

Shanti Foundation for Peace

October 18, 2007 – Jane Addams Hull-House Museum

Panel Discussion

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

Indira Johnson – Founder and Executive Director, Shanti Foundation for Peace

Welcome; thank you to donors and supporters; this evening's panel discussion is being hosted by Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and its director, Lisa Yun Lee

Introduced Sunny Fischer – she is Executive Director of The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation; she is a powerful voice for community-based institutions, championed funding, and served as advocate for bringing the arts to under-resourced communities.

Sunny Fischer –

Conference participants care about bringing arts to communities. Artists have special powers – “magical” – when used for the common good, can help engender humanity in each other

Conference planning began a while ago – goal is to bring people together, to better publicize, raise awareness of the importance of the work you do

Introduced Lisa Yun Lee as moderator of Panel Discussion – Director of Jane Addams Hull-House Museum – she participates on a diverse set of Boards, does it all with passion and energy. “You don't meet Lisa – she happens to you.”

Lisa Yun Lee –

Jane Addams was first American woman to win Nobel Peace Prize – involved with community organizing, public health, housing, labor reform, free speech, arts and democracy. She was an original founding member of NAACP and ACLU. The room in which we're meeting once hosted notable speakers (eg, W.E.B. Dubois, Gertrude Stein), people who believed they could collectively identify and discuss social ills. Upton Sinclair ate dinner in this room every night.

Jane Addams believed in using the arts to promote participatory democracy. The arts are important for unleashing radical imaginations – should not only be accessible to elites. Hull House sponsored programs for all in community (including arts and dance classes). The arts are a mechanism to engage neighbors in an urban context.

Panel discussion will explore values and ethics in the community.

## **PANEL DISCUSSION**

Arlene Goldbard – writer and expert on issues involving the intersection of culture, politics, and spirituality –

Discussion of values and ethics of community arts and community cultural development. Two general themes: goal of cultural democracy and citizenship, and dynamic interactive nature of ethics in this work.

Community cultural development – similar to economic development. Flow of cultural information is blocked by prejudices, conflicts, barriers. Goal is cultural democracy and citizenship, in addition to political and economic citizenship – all ways that people assert/claim identity in society. Are community institutions grounded in all cultural identities, are artistic visions visible/integral to all? How are people of color represented in society? To what extent is cultural identity freely expressed within the community? Look at the extent to which this matters to policy makers as well as ordinary citizens. Inherent in idea of cultural citizenship – diversity, equality of

cultures, culture as crucible of societal transformation, means of emancipation (process is as important as product). Artists have roles as agents of social transformation.

Ethics – same values pertain. Life provides ethical challenges; community artists generally view these as conflicts/bad things. People involved in community cultural development need to recognize it's perpetual, always with you – ethical principles always subject of negotiation – the process is the most important experience people can have in exploring ethical challenges (such as freedom of expression, personal boundaries, questions of cultural identity.) Example – workshop – experience with Arab-American group, teens making videos about their parents' immigration experiences – led to huge clash within organization, but through the process of exploration of ethical challenge, they arrived at better identification of project themes (belonging and identifying). Kids valued their freedom of expression; parents felt betrayed by what kids discovered. In the end, both groups re-engaged in deeper exploration of video projects – what does it mean to “belong”, and how does this differ across generations?

Juana Guzman – Vice President, Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum

Her passion is working with communities, to help them meet challenges and obstacles. Currently collaborating with the Ford Foundation, re: how people think about arts in the community. Need strong cultural action in the neighborhoods, as well as downtown (“soul” vs “heart”).

Focus on excitement coming from the neighborhoods, involving formal and informal institutions. Address community issues through the arts (use art to express community voices); provide safe space to express views; use arts to bridge barriers and defy stereotypes about cultural groups.

People/communities have international ties, as well as national/local – need to recognize that they have broader connections, their influence isn't only localized. Need to look at the ways in which communities can empower

themselves – “first voice” – not rely on others to interpret them. Use the arts to educate people, and do this respectfully.

Ethical dilemmas of serving communities – who decides what’s needed? Top-down vs bottom-up collaborations; public art placements and how these decisions are made. Ethics of leadership in arts – some see it as entertainment, not as a mechanism to mobilize energy/development. Discussions “around” communities, not “with” them. Need to go into the neighborhoods, listen to people, “you are their guest”.

Andres Hernandez – Assistant Professor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

“Art as a social force”. Replayed a 2006 voice mail message he received, in reference to a community design charette in West Pullman Park. The message expressed opposition to information included in a community flyer distributed only 2 hours earlier. Led him to reflect that process is as important as product, journey vs destination. Can process be a product? What are strengths/weaknesses?

Aeration strategy – based on gardening technique, turning over soil to allow it to breathe – leading to a richer base, generation of seeds, greater harvest (tilling the soil, preparing land for crops to thrive). Often we inherit context for art that isn’t ideally “nutritious”. What if we ‘aerate” (stimulate) context? Would artists be satisfied with this product? Is there artistic value?

Ends vs strategies for future artistic development – perhaps work would develop differently/more robustly

This conference can serve as the process for “tilling”.

## **Q&A WITHIN PANEL**

Question for Arlene - "Cultural citizenship" – appealing, but also alarming – the concept of "citizenship" is often maligned – find a more inclusive term?

- Arlene – doesn't believe in surrendering language to the other side – rather, claim it. Expand citizenship, not concede it. Multiple belonging, multiple participation, all things are true about us at the same time – nobody is just one thing. Don't objectify.

Question for Juana and Andres – Critique of "multiculturalism" – distinct cultures are a method of diversity management – how strengthen cultural identity, but at the same time break down notions of cultural purity that promote racism? How think about communities as a process of changing, how build bridges/don't balkanize?

- Juana – term is often misused as a fundraising tool. Lots of funding is given for this – rewards institutions that haven't historically embraced this concept – but this isn't sustainable. Once the funding is gone, programs often end – and groups/communities do not receive a fair share of the funding. Her opinion – strengthen communities, help build institutions/base, help them fight for funds/compete with larger institutions. Often, funding is not sufficient, and conditions can be placed on expenditures. Also, need to reach out to communities outside our culture – sincere, diverse partnerships really can work.
- Andres - sometimes the use of the term "community" is monolithic and too simplified, promotes concept of insider/outsider – need to recognize complexity.
- Juana – doesn't want artists to be pigeon-holed, but also wants them to exhibit cultural pride. World has to be broader. Show common threads, talk about commonalities through art and culture.

Question from Lily for all panelists – Asked the panelists to speak to the ethics of creating community art, when government is cutting so much funding – where will the money come from?

- Arlene – we are living in a time of huge distortion, which becomes normalized. Arts and culture should be assessed in the same way as public works, everyone has a right to participate in it. But 30 years of public funding has been reduced to the point of anorexia, and the economics have shifted to the private sector. Distortions include time (desire for quick, project-oriented work), censorship issues, agendas. Who has “clean” funding, that isn’t tied to corporations or bad causes? Small grass-roots contributors – but this isn’t sufficient to address the entire need for funding. So each artist/organization has to draw its own line, examine their own practices.
- Juana – artists need to be savvy, and to learn how to negotiate, identify what they will and won’t do. Many funding organizations have criteria, but you can still negotiate. It can be a tricky balance. Need to respectfully acknowledge these criteria, but at the same time you don’t have to slap logos on everything. So little funding is awarded to individuals, so you have to be very creative.
- Andres – grass-roots funding circle – people fund what they like. Need to help communities decide to fund what they want, not look for someone else to provide it for them. Need to invest in our own artists, to re-cultivate communities, and challenge others to support them as well. (Community funding isn’t necessarily “clean”, either.) Our art forms and traditions are important, let’s fund those.
- Juana – institutions need to be careful not to exclude members of their own community. Need to promote accessibility, minimize elitist boundaries, create a community sense of belonging – how

convince them that they should “invest”. Transform facilities into community centers that can be in constant use. Bring them in on many levels, so they feel they belong – still a challenge. The level of funding for neighborhood-based institutions is not the same as for downtown.

## **QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE**

Question – Lots of discussion about community arts programs, but not much talk about schools. Community-based art projects are created in classroom environments – why isn’t there more discussion about public schools?

- Juana – her museum has a strong relationship/partnership with Chicago Public Schools, as well as other related groups. It’s important how we anchor ourselves in the community – partnerships with school systems, collaborations re: curricula. They help fill a void for CPS.
- Arlene – NCLB is worst thing for kids – distortion. Each child has their own way of learning, self-discovery, self-expression. Need to step back from the classroom – ask what it says about our country, to treat creativity this way – what are we going to do about it?
- Juana – she grew up with arts in her neighborhood – music, art. It’s a tragedy that kids don’t get this through the educational system anymore.
- Andres – concept of aeration doesn’t exclude schools – they are part of communities. Arts environment in Chicago schools is alive, although challenged – schools function as community centers.
- Lisa – concept of aeration – think of new ways of articulating success, identify rich language around process.

- Juana – aeration is happening in community anyway (organically and informally), but we don't yet see the value of strengthening community.

Question from Bill Cleveland – he believes strongly in thinking of parallel universes as metaphors – our relationship to the earth. Try to build a sustainable cultural ecology – how move the ethical cultural debate beyond panel discussions, to a place where artists can become directly involved in it? What's the “green equivalent” of cultural practices?

- Arlene – question assumptions. What is unseen is meaningful. In community arts/cultural development world, there are concerns about normalizing existing constraints, not questioning them. Need to keep questioning existing conditions, talk about how things should be – don't give up. (Lots of community artists have diminished their expectations.)
- Juana – young people keep raising the issue of greening – moving towards being a green facility/museum. This goes beyond the museum itself, they are also concerned about what's happening in Mexico (Disney-fication; industrial expansion into towns without strong environmental regulations).
- Andres – need to separate spectacle from substance – are these fads, and to whom? More students are hungry for community collaboration – “communiversity”.
- Juana – concerned about public art in communities. Outsiders dictate; community institutions don't bring in community input, so there's no community buy-in, no infrastructure created.
- Andres – is there room for the conceptual, in our practice? How help people understand larger issues? Community arts practitioners need to challenge communities to look at other art

forms/practices. How do you give people what they want, but still challenge them to think differently? Need to dialogue with community members while they work.

- Lisa – draw from all social movements, knit together arts activism with all other movements.

Question – What are others doing to promote/accurate access to community artists/first voices – how are we supporting new voices/visions?

- Juana – so much need exists. Museum provides so much, but the need is so huge – they can't provide support to all artists all the time. There are very few venues outside the museum for these artists – but doors could easily be opened up (other mainstream institutions funded with public dollars).
- Arlene – this is exactly what she's been working on! She will make information available on website, for downloading.
- Lisa – make this forum a springboard for conversation, don't view the panel as having all the answers.
- Audience member – concerned that there is no concrete dialogue or other opportunities for young artists to talk with established institutions.
- Andres – “lifting as we climb” – mentor others, value other forms of scholarship beyond writing – how document other art forms beyond books?

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