

CONSIDERING THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE: A KALEIDOSCOPE CONVERSATION

Alliance of Artist Communities Conference, 2018

“For more than five hundred years, Native communities across the Americas have demonstrated resilience and resistance in the face of violent efforts to separate them from their land, culture, and each other.”¹ As custodians of space-based programs, how do we contribute to the reparations necessary to indemnify native people from the genocide and colonization so harmful to their communities? Does your organization acknowledge the traditional Native inhabitants of the land when introducing programs? Is this enough? Join c3:initiative in a kaleidoscope conversation as we consider: How do we move beyond sustainability for ourselves and toward reciprocity with the land and its indigenous people? What is responsible? What is enough?

The kaleidoscope conversation format is inherently participatory. It dissolves the “expert” versus “audience” boundary that often exists in traditional panels and empowers attendees to be actively engaged through collective questioning and sharing. In our experience, the kaleidoscope approach of only asking questions demands active listening and critical thinking in a unique way. The group conversation will conclude with a collaborative reflection period in which everyone is invited to voice their responses to the entire session.

QUESTIONS WE ASKED TOGETHER

How do we move beyond sustainability for ourselves and toward reciprocity with the land and its Indigenous people?

What is responsible and what is enough?

How do we offer to hold spaces for Indigenous communities?

Are you scared to connect with the Indigenous people in your region for fear of what they might request?

Have any organizations in the local Indigenous community reached out to you about accessing your space?

¹ <https://usdac.us/nativeland>

How does it feel to give a sacred ceremony knowing that the organization is going to be collecting resources but not necessarily seeing that come to your community directly?

How can we as artist residencies be people who put money back into the hands of those we stole from?

Can you better impact the land and its people by consciously spending?

Is there any way to reach any sort of reciprocity for Native people in the Americas?

Is that even possible?

Could it be perhaps that the systems that we utilize today to create funding, to create resources, to create conversation about these issues... are they not also toxic?

Do we reinforce colonialism by maintaining these practices, and wondering if spending is the direction?

Are capitalism and colonialism synonymous?

Was there a system in place here prior to contact that didn't involve land ownership and function for tens of thousands of years?

Did people not suffer during that time?

Was there not fights over some of this as well?

Can we envision a value system based on reciprocity as opposed to theft and violence and genocide?

We need, as a society, in general and as artists, and as institutions, we really need to think and make that connection between that toxicity of capitalism, colonialism, and religion. We need to get to the root of that

What is settler colonialism behavior and how does that manifest every single day?

What are ways to realize economic liberation of our people who are not reliant on white supremacy and capitalist settler origins?

What are ways to support each other outside of settler colonialism?

What are the things that we carry and practice for a long time that are inherently part of our communities?

How might we use residency programs and programming in ways that are supportive to Indigenous communities?

How might we promote artists to do social practice work in that space as well, which will help open more doors?

How does one build relationships with Indigenous peoples in their community?

Is the term incubator, which is often used to describe rural residencies an insult to Native people?

How do we decolonize our understanding of what art is and its relationship to life and social practice from an Indigenous world view?

How do you maintain your artistic integrity when you're navigating these circles?

How do we as institutions pre-figure the relationship that we want to see?

How might we as a potential collective of residency programs provide a channel that confronts and challenges the barriers of the institutional education systems that are set up as so-called traditional education models...

How might we as a collective provide more opportunities to confront that?

How do we return to traditional practices without participating in cultural appropriation?

How do we convince white or western institutions to dismantle themselves rather than save Indigenous people?

What relationships or practices should immigrant communities be aware of so as not to continue to perpetuate colonialism?

How do we move from a scarcity mentality to an abundance mentality that allows space for all people to participate?

How can we put more in than we take out in every instance?

How can we make our lives beautiful every day?

How can we recognize without an artistic skill set that we are artists, and we are sensitive, and we can do beautiful things in everyday life?

How would that make a difference to each other?

How would that ripple and resonate and change everyone's opinion about one another?

How would that create more inclusivity? More intersection?

How would that make us more united without making us homogenized?

How have we not asked these questions before?

Why has this continued to be swept under the rug? Are we super complicit in it? Are we not actually going to talk about it with our organizations or other people who might need to hear it?

By doing nothing are we furthering the issue?

How many board members are in this room having this conversation?

How can we begin to move toward ecological and cultural sustainability if we cannot even imagine what the path feels like? (Robin Wall Kimmerer)

How can white people begin to know what it feels like?

How can we get to reconciliation when we don't want to know the truth?

How would you define common ground whether emotionally, physically or psychologically?

How do you really listen?

How do you find resources to read and work from? Where do you find them??

Why is there no Lenape language anywhere on any outdoor sites in Philadelphia?

How do we create a funding structure that supports relationship?

How do we design programming that isn't western-based that invites the notion that art and culture are one?

How can that same question be expanded to the sciences?

How do we create spaces outside of this one where Indigenous voices are lifted?

How do we show up for each other without co-opting each other's

Are white leaders willing to look at their own ancestral histories and the ways that they've perpetrated and benefitted from these systems and participate in a truth-telling from that level of vulnerability and truth?

How do we relate our feelings about this conversation to acts of institutional violence that are happening right now?

How do I look toward Indigenous leadership when it's also being said don't come near our space?

What are white people?

How do I create reverence for all the trauma that's affected generations before me so that I don't pass it on to my kids?

How do I find appreciation for all of that because I'm alive today?

How do I recognize the incredible privilege I have being alive today?

How do I weaponize that? How can you?

How do we reach out to Indigenous artists and ask them for help?

How do I wake up every morning and walk with beauty and love for all the parts of me? From my family from Europe, my family from Modoc homelands?

How do we stand up and find our voice and not be afraid to challenge institutions and board members?

As an art organization, how do we have these conversations every single day and ask our participants to walk on the land and to listen and talk to representatives of those places?

How do we have these two paradigms of violent western settler colonialism and indigenous worldview and find balance?

How do we listen to the land together and what do we hear?

What are tools and technologies that currently exist or need to be created to facilitate the answering of these questions?

How do people from other forms of oppression bring this conversation to their communities and how do we learn to work together?

How do we stop glamorizing the act of unsettling?

How do we become comfortable with the fact that we will never live in that beautiful world?

How do we recognize we are part of a continuum and its taken 500 years to get to the place we're at, and expect it to be done within our lifetime?

How do we own that? How do we recognize that? How do we become comfortable with the privilege that we have and the opportunities that we have and the access that we have now, and recognize that it's probably too much, that there are things we need to let go of, maybe not expect so much?

How do we have a conversation globally where maybe the planet can't sustain a bunch of first world nations?

Can we become more comfortable recognizing that we do have too much, we're using too much?

Can we up here on the high horse look down and say, can you help me down? Can you help me belong again to place because it seems as though I can't touch the ground anymore?

Can we ask ourselves, when were we separated from the land?

How do we stop glamorizing those that have too much?

How can we stop expecting other people to teach us what we need to know?

How can we show up for each other in ways that are generous and take responsibility?

How do we not fall into a trap of thinking of social practice as something that will save indigenous communities? How does that not become in itself settler colonialism?

How do we conversely understand that time, space, deep thought are intrinsic to this indigenous practice and are not the province of white art?

How do we navigate the inherent crassness of offering space to indigenous people?

How do we, at the same time, deal with the fact that that's something we actually can do?

How do descendants of immigrants and slaves come to this from a point of solidarity?

How do we do that while also making it very clear that white people need to do more work, even when it is "our" job?

How do we embed this into our organizations?

How do we as a privileged class demand that the economy shrink? Demand material discomfort in exchange for right relations?

How do I not fuck up my kids?

How do we keep these conversations going?