



# **No Longer Empty**

**Building Art  
and Community  
in Unused  
Spaces**

**Manon Slome**



**No Longer Empty**

A large, heavy-duty metal safe door is shown, partially open, revealing its interior. The door is constructed from thick metal plates with a complex locking mechanism. The interior is lined with a mesh material. A small plaque on the door reads "YORK SAFE & LOCK CO. NEW YORK, N. Y. YORK, N. Y.". The door is set against a wall, and a black barrel is visible on the floor to the left.

Manon Slome

**No Longer Empty**



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**For my mother, the beautiful Ruth, who never missed a show.**



**Ruth Mukherji, 1927–2021**  
Photograph by Raimundo Rubio

**NO LONGER**

**EMPTY**



WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE

THIS BUILDING BECOME

A Haunted house  
HOTEL

T SolArte

Haunted house  
in many styles

#HipHop  
Hall of Fame

Post-IT  
NOTE  
FACTORY.

To keep the building  
open or turn it in  
to a public ice  
skating rink. ♡

recreational  
programs for  
all ages  
(dance, sports  
etc.)

A museum  
on the floor  
and a library  
on another

A music  
studio

A CHOCOLATE  
FACTORY

Museum (History)  
&  
Community  
Organizing

A FREE  
Art School  
Cafe  
at your program

more  
frightening  
pieces as well  
as pieces about  
equal rights

Dance Studio  
championing  
a great future  
for our nation  
and our people

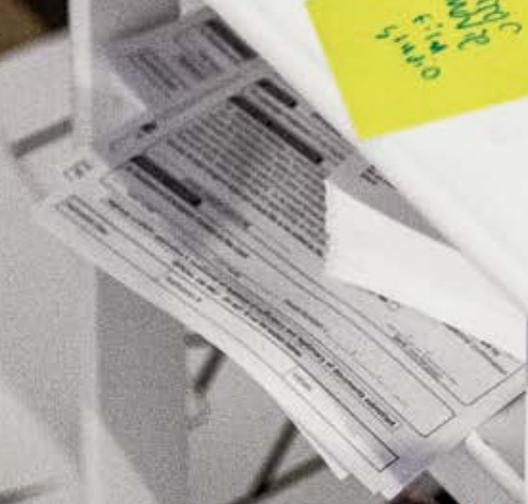
Topic  
NOTE  
STICK

Museum  
about  
the Bronx  
& Brown

An art-education  
Community center  
classroom, with  
classes, painting,  
dance - please  
space - please  
community  
space - please

NOT  
LUXURY  
LIVING

A  
Dance  
Studio



Let's  
keep  
it  
going



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Manon Slome



Installation view of *Hold These Truths*, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Manhattan, 2017–18. Left: Alexandra Bell, *A Teenager with Promise*, 2017. Screen-print and archival pigment print on paper. Right: Carey Young, *Cautionary Statement*, 2007. Vinyl lettering. Photograph by Whitney Browne

**WE  
MAY  
MAKE  
COMMENTS  
THAT ARE NOT  
PURELY HISTORICAL  
AND WHICH REFER TO OUR  
EXPECTATIONS, BELIEFS OR HOPES  
FOR THE FUTURE. SUCH FORWARD-LOOKING  
STATEMENTS MAY BE IDENTIFIED BY THE USE  
OF WORDS SUCH AS 'WILL', 'CAN', 'SHOULD', 'ESTIMATE',  
'POTENTIAL', 'EXPECT', 'PROJECT', 'INTEND', 'PLAN', AND SIMILAR  
EXPRESSIONS. YOU ARE ADVISED THAT THESE STATEMENTS  
ARE ONLY PREDICTIONS AND THAT ACTUAL EVENTS MAY DIFFER MATERIALLY**

CITY OF NEW YORK PROSECUTION BUREAU  
Wanted Poster 1128891

**WANTED**  
**FOR LOOKING OUT**  
PERPETRATOR - PROBABLE CAUSE TO STOP AND FRISK



On Friday July 14, 2014, at 2:00 hours, a female Hispanic, approximately 19 years of age was observed standing at the intersection of 145th Street and 145th Avenue. The female was wearing a green tank top. Officers who had received information to be on the lookout, suspected her of participating in the robbery. Suspect is believed to associate with other teenagers in the vicinity. Public notice that suspect may be in the gang database.

The suspect is wanted by her family, friends and neighbors. To disseminate copies of this poster and display it, www.wanted-poster.com

Investigator: [redacted]  
Assigned: [redacted]  
Case# 2014 02 Complete Report# 2014020202

CITY OF NEW YORK PROSECUTION BUREAU  
Wanted Poster 1128912

**WANTED**  
**FOR FURTIVE MOVEMENT**  
PERPETRATOR - PROBABLE CAUSE TO STOP AND FRISK



On Saturday May 15, 2014, at approximately 12:30 AM, a male Hispanic, approximately 19-20 years of age was wearing a black t-shirt and dark pants. The male was observed engaging infurtive movements. The police allege that the perpetrator was seen in the vicinity of 145th Street and 145th Avenue. Suspect has been seen in the vicinity of 145th Street and 145th Avenue. Suspect is believed to associate with other teenagers in the vicinity.

The suspect is wanted by his family, friends and neighbors. To disseminate copies of this poster and display it, www.wanted-poster.com

Investigator: [redacted]  
Assigned: [redacted]  
Case# 2014 02

CITY OF NEW YORK PROSECUTION BUREAU  
Wanted Poster 1128891

**WANTED**  
**FOR LIFESTYLE CHOICE**  
PERPETRATOR - PROBABLE CAUSE TO ARREST



On Friday June 27, 2014, at approximately 10:30 PM, a male Black, 23 years of age was wearing a white t-shirt and dark pants. The male was observed walking in the vicinity of 145th Street and 145th Avenue. The suspect exhibited erratic and suspicious behavior. The police report that the suspect left the area in a hurry and was carrying a bag. Suspect is believed to associate with other teenagers in the vicinity. Public notice that suspect may be in the gang database.

The suspect is wanted by his family, friends and neighbors. To disseminate copies of this poster and display it, www.wanted-poster.com

Investigator: [redacted]  
Assigned: [redacted]  
Case# 2014 02 Complete Report# 2014020202

CITY OF NEW YORK PROSECUTION BUREAU  
Wanted Poster 1128912

**WANTED**  
**FOR UNSPECIFIED REASONS**  
PERPETRATOR - PROBABLE CAUSE TO STOP AND QUESTION



On Friday July 18, 2014, at approximately 10:30 PM, a male Black, approximately 19-20 years of age wearing a blue t-shirt and dark pants was observed standing in front of a building at 145th Street and 145th Avenue. Officers allege that the suspect was seen in the vicinity of 145th Street and 145th Avenue. Suspect has been seen in the vicinity of 145th Street and 145th Avenue. Suspect is believed to associate with other teenagers in the vicinity.

The suspect is wanted by his family, friends and neighbors. To disseminate copies of this poster and display it, www.wanted-poster.com

Investigator: [redacted]  
Assigned: [redacted]  
Case# 2014 02 Complete Report# 2014020202

ROCHAMBEAU



## Foreword

# No Longer Empty Experiments in the Cultural Commons

Laura Raicovich

The very human desire for exchange, for being in the presence of one another, with family and friends, or even strangers, is profoundly necessary. As we have experienced during the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for this swapping of emotions, thoughts, and ideas in space together is not only urgent, but also keeps many of us sane. The technologies of connection are not enough. The need for embodied sharing, the emotional resonance of being in the same physical space to speak, to eat, to breathe, to be human together, to experience culture collectively, is deeply meaningful. This desire is like a shard of crystal in sunlight, at once harsh and beautiful, warm and hard. It is what culture is made of, and it brings meaning to shared experience. Over its twelve years of operations, No Longer Empty invented, experimented, and carefully engineered a wide variety of cultural infrastructures to make such civic spaces for cultural exchange possible. This was NLE's great strength.

No Longer Empty was founded to take advantage of disused storefronts and other underused urban spaces as sites for temporary art interventions, for artistic activity that could transform an experience of an empty commercial space. Up close and personal, embedded within neighborhoods, these spaces became a vortex of experimentation and creativity. The objective was to take an available resource, transform it, and allow art to appear in a given location, preceded by deep engagement efforts with people who live or work nearby, as well as their lived contemporary and historical realities. This work was not about installing a single artwork or groups of artworks to inform or educate a public, but rather the production of cultural meaning from the development of exhibitions and projects alongside the histories, conditions, and narratives of the chosen sites and adjacent communities. The co-creative aspect of NLE's work and its participatory sensibility were central to its success.

Further, NLE's selected neighborhood spaces were not necessarily destinations, but places where you might be surprised to encounter an exhibition. No longer confined to the marble or glass halls of museums, the art was sometimes, although not necessarily, object-based, and invited additional interaction. Maybe those who encountered these projects didn't even think of them as art in a conventional sense—nevertheless, they experienced something that was different, ungated, for all, and made explicitly to engage a broad assembly of people who might bring their own creative acts and knowledge into a cultural exchange.

**Local residents read *Wanted Posters* from Dread Scott's project for *If You Build It*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014. Local youth volunteered to become the subjects of wanted posters for this multifaceted community-based art project, which addressed the harrowing stop-and-frisk police policy that was so much a part of the participants' lives**

Cultural space is often defined as “educational,” too often interpreted as a space in which to be taught something, to receive wisdom, or to be spoken to. No Longer Empty instead created a space premised on exchanging knowledge and experiences among artists and cultural workers and publics, each defined in myriad ways. It is in this approach that No Longer Empty made meaning, centering the ideas that came together through its offerings rather than what it had to impart to a public.

There is extraordinary civic value in art in public spaces. In these contexts, art has the potential to reflect the lived experiences of diverse publics back to them, or to break open entirely other possibilities of encountering the world as participants engage in a common experience. The more accessible the shared space, the greater the diversity of audiences. Under these conditions, art engenders alternate imaginaries as well as common ground, fostering civic exchange through collective experiences. Spaces of imagination not only enrich the civic character of specific sites, but also create physical spaces in which people can engage both as individuals and as members of larger communities.

This model did not emerge fully formed, but evolved over the course of the lifetime of NLE. There were bumps in the road, and artists alongside activists and organizers and curators and educators experimented in ways not possible in more conventional institutions. The learning and adjustments, always a work in process, are captured in this volume, in part to provide inspiration and practical knowledge, as well as wisdom gleaned from mistakes made, to the next generation of makers and agents of change. The book begins with essays by the two founders of No Longer Empty, Manon Slome and Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, who saw opportunity in vacant spaces throughout New York City. They framed the practices of NLE as they endeavored to cultivate democratic cultural spaces that connected with the specificity of their geographies, histories, and lived realities. This is followed by a full chronology of NLE’s exhibitions over twelve years, and several case studies that show the evolution of the curatorial model. From the outset, a major component of NLE’s work was education and engaging with young people, which is the focus of the subsequent essays by Jodie Di Napoli and Mica Le John; they elucidate how the organization’s pedagogies emerged and transformed over the its lifetime. Nick Kozak, an art teacher in a large NYC public school, provides an insightful view of how NLE changed the way he taught art to his students. Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger’s essay concludes this section with the important work of the NLE Curatorial Lab.

Throughout the book, several artists who created powerful artworks in diverse mediums for projects in neighborhoods across the city reflect on their unique collaborations with NLE. Finally, the book pro-

vides a series of guidelines drawn from NLE's cumulative learning, useful resources for anyone who wants to pick up some of the fruitful threads of cultural practice that NLE worked to establish. In this act of generosity and openness, NLE further seeds the field with artistic and cultural knowledge that can support future radical work.

No Longer Empty was founded on the belief that art is not only central to making change, but also that connection to community is integral to this path. One of the most important aspects of NLE's evolution was around engagement. Here I deliberately do not use the word "outreach," as it implies that one must go outside and bring someone in, meaning that the art is already *not of* the place. Cultural institutions in the United States have long thought of their reason for being as primarily about public education, about bringing expert knowledge that resides within the museum or cultural space to the public. Thus the need to reach out, to bring people inside cultural spaces, and to provide education. An overemphasis on this methodology has resulted in a form of communication between cultural spaces and people that puts the public constantly on the receiving end of being educated. NLE took a path less traveled and invited conversation and exchange from the outset, building cultural experience from the bottom up.

I am writing some eighteen months after the arrival of the global COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. While the pandemic's social, cultural, and economic effects have not yet been fully understood, one area that has opened for reconsideration is how culture is produced, where, and by and for whom: simply put, how arts institutions can be better for more people. Demands for a profound reimagining of cultural space have been heard far and wide, and perhaps the legacy of NLE will be to serve as a model for experiments in undoing and redoing cultural infrastructures. While we yearn for other forms of togetherness, perhaps we can disassemble existing systems that seem to serve fewer and fewer of us, and remake them into systems of care and creativity, mutually supportive and fulfilling, ensuring that greater numbers on this planet, including the flora and fauna, not only survive, but also thrive.

At moments such as these we require alternative ways of thinking about "how it is done," where the "it" is all we can imagine. Imagination, then, is at the center of inventing these other ways of being together, and therefore the realm of art is crucial. With this book, NLE graciously hands its learning and ideals over to others so that they may remake anew, with other partners and artists, but perhaps with the same generosity of spirit and belief in culture as an agent of change.

**FREE**



# Introduction

Manon Slome

*No Longer Empty: Building Art and Community in Unused Spaces*, is not intended to merely document what one nomadic arts organization, No Longer Empty, created over a period of twelve years. The intent of the publication is to take a deep dive into our work as an organization and to examine, with the same radical transparency with which we always operated, what we collectively achieved, our successes, the mistakes we made, and the power of the art created for our exhibitions. We hope it will also serve as a handbook or how-to manual for curators, artists, community organizers, educators, and any students of change who seek to take cultural production and the power of art into their own hands and bring art into their own communities. Through essays from multiple perspectives, case studies, the sharing of syllabi and examples of contracts, loan forms, and the like, we aim to make our process clear and replicable.

Our vision was to create a democratic access to art through site- and community-responsive exhibitions and radical educational programming. Our goal was to create space for dialogue and to engage artists and audiences in the intensity of the art of the *now*—art responding to and engaging with the issues of the community and our times outside the restrictions and burdens of a formal institutional framework.

No Longer Empty (NLE) was born from the financial chaos of the Great Recession of 2008. It grew from a few impassioned volunteers meeting in coffee shops and evolved over twelve years into an organization that presented over forty exhibitions, worked with many hundreds of artists and cultural organizations, and welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors. During that time, NLE’s volunteers turned into staff with competitive industry salaries and health insurance, our artists and presenters were paid according to the guidelines of WAGE (the activist group Working Artists and the Greater Economy), and we worked in a communal office space—all the while remaining grassroots in style and substance and just about always running on empty! Nevertheless, NLE continued to pull off the seemingly impossible in terms of the quality and scale of the exhibitions, the artists we worked with, and the amazing spaces that temporarily hosted us in four of the five boroughs of New York City.

Over the course of those twelve years much changed, beginning with the financial collapse and ending in an unprecedented pandemic that has radically changed our individual, social, working, and creative lives. A heartbreakingly endless chain of black and brown deaths at the

**Nicky Enright, *The Free Flag*, 2012. Created for the flagpole on the grounds of the Andrew Freedman Home in the Bronx for *This Side of Paradise*, 2012. *The Free Flag* was an homage to the Home’s founder (Freedman) and its original function as rent-free retirement housing for the formerly rich. “Free” also signified what Enright considered to be the free zone of art and the lack of admission fees to NLE’s exhibitions. Photograph by the artist**

hands of the police has laid bare the enduring brutal and lethal inequities in our society when it comes to justice. COVID-19 has taken a disproportionate toll on minority communities, revealing—even to those who would rather turn away—the gross inequities in health care, the workplace, housing, and education. In the first months of the pandemic, millions of people in the United States and around the world demonstrated in the streets for policy and legislative change. Many cultural institutions—museums, orchestras, performing arts companies—have likewise been called out for their entrenched racism and hierarchies of opportunity and reward, as they quickly laid off the most vulnerable of their staff (including guards, front of house, cleaners, and gig educators).

In parallel, many small nonprofits, working outside the institutional scale, could no longer operate under the safety structures that COVID necessitated. This, together with the simultaneous decrease in philanthropic giving in the arts, forced NLE to suspend programming. The deluge of emails we received following this announcement pointed to the fact that the work of No Longer Empty would now be needed more than ever. The pandemic has irrevocably changed our patterns of commerce and work, leaving a proliferation of empty storefronts and vacant commercial real estate—this alone must change our approach to how buildings can and must be repurposed and used and how the boundaries between public and private space must be reimagined. I also believe, in the same vein of thinking, that changes to the whole structure of art and its institutions have to be made top down and bottom up.

As we wrote in the letter announcing our decision to close No Longer Empty:

**This is indeed a very challenging environment for art and educational programming and funding. It is also a time for cautious optimism that there will be a deep realignment of our society, elevating values of equity and justice. Now, more than ever, voices of marginalized communities that were amplified throughout our exhibitions and programs need alternative platforms and spaces for expression. We look forward to seeing how artists and curators, including those from the NLE Curatorial Lab and the many youth who went through our programs, will continue to find innovative ways for public engagement with the arts. We hope there will also be an environment for grassroots organizations that have been inspired by our model to thrive and create meaningful projects in their communities.**

This publication recognizes and supports such an evolution. As mentioned at the outset, for all who seek change through the power of art to make us see differently—curators, artists, community organizers, indeed

anyone with imagination and will—the values and the wisdom you need to harness are already present in the places in which you operate. Your role, through the power and insights of the artists with whom you will work, is simply to amplify them.



**Amanda Jones in #ImagineAwrld, a video presentation by the Youth Action Council 2020 cohort. The three-and-a-half-minute video combines a spoken-word piece with images of NLE Youth Action Council members in**

**Zoom rooms, attending protests and exhibitions, and in their homes, interspersed with historical and personal photographs. The title repeats throughout the piece, spoken and written in various ways and communicating**

**joy, solidarity, and community. The cohort was led by Lauraberth Lima, NLE director of education**





**Part 1**  
**How It**  
**Happened**

## Mel Chin

Way back in my earliest history, in Houston in the '70s, I made my first attempt to bypass the galleries and institutions by renting out an empty storefront to stage a solo exhibition. I thought I did everything right: I got the space, cleaned and cleared it, called the press, sent out the flyers, and put the work up in this dusty art deco storefront on Houston's midtown Main Street . . . In truth, it was all madness, and best not to be celebrated.

With critical hindsight, I should be thankful the reception was nonexistent.

Thirty-five years later, I finally met someone who has accomplished what I had tried to do all those years ago. A woman with clear, nonsensical enthusiasm, Manon had a track record of mounting ambitious, challenging exhibitions in vacant spaces throughout New York City.

Before connecting with **No Longer Empty**, having a successful exhibition (this time with a more mature body of work) outside of a gallery or museum was only a dream. But No Longer Empty made it happen.

*All Over the Place* happened because of the efforts of No Longer Empty. From the eponymous exhibition at the Queens Museum, to a dedication acknowledging my collaborators from the Six Nations Iroquois on the Broadway-Lafayette subway station project, to the augmented reality of *Unmoored* and the oversized animatronic sculpture of *Wake in Times Square*, to a discrete musical composition for the 7 train, we were indeed all over the place.

None of these actions was without trials, but what we accomplished is clear. Our work together was not just about filling spaces, it was about the quality of the ideas that filled them. It wasn't about personal dream fulfillment, but about the trust and relationship it takes to transmute ideas into a reality that can be shared. Working with others is far from a dream but proof that there are necessary entanglements to force a clarification of vision that eventually produces poetics of public engagement.



Mel Chin, *The Fundred Dollar Bill Project*, 2008–22. Visitors drew their own \$100 bills as part of the large-scale installation of the project in *How Much Do I Owe You?*, Clock

Tower building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, 2012–13. Chin's project (now in the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum) calls attention to the

danger of childhood lead poisoning and is a powerful reminder that every child's future has value. Photograph by Whitney Browne

## HOW MUCH DO I OWE YOU?

"How much do I owe you?" is the most common language of transaction and at the same time a deeply philosophical and ethical question. How much do we owe each other? What are our duties or obligations in the myriad transactions and interactions we make both as citizens and as consumers, as producers and consumers, as bosses and workers and as neighbors?

The former bank and the surrounding neighborhood with its history of social and economic struggles, the artists have examined and interpreted these complex issues and are even more pertinent at this time of financial flux, economic uncertainty, and job insecurity.

In the various works and installations, the exhibition reflects on the importance of transparency, honesty, and accountability, security and trust as they function in the world of banking, in the housing market, in industrial production, and in the social realm. The role and function of art is being re-examined at its polarities from high commodity object to social critique and political action.

Over the next few months, the exhibition will become an essential hub with performances, workshops, and community events. Please refer to the program schedule for details.

Artists: Ori Ben-Shir, Alberto Barba, Susanna Castro, Jennifer Dalton, Nicky Enright, Colleen Bank of America-Draw, Deposit, Display Station, Guerra de la Paz, Susan Wambarger, Erika H. Chris Jordan, Jongun Jay Lee, Shaun Leon, Keiko Miyamoto, Paulette Phillips, Ana Pridemore, Simon, Tom Sanford, Theodora Stamatogianni.



# No Longer Empty

## Its Birth, Growth, Demise, and Why All That Matters

### Perspectives on Founding and Curating

**Manon Slome**

Cofounder and Chief Curator, No Longer Empty

Let me begin with some basic premises from which I have worked and which fueled the creation of No Longer Empty.

**I have a passionate belief that art matters, that art is transformative and that it should be for everyone.**

**I believe that the most powerful art experiences connect us to one another by creating compelling communal experiences and expanding our imagination for what is possible.**

**I believe that democratic access to art is an essential element of a productive and engaged life and that art spaces must facilitate this.**

The reader may be thinking: but aren't there already enough museums and galleries, art shows, and the like, especially in cities like New York, to deliver these goals? Well of course, that depends on where you live, what transportation options are available to take you to these spaces, and whether the kinds of opportunities open to you from childhood allow art to become a natural part of your life. Far too many people have never been welcomed into an art space or encouraged to explore the challenging array of choices that do exist. Though some call New York City (the operational site of No Longer Empty) the art capital of the world, there is a serious shortage of art spaces that provide an alternative to the exclusive/exclusionary nature of the museum and gallery world, and this holds true for most cities and towns that boast of a cultural presence. Over the years, I have heard too many times, "Art is not for me! I don't get it." Cultural leaders at every level must take some responsibility for this.

**Entrance to *How Much Do I Owe You?*, Clock Tower building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, 2012–13. Partially visible at right is *Self-Portrait Azua (Charon)*, 2012. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

#### **How It All Began**

I had never thought of starting an organization. It was the spring of 2008 and New York and the world were reeling from the news that the national financial markets were collapsing. There was a feeling of shock and—not to conflate very disparate realities—a sense of foreboding, of fear, an intake of breath and silence, like that pervading the city in the aftermath of the tragic events of 9/11. Banks were imploding, iconic companies were heading to bankruptcy, and store after store stood empty—

all markers of the economic meltdown that afflicted the United States and much of the world as we entered the Great Recession. I counted something like twelve empty storefronts on just a few blocks of one commercial stretch in Manhattan. The stores still in business had no customers, and the salespeople, in an attempt to look busy and purposeful, were tidying piles of already immaculately arranged sweaters.

The phrase “empty, empty, empty” kept going through my mind—the emptiness not only of the businesses, but also of the whole structure on which the bubble of wealth had been resting—the shady dealings, the derivatives, the subprime mortgages, and the lie that all was well. The idea for an exhibition called *Empty* began brewing in my mind. From a curatorial perspective, my deepest interests have always revolved around the intersection of art and sociopolitical issues, and I began to think that this



**A visiting school group with Élan’s *Sugar Hill Tapestry*, 2014, in *If You Build It*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014. Constructed from found objects and materials donated by residents of the Sugar Hill area, the tapestry, with its additive nature and origins in a collective process, was envisioned as an emblem of the values of community, togetherness, and teamwork. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

“empty” exhibition could be a powerful response to the times, particularly if placed in one of the vacated storefronts that were proliferating. Such an enterprise, I thought, would align a space and a theme to the moment of crisis.

A friend, Marlene Krauss, heard me discussing the idea and immediately offered the use of an empty storefront at the Chelsea Hotel, a legendary nexus of vanguard art in New York, of which she was part owner. Within a month, the first exhibition, *No Longer Empty*, came into being. The show spread into three adjacent storefronts. An excerpt from the wall text for that exhibition conveys our aspirations at the time:

**Through an interrelated series of installations, video works, sculpture, photography, painting, sound art, and performance, installed not in traditional gallery or museum settings but in empty spaces around the city, we are committed to making these vacated architectural sites enticing platforms for challenging and thought-provoking work, allowing the excitement of the enterprise to show the potential**

**of these empty spaces, encouraging traffic and eventually tenants to fill them again with lively commerce . . .**

As we worked to mobilize these currently empty sites, they immediately became filled with the enthusiasm and energy of all the artists and the NLE team. The opportunity to be spontaneous, to collaborate, and to create provided us all with an infectious optimism.

That optimism concealed both our naiveté and inexperience in setting up such an impromptu exhibition, yet it also brought together so many wonderful people and catalyzed a camaraderie of ideas and energy. Co-conspirators at that time were Asher Remy Toledo, a gallery owner and an early partner; Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, who would go on to become NLE's executive director (and with her background in urban planning, bring a radically important and non-art body of knowledge to our fledgling organization); Tara de la Garza, who was also an artist in the show; Julian Navarro and Keith Schweitzer, who became co-curators on many projects; and Jodie Di Napoli, who would become NLE's director of education. These and countless other wonderful people, some introduced by friends, some simply walk-ins who immediately wanted to volunteer, helped with both the installation and running the exhibition once it opened. The team, however, pointed out that *Empty* (my original title for the show) was somewhat depressing. When we had finished installing, I shouted, "See, it's no longer empty!" The name stuck. Not yet registered as a nonprofit and with no funding, but with a host of volunteers and good will, we managed to launch three additional exhibitions that first year.

### **The Evolution of the Curatorial Model: Site-Specificity and Community**

Later on in this section, I will examine in depth a few key exhibitions and artworks that were important to the development of NLE. Here, however, I would like to focus on the origins and growth of NLE's unique curatorial model, and the issues that came to define its essence: site-specificity and community responsiveness.

At the very start, the site-specific approach came about through that plain old shaper of so many events: necessity.

The storefront we took over at the Chelsea Hotel had been a famous fishing tackle store. It had stood empty for years, but some of the artifacts attesting to its former use were still intact: a seaside diorama in the window niche, pegboards that had displayed the fishing rods, fake wood



**Neon sign, Chelsea Hotel, Manhattan.  
Photograph by Tara de la Garza**

crafted to resemble boats, and more. In a very low- to no-budget way, troops of friends and volunteers helped clean and ready the space and

twenty artists, well known to each of us organizing the show, were invited to respond to the original theme of *empty*. While a few participated with existing works, the majority of the artists created new work for the site, and this practice of commissioning new work became a crucial hallmark of NLE exhibitions. The former fishing tackle store, like many properties we were to use, was not in great condition, so we swept, patched, and painted—activities that were to be the start of almost



**Street view of the exhibition *No Longer Empty*, Chelsea Hotel, Manhattan, 2009. Visible in the window is Tara de la Garza's *Neon Dreaming*, 2009. Photograph by the artist**

all our projects. In this way, we always left a space in better condition than when we received it, a crucial aspect of gaining the confidence of the property owners over the years.

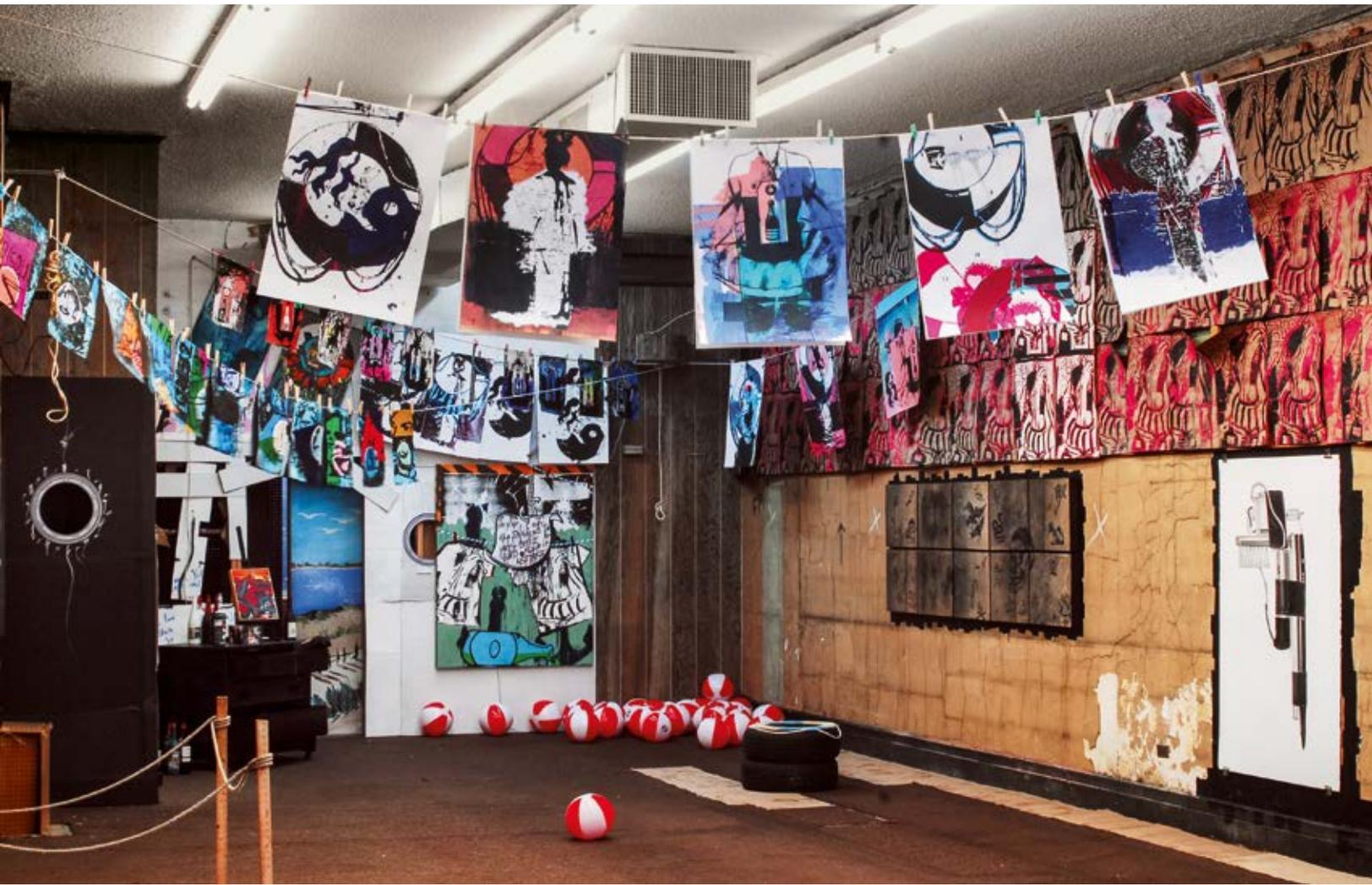
As can be seen in the images of Michael Bevilaqua's *Ship of Fools* (which also referenced the drowning economy) and Raimundo Rubio's *Sodom and Gomorra*, which was placed in the store window with its marine diorama, the artists enthusiastically responded to the many physical, historical, and symbolic aspects of the site.

Several artists still living in the hotel, including Linda and Lotha Treoller, had protested efforts to sell the building, but they enthusiastically joined in this exhibition that not only paid homage to the rich heritage of the site, but also gave them a voice to express the frustrations shared by remaining tenants about attempts to evict them.

From this project, several things in particular emerged that were to direct the course of how NLE developed. When people passing the storefront peered in the door to see what was going on inside, whoever was sitting at the reception desk would say some variation of "Come inside, it's an art exhibition. Entry is free." It struck us that this welcome, followed by an explanation of what we were doing there, was a profound



**Raimundo Rubio, *Sodom and Gomorra* (detail), 2009. Installation with coffee table, shoe, cell phone, jewelry, dried sticks, and salt. In *No Longer Empty*, Chelsea Hotel, Manhattan, 2009. Photograph by Tara de la Garza**



contrast to the traditional gallery-going experience. When I was an institutional curator, I rarely spent time in the shows I had organized when the public was there, aside from the opening and special VIP tours. In commercial galleries, the often chilling demeanor of attendants at the front desks staring into their computer screens can deter anyone with an implied sense of invisibility. Museums, too, often seem off limits. High admission prices and imposing architecture, all too often more reflective of the donor and architect than hospitable to the art, can make for unwelcoming spaces.

With NLE, by contrast, the non-traditional spaces we worked in, which if nothing else sparked curiosity rather than trepidation, put people at ease. The team members who had welcomed visitors also asked them questions as they were leaving. What were their thoughts on the exhibition? Which works had particularly resonated? Additional feedback also came through the tours developed over time by staff, interns, and our youth docents and follow-up surveys. This constant loop of dia-

**Michael Bevilacqua,**  
*Ship of Fools, 2009.*  
Installation in *No Longer Empty*, Chelsea Hotel, Manhattan, 2009.  
Photograph by Tara de la Garza

logue with our visitors became a critical tool in the continued development of our exhibitions and programming and provided a much-needed antidote to the traditionally engineered exclusivity of the art world.



**A group of regular after-schoolers at the exhibition *If You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*, Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, the Bronx, 2015. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

Why “engineered”? The notion of exclusivity rests on a premise that entry and acceptance are limited. The meteoric rise of the art market in recent decades, along with the extensive catering to high-net-worth individuals required to secure patronage, has created a situation that is intimidating to the curious would-be art visitor. In an

excellent essay on the need for radical change in the funding structure of nonprofits, Deborah Fisher, executive director of the pioneering social practice organization<sup>1</sup> Blade of Grass, points out that institutions have played a role in conflating art with an art market that most of us cannot afford to participate in, and that makes a lot of people feel economically excluded by art.<sup>2</sup>

### **Learning on the Job!**

In our first exhibition, we focused on the symbolic meaning of the exhibition site, an empty fishing tackle store, but our true engagement with site-specificity and how to honor its deepest meanings only developed with experience and was honed from one exhibition to the next. We began each project with extensive research into the history and current social context of the building. What were its former uses? What was the nature of the communities in which the space was located? What were the area’s demographics, and how had they changed over time? What could we learn about the narratives and voices of these communities? What were the cultural and social organizations that served them? What modes of public transportation were available in the area to make the exhibition and its programs accessible to a wider public? Were there spaces in the community for youth to go after school for recreational activity or quiet homework space? Who were the artists and other cultural practitioners working in the neighborhood? To further this research and to share with complete transparency what we hoped to do at a given location, we held

open houses at the site (advertised on our website and on those of the local partners with whom we were speaking, in local media, and through the handing out and posting of fliers throughout the neighborhood). We presented our fledgling project at housing associations or local community board meetings and similar local gatherings and received valuable feedback. We heard of the needs for communal space or for programs that gave youth a place to congregate. It was only when a myriad of issues pertinent to the neighborhood had been explored and researched that we started to discuss the shaping and themes of the exhibition. What subjects had become most resonant? Which artists would be most suited to this theme?

### **Choosing the Artists and Art—The Heart of the Curatorial Process**

The question of selecting the artists for the shows, goes, of course, to the very heart of the curatorial process and what I would call a curatorial mandate. It will sound like too much of a truism to say that as a curator you must be out there—constantly looking at art, following your intuition, speaking to other curators and artists about what they have seen and liked and reciprocally sharing—but this is less common than one would suppose. When working in a community-responsive way, it was crucial to meet many artists across multiple disciplines working or living in the area, listen to them and learn about their work.

In preparation for an exhibition, I conducted countless studio visits. For me, the heart of curatorial practice is the studio visit. Only there can you begin to deeply get insight into an artist's work. I believe it is essential to conduct such visits with an open mind and an open heart. An artist inviting you into his or her studio is an offer of vulnerability and generosity, and should be received as a gift. Both curator and artist should benefit from the time in learning and feedback. I have an internal rule to give an hour to each visit, whether the work lives up to expectations or not. I also never set up expectations that the studio visit is about considering work for a particular exhibition—this approach sets a much more level playing field for the whole visit and removes any pressure to make decisions on the spot.

### **Commissions—An Essential Aspect of the NLE Model**

While we did choose existing work directly from studios, commissioning new works became a dominant feature of our curatorial practice and the heart of the site-responsive exhibition. In the discussions of a proposed work, we shared all our research and our growing sense of the emerging themes of the exhibition with the artists and they often extended their own investigations into the host community. The power of much of this



**Adam Cvijanovic,**  
*Picardie, 2010.*  
Flashe and house  
paint on Tyvek. In  
*The Sixth Borough,*  
Governor's Island,  
2016. Photograph by  
the artist

commissioned work was electric and made huge impacts on our audiences while allowing unprecedented freedom (and a budget) for artists to expand their practices.

As the artists were being selected for an exhibition, we invited them to informal joint meetings to discuss their ideas, and interesting collaborations that could not have been foreseen often emerged from such encounters. Again, this openness of process and the facilitation of collaborative creation were vital to our emerging curatorial practice. It became a pillar of NLE to transform the power dynamics so often embedded in the curatorial role. From inviting diverse voices to the research and initial decision-making phases, to actively collaborating with artists about the way they chose to be part of an exhibition, we placed transparency and inclusion at the heart of our curatorial process. In addition, our emphasis on building community facilitated experiments in new immersive environments that frequently invited or even necessitated public interaction, such as Dread Scott's *Wanted* and Nari Ward's *Sugar Hill Smiles for If You Build It* (2014) in Sugar Hill, Harlem (both discussed at length in the Part 2 of this book).

Works such as these, directly generated by community realities and addressed to the people who live them, can go far in responding to

those expressions of “art is not for me” and make more people realize they can indeed be included in the creative process. We found that as visitors engaged with the exhibitions and programming and shared in the exploration of some of the area’s histories or narratives through the art, some powerful connections were made and some definite “aha” moments experienced.

We selected work or commissioned new projects from artists in the area, as well as artists from all over the city and sometimes from other states or countries if we felt the work was pertinent to the themes of the exhibition. We paired emerging artists with more established artists providing exciting and valuable intergenerational collaborations while exposing them all to new audiences and critical reception.

While the rewards of this curatorial approach can produce ground-shifting work, it requires a significant level of trust, and collaboration between both artist and curator. Clear and open communication is essential, with the artist being made fully aware of the research that led to the themes of the exhibition, the nature of the space itself (both its possibilities and limitations), and the agreements (made in writing and with a loan or commissioning form) on budgets and fees. With commissions, I stayed in regular touch with the artist to see how the work was progressing or point out areas I thought could be strengthened.

As NLE’s chief curator and someone with a deep respect for art, I sought never to drop my critical judgment when selecting artists or following up on their progress on an installation or commission. Issues of quality are of course subjective, but I have an important dictate that “a show is as weak as its weakest work.” Maintaining critical judgment is a curatorial duty to the show, to the artists, and to our audiences. It was crucial to the sense of trust that developed around the organization that we never “dumbed down” to be inclusive or accessible.

**A theater collaboration on *Othello* for the exhibition *If You Build It*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014, with The Classical Theater of Harlem and a visiting theater company, Dimona Culture Lab (Israel). Ty Jones, artistic director of The Classical Theater of Harlem, in the role of Othello. Photograph by Whitney Browne**



## Collaborations

Collaborations with local community and cultural organizations became integral to our practice. Local organizations have, by definition, deep roots in the communities they serve and have built a level of trust that no temporary presence can hope to duplicate. Through these meet-



**Giuseppe Stampone, *Charon's Bark*, 2009. Site-specific installation in the freight elevator shaft for *Something Out of Nothing*, The Invisible Dog Art Center, Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, 2009. Acrylic paint, carpet, velvet-upholstered furniture, neon signs (*Heaven, Hell, Purgatory*), and soundtrack by Julia Kent**

ings and, in some cases, eventual partnerships, we obtained crucial knowledge of the local communities and developed cross-disciplinary programming that attracted diverse audiences to our site. Where space permitted, as in our exhibitions at the Andrew Freedman Home in the Bronx and at Broadway Housing's new building in the Sugar Hill historic district in Harlem, we were able to invite local organizations to curate their own presentations or programs in, respectively, the former bedrooms of the Home and the future apartments in Sugar Hill.

Collaborations also allowed us to channel many of the themes of an exhibition into programming opportunities. For example, in the Clock Tower building in Long Island City, which had formerly housed the Bank of Manhattan, our focus on the meaning of exchange in *How Much Do I Owe You?* was amplified by a panel discussion with artists and trade

union leaders.<sup>3</sup> A local bank representative spoke about how to open a bank account while another presentation addressed issues of immigration protection and workers' rights. At the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, a space within the exhibition that we had designated as a public square was powerfully programmed by the social design studio Designing the We, whose interactive exhibition *Undesign the Red Line* highlighted the structural racism built into mortgage lending, city planning, and zoning.

The outcomes of these various forms of social cooperation, integrated projects, and activities continually developed and inflected our work—and our growing sense of who we were as an organization. The alliances and conversations among disparate local organizations that

we put in place became a valued legacy of an NLE intervention at a site. For example, after the extended collaborations attendant to the Andrew Freedman Home exhibition and programming in the Bronx, the Bronx Art Alliance was formalized and continues to this day as a forum for important exchanges of ideas, coordinated openings, and marketing and funding opportunities.

At NLE, as some of these examples show, we tried to create a new sense of space in which experimentation could take place—experiments in the ways art was made, how it was presented, and who the public for this art might be. These investigations into site and community, activities of research and engagement, and the type of curating and programming they engendered were the essential tools and foundations of the broadly democratic access to art that we championed. **For us, curating came to be about an exchange of knowledge, a way to open up a subject rather than to present conclusions, an activity of listening rather than presiding.** It meant moving away from the old figure of the curator as arbiter of taste toward the curator as a mediator—not just of the relationships between artworks, but also of the interrelationships between art and the social, spatial, and economic (to name but a few) conditions of a given site—and the communities in which the exhibition was situated. Our goal, as stated, was to make art feel accessible: through welcoming staff, in transparency of purpose, and by working in known neighborhood sites to present exhibitions that reflected local realities, narratives, and issues.

I believe it is essential for cultural practitioners to remember that the visitor to a show takes the first step. It is our duty to acknowledge that initiative. I feel the same way about informative signage, exhibition labels, and materials. They must be clear and intelligible, devoid of art jargon, and available, as much as possible, translated into the dominant languages of the communities of the host site.

### **Changing Times: Shifting Sites**

I began this chapter speaking of how the NLE curatorial model grew experientially, taking forward and adapting what had worked and adjusting where negative feedback or staleness seemed to be setting in. Such was the nature of the change in the meaning of *site*. Our very notion of what constituted a vacant site and why it was empty changed significantly over NLE's twelve years. The arc began with a plethora of empty storefronts and business spaces that had become vacant due to the Great Recession—which hit low-income neighborhoods particularly hard. Turning an empty, deserted storefront, so often a harbinger of vandalism and blight, into a vibrant hub of artistic activity was genuinely welcomed in each neighborhood in the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. Our varied pro-

grams and educational initiatives attracted thousands of local residents as well as art lovers from around the city.

But as the economy grew and surged again in the latter part of the decade, not only leaving systems of inequality in place but exaggerating their extremes, the nature of why a space might be empty changed. Now it was less the economics of the community that had caused a business to fail, but the greed of landlords and the push of gentrification. Bookstores turned into a rash of chain pharmacy branches; local stores closed, and in what were perceived as up-and-coming neighborhoods landlords refused to sign leases with local small businesses, preferring to keep a space empty and inflating the rent in anticipation of the next wave of higher-income residents and franchises. Taking advantage of such empty properties was now out of the question, and alongside this wave of dislocation art itself became associated with the very forces of gentrification: the term *artwashing* was invoked for landlords using art to increase the perceived status of an area or property.

Given the responsive nature of our work, NLE shifted the types of spaces and partnerships we engaged in to ensure that our work could not be interpreted as aiding displacement. In 2017 we accepted an invitation from Carlos Rodriguez Perez, director of the Wellness and Recovery Division at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, to create exhibitions and programs that would serve to create closer ties between the hospital and its communities. As a further pivot from the use of commercial real estate, in 2018, in collaboration with Laura Raicovich, then director of the Queens Museum, NLE worked across boroughs, spaces, institutions, and media on a citywide presentation of the works of Mel Chin titled *All Over the Place*, which will be discussed in more detail in the latter part of the book.

We broadened, too, the notion of what was owed to communities beyond access to art, at a time when draconian efforts led by ICE (the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency) to rout out undocumented people started to sow terror into the lives of many of the people we served. NLE had claimed in our organizational language that we provided safe spaces for dialogue and inquiry, but we could no longer claim that our spaces were safe. Led by our director of programming, Raquel de Anda, we convened a meeting with Tom Finkelpearl, then the commissioner of the New York Department of Cultural Affairs, and invited people from a wide range of cultural organizations to discuss with him and each other how nonprofits should respond to this threat to our colleagues, undocumented artists, and our audiences. Such was the power of the meeting and the need for a collective response to the crisis that we then cohosted “What Can We Do? Immigration Summit for Cultural Organizations” in partnership with the Department of

Cultural Affairs, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and Artspace Sanctuary. More than 250 arts professionals attended the summit on October 31, 2018, at BRIC (Brooklyn Information and Culture) in downtown Brooklyn. Through panel discussions and presentations using the PechaKucha format,<sup>4</sup> participants gained valuable insights and learned about resources arts organizations could employ to protect and serve migrant communities.

Continuing with our interest in presenting discourse and building knowledge around such crucial issues, in 2019, under the executive leadership of Christine Licata, the organization entered an agreement for a two-year cycle with Bellevue Hospital. The plan was to use both its current facility and old buildings, some of which had been turned into a men's shelter, for what we envisioned as a series of artistic interventions and programming around the stigmas of disability and the inequality of access to health care. How prescient that turned out to be!

### **A Force Majeure and the Unforeseen Need to Wind Down**

In early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and in the space of a few short weeks New York City was brought to its knees. In-person gatherings for arts exhibitions and programming became untenable. Bellevue Hospital, our planned site and collaborator for 2020 programming, became immersed in the surge of hospitalizations and demand for medical facility resources caused by the pandemic.

Two outstanding programs were transferred to a virtual platform. The NLE Young Exhibition Makers (led by Catherine Feliz, a curator, artist, and educator) created a powerful online exhibition, *A NYC Youth-Led Response to COVID-19*, while our Youth Action Council (led by Augustina Warton, also a curator, artist, and educator) created an online program of discussions, workshops, and interventions under the rubric of #ImagineAwrlld.<sup>5</sup>



**Jackie Vimo of the National Immigration Law Center outlines the distinction between the jurisdictions of local police and agents of ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement), at What Can We Do? Immigration Summit for Cultural Organizations, BRIC House, Brooklyn, October 31, 2018. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

Ultimately, the persistent nature of the pandemic and the catastrophic fall in philanthropic giving in the arts forced NLE to suspend programming in 2020.

But as I have met with past NLE colleagues in the preparation of this book, we all look back with pride at what we were able to achieve, the amazing artworks that were created, and the audiences we reached. It was, in hindsight, something of a miracle. In the pages that follow, I hope readers will get a sense of the quality and scale of the exhibitions, our amazing team and colleagues, the artists we worked with, and the unusual spaces where we welcomed so many wonderful people—all the while, *running on empty!*

1. Socially engaged practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory, and involves people as the medium or material of the work. For social practice art, see Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

2. Deborah Fisher, “To Survive the Challenges Ahead, Cultural Institutions Will Need to Redefine the Value of Art—Here’s How They Can Do It,” *Artnet News*, April 29, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/deborah-fisher-blade-of-grass-op-ed-1847463>.

3. The panelists included Mike Merrill, dean of the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies/SUNY Empire State College, Valeria Treves of New Immigrant Community Empowerment in Queens, and Barrie Cline of the Arts & Labor group of Occupy Wall Street. The panel was moderated by Alexandra García, a former community organizer at the Queens Museum.

4. PechaKucha is a storytelling format, created in Japan, in which participants show twenty slides and comment on each slide for up to twenty seconds.

5. See [nolongeremptyedu.org](http://nolongeremptyedu.org).

**Laura Anderson Barbata  
and the Brooklyn Jumbies,  
*Intervention: Ocean Blues*,  
2018. Dumbo, Brooklyn. A  
procession from the Brooklyn  
Bridge to the water invited  
audiences to acknowledge  
our intersecting identities  
and celebrate them by  
changing behaviors to protect  
our oceans. Photograph by  
Shannel Resto**





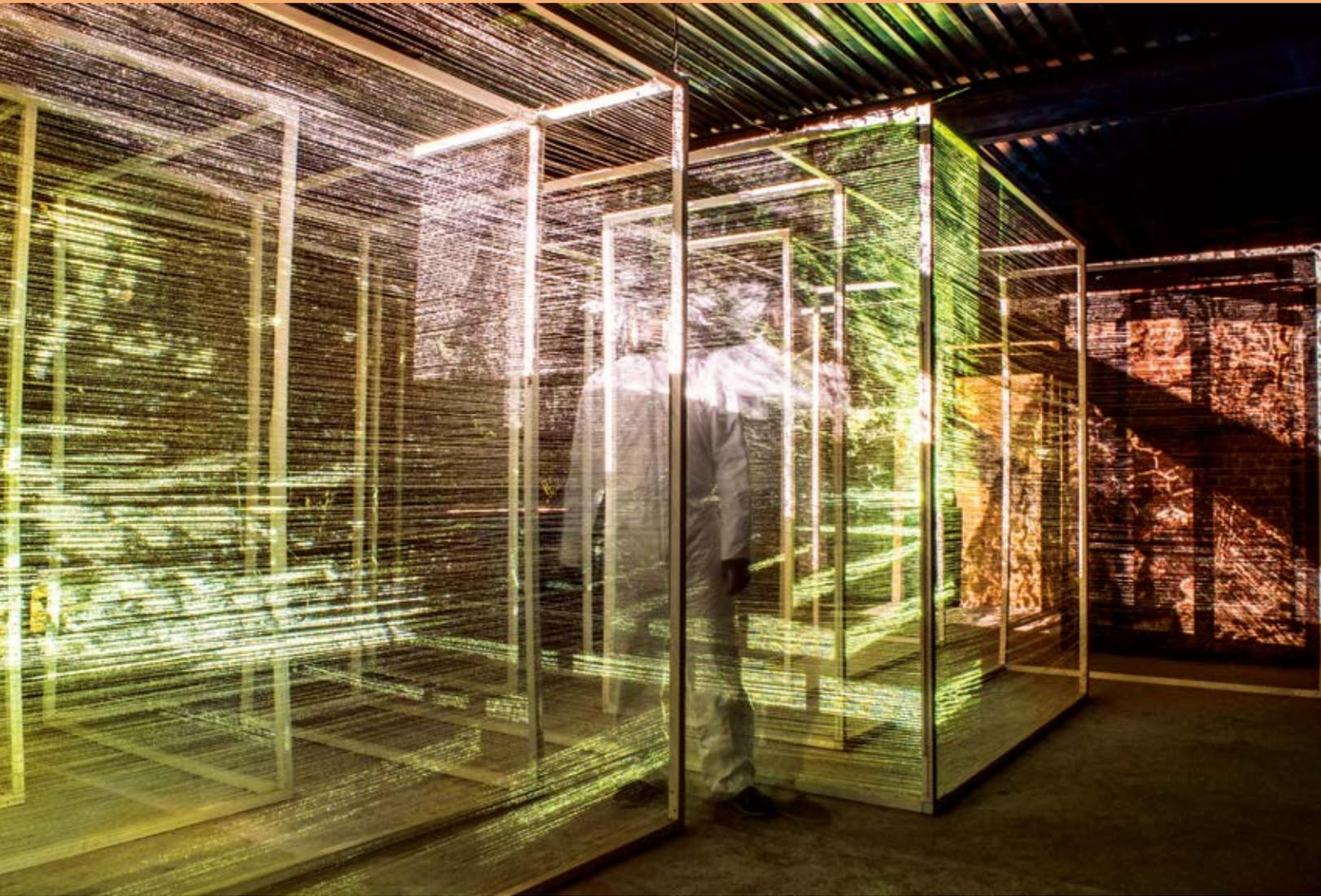
**Teresa Diehl**

NLE was the catalyst that enabled me to materialize an idea, from an abstract thought into an immersive tangible experience where there was freedom to express, engage, and learn. I do want to emphasize freedom to express and engage, things that are not always possible to achieve in the traditional museum or gallery setting; it was here, in these alternative spaces and inclusive platforms, where curiosity and fascination were able to be unleashed.

*When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*, at the Old Bronx Courthouse in 2015, was the exhibition that freed my work (it was at the courthouse where I found liberty). The interactions between artists, works, and audience intermingled all into one, and that freedom to play and engage with many of the artworks spaced throughout the building gave me and the visitors a better understanding of how to transform the stale art experience into a more democratic and inclusive one.

Going into sites in the communities, altering and activating them, not only freed the definition of what art was, but also helped demystify for many visitors the archaic notion that art is about beautiful artifacts displayed for the gaze. Now art had a much broader definition. We saw communities engage back through dialogues and realized that we could make something probable absolutely possible . . .

NLE was like an alarm clock, helping us awake from apathy and conformism; it provided tools and platforms to so many of us. NLE filled our empty drawers with memories, laughter, and joy . . . the voice of the many and the hope for what is to come . . . What has started cannot be stopped.



Teresa Diehl, *L-Aber-Into*,  
2015. Video and sound, steel  
bars, monofilament fishing  
line, and resin. In *When You  
Cut into the Present, the*

*Future Leaks Out*, Old Bronx  
Borough Courthouse, the  
Bronx, 2015. Photograph by  
Josh Simpson



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## Making Dreams a Reality

# The Energy, Momentum, and Organization of No Longer Empty An Urban Planner and Executive Director's Perspective

**Naomi Hersson-Ringskog**

Cofounder and Founding Executive Director (2009–16)

I had just received my diploma from the urban planning graduate program of Columbia University and had the summer ahead to reflect on what I had learned and, more acutely, to look for a job in the sinister job market following the Great Recession of 2008. Teeming with ideas, idealism, and ambition, I had set out to pursue a career focused on the ecological design of underused urban rooftops. This aligned with my interest in making wasted space useful for social well-being. Rejecting a tabula rasa approach, I wanted to work with what existed. By chance, a friend forwarded an email with a call to volunteer for a new art project called No Longer Empty. With little idea as to what the volunteers might do, I found myself at the first group meeting of several art curators and a handful of other volunteers, curious to see a “no longer empty” space and to learn about these people and what they hoped to accomplish.

The project in process, in the storefronts adjacent to the Chelsea Hotel, presented a stark contrast to building a green roof. It appeared to have emerged spontaneously from informal conversations and exchanges of ideas. The curators had invited artists they knew were capable of making effective, innovative, site-specific works on short notice in an abandoned fish-and-tackle store. The installation and management of the exhibition happened in a seemingly nonhierarchical way, artists, curators and a growing number of friends and volunteers contributing to the preparation of the space and the installation of the work and talking to curious pedestrians who wanted to know what was going on inside. As an outsider to what can seem a very insular art world, I discovered this group of allied friends and artists uniting to create a bit of magic in a dilapidated space on a shoestring budget, without governing rules or specific plans for operation and sustainability. The adventurous, action-oriented energy resonated strongly with me. It was kismet for me to have answered their call.

That first meeting left me wondering how we might capitalize on this energy—metaphorically and practically. As a person highly motivated by the spirit of doing, I started to carve a role for myself. The group had been offered a space for a second exhibition—the ground floor of the Caledonia, a new residential building on the West Side of

**NLE's second exhibition, *Reflecting Transformation* (in the vacant ground floor space of the Caledonia apartments on West 16th Street, Manhattan, 2009), also featured its first panel discussion, which focused on the changing notions of public art and the audiences to whom the art is addressed. Moderated by Manon Slome, the panel included Tom Finkelppearl, then director of the Queens Museum; Lauren Ross, then curator of the High Line Park; Peter Marcuse, professor emeritus of urban planning at Columbia University; Anita Durst, director of Chashama; Steve Evans, then assistant director of Dia Beacon; and participating artist Sean Slemon. Photograph by Julian Navarro**

Manhattan. It was adjacent to the recently inaugurated High Line, an overhead public park on former railroad tracks that was the catalyst for a transformation of the area. This exhibition was in fact called *Reflecting Transformation* and I worked on it as a volunteer. Between moments when I was welcoming visitors to the exhibition space, I drafted a manual suggesting a sequence for the group's operations, including front-desk protocols on how to greet visitors and speak to them about the art. In addition, I organized the fledgling group's first panel discussion and children's program as ways to engage with the exhibition's theme, as well as to welcome visitors and generally activate the space. The time and reflection spent on operations gave me space to think about how to connect with the community and history beyond the exhibition space. I was starting to look inside and out.

In the early 2000s, the urban planning field witnessed an increased popularity in the strategy of incorporating artworks and creative interventions to build communities. Our group's goals in temporarily activating these underused spaces, however, were not based on this top-down approach, and were more in the spirit of the ballet of the streets articulated by the renowned urban activist Jane Jacobs and further developed by other urban thinkers. In urban planning I found few references to what art endeavors like Keith Haring's Pop Shop, Andy Warhol's Factory, Gordon Matta Clark's restaurant, Food, and many similar ventures by artists had contributed to community building or social discourse. These creative approaches embraced a resourceful, grassroots, and community-centered way of improving neighborhoods, in contrast to the often ineffective methods of traditional planning, which usually place government and developers at the center of the process. Projects such as these could be deployed in a short time frame and have an immediate impact. As my early, ad hoc efforts quickly became more integral to the growth of the group and its projects, I relished the interdisciplinary energy of bridging the worlds of urban planning and art. The art model was powerful—it convened community members from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and animated unused spaces and neighborhood corridors.

**Job Description: It's What You Make It**

In the first four exhibitions, in addition to the core team of Manon Slome, Asher Remy-Toledo, Julia Draganović, Tara de la Garza, Julian Navarro, Keith Schweitzer, and Jodie Di Napoli, a steady stream of volunteers gathered, eager to participate in a space where everyone could have a voice. As for me, I was feverishly engrossed and involved in everything. My chief tasks, while still a volunteer, entailed the marketing

of the exhibitions to the press; posting on the newly formed Facebook platform; organizing cultural programs such as panel discussions, artist-led programming, and children’s workshops; management of volunteers; and—along with all the founding members—cleaning windows and scrubbing floors! Wherever there was a gap, I would fill it. As the opportunities grew, the projects scaled up, programming evolved, and the mission became more refined, so did my role and responsibilities. This experience gave me a wide lens on the many steps and the coordination of people and tasks required to stage an exhibition in a new and unusual space in a community setting.

In fall 2010, after six exhibitions, with the support of my colleagues, I was named founding executive director. We finally formalized the structure of the organization and applied for our own nonprofit status, signed the IRS application, and waited for approval. The lag in formation was inadvertently helpful in increasing our flexibility.

Before achieving tax-free status, we became members of Fractured Atlas, which provided fiscal sponsorship for our grant requests, helped us manage our revenues and IRS reporting, enabled us to procure competitive prices for general liability insurance, and offered templates for

donor management and workshops for marketing. Fractured Atlas and the searchable grants databases of the Foundation Center were instrumental in getting our essential operations streamlined and in clarifying the strengths and roles of the core team. As executive director, I quickly learned that the three most important elements of creating a project under our emerging collaborative model were site selection, fundraising, and community collaboration.

### **Site Selection: How to Find a Property and What Makes It Suitable**

The exhibitions staged by No Longer Empty (NLE) took place in empty or underused spaces in densely populated urban locations in all five boroughs of New York City. The spaces were donated by landlords or

**NLE invited residents from the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale to tour the exhibition *This Side of Paradise* at the Andrew Freedman Home, the Bronx, 2012. Several shared that they had known people who lived there when it was an operational retirement home. Photograph by Whitney Browne**



institutions, depending on the partnership (usually rent-free and with utilities paid by the landlord), for a duration of three to nine months. A detailed legal contract was drawn up for each exhibition that protected both parties, ensured the curatorial freedom of our team, and included insurance for the property, team and visitor liability, and all the artwork (a sample contract appears in Part 3). The contracts also reassured landlords that NLE would not take up permanent residence, in a clause that stated that should the property be rented, NLE would vacate within ten days. We knew this situation was not likely to occur, as the legal and technical aspects of property rentals almost always take much longer than that, but this did provide reassurance to the property owner that we would not become squatters. Two questions immediately arise: why did landlords loan us properties, and how did we select them?

In the early years of NLE, landlords were keen to offer us the use of their vacant spaces because they recognized that the NLE model had a utility value for them as well. NLE always undertook a thorough cleaning of each space, including lead and mold testing, painting, and site preparation, and so we always returned each property in much better condition than when we first moved in. Property owners all too often ignore the fact that empty storefronts and buildings can become community liabilities, prone to vandalism, discouraging investment in the area, and reducing foot traffic on a given street. The temporary presence of an exhibition reversed that trend, bringing thousands of visitors to the site over the course of the show and its public programs. We hoped our practice of interim use for the sites would increase landlords' awareness of their responsibilities to the community, discourage them from keeping spaces empty for prolonged periods, and highlight the local recognition they might gain from being civic-minded, in turn promoting greater willingness on their part for interim uses until the vacant sites were purchased or leased.

As we built a track record and could show the success of past exhibitions—along with the testimonials of previous owners—it became easier to gain access to sites, and landlords often approached us with offers of empty spaces. The endorsements we received from local elected officials and government institutions like the New York City Economic Development Corporation and Department of Small Business Services also spread confidence that further contributed to donations of space.

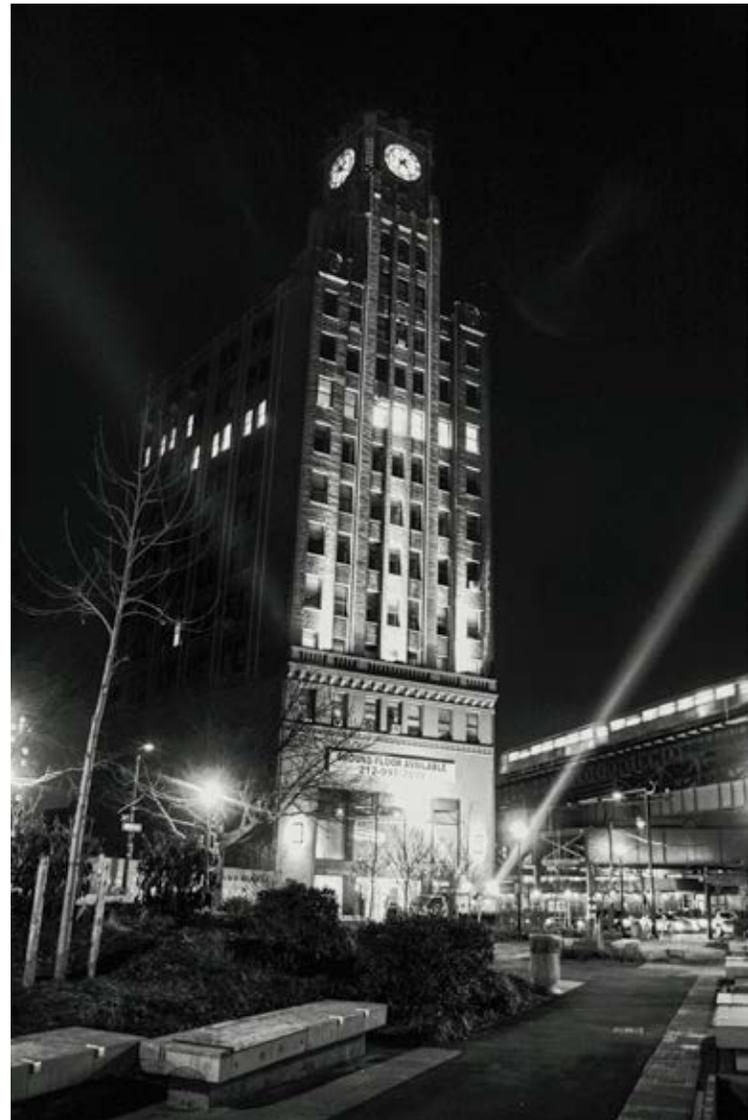
To identify leads on potential sites, I was always looking and listening. Property tips came through word of mouth from artists, supporters, and friends; a lead might emerge from an interesting story in a local newspaper or noticing a boarded-up space or building on a walk in a neighborhood. We felt a particular imperative to secure landmark sites

such as the former Bank of Manhattan in Long Island City and the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse when we learned they had sat empty, lost to local use, for more than twenty-five and thirty-five years respectively. At the Bank of Manhattan building, colloquially known as the Long Island City Clock Tower, we staged the 2012–13 *How Much Do I Owe You?*, an exhibition aesthetically and provocatively addressing global monetary issues and themes of exchange. Two local architects, Michael Hall and Matthew Chrislip of +Partners, visited the exhibition, learned the unique history of the neo-Gothic-style building, designed by Christopher Morrel and built by C. T. Willis in 1927, and soon after staged a public campaign to landmark the Clock Tower building that garnered fifteen hundred supporters. The success of their campaign was critical, as the area had been rezoned for denser use and generic glass skyscrapers were cropping up all around what was once the tallest building in Long Island City.

With all potential sites, we had to be nimble in juggling leads, making pitches, and patiently undertaking often lengthy negotiations. Many properties that we hoped to work in fell through, and cold calls went unreturned. On the other hand, the list of spaces offered grew, and it soon became important for us to ask crucial questions about how a project at a given site might further NLE's vision of our exhibition process.

I developed a site matrix to keep track of properties we had been offered.

The fundamental questions were: Does the site have a story? Does that narrative intersect with current local issues? And what value might creating an exhibition in the space have for the community? The matrix also included seven other factors: geography (are we serving all boroughs?), transportation access (how can the public get there?), project and community partners (are there organizations to collaborate with?), demographics (what audiences are we targeting?), community legacy (is there potential for long-lasting impact?), renovation (what is the scale



**Exterior of the Clock Tower building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, on the opening night of *How Much Do I Owe You?*, December 12, 2012. Photograph by Whitney Brown**



**NLE's Fifth Anniversary Fundraiser in the studio of José Parlá, an artist and NLE advisory board member. On the wall are works donated for a silent auction. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

of work needed for art and public use?), and the ability of NLE to serve more visitors and constituents.

The final decision to move ahead on a site was made by the team based on the site matrix responses. From that point, from the preparation of a space to the opening of an ambitious exhibition and programs, the process often felt like nothing short of a miracle as we were nearly always working with a lean staff and on a shoestring budget.

### **Fundraising**

Fundraising is always the necessary evil of the not-for-profit world and an area that could use much reform and reframing. NLE needed constant and consistent funding to sustain the organization, pay competitive salaries and artists' fees, offer honorariums to our cultural collaborators, and commission ever more ambitious artworks.

From 2009 to 2012, while the NLE model was still evolving, we mainly survived with volunteers, long hours, in-kind donations, and, most important, seed money from two benefactors. With that cushion, we were able to produce three or four exhibitions every year and prove that the concept worked. The short turnaround time from being given the use of a property to the inauguration of a project forced our funding to cover exclusively the artist commissions and immediate program needs, rather than salaries or operating costs. Winning early small grants, such as those from Humanities New York and the Citizens Committee for New York City, was fundamental to our growth and provided an opportunity to refine our mission and methodology. In addition to the grants, we held innovative dinner experiences in the exhibition spaces, with the chefs embellishing on our site-specific themes. At our five-year mark, we held our first gala in the studio of artist and NLE advisory board member, José Parlá.

Although it was understandable that the foundations to which we applied wanted our young organization to demonstrate a level of success and show financial maturity before they would consider us for grants, to our frustration, the NLE model was difficult to fit into many of their rubrics and requirements. Given our shorter lead times for undertaking and finalizing projects, we did not have sufficient information, or sometimes even a final checklist of artworks in a show, to coincide with a foundation's deadline. We could demonstrate the scale and innovativeness of past exhibitions with their powerful commissioned works. We could illustrate how we had helped solidify new efforts in cultural organizing, how we had invested resources in local communities, how we were providing quality, accessible experiences for school children, who could walk around the corner from their classrooms and learn something about their neighborhoods and social issues. But the fact that we could not provide details of our projects in applications due months or even years in advance seemed insurmountable.

But we persisted, researched, participated in information sessions, and attended meetings. Gradually, as our experience grew, so did the results. I remember distinctly the day we were awarded our first major grant, from the Joan Mitchell Foundation. The news came during the 2012 opening of *How Much Do I Owe You?* at the Clock Tower Building in Long Island City, and it was a huge affirmation that we could survive! After this breakthrough, and with a growing track record, we were able to gain support from other venerable foundations—though it was never easy, and the time and resources for grant writing and applications remained a constant strain on a small organization.

Essential to any nonprofit organization and its fundraising is the formation of a board of directors. Besides being a fundamental requirement for establishing a 501c3, a board helps solidify an organization's mission and purpose, and ensures financial oversight and reporting while maintaining legal and ethical integrity. To ensure the viability of NLE, we immediately recruited a small group of colleagues and friends with diverse skills, such as law or communications, as board members, adopting a give-or-get policy. In crafting our growth strategy, we worked in particular with NLE board member Amy Kaufman, who was then a consultant for the cultural planning firm Lord Cultural Resources (and who subsequently founded Amy Kaufman Cultural Planning) on a three-year plan for the organization. My working relationship with board chair Alan Rosenbloom was equally crucial. We met weekly to strategize on issues such as organizational growth, staffing, management, fundraising, and legal matters. NLE also developed an advisory board, free of financial commitments, deeply invested in the arts, whose members were

more than generous with time and advice helping us shape exhibitions, introducing us to artists, and serving as ambassadors for NLE.

### **Community: Making It Work for Everyone**

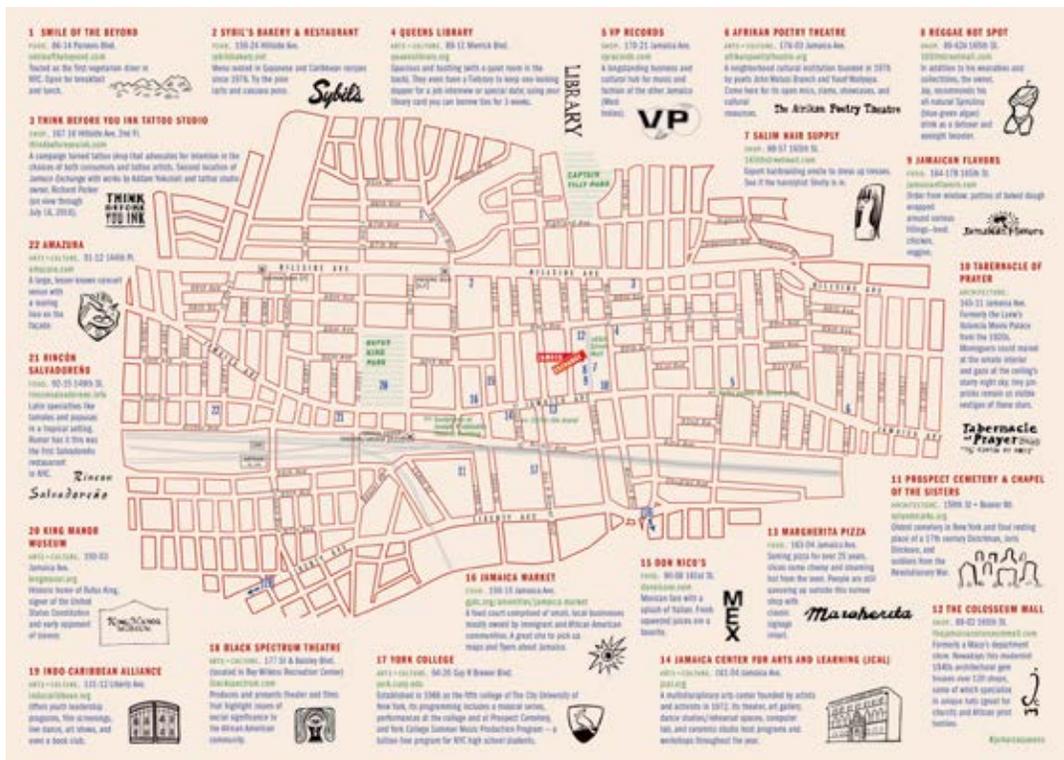
As a small, nimble organization, we could not afford an office initially, so we convened in cafés, first out of necessity and later as an intentional part of our research. One could regularly see four or five team members huddled around cups of coffee and computers in cafés with wi-fi or in libraries, working in the neighborhood while planning the exhibition and programs. Being consistently based around the site of an upcoming exhibition allowed us to explore and learn about the neighborhood, meet the store owners and neighbors, discover hidden gems and historical markers, and simply get to know local people. We subsequently sourced installation materials, exhibition supplies, and all food and beverages for our projects from the area businesses so that we were supporting as well as being supported through a system of mutual exchange. We invested, as mentioned, in our borrowed spaces, improving them with lighting, professional graphic design and, of course, exciting and welcoming artworks—giving visibility to the properties and increasing the chances that they would continue to benefit the community as active spaces. We streamlined the processes for hiring local workers for our installation work and security, as well inviting them into our docent information sessions so that they could discuss the art with visitors.

While maps can be highly contested documents of place and belonging, to create a deeper connection between our exhibition site and the surrounding neighborhood we found it useful to create maps of the area and hand them out when greeting each new visitor. NLE staff designer Patra Jongjitirat (now of the cartography and design studio *As the Crow Walks*) created maps that combined the history of the neighborhood, its architecture, favorite stores, restaurants, and cafés with elements of the exhibition theme. The map became a form of storytelling. With certain maps, we attempted to measure how they were used by arranging incentives with local restaurants, such as 10 percent discounts at local stores when visitors presented the NLE maps or two-for-one passes to nearby local attractions. We received testimonies of a visible and measurable increase in patronage while our exhibitions and programs were at a site. Elements like these can make New York City a smaller, more familiar place, and maybe even a more united city, and we saw visitors from previous exhibitions and boroughs follow us to each new site.

Of course, there were challenges as well. New York City remains one of the most competitive and expensive housing and commercial markets in the country. At the time of some NLE exhibitions, neighborhoods

**Starting with *This Side of Paradise* (above) at the Andrew Freedman Home, the Bronx, in 2012, most NLE exhibitions were accompanied by maps of the surrounding area. Each map aimed to capture the unique historic and cultural assets of the neighborhood and to encourage further exploration. Design by Patra Jongjitirat**

**Below: The neighborhood map for *Jameco Exchange*, 165th Street, Jamaica, Queens, 2016. Design by Patra Jongjitirat**



like Central Harlem and Fort Greene were changing at incredible speed. In the spring of 2015, No Longer Empty opened *When You Cut into the*

*Present, the Future Leaks Out* at the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse. The landmarked Beaux-Arts building had been shuttered for the previous thirty-seven years, and the team had worked for many difficult weeks cleaning up decades of decay in the areas that were to be open to the public. After an incredible effort from our team, we were stunned to be met at the opening by a small but organized protest, complete with flyers and a clear message: “Do not use art to pimp us out!”

Our team had spent the previous months meeting with local organizations, including the one that protested, discussing neighborhood dynamics and attempting to understand the complexity around the city’s sale of the courthouse to investors instead of to a local nonprofit in the 1990s. But the larger dynamic of housing—local anger about not having a voice in rising rents and the fear of displacement—was too powerful not to arouse suspicion of our attempts at providing both an exhibition that addressed these very concerns and a platform within the exhibition for local expression.

The accusation that we had engaged in “artwashing”—using art for the purpose of gentrification—was painful for the NLE team. We had always taken as the core of our organizational mission that our exhibitions were founded on local

**Invitation to *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out* at the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, the Bronx, 2015. Curated by Regine Basha, the exhibition featured twenty-six artists, mainly from the Bronx, and breathed life into a building that had stood empty since the 1990s. Over the course of three months, some 6,800 people visited the show. Design by Patra Jongjitirat**

research, transparent process, open houses that discussed our presence far in advance of the exhibition formation, and artworks that responded to both our own and the artists’ research. That had been the case here. But we made the grave error of proposing to host an event for real estate brokers to discuss the topic of site activation, a decision that was naive, considering the aggressive changes that were occurring throughout city neighborhoods. While it was inevitable that art projects were going to receive greater scrutiny as they emerged in neighborhoods fearful of change and higher rents, there was clearly a (still ongoing) challenge here—that of balancing an understandable distrust and fear of displacement that the presence of art can bring with a very real need for alternative modalities for presenting art in community contexts.

## **Sharing the Knowledge**

NLE was often called upon to speak about our model and strategies of alternate use. Over my years with NLE, I was repeatedly invited to public hearings by the chair of the New York City Council committee on cultural affairs, Jimmy Van Bramer, to testify about the potential of using empty spaces for community benefit. Here is a sampling of the ideas I shared with the committee:

**When vacancy rates rise above 10 percent, designate certain neighborhood or business corridors as eligible for funding or tax incentives when owners agree to an NLE-type model of temporary uses for empty spaces.**

**Create safer street corridors for residents and businesses to attract and generate foot traffic to local businesses.**

**Publicly promote the interim use of retail spaces to inspire more people to host and orchestrate cultural programs and nonprofit services.**

**Conduct a thorough study on the benefits of temporary and interim uses.**

**Bring together major players across disciplines to overcome the challenges of change and displacement.**

**Bolster the vibrancy and sustainability of naturally occurring cultural districts, especially in neighborhoods with large immigrant populations.**

**Amend municipal and foundation funding practices to accommodate projects with shorter lead times (and thus fewer programming details) than traditional models.**

**Institute incentives and enforce code compliance for absentee landlords and vacant properties.**

**Provide tax breaks for sharing properties for interim uses while imposing a penalty on landlords whose properties remain vacant for extended periods.**

An enormous amount remains to be done to make access to art more equitable and ubiquitous. While other countries have municipal mechanisms to respond quickly to issues of vacancy in neighborhoods, New York City and the United States as a whole can do so much more. No Longer Empty continues to be a potent model that can be expanded and incorporated into policy. “New ideas must use old buildings”<sup>1</sup>—this adage rings true sixty years after Jane Jacobs first said it and the times are ripe for putting this principle into action. We hope this book will provide useful guidance to those who seek to do so.

1. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

**Tom  
Sanford**

That was the thing about No Longer Empty exhibitions, they weren't in galleries, those bland showrooms of mostly boring investment-grade art. No Longer Empty exhibitions were in real places with real history, the context had meaning. You had to make something truly interesting to even compete with the space. And when you did that, the art was enriched by its context.

I knew at the time that what No Longer Empty was doing was important. Putting art in abandoned commercial and industrial spaces is obviously better than leaving them dormant. But it was more than that. It showed me that disruption and change in how things are done in the art world is possible. Art does not have to be in the white-cube gallery to be important, and in fact taking art out of conventional context-free art spaces can make good work better, and can sometimes, with a little luck, lead to the magical interactions and connections I think artists crave.



Tom Sanford, *Motherless Brooklyn*, 2009. Mural for *Something Out of Nothing*, The Invisible Dog Art Center, Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, 2009. Sanford's mural imagines

the (fictional) history of the street from Jonathan Lethem's 1999 novel *Motherless Brooklyn*. Photograph by the artist



## A Closer Look

### Selected Exhibitions and Commissions

Manon Slome

While my opening essay detailed the birth and growth of NLE and our emerging curatorial practice, this “closer look” is intended to provide a more detailed view of several selected exhibitions and take a deeper dive into how we approached the uniqueness of each site and neighborhood. In particular, I highlight here some of the powerful commissions that animated the sites and through which the artists created a truly magical bond with viewers and neighbors. It is our hope that these case histories and the section “Planning and Realizing a Project: The NLE Approach” in Part 3 will give a sense of how the NLE model developed over time as we learned grew and our circumstances evolved.

*Never Can Say Goodbye*, our sixth exhibition, solidified NLE’s reputation as, in the words of an NPR editor, “here to stay!” It keenly demonstrated the power of place and the impact a site-responsive exhibition could have. Set in a former Tower Records store, the exhibition reanimated the excitement and creativity embodied in the site, which for years was sales central for indie, classical, and contemporary music, as well as a gathering place for musicians and music lovers. Crowds formed round the block for the opening (some standees wondered whether the record store had reopened). The crowds also earned us our first visit from the police—fortunately in the form of two friendly officers who, when they heard what we were doing, advised us in the future to give them notice when such crowds were expected. (This was something we never failed to do again!)

At the core of the exhibition was *Never Records* (2010), a multi-media, multi-artist installation composed by the artist and musician Ted Riederer. Constructed to resemble a functioning record store, including record bins, poster racks, large reproductions of fictitious album covers, and a stage for music performances, *Never Records* paid tribute to the record store as a locus of music, art, and community. Including works by more than thirty artists, record labels, and musicians, the project continues to travel the world.

Artist Ryan Brennan bounced sound through an eight-boom-box installation, sonically affecting viewers with his fragmented yet comprehensive audio tour through the evolution of hip-hop. Meanwhile, a haunting installation by Kaz Oshiro suggested the emptiness and

#### Never Can Say Goodbye

January 16–February 13, 2010

Former Tower Records store

Broadway and East 4th Street, Manhattan

Street view of *Never Can Say Goodbye*, corner of Broadway and East 4th Street, Manhattan, 2010. Photograph by Kathy Zeiger

false facades that often accompany music industry glamor. Artworks by Invader, R. Luke DuBois, and Richard Garett also invoked and celebrated that which has been lost and gained in the creative sector—not merely the loss of a particular record store, but the profound changes techno-

logical transition has introduced in the production and dissemination of music itself.

Music-inspired work populated the exhibition. Brent Birnbaum commemorated the twenty-year anniversary of Vanilla Ice’s legendary single “Ice Ice Baby,” the first hip-hop single to top the Billboard charts (see image page 87). For the opening, Birnbaum enacted an alter ego, Ice Ice Maybe, who

signed autographs for fans. Paul Villinski created an entire installation, *Diaspora* (2010), from old vinyl LP records transformed into flock of birds that swarmed from a turntable balanced on a stack of album covers (see image pages 18–19).

*Never Can Say Goodbye* not only put No Longer Empty on the media radar, but also opened up for us the power of moving art out of an institutional framework. Tower Records was an exciting place that lived on in the public memory. The public’s curiosity about what was happening to the former store built up over the period of the installation. Their discovery that it was not the record store reborn but an art installation that rekindled the magic of the past was a potent mix that drove not only foot traffic but an immediate curiosity and connection to the work inside. In addition, the history of live performances at Tower Records—to promote both record sales and the affiliation of music fans with the store—became a crucial point in expanding our understanding of the very form of the exhibition and its porous boundaries. It was here that we began to incorporate performance in its many guises (music, dance, poetry readings, and more), which not only further explored the narratives of the site, but also expanded the platform for the voices of diverse

**NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE**

**FORMER TOWER RECORDS**  
Broadway and 4th Street

**OPENING:**  
Friday, January 15th 7pm-10pm

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:**  
January 16th-February 13th  
Wednesday-Sunday, 12pm-7pm

**PRESS PREVIEW:**  
Friday, January 15th 10am-12pm

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SEE FULL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS GO TO [WWW.NOLONGEREMPTY.ORG](http://WWW.NOLONGEREMPTY.ORG)

**CURATED BY:** MANON SLOME, NLE; STEVEN EVANS; AND ASHER REMY-TOLEDO, NLE

**FEATURED ARTISTS:** Ryan Brennan | Joe Diebes | R. Luke DuBois | Richard Garett | Invader | Josh Jordan | Kaz Oshiro | Ted Riederer | Meredyth Sparks | Naama Tsabar | Siebren Versteeg | Paul Villinski

**ARTISTS IN NEVER RECORDS** composed by Ted Riederer: Richard Barnes | Jeff Beebe | Josh Bernstein | Jake Berthot | Steven Bindernagel | Brent Birnbaum | Nicholas Brooks | Olaf Bruening | Jon Bush | Shane Caffrey | Brendan Carney | Exene Cervenka | Bill Crandall | Bill Fallon | Jason Farrell | Jeremy Fletcher | Bob Gruen | Evan Grudz | Nathan Gwynne | Richard Hambleton | Allison Hester | Jay Ivcevic | Spencer James | Michael Joyce | Damon Locks | Jason Losh | Michelle Matson | Doug McQueen | Brandi Merolla | Marilyn Minter | Cliff Mott | Ted O'Sullivan/Rebecca Potts | Ted Riederer | Dario Robleto | James Rubio | Dan Sabau | Tom Sanford | Josh Shaddock | Ryan Sullivan | Stephanie Syjuco | Arturo Vega/Dee Dee Ramone | Chris Yerington | Johnny T. Yerington

**VIDEOS:** Josh Azzarella | Matthew Bradley | Mike Egan | Ethan Minsker | James Woodward

**Sam Ash**  
MUSIC STORES

Property donated to NLE through the generosity of Winstate Realty Trust. This exhibition is made possible by the generous support of Sam Ash Music Stores, Asahi, Love Group, and Fourth Arts Block.

**Invitation for *Never Can Say Goodbye*, 2010. Design by Patra Jongjitirat**



**Ted Riederer,**  
*Never Records,*  
2010. Multimedia  
installation.  
Photograph by Kathy  
Zeiger

publics within the exhibition format. Presentations such as these, as they developed across subsequent exhibitions, were not relegated to the lesser hierarchies of “related” or “educational” programming in the service of the artworks (or to secure lower-hanging fruit in arts funding); they were

instead conceived hand in hand with the curatorial selection of artists and firmly embedded in the DNA of each exhibition.

At Tower Records, under the direction of team members Kathy Zeiger and Barbara Feldman, a roster of performances played to packed houses and included legends such as Broken Mirrors with John Miller, the Metropolis Ensemble, the Jon Herington Band, Azita, Disco Monkeys, and former New York Dolls guitarist Steve Conte. A panel discussion, “Discs to Downloads: New Directions in the Music Industry,” gathered notable people from the industry to discuss how technology and the internet had impacted contemporary music production and consumption—and led to the closing of a store as iconic as Tower Records.

It was an intoxicating time for us all.

**“Disc to Downloads”**  
panel discussion. From  
left: Craig Balsam,  
Ted Riederer, Elliot  
Groffman, David  
Weiss, Kevin Patrick,  
Kathy Zeiger, and  
Oli Bjorn Stevensen.  
Photograph by  
Whitney Browne



*This Side of Paradise* was our first experience with the scale of an entire building and a milestone in turning an abandoned site into an exciting and lasting community hub. After an introduction from the revered Holly Block, then the director of the Bronx Art Museum, we met Walter Puryear of the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council (MBSCC), which owned the Andrew Freedman Home. The baseball and managerial mogul Andrew Freedman had built it as a retirement home for seniors who had once been wealthy but had fallen on hard times, enabling them

**This Side of Paradise**

April 4–June 5, 2012

Andrew Freedman Home

Grand Concourse, the Bronx

Curated by Manon Slome with Keith Schweitzer

to continue to live as they always had. In its heyday, the house was run in grand style, with a ballroom, a wood-paneled library, dinner served by the 21 Club, and committees for everything from opera to gardening. Applications for residency required being formerly rich, with enough money left to pay for your own funeral and a willingness

to be sociable. Built on the Grand Concourse in the form of an Italian Renaissance palazzo, the home had operated (in gradual decline) from the 1920s to the 1980s, when the endowment ran out and the home fell into substantial disrepair. It had maintained its outward grandeur, however, surrounded by high iron fences and closed to the public. Turning from

this exclusion into welcoming the public into a site from which they had always been barred was an important aspect of our approach.

The title of the exhibition, *This Side of Paradise*, asked the public and artists to ask, “where, or what, is paradise?” (It also explicitly recalls F. Scott Fitzgerald’s first novel, which details the coming of age of a young Princeton graduate and his introduction to the pleasures and pitfalls of wealth.) The Bronx was indeed considered a paradise by previous generations of immigrants, whether they were escaping Eastern Europe for New York or the Lower East Side’s tenements for the Grand Concourse’s clean air. Today the Bronx continues to be a haven for newcomers from other parts of the world, and as we undertook our research we heard from all sides about the importance of pride in the Bronx.



**Vintage postcard of the Andrew Freedman Home, 1924. © Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council**

In a press release following the invitation to temporarily take over the site and to examine the possibility of repurposing the Home for community use, we quoted Walter Puryear: “We seek to transform the Bronx stigma of poverty into opportunities of employability and cultural esteem. It is with this entrepreneurial energy we endeavor to inspire socio-economic change using the tools of awareness, perception, dialogue, and action and to support the community, specifically through cultural and economic revitalization.”

With the help of young trainees from the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council and scores of volunteers, we began the big clean-up.

Following extensive research and numerous studio visits, we selected and commissioned thirty-two artists to respond to the quixotic nature of the Home alongside issues such as immigration, historical and cultural mem-

ory, transportation in this fractured borough, racism, street and domestic violence, loss of manufacturing, and more. Several artists worked directly within the community, creating



in the case of Mel Chin, even collecting messages for President Obama. Many of the artists scoured rooms in the Home, which were piled up with abandoned objects—suitcases, expired passports and identity cards, a chair from the beauty salon (yes, the Home had one!), typewriters, photographs, and an old menorah—objects that were so full of history and nostalgia, redolent of all the lives that had passed through the Home and into history.

In the words of one of the participating artists, Linda Cunningham:

**When NLE planned its major exhibition in the old Andrew Freedman Home, Bronx residents had barely noticed its existence, although it consumed a city block just up the street from the Bronx Museum. NLE obtained permission for the participating artists to scavenge the contents of the ruins in the upper floors for the installations they were creating in the spaces. A wonderful sense of shared community developed among the Bronx artists, especially during the**

**From in-house  
Andrew Freedman  
Home brochure, ca.  
1950s. © Mid-Bronx  
Senior Citizens  
Council**

installation period. That energy also continued to enliven collaboration with other Bronx arts organizations that NLE had invited to curate rooms in the immense building. I remember especially the



Laura Napier and local residents created new versions of the Andrew Freedman Home's committees, which met weekly throughout the run of the exhibition. Pictured here, the Entertainment Committee

room curated by the relatively new Bronx Documentary Center, with films and an installation honoring Tim Hetherington, a photojournalist killed in Libya.

The crowds that poured into the opening of the exhibition, which in time attracted over nine thousand visitors into a space to which the community had never before had access, kick-started a new energy among Bronx arts organizations and artists that extended to the wider metropolitan community and continues to this

Broadway Housing staff, members of its paid youth trainee program, and the NLE team scraping decades of paint from the residential corridors in preparation for the exhibition. Such intensive restorative work was characteristic of NLE's site preparation and supported our claim that we always left a property in better condition than we found it. Photograph by Whitney Browne

day in the vibrant Bronx Arts Alliance. Again, this was an important point on our learning curve as to the potential power of the model. In its art visioning, New York City is overwhelmingly Manhattan-focused, and I was told during the preparation of this exhibition that I was being naive—no one from Manhattan would come. My response was that the Bronx had over a million residents and that if a fraction of them came to the exhibition, we would have succeeded. **The narratives, the talent, and the audiences are there wherever you work.**

The vast number of empty bedrooms formerly occupied by residents gave NLE a singular opportunity to reach multiple audiences in the Bronx by inviting a wide selection of Bronx cultural organizations each to curate its own room in the Home or to run a program in any of the spaces to which we had access. The collaborative process transformed the exhibition site into a true community hub, showcasing the creativity, narratives, and voices of the



Bronx, all of which were shown on the area map we produced for this and subsequent exhibitions. Among our partnering Bronx organizations were the Bronx Documentary Center, Casita Maria, the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, the Hip-Hop Dance Conservatory, the Lehman College Art Gallery, Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos College, the Bronx Children’s Museum, the Bronx Council of the Arts, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Bronx River Art Center, THE POINT, and Wave Hill.

**Selected Works from *This Side of Paradise***

From research into the history of the home, we discovered that, in its hey-day, the rooms were decorated with sumptuous rugs and drapes. Federico Uribe reimagined such a rug, bringing his signature labor-intensive, repetitive, and almost compulsive process of turning ordinary objects into a new whole, with a vitally different significance, appearance, and texture. In *Persian Carpet* (2012), Uribe used multiple objects to evoke the past of the people who lived in the Home. For example, golf balls called to mind the sporting activities, the silver cutlery was reminiscent of the white-glove dinners of the residents, and the wires recall the connections they had while the keys were symbols of both the homes they left and the keys to their rooms in the residence. The crutches pointed to the cruel reality of aging. The work appealed to many of our visitors who, once over the “wow” factor, looked deeply into the intricate way the work was made and became fascinated by Uribe’s process. In workshops throughout the duration of the exhibition, visitors were invited to make their own versions of the carpets in ways that spoke to their own histories.

**The Bronx Hip-Hop Dance Conservatory led a daylong workshop in the former dining room. Photograph by Whitney Browne**





For *Paradise Lost/Regained? Utopia to Survival* by Linda Cunningham and *The Ravages* by Nicky Enright, the Bronx-based artists scavenged from the abandoned rooms and discarded objects littered throughout the Home. In Cunningham's installation, an expired passport showing multiple denied entries from war-torn Europe evoked the plight of a former generation of immigrants to the Bronx; the expired union card of a jazz musician, placed near historic images of the old piano manufacturing area of the Bronx, spoke to the borough's rich musical history; while the concertina structure of torn drywall and concrete spoke eloquently of decay and revival. Likewise, Enright's *The Ravages*, a juxtaposition of vintage typewriters and a dilapidated piano spewing out its keys, stood as a reflection on the passage of time, memory, decay, and loss.

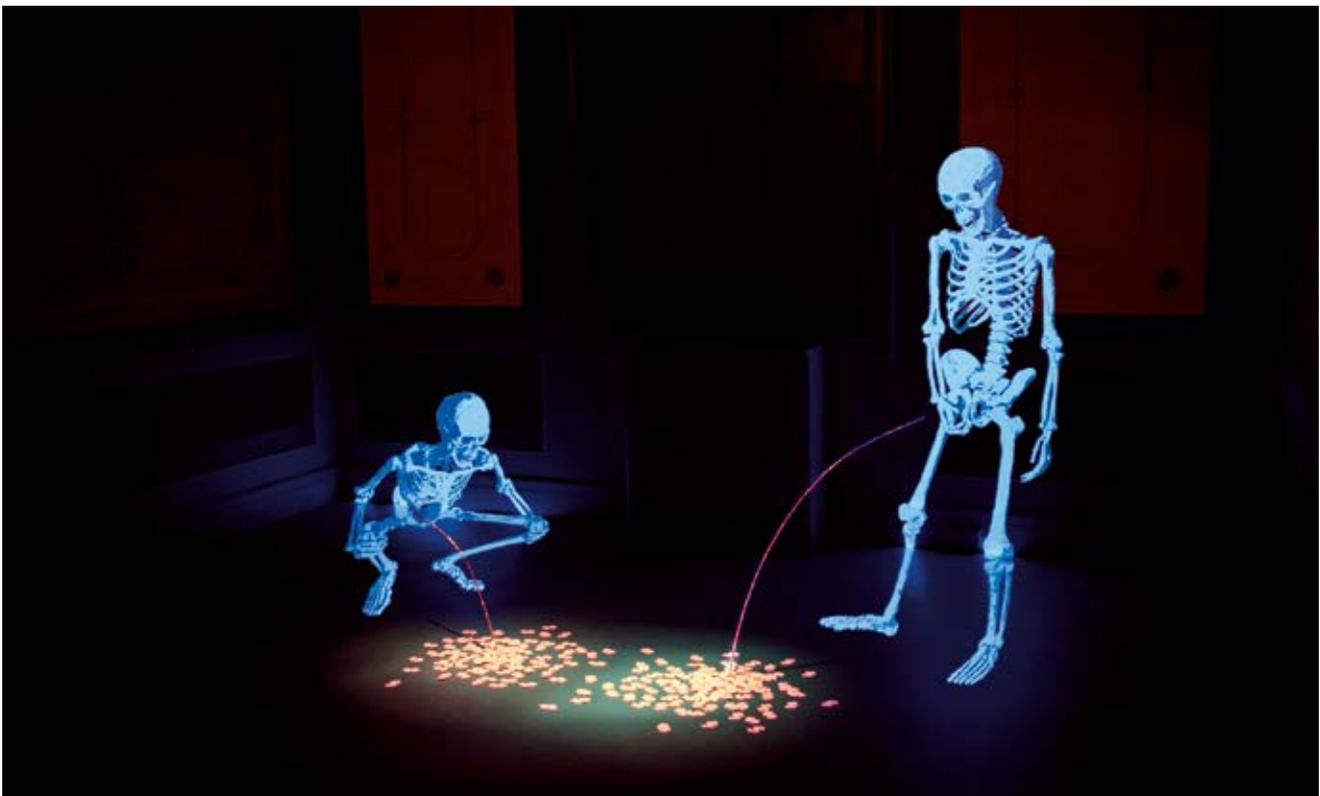


**Nicky Enright, *The Ravages*, 2012. Piano and typewriters found in the Andrew Freedman Home, speakers, CD player. Photograph by the artist**

**Opposite: Installing Federico Uribe's *Persian Carpet*, 2012, element by element. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

**Below: Justen Ladda, *Like Money, Like Water*, 2012. House paint, Day-Glo paint, black light, and mixed media. Photograph by the artist**

The abundance of former bedrooms in the Home also afforded a wonderful opportunity for artists to completely transform spaces into unique environments. How and Nosh's room was transformed into a spectacular recording studio, entered through a hole cut in the door (see image page 124); Justen Ladda's miraculous *Like Money, Like Water* (2012) created the vivid illusion of skeletons urinating on money, shapes that seemed to magically materialize with shifts in perception and position—a profound





Federico Uribe, *Persian Carpet*, 2012. Mixed media, including crutches, golf balls, cutlery, keys, pencils, and plastic rakes.

The image on the wall, a portrait of Andrew Freedman made from wire, is part of the same installation, as is the

fire, which is assembled from taillight plastic. Photograph by Whitney Browne



metaphor for Ladda (and the Home's former residents) of the shifting and fickle nature of fame and fortune.

Daze transformed the decayed state of his room into a warm and inviting environment inspired by the animated films *Yellow Submarine* and *Alice in Wonderland*. In the artist's words,

**Standing in its center, one feels a part of the installation. Not only as a viewer but as a participant. The image of a father giving his son a piggyback ride represents me walking into this installation and showing my son this strange and wonderful world for the first time.**

Artist Sylvia Plachy took the approach of creating a ghostlike re-enactment of a former bedroom in the home as though the resident had just stepped out. (The images she used on the walls and printed onto the curtains originally accompanied an article on the Home written by Vivian Gornick

for *The Village Voice*, July 16, 1980). Those images captured the lives of the Andrew Freedman Home residents at that time, showing them at their social hour, reading, or in silent contemplation. One could glimpse in Plachy's photographs, as in the installation, a little of the elegance of the



The bedroom of a former Andrew Freedman Home resident became the site of an installation by Daze, shown below. Photograph by Whitney Browne



Daze, *Further*, 2012. Site-specific mixed-media installation. Photograph by the artist



Left: Linda Cunningham, *Paradise Lost/Regained? Utopia to Survival* (detail), 2012. An elegiac installation evoking memories of lives lived and lost, with a detail showing personal papers, a passport, and items found in the former residents' rooms. Photograph by the artist

Above: Linda Cunningham, *Paradise Lost/Regained? Utopia to Survival*, 2012. Canvas, plasterboard, photo transfers, collaged remnants from the Andrew Freedman Home, salvaged windows, acrylic, ink, and graphite. Project assistants Louis Riso and Maria Estevez. Photograph by the artist



**Above:** Sylvia Plachy, *A Sitting Room: Remembering a Week in January*, 2012. The images in the installation are reprints of photographs Plachy took in the home in 1980, which originally accompanied an article by Vivian Gornick in the *Village Voice*. Photograph by the artist

**Opposite:** Sylvia Plachy, *A Sitting Room: Remembering a Week in January* (detail), 2012. This image of a former resident printed on a curtain was among the ghostly presences summoned forth by the installation. Photograph by the artist

time, the ladies with their hair coiffed and gentlemen in suits and ties, but also the melancholy of old age, the loneliness that can be felt even in communities.

Collaborations between artists working with community members were an important aspect of our exhibition practice. The Bronx-based artist John Ahearn had long been familiar with the Andrew Freedman Home, living not far from what he described as “this mysterious ancient building on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. I would pass it slowly, a little spooked, in awe of the silence surrounding it.” Coming to one of the first group meetings, when artists had the chance to explore the Home, Ahearn came through the back entrance of the building and “was surprised to see crowds of little



children and their parents pouring out the back door! I learned that this was a Head Start program. By the time I got to the artists' meeting upstairs, I was obsessed with the Bronx Head Start program." Together

with NLE's director of education, Jodie Di Napoli, artist/educator Natalie Woods from the Bronx Children's Museum, and the support of the Head Start teachers and parents, Ahearn and the education team met with the morning session (AM) and afternoon session (PM) children. In regular Friday meetings (which continued in a different format even after the opening of the exhibition), they collectively

decided to cast and paint plaster hand plaques which the children could then take home. For the final installation, the set of the AM children's hand plaques was pigmented yellow and installed in a circle like a large sun, and the PM group's hand plaques were pigmented in an earth tone and intertwined to form a horizon. Ahearn donated the work to the Head Start program.

Melanie Crean, who often works with youth to imagine new ways of relating and learning, developed a collaborative, visual storytelling project with teenagers from the BronxWorks Community Center located opposite the Home. In weekly meetings they designed *Once Upon a Time in the Bronx* (2012), a mechanism for telling their personal stories, first within the group and then with the broader community. They began by modifying a storytelling card game called *Once Upon a Time*, originally featuring characters and situations from traditional European fairy tales, to reflect

**Head Start AM students working with John Ahearn prepare for the casting of their hands. In the words of the artist, "all the kids were excited, nervous, and brave!" Photograph by Jodie Di Napoli**



**Students from the Head Start program with John Ahearn, *Headstart AM and PM*, 2012. Photograph by Justen Ladda**



life as the youth experienced it in the Bronx. The group redesigned and rephotographed the deck to create cards that reflected their lives, highlighting many of the issues they faced and deep-seated anxieties they felt.

Through further play and discussion, an interactive theater project developed using the “forum theater” method of participatory theater, in which both actors and viewers can intervene to develop and resolve the narrative. During forum presentations, audience members joined actors onstage to brainstorm alternative possibilities and scenarios that might help overcome the many challenges faced by the youthful characters.

This was one of the most impactful public projects I have ever seen. Many critical issues arose from the workshops, including domestic violence with ensuing behavioral issues in school, teachers failing to understand that disruptive behavior is often an urgent cry for help, and gun violence in the neighborhood. In the public performance of these narratives, facilitated by the social justice theater group Theater of the Oppressed, powerful scenes of violence in a teen’s home were followed by one in which the teacher reprimanded the same student for not paying attention in class the next day. Members of the audience, prompted by Theater of the Oppressed moderators, discussed how the scenes could have played out differently, either by the child who witnessed her parents fighting or by a teacher with greater understanding of the child’s home life. After an audience discussion of the suggestions, the scenes were reenacted to see how the outcomes might change. Several local teachers were in the audience, and we soon learned that they had worked the card game into their class curriculums.



Teenagers from the BronxWorks Community Center play with modified *Once Upon a Time* cards to develop narratives for the interactive theater aspect of Melanie Crean’s *Once Upon a Time in the Bronx*, 2012. Photograph by the artist

Opposite: Melanie Crean, *Once Upon a Time in the Bronx*, 2012. Silkscreen print series, customized deck of 165 cards (some shown here), and interactive theater performance. Collaborators on the project included Burak Nehbit (graphic design), Katy Rubin and Becca Lynch of Theatre of the Oppressed NYC (theater facilitation), and community members of BronxWorks (theater performances). Photograph by Whitney Brown

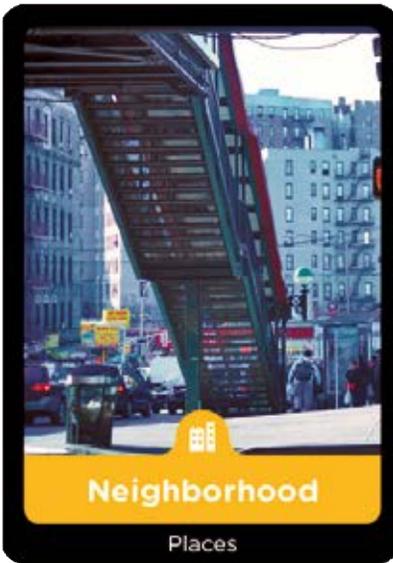


An enactment of domestic violence in the home of one of the young participants. Photograph by Whitney Brown



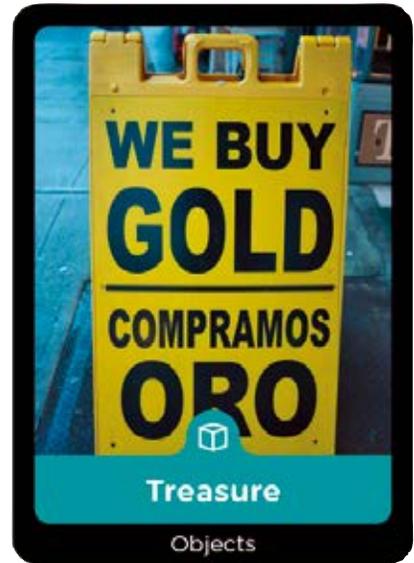
Money

Objects



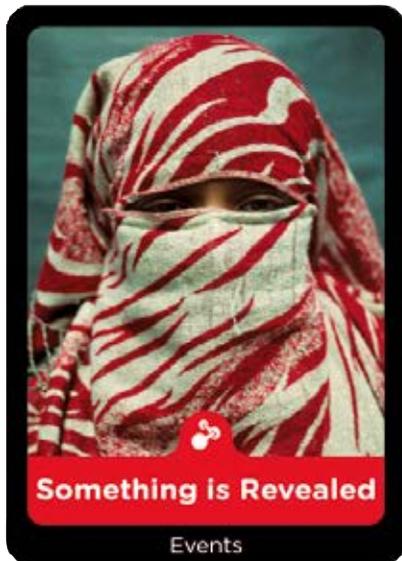
Neighborhood

Places



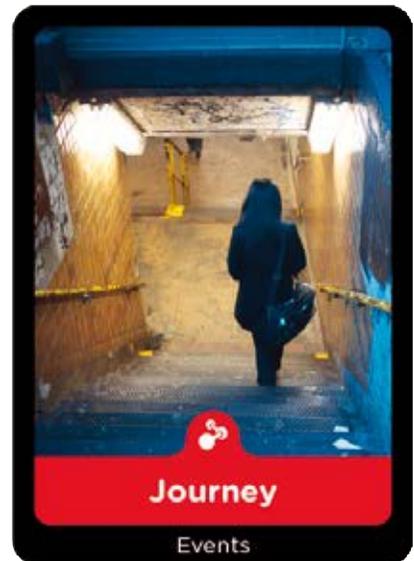
Treasure

Objects



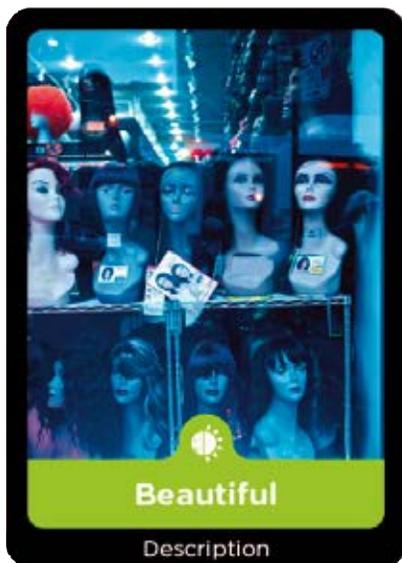
Something is Revealed

Events



Journey

Events



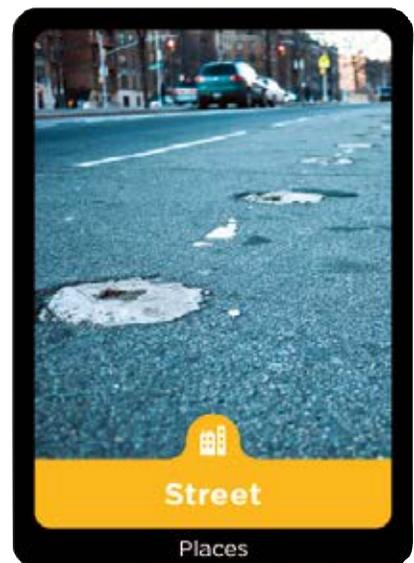
Beautiful

Description



Addict

Character



Street

Places



Sketch of the Sugar Hill development, 2014. Drawing © David Adjaye Associates

Sugar Hill 155th Harlem  
NY David Adjaye

The impetus for *If You Build It* was an invitation from Broadway Housing Community to introduce its new building in Sugar Hill, Harlem, designed by the architect David Adjaye, to a community that

had expressed dislike of the style and considerable suspicion as to what the building might mean for them. It was to be, in fact, a visionary building with thirteen floors of affordable housing, an early childhood education center, and the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art &

Storytelling. Though the compelling invitation to participate arrived at an early planning stage for the building, the process was one of the more challenging we had faced, mainly due to construction delays. The artists and we at NLE were further challenged when the exhibition space moved from the ground floor to the eighth and ninth floors, which were served by an elevator frequently unavailable to us due to construction issues. On one occasion, for a work by Radcliffe Bailey, we had to carry the keys from four hundred pianos up nine flights of stairs! At times we even wondered if we should withdraw, concerned about constantly having to modify the spaces and the timeline we had shared with the artists. But by that point, many of the commissioned works were in progress, and we felt the project was so important that we persevered. Even a weekend of closure, when the exhibition space was unavailable to the public, did not deter us—we took

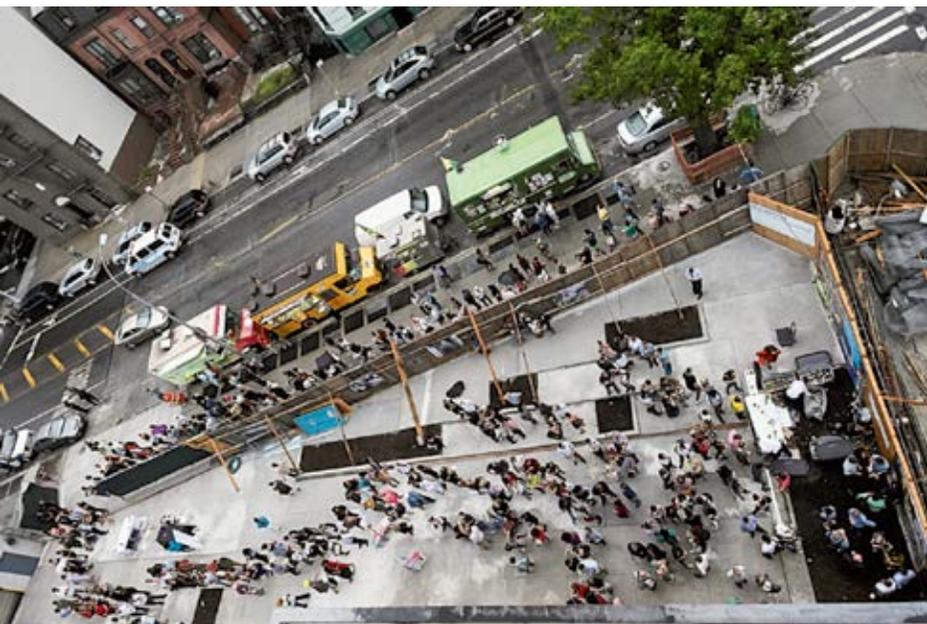
**If You Build It**  
June 25–August 10, 2014  
Sugar Hill, Harlem  
Saint Nicholas Avenue and West 155th Street  
In partnership with Broadway Housing Communities

all the scheduled programs into the adjoining park or to the sites of local organizations with whom we had established partnerships. Other challenges emerged as well: the building required four fire marshals to be on

site whenever the exhibition was open to the public. This would have been cost prohibitive, so the solution was that five of us trained to be fire marshals. We studied hard for the test, and each of us passed with flying colors!

In summary,  
**you do what you have  
 to do to make it work.**

The artworks in the exhibition addressed distinctive



Visitors line up around the block to enter the exhibition on opening night and are welcomed in the courtyard by local musicians Jazz Foundation All Stars: Joey Morant, trumpet; Michael Max Fleming, bass; Mitch Margold, piano; and Greg Bandy, aka “the mayor of Harlem,” drums. Photographs by Whitney Browne

narratives of the Harlem neighborhood, such as cycles of urban decay and regeneration, the repercussions of racial injustice, immigration and displacement, longing for home, and the economic disparities that plague our cities. Several works paid homage to the neighborhood’s heritage as the epicenter of the Harlem Renaissance. As in *This Side of Paradise* at the Andrew Freedman Home, the availability of yet to be occupied apartments gave us the opportunity to provide space to neighborhood cultural organizations bolstering the cross-disciplinary cultural and educational programming that had become central to our work.

**Selected works from *If You Build It***

In a veritable embodiment of “the sweet life” in Sugar Hill, sculptors Brendan Jamison and Mark Revels created *Sugar Metropolis* (2014)—a giant sculptural collaboration between the artists and visitors. Acknowledging the deep cultural origins of the neighborhood’s nickname, *Sugar Metropolis* built on this past in order to create an imaginary city of the future. Composed of a quarter





**Brendan Jamison  
and Mark Revels,  
*Sugar Metropolis*,  
2014. 250,000 sugar  
cubes. Photograph by  
Whitney Browne**

million sugar cubes, the installation began with a meandering river of sugar, complemented by mountains of sugar cubes transformed into bridges, high-rises, and temples. Over the period of the exhibition, visitors were invited to contribute to the freestanding artwork. In Jamison's words, "this special project aims to celebrate the power of collaboration in art, unlocking the potential of thousands of minds working together in the realization of an artwork beyond any one person's single vision."

Dread Scott's *Stop* (2012), another community-based project, featured life-size images of young men from East New York, Brooklyn, on one side of the room, and young men from Liverpool, England, on the other. With the trios delineated in a manner imitating classical triptychs, each figure (they were all black males) repeatedly stated the number of times he had been stopped by the police without cause. By having the viewer literally face the individuals whom certain authorities deem threatening, *Stop* openly critiqued the purported efficacy of zero-tolerance to crime policing strategies from the perspectives of those directly impacted. The installation view (page 109) indicates how actively many of our visitors related to the piece, the young boys almost seeming to become part of the projection.

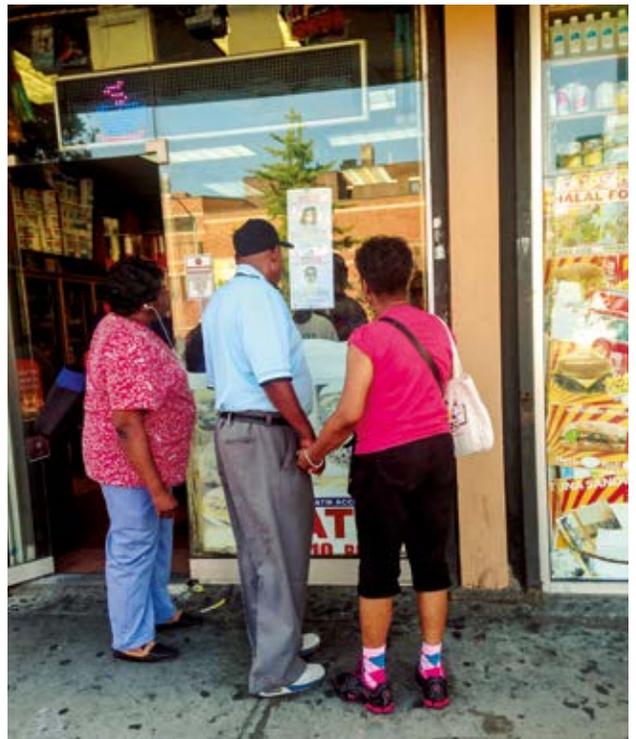
Scott's commissioned work for the exhibition, *Wanted* (2014), similarly addressed the harassing stop-and-frisk police programs that criminalized young people of color and rapidly expanded the number of people warehoused in prisons and jails throughout the U.S.

*Wanted* began to take shape when Dread Scott and I visited several youth and community programs in the area to select youth participants—he envisioned a group of twenty youth—for the project. We then hired a trained forensic artist who had worked for decades in various police precincts in the area to sketch some of the youth. Additional portraits resulted from an adult's verbal description of a participant he or she had briefly seen. Scott then developed the generic sketches (and they are always generic and thus heavily stereotyped) into a set of wanted posters, replete with the reasons those individuals were “wanted”: loitering, looking suspicious, and so forth, all based on the so-called violations for which youth have been cited and arrested. The posters were then plastered at sites near the exhibition and throughout Harlem.

In Dread Scott's words,

**NLE's commissioning of *Wanted* allowed for the creation of an important community-engaged project that addressed the effect of this criminalizing of youth. Community-engaged projects frequently work on lean budgets, but without funding like NLE provided these projects are self-funded by the artists, which is unsustainable. And most importantly, NLE provided connections to the community. I had some existing ties with activists in Harlem and had been part of some revolutionary organizing efforts, but NLE researched and established connections with community organizations that had infrastructure in the neighborhood.**

**A *Wanted* participant sitting for the forensic sketch artist. Photograph by Dread Scott**



**Harlem residents view the *Wanted Posters* in the window of a local bodega. Photograph by Dread Scott**

At the end of the day, after building trust and relationships, engaging in substantive conversations with the young collaborators, having public community meetings where the themes of the project were addressed, and a “performance” of a forensic sketch session, we produced Wanted posters. Taking these into the community, with the youth and with NLE’s team, extended the project to a very public manifestation of the ideas of *Wanted*. It connected with the workers and patrons in barber shops, nail salons, Chinese take-out joints, delis, and the people on the streets of Harlem. We had a great conversation about how the youth are wanted—everyone had a story to tell and we helped flip the script on how the youth are viewed. And for a few days throughout swaths of Harlem this was what was on people’s minds and lips.

Kameelah Janan Rasheed, *No Instructions for Assembly, Activation IV*, 2013. Mixed-media installation with diptychs and collages, photographs, family hair, American flag sewn with linen thread, Islamic prayer rugs, abaya, hijab, newspapers, books, religious tracts, mirrors, cigarette boxes, tea bags, black stockings, bleaching cream, concealer, votive candle, handwritten letters, upholstered chair, and album covers. Photograph by Whitney Browne

Kameelah Janan Rasheed’s *No Instructions for Assembly, Activation IV* (2013) functioned as an ephemeral and portable archive of Rasheed and her family, who struggled through years of homelessness. Rasheed engaged with these traces of displacement using both found and original images, objects, and texts, all functioning as specters of displacement. The audience was invited to further activate the space by inserting their own stories into the installation through images, letters, or small objects that created a relationship with the artist’s story of homelessness. In this way, Rasheed ensured that the space enabled alternative narratives to have a voice and hold weight.



Of all the public-facing projects NLE produced, Nari Ward's *Canned Smiles* (2014) was unquestionably the most popular—it literally brought a huge smile to the face of everyone who participated. Ward had long been concerned with the way the “cool” of Harlem had been co-opted by consumer brands whose products were neither made in Harlem nor gave anything back to the community. As he commented while discussing the evolution of the project,

**Harlem has always been a place of re-composition. Its Jazz history and the Harlem Renaissance superseded its history as a home for wealthy immigrants. Its turbulent times included its devastation by crime and poverty. With a former U.S. president [Bill Clinton] declaring his allegiance to the neighborhood and a slew of trendy restaurants opening to new occupants, real estate brokers are still careful about the fragile nature of their investments and are quick to brand proximity without declaring their allegiance. . . . How can this important if seemingly romanticized history truly serve the changing community on a grass-roots level?**

Nari Ward, *Canned Smiles*, 2013. Mirror-bottomed tin with custom-designed label, signed edition of 1,000. Photograph by Whitney Browne



Nari Ward canning the smiles of Sugar Hill residents on the streets of Harlem. Photograph by Oluremi Onabanjo



By way of response, *Sugar Hill Smiles* adopted the Sugar Hill brand as Harlem's own smile manufacturing center. Ward carried two thousand mirror-bottomed cans—created to mimic the form of mass-manufactured food cans, replete with a Sugar Hill Smiles label—through the streets of Harlem, operating from a wheeled cart reminiscent of the simple portable shops

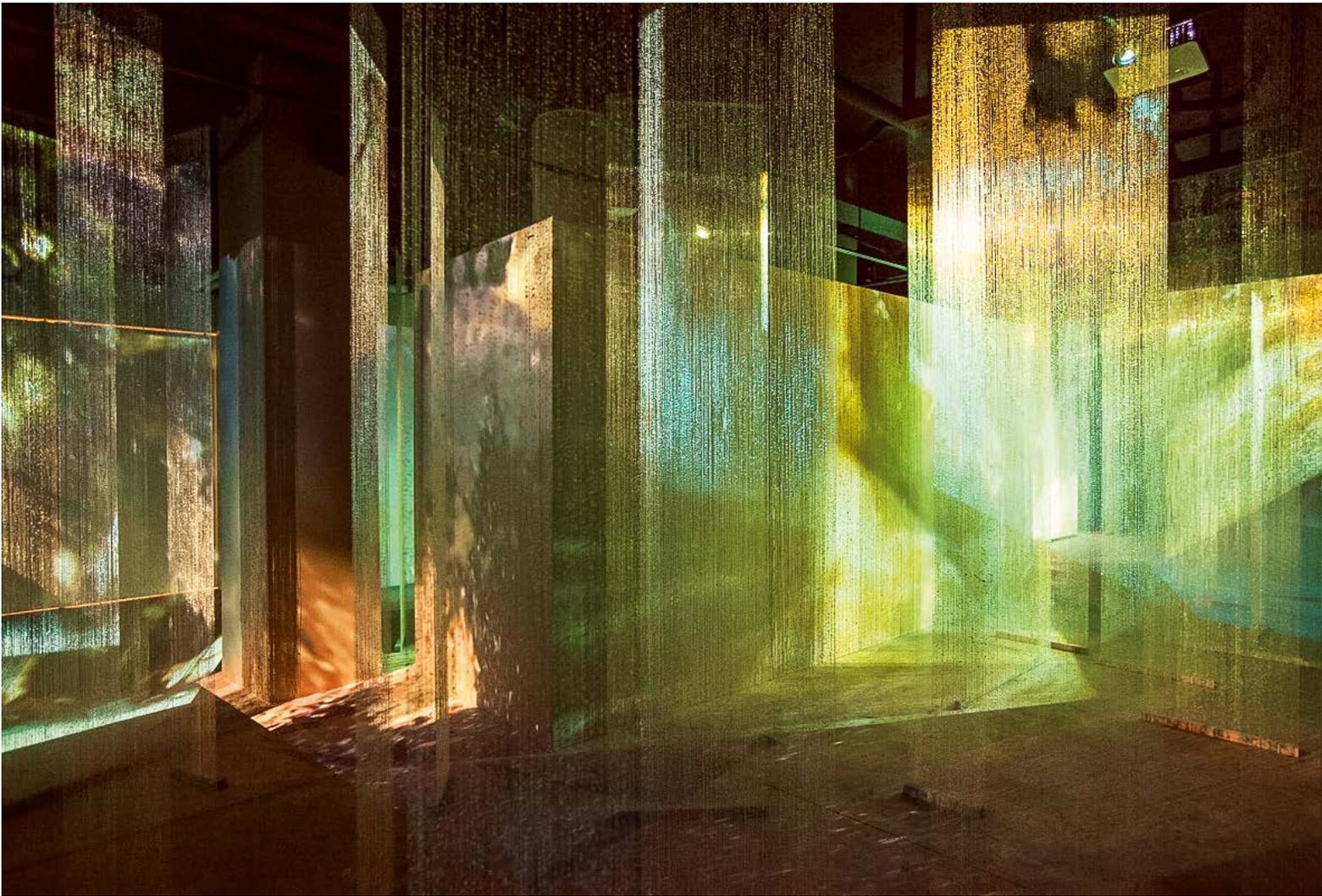
on the streets of his native Jamaica. He invited pedestrians to smile into the cans, often getting the response, “You can't can a smile.” But that was before they looked into the can and beamed at their images at the bot-

tom! Ward then sealed the cans, numbered them and sold them in a store display in the exhibition for \$10 each, with the profits going to Broadway Housing Communities' educational programming. A product that was truly from the community gave back to the community.

Another work that resonated strongly with audiences was *Cathedral/Catedral* (2014), a large-scale soft sculpture consisting of inner tubes dipped in gold paint and stacked to resemble a floating altar. Bound together by electrical ties reminiscent of the handcuffs used by immigration agents, alluding to the pain and suffering often intertwined with migration stories, the piece evoked memories of journeys, home, immigration, religion, politics, and history. The work was covered with *milagros* (prayer cards) in different languages, referencing the diversity of origins on the journey to America—the land of opportunity. Viewers could make their own *milagros* by filling out the back of the prayer cards with their own specific information. In this way, *Cathedral/Catedral* became a floating, universal monument to immigration, laden with the origins, aspirations, and experiences of those who became part of the Sugar Hill community through *If You Build It*.

**Scherezade García,**  
*Cathedral/Catedral,*  
2014. Inner tubes,  
gold paint, plastic  
ties, and luggage  
labels. Photograph by  
Whitney Browne





### **Solo Projects: NLE Presents**

From time to time over the years, NLE departed from the group exhibition format to focus on the work of one artist. We called this series NLE Presents. The first of these presentations, Jan Tichy's *The Politics of Light* (2013), transformed a small Lower East Side storefront into a poetic light installation that worked at the intersection of video, sound, and the architecture of the space. This was followed in 2015 with an installation by Teresa Diehl at the historic South Street Seaport in Manhattan. *Breathing Waters* was a magnificent immersive video and sound installation for which the artist took as her point of departure the nearby confluence of the Hudson River and the East River. The work resonated with the power of water as the origin of life and a continual magnet for the imagination.

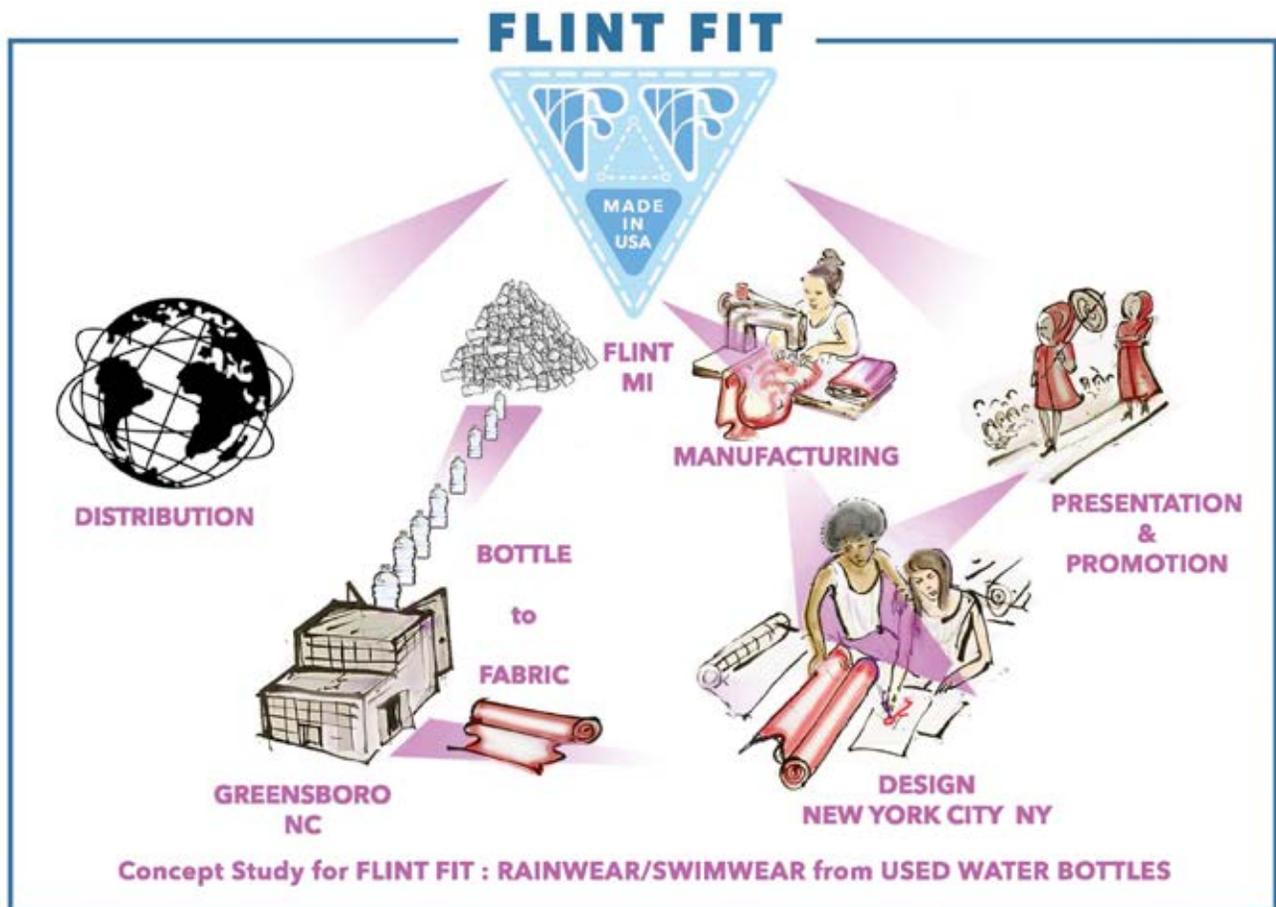
The final such solo presentation, *Mel Chin: All Over the Place* (2018), had a tortuous beginning, much like *If You Build It*. I go into detail here to underscore the difficulties that can arise when dealing with donated, nontraditional exhibition sites. We had been offered

**Teresa Diehl, *Breathing Waters*, 2015. Video and sound, monofilament fishing line, and resin. Installation at the South Street Seaport, Manhattan. Photograph by the artist**

a fifty-thousand-square-foot space across the street from Madison Square Garden, and we proposed that the bold work of Mel Chin had the power and presence to hold such a space. We got the green light and some funding, and planned to give the Chin a much-deserved retrospective that would also feature several new, site-responsive commissions. It took a year to secure additional funding and the loan of artworks, and to hire the brilliant architectural design firm LOT-EK to help with the layout and design of the show. One day at the airport coming back from Greensboro, North Carolina, where I had been selecting drawings for the show from Mel's studio, I got a phone call informing me that the space had been withdrawn. This indeed is the one of the biggest pitfalls of the nomadic model; while we had had dates changed in the past, this was the first time a space was actually irretrievably cancelled. How to find an alternative site for the show? Salvation came from the wonderful Laura Raicovich, then director of the Queens Museum of Art, a staunch champion of our work at NLE and a great admirer of Mel's work. She offered us the whole of the Queens Museum to do the show!

While some of us wanted to jump at this promise of a solution, serious discussions followed with my NLE colleagues, our board of directors, and Chin himself as to whether we should operate in an institutional setting, as our whole curatorial model to this point had been based on working outside traditional art settings. Chin, with whom we had worked in two previous exhibitions (*This Side of Paradise* and *How Much Do I Owe You?*), was particularly hesitant. But complex new projects had already begun (notably *Flint Fit*, described below) and the Queens Museum was the most community-centered art museum one could hope to encounter. In addition, while we were making this critical decision, Times Square Arts approached us with the offer to sponsor a major project for that most iconic of public sites, Times Square (hard to refuse!). Mel also wanted to refurbish and rededicate to the Six Nations Iroquois people, indigenous to the area, his project in the Broadway-Lafayette subway station in lower Manhattan. With the convergence of all these opportunities, we decided to go ahead with *All Over the Place*—as now, indeed, it truly was.

As extensive documentation of the exhibition at the museum continues to be available on the Queens Museum website, I will focus here on two of the project's commissions, *Flint Fit*, which examined the criminally contaminated drinking water in Flint, Michigan, and the two monumental projects Chin created for Times Square, *Wake* and *Unmoored*. In Chin's words,



Flint, Michigan, is enduring a major lead poisoning crisis in their water system and is faced with mandatory use of bottled water. The resulting increased waste stream of plastic has produced another challenge for beleaguered citizens as they collect and recycle the empty bottles.

Mel Chin, concept study for *Flint Fit*, 2018.

*Flint Fit* is envisioned as a creative triangulation of excess material, economic opportunity, and artistic innovation conducted between people in Flint, Michigan, Greensboro, North Carolina, and New York City. A new enterprise can be developed through recycling, design, manufacturing, and retail. As an artist, I see *Flint Fit* as an art project with diverse engagement as its medium; but it could grow into a design and marketing enterprise on a national level providing a new source of identity, income stream, a shared pride, and notoriety of a positive kind for all the players involved.

The plastic water bottles were collected in special bins placed throughout Flint and sent to a processing facility in Greensboro, where they were transformed, through a multi-stage process, into a fabric. In the meantime, the New York-based fashion designer Tracy Reece created a range of rain- and swimwear to be made from the fabric by a



**Mel Chin, *Flint Fit*, 2018. Installation view. Clothing designed by Tracy Reese. Installation as part of the exhibition *All Over the Place*, Queens Museum, Queens, 2018. Photograph by Ben Premeaux**

small, women-run manufacturing hub in Flint at the New Life Center where Reece visited to train the women in the cutting and sewing of the clothes. The first rain and swimwear collection debuted in Flint and then was shown both as an installation and fashion show at the Queens Museum.

### ***Wake and Unmoored***

*Wake* was a twenty-four-foot-tall installation that evoked the hull of a shipwreck crossed with the skeletal remains of a marine mammal. The structure was linked with a carved, twenty-one-foot-tall animatronic female sculpture, accurately derived from a figurehead of the opera singer Jenny Lind that was once mounted on the nineteenth-century clipper ship USS *Nightingale*.

The site-responsive work was designed to evoke both the triumphs of New York City and the complicated layers of its past. A success story

of trade, commerce, finance, entertainment, and tourism was built on a history that included the shipping (on the USS *Nightingale*, among other vessels) of guns and slaves that contributed to the burgeoning city's economy. As Chin showed in the accompanying work, *Unmoored*, these expanding economies were also a prologue to our current issues of climate change.

Visitor interaction and delight with the work was overwhelming. Not only did crowds watch overnight as we installed (we were only allowed to bring machinery into Times Square from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.), but once the mammoth structure was complete, people took it over—climbing, relaxing, eating lunch, or just posing for selfies. In order to fully share the import of the work, NLE-trained docents were at Times Square daily, asking visitors about their responses to the work and sharing a “Did You Know?” flyer that contained important information about climate change and rising sea levels which, according to climate scientists, will see Times Square under sixty feet of water in less than fifty years unless steps are taken to combat global warming.

As a companion piece to *Wake*, Chin, in collaboration Microsoft, developed *Unmoored*, a site-dependent augmented reality app that offered viewers the opportunity to experience that very scenario: with the app downloaded on a cell phone or tablet, the work blended the physical and digital worlds, and viewers saw untethered boats floating overhead and sailing down Seventh Avenue, or smacking up against adjacent buildings, which also sent underwater sound effects to the audiences below.

**Throughout the summer of 2018, NLE docents were available from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily to discuss with visitors issues raised by the work, such as climate change and rising sea levels. Photograph by Whitney Browne**







Mel Chin, *Wake*, 2018. Installation in Times Square, Manhattan. Photograph by Ian Douglas, © Times Square Arts

# No Longer Empty

## Exhibition Timeline



No Longer Empty



Reflecting Transformation



Something Out of Nothing

### No Longer Empty

June 19–July 18, 2009  
Chelsea Hotel, West 23rd  
Street, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Guido Albi-Marini  
Joseph Aloï  
Rita Barros  
Sam Bassett  
Michael Bevilacqua  
Alina and Jeff Bliumis  
Scott Campbell  
Tara de la Garza  
Kate Gilmore  
Mia Hanson  
Noel Hennessy  
Michael Mandiberg  
Cheonwook Park  
Diana Puntar  
Bruce Richards  
Raimundo Rubio  
Linda and Lothar Troeller  
Dani Tull  
Marnie Weber

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Julia Draganović  
Asher Remy-Toledo  
Tara de la Garza  
Julian Navarro  
Nunu Hong

#### COLLABORATOR

The Chelsea Hotel  
(Marlene Krauss)

### Reflecting Transformation

July 30–September 26, 2009  
Caledonia apartments, vacant  
ground floor, West 16th  
Street, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

U-Ram Choe  
Guerra de la Paz  
Cao Fei  
Yoko Ono  
Stephanie Rothenberg  
Alyson Shotz  
Sean Slemon  
Suzanne Song  
Siebren Versteeg

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Julia Draganović  
Asher Remy-Toledo  
Tara de la Garza  
Julian Navarro

### Something Out of Nothing

October 3–November 14, 2009  
The Invisible Dog Art Center,  
Boerum Hill, Brooklyn

#### ARTISTS

Thomas Bell  
Ryan V. Brennan  
Amanda Browder  
Rosane Chamecki  
Gina Czarnecki  
Steve DeFrank  
Jeanette Doyle  
Richard Gareth  
Phil Harder  
Kaarina Kaikkonen  
Andrea Lerner  
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer  
Giles Lyon  
Miguel Palma  
José Parlá  
Rey Parlá  
Tom Sanford  
Keith Schweitzer  
Francesco Simeti  
Giuseppe Stampone  
Alfred Steiner

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Asher Remy-Toledo  
Julia Draganović  
Keith Schweitzer

#### COLLABORATOR

The Invisible Dog Art Center

### Re-Purpose

November 12–December 1,  
2009  
Vacant storefront, Lower  
East Side, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

D\*Face  
Gaia  
Corinne Kamiya  
Tracey Moffatt  
Janet Nolan

#### CURATOR

Tara de la Garza



Skylar Fein: Remember the Upstairs Lounge



Cartoons in Conflict



Never Can Say Goodbye



The Sixth Borough

### Cartoons in Conflict

December 10–23, 2009  
Vacant storefront, Nomad,  
West 26th Street, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Jeff Danziger  
Liza Donnelly  
Jim Morin  
Pat Oliphant  
Plantu  
No Rio  
El-Roto  
Cathy Wilcox

#### CURATOR

Manon Slome

#### COLLABORATORS

The Parents Circle Family  
Forum  
ArtIs  
Kew Management

### Never Can Say Goodbye

January 16–February 13, 2010  
Former Tower Records Store,  
Broadway at East 4th Street,  
Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Ryan V. Brennan  
Joe Diebes  
R. Luke DuBois  
Richard Gareth  
Invader  
Josh Jordan  
Kaz Oshiro  
Ted Riederer  
Meredyth Sparks  
Naama Tsabar  
Siebren Versteeg  
Paul Villinski

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Asher Remy-Toledo  
Dan Cameron  
Steve Evans  
Barbara Feldman  
Kathy Zeiger  
Naomi Hersson-Ringskog

#### COLLABORATORS

Sam Ash Music Stores  
Artist Pension Trust  
4 FAB  
Broken Mirrors with John Miller  
The Metropolis Ensemble  
The John Herington Band  
Azita  
Disco Monkeys  
Steve Conte, New York Dolls  
Vornado Realty Trust

### Skylar Fein: Remember the Upstairs Lounge

April 28–May 30, 2010  
Caledonia apartments, vacant  
ground floor, West 16th  
Street, Manhattan

#### ARTIST

Skylar Fein

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Dan Cameron

#### COLLABORATORS

Jonathan Ferrara Gallery  
Taconic Investment Partners  
LLC

### The Sixth Borough

June 5–October 3, 2010  
Governors Island

#### ARTISTS

Amelia Biewald  
Adam Cvijanovic  
Teresa Diehl  
Trong Gia Nguyen  
Luis González Palma  
Pablo Helguera  
Natasha Johns-Messenger  
Kaarina Kaikkonen  
Andrea Mastrovito  
Alan Michelson  
Clive Murphy  
Ted Riederer  
Marina Rosenfeld  
Raimundo Rubio  
Vadis Turner  
Mary Walling Blackburn  
Monika Weiss  
Wendy Wischer

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Julian Navarro  
Regine Basha

#### COLLABORATORS

Governors Island Trust  
Poster XXL  
Children's Museum of the Arts  
The Flea Theater  
Jorge Pinto Books



Weaving In & Out



Watch This Space



About Face

### **Weaving In & Out**

June 15–August 30, 2010  
Vacant storefront, East Harlem

#### ARTISTS

Mequitta Ahuja  
Blanka Amezkua  
Grimanesa Amorós  
Isidro Blasco  
Myritza Castillo  
Carolina Caycedo  
David Antonio Cruz  
Helen Dennis  
Alexis Duque  
Eleni Kamma  
Fabienne Lasserre  
Cristobal Lehyt  
Olek  
Lina Puerta  
Chemi Rosado  
Trash Patch  
Manny Vega  
Carol Warner  
Marela Zacarias

#### CURATORS

Jodie Di Napoli  
Ella Levitt  
Trinidad Fombella

#### COLLABORATORS

El Museo del Barrio, New York  
The Artist Pension Trust  
West Harlem Arts Fund  
Cave Canem, Remezcla  
Columbia University Graduate  
School of Architecture,  
Planning and Preservation  
Alumni Association

Columbia Affordable Housing  
Group  
Art for Change

### **Watch This Space**

September 24–October 23, 2010  
Vacant storefront and multiple  
scaffoldings, Dumbo,  
Brooklyn

#### ARTISTS

Alejandro Almanza Pereda  
Alexandre Arrechea  
Michel de Broin  
Helen Dennis  
Imminent Disaster  
Cal Lane  
Lincoln Schatz  
Jordan Seiler  
Chris Stain

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Jodie Di Napoli  
Keith Schweitzer

#### COLLABORATORS

DUMBO Arts Festival  
Two Trees

### **About Face**

May 6–June 12, 2011  
Vacant storefront and various  
scaffoldings, Lower East  
Side, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Maria José Arjona  
Itziar Barrio  
Alina and Jeff Bliumis  
Helidon Gjergji  
Niklas Goldbach  
Jason Gringler  
Franco and Eva Mattes  
paperJAM  
Edward Purver  
Marinella Senatore  
Dannielle Tegeder  
James Tunick

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Julia Draganović  
Jodie Di Napoli

#### COLLABORATORS

The New Museum  
Consulate General of Spain  
Edison Properties



XYZ: NYC 10 Downing



This Side of Paradise

### **XYZ: NYC 10 Downing**

December 7, 2011–  
January 5, 2012  
Vacant storefront,  
10 Downing Street,  
Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Leslie Eastman  
Natasha Johns-Messenger

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Tara de la Garza

#### COLLABORATORS

American Australian  
Association  
Stonehenge

### **This Side of Paradise**

April 4–June 5, 2012  
The Andrew Freedman Home,  
Grand Concourse, the Bronx

#### ARTISTS

John Ahearn  
Guido Albi-Marini  
Art Jones  
Alina and Jeff Bliumis  
Mel Chin  
Carey Clark  
Melanie Crean  
Tats Cru  
Sharon De La Cruz  
Linda Cunningham  
Crash  
Daze  
Alejandra Delfin  
Mario Chamorro and  
Daniel Paluska  
Nicky Enright  
Lady K Fever  
Martine Fougeron  
Scherezade García  
Alicia Grullon  
Tim Hetherington  
How and Nosm  
Lisa Kahane  
Justen Ladda  
Abigail Lazkoz  
Sofía Maldonado  
Esperanza Mayobre  
Laura Napier and Carmen  
Julia Hernández  
Guillaume Légaré  
Jay Paavonper  
Adam Parker Smith  
Anne Percoco

Danny Peralta  
Sylvia Plachy  
Cheryl Pope  
Alejandra Prieto  
Hatuey Ramos-Fermin and  
Elizabeth Hamby  
Bruce Richards  
Tim Rollins and KOS  
Wade Schaming  
David Schroeter  
Jimmy Smith and  
Princess Alexander  
Marisa Tesauro  
Gian Maria Tosatti  
Federico Uribe  
Raúl Gómez Valverde  
David Yearwood  
Seldon Yuan

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Keith Schweitzer  
Jodie Di Napoli  
Barbara Feldman  
Walter Puryear  
Lucy Lydon  
Charlotte Caldwell

#### COLLABORATORS

The Andrew Freedman Home  
Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens  
Council  
A Blade of Grass  
Bronx Documentary Center  
The Bronx River Art Center  
The Bronx Children's Museum  
The Bronx Museum of the Arts  
with the AIM Program  
Bronx Lebanon Hospital  
BronxNet

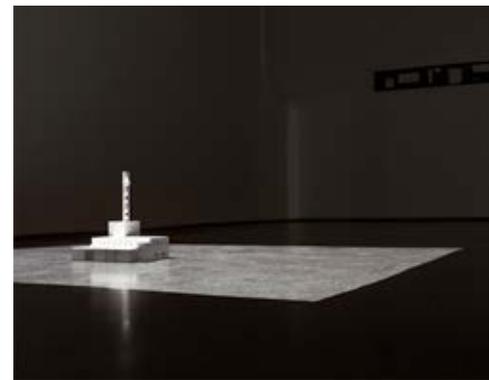
The Bronx Art Alliance  
The Bronx Council on the Arts  
Bronx Housing Works  
Hostos Community College  
and the Longwood Art  
Gallery  
Lehman College Art Gallery  
The Point  
Consulate General of Spain  
Wave Hill  
WNYC



How Much Do I Owe You?



NLE Lab: Gathering Place



Jan Tichy: Politics of Light

### How Much Do I Owe You?

December 12, 2012–  
March 17, 2013  
Clock Tower building, former  
Bank of Manhattan, Long  
Island City, Queens

#### ARTISTS

Sol Aramendi  
Artefacting  
Orit Ben Shitrit  
Alberto Borea  
Susanne Bosch  
Marco Antonio Castro and  
Jason Gaspar  
Mel Chin  
Jennifer Dalton  
Enmedio  
F.R.E.E. LIC Branch Bank of  
America—Draw Deposit  
Display Station  
Guerra de la Paz  
Nicky Enright  
Colleen Ford  
Ghost of a Dream  
Susan Hamburger  
Erika Harrsch  
Pablo Helguera  
Chris Jordan  
Hayoon-Jay Lee  
Shaun Leonardo  
Keiko Miyamori  
Paulette Phillips  
Ana Prvacki  
Sal Randolph  
Tom Sanford  
Sean Slemon  
Theodoros Stamatogiannis  
Caroline Woolard

#### CURATORS

Manon Slome  
Charlotte Caldwell  
Barbara Feldman  
Ella Levit  
Naomi Hersson-Ringskog

#### COLLABORATORS

Arts Connection  
The Harry Van Arsdale Jr.  
Center for Labor Studies  
Our Goods Trade School  
Council member Jimmy Van  
Bramer, chair of New York  
City Council Cultural  
Affairs Committee  
Museum of Arts and Design  
East River Development  
Alliance  
Financial Fitness Program  
The New Immigrant  
Community Empowerment  
Immigrant Movement  
International  
LaGuardia Performing Arts  
Center  
Local Project  
Modern Spaces  
Queens Museum of Art  
Nina Rappaport, Vertical  
Urban Factory  
Meenakshi Thirukode  
The Mexican Council of  
New York  
New York Council for the  
Humanities  
Untapped New York  
Debrain  
Linda White  
Andover Realty

### NLE Lab: Gathering Place

February 22–March 21, 2013  
Vacant storefront, West  
8th Street, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Luisa Caldwell  
Rebecca Hackemann  
Kristin Jones with  
Andrew Ginzel  
Gwyneth Leech  
Jennifer Maravillas  
Simonetta Moro  
Eleanor Ray  
Ira Sachs  
Micki Watanabe Spiller  
Gail Thacker  
Seldon Yuan

#### CURATORS

Jessica Wallen  
Katherine Gressel

#### LED BY

Manon Slome

#### COLLABORATORS

Lower Manhattan Cultural  
Council  
Village Alliance  
Buchbinder & Warren

### Jan Tichy: Politics of Light

October 10–December 14, 2013  
Vacant storefront, Stanton  
Street, Manhattan

#### ARTIST

Jan Tichy

#### CURATOR

Manon Slome

#### COLLABORATORS

Richard Gray Gallery  
NYREX



NLE Lab: Through the Parlor



If You Build It



NLE Lab: The Way Out Is Through

**NLE Lab:  
Through the Parlor**

November 8–December 14,  
2013  
24 Rutgers Street, Manhattan

**ARTISTS**

Heather Hart  
Lin + Lam  
Sonia Louise Davis  
Amos Mac  
Miao Jiaxin  
Jaye Moon  
Megan Mosholder  
Shelly Silver  
Betty Yu

**CURATORS**

Shlomit Dror  
Anna Harsanyi  
William Helfrecht  
Alexis Heller  
Hyejung  
Hanlu Zhang

**LED BY**

Sara Reisman  
with Sarah Corona

**If You Build It**

June 25–August 10, 2014  
Sugar Hill, Harlem

**ARTISTS**

Mequitta Ahuja  
Raúl Ayala  
Aziz + Cucher  
Sonia Louise Davis  
Élan  
Scherezade García  
Brendan Jamison and  
Mark Revels  
Carlos Mare  
Omo Misha  
Shani Peters  
Freddy Rodríguez  
Moses Ros-Suárez  
Bayeté Ross Smith  
Dread Scott  
Hank Willis Thomas  
William Villalongo  
Nari Ward

**CURATOR**

Manon Slome

**COLLABORATORS**

Broadway Housing  
Communities  
Art in FLUX  
ArtsConnection  
The Classical Theatre of  
Harlem  
Dominican York Proyecto  
GRAFICA  
Harlem Arts Alliance

Institute for Public  
Architecture

LeRoy Neiman Art Center  
The New School Collaboratory  
Northern Manhattan Arts  
Alliance  
Schomburg Center for  
Research in Black Culture  
Sugar Hill Culture Club  
Taste of Harlem

**NLE Lab:  
The Way Out Is Through**

January 10–31, 2015  
LeRoy Neiman Art Center,  
Frederick Douglass  
Boulevard, Harlem

**ARTISTS**

Peggy Buth  
Raquel Cepeda  
Free Breakfast Program  
Paloma McGregor  
Nicko Nogués  
Kyla Marshall  
Mark Salvatus  
Phan V  
Akeema-Zane

**CURATORS**

Leticia Gutierrez  
Ladi'Sasha Jones  
Kirstin Kapustik  
Zena Koo  
Kenneth Paranada  
Maurizzio Hector Pineda

**LED BY**

Petrushka Bazin-Larsen

**COLLABORATOR**

LeRoy Neiman Art Center



When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out



Bring in the Reality



Teresa Diehl: Breathing Waters

**When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out**

April 23–July 19, 2015  
Old Bronx Borough  
Courthouse, the Bronx

**ARTISTS**

Juan Betancurth and  
Daniel Neumann  
Daniel Bozhkov  
Melissa Calderón  
Beth Campbell  
Paco Cao  
Onyedika Chuke  
Abigail DeVille  
Nicolás Dumit Estévez Rafal  
Deborah Fisher and  
Paul Ramirez Jonas  
Ellen Harvey  
Skowmon Hastanan  
Adam Helms  
Iman Issa  
Lady K Fever  
Michelle Lopez  
Shellyne Rodriguez  
David Scanavino  
Todd Shalom (Elastic City)  
Lisa Sigal  
Xaviera Simmons  
Valerie Tevere and  
Angel Nevarez

**CURATOR**

Regine Basha

**COLLABORATORS**

Art Works  
BX200  
BronxNet Community  
Television  
Bronx Academy of Art and  
Dance (BAAD)  
Bronx District Attorney's  
Community Affairs Office  
The Center for Bronx  
Nonprofits (CBNP)  
Designing the WE  
Joe Conzo Sr.  
Jane's Walk  
NYC Landmarks 50  
WNYC

**Bring in the Reality**

May 13–September 17, 2015  
The Nathan Cummings  
Foundation, Manhattan

**ARTISTS**

Carolina Caycedo  
Mel Chin  
Melanie Crean  
Jeff Crouse  
Jennifer Dalton  
Enmedio  
Scherezade García  
Iliana Emilia García  
Kyle Goen  
Guerra de la Paz  
Kameelah Janan Rasheed  
Tim Rollins and KOS  
Stephanie Rothenberg  
Dread Scott  
Hank Willis Thomas in  
collaboration with  
Sanford Biggers  
Nari Ward

**CURATOR**

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

**COLLABORATOR**

The Nathan Cummings  
Foundation

**Teresa Diehl:  
Breathing Waters**

August 26–December 20, 2015  
South Street Seaport,  
Manhattan

**ARTIST**

Teresa Diehl

**CURATOR**

Manon Slome



Be My Guest: The Art of Interiors



Jameco Exchange

**NLE Lab:  
Intersecting Imaginaries**

November 20–December 15, 2015  
Former ballroom of the  
Concourse Plaza Hotel,  
Grand Concourse, the Bronx

**ARTISTS**

Elia Alba  
Arthur Avilés and Nicolás  
Dumit Estévez Raful  
Linda Cunningham  
Josué Guarionex  
Giorgio Guidi  
Ariel Jackson  
So Yoon Lym  
Laura Napier  
Anne Percoco and Ellie Irons  
Amy Pryor  
David Shrobe  
Manuela Viera-Gallo

**CURATORS**

Dalaeja Foreman  
Emilia Shaffer-Del Valle  
Eva Mayhabal  
Davis Lindsey O'Connor  
Mary Kay Judy  
Natasha Bunzl  
Paola Gallio  
Walter Puryear

**LED BY**

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

**COLLABORATORS**

Andrew Freedman Home  
Bronx Council on the Arts  
Bronx Museum of the Arts  
Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens  
Council  
Residency Unlimited  
Ed García Conde

**Be My Guest:  
The Art of Interiors**

April 20–May 8, 2016  
Private townhouse, East 70th  
Street, Manhattan

**ARTISTS**

Barbara Bloom  
Ghost of a Dream  
Misha Kahn  
Jean Shin  
Ena Swansea  
Mickalene Thomas

**CURATORS**

Manon Slome  
Michael Steinberg  
Lisa Fayne Cohen

**COLLABORATOR**

Hetrick-Martin Institute's Youth  
Art and Culture Program

**Jameco Exchange**

May 21–July 17, 2016  
165th Street Pedestrian Mall,  
Jamaica, Queens  
Think Before You Ink Tattoo  
Studio, Jamaica, Queens

**ARTISTS**

Ibrahim Ahmed  
Sol Aramendi  
Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani  
Jane Benson  
Hector Canonge  
Carolina Caycedo  
Diego de la Vega Coffee Co-op  
Nicholas Fraser  
Rico Gatson  
Kimsooja  
Azikiwe Mohammed  
Odathrowback  
Richard Parker  
Antonia A. Perez  
Nicolás Dumit Estévez Raful  
Calo Rosa  
Juana Valdes  
Mary A. Valverde  
Margaret Rose Vendryes  
Ezra Wube  
Adam Yekuteli (Know Hope)

**CURATORS**

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger  
Sara Guerrero-Mostafa  
Emilia Shaffer Del-Valle  
PJ Gubatina Policarpio  
Lo Ehrhart  
Juliana Steiner

**COLLABORATORS**

Afrikan Poetry Theatre  
Central Library of Queens  
Local Project  
Queens Council on the Arts  
Jamaica Center for Arts &  
Learning  
Lewis Latimer Historic House  
Indo-Caribbean Alliance  
Queens Museum  
NYC Department of Small  
Business Services  
The New York City Economic  
Development Corporation  
Think Before You Ink  
Heng-Gil Han



Fresh Out of Storage



NLE Lab: Remix Rememory



ART ZONE CG-91

### **Fresh Out of Storage**

October 13–31, 2016  
Manhattan Mini Storage,  
West Street, Manhattan

#### ARTISTS

Rita Barros  
Barbara Burger  
Steve Danielson  
Elaine Defibaugh  
Mike Jacobs  
Eliot LeBow  
Calvin Lom  
Susan Natale  
Gabriel J. Shuldiner  
Ralph Toporoff

#### CURATOR

Ariela Kader

#### COLLABORATOR

Manhattan Mini Storage

### **NLE Lab: Remix Rememory**

December 3–18, 2016  
Jamaica Colosseum Mall,  
Jamaica, Queens

#### ARTISTS

Laura Castro  
Robert Craddock  
Neal Desai  
Rejin Leys  
Lan Ding Liu  
Ify Chiejina  
Sherese Francis  
Vandana Jain  
Jocelyn M. Goode  
Joiri Minaya  
Odathrowback  
Curtis Talwst Santiago  
Ambika Trasi  
Kamau Ware

#### CURATORS

Zalika Azim  
Tara Foster  
Jordan Greenberg  
Abbie Hebein  
Shu Cao Mo  
Candice Strongwater

#### LED BY

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

#### COLLABORATORS

Afrikan Poetry Theatre  
Jamaica Center for Arts &  
Learning  
Fine Arts Gallery, York  
College, CUNY  
Robin Cembalest

Heng-Gil Han  
Thomas Logan  
Prerana Reddy  
Kwamé Sorrell  
Margaret Rose  
Vendryes

### **ART ZONE CG-91**

June 23–July 30, 2017  
Former emergency waiting  
room, Kings County  
Hospital campus, Brooklyn

#### ARTISTS

Manolo Ampudia (design)  
Shervone Neckles  
Ezra Wube

#### CURATORS

Sara Guerrero-Mostafa  
Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger  
Mica Le John

#### COLLABORATORS

NYC Health + Hospitals/  
Kings County  
Materials for the Arts



Mel Chin: All Over the Place



NLE Lab: (after)care

**Hold These Truths**

November 13, 2017–  
March 14, 2018  
The Nathan Cummings  
Foundation, 475 10th  
Avenue, fourteenth floor,  
Manhattan

**ARTISTS**

Sol Aramendi  
Alexandra Bell  
Natalie Bookchin  
Andrea Bowers  
Nancy Chunn  
Adina Dancyger and  
Mykki Blanco  
Nona Faustine  
Ramos Gomez and  
David Feldman  
Shaun Leonardo  
Cannupa Hanska Luger  
Loren Madsen  
Esperanza Mayobre  
Richard Mosse  
Not An Alternative  
Jenny Polak  
Michael Sharkey  
Dustina Sherbine  
Bayeté Ross Smith  
Unlimited, Ltd.  
Kamau Ware  
Carey Young

**CURATORS**

Manon Slome  
Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger  
Raquel de Anda  
Mica Le John  
Nicole Pollard

**COLLABORATOR**

The Nathan Cummings  
Foundation

**NLE Lab:  
Southeast Queens  
Biennial**

*A Locus of Moving Points*  
*Notations in Passing*  
March 3–April 21, 2018  
The Fine Arts Gallery, York  
College, CUNY  
The Queens Library

**ARTISTS**

Damali Abrams the Glitter  
Priestess  
Salimah Ali  
Natalie S. Bravo-Barbee  
Ify Chiejina  
Renee Harper  
Janet Henry  
Corona Johnson  
Rejin Leys  
Sana Musasama  
Shervone Neckles  
Odathrowback  
Okechukwu Okegrass Ofiaeli  
Elizabeth Velazquez  
Lisa Wade

**CURATORS**

Anastasia Tuazon  
Corrine Y. Gordon  
Niama Safia Sandy  
Rebecca Pristoop  
Sarah Fritchey

**LED BY**

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

**COLLABORATORS**

The Fine Arts Gallery, York  
College, CUNY  
Central Library of Queens

**Mel Chin:  
All Over the Place**

April 8–August 12, 2018  
Queens Museum  
Broadway-Lafayette  
Subway Station  
1, 5, 7, and E Train  
*Wake and Unmoored*  
July 11–September 5, 2018  
Times Square, Manhattan

**ARTIST**

Mel Chin

**CURATORS**

Manon Slome  
Laura Raicovich  
Carol Stakenas  
Jace Clayton (aka DJ /rupture)

**COLLABORATORS**

Queens Museum  
Tracy Reese  
Red Bull Arts, New York  
Unif/REPVEVE  
UNC Asheville's  
STEAM Studio  
St. Luke N.E.W. Life Center  
G. Peter Jemison  
(Heron Clan, Seneca)  
Amerinda  
MTA Arts and Design Open  
Engagement  
Consulate General of Sweden  
in New York  
Microsoft  
We are listen  
Times Square Arts  
Times Square Alliance  
Jaros, Baum & Bolles

**NLE Lab:  
(after)care**

June 1–23, 2019  
Kings County Hospital,  
room CG95, Brooklyn

**ARTISTS**

Pamella Allen  
Bobby Anspach  
Quinci Baker  
Chloë Bass  
Damien Davis  
Diane Exavier  
Kearra Amaya Gopee  
Charlie Gross  
Kathryn Ko  
Taja Lindley  
Jenny Polak  
Malik Roberts  
Sol'Sax  
Larry Weekes  
Ezra Wube  
Tattfoo Tan

**CURATORS**

Amalie Frederiksen  
Maleke Glee  
Lillian Hanan Al-Bilali  
Sofia Jamal  
Katrina D. Jeffries  
Fang Yu Lee  
Shimrit Lee  
Julie Yunhee Moon  
Ogemdi Ude  
Margot Yale

**LED BY**

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

**COLLABORATORS**

NYC Health + Hospitals/  
Kings County  
Paper Monument





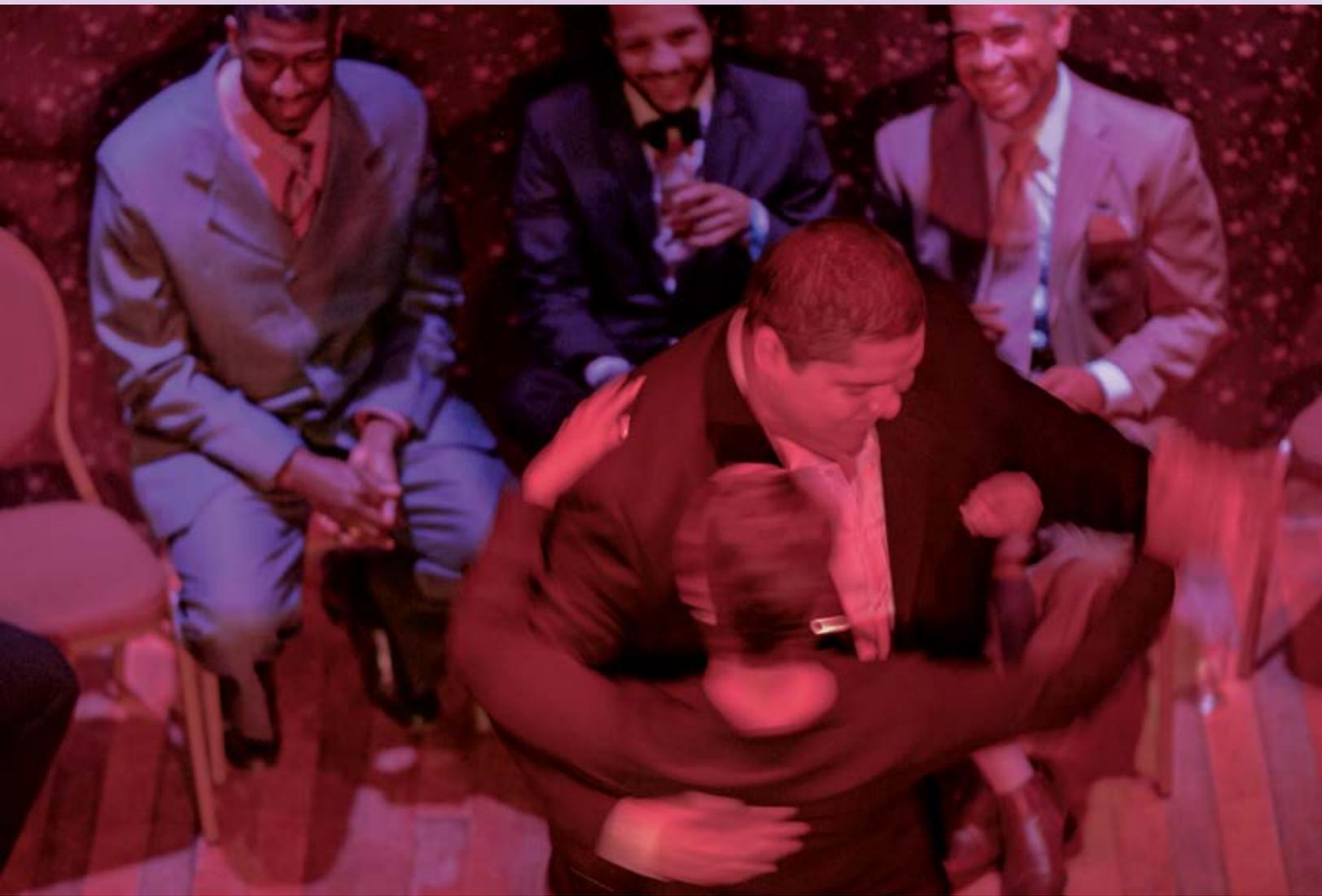
## Part 2 Making It Accessible

## Shaun Leonardo

A simple gesture, a grand experiment. What permission would be granted and obtained by a reversed social contract? Would it allow someone who normally awaits the invitation for a dance to boldly find and/or create a romantic fantasy, an imagined relationship, a momentary escape? LADIES—an evening dedicated to you and your choice. A carefully selected group of beautiful men are waiting to be your dance partners. Only two dollars a song! In a review of the performance for the 2013 NLE exhibition, Bhushan and Catherine Mondkar wrote,

**This event . . . shifted both men’s and women’s perspectives on the power of social monetary exchange from a traditionally male point of view toward empowering women to choose if they want to dance and with whom. Ultimately, the evening was a testament to the universal yearning and desire for a dance. Perhaps one day cultures across the world will deem that gift priceless. Leonardo’s bold role reversal may just be taking some of the first baby steps in that direction.**

This type of socially engaged practice is the space in which I invest myself most deeply. To allow a social experiment to unfold as it will, requires an partnership that is founded not only on trust, but also bravery. No Longer Empty has served as a platform for experimentation and committed to my practice at moments when the work was untested—coming from a place of sheer questioning. In both my and NLE’s focus on site specificity, and its roving proximity to neighborhoods, it was an extra gift that this experiment could be grounded in genuine inquiry, daring expression—and, hell, a little fun.



Shaun Leonardo, *Taxi Dance—The Slipper Room*, a one-night-only performance dance party, February 15, 2013. In *How Much Do I Owe You?*,

Clock Tower building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, 2012–13. Photograph by the artist



## No Longer There, but *Here*

### The NLE Approach to Learning in Context

Jodie Di Napoli

NLE Director of Education (2010–15)

**What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we go down-stairs, we sit at a table in order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How? Where? When? Why? Describe your street. Describe another. Compare.**

—Georges Perec<sup>1</sup>

It is a hot summer day in 2014. A sixteen-year-old girl leads her father and younger siblings through an art exhibition in Sugar Hill, the neighborhood in Harlem where she lives part-time with her father. The exhibition has been organized by the nonprofit organization No Longer Empty (NLE), and she is a participant in a teen docent program called Y.Dot (Youth Docent Program). She learned about Y.Dot through her art teacher at Manhattan Hunter Science High School on the Upper West Side. In her application, she expressed interest in acquiring confidence in public speaking and learning more about art. The program has given students space and time to think critically and creatively through art; it has offered the tools and training to allow them to lead tours of an art exhibition located in a newly built, as yet uninhabited apartment building in Harlem. She has chosen this familiar audience for her first tour of the exhibition *If You Build It*. She will later continue working as a docent through the summer as part of a paid internship offered in the program. In a post on the NLE Y.Dot blog she writes:

**With all that we have learned so far within the program, the main theme that I would like to focus on in my tour is family . . . everyone can relate to it in one form or another.**

**I want my tour to be able to speak to people and I want to be able to hear the different experiences or memories from each person.**

**I want to be able to get different interpretations and experiences from the people looking at the artwork . . . sharing with them my own opinion.**

Accordingly, and with guidance from the program's educators (including myself), she has put together a tour in which artworks in the exhibition act as a platform to discuss her culture and upbringing as a New

Youth docent Eleny Ynoa from Hunter Science High School and her family with Scherezade García's *Cathedral/Catedral*, 2014, in *If You Build It*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014. Photograph by Whitney Browne

Yorker of Dominican descent. The tour includes both her family and members of the public, who are encouraged them to make their own connections to family and culture. Besides presentations in class, this is the first time she is leading visitors through an art exhibition, fulfilling her reasons for being in the program.

She offers information on the site, a building designed under the auspices of Broadway Housing Communities by architect David Adjaye that is to serve as affordable housing, a preschool, and a children's museum. Her father is impressed by the site and mentions that he wishes he could have entered the lottery to get an apartment in the building. She nods as we reach the exhibition floor. She invites us into a room where the artist Scherezade García (also of Dominican descent) has stacked large inner tubes covered in gold pigment and drawn waves in chalk on the walls, transforming the small space into a vast ocean with views through the window to the Harlem River and the Bronx. The girl shares information on the piece, which is called *Cathedral/Catedral* (2014), and how it relates to the artist's journey from her native island of Dominicana to New York. Taking her father by surprise, she asks him about the family's journey to the United States from the Dominican Republic. In shock, since he was not expecting this visit to be about him, he speaks about their family history. She then leads her group to a work by Freddy Rodriguez, also an artist of Dominican origin. The work displays the names of famous baseball players from the Dominican Republic playing in the United States. She mentions the importance of baseball to her—a softball player—as well as to Dominicans because it literally builds a sense of pride “like with these bricks.” “That’s your uncle!” her father cries, pointing at the name Rafael Bellard on one of the bricks. Smiling, she responds, “I didn’t know my uncle was a famous ball player!”

The tour keeps building on the joint momentum of truth within the small group, culminating in canning their own smiles in Nari Ward's project *Sugar Hill Smiles* (2014). Her father comments that he would have never called that art, “but it works.” Then, laughter and funky dancing as the group visits Shani Peters's installation *The Crown* (2014), striding down a red carpet under a set of crowns. The soundtrack is Gary Byrd's 1983 song “The Crown”: “I wear the crown, you wear the crown, we all wear the crown.” The student gathers the group for the elevator ride back to street level. She invites us to think about roots and history, linking her background from New York to the Dominican Republic.

Outside the exhibition, the girl's father and brothers thank her and congratulate her on her knowledge, skills, and ability to lead such an enjoyable presentation on art, something they do not “know much

about.” The father is impressed by her commitment to the program, laments not having had such educational opportunities when he was growing up, and declares how proud he is of her.

The joyful family moment is contagious, but as the educator leading the program and as NLE’s first director of education, I wonder if this conversation could be more than a starting point, and if it could, from there, delve into the very questioning of structural patterns, cultural perceptions, and the way art is not only taught but incorporated into everyday lives.

I found teen-led tours such as this one to be profound experiences, reshaping my vision for what could be a powerful new approach to arts education. *What if* became a kind of mantra for me. *What if* alongside exhibitions of professional artists, we were to place artworks created by teens, selected by other teens, thereby empowering youth who never thought that a place might be available for them in anything that might be called art? *What if* those teens could then be trained to share their own ideas about the art with visitors as they led them through an exhibition of their peers? Such an approach could be at once radical, perplexing, ingenious, fun, and *real*.

In what follows, I will aim to share the evolution of our new approach to education. **It was an approach that emotionally, physically, and mentally surprised and welcomed participants; that challenged hegemonic discourses and politics; that questioned the authority of teacher, artist, curator, viewer, and instructor in favor of participation by as many people as possible and generated diverse, complex, and ultimately richer meanings of the world we share.**

We strove to welcome and encourage this process, its possibilities and unpredictable outcomes, through movement, play, imagination, interpretation, interaction with the environment, memory, conversation, and cross-disciplinary art practices that would provoke the mind and the senses. The shaping of these actions was also part of a *pedagogy in the making*—open to error, flexible, and experimental—and led to such programs as No Longer Bored for families and school and after-school groups, and Y.Dot and Teens Curate Teens (TCT) for teens aged fourteen to seventeen.

Although from its inception NLE had an interest in exploring how to involve younger participants, the actual call for youth programs came directly from visitors themselves. In the summer of 2010, NLE opened an exhibition in East Harlem called *Weaving In & Out* that took place in the large, empty commercial space of a newly built mixed-income apartment building at the corner of East 124th Street and First Avenue. The building, self-consciously called Tapestry, was surrounded

by low-income housing and New York City Housing Authority buildings with a mostly Latinx population. Through our research, we learned that area residents frequently emphasized their separate identity from that of Central or West Harlem, so “don’t confuse us.” Our exhibition took this complexity as a point of departure. We met with local artists, neighbors, and institutions in order to create and present artworks and programs

that would encourage conversations on local culture, identity, displacement and transport, climate change, and urban living conditions.

The show became a popular destination for groups from summer camps and a haven for children who did not have any other summer plans or spaces in which to gather. They enjoyed



**A group from the summer program of El Faro Beacon Community Center in Harlem entering Lina Puerta’s sculpture *Arbol*, 2007, in *Weaving in & Out*, vacant storefront, East Harlem, 2010. The exhibition and the requests from local camps for tours and programs marked the beginning of NLE’s collaborations with neighborhood youth development organizations. Photograph by Jodie Di Napoli**

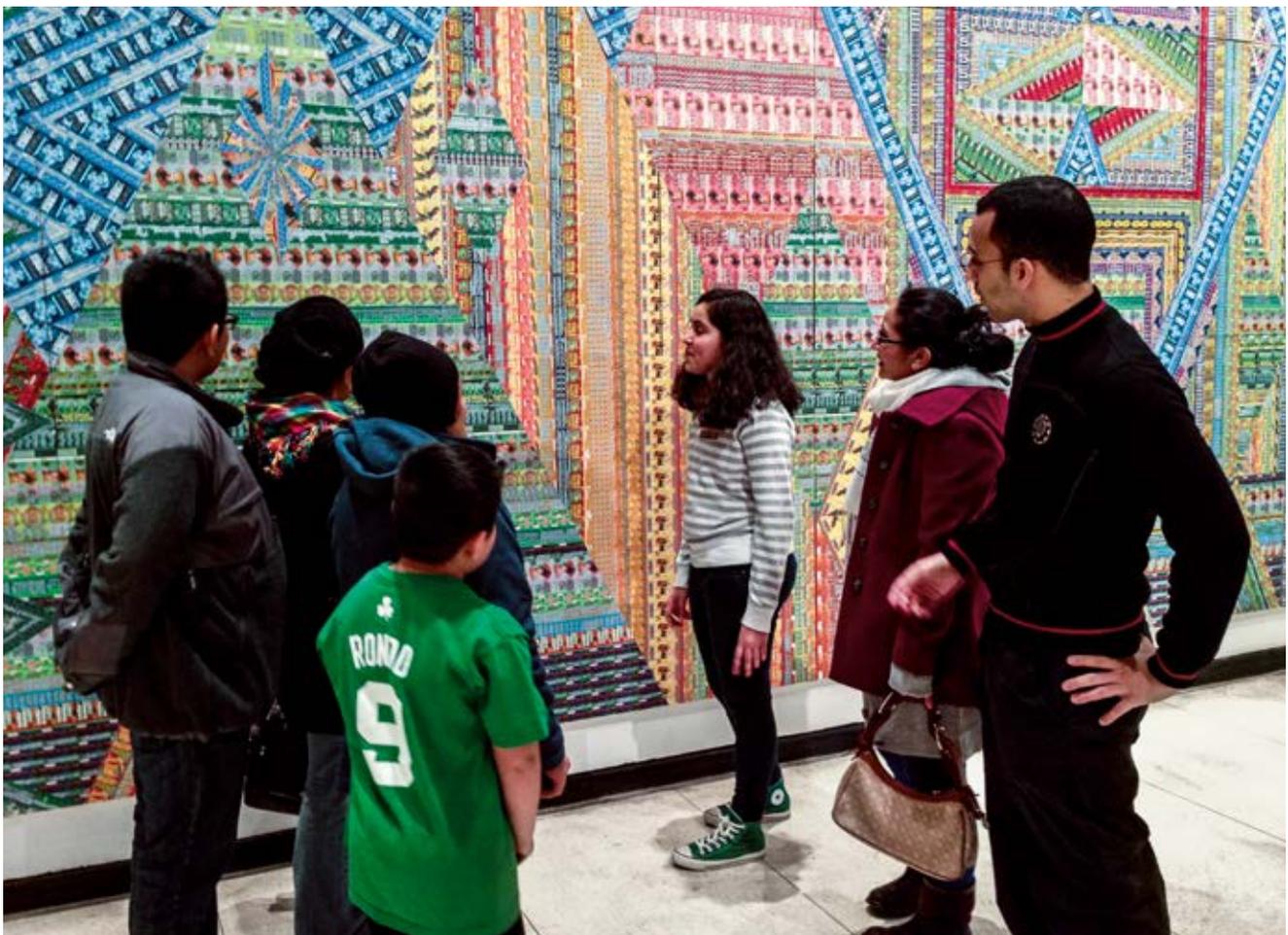
sitting in Olek’s *Crocheted Grapefruit* installation while listening to the reggaeton on the jukebox that was part of Carolina Caycedo’s work, *Solo Under* (2005–06); they even self-organized and took turns hiding inside Lina Puerta’s sensory piece *Arbol*. A twenty-four-hour Drawathon organized by neighborhood artist Manny Vega, which was telecast in Puerto Rico, brought people from all around the neighborhood and their activities poured out from the space and out on the sidewalks. Kids came back with their families the next day to continue drawing, so the materials were brought out again, leading us to set aside a drawing corner for the rest of the run of the exhibition. This art corner, filled with materials for free exploration, often supplied in future exhibitions by Materials for the Arts, became a feature of all NLE exhibitions. I am particularly indebted to Linda White, an educator based in the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, for fostering our development of this children’s artistic playground.

*Weaving In & Out* was a milestone in the development of our educational practices committed to a process developed through listening, negotiation, openness, and flexibility. I remember a group of teenage girls posing proudly in front of Mequitta Ahuja’s 2009 paint-

ing *Perch*. They were happily surprised to learn it was a self-portrait, described by the artist on the label text as an Amazonian-type woman striding through nature and transcending the archetype of *the rescuing prince*. Another teenage girl, who had watched the exhibition installation process, mentioned how impressed she was to see a woman using the powerful building tools typically used by men in construction. She was referring to Marela Zacarías's lengthy creation process for her large mural sculpture *Rebosando* (2010), which could be viewed through the display windows of the exhibition space weeks before the exhibition opened. We had not considered the artist's installation process as a performative action, but the comments of this young girl thoughtfully wove it into the exhibition's impact, the ongoing building and shaping of its narrative addressing issues of gender, power, and race.

After *Weaving In & Out*, the NLE team felt that education needed its own dedicated leader within the organization, which would allow us to make each exhibition a vehicle for learning (for ourselves as well). By fall 2010, NLE had shaped an education team that included an education manager, interns, and myself. The contributions of members of this team

**Youth docent Isabelle Montesinos leading family members and friends on a tour of *How Much Do I Owe You?*, Clock Tower building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, 2012. Here she discusses *Ghost of a Dream's The Price of Happiness*, 2012, made from discarded lottery tickets. The first in her family to attend college, today Isabelle works as the development assistant at the Queens Museum. Photograph by Jodie Di Napoli**



such as Julie Bell, Anna Harsanyi, and Ayana Hosten were essential to the design, development, and success of NLE's education programs. The team worked very closely on four phases of each exhibition: research and conceptual frames, engagement and collaborations, program and educational materials design and development, and ongoing evaluation.



**Children and their families build imaginary cities with sugar cubes as part of Brendan Jamison and Mark Revels's interactive installation *Sugar Metropolis*, 2014, in *If You Build It*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014. Working with 250,000 sugar cubes, the artists and visitors created an imaginary city of the future in which art and the collaboration of many hands and visions create and maintain community. Such family days of NLE's No Longer Bored program opened a space for connection between the exhibition and area families. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

As part of the extensive research that initiated each project, the education team approached local schools and nonprofit, youth-focused organizations and met with young professionals, families, teachers, and school principals. We invited them to participate in the exhibition process and welcomed their ideas. These encounters helped identify community interests and needs and they quickly showed results. School groups were soon booked most

weekdays during the run of an exhibition, and our summer exhibitions became hubs for visitors from summer day camps. On weekdays children and other special groups (neighborhood mothers or residents of seniors' homes) filled the morning time, while afternoons belonged to teens taking part in Y.Dot and Teens Curate Teens. Weekends brought all types of visitors to the various NLE programs, often with several groups attending the multiple programs that might be being hosted in different parts of the exhibition site and outdoors.

No Longer Bored, a program that launched in fall 2010 for children and their families, school groups, and after-school groups, offered tours of the exhibitions, artist-led workshops, games, and self-led intuitive activities. While No Longer Bored used exhibition space for intergenerational fun, our Family Days presented a much-needed resource given the significant reductions in art programs in public schools. Above all, No Longer Bored provided fun, creative, and local cultural gathering opportunities that fostered the relationships between cultural spaces and families and showed how both could work with and around the education system beyond school walls.

For schools, we encouraged students to use their route to the show as a part of the visit, to notice what they saw, heard, or even smelled as they walked through their neighborhoods and to always be on the look out for discovery. In the case of the 2012 project at the Andrew Freedman Home on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, many

students had grown up wondering what the old mansion was, cut off from the public by large iron fences. Inside the exhibition, they were invited to explore and question the existence of that space and build up their own versions of Andrew Freedman and his Home (a refuge for formerly rich elderly people who had fallen on hard times) from the perspective of the present. We also encouraged speculation on the future of the space, and many asked that the home's garden stay open and accessible for recreation. This response arose during a No Longer Bored Family Day, featuring an Easter egg hunt in the garden. More than eight hundred children showed up, far more than we had predicted—or could handle, given the number of eggs on hand! Many children and adults expressed a desire for the massive structure to become a space for arts and culture—and indeed, the popularity and lines for the exhibition and programs convinced the Home's director, Walter Puryear, to pursue his own desire to transform the Home into a cultural venue for exhibitions and artists' studios and a training ground for youth in hospitality and communications.

These programs would soon be seen as providing a valuable additional tool for teachers to motivate students in cross-content learning. The site-responsive approach helped teachers reshape curriculum according to local realities and opportunities. As a consequence, teachers drew connections between class subjects, their students' neighborhood, and topics raised during the visit to the show. The exhibition in Sugar Hill, Harlem, *If You Build It*, juxtaposed works representing historical figures—W. E. B. Dubois, for example, in the pose of Auguste Rodin's *Thinker*—in Radcliffe Bailey's *Pensive* (2013) with images of men who had been stopped by the police under the notorious stop-and-frisk policy on the streets outside the exhibition in *Stop* (2013) by Dread Scott. Youth and school tours continually generated new ideas and responses to the art that the teachers subsequently inserted into their own curriculums and that summer youth leaders wove into conversations, often in dialogue with NLE.

Our interest in exploring the NLE-school relationship led to a yearlong pilot program for students in grades six through eight, which

***Life*, an installation created by teens from Harlem School of the Arts, for *Rose from the Concrete*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014, curated by participants in the Teens Curate Teens program. From over a hundred submissions, the teen curators selected twenty-three individual and collective works involving sixty-five young artists. Photograph by Brian Hatton**



we co-taught with the art teachers from the Community Health Academy of the Heights and the after-school program Community League of the Heights, both in Sugar Hill. The results of this collaboration opened a discussion on the need for interdisciplinary spaces at the margins of learning institutions, like the ones that NLE was able to create—in the words of educator and artist Elizabeth Ellsworth, “anomalous places of learning: peculiar, irregular, abnormal, or difficult to classify.”<sup>2</sup> The experience was illuminating as an effort to articulate and better understand NLE’s role in the fields of education and youth development in the city.

We encouraged visitors to create their own pathways through the exhibitions and also to join in conversations with other visitors and NLE team members. To this end, NLE provided self-guiding materials such as scavenger hunt booklets for each project. Visitors to *If You Build It* received Sugar Hill fans that could be used in the show—they were popular during the warm summer months! Materials such as these arose from the Visual Thinking Strategy methodology I created after attending a training module presented by the organization CALTA21 (Cultural and Literacies through Art for the 21st Century), which encourages arts groups to actively engage with immigrant community members. A particular focus of NLE’s strategy



**Examples of the self-guided scavenger hunt booklets produced for each exhibition. Design by Jodie Di Napoli**

was to spark conversations with adults whose primary language was Spanish: a conversation in one’s mother tongue opens channels for a deeper and more personal experience. (Being Spanish was very important for me when relating to different Latino communities, and Latino or Latin American artists. I am also quite fluent in French, which allowed me to interact with African communities while working in the Bronx. I thrive on the relational power of language.)

I wanted to learn more about the role that the arts could play in youth development and about progressive education more broadly. In my efforts to effectively lead by blending theory and practice, I attended training at the Youth Development Institute and the Partnership for Afterschool Education, attended events organized by the New York Collective of Radical Educators and the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and took part in groups like the Cultural Institutions Teen Programs Group and the New York City Museum Education Roundtable (where I served as a board member in 2015). I also pursued a master’s degree in Leadership in Museum Education at Bank Street College of Education,

using my experience at NLE as a practical case for analysis and experimentation. Much of what we were able to achieve in NLE's education programs, especially our initiatives for teens, stemmed from these experiences and contacts. In addition, NLE's teen programs benefited from key relationships with The Lamp's Media Literacy program, which encouraged young people to analyze media with a



**Children from the Harlem Children's Zone interact with Dread Scott's video installation *Stop*, 2012, in *If You Build It*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014. Conversations during and after the visit to the show enabled the participants to share their and their families' experiences of being stopped as part of an active stop-and-frisk police policy in their neighborhood**

(Y.Dot), a twelve-week training and professional experience for participants aged fourteen to seventeen, brought together teens from all over the city interested in connecting with art and in presenting and discussing their own thoughts on art's role in society. Activities included field trips to artists' studios and cultural spaces, media literacy workshops, and the design and presentation of their own inquiry-based visits to NLE exhibitions. For some, this paid internship was their first job in the arts—or their first job ever. The program first took place in conjunction with NLE's 2011 exhibition *About Face* on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. ArtsConnection, an organization that partners with high schools in its Teen Reviewers and Critics program, shared the open call to teens on its mailing list, and most participants came from responses to this call. As

critical eye; ArtsConnection's Teen Reviewers and Critics workshops and its Student Art Program; Museum Teen Summit; mentorship support from the Youth Development Institute; and strong working relationships with art teachers like Nick Kozak (who has contributed a chapter to this book) and museum teen programs.

### **A Closer Look at NLE's Teen Programs**

The Youth Docent Program

**After touring the exhibition, young visitors meet with the artist to discuss their responses to the work. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

the program evolved, we conducted outreach in high schools, where we were able to present in classes.

Our partnership with The Lamp and their focus on media literacy for youth shaped Y.Dot's critical approach to visual analysis as a means to combat false or misleading narratives perpetuated by culture and media. The first media literacy session aimed at making the participants aware of their public voice online and offline as docents in the exhibition. We practiced a form of dialogic teaching, based on a dual process of shaping and being shaped through culture.

Most participants in the five years of Y.Dot lived in the neighborhood or borough of the exhibition site, giving them the sense that they had a stake in the space. From surveys and interviews conducted by NLE staff, we learned that the chief takeaways for participating students were enjoyment, confidence-building, learning about and through art, paid work experience, meeting creative people, and exposure to new ideas.

I was curious to learn about the adults' perspective on the tours, too, so we asked attendees if the teens' views on the art helped them learn something new, if they often or ever conversed with peers about art or social or political issues, and if they had enjoyed themselves. Most adults and teens who attended the tours explained how surprised they were to have learned something new, to have spoken to someone young about art (and much more), and—to me the most interesting points—that they were fascinated with the docents' own unique views and how they presented them through a visual and physical experience. The success of the program was also based on generating an intergenerational conversation on current issues and allowing the exhibition to be a space for public dialogue. As I followed these tours, I saw both growth and courage, as the young people gave their personal perspectives about the art and its relevance to different aspects of their lives.

Teens Curate Teens (TCT), a program codesigned and led by ArtsConnection, was, as its name suggests, a teen-focused exhibition process in which student artworks were selected and curated by their peers. The artist-instructors from ArtConnection's Student Art Program, Amanda Guest, Nathan Sensel, and Diane Exavier, together with NLE chief curator Manon Slome and myself, developed a ten-week program that encouraged students to curate an exhibition inspired by the themes of the signature NLE exhibition. Sharing a joint opening, the teens and their families basked in the recognition their work received. This joint initiative brought three shows to fruition during my tenure: *Specie* (Queens, 2012), *Rose from the Concrete* (Sugar Hill, 2014), and *Future Fix* (the Bronx, 2015). For each show, the student curators reviewed the many submissions, selecting works and by extension rejecting others,

which brought the pressures of a real-life professional experience to the teen participants. As curators, they then hosted conversations on the show's theme and developed accompanying cultural programs in a similar manner to the NLE exhibition. Although teen programs were already popular in museums, few focused on students creating, curating, and presenting their work alongside art by adult professional artists.

Education became integral to each of the NLE exhibitions, helping both inspire and give voice and legitimacy to personal interpretations of the artworks. We came to understand knowledge as a living, breathing,

emotional, physical, critical, social, and contextual construction, made possible through experiences and artifacts that are in constant transformation and use. The development of NLE's education initiatives embodied the challenging idea that nomadic contemporary art projects could create lasting cultural and individual



change. Furthermore, the knowledge generated by these groups proved to be crucial not only to the exhibition process but also to the impact of NLE beyond its immediate activities by giving young people space to think about and act on social engagement through the intersections of art and other areas of human endeavor. Additionally, the practice moved from the locality of a site tied to exhibition dates to a yearlong, citywide initiative in the creation of the Youth Advisory Council. This occurred soon after I moved from the position of director of education to a seat on NLE's advisory board. I was very excited to remain part of a conversation that shifted the NLE curatorial model so boldly in response to the educational implications of its practice—as can be seen in the following chapter by my successor, Mica Le John.

**Teen curator John Deloatch leads a group of visitors through *Rose from the Concrete*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014, and discusses *Sugar Cube: A Sweet Life*, a site-specific work created by students from the Bronx School of the Visual Arts with the mentorship of their teacher, Linda Stern. Photograph by Brian Hatton**

1. Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?" (1973), in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1997), 210.

2. Elizabeth Ann Ellsworth, *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge and Taylor & Francis, 2005), 5.

**Ezra Wube**

It is with gratitude and appreciation that I speak about No Longer Empty.

Over the years, I was fortunate enough to be commissioned by NLE and to participate in several of their exhibitions for which I produced two new works that were crucial for my artistic development. These projects for NLE helped me expand from a purely studio practice into community participatory projects. *Words of Wisdom*, an animation short, was created through community engagement in Jamaica, Queens. Participants contributed to the piece by drawing, painting, collaging, and deciding which scene to develop next. This unique project could never have come to life without NLE connecting me to diverse segments of the community. *Flatbushtopia*, another animated short, was a diorama-like portrait of the Flatbush neighborhood that surrounds the Kings County Hospital. The film was developed by working with local participants over a two month period. NLE's structures and dedication to helping artists realize their dreams provided a perfect platform to connect art to the everyday person.



Ezra Wube, *Flatbushtopia/ A Place to Be*, 2017. Mixed-media installation and animated short created by the artist in collaboration

with local residents who contributed their memories, desires, and objects to the compilation of the piece. Photograph by the artist



# Curiosity, Creativity, Community

## Youth Programming at NLE

Mica Le John

NLE Director of Education (2017–20)

**Many artists and educators came in to talk about their work and it always amazed me that one could have a successful and happy life doing the things that they loved . . .**

—Kalia Asencio, NLE youth program alumni, age seventeen

I became an arts educator because I had personally experienced how impactful arts education could be. I had attended arts-focused elementary and high schools, so I knew the powerful difference that creative and collaborative environments can make in the lives of young people. I deeply believe that fostering a nurturing learning space, grounded in the lives of participants, is essential to creating a dynamic educational experience for all involved. In spring 2017, I was elated to join the No Longer Empty (NLE) team, where my colleagues' beliefs and approach to education aligned with my own. For the next two-and-a-half years, I embarked on a journey of learning alongside a diverse group of fourteen- to nineteen-year-olds from across New York City. I dove head first into developing educational programming that would continue NLE's legacy of co-creating spaces of exploration and experimentation with intergenerational audiences across the city.

This chapter will offer a view into the initial program that brought me to NLE, the process of collaborative redesign that our youth programming underwent when I assumed responsibility for the education department, how our partnerships were structured, the impact of our programming on the young people taking part, and how the programming evolved both experientially and theoretically over the years.

My tenure at NLE began during a time of internal growth for the organization as my colleagues had spent the previous exhibition cycles creatively interrogating the relationship between the curatorial and educational sectors of the NLE practice. The exhibition *Jameco Exchange* (Jamaica, Queens, 2016) had sparked a new type of expansive collaboration that they wished to carry into future programs—one in which programming was co-curated with the students and educators and where exhibiting artists would work directly with youth. Additionally, our new model enabled us to move toward the exploration of “space-holding” and away from “place-making,” a term which implies that no place pre-exists in and around the selected site. This new approach grounded all our work first and foremost in the experiences of the community, and

**Ezra Wube placing the final elements of *Flatbushtopia/A Place to Be*, 2017. In *ART ZONE CG-91*, Kings County Hospital Campus, Brooklyn, July 2017. Photograph by Josh Geyer**

enabled NLE's exhibitions and programming to expand and to reflect and incorporate the site's communities in new ways.

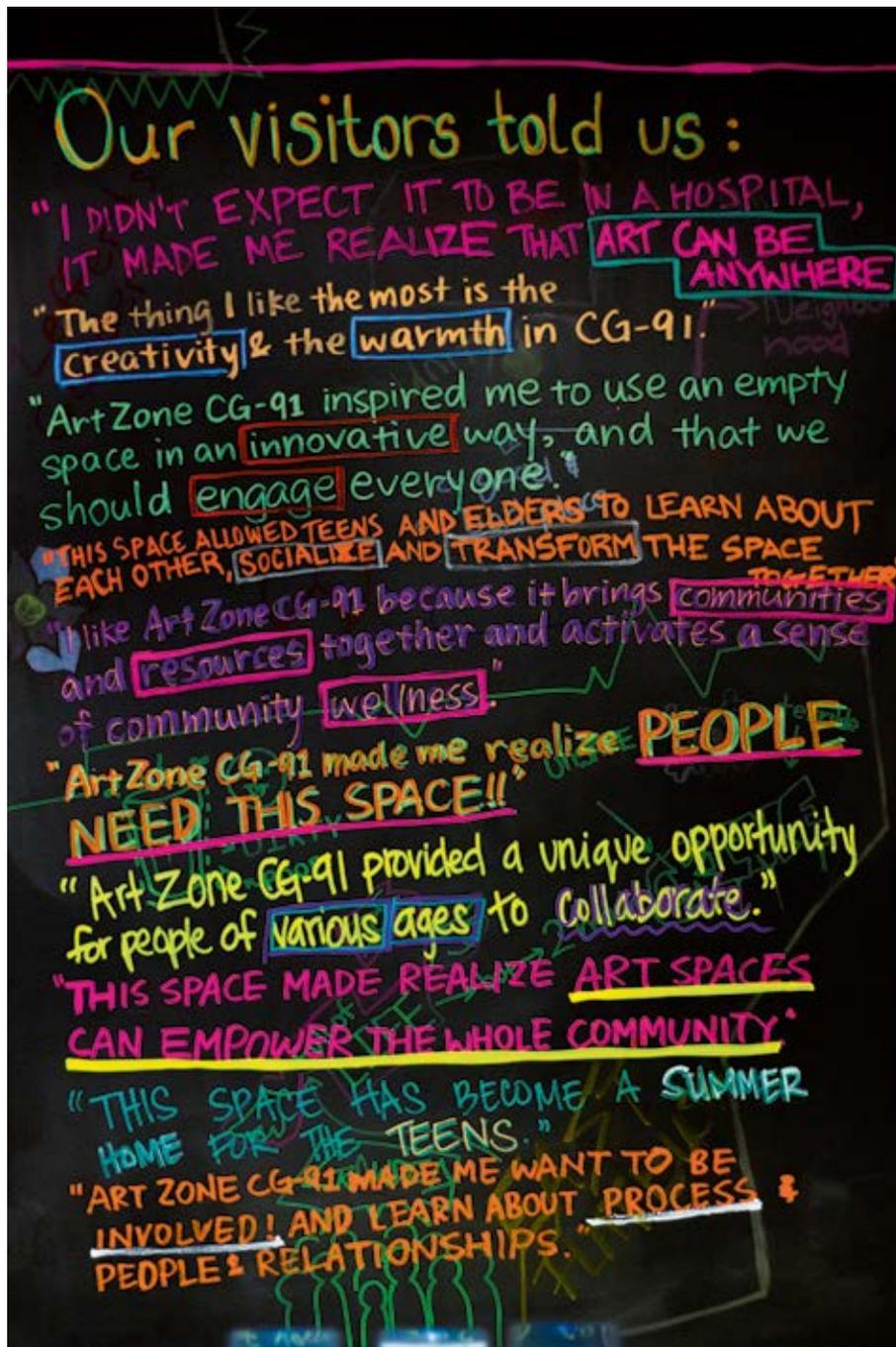
The first program I worked on, together with NLE curator Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, was ART ZONE CG-91: Community Art and Data Lab. ART ZONE was an experimental exhibition and community think tank sited in an unused emergency waiting room at Kings County Hospital (H+H/Kings County) in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Invited by the hospital's administration and working closely with Carlos Rodriguez Perez, senior associate director of the H+H/Kings County Wellness and Recovery Division, the NLE team began to explore the intertwined histories of East Flatbush and the hospital, as well as potential new relationships that could be built and nurtured. ART ZONE's exhibition component, curated by NLE's curatorial and education teams under the leadership of Sara Guerrero-Mostafa, featured work by the artists Shervone Neckles and Ezra Wube that reflected stories of the community and the future they wanted to see for their neighborhood. In parallel, local high school students (fourteen to nineteen years old) and elders (sixty years old and up) participated in an intergenerational program that explored community well-being and its relationship with the arts.

Throughout this one-month intensive, which took place in early summer 2017, participants interviewed exhibition visitors, pedestrians, and business owners in the surrounding areas to gather information about demographics—such as age, ethnicity, and residency in the community—as well as the ideas and desires local people had for linking healthcare and creative practices in East Flatbush. Under the design direction of Manolo Ampudia, social designer in residence, that information was then consolidated into a visual, interactive installation that relayed the community's many stories. Visitors and the ART ZONE creators were then in daily dialogue about the role art could play in their community. Visitors interacted with the exhibition in many different ways: local residents popped in for docent tours given by ART ZONE participants; youth groups came for art-making workshops; and hospital staff dropped by on their lunch breaks to see the exciting space their colleagues had told them about (and to get a welcome break from the stresses of hospital life). No matter the group, ART ZONE became a place of healing and conversation, encouraging all who entered to learn something new about the community and its countless stakeholders.

Following ART ZONE, NLE began to pursue a new path for our public engagement initiatives. With Raquel de Anda joining the organization to run public engagement strategy, I became director of the education department, with a focus on creating a new suite of youth opportunities. In this new role, I underwent a process of reflection and analysis to determine

**A section of the installation created by ART ZONE participants based on survey responses from community members. In ART ZONE CG-91, Kings County Hospital Campus, Brooklyn, July 2017. Photograph by Josh Geyer**

**Participants collaborating on mandalas in the ART ZONE space. Photograph by Josh Geyer**



what direction our programs should take and to create a cohesive philosophy for the education department as a whole. As in NLE's larger model, this process began with gathering input from stakeholders—previous NLE education staff, my peers at various NYC organizations, the Youth Development Institute, NLE's youth alumni, and so forth. Analyzing this information enabled me to create a strategic plan that articulated departmental values and program goals. Simultaneously, our education and curatorial teams worked together to build critical pedagogy and educational philosophy into every element of our processes and practices. For this we drew heavily from the work of the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire and his influential 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,<sup>1</sup> which posits that teaching and learning are intertwined with social justice, democracy, and freedom. Freire's work was foundational in building NLE's new programming and played a central role in defining impact measurement frameworks.

These ideas inspired the creation of NLE's education matrix, a relational model that enabled youth joining and returning to our programs to build the scaffolding for their personal and professional growth as creative people. As members, facilitators, or peer leaders, the matrix provided the opportunity for the youth to create and adapt programming that could be tailored to their needs and goals and, most importantly, to turn the student into the teacher. Each program node in the matrix furthered NLE's expansive model for youth education offerings, so that new pedagogical practices, reciprocal feedback loops, and opportunities for continued youth leadership could play a role in the organization's ongoing evolution.

Part of the new program development also involved exploring ways we could incorporate more intersectional discussions of race and feminist practices into our pedagogical models. Our team of teaching artists, youth workers, and curators collaborated with community leaders, artists, curators, and other arts professionals over the next two years to provide opportunities for the youth to examine art and the world at large through a new lens.

We also wanted to offer young people more opportunities to see futures for themselves as arts workers. Visibility and representation play large roles in identity creation and affirmation, and our programming strove to find new ways to center the cultural heritages of the teenagers taking part, many of whom identified as Black, African American, or Latinx.

Building more robust feedback loops with the young people who took part in NLE's programs enabled us to create new youth-led initiatives rooted in the teens' lives and experiences. In the long run, by centering their voices we created collaborative and responsive programs that led to a higher impact on both the youth and the NLE team.

Recruiting participants for NLE teen programs involved active outreach to multiple youth organizations and individuals across New York City, among them youth groups, arts organizations, educator communities, and social media campaigns. The subsequent selection process was rigorous and started with an application that was then evaluated by a diverse group of professionals in NLE’s community, including artists, members of NLE’s advisory board, and our education and curatorial staff.

Leadership opportunities formed the foundation of all our youth programming; peer-leader training and ongoing mentorship enabled youth to continue to engage with NLE’s programs in a more progressive way. First joining as a participant, a teen learned the foundations of community-centric and site-specific exhibitions, social practice, public art, and curating. Teen alumni could then apply to become paid peer leaders in the next program cycle, learning how to support other teens and run the programs alongside our education staff. Program length varied, from one-month intensives to school-year-long programs.

NLE’s new programs demonstrated how significant youth-led initiatives could be both for participants and, through feedback, for the adults supporting them. Our findings over the two-and-a-half-year cycle demonstrated that young people who completed these programs showed strong evidence of improvement across our entire learner outcome targets. These learning targets spanned a range of personal and professional skills, including “soft skills” such as teamwork, communication, and time management, and connection to the arts as a form of self-expression and a medium for change.

A powerful example of this youth-inspired expansion began in 2018 with NLE’s Young Exhibition Makers (Y.Ex) program, which was an



**Youth Action Council members exploring an exhibition at the Drawing Center, Manhattan, April 2019. Photograph by Sinaia Jones**

expansion of the Teens Curate Teens program described in the previous chapter. Developed in partnership with the Kings Against Violence Initiative, a youth-serving, anti-violence organization founded by H+H/Kings County emergency physician Rob Gore, Y.Ex became a seven-week program in

which youth aged fourteen to nineteen were paid while being trained in all elements of exhibition making, from curating and installation to docent tours and management.

After ART ZONE and Y.Ex 2018, our youth expressed a desire to engage even more with public art and social justice, so NLE created the Youth Action Council (YAC). The YAC youth development program, a yearlong program coinciding with the school year, allowed NYC teens to connect with artists, scholars, and activists to explore more deeply the

**Ashanti Strong and Kalia Asencio (holding green banner) at the Decolonize This Place action, American Museum of Natural History, October 2018. Photograph by Mica Le John**



**Members of the 2018 Young Exhibition Makers cohort with the installation *Complexions*, which explored Black youth identity, as part of the exhibition *A Story to Be Told*, Kings County Hospital Campus, Brooklyn, 2018. From left: Yewande Ogunleye, Emely Evangelista, Sarahfina Cunningham, and Nerma La France. Photograph by Julia Hickey**

intersection of the arts and social justice. In 2018, we launched a pilot year of YAC with a small group of NLE education department alumni to explore what it would mean for our youth to be active members of the arts community, of a neighborhood, and of the city as a whole. Our team worked hard to create a new model for partnerships that married program support, co-learning opportunities with other youth organizations, and unprecedented avenues for youth to gain access and exposure to interdisciplinary groups of artists, academics, and community leaders.

NLE's 2018-19 YAC cohort had an especially active year. The eleven young people in this group—all from different high schools, and mostly Brooklyn or Queens based—were able to interact and collaborate on an extensive variety of workshops, events, and programs. They participated in a poster-making workshop with artists from New York City's Decolonize This Place movement and then took part in their first

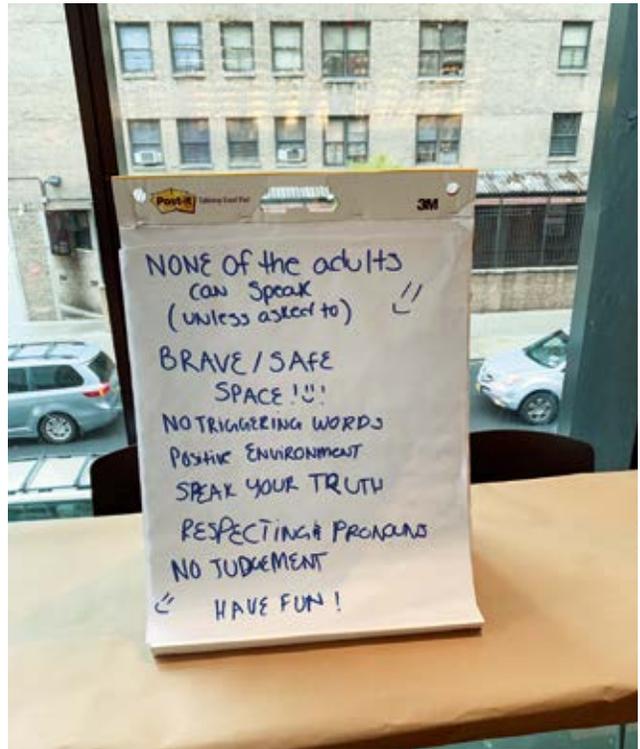


ever protest, an October 2018 Anti-Columbus Day action at the American Museum of Natural History on Indigenous People’s Day. The YAC group organized and co-hosted two public events for New York City youth: “ArtFuture NYC: Youth Alliance” with the Joan Mitchell Foundation, Brooklyn Museum, and Parsons Scholars, and “Youth Voices” with Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY and El Puente. With support from Cuchifritos Gallery, they also organized and hosted a teen-only dinner party at Essex Market on Manhattan’s Lower East Side to engage NYC youth in creative solution building for social issues about which they were passionate. YAC demonstrated the power that partnerships can have in fostering communities of young people who would not otherwise meet. This was especially evident at the youth-only dinner, where they were the only ones allowed to speak. In the course of this, independently facilitated group conversations grew into heated debates around themes the teens wanted to explore, such as gender and sexuality, feminism, and violence.

Press coverage can help amplify positive visibility that teenagers rarely receive, and seeing their efforts in print is both exciting for the teens and an indicator that their work is valued. *The Brooklyn Rail’s* coverage (June 2, 2018) of the youth-curated *A Story to Be Told*, the Y.Ex 2018 exhibition at H+H/Kings County, captured this dynamic:

**The curators spoke repeatedly [during a public panel discussion] about feeling unheard. . . . But we might see in programs like Y.Ex . . . that somebody is listening. And that the people who are listening are finding, in these voices, the thing they might have been looking for everywhere else—a recognition of their angst and desire to celebrate the fact that, despite everything, we’re still here.**

Being seen and respected helps young people build confidence and a sense of independence. Agency and self-efficacy are core elements of youth development, and NLE’s model ensured that they were built into even the most minute of program logistics. Just as the youth’s stipends were often their first paycheck, our field trips were likewise the first time many of the teens had ever left their borough or taken the subway without their parents. With the expansion of their sense of the city, New York City took on a new role in their minds as a place for exploration and discovery; stepping outside their comfort zone ignited a new sense of curiosity tied to both time and place. Witnesses to these coming-of-age moments, NLE education staff created as many ways as possible to enable participants to learn, experiment, and experience new things. Kalia Asencio, a five-time NLE youth program alumni, expressed the impact this had on her:



NLE’s 2018–19 Youth Action Council cohort at Essex Market moments before their teen-only dinner party, June 2019. Pictured here: Sarahfina Cunningham, Marvens Volcimus, Justice Hamlin-James, Mariel Martinez, Jontay Beckles, Jade Villegas, Ashanti Strong, Kalia Asencio, and education director Mica Le John. Photograph by Sinaia Jones

Ground rules set by Youth Action Council and guests, Essex Market, June 2019. Photograph by Mica Le John

On my journey in NLE’s programs, I learned a lot about art and activism, and I learned a lot about myself and my identity. Here, I learned to question my environment and the social structures around me . . . Meeting in different locations around New York gave me a real knowledge of my city. The programs showed that life isn’t a linear path and there are multiple alternatives. Many artists and educators came in to talk about their work and it always amazed me that one could have a successful and happy life doing the things that they loved . . . It was very cool to see how these talented people got to where they were without a “typical” career path.

One interesting challenge during this time was reconciling traditional quantitative evaluation measures (which inherently simplify experience) with the qualitative stories that came from NLE’s exhibitions and programming in order to shape a narrative about NLE’s teen programs for our funders. With support from the educator and writer Abby Remer, we were able to find a balance—the impact targets we defined made it possible for us to gather quantitative data on impact from the teens through evaluative surveys while at the same time keeping the focus on their stories and experiences. This method of reporting worked well for us; it brought in new private donors and foundation and city funding to support the opportunities offered in NLE’s Education Matrix.

Part of the NLE model of dialogue and sharing of knowledge was the imperative that these new programs be accessible to and replicable

by those who might be inspired to adopt them for their own communities. One major part of this process was creating the 2018 and 2019 education reports *Teens, Amplified* and *Teens, United*, which gave an in-depth look at NLE's programs and were shared widely with our many partners.

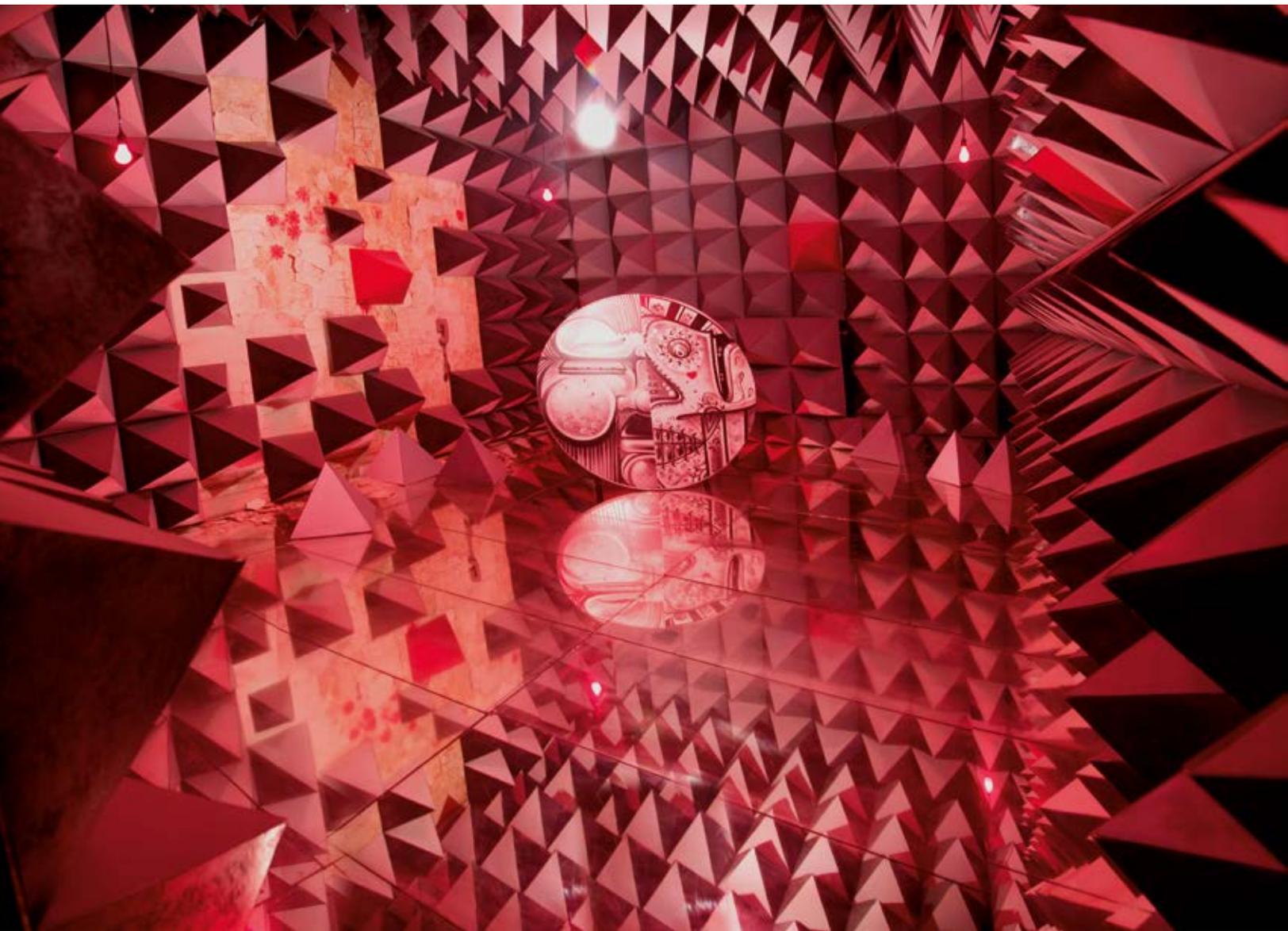
With regard to the replication of our model, I prefer an expanded definition that does not mean to duplicate but instead emphasizes creating a base that can then be edited, adapted, and shifted. In this way, programming and materials morph into something relevant and exciting for the community using or adapting the material—as we hope will be the case with this book. On my departure from the organization to launch my youth-oriented tech startup, Idoru, Laurabeth Lima took the helm and further developed NLE's teen programs. Unfortunately, COVID-19 soon followed, but she admirably created new models that enabled a youth-led response to the massive changes brought on by the pandemic. In this new phase, NLE adapted and expanded its site-driven work to the virtual realm, empowering young people to create digital spaces of exploration and healing.

When they are engaged in critical pedagogy, the roles of educator and student blur, enabling everyone involved to learn from each other. In my time at NLE, I saw not only the incredible impact our programs had on the youth who took part, but also the life-changing effect those young people had on our entire NLE team. This impact was also evident in their greater public engagement—in the course of my two-and-a-half years with the organization, NLE youth engaged more than 8,650 New Yorkers of all ages and from every borough. I am excited to see what the future of public art holds when created and curated by a generation that lives its life so publicly online, where the site and audience are not only physical but digital. We can already see the signals, from artists being able to reach international audiences in one viral share on social media to the ways in which new technologies enable artists to create impressive immersive experiences. This generation's creative practices are often collaborative and collaged; it will be fascinating to watch how this creates community change. With young people taking the reins in the coming years, I suspect the world will be flipped on its head—and I cannot wait to see it.



**Nilajah Batts and Janae Stanford greeting visitors at the Young Exhibition Makers' *InJustUs*, Kings County Hospital Campus, Brooklyn, June 2019. Photograph by Shannel Resto**

1. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in Portuguese in 1968 and subsequently translated and published in English in 1970. Freire's work has taken on especial urgency in recent years as the reality of permanent communities of the underprivileged has become a de facto reality of urban life.



## Teachable Moments

**Nick Kozak**

Artist Educator, Manhattan Hunter Science High School

My connection to No Longer Empty (NLE) manifested itself in many ways during the six years I was involved with the organization. My role was fluid and multifaceted, from an educational collaborator to an occasional art handler. No matter how I was helping NLE, though, these efforts were often tethered to the visual arts classroom where I teach at Manhattan Hunter Science High School, an early college public school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. My students come from every borough and every background, with the majority at or below the poverty line.

The daily atmosphere often feels like an international hub, as many students speak a language other than English at home. As the sole art educator at Manhattan Hunter Science, my goal is for my students to develop a strong and wide-ranging appreciation for the arts. Each year, I have the joy of assisting a few seniors with art portfolios, and a couple of dozen former students have pursued careers in the arts—some in art history, some as professional painters or photographers, and some in other art-related areas. Most often, though, students who first arrive in my classroom in ninth grade have had very limited experiences with art in our city’s museums and galleries. New York is one of the art capitals of the world, but for the most part these kids have not been exposed to cultural institutions. Those who have ventured forth remarked on feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome in these spaces—that is, before they take my class. Each year I reinvent my curriculum to include current local exhibitions in our city so I can effectively teach my kids how to navigate art spaces. Typically, my students and I will spend a month or so learning about an exhibition and the artists’ work, and then we’ll all go see the show in person. Designing a new course every year is taxing but the freshness of a new curriculum and the excitement of the unknown keeps away the repetition with which far too many educators have to deal.

When I visited my first NLE exhibition, *This Side of Paradise*, at the Andrew Freedman Home in 2012, I was so moved by the work that I knew I had to integrate this project into my curriculum. Walking around I kept thinking, “My kids would love this show!” In fact, I recall immediately filing the paperwork the following day for a field trip and handing out permission slips . . . before even planning the unit. All of my students are encouraged to attend field trips, but, of course, usually some show more interest than others. I always strive to have as many as possible participate, since field trips are the bridge between standard classroom art projects and relevant pedagogy in the real world.

**How and Nosm, Reflections, 2012. Spray paint, mirror, cardboard, and lightbulbs. In *This Side of Paradise*, Andrew Freedman Home, the Bronx, 2012. The artist duo’s signature split-face emerges from the room’s center, one part life and one part death, illustrating well-justified concerns of mortality in an old-age home. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

What made this first 2012 NLE site visit (and all the subsequent ones) so special was that it was different from the traditional gallery settings the students had been visiting all year. I knew that several of my students lived nearby in the Bronx—one lived only a block from the Freedman Home. No matter how powerful a work of art is, when it is being shown in your own community there is an added sense of engagement, since the work lives and breathes in the same place as you do. I witnessed firsthand the power localized art can have, giving my students a sense of pride, empowerment, and understanding while on home turf. The exhibition showed them that, yes, art exists and thrives outside the white boxes and museums of midtown and lower Manhattan. Most of us know this to be true, of course, but for young people who may be disconnected from their local art scene, it's a revelation when they first discover it.

This sentiment pushed me to continue working with NLE for years after that first visit, collaborating with its education department and encouraging my students to take part in its youth programs. Despite all the various ways in which I connected with NLE and the wonderful people who worked there over the years, I think the most accurate description of my relationship to the organization would be as a convert. After seeing the amazing exhibitions they pulled off, I genuinely subscribe to the idea that idle urban spaces can and should be activated by local artists and open to the public.<sup>1</sup>

“Activate” may conjure ideas of site-specificity or restoration, but activation for me has always been related to the audiences that are invited to witness and/or to collaborate with a given work of art. My kids were always riveted by the way NLE exhibitions seemed to tiptoe just past what might seem possible to pull off. The seemingly impossible interventions and artworks left my students in a state of awe. Some particular works come to mind: Ghost of a Dream's *The Price of Happiness* in the 2012 exhibition *How Much Do I Owe You?*, the hypnotic and impossibly precise work of How and Nosm's installation *Reflections* (2012) in *This Side of Paradise* at the Andrew Freedman Home, and finally Abigail DeVille's immersive and haunting 2015 installation . . . *and justice for all?* in the basement of the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse for *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*.



**Participants in the Teens Curate Teens exhibition celebrate the installation of *Rose from the Concrete*, Sugar Hill, Harlem, 2014. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

These works (among many others from NLE exhibitions) had the ability to rewire the way we think about art, space, and community. After bringing students to NLE shows, I often had a feeling that part of them was being switched on for the first time—that is what “activate” means to me. After viewing how NLE transformed a disused site into a welcoming place to experience art and ideas, my students would then look for spaces in their neighborhoods that felt underused or abandoned to time, and see them for the potential of what could be—not simply what happened to be.

Giving young people access to artwork that is so visually captivating in their own neighborhoods is something special, and the choice to feature so many artists who live in New York, specifically within the borough where each exhibition took place, had a strong impact on the community response to NLE’s work. There was always a locally relevant context that augmented the conceptual strengths of the exhibition. On the field trips to NLE shows, we learned that there were always a few students who lived within walking distance of the site, and that they felt a certain pride in knowing that the whole class would be visiting their neighborhood. These experiences have inspired my own socially engaged art and educational practices, as I often choose to work in spaces that encourage viewers to think about their relationship with their neighborhoods and communities. My social sculpture *Citizens of Earth* (2015) prompted students to act as conversational ambassadors

**Abigail de Ville, . . . and justice for all?, 2015. Onsite construction debris, broken marble, branches, reclaimed wood, dead Christmas trees, heirlooms, TVs, computer monitors, phones, and oven. Installation for *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*, Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, the Bronx, 2015. Photograph by Whitney Browne**



and to encourage participants to speak about their family's immigration and ancestry stories. When we activated this work at the Queens Museum in the fall of 2017, students were prepared and eager to generate conversations on these topics. In 2018 we installed a small outdoor classroom in Inwood Hill Park, with the help of the Northern Manhattan Art Alliance and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, for a work called *Opposition Position*. For six months, students hosted educational interventions for neighbors who lived nearby. Both *Citizens of Earth* and *Opposition Position* interwove art and educational contexts. They were built on the idea that social critique needs to be accompanied by personal connections, so that viewers can find a connection between the concept at hand and their own lives. To put a finer point on it, my work wouldn't be the same without seeing how NLE drew in local artists who spoke about issues that were both accessible and relevant to the audiences that lived nearby. Melissa Calderón's remarkable work comes to mind, in particular two works that she exhibited at the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse that spoke of gentrification issues in her native borough. Calderón's *The Bronx River* and *South Bronx River Gold Rush* of 2015 were pieces that my Bronx students understood and connected with. The students discussed these works with their parents at the dinner table when they got home, for they were able to see their lives in their own borough represented imaginatively and creatively by a fellow resident, in an old and massive building that had been shut down and off limits for years.

Risks certainly arise when an organization does the kind of ambitious work that NLE did. In many ways, each exhibition's neighboring community is part of the context for each work of art that is exhibited. The stakes are much higher than for a show in a typical white-cube space, because there is a real responsibility to local stakeholders beyond the usual parameters of an exhibition. After the show closes, it is crucial to consider how local people (for example, my own students) will continue to perceive the site, as they will be walking past it long after the organization has departed. The real takeaway is that if you are borrowing the keys to a space in a community that is not yours, you owe it to that community to leave the space better than you found it. To create an exhibition in a community space is to recognize that the space and the people who live around it have important histories that must be seen and heard—and involved in, invested in, and advanced through the ideas being conveyed. At this point, however, it should be clear to all organizations and artists who work nomadically, as NLE did, that if the dialogues we wish to build involve radical reflection and critical thinking, then we need to have *everyone* on board, and this can only happen with an evolving approach that normalizes dissent while still maintaining inclusivity.



NLE team members put much of their time and efforts into generating free programming and professional opportunities for local residents. Through the Youth Docent Program (Y.Dot), my students had the opportunity to learn new skills, including how to talk about art in a personal, thoughtful, and informed manner. For years, NLE offered a unique possibility of engagement with the arts, particularly for those young people who lived close to the exhibition site. Y.Dot was a real opportunity for young people to develop and experiment with a professional involvement in the arts. Over the course of seven years, eight of my students worked closely with some of NLE's all-star educators: Jodie Di Napoli, Ayana Hosten, Ilk Yasha, and Mica Le John. While I cannot report on the specifics of their Y.Dot meetings, I can speak to what these students brought back into the classroom: purpose and joy. In the few months that students worked at their respective exhibition sites, they would return with exhilarating stories about meeting the artists and sharing ideas with visitors of all ages. Yet again, NLE had me rethinking what being an effective educator meant. A crucial ingredient in the teaching/learning experience of art is when a young person gains the confidence, after a period of study and reflection, to speak about a work of art. When the audience is their own neighbors, it has particular resonance. The NLE educational team nurtured the intellectual growth of my students, and for that I am eternally grateful. By involving students and

**Melissa Calderón, *The Bronx River*, 2015.  
Three panels; plywood  
and embroidery thread.  
Photograph by Ian  
Douglas**

# Kozak's checklist for teaching

The first step should and always will be:

## GO TO YOUR LOCAL ART SHOWS!

### Not enough art shows nearby??

Try to make friends or professional connections with artists/educators at a local college/university. Making sure you're on their email lists, follow them on social media, and pay attention to the names that frequently pop up. Reach out, introduce yourself, ask to meet for coffee or beer, and find a project that might be of mutual intellectual interest.

### Too many art shows nearby??

Avoid the big museums and focus on smaller galleries that cycle through shows a bit faster. Check their upcoming exhibition calendar to find artists who are working with themes that authentically connect to your curriculum and students in meaningful ways.

## Organizing your site visit (field trip)

### Non-profits vs for-profits?

Generally speaking, one of these tends to be more receptive to collaborations with students, though both are almost always down to host a field trip. When you're coordinating that trip, be sure you explicitly ask if they plan on taking photos of your group during your visit. It's shocking the number of art administrators who think that a school group in their space will look great on their social media pages.

### Collaboration verb

(ka - la - bor - AY - shun)

when two or more entities join together to produce something of mutual benefit and/or interest.

### Visiting an artist's studio!

If you really want to press your luck—ask if they can host a studio visit, or even a guest visit to your school. When students see an artist in person, it's always going to be fun, but there are some things to keep in mind:

**Bias.** People (including your students) tend to look for confirmation bias when meeting an artist. Some want to find out that artists are self-centered, pretentious, or even fake. It's easy for the pop culture renditions of artists to loom large in students' minds. Making it all the more important for your students to meet real live artists. Some tropes have truth, but complexity requires conversation to unravel and create understanding.

**Exchange.** For the best results, explain the project that students are currently working on. Hopefully your students are studying the themes and concepts that the artist works with and not just making miniature versions of the artist's work. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it does little in terms of teaching students how artists think, work, and process the world through their work.

## The most underrated question:

"Have you worked with kids before?"

In planning any collaboration with an artist(s), gallery, museum, or organization, this question is one that you MUST ask. On the surface, it's a way for you to gather some intel on their previous projects that might not be publicly available or documented. On the flip side, it gives your collaborators a chance to pitch themselves to you. After all, anyone who works with you and the amazing young people who inhabit your classroom should know what they're doing. For any collaboration to work there needs to be mutual interest. If they've never worked with kids before and have no interest beyond this exchange, it may help to know this so you can establish your expectations.

# with contemporary artists

## Is the artist local?

### Yes? Great. Keep going.

Keep researching, and try to track down all the local work they've made over the past few years. Cross reference their website, social media, and exhibition pages to find something that has happened in your city/town, or better yet, in your students' neighborhoods!

**No? Meh, that's alright.** If their work is strong enough to connect to your students, then keep going. But check in with your local museum to see if they've worked with this artist before. Ask what it was like, ask what they'd suggest. You don't have to take those suggestions, but it's good to get some background info.

## Do they have a website?

**Yep! Great!** Copy and paste the artist statement and bio into a slide presentation. Take screen shots of the work if their images aren't downloadable. Be diligent with keeping track of their titles, dates, materials. Respect the work they've put into how their art is categorized and organized.

**No? That's okay,** not all artists market themselves with websites. Hell, some don't even have cell phones! Check to see if their work was featured in other exhibitions—sometimes they'll have a snippet of an artist statement, or at bare minimum a curator's statement.

**Kinda?** A common issue that comes up is when artists have allowed galleries to represent them to take charge of how their work is represented on the internet. This can be harder to use in an educational setting, since most of the information is going to be highly manicured by the gallery and several steps away from the artist's authentic voice. Keep this tab open, but look for video interviews so students can see how the artist actually lives, speaks, and moves. Consider the difference between a video interview with Jean-Michel Basquiat and a wall label about his work at a museum. There's a lot of ground to cover in between...

## Are they on social media?

**Yes! Awesome.** Find some shots of their work-in-progress. Scroll through some comments, see how they're connecting with people. Maybe even send them a direct message, explain that you're showing their work to local students who have questions about it (don't worry, they ALWAYS do). Explain how you'd rather ask the source than hypothesize.

**Nope. Really? Well,** good for them. Maybe they're missing out on some audience engagement, but I'll bet they have a lot more time to actually make art.

## Have they worked with other local institutions?

**YES!** Everything from community murals at the VFW or performance art in a park? These are evidence of the artist's values for how they see their work connecting with a given place.

**NO!** Maybe this artist's work isn't about community, but that's totally fine! Learn about what kind of motivations this artist has, what questions they're asking with their work, and how they want their audience to relate. Remember that at the end of the day the tension between an artist's intentions and viewers' interpretations is the lifeblood of art-educational discourse.

**Nick Kozak, visual representation of the process for working with contemporary art and artists in a public school classroom setting**

community members from the ground up in creating an exhibition and stewarding a formerly unused space, NLE taught young people how to be collaborators with their neighbors and allies in their neighborhood spaces. This method of working has the power to change the paradigms of the hegemonic structures that surround far too many art institutions in most cities, and these institutions would do well to adopt a strategy from No Longer Empty's playbook by working for a community, not simply in it.

As you will have gathered, field trips are a big part of my curriculum. Reinventing things each year with this type of "kinetic curriculum" based on studying and visiting art spaces takes a lot of planning, and I spend just as much time collecting permission slips as I do on lesson prep. When a field trip to an exhibition is successful, there's a magical feeling in the air. Without question, a split can develop among the students: some wish the trip could have been an hour longer and some are ready to leave twenty minutes after walking inside. Accompanying this dichotomy is the educator's wish to capitalize on the teachable moments that present themselves when one takes a detour from the usual forty-minute classroom session. After the field trip, teachers want to give an assignment, to ask students to think or write about what they saw, to

make certain all the excitable energy from the site visit gets brought back into the classroom the following day. Typically, I ask students to email me a selfie with a work of art that made a strong impression on them, so we have a visual accompaniment for the debrief in class. But when my students walked out of *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out* at the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse on that spring day in 2015, we all lingered on the wide stretch of sidewalk for a bit. A short wrap-up conversation about our experiences and observations followed, as well as thank-yous to our tour guides, Manon and Ayana. Students said their goodbyes, and I watched them divide into a few distinct groups. Making sure everyone knew their way back to their respective public transportation, I could see that only a few were making a beeline back to the subway station. Someone had bumped into a friend from middle school and was off to play basketball; a few were invited to a classmate's home in an apartment building only a few blocks away. The rest of us decided to go to a nearby Mexican bodega, La Charrita, that was owned by one student's family. Walking down to the Hub (a retail area at Third Avenue and East 149th Street) with a dozen students in tow, I felt a familiar sense of elation that only comes after concluding a month of curricular development. What a fantastic denouement! I remember thinking to myself, "This was awesome, and I only want to ever teach things that are awesome."

When we arrived at La Charrita, students found some tables and chairs and began unloading their backpacks, working on homework and waiting for their tortas to be made. One student had to work on an essay for another class, and in responding to the prompt she was trying to find a way to talk about the artwork she had just seen. The best practices in education are circular, not linear, and I could see this student looking for the conceptual intersections between one course and another. The key is to allow students to return to the place where they began and to take specific note of the changes that have happened within themselves.

When that local exhibition comes down, the banners are struck and the doors are closed and the building returns to its usual humdrum state or finds a new and improved usage or returns to emptiness, the memories of art experienced at that site remain. Now, as my students walk down their neighborhood streets in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, they start to see the potential of sites around them as the echo of past experience inspires their present. From common, unused, or derelict buildings, beauty and creativity may bloom, provided that artists, educators, and everyone outside and in between nurture the seeds of possibility.

1. I'm proud to say that in time my appreciation of NLE and its model proved to be mutual; in 2015 I had the distinction of being recognized as an honoree at NLE's five-year benefit, alongside renowned philanthropist Shelley Rubin and fellow artist Mel Chin.

**Margaret  
Rose  
Vendryes**

The inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial was in its early development stage when I approached Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger and Manon Slome to consider the NLE Lab curators to lead the Biennial. As an educator, I immediately leaned into the idea of having a dedicated cohort of emerging curators not only work on the exhibition but also design it from the ground up. This gave the Biennial, currently in its third iteration, a deeper connection to teaching and learning than initially imagined. Local artists, some well-established, were little known in Queens. NLE Lab curators had to locate them, and then convince them to exhibit at the York College Fine Arts Gallery and the satellite venue of Queens Public Library a few blocks away on Merrick Boulevard. *A Locus of Moving Points* was more than a visual art exhibition. It was a learning experience for all who engaged with it. Artists found each other and new ways to connect their practice to local audiences. Older works were revisited considering current events, and new works were created to open dialogues with York's students, faculty, and staff, as well as local community members. The 2018 Southeast Queens Biennial was a vital springboard for the future of an idea meant to bring art to an overlooked corner of Queens as well as attention to the artists who call the borough home.



Margaret Rose  
Vendryes, *African Diva*  
*Project Live!!!*, 2016. A  
performative interactive  
installation where visitors  
were welcome to take the

stage and become African  
Divas themselves. *Jameco*  
*Exchange*, 165th Street,  
Jamaica, Queens, 2016



# The No Longer Empty Curatorial Lab

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

The No Longer Empty Curatorial Lab (NLE Lab) followed a winding course of potentials, ambivalences, and ambitions. NLE Lab was created in 2013 when NLE cofounder Manon Slome envisioned a program that could serve as a financially accessible professional development vehicle for emerging curators and a way to share the NLE model. It grew into a curatorial intensive for cultural workers across disciplines interested in hands-on experience curating site-responsive exhibitions and programs in unique spaces—primarily non-art contexts at the intersection of the aesthetic experience and the everyday. NLE Lab grew from a cohort of two participants in its first year to ten in its final year, with the ages of participants spanning nearly four decades. NLE Lab exhibitions were presented in a former storefront in Greenwich Village, a ballroom in the South Bronx, a beauty salon in Chinatown, a former emergency waiting room at NYC Health and Hospitals Kings County in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, at York College Art Gallery and Queens Central Library, and in a former photography studio inside the Jamaica Colosseum Mall in Jamaica, Queens.

The curriculum was energized by interdisciplinary pedagogies and readings informed by the neighborhood where we were working: readings, assignments, and projects considered the local community, geography, and history, as well as a sense of place that employed memory as a transformative act. While NLE Lab exhibitions benefited from the research and development of prior NLE exhibitions rooted in the same neighborhoods and the collaborations and partnerships that had been forged, they were distinct, stand-alone exhibitions with related programs that reflected the collaborative visions of cohorts diverse in age, experience, and cultural background.

We modified the program along the way by lengthening its duration, shaping course assignments to directly inform exhibition research, and slimming down the readings in order to dedicate more time to exhibition development—all changes based on participant feedback. While the participation fee of \$1,200 was deliberately as low as we could make it, my two goals (not achieved by the time we closed) would have been to expand financial support for participants and transition NLE Lab into a paid curatorial fellowship program, and to reduce the number of participants in each Lab.

With a focus on research, project-based learning, and collaboration, NLE Lab was designed to deepen an understanding of the development of exhibitions in a specific context in a distinctly urban setting. It

**Installation view of the 2015 NLE Lab exhibition *Intersecting Imaginaries*. From left to right: works by Bronx Photo League, Anne Percoco and Ellie Irons, So Yoon Lym, and Amy Pryor. Photograph by Tom Powel Imaging**

immersed participants in salient readings and dialogues that have impacted and shaped the parameters of contemporary curating, as well as in practices anchored in cross-disciplinary modalities of memory work. Key components of the curriculum included readings on site-specific curatorial practices from interdisciplinary positions in tandem with readings and research on the sociopolitical histories of the neighborhood and participation in neighborhood programs and events. Certain readings became foundational, such as bell hooks's "Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness" (1989, from *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*); *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy (1995); Miwon Kwon's "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity" (1997, in the journal *October*); Lucy R. Lippard's *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997); "The Shadow Books" in Kevin Young's *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (2012); and Jeremiah Moss's *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul* (2017).<sup>1</sup> Assignments ranged widely, from mental mapping exercises to presentations of case studies on place-based exhibitions, site-specific artists' projects, and community-based projects, and from curatorial workshops to self-selected, object-based tours of artworks in parallel NLE exhibitions.

The curriculum included workshops with NLE education and public engagement staff, program development and planning, communications workshops with staff or guest professionals in the field, exhibition and program management, visitor engagement, and evaluation and assessment that included an exhibition critique with a visiting curator of the participants' choosing. In addition, NLE facilitated studio visits with artists, exhibition visits, guest presentations, panels and talks, and introductions to community and partner organizations. The NLE Lab group met twice a week to discuss, share, present, and respond to participants' experiences all within a framework of the two core NLE beliefs: first, that flexibility and experimentation invigorate exhibition-making practices, and second, that art can and must reach diverse audiences.

In conjunction with the culminating exhibition, the group was required to organize at least three public programs: one around themes of accessibility; a free and accessible professional development session designed for cultural workers in the neighborhood; and a program organized in collaboration with a community organization. The purpose was not only to familiarize participants with modes of curating, but also to collectively and actively generate new possibilities for the practice of curating.

## 2015

The first NLE Lab that I facilitated followed on the heels of the 2015 NLE exhibition *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*, guest-curated by Regine Basha at the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, which is discussed in other chapters.

In hindsight, I consider the 2015 NLE Lab to be among the most successful Lab programs precisely because of its proximity to the events at the courthouse, the extent to which research, resources, and lessons were passed on and community introductions were made, and the manner in which the exhibition was approached: collectively and with a vulnerable combination of caution and care. Crucially, the Lab inspired a reassessment and refinement of NLE's community and exhibition research and development practices, always deeply committed to the perspectives of the neighborhood.

The 2015 NLE Curatorial Lab was organized in collaboration with the Andrew Freedman Home under the auspices of the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council (MBSCC). The historic Andrew Freedman Home, which partnered with NLE on the 2012 exhibition *This Side of Paradise*, was a mansion and retirement home for the formerly wealthy, later renovated into an artist residency and incubator space providing workforce development and community services. The Andrew Freedman Home hosted NLE Lab sessions and programming, while the MBSCC provided a vacant space—a storefront at the intersection of Grand Concourse and East 161st Street facing the Bronx Supreme Courthouse, just a few blocks from Yankee Stadium—for the culminating three-week exhibition where events and programs also took place. These landmarks, each controversial in its own right, have generated singular stories within a diverse borough and informed the cultural and sociopolitical discourse at the heart of the exhibition. The building had served many functions: it was at different times a ballroom as part of the Concourse Plaza Hotel, a disco and music club, a diner, and a thrift store.

The resulting exhibition *Intersecting Imaginaries* was informed by the philosophical concept of the “social imaginary,” a set of values composed of community interaction and perceived connections. The exhibition and related programs melded this abstract understanding with an acknowledgment

**Opening reception of the 2015 NLE Lab exhibition *Intersecting Imaginaries* in the South Bronx. From left to right: Lindsey O'Connor, Mary Kay Judy, Paola Gallio, Walter Puryear, Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, Natasha Bunzl, Dalaeja Foreman, Emilia Shaffer-Del Valle, and Eva Mayhabal Davis. Photograph by Whitney Browne**



of external circumstances, presenting a constellation of artworks that spoke to memory and lived experience as composite parts of a map, and as the binding fibers of community. The weathered space, with its Art Deco flourishes and evidence of prior histories, provided both inspiration and context for borrowed and newly commissioned works by predominantly Bronx-based artists who navigated through several intersecting themes: body politics, racial identity, communities in flux, and the natural environment.

**Janet Henry, *Words of Love* (detail), 1983, in the inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial: *A Locus of Moving Points*, curated by the 2017–18 NLE Lab, at the Fine Arts Gallery, York College, CUNY, and the Queens Library. Photograph by Ian Douglas**

Hyper-local artworks included photographs from the Bronx Photo League’s extensive exhibition *Jerome Avenue Workers Project* (2015), which portrayed people and businesses threatened by plans to rezone two miles of the titular street for residential development, and which captured the ethos of one of New York’s last working-class neighborhoods. Linda Cunningham’s installation *Surviving Then and Now: South Bronx Sagas* (2015), built from layers of broken, wall-like constructions, memorabilia, and archival materials, documented the changing urban landscape of the Bronx and reckoned with memory, loss, and survival. Elia

Alba’s installation *Larry Levan Live!* (2006/2015) paid homage to late 1970s and early 1980s underground dance culture, in particular the disco scene originating in the Bronx and the legendary Brooklyn-born disco DJ Larry Levan, whose performances celebrated sexuality and queer culture.

Public programs that “connected to and learned from the community” (as noted in the black-and-white zine created on the occasion of the exhibition) included visits designed for the MBSCC Home’s residents; the panel discussion “How Can We Unite to Preserve Our Communities?,” which focused on the inseparability of self, community, and place; and “Come Más Bronx Cuisine” (Eat More Bronx Cuisine), which mapped the diversity and availability of Bronx foods. “The Conversation,” a dedicated whiteboard space on the wall, invited written responses and engagement from visitors to the exhibition.



## **Notes On Exhibitions, Curating, Art...** **Emilia Shaffer-Del Valle**

an exhibition is:  
a forum  
a classroom  
a mirror  
a window  
a corporeal site  
a reactive space  
a work of art

It is physically impermanent and its meanings are malleable (site-responsive). It references history and the present, sociopolitical and cultural happenings, and reflects our communities. It responds to sight and to touch. It presents connectivity and dissonance, and thrives on discussion. It holds truths and subjectivities, and accrues both throughout its run.

a curator is:  
  
a teacher  
a student  
a storyteller  
a listener  
a writer  
a thinker  
an artist

She culls a diversity of artists and works of art. She unites creative forms under a relevant theme, and fosters conversation amongst them. She sees poetic value and formidable power in art, architecture, nature, and people; she links them across time and space. She learns from visitors – her essential collaborators who enter the exhibition with novel eyes, and imbue the space with knowledge and stories. She embraces the relative ephemerality of her work and welcomes a multiplicity of interpretations.

What made this three-week exhibition in the Bronx so successful? At the core, perhaps, was that the majority of participants felt a deeply committed relationship to the Bronx. They had a preexisting working relationship with the arts and culture sector in the Bronx, collaborations with Bronx stakeholders, and, as stated in the zine, a focus on “supporting community efforts to preserve the histories and cultural identities of the South Bronx.”

It was around this time that NLE’s education, public engagement, and curatorial staff began conceiving of ways to work together more closely in both outreach and community engagement, blending the overarching research and development processes and incorporating them into the ethos of NLE’s large-scale exhibitions. In addition, we saw

**“Notes on Exhibitions,  
Curating, Art . . .” by  
Emilia Shaffer-Del  
Valle, in the 2015  
NLE Lab Zine for  
Intersecting  
Imaginations. Design  
by Eva Mayhabal  
Davis, Dalaeja  
Foreman, Paola  
Gallio, and Emilia  
Shaffer-Del Valle**

the value of committing to neighborhoods, where possible, for extended periods of time and began to design a programmatic progression of exhibitions, youth education, the intergenerational Community Art and Data Lab, and the NLE Lab. These initiatives would build on and inform each other, with phases along the way serving as archives of neighborhood stories in their own right.

## **2016**

The next large-scale NLE exhibition had many firsts and a significant impact on further developing the NLE Lab program. In 2016, I curated *Jameco Exchange*, a site-responsive exhibition and socially engaged education platform around the art of storytelling about a place—Jamaica, Queens—with Sara Guerrero-Mostafa, NLE director of education and public engagement. This would be the beginning of a three-year relationship with the community of Southeast Queens, a realization of NLE’s goal of an extended commitment to an area. It was the first NLE exhibition to benefit from a Community Advisory Council—a network of community partners and experts who shared ideas, made recommendations, and made collective use of the project space during the course of the exhibition.<sup>2</sup> It was also the first NLE exhibition that merged the visitors’ welcome desk with an education hub and community space designed and run by local students participating in our youth programs. The students organized tours of works that had personal meaning for them and also curated *Jamaica Vibes*, an exhibition and hangout space for teens whose lack of space for congregation had been an essential finding of our research.

That research from the *Jameco Exchange*, as well as the relationships we had formed with key stakeholders, was shared with the 2016 NLE Lab participants. Lab sessions were held at the Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning (JCAL) and the legendary Jamaica Colosseum Mall, an active commercial center and a landmark in hip-hop fashion and music culture since the 1980s. The exhibition took place in a former photography studio inside the Jewelry Exchange on the bottom floor of the mall. With more than one hundred independent vendors, including a dental office, a food court, hair salons, and places of worship and healing, the mall is a haven for small business owners and consumers, serving as a site of cultural and economic exchange.

The exhibition title of the 2016 NLE Lab exhibition *Remix Rememory* was conceived in response to the rapidly changing neighborhood, speaking to the idea of sampling and synthesizing elements of hip-hop and Toni Morrison’s concept of “rememory”—the intentional revisiting of memories. Featuring borrowed and commissioned works by fourteen artists, the exhibition and programs explored how mem-

ories can be recaptured and preserved through actions, objects, and reframed tales. The artworks engaged with the blended space of the mall to explore, examine, and recreate local histories that interwove personal and collective memories.

Exploring the intersection of historical research, community consciousness-raising, and art making, Kamau Ware's *Black Solidarity* (2016) consisted of a video installation and digital print on canvas that confronted the absence of robust archival material about Tom Lloyd, a sculptor, community organizer, and advocate for Black arts and culture who founded the Store Front Museum in Jamaica (1971–85). In the site-responsive installation *Hip-Hop Fashion on Jamaica Ave: 90s to Now*, Jocelyn M. Goode painted a wrap-around mural of three decades of fashion styles and iconography, highlighting influences that emerged directly from Jamaica Avenue and spanned several generations, ranging from Shirt Kings to designer brands like FUBU, Phat Farm, S&D Underground, and G-Unit. The Queens-based poet, writer, and blogger Sherese Francis contributed a broadsheet with an excerpt from her science fiction novel in progress, *The E*, inspired by the Underground Railroad and set in Southeast Queens.

**Storefront view of the 2016 NLE Lab exhibition *Remix Rememory* at the Jamaica Colosseum Mall, Jamaica, Queens. From left to right: works by Laura Castro, Robert Craddock, Neal Desai, Rejin Leys and Lan Ding Liu, Odathrowback, Sherese Francis, and Joiri Minaya. Photograph by Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger**



Programs that elaborated on capturing and preserving memories of place included “The Power of the Word,” a panel discussion moderated by Saiku Branch that celebrated the historical context of the Black Arts Movement leading to the development of the Afrikan Poetry Theater, and a live radio broadcast with the variety show “Chillin Island,”<sup>3</sup> featuring *Remix Rememory* exhibiting artist and carpenter Odathrowback, Ras Kefim, the store owner of Locks Culture, *Jameco Exchange* teen docents Raymone and LaTavia, and Marchello the Jeweler.

### **2017–18**

Based on NLE’s ongoing engagement with artists and organizations in Jamaica, Queens, NLE Lab was invited to curate the inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial by Margaret Rose Vendryes, chair of the Performing and Fine Arts Department at York College/CUNY and director of York College Art Gallery. Vendryes, a Jamaica-based artist and curator, had been formerly commissioned to create the interactive multimedia installation *The African Diva Project Live!!!* for *Jameco Exchange*. Vendryes’s offer provided another chance to expand our engagement with the creative communities in Jamaica and focus on the rich and diverse cultural legacies of the neighborhoods in Southeast Queens. This was also one of many instances in which NLE worked with artists in their various roles as cultural producers, teachers, scholars, administrators, and writers.

Considering the research, development, and exhibition production needs that a place-based biennial required, the 2017 NLE Lab program and exhibition were expanded in duration. The curriculum incorporated an extensive analysis of the growing phenomenon of international biennials, with a focus on local iterations in New York City, including the inaugural Uptown Triennial, curated by Deborah Cullen, and the 2017 *Art in Odd Places: Sense*, curated by Nicolás Dumit Estévez Raful, Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, and Jodi Waynberg. We invited Cullen, Estévez, and *Art in Odd Places* founder Ed Woodham to present their work to the Lab.

The inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial, *A Locus of Moving Points*, opened in 2018. Building on the region’s identity as a transportation hub, the concept of itinerant movement served as both a literal and philosophical organizing principle of the exhibition. Invoking bell hooks, the exhibition embodied how a center shifts when a gaze shifts, and how a whole body is made up of both margin and center. Southeast Queens is both of this body and part of the greater locus that is defined by the many points of influence that connect its ethnically diverse population, dismantling the notion of a dominant center. The biennial highlighted three generations of cultural producers with deep connec-

tions to Southeast Queens with sociopolitical discontent as a unifying theme. A number of installations and newly commissioned works dating from the 1980s to 2018 confronted misogyny and racism, such as Sana Musasama's ceramic and mixed-media installations *Stop* (1994) and *Sugar vs. Sap* (1992), where the trees served as "silent witnesses" that spoke to a little-known piece of U.S. history—the Maple Tree Movement, which originated in the eighteenth century as an initiative to lessen or destroy the consumption of West Indian sugar as an indirect means to abolish slavery.

In the 2010 video *Baby It Couldn't Have Been You That I Feared*, Damali Abrams the Glitter Priestess drew from talk shows, reality television, and news programs to confront the media's fabricated hysteria over the "problem of the unmarried black woman." And in *Words of Love* (1983), Janet Henry offered a wry commentary on sexual objectification and harassment that is just as relevant today as it was nearly forty years ago.

Artists representing African, Caribbean, and Latin American diasporas reflected on environmental stewardship, inherited rituals, and traditional healing practices. *Interstice*, a series of four site-specific black "void" installations by Elizabeth Velazquez, were installed around the campus to act as memorials to the Indigenous populations who originally stewarded the land and the Europeans who settled, industrialized, and profited from it. The installations also memorialized people interred at sites with relatively unknown colonial histories, such as the Methodist Cemetery (founded in the mid-1800s) and St. Monica's Cemetery (circa 1856), both commercial properties purchased by York College in the 1970s. Odathrowback (previously featured in *Jameco Exchange* and *Intersecting Imaginaries*), a Jamaica-based fabric artist whose work is informed by his craft as a carpenter and vernacular urban design, created a community portrait made of bricks of fabric donated by visitors to the exhibition.

**Sana Musasama, *Stop*, 1994, and *Sugar vs. Sap*, 1992, in the inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial: *A Locus of Moving Points*, curated by the 2017–18 NLE Lab. Photograph by Ian Douglas**



The biennial continued at Queens Central Library with a second presentation, *Notations in Passing*, and gave viewers a glimpse of the lived experiences of exhibiting artists and people living and working in Southeast Queens through photography, painting, drawing, and collage, revealing connections to each other and the world at large.

Programming included “Prologue,” a series of readings honoring the literary community of Southeast Queens. The poets Amber Atiya, Desiree C. Bailey, Sherese Francis, and Bob McNeil read works engaging with the Black diaspora, ancestry, and intersectionality, as well as personal and collective histories. The program was presented in partnership with J. Expressions, a Southeast Queens pop-up bookshop and mobile library project founded by Francis. A Wikipedia edit-a-thon with Black Lunch Table, an oral-history archiving project focused on the lives and work of Black artists, provided basic Wiki training, and participants uploaded content about under-recognized and underrepresented Southeast Queens artists and cultural producers. Additional programs designed specifically for Southeast Queens-based cultural workers included conversations with exhibiting artists, portfolio reviews, and a series of workshops: “Grant Writing, Resources, and Techniques,” “Social Media Strategies,” “Accessibility Workshop for Curators +,” and “Art as an Organizing Strategy.”

**Hadrien Coumans of the Lenape Center leads a blessing and land acknowledgement to welcome visitors to the Land of the Lenape, Lenapehoking, and to initiate the 2019 NLE Lab exhibition (*after*)care and the parallel exhibition *InJustUs*, curated by the 2019 Young Exhibition Makers, both on the Kings County Hospital campus, Brooklyn. Photograph by Shannel Resto**

## 2019

The 2019 NLE Lab exhibition re-imagined a former emergency waiting room at Kings County Hospital, Brooklyn, as a site of remembrance, possibility, and celebration of care. Titled (*after*)care, the exhibition took its name from the process of transitioning out of institutional medical care

and back into one’s home and community. Thinking beyond the limitations of traditional healthcare systems, the artworks and programs expanded definitions of care in the present, while memorializing the failures of the past in order to move toward a more radical future.





The exhibition opened with a ceremony led by Hadrien Coumans of the Lenape Center to welcome visitors to the Land of the Lenape, Lenapehoking, and to initiate *(after)care* and the parallel exhibition *InJustUs*, curated by the 2019 Young Exhibition Makers. Coumans shared a blessing that honored the Indigenous peoples on whose land our work took place.

Artworks by Damien Davis, Malik Roberts, and Sol'Sax brought the invisible to the foreground—the disproportionate impacts of sickle cell anemia on people of African descent and mental illnesses on communities of color—examining the burden of non-recognition and trauma within the medical system. Works by Pamella Allen, Quinci Baker, Kearra Amaya Gopee, Charlie Gross, Taja Lindley, and Larry Weekes addressed accounts of survival and developed a fabric of care that is everyday, collaborative, and generative, including ritual and therapeutic storytelling, the calming effects of color on the autonomic nervous system, and memory work. Participatory and community-engaged works by Bobby Anspach, Chloë Bass, Diane Exavier, Kathryn Ko, Tattfoo Tan, and Ezra Wube navigated toward a future of collective joy and survival

Installation view of *(after)care*. From left to right: Diane Exavier, *Each Body Is (Still) a Miracle*, 2017–19, commissioned by the 2019 NLE Lab, and Damien Davis, *Blood Cells (Blackmoors Collage #131)*, 2018. Photograph by Shannel Resto

through mindfulness practices, shared performance, celebrations of local vibrancy, object sharing, and coloring pages.

Public programming for the exhibition engaged with modes of holistic wellness and dialogue to center practices of care that exist outside of conventional Western medicine, focusing on themes of mental health and accessibility. Other programs offered professional development for Flatbush artists and exhibition tours provided by NLE Lab curators and NLE's Youth Exhibition Makers.

Reflecting back on the work of the NLE Lab curators and artists, the program developed as a series of unique collaborations in storytelling that nurtured different modes of art and community. It created spaces that existed between education and exhibition to better understand the various experiences around us. Each NLE Lab came with a unique set of personalities and circumstances and common nonprofit challenges (size, time, funding, measuring effectiveness, sustainability).

With a goal to diversify by underwriting scholarships for community-based participants, ideally NLE Lab would have become a paid fellowship program, as suggested earlier. As I wrote in my last grant application for the Lab, "We believe we can broaden the diversity of the field in general and curatorial pathways specifically, and make substantial contributions to the realization of exhibition-making as an inclusive practice that can take shape both in and out of traditional art venues." I would have loved to get NLE Lab to a point where guest curators deeply connected to the neighborhoods in which the Lab was taking place would be invited to actively design and lead place-based NLE Lab programs.

I greatly miss the cross-generational mentorships that NLE Lab provided. I believe that its ever-changing "living" model is ripe for continued exploration. The combinations, challenges, and contributions it can engender are endless. Considering the mind-bending, life-changing events since 2016—the Trump administration, heightened racist violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing demands for social justice, the 2020 presidential election, and the painfully slow unpacking of a romanticized history of the United States, I am reminded of Tania Bruguera's notion of "political-timing-specific art." Moving beyond the notion of site, she has made political timing the material of her work. NLE's projects in Jamaica, Queens, and East Flatbush, Brooklyn, unfolded over the course of major social and cultural change, a political context in which the exhibitions and programs existed and acquired meaning. "Political-timing-specific art doesn't simply address the news cycle," writes Bruguera, "It's also about understanding how, under certain circumstances, politics can define the aesthetic."<sup>4</sup> If we apply this crit-

ical sensibility to the practice of exhibition-making, then the NLE Lab model engendered activism in less predictable ways: by honoring the physical site and the neighborhood as a main character in stories about place, highlighting a variety of narratives and their political dimensions. Friends and colleagues have heard me wonder out loud many times: What if we could collect the unfamiliar and untold stories generated through place-based practices into a single book form? Might we be able to contribute to a people's revisionist history of the United States through the lens of art?

1. An abridged bibliography includes: bell hooks, "Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness," in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 203-09; selections from *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Edward W. Soja, "Introduction/Itinerary/Overture," in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996); Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 85-110; selections from Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997); selections from Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Jeanne van Heeswijk, "A Call for Sociality," in *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, ed. Ted Purves (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 85-98; Terry Smith, "What Is Contemporary Curatorial Thought?," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 28-55; Kevin Young, "The Shadow Book," in *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2012), 11-19; John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Who Is Curating What, Why? Towards a More Critical Commoning Praxis," *Museum and Curatorial Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (Summer 2013), 5-26; and selections from Jeremiah Moss, *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 389-402.

2. The Community Advisory Council for *Jameco Exchange* consisted of Saiku Branch, director of Afrikan Poetry Theatre; Kim McNeil Capers, outreach coordinator, Queens Library; Stephanie Davis, poet, poetry editor of *Newtown Literary*, and Queens Council on the Arts Jamaica Arts Leaders 2015-16 program fellow; Sherese Francis, poet, writer, and blogger at *FuturisticallyAncient.com*; Heng-Gil Han, director and curator, Jamaica Flux; Cathy Hung, director of Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning; Simone Jhingoor, cofounder of Jahajee Sisters; Brandon Lee, artist and teaching artist at Children's Museum of Art; Rejin Leys, visual artist and Queens Council on the Arts Jamaica Arts Leaders 2015-16 program fellow; Monica O. Montgomery, director of Lewis Latimer Historic House Museum; Tunisia Morrison, independent curator and founder of VOYCE; Odathrowback, visual artist and carpenter; Richard Parker, visual artist and owner of Think Before You Ink; Prerana Reddy, director of public events, Queens Museum; and Kenrick Ross, director, Indo-Caribbean Alliance. (Community Advisory Council titles or positions indicated may have changed since the time of the exhibition.)

3. Founded by Ashok Kondabolu (aka Dap) and hosted by the rappers Despot (Alec Reinstein) and Lakutis (Aleksey Weintraub), Chillin Island is a collective of born and bred Queens musicians and artists who host a weekly program on Know-Wave radio. The December 10, 2016, show is archived at [https://www.mixcloud.com/know\\_wave/chillin-island-remix-memory-jamaica-colosseum-mall-december-10th-2016/](https://www.mixcloud.com/know_wave/chillin-island-remix-memory-jamaica-colosseum-mall-december-10th-2016/).

4. Tania Bruguera, "Notes on Political Timing Specificity," *Artforum* 9, no. 57 (May 2019), <https://www.artforum.com/print/201905/notes-on-political-timing-specificity-79513>.



FORTUNE

TELLER

PALM

COFFEE

NOVEMBER



**Part 3**  
**Making It**  
**Replicable**



# Planning and Realizing a Project

## The NLE Approach

The preceding essays and case studies give a broad sense of how NLE developed a project. We offer this bullet-point overview to show how we selected exhibition sites and the nuts and bolts of how we made shows happen. *Please note that the following points should not be considered sequential. Many of them will and must be undertaken simultaneously.*

### 1. Finding a site

#### Team assessment of a potential site—the questions to ask:

- Who is inviting us and why?
- Feasibility of the site—is there a need in the area for an NLE type of engagement?
- What are the histories and narratives of the site?
- What are the politics of the site?
- Who is our primary audience in the area?
- What are our non-negotiable objectives?

### 2. Logistics of the site

- Assess the safety of the building for people (staff and visitors) and artworks.
- Evaluate potential issues such as ongoing construction, temperature, humidity, vermin, and toxic materials. (This assessment will necessitate bringing in, for example, an expert to test for lead paint on the walls, a check of window and door frames, and an electrician to test the safety of lighting and electrical outlets.)
- Are there original architectural drawings or floor plans?
- When can the site be accessed? Is there a current certificate of occupancy or a temporary one?
- Draw up a contract for the use of the space, including all dates and conditions (see sample contract, pages 170–75). Set a deadline for the contract to be signed and for the project to be set in motion.

### 3. Who is on the team?

- Define who the lead curator should be. Is this an in-house or guest curator?
- The director of education should work hand in hand with the curatorial team to ensure the integration of the curatorial and educational programs.
- Select the project manager, art installers, and research team, and determine how many interns will be required and what they will be paid.

Charlotte Caldwell, an NLE project manager, buying sacks of rice for Hayoon-Jay Lee's installation *Shifting Landscape*, 2012, for *How Much Do I Owe You?*, Long Island City, Queens, 2012–13. Photograph by Whitney Browne

Artist Hayoon-Jay Lee pictured in her installation *Shifting Landscape*, 2012

#### 4. Finance and budget

- Prepare a budget for the project. You don't need to include daily operational costs in a project budget, but do figure what percentage should be allocated for staff costs.
- Will the fundraising be done in-house or outsourced to grant writers?
- Create a list of potential funding sources and which grants to pursue, along with a timeline for submissions. Explore:
  - foundations
  - city arts grants
  - local corporations and businesses, e.g., banks
  - in-kind donations from local small businesses, e.g., restaurants for snacks and liquor stores for drinks at the opening
  - individual giving
  - local political discretionary grants
  - what contingency plans could be made, should funding objectives not be achieved?

#### 5. Research

- Establish the team to conduct research, both related to the site and integral to the neighborhood.
- Create an advisory committee from a cross-section of the neighborhood, which could include artists, teachers, librarians, social workers, representatives from local cultural organizations, and small business owners. Meet with them on a biweekly basis throughout the research period. (Ideally, members receive a stipend).
- If time and conditions allow, consider the ART ZONE model, in which youth and seniors from the community conduct the research under supervision. (See Mica Le John's essay in Part 2.)
- Organize and broadly market an open house in the space after the site has been secured and a general concept of the exhibition has been formulated. This will allow you to share the direction of the project and the artist list as it is taking shape—so various local communities can offer feedback before things seem set in stone and their input a mere formality. Buy-in by local people is a huge plus.
- Be transparent and allow for evolution of ideas as you glean new information.

#### Building or exhibition space research

- What were its former uses?
- Who were some of the former owners?
- How long has it been empty—and why?
- Community's future goals or aspirations for the site, including current and previous ideas for activating the space.

**Artist Sean Slemon making a reception desk from a selection of old furniture found in the Andrew Freedman Home for *This Side of Paradise*, Andrew Freedman Home, the Bronx, 2012. Photograph by Lucy Lydon**

**Beginning the installation of *Jameco Exchange*, 165th Street, Jamaica, Queens, 2016. Photograph by Whitney Browne**



### **The neighborhood: Spatially anchored research**

- Maps of boundaries and sub-neighborhoods. Consider making your own map of the area, complete with other cultural attractions, and mark local businesses, restaurants, and so forth on it. This can often be supported with funds from the local tourism office or the local council member.
- Architectural characteristics of neighborhood.
- Socially and anthropologically anchored research
- What is the demographic composition of local communities?
- Which social services organizations cater to these different groups?
- Who are the public housing representatives?
- Do an assessment of after-school programs in the area and determine whether there are special programs for students with special needs or disabilities.
- Seek out a local historian. (We found that almost every neighborhood has one, formal or informal.)
- Be aware of the relativism of research—how the neighborhood is viewed from different perspectives, e.g., those of youth, seniors, and religious groups.
- Consider collaborations with universities and colleges to enlist graduate students in the research process.

### **Politically anchored research**

- Meet with local political representatives and city council staff.
- Offer to present the project at community board meetings.

### **Culturally anchored research**

- Research the cultural landscape of the neighborhood. This might include identifying curators who live in the neighborhood and might be invited as guest curators or curatorial advisors as well as artists living in the neighborhood.
- What form of cultural production or expression is the area known for?
- Research other cultural organizations serving the neighborhood. Assess the potential for collaborations. If they are sponsoring specific programs or activities during the time of the exhibition, consider joint marketing or promotion.
- Organize meetings to develop programming and joint marketing and publicity opportunities.
- Research prior exhibitions, books, films, and so forth that have featured the neighborhood.

**Share your research process and findings as much as possible with the broader community in the lead-up to the exhibition.**

- Consider methods of sharing: post flyers online and onsite; share the information with libraries, community boards, schools, and the local historical society; meet with journalists from local papers or websites to discuss the project and its goals.
- Make an announcement at a town meeting or to another local community committee, such a housing board.
- Put big posters outside the exhibition site to advertise what is coming.

**6. The Project**

**Establish the chain of command**

- Executive director, senior curator, education director, project manager, communications leader, graphic designer, and more.
- Ensure that everyone is aligned with the wider goals of the project.

**Curatorial Process**

- As the research process nears its end, define the themes of the exhibition (as they relate directly to the space and its history) and the curatorial team.
- Conduct studio visits and compile a broad list of artists whose work could contribute to the dialogue. Seek a balance of local and regional, national, and international artists as budget permits. Ensure that the list as it develops is diverse and inclusive, inviting a myriad of voices into the artistic dialogue.
- Determine the appropriate number of artists, both in terms of budget and amount of space available.
- Solicit proposals from artists for commissions, where applicable. Make sure the artists are fully informed about your model with your commitment to site and community. Be specific about how much space they would have, the budget for the commission, and the artists' fees.
- The eventual agreement with commissioned artists should state that future showings or published images of commissioned works acknowledge your organization.
- Select existing artworks as appropriate. Send out formal invitations that specify the artist's fee for the loan and fully inform the artist or lender of the conditions of the site and the security that will be available throughout the run of the exhibition.
- Develop a loan form for each artist (see sample on pages 176-77). The loan form will also include insurance information, which you will need both for the artworks and for liability insurance for the space indemnifying the owner. The value assigned to an artwork should be the replacement value, not market value.

- Begin compiling a folder on each artist, including full contact information, CV, images, and profiles, as well as contact information for the gallery or collector, as appropriate. In time, some of this information will migrate to an exhibition binder of all the artists and artworks in the exhibition, which will be a valuable tool for staff answering visitors' questions.
- Dedicate spaces for public programming and education within the larger footprint of the exhibition space.
- Schedule information sessions at the site to share the results of your research with the artists and others who have been identified in the research, along with members of your board, press connections, and potential funders who might like an early, behind-the-scenes tour.
- Develop all printed exhibition materials, such as
  - invitations (print and online),
  - press release,
  - introductory wall texts,
  - and object labels and expanded object information as necessary for individual works.
  - Curators should share drafts of the proposed texts with educational staff and the community advisory board to ensure that texts are accessible to different audiences. Consider various kinds of label texts and labels generated by the local community.
  - It is crucial to have wall labels of high quality for each artwork. Have the exhibition designer (whether in-house or freelance) lay out labels and print them commercially. Proper labels and wall text are worthwhile expenses; they show respect to artists and audience alike.
  - Plan for translator(s) to make materials available in other languages spoken in the neighborhood.
  - Create exhibition maps or leaflets. If the budget allows, plan an exhibition catalogue. This is a big endeavor and requires a separate budget, writers, photography, printer, and so forth.
  - Determine appropriate materials for site conditions for all interior signage taking lighting, humidity, and wall surfaces into consideration.
- Set up a desk or table at the entrance where staff can greet visitors.
- Curators must schedule several tours prior to the opening to ensure that all staff, docents, interns, and art handlers are versed in the themes of the exhibition and conversant with all the artworks.
- Additional tours will be necessary throughout the course of the exhibition to ensure engagement with diverse audiences.

- For an outstanding article on accessibility for all in exhibitions, see Sarah Reisman, “Now Is the Time to Address Issues of Accessibility for Artists and Institutions,” at <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/accessibility-art-institutions-disability-justice-sara-reisman-1234580719/>.

### **Installation/de-installation**

- **Project manager**  
This is a highly important role in curating outside an institutional framework, as each project has a distinct set of variables that have to be tackled to ensure a safe environment for the art, staff, and visitors. The person can be on staff if budget allows or hired for the duration of a project, but installation experience and a great gift for coordination are musts. The project manager should
  - have a deputy;
  - work closely with curatorial staff and be in touch with each artist to determine installation needs and number of art handlers each piece will require, and to develop an installation schedule;
  - create a timeline of site preparation, art transportation, and installation;
  - demarcate a clean area for receiving, unpacking, and reporting on the condition of each artwork—condition reports, including documentation photographs, should be completed immediately on unpacking the artwork (see sample form on page 178);
  - regularly inspect artwork throughout the exhibition and mark any change to original condition on the report—any changes should be immediately shared with the artist or lender;
  - set aside a clean space for storage of any crates or packing materials.
- *Only professional art handlers* should work with artists and artwork at all times. Artists often have preferred art handlers who are used to installing their work. This is not a place to skimp on hourly rates. For guidelines on all aspects of compensation, from artists’ fees to speakers to art handlers, WAGE (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) is a great resource.
- Book the same art handlers for the de-installation as well, to reduce any learning-curve difficulties in handling the work.

In the words of one of NLE’s most stellar project managers, Rita Leduc:

**I recall how important it was to establish relationships not only with the artists, but with site managers, any fabricators, art handlers, or staff, and the site itself. Spreadsheets and templates are helpful,**

but each project, space, and person was so specific—specificity that made each exhibition truly unique—that they needed to be met with specificity on my part. There was never a one-size-fits-all conversation or solution, and if it seemed like there was, that was a red flag that I was missing a crucial detail!

As all relationships do, much of this boils down to trust, and trust isn't immediate, especially when you're dealing with someone's artwork or property. A large part of the initial work was not only collecting details, but also collecting trust. Fortunately, both require more or less the same actions: clear, consistent, friendly communication that directs the conversation toward a mutual goal of future success while acknowledging present conditions and concerns.

A note: this is required of the space as well as the people. A site-specific exhibition cannot be installed by a project manager who has not developed a relationship with the site. Rain, humidity, temperature, wind, dust, bugs, structure, etc.—it was important to spend time in the space in order to get to know it. As understanding unfolded, so too did potential situations that I could then be sure to avoid (anything from problems with visitor experience to the type of adhesives to use for hanging). This knowledge then fed directly into my trust-building with the people mentioned above. The more I offered them about the location, the more confidence they felt in me and my handling of the installation and exhibition.

Of course, this was not always so graceful! But that's where the spreadsheets and templates helped, so I could at least keep track of my own communication and make sure that on my end questions were being asked, answers collected, and problems trouble . . . shot!!

A solid installation team was also critical. This included providing them not only with training but also food and humor when appropriate. Lots of fun can be had once the details are ironed out and trust has been built. Then—amazing exhibitions happen!

### **Line up exhibition photographers**

- Develop a roster of photographers who can document the final installation, the individual artworks, the opening, and public programming.
- Curators must do a walk-through of the exhibition with photographers to explain which shots and angles are necessary to document the work.

### **Marketing and publicity**

- Create a timeline for the press release and marketing.
- Develop a contact list of press that might cover the exhibition across all media. These could include local and regional press and media outlets, art press, and specialized writers who might be interested in the themes of the exhibition, such as the environment, social justice, education, and more.
- If an artist has gallery representation, seek the support of the gallery's press office to communicate that artist's presence in the show.
- Invite individual writers for a tour of the exhibition before it opens to the public.
- Consider the appropriateness of a press preview (an event artists should attend).
- Maintain an up-to-date website and an active presence across a wide range of social media.
- Create a relationship with a public relations company with art-based clients. Sometimes they will offer pro bono or reduced-rate services in hopes of retaining you as a client when your organization has grown.

**Keep the show new and interesting** with programs and performances that attract various cross-sections of the community. Make it known (where feasible in terms of space and the safety of the artwork) that a local organization could hold a meeting in the space.

### **Staffing the show**

- Create a roster of staff to work at the entrance desk and greet visitors.
- As the space requires, several staff or volunteers should be placed in gallery areas to monitor artwork and engage with visitors.
- Keep visitor sign-in books so visitors can record their opinions on the exhibition and subscribe to newsletters.

**Enjoy your work—that enthusiasm will be infectious.**

**Shervone  
Neckles**

Since spring 2016 I've been hosting lively, informational conversations and demonstrations at my Creative Wellness Gathering Station, a community and preventative-care initiative developed in response to years of research exploring the health and wellness issues directly affecting immigrant communities.

My collaboration with No Longer Empty in summer 2017 made it possible for me to return to my childhood neighborhood in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, to activate my Creative Wellness Gathering Station at Kings County Hospital and extend my research through the ART ZONE CG-91 experimental platform. I honestly wasn't prepared for the level of engagement, knowledge sharing, and trust I would receive from the public at the Station. The opportunity to connect and hear stories from hospital staff, long-standing residents, students living in the area, and even amongst my artist peers will remain with me and inform how I work alongside and within the community going forward. The experience reminded me that we as community members can initiate our own beloved community care resources and that meaningful change can be built through relatively small interactions and exchanges.



Shervone Neckles, *Creative Wellness Gathering Station*, 2017. Installed on the grounds of Kings County Hospital, Brooklyn, with the cohort of ART ZONE CG-91. Photograph by Whitney Browne

# A Sample NLE Curatorial Lab Syllabus

Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger

**Note for educators: The following syllabus has been adapted to provide a more flexible outline with fewer “housekeeping” specifics. It excludes session dates and locations and suggested exhibitions and events, but maintains required assignments, readings, names of guest visitors with their titles at the time, and collaborating/partnering entities. For more information about the 2016 NLE Lab exhibition *Remix Rememory* and related programs and events, visit [www.nolongerempty.org](http://www.nolongerempty.org).**

## 2016 NLE Curatorial Lab Syllabus

Jamaica, Queens

September 7–December 17, 2016

Sessions: Wednesdays, 5:00–8:00 p.m. & Saturdays, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Location(s): Various

The NLE Lab program consists of two key phases—research and exhibition development—achieved through collective learning and collaboration. This 15-week program is broken down into seven key components:

1. Fundamentals of curating and site-specificity
2. Site, historical, community-based research
3. Artist research and studio visits
4. Exhibition and program development
5. Exhibition planning and management
6. Promotion and outreach
7. Exhibition evaluation and assessment

NLE Lab will utilize the creative assets of New York City and provide participants with the resources to explore and develop curatorial concepts that can be tested in the environment of an exhibition in phase two.

### Requirements:

Participation is an essential part of NLE Lab and includes readings, contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, on-time class attendance, and a collaborative spirit. PDFs and/or links to all required readings will be provided.

### Participants are expected to:

- Complete assignments and readings on time and present ongoing research. While individual participants may take on specific tasks/roles towards exhibition development, working as a collaborative group is a fundamental component of the program. Participants can expect to work approximately 12 hours per week outside of class sessions
- Engage in ongoing research on the designated site(s), neighborhood, borough, and artists, and conduct studio visits

- Lead at least one session each, and engage the group on assigned readings
- Attend talks, field trips, workshops, and cultural events and visit exhibitions, and share critical responses with the group
- Conceive an exhibition, select artists, and develop programming and events; generate promotional materials and interpretive and educational copy; manage exhibition logistics including calendars, budgets, and shipping and handling with facilitator
- Develop, promote, and present at least three public programs, one of which must be organized in collaboration with a community cultural organization
- Provide public exhibition tours
- Provide a curatorial walk-through in a curatorial critique provided by a curator/cultural producer determined by the group, self-evaluation, and one-on-one meetings with NLE Lab team members

The contents and schedule of this syllabus are subject to change.

## **Week 1, Session 1**

### **Introductions & Orientation**

Agenda:

- Introductions and research sharing
- Review site-use policy, curriculum, schedule, and information sharing systems. Assign class readers and NLE Lab Instagram takeover
- Guest Speaker: Cathy Hung, Executive Director of Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning (JCAL), NLE Lab partnering organization

Assignments:

- Review and familiarize yourself with the *Jameco Exchange* exhibition research documents.
- Research the organizations listed below, their missions and histories. Email the facilitator your preferred assignments in order of preference: (1) develop a public program in conjunction with the Emmett Wigglesworth exhibition *It is not enough to see at JCAL*; (2) organize an educational program in conjunction with the exhibition *Catching Up: Fine Arts Alumni Return to York at Fine Arts Gallery*, York College,

CUNY, in celebration of York's 50th Anniversary; and/or (3) contribute an arts essay for Afrikan Poetry Theatre's upcoming publication *The Power of the Word*, in celebration of APT's 40th anniversary.

- Research and "surf" Southeast Queens media outlets online (see resource document) and subscribe to email lists/newsletters of interest

## **Week 1, Session 2**

### **Fundamentals of Curating & Site-Specificity**

Agenda:

- DUE: Please write a curatorial statement (1 page, single-spaced, 12-pt. font) that articulates the kind of exhibition you would like to organize, what theme(s) you would like to tackle, artists and/or collectives you would like to work with (limit discussion to three each), and a few programming ideas. Who is your target audience? What are your expectations?
- Discuss readings
- Mental mapping: Break up into small groups and walk Jamaica Avenue and the downtown Jamaica Corridor encompassed by Sutphin Boulevard to the west, Merrick Boulevard to the east, Hillside Avenue to the north, and Archer Avenue to the south.

Readings:

- Lucy Lippard, "Places with a Present," in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicenter Society* (The New Press, 1998), 277–284.
- "Introduction," "Words of Wisdom," and interviews with Ammann, Cameron, Golden, Jacob, Lippard, and Storr in *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*, ed. Carin Kuoni (Independent Curators International, 2001).
- Terry Smith, chapter 1: "What Is Contemporary Curatorial Thought?" in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (Independent Curators International, 2012), 28–55.
- Claudia Gryvatz Copquin, "Jamaica," in *The Neighborhoods of Queens* (Yale University Press, 2009), 100–114.

## Week 2, Session 1

### Fundamentals of Curating & Site-Specificity

#### Agenda:

- Lab member #1 leads readings discussion
- Guest Speaker Heng-Gil Han, former Visual Arts Director and Curator for JCAL, is the project director of Jamaica Flux: Workspace and Windows, an ambitious, large-scale, perennial exhibition of site-specific projects investigating the potential of art to transform the built environment by revealing the economic, social, and institutional forces acting on it and prompting new ways of interacting with the space and the public.

#### Readings:

- Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring, 1997), 85–110.
- "Mary Jane Jacob Interview 2002," in *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, ed. Carolee Thea and Thomas Micchelli (D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2010), 20–25.
- Excerpts on Queens-based alternative art spaces from *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces 1960–2010*, ed. Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski (Exit Art and MIT Press, 2012).
- Interview (online): Meet QAF Awardee Heng-Gil Han! (Queens Council on the Arts, 2016).

## Week 2, Session 2

### Site Specificity & Community-Based Research

#### Agenda:

- DUE: Recommend a text on site-responsive practices, creative use of public space, and/or community engagement as they pertain to your specific interests
- Exhibition site visit to Jamaica Colosseum Mall
- Guest speaker Saiku Branch, director of the Afrikan Poetry Theater, a community-based cultural institution located in Jamaica, Queens, and NLE Lab partnering organization.

#### Readings:

- Vito Acconci, "Public Space in a Private Time," *Critical Inquiry*, 16 no. 4 (Summer, 1990), 900–918.
- Tom Finkelppearl, "Introduction: The City as Site," in *Dialogues in Public Art* (MIT Press, 2000), 3–51.

- Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell, chapter 2: "Artifacts Connecting Communities," in *Artifactual Literacies: Every Object Tells a Story* (Teachers College Press, 2010), 15–38.

## Week 3, Session 1

### Research

#### Agenda:

- Lab member #2 leads readings discussion
- Discuss research

#### Readings:

- Lucy R. Lippard, Introduction: "All Over the Place," in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (The New Press, 1997), 4–20.
- Miwon Kwon, "Sittings of Public Art: Integration Versus Intervention," in *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2002), 3–44.
- Nina Möntmann, "New Communities," *ARTocracy: Art, Informal Space and Social Consequence: A Curatorial Handbook in Collaborative Practice*, ed. Nuno Sacramento and Claudia Zeiske (Jovis Verlag, 2010), 162–172.

## Week 3, Session 1

### Field Trip And Community-Based Research

#### Agenda:

- Lab member #3 leads readings discussion
- Exhibition visit: *Catching Up: Fine Arts Alumni Return to York* at the Fine Arts Gallery at York College, for a curatorial walk-through and discussion of the required education program assignment. Co-curator Margaret Rose Vendryes is a Jamaica-based artist, curator, professor, and director of the Fine Arts Gallery at York College. Co-curator Nicholas Fraser is an artist and professor at York College. Both were exhibiting artists in NLE's 2016 exhibition *Jameco Exchange* and York College is an NLE Lab partner.

#### Assignments:

- Continue research on Jamaica, Queens: architecture, downtown corridor, neighborhood, artists, and local organizations. Select both primary and secondary resources. Which current and or past exhibitions, documentaries, films, and books can inform your research?

- Prepare to discuss curatorial ideas that are emerging. Compile a running list of organizations that may be of interest for collaborative programming. Consider new partnerships and collaborations
- Visit the following artist studio/residency programs online and collectively select six to 12 artists to conduct studio visits with as a group: Flux Factory, Hibridos Collective, International Studio and Curatorial Program, Local Project. Residency Unlimited, Queens Museum Studio Residency Program, and Queens International

#### Readings:

- Tom Finkelpearl, chapter III: “Five Dialogues on Dialogue-Based Public Art Projects: Interview with Paulo Freire,” in *Dialogues on Public Art Projects* (MIT Press, 2000), 272–293.
- Grant Kester, “Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art,” in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kucor and Simon Leung (Blackwell, 2005), 1–10.
- Explore Queens Memory Project online. The Queens Memory Project combines historical and contemporary photography, maps, news clippings, and other documents with oral history interviews of current residents
- Immigrant Movement International (online)
- Social Practice Queens Art + Social Action (online)

### **Week 3, Session 2**

#### **Site, Historical & Community-Based Research**

##### Agenda:

- Visit Queens Museum of Art
- Guest Speaker Prerana Reddy, director of Public Programs and Community Engagement, Queens Museum of Art, and co-founder of Social Practice Queens, where she serves as an advisor and occasional instructor. At the Queens Museum, Reddy organizes screenings, talks, festivals, and performances, a third of which are developed in collaboration with diverse local community organizations and cultural producers. She also co-curated the exhibition *Fatal Love: South Asian American Contemporary Art Now*,

and coordinated two editions of *Corona Plaza: Center of Everywhere*, which commissioned eight artists to develop public artworks that engaged local residents on issues of neighborhood history and identity as well as tensions around its various transformations.

### **Week 4, Session 1**

#### **Location & Radical Creativity**

##### Agenda:

- DUE: Artist selections for studio visits
- Lab member #4 leads readings discussion
- Share research

##### Readings:

- bell hooks, “Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness,” in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (South End Press, 1989), 203–209.
- Selections from Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Blackwell, 1996).
- Shuddhabrata Sengupta, “I/Me/Mine—International Identities as Negotiated Minefields,” *Signs* 31, no. 3, “New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture” (Spring 2006), 629–639.

### **Week 4, Session 2**

#### **Site, Historical & Community-Based Research**

##### Agenda:

- Lab member #5 leads discussion
- Share research
- Schedule studio visits (ongoing)

##### Readings:

- Ann Landi, “Show and Tell: The Dos and Don’ts of Studio Visits,” *ArtNews* (September 30, 2013).
- Listen to a selection of interviews with international contemporary artists online at Studio Visit, a radio program featuring hour-long interviews with international contemporary artists, writers, theorists, and musicians broadcast weekly on Resonance 104.4 FM.
- Visit Creative Time Reports: artists’ perspectives on issues of our times (online).

- Watch Fieldworks, a short documentary series presented by A Blade of Grass that explores socially engaged art (online).
- Visit “Discuss” forums on A Blade of Grass website: “Conversations that help to define and explore the meaning, value, and practice of socially engaged art.”

### **Week 5, Session 1**

#### **Fundamentals of Curating, Site-Specificity & Exhibition Development**

Agenda:

- Discuss readings, studio visits, and exhibition concepts
- What type of programming can accompany the exhibition? How can programming be a vehicle for conveying or deepening the exhibition theme and for engaging communities?
- Review sample letters of loan requests to artists and/or lenders
- Determine next steps

Readings:

- Selections from *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Bay Press, 1994).
- “Using Walls, Floors, and Ceilings” exhibition pages on the Jewish Museum website
- Curatorial statement and exhibition proposal samples
- *Intersecting Imaginaries* exhibition proposal (NLE Lab 2015)
- *Intersecting Imaginaries* press
- *Jameco Exchange* press
- Recommended: Jane Jacobs, introduction to *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Random House, 1961)

### **Week 5, Session 2**

#### **Research Field Trip**

Agenda:

- Visit with Richard Hourahan, Queens historian and collections manager of the Queens Historical Society

### **Week 6, Session 1**

#### **Fundamentals of Curating & Site-Specificity**

Agenda:

- DUE: Proposals for collaborations with Jamaica-based community organization (1 page, single-spaced, 12-pt. font)
- Guest Speaker Brooke Davis Anderson, executive director of Prospect New Orleans, a citywide triennial of contemporary art. Emphasizing collaborative partnerships, Prospect presents the work of diverse international artists in unique and culturally exceptional venues, thereby creating optimistic cartography for the future through the education and engagement of residents and visitors.

Readings:

- Selections from *Documents of Contemporary Art: Situation*, ed. Claire Doherty (MIT Press, 2009), 197–202, 205–206, 207–208, 213–215, 216–219.
- Joshua Decter, “Art and the Cultural Contradictions of Urban Regeneration, Social Justice, and Sustainability: Transforma Projects and Prospect.I in Post Katrina New Orleans,” in *Art Is a Problem: Selected Criticism, Essays, Interviews, and Curatorial Projects 1986–2012* (JRP | Ringier & Les Presses du réel, 2013), 370–383.
- Visit Prospect New Orleans website
- Franklin Sirmans, “Somewhere and Not Anywhere,” in *Prospect.3: Notes for Now* exhibition catalog (DelMonico Books and Prestel, 2015), 21–29.
- Recommended: Nuit Banai, “Shifting Sites: The Brewster Project and the Plight of Place,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Arts* 24, no. 3 (2002), 56–67.
- Recommended: Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, “Artists and Gentrification: Sticky Myths, Slippery Realities,” in *Create Equity* (online)

### **Week 6, Session 2**

#### **Exhibition Development**

Agenda:

- Lab member #6 leads readings discussion
- Finalize exhibition dates, duration, and viewing hours. This will determine production timeline going forward

- Assign project management responsibilities
- Discuss including group tours for local schools/organizations, outreach, target audience(s), and collaboration with a community organization in preparation for the upcoming session with Sara Guerrero-Mostafa, NLE director of Education and Public Engagement

#### Reading(s):

- Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* (February 2006), 178–183.
- Sara Reisman and Saul Ostrow, "The Social Function of Art" (2013), online at ArtChangeUS: Arts in a Changing America.
- Mabel O. Wilson, "Mingling in Curious and Uncanny Manners," in *Group Efforts: Changing Public Space*, ed. Gavin Browning (GSAPP Books, 2015), 73–84.
- Holland Cotter, "Toward a Museum of the 21st Century," *New York Times*, October 28, 2015.

### Week 7, Session 1

#### Exhibition Planning & Project Management

##### Agenda:

- Meeting with NLE Lab project manager. Be prepared to share your working exhibition proposal and artist needs. The project manager will discuss the logistics around shipping, art handling, and installation, including loan forms, condition reports, AV/tech and programming needs, installation schedule, exhibition documentation, and expectations from the group
- Review exhibition budget, WAGE guidelines, NLE Lab budget management, and delegation of responsibilities with NLE executive director

##### Assignments/Readings:

- "Writing Effective Art Exhibit Labels: A Nuts and Bolts Primer," MoMA slideshow and transcript (online)
- Review exhibition didactics, wall signage, and exhibition checklist samples on file
- Review 2014 NLE Lab *The Way Out Is Through* materials online
- Review 2015 NLE Lab exhibition *Intersecting Imaginaries* materials online

### Week 7, Session 2

#### Exhibition Proposal, Development & Design

##### Agenda:

- Present exhibition proposal to NLE Team for constructive criticism and feedback. Presentation must include curatorial premise, working title, preliminary artist list and commissions, images, exhibition dates (including installation/de-installation), opening reception, viewing times, and programming
- Bring design templates for inspiration and review samples of past NLE exhibition design collateral; discuss required elements (logos, sponsor thanks, boilerplates and templates). Finalize design elements, e.g., exhibition invitations, pamphlets, object labels and/or exhibition checklist, wall text, etc. Timeline for copy, editing, approval process, printing, etc. to be determined together based on best practices.

### Week 8, Session 1

#### Exhibition Development & Promotion + Guest

##### Agenda:

- Mid-program check-in!
- Review exhibition timeline and adjust as needed
- Schedule production meetings with project manager
- Guest Speaker: Robin Cembalest, former *ARTnews* editor turned social-media influencer helping galleries, nonprofits, and other art-world clients to implement editorial strategy in social media, web, and print. Robin will discuss topics related to press cultivation, press release and website content, eblasts, social media, and press preview. Ideal-case timelines will be discussed and realistic timelines will be determined

##### Readings:

- Ryan Steadman, "The Art World's Aussie Operator on the Changing Role of PR in Art," *Observer Culture: The Expanded Field*, August 7, 2015 (online).
- Check out Robin Cembalest's website, Instagram, Twitter, portfolio.

## Week 8, Session 2

### Education, Programming & Public Engagement

#### Agenda:

This session will be facilitated by Sara Guerrero-Mostafa, NLE director of Education & Public Engagement. Sara will introduce NLE's education program and discuss the role of education, programming, and outreach. Be prepared to present your programming ideas for feedback. Discuss your inclusion of tour groups for schools as part of your outreach, targeted audience groups, community organization, and specific individuals. You will participate in a scavenger hunt in downtown Jamaica, to be followed by visits to Jamaica eateries. Come hungry!

#### Readings:

- Amanda Cachia, "Disability, Curating and the Educational Turn: The Contemporary Condition of Access in the Museum," [oncurating.org](http://oncurating.org).
- Nina Simone, chapter 4: "Social Objects," in *The Participatory Museum Book* (online).
- *Life as Material for Art and Vice Versa*, ed. Nicolás Dumit Estévez (online).

#### Assignments:

- Continue working on all aspects of the exhibition
- Draft promotional copy and select images for the press release, website content, email blast, signage, etc. as determined by the group. All copy must be submitted to NLE for approval
- Finalize loan requests and/or commissions and submit to project manager

## Week 9, Session 1

### Exhibition Planning & Promotion

#### Agenda:

- Continue working on all aspects of the exhibition, program development, and promotional materials
- Plan and schedule curatorial walk-throughs for NLE staff (preview), press, project stakeholders and partners, *Jameco Exchange* artists, select guests, and colleagues
- Schedule photographer
- Outreach and neighborhood canvassing
- Promote exhibition

## Week 9, Session 2

### Exhibition Planning & Promotion

#### Agenda:

- Review budget and loan forms
- Draft didactics and organize translation for bilingual copy
- Plan and coordinate opening reception
- Compile and print exhibition and artist materials for binder (e.g., press release, "About NLE" and "About NLE Lab" materials, artist CVs, bios, images, press)
- Update press release and website as needed
- Outreach and neighborhood canvassing
- Promote exhibition

## Week 10, Sessions 1 & 2

### Exhibition Planning & Programming

#### Agenda:

- Status updates
- Schedule exhibition staffing
- Design visitor services table and materials. How do we create a welcoming and informed environment that encourages visitors to explore the exhibition? How do we creatively engage in dialogue and receive visitor feedback?
- Coordinate installation and shipping with project manager
- Outreach and neighborhood canvassing
- Promote exhibition
- Determine next steps

## Week 11, Sessions 1 & 2

### Finalize Exhibition & Program Details + Installation

#### Agenda:

- Check-in and status updates
- Promotion
- Installation management with artists and project manager
- Organize documentation of the exhibition

- Plan and organize a closing reception or event
- Outreach and neighborhood canvassing to promote exhibition

## **Weeks 12–14**

### **Exhibition Management, Promotion & Programming**

The exhibition is now open to the public!

Agenda:

- Outreach, promotion, and exhibition adjustments
- Manage exhibition, events, and programming
- Provide curatorial walk-throughs
- Document exhibition
- Send artists and/or lenders images with appropriate credit/courtesy details
- Coordinate de-installation and return shipping with artists and project manager
- Walkthrough and curatorial critique with Sara Reisman, artistic director and executive director of The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation

Assignments:

- Prepare for self-evaluation meeting with NLE Lab facilitator
- Organize and archive exhibition research and development files

## **Final Week 15**

### **De-Installation, Evaluation & Impact Assessment**

Agenda:

- Deinstallation, condition reporting, and return shipping
- One-on-one meetings, self-evaluations, and NLE Lab survey
- Final session at downtown Jamaica restaurant El Rincón Salvadoreño

# Sample License Agreement

**NOTE: THIS IS NOT INTENDED AS LEGAL ADVICE**

This License Agreement (this “Agreement”), dated . . . . . (the “Effective Date”), is made by and between YOUR ORGANIZATION, a limited liability company with a business address at . . . . . and (“Licensor”), a limited liability corporation organized and existing under the laws of . . . . . with a business address at . . . . . (together, “Parties” or individually “Party”).

WHEREAS (NAME OF ORGANIZATION) is an organization that presents high-quality artwork in the space of vacant properties;

WHEREAS Licensor owns and operates a vacant property site located at . . . . . (hereinafter the “Site”);

WHEREAS the Parties seek to enter into this Agreement for the purpose of allowing ORGANIZATION to present certain artwork (hereinafter the “Work”) in the Site for a prescribed period of time (hereinafter the “Project”), with the hopes of publicizing the Work, increasing attention to the Site, generating foot traffic, and attracting potential investors, partners, customers and/or tenants for the Site;

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the performance to be made by each Party, mutual promises contained herein, and for other good and valuable consideration, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, the Parties agree as follows:

## SECTION 1 RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE PARTIES

### 1.1 General Rights Concerning the Project.

(a) Subject to and as part of the Project, Licensor hereby grants ORGANIZATION a license to occupy the Site for a minimum guarantee of six months and to display the Work in the Site, in accordance with the schedule set forth in **Exhibit A** (attached hereto).

(b) As set forth in greater detail below, and in furtherance of the Project, Licensor also grants ORGANIZATION license to:

- (i) inspect the Site;
- (ii) install the Work at the Site;
- (iii) allow the public to enter the Site;
- (iv) maintain, modify and/or repair the Work at the Site;
- (v) hold one or more Event(s) in connection with the Project at the Site; and
- (vi) de-install/remove the Work from the Site.

### 1.2 Inspection of the Site.

(a) ORGANIZATION shall have the right to visit the Site, accompanied by a representative of Licensor, for the purpose of inspection and/or research concerning the Project, in accordance with the schedule set forth in **Exhibit A**.

(b) If requested by ORGANIZATION, Licensor shall make available certain background material and information in its possession on matters relevant to installation of the Work, and/or other matters pertaining to the Project, unless such information is deemed confidential or proprietary by Licensor in Licensor’s reasonable discretion.

### 1.3 Installation of the Work.

(a) On the applicable date(s) specified in **Exhibit A**, Licensor shall grant ORGANIZATION access to the Site and ORGANIZATION shall have the right to occupy and install the Work at the Site.

(b) ORGANIZATION shall be responsible for all expenses (including materials, equipment, labor, and clean-up) associated with the delivery and installation of the Work at the Site.

(c) Immediately prior to installation of the Work, Licensor will ensure the area within the Site where the Work will be installed and/or displayed is reasonably clean and free of debris.

(d) ORGANIZATION represents and warrants to Licensor that the installation and de-installation of the Work at the Site will be performed in a workmanlike manner.

(e) ORGANIZATION shall be liable for any damage to the Site during the period covered by this Agreement that is caused directly by ORGANIZATION and/or its agents, employees or invitees. ORGANIZATION shall not be liable for any damage to the Site during the installation process that is caused by Licensor or Licensor's employees and/or agents.

#### 1.4 Maintenance, modification and/or repair of the Work.

(a) ORGANIZATION represents and warrants to Licensor that any maintenance, modification, and/or repair of the Work and/or signage performed by ORGANIZATION will be performed in a workmanlike manner. ORGANIZATION further agrees to clean up any materials and/or debris at the Site created from its maintenance, modification, and/or repair of the Work and/or related signage.

(b) ORGANIZATION shall be liable for any damage to the Site, during any maintenance, modification and/or repair of the Work and/or related signage that is caused directly by ORGANIZATION and/or its agents, employees, or invitees. ORGANIZATION shall not be liable for any damage to the Site, during any maintenance, modification, and/or repair of the Work and/or related signage that is caused by Licensor or Licensor's employees and/or agents.

#### 1.5 Events.

(a) Licensor hereby grants ORGANIZATION the right to host one or more event(s) inside the Site to commemorate and fundraise for the Project (each, an "Event"), at date(s) and time(s) indicated in the schedule set forth in **Exhibit A**.

(b) ORGANIZATION shall have the right to host an Event (such as panel discussion or children's workshop) inside the Site other than as set forth in **Exhibit A**, so long as ORGANIZATION: (i) notifies Licensor in writing no later than five (5) Business Days prior to the proposed Event, (ii) provides the proposed date and time and total number of invited guests for the proposed Event, and (iii) agrees to provide any other information relevant to the Event reasonably requested by Licensor.

(c) ORGANIZATION shall be responsible for all expenses (including materials, equipment, labor, catering, and clean-up) associated with hosting any Event at the Site.

(d) ORGANIZATION represents and warrants to Licensor that, should ORGANIZATION host an Event at the Site, ORGANIZATION will not serve alcoholic beverages to anyone who appears to be under the age of twenty-one (21), or appears to be overly intoxicated.

(e) ORGANIZATION shall be liable for any damage to the Site during the Event that is caused directly by ORGANIZATION and/or its agents, employees, or invitees. ORGANIZATION shall not be liable for any damage to the Site, during the Event that is caused by Licensor and/or Licensor's employees or agents.

#### 1.6 De-installation/Removal.

(a) At the conclusion of the Project, and in accordance with the schedule set forth in **Exhibit A**, ORGANIZATION shall de-install the Work at the Site, including any signage relating to the Project. Licensor grants ORGANIZATION the right to place a small dumpster outside of the Site for purposes of de-installation and removal of the Project, provided that ORGANIZATION obtains any applicable permits.

(b) ORGANIZATION shall be responsible for all expenses (including materials, equipment, labor, and clean-up) associated with the de-installation of the Work at the Site.

(c) ORGANIZATION represents and warrants to Licensor that the de-installation of the Work at the Site will be performed in a workmanlike manner. In this regard, ORGANIZATION agrees to remove all equipment, trash, and other materials pertaining to the Work, and to leave the Site in the same condition or an improved condition from the state in which it existed immediately prior to installation of the Work. ORGANIZATION further agrees to repair any damage relating to installation and/or deinstallation/removal, and that is/was caused directly by ORGANIZATION and/or its agents or employees.

(d) ORGANIZATION shall be liable for any damage to the Site during de-installation of the Work that is caused directly by ORGANIZATION and/or its agents, employees, or invitees. ORGANIZATION shall not be liable for any damage to the Site, during de-installation of the Work that is caused by Licensor and/or Licensor's employees or agents.

1.7 Hazardous Materials and Open Flame.

(a) ORGANIZATION shall not use any hazardous materials (including but not limited to open flame or fire) in connection with installation or de-installation of the Work or at the Site, or at an Event, without the prior written consent of Licensor and to the extent permitted by law.

(b) Assuming the above consent is provided by Licensor, ORGANIZATION agrees to use reasonable cautionary measures when using any hazardous materials.

1.8 Sponsorship.

(a) ORGANIZATION shall have the right to obtain corporate sponsors to support the Project.

(b) Subject to Licensor's signage approval right, Sponsors' logos and/or insignias for the Project will be incorporated on signage installed and displayed at the Site and on promotional materials for the Project.

1.9 Merchandise. ORGANIZATION shall have the right to display and sell merchandise at the Site as a method of recouping some costs of the installation.

1.10 Public Relations/Press Releases. ORGANIZATION shall have the right to promote the Project by utilizing various forms of communication media and the press.

1.11 Insurance Coverage.

(a) At its own expense, ORGANIZATION shall purchase and maintain general liability insurance, with policy limits of . . . . . for each occurrence and . . . . . in the aggregate, to cover certain liabilities that may arise out of ORGANIZATION or its employees' or agents' activities in connection with the Project. ORGANIZATION shall furnish a certificate of insurance upon Licensor's request.

1.12 Copyright. No copyright to the Work shall be considered expressly or implicitly licensed, transferred or assigned to Licensor by way of this Agreement, or through the Project, other than to display the Work at the Site pursuant to this Agreement.

1.13 Access to Site. Licensor, and its employees and/or agents, shall continue to have unimpeded access to the Site during the term of the Project and this Agreement. However, Licensor, and its employees and/or agents, shall not disrupt, move, change, or otherwise alter the Work without first notifying ORGANIZATION and receiving approval in writing from ORGANIZATION.

## SECTION 2

### TERM AND TERMINATION

2.1 Term. Unless earlier terminated as set forth in Section 2.2, this Agreement will continue in effect until de-installation of the Work at the Site is completed in accordance with the schedule set forth in **Exhibit A** (the "Term").

2.2 Termination. Either Party shall have the right to terminate this Agreement prior to completion of the Term as follows:

(a) Licensor provides ORGANIZATION written notice thereof. In such case, ORGANIZATION shall have ten (10) Business Days from receipt of such written notification to complete de-installation of the Work from the Site. Upon de-installation of the Work, this Agreement shall then terminate.

(b) Upon ten (10) calendar days prior written notice to the other Party in the event that the other Party commits any material breach of its obligations hereunder and fails to cure the same within such ten (10) calendar day notice period. Following any such failure to cure, ORGANIZATION shall have three (3) Business Days to complete de-install of the Work from the Site. Upon de-installation of the Work, this Agreement shall then terminate.

(c) In the event that damage to the Site, through fire or some other casualty, renders the Site unusable, Licensor shall provide written notice to ORGANIZATION, and ORGANIZATION shall have three (3) Business Days from receipt of such written notice to complete de-installation of the Work from the Site, if appropriate. Upon de-installation of the Work, this Agreement shall then terminate.

2.3 Effect of Termination. Prior to termination of the Agreement, Licensor shall grant ORGANIZATION, and/or its employees or agents, access to the Site in order to de-install and remove the Work, and any other related materials and/or equipment.

## SECTION 3

### MISCELLANEOUS

3.1 Authority. Each Party warrants and represents to the other that it has the full right and authority to enter into this Agreement, that all corporate action necessary to authorize the execution and delivery of this Agreement by such Party has been duly and properly taken, and that it is not aware of any impediment that could inhibit its ability to perform its obligations under this Agreement.

3.2 Force Majeure. Neither Party will be liable for any default or delay in such Party's performance if such default or delay is caused by an event beyond the reasonable control of such Party, including, but not limited to: act of God; war or insurrection; civil commotion; destruction of essential facilities or materials by earthquake, fire, flood, or storm; labor disturbance; epidemic; or other similar event; provided, however, that the Party so affected will give prompt notice of such event to the other Party to this Agreement, and will use its commercially reasonable efforts to avoid, remove, or alleviate such causes of nonperformance and will continue performance hereunder with the utmost dispatch whenever such causes are removed.

3.3 Entire Agreement.

(a) This Agreement, including any and all Exhibits attached hereto, constitutes the entire agreement between the Parties pertaining to the subject matter hereof, and this Agreement supersedes any other agreements, understandings, promises and representations, whether written or oral, between the Parties relating to the same subject matter.

(b) No agent of either Party is authorized to make any representation, promise, or warranty not contained in this Agreement.

3.4 Execution in Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in two or more counterparts, each of which will be an original and all of which will constitute together the same instrument.

3.5 Amendment and Waiver.

(a) This Agreement may only be amended by the Parties in writing, making specific reference to this Agreement, provided that the same is signed by both Parties.

(b) No course of dealing between the Parties or failure by any Party thereof to exercise any right or remedy hereunder will constitute an amendment to this Agreement or a waiver of any other right or remedy or the later exercise of any right or remedy.

3.6 Governing Law; Jurisdiction. This Agreement will be construed in accordance with the laws of the State, without regard to any choice of law provisions. Each Party hereby irrevocably submits to the jurisdiction of any State or Federal court sitting in the State in any action or proceeding arising out of or relating to the Agreement, and each Party hereby irrevocably waives the defenses of improper venue or an inconvenient forum for the maintenance of any such action or proceeding to the fullest extent permitted by law.

3.7 Assignment. No Party may assign any right or obligation hereunder without the written consent of the other Party. This Agreement will be binding upon and inure to the benefit of the Parties hereto and their respective successors and permitted assigns. Any attempted assignment in violation of this provision will be void and of no effect.

3.8 Independent Parties.

(a) In operating under the Agreement, each Party will act independently and this Agreement will not be construed as creating any partnership, joint venture, or incorporated business entity.

(b) Neither Party will have any authority to incur any liability or obligation whatsoever on behalf of the other.

3.9 Notice. Any notice, demand, waiver, consent, approval, or other communication which is required or permitted to be given to any Party under this Agreement will be in writing, will specifically refer to this Agreement, and will be effective on receipt, as evidenced in writing, when given by registered or certified mail, postage prepaid, or overnight courier, and addressed, unless otherwise specified in writing, to the addresses of the Parties described below, and effective upon sending if sent by electronic mail confirmed by a written transmission report:

If to ORGANIZATION:

If to Licensor:

3.10 Severability.

(a) In the event any portion of this Agreement will be held illegal, void, or ineffective, the remaining portions hereof will remain in full force and effect.

(b) If any of the terms or provisions of this Agreement are in conflict with any applicable statute or rule of law, then such terms or provisions will be deemed inoperative to the extent that they may conflict therewith and will be deemed to be modified to conform with such statute or rule of law, and the remaining portions hereof will remain in full force and effect.

(c) In the event that the terms and conditions of this Agreement are materially altered as a result of this Section 3.10, the Parties will renegotiate the terms and conditions of this Agreement to resolve any inequities.

3.11 Headings, Interpretations. The headings used in this Agreement are for convenience only and are not a part of this Agreement nor affect the interpretation of any of its provisions.

3.12 Exhibits. All Exhibits referenced herein are hereby made a part of this Agreement.

3.13 Interpretation. The Parties hereto acknowledge and agree that:

- (a) each Party and its representatives has reviewed and negotiated the terms and provisions of this Agreement and have contributed to its revisions,
- (b) the rule of construction to the effect that any ambiguities are resolved against the drafting Party shall not be employed in the interpretation of this Agreement, and
- (c) the terms and provision of this Agreement shall be construed fairly as to each Party hereto and not in favor of or against either Party regardless of which Party was generally responsible for the preparation of this Agreement.

3.14 Third-Party Beneficiaries. This Agreement is not intended to confer upon any non-party rights or remedies hereunder, except as may be received or created as part of a valid assignment.

3.15 License and Not a Lease. This Agreement is not to be construed as in any way granting to ORGANIZATION any interest as a tenant in the Site; it is intended that this Agreement merely grants to ORGANIZATION a license to enter upon and use the Site in accordance with the terms hereof and will not be deemed to grant to ORGANIZATION a leasehold or other real property interest in the Site. This Agreement is subordinate to all underlying leases and mortgages now or hereafter affecting the real property of which the Site is a part and to all renewals, modifications, consolidations, replacements, and extensions of such leases and mortgages.

3.17 Further Assurances. Each party shall execute and deliver such additional instruments and other documents and use all commercially reasonable to take or cause to be taken, all actions and to do, or cause to be done, all things necessary under applicable law to consummate the transactions contemplated hereby.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Parties hereto have duly executed this Agreement as of the Effective Date.

**ORGANIZATION**

**LICENSOR**

By: \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature**

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title**

# Loan Form

**EXHIBITION TITLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**LOAN PERIOD:** \_\_\_\_\_

**LENDER NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY:** \_\_\_\_\_ **STATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **EMAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ARTIST:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Medium:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dimensions (H x W x D) / Duration (video):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Edition #** \_\_\_\_ **of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Insurance Value:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Replacement Value:** \_\_\_\_\_

**If the work is available for purchase, please list sales price:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Credit Line:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Packaging dimensions (H x W x D):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Weight:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Special instructions and/or conditions:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Installation dates/times:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please note if the artist would like to install the work:** Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

**TERMS OF LOAN:**

This Exhibition Loan Agreement is between ORGANIZATION and ARTIST/GALLERY for the exhibition titled \_\_\_\_\_.

**SHIPPING/HANDLING**

- Loans shall remain in the care of ORGANIZATION for the time specified on the face of this agreement.
- ORGANIZATION will arrange for the pick-up and return of artwork(s) unless arranged otherwise.
- The Artist/Lender certifies that the Artwork is in such condition as to withstand the ordinary stress and strains of transportation, installation, and display. The Artist shall be responsible for all repairs to Artwork necessitated by the Artist's workmanship.
- Shipping crates, boxes, and packing materials are the responsibility of the Artist/Lender and are to be designed for reuse in return shipping.
- Artwork(s) will be returned to Artist/Lender at the address provided, unless ORGANIZATION is notified in writing no later than two weeks prior to the end of the exhibition.

**INSURANCE**

ORGANIZATION will insure this loan wall-to-wall under its fine art policy for the replacement value provided against all risks of physical loss or damage caused while in transit and on location during the period of this loan. ORGANIZATION's liability contains the usual exclusions of loss or damage due to war, invasion, hostilities, confiscation by order of any government or public authority, risks of contraband or illegal transportation and/or trade, nuclear damage, wear and tear, gradual deterioration, moths, vermin, inherent vice, or damage sustained due to and resulting from any repairing, restoration, or retouching process unless caused by fire and/or explosion.

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

- The Artist/Lender will supply image(s) for documentary, educational, and promotional purposes as follows: digital image at 300 dpi, 5 x 8 inches, listing photo credit/courtesy.
- ORGANIZATION may reproduce the image(s) for documentary, educational, and promotional purposes in printed materials, on the web, and other publications unless specified otherwise.
- ORGANIZATION may photograph loaned work(s) for documentary, educational, and promotional purposes and display in printed materials, on the web, and other publications.

**Artist Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**ORGANIZATION Representative Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

# Condition Report Form

## EXHIBITION

Exhibition title:  
Opening date: Closing date:  
Incoming Organization Location:

## IMAGE/SKETCH

## INCOMING OBJECT

Artist:  
Title/Date:  
Medium:  
Crated: Yes  No  Number of crates:  
Size Crate 1 (in.): H: W: D: Size Crate 2 (in.): H: W: D:  
Size Crate 3 (in.): H: W: D: Size Crate 4 (in.): H: W: D:

Framed: Yes  No   
Glass  Plexi  Other   
Specify:

Support type:  
Fabric  Wood  Masonite  Composite Board  Paper  Other  Specify:

Auxiliary support:  
Stretcher/Strainer  Panel/Cradle  Matte  Other   
Specify:

Hanging device:  
Oz-clips  D-rings  Other   
Specify:

Overall Condition  
Excellent  Good  Stable  Poor  Requires treatment   
Notes:

Frame condition:  
Excellent  Good  Stable  Poor  Requires treatment   
Notes:

Support condition:  
Excellent  Good  Stable  Poor  Requires treatment   
Notes:

## ADDITIONAL CONDITION NOTES

Installation instructions provided: Yes  No   
Details:

Changes to display: Yes  No   
No changes are to be made without prior written permission by the lender. Describe changes:

Approved by: Date:  
Check if condition has not changed   
Specify if otherwise:

Outgoing ORGANIZATION Location:  
Examined by: Date:



Anne Katrine Senstad, *Tears on a Coffin*, 2013. A public art project that took place in Sunnyside, Queens, in October 2013, *Tears on a Coffin* consisted of Senstad's neon sign, a funeral car,

a mariachi band, and a video installation in P. J. Horgan's Irish Pub; the neon sign was later installed in the pub for the remaining weeks of the project. The project was supported by the Royal

Norwegian Consulate General New York, Gallery Nine5, 419 Neon, and Sunnyside Shines BID, and curated for No Longer Empty by Sarah Corona

## Contributors

**Manon Slome** is the cofounder and curator of No Longer Empty, where her passion to merge art with the experience of daily life brought together like-minded collaborators, artists, and educators to showcase the power of art to touch life and transform the imagination.

Selected publications prior to her work at No Longer Empty include *An I for an Eye: Strategies of Language in Contemporary Art* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), *Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On* (contemporary Israeli art, Chelsea Art Museum, 2005), *Dangerous Beauty* (PAN/Palazzo delle Arti Napoli, 2007; exhibition at Chelsea Art Museum and Jewish Community Center, New York), and *The Aesthetics of Terror* (Charta, 2009).

Prior institutional tenures at the Guggenheim Museum (1995–2003) and the Chelsea Art Museum (2003–08), and a curatorial fellowship at the Whitney Independent Study program provided the training and impetus to work beyond the institutional framework. Slome continues to advocate for the expansion of the curatorial field and for alternatives to the exclusionary conditions of entry.

**Laura Raicovich** is a New York-based writer and curator who recently completed a new book, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* (Verso, 2021). She recently served as interim director of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art; was a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow at the Bellagio Center; and was awarded the inaugural Emily H. Tremaine Journalism Fellowship for Curators at Hyperallergic. While director of the Queens Museum from 2015 to 2018, Raicovich co-curated *Mel Chin: All Over the Place* (2018), a multi-borough survey of the artist's work. She lectures internationally and in 2019–20 co-curated the seminar series “Freedom of Speech: A Curriculum for Studies into Darkness” at the New School's Vera List Center for Art and Politics; she is currently co-editing an anthology of writings on the same subject. She also is the author of *At the Lightning Field* (CH Press, 2017) and co-editor of *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production* (OR Books, 2017).

**Naomi Hersson-Ringskog** enjoys bringing her tenacious strategic and operational energy to a variety of organizations in order to promote and engage in adaptive reuse, reactivation of disused urban corridors, nonprofit management, and creative placemaking. Her organic, participatory approach integrates the arts, culture, and history into community development and planning goals. Recognizing the

power of incremental change, in 2016 she founded the Dept of Small Interventions to amplify cultural assets, galvanize collaborations, and build social infrastructure in Newburgh, New York. She also co-chairs Newburgh's Transportation Advisory Committee. Hersson-Ringskog earned a master's degree in urban planning from Columbia University and has received numerous awards in the arts, planning, and nonprofit fields. She serves on the boards of No Longer Empty, the Fullerton Center, and the Awesome Newburgh Foundation. She is a Storm King Art Center Young Council member and an advisory member to the Institute for Public Architecture. A fellow at the Urban Design Forum, she is also a cofounder of the American Planning Association's Arts and Culture subcommittee.

**Jodie Di Napoli** is a curator and educator working in the field where art and education cross, researching the space that this relationship unfolds. She holds an MA in art history from the University of Valencia, Spain, and a MS in education from Bank Street College of Education in New York. Her professional experiences have delved directly into her interest in museums and nonprofit cultural organizations, among them No Longer Empty, El Museo del Barrio, The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA PS1, and the Brooklyn Museum in New York and Red Planea Arte y Escuela and El Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana in Spain. She has also developed her own projects such as Creixem al Carme in Valencia and has curated exhibitions with organizations such as Instituto Cervantes and No Longer Empty in New York and the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, DC, among others.

**Mica Le John** is a technologist, educator, and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) advocate whose work uses an intersectional lens to explore the relationships between art and technology. In her time at No Longer Empty, she created the Young Exhibition Makers program and Youth Action Council, which sparked significant growth in participation rates among youth and increased public engagement with the organization's youth programs. A graduate of the New School, she holds a BS in liberal arts, with a focus on Intersectional Pedagogies through the Arts and Social Engagement. Additionally, she completed the Riggio Honors Program for Writing and Democracy, and holds a Certificate in Design Management from Ryerson University.

**Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger** is a New York City-based curator with a focus on place-based practices around social, cultural, and civic issues. She currently oversees Residency Unlimited's NYC-based Artist Residency Program, dedicated to artists underrepresented in the arts whose research-based practices fill gaps in historical knowledge. Her exhibitions include *Storying* at the Andrew Freedman Home in the Bronx; *Bound Up Together: On the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment* at Smack Mellon, Brooklyn; and *This side or the other . . .* at Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space on the Lower East Side. As curator at NLE and director of the NLE Curatorial Lab, Gugelberger directed projects such as the 2019 NLE Lab and culminating exhibition *(after)care*, in a former emergency waiting room at Kings County Hospital in East Flatbush, Brooklyn; the inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial; and *Jameco Exchange*, a site-responsive exhibition and socially engaged education platform in a vacant storefront in Jamaica. She has served as curator at Exit Art, codirector of Sara Meltzer Gallery, and associate director of Student Galleries/Visual Arts Museum at the School of Visual Arts.

**Nick Kozak** is an artist-educator based in New York. He attended the State University of New York at New Paltz, where he studied art history and art education. Later, he completed a master's degree in Arts + Education at New York University, where also he taught for six years. Since 2009 he has been a New York City public school teacher at Manhattan Hunter Science High School, where he focuses on contemporary art and radical pedagogy. The shared experience of viewing and making art is central to Kozak's pedagogical ethos, whether it's a site visit to an art space or building social sculptures with his students.

## Acknowledgments

For an organization that ran for twelve years and produced more than forty exhibitions and hundreds of programs and collaborative projects, there are so many people to thank. The NLE staff, interns, and volunteers who were the hardest working and most enthusiastic team that could be wished for; the brilliant and inspiring artists who put their trust in us and produced such incredible work; the teens with their dedicated teachers and schools who participated in our youth programs; the curators who led and the cohorts who attended the NLE Curatorial Lab; a champion board of directors and board of advisors who were always there for advice and support; the innovative funders, foundations, and individuals who supported us with grants, attended our benefits, and gave to our annual appeals, making all our work possible; and the hundreds of thousands of visitors who repeatedly came to our exhibitions and taught us so much with their feedback: all of these people cannot be thanked enough. You all made miracles. You all built and sustained No Longer Empty and changed lives in the process.

For this publication, I am especially grateful to all the writers who contributed their time, memories, and expertise: Laura Raicovich, Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, Jodie Di Napoli, Mica Le John, Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, and Nick Kozak. I would like to particularly thank advisory board member, art historian, and curator Gail Buckland, who from the very inception of NLE was one of our biggest champions. Her encouragement made this book a reality, and I am particularly grateful for all the work she did in helping choose the images contained here and for bringing on photo editor Jessica White, whose technical skill helped give a very diverse set of images the cohesion that adds to our story. To our editor, Joe Hannan, I am deeply indebted for his professionalism and patience as all the manuscripts came in and were smoothed out under his caring eye. To dear friend, Lucille Herbert, I am grateful for your encouragement and feedback on the texts as they progressed. For subsequent editing, I am awed by and deeply indebted to Craig Rodmore for his painstaking thoroughness and dedication. To Katy Homans—thank you so much for your enthusiasm and generosity in designing this publication. Without your tireless guidance, this book would not have been in readers' hands. Whitney Browne, who became our resident photographer at most exhibitions, provided an enduring legacy of documentation and her photographs are amply represented in this publication. Tahera Tajbhai was a treasure in the management and sharing of images and content in a digestible form. For No Longer Empty's legal work, we are



**The No Longer Empty team in 2014. Back row, from left: Rita Leduc, Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, Manon Slome, Kwame Sorrell, Annie Sharpe, and Regine Basha; front row: Laurell McCaffrey, Emilia Shaffer-Del Valle, Patra Jongjitirat, Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, Lindsay Smilow, and Ilk Yasha. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

indebted to the expertise and generosity of Amanda L. Zablocki from the firm Sheppard Mullin. Thank you all.

While all the artists, staff, and NLE Curatorial Lab alumni are mentioned by name in the timeline (and thanked here again), I must single out several co-conspirators who gave birth and life to NLE. Naomi Hersson-Ringskog—you were a force of nature. You found most of our exhibition spaces, built a board, raised funds, got us organized—and your energy propelled us forward. Jodie Di Napoli—your love of children and arts education expanded the reach of NLE to populations of all ages, work that was so capably continued by Ayana Hosten and then our subsequent dynamite directors of education, Mica Le John and Laurabeth Lima. Patra Jongjitirat—you were the design and communications genius who created the initial NLE brand and materials, along with the design firm Skinny who created our signature NLE ribbon; Charlotte Caldwell, Lucy Lydon, Mira Friedlaender, and Rita Leduc—you were the best project managers ever, making the installation of exhibitions in our many unusual and challenging spaces as smooth as could be. Fellow curators Asher Remy-Toledo, Julian Navarro, Keith Schweitzer, Tara de la Garza, and Ella Levitt—you were all such an inspiration.

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None of this could have been done without family and friends cheering us on—so thank you and all my love to my husband, Ian Slome, and our children Imy, Gabby, and Ben and their families.

• • •

#### **NLE Board of Directors**

Alan Rosenbloom, founding board chair; co-chairs Nancy Schwartz-Weinstock and Michael Steinberg; Amy Kaufman; Joanna Wu; Frances Beinecke; Julia Draganović; Naomi Hersson-Ringskog; Jon Kurland; Dara Metz; Danni Pascuma; Rivka Saker; and Brett Zaccardi

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**Teens Curate Teens: Specie,** Clock Tower Building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, led by Jodie Di Napoli. Teen cura-

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**Teens Curate Teens: *Rose from the Concrete***, Sugar Hill, Harlem, led by Jodie di Napoli. Teen curators and artists: Susan Jean-Baptiste, Aumit Leon, Melanie Perguero, Amber Smalls, Jocelyn Velez, Eleny Ynoa, Aaaron Alexander, Stephan Baez, Samuel Berenguer, Dyreek Brathwaite, Anjali Bromfield, Tiffany Brown, Adrian Camacho, Denisa Carty, Janee Coleman, Sharlene Cooper, Lisbeth DeJesus, Natalie DeJesus, Anthony Denor, Aissata Diallo, Nadia Diyhem, Cynida Drepaul, Nigel Farmer, Celines Flores, Odalis Flores, Tina Gao, Malik Gayle, Beatrice Genfi, Dillan Haynes, Christopher Hernandez, Cherifelfarissy Idriss, Zanat Islam, Rogerma Jacques, Adonys Jimenez, Davon Johnson, Sunshine Joseph, Chantece Judon, Mira Kheyman, Piotr Lapinski, Luanne Lara, Maya Lee, Shana Lewis, Devin Lopez, Alisha Maldonado, Mariah McDonald, Arlin Medina, Aika Matsushiro, Zoraya Noel, Nadine Norales, Ewa Nowogorski, Cleon O'Connor, Lesline Obour, Elida Ortiz, Alan Padilla, Gabrielle Parham, Melody Peralta, Melissa Paredes, Jade Pierce Jade, Roswell Ramos, Catherine Reyes, Jaffet Reyes, Elisea Rivera, Maya Rivera, Suheiry Rosario, Lhakpa Sherpa, Jamilla Staine-Pyne, Cheyenne Ubiera, Kimberly Valentin, Gabrielle Vasquez, Leyonna Williams, Rebecca Wynter, Malitaye Wright

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Opening of *How Much Do I Owe You?*, Clock Tower building, former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens, December 12, 2012; suspended above the crowd is Erika Harrsch's *US DOLLAR KITES*, 2012. Photograph by Whitney Browne

Media & Communications, Manhattan Hunter Science High School, Mott Hall High School, Newtown High School, Richmond Hill High School, Urban Assembly for Design & Construction, Wadleigh High School for the Performing & Visual Arts (in collaboration with the Apollo Theater Education Program), Young Adult Borough Center High School

**Teen Curate Teens: *Future Fix***, Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, the Bronx. Students Ebenezer Adjei, Amber Baez, Yasmina Belkacemi, Akvinder Kaur, Maya Lee, Max Martinez, Keiny Miranda, in collaboration with ArtsConnection and Dream Yards

**Y.Lab Young Curators: *Jameco Vibes***, 165th Street Pedestrian Mall, Jamaica, Queens, program led by Sara Guerrero-Mostafa with stu-

dents Mommima Ashaqe, Alexa Avelar, Dyann Beer, Fateha Bushra, Nudrat Mahajabin, Nyle Blades, Daniel Chaturgoon, Rebeka Gutierrez, Iman Oza, LaTavia Council, Leo Ng, Ana Radonjic, Ramone Segers, Sean Pursaud, Lily Walker

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**Young Exhibition Makers: *InJustUs***, Kings County Hospital CG-91, Brooklyn, led by Mica Le John. Teen



artists and curators Elham Abuali, Etharr Ahmed, Kalia Asencio, Hamza Ashar, Nilajah Batts, Kimani Brown, Nazair Deondre, Francois Givienna, Geneva Gordon, Umahani Hamad, Michelle Muszkat Levine, Steph Martinez, Benjamin Opoku, Elani Amélie Reyes, Carlitos Rodriguez, Alirat Sanni, Nyia Savannah Pilgrim, Janae Stanford, Jade Villegas, Marvens Volcimus, in collaboration with Kings County Hospital and Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI)

**Young Exhibition Makers: A Story to Be Told**, Kings County Hospital, Brooklyn, led by Mica Le John. Teen artists and curators Jeff Adolphe, Kalia Asencio, Jontay Beckles, Can Chen, Saraphina Cunningham, Emely Evangelista, Fairya Farah, Maria Jahangir, Adrian Jones Gibbs, Precious Kermon, Nerma La France, Mariel Martinez, Marie Massier, Ruby Mendez, Yewande Ogunleye, Benjamin Opoku, Yasminka Radonicic, Wade Roach, Jamal St Louis, Dakaibo Tallerand, Megan Vega, Jade Villegas, Marvens Volcimus, Tarek Youssef, in collaboration with Kings County Hospital and Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI) and Exploring the Arts

**A NYC Youth-Led Response to COVID-19 (virtual)**, led by Christine Licata, Lauraberth Lima, Taraneh Fazeli, Catherine Feliz, Danilo Machado, Kalia Asencio, Jordan (Issac) Bowen, Hailey DelValle, Andrin Diaz, Karilyn Duran, Geneva Gordon, Ayah Hassan, Emilia Pelegano-Titmuss, Julian Sharp, Shonnae Imei Teel, Kenisha Terry, with teen curators and artists Leonardo Almeida-Ramirez, Jordan (Isaac) Bowen, Tamara Bueno, Haoyue Chen, Junior Steven Clavijo, Camelia Dias, Awa Diop, Emily Eber, Jeremy Feliz, Omar Garcia, Radeha Haque, Lamees Hadou, Elijah Hassan, Brianna Hernandez, Maia Kilian, Yoona Lee, Kristyna Lorenzo, Itzel Maldonado, Giovanna Martinez, Stephanie Mata, Julia Mitchell, Valerie Olivares, Anna Philippe, Jessica Randazzo, Pearl Skelton, Christopher Szczytowski, Shonnae Imei Teel, Frank Tran, Marisa Yang, Kaitlyn Youn, supported by the NYC COVID-19 Response and Impact Fund in The New York Community Trust

**#ImagineAwrld** virtual exhibition, led by Christine Licata, Lauraberth Lima, Augustina Warton, Catherine Feliz, Justin Perez, Dylan Kennedy, Andrin Diaz, Taraneh Fazeli, Danilo Machado, Tahera Tajbhai, with artists and curators Giancarlo Asencio, Kalia Asencio, Andrin Diaz, Geneva Gordon, Amanda Jones, Samantha Rodriguez, Aurora Sadasy, Marvens Volcimus, Grace Wang, supported by the NYC COVID-19 Response and Impact Fund in The New York Community Trust



A Corner of Sunnyside, Queens, where the project *From Nuisance to New Stance*, 2012, curated by Sara Corona, featured five site-specific public

art installations that investigated Sunnyside's identity and cultural development. No Longer Empty was invited by Councilman Jimmy Van

Bramer to highlight Sunnyside Restaurant Week. Photograph by Sara Corona



## Postscript

I hope this book has provided some inspiration and helpful guidance for many exciting future projects. I would like to end, though, with a question and a reflection that sum up some of the challenges and possibilities for the future of working with art in non-traditional spaces that will surely proliferate with the shifts in retail and working habits.

How do we deal with the monster of gentrification and the perception of art as displacement? Art, I believe, must not retreat. But we must find ways to more fully engage communities in discussions about their hopes and aspirations for a given site or public space. It is imperative that all their voices be heard and that we strive to show the role that art can play in this enhanced visioning and communication.

As we all struggle forward, know that there is joy and hope in the creation of art; that it should and must be shared and be accessible to all. Art, in its essence, allows for the expansion of the imagination and possibilities. And what is all this for, if not *tikun olam*: to heal the world and each other?

—MS

## No Longer Empty: Building Art and Community in Unused Spaces

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Pages 2-3: **Orit Ben Shitrit, *Vive Le Capital*, 2010–12. HD video installation in the safe of the former Bank of Manhattan, Long Island City, Queens**

Pages 4-5: **The highly adaptable No Longer Empty logo, designed by Skinny NYC in 2011**

Page 6: **Visitors share their opinions and visions for the future of the Old Bronx Borough Courthouse during the exhibition *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*, 2015. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

Pages 18-19: **Paul Villinsky, *Diaspora*, 2010. Vinyl records and record sleeves. In *Never Can Say Goodbye*, former Tower Records store, Broadway at East 4th Street, Manhattan, 2010. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

Pages 96-97: **Clive Murphy, *Why x Why*, 2010. Domestic trash bags, tape, and electric blower. Site-specific installation for *The Sixth Borough*, Arsenal building, Governors Island, 2010. Photograph by Whitney Browne**

Pages 148-49: **Deborah Fisher and Paul Ramírez Jonas, *Something for Nothing*, 2015. Mixed media and timed performance. In *When You Cut into the Present, the Future Leaks Out*, Old Bronx Borough Courthouse, the Bronx, 2015. Photograph by Whitney Browne**



Cover and above: **Grimanesa Amorós, *Tapiz*, 2010. LEDs, diffusion material, slotted angle steel, vinyl-coated steel cable, zinc-coated hardware, custom lighting sequence, and electrical hardware. In *Weaving in &***

***Out*, vacant storefront, East Harlem, 2010. *Tapiz* was conceived as a floating map representing the richness and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood. Gleaming and visible from afar, the corner window installation worked to dissolve the**

**boundaries between the exhibition and the life beyond it through complex overlapping portraits of people living in the community. Photograph by the artist**



