not successful. We were told that residents were not interested in art programs when there were other pressing needs at the developments, and that our presence at the developments was regarded with suspicion.

As we got to know our collaborators on the Tenant Associations better, they became supporters of the program. We were offering paid work activities for youth in the developments, opportunities to articulate issues of concern to the community, and chances to improve the appearance of lackluster areas of their neighborhoods at no cost.

In early April, we completed the first set of murals at the five developments, which were greeted with universal excitement and enthusiasm for the next project. This is a familiar reaction for us. Visible neighborhood change at almost any scale creates excitement and enthusiasm. We were less prepared for other responses to the projects.

- A number of youth said that they vaguely aware of the community centers at their developments, but until participating in the Groundswell project, had never been there;
- Other participants, who were all aged 14-24, expressed their appreciation for our offering a non-sports youth activity at the community centers in the evening hours;
- Many youth were unaware of the existence of the Tenants Associations and attended their first meetings in the context of the program, as they researched the mural topics;
- The projects created unusual opportunities for cross-generational conversation between youth participants and older residents of the developments as part of the research process for the murals. The youth were surprised to learn from long-term residents that perceptions of public housing were once more positive than they are today.

In short, even without addressing the specific content of the murals, we saw vividly through **Public Art/Public Housing** how art can foster community, which is the platform for creating change.

Through the past few months of developing art projects in collaboration with NYCHA residents, we have learned things about using art as a tool for social change in the distinctive context of public housing in New York. These include:

Residents must believe that they will lead the change they desire. As I mentioned earlier, our meetings with the Tenants Associations began with the residents declaring their skepticism about our intentions and wariness about top-down interventions in which they had no say. This skepticism softened when it became clear that our mural making process gives them key decisions about the artwork content and location.

There is tremendous interest in sustained community programs, particularly ones that help develop workforce skills among youth. The most positive initial responses to our project centered on our policy of paying youth participants for their work on the murals. In all, Public Art/Public Housing will employ 200 young adults by time it concludes over the summer.

In a related vein, **our organization has been frustrated by the stringent identification requirements of programs such as SYEP and Work Progress Program.** It has been difficult to qualify many interested and eligible youth in NYCHA developments because of their difficulty in assembling up to eight separate documents to confirm their eligibility before the application deadlines.

Finally, we have found that **NYCHA residents are hungry to share their knowledge of their communities and envision their own futures.** The residents we have worked with have delighted in the chance to celebrate their connections to their communities through public art. We have been so honored by this opportunity to recognize, affirm and celebrate the lived experiences of NYCHA residents.

Advancing social change is a slow-moving, sometimes unpredictable process. Throughout its history, Groundswell has focused as much on process as on artistic outcomes out of a conviction that successful public art projects create tangible benchmarks and points of cohesion amid processes that are less tangible. Art creates community, and communities create change.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

For more information and information about specific projects: <http://www/groundswell.nyc>



**TESTIMONY OF JASON BAUMANN
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**

**COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

ART AND CULTURE AS A CATALYST FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

May 4, 2016

Good afternoon. My name is Jason Baumann and I am a Coordinator of Collection Assessment, Humanities, and LGBT Collections at the New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to start by thanking Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer, and the entire City Council, for holding this hearing and allowing us to testify today.

It is my great privilege to assist in the preservation and promotion of the Library's historic archives of LGBT and AIDS activist history. These archives include the papers of pioneering organizations like the Mattachine Society of New York, the Gay Activists Alliance, People with AIDS Coalition, and of individuals like Barbara Gittings. These collections bear witness to the tremendous courage and creativity that these activists demonstrated in order to make our city and our nation more conscious, just, and kind.

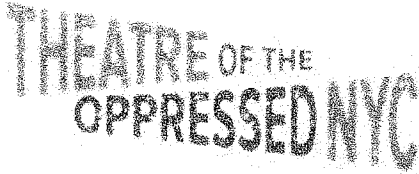
One of the most important points proved by these archives is the deep interrelationship between the arts and social change. For instance, NYPL is the repository of the archives of the AIDS activist organization ACT UP New York and their closely associated artist collective Gran Fury. These groups changed not only our conceptions of HIV, politics, and civil disobedience, but also the possibility of the arts as activism. ACT UP transformed strategies of social protest through new forms of street theater, ranging from die-ins to practical jokes, which broke the boundaries between politics and performance. Gran Fury broke free from the boundaries of the



art gallery to spread their agitprop message in newspapers, billboards, and bus advertisements. Another example is our collection of photographs from Kay Tobin Lahusen, an activist photographer who changed the image of lesbians in the United States; creating the first images of lesbians as happy, well-adjusted individuals. Furthermore, At NYPL's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the papers of writer/editor Joseph Beam, instrumental in fostering the Black Gay literary renaissance, testify to the power of literature to transform the way that LGBT people of color conceive of themselves and politics. These, often underappreciated, artist/activists revolutionized our society by creating new ways of seeing —visions of a more equitable world.

In my work at NYPL, I have seen how these archives inspire the next generation of social change. For example, the recent resurgence of interest in the AIDS activism of the 1980s and 90s has lead younger activists to explore the posters and agitprop art of groups like ACT UP and Gran Fury. They are both drawing on this historic work and transforming it to face the challenges of the HIV epidemic today. A similar process is currently taking place in a renewed interest in the politics and aesthetics of organizations like the Black Panthers, whose work is also documented by the Library's Schomburg Center. Without a doubt, libraries and museums are pivotal in providing historical memory and continuity in this process.

I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to preserve and make available these immensely important bodies of work. I would like to again thank the committee and the Council Members for offering me this opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.



May 4, 2016

Representatives from Theatre of the Oppressed NYC:

Jon Mincey (actor with the Concrete Justice Troupe), John Leo (Joker/Facilitator, john@tonyc.nyc)

Theatrical monologue testimony from Jon Mincey about the hardship of finding a safe place to live within the shelter system in NYC and the stigma of having HIV.

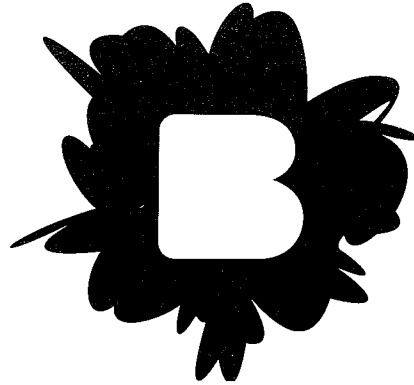
Theatre of the Oppressed NYC partners with communities facing discrimination to inspire transformative action through theatre. At TONYC's annual Legislative Theatre Festival (*taking place this week!*), we take socio-political impact one step further: you will watch original plays (like the monologue you just saw) based on the actors' lived experiences of discrimination in New York City. You will act onstage alongside the actors to offer alternative responses to these systemic problems on an individual, institutional, or policy level. Representatives from City Council, the Mayor's Office and the federal government are present to take your ideas and craft new policies. Finally, you and your fellow audience members vote to carry these ideas forward to the representatives' respective chambers. You will use theatre, in other words, to spark concrete civic change.

Augusto Boal, the pioneer of Theatre of the Oppressed, created "Legislative Theater" when he was a city councilman in Rio de Janeiro, as a way to give his voters the opportunity to voice their opinions. Some thirteen laws were created through legislative theatre during Boal's time in government. The technique has since been used overseas in countries including Canada and the United Kingdom.

This is why the New York City should support arts for social impact and civic engagement, and involve the arts in policy change by inviting groups like TONYC to testify through theatre at hearings and to perform in council chambers to create new laws.

68 Jay Street, Suite 220
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May 4, 2016



**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**

Good afternoon Chair Van Bramer and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Catherine Morris and I am the Sackler Family Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum. Thank you for providing this opportunity to testify on the important topic "Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change."

The Sackler Center for Feminist Art was founded at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007 with the mission of creating and supporting dialogue in visual arts communities – local, national and international – addressing the fifty year legacy and impact of the feminist movement, while also envisioning ways in which we can continue to be a vital contributor to the changing and developing priorities of contemporary feminisms into the future. Focusing on producing dynamic and influential exhibitions and engaging programming, the Center has presented twenty-nine exhibitions, three special projects and hundreds of programs over the past nine years. This fall we will begin a year-long celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Sackler Center with a museum-wide initiative that will include nine distinct curatorial projects and an extraordinary calendar of related programs.

Our current exhibition, *Agitprop!* grew from a desire to examine my suspicion that it must be possible to find in any historical moment and anyplace in the world artists making work intended to spark dialogue and challenge the status quo. One of the extraordinary opportunities a place like the Brooklyn Museum offers is the chance to think broadly about history and human connections. As the show illustrates, at key moments in history, artists have reached beyond galleries and museums, using their work as a call to action to create political and social change. For the past hundred years, the term "agitprop," a combination of *agitation* and *propaganda*, has been used to directly reflect the intent of this work.

Agitprop! explores the complexity, range, and impact of these artistic practices by presenting both historical and contemporary work—including photography, film, prints, banners, street actions, songs, digital files, and web platforms—within a unique framework that expands over the run of the exhibition. It opens with works by twenty contemporary artists committed to social change, in dialogue with five historical case studies. Two more waves of contemporary work were subsequently added—with each wave of artists choosing those in the next. These projects highlight social justice struggles since the turn of the twentieth century, from women's suffrage and anti-lynching campaigns to contemporary demands for human rights, environmental advocacy, and protests against war, mass incarceration and economic inequality.

The value of exhibitions like *Agitprop!* is that it fosters a vital sense of engagement with multiple communities and invites an understanding that museums are responsive, open and available to multiple points of view while also presenting art that contributes to our own cultural heritage; one that reflects current lived experience.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share our work.

New York City Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Wednesday, May 4, 2016 – Brooklyn Museum of Art

Testimony Presented by Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Executive Director, El Museo del Barrio

Thank you Chair James Van Bramer and the other committee members and the entire City Council for this opportunity to speak before you.

The City of New York has a history of assuming great democratic responsibilities. These responsibilities are manifold, and we are here to talk about one sector of civic responsibility: culture. The fabric of civic life is interwoven with culture throughout.

We know that the City Council and the Mayor's Office are working hard to make New York a more equitable city for its citizens. We want to stress that among the instruments of social change, such as education, social services and employment opportunities, culture is has also been an active, vibrant field of activity for those who want to imagine what society can be and do, as well as those who want to promote change or take public positions about the world they live in.

Arts and culture can catalyze ideas and promote modes of living that benefit the wellbeing of a city's citizenry. It is with this understanding that El Museo del Barrio was founded in 1969 on the principle of democratic representation, at a time in our history when the Puerto Rican community had no presence in school curricula or in museum presentations. The quality of civic life involves more than the right to vote and work; it includes the right to be recognized, to exist as a contributor to society. Only cultural recognition can do this.

Fighting for the advancement of all people in our multifaceted city must include the support of the arts and culture. This support is as basic to the infrastructure of the city as paving roads—more so, in fact. For these reasons we ask that the City Council support the supplemental increase requested on behalf of the Programs Group and the Cultural Institutions Group. The City's objectives to build a more equitable habitus will be greatly enhanced and strengthened by fueling this vital engine of social-cultural change. We thank the City Council and the Mayor's Office for engaging us in these conversations and look forward to working in partnership with you to improve what the city can offer its citizens.

Lincoln Center

Chairman Van Bramer, Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations: my name is Alex Sarian, and I am honored to represent Lincoln Center on this important topic.

Prior to today, City Council has heard testimonies from fellow Lincoln Center staff members on how our programs partner with over 250 schools a year; respond robustly to the needs of children with disabilities and their families; empower adults and juveniles residing in non-secure placement facilities; engage adults with dementia and their caregivers; and transform the lives of veterans healing from physical and emotional trauma. My colleagues have articulated “WHAT” we do, and “HOW” we do it. Today, I share “WHY” we do it, and how our commitment to civic engagement connects through Lincoln Center’s wide range of programs.

Our founding Chairman said,

“The arts are not for the privileged few, but for the many. Their place is not on the periphery of daily life, but at its center. They should function not merely as another form of entertainment but, rather, should contribute significantly to our well-being and happiness.”

More than 50 years later, Lincoln Center still commits energies and resources to the intersection of culture, participatory democracy, and social justice. The late Dr. Maxine Greene, Lincoln Center Education’s longtime philosopher-in-residence, said:

“The arts, it has been said, cannot change the world, but they may change human beings who might change the world.”

We take this responsibility seriously: to partner with likeminded individuals and community-based organizations to ensure that access to the arts unifies people, instead of dividing them.

- We partner with social service agencies across the five boroughs to welcome more than 500 families with financial and other barriers to productions on the Lincoln Center campus, pre- and post- show activities, and sustained opportunities to return time and time again.
- In partnership with the NYC Department of Education, we host the Middle School Arts Audition Boot Camp, which levels the playing field for 8th graders in Title 1 schools seeking to audition for specialized arts high schools. This year, 98% of our participants received an offer to attend a specialized high school.
- And we are excited to report that as a result of our work with IDNYC, we are engaging more New Yorkers than ever before – in terms of age, income, race, ethnicity and education.

The arts cultivate a skillset and a mindset that are indispensable for the 21st Century, and Lincoln Center equips audiences with the tools to serve as active participants in their communities. In the words of Jessica Torres, a 19 year old high school student who participated in one of our programs:

“This was an entirely judgement free zone. I was able to speak my soul unapologetically and comfortably for the first time in my life.”

Through our work, as Dr. Maxine Greene would put it, people “imagine the world as it if could be otherwise.”

On behalf of Lincoln Center, and the millions of visitors we welcome every year, we thank the council for its continued support of arts that challenge the status quo and inspire conversation.



Tom Block

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Good afternoon. My name is Tom Block and I am the Founding Director of the *Institute of Prophetic Activist Art*, an art-activist incubator at Dixon Place. I want to thank Majority Leader and Committee Chair Van Bramer; the members of the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations; and Anne Pasternak and the staff of the Brooklyn Museum, for hosting today's hearing. I would also like to thank Ginny Louloudes, Executive Director of A.R.T./New York for inviting me to testify here today.

I have a 20-year career in art activism, as a painter, author, playwright and producer. During these two decades of work, I have grown to appreciate how the objectives of many involved in government, and specifically the New York City Council, and the goals of art-activists have much in common. We may use different methods, but we share the desire to work toward racial, gender and economic fairness; heal the environment and move toward a just society.

I have done much art-activist work in Department of Cultural Affairs funded institutions, and have come to appreciate how important this aid is not only for the encouragement of positive and forward looking art activism, but also for the greater society, as we work together to heal our social ills. The intersection of governmental support and art-activist creativity offers a unique opportunity to reimagine collective issues, and propose novel solutions to them.

For example, funding from the DCA and other sources has allowed Ellie Covan and Dixon Place to provide me with tremendous assistance for my art-activist initiatives, including free space, advertising and outreach, and a well-known venue to, among other things, found the *Institute of Prophetic Activist Art*, where I work with New York City artists to help them build their art-activist projects.

At the Institute, I have worked with an actress inspired by Black Lives Matter to create a collective of Black artists and activists; a transgendered South Asian man who is building a project to gently introduce ideas of gender-otherness into traditional South Asian communities; the first openly Gay Jewish pop star in New York, who is working on an autobiographical project; a “fractivist,” who is using theater to raise awareness of the dangers of “fracking” and numerous other art-activists as they build their endeavors.

I can say with a great degree of confidence, that without the funding provided to Dixon Place, that venue would be unable to provide a home for this novel endeavor. This is one example of how DCA funding can help generate restorative energy that ripples out through creative non-profit partners and into individual projects, and then the general society.

Many thanks for the opportunity to speak with you today. If you would like further information on the variety of projects I have been involved with at DCA funded venues, I would be more than happy to provide you with a detailed list.

My art-activist endeavors in *NYC Department of Cultural Affairs* funded venues:

Dixon Place

Institute of Prophetic Activist Art

New York, NY

The *Institute of Prophetic Activist Art* was founded at Dixon Place in 2015. I teach a series of classes in art-activism, the spiritual underpinnings of activism and art theory under this moniker.



I am in the early stages of producing the first *International Human Rights Art Festival* in New York City's vibrant cultural history. The event will involve 100+ activist artists presenting 50+ events over a weekend, March 3-5, 2017. Presidential Medal of Arts Winner Norman Lear is our advisor.

Emission: The premier of this multi-media theatrical presentation concerning global climate change, and one lonely person's attempt to bring attention to it, took place at Dixon Place, May 2015.

My *Response to Machiavelli* art exhibit, exploring the pernicious Machiavellian attitudes that beleaguer our political system, and using art to offer a response to this energy, was exhibited in the gallery at Dixon Place from October 2015-February 2016.

My *Human Rights Painting Project*, in conjunction with Amnesty International, which uses portraiture to highlight the stories of human rights defenders from around the world, will be exhibited at Dixon Place in February-March, 2017.

Theater for the New City

My play *White Noise*, which explored an African American artist in existential crisis, who was viewed by the liberal White people around him as simply a large Black man, had its New York premier here in June-July, 2013.

My multi-media exploration of immigration in conflict with the values promoted by our C.I.A., *La Bestia: Sweet Mother*, had a full production here in September 2014.

Emission, my multi-media theatrical presentation concerning global climate change, and one lonely person's attempt to bring attention to it, had a full production here in September 2015.

HERE Arts Center

My multi-media exploration of immigration in conflict with the values promoted by our C.I.A., *La Bestia: Sweet Mother*, was included in the Downtown Urban Theatre Festival, May 2015.

A.R.T.-NY

I developed my multi-media exploration of the clash between heart and head, art and reality and two homeless men's attempts to solve the problem within one lost, young soul. Entitled *Sub Basement*, this play went through development with *Athena Theatre Company* and then an Equity Reading here in 2014-2015.

Urban Stages

My 10-minute play "The Debate," examining what would happen if presidential candidates were hooked up to lie detectors for their debates, premiered at Urban Stages *The President Plays*, February 2016.

Drama League

My play *Duck*, which examines the internal disintegration of a C.I.A. officer who loses faith in the government that nurtured him, had a staged reading here as part of Wide Eyed Productions *WINKS* series, May 2015.

Jewish Plays Project

My tough, multi-media play entitled *Oud Player on the Tel*, which looks at the founding of Israel from the perspective of the Palestinians, was developed and had its premier as part of the Jewish Plays Project *Open Festival*, June 2014.

Secret Theatre

My play *Duck*, which examines the internal disintegration of a C.I.A. officer who loses faith in the government that nurtured him, had a developmental reading as part of the New Voices Project, in November 2015.

Testimony of Meggan Dodd at NYC Council Hearing 5/4/16
Honest Accomplice Theatre

Good afternoon. My name is Meggan Dodd and I am an Ensemble Member of and Community Liaison for Honest Accomplice Theater. I want to thank Majority Leader and Committee Chair Van Bramer, the members of the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, and of course, Anne Pasternak and the staff of the Brooklyn Museum for hosting today's important hearing.

Honest Accomplice Theatre's (HAT) mission is to deepen understanding and acceptance of, and incite community dialogue about, women and trans people, by exploring topics that are often silenced, seen as shameful, or portrayed as one-dimensional. Many topics remain binary, leaving a community of women and trans people feeling ignored and misrepresented.

Honest Accomplice energizes that community and those around them by engaging professionals and members of the community to work together to devise new work that makes visible the nuanced and personal experiences of women and trans people. This approach engages the audience, allowing them to relate the experiences played out on stage to those in their own lives, as well empowering the community itself with an opportunity to construct and own their narratives. We believe the creation of such work is vital to counteract mainstream art, which often ignores, or misrepresents the voices and interests of our diverse participants.

We tour performances to college campuses and high schools, as this is where many of our cultural crises are played out, challenged, or upheld; it is where young people can discover and explore new identities, and yet may experience great isolation. We believe theatre can engage students, energize them to think critically, provide them with the opportunity to see their perspectives both presented and challenged on stage, and galvanize them to become more engaged and discerning community members.

Our performances, workshops and talkbacks have had a significant impact on the lives and perspectives of our audience members. After seeing one of our pieces called *The Birds & The Bees: Unabridged*, one audience member said "The show was a total game-changer. Thanks for making me think." And Roberta Sklar, an LGBT activist and theater director, said "The Birds and the Bees: Unabridged made me laugh and even want to cry. It's not heavy handed and is a platform for opening up crucial conversations that otherwise might not happen because of the nature of the content."

We firmly believe that art can and should be a catalyst for political and social change, and are encouraged by our City Council's recognition of art's power and potential to affect our lives.

Meggan Dodd
She/Her/Hers
Community Liaison
Honest Accomplice Theatre
meggandodd@honestaccomplice.org



**Testimony of Guy Yedwab, Managing Director
League of Independent Theater**

***City Council Hearing on Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social
Change***

May 5, 2016

Thank you to Chairman and to the Council for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Guy Yedwab, Managing Director for the League of Independent Theater. The League is a 501 (c) 6 Political Advocacy Organization, and is testifying today on behalf of the city's 50,000 independent theatre artists.

On December 29th, 1989, when Czechoslovakia had its first elections for President after decades of Communist rule, they elected Vaclav Havel, perhaps history's only playwright president. This was recognition of all the time he had spent writing plays, books, and essays, hassled, censored, arrested by authorities.

He wrote that the power that every person has is to speak out the truth – through essays, performances, photographs, any means at their disposal – and that just the act of speaking the truth had power.

Culture – visual art, performance, writing, translations, poetry – is how the community speaks to itself publicly. It's how we speak truth to each other, through many different languages and through many different modes.

You see culture speaking out in all kinds of ways. In independent theater, I've been proud to watch Diana Oh's installation "my lingerie play" where she stood in public bearing signs that bear witness to public harassment and mistreatment of women – literally standing on a soapbox to and inviting people to join her, and bear their own witness. Theater, starting a vital conversation about how people live. Making change.

Over the last year, I've seen art speaking to injustice. To police brutality. To the need to extend compassion to refugees in need. To the need not to destroy the planet we live on.

I've seen artists investing themselves to invest in every community they hold dear, with whatever cultural tools are at their disposal.

Since 2008, in my field (theater), we've lost at least 70 performance venues across the five boroughs. [REDACTED]

We've heard many voices today on the power of art and culture to spark political and social change. Artists and culture will continue to be made. But the artists who make it will be driven out of their homes and their communities by rising rents. Just as we speak about food deserts, we will find New York City growing cultural deserts, where only the wealthy have access to consume art, and most New Yorkers will have lost the ability to actually take part.

I ask the Mayor and City Council to invest properly in art and culture, so that art and culture can continue to invest in our city.

League of Independent Theater Written Testimony
City Council Hearing on Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change
May 4, 2016

League of Independent Theater Program Proposals

The following is the set of proposals which the League of Independent Theater drafted with its membership as part of the endorsement process in the 2013 City Council Elections.

These proposals are presented as examples of the opportunities that exist to support the arts and culture in New York.

The League of Independent Theater ("LIT") is the only 501(c) 6 advocacy organization for the independent theater and performing arts population of New York City. As such, the League and its coalition partners, which comprise cultural and performance institutions that serve over 50,000 independent performing artists, 86% of whom vote, far exceeding the general population, entreat our city's elected officials to acknowledge the independent theater sector's historical significance and cultural, civic and economic importance to New York City, and to demonstrate tangible support of independent theater in order to allow it to continue its positive impact. LIT will endorse candidates in every city race and work to form alliances with other cultural advocacy organizations in the city. Our endorsement will be based on the candidate's willingness to adopt the following performing arts platform:

As a pro-performing arts elected official, I will work to:

1. Create access to low-cost and/or no-cost Community Facilities Spaces that are currently available and remain unused throughout the City through the creation of a Community Facilities Space Database.
2. Create access to empty and unused City property to be re-purposed as temporary rehearsal, office, and (if appropriate) performance space.
3. Include non-profit performance venues in the favorable electricity and utility rates enjoyed by religious institutions and the VFW.
4. Implement a proposal that would reduce or eliminate property tax assessments for those non-profit organizations that have an artistic mission and/or rent performance space to similar non-profit performing arts groups with artistic missions of their own. This proposal was unanimously ratified by all twelve (12) Manhattan Community Boards.
5. Secure affordable and permanent low-cost housing for working artists.
6. Support the commission of an economic impact study for the independent theater territory.
7. Work with the Department of Cultural Affairs to expand the Cultural Institutions Group to include the independent theater sector's anchor venues.
8. Install plaques at sites of historical import and rename streets after the founders of the independent and Off-Off Broadway community

Additional Information

Some additional points of information to provide context for these remarks:

- An average of 36% of the cost of production goes to performance and rehearsal space, meaning that independent artists are particularly vulnerable to rising rents.
- The following map is from a 2010 study from the New York Innovative Theatre Foundation¹ showing the distribution of Off-Off-Broadway theatermakers surveyed throughout the city. This is an incomplete study based on audience survey responses, but speaks to the wide distribution of theatermakers throughout the city. We hope the proposed Cultural Plan will include an updated and thorough impact study of independent theater to the culture and economy of New York City, and will address the needs of the entire theatre artist community.



- Despite the cultural community having a strong presence in New York City, many schools do not have arts programs, as is documented in the map below taken from the New York City Comptroller's office report *State of the Arts*².

The League of Independent Theater has begun to work with local schools

¹ *Demographic Study of Off-Off-Broadway Practitioners*. New York Innovative Theatre Foundation, 2010

² *State of the Arts*. Office of the New York City Comptroller.
<http://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/state-of-the-arts/>

Closed Arts Venues (2009-2016)^{3 4}

The following is a list of the independent theater, music, and dance performance spaces known to have vanished in the period of current crisis. This is likely an incomplete list.

285 Kent - 11211
29th Street Theatre - 10001
3rd Ward - 11237
78th Street Theatre Lab – 10024
92YTribeca - 10013
Actors Playhouse – 10014
Amato Opera Theatre - 10003
b.pm. - 11211
Bowerie Lane Theatre – 10002
Brooklyn Rod & Gun - 11211
Center Stage – 10010
Chelsea Repertory Company – 10011
Collapsible Hole - 11201
Collective Unconscious - 10002
Common Basis Theatre - 10036
Creative Place Theatre - 10036
Culture Project – 10012
Dance New Amsterdam - 10007
Death By Audio - 11211
Douglas Fairbanks Theatre – 10036
Douglass Street Music Collective - 11217
Emerging Artists Theatre – 10036
Exit Art - 10018
Flatiron Theatre – 10011
Galapagos Arts Space - 11201
Gene Frankel Theatre – 10012
Glasslands - 11211
Greenwich Street Theatre – 10014
Goodbye Blue Monday - 11221
Grove Street Playhouse - 10014
Hinton Battle Dance Laboratory - 10036
House of Candles – 10002
Incubator Arts Project - 10003
Intar Theatre on 53rd Street – 10019
Interart Theater - 10019
Location One - 10013
John Houseman Theatre - 10036
Jose Quintero – 10036
Joyce Theater - 10012

³ *List of lost / closed Off-Off-Broadway Spaces.* New York Innovative Theatre Awards, Inc. <http://www.nyitawards.com/news/newsitem.asp?storyid=78>

⁴ *Closed Venues.* JACK Arts. <http://www.jackny.org/closedvenues.html>

The Living Theatre - 10001
The Living Room - 10002
Magic Futurebox - 11232
Manhattan Theatre Source - 10011
Michael Weller Theatre - 10036
Nat Horne Theatre - 10036
Oasis Theatre - 10019
Ohio Theatre - 10012
Pelican Theatre - 10036
Perry Street Theatre - 10012
The Piano Store - 10002
The Pink Pony - 10002
Red Room - 10003
Provincetown Playhouse - 10012
Sanford Meisner Theatre - 10011
Show World Theatre - 10036
The Spoon Theatre - 10018
Stage Left Studio - 10001
Studio Dante - 10001
Sullivan Street Playhouse - 10012
The Tank on 42nd Street - 10036
Theatorium - 10002
Theatre 5 - 10036
Theatre Studio - 10036
Theatre1010 - 10028
Todo Con Nada - 10002
Two Moon Art House and Café - 11215
Trilogy Theatre - 10036
Variety Arts Theater - 10003
Village Gate Theatre - 10012
Vital Children's Theatre on 42nd Street - 10036
Where Eagles Dare - 10018
Zebulon - 11211
Zipper Factory - 10018

Art and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change

My name is Sheila Lewandowski, Founder and Director of The Chocolate Factory Theater, a nonprofit award-winning performing arts venue in Long Island City, Queens. I thank you, Chairman Van Bramer and the Committee for this opportunity to submit testimony on Art & Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change.

I believe in freedom of expression and speech and believe that artists - when allowed to truly pursue creative goals without expectation of commercial success - are the best examples of such freedoms. I believe that it is important to protect and support such opportunities for artists since it is through their creations that we get/society gets a true reflection of progress, regressions, suppression, celebratory human experiences - all that is good, bad and possible.

That is political and can help drive change.

Of course I believe that artists should be paid - I just believe they need to be able to create without penalization that might censor or restrict or constrict their desired messaging.

I am grateful for the hearing and the opportunity to submit testimony but a fear remains and that is ...in recognizing the power of Art & Culture as a catalyst for change there are those who will seek to control it.

I was just in Cairo and met with artists and arts groups. They shared that arts organizations and studios were raided when the military seized control of the government again recently. Work was destroyed & artists were abused/imprisoned... just enough to get a message across. The message was to remember who was in charge.

That is political.

I was in Mexico last week and surrounded by images of Frida Kahlo & Diego Rivera. And, we know what Rockefeller did to Rivera's mural.

That was political.

I had a conversation recently with a few people from South Africa and they spoke of the music of Sixto Rodriguez from Detroit and how important it was in the apartheid movement for them and many young people like them. They were unaware that the artist was in America until after the music influenced them. And, he was unaware of the influence of his music on them until years into giving up on his music (that he returned to).

There is the story of Vladimir Mayakovsky a Russian poet, writer and artist who was a darling of Stalin's creating beautiful propaganda for the Communist movement. He fell out of favor with

Stalin when (after the Communists seized power) he continued to challenge thinking and refused to just propagandize. He had an extended vacation to Siberia and had his travel restricted.

Of course there are the Guerrilla Girls, there was *Silence=Death*, works of art like *Angels in America*, and much more.

Art is powerful and I look forward to much more that challenges my thinking and life experience. That is fulfilling. That is political and social.

The setting of the hearing itself is one of encouraging free speech and expression.

Quotes & references -

"Art consistently toys with notions of power, whether to comment on the horrors of war, as evidenced in the work of artists such as [Richard Serra](#) ([Season 1](#)) as well as other Art21 artists including [Nancy Spero](#), [Alfredo Jaar](#), and [Jenny Holzer](#) (all [Season 4](#)), or to pay homage to powerful figures, as reflected in more traditional forms such as monuments, presidential portraits, and religious imagery. On the other hand, art can also serve the controversial function of propaganda, looking back upon court painters like [Jacques-Louis David](#) and [Diego Velasquez](#) to today's [Venice Biennale](#) positioning contemporary artists as nation builders." http://blog.art21.org/2009/01/21/art-and-politics-an-introduction/#.VyjmDD_InIo

The art field is a space of wild contradiction and phenomenal exploitation. It is a place of power mongering, speculation, financial engineering, and massive and crooked manipulation. But it is also a site of commonality, movement, energy, and desire. In its best iterations it is a terrific cosmopolitan arena populated by mobile shock workers, itinerant salesmen of self, tech whiz kids, budget tricksters, supersonic translators, PhD interns, and other digital vagrants and day laborers. It's hard-wired, thin-skinned, plastic-fantastic. A potential commonplace where competition is ruthless and solidarity remains the only foreign expression. Peopled with charming scumbags, bully-kings, almost-beauty-queens. It's HDMI, CMYK, LGBT. Pretentious, flirtatious, mesmerizing." <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>

& a real good read -

"Perhaps it is only through arts criticism and its absolute belief in art's imaginative ground that we will be able to combat an ever-growing lack of faith in art's autonomy and power. We will never be able to restore our embattled cultural life—reverse the budget cuts, undo the increasingly utilitarian and mechanistic arguments that are made on behalf of the arts—if we do not restore art's freestanding value as a value worth fighting for.

I am not arguing for the ivory tower. It is beyond dispute that art and the people who make art affect us in a great many ways. Even as we acknowledge the excellence of the artist and the art, we may find it difficult to listen to a singer who had a booming career during the Third Reich, or

watch a movie as racist as *Birth of a Nation*, or listen to passages as anti-Semitic as some in the *St. John Passion* and *The Merchant of Venice*. And we may especially cherish an artist whose life and opinions and art seem to comprise an admirable whole, an example for many being George Eliot, who not only produced *Middlemarch* but was also a philo-Semite and a feminist. (Although both in her own day and in ours there have been quibbles with her feminism.) There is something almost lovable about the case of Nabokov, that most bejeweled and intransigently elitist of aesthetes, who never abandoned his father's proud liberalism and had no use for the totalizing programs of the left or the right."

<https://newrepublic.com/article/118958/liberals-are-killing-art-insisting-its-always-political>

NYC Council Hearing on Arts and Culture as a Catalyst for Political and Social Change

Wednesday, May 4, 2016

Brooklyn Museum

George Emilio Sanchez

I want to thank the Chair and all the members of the panel, as well as, all the people who have come here to share their testimony for such an important call. I wear many hats as a performance artist in my own right and as a professor who teaches in CUNY but today I am here as a representative of Emergenyc, a program that aims to explore the intersection of arts and activism. We've been in existence for 9 years and each year we work with a cohort of 18 participants who are passionate about numerous issues tied to equality and justice. But as I only have three minutes I am going to cut to the chase and piggy back on a point raised by Marta Vega. And although I know I am speaking to the choir in this room today, I also know we cannot sing loud enough about arts and culture.

This morning I had a court date in response to a civil disobedience action I took part in as a professor of CUNY for the "die-in" we enacted in front of Governor Cuomo's office in Manhattan. As I sat in the courtroom waiting to be called to stand before the judge, I witnessed a part of a reality of living in this city, one that many of us can attest to, but to see it with my own eyes was startling. I saw nothing but young black and brown bodies, both male and female, come before the judge to answer a slew of charges, but was struck by the significance of whose bodies were on trial. And then I took a train ride from Manhattan to Brooklyn and when I entered this museum, I saw the complete opposite. This experience alone points to the critical situation we find ourselves in even in New York City, the fact that institutional racism is alive and well, and how we have much work to do. No doubt the work of this panel aims to address this issue and many other equally disturbing ones, but the point is this. At the risk of sounding overdramatic, arts and culture is about life and death. I can attest to the fact that if it wasn't for arts and culture in my life, I would not be here. And when I see what I witnessed today, when I face the students in my classroom, when I work with my colleagues in performance projects, or with my partners in activist circles, it is clear to me how arts and culture are key to nurturing individuals, relationships in communities, and for kneading the imagination muscle in developing critical thinking and compassion among us all. In regards to what I witnessed this morning, the fact of the schools-to-prison pipeline is not some abstract concept but rather something that is institutionalized and operating at such a brisk pace and the only tools of intervention we have come from the sources of arts and culture that makes for engaged agency to transform the inequalities so many of us face daily. We need arts and culture to help with grounding our citizens and residents in efforts to promote the general welfare of all out city, while also they are utilized as elements of the restorative justice we desperately need to create and implement.

I come today with two concrete ideas for this panel to consider. First, we need to create a Congress of Arts and Culture where every district in New York City will nominate an arts practitioner (artist or administrator) to represent their election district in a body where the entire city is represented. I do not wish to add another bureaucratic arm to the city, but rather, I want to expand and make decision-making bodies more inclusive. No doubt the Department of Cultural

Affairs is needed and is working well, but I offer this idea as a way to see how we can find alternative legislative bodies to better serve all our communities. Second, I think we should use the economic model of Participatory Budget, by taking 1 % of a council member's discretionary funds, and earmark them specifically for Arts and Culture support. Everyone in this room knows we will never have the budgets we merit, but we also know that arts and culture spaces, artists and activists know how to maximize dollars. We are always underfunded and we know how to maximize dollars.

Arts and Culture saves lives; political and social change saves lives; and we can witness from Stonewall to Occupy to Black Lives Matter, political and social change makes us a more perfect union.

P.S. I forgot to mention how I integrate Theater of the Oppressed in all my work. I studied with Augusto Boal between 1990-1992 through weeklong workshops held at the Brecht Forum.

REMARKS PREPARED BY NANCY YAO MAASBACH, PRESIDENT, MUSEUM OF CHINESE IN AMERICA FOR THE PUBLIC HEARING TITLED "OVERSIGHT: ART AND CULTURE AS A CATALYST FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE" HELD BY THE COMMITTEE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS AT THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM ON MAY 4, 2016.

Arts and culture colleagues, fellow New Yorkers especially my Queens brother and sisters, Chairman Jimmy Van Bramer and other members of the New York City Council, thank you for your great service to this City and the very real tangible differences you are making for museums, parks, libraries to name a few. Thank you also for IDNYC. Since joining IDNYC in January 1 this year, MOCA has quadrupled its membership. Thank you to Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl for your encouragement, so glad to see you after your return.

Art and culture are rooted in EXPRESSION. Expression is art through painting, dance, set design, written word, stage. Expression is culture through language, food, dress, traditions.

Expression is a form of sharing, informing, educating, learning.

Expression is delivered from one's perspective, accepted with one's interpretation.

The social and political state of any city needs input. Social and political change require participation. But how?

This morning, I spoke with over 100 5th graders at P.S. 124 on Division Street in Chinatown. I asked them, how many of your 5th grade Asian American classmates will go into arts and culture. Surprisingly, several of them guessed less than 5. Unfortunately, the answer is 1. I shared, less than 1% of your 99 Asian American classmates will go into arts and culture. I then asked them, why do you think the number is so low? The responses: it is not safe; I am scared to talk in front of a group; I like to draw, but I am going to be a doctor; my parents want me to make money; I do not know any artists.

Then I asked them how many of you know an adult who is an artist? Not one. Painter? Not one. Actor? No hands. Set designer? What is that? Architect? No. Dancer? Not a one.

We need models.

The Museum of Chinese in America allows for DISCOVERY.

DISCOVERY of one's own identity and heritage

DISCOVERY that our paths were made easier by earlier pavers

DISCOVERY of how a special space fuels reflection, confidence

DISCOVERY of models who were never celebrated

DISCOVERY of the strength and humility of Tyrus Wong who transformed Disney animation with the innovative creation of Bambi during a time of exclusion in America;

DISCOVERY of the sacrifice and talent of Poy Gum Lee who was born and raised in Chinatown, NY, and designed over 100 buildings in downtown NY with limited fanfare and recognition;

DISCOVERY of the love and passion of New Yorker Ming Cho Lee, renowned American set designer who has influenced the American stage like no other and taught every theater professional living today;

DISCOVERY that each journey is a brilliant glass in this American mosaic

Arts and culture converge in New York City. It is this city's greatest leverage point. Arts and culture allows us to express. Arts and culture allows us to participate. Over 600,000 Chinese Americans live in New York City over 4,000,000 Chinese in America, comprised of 25% of the Asian American population- the largest Asian American group. Programs like the IDNYC one have acted as a catalyst for Chinese Americans to visit museums, gain experiential learning, develop greater appreciation for arts, challenge the allocation of time well spent, a great percentage of which is immigrants or children of immigrants. And as a museum that exists as a dialogic museum- one that engages and questions the visitors.

Arts and culture through MOCA allows for the experiential learning for

- an anticipated 50,000 visitors from around the world and right down Canal Street
- provide much-needed professional development to K-12 teachers on topics such as the Asian American myth and
- best-in-class internship and volunteer program for over 50 individuals each year- internships beget jobs!
- pursue and receive two national expert grants:
 - National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for the first NEH Summer Institute at MOCA
 - National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to allow MOCA's valuable collection to be accessed by research and scholars online

Art and culture undoubtedly lead to social and political change.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Yao Maasbach
President, MOCA

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Name: Felicia Young, Director

Address: Earth Celebration

I represent: _____

Address: 199 Bowery, LES

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Name: Oswaldo Beatriz

Address: 394 Rutland Rd

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Nancy Yao Maasbach

Address: 215 Centre St. NY NY 10013

I represent: Museum of Chinese in America

Address: _____

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Name: DR MARTA MORENO VEGA (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 1825 PARK AVE

I represent: CARIBBEAN CULTURAL CENTER

Address: _____

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Name: Andrea Louie (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Asian American Arts Alliance

Address: 20 Jay St, Ste 740 Brooklyn 11201

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Name: Jorge Daniel Veneciano (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 4230 3rd Avenue Sq. 18C NYC 10029

I represent: El Museo del Barrio

Address: 1230 5th Ave NYC 10029

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Name: Tom Finkelpearl

Address: 31 Chambers St

I represent: NYC Dept of Cultural Affairs

Address: _____

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Date: 5/4/16

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Name: GUY YERGEN

Address: 333 4TH ST APT 60

I represent: LEAGUE OF INDEPENDENT THEATER

Address: _____

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Name: Genny Koulouides

Address: ARTINY 520 E 4th Ave 30 fl 319

I represent: Alliance of Resident Artists NYC 10018

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MEGGAN DODD

Address: 367 5th St, Bklyn, NY 11215

I represent: HONEST ACCOMPLICE THEATRE

Address: _____

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Name: Martha Wilson

Address: 96 Rowwell Pl 11217

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Date: 5/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tom Block

Address: 914 2 73rd St # 5M, Woodside, NY 11377

I represent: Artist / Dixon Place

Address: Lower East Side

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Name: Leslie Schultz

Address: 647 Fulton St. Bklyn 11201

I represent: BRIC

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ryan Gilliam

Address: 70 EAST 4TH ST. NYC

I represent: DOWNTOWN ART/NOCD-NY

Address: _____

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kelley Girod / Erez Ziv

Address: 85 East 4th St., NY, NY 10006

I represent: The Fire This Time Festival

Address: same ↑

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rise Wilson

Address: 331 LAFAYETTE AVENUE

I represent: RAUSCHENBERG FOUNDATION

Address: 331 LAFAYETTE AVENUE

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Name: Kathy Engel

Address: 665 Bldg NYC 1012

I represent: NMVA Dept of Public Policy

Address: _____

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Date: 5/4/16

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Name: GEORGE F. SANCHEZ

Address: 119 Pacific St. #2

I represent: EMERGENCYC

Address: 20 Cooper Sq. NYC

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Date: 5/4/16

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Name: Ginny Louloundes

Address: 520 8th Ave #319 NYC, NY 10018

I represent: A.R.T / New York

Address:

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nazli Deniz

Address: 204 Jefferson Ave 1616

I represent: Groundswell

Address:

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/4/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALEX SARIAN

Address: 70 LINCOLN CENTER PL

I represent: LINCOLN CENTER

Address: 70 LINCOLN CENTER PL

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JASON BAUMANN

Address: 615 West 184th Street 2J NY NY 10033

I represent: NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Address: 476 Fifth Avenue NY NY 10033

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

Name: John Leo (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 3317 Farragut Rd / 68 Jay St.

I represent: Theatre of the Oppressed St. 220

Address: _____

NYC

BK
NY
11201

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jon Mincey

Address: 2435 CRESTON

I represent: Theatre of the Oppressed

Address: 68 Jay St. BK NY 11201

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Date: 5.4.16

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Name: Catherine Morris

Address: Brooklyn Museum

I represent: 200 Eastern Parkway

Address: _____

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