

The National Herald

ARCAthens Launch Event in Tribeca Introduces Inaugural Fellows
By Eleni Sakellis



ARCAthens Board member George Negroponte and Founder and Executive Director Aristides Logothetis, center, spoke about the nonprofit organization. Photo by Eleni Sakellis

NEW YORK – The ARCAthens (Artist Residency Center Athens) launch event took place on January 22 at R & Company in Tribeca to introduce the inaugural Fellows of the Pilot Program and support the nonprofit organization’s future programming. Founder and Executive Director Aristides Logothetis welcomed everyone to the event in his remarks and thanked the hosting committee, board members, advisory council members, and all the supporters of ARCAthens.

He introduced the inaugural Fellows, artist Cullen Washington, Jr. and curator Larry Ossei-Mensah, who spoke about the program. Logothetis also introduced Pedro Barbeito, Assistant Professor of Art at Lafayette College where he is also the Director of the Experimental Printmaking Institute (EPI). Logothetis and Barbeito created the ARCAthens at EPI residency program which Washington will attend following his residency in Athens.

Zesty Meyers, co-founder of R & Company and treasurer of ARCAthens' Board of Directors gave the welcoming remarks. ARCAthens Board member and Director Emeritus of The Drawing Center George Negrofonte spoke about the importance of supporting the nonprofit organization, adding that he was pledging \$5,000 and invited everyone join him in making a gift.



The inaugural Fellows of the ARCAthens Pilot Program, artist Cullen Washington, Jr. and curator Larry Ossei-Mensah. Photo by Eleni Sakellis

The inaugural Fellows, artist Cullen Washington, Jr. and curator Larry Ossei-Mensah, spoke with The National Herald about how they got involved with ARCAthens and what they look forward to in Athens.

Ossei-Mensah told TNH, “Aristides and I have known each other for several years, I actually wrote an essay for an exhibition he had at the Bronx Museum, and we’ve always been in constant dialogue and conversation. He mentioned to me that he was starting an organization and explained to me the vision. I was very excited by it and was actually on my way to Athens because I was going to Hydra for the DESTE Foundation.

“I spent about two days in Athens and I got to begin to understand what’s happening particularly in the art community there, beginning to build relationships.

“Some of those artists were at the New Museum’s Triennial last year, another artist was in a show I curated in Harlem last year, so I became very curious about what’s

happening in the Athenian art scene particularly and he asked me if I would be interested in participating in the fellowship and I was excited he accepted the offer. Ossei-Mensah explained, "For the pilot, I will be going as a curator fellow and Cullen Washington Jr will be going as the artist fellow and we'll spend about 5-6 weeks there and part of that is doing studio visits, getting to know the artists, getting to know curators, and using art to create this cross cultural dialogue/conversation.

"We'll be totally immersed in what is happening in the Athenian art scene, so for me I have a bit of a head start because I've already built some relationships with artists, I've kept in contact with them, so when I go, it's me engaging with them but then them introducing me to another set of artists, curators, writers in addition to the artists, curators, and writers that the organization wants us to be in contact with."

About the Greek artists, Ossei-Mensah said he found them "energized coming out of the crisis, really thinking about what is the next chapter and how do we tell that story through artistic practice.

"I was really impressed by the entrepreneurial spirit, a lot of the artists had their own spaces that they created whether it's in their apartment, a loft, one used to be a mechanic's shop, so I was impressed that they were not waiting for people to help them get a show, they were just doing it, working together, and the community is very tight-knit, from what I've observed. I'm excited.

"For me, it's an opportunity to continue to learn, build relationships, try to find opportunities with things I'm doing or recommending to colleagues, because when I come back they're going to ask, so you went to Greece for six weeks, tell us what happened in Greece who are the artists we need to know, who are the curators, the writers, so you're a bit of a reporter in a way."

Cullen Washington Jr told TNH, "I think it was really an appropriate connection because my work is about the Agora. City Square is the title of my work. I use the Agora as a metaphor for humanity which I believe is that the city square is the nexus of humanity, it's where you see the good, the bad, and the ugly, so you have protests in the city square, you have military pageantry, people watching, you have all these different facets of human behavior that kind of organically intermix in this open space.

"I was speaking to Aris about it and he said, 'we're coming up with this residency program and I'll keep you posted, I think you'd be a good candidate for it.' A few weeks later he calls me and says 'guess what, we've got the funding and we would like you to be the inaugural artist,' and, of course, I'm ecstatic about it, this is really a treat and a privilege to go to the birthplace of the Agora. I've never been to Greece."

He looks forward to seeing "the roots of where this took place and actually stand in that place, so it's not just a thought, it's an actuality."

When asked about his research on the Agora, Washington noted that he read about "the importance of the city square in cities around the world, especially in areas that don't have democracy, but even here protests take place in Washington Square, so it's neutral ground where maybe the rules subside just a little bit and it's a place of free speech."

He continued, "I read that in certain Muslim countries, the city square is the only place where women can be seen in public, and even in some refugee camps they created a sort of a square, you find it's a human need to have a square, this facilitator of human

behavior, so I thought it would be a great idea to kind of use that as a jumping off point for the work.”

Washington told TNH, “I have an interesting relationship with Greece because my dad was a minister and theologian and in the mornings on Saturdays, he would transliterate the Greek New Testament, so he put me in a chair next to him as he was drawing these picture words and I started copying, emulating, mirroring him, and that’s how I learned to draw, so all throughout my childhood I heard my dad talk about Greek and Greek culture and the words because it has this relationship to the Bible, searching for truth.” The Alexandria, Louisiana-native told TNH that he began drawing at the age of three and had his first art show when he was 9 at the elementary school where his mother taught. “My mother is an educator and she would buy me art supplies, for Christmas, that’s what I got, art supplies,” Washington said.

Among those present were Consul of Greece in New York Lana Zochiou, ARCAthens Board of Directors President William Fagaly, EMBCA President Lou Katsos, AGAPW founder and President Olga Alexakos, Argyris Argitakos, community members, and many artists, including Philip Tsiaras, Masaaki Noda, Aphrodite Navab, and Giorgos Taxidis.

More information about ARCAthens is available online: arcathens.org.