

Proposal for Major Grants funding for Representations: a Series on Culture, Politics and Aesthetics

Program

The Experimental Station has the potential to play a pivotal role in uniting two divergent communities (the black working class and the white academic, intellectual class) that share a history of intellectual and social tensions. We hope to use our geographic positioning between the Hyde Park and Woodlawn neighborhoods as a meeting point for those communities to be in conversation with each other. Relevant themes for both communities include cultural identity, geographic boundaries, and creativity. The Experimental Station is poised to act as a mediator for the great cultural work happening in each community and serve as a bridge for community members to learn about each other's thoughts, attitudes, and creative endeavors in a more in depth manner.

Most conversations in the arts around race and ethnicity are implicitly about representation in creative practice, though they share underlying themes relating to the politics of aesthetics, how art is viewed, perceived, and accepted in the marketplace, and how different groups of people perceive the importance of cultural products and activities. Often, these conversations fail to challenge the status quo and existing idioms around what it means to be a cultural worker, artist of color, and creative person. Many of these conversations also tend to occur in traditional cultural institutions and academic settings that don't always make a conscious effort to include marginalized voices. By aggressively exploring how communities use different language to communicate similar cultural ideals, "Representations" hopes to show that while being expressed differently, creative individuals desire similar outcomes.

Through the course of 7 core programs highlighting the literary, performing, and visual arts, "Representations" will occur on the third Thursday of February, March, April, May, June, August, and September in 2008. Using the casual salon format as a launching point for cultural convergence,

“Representations” provides common ground for artists, public intellectuals, and cultural workers to move from the margins of public discourse on creativity, community, politics, and culture to the center. Through these social happenings, we hope to share language and creative interests, forge new relationships, and expand the current conversation on culture. The core programs will consist of two components: an artistic element and discussion. Artistic elements range from musical performance, listening parties, and art exhibition to facilitated discussions and readings. Each artistic element will incorporate a form of dialogue such as panel, group conversations and experiential exercises. Artists, cultural workers, panelists, and facilitators are primarily Chicago-based and residing in various communities such as Hyde Park-Kenwood, Woodlawn, Pilsen, Wicker Park, Bucktown, West Town, Bronzeville, the Loop, and Lakeview. We have also made special effort to gain a wider perspective by engaging members residing in the suburban creative communities of Evanston and Highland Park as well as artists and cultural workers residing outside of Illinois.

Through collaboration with the Chicago Arts District, events at the Experimental Station will be complimented by complementary activities during the month of May. Chicago Arts District collaborative events include a dinner conversation, video installation, and a dance party, which will take place at 2003 S. Halsted in the Pilsen community. Core activities at the Experimental Station are supported through collaborations with the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, the University of Chicago Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture, and the University’s Departments of English and Art History. Collaborators support the series through public relations assistance, space and facilities usage, humanities scholars and experts, artists, cultural workers, and participants.

Scholars and Experts

Professor of English at the University of Chicago **Leela Gandhi** has research and teaching interests that include sixteenth and seventeenth-century drama, the culture of late-Victorian radicalism, Indo-Anglian literature, and Postcolonial theory. To date, her scholarly work has been driven by a methodological impulse toward disciplinary intersection and an accompanying inclination toward the overlapping and intertwined legacies borne of colonial encounter. She is the author of *Postcolonial Theory* (1998), co-author of the study, *England Through Colonial Eyes* (2001), and most recently published a book, *Affective Communities* (2006), which seeks to represent anticolonial politics as the product of numerous transnational collaborations, friendships and conversations between western and non-western dissidents. Currently, Gandhi is working on a book length study examining a series of historical conjunctures, events, phenomena, largely shaped by the events of the first two world wars, that she believe to have been especially congenial to the distillation of a postcolonial *askesis*.

Darby English is Associate Professor of Art History and the College, and Affiliate Faculty in Visual Arts, the Center for Gender Studies, and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago. He is the author, most recently, of *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (MIT Press, 2007) and *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress* (Rizzoli, 2007). English teaches courses in modern and contemporary American art, art theory and criticism, and cultural studies. Recent courses include American Art since 1960; Jasper Johns (in conjunction with a thematic retrospective of the artist's work at the Art Institute of Chicago); Vocabularies of Abstraction; Alternative Approaches to the Visual; Modern/Postmodern; and New Art in Chicago Museums (and other spaces).

Since 1994, **Hamza Walker** has served as Director of Education for The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, a non-collecting museum devoted to contemporary art. Prior

to his position at the Society, he worked as a public art coordinator for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. He has written articles and reviews for numerous publications, including *Trans*, *New Art Examiner* and *Parkett* and recently co-edited the *Raymond Pettibon Reader*. For several years before its closing, he served on the board of Randolph Street Gallery and is currently on the boards of *Noon*, an annual publication of short fiction, and Lampo, a non-profit presenter of new and experimental music. He has served on numerous panels, locally, nationally, and internationally and is the recipient of the 1999 Norton Curatorial Grant.

Jacqueline Goldsby, Associate Professor of English at the University of Chicago, teaches courses that interrogate the relations between genre criticism and cultural history—the ways in which literary forms function as memorial archives—in late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century American and African American literatures. Currently, Goldsby is completing a book manuscript that follows from this line of inquiry, *A Spectacular Secret: the Cultural Logic of Lynching in American Life and Literature*. This work considers how literary representations of lynching in fiction, poetry, and photography bear within their compositional structures a “secret,” or otherwise buried history of the violence; a history that implicates this practice of racial terrorism with pivotal developments in American modernity.

Daniel T. Parker is a Chicago based art collector and co-founder of Diasporal Rhythms, an organization that seeks “to promote the collection of visual art by individuals and institutions in the African American communities of Chicago through the sponsorship of activities honoring, celebrating, analyzing and presenting the works of those active contemporary artists of African descent, recognized by our organization as being of quality, merit and cultural and artistic significance.”

Author of *Slingshots (A Hip-Hop Poetica)* [named Book of the Year-finalist by The American Library Association] **Kevin Coval** has performed at universities, high schools and theaters on four

continents in seven countries including; The Parliament of the World's Religions in Capetown, South Africa, The African Hip-Hop Festival: Battle Cry, Poetry Society of London, and Stanford, St. Xavier's College in Bombay, India. He also appeared in four seasons of *Russell Simmons' HBO Def Poetry Jam*, for which he also serves as artistic consultant. Coval's writing has appeared in *The Spoken Word Revolution* and *The Spoken Word Revolution: Redux* (Source Books); *Total Chaos* (Basic Civitas); *I Speak of the City: New York City Poems* (Columbia University Press); *Awakening The Spirit* (Skylight Paths); seen on C-Span, WGN, and can be heard regularly on Chicago Public Radio, where he is resident poet and hip-hop correspondent. Additionally, Mr. Coval is Founder of *Louder Than A Bomb: The Chicago Teen Poetry Festival*, the largest youth poetry festival in the world. For over ten years, he has taught hip-hop poetics in high schools and colleges around the country and currently serves as faculty at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago as well as Minister of Hip-Hop Poetics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jacqueline Stewart, Associate Professor in the School of Communication at Northwestern University, has research and teaching interests in African American film and literature, American silent film, histories and theories of spectatorship, and the role of race in "orphan films" (non-commercial and other marginalized film and video works in need of preservation, from home movies to cable access television programs). Her book, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005) explores African American images, spectatorship and filmmaking practices up to 1920. Her essays have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *Film Quarterly*, *The Moving Image* and *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, eds. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)). Her current projects include a study of the life and work of African American actor/writer/director Spencer Williams, and the South Side Home Movie Project.

CJ Mitchell is the Executive Director of Links Hall Performance Space in Chicago, IL. CJ also runs the record label False Walls and does fundraising for the performance group, Goat Island.

Ayesha Jaco is dedicated to the discipline of dance and other performing arts that enhance the educational experiences of youth and their self-esteem. Through her work with youth in communities, she works toward a model of programming and outreach that provides empowerment to communities by identifying, magnifying and cultivating the assets that sustain their growth and existence. She holds the Master of Arts Management degree from Columbia College Chicago and in her thesis project, documented the relationship between African Dance and positive self-esteem in African-American adolescent girls in Chicago. Ms. Jaco currently serves as an instructor, choreographer, company member and consultant with Najwa Dance Corps and as Program Manager for Youth Outreach Services.

Maria Gaspar is an interdisciplinary artist and public artist with a B.F.A. in Fine Arts from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. As a performance artist, she has performed at the Athenaeum Theater and the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio, TX, and participated in *Escultura Social* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in 2007. She is a Core Artist with the Chicago Public Art Group, and has led mosaic mural projects and other permanent work installations around Chicago, including projects at the Garfield Park Conservatory, Marwen Foundation, and Washington Park.

Audience

In accordance with the mission of the Experimental Station, programs that are part of “Representations” are free and open to the public. Though we welcome all members of the Chicago community, we wish to focus our marketing and communications efforts on a marginal community including but not limited to artists of color, living and working on Chicago’s south side who have

not received major awards or recognition for their practice. In our desire to be a connecting point for communities and a place of conversation, we feel this series will provide a format and venue that encourages local community residents to dialogue about creativity and the politics of creative culture with the larger cultural community. Through programmatic activities, "Representations" seeks to connect marginalized artists with a larger social and cultural community, in turn increasing their access to local funding opportunities and other resources, and grow a creative and intellectual community that is interested in building new alliances with like minds in the city.

To reach this specific population, we plan activities in conjunction with members of various constituencies within this population, including practicing artists of color on the city's south side (some of whom have received critical acclaim for their work along with those who have not), cultural workers and community organizers with an interest in these issues, and community and cultural allies and advocates.

Recently, the Experimental Station has hosted a number of community cultural events and activities, including a conversation with Naomi Klein, award-winning journalist, syndicated columnist and author of the *New York Times* and international bestseller, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*; the Illinois Humanities Council democracy symposium; south Chicago Humanities Festival programs and events; student exhibitions; the Hyde Park Jazz Festival, as well as serving as an incubator for emerging arts organizations and artists.

Promotion

The communications plan for "Representations" will include using local arts networks to promote events, college and university list serves, and employing key constituents in the target audience group to serve as "ambassadors" who can participate in conversations and arts activities and events and share the information and continue the conversation with their personal networks.

By having the core activities occur in the target audience's community will open additional distribution channels for communications more easily as well. Specific activities associated with promotion and communications include but are not limited to:

- Posting program announcements on local arts list serves such as Chicago Artists Resource, the Chicago Teaching Artist Collective, Chicago Artist Coalition, Bronzeville Community Alert;
- Utilizing cultural organizations and institutions such as the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago, Vocalo, Chicago Artist Coalition, *Lumpen* magazine, AREA Chicago and the Stockyard Institute as drop points for printed materials, a resource for Web site links to events and programs, and as advocates for programmatic activity and conversations; and
- Creating a forum (blog, list serve link, etc.) for conversations that were sparked as a result of programmatic activity so that those conversations can continue and those relationships and alliances can grow.

Evaluation

The primary desired outcome of "Representations" is growing the ability of artists, cultural workers and leaders, and intellectuals of color to articulate their own creative position with conviction integrity. In addition, we hope that "Representations" will foster the development of new relationships as a result of various communities converging in common, yet neutral spaces. We expect that the quantity of participants will grow as the series progresses, however, it is most important to us that participants feel a longer term impact from the opportunity to forge new relationships, meet like minded individuals, hear and critically reflect on varying points of view, and experience a broadening and deepening of their creative and cultural "tool kit." We will work closely

with an evaluator who can help us determine the most appropriate qualitative study methodology in order to measure the outcomes of the series.

IHC Fund

Funding from the Illinois Humanities Council will be used to support the creative work, time, and intellectual capital of creative people by giving artists, panelists, facilitators an honorarium and providing audiences a comfortable and welcoming environment that encourages community building and dialogue. IHC funds will also be used to cover basic operational costs associated with program development, planning, and execution such as facilities usage, administrative support, marketing, advertising, and collaborative activities. Additionally, IHC funds will allow the Experimental Station to invite one significant artist from outside of Illinois (such as Chicana playwright, essayist, editor, and activist Cherie Moraga) to participate in the program and dialogue with community members.