

BRAVE

REIMAGINING
TEEN
ARTS
EDUCATION



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TEEN ARTS
EDUCATION

Jill Medvedow
&
Monica Garza

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Lead support for Teen Programs provided by Wagner Foundation.



Teen Programs are made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Award Number MA-10-17-0447-17.

Additional support is provided by the Surdna Foundation; the Rowland Foundation, Inc.; The Corkin Family; John Hancock; the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation; the Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative, funded by the Walton Family Foundation and the Ford Foundation; The Angell Foundation; the William E. Schrafft and Bertha E. Schrafft Charitable Trust; Vertex; The Willow Tree Fund; the Nathaniel Saltonstall Arts Fund; the Mass Cultural Council; the Robert Lehman Foundation; the Deborah Munroe Noonan Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee; MFS Investment Management; the Plymouth Rock Foundation; the Jean Gaulin Foundation; the Thomas Anthony Pappas Charitable Foundation, Inc.; and Santander.



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Cover: Kevin Garcia, *Untitled*, 2019.

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—poet, educator, memoirist, scholar, and cultural advocate—is president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Dr. Alexander has held distinguished professorships at Smith College, Columbia University, and Yale University. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and co-designed the Art for Justice Fund. Notably, she composed and delivered “Praise Song for the Day” for the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009, and is author or co-author of 14 books.



ISABEL BEAVERS

is a multimedia artist and educator. She explores ecologies, environmental histories, and scientific storytelling through a range of media including video, animation, sculpture, and sound. As ICA Education Fellow, she was an integral part of the Building Brave Spaces conference and publication team. Her work has been exhibited widely and is in the permanent collection of Boston Cyber Arts, the Association for Gallatin Agricultural Irrigators in Montana, and Framingham State University.

Photo: Ally Schmaling



MITHSUCA BERRY

is a Boston-based artist and educator who believes creativity goes beyond technicality and into a way of living. At a young age, art was an important tool in healing. Now, across mediums like illustration, mixed media, and education, those stories can be told. Black, queer, and nonbinary, Berry creates images that deconstruct the restrictions placed on these identities and makes the space for them to intersect freely. At the ICA, they are an alum, an Alumni Assistant, and on the Building Brave Spaces conference and publication team.



DONOVAN BIRCH, JR.

is a progressive entrepreneur and advocate, as well as a strategic storyteller. An alum of the ICA Teen Arts Council, Birch also served on its Building Brave Spaces Advisory Group. He is running for State Representative to serve the 12th Suffolk District of Massachusetts. Birch hopes to empower more young, queer, Black, and Latinx folks to lend their voices to politics. He is also the CEO and Founder of the Birch Group and has a degree in Political Communication from Emerson College.

Photo: Neven Samara



SYDNEY BOBB

is a Black, queer, femme poet from Dorchester, Massachusetts. Her work navigates life through the lens of a daughter of the Caribbean diaspora with chronic health issues. With her art, Bobb hopes to encourage Black women to be more aware of what good health looks like, mentally and physically. Her favorite artists include Porsha Olayiwola, Prince, and Donald Glover. Bobb is a First Wave scholar at the University of Wisconsin at Madison studying African Cultural Studies and Psychology and is an ICA alum.

Photo: Carlie Febo



ENAHJAH BROWN

is a recent alum of the Teen Arts Council at the ICA, an interviewer for this publication, and upcoming high school graduate. Most of her free time is spent searching for new music, thrifting, and questioning life. She enjoys attending concerts and trying to find new places to eat in the city. Her biggest goal right now is to achieve a degree in screenwriting. If she could, she would want to have her very own farm with animals to keep as pets.

Photo: Margie Samp



ARIC CROWE-PINA

is a creative person and educator. At the ICA, he is an Alumni Assistant and part of the Building Brave Spaces conference team. Being in the Teen Arts Council when he was younger helped him find his voice as an artist. He's been learning to balance working on his art with working on his life. He feels fully fulfilled working with the TAC and hopes he can continue to support the family. He also hopes to one day win a Super Smash Brothers tournament or a Pokemon one.

Photo: Christian Arthur



TURAHN DORSEY

is a community servant, public policy researcher, strategist, and education innovator. He served as the Chief of Education for the City of Boston and as a member of Mayor Martin J. Walsh's cabinet. Previously, he served as Evaluation Director and an Education Program Officer at the Barr Foundation. He is currently working with local and regional organizations to expand access to high-quality early learning and to close Boston's racial income and wealth gaps. He also served on the Building Brave Spaces Advisory Group.

Photo: Lauren Miller



KIMBERLY DREW

is a writer, curator, and activist. Drew received her B.A. in Art History and African American Studies from Smith College. She first experienced the art world as an intern at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Inspired to start the Tumblr blog *Black Contemporary Art*, this sparked her interest in social media. Drew's writing has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *Glamour*, and *Teen Vogue*; she has executed Instagram takeovers for Prada, the White House, and Instagram. Follow her at @museummammy on Instagram and Twitter.

Photo: Travis Matthews



LUNA ESCOS

is from Spain. She loves taking pictures. Most of the time, she captures candid moments with people. She likes how the background story can change the perspective in a moment, to help you understand why it's happy or sad. Sometimes just by taking photos of what's around you—the landscape, an object—everything can be converted into something beautiful and interesting. At the ICA, she studies digital photography and film. She is a senior at East Boston High School.

Photo: Cindy Portillo



PAT FRAZIER

is a filmmaker, activist, and student born and raised in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. In 2018, they were named the Youth Poet Laureate of Chicago and the National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, an initiative of Urban Word. Frazier's writing addresses the intersections of young, queer, and colored identities living in marginalized areas. Their first poetry chapbook, *Graphite*, was published in 2018. Frazier is a Young Chicago Authors alum, Davis-Putter scholar, and student at Smith College.

Photo: Chanel Matsunami



KEVIN GARCIA

is a junior at East Boston High School, where he is on the football team. He likes to be entertaining around his friends. In his free time, he likes to listen to music and play video games, or go play a quick game of basketball. His biggest goal at the moment is to get into college to study Photography and Film Production. At the ICA, he takes part in the Advanced Photography program. He began studying digital photography there last fall. One of his photos graces the cover of this book.

Photo: Emma Fitzsimmons-Brann



SANDRA JACKSON-DUMONT

is the incoming Director and CEO of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. Through December 2019, she is the Frederick P. and Sandra P. Rose Chairman of Education at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and she has worked at the Seattle Art Museum among other cultural organizations. Known for her ability to blur the lines between academia, popular culture, and non-traditional art-going communities, she is invested in curating experiences that foster dynamic exchanges between art/artists, past/present, public/private, and people/places.

Photo: Mangué Banzima



JILL MEDVEDOW

is the ICA's Ellen Matilda Poss Director. A national leader in contemporary art and civic life, she is committed to nurturing artistic experimentation, amplifying artists' voices, promoting lifelong learning, providing access to and equity in the arts, and sharing the conviction that art is essential to happiness, social justice, and healthy society. Investing in teens as future leaders, artists, and electorate is central to her vision. She sits on the Boston Public School Arts Advisory Board and is Chair of Boston After School and Beyond.

Photo: Liza Voll



KAISHA GERHARDT

is a creative and humorous individual. She is a freshman at the University of Montana, working on majoring in Media Arts. She was practically born with a sketchpad and a pencil and will doodle whenever she has time. She is excited to make her passion into a career in the video game or graphic design fields. She also wants to help young adults learn to express themselves through art. She enjoys drawing, playing video games, and being a proud mother to her cats.

Photo: Nicole Stroman



BETSY GIBBONS

is a creative person, educator, and advocate for teen arts education. As the Director of Teen Programs at the ICA, she works with and for teens to create dynamic and essential programs, opportunities, and experiences. Previously, she worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New-York Historical Society. She has a B.A. in History from New York University and an M.A. in Medieval Studies from University College Dublin. Her other creative pursuits center around movement, textiles, and cooking.

Photo: Liza Voll



DENISE MONTGOMERY

is founder and principal of CultureThrive, a consulting practice with a primary focus on arts and culture and youth development. She has led and contributed to a host of publications as researcher and author, including *National Action Blueprint, Youth. Creativity. Now. Building Opportunities and Support for Creative Youth Development* (2018). She has held leadership positions at the Denver Office of Cultural Affairs, the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts, and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.

Photo: Sam Hogdson



JASON MORAN

is a jazz pianist, composer, and performance artist born in Houston, Texas. He was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2010, is the Artistic Director for Jazz at the Kennedy Center, and teaches at the New England Conservatory. He is invested in reassessing and complicating the relationship between music and language, and his extensive efforts in composition, improvisation, and performance are all geared towards challenging the status quo while respecting the accomplishments of his predecessors.

Photo: Clay Patrick McBride



AJ HOWELL

is a 19-year-old aspiring engineer currently studying at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. He recently graduated from Snowden International School, a Boston Public High School. Photography is his way to express creativity when he is not diving into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). He is able to see the world from a different perspective when using a camera. At the ICA, he studied digital photography as part of the Special Focus program.

Photo: Andraya Segura



KARA JACKSON

is a poet, prison abolitionist, and jazz vocalist. She uses her voice, activism, and art to document her lineage of divine womanhood in a country that demands its erasure. In 2019, she was named the Youth Poet Laureate of Chicago, the Midwest Regional Youth Poet Laureate, and now the National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, an initiative of Urban Word. She has been featured in numerous publications and has performed at the Library of Congress, WBEZ Chicago Public Radio, and beyond.

Photo: Mercedes Zapata



OKWUI OKPOKWASILI

is a writer, performer, and choreographer who works to make visible the interior lives of women whose stories of resistance and resilience have been left out of dominant cultural narratives. She creates multidisciplinary projects in partnership with collaborator Peter Born. Her performance work has been commissioned by numerous institutions. She was a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University's Lewis Center for the Arts in 2018-2019 and a 2018 MacArthur Fellow. She received a B.A. from Yale University.

Photo: Peter Born



JOSEPH REUBEN QUINTO

is a spontaneous and creative individual. A 19-year-old Filipino currently living in Denver, Colorado, he is a sophomore at the University of Colorado Denver getting a B.F.A. in Art History. Some of his favorite artists are Devan Shimoyama, Rashaad Newsome, and Yayoi Kusama. When he graduates from college, he hopes to work in a museum as a research assistant or an art curator. During his free time he enjoys drawing, painting, reading, and discovering new things around him.

Photo: Miller Moreno



MATTHEW RITCHIE

is an artist whose installations integrating painting, wall drawings, light boxes, performance, sculpture, and moving image are investigations into the complex and transient nature of information. His works describe generations of systems, ideas, and their subsequent interpretations in a kind of cerebral web, concretizing ephemeral and intangible theories of information and time. He has engaged in many cross-disciplinary collaborations. He serves on the ICA's Artist Advisory Council.

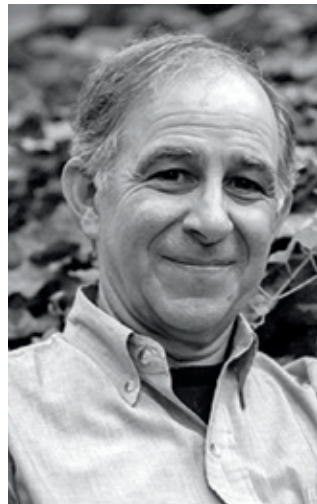
Photo: Jennifer Taylor



JACLYN ROESSEL

was born and raised on the Navajo Nation; the wisdom of her homelands shapes her cosmovision. Molded by her grandmothers, Roessel fosters a praxis that utilizes Indigenous ways of knowing and decolonized methodologies to build cultural equity. She is the founder of Grownup Navajo, director of decolonized futures and radical dreams at the U.S. Department of Arts & Cultures, and cofounder of Native Women Lead. Most important, Roessel is a wife and mother, living in the Pueblo of Tamaya in New Mexico.

Photo: Fleurette Estes



STEVE SEIDEL

is the Director of the Arts in Education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a former director of Project Zero (2000–2008). He has been an International Research Fellow at The Tate Museums (2010–2014). His current research includes *Talking With Artists Who Teach*, a study of working artists' ideas and insights into the nature of artistic development and learning. He has worked as a professional actor and stage director. He also served on the Building Brave Spaces Advisory Group.

Photo: Melissa Rivard

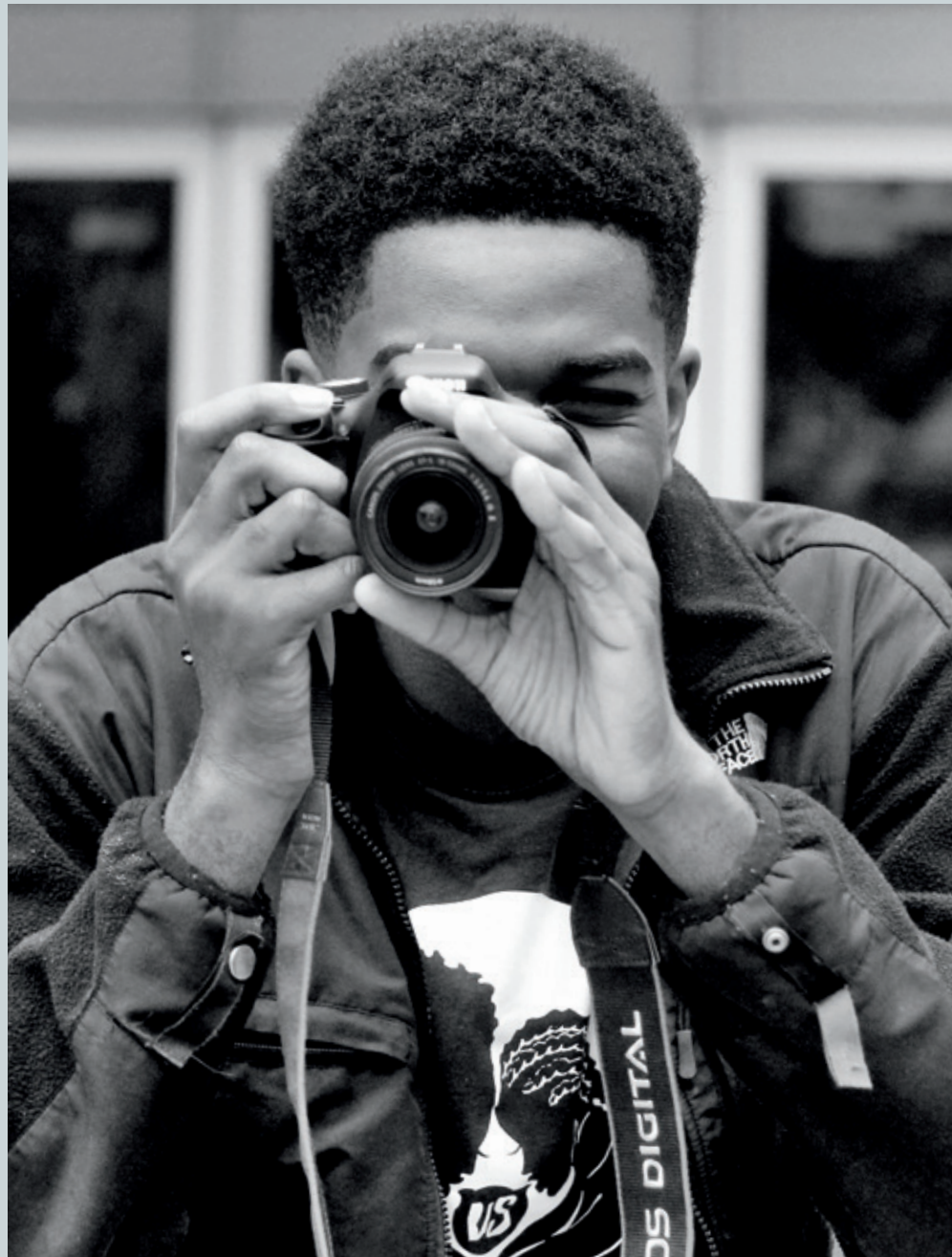


AKIR STUART

is an 18-year-old social justice activist. As a Senior InterseXtions member at the Brooklyn Museum, he developed skills, knowledge, and friendships as he planned events for other LGBTQ+ youth. Stuart recently graduated from the Scholar's Academy in New York and committed to New York University under their Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship. He intends to double major in Journalism and Economics and continue to explore his interests in communications, music, and activism.

Photo: Mia Ventola





ICA Teen Artist Encounter, 2017. Photo by Cliften Bonner-Desravines.

FOREWORD

Since its founding in 1936, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston has been an experimental laboratory for artists and audiences to grapple with the most pressing issues of our day. Art anchors our work at the ICA, but it's people—artists and audiences—who define who we are and who we aspire to be as an organization. They are what make us thrive and what make us brave. And often, they influence which of the day's issues seem most critical and relevant in our communities.

In 2018, the ICA convened hundreds of teens, alumni, educators, policy makers, and artists for Building Brave Spaces: Mobilizing Teen Arts Education to reflect on our collective work and to imagine what a thriving field in teen arts education can look like in the future. The timing for the conference and this publication is significant and noteworthy, marking ten years of ICA Teen Convenings as well as the recent rise of numerous social movements around the world led by teens—on climate change, gun violence, gender inequity, and more. Through this work, teens have changed our world's ways of living, thinking, and working, organizing as they did in the mid-20th century during the desegregation of schools and the Civil Rights Movement(s) to have real impact.

Against this backdrop, the ICA is delighted to present this timely compilation of contributions from speakers and teens involved with Building Brave Spaces, its Advisory Group, and artists, researchers, program alumni, and museum professionals from throughout the country. Two essays frame a series of interviews, punctuated by photos from the conference. These contributions shed light on current thinking about the arts and education systems from a range of viewpoints and areas of expertise, and imagine the different roles youth, artists, and institutions can play in the future.

This publication by no means aspires to provide the defining answers to the many questions we have on these important topics. Rather we hope it will serve as a catalyst for continued dialogue, reflection, and action that eradicates the inequitable systems and structures of living and learning that inhibit our world from thriving.

We are incredibly grateful to the many generous contributors; their words give us much hope and inspiration. We also would like to thank the interviewers—ICA teens and alumni Mithsuca Berry, Sydney Bobb, Enahjah Brown, and Aric Crowe-

Pina—who worked diligently to generate interesting conversations we will want to read again and again. Thanks also to Kara Jackson, 2019 National Youth Poet Laureate, for her inspiring interview with Elizabeth Alexander, and to Ami Pourana, ICA Creative Director, for the book's elegant design.

The conference and publication would not be possible without the guidance and dedication of Isabel Beavers, Education Fellow, and Betsy Gibbons, Director of Teen Programs. We thank them for their steady leadership, creative thinking, and good humor throughout this initiative. We are awed by the advocacy and friendship of the ICA's Education Committee and the Building Brave Spaces Advisory Group, who contacted institutions and individuals across the country to highlight this important opportunity to work together on teen arts education. Advisors Donovan Birch, Jr., Turahn Dorsey, and Steve Seidel share rich insights in interviews included here; fellow members Anthony Barrows, Antonia Contro, Karla Diaz, Radiah Harper, Danielle Linzer, Rasheem Muhammad, Carlos Moreno, Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad, Dario Robleto, and Mario Ybarra, Jr., also contributed indelibly.

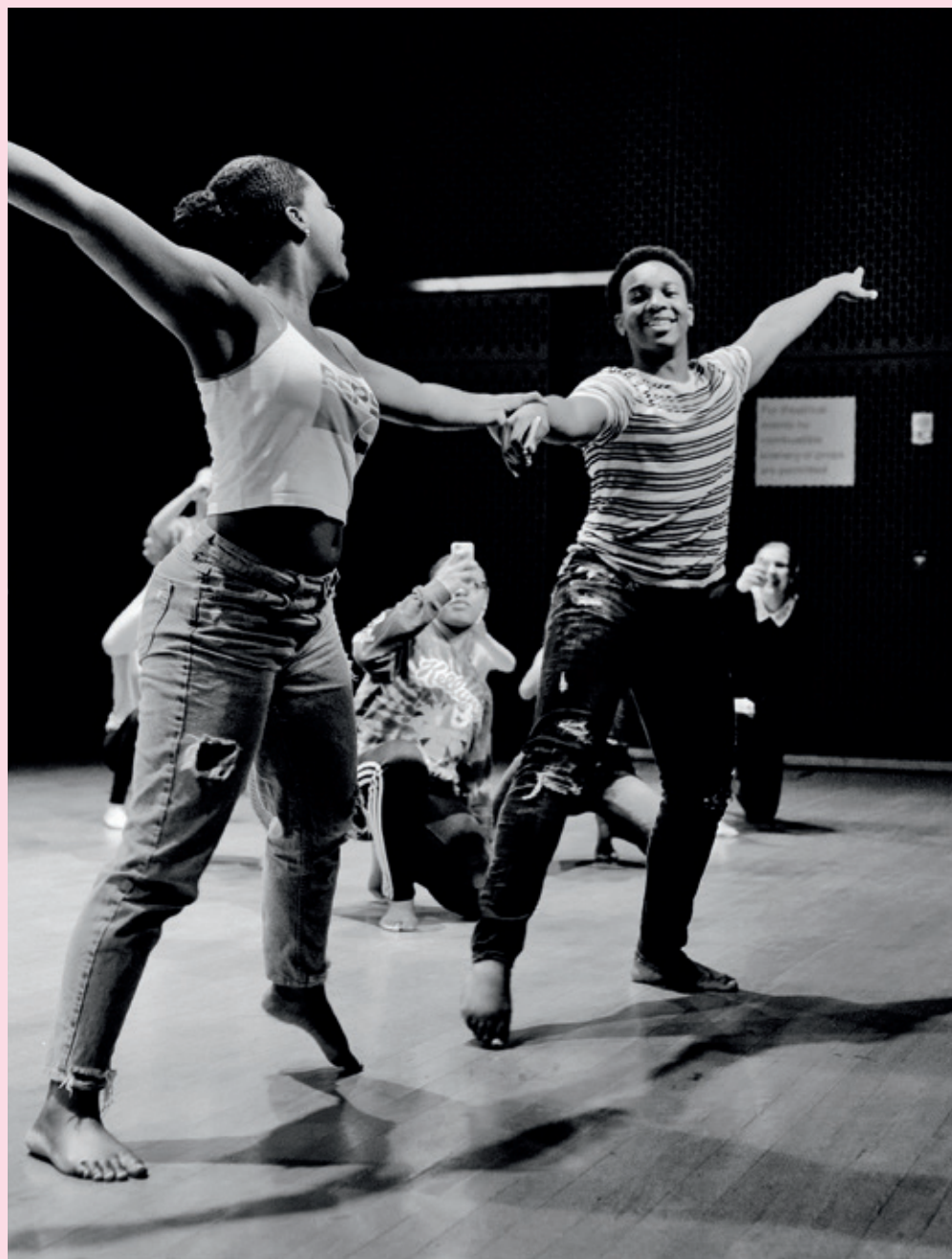
This ambitious initiative was made possible in part by the generosity of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, as well as the many other longtime foundation, corporate, government, and individual partners who help the ICA's teen programs flourish year after year, and to whom we are deeply grateful.

Our acknowledgments would be incomplete without thanking Jill Medvedow, the ICA's Ellen Matilda Poss Director, whose unwavering faith in museum education is at the heart of the deep and lasting engagement we and our audiences of all ages enjoy at the ICA.

Lastly, we dedicate this work to the teens everywhere who make our world thrive through their creativity, curiosity, and passion.

Monica Garza
Charlotte Wagner Director of Education,
Institute of Contemporary Art

Charlotte Wagner
Vice President, Board of Trustees, and
Chair, Education Committee,
Institute of Contemporary Art
Founder and CEO, Wagner Foundation



Project Moves at Spring Teen Night, 2019. Photo by Ally Schmaling.

JILL MEDVEDOW

Teens are not a hot topic in public and policy discourse on education. Neither are the arts. Workforce is a hot topic; inequality is an urgent topic; and the skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century labor market dominate conversations on education reform. Yet the arts—access to making and experiencing art, to artists, and to arts education—have a critical role to play in the lives of adolescents and in realizing a new vision for the arts in education that creates greater opportunity and equity for our young people. If it takes a village to raise a child, it is increasingly clear that it takes an entire community to educate one.

One site where community-based learning is thriving today is the country's art museums. Over the past decade, the ICA has convened teens and teen arts educators from almost every state in the nation to discuss the importance of museums in teens' lives and how best to work with them. Through our National Convenings of Teens in the Arts and our recent conference Building Brave Spaces: Mobilizing Teen Arts Education, the ICA is committed to transforming education to include teens and the arts as central components of civic life, excellence, and equity.

Equally important, teens bring the world to the museum. They are the front-runners of culture and a direct link to their communities. When museums are central to teens and embrace their forward thinking and personal experiences, our institutions find the relevance, creativity, and courage that teens need to commit to education and learning.

More than 6,000 teens participate in programs at the ICA each year. Over the past two decades, providing programs, space, and opportunities with and for teens has become central to the mission of the museum, based on our belief that a robust arts education is critical to building future artists, audi-

ences, activists, and electorate. From the Boards of Directors and Advisors to the entire museum staff, each member of our community understands that teens are a core constituency and important partners in shaping what we do and how we do it. This publication seeks to chart a path from individual commitment to institutional investment and, ultimately, asks how to create a field of practice and a movement that puts teens in the center of education, in school and out.

I grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, influenced equally by art, artists, electoral politics, and organizing. My mother's best friend was a working artist; she painted landscapes and portraits on commission and was my first art teacher. My mother introduced me to the Yale University Art Gallery and I returned again and again, taking the bus downtown to see my favorite artworks and feel my worldview widen and expand. There, I discovered Marcel Duchamp's *Tu'm* and the art of Stuart Davis. As a youngster, I thrilled at the visual puns and heady puzzles of Duchamp and the combination of European modernism and American jazz in Davis. A small, encyclopedic museum, YUAG offered horizons of time and space way beyond those of my family and hometown. Yale provided me the opportunity to discover a world of my own definition, despite my being a "townie."

Politics permeated my middle and high school years: a generation of young white men teaching high school to avoid Vietnam; racial unrest; the Black Panther trial and frightening presence of the National Guard; skipping school to go to rallies on the New Haven Green; biannual work on my father's campaign for local elected office. (My mother also ran once for statewide public office.) As I reflect on the development of teen programs at the ICA, these formative experiences are foundational to my understanding of change and transformation.

When I arrived at the ICA in 1998, there was a small program for a handful of Boston teenagers, the genesis of which would become a major commitment to and investment in the next generation. In the early 1990s, the ICA launched further programs: Docent Teens, Writing on the Wall, and workshops in conjunction with the exhibitions *Malcolm X: Man, Ideal, Icon* and *Elvis + Marilyn*. Though small in scale, these programs connected teens and artists, following the pioneering example of the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Former Walker director Kathy Halbreich set the stage for teen arts education across the nation, recognizing teens as the front guard of culture. She looked cross-sector to learn about teens' interests, and how best to respond. Halbreich not only demonstrated the role that museums could play in the lives of teens, she also exemplified the leadership required to persuade staff, boards, and funders of the importance of teen programs.

With these strong examples as precedents, I set out to connect art, teens, and civic life at the ICA. When City Year was created in Boston, I participated in their open invitation to see it in action: calisthenics in Copley Square and a visit to a school. Wowed by City Year's vision of service, I was piqued by their lack of any arts partners—and the implicit suggestion that the arts were not central to the civic infrastructure of the city, piling onto conventional ideas of arts as elite. Soon after, with the support of Holly Sidford, then program director at the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, I worked with City Year and one of its teams to write and conduct an unprecedented survey on attitudes and behaviors of young people in the arts. The data confirmed what was experientially evident: young people who were exposed to artists and the arts in their home and/or at school both participated more in the arts as they matured and were more civically engaged. These truths were to be validated again and again over the years.

Two other events occurred around that time, external to everyday museum work and formative to my developing ideas about art and civic life. The first was a series of unsolved deaths of young men in Charlestown, then an insular neighborhood of Boston where homicide, overdoses, and suicides were devastating the community. Earlier, I had founded an organization called Vita Brevis to produce temporary works of public art. Vita Brevis came with me into the ICA and its first project was a series of commissioned works along Boston's Freedom Trail by artists Jim Hodges, Mildred Howard, Barbara Steinman, and

Krzysztof Wodicko. Wodicko selected the Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown as his site and met with mothers whose sons had died in this epidemic of loss and silence, as well as with young men involved. The result was an unforgettable, powerful, and devastating work of art: *The Bunker Hill Monument Projection*. Wodicko projected film images of the faces and hands of his interviewees on the top third of the Monument. Three mothers and two young men described their experiences, gesturing to places that were literally behind the Monument, giving voice to this Revolutionary War memorial, and speaking volumes about freedom, life, and loss. The power of being seen and heard, of being, for a brief while, the tallest people in town, was a transformative moment for the mothers who subsequently came together to break the "code of silence" that had prevented action and justice for their children.

In 1998, a second epidemic was also evident in our city: crime by and against young people during out-of-school hours. Building the staff, space, and resources to offer programs to hundreds of teens became a priority in the museum's plans for a new building. Creating a museum that could respond to the events and issues of our time, address Boston's history of segregation and racism, and offer a platform for the voices and energy of our young people came to define the new ICA.

Now, more than 20 years later, and under the leadership of Monica Garza, the ICA's Charlotte Wagner Director of Education, after- and out-of-school activities dominate the ICA's teen programs and run the gamut from drop-in Teen Nights to short- and long-term immersive courses, workshops, and paid ICA Teen Arts Council positions. Of the 56,000 students in Boston Public Schools, 15,000 are in high school; of those, roughly a third have no arts in school. By the time young people reach sixth grade, children born into middle- and high-income households have spent 6,000 more hours learning in out-of-school enrichment and experiential learning than their counterparts in low-income households. If real learning comes from thinking about experience, as John Dewey suggested, the arts offer a unique combination of action, reflection, and agency and should be available to all our children.

Last March, Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine authored an opinion piece in the *New York Times* on the failure of U.S. high schools, drawing from research for their book *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School*. Most teens,

they reported, described themselves as "bored" in school and engaged after school. Extracurriculars, Mehta and Fine observed, offered essential qualities of agency, authorship, purpose, relevance, and discipline. In 2016, the ICA hosted its eighth National Convening of Teens in the Arts on this theme, *After the Bell*. We found the kinds of learning that occur at the end of the school day—after the last bell has rung—flip the switch on learning. Instead of being "at risk," teens learn to manage risk. Rather than being taught, teens direct their own learning. And in addition to focusing primarily on cognitive criteria, social and emotional skills are assessed and valued. As one teen recently said, "teen programs taught me to be more aware of others, to be more caring of others, showed me how to be myself," and contemporary art "makes me aware of what my boundaries are, but it doesn't set those. It breaks boundaries."

Author Angela Duckworth's groundbreaking thinking on grit and resiliency; the Rennie Center in Boston's research on extended-day learning; new studies by the Arts Education Partnership and Boston After School and Beyond; Shirley Brice Heath's research into out-of-school time programs in under-resourced communities; and investigations into art and empathy all advocate for and quantify the impact of social-emotional learning and out-of-school education. They reflect what many in the arts have been describing anecdotally for years: the positive changes that young people experience in and out of school through immersion in the arts.

At the ICA, we have piloted programs and looked deeply at where and how students learn, the gaps in both achievement and opportunity, what teens need to succeed as citizens and individuals, and how best to facilitate that learning, all within the context of a contemporary art museum. We designed spaces for young people in our Charles and Fran Rodgers Education Center. We were a pilot program in the Boston Public School District's credit-bearing initiative for students to fulfill their arts requirement. We enlisted the partnership of extraordinary artists over the years who met with, collaborated with, and inspired teens: Nina Chanel Abney, Huma Bhabha, Mark Bradford, Paul Chan, Karla Diaz, Shepard Fairey, Thomas Hirshhorn, Roni Horn, Bill T. Jones, Jason Moran, Okwui Okpokwasili, Claudia Rankine, Matthew Ritchie, Dario Robleto, Mario Ybarra, Jr., and many others. We found generous philanthropies and philanthropists who shared our vision and embraced risk: the Barr Foundation, the Corkin Family, the Paul and

Phyllis Fireman Family Foundation, John Hancock, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Mass Cultural Council, the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation, the Rowland Foundation Inc., the William E. Schrafft and Bertha E. Schrafft Charitable Trust, the Surdna Foundation, Vertex, the Wagner Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, and many, many more, as well as our Education Committee Chairs Charles Rodgers and now Charlotte Wagner, and our entire Board of Trustees and Advisory Board. In 2012, we were deeply honored to receive a National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, an initiative of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, from First Lady Michelle Obama. And now, directly responding to former Teen Program participants, we are launching an alumni network to continue the community, support, and learning that every young person needs to succeed.

In all of these programs, our most important partners are young people. Listening to them, learning from them, and supporting their social, emotional, and creative development has enabled the museum to embrace and enhance their many strengths and contributions. Just as teens lead popular culture, so, too, do they make change in our museums.

The ICA's first National Convening of Teens in the Arts took place in August 2009, following the election of Barack Obama. Our teens, even those too young to vote, were galvanized by his platform of hope and appeal to young people. The same year, artist Shepard Fairey came to Boston for his solo exhibition at the ICA and discussed with our teens his unique synthesis of art and activism, aptly illustrated by his iconic HOPE poster. Several years later, a former ICA Teen Arts Council member expressed her own brand of hope, writing, "TAC has been a profound experience. I discovered a deep-rooted passion in working in museums and museum education and I can frankly say that has saved my life. I am incredibly positive now that in my future, I will work in museums and stay involved with museum education for the rest of my life."

At the ICA, teens are always a hot topic. I look forward to every Thursday, when the Teen Arts Council fills our conference room with food, fashion, energy, ideas, and warmth. They bring the outside world into the museum; they exercise their agency; they challenge our status quo. Through support, love, resources, advocacy, funding, and public policy, teens can find and fuel their dreams and seed our future. President Obama called equity in education the civil rights issue of our time. At the ICA, we agree.

PAT FRAZIER

THE DAY THEY ARRIVED

brown water / shot from metal /
faucets / ford / interceptors / parked /
adjacent / Sunrise / school buses /
& when they revealed their blue /
bulletproof / jackets / the metal /
detectors grew legs / the security /
guards stepped down / the lunch /
ladies stayed home / with their grandkids /
everybody / stopped eating because /
They arrived / & apple slices molded /

They recorded everything /
even the mice studying / in skinny /
vents / the hallway / a holster /
my class/mates / suspended for breathing /
smoke on the grassy street /
behind Shultz / They arrived /
& the boys stopped shooting /
dice in the bathroom / The Dean's /
office grayed / into a holding cell /

They arrived when the sky was blue /
the sun was out / but it was so cold /
you could get your tongue stuck /
on the schoolyard fence / better not /
merch it / better not be / finna /
in front of the Armed / English / Teacher /

They arrived / and we were made /
to learn / to be translucent /
backpacks / to shake like steel /
when The Bell says it's time / to run /
to class / your brain waiting /
like an empty stomach or a handcuff /
yearning / to make ash / of someone's /
wrist / They arrived / and we sharpened /
our nails / made them colorless demerits /
kept acetone / in our lockers / just in case /

this / once a free meal program /
now a jailhouse of students / radical /
enough to still sell honey / buns / this /
once a field of gazing grain /
now a police academy glimmering
like a beetle's back / They arrived smiling /
pearly whites / punctuating triggers /
parents had no notice / of our departure /
upon Their arrival / only a warning
of the better things to come /
thanks to The Mayor's / generous donation. /



Pat Frazier and conference presenter Carlos Moreno at Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

by Kara Jackson

KJ: First things first: would you mind introducing yourself, who you are, and how you would describe yourself personally and professionally?

EA: My name is Elizabeth Alexander. I was born in Harlem, USA. I grew up in Washington, DC. I am a lifelong educator. I have been a lifelong teacher of African American literature and culture. I'm very devoted to exposing more people to the glories of that tradition.

I am a writer, primarily a poet. Though I've also written a memoir and a play, and lots and lots of critical writing and essays about culture, being a poet is at the center of who I am as an artist.

My career has taken me in an unexpected direction. Now I work in philanthropy. I think that the mission is the same, which is to uplift and encourage the power of learning stories that are sometimes marginalized and of the transformative power of art.

Extremely importantly, and at the core of who I am, I am a mother to Solomon and Simon, who are 21 and 20, and sit at the core of my being.

KJ: Thinking about how arts transform, can you tell us about a time when you were gripped by or deeply changed by an art experience?

EA: There have been so many art experiences that have gripped or transformed me. I can remember it happening from when I was very, very, very small and I was captivated by the rhythm and rhyme of A. A. Milne's *Now We Are Six*, his book of poems. I remember loving the music and the images and the other world that those poems took me into.

Just three days ago, going to see Lorna Simpson's painting exhibition here in New York. She moved from being a photographer, mostly of Black women, to very abstracted, painted spaces that

felt like they hollowed me out inside and made me able to contemplate the infinite-ness of mind and the possibilities of seeing parts of the world that I never dreamed of.

I would say that when I'm living right, every day has a transformative art/human experience.

KJ: I think about that a lot, too, especially with art. I think that visual art finds a way to transport me to a whole different place unlike any other art.

I've been thinking a lot about poetry, particularly spoken word. That's where I started doing a lot of poetry, in spoken word spaces. It's often deemed an "accessible" type of art. Do you think that that kind of accessibility threatens the elitism that's often found in academia or that poetry permeates through the boundaries of education in other ways?

EA: I've lived through, in my own life as a poet, the rise of what we would now describe as performance poetry—although performance poetry is actually much older than its recent rise, if you think about rap and toasting traditions, oral poetry through thousands of years. I think that spoken word is something that has actually evolved and didn't just spring up so recently.

I've always been very resistant to the dichotomy that one was high art and one was not. One was the academy and one was the street. For those of us who have worked inside academia, like myself, working out of varied traditions and varied African American traditions, I feel like we have to be able to call upon many things at once to make the things that we make.

That said, I do think that if you are writing primarily for the stage, that sometimes you have both different tools and also different challenges than you do if you're writing primarily for the page. I don't think of them as being unrelated to each

other, but I do think that in order to succeed in one or the other, you don't always do it the same way.

KJ: That's a really good point. I did poetry through Young Chicago Authors. A lot of my education was making sure it's not a dichotomy. It's absolutely possible for everybody to call themselves a poet, whether they're on stage or not. I do agree in terms of how you approach either as very different. Your insight is very helpful.

EA: I would also add that no matter what, you've got to read. No matter what you're trying to make, you have to read. Also, no matter what you are trying to make, you have to have an ear.

KJ: That's such a good point. That's something that I'm really trying to bring to my own spaces as I venture out into new poetry spaces, the importance of reading. A lot of times the stereotype of spoken word poetry is that those people are not well-versed, or maybe the spoken word poets are not reading the same poems as the page poets, when really we should all be doing the work and sharing curriculums.

EA: Exactly.

KJ: My next question: I've also been interested in this codependency between imagination and liberation. What do you think is the relationship between imagination and liberation?

EA: I love that question. If we cannot imagine beyond our circumstances, if we cannot dream, if we cannot look around the corner and see that which is not directly in front of us, if we cannot transcend the moment or even our identities, then the work of liberation, the work of making ourselves and others more free, is very difficult.

The path to greater empowerment is not a straight one. I think that art and the imagination have

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tremendous roles to play in the rigorous creativity that it takes to achieve enhanced liberation.

KJ: That's very interesting. As an educator, do you feel responsible for the imagination of your students? What do you think is the importance of exercising that imagination in the academic space? I feel like a lot of times for me, as a student, a lot of the most crucial thinking I've done about my identity has been in poetry spaces, because of the way that it forces us to imagine ourselves and imagine situations.

EA: I wouldn't say I feel responsible for my students' imaginations because I feel they come with what they come with. That's what they're to show their classmates and communities and their teachers. The role of the teacher is twofold: one, to expose widely and vigorously. I think that most of my students would say that their reading load was always unusually heavy in my classes.

The second is to nurture and make more rigorous the ways that students use and tend their imaginations and their critical thinking. It's one thing to be dreamy and have a lot of ideas, and that's all well and good, but I always felt that I was there to help my students, to ask them the kinds of questions that can hone their beautiful imaginations into actionable critical thinking.

KJ: Which artists do you like, who are your favorite educators? I think a lot of times it's expected for artists to be good educators but those are two very separate skills.

EA: I like that question a lot, too. I think that sometimes artists are educators by example. It's not necessarily about being in the classroom or about being explicitly didactic about their work,

but rather about making their work, and in the process, showing others how things can be done.

Two people I'm thinking about a lot now—there are so many—are Theaster Gates and Titus Kaphar, who are both doing amazing things. They make their own works of art, but they also are working in community, in space, in cities, activating spaces that have been left for dead, transforming spaces into living communities with the arts to make cities more exciting places. Everything they do shows us ways that you can make something out of nothing, and make art that is absolutely beautiful but that also is a service.

KJ: That's such a good point. I think about artists demonstrating, and how artists leading their lives could certainly be a way of also educating. That's such a beautiful way to put it. My last question is, how much of teaching requires being aware of what you, yourself, needed when you were a teenager?

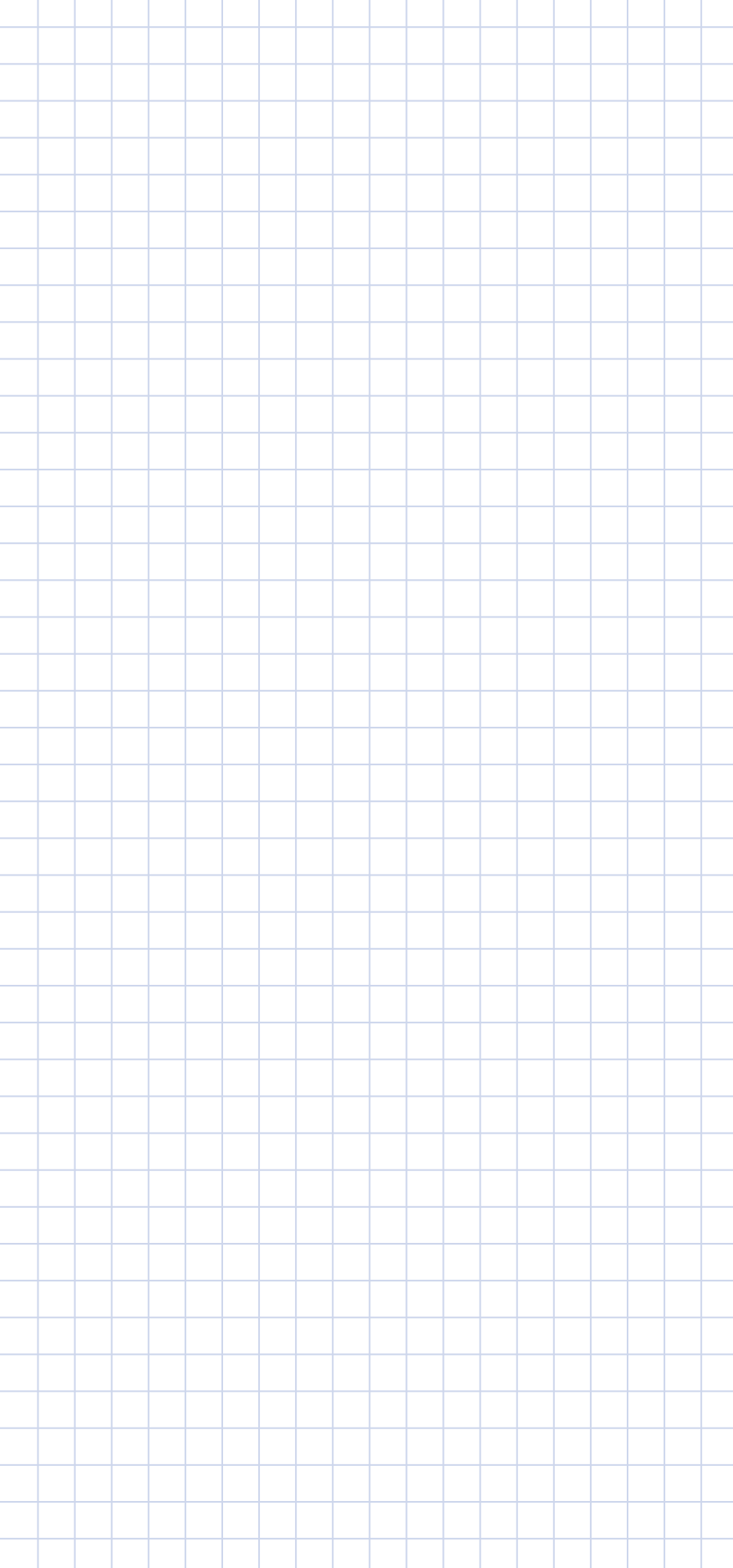
EA: That was a great question, too. I just love young people. I think that to be listened to is what we always want, to be taken seriously but within a respectful context. Multigenerationalism is really important. People want to have mutual respect across generations.

As a teenager, I was someone bursting with ideas and with creativity. I wanted to share those ideas, but I also knew that there were folks who I could learn from. I wanted to be taken seriously but I knew I didn't know everything. To have teachers, and to be a teacher who understands that multigenerational two-way street, is what is optimal coming from both sides.

KJ: That's very helpful for me as the teenager!



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Natasha Moustache.



ICA Fast Forward
Alum documenting
Teen Convening, 2019.
Photo by Lauren Miller.

DONOVAN BIRCH, JR.

by Isabel Beavers and Sydney Bobb

WE LIVE IN A WORLD
WHERE WE CAN
NO LONGER LIVE
IN SILOS.

IB: How do you describe yourself personally and professionally?

DB: I am an unapologetic queer man of color from the City of Boston. I grew up in the neighborhood of Mattapan. I am a product of Boston Public Schools and of the Institute of Contemporary Art.

Professionally, I'm the CEO and Founder of The Birch Group, which is a marketing and public relations firm in Boston that I founded on my own. I work mostly with clients who are in education advocacy and other realms of politics, as well as other spaces.

I am super active in my community. I don't like the term "community activist," because it's played out. Everyone uses it. I'm on my neighborhood council. I'm in my small business association. I like to be involved in my community to make a difference. I'm a perennial campaigner. I'm always on a political campaign doing something.

SB: Can you tell us a story of a time when you were deeply changed by an artistic experience that you had?

DB: When I was on the ICA's Teen Arts Council, we met the artist Mark Bradford. He is a Black artist, and his exhibition was about his experiences growing up queer and Black. You had to walk through a chamber of Nancy Wilson singing. I was gripped by that experience because I think that was probably one of the most complete, thorough, and exploratory pieces of political art that I have ever seen. I saw this exhibit, and I saw it was a different use of materials—from sound, to found materials, to painting, to mâché—and told a story of growing up queer and Black, but also connecting it to Jim Crow, and then also connecting it to modern society.

It was 2010, during the Obama presidency. I realized how racist the Republican Party was and how racism still exists in this country. I was grappling with being a queer man, but also Black, and the different struggles that you go through with each. This is also pre-marriage equality. My experience predates all the things that we know now to be true, which is, "Everyone can get married. We want to be anti-racist." Before then, that was not the case. All those things weren't allowed to exist.

I loved the Mark Bradford exhibition because I have never seen someone activate the ICA in such a dynamic way, in the way that he used this space, all the different materials and spaces that were there. It was a mix of the personal but also the political. The personal and the political are always together, but some of the work wasn't necessarily personal. To me, some was just a political statement.

IB: What is the most provocative site of learning that you see today? Why does it excite you?

DB: I don't want to necessarily say one space is the most provocative. I think all spaces have the potential to be. When I think about museums, and the ICA in particular, I wonder: Where are we now? Where can we be in the future? What is that commentary? How can we express that? Schools provide historical context, which helps you think critically about the work that you're seeing and then examine your current space and the future; other spaces are meant to foster critical discussion and dialogue. Those spaces have to work together. I think all of those spaces could be made more provocative in their own ways, as well. I also think that bringing spaces together and the distinct experiences they provide—the ways that they can be used for education—is provocative.

That is something we actually don't do or consider in education. "How can we help this one student here?" Let's bring him to the museum to have that experience, and give him a totality of a learning experience about a subject.

SB: That's true. What specific action do you think we could take to ensure the future of learning is more equitable in that way?

DB: I would love to see more partnerships with organizations and schools, and organizations with each other. When I was in elementary school we talked about Columbus Day. I think there's constantly critical examinations of that holiday in other spaces in the city. There are notes of critical dialogue in art museums as well—from political pieces that examine the role of colonialism, or that examine the role of racism that has been bred through colonization and white supremacy.

We could come up with an engaging, cross-city curriculum for students to engage in this topic by learning about it in the classroom and then at the museum, engaging in a cross-city dialogue, but hosted by an organization that's organizing the community to break these systemic inequalities. It's collaboration, collaboration, collaboration. We live in a world where we can no longer live in silos. Spaces like the ICA are starting to slowly break that down, but other folks can do it as well. They can all collaborate together.

IB: Bouncing off this idea of making sites of learning more equitable, how can we also make sure that art is in the lives and educations of every young person?

DB: I know that a lot of times programs work with or through schools. For example, the ICA has WallTalk, its school partnership program. Are there ways for the ICA to be doing even more in

communities? I live in Mattapan. This is one of the southernmost neighborhoods of the city. I interact mostly within the neighborhoods of Dorchester and Roxbury and Hyde Park. There's always a street fair. There's always a festival happening in the summertime. How can the ICA be a part of those events? Whether it's partnering with local artists for an exhibit, or coming and just being there and creating more culturally aware art, or getting people to do art-making in those spaces with artists that look like them. There are a ton of young and emerging artists of color in the city who are either looking for an opportunity to create art, teach art, or have some sort of collaboration. The ICA could be working more with them.

Museums are often seen as elitist white spaces. They are starting to try to chip through that via teen programming. But how about the other people in the community? What happens when the teens are grown and they are back in the community doing other things? What other collaborations are you fostering? Not just focusing on someone who had a show at the Met, or someone who is now a viral star. Are you nurturing, curating, and collaborating, and fostering partnerships with the local artists—particularly of color—in your own backyard?

SB: If you could give your younger self something that you feel like you didn't get at the ICA or elsewhere, in terms of art, what would it be?

DB: I would have loved to give myself more opportunity to create art. I think what I got was an opportunity to meet artists, to learn about the art, to learn about the artwork and all the different things that went into it, and that process, and some of the history and background of it. Now that I'm older, I would have loved the opportunity to create. My upbringing was geared towards college prep. Everything was about making sure that you get

your subject right and not necessarily about fostering my creativity.

Going to the ICA spurred me to go to an art and communication school over an HBCU (historically black college or university) and learn that I am a really good writer and that writing is creative. I now work as a digital storyteller. I'd have loved an opportunity to create and learn different types of writing. For example, now I'm interested in taking a songwriting course just to learn how to write music. Not that I want to be an artist. I want to learn how to use a craft that I honed post K-12 that I now really appreciate and see where else I can take it. I see now the ICA has a writing and performance group that they didn't have when I was there. That would have been really great to have. I was in the Teen Arts Council, which is not necessarily meant to be a vehicle to create art, but it exposed me to so much art and creativity that I was like, "Damn, I really want to create." You know? I want to create.

IB: Don't we all? It's the best thing. Be bold: What is one thing that you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

DB: I wish it were more geared toward discovering and following passions. I would love for education to be more about finding the things you like and honing skills. I'm not saying that being able to get a job is not important, but we promote arbitrary timelines that just don't quite make sense. You don't have to be 18 and then immediately go to college. Take a year off. Take two years off. Discover that creativity. You do not have to live by arbitrary timelines of when you need to create a career. It's your life, and everything is on your time.

SB: Describe one way that digital and creative media can make the future better.

DB: Yes. This is my bread and butter. This is what I do. One is the element of digital storytelling. America is a very individualized society. We constantly think about ourselves. We oftentimes think of ourselves as unique in ways that are not actually unique. Or we think of ourselves a part of collectives in a way that's not really a part of a collective or not the most beneficial way to be a part of a collective. I think that we need to be telling these stories to foster and build communities along specific pathways.

We're in a time period where we're dealing with Me Too, Black Lives Matter; this year is going to be defined by intense Islamophobia. What if we have these stories about people's actual lived lives

that counter these narratives? I live in Boston, in Massachusetts. You'd think it's progressive, but I meet people who say Islamophobic comments. I ask them, "Why do you believe that?" And they say, "It's because of 9/11." Why have we not moved past that yet? We live in a country where we don't have alternative stories being shown. How often have you seen a film, or a piece of artwork, or anything that was widely received and distributed, that actually talked about the Muslim experience in America? It doesn't happen often enough.

Those stories have a way of challenging narratives and challenging the status quo so we can change policies or advocate politically.

IB: I have a final question that's a little more fun. Who are two people—artists, educators, authors—who inspire you right now that you think other people should know about?

DB: Someone who's inspiring me right now is Bayard Rustin, who was one of the main organizers of the March on Washington and the Civil Rights Movement. He was a Black gay man. He's a figure in the movement that people don't talk about or know about. When I look at our modern movements, whether it's Me Too, or trans rights, they're often headed by queer women of color. I'm constantly thinking about how queer folk of color, women of color, are often the leaders of movements, but don't get the notoriety or a "thank you." We're on the back burner and we're fighting for more and better political representation and power, which is why I'm so excited about all the women of color and people of color, in general, who came into office this past year.

Then, in the arts realm, I'm going to be honest with you, everyone who's a drag queen on "RuPaul's Drag Race" right now is simply amazing. I am challenging my notions of self and the internalized toxic masculinity in me, and learning to realize and appreciate drag as an art, as a culture, and as a form of expression. Seeing all the work that they put into their craft is amazing. I'm seeing less drag that is, "Let me be Britney Spears. Let me be Beyoncé," and more like, "Let me make a political statement." From making things out of caution tape, or using the platform to speak out against the Trump administration, or talking about what it's like to be a queer person of color in a gay culture that is largely defined by being white and queer, which I was totally ignorant to before. This is a form of new discovery and art. I'm constantly in awe and amazed by them, all of them.



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Natasha Moustache.



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Natasha Moustache.



ICA Teen DJ at Summer Teen Night, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.

TURAHN DORSEY

by Mithsuca Berry

MB: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

TD: I identify as a Black male and a Detroiter, first. All of the identities are important to me. I'm a free thinker and community servant, but by vocation, I am a public policy researcher, strategist, and hopefully an education innovator. We'll see.

MB: Can you tell us about a time you have been gripped or changed deeply by an art experience?

TD: I have two to share with you. The first is Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry Murals* at the Detroit Institute of Arts. I grew up in the DIA participating in different programs as a kid. I knew from a very early age that the murals tell part of the story about where I come from and the history of the place that I lived. The murals are commentaries on the times that I was growing up in—certainly at the beginning of the end of the industrial and car manufacturing era. They were commenting on Detroit's future as well—I felt pretty tuned in to this at that time.

They were subversive on very subtle levels. Diego Rivera is thumbing his nose at capitalism and Henry Ford, in particular, and the people who commissioned him to do the piece. He's in dialogue, as an artist, about what he's being asked to do, what he's being asked to represent, who he is—both as a man and an artist—and what his opinion is of his benefactors. They are images that have always been a part of my life.

The second is a series of pieces called *Flight Series* by the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. This international touring company was founded by my aunt, Jeraldyne Blunden. This was a group of artists that I grew up around as a kid. Sometime around the early 2000s, they were commissioned to do a piece commemorating

the Wright brothers. The Wright brothers were from Dayton, Ohio, and they're key to the history of aviation.

What struck me is how the dancers explored ideas about discovery, determination, and vision—and some other things I found particularly startling—through movement. To see a Black dance company interpreting white historical figures, but also making a bigger commentary about transcendence was amazing. I left the theater like, "Wow. What did I just see?"

MB: Do you feel like experiences you had growing up have affected your practice as an educator and the way you approach education?

TD: Definitely. One, it makes me think about the importance of cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary work in education. Some of the people who have had the greatest impact on me may not be considered traditional educators, but they are.

They may not have gone through education schools and done a whole lot of other things, but they've got immense talent for teaching and can probably teach anybody to do almost anything. They have, also, great value for young people's development. It's not that traditional teachers don't, but I think that there are some structures, restrictions, and mandates in traditional classrooms that crowd out youth development. We have to be very concerned about that.

Secondly, some experiences opened my eyes to the fact that learning is continuous, so we've got to be intentional about connecting all of the spaces where young people learn, and creating systems architecture to support it—if for no other reason than to help young people and their families easily navigate the options, to know what doors they're walking in, and to be agents in their own learning.

MOST OFTEN WHAT IS SAID TO ME IS THAT “SCHOOL IS NOT A HUMAN EXPERIENCE.”

To be able to say, “I chose this door because I’m really interested in what’s behind it.”

Several experiences have helped me to understand that what I need to contribute to is building something that’s bigger than school, but also thinking about how we reimagine school in some ways that not only promote the kind of learning that we want, but that are dynamic enough to deeply engage young people and put them at the forefront of their own learning.

MB: What is the most provocative site of learning you see today, and why does it excite you?

TD: I actually think workplaces are very interesting learning sites, because increasingly, employers are saying, “We want a hand in training people and in skill-building, because we don’t think school is getting the job done.” The other piece is that knowledge and technical skill are changing so fast that schools don’t keep up very well. As smart as our science teachers are, there are a lot of science-based professions that they don’t have deep knowledge of. I’m not sure how they can fully train young people to be, for example, bioinformatics engineers if they have no idea what these folks do for a living.

Companies are starting to be more hands-on in training, and the experiments are pretty intriguing. What’s good about it is it’s not simulated. A lot of classroom work, for good reasons, has safeguards and boundaries on it. It’s simulated—it’s not you actually doing the thing. It’s you learning to be a scientist instead of actually being a scientist, which young people are ready for right now. What I love about young people, and we see it every day, is that they’re ready to contribute. We don’t need to hold young people off until they’re 18, and then tell them it’s time to contribute. There are ways we can put them in the game now.

The most progressive work environments are doing things like this as well. They’re also bridging the gap between concept and practicality. What do the concepts that I’m learning have to do with reality? What do they have to do with my life? What do they have to do with the economy, the way my community works, etc.?

MB: What is one thing you wish you could change about our system of education and learning?

TD: Seat time. Right now, there are a lot of mandates about the number of hours you need to spend in a classroom. That’s a constraint. I realize that there’s a certain amount of time that teachers need to do their work, but I wish that, legislatively, and from a practice standpoint, we could disrupt that and create a system where we count seat time in whatever seat you’re learning—whether that’s at the ICA, in your school classroom, on somebody’s college campus, or in the workplace. We need to figure out a system whereby you accrue experience, credits towards course work, and credentials in all of the learning spaces that a city like Boston has to offer.

The care we have to take in constructing such a citywide system is to consistently ask ourselves, “Do the parts then add up to more than the sum?” And, if they do, “Do you get something that’s exponentially powerful from a learning standpoint?” My hypothesis is that you do. My experience is that you do as well, but it’s about creating a system that allows for all of the connective possibilities. One of the ways that we start to do that is to say the seat time mandate is not just about the school classroom. In fact, if we’re really interested in complex skill-building, it can’t just be about the classroom.

MB: I feel like people’s experiences with education are very subjective. Not every young person

processes information the same way, or processes it the same way from the same person. Having accessibility to other parts of education that pushes them to see themselves as an active learner, and leads to appreciation and love for learning, is very important.

TD: I think that’s right. If you had a recommendation about what to create so that young people could thrive out of your experience and given what you just said, what would you tell people to do?

MB: I don’t know of a specific solution, but I know that a lot of the structures that are in place don’t benefit every student. Students have different learning styles and circumstances have changed the way that they learn.

Unconventional education styles and being in different spaces have been very healing for me. I wish that the education system, in a very systemic and structured way, would humanize students to see that they’re not all carbon copies of one another, so they’re not going to function the same way. It plays into how people feel outside of school too: in pursuit of their careers they feel they don’t have enough of this or that to feel valid in their pursuits because in school they did not feel like they were smart enough in comparison to other people, when they just learned a different way.

TD: You’ve identified something that always comes up when I talk to young people about their education and school experiences. They use very similar language to describe it. I think most often what is said to me is that “school is not a human experience.” In saying this, young people are saying everything from, “The bathrooms are in disrepair and I hate the school lunch” to “My relationships with adults and with my peers are not great. I don’t feel valued, I don’t feel seen in the school.” Something about that is at the root

of what learning is and how you put somebody in the position to be the most effective learner.

Students feel denigrated on many levels. If you don’t feel comfortable in the environment, if you aren’t in an environment where you can see positive images of yourself, that doesn’t promote positive images of you and your community, it’s dehumanizing. It was startling when this language came up to me. It’s still alarming and maybe it’s pushing me to the point to think about as much as we stress the content, and the delivery, and the mechanics of education that there’s something more fundamental to do in the transformation of education that is about affirming people’s humanity. How do we do that first, and then build pedagogical processes around the mission of affirming and deepening young people’s humanity?

MB: That leads to our next question: Can you tell us a story about someone or something that is making learning more equitable?

TD: Somebody that I really admire is a guy named Colin Rose, who is the Director of the Opportunity and Achievement Gap office in Boston Public Schools. This is a really powerful young brother who comes out of teaching, spent 10 years at the Higginson-Lewis K-8 School. He’s one of the most studied people on educational equity and educational equity challenges.

Colin has looked at our system and started to name some very concrete equity goals to build a culture that knows that it has to pay deep attention to racial justice. He has had a very clear vision, has been unwavering, and in the process has done some very cool things. He and his team were in the news for an initiative to decolonize the curriculum, an effort to think about the representation of race in the curriculum. It

IN ADDITION TO YOUNG PEOPLE BEING ABLE TO SEE THEMSELVES, THEY'VE GOT TO COME HERE AND BE ABLE TO BE THEMSELVES.

began with a re-representation of the Global Map, so that we would stop putting Europe in the center, we'd stop putting the U.S. in the center, and view the world differently. People were asking, "Why would you do that?" We were then able to have a set of conversations about why we did this and how it contributes to learning and the development of a world view that does not perpetuate racial biases. It was a bold move.

I'll also name the Boston Summer Learning Initiative. Research tells us that the summer learning loss may explain up to two thirds of the achievement gap. We thought that if we could offer robust, rigorous, and fun opportunities in the summer for young people, that we could bridge that gap. The research is showing that we're getting there. We started with a pilot in 2010 that included 232 students. This year, we will serve about 14,000 students over 160 sites in Boston.

I'm hoping that what we'll start to see, among other things, is greater exposure for young people to the city's learning opportunities where we didn't see patterns of broad exposure for young people in Boston. I still hear too many young people in Boston, particularly teenage students of color, tell me things like, "I've never seen the Boston Harbor," "I've never seen the Charles River." For me, that's a proxy for a whole lot of opportunities that they aren't tapping or a whole lot of opportunities that we've created barriers to.

MB: That's interesting. What specific actions can we, in the field of teen arts education, take to ensure the future learning is more equitable?

TD: Part of the solution calls for us to make a radical invitation in a city where there are competing opportunities for young people, and in a city that still tells young people, in very subtle ways, "You don't belong in some of these spaces."

The invitation has to be radical and it has to be crystal clear, "This is a door that you can walk through whenever you want to walk through it; there's something for you here when you do." The ICA has made this kind of invitation and so, through your teen programming, young people are allowed to be at home in a space that is falsely regarded by some as exclusive and exclusionary.

It's also about building social capital and unlikely connections for young people to the adults who come through the museum, to the artists, and to the networks around the city that an institution like the ICA has. Often young people don't see anybody who looks like them in the space. There is nothing represented in the environment that is similar to the neighborhoods or schools that they come from. There'll have to be touchstones so that young people feel like, "This is comfortable for me. This is welcoming for me as well."

Arts institutions, in particular, can help figure out how to create that context for young people. How do you use sensory experiences to convey to young people that this is their home away from home on foreign soil, or, even worse, in our not-so-demilitarized zones—like the Innovation District—that keep pushing you away? Part of this question is being intentional about how a learning space and the connections you help young people make contribute to their becoming.

MB: Being able to see yourself in the act of learning, or in the practice of learning, is something that I feel like not many people put a lot of emphasis on. Representation is something that's in front of you that you can see parallels of yourself. When you're in low-income areas where a lot of young people's time is spent on trying to survive in and out of school, whether that be through

working for their family, or the generational trauma that comes with being a person of color in a low-income area, there are many distractions and things that people need to prioritize that lead to the disconnect. They don't feel like school is something that necessarily involves them, or is accessible to them, or aids them in a way that they need to focus on to survive. Creating spaces where people see themselves in learning is very important. It can lead to a lot of reimagining of possibilities for oneself.

TD: I think that's right. In addition to young people being able to see themselves, they've got to come here and be able to be themselves. We've got explicit and implicit expectations of the way young people are supposed to be. If you're going to be serious about creating spaces and context where active becoming is one of the goals, then you got to emphasize the "be" part and let young people be who they are and evolve in that as well. My friend Milton Irving at the Timothy Smith Network puts it beautifully when he says we've got to help young people "feel free to feel free."

The ICA and similar organizations need to make a unique contribution by helping young people do the identity work—and this is an extension of becoming. It has to be intentional work for young people to actively ask, "Who am I? How am I going to become who I want to be?" You also have to create an environment for young people to build capability. What they're doing in school oftentimes is building a knowledge base rather than capability. Capability is about what can you do with the things that you know. Arts institutions are spaces where you can begin to build capability because you can practice. You can apply the concepts and the knowledge that you have, test it, play around with it, debunk it: but you actually need to be hands-on to build capability.

MB: What can we do to ensure that all teens have art in their lives and education?

TD: We have to continue pushing for out-of-school-time arts programs to be credit-bearing. When young people come to the ICA, this is one of the places that they earn credit for school. This requires technical alignment of standards, creating some parallels between what would happen in the classroom and what happens here. The delivery does not have to be the same. BPS needs to be structured to certify experience, not necessarily provide it. As much as we lament the loss of arts in schools, school is not art's primary residence. I want young people to be where art takes shape and lives.

The other piece that needs to happen regarding accessibility is making sure that art is happening where young people are. We need to support local artists more, the people who create things in the places where young people live, and to put young people in touch with those artists to make sure that what is created is featured in their neighborhoods—that it's in the places that young people and their families patronize. We can also think about what the satellite venues might be to help art reach deeply into neighborhoods. We also need to give young people and their communities some of the curatorial power to say what shows up where they live and to declare how they want to express what their communities are about.

Then there's something about helping the arts play more of a role in how young people are experiencing living in Boston. Part of what strikes me is that the ICA sits in one of the most contentious places in the city, in the Innovation District, the Seaport. One role that art can play is getting young people in the game. What do they think about the politics of the Seaport?

What do they think about the politics of other neighborhoods? Concerns about gentrification and housing, among other things? Art provides a powerful set of tools to explore communities' existential questions.

Part of what I think young people may need to learn is that art is not just a kind of observational practice. Of course, they know that there are practitioners, but it's not just about whether you are either an observer or you're an artist, with nothing in between. There are a whole lot of tools in the toolbox that help us articulate and communicate with one another and the tools are all accessible to us. We have to figure out how we start to play with the tools. It includes an exposure to a mastery of those tools, then deciding what conversations we want to have with them.

MB: Let's go back to what you were saying about becoming and capability in terms of knowing that young people are going to exist outside of the institution, that they have experiences and lives outside of that, that impact the way that they learn. What do young people need now that we're not giving them?

TD: I think the big thing that they need is something that the ICA can't fully give them in arts education, but needs to play a role in doing, and that's full agency—enfranchisement, if you will. It particularly strikes me in a place like Boston that young people experience a kind of segregation and oftentimes self-segregation because of the ways that we communicate with them. We dictate in explicit and subtle ways the spaces they're supposed to be in, the ones they're not supposed to be in, where they're allowed to lead and where they're not allowed to lead—and most of the time, they're not allowed to lead.

The goal for us is to help nurture fully enfran-

chised people. People who feel like, "As much as I love being a resident of Dorchester, Boston is mine. I can go anywhere I want to go here. I can do anything I want to do here." We want them to know that they've got a web of relationships that are helping them achieve the things that they want to do but when things aren't going right, they've got somebody to catch them.

We want them to know that there are multiple second chances and ways to course-correct where you don't have to do it all yourself. We also want young people to be folks who can act on their own vision and act on their own authority. One of the experiences that I have with Boston as opposed to my home, Detroit, is that Boston has a culture of permission seeking, which frustrates me. When folks want change they try to figure out how high up the totem pole they need to go to ask somebody for permission to do something. I'm like, "You don't need anybody's permission. Go do it."

By contrast Detroit is often characterized as a DIY city and so when people see things that are not working for them, they go make solutions. It puts them in conflict with the powers that be, but folks are like, "We are going to create what works for us and we'll negotiate the politics of it later." One of the standout examples of this is the Heidelberg Project. There was an artist on the north side of Detroit who said, "Look, something better and more beautiful needs to happen in my neighborhood," so he started this wild installation in the late '80s and '90s. He was in a ten-year fight with city government, who hated what he was doing, but the neighborhood loved it.

That's what I want for young people, because I think it's another dimension of power that I don't see people exercise very often and very willingly

here. It's crucial to making sure that they're included in Boston and, certainly, in Boston's current prosperity.

There's about to be a time when the next downturn will happen. Sustainability in the most vulnerable communities depends on the kind of power and agency they have to determine their own futures. We need to make sure that young people are built for it.

MB: I think that comes from an air of privilege that is applied to curiosity and creativity, or having passions for what you believe in. A lot of young people don't feel like this applies to them, or don't feel like it is something that they're capable of, because of the restrictions that we make. Coming from their identity or their environment, there are spaces where they don't feel like they can go for it.


TD: We need to work on changing this, and it's a cultural thing. Culture is hard to change, but we've got to work on it.

MB: What is one thing you find inspiring that you think teen arts educators should know about?

TD: Young people's ingenuity, their entrepreneurial sense and their willingness to be risk-takers. There are a lot of things that young people are that, as adults, we're unwilling to be. I'm underscoring that we've got an underleveraged energy source. It's been there, but our adults' proclivity to contain that energy source, to make sure the energy source doesn't explode, has meant that we've held young people back from achieving a lot of their own possibility and creating more possibilities for the rest of us in the process. We need to figure out how to better unleash that energy. Trust that it will translate into positive things—instead of feeling like we always have to be out in front of young people, figure out how to get behind them.



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Natasha Moustache.



ART PROVIDES A
POWERFUL SET OF
TOOLS TO EXPLORE
COMMUNITIES'
EXISTENTIAL
QUESTIONS.

Panelists at Teen Convening, 2019.
Photo by Natasha Moustache.

KIMBERLY DREW

by Mithsuca Berry and Betsy Gibbons

BG: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

KD: I am a writer, independent curator, and activist based in New York City, interested in making the arts and the world of culture more accessible to wider, broader, more international audiences.

MB: Can you tell us a story of a time when you were gripped by or deeply changed by an art experience?

KD: There are two that I always think of, the first being a Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario. I took this girl that I had a crush on to go see the show. It was the first time that I saw *The Forty Part Motet*, and to this day, it is my favorite work of art. I see a lot of art in my life. I hear a lot of art in my life. I interact with a lot of art in my life. There's something about that piece in particular that really struck me that day. I think it was because it was time-based media and it was one of my early interactions with time-based media that I actually liked.

The second, I would say, is seeing Kehinde Wiley's paintings for the first time at the Brooklyn Museum, also on another date. Seeing that work for the first time, I was like, "Oh, I have to make sure that as many people as possible see this work." This was sometime before I started the blog *Black Contemporary Art*. It was a real catalyst for me in thinking, "OK. This feels just too good. How can I keep replicating this feeling? Then also how can I share this feeling with others?"

BG: What is the most provocative site of learning you see today? Why does it excite you?

KD: I would say that provocative is one of those words that I think we all use and I actually have no idea what it means. I will say that YouTube is perhaps one of the more exciting spaces of

learning. I think that YouTube has revolutionized so many creative industries in ways that we will just continue to see making an impact, whether that's the field of graphic design or the beauty industry. You think about someone like a Virgil Abloh figure, there are so many other people of all ages really who are on their way towards more creative possibilities because of platforms like YouTube.

Additionally, you can watch YouTube on the bus. You can watch YouTube at school. You can watch YouTube at the library. I love that it's a learning tool that is dynamic and relatively accessible to so many people on a global scale.

MB: Can you tell us a story about someone or something that is making learning more equitable?

KD: I like Christine Sun Kim's work, especially her recent work. She's a mixed-media artist who explores identity. She just installed this incredible text piece in London that reads, "If Sign Language was considered equal, we'd already be friends." The piece is really pointed and also very generous. It's a welcome reminder of how much learning can be done. Especially in thinking about making communication easier and thinking about how to communicate.

From her standpoint—I can't speak for her as an artist—but from an emotional standpoint, being able to utilize her work to educate others on how she's feeling is really profound. I love anyone who can take something that is vulnerable or emotional and make it really tangible and enticing.

BG: What specific action can we in the field of teen arts education take to ensure the future of learning is more equitable?

KD: I think that it is imperative that educators always operate from a space of curiosity as opposed to a space of interpretation or a space

of education. There's a lot that's lost when young people arrive to museums. What serves us most is that every encounter with young people, every encounter with visitors, is an opportunity to be in dialogue. That for me, as a person who once did social media for institutions, was my favorite thing about the work—that every day I could learn something new from our audience. We have to operate from that space.

MB: I feel like social media, in terms of museums, is such a vital thing and really important now. Aside from that, I feel like your existence and your platform, it's just so good.

Being able to be part of all of these institutions, but also being able to hold your own on a social media platform, regardless of which institution you find yourself in, I feel like is very important. Personally, as an educator, that's something that I want to practice and build for myself. At the end of the day, I exist beyond the institutions that I work with. Being able to sprinkle a little bit of yourself in those spaces is really cool.

KD: We could go into work every day and do the same work the same exact way, or we can let it be informed by our experiences. I think as educators and beyond, it's really important to understand that these institutions are living and breathing things. Life and breath come both from the people who are making the work happen, but also from our visitors, from our volunteers, from our guards.

I loved the opportunity to interact with teens at the Met, because of the way that they're viewing that space, just by virtue of having different walks of life. I thank each of them for the ways they helped me keep what is otherwise a very mundane job fresh.

How do you keep your eyes as open as possible, your ears as open as possible, your heart as open as possible, to make sure that it remains a generative space?

MB: To have people be able to see themselves in those spaces through social media is really important.

Even the way that I look now, I never expected myself to be able to find a space in education because of the way that educators have been put in a box. I feel like social media is one of those things that has expanded my relationship with learning, and relationship with being a teacher, as well as someone who retains information.

It pushes me to be curious and unapologetically curious in the way that I express myself, and in the way that I function as an educator, which is why I'm so grateful for people who have platforms beyond their relationship with institutions. I feel like that's really eye opening and helpful.

What can we do to ensure that all teens have art in their lives and education?

KD: That's a big question. I think we can just make sure that we are leaving the doors as wide as possible for curious minds, which is a very simple answer to a very complicated question.

There also has to be that understanding that maybe not everyone cares about what we're doing. If we can operate from there, and make sure that everything that we're building is as enticing and inviting as possible, I think we can get people, especially young people, and hopefully engage them as much as possible.

The reality of it is this isn't the center of everyone's universes. For me, one of the most profound experiences I had was taking my mom to the Whitney. My mom was like, "I haven't been to a museum since you were born." I'm like, "What?" I go to museums all the time, and I never stopped to think about why my mom hadn't gone.

I was 23 at the time. We need to understand that this is not a thing that keeps people alive. It's not essential. We're not doing brain surgery. If we're building something that potentially could have an added benefit to a teen's life, let's treat it that way. Let's treat it as something that's really delicate and precious, and be patient.

MB: I haven't been in museums for that long, but in the time and engagement that I've had within museum spaces, I've been able to craft my own specific experience because I've had access to some of the resources here and I've built relationships with people.

At a very young age, I made the conscious decision to leave my community, which is a very isolating and depressing place to be sometimes. I made the active decision to leave and look for something else to do. I did that with survival at the forefront of my mind.

I knew that I wanted to continue making art in a way that felt exhilarating and empowering, not in a way that made me feel riddled with guilt and shame, the way that generational trauma passes down to you as a low-income family. Being like, "Yeah, we can't afford to do X, Y, and Z, so how do you expect us to afford to do art?" or, "Why would you put your energy into doing art?"

I feel like I pushed myself to reach out and go to those places. Some people don't even think that they have the capacity to step out of their community to do those things. I'm very grateful, in the sense that I feel like I've been able to pave that way for myself. I did it when I think I was at a very low point, and I needed somewhere. I found somewhere, and now, trying to make that accessible or make that message clear to people is one of my priorities as an educator.

BG: It leads to another question we have for you: how can cultural institutions prepare themselves to meet the youth of the future? How can they be instigators?

KD: My first instinct is to say: follow the youth. Not every teen's on Snapchat or on these digital platforms in a way that you would anticipate. I will say that, first and foremost, it is important to be in those spaces, just to figure out what the trends are.

There's such an incredible shift in language that's happening for all of us. Whether that be around



Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

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gender, identity, and all these things, I think it's really essential that people are being really cognizant of the way that technology is shifting our awareness around who we are and what we need. Museums, at their very best, that's what they reflect back to us.

I would also say that we need to make sure that teen programming remains central to the mission of whatever institution is able to support it. I was definitely a person who grew up in the church. One of the sayings in general is, if the babies are not crying, the church is dying. Maintaining a commitment to serving youth directly, like some of the ICA programming, where young people have opportunities to transition from student to teacher.

Making sure that you're growing alongside or with young people for as long as they want to remain engaged, I think, is an essential way for any institution to be a part of any community, over any determined amount of time. That, I think, is the most future-forward, even though it's like an oldest trick in the book.

MB: With that being said, what do you think young people need now that we're not giving them?

KD: I think that, if I were a young person right now, I'd be looking for sanctuaries. There is a lot of pressure on young people right now around issues of safety, whether that be conversations around climate collapse, thinking about violence in schools, or something else. I can't imagine being 10 years younger than I am and being on Instagram.

Having spaces that are sanctuary spaces, I think, is really essential. Hopefully, museums can fashion themselves to be those, despite museums typically having very violent histories. Hopefully, the future of museums can be that of sanctuary for young, budding minds.

BG: Moving beyond just museums and thinking about our systems of education and learning, what is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

KD: I would think about providing more resources to educators around the myriad ways of learning. I feel like, for my entire education, I was taught in the same exact way as every single person in all of my classrooms. That's just not how brains work. I think a big step would be to better resource educators to identify learning disabilities and to identify situational needs of people who are in spaces.

BG: I think a lot about that as well, because one thing we hear is how different out-of-school time learning is from in-school time. In both spaces, educators being informed and learning from each other seems like something that needs to happen.

MB: What could be deemed as a new version or a new iteration of learning techniques for educators shouldn't even be something that should be labeled as new. It should be something that could be easily integrated, regardless of which institution takes the initiative to do it.

It's so wild that we have to pitch new ways of being an educator to institutions like conventional education spaces, when it could just be something that could be integrated into the curriculum at the end of the day. I feel like, even when I was in art class, some place where people can be like, "Oh, you'd thrive," because I guess I was identified as an artist at a younger age.

It was a draining, sad space to be in. I don't think I ever really took myself seriously as an artist, or even saw art as a possibility for myself, until I branched off to things like social media. That's where I got my first freelance jobs and when I actually started to feel like I was getting recognized for something that I was working really hard on.

I wish that accessibility was present for young people now, because I feel like I've been able to find teachers in spaces that aren't school. I feel like the education system has personally failed me in a lot of ways, but I feel like it hurts even more, the way that they failed me in creative things, like art.

BG: Kimberly, we have one last question for you. I think people look for inspiration in a lot of different ways. Share one thing—it can be a person, an event, whatever—that you find inspiring, that you think teen arts educators should know about.

KD: Ideologically, I think it's really important for everyone to understand that they could have an impact in the arts, should they find themselves there. Oftentimes, people assume that you can only be an artist, you can only be a visitor, you can only be a curator, you can only be this or that. The truth is that institutions don't work without the sum of all of those parts.

For me, it's really just understanding that your small actions really do leave an imprint, and the more civil actions the better. For me, in my career path, especially in the three years that I spent at The Met, I did not go in with the idea that, "Well, I'm going to have all this impact and change on this institution," nor did I leave feeling like, "Oh, I've completely changed this institution forever."

I do know that the micro changes that I made, whether that be finding community, whether that be introducing a policy or different ways of doing things, it made the time that I spent there feel really valuable. I hope that it made the possibility of other people being there more possible.

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Fall Teen Night, 2019.
Photo by Lauren Miller.



Teen Convening, 2016. Photo by Kristyn Ulanday.
Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Natasha Moustache.



KAISHA GERHARDT

by Isabel Beavers and Sydney Bobb

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED
THE TOOL OF BEING
DETERMINED, OR
HAVING MORE HOPE.

IB: Can you introduce yourself for us? Who are you and how would you describe yourself?

KG: It's kind of hard to really answer. I'm still learning who I am, truly. I'm a very big art kid. I practically live at our art museum, the Holter Museum of Art. I'm the president of one of our art groups, ATAC (After-school Teen Art Council). I live in Helena, Montana, and am a senior at Helena High School. Not to be cheesy or anything but I'm definitely an artsy-fartsy kind of gal.

I'm using a wide variety of mediums right now. One recent piece was a sculpture out of a mannequin, and then I covered a skull in gold paper and spray paint. Now I'm going to be painting the broken off bumper of my car.

SB: Can you tell us about a time when you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

KG: I think there were a lot of different experiences where I felt deeply changed by art. Actually, going to the Building Brave Spaces conference opened up my eyes for how much art can affect someone and how we can use that towards society. I now realize that when I was younger, I didn't know what to say or do, so I just drew it out. Art definitely gives me a different grip on life.

IB: Was there anything specific you remember about the conference that gripped you?

KG: From Dr. Shawn Ginwright, I learned about social toxins. Social toxins have a huge impact in big cities but also in little towns such as Helena, where I live. It was amazing to hear that at the conference because it was just an eye opener of the steps to take so you are surviving, then you're being yourself, and then you're thriving from what you've experienced. I found that incredible to understand and learn about.

SB: Equity is defined as the quality of being fair and impartial. Can you tell us a story about someone or something that you feel is making learning more equitable and accessible to others?

KG: Yes. There have been plenty of people. One of my biggest role models, the head of our art group, Sondra Hines, is trying to make an opening for young students to have a place to be themselves, safe, and expressive with art. It is incredible how she is giving education towards art possibilities and wanting to share it with anyone in the community.

Also, when it comes to other schooling, I had a teacher, her name was Ms. McGerty Anderson. She was very straightforward. She was young. She really wanted us to understand that even though going to school is boring, depending on who you are, and it's not the best place to go, she wanted to teach us valuable things and look towards our education as a gift. She brought to us a future, future ideas of what to do. She would praise you for wanting to step out of the box. She also taught us about taxes, which is really incredible. I feel like she definitely wanted to give us, her students, a nicer outlook and talked about how we need to have an open mind. It really is a great thing to teach the students.

IB: What is an action that we can take to ensure that learning is more equitable in the future?

KG: There could be many different actions, but the biggest step is trying to understand, or have an open mind for everyone in the classroom—so we're not jumping to conclusions about what is right and what is wrong, and so we can see that there's not one straight plan of what you need to learn, that there's more out there. If we keep an open mind we can learn from one another and build on that. It's not really a specific action. It's

a huge thing to all be open-minded and accept one another. What we can do is take the responses or feelings that students have towards their learning to understand what they want.

IB: What do you think we can do to ensure that art is in the lives and educations of young people everywhere?

KG: There are so many different forms of art that we can incorporate into daily experiences. We can teach kids, students, and teens the multiple forms of art through activities within school or in an art groups. Art is practically surrounding us. We want to incorporate that into other schooling in classrooms or teaching about art. Whether it is having music play, looking at artists, encouraging, or helping at the art museum, really encouraging students to take that step, observe, have a look around and see what is all around us.

IB: What is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

KG: As a student, I would really love if we didn't start school so early! That's not really the major thing. We should have more of a laid-back system. I would love to have not so much homework. It's the most beneficial when there is less work and more freedom for students so they can feel comfortable at school. I think relieving the amount of work that's constantly being pushed onto students would help them out a lot and decrease the stress level. It also encourages students to expand on an activity outside of school, such as joining an art group. A lot of plates are full, but if you can slim down the work, we would definitely be able to be ourselves and learn more about who we are.

Another thing I would change in high school is not to slam this idea that you need to know who you are, what you want to do. Help students relax. Tell

them that you don't need to know yet, that you still have a whole lifetime ahead of you.

SB: Following up, what do you think that young people need now that they're not being given?

KG: We're not encouraging young people to have determination to continue what they believe in or what they think they can do. A lot of my peers, they're giving up so easily. Hearing the news brings everyone down. I had a conversation about how some students are scared we're going to be graduating soon. We feel like it's going to be a waste of time because ... it's a dark idea, but a lot of them think, "We're just going to die young because of what we're having go around our lives right now." It's a dark outlook on life, and I think it's important to teach any young person to have determination and make that into a tool that you personally have. To make yourself believe "I can do more. There's nothing stopping me." Young people need the tool of being determined, or having more hope.

IB: I love that idea of a tool of hope. On a little bit of a lighter note: What is one thing that inspires you that teen arts educators should know about?

KG: It's a broad answer, but art, in general, inspires me. It's just constantly around us, and we're constantly surrounded by some form of art. Even advertising is a form of art. It's created to be appealing. Music is a huge form of art. It's all very inspiring. Also, going to see works of art created by other people inspires me to think outside the box. I can express a topic in a visual form whether it's personal or what we face in society.



Building Brave Spaces, 2018.
Photo by Lauren Miller.
Teen Convening, 2019.
Photo by Natasha Moustache.



Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

SANDRA JACKSON-DUMONT

by Isabel Beavers and Sydney Bobb

IB: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

SJD: I am a daughter of Eadie Jackson, a Southern Black woman who lives in San Francisco. I am a product of labor. I am proud, young, gifted, and Black. I work in museums. I work in cultural spaces. I see myself as a cultural producer who takes up space in ways that make new opportunities for people to be themselves out loud. Whether that be academically, artistically, socially, personally, or professionally.

I am someone who is interested in dismantling injustice, whether it be social or structural. I'm interested in access and equity. I'm interested in art as a vehicle for transformative thinking and relationship-building. I am someone who sits in the interstitial spaces of those things. I'm a bridge-builder, and a connector, professionally and personally. I am fair, honest, truthful, and engaged.

SB: Can you tell us about a time when you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

SJD: I was born and raised in the area of San Francisco called the Fillmore. I grew up going to church as a way to think about how to escape, how to be fully present in a different type of mind state. One might call it the imagination. My dance teacher danced with Sun Ra, who was a very famous jazz musician, let's call him the Jimi Hendrix of jazz. He had an eclectic personality, all about space and free thinking and a kind of Black imagination. I was part of a program for young people that taught us to practice that kind of thinking. I grew up across the street from the Saint John Coltrane Orthodox Church. John Coltrane was a celebrated jazz musician. I didn't grow up going to *that* church. I would go past this church on the way to my church. One day, I was at the bus stop in front of the Saint John Coltrane Orthodox Church, and I heard jazz music

playing. I looked in, and all of the images of Christ were Black. I grew up going to a church where the images of Christ were white with very straight blond hair, but in the pews there were mainly Black people. These were major portraits, painted using gold leaf, like some of the most important European artists from around 1300. They were all majestic images of a Black man who was John Coltrane, as if he were the savior. He was painted holding a trumpet.

The transformative experience for me was looking through that window and realizing that the arts, the Black imagination, and the Black church had come together in these paintings. Where I actually saw an image of God that reminded me of my uncle and my brothers. One of my first real moving experiences in the arts was actually not in the art world at all, but had everything to do with belief and self-reflection and the imagination. It was looking into a window of a place that was called a church, Saint John Coltrane Orthodox Church, and seeing an image of myself finally as God.

SB: That sounds like it was quite a provocative experience. What is the most provocative site of learning that you see today why does it excite you?

SJD: The street. I think walking down the street is a learning experience. Teachers could say, "Today the city is our classroom. We are going to sit outside and our lesson is going to be capitalism and slavery." You could actually do that sitting on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, watching people walk by and analyzing their fashion.

I think that people are often ill-prepared to process what happens in learning when stuff unexpectedly shows up in front of you. I think those muscles need to be built in structured spaces so that when one finds themselves in the unstructured space, they understand what's happening around them.

GET YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE SHAPE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S VISION.

That sounds like a riddle of sorts. In other words, if one is not careful, the world will happen to you and around you. I think we have to provide the tools for young people to know how to process experiences that impact their lives. As a result, the on-the-job, on-the-life learning that happens is often outside of formal spaces. For me, those are often some of the most meaningful spaces.

Museums can be those spaces and in many scenarios are. They are interesting and relevant if people are teaching and doing really incredible, provocative, and engaging work in those spaces.

SB: Can you tell us about someone or something that you feel is making learning more equitable?

SJD: One of the Met's artists in residence is Miguel Luciano. He's a fantastic educator and maker. The project he's working on is centered on Puerto Rican art, heritage, and social impact. Much of his work explores how to create healthy spaces. Right now he is looking at the history of Puerto Rico and its relationship to the Met. He works and he lives in East Harlem and he's been thinking about the history of that community and its relationship to social justice.

He is thinking specifically about the Young Lords and the history of this incredible group of organizers and their concerns around poverty, housing, education, and simply one's overall well-being. He is interested in how people get information in all kinds of ways. That may mean holding a workshop in a community center. That may mean working with practitioners that are not taught in the traditional way—meaning in a university setting—but that have been trained and taught from a community group to form healing spaces. The Young Lords did work around health and healing, bringing elders into public spaces to help heal people through naturopathic healing.

Miguel is looking at how you create spaces for people to be healthy and heal themselves. He's figuring out how to make these spaces equitable in the sense that they are free—he works together with communities to carve out spaces and shine light on those that have the skill set but may not have access to space. These are the same kinds of practitioners that are working on health and healing through acupressure and acupuncture on the island of Puerto Rico. He's tying historic practices together in a contemporary space, and bringing people along in sharing those histories.

IB: What specific action can we in the field of teen arts education take to ensure that the future of learning is more equitable?

SJD: The greatest thing that we can do is train youth workers. This field of youth workers in cultural institutions needs to shift wholly, to make sure that they understand what youth development work is. Oftentimes museum professionals understand how to do workshops and activities that they think are cool, but they haven't really thought about what the skills and competencies are for excellent youth development work.

The field of youth development understands that, and then in some cases, they don't understand what great arts programming looks like in terms of content. They understand youth voices, they understand how to shape healthy spaces, they understand the dos and don'ts of youth work.

If we're going to ensure the future is equitable, then we actually have to hire people who understand what equity truly is and understand the difference between equity and equality. We need skilled and competent youth workers who are also arts educators and museum professionals in order to ensure that equity is realized in these spaces.

IB: What do you think we can do to ensure that all teens have art in their lives and education?

SJD: The people who are making the decisions have to value and understand the role of art in society. They need to understand how it can shape things, people, places, and ideas. Then that will trickle down to people, so there almost has to be a bottom-up, top-down approach that's structural, systemic, and one that people understand how it's applicable to what matters most to them.

I am not always convinced that museums do a great job of that. I am not always convinced art teachers do a great job of that. We all have heard the story of a parent that says, "Oh my God, my kid really needs to improve in reading comprehension." An arts professional might say, "Well, we need them to make art because art makes you feel great and that will help their self-esteem and that will help with reading." Why can't it make you feel great and help you read? I think that to ensure that art is radically accepted in a major way, people have to understand its value in action.

IB: What is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

SJD: Fear. People are scared of young people. Truly, I've never seen more educators in my life terrified of young people, terrified to get in there with them. The students that are considered the greatest challenge are the ones that people are most afraid of. They're the ones that people feel like it takes too much time, but they're often the most rigorous thinkers. They're often the smartest and the most fearless. They're the ones that call into question the ability of an educator.

When educators are ill-prepared to stand up and alongside young people who need generative practice—and not a lesson that asks them to simply regurgitate information—then I think that our system fails, and we fail young people. In the words of James Baldwin, "We need people that are going to go for broke," people that are going to really, really understand that education is serious business on every level. So many of the ills of our society can be addressed with dynamic, critical, and reflective learning spaces. It is the greatest moral issue of our time.

What would I change? Well, that's a big one. I would change a lot of things. I am not a K-12 educator so I am not the best person to ask. But... if I put on my highly opinionated hat, I might consider changing what we teach. Perhaps, I would change the structure of the school day or how the pace of the day works. I would infuse it with all kinds of things that some of the best schools in this country offer, like yoga and meditation. I would ask questions like, "Can museums function as alternative

universities?" Let's make museums the people's university. I would change a lot, but the greatest things I would change are pay, equity, access and educator trainings.

I'm going to be bold—I would say that the entire system of education and learning needs to be overhauled. To be more specific, we need skilled, competent educators that do not criminalize young Black and brown children, and we need folks that are not afraid of our young people. I should say, we have many educators that already exhibit radically beautiful teaching. I am simply saying we need them to be the norm and not the exception.

SB: How can cultural institutions prepare themselves to meet the youth of the future, and how can they be instigators?

SJD: Cultural institutions can prepare themselves to meet youth of the future by going where young people are. We need to be in the very places we want youth to come from and we need to be there when we don't have the microphone. If you want to learn about young people, your only learning cannot be asking them a bunch of questions. You could just be where they are as supporters and advocates. I also think that reading is fundamental. There's a ton of research out there. When it comes to young people, local institutions often ask young people to tell them what they think they should do. I'm like, "Yes, you should do that, but you should also read." Instead of starting from some big open field, ask them something that they can comment on, something specific.

One way cultural institutions can be instigators is by partnering with one another. Stop being competitive. Show young people hopeful behavior about collaboration, because that's the future. No one does anything alone.

We can also be instigators by asking critical questions about the world and not dumbing things down. Finding out things like, what's the connection between skateboarding, art, youth culture, and public policy around safe spaces for young people to live out loud.

Get young people involved in the shape of your organization's vision. Ask them how they would make your space a safer space. This teaches them about how to lobby for those things.

We can instigate by being transparent with young people about what it takes to create the spaces that they love so much.

IB: That's great. I love the idea of collaboration as something that can instigate. What is one thing you find inspiring that you think other teen arts educators should know about?

SJD: I am so inspired when I talk about other people's work. When I talk about what you all do at the ICA and your Teen Convenings, I'm super excited. I'm like, "Yes. I love that." I love that young people are alongside adult educators working collaboratively.

I'm also super inspired when I hear young people show up in critical ways. I love the idea of being a super critical ambassador for other folks.

SB: What role does freedom play in the lives of youth?

SJD: That, for me, is the most important radical thinking we should invest in. For young people to understand that youth voice and choice is an investment and a practice. It isn't simply a given. Youth have to first define what they mean by freedom. Then they need to understand that freedom takes effort and they actually have to own it and often take it. I'm interested in being part of a community of radical thinkers. People who say, "This is what I think, this is why I think it, I'm not afraid to think it, here is me respectfully responding to someone else's thinking." That's a free-er space than normal. Freedom looks like me taking up space alongside people respectfully.

Those are the "good" citizens. Freedom, I hope, for young people is about asking, "What does the best future look like? What does the best now look like?" I truly am betting on young people to really help us

understand, and physically live, in spaces of freedom. They have a heavy burden.

SB: You talked about deeply interrogated and accountable questioning. What is one question that will help us create better futures for young people?

SJD: We often ask youth what they want, what they like, and then we focus on making them feel welcome. I'd like us to scratch beneath the surface. One question that'll help create better futures for young people is asking them, "What do you think the future should look like? How does that vision support healthy communities? What are you going to do to make that happen? What can I do to help realize that?"

Young people in general need to own their own lives, with responsible adults helping them do so. We need to figure out how to help young people do that in ways that they respect themselves and respect others. In some of the spaces where young people reside, even in classrooms, the community norms are not informed by them. They don't get to govern anything. It's important for us to create community norms that foster dynamic learning and personal growth. Young people should not be talked at or told what to do, they should be in partnership with people that have life experience and professional skills, who can help *them* make informed decisions.



Luna Escos, *PINK*, 2019.



JASON MORAN

by Enahjah Brown and Betsy Gibbons

EB: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

JM: I am a New Yorker by way of Houston, Texas. I am a father and a husband. I'm a pianist and composer. I'm an Aquarian and I like unbalanced situations. I also use the piano to find balance and promote balance.

EB: Can you tell us a story of a time where you were gripped by or deeply changed by an art experience?

JM: I remember walking into my parents' room when I was about 13 years old. My parents were watching television. They were watching a breaking news story about a politician in Houston named Mickey Leland. Leland died in a plane crash in Africa, on a mission. My parents knew him and were in shock. As they were watching the wreckage of this crash on television, they didn't have the sound of the television on, it was on mute. There was music playing and the music was of the pianist Thelonious Monk.

Monk was playing his most famous composition, "Round Midnight," and he was performing it solo piano. It was a gripping commentary during an extremely heavy moment. The commentary was only from Thelonious Monk. It wasn't from the newscaster.

From that moment on, I wanted to be Thelonious Monk, period. In that moment, I heard that song in that time and space in my parents' bedroom, and they were mourning their friend. The sound that consoled them was Thelonious Monk. It was life-changing to witness.

EB: Thank you for sharing. My next question is, what is the most provocative site of learning you see today and why does it excite you?

JM: Children learn better than adults because they haven't solidified what is a rule and how it works

yet. As a parent, I've watched my kids learn, whether it's language, whether it's body movement and dance, whether it's music. They also learn subtleties of conversation. They're much more aware, sensitive, and also able to move past a messed-up situation—a child could be crying, totally hysterical one minute, and then five minutes later, totally happy. Adults cannot get to that. That's something remarkable that we lose as adults.

There's a freedom of movement, I think, that activism requires. Young people have not solidified what the rules are yet as they, like babies, are also very flexible. If the rule should be changed, young folks will find a way to change it.

EB: What specific action can we or people in the field of teen arts education take to ensure that the future of learning is more equitable?

JM: I say it goes two ways. One is, you take the information you learn there and teach it to your parents. You teach it to your grandparents. You see if you can transmit what you've learned in that space to your home life. A problem of museums is that they live in museums. They live in these walls.

Part of what artists yearn to do mostly in societies is to figure out how to move that information from their lives onto those walls, but then how does it get back out of those walls? Big question.

If you see something in life, whether it's on the bus or the train, that reminds you of something you saw or heard someone say in a museum, then actually share it rather than holding it in. Unlock the information.

EB: What can we do to ensure that all teens have art in their lives and education? What steps do you think we could take?

JM: If you ensure that every kid in America has access to all arts and to making it themselves, too, then that'll help. A lot of the time, arts education



Jason Moran at the opening of his exhibition at the ICA, 2018. Photo by Liza Voll.

is dedicated to those living in metropolitan cities, but the country is so vast. I'm positive there isn't enough arts education in rural areas.

Every town and every school should have a performing arts high school or middle school. They should have a track that leads kids into the arts rather than parents always thinking that the arts is the worst way to go because you'll never make a living. I think these schools are a big thing.

Our job, in a certain sense, is to continue to be some sort of healing device for people. A device that lets people know that they exist, or that life is complex and that music sounds this way, that not everything is on the Internet. I know in music, that's how we function.

I have traveled to many places as a performer. I don't have enough energy to do all the work that I know is out there to do, which involves much more time spent in parts of America I rarely get to. Whether it's the reservation in North Dakota or the cornfields of Iowa, there are still communities that would like to have interaction with the music. Back to the old phrase "each one teach one."

EB: If there were one thing you could change about our system of education and learning, what would it be?

JM: I'd want people to think that what they learned could become a career and the country would support your career as an artist. It's what I see in other countries. Artists get a stipend. They get money in their account. If they want to study with a certain teacher who lives in New York, they get a grant from their government. It's not from a foundation, it's from the government. Our government loves to peddle the arts, but it doesn't love to acknowledge how hard it is to create it.

If the government could stand up in the same way that it stands up for war, if it could stand up and fund future artists so that you wouldn't have to feel so on the edge with your entire life, your life or the livelihoods of your family that you're making or building, if we could have support for that, the country would be different.

EB: Did you, as an individual, feel supported in arts growing up? Do you feel supported now?

JM: I feel overly supported. It starts from my family. My family supported every move that I made. Even when I got to my first high school in 9th grade, it wasn't the high school I needed to be in, so they switched me to the arts high school for 10th grade. From then on, I was kind of saved.

And then also getting into Manhattan School of Music in New York and meeting friends who supported me. Then getting out into the professional world and touring as a musician, that support has been there.

I feel extremely supported by the audience that comes to see the work too. I also then turn around and try to support zillions of other people as much

as possible, because I know that I've been given a lot of support.

EB: Is there anything other than support that young people need now that we're not giving them?

JM: The hard thing about being young is not knowing which mistake can be life-threatening. At a young age, each mistake seems like the one you make that day. I didn't know how stupid I could be until I was in my twenties.

If you gave kids more destinations that allow them to think a little bit freer, I don't even know how you make that. They aren't big buildings with white walls either. They're in communities. I don't mean like a community center either. They are some other thing in between that could lend its support to let people make artistic mistakes, but not life-threatening mistakes. We all need space.

EB: How can cultural institutions prepare themselves to meet the youth of the future? How can they be instigators?

JM: I'd say that anything that revolves around a ticket counter is already off. How do you make cultural institutions free? How do you make them porous? If the work only can be seen within the walls of that place, that limits who can get there.

I think for the teachers, there have to be outposts. The outposts can be much smaller and more flexible, much like the ICA Watershed across the water. How do you make other spaces that allow a different kind of flexibility but are still institutionally supported? I'm not naïve. I also know it takes a village. And within the village you have the preacher, banker, teacher, mother, thief, judge, singer, doctor, child, skeptic, etc.

BG: Do you mind speaking a little bit more about your role at the Kennedy Center and why you got involved?

JM: My professional role or my title is the Artistic Director for Jazz at the Kennedy Center. The Kennedy Center is the national performing arts center for America. It's a big notion to program a place like that. It is important to understand that there were blind spots and to make the institution aware of them.

Even within jazz, there was a way that the avant garde was unacknowledged, I might say. I mean, there wasn't a jazz program at the center until the early '90s. I think more institutionally what we wanted to do was start to understand that America continues to innovate music, and global music especially. One of the big things I really wanted to push through was to have a hip-hop program, to have hip-hop firmly a part of our program in much of the same way as dance, theater, symphony and orchestral, and opera. Now we have that. I would also address hip-hop because it is time that the country understood that maybe the latest innovation in music in the past 40 years has been hip-hop. What that has fueled, whether it's in sound, fashion, or dance. In film, it has done a lot as an

art form, but it started very humbly in the Bronx and in Queens.

To know that these are the stories that America also has to tell, and not lie about. These are the things that we wanted to put on stages, realizing what was missing from stages. It's a big part of why I'm there whispering in everybody's ear about what we can do and change.

BG: I think about who feels like they want to be part of teen arts education. If we change who and what stories are represented on the stage and on the walls in places like the Kennedy Center and the ICA, what is the relationship between that and teen arts education? Do you have any thoughts on that?

JM: The biggest thing to understand is that everyone who's in your program all of a sudden becomes—this is really strange, what I might say—but the focal point for any corporation, because they are a future customer. I don't think about it like that, as the customer part. I think about it as the creator part, which also means that they will drive the conversation in the next 10 to 20 years. Anything you, as a young person, think about right now, you will obsess over 10 years from now. You will make that a part of the canon 20 years from now. All of these ideas, and every innovation, will be geared toward what you are learning right now.

Which part do you want to have? Which conversation do you want to have over and over again? Which conversation do you want to innovate? I know from my work in jazz and from the piano that there was a conversation that I wanted to innovate around understanding history and understanding contemporary society, that they are one, and never to really detach myself from that. That's an old idea. I'm not the first to explore it.

Enahjah, you'll have an entirely new take on what should be done, especially after college. You'll see what you've been taught, and you'll start to analyze what you've been taught. You'll start to think about it as a free thinker rather than just simply as a student, but one who can teach.

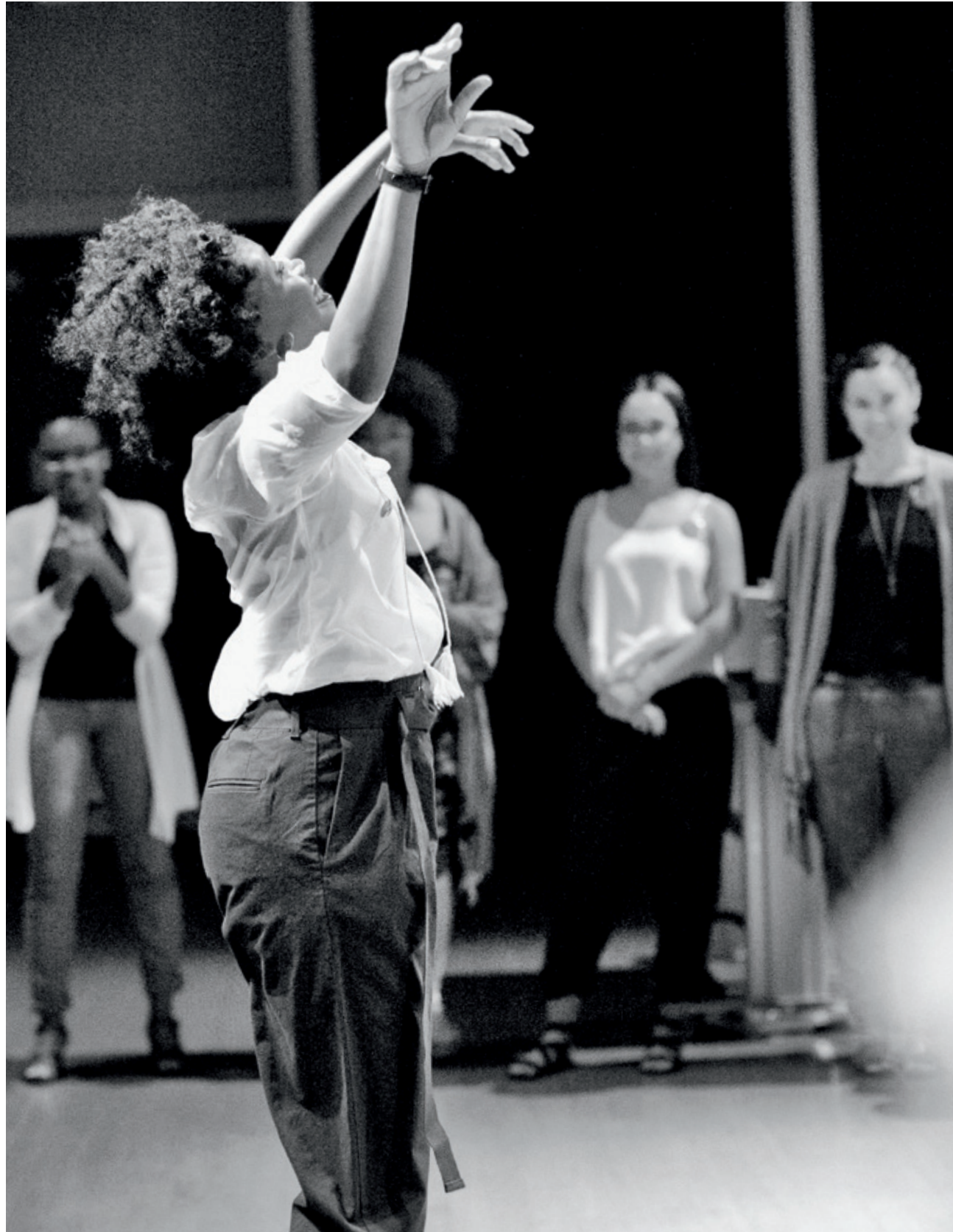
It takes some energy, but if we think that we will be the ones to change it, then we're much more powerful that way than being the passenger.

BG: What compelled you to become an educator as well as an artist and musician?

JM: I was taught by some of the best educators in the world, starting with my mother and then my teachers—the first piano teacher I had, the first orchestra teacher I had in elementary school, the teachers I had in high school and in Manhattan School of Music, and the teachers I've been through in the professional world.

I had a series of unbelievable teachers. I knew, as a student, that I owed it to their legacy to turn around and start teaching as soon as I possibly could. Whether I was a good teacher or not, I owed it to the community. They totally informed how I move right now. I owe it to them.

IF THE GOVERNMENT COULD
STAND UP [FOR ARTISTS] IN
THE SAME WAY IT STANDS
UP FOR WAR...THE COUNTRY
WOULD BE DIFFERENT.



Teen Convening, 2015. Photo by Kristyn Ulanday.



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.



Okwui Okpokwasili at Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

OKWUI OKPOKWASILI

by Mithsuca Berry

MB: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

OO: I would describe myself as a mom, a collaborator, a wife. I've been starting to use the word artist but I'm not quite comfortable with that label because I think of visual artists. I guess I'm not very comfortable with any label. I do time-based work. I do performances at the intersection of dance, theater, visual art, and sound work—hopefully, all-encompassing pieces that create energetic shifts in the body.

I'm a collaborator, too. I work with other people to share their thoughts, and to share how they address particular questions in the body. I have a hard time knowing what to call myself or how to talk about myself.

MB: I feel like we're in a time of creative expression that even in professional settings, you can be more than one thing, and you can call yourself more than one thing, not just confine yourself to being an artist. What is an artist without so many different components?

I'm happy to say artist, but maybe sometimes, I want a new, all-encompassing term. There are folks in the generation before me coming up with some terms like "generators." There are interesting ways that people are trying to trouble that water.

OO: Many artists are clearly activists or educators, and I'm definitely not that. However, I do feel that my work is concerned with a particular kind of visibility and liberation. I do get inspiration from critical thinkers and other artists.

MB: I feel the act of being an educator, or the act of teaching, is broader than the way that term has been used. Even if it's not teaching about a certain time period or a certain concept, you can also be teaching people through teaching them

about themselves, or teaching them about certain systems that are in place that you want to explore in your work or concepts.

Challenging peoples' minds, I feel, is enough to be able to say you were teaching others. That in and of itself makes education accessible. When you deconstruct the way that the word educator has been used, it makes it more accessible for people to feel like they're able to teach others as well as they're able to learn.

OO: I think that's a very good point. Thank you for opening up that space. In that space, it feels more generous. It seems like you're talking about undoing codes that are put in place to disconnect people from their own intuitive capacity to teach and learn.

We're educated in a number of ways, right? Of course, when I think of education, I'm thinking of all of the things that are complicated about our system of educating young folks from pre-K to college. I also think about universities and the very narrow way one accesses that kind of world.

I'm thinking of the culture of experts. Or maybe not all educators or academics call themselves experts; they are holding and transmitting what they feel is necessary and urgent information to unearth hidden connections and to map out a lineage.

How do you continue to build spaces for people to have a new way of imagining relationships, relating to each other? I hope my work does. I am interested in considering visibility—the politics of the personal—I want my work to facilitate the exploration of liberating interior space for women of color.

MB: I feel like that is at the heart of what education should be. It is not being forceful in the way that you teach someone. You lead them to answer all of their own questions. It's more like giving them

WE CAN'T EXPECT EDUCATORS TO BE LOVING TOWARD STUDENTS IF THEY'RE NOT LOVED.

a platform from which to think and explore their own thoughts and then helping them develop their beliefs. That's what learning is to me.

OO: That's beautiful, or sometimes coming into the space and saying, "I don't understand," and being OK with not understanding, and asking questions later. Maybe there are some things that you do feel you have an understanding of, and finding how to hold both of those things. More of us need to be brave enough to go into spaces that we don't understand. There's part of the privilege of being from the United States and speaking English. Obviously being a Black woman or of whatever descent we are—like first-generation, second-generation—there are complications. We've had to learn how to navigate spaces that weren't necessarily made for us. More people that haven't done that need to do that.

MB: Can you tell us about a time you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

OO: I spent some time in Japan in the late 1990s. I was doing Butoh workshops. I remember going to see a show in Tokyo. It was in Japanese. The company called Dairakudakan. The stage was like a small black box, completely black, completely dark. Then it opened up. There were three people hanging like bats from the ceiling and doing excruciatingly slow movements. It was as if there was an invisible chrysalis around each of them, and they were emerging from it.

I was watching, and I found it amazing. I was sure too, at the same time, that there was so much that I was not understanding, so many things that I was not absorbing. I also was absorbing something that I needed in the moment, which was to think of the possibility of how to enter a space and how to shape a space—how the performance is not just about when you first see the bodies. I understood that there was a huge gap between what I under-

stood and what was happening, but I could still be there. I could be the alien in the room in that space. I wonder if more of us need to be able to do that.

I don't know that I have experienced that kind of blackness for so long. At some point, I don't know if the lighting was adjusting, or my eyes were adjusting, but I noticed them doing microscopic or super subtle cellular ripples. First, they felt like they were barely moving. Was that the movement of breasts? Muscles? It was strange, feeble, and primordial. It felt just like we were in the protean zone. As they were seeming to come more and more to life, I also was coming more and more into sight.

I was very aware of my process, my thinking, and projections. It was interesting that, in some ways, I felt they opened up this vast landscape within me, but also I felt I was kept in check to some degree. It's like, "OK. What you're seeing is also your responsibility."

Those things are really critical for me, but then there was also reading Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* when I was 15. I had been in theater classes. I was looking for monologues and wondering where all the Black people were. I mean, how many times can one read *A Raisin in the Sun*? I was starved for works that were written for and by women of color, Black women, African women.

This book, this poem, this choreography picks up the cadence and the variability and the rhythm of Black language, Black sound, urban Black sound. I grew up in the Bronx, and I would think that I would understand and recognize it but it was so foreign to me in the context of theater to have this language. And that was also a part of what made it so powerful, that it was a singular and rare expression of the interior lives of particular Black women using all the tools Black women use to tell stories, transmitted in a multivalent form that could hold that interiority. She called it a choreopoem. But she wasn't prescriptive.

When I went to college, I feel like almost every school I went to there was like a group of Black women in a Black theater group or women in a women-centered theater group doing *For Colored Girls*. Every one was radically different. Their language and the cadence and the rhythm was the only potential cue for what it might be, but it asked that everyone bring something of their own experience, to marry their own dances to the poems that she had written.

That was also a very transformative connection to a kind of Black woman radically shifting the landscape of performance, theater, and dance. They were pushing against the structures meant to contain them and building their own—connecting it to their traditions and legacy. They understood something about the forms of Black life, of Black birth, of Black movements. They were finding a way to protect and shape those forms and project it out into the world without diminishing them.

Also, reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and thinking about precolonial Nigeria, Igbo

culture, my parents' Igbo culture. Because they are children of a British colony as much as precolonial practice in Nigeria, a lot of those things were not held or kept.

MB: You touched on people that are making spaces more equitable. Can you tell us more about someone or something making learning more equitable?

OO: There is a program that my sister-in-law started in Newark and New York called the Sadie Nash Leadership Project. It's a program that aims to build leadership capacity in young women, particularly teenage women, to not only build self-esteem but to also give them the tools to support their desire to make change in their community. It also gives them the tools to implement that through academic courses, through mentorship, through conversations and lectures with critical thinkers and activists in the world, like Wilma Mankiller. She was the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. They also spoke to Barbara Lee, U.S. Representative from California.

Not only are they giving these young girls a sense of self esteem, perspective, and connection to other people in the community but also access to folks who are making change right now. "What is it in your community that you want to do or want to change or implement?" They work with the girls to do that. They can see within themselves and build the capacity to be a leader, they understand how leaders are deeply rooted to their communities and want to address the concerns of their communities. You don't need someone to come from the outside and tell you what you need to do to address some inequality or problem.

I think it is incredible to connect these young women to other women who have been leading. To be given the support and the framework to start to imagine and then build and implement your own grassroots project for your community is amazing. I'm so glad that there is a program that is structured to do that.

Or Greta Thunberg in Sweden. She's on strike. Who's educating her?

Sometimes we elders need to take a look and stop talking and listen to what some young folks are saying, particularly around climate change and climate justice. We should critique our own greed and venal purposes, our own shortsightedness, that we're not thinking about the fact that we're going to be gone, while those of you who are here will be bearing the most devastating brunt of it. It's going to be like Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

MB: What can we do to ensure art is in the lives and the education of young people?

OO: Give artists a chance to interface with students and young artists and share work and practice. What's the possibility for exchange? Everyone is moving at such lightning speed. How do we come into spaces together and just be still?

MB: We've talked a lot about what it means to be

an educator, and what it means to be a learner, or student, and whatever, and how those lines can blur.

I feel like that's something that could really be touched on in the next question, which is what is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

OO: I wish sometimes that there was more love in the system. I wish that I could have a radical loving space in the system. First of all, they've neutered art programs in public schools. That's the first thing that is gone, even though that's something that has been shown to increase productivity and focusing capacity, and also a sense of engagement and connection in students.

How can we think about education that's building people's capacity to be in community with each other, to hear each other, to be more human? That entails a radical loving posture and position, but that means everybody. That means not just loving the students, but loving the teachers, the administrators, the folks who are part of the janitorial staff, and the cooking staff.

MB: It's wild. I didn't necessarily see that love could exist in learning spaces until I branched outside of my conventional education space. It's true. It's not even like something that students are feeling discouraged about. It's a layer of detachment that exists even in the educators themselves. It creates this whole environment of toxicity. What are we really here for if we're not here for each other and the growth of one another?

It's a sad thing, but I feel like with what we're aiming for is a wave of new educators and people who challenge learning; love can be brought into schools in a new way.

OO: Right, but I don't want to just put it on the educators, because they're under such enormous strain already. It has to be a huge cultural shift. We underpay folks. They also have to go home to families. We're exhausting them. Their jobs are on the line if their students don't meet certain standards.

There's a whole upending that has to be done. There's a whole system that has to be loving. We can't expect educators to be loving towards the students if they're not loved.

BG: Do you have one thing you find inspiring that you think teen arts educators should know about?

OO: I'm really interested in the question of the chorus, as in people who come together as individuals but find a way to be part of the same song, even if they're singing different parts. That's something really inspiring to me.

Maybe the song doesn't have to be made of pure chords. It can be dissonant or it can have strange and long pauses. Maybe there's no conductor. At the same time we're singing together, we've got to figure that out. We've got to understand that's what we're doing. We have to become a chorus in some way to survive.



WE HAVE
TO BECOME
A CHORUS
IN SOME
WAY TO
SURVIVE.

Teen Convening, 2015
Photo by Kristyn Ulanday.

JOSEPH REUBEN QUINTO

by Isabel Beavers and Mithsuca Berry

YOUNG PEOPLE NOW SHOULD REALLY BE GIVEN THE TOOL OF EXPRESSION.

IB: Can you introduce yourself for us? Who are you, and how do you describe yourself?

JQ: I was born in the Philippines, but I was raised in Denver, Colorado. I am a creative, curious person that would like to keep growing and keep learning. I love to explore different opportunities and different ideas to better understand the world around me. As a kid, I was always curious about everything that is going on around the world. I think of myself as a creative person that's open to grow and to expand with other people.

MB: Can you tell us a story of a time when you were gripped by or deeply changed by an art experience?

JQ: When I first started out as an intern at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, there was an artist that came in for a collaborative exhibition. His name is Wes Sam-Bruce. He wanted to collaborate with us on an exhibition that was about hands, and how hands incorporate into our daily lifestyle. I remember that he brought a perspective of how conceptual art could be, and how a lot of meaning and different experiences can bring in a new concept, a new idea, through creative outlets. It was really amazing how through all of our different perspectives and different stories of how we collaborated with hands, we were able to create a really cool exhibition. This changed how I have viewed art ever since.

IB: What is the most provocative site of learning that you see today, and why does it excite you?

JQ: It's not a site, but for me, probably the most provocative goal of learning for me is to challenge learners to push themselves to go outside the box, to not be afraid to fail, because through the school systems, we always fear failure. If we always see that failure, we can never grow as a learner. I don't

think failure is the end of something. Failure's not a stopping point, more of an obstacle that you can get over.

MB: That's very real. I feel like no one teaches about that in schools.

My next question is: Can you tell us a story about someone or something that is making learning more equitable?

JQ: With equity it's definitely important that everyone has their own perspective on a certain topic. Different perspectives can bring more clarity on a certain topic. It's really important that we hear other perspectives that have different backgrounds and different experiences such as gender, race, religion—that everyone is open and is willing to look at other perspectives so that we can grow a better understanding of one another.

IB: Bouncing off of that question, what specific action can we take to ensure that the future of learning is more equitable?

JQ: For education, it's really important to be open-minded and make it more accessible for everybody. Sometimes education can scare people. It's really important for the future that people view education as an important tool that everyone can have and should have, because I think education is essentially a life-changing point that can give us an understanding of everything.

MB: What specifically can we do to ensure art is in the lives and the education of young people?

JQ: Art is something really important that young people should have. In my high school, we didn't have a lot of creative classes. As the years went on, there was a program called "Bringing Back the Arts," and this brought art to the education system. This is really important for young people

to use creativity as a way of learning. I think some educators don't think that creativity is important. Personally, I believe it's super important that creativity is built into our system so it's as important as English and math.

IB: I really like what you said about creativity as a way of learning, as a method. Now, be bold: What is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

JQ: One thing that I hope for education is just that it would be accessible for everybody. Some people can't get the education that they need, because some can't afford it or it's not accessible to them. I also think that education should change in a way where we wouldn't have to fear testing. Testing has stressed a lot of students, such as SATs or ACTs. A lot of students fear that test scores determine where they are going in life.

MB: I agree. I feel the education system lacks a lot in humanizing their students. A lot of the time, they put them into boxes and categories based on information that doesn't capture the entirety of what this person's creative process is and what different thinking patterns they benefit more from. They should take into consideration the individuals that they're engaging with, as opposed to the whole student body, because that doesn't help anybody.

JQ: It also brought to mind how education systems should be open to the other techniques of learning, so that students would be able to understand and to capture the lessons even better. I think educators should be more considerate of how all young learners capture information because some are not as fast as others. Everyone should be included.

MB: Definitely. That being said, what do young people need now that they're not being given?

JQ: Young people now should really be given the tool of expression. Some people push expression away to get young people to try to focus. But by seeing expression as a way for young people to experiment, and to be themselves, and be able to learn differently, it could bring in a lot of creativity that young people have. Being able to express themselves differently is important for every young person to know that it's OK to do in everyday life.

MB: I agree. I feel like there are so many things that would benefit from everybody's education being one that motivated different aspects of their expression and creativity. Even if it isn't in the field of art. If you were to apply that kind of creative energy to your science career, you could take it to different places. That's very real. I feel like the education system sees it only one way, giving arts kids these resources. When it could be, "Let's give this way of thinking to everybody."

IB: I love this idea of the tools of expression. What is one thing that inspires you that teen art educators should know about?

JQ: I remember a 21 Below event at MCA Denver where it seemed teens really got to express themselves freely. There was a little runway in the basement where they were able to create a really cool show where young people could express themselves and dance. Other people in Denver, outside of MCA, have created DIY venues and invited group bands. They would have events where they host concerts for everyone to enjoy themselves. In my city a lot of teens are really becoming more experimental with music and art and other things. It's amazing that teens are really using that tool now. It's like progressively even more in use now. I think teen educators should reach out to more of these teens who are experimenting.



Summer Teen Night, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.



Teen Convening, 2019.
Photo by Natasha Moustache.

MATTHEW RITCHIE

by Aric Crowe-Pina



Aric Crowe-Pina and Matthew Ritchie at an ICA Teen Artist Encounter, 2014. Photo by Liza Voll.

THERE NEEDS TO BE AN EFFORT TO THINK ABOUT LIFE LARGER THAN JUST PURE LABOR.

ACP: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

MR: I'm an artist who was originally born in the U.K. I moved to the United States in 1987. Since then, I've been working and living in New York, where I met my wife and we had our son. For the first six or seven years in New York I really wasn't a functioning visual artist, I was a building super. I didn't have any money, I was an illegal immigrant, all the usual stuff, which turns out to have been weirdly important in ways that I wouldn't have expected. Before that I came from London, where I lived in what was the most economically challenged area of London, the North Peckham Estate. It has since been demolished. That turns out to have been weirdly important as well in ways that I didn't expect at the time.

I remember England joining the European Union. I remember a world that was headed out of the Second World War towards an integrated world; that consumer, capitalist, quasi-homogeneous society that came out of the 1990s. Now I'm watching the end of that world as we move on to the next historical cycle—and that's something.

ACP: Can you tell us about a time when you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

MR: I saw an exhibition of the artist Pierre Huyghe in Los Angeles about two or three years ago, his retrospective. As an artist I hadn't really understood him. He took all of his work and he put it basically all in three rooms. All the works were talking to each other from different times and they were all interactive. Works would turn on, other ones would turn off. You got the impression of an entire life of work all happening at once. That was an amazing experience. It was a really beautiful and incredibly thoughtful way to think about yourself as an artist.

A few years ago, I saw a show by an artist called Georgiana Houghton, who was a British artist.

She was the first abstract artist in the world. She showed her work in 1860, 50 years before Kandinsky, and no one got it. She was quite wealthy, so she put it up in a gallery and people saw it. She was very interested in science and theosophy and people kind of wrote it off. This work was sent to Australia, where it lives in this weird theological seminary. I found that really moving, because no one's dealing with the fact that the story of abstraction starts 50 years too late, that it doesn't include the key players at all. That tells you how blind we are, about what gets left in and what gets left out.

I could go on. There are other examples, like Ian Hamilton Finlay's house in Scotland, or the cave paintings in Northern Brazil, which people spent thousands of years collectively adding little bits and pieces to. That's the thing that always moves me, the sense of a huge ongoing effort. You know that the artist is very aware that this is not just for them at that point. It's this effort that includes all these other people over this huge span of time.

ACP: It turns the exhibition into something other than a show. It's like, "Everything that I put forward for you, take this, and now use it, so you can put more forward." That's definitely an important thing to grip on to.

What is the most provocative site of learning today, and why would you say that it excites you?

MR: It's obviously the Internet. Right? It excites me because it's designed to. What is exciting about it is what it promises. What is not exciting about it is what it's not doing. What excites me is that it might be changed.

ACP: Can you tell us a story about someone or something making learning more equitable?

MR: There are some great examples here at MIT. There's a lab called Poetic Justice that is trying to make projects explicitly about equity. I've been

CAN YOU GENERATE THE ART OF THE FUTURE AHEAD OF THE FUTURE?

researching and working for a few years now on how to accomplish this in a way that is meaningful. It's an incredibly difficult question, because you have to take the point of view of the student, rather than the point of view of the teacher. If you don't do this, then you're teaching another hierarchy.

The question of earned and learned equity is a really, really difficult question. Think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow is this guy who in the 1940s came up with this pyramid of what we need. He says, first, you need food and shelter. If you're thinking about equity, the first thing you have to teach is, "Do you have food and shelter?" If you don't, we already don't have an equitable conversation.

ACP: That's true.

MR: Already, you've decided who's a student, because if you don't have food and shelter, then you're not going to be in a classroom. You have to rethink the question of where the teaching and learning are happening. This question of equity is so easy to ask, and should be asked endlessly. It's hard to articulate what the constituent parts of it are. At the top of Maslow's pyramid is art. It's a sense that the goal of learning is to transcend the material drives of the world—food, shelter, security, the base needs—that you're only truly fulfilled when you go beyond your material needs. By taking art into any community, at any level, it always does that. That's a way of upending the idea of learning. It's teaching people to climb one more rung on the ladder, because it can become very utilitarian.

ACP: It also has to do with going beyond the materialistic. A lot of learning can be done. It's usually a material boundary that is stopping someone from having the same education as someone else. Whether it be money, or food, or a place to

stay—it's always something material that's keeping them from having that same education. What do you think are specific actions that we can take to ensure the future of learning is more equitable?

MR: Obviously, at a local level you can vote. That's really specific. Young people don't vote nearly as much as they should. Vote and advocate strategies of resistance. First articulating what constitutes the equity wanted. You can't get everything all at once; you can get specific results.

The lesson of Occupy in Zuccotti Park was that they had no specific demands. They said, "Change capitalism," and people said, "What exactly do you mean?" So, first vote, organize, resist, and be specific about what it is that is wanted and what is not wanted. We have to be more coherent about what we consider this "equitable state."

ACP: What is something we can do to ensure art is in the lives and educations of young people?

MR: Probably money. It's a budgetary thing. It's a political will thing. It's also resisting, wherever you can. Even at MIT, there's a false assertion that art is not important to some people. There's actually a false assertion that science also is not important. I think it's all part of the same conversation that the United States is a country built around a world picture that's founded by businessmen, essentially, and it wants people to go to work. You hear the political narrative, "What are the jobs?" Jobs are meaningless if your life has no meaning. There needs to be an effort to think about life larger than just pure labor.

ACP: Labor, or the things directly in front of you.

MR: It's insisting that every person deserves access to the entire pyramid of needs and should be made aware at the start. This is something the life of say, the church, was more instrumental in a

hundred years ago. The church would be a place you would encounter music, art, philosophy, and thought, all cooked down into this weird story that you get in one place. That's why gospel churches are so incredibly important in the lives of communities. They're not just there because it's all about God. They're there for music, they're there for joy, they're there to talk about issues of the day. In the arts, we've ended up as a residual version of that, but we haven't embraced it to the full extent that we say, "Yes, that is what we're doing."

ACP: I totally agree. I think there's also a notion that if young kids are not good at drawing, that they're not artists or that they can't be artistic. One thing that a lot of people miss out on is thinking that the artistic activities they do on a daily basis are art. Growing up, I didn't think of photography as art. I just enjoyed taking photos. A notion that a lot of young people have is that art has to have a specific box it's framed by.

MR: It's all to do with that specialization. What they're really inheriting is an educational system that's designed to teach them to do art jobs. All those categories are gone. The idea that schools are still teaching arts in these separate chunks is something we could absolutely dispense with. You have to then replace that with a different kind of curriculum—a curriculum that shifts the relationships between the sciences and the arts in deep and specific ways.

When my son was in school there was one grade where the English and math departments decided they would teach the whole year around a single body of knowledge. You have to start organizing things as fully experiential. Then, you're teaching someone how to have a protest march, but it's also a kind of dance, but it is also learning about the music of the day, about the politics of the day, but

also how to tally votes and organize it mathematically, and how to write essays and manifestos. You're doing what people do with their knowledge, which is what I think my son, certainly, and his friends always complained about. They'd say, "What's all this for? Why am I learning this?"

It should be taught that everything has a practical application, even the most abstract.

ACP: What are some other things we could change about our systems of education and learning?

MR: The bold thing would be to change the conversation about systems of education and accept that there is no one coherent model. The danger, then, is that it fragments into multiple incoherent models which usually prefer the most advantaged students, as we had before.

That would take a lot of courage. The education community does not always recognize its economic power until it acts. When teachers started going on strike a couple of years ago, states realized, "Oh, if we don't have schools, we don't have a state. No one wants to move here. Families will just leave. We're finished." In New York, for example, the education community is larger than the financial sector's tax. It pays more taxes than Wall Street. It's a huge sector of the economy.

It would be a moment of huge change. I do not want to underestimate or underemphasize the difficulty of it, but it's the boldest thing. It is essentially saying, "What is the purpose of education in the 21st century?" That has to be articulated for it to change.

ACP: What do you think young people need now that we are not giving them?

MR: My son would say, a clear sense of purpose. What is the purpose of all this, certainly educa-

tionally but also just sociologically? We're not articulating the purpose of human society at every level. We proceed with caution because that kind of rhetoric has gotten people in a lot of trouble in the past. Until we re-initiate the conversation in a positive way, we're allowing other groups who have a bad sense of purpose to take or seize it.

I think the key question is: who is the "we"? We are not giving them a counterpoint to the negative sense of purpose that is being promoted. We keep coming up with a soup of better jobs for some people, and kind-of-better health insurance and, maybe, cheaper college. You can't fly a battle flag around a bunch of "maybe." We've said exactly that for 50 years. It actually got worse.

ACP: We're not going to change too much.

MR: We might change a few things but leave them open to being changed back. That's hopeless. Kids are seeing that and it destroys hope if there is no confidence that the people higher up in the hierarchy have a sense of purpose, or mission, or principle.

ACP: What's one thing that inspires you that teen arts educators should know about?

MR: I learned this at the Santa Fe Institute: allow an equal amount of time for discussion to anyone giving a talk. If a talk is 20 minutes, you allow 20 minutes for discussion. If it's an hour, you leave an hour. It takes people a long time to warm up. Otherwise, you don't hear from everyone if it's just an hour of talking, 10 minutes of questions. The three noisy people speak, and then it's done.

As an educator, it's really critical. My best educational experience is mentoring at Columbia. I'm with the students for a week, all day, every day. I give my little talk. Maybe I've got four hours over the whole week in me. Maybe I've got five hours, but I do not have 40 hours of talk. By the time the week is over, they've all had a lot of time to hear what I've said, to react to it, talk it through, come back again and again and chew on it. It's super successful.

ACP: When I'm working with teens at the ICA and we are having conversations, sometimes a pause of silence is really good. People who don't normally speak up, do. Then it can inspire everyone to use that chance to have their voices heard.

Another question: what is the most radical way an artist could work with youth?

MR: I'm working on a project right now that I think is radical. It goes back to a number of these pedagogical questions. Can an artist present a new toolkit working with an audience who are disenfranchised—probably the youth of that audience,

because they have the time? Can you generate the art of the future ahead of the future? Could you make a laboratory with a group of people who are young enough and out of place in time enough? I'm specifically thinking of the population in East Boston, which includes people displaced from Central America.

It's radical in that I'm proposing a weird experiment, finding a population with limited services, and then saying to the artist, "OK. One way you could do this is you could take these people to a museum, and teach them the canonical way. Integrate them." Another way would be, "What have you all brought with you? What can I teach you about how art works without reference to content? What tools can I give you to make this new art—tools hot off the press, like a hard-light printer, artificial intelligence, and a neural network? What would you do with that?"

It's radical in that we're looking to engage with what is damaged, and talk about healing. Not in a way that says, "Let's heal you and make you a 'normalized' person," but "Let's heal you on your terms, starting with the damage." I think the radicality is proposing it as actually the way forward, rather than this kind of remediation.

How much of it can be done here and now? The question is always, why wait? Of course, there's a million real-world reasons, but nothing ventured, nothing gained. There's a pastor in Texas. When people are caught at the border, they request asylum, and then they're thrown out after three weeks, and they have nowhere to go. So he houses communities. He used to house about a few thousand people, because that was how many people got released in this particular border town. Now, he's looking at spaces that house 10,000 people. Warehouses. Or 20,000, there's no upper limit.

ACP: Yeah, he's doing what he has to do.

MR: That sort of goes back to all these questions of, if we can't do it for someone who has nothing, what's the good of doing it for all the people who have something? If we can't even articulate it in terms that speak to equity for someone who has no equity, then we're doing it for the people who already have some equity.

I think the advantage one has in the 21st century is we know about how systems scale and how fast they scale up. This is a very predictable problem. If artists aren't brave enough, and educators aren't brave enough to think about the problems that they know are coming, then who will be? If we're not doing this work, no one else is going to. We're supposed to be the people to do it first. That's what arts educators can do.





Aric Crowe-Pina at Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.



Teen Convening, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.

JACLYN ROESSEL

by Isabel Beavers and Mithsuca Berry

IB: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

JR: I will start by introducing myself and my clan in my language. *Yá'at'éeh, shí'éeí Jaclyn Roessel yínishyé. Tá'chii'nii nislí, Kiyíiaanii bashichiin. Tódiqozhí'éeí dashíchéí. Bilagaana'éeí dashínalí.* Hello, I am of the Red Running into the Water People. That's my mother's clan. I'm born for the Towering House People. That's my father's clan.

My maternal grandfather is of the Bittter Water Clan, and my paternal grandfather is actually of the Monteath Clan from Scotland. I was born and raised on the Navajo Nation in between three communities, Lukachukai, Round Rock, and Kayenta, Arizona. It's all in the northeastern part of the state.

I am an *Asdzaan Diné* or a Navajo woman. I am a mother, wife, poet, writer, creative entrepreneur working to leverage the power of Indigenous culture, knowledge, and teachings towards the future where our communities and nations are stronger. Those ideas are embedded into our societies in a much stronger and more visible way.

MB: Can you tell us about a time when you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

JR: I worked in museums for over 15 years. The beginning of that time was spent at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. I was the Director of Education and Public Programs. I had been thinking about this idea of an exhibit that would be built in co-creation with Native youth. I created the proposal, I sent it, and they were like, "This sounds great. Let's do this."

I was like, "Holy moly, this is going to be fantastic." What became of that was the exhibit *Confluence: Inter-generational Collaborations*. *Confluence* was the pairing of mentor and mentee artists. There

were seven pairs of intergenerational, intertribal artists who came together. The mentees were between 16 and 20 years old. I matched them with an artist based on their expertise and interest. From that, they created a piece over three weekends that would be in the exhibit and on display.

There were two murals that were a part of it, a fashion design couple, and a video game. I feel like that came from the driving power of the youth participants pushing themselves to explore. None of the subjects had ever been in an exhibition space before. They all were super talented and working in mediums they never had experienced. There was this fearlessness that they would move into, a way to come together for our meetings and meetups.

This all stemmed from a trend I was reading about and hearing about within Indian Country. In Native communities across the country, there is a high proportion of Native youth. In my own community and nomination, over half our population is under the age of 30. In the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Community right outside of Phoenix, over half the population is under the age of 18. When you think about that, half of our nation are actually youth, they are literally the future.

One of the questions that I was thinking about when this exhibit began was, "How do we foster and think about intergenerational collaborations?" The question was really, "Is it possible for creativity to be a catalyst in those collaborations, to have a dialogue between different generations?"

In the process of creating *Confluence*, I feel we answered that, and it was a resounding yes. Yes, creativity can play an integral role in creating intergenerational dialogues within Indigenous communities, it can really allow youth to imagine and build a future that they want to live in.

Our role, my role, is really to be able to help foster that, to seek and share tools to make that possible. The exhibit was really phenomenal, and the community support was incredible. It was an exhibit that brought a lot of Indigenous families to the museum in a way that we had not really seen.

I said it then and think about that time now as one that helped me see the importance of how we engage youth in very tangible, meaningful ways to move toward a future where there is more representation from Indigenous youth within our communities and our leadership.

IB: What do you think is the most provocative site of learning today, and why does it excite you?

JR: There is an incredible site for lessons and learnings, our Indian communities and nations and homelands. They can call back community members at different points in their lives.

I feel like there is this arc in someone's life to be able to be called back to these places to learn incredible lessons for what it means to be Indigenous. We live in a time where there are barriers in access to those lands for a variety of reasons.

When your parents get jobs in the city and you have to move with them, there is this natural progression of, "OK, we have to follow them." Oftentimes, it can be really difficult to maintain those ties. To me, Indian or Native communities and nations provide this opportunity to understand the connection to land.

If we provide and think about these spaces as ways for Indigenous youth and others, and allies, and accomplices, to come to these places and see the importance of them, to see the medicine that's on them, the way that the land relates to language and culture, then we begin to understand and create bridges where we're able to face challenges like climate change. We're able to stand up more to issues of extractive economies.

There is a way to reclaim and indigenize or even re-indigenize the methods and the models that we're speaking about things. There are a lot of answers and solutions that are here on reservations that can help Indigenous youth shield themselves.

We're able to think about ways of healing and regenerating as communities and nations, and recognizing that Native people, when we pray, we don't just pray for our community and our nation. We pray for all people.

If we have strong Indigenous communities and nations, we have healthier communities overall. Our land becomes replenishable. We're able to create a future that is healthier, safer, and much more in tune with the environment around us.

MB: When I think about education and work, I know that a large part of it is providing tools for or preparing young people to heal themselves. Especially if you're a brown or Black person in America, sometimes the trauma you experience isn't just your own within the system, it's generational. I feel like there hasn't necessarily been a lot of language

in providing these resources. There's definitely got to be some way that healing and reflection can be brought back to people regardless of how long they've been part of the community or how old they are. I feel like the healing will extend beyond just a personal journey.

That really resonated. It leads to my next question: Can you tell us a story about someone or something that is making learning more equitable?

JR: What I'm beginning to see more and more is colleagues teaming up to grow the visibility of work that has been created by helping to lift each other up. Representation matters, and as Indigenous people, we don't easily see ourselves reflected in the curriculum, Hollywood, or pop culture. There's a lack of representation, positive or even just real representation, of Native people in these spaces.

A friend of mine, Matika Wilbur, one of the projects that she has been working on for the past seven years is called Project 562. The idea is to photograph every Indigenous, federally recognized, Native community in the country. She has over 400 photographs so far. She photographs people and also interviews them as a way to create documentation and a record of the diversity of Indigenous people across this country.

This hasn't existed before. There's power in this work because it will allow young people like my niece, my nephews, my son to grow up in a world where they see positive representations of themselves. I took that for granted when I was younger because my dad was also a photographer. We got to see beautiful people from around the world. That wasn't always accessible to my peers, my friends, in the way that I see now, especially because of social media. You can follow Matika on Instagram and see the vastness of the regalia that we wear as Indigenous people, how it's reflective of the environments that we come from.

There are people who are doing poetry and they're doing all different kinds of performances and readings across the country. When I think about who came to my school, it was always white poets. Muskogee (Creek) Nation's Joy Harjo was recently named the U.S. Poet Laureate. I was so excited. We're seeing this great visibility. That's something that generally creates this belief of equity within learning, to be able to say that our stories are relevant, our history is relevant.

There's a long way to go in terms of representation. If we began to see ourselves and tell stories about ourselves that are represented and shared in papers, in museum exhibitions that are done by us, and shared with the greater world, that puts pressure on some of the other strong gatekeeper places, for instance within education.

IB: What specific action can we in the field of teen arts education take to ensure that the future of learning is more equitable?

JR: Two things. One, we can ensure that there are always Indigenous people, like plural, Indigenous

people in the room so we're able to incorporate and engage the inherent power that Indigenous people possess.

The second is that, no matter where our programs are taking place, there should be a duty we all feel to center Indigenous history and story in connection to that place. Who are the Indigenous people that have lived on those lands? Who may have been removed from those lands? How are we engaging in those stories and carrying on that knowledge and moving that forward in the work that we're doing?

That doesn't stop after the land acknowledgment is given. It's making the land acknowledgment and making that promise to the community and to those nations. We're going to continue to integrate those histories beyond the start of the program. How else are we doing that?

MB: I've seen more spaces, particularly poetry ones, acknowledging the land. I am interested in thinking of ways to make that more active than just the verbal acknowledgment. I want it to be something we're all partaking in, respecting, and moving forward through together, especially as people who are supposed to be allies or on the outside or trying to uplift those voices and support Indigenous voices in the spaces that we're trying to acknowledge. It should be more of a practice.

What can we do to ensure that all teens have art in their lives and education?

JR: Across the board, we have to lift up the work that folks are doing in the community and be able to share the ways that community is already mobilizing to create space for teens, for families. In connection to that, being advocates of that work. Let's fund the work that's already happening.

I think that the more we're in tune and engaged in support of our communities, the more we are open or can be open to partnerships, collaborations, co-creations, and this is how we value teens—by investing and trusting them to lead us.

IB: We've touched on making education more equitable in the future, great things that are happening now, but what is one thing you wish that you could change about our system of education and learning?

JR: There are two things. I believe it's important for our Indigenous languages to be available to students at every school. I was told that if I wanted to go to college and be successful that I shouldn't study my own language. This was in the late '90s, in high school. It's a problematic thing that hasn't gone away, the way that we're discouraged from engaging in our culture. I want to see language taught within every school, regardless of their location, whether they're on or off the reservation.

Connected to that, I want to see actual truth-telling around Indigenous and Black history in our curriculum. There is false information that continues to be presented in curriculum with regards to Indigenous and Black history, Black and African American history. Specific to Indigenous culture and history, a majority of people don't think that we exist, because of how we're integrated into curricula. I want curriculum that is intersectional. I want it to be engaging, I want it to be truthful.

IB: Let's shift gears. How do you think cultural institutions can prepare themselves to meet the youth of this future? How can they be instigators?

JR: Cultural institutions need to be pivoting towards providing space for youth to be involved in the decision-making of institutions. Specifically, making room for them, like on boards and committees, so that they're a part of the conversation, the decisions that institutions make with regard to programs or exhibitions.

Oftentimes, the answer can be as simple as making meaningful contact with the many youth councils or different youth projects that exist within our communities as a way to be able to say, "Hey, can you be a thought partner with us in thinking about these programs, projects, exhibitions?" Making that worth their time.

I think for too long institutions have catered to their members and their donors. There are real opportunities to be able to integrate community members of all different backgrounds within that decision-making process. Begin to privilege their voices and lift them up.

I think that youth are a really important constituency to engage in meaningful ways. That also includes making sure that they have transportation to their meetings, making sure that they have stipends for their time too. It is totally within the power of cultural institutions to make that shift.

IB: What is one thing you find inspiring that you think teen arts educators should know about?

JR: What I find inspiring is the importance of valuing each other. Within Navajo culture, we have this philosophy of *K'é* that is our framework for kinship and relationality to one another. It's how we address each other. It's not necessarily just, "Oh, this is my brother, this is my sister," like in clanship. It's also, "Because you are my sister, because you are my brother, my auntie, because you're a member of my community, I value you, your perspective, and also I'm accountable to you." I really try to center that in my practice.

Within thinking about that, I wanted to say that we all have value. As a new mom, I'm so appreciative for my son, who is only seven months old. He has taught me more about being a better human being than anyone. I know the importance of

being vulnerable, the importance of being self-aware. Also, the importance of being silly and not being so caught up in the way that society says I'm supposed to be as a new mom, as a woman, as a person. I know that if I show up in this way of having an open heart that I can still be giving and still offer my gifts to the world around me. That all has come from being in connection and spending time with my little seven-month-old.

Youth and children are powerful teachers. I speak about their presence as something that can move us closer to healing our society and healing our people, ourselves. Some of the most powerful medicine comes from our youth and our children.

MB: You talked about the role of radical lateral love as a way to make the world more bearable and create decolonized space. Can you elaborate on this idea and the value of these spaces?

JR: The systems of oppression in this country have pushed, and caused Native families and Native youth to be pushed, away from their homelands. That separation from their land into urban areas has created a huge disconnect that in most cases has created a type of hurt and harm within families, within people.

Because of that, we are all coming to this place of exploring our identity, understanding that we are having to think about these distances, these separations, these disconnects because of our inability to grow up in our homelands.

That means not being able to know and have a continual lived experience of waking up to greet the sun within our land, plant within our spaces, visit our relatives over dinner, breakfast, and such. We don't all speak our languages. We don't all know what being in ceremony is like.

I think radical lateral love is to be aware that we are coming into this space of forgiveness, and openness, and understanding that for many different reasons, we don't have all of the same knowledge.

I feel deeply that if we're able to understand that we all have value as people, all have different lessons still to bring, we can transform our communities and our lives and enrich and nourish, regenerate the world and our families, our societies, and the spaces we occupy from this place of being compassionate with each other.

There is incredible potential in being able to work and give in those ways, through loving each other for our differences and knowledge. That's within Indigenous communities. Then if you take this kind of expanded intersectional approach, there is the opportunity to recognize that we can begin to shift these systems of oppression in ways that can help us heal.

I WANT TO SEE
ACTUAL TRUTH-TELLING
AROUND INDIGENOUS
AND BLACK HISTORY.



ICA Fast Forward Alum documenting ICA Teen Spring Showcase, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.



ICA Alum Assistant hosting Open Mic at Fall Teen Night, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.



Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

STEVE SEIDEL

by Isabel Beavers and Enahjah Brown

IB: How would you describe yourself personally and professionally?

SS: I was born in 1951 in Baltimore, Maryland, which to no surprise, was a deeply segregated city. I grew up there and came of age not having the language for it, but understanding that things were terribly wrong in my world and trying to make sense of that. The Civil Rights Movement helped to give language to that. I also had the incredible experience of finding a teen performing arts workshop in which I got to study dance, theater, and music. It was a racially integrated space, which was just not typical or common. Fast-forward, I pursued theater professionally but also started to teach in a small alternative high school for working-class young people in 1971, and found myself more interested and compelled by that work than I was by the professional theater work that I was doing at the time.

The labels of “artist” and “educator” when I was growing up were extremely bifurcated. There were bad and weird hierarchies between those roles. One of the driving purposes of my work and life has been to argue on behalf of the idea that those two roles are not naturally separated or separable—that the separation is a distortion of the deep nature of the work of both the artist and the educator.

Currently, I’m the faculty director of the Arts in Education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. It’s a Master’s program and I feel very fortunate to work with the students that I get to work with there.

EB: Can you tell us about a time when you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

SS: It’s key to my story—the story of my life. I got involved in an alternative high school for working-class young people in Cambridge in 1971. These young people had been working with youth workers for two years. For a short period they had

a storefront and then they got this idea to create a school because a lot of them were having bad experiences in high school in Cambridge. They either walked out or had been kicked out. They wanted to create a different kind of space for learning, and they wanted it to be democratic. They wanted to have a voice in that space.

They thought they had lost their drama teacher a week before they were starting their first short summer session. I got a call from a friend of a friend and I said, “Sure, I’ll try that.” I showed up and actually the drama teacher was there. There was some mistake, so we taught together that day and then for the next 10 years. I was coming up through the avant-garde theater of the 1950s and 1960s, and so I was interested in Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and other writers. When we brought those scripts to class there was no actual engagement. I thought “a bunch of these students really can hardly read,” because they struggled so much with these texts. Then we brought in a play by Clifford Odets called *Waiting for Lefty*, which is about a 1930s taxi driver strike in New York City. The same people who seemed like they could barely read were suddenly reading fluently, and I thought, “Wow, I wonder if the content actually makes a difference in their reading ability?”

That was a turning point. We performed *Waiting for Lefty* for about 40 workers who were on strike at that time, and the performance was electric. The response was so deeply felt and so powerful that I thought, “Oh, this is actually what theater is supposed to be.” I stayed at that school for 10 years.

IB: What is the most provocative site of learning you see today, and why does that excite you?

SS: Can I talk about two? One involves teens and the other is for younger children—and their families.

WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THE MARGINALITY OF THE ARTS IN SCHOOLS AS AN INTENTIONAL DIMENSION OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM.

I have just spent some time with young people from Oakland, California. They are a combination of middle- and high-school age and are involved in an after-school program with two of their teachers. This was during the Oakland school teachers' strike. The young people and the teachers were at Harvard to present at the Alumni of Color Conference at the School of Education about their work, activism, education, and action. They have an organization called Youth Vs. Apocalypse in which they are studying issues that they feel are really important.

They are trying to figure out how to use art in response to those issues, educationally, to draw attention, to rally people, to encourage and support people who are activists. There's a long, long history of that work of young people engaged in activism and art. Sometimes those come together. Sometimes it's a little accidental. Sometimes it's very intentional. I find all of it very, very encouraging and exciting.

That's one. The other is an organization in New York City called Broadway Housing Communities. They have been working for 35-plus years on trying to create long-term, sustainable living situations for people who were formerly homeless or sheltered. They concluded after many experiences that two things most useful in creating a stable space—because they renovate buildings for individuals, couples, and families—were the presence of a preschool in the building and an art gallery.

Broadway Housing was given a property on 155th Street, in the Sugar Hill neighborhood, which was the epicenter of the Harlem Renaissance. They decided they were going to build a new building with 140 units of housing, an early childhood center, and a children's museum of art and storytelling. The museum is open to anybody and

draws people from the neighborhood, from the rest of the city, and from other places. But there is a strong interconnection between the residents, the children in the preschool, and the museum. To me, the re-connection of art, community, education, and daily life is the long, essential work that we have to be involved in to repair the rupture that the art world has fostered.

EB: What specific action can you take to ensure that the future of learning is more equitable?

SS: I believe in the power of education, but I think it has to be an education that helps young people make sense of what's wrong. Education can help them to develop an analysis or a theory. It can listen to their theories and engage them with other people's theories about why the world has become such an obscenely unlivable space. I mean that in terms of racism. I mean that in terms of the environment. I mean that in terms of public safety—that you can't be safe in school, for example. I mean that in terms of the income gaps in the society.

I don't think you can ensure that the future of learning is more equitable if you're not actually trying to grapple as adults, in the presence of young people—and supporting them in grappling—with *why* it's inequitable. If we can't look at that, which means looking at the history of this country, then we're not going to ensure that the future of learning is more equitable. It's not going to become more equitable until young people say, in effect, "What are you people doing?"—"you people" meaning adults. And let's be more specific: white adults who are in power in this society.

IB: You talked about the arts, community, education, and families weaving together as a fabric. What do you think we can do to ensure that all teens have art in their lives and their educations?

SS: Well, all teens do have art in their lives. They don't all have it in their education. It is kind of a cliché in the art and education world that the arts are on the chopping block—that they're the first things to be cut in schools. That's actually not true in all cases. If you look at wealthy independent schools, the arts are actually not the first on the chopping block.

They are, in many of those schools, thriving. There are incredible spaces for them. There are incredible people teaching in them. There's time in the schedule. So really what we're talking about when we say that the arts are on the chopping block are public school systems in urban and rural settings, particularly school systems serving young people of color. We have to understand the marginality of the arts in schools as an intentional dimension of institutional racism.

Why would that be? Why would it be important from the perspective of institutional racism to keep the arts off the schedule? I think that just as enslavers understood the most dangerous thing you could do was allow enslaved people to learn to read and write, they also understood that the arts were an incredibly powerful medium for the communication of the realities of their experience—that the arts are a powerful language. What we see in schools today is essentially an extension of those laws that prohibited enslaved people from learning to read and write. One of the major ways of dominating people is to ensure their illiteracy and to not allow them other forms of expression.

Historically in this country, the most powerful and profound cultural developments have come from people of color, and from African American communities in particular. Today, hip-hop is a youth culture that is international and incredibly profound. Despite all the efforts to take it over and

commercialize it or own it in various ways, it still has its own cultural life that lives in young people. My feeling is that on the whole, young people create cultural life for themselves. It may not be what the art world, or particularly white art educators, call "the arts." It certainly doesn't always involve formal educational experiences; it often does, but the informal learning experiences that many young people have, whether it's in community with their peers, or in religious settings with multigenerational learning opportunities, there's a lot that goes on. I think that we need to be really careful about how we talk about and think about youth culture. Part of the question is, how could we bring it into institutions that seem hell-bent on keeping it out?

IB: What is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

SS: Scale. I think that the obsession with education on a large scale deeply and profoundly undermines the actual nature of human learning and education, which is on a human scale. Every time you try to take something "to scale," you diminish its specificity, its particularity, its relational dimension, its possibility for being spontaneous, for improvisation, for response in the moment. When you do that, you actually sink the ship, because learning has to be all of those things. It has to be relational. It has to be contextualized. It has to be human, alive, responsive.

If I'm a student, who I am has to make a difference, or I'm going to start to realize that actually it doesn't matter who I am and whether I'm here or not. One of the things about theater is that if somebody decides they're cutting out, people go chasing after them and say, "What do you mean you're out? You can't be out. You can't even be out for the rest of today, you have to be here. We can't

do this without you." Large scale means you've got people who are ultimately making decisions who don't know the names of the people in the classroom. That's a problem. If I could change anything, I'd change that. But I can't change that because we've institutionalized education. It's a big problem.

EB: What do young people need now that they're not being given?

SS: Power to say what they need. They need people to listen to them. I've been very influenced by working on a project with a group of educators in northern Italy who run a set of about 35 pre-schools. They use what they call "a pedagogy of listening"—teaching that is driven by listening. This means that the teachers have a respect for the capacities of children. You could talk about a pedagogy of listening as meaningfully in the context of high schools as you can in preschools. Young people need to be seen and heard and listened to, then engaged with in real dialogue. And they need some power of control.

EB: Thank you. As a high-schooler, I can say that's very true.

SS: Yeah, so you're saying you don't feel that's what you're getting?

EB: Yeah, I've been in public school my whole life. I feel that would be very beneficial. In my own school system, the arts are not something that's valuable. Not something that's affordable or can be put over our education at this point, because you have to balance the popular, what you actually "need," if that makes sense. So in their eyes, I need algebra more than I need theater, even though I don't want to do anything with algebra.

SS: Yeah, just the idea that someone else is deciding what you need. Based on what? They've got all their answers to that. That's it.

I'm not prepared to say you don't need algebra. But to not be in a dialogue about what you need is a problem. "Why do I need algebra? And why is this a choice? It's not a choice in the suburban school—there you can get algebra *and* theater. Here in the Boston Public Schools it's not a choice at all."

IB: In a similar vein, what are we not giving educators right now that they need?

SS: I immediately think of Otis Redding—try a little tenderness.

Let me sort that out a little bit. I am thinking about teachers in public school systems. I don't think

that most people chose to go into education because they wanted to perpetuate institutional racism, though many do. I don't think that they went into education because they wanted to be disrespected, though many are. In many schools and school systems, that's where you find yourself. It's a very complex and difficult situation to be in. People find different ways to negotiate it.

I think teachers and educators tragically get caught up in a situation in which they're not good to students. In part I can say this because I did it in my years in the Boston Public Schools. I participated in systems, in management, in punishment—in things that were not good for anybody, but were especially bad for students of color. At the same time, I was trying hard to create a space in my classes that was a good space.

Maybe part of the way I would be inclined to re-frame the question is, "What do educators need to *take* for themselves?" I'm inspired by educators who can maintain their self-respect, make demands and organize, build community, build a team around them with others in order to change conditions for themselves but also for the people they're working with. I can't make my conditions better if they aren't better for my students. To me, those things are inseparable.

IB: What do you know about young people that you think we in the field of teen arts education should know?

SS: I had this great experience about 20-plus years ago. Completely by accident, I got involved in education research. I participated in a study of the education activities of Shakespeare & Company in western Massachusetts. Kevin Coleman is the Director of Education and a really brilliant educator. Kevin made a list of qualities of their teaching artists. One is that they remember what it's like to be in high school. I think that's really important.

It's also really important, especially for white educators working with young people of color, to know that they can't fully understand what it's like for their students to be in high school. But they can try, and they have to try. They can learn and they can inform their practice. And their practice can improve. That's really important. Having an imagination is really important.

And being humble is also crucial, because that's the only stance from which you can really learn what you need to learn. A lot of what you really need to learn, you don't want to admit. It actually takes a kind of sacred humility.



AKIR STUART

by Isabel Beavers and Sydney Bobb

SB: Can you introduce yourself for us? Who are you and how would you describe yourself?

AS: My name is Akir and I'm an 18-year-old social justice activist. I recently committed to New York University under their Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship, and I intend on double majoring in Journalism and Economics.

IB: Can you tell about a time when you were gripped or deeply changed by an art experience?

AS: Kehinde Wiley. I was introduced to him through the Brooklyn Museum. He has done so many artworks that have been in the museum; he's one of the first artists that we actually focused on in the program there. Going through all of his work as someone who is really a nerd for art history, not that he's only the artist who represented, fulfilled that intellectual desire... as a Black body, it's beautiful to see other Black bodies that live happily and beautifully within art. It helped me further see why art is important in education. Seeing people who look like you prosper, it's inspiring like no other experience.

IB: What is the most provocative site of learning that you see today, and why does it excite you?

AS: In all honesty, the Internet is one of the most exciting places for intellectual expression. Not only are our young people more attracted to what the Internet can offer, but it doesn't have the same barriers that institutions pose. With the Internet there's a lot more accessibility within education. Personally, I've used Khan Academy more than most textbooks I've been offered in high school. As funny as it may sound, there's a certain power that's growing within Internet memes. I think that it's actually being used as a medium to teach politics. I'm seeing more and more Instagram pages blow up specifically off memes that deal

with racism and sexism. It's a new driving force in its infancy.

IB: What specific action do you think we can take to ensure the future of learning is more equitable?

AS: Sometimes I'm a little wary of the word diversity, but I think that ensuring diversity among teachers is an important step toward making sure teaching is equitable. I believe that we need a wide range of teachers teaching students these days. We all try to eliminate our biases, but no matter what, they come through in conversations or through our actions. A diverse pool of teachers, that's one of the most important steps towards making sure education is equitable.

The college admissions process poses a lot of financial barriers, from study materials for the testing prep, to the fact that you have to pay to take certain tests that are required by certain colleges and application fees. I think removing these financial barriers is another key step in making education more equitable.

IB: You are speaking about having a broad range of teachers or educators. Are there any spaces in your own life where you've seen that happening?

AS: Maybe not within the public education system I've seen so far, but within the museum, I've seen a lot of young people of color, queer people of color, being brought into the education department at Brooklyn Museum. I think it's a beautiful thing because speaking with them allows me to see myself more within them. I know for me, personally, it's allowed me to be like, OK, I can enter into the art world. This is something that I can do. There's people who look like me, that work in this line of work, that do educational services, that do work in museums. I can't say the same for public education systems.

SB: Going off of that, what is one thing you wish you could change about our systems of education and learning?

AS: I think the biggest change that needs to happen is leaning away from forcing students to memorize information into having them discuss information and actually analyze and interpret. I think that memorizing content is important, but I feel like without understanding how to apply said information, we're not building leaders. Memorization is only one step of the education process, and I think we need to do a lot more to help facilitate discussions between students and have them create. I would love to see more research done in high school. I feel like it's something that people don't see well into late undergrad to graduate-level degrees. I believe that research is the key component to education. It's a shame that it's not employed by high school students enough.

IB: That was interesting what you said about how memorization doesn't build leaders. Could you talk a bit more about why that's important to you or what sparked that thought about leadership?

AS: Absolutely. I think one of the most important goals of any education system is to produce leaders. Not everyone is designed to be a leader, but leaders are exactly what we need within not just America, but in all countries today. There are newfound problems that no generation has ever experienced before. My generation is really the first to grapple, to really completely live under this new era of social media and technology. With these experiences, we can answer problems that I don't think any generation has ever answered before, let alone faced.

SB: What can we do to ensure that art is in the lives and education of youth?



Akir Stuart at Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

AS: A lot of my other answers have been a bit more theory. This one's more practical: more funding for the arts. My school only has two teachers in the arts, one for music and one for visual arts. They teach an insane number of classes that I don't think any one teacher should have to handle. They deal with it great.

They dedicate a lot of time to each student, and I appreciate them for that. I think it's sad how little funding there is within the art department. Especially because as funding increases for STEM, because of career opportunities, the arts are just forgotten about and tossed to the side. There's actually tons and tons of great opportunities within the arts, it's just not explored enough within high school. It really starts with funding.

IB: What do you think young people need now that they're not being given?

AS: In all honesty, hope. I'm seeing a lot of peers of mine turn nihilistic. A lot of people my age are scared. I think job security has never been more shaky for the middle class. People are not sure about where their careers are going to take them before they even enter college. I'm seeing kids my age depressed and disillusioned with life during



Building Brave Spaces, 2018. Photo by Lauren Miller.

their teen years and early 20s, more now than ever. Hope is one thing that we really need right now. I think conferences like Building Brave Spaces at the ICA really help instill that hope. What you see is not just the thought to change, but other people our age trying to promote change. Hope is what people really need right now, and not just teens, but all people. We're living in a scary time.

SB: What are cultural institutions missing when creating inclusive spaces?

AS: Many institutions don't have enough openly queer people on staff. There's an unsaid barrier between sexuality and professionalism. I didn't start to break that barrier with my own sexuality until I entered the Brooklyn Museum. I always felt like sexuality is something you take home with you and not something that you make open for co-workers. Working through the Brooklyn Museum definitely helped me change that and allowed me not just to express myself socially but to be who I want to be in a professional setting. I don't think I would've gotten that lesson had I not had a group of managers and supervisors that were also queer and open and honest about their experiences with me. That's something I appreciate every day, and I wish more institutions had more openly queer people. I don't think that's going to be something that could be solved within one day.

IB: I've heard you talk about the Brooklyn Museum in both this conversation and the conference as providing a safe space for you to feel at home. How can other organizations help the young people that they work with feel at home?

AS: Feeling at home is not a feeling that everyone is privileged to have. It takes a lot to get there with

someone, especially someone who is a teenager. There is so much going on in their minds. But what helps is employing empathy within the systems. The Brooklyn Museum helped me feel at home by having managers and supervisors that looked like me and went through the same sort of experiences as me. It is the human connection that sometimes is lost within the corporate world. I think institutions could help empathize with teens more. Bureaucracy is a necessary part of running any institution, but there has to be some sort of marriage between having offices and having positions put in place for people while removing the title. Instead of being a direct manager over teens you could be a mentor. My title of being a mentor rather than supervisor removes barriers before we even know each other's name. It may seem small, but title is a big thing that pushes a lot of people away.

SEEING PEOPLE
WHO LOOK LIKE
YOU PROSPER,
IT'S INSPIRING
LIKE NO OTHER
EXPERIENCE.

DENISE MONTGOMERY

Creative Youth Development: A Powerful Combination of Arts, Belonging, and Life Skills

To belong. To create something completely original. To participate in a thoughtful, considered critique of another person's work. To convince the museum's leadership to do something they would have never considered in the past. To be in charge of every aspect of an event, forget to call the caterers, and rise to the occasion with on-the-fly troubleshooting. To engage in reciprocal learning with a practicing, professional artist. To discover community issues, connect with others working on them, and take action. To be recognized for your individual strengths. To grow.

Young people do these things every day in creative youth development programs throughout the United States and around the world. Creative youth development, or CYD, programs combine the assets-based approach of positive youth development with creative inquiry and hands-on experiences. It is a powerful and engaging combination—and one that is too rare in our society.

Nuanced and innovative CYD is transforming the lives of young people and, in some cases, institutions. ICA at VCU in Richmond, Virginia's engagement of young people in designing and implementing research focused on young people, and what they learned was a catalyst for the museum to include listening to young people among its strategic imperatives. Teens at A Reason to Survive (ARTS) in National City, California, are influencing community planning through collaboration with city government and contracts that compensate ARTS teens to create community enhancements.

Shawn Ginwright, who gave a keynote address during Building Brave Spaces, advocates for moving beyond trauma-informed practices toward healing-centered engagement that is consistent with an assets-based, rather than deficit-based, approach to working with young people. Creative youth development is a form of healing-centered

engagement. CYD is also a compelling solution for positive outcomes for young people that employs the power and possibility of creativity at its core.

What is Creative Youth Development?

In the early 2010s, practitioners and stakeholders who embraced holistic approaches and positive youth development in youth arts programs began to unify as a field to build awareness and support for their work. The term "creative youth development" was coined in 2013, prior to the National Summit on Creative Youth Development, which took place in 2014.

Creative youth development is a recent term for a longstanding theory of practice that integrates creative skill-building, inquiry, and expression with positive youth development principles, fueling young people's imaginations and building critical learning and life skills. (Creative Youth Development National Partnership website, www.creativeyouthdevelopment.org, 2019)

Creative youth development programs reflect the diversity of the arts and humanities in artforms and genres. These creativity-based programs take place in a variety of contexts and settings, including the following:

- CYD-specific social sector organizations;
- Programs that are part of a larger, multifaceted youth development organizations or arts organizations (for example a regional theater company, art museum, or Boys & Girls Club);
- School-based programs occurring both during the school day and during out-of-school time (OST);
- Libraries and community parks and recreation programs; and
- Other community contexts such as in collaboration with juvenile diversion programs.

A set of key characteristics unifies the Creative Youth Development field and sets CYD apart from other types of arts learning experiences.

Key Characteristics of Effective Creative Youth Development Programs (Mass Cultural Council, 2017)

1. Occur in **safe and healthy spaces**
 2. Are **assets-based**, helping young people build upon their unique strengths
 3. Nurture **positive relationships** among peers and with adults
 4. Programs are **youth-driven** and embrace, value, and respect youth voice
 5. Set **high expectations** for personal growth and arts learning
 6. Are **holistic** in their approaches and outcomes
- (Mass Cultural Council, 2017)

The Mass Cultural Council's *Seen & Heard* website discusses these characteristics in greater detail.

Quality in CYD Program Practices

CYD programs vary in the quality of arts skill-building and in the degree of youth development that occurs. Many CYD programs are nuanced and refined in their program approaches, often through years of reflective practice. Other programs are at an earlier stage of development. Still other programs, seeking to align with the field of CYD, call their work CYD but have significant gaps to address before they might be considered to be of high quality.

The results of a research investigation of what constitutes quality within CYD programs are presented in *Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts* (Montgomery, Rogovin, & Persaud, commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The report discusses a common set of principles among the high-quality CYD programs studied. Notably, programs that developed independently of one another had evolved to employ similar ways of working with young people. In addition, there was alignment between young people and experts in after-school programs about how the involvement of professional artists in CYD programs is key to youth engagement and to program quality.

The principles of high-quality OST arts programs from the *Something to Say* research are presented below. (These principles encompass the six key characteristics of effective CYD programs that were discussed previously in this essay.) Taken in the aggregate, this set of principles provides a basic blueprint for developing a high-quality CYD program. Within the set of 10 principles, employing instructors who are professional, practicing artists is listed first to emphasize its foundational importance.

The 10 principles were further validated via a 2013–2014 national survey of CYD practitioners. Survey respondents overwhelmingly agreed or

strongly agreed that the set of quality principles were essential ingredients for effective CYD programs (Lauren Stevenson, *Setting the Agenda*, 2014). This affirmation is meaningful since a shared awareness of the characteristics of high quality programs is valuable as out-of-school time policymakers, researchers, and practitioners are increasingly focused on evaluating and ensuring youth program quality.

The following are the 10 principles for effective, high-quality OST arts programs from the *Something to Say* report:

1. Instructors are professional, practicing artists and are valued with compensation for their expertise and investment in their professional development.
2. Executive directors have a public commitment to high-quality arts programs that is supported by sustained action.
3. Arts programs take place in dedicated, inspiring, welcoming spaces and affirm the value of art and artists.
4. There is a culture of high expectations, respect for creative expression, and an affirmation of youth participants as artists.
5. Programs culminate in high-quality public events with real audiences.
6. Positive relationships with adult mentors and peers foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.
7. Youth participants actively shape programs and assume meaningful leadership roles.
8. Programs focus on hands-on skill-building using current equipment and technology.
9. Programs strategically engage key stakeholders to create a network of support for both youth participants and the programs.
10. Programs provide a physically and emotionally safe place for youth.

CYD program practices are continuously evolving, driven by the commitment to support young people in shaping programs and also by the conviction that programs should reflect their communities, which are also shifting. A 2019 landscape analysis, *Trends in CYD Programs*, identifies and discusses five trends in this dynamic field. These trends include: holistic approaches growing as needs grow, collaboration across sectors, a new generation of program staff with new approaches, scaling by depth, and establishing creative career pathways. (Montgomery, Americans for the Arts, 2019). The landscape analysis also discusses the historical foundation of CYD.

Theory of Change and Evidence of CYD as a Solution for Positive Outcomes for Youth

CYD programs help young people develop their creativity, self-awareness, cross-cultural understanding, collaboration skills, perseverance, and sense of agency, as documented by Lauren Stevenson in her 2013 report *Setting the Agenda*,

which examined numerous CYD research studies. Independent research investigations document the outcomes of youth participation in CYD programs, both encompassing and extending beyond indicators of social and emotional development such as heightened optimism and improved relationships with peers. For example, a University of Michigan study of Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit, *Excellence on Stage and in Life: The Mosaic Model for Youth Development through the Arts* by Lorraine Gutiérrez and Michael Spencer (2008), identified that 81% of alumni reported that they experienced more personal growth and transformation at Mosaic than any other activity they participated in as a teenager.

Many CYD programs also track outcomes such as graduation from high school and students' sense of viewing themselves capable of academic success. One example is SAY Sí, in San Antonio, Texas, which has more than a decade of 100% graduation rate and pursuit of higher education among program participants, in a city with a 20% high school dropout rate.

Based on research and program evaluation, the Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project (BYAEP), a partnership of practitioners, program evaluators, and funders, developed the following theory of change, *Framework for Outcomes in Youth Arts Programs* (2012).

The BYAEP theory of change states:

- If youth participate in high-quality arts programs, they will develop specific skills and competencies, **I Create, I Am, We Connect;**
- which, in turn, lead to a set of **intermediate outcomes (able to engage and be productive, to navigate, and to make connections with others);**
- which in turn lead to a set of **long-term outcomes (resiliency, self-efficacy and personal fulfillment, and community engagement)** that together constitute **life success.**

The BYAEP framework is consistent with other efforts to create a CYD theory of change, such as the model featured in Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit's *Excellence on Stage and in Life: The Mosaic Model for Youth Development Through the Arts* (Gutiérrez & Spencer, 2008). While this essay's scope limits its exploration of the research on CYD, a growing body of independent research provides evidence of more than 20 years of positive impact.

The #1 Spark, or Passion, for U.S. Teens Is the Arts Young people's sparks, or deep interests and passions, are a key factor in how they can thrive. (Search Institute website, www.search-institute.org, 2019). Sparks energize us and give us joy. While all people have at least one spark, or the capacity to have a spark, young people with limited experiences and opportunities may have not yet identified or developed their spark.

When teens know their spark and have adults who support them in developing their spark, they are more likely to have a sense of purpose, be physically healthy, be socially conscious, volunteer, and have better attendance and higher grades in school. These teens are also less likely to experience depression or to engage in acts of violence toward others. (*Adolescent Thriving: The Role of Sparks, Relationships, and Empowerment*, Scales, Benson, and Roehlkepartain, 2010).

American teenagers aged 12–17 cited creative arts as their #1 spark category, more than any other area by a wide margin. Fifty-four percent of teens named creative arts; 25% of teens chose athletics, which was the second ranked category of sparks (Peter Benson, *Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers*, 2008).

Arts organizations can cite the Search Institute's extensive research on sparks as evidence of young people's interest in the arts. This research also identifies that, in addition to unmet demand, there is also likely latent demand among young people to develop their creative and artistic skills.

Inadequate and Inequitable Opportunities to Participate in CYD

Lamentably, significant gaps exist with regard to equity and access to arts learning opportunities, as documented by Americans for the Arts in *Arts Facts: Access to Arts Education is Not Equitable* (2017). African American and Latinx youth had less than half the access to arts education than did white students, as reported by the National Endowment for the Arts Office of Research & Analysis in the 2011 report *Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation* by Nick Rabkin and Eric Hedberg. Further, Rabkin and Hedberg also documented three decades of precipitous decline in access to arts education among African American and Latinx youth.

Among low-income families, students are less likely to participate in the arts outside of the school day, such as through fee-based lessons or camps. Barriers for youth participation in CYD programs include transportation challenges, program tuition, being responsible for babysitting younger siblings, lack of awareness of programs, and overall inadequate supply of high quality programs. At the same time, the benefits of arts education can be the greatest for youth from low-income families (*The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings From Four Longitudinal Studies*, Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012).

Racial equity and social justice are core values of the CYD field and are driving forces for many CYD programs and organizations. With a commitment to improving equity in access to quality out-of-school-time arts education, CYD programs commonly prioritize working with low-income youth and racially and ethnically diverse populations of youth (*The Rise*

of Creative Youth Development, Montgomery, 2017). However, currently not enough CYD programs exist or are accessible to meet the interest and needs of young people. As arts leaders and as a society we have much to do to bridge opportunity gaps for young people in the arts.

The Future of CYD

Increasingly, as people talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, they are also talking about belonging, or DEIB. Belonging goes beyond inclusion to a place of co-creating (John A. Powell, *Building Belonging in a Time of Othering*, 2019). Belonging requires sharing power and it also involves caring. Belonging is a fundamental human need and is elemental to creative youth development programs. That sense of belonging and the opportunity to co-create are part of what makes CYD programs so important in the lives of young people.

Imagine if, in our spaces and places and organizations, young people are not just invited in, but rather, know they belong. To support young people in a deeply felt sense of belonging in our organizations is to support them in belonging in our communities and in society. In this way, creative youth development programs contribute to a more just and healthy society.

With more than two decades of changing young people's lives through creative youth development, CYD organizations and stakeholders such as funders and collaborators from allied sectors are unifying to advance the field of creative youth development. In 2016 the Creative Youth Development National Partnership formed in 2016 with a vision that:

All young people will have equitable access to opportunities to develop their worldview and creative potential, to live richer, fuller lives and develop the critical learning and life skills they need to become active contributors to their communities. (Creative Youth Development National Partnership, 2017)

Awareness is growing of how creative youth development is a compelling path for positive outcomes for youth. Organizations such as the ICA and the many presenters and participants at Building Brave Spaces, including many youth leaders, are helping to raise awareness and to lead the way with new ways of working that encompass principles of CYD. Importantly, they are generously sharing what they are learning with others.

Author Toni Morrison died this past year; the Nobel laureate's works of fiction will endure for their artistry, wisdom, and truth. Morrison's direct advice is also timeless and urgent, including to those of us working in the arts and with young people: "When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."



Fall Teen Night, 2019. Photo by Lauren Miller.

AJ Howell, *Untitled*, 2018.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BUILDING BRAVE SPACES ADVISORY GROUP

Anthony Barrows
Donovan Birch, Jr.
Antonia Contro
Karla Diaz
Turahn Dorsey
Radiah Harper
Danielle Linzer
Carlos Moreno
Rasheem Muhammad
Amireh Rezaei-Kamalabad
Dario Robleto
Steve Seidel
Mario Ybarra, Jr.
Various ICA Teens and Alums that
generously shared their thoughts
and knowledge

PROJECT SUPPORT

Isabel Beavers
Mithsuca Berry
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Travis Matthews
Clay Patrick McBride
Lauren Miller
Miller Moreno
Natasha Moustache
Cindy Portillo
Melissa Rivard
Neven Samara
Margie Samp
Ally Schmaling
Andraya Segura
Nicole Stroman
Jennifer Taylor
Kristyn Ulanday
Mia Ventola
Liza Voll
Mercedes Zapata

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from that conference, as well as recordings of select sessions,
discussion of its impact, and past Teen Convening reports.



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