INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The Bronx is home to arts and community organizations, and is a site of research.

With scant written documentation, the creativity of artists who produce their work in the Bronx can be overlooked in the larger conversations about art-making practices. This small collection of essay excerpts is a step towards ongoing work towards supporting artists and their communities formed through the work.

This grouping of diverse materials -- from a research proposal to think pieces, from programs to interview documentation -- aims to offer more possibilities for engagement with some of the writing about artistic works of the borough.

In 2016, three writers -- A. Nia Austin-Edwards, Layza Garcia, and John Maney, Jr. -- will creatively engage with today’s event and add their work to previous pieces about the 2013 and 2015 showcase and conversation events. These writers included performers, a poet, curators, executive director, media professional, dancer/choreographer: Jennifer Archibald, Sarah Corona, Marcy S. DePina, Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, Taja Lindley and Simply Rob. We are discussing ideas for publication to make the work more accessible.

We hope you enjoy reading this small collection as we continue to build!

-- Jane Gabriels, Ph.D. and Producer, Bronx Artist Now www.pepatian.org

The writings compiled in this sampler are the outcome of generative artistic expression, conviviality, deep listening, and a sustained ambition to continue shaping, growing, and connecting multiple creative practices in and beyond The Bronx. The purview is personal and political, immediate and expansive. Our contributors provide detail and commentary about the current state of affairs for local artists and audiences, and also outline demands and dreams for what’s next. Each bit has its own viewpoint, its own accent, and its own sense of urgency. As a set, they are also run through by a common history, and they succeed in conveying a distinctive effervescence and pride of place.

This sampler is equal parts teaser and invitation for you to get to know the arts and culture milieu of The Bronx better. The individuals, organizations, and networks that labor creatively in and out of our borough seek other interlocutors, collaborators, and investors who value talent, complexity, and resolve. We want these pages to help you strike up interesting conversations today, as well as to arm you with leads, references, and contacts to pursue later. We welcome your interest, and hope you choose to stay in touch and visit again!
Arnaldo J. López, Ph.D.
Development Officer, Pregones Theater + Puerto Rican Traveling Theater,
www.pregonesprtt.org

Table of Contents

1. Young Roots Performance Series program and interview with NeNe Ali and Caridad De La Luz.


3. Jane Gabriels - "Lessons from Familias": Artist-activist curation in the South Bronx"

4. Bronx Artist Now: Showcase & Conversation (formerly APAP@Home) - excerpts from essays written by various writers about the project and participating artists in 2013 & 2015.

This booklet was compiled and edited by Jane, with a big thanks to Arnaldo for your words of support for this project!!

PEPATIAN
Founded in 1983, Pepatián is a South Bronx-based, non-profit organization dedicated to creating, producing and supporting contemporary, multi-disciplinary work by Latino and Bronx-based artists. www.pepatian.org
1) THE YOUNG ROOTS PERFORMANCE SERIES

The Young Roots Performance Series began in 2011 as a creation of former Hostos Director Wally Edgecombe in collaboration with Project Director Jane Gabriels, Pepatian. The series supported the work of eight artists/groups: Noemi Segarra and Henry Cole, Raquel Z. Rivera and Catarina Dos Santos, Sita Frederick/Areytos Performance Works, Los Monstritos, Caridad De La Luz/La Bruja, Antonio Ramos, and Rokafella.

The purpose of the 2011-13 series was to develop a platform for emerging Latin@ artists to experiment with the artistic roots of Afro-Latino traditions to create new branches that reach into the future. This project also helped support Hostos as a creative incubator for new works.

The artists’ work was further supported by an artist network as they attended each others’ performances, rehearsals, gave creative feedback, interviewed each other for the blog, participated in artist discussion groups with the public, invited senior members of the artist community to facilitate discussion with audiences.

All of the performances were fully documented by a collaborative partnership with BronxNet and professionally photographed by Bronx-based documentary photographer, Marisol Diaz. The work was funded in part by the Rockefeller Foundation NYC Cultural Innovation Fund, 2010-12.

For more published interviews, artist conversations, links to BronxNet footage, and other essays, please visit: http://theyoungrootsperformanceseries.blogspot.ca/

In this second incarnation, the Young Roots Performance Series 2015-16 is working with the original artists and has asked each of them to chose another artist/group of artists to collaborate with and pass along the performance opportunity and their knowledge as contemporary artists continually making new work to further inspire themselves, other artists, and communities eager to hear from Afro-Caribbean-Latino voices. This second series is co-produced with Pepatian.

Gabriels and Raquel Z. Rivera are also starting to work on a book project about the series.

On October 30, 2015, poets and singers Caridad De La Luz (La Bruja) and NeNe Ali presented: Rappin’ and Riffin’ in the BX at Hostos Center with composer/musician Desmar Guevara and DJ DP One, and guest artists: Nejma Shea, Intikana, Haley Smith, and Sham.
In a powerful mix of traditional Afro-Caribbean rhythms with the urban beats of Hip-Hop, the evening celebrated women’s empowerment and delivered messages of activism from artists of two generations – keeping the flame alive in the Bronx and passing it on.

To continue the interviews begun with the first group of Young Roots artists, we asked Caridad De La Luz & NeNe Ali to ask each other questions and share their answers with you. Here is their conversation published in the program for the October 2015 performance:

**HIGHLIGHTING THE ARTISTS:**

*Caridad De La Luz & NeNe Ali in conversation*

**Caridad:** What makes you feel most connected to your African roots?

**NeNe:** My people - there’s a connection right there with the elders, and with the young ones. I feel connected by those around me. Besides that – there’s the culture, the music. And where the music derived from in Africa. As an artist, I feel connected to my African roots on a daily basis – I’m always tapping, always writing. Music is communication.

**Caridad:** Nice, I agree. It’s the music.

**NeNe:** It is.

**Caridad:** And humanity itself – knowing that humanity was born from Africa. It’s a fact. Its not even about how you look – its more than those things –on a human level, on a humanity level – that’s where the seed came from, that is where the root is, life as we know it, as humans know it, Africa is where everything came from. If everyone understood that – everyone would feel connected to their Africanness, and everyone would be connected to each other. The power of music coming from there, the power of the music does connect everyone. It breaks down barriers of cultures, of everything. Everything connects to music. Music is the connection as well to the root. I feel that.

**Caridad:** My second question - as an artist/activist, what is the mission and your purpose that you are most passionate about?

**NeNe:** My biggest mission as an activist and an artist is reaching the youth. And I say that because I started doing spoken word when I was 6, doing Hip-Hop. I started off young as well. One thing I can say is that I was shunned from doing a lot of shows just based on my age. They thought I didn’t have a voice, which I did.
I feel as though today’s generation is misunderstood. There is some youth out there with a voice, with a positive message, and we just can’t get that across. And also there is some youth out there who are eager and willing to learn, you know, and to bring forth their talents - through artistry or just through everyday ways of living.

Reaching the youth is important because I when I started, it was a struggle for me. And us as the future, for the next generation, we need to jump on board and get our priorities straight on a spiritual and mental level.

When we talk about oh, the young men are sagging, young girls having babies, but what are we going to do in order to change that? Are we just going to sit there and look down upon them for doing what they’re doing? Or are we going to say like: pick yourself up, pick your pants up, you know, what’s your self worth?

You have to reach them, in order to teach them, you have to reach them. That’s my biggest mission - just reaching the youth. And I’m young myself.

Caridad: How old are you now?

Nene: I’m still 17, I turn 18 in November. Even when I do shows for young kids, I see them, they just sit there in awe. You can see it on their face - like she’s doing this, I want to do this too. And just seeing that is amazing, because that means we have the potential to change the route in which they’re going.

They’re saying we’re heading towards negativity, the worst things, killing each other, and this and that and that and this, but we can help change all that by bringing forth positivity, that positive message, whether its through spoken word, Hip-Hop, R&B, even if its not through the music, or an art form, by just speaking to them. My biggest mission is reaching the kids.

Caridad: Right. And this whole project is called Young Roots. I’ve been part of this series at Hostos for several years now, and when they asked me about this next incarnation, they asked what my vision was for this next performance, and that’s why I thought of you – because of how young you are, because of your mission, because of the things that you’ve done. I wanted to really raise up the youth voice, that’s why it was important for me to have you in this -- on top of the fact that you are also extremely talented and intelligent. And I feel like you have talent that you haven’t yet explored – like your voice, your voice itself. And I want to help you, if I can, develop and expand and really see just how beautiful it is!

There’s this thing that, as artists, while we’re doing what we do, we don’t always see potential in ourselves. We see it in other people, but we don’t see that strength in ourselves. And I feel that you definitely have that - I had seen some clip on facebook and you were singing, just singing, I was like, what the - she sings like an angel!
NeNe: I was singing to my Dad.

Caridad: I was like OMG, this. is. good. So it’s really exciting for me to collaborate with you, considering that you are a young root, and that’s what this series is called. I feel like you exemplify exactly what it stands for.

And for me, as already like the older generation, I was working with the concept of: old school, new school = true school. That’s what was important to me – that this performance is intergenerational, but the purpose is still the same, the root is still the same.

It’s interesting for me to hear you talking about reaching out to youth because that’s what I feel my purpose is – as a facilitator, as a teacher, as a performer, as a parent. My son is 17 too. I feel like this collaboration is in complete alignment with what the series stands for.

NeNe: When I was talking about elders and the youth before, I meant creating a bridge between them.

Caridad: Yes, and being the bridge. It’s like our duty. I feel that when you do have a talent, a gift to reach people, it can break down mental barriers. It’s our duty to connect everybody, to become a bridge on so many levels.

ARTIST BIOS

NENE ALI has a passion for the healing power of words and the ability to deliver mind-blowing performances. NeNe has become a headline artist and has performed at many venues throughout the northeast and midwestern United States. Ms. Ali captures her audience with a certain magical force all her own. The youngest recipient of Miami Heat Dwayne Wade "Keeper of the Village Award" and "Nelson Mandela Community Activist Award" Ms. Ali activism is attached to her art and vice verse. After each performance Ms. Ali gets nothing less than a standing ovation and walks away with the inspiration to continue to make this world a better place!

www.reverbnation.com/neneali

La Bruja/Caridad De La Luz has appeared on HBO's "Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam" and performed internationally at countless respected venues, including Joe's Pub at The Joseph Papp Public Theater, The Nuyorican Café in Puerto Rico, SOBs, The American Museum of Natural History, El Museo del Barrio, The Bronx Museum of Art and at Miramax's "Celebration of Miguel Piñero." La Bruja is the author of the highly successful musical "Boogie Rican Blvd.,” which sold out its eight-week run at La Tea Theater, has been produced at The Nuyorican Poet's Café and in a four week run at The Puerto Rican Traveling Theater off Broadway. She has
released four albums, and is touring her work La Consulta created in collaboration with Desmar Guevara and produced by Pepatian with Pregones Theater. www.labrujamusic.com

http://theyoungrootsperformanceseries.blogspot.ca/

2) THE BRONX IS ALREADY ACCOUNTED FOR
   Erin K. Hylton (excerpt)

   The Bronx has been my home my entire life, and I have been inspired by the neighborhoods, history and culture within the dynamic borough. It influenced me to study art history and later nonprofit management as well as become a cultural worker, creating opportunities and spaces for artists to create digitally and in person. As I finished my first graduate degree I noticed that the Bronx was undergoing a renaissance of interest from developers and investors from outside of the borough. I sought to take part in research to examine what I was observing from an academic standpoint. In using an arts-based economy theory as my lens, I examined the basis of the new movement being for residents or for investors and the importance of community. After understanding what the arts and culture landscape of the Bronx, New York was and the importance of community to the programming of arts and culture organizations in the borough, the project is concerned with the importance of the community within the programming of arts and culture organizations in the Bronx.

   Problematic
In the mid-2000s large media outlets started to create coverage on the Bronx, New York in a new way. Media began to cover the borough using largely positive rhetoric, highlighting the positive attributes of the borough, such as the fact that over 25% of the Bronx is green space. During the 2000s began the label that the Bronx was entering a new era or renaissance (Siegal, 2000; Kugel. 2004; Budick, 2012; Samuels, 2012; Navarro, 2012). At the center of the story was the boroughs art and culture institutions or organizations. Often highlighted was a performance, exhibit, or new space for the creative people moving into the area that highlighted the wave of new residents.

The Bronx was portrayed, as evidenced by the emergent arts and culture scene, as a new area to become a part of. It was not only safe, but full of economic and investment potential. The art scene was detailed as emergent and the potential to create a community was promising (Siegal, 2012). Rhetoric centered on the economic signs of the neighborhoods discussed, often leaving out any discussion of the rich history of neighborhoods or the community that exists in the area. The Bronx was making a comeback into mainstream media as livable, drawing attention to investors and entrepreneurs on the new terrain available.

At the same time, Bronx arts and culture organizations were doing great work in their local communities and impacting the art world. During the 2000s the Bronx arts and culture scene continued to gain notice and recognition in local and national arenas. Becoming a part of major museum retrospectives and fairs, the arts and culture scene in the Bronx was blossoming, hosting events such as the Bronx Comic Fair and ground breaking of the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Creating peace murals, leading community-building work, and mentoring youth, the arts and culture sector was doing community development work in schools, community centers, and in informal settings like parks and vacant lots.

In 2012 the Armory Show, which is one of the most important international contemporary and modern art annual events in New York, devoted to showcasing the most important artworks of the 20th and 21st centuries, devoted an entire day to be centered in the Bronx (Samuels, 2012). The curators wanted a Bronx presence to let people know that there is a thriving arts community in the Bronx. Frieze New York, which is an international contemporary art fair centered on living artists, paid tribute to two South Bronx artists, John Ahearn and Tim Rollins (Budick, 2012). In addition, the Bronx Music Heritage Center, slated for completion in 2013 as a residency for elder musicians and intergenerational collaboration, has signaled economic investment by the local government (Wagner, 2012). With international and local interest in the Bronx arts and culture scene, the media has portrayed the Bronx as a hub of economic return, leaving out the personal stories of community or neighborhood.

By leaving out the social impacts of the Bronx arts and culture scene, the Bronx is portrayed as a new terrain of economic opportunity and investment, leaving out conversation about the community that already exists within neighborhoods. It creates a misrepresentation of the Bronx, New York and the landscape of community while relying on information from limited resources. There is not a representation of the wide variety of arts and culture organizations or
artists that reside within the borough and have resided for decades. It also created a shift into the spotlight of the Bronx, New York, a borough that had been in the low light for decades and naturally occurring cultural district, without them leading the way into defining the space they currently call home.

The central concern of the research project is how are Bronx arts and culture organizations making choices connected to their organizational structure, such as what work to show and who to hire? I am interested in exploring the decisions of the organizational structure of Bronx arts and culture institutions during the emergence of the borough as a center of economic opportunity and whether community is sacrificed for funding opportunities. Also, how the funding process is navigated in connection to the goals of community work. This project is concerned with the importance of the community within the programming of arts and culture organizations in the Bronx.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of the study is the arts-based economy, which was created by cultural policy makers, urban planners, and cultural economists to make a case for arts and culture based on economic returns (Caust, 2003; Americans for the Arts, 2007; Eisenger, 2000; Nowak, 2007). Based on a market model, the arts-based economy approach has viewed the arts and culture as a production value measured in returns to investment and the creation of capital. Impact studies have reflected the direct and indirect impact on community culture. Lacking within the arts-based economy model has been the organic language and process of arts and culture communities (Caust, 2003). The arts-based economy theory could explain the reemergence of the Bronx as a place for investors since a main indicator of economic vitality of an urban downtown is the presence of arts, which has been detailed in major media outlets and praised by the art world. Art and culture is a commodity, not a community tool, which can be owned.

**What is At Stake?**

The Bronx, New York is at a pivotal time in its existence as a borough. With redistricting of its political districts and major budget cuts the borough is seeking new areas of investment. One such area highlighted by politicians and policy makers is investment in the arts and culture sector with the go ahead of such projects as the Bronx Music Heritage Center. Investors and entrepreneurs are welcomed into the borough to find new ways to make capital, which has created a commodification and appreciation of the thriving arts and culture community across the borough. As advertisements and reports have called areas in the Bronx new or undergoing renaissance, they stake an imperialist claim to areas already occupied and lived in by
communities of residents. It has created an inorganic progression and false portrait of arts and culture in the Bronx, trying to replicate other areas like Williamsburg in Brooklyn or Chelsea in Manhattan. The Bronx is already accounted for, and recent efforts by outsiders and investors have ignored the fact. As a result, the effects of gentrification have continued to progress in some of the poorest communities with residents being pushed out due to rent hikes and the culture of communities ignored to make way for the needs of a new class of residents. Such a progression could create a dangerous spiral in the Bronx of displacement and the ruin of communities due to economic gains not community focus.

BIO

Erin K. Hylton is a cultural organizer, social justice advocate, mentor, art collector and artist who proudly hails from the Bronx, New York. Currently she works as School Programs Coordinator at The Studio Museum in Harlem. She fervently believes that art is a human right. Her academic focus is on the importance of the arts to students, with special focus on those with special needs. In her personal time she works on her blogs (artedgenyc.com and erintravels.com) and collaborates with other cultural organizers in New York City and abroad creating events, articles, and presenting at conferences (NYCMER, Open Engagement, Power of Art). Her work, “The Bronx is Already Accounted For: Investigation into the social justice and arts-based economy model in use by Bronx arts and culture” was written in 2012 as part of a research proposal on qualitative research at the New School for Public Engagement (2012). Her personal mantra is "Take action, create change."

Bibliography


Samuels, Tany Anika. “Bronx artists to be part of the Armory Show; first ever Armory Art Week to showcase talent in all boroughs” Daily News Retrieved May 7, 2012 (http://dailynews.com)


3) Lessons from Familias: Artist-activist curation in the South Bronx (draft)
Jane Gabriels, Ph.D.

This chapter (a work-in-progress) focuses on the role that performance curation plays in areas like the South Bronx, New York, one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States, composed predominantly of communities of color that are in an ongoing process of revitalization while meeting intense pressures of hyper-gentrification.

I argue that the performance work, Familias, created by award-winning artists choreographer Merián Soto and visual artist and MacArthur Fellow Pepón Osorio is a curatorial work that was a breakthrough for art and community projects particularly in the South Bronx. Familias was created in 1994-95 with ten local families who participated in the creative process and performances. For Soto and Osorio, Familias is perhaps experientially not as much a curated project as an artistic calling, but I argue that Familias is a curated work through its relationships with the predominantly Latino communities of the South Bronx. As a groundbreaking project, Familias is part of the borough’s artistic history and offers recent initiatives of other art and community projects, whether they realize it or not, foundational support that makes their work more possible in the South Bronx.

Thinking with Familias provides a lens to consider the possible implications of an "artist-activist curator" that could help inspire others, and this focus in the Bronx continues the building of creative legacy so important in a challenged borough.

VALUE

I’m thinking about ideas of value, and where we place it. Merián Soto and Pepón Osorio place value on being artists who worked with the Latino community. I want to think about Familias as also a curated project in order to connect with some other curatorial projects happening in the borough, and engage with their conversations. I also want to make room for the artists within that and foreground some particular ideas, like “inreach,” “Nuyorico,” among others that were created by artists in the Bronx. I’m interested in foregrounding curation to reveal something else, something about process.

I’m interested in thinking how Familias is a series of transversal moves that co-choreograph and co-compose a Latino community through the work. How the creation of this performance work, in its looping of storytellers (dancers, lead artists, community residents, participating venues, audiences) builds their stories forward and supports a borough and people that survived a whole lotta crisis and still kept its home together.
It’s also an important move to keep *Familias* in the artistic archive, and part of the conversation. In writing my dissertation, I felt like it was something that should have been written at least ten years ago. We’re still catching up with documentation.

There are three words that I’ve been thinking about and would like to share here as I continue workshopping some ideas.

**INREACH**

Merián Soto and Pepón Osorio, who are both originally from Puerto Rico, described the South Bronx as their “adopted borough.” Instead of naming their desire to connect with local residents as “outreach,” which refers to reaching out to new communities usually as an “other,” Soto and Osorio described their work as “inreach” into the community of which they were also a part. Conceived by the artists as a conceptual approach, this term was also based on the need, as the artists described, for inclusion of often-marginalized Latino artists and community in the contemporary arts (Soto, “MAP Fund”). “Inreach” implies that the reach is not an action that requires great mobilization; one does not have to reach out far to connect with others. The term relates to the artists’ personal connection with their surrounding South Bronx community, and foregrounds the relationship between their personal response and initiation of the work with their neighborhood residents. They were part of the community participating.

Concepts like “inreach” can help lead to particular ways of thinking about how creative work is made and who is involved in creating the work, as well as pushing ideas for new kinds of words and writings that describe future possibilities. It also signals how artists can take an existing descriptive term often used in arts and community work and alter it to better suit their specific projects. In doing so, the artist is also supporting their work by further revealing to others the complexities of how they create in the borough. Artists are free to use existing terms and develop their conceptual impact or remake, reinvent, reconfigure these definitions as needed to support their work.

**RENAISSANCE**

The term has been used nearly continuously to talk about the borough’s development since the early 1980s. Arts organizations, construction companies and real estate agents all used this idea of “rebirth” to describe, attract investment interest, and promote the South Bronx (Gordon).

Artists, especially those from the Puerto Rican diaspora, have been making work in the South Bronx since the 1940s. There is a complexity at work: people are steadily building their lives and yet are “re-discovered” or their successes are identified as an instantaneous “re-birth.”
What is the recycling of this word from the European Middle Ages doing to support current artistic work in the borough? The word itself is a western concept and the South Bronx has many other cultural influences it can draw from to create a multiplicity of words to describe its own evolution. Is it strong enough, relevant; does it adequately speak for and activate the art making practices in the South Bronx?

It might be more interesting to, rather than focus on separating and foregrounding certain moments apart from each other, find ways to articulate the powerful continuance of arts organizations continuing to make work in the borough in an ongoing drive towards revitalization.

To look at the idea of “renaissance” positively as an opportunity to live and make work in a place that is continually being reborn could also be invigorating.

Maybe part of the continual call of renaissance in the Bronx is that it’s so tender a thing. To announce its arrival repeatedly might be a way to build and support the borough’s continued transformational efforts. To keep building with available materials.

**NUYORICO**

This is a term used by two artists: poet and singer Caridad De La Luz/La Bruja and Arthur Aviles.

Caridad De La Luz defines Nuyorico - in a poem dedicated to Pedro Pietri, poet laureate of the Nuyorican Poetry Movement - almost as a mythical land, a state of mind/heart in a hip-hop beat that connects the Puerto Rican diaspora: “that place somewhere between The Empire State and El Morro,” referencing a New York City landmark and the historic citadel in San Juan (De La Luz 2011: 60).

In his 1998 choreographic work, ‘Maeva de Oz,’ Aviles locates “Nuyorico” located “somewhere beyond the Bruckner Expressway,” where at the time, his theater and dance company were located in the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx. Aviles’ works to support and raise the visibilities for “artists who are women, people of color and/or from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community” (Hadaway). Nuyorico, as Lawrence La Fountain-Stoke suggests is a place of freedom, acceptance, and social justice, with queer visibility and fulfillment; a ghetto utopia (La Fountain-Stokes 2009: 133).

As a conceptual term, nuyorico brings support and empowerment, and focuses on abundance and affirmation in the borough, offering a present and future foundation for the work.

**REALITY & FANTASY**
Where I really want to go is here.

Like “inreach,” Nuyorico is part of a legacy that also includes the utopian imaginary of Eugenio María de Hostos’ Antillean Confederation (“Confederación Antillana”). These are conceptual sites of inspired activation. They are part of the South Bronx artistic biography, and they empower through listening to community and to their dreams. As Osorio states: “I know more than those who colonized me. I create a sense of reality with fantasy” (Coussonnet).

The South Bronx is a creative source, a place to experiment with Afro-Caribbean-Latino multiplicities.

What does this have to do with curation? Context - real and imagined - is everything.

Works Cited


Note
This is a work-in-progress of material from my dissertation, “Choreographies of Community: Familias and its impact in the South Bronx” (Concordia University, 2015), along with a short essay published as a result of a symposium at Duke University (co-conveners: Thomas F. DeFrantz, Jane Gabriels and Dasha Chapman), “Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation & Communities of Color” (June 2015; sites.duke.edu/configurationsinmotion/our-essays). This material was recently presented at the annual conference of NPN/National Performance Network in a panel “Performance Curation & Communities of Color” (Dec 2015), and is now in development for a chapter in a forthcoming book, Curating Live Arts: Global Perspectives, Envisioning Theory and Practice (co-editors: Dena Davida, Jane Gabriels, Véronique Hudon, Marc Pronovost) www.cica-icac.org.

4) Bronx Artists Now: Showcase & Conversations (5th annual)
January 9, 2015

In 2015, Pepatián organized five conversations, and here are their summaries:

1) Teaching Artist Exchange & Artist Residency Projects in the Caribbean
Writer: Jennifer Archibald, dancer/choreographer

Moderator: Jorge Merced, Associate Director, Pregones Theater-PRTT

Participants:
Tina Vasquez, co-Founding Manager, Art Education Exchange: Cuba/USA
Hatuey Ramos-Fermín, rep for Beta-Local (San Juan, PR)
Brittany Williams, New Waves! Dance & Performance Institute (Trinidad/Tobago).
Nick Slie, Co –Founder, Mondo Bizarro, New Orleans, LA.

HIGHLIGHTS

Moderator Jorge Merced, Associate Director, Pregones Theater-PRTT, defined artist exchanges in a unique way: “for the artist, an exchange doesn’t necessarily have to be about ‘what I have to personally give,’ but rather, it can explore the concept of self-questioning, ‘who are you?’

What are we really talking about in terms of privilege? And how does that define your
Brittany Williams: And how does an outsider come into my environment in my community and describe their ways of understanding life and suggest that I can learn from it. Who defines that? These kinds of questions of confrontation are interesting topics of discussion during artist exchanges.

Also, how do you allow trustworthy relationships to cultivate spectrum racialization? The cultural perspectives of an African American and a Puerto Rican from the Bronx could have a lot of commonalities, and they also need be discussed.

Having the space for these types of conversations are where meaningful international collaborations can happen.

Tina Vasquez: When thinking with collaborations with the Caribbean is language a factor or a criteria in determining the types of works or exchanges that take place, or do you think it should be a criteria at all?

In terms of preparation for an artist exchange, should political and social awareness be addressed in advance or should they be determined at the moment of the exchange?

Other questions/thinking points from the conversation:

When you work back home, do you become really aware of what you’re creating and the interactions that you’ve acquired?

"What / where is the place for transients identities in the Caribbean?" There is tolerance and intolerance. It is important to create safe environments to support the exchanges. Identity is being challenged in art making all the time. Is the community ready for this?

2) Creating Art in the South Bronx (multi-disciplinary organizations)
Writer: John Maney, Jr., Bronx-based poet

Moderator: Lauren Click - Director of Community and Public Programs - The Bronx Museum of the Arts

Participants:
Arthur Aviles – Founder - Bronx Dance Magazine & Artistic Director of BAAD
Carey Clark - Visual Arts Program Director - The Point - member Bronx Arts Alliance
Ron Kavanaugh - Executive Director - The Literary Freedom Project
Ariana Hellerman - Assistant Director - Arts & Community Programs WHEDco/Bronx Music Heritage Center
Gail Nathan - Executive Director - Bronx River Art Center
Victoria Sammartino - Founder & Executive Director - Voices Unbroken
Mike Kamber - Founder of the Bronx Documentary Center

HIGHLIGHTS

Artists never left the Bronx but they have not received the support they needed from the Bronx political structure, which was much more concerned with commercial interests.

It seems like funders think when “white artists come all of sudden artists have come.”

The Bronx is one of the poorest counties in the United States, and that artists who work in the Bronx can’t just take advantage of scarce resources, but must give something back.

Bronx artists, and arts organizations need to demand more from the City they give so much to.

We need to develop more programs where young artists from the community and businesses can work together.

The Bronx is a place where diverse cultures rub against each other, mix and produce new things. It’s fertile ground for artists. Unfortunately the South Bronx is also a place where poverty can smother creativity. Each of the panelists through their respective organizations tries to grapple with these difficult contradictions.

3) Site-Specific Work in the South Bronx
Writer: Sarah Corona, Curator, No Longer Empty

Moderator: Arnaldo J. López, Ph.D., Development Officer, Pregones Theater—Puerto Rican Traveling Theater

Participants:
Petrushka Bazin Larsen, The Laundromat Project
Aviva Davidson, Executive & Artistic Director, Dancing in the Streets
Aisha Jordan, Manager of Performing & Visual Arts, Casita Maria Center for Art & Education

HIGHLIGHTS

Aviva Davidson, Dancing in the Streets: “We think of ‘site’ as significance and how the people connect to it.”
Aisha Jordan, Casita Maria Center for the Arts and Education: “With the launch of the Culture Trail we are beginning to arrest this loss of community memory.”

Petrushka Bazin Larsen, The Laundromat Project: “There are three essential elements: time, listening, and research. Projects should reflect what the area is (see ‘Community Mapping Workbook’ attached).

All three organizations agree on the fact that the Bronx has a huge culture of generosity and abundance, and even if financial resources are not always guaranteed, passion and love for the work, networking and leveraging change are fundamental components for a successful outcome of any project.

Valuing what already exists. It is not about gentrification in the common sense, but about making things better and highlighting the local culture and infrastructures, about interpreting the already existing identity and change.

Dancer/Choreographer Merián Soto, in the audience, said something very rich about site-specific artworks: "There has to be something in common and something at stake [for the artists and the community that collaborate in this type of work]. It has to be personally enriching to all." (Cit.)

4) Hip-Hop Update from the Bronx Birthplace (education and media)

Writer: Marcy S. DePina
Program Director, Newark Riverfront Revival; Pres & CEO, FORSA Media Group LLC

Moderator: Michael Max Knobbe, Executive Director, BronxNet

Participants:
Shanika Blount, Program Director, BronxWorks
Caridad De La Luz, Founder, De La Luz Inc.
Erin Hylton, Cultural organizer & Blogger, ArtEdge NYC
Kwikstep and Rokafella, co-Founders, Full Circle Souljahs
Paul La Salle, Chief Development Officer, Windows of Hip-Hop Inc.

HIGHLIGHTS

Paul La Salle of Windows of Hip-Hop Inc.: “Hip-hop could only be born out of the Bronx because of the painful environment and foundation of African, Caribbean, and Latin peoples building on traditions such as Gil Scott-Heron.”
Most in the group agreed that the freedom of expression is a key element in hip-hop. Rokafella suggested that jazz history be used as a cautionary tale and that the foundations of Hip-hop be codified as a basis of knowledge informing the genre wherever it goes.

Hip-hop has begun to be seen as a force in the field of education. Erin Hylton of ArtsEdge NYC spoke about how the world of academia is using hip-hop to speak to students. Shanika Blount who is the Program Director of BronxWorks talked about using hip-hop arts as a tool for transformation and education for her students who are navigating painful environments with intense amounts of urban stress.

Caridade De La Luz, who often teaches at BronxWorks talked about gender and racial pressures and creating safe space to create within the genre as it evolves. The group discussed what many see as a devolution of hip-hop from poetry that provided social commentary on life and traumas in American ghettos to music that glorifies drugs, crime, and the objectifying of women.

Bronx based organizations, artists, and educations recognize the multi-million dollar business of hip-hop and are using the medium to empower youth to consider creative alternatives for economic empowerment.

Hip-hop has always been about being the best and the energy of competition has fueled the genre since the beginning. Kwikstep pointed out that in the past being the best was something that had to be earned based on skills but as the landscape has changed, position can be bought shifting the climate from being the best, to having the most money and resources.

Hip-hop has been a weapon and a shield that has represented a way out of the poverty. No matter how far hip-hop travels, the Bronx will always be its home.

5) BRONX ARTISTS NOW: SHOWCASE & CONVERATION
(formerly APAP@Home)
January 2013
In 2013, Pepatián organized three writers: **Taja Lindley, Naomi Hersson-Ringskog and Simply Rob.** Excerpts from their essays and poem follow.

**Bodies in Movement**  
*Taja Lindley, performing and visual artist, Founder of Colored Girls Hustle*

Community-based and identity-based performing arts use dance as a vernacular language to share stories of resilience, history and culture. Art is created not for it’s own sake, but rather, in the words of Wally Edgecombe, art is an “affirmation of a people supposedly defeated.”

The showcase of Bronx-based and Latino dance artists in the APAP@Home 2013 Program featured works that affirmed the experiences of the artists and their communities. I witnessed stories of cultural and traditional practices, autobiographical healing journeys, immigration, personal integrity, and intersectional explorations of gender and sexuality in communities of color.

APAP@Home provided a unique experience for audience and spectators to travel to the communities where the art is inspired and made — a homecoming of sorts. As we travelled to and through the Bronx, featured speakers shared invaluable contextual information, analysis and history that prepared the stage for the performance pieces witnessed throughout the day.

It became clear how art and culture, namely dance and performing arts, are necessary for organizing, sustaining and celebrating communities in and of the Bronx. On our ride uptown, Majora Carter spoke of the impact of cultural institutions in the Bronx – how bringing live performances and audiences literally change the landscape of the borough, attracting people to walk down formerly deserted streets. And it is these streets that form the fertile cultural soil for art and dance.

As I watched the dance performances, I felt like I was in the company of kindred spirits. While technique and delivery of movement was clearly important and valued by the dancers, it was evident that choreographers relied on the intuition of bodies – bodies that were intimately connected to the messages and stories articulated in the movements.

As a dancer I wonder: if this choreography were placed on other people’s bodies, would the delivery be the same? This question draws me to a conclusion I came to over and over again throughout the day: dance is not simply about the movements; it is too about the people who move. The healing practices of dance not only come through the type of dance that is used, but also through the use of dance to organize and build community relationships. Dance as a method and tool for healing and community building means making it as accessible as possible, and celebrating and recognizing all types of styles, techniques and contributions. I appreciate that hip-hop is included.
By the end of the day, I was full: filled with the energy, passion, and authenticity I witnessed throughout the day’s performances. Our bodies, all bodies, have important stories to tell. The dancers and choreographers are using movement to heal and transform themselves, their audiences and their communities; breaking silences; and making narratives visible that have been erased or forgotten. -- Taja Lindley

**Thoughts about APAP@HOME 2013**  
*Naomi Hersson-Ringskog, Executive Director No Longer Empty*

Days before Jane Gabriels organized the annual APAP tour of the Bronx in early January 2013, I attended a press conference, presented by City Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, which announced the launch of a new initiative to allocate one percent of the city’s budget to cultural spending.

The press conference made it clear that there were two approaches to cultural generation: grassroots organizing and leveraging of political will. To fully bolster the cultural landscape, my experience leading the contemporary public art organization, No Longer Empty, the two must come together.

In thinking through and comparing my experiences of these two approaches, I found that yes, they both reached the same goal of supporting the arts, but in contrast to the city initiative, the APAP@HOME event fostered meaningful introductions that then created a life of their very own. Specifically, the work of No Longer Empty was further supported through introductions to performers like Christal Brown and Inspirit, a dance company. One-time events like APAP@HOME face difficulties in measuring their impact in terms of how much money was circulated, how many collaborations were realized, what sentiments and branding it instills in viewers, the levels of confidence and reinforcement of their work is manifested for performers. In contrast, legislative initiatives benefit from being more easily measured.

The ability to measure impact, however, should not wholly define the success of an initiative in the arts and cultural sectors.

I believe that the APAP@HOME model as produced in the South Bronx should exist widely, and for the following reasons:

The diverse set of attendees convened on the tour that showcased a range of artists in three different venues in the South Bronx. These attendees included foundation program directors, performing arts presenters, journalists, and community based social justice organizations. The program offers opportunity for the attendees to connect and share information and get to know each other and our work.
The participating organizations – Pepatian, BAAD!/Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture and Pregones Theater, as well as support from the Bronx Council on the Arts – shared resources and came together to make the event a success. Attendees were welcomed into their spaces and able to connect with the Directors (and often the founders) at each venue. On the BCA Cultural Trolley, which picked up attendees at the Hilton Hotel (site of the APAP/ Association of Performing Arts Presenters annual conference) and drove them to the Bronx, there were updates on the work of other Bronx-based organizations. The human contact was present, and with this, the potential to share information, experiences, and to make connections for future work opportunities.

In this sharing and banding together was also an economy of exchange, a pooling of resources, to create an atmosphere for even more exchange. This was something that I understand well from my work with No Longer Empty and the exhibitions we explore in different neighborhoods. There is value in these exchanges that are more than any city-wide initiative is able to offer. While not easily measured, their impact is high.

As a final thought, I am eager to observe whether the model of APAP@HOME can become a sustainable platform for setting into motion or further empowering these kinds of naturally occurring cultural districts. - **Naomi Hersson-Ringskog**

**POEM by Simply Rob**

I can’t even front; when my birthday twin, Jane Gabriels, Director of Pepatian and lead curator of APAP@HOME invited me along for the 3rd annual tour and showcase event, I was all kinds of excited. Excited to be gifted a day of experiencing showcases of work by Latino and Bronx based performance artists, some of whom are part of my inner/extended circle of peeps, others whom I would experience for the first time. Excited to be afforded the opportunity of touring through my borough, my hood, and my streets via TROLLEY!! The streets which I walk (or run) up and down, mindlessly, every day on my way from point A to point B. Streets decorated with off da heezie graffiti pieces, dripping with spray painted colors of struggle and triumph, alive with more hustle than bustle, rich with history from mambo to hip hop and where the flava is Afro-Latino-Carribean sofrito and sazon with a little bit of pique and limon. The streets which have also served as the scene to my self destruction and redemption, providing me with the concrete inspiration to pave the way for my creative/artistic journey; as it is so for many of the artists featured in this year’s line up. I’d be revisiting all 3 South Bronx venues, BAAD, HOSTOS and Pregones, only this time as a spectator and writer/poet to take snapshots, in poetic essay form, along the day’s journey into art. I knew the day would be a gift! I knew that I would experience God in many forms; in movement and color, vibration and light. In drum beats, goose bumps and tears. As the days have passed, this gift has continued to keep on giving. Even in the midst of my daily insanity, whenever I reflect back on that day I am overcome with the euphoric recall of the emotions sparked within me by the performances I witnessed. I pray that I am able to convey the magic of that day through a slide show display, in poetry.
The South Bronx had a face lift
Same face only tighter
Garrison Ave is still The Point
Still gritty
Still BAAD
This thunder cannot be stolen
Centro de cultura
Look around
It’s everywhere
Take a deep breath
It’s in the air
Pain turned into art
Transformation
Change
Wastelands are now parks
Woman pulls child in a supermarket cart
Gentrification rolls in but we still have heart
And soul
Impossible to suppress
Taste the cross pollination
Arroz y habichuelas con southern fried chicken
Mambo
Doo wop
Down Low
Hip Hop
Salsa rhythms on black tops
Dancing on fire escapes and rooftops
Trolleys are foreign up in these parts
We up in here
They stops and stares
As we ride through with a clang clan clang and a ding ding ding
We out like that2
And so it begins
Brothaz with their fingers and palms
Pound against the skins
Like wonder twins
Channeling ancestral kinSalute the drums
Before bootys bounce like flames
Beneath the flair of red skirts
BOMBASO DANCE
Afro Latin swag
Cuerpos y tambores hablando
In unison
Native tongue
Mambula ye
Lift that leg
Lines like what
Back that booty up
Shoulders shimmy and shake
Movement and eyes communicate
Transcending language
Time and space

For the rest of the poem and to read the complete articles, please visit: www.pepatian.org