

# WallTalk 2022-23

**ICA**

# Introduction

WallTalk is a multidisciplinary arts engagement program for Boston middle and high school students that encourages creative thinking, open discussion, and individual connections to contemporary art through visual art, writing, and performance. Centering on ICA exhibitions, the program consists of multiple museum and classroom visits over a school year in which students observe, question, interpret, and respond creatively to the art and issues of our time. Students work closely with teaching visual artists and writers to guide their critical analysis. The experience culminates in a Reading Jam in which the ICA Barbara Lee Family Foundation Theater becomes a brave space for WallTalk students to come together and showcase their creativity in an exhibition of their visual art and performances of their writing.

Through this program, the ICA aims to provide an engaging and supportive environment for student expression and to make contemporary art an integral part of the development of young people. This publication is a record of our year together to share both our process and a selection of the work created.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the ICA collaborated with more than 350 students from eight partner schools: Boston Community Leadership Academy, Charlestown High School, Dearborn STEM Academy, Donald McKay School, Excel High School, McKinley/Melvin H. King South End Academy, Rafael Hernández School, and Young Achievers Science and Math Pilot School. Using a wide range of exhibitions, students explored the theme Authenticity and produced a variety of writing and visual artwork.

The ICA/Boston is fierce in its commitment to teens. We believe that robust arts education is critical to building future artists, audiences, thinkers, and leaders and to creating more equitable education for young people. We offer a wide range of opportunities for teens to connect with art, artists, and one another through their schools or on their own. We know that museums have a unique role to play in the landscape of arts education, giving people direct experiences with art, convening people to discuss ideas, and acting as centers of community-based learning and social change.

This year's program would not have been possible without the generosity and dedication of many individuals and organizations. The ICA extends our most sincere thanks to the Wagner Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and many other foundation, government, corporate, and individual partners who allow us to do the work we do.

I am grateful for the many teachers and administrators at our partner schools who contribute time, energy, and enthusiasm to the program. I also extend my deepest appreciation to the ICA Education staff: Education Department Coordinator Lindsay Darnell, Education Fellow Renessa Rabenda, Teaching Artists Tori DelValle, Dubem Okafor, Coco Rosenberg, Fatima Seck, Taina Vargas, and Durane West, and most especially Jessie Miyu Magyar, School and Family Programs Manager. A final, heartfelt thank you to all of the young people who opened themselves up to art, to ideas, and to us. Thank you for authentically sharing stories, perspectives, and questions and for engaging with ours and one another's.

Betsy Gibbons  
Director of Teen Programs  
Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston

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Converse is committed to supporting movements for positive social change and amplifying youth voices as they build the future they believe in.



What needs to happen in order for people to feel like they can be authentic? How do we present ourselves in different spaces? How do we authentically take up space?

This year, WallTalk students explored the theme of authenticity and engaged in open discussions to question and challenge what it means to be authentic.

Focusing on three key exhibitions, *Rose B. Simpson: Legacies*; *To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood*; and *Simone Leigh*, WallTalk Teaching Artists explored authenticity in contemporary works of art through the lens of form, identity, and power. With questions like: What is form? How does an artist's identity inform their work? And how are power and authenticity related? Students reflected on how their personal experiences and identities connect to contemporary art while informing their own creative experimentation in visual art, writing, and performance.

# Focus Exhibition 1

## *Rose B. Simpson: Legacies*



Rose B. Simpson, *Genesis Squared*, 2019. Ceramic, steel, and mixed media. 77 × 23 × 23 inches (195.6 × 58.4 × 58.4 cm). Collection of William A. Miller, Santa Fe, NM. Courtesy Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, NM. © Rose B. Simpson

# IDENTITY

During fall 2022, students explored identity using contemporary work by mixed-media artist Rose B. Simpson to ask how identity informs an artist's work, where we find our own identities reflected in art, and how we can authentically represent our identities in our own art-making.

### Discussion Prompts

1. What is powerful about this piece?
2. How does *Genesis Squared* represent authenticity to you?
3. How would you choose to represent your identity through art?

# Focus Exhibition 2

## *To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood*



Charles Ray, *School Play*, 2014. Solid stainless steel. 76 × 23 × 15 1/2 inches (193 × 59 × 40 cm). Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, New York; Courtesy the FLAG Art Foundation. Photo by Mel Taing. © Charles Ray



Photo by Jessie Miyu Magyar.

Meanwhile in *To Begin Again*, we viewed art and childhood through the lens of form. Students started by questioning what form means to them and how artists use form to communicate ideas and concepts like authenticity.

### Discussion Prompts

1. What do you think this sculpture is made of? What do you think this figure is doing?
2. This piece by artist Charles Ray is called *School Play*, a sculpture of a kid playing a role in a play like *Julius Caesar*. It's made out of solid stainless steel. Does this information change the way you see or interpret the sculpture?
3. Does playing a role, whether on a stage or in real life, affect your authenticity?

# Focus Exhibition 3

*Simone Leigh*



Simone Leigh, *Cupboard IX*, 2019. Stoneware, raffia, and steel armature. 78 × 60 × 80 inches (198.1 × 152.4 × 203.2 cm). Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. Acquired through the generosity of Bridgitt and Bruce Evans and Fotene Demoulas and Tom Coté. Courtesy the artist. © Simone Leigh

POWER

In the spring, students explored the concept of power through the monumental work of Simone Leigh. Students had conversations with selected works during an in-gallery activity called, "If Art Could Talk." Try this activity with *Cupboard IX*!

## Discussion Prompts

1. What would you ask this piece of art to get to know it better?
2. What do you want to know more about?
3. What type of answers would it give you?
4. What would it ask about you?

# Focus Exhibition 3 Activity: If Art Could Talk

Students returned in the spring, this time having a conversation with a work of art from the *Simone Leigh* exhibit.

From student BM0

Questions created

You Can I call you mama raffia?

Art Yes, my child. Why do you pry?

You Life is hard, mama raffia. Do you struggle as well?

Art We all have struggles in life my child.

You So, what do I do, mama raffia? How can I fix them?

Art How you work through these struggles is up to you.

You Will you help me, mama raffia?

Art Of course, my child. Work with me.

From student Yowary R.

Questions created

You "Nothing"

Art Hello my child, what's your name?  
What's your tribe my love? Are you lost? Do you remember?

You Oh hi, my name is Yowary. I don't know what's my tribe but I wish I did. I'm lost? Well in some places maybe and if I remember what?...

From student Elias V.

Questions created

You Are you embracing something or calling someone over?

Art I am embracing those that wish to share their authentic selves with me.

You Why is your head like a pot or vessel?

Art I am looking to be filled with the experiences of others.

You Why are you so tall?

Art I am this tall to catch the eyes of others.

# Talk Backs

We wanted to hear what students had to say about how they defined ART. We asked them to respond to the following questions:

## What is art?

*Art isn't something that can be explained because it has a different meaning for everyone.*  
Emily, Melvin H. King South End Academy, 9th Grade

*Art is color, life, experiences, memories.*  
Genesis G., Boston Community Leadership Academy, 11th Grade

*I think art is expressing emotion and letting your feelings spin out into art.*  
Izzy L., Rafael Hernandez, 8th Grade

## Why do people make art?

*People make art to present themselves to others.*  
Antoine J., Young Achievers, 8th Grade

*I think people make art because they want to express their emotion, culture, and how they see the world.*  
Kevin A., Donald McKay, 7th Grade

*To share stories without saying anything.*  
Tayasir M., Dearborn STEM Academy, 9th Grade

## What did you like about making art?

*Que pude expresar mi emocion, sentimiento de otra manera. (That I could express my emotions, feelings in another/different way).*  
Jhosep, Charlestown High School, 9th Grade

*I liked being able to just have the space and create what I wanted.*  
Claudia V., Boston Community Leadership Academy, 12th Grade

*I liked how I could use my imagination to make art.*  
Dennis G., Donald McKay, Grade 7A

## What do you like about going to the ICA?

*Everything about it — from the views, the art, the people here, everything!*  
William F., Boston Community Leadership Academy, 12th Grade

*All the art and I saw things that I have never seen.*  
Trinity V., Young Achievers, 8th Grade

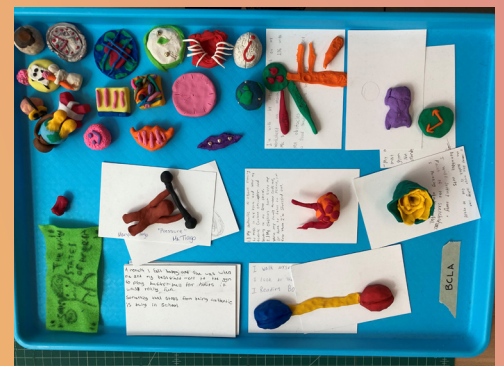
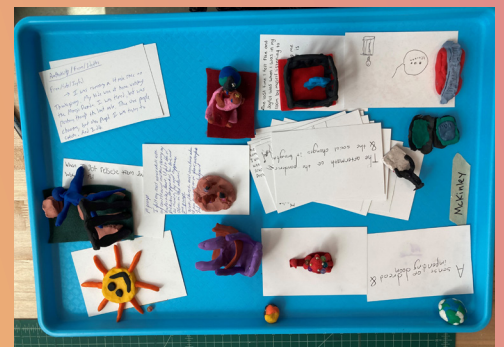
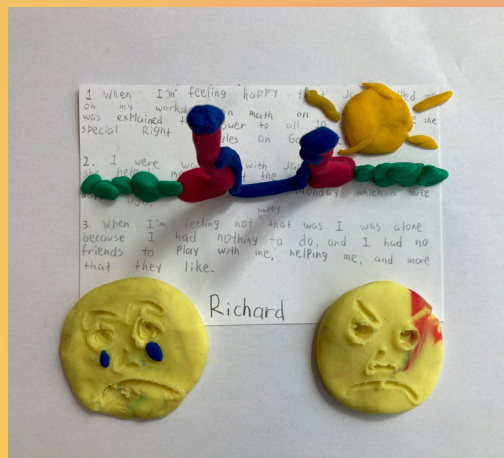
*I got to learn different art styles.*  
Nyuiiah S., Rafael Hernandez, 8th Grade



# WallTalk Fall 2022 ICA Visit

## Breaking Through...

After working in the galleries, students headed to the ICA's Bank of America Art Lab to create clay sculptures that represent something that stops them from being their authentic self. Once created, students left their sculptures behind!



# In-Class Writing Workshop / Acrostic Poems

## Role Call

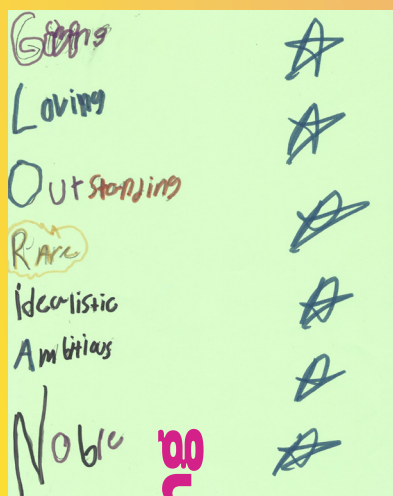
What is in a name? Teaching artists asked students this question when they visited their classrooms and invited them to write acrostic poems using their names.

The artists wanted these young people to see that words have power and that power comes in many forms.

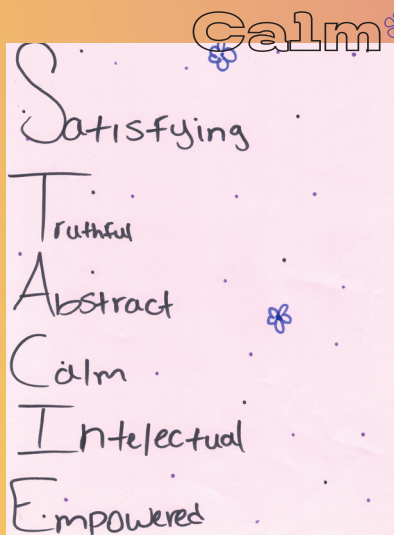
### Discussion Prompts

1. Who gave you your name?
2. What sorts of meanings does your name have to you, to the people who gave you your name, or to others?
3. If you could make up what your name means, what 3 words would your name mean?

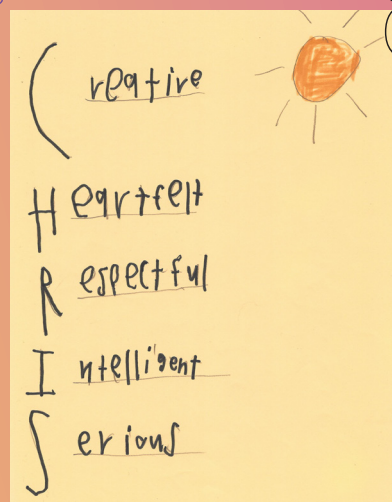
Creative



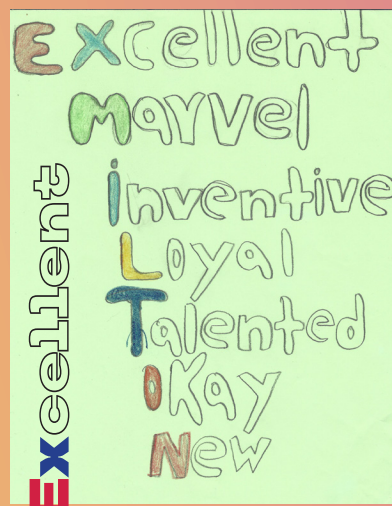
Giving



Calm



Independent :)



Excellent

## In-Class Visual Art Workshop

## Body as a Vessel

As the 2023 Reading Jam approached, teaching artists visited students in the classroom to create clay vessels inspired by the work of contemporary sculptor and artist, Simone Leigh. Students were asked: how can we use clay to create vessels that represent vulnerable/important parts of our individual identities and communicate parts of our collective stories?

The vessels created by students were later displayed at the Reading Jam for everyone to view!



Photos by Sebastian Parra.



# Reading Jam

At the end of WallTalk, students expressed their authentic selves during the 2023 Reading Jam in the ICA's Barbara Lee Family Foundation Theater. Students and teachers from various schools came together to celebrate the year. After viewing an exhibition of their clay vessels, many of the young people chose to bravely perform their written work live on the stage or recorded on video.



Photos by Sebastian Parra.



**Tori DelValle** is a Puerto Rican designer and visual artist based in Boston, MA. She grew up and still resides in the South End's Villa Victoria. She is an alumna of Boston Latin School & New York University Tisch School of the Arts.

**Dubem Okafor** is a Nigerian-American Multimedia artist based in Boston, MA who creates spaces for both himself and others. Whether he does this through visual works, paintings and graphic design, or in the music he makes through the alias of 'calvinkleincaterpillar' — Okafor aims to connect to others, translating his own creative Language.

**Durane West** is a Boston born, spoken word artist with a love for coloring based in Brighton, MA. In eighth grade, he stumbled upon poetry to express his feelings for a crush. Winner of the 2021 Poem for Roxbury contest, his favorite forms of poetry are haikus. West was published four times in 2021 from 826 Boston, Write on the Dot, Mother Mercy, and Boston Hassle.

**Coco (Corine) Rosenberg** (they/them) is an artist, educator, community organizer, and care worker- rooted in the power of the arts in social justice movements, the radical imagination of youth, and pulling from ancestral lineages and spiritual technologies as a queer, trans, Jewish, and disabled person. Coco is a mixed-media artist, working in printmaking, film photography, poetry, textile art, and collage.

**Fatima Seck** is a writer, artist, land steward and birthworker. She works through a community-based storytelling practice to explore birth, play, neighborhoods, public space and Black diasporic cultures.

**Taina Vargas** is a mother, artist, educator, and small business owner with roots in the Dominican Republic. She has nearly two decades of experience providing quality art education to diverse learners. Taina's studio practice centers around themes of gender, culture, and identity. She primarily works with photography, printmaking, ceramics, and mixed media. Taina splits her time between Boston and Western Mass.