

Transcript of Event
“**Contemporary Agora—Athens as Cultural Microcosm**”
March 28th, 2019
Amphitheater of the Acropolis Museum
Athens, Greece

ARISTIDES: So, good evening everyone and welcome to ARCAthens’ inaugural public presentation “Contemporary Agora: Athens as Cultural Microcosm” here at the magnificent Acropolis Museum.

I’m Aristides Logothetis. I am a visual artist, founder and executive director of ARCAthens. Tonight’s program will introduce you to the wonderful work of our inaugural fellows: Cullen Washington Jr and Larry Ossei-Mensah. And it will be followed by a conversation where our fellows will be joined by Daphne Vitali, Dan Cameron. And we will discuss what the Contemporary Agora means to them through the lens of the ARCAthens Residency Program.

I, first of all, want to thank you for joining us and everyone who helped organize this event: the Acropolis Museum, especially the director Dimitrios Pandermalis and Sophia Stavropoulos, as well as the US Embassy for supporting us with their auspices. Our presentation and panel discussion tonight takes place in conjunction with ARCAthens’ Inaugural Residency here in Athens.

And before I jump into tonight’s program, please allow me, I also want to thank everyone who helped make our program a reality. It’s been a lot of work. Joy, blood, sweat, and tears. Among them are our Inaugural Fellows, our Board, our Advisory Council, our Staff—which I should take a moment and individually acknowledge—Iris Plaitakis, our Assistant Director who lives here in Athens. Maggie Lam, our Communications Director, who lives in Madrid and is here for this presentation. And Clayton Campbell, our Residency Advisor, who lives in Santa Monica and is here with us tonight as well. Thank you for coming.

I also want to acknowledge the supporters that have made this program a reality. Particularly the McComb Foundation and our founding patrons the Daphne and George Hatsopoulos Fund, the Helis Foundation, Louis Katsos, Charlie Kiriakos Perperidis and Dr. Roda Plakogiannis.

I’d like to acknowledge and thank you, the Athenian Community, who generously came together to provide access to the community for us and our fellows. Thank you for making

us feel very welcome in our first activity. Our Outreach Program is an essential part of the residency experience. We aim to provide for our fellows and we would like to also thank Yerassimos Yannopoulos, Daphne Vitali at EMST, Stamatia Dimitrakopoulos, Marino Pascal, Nikos Papadimitriou, Maria Papadimitriou and Click Ngwere at Victoria Square Project, Cathryn Drake, Paolo Colombo, Athos Stylianou at RSM, Craig Mauzy and John Camp at the Agora Excavations, Elena Kechagia at iset, Poka Yio and the Athens School of Fine Arts, PostScriptum. And Atopos cvc for hosting our welcome event back in February. Thank you to all of you mentioned here and to the many others that have pitched in and truly provided philoxenia—the hospitality Greeks are known for and an essential element of any residency project.

So, for me as founder, a very special thank you to every one of you for helping us come to this poignant moment. It's a true pleasure to welcome you here tonight.

ARCAthens is a nonprofit organization from New York City, supported by people like you whose mission is to immerse talented scholars in the Athenian community. And to provide them with the financial support and structure so that they can develop and enrich the research, build bridges, and cross-pollinate advanced ideas through their relationships with the Athenian Community—which I, and many others, believe is uniquely dynamic. I too share the vision of many people here in Athens, as well as in the diaspora, that Greece and Athens ought to be a global center for creation, scholarship, and academia. And ARCAthens aims to provide a positive contribution to an already energized city. The creation and sharing of ideas is what defines humanity.

The Greeks have had an early and ongoing relationship to the cultivation of ideas through the development critical thinking and dialogue. Early in the founding days of ARCAthens, as we were putting together a structure, it was Father Alexander Karloutsos, in New York City, that wisely reminded me of Greek President Konstantinos Stephanopoulos' quote from a few years ago during a controversial moment in the country's ongoing challenge in understanding its contemporary development. That Isocrates stated 2400 years ago, here in Athens, that Athens has become a teacher of others and the city has made the name Greek seem to be not that of a people but of a way of thinking. And people are called Greeks because they share in our education rather than in our birth.

This cosmopolitanism and outward perspective is not new. And while Greeks are diverse people, as people are everywhere, there is a uniqueness and continuity in the relationship to the sharing of knowledge and the embracing of the other—which brings us to the “Contemporary Agora: Athens as Cultural Microcosm.” This beginning concept for tonight's

conversation was inspired by Cullen Washington Jr's ongoing interest and inspiration by the ancient Agora—a subject of many of his works.

And I'll tell you a little bit about Cullen Washington Jr. Cullen utilizes the grid to communicate humanity and interconnectedness. He describes his collage abstract paintings as non-representational fields of activity. Washington has shown nationally, and internationally, in selected exhibitions including the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Saatchi Gallery in London, the studio Museum in Harlem, as well as the Academy of Arts and Letters in New York. Washington has been a resident of the Studio Museum in Harlem the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and was the recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award—in the collection—and is also in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, Studio Museum in Harlem, Joyner Giuffrida Collection, and the Alexandria Museum of Art in Louisiana. In 2018, Washington was Resident Artist at the Joan Mitchell Foundation in New Orleans. So let's bring Cullen up for him to share with us some of his work and history. Ladies and gentlemen, Cullen Washington Jr.

CULLEN: 'Yessas' — did I say it right?— 'Yassas.'

I tell you it's a pleasure to be here. And it's with great joy that I have this opportunity to share my work with you. Before I get started, there's just a few things I'd like to read. These are some notes that I journal from time to time. And I synthesize them so they sound coherent.

Being abroad for an extended period of time broadens one's concept of non-linear thinking and erases the fragile dotted lines between people and their differences.

True civilization is how one man or woman treats another. It's not based on how high a building is or how fast your internet connection.

Here in this mental space in Athens, Greece, I ponder these two questions:

What is hope?—Eltipo? How do you say it? Elpída—

What is the generosity of abstraction?

So those two questions. What is Hope? And what is the generosity of abstraction?

Coming from a family of clergy and ministry, I am aware of the idea of faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped-for but not seen. As an artist and painter, I ponder what is the hope of mankind?

The hope of mankind, for me, is the grid. The grid is the inter-connective tissue and unconditional exchange of humanity. The grid is inter-genetic, inter-racial, inter-national,

inter-gender and inter-connected. The grid is transcendent of political personifications. No blackness, no whiteness, or maybe we are all Greek, and there is no other.

The grid is the infinite field of activity where the lives of things and people intersect with mutual exchange. The grid is where the idea of the whole can be met with the reality of the individual. The grid is a metaphor for individual parts acting in harmonious, connected flux with each individual's needs being met in accordance to the whole. It would seem that individual interest would be in direct opposition to the whole, but the wisdom of the grid strikes a balance. It globalizes. It allows for a non-hierarchical view of humanity. It resolves the problem of identity and differences by placing diverse component parts on one plane while still maintaining the integrity of each one.

In this concept of identity, people are accepted exactly as they are. Identity is opaque. If seen laterally with no origin—as with the grid—people and cultures are intermixed... exchanging traits, goods and qualities among one another...none being better than the rest. Everyone sitting at the same table and given a right to speak in the assembly.

But what is hope? Hope is an intention. An intention is a thought undergirded by a strong desire. Hope is a belief that becomes an act, a making, a manifestation, a behavior....a painting.

A painting is a space for hope. A thought underscored by desire to make a possibility—one of many possibilities and translations of what could be. An abstraction holds many possibilities—inclinations and relations directly subjective to who sees it. 'That looks like'...'That could be'....'That feels like'....But never concretely fits the description. Its elusiveness is its power and its benevolence.

And so I propose, to paint is to hope with intense desire. And the desire is the hope of humanity. Hope provides the ideal context of interconnectedness, civility, democracy, unity and inclusiveness of differences. For me abstraction is the analog for hope. A wellspring of reception and generosity and constant good. For hopeful feelings, pleasurable feelings and promise are awarded to those who see it. This is the desired effect as one stands in the moment of the painting, confronted but not confrontational but rather comforted in the presence. You could take two steps back, and then take two steps forward. Yes, do the two-step to painting.

Is paint somehow the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen? The painting is the possibility. The promise manifested in one of many. Can paint save

mankind? Can it provide a lasting sparkle of humanity in its zenith, devoid of the individual with a plural presence for all.

The viewer's perception is his or her own. A view ungraded and unjudged. No bad marks or failing grades. It is just and fair. The moment is peace. No littered beach. It is the winter's edge of infinite possibility. Whatever that feeling is—anger, peace, joy, happiness —is what is true.

The essence of the human condition is commonality. To think and to feel are modes of operation we all have. To create a moment for the purest form is a generous gesture of southern hospitality.

It offers a particular moment of experience for everyone. To think abstractly about one's neighbor is to see them in their essential nature as human—a thinking and feeling being no matter where from which they have come. This is the hope and challenge of today's hero within the setting of the contemporary agora, the center of civic life.

I am from the South. The home of gumbo, and seafood, and the Saints football team. Two very important traits of the South is hospitality and creativity. In the South, everyone is welcomed. My Dad, fraternal and maternal grandfathers were ministers. Ministers would come over on Sundays and have dinner with our family. Mom would serve us all. Almost daily the neighbor's daughter would tap on the door and ask for food. Mom would let her sup' with us and never turn her away. There is always enough to share. There is room for everyone, so come on in. That's southern hospitality.

In the South, I learned to offer your neighbor your own plate. In New York I learned to be resourceful and do whatever it takes to prepare my own plate. But in Athens, I learned to eat from the same plate with others. I know that Athens' heart is big even though the pockets may be shallow. But at this moment, Athens has the opportunity to be the hero. To lay down the weight of history and experience and treat your neighbor as yourself. Thank you.

(applause)

So I'm going to do some visuals now. Wasn't just all talk. So what I'm showing you is evolution of work over many years. The—kind of the premise of it is I've always been interested in humanity. And humanity started off with my own humanity in terms of self-identification. So 'who am I?' And putting my self, my face forthright.

As I gradually evolved, I started to think about basic art types that connected us all. No matter what culture, what region, what locale, there's certain things that connect us all.

So these particular works are based upon these mythologies— like this one is called 'The Twelfth Labor of Hercules.' But it's an integration of urban youth and the myth of Hercules in which he had to bring up Cerberus from Hades without killing it. So in this picture, the little dog in the center is Cerberus, which is the symbol of fear. And Hercules is a young black gentleman that's riding on the bicycle—the bicycle has become the steed.

Gradually these ideas of identity became limiting for me, in terms of how do I have an ecumenical discourse, how do I have a globalized discourse or a broad enough discourse. And the way to do that, in this instance, became about symbolism, and not so much the face of identity. So here in this work, the the image of the self is removed and replaced with symbol. And then gradually I went into pure abstraction. In a way, to try to communicate with everyone. The paintings that I just showed you are canvas that's torn. It's deconstructed, reconstructed, and it's assemblage.

So I'm using a lot of things that I find—paper, tape. Painting became, at that stage, heavy and filled with labor. And so I started to think about what if painting became a means to an end in this attempt to make something that was much more refined. So this is one of my paintings— which is actually an assemblage of different materials. Here we have tape, a CD, string... And I inked it. And then from this inking process, placed paper on top and revealed the topography, or the surface, or more or less the braille, that was going on on the surface of the painting. And then it rendered these particular works.

So that process is called collagraph. And it's a printmaking process by which you put items— you can use the item as a plate, ink it, put paper on top, and run it through the press. Here I'm starting to think about the painting as matter, as... as material and not something that's artistic thinking about ideas of chaos and disruption. And how matter is always in motion.

This was my first agora piece and I was thinking about how the agora—or the city square, or the assembly, or this place of speech—is the nexus of humanity. And so in doing so, the metaphors for those things became material so that's painting, printmaking, and drawing all existing on the same plane. It's flattened as the grid. So this was the first one that was in response to me going to Venice to St. Mark's Square.

So coming here, the influence—I think first and foremost—has been architecture. I'm usually influenced by architecture or the things that I see that are more or less rudimentary. And

these...this repetition of form in the grid is everywhere—on the sidewalks. So this was the first thing I really noticed. Right? It's for the as for the blind, correct? It's to keep them... But to me, they're very aesthetically pleasing.

And then cardboard. It's the things we take for granted... and so I started to think about cardboard. And seeing people late at night get the cardboard and recycle it and sell it. And so this idea of economy and things that were once not valuable now become valuable again. And so I synthesize those two things. This idea of the repetition of form and the fluting that's evident in the Corinthian and Doric and Ionic columns, as well as it is in the contemporary space of Athens—on the sidewalks—and I merge those two things together. So this is my plate, which is a piece of cardboard with another piece of cardboard put on top.

But when they're inked, they become transformative. So these are collagraphs that are made by hand that are made from the cardboard pieces that you just saw....That's it.

(applause)

ARISTIDES: Thank you, Cullen. I was very inspired by the first part of your presentation—to the point where I thought there was maybe no visual stuff coming up. (laughs)
I'd like to now introduce Larry Ossei-Mensah—Susanne Feld Hilberry Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD). Larry is a Ghanaian-American curator and cultural critic who uses contemporary art and culture as a vehicle to redefine how we see ourselves and the world around. Ossei-Mensah cut his teeth in the marketing and advertising sector at Sony Music, Clear Channel, Fox TV... all of these experiences were catalysts that informed his over decades career as an independent curator before taking the helm as senior curator at MOCAD in Detroit in September 2018. As a curator, Ossei-Mensah has organized exhibitions and programs at commercial and nonprofit spaces around the world—from New York City to Rome. Ossei-Mensah is the co-founder of a non-profit collective ARTNOIR. And in 2017 he was the Critic-in-Residence at ART OMI, in addition to serving as a member of MoMA's Friends of Education, and a member at the New Museums incubator program NEW INC. I should mention here that during his residency at ARCAthens, Larry was given an extensive profile *The New York Times*, was chosen as a contributor to Ghana's inaugural pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and was also chosen as curator of the new Rudin Family Gallery at the Brooklyn Academy of Music—well known for its visual art program, which we'll touch upon a little later. Please help us congratulate and welcome Larry Ossei-Mensah.

(applause)

LARRY: Thank you guys. Woo! It's a long time coming. Thank you guys for being here. I'd like to thank Aris—longtime friend, fellow Bronx-ite. Iris, Maggie, Clayton, Bill, Advisory Board, and finally Cullen. Who... we've actually known each other since 2011. So it's been beautiful to spend these six weeks together— talking, laughing, questioning, and growing together. So thank you for that.

So my name is Larry Ossei-Mensah. As was mentioned before, I'm the Susanne Feld Hilberry Senior Curator at MOCAD, as well as many other titles.

So what I'm going to do is give you guys an insight into a framework that I began to build for myself in terms of what structures my curatorial practice. And then the second half I'll share some key reflections from the experience. One thing that I've realized—and having the opportunity to travel and spend time in spaces—is how do you focus on listening, learning, being a good neighbor. And then pulling together those insights, and then hopefully being able to offer something that the community can then think about...and work together towards being more solution-oriented or asking more questions... but really just trying to move things forward together.

So as was mentioned I've worked as an independent curator for the last 10-11 years. I think Clayton was asking me, kind of more of a timeline—so pretty much for the first half—maybe two-thirds—of that I worked a job, in addition to curating. So I had a corporate job and I didn't make the shift towards curating full time until 2015. And I think that's an important note to make because I think a lot of times people think curators are...you know... running around with pots full of money.

And I think for me, one, it took me a long time to figure out if this is what I wanted to do. And then two, figure out how do I make this sustainable for myself. And this is a conversation I have with artists all the time, in terms of how do you make this sustainable for yourself. It's never going to be a perfect economic environment, never going to be a perfect ecosystem, political environment... so what are the things that you need to do in order to move yourself forward.

So these, the image on the left is an image from the first exhibition I did so my start was as a photographer. So I wanted to be an artist. I did my grad school in Switzerland. My background's in business management, hospitality...did not go to art school. But while living in Switzerland I was compelled to pick up a camera and document these experiences.

And then when I moved back to New York, I thought I could...you know...show some art. And this is 2008 where you had a lot of pop-up spaces—artist-organized spaces. So my first

exhibition was actually at the back of a retail store on Fulton Avenue in Brooklyn called Harriet's Alter Ego. So it wasn't a proper gallery. And I say this to kind of help you understand that it's been a cosmology of things that have helped build my practice, build my interest—but then also build my fortitude to want to be part of this community. And so as you can see the photographs... I got to hook up when printing, but I couldn't get a hookup on framing... So I got some foam core and literally, at home, it was me and my mom and my cousin... Sprayed the foam core, adhered the photograph and we did the exhibition. At the time I didn't know this is where I would end up, but I knew something was intuitively guiding me. And a lot of my practice is really following my intuition and my curiosity.

Over time I kind of realize that being an artist wasn't my dream... To be honest it was difficult for me to deal with the critique of my work. But I think it gives me an insight in terms of how I offer feedback when I'm with artists. And you know when we visited the School of Arts and some artists showed work that could be potentially challenging. And so how do you find a seed of possibility to encourage them to keep going...but to think about all the different permutations. And so I don't—most people don't know that I started out doing photography. But that start allowed me to have a hyper level of sensitivity when I do engage with artists. In that I'm not trying to tell them what they should do, but offer pathways of consideration.

Once I realized being an artist wasn't my path, I tried to be a writer. So I'm your 21st century flâneur—I was just figuring it out. And writing, for me, allowed me an opportunity to learn and engage in some really meaningful conversations with artists who now are becoming the artists of our day. So this article on the left is on Toyin Ojih Odutola, who is now a finalist for the Future Generation Prize. I did this in 2010...when she was still in art school. Another thing that I'll talk a little bit more about is...foundationally, what's really kind of undergirded my practice is finding the diamonds in the rough before anybody says it's a diamond. Leaving no stone unturned, trying to—you know, discover what's going to move me and what has the possibility to move other people.

And so, within this time I started curating exhibitions, I began to realize that there weren't enough platforms, particularly for artists of color. This is, you know, almost a decade ago... now you look, many institutions have, kind of like, changed their attitude in terms of being a little bit more inclusive—whether it be with curators, staff, and artists. And so for me, there was this romantic notion of how do I find the artist of my generation, collaborate with them, and then grow together.

And so in terms of my practice, these are the key platforms that I've been able to utilize to ask questions, stimulate dialogue...conversation. And also offer space for artists to have their work be seen. So obviously as a curator, the exhibition format is one. For me public

programming is a very big part of my practice. It's part of why I was attracted to the opportunity that I have at MOCAD. How do you—how do you couple public programming with exhibition in the way that brings in an audience that normally wouldn't feel invited. Because I didn't grow up going to galleries. I didn't grow up having exposure to artists. So these are things that I always think about when I'm building out exhibitions. How do I get the people who don't feel welcome or don't care to want to be part of these conversations.

Social media. I use it as a tool. Anybody who's kind of paid attention to my Instagram. For me it's an extension of the practice. It's funny enough, it's a safe space because I don't necessarily have to regulate what I post. Obviously I post things within reason but it's become an archive of sorts. But I think it's also been another tool for me to disseminate what's interesting, what's happening. So it's been great to do studio visits, showcase work of artists that I've met in Athens. And have people say 'Who's that?' You know, 'Who are the artists in Athens?' And for me, to begin to utilize that platform to begin to build these bridges.

Publications is something that is becoming more and more a part of my practice. So Peter Williams is an artist that I did an exhibition with last year. Peter and I, funny enough, met at Joan Mitchell in 2016. Peter is 67. As I said before, I normally work with younger artists. But when I visited Peter's studio, he made more work in two weeks than some guys who were there for three months made. So I said, 'Something's happening here.' When I left I said, 'We're going to do a show together.' Peter participated in an open call CUE does every year. I was a juror, I saw the work. I didn't look at any of the other applications and I said, 'Peter is the one I want to work with.' Because over time, I realize that you have artists who have mastered their craft, but maybe have been overlooked. So how do I not begin to think about their work in my curatorial practice.

And then, all of this becomes part of this conceptual archaeology—thank you Maggie. Maggie and I were chatting and she said, 'Oh, you're a conceptual archaeologist.' I was like, 'That's what I'm doing?' Because so much of it is so intuitive and 'gut-eral'... so now to be able to kind of posit this under one umbrella, I think, now gives it a little bit more direction and focus. Which I'm excited about.

In terms of my curatorial practice, these are principles that I began to develop. I'm a Gemini, which I believe is air sign, so I'm pretty fluid with things. So you might see this presentation again in a year or two, and some of these principles might drop off...new principles will add...but for me, it just gives me a framework to think about my practice. So thinking about access. Thinking about a sense of belonging, curiosity, conversation, a sense of value, diversity, and collaboration— which, for me, collaboration is so essential in order to do all these projects that I do.

So access. So for me, thinking about how do I engage a multitude of audiences to be part of experiences that I create, conversations I'm interested in. The image on the left is an image from a performance that I curated at National Sawdust, which is an experimental music space in Brooklyn. I did this in collaboration with the painter Nina Chanel Abney, and Samora Pinderhughes is a writer/composer. And it was a response to a project that I'd seen Mickalene Thomas do called 'Entropy'—where she was trying to find ways to push her practice as a painter. And for me, I was interested in what happens when you have the paintings of an artist and a composer and put together conversation.

So we put together this experience called 'Hear/Here' — and I cautioned not to call it a the concert because it wasn't that. For me, it was this sonic experience. And what was great about it was that most people didn't know what they were going to expect. Nina didn't even know, until she got there, what we were doing. Samora and I were the only ones that really knew what it was going to be. And so, you know, we put the performance in a round and by the end of the performance, you had people who didn't know each other, hugging each other, and crying because it was such a moving experience. And for me, that's what I wanted to get. And interestingly enough, doing this, I was very nervous. Because with an exhibition, formally, you can kind of control it where—the placement of a work. But when it comes to music, you can't really control how people feel. So the nice stretch for me to try something new and now figure out how do I incorporate that in other components of my practice.

On the left is a workshop that I did for a show that I have up. It's been traveling since summer 2017. It's call 'Race and Revolution: Still Separate - Still Unequal.' And it's looking at inequality in the public school system. And so this is a workshop we did on restorative justice. Thinking about other ways to... when a child has something wrong, instead of doing something punitive, how do you get to the root problem. Because it might be something happening at home...it might be an issue where they might have a learning disability.

And this was great in terms of...the exhibition was open call and most of the artists—we had 18 artists in the show—were teaching artists. So there was another layer where, you know, the artists weren't just artists, but they were artists who are working in the classroom. And so for me one thing that's important is how do you cross pollinate these spaces, these expertise. And I think that comes from my background—not taking a linear path towards curating.

Belonging. So for me, because I didn't grow up going to museums, it's a conscious thing that I do with every exhibition—I try to work in collaboration with a school or a program to make sure that we do programming with kids. So the image on the left, is from an exhibition I did

in Harlem with Elizabeth Dee. And these are kids that went to school about three blocks away from the gallery. And talking to their supervisor, she told me that 99% of the time, when they went to see exhibitions, they would have to get on the bus and go to Chelsea. So to be able to walk three blocks, imagine what that does to the psyche of a child— knowing that art can be experienced in their community.

And then on the left is a collaboration with Urban Word, they're a poetry group— teen poetry group. It's an install view from Peter's show. So for me, now inviting poets to come in, see the exhibition, and they respond to it—which was the exercise. So they had to write a poem there. And then they each perform their poem. So for me, it's just figuring out how do I access different audiences, how do I create a sense of belonging in a shared space. And let people know, 'This is for you.'

Curiosity and conversation. So as I said before, public programming is big component of my practice. I learn through talking, doing... There are many of you, I've had a coffee or a drink or a wine and we've had really great conversation. And, you know, these are things that I've been continually processing while I've been here. And for me, it's also helped me grow in my practice.

So the artist next to me in the image on the left is Irini Miga, who is actually a Greek artist, who encouraged me to come to Greece last year. She was in an exhibition that I did called 'Selections' which is a group show— showcasing work from artists in Harlem and the Bronx. And for me, I mention diversity— when I say diversity I'm not just thinking about race, I'm also thinking about economics, I'm thinking about social class, psychographics, people identify, in terms of if they're LGBTQI. And Irini and I had a conversation... she said, 'You need to go to Athens. There's something's happening there.' And I said, 'I been to Athens. 2006. I've seen it.' She said, 'It's different.' And so, funny enough, so we agreed we were going to come together. I bought my ticket, then I get an email 'I can't go to Greece... But you should still go.' (chuckles)

And so for me I'm a believer that everything happens the way it's supposed to be, because when I actually got the official invitation to be part of ARCAthens, I was in Hydra. I got a phone call from Aris. I was like, 'I think this is the right decision.' But I say that to say that that planted the seed for a lot of the relationships that I began to develop here—with artists that I met last year, and we're beginning to continue to have these conversations.

Upper...your right... a conversation I put together with Joan Jonas and Jason Moran. They'd been collaborating for over 12 years. For me, I was interested in what does collaborative practice look like—particularly inter-generationally, interculturally. She's a performance

artist...artist—I don't want to limit her—she's an incredible artist in her own right... Jason being a composer... and looking at what they learn from each other and how can I use that in my practice.

Klaus Biesenbach has become a mentor to me. We did a project together in the Rockaways in 2016—thinking about art and activism. How do you use art as a platform to talk about activism in a multitude of ways. Adonis... again we—I had an opportunity to go to the exhibition at the School of Fine Art. And to talk and learn about your practice, for me, was important. And then this is a friend of mine Shantrelle Lewis, who—we started together as curators. This is the first book that she did, so for me it was gratifying to be in discourse with her about that.

Value. How do you create a sense of value? So as you see there's a theme. Young people are important to me, you know, and making sure that, you know, particularly in this challenging climate regardless of whether you're in Athens, New York, New Zealand, it's always going to be challenging. And how do we use art as a tool to help people work through those challenges, find value in themselves, find value in what they're creating—it's an important aspect of my practice.

Catalyst for diversity. So as I said before not just race, but also class, gender... On the left is an install view from 'Race and Revolution' when it first launched at Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, 2017. And then on the right is an install image of an exhibition I currently have up at MOCAD called 'Parallels and Peripheries.' And so to talk a little bit more about that... so the practice, for me, started with a focus on people who looked like me. And now that's began to shift to think about the voices that are on the periphery. You know, who are those voices that are unheard—haven't had an opportunity—are making incredible work, offering something that's important to our society and how do I give them space—though the resources available to me—to showcase that. Won't talk about all these images, but this image on the right comes from a project that's—you're actually getting a preview. So you'll get a couple of previews... The artist will probably kill me for showing this, but it's fine. Because this won't go live until the show's open.

So on the right that's a project that I'm doing with an artist, his name is American Artist—he legally changed it to that. African-American artist from Los Angeles. We met—he was doing a residency at Eyebeam. Eyebeam had harassed me to come and do studio visits and I said, 'I don't have time.' And finally I went, and our studio visit was on the laptop so there was no physical artwork to see. But following my intuition there was a seed of something. And it was this project he was doing he did in Harlem call Dignity Image. And it's these images that we all have on the phone—the selfie that we take that we might not share with

anybody. Getting to the root of why you are you capturing that image... What is the essence of that image?

And in August I was in San Francisco and I was in this neighborhood Bayview-Hunter's Point, which is pretty much the last black and brown neighborhood in San Francisco. San Francisco has been pretty much gentrified is unaffordable to live. A lot of natives have had to leave. And so when I saw that project and thought about this, I thought about this as an opportunity to archive those communities. So we partnered with an organization called BAYCAT, where we documented young people, seniors, activists, artists... So this is an exhibition that's going to debut in May at MoAD in San Francisco.

This is another preview. So this is a collaboration—my first public art project with Stanley Whitney, who was an artist who exhibited at Documenta 14. And so this piece comes from a piece that he actually made for Documenta. And it's one of the first times the public will see a combination of his abstract painting and his text-based work. Most people know him as an abstract painter. And in talking to Stanley, who's in his seventies now, I was trying to find a way to collaborate. Because I felt like I can learn from him, and he can learn from me. But then also how do you use public space—which I think we were talking about earlier—as a platform and not just a traditional, white-cube space for exhibitions. And, you know, 'No to prison life.' What does this mean? You know, on the literal term, you can think about the issue around prison reform in the United States. But for me, I'm also thinking about this from a psychological standpoint—you know, the prisons that we put ourselves in. And how do we break out of that through abstract thinking, design thinking, and really push things forward.

Collaboration...I'll talk about that in the panel. But I do want to talk about this. So this was a collaboration that I did with Brendan Fernandes and Mixed Greens in Chelsea. We had a budget of \$500 to do a performance. And obviously that doesn't work—you gotta pay people. And so for me, this is just an example of I guess the ingenuity that I try to exude in my practice.

One day I was reading the newspaper...the chief marketing officer at Under Armour said, 'Dancers are athletes too.' I said, 'Really?' Found the guy's email, emailed him and said, "You said, 'Dancers are athletes.' I'm doing this project with dancers, give me some money." And so they ended up giving us some money, they gave us some clothes. We did the performance. And again this was something where I had to trust Brendan. He did the choreography. The performance—we were on 26th Street—I bought a bunch of beers, pizza... and it was open to the public to enjoy. And so this for me, this was a turning point because I had to trust the artist and trust the process, understand that you can't control everything.

Collaboration again. Someone else showing up... Also thinking about how does the audience be able to participate in the experience. 'Cause I'm a believer—and I've talked to some artists—about the audience being the one that completes the work. So how do you create opportunities for that in the exhibition format.

Key Reflections and then we'll get to the panel 'cause I know you guys want to hear all of us talk. So I know Greece is not part of the global south, but being here has gotten me thinking more about that. So, you know, the practice started with thinking more about African diaspora... then shifting to the margins and the periphery. And now, thinking about a more expansive diaspora—for me, you know, which is this Global South, which of these countries have been either imperialized or colonized. And then in the context of Athens, what happens when you're at the cusp of these spaces? So being in the Balkans...being in Eastern Europe...being on the cusp of the East— like, what does that mean? What generates from those experiences and how can I use that now as a platform to begin to ask deeper questions. For myself, but then deeper questions for my practice.

Abstract thinking. So it's been interesting to see the push and pull, where in Greece there are these unwritten rules and you kind of just do it...and then they're very firm rules on other things. So how do you kind of use, I guess, that polarity as an opportunity to think more abstractly about, you know, as a community, 'cause I now consider myself a part of the Athenian community. Been here three times, so...I hope you'll accept me.

But as a community, thinking about, you know, how do we support artists...how do we support each other...how do we support exhibitions... how do we not just look at the traditional funding sources. So as I showed you before, I went to Under Armour—a clothing company that has nothing to do with art—to fund my project. So how do we think about, you know, the young collectors, lawyers, accountants, who have a passion for art, who have been collecting, supporting and maybe haven't really been brought all the way in. So how do we bring them into the ecosystem.

A deeper consideration of conversations, and a deeper consideration of curiosity... visiting the School of Arts for was great. When I visit art students, it's a reminder of why I do it—because you get them at a very vulnerable stage in their career. And so to be able to be part of that, and learn from that, and see what they see, for me, is very stimulating.

And these are other conversations that were at the School of Arts.

And then diversity. So thinking about, you know, how do we get more platforms for women artists, you know, how do we get more platforms for first-generation Greeks. So Dimos and Kevin—Dimos is from Sierra Leone, Kevin's from Ghana—both born in Greece. They identify as being Greek and they talk about the challenges that they've had. I think Dimos didn't get his papers until he was 21. You know, so how do we think about embracing people who might not necessarily be of traditional Greek DNA, but are part of this ecosystem that want to contribute...that have been making do with limited resources to further expand what's happening here.

And then I went to see a Greek play 'Art.' How do we ensure that there's more cross-pollination in terms of disciplines? So the play was in Greek. I didn't understand anything, so I basically had to understand—look at body language, look at gesture. And one thing that has inspired me now, you know, listening to the laughter, looking at the joy of the audience is...how do I now think about theater as a platform for exhibition. And in the role that I have at BAM that now potentially presents that as an opportunity.

And collaboration. So we visited Victoria Square Project, which is one of many projects that is working with the community. How do we....What I appreciated about this project, specifically, is that it was for everybody. So it wasn't just for refugees, and wasn't just for immigrants, it wasn't just for Greeks... it was open. And there are a number of other projects that are in the city, so how do we support these initiatives with our talent...our time... you know, if you have it, our dollars...Because right now, you know, although Documenta helped spark it, it's self-funded. And then many other artists in the community who are doing similar work whether it's through a form of brick and mortar or through projects in different parts of Greece. How do we support that?

And again, how do we support students? Because for me, young people are...they're our future. You have a generation of artists who basically only know Greece through the crisis. And so how do we leverage that inclination to just kind of make it happen? Because through that time, there's been the emergence of tons of DIY spaces. And so how do we continue to build on that? Because I think that's as much important as it is the institutions that are also here that exist in Athens and in Greece. And...that is it!

(applause)

ARISTIDES: Now I'd like the the panel to come up and take their seats...And it's my pleasure to introduce to you Daphne Vitali, who may well know. A friend of ARCAthens, and a supporter— she's a Greek and Italian art historian and curator based in Athens. Since 2006 Daphne works as a curator at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens

(EMST) where she has curated numerous exhibitions and curatorial projects of Greek and international artists. In 2017 she was invited to curate the retrospective exhibition 'Uncinematic. George Drivas'—which I got to see, and I loved—at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Roma. In 2018 she co-curated the show 'La verità è sempre un'altra'—a dialogue between two collections, a collaboration between EMST and the Galleria Nazionale in Rome. She has published essays in contemporary art in various publications and international art magazines such as *ARTPULSE*, *KUNSTFORUM International*, and *Moose—Mousse?...* and has authored many artist catalogs.

And we're delighted that Dan Cameron is here tonight. He sits on the Board of ARCAthens and is a very close personal friend of mine. Welcome to Athens once again—I think Dan's been to Athens 19 times? (laughs) Well, who's counting... Dan Cameron is known for founding Open Spaces in Kansas City in 2018... Prospect New Orleans—an organization he ran from 2006 to 2011. He was also director of Visual Arts for New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center. As a writer, Dan Cameron has had numerous publications to his credit, has lectured at museums and art events around the world, served as a senior curator at the New Museum in New York from 1995 to 2006, and as artistic director for the 8th Istanbul Biennale in 2003. Co-curator of the 10th Taipei Biennale in 2006 and curator of the 2016 Bienal de Cuenca in Ecuador. Thank you all for joining us. I'll sit down with you and we'll start the conversation.

DAN: Well...If I could just dive in, I would love to start off—open up the panel by congratulating these two outstanding residents at the end of their fellowship for these wonderful presentations.

Usually when I go to these sort of events, what I expect to see is something that the artist has already prepared as a sort of a canned presentation—something that is based on what they've been doing up to now—and we got some of that.... But what struck me was what they've done since they've been here in Athens. That both Cullen and Larry presented us with a process by which there was a kind of a morphing of their work—from one position to—not a radically different position—but an evolved position from where they started from. And I think both of them would agree with that.

And so I guess that's where my first question—maybe comment—comes from is the idea that, you know, sometimes you're just in another place with a studio... or just another place with a window... or just another place with a laptop. That wasn't what happened here..at all. And I wonder if either one of you would want to speak a little about that experience.

CULLEN: Yeah, I think —testing— Well ARCAthens did a fantastic job. When I say ARCAthens, symbolically, I'm talking about Aris, and Iris, and Maggie. And really plugging us in and allowing sort of tentacles to go out and feel, and touch, and smell, and connect with people. And I was having a conversation with someone earlier, and I thought, if I was just parachuted in to Athens, I would have a very different experience. And even if I come back without their auspices I would have a very different experience.

And so what that has allowed for me is to just have— be in the moment and have an experience and then metabolize it. Let it simmer and metabolize it. And then give an output. As opposed to it being result-oriented. It's more process and experience oriented.

LARRY: Yeah I definitely agree...Thank you. I mean, you guys did a fantastic job. I mean, even though I had been to Athens— I was saying to someone earlier—even though this is my third time, it feels like my first time 'cuz I've gone deeper. And really... got a cross-section of exposure...

And I think what's interesting is that, like, you know, everyone ask you how do you find Athens. And for me, it's complicated, it's layered, it's confusing. And what's exciting for me is that, like, it's something that I'm going to continue to meditate on even after the residency...you know, 'cuz there are some situations where, like, you come to a place, you automatically get an idea for a project, and then it might be 6 months, a year, 2 years from now. I'm like, 'This is what I want to do. This is the contribution I want to make to the Athenian community. Or these are the Athenian artists I want to collaborate with... 'cuz they help me actualize an idea or explorer question.'

So for me I came with the intent of being open. Wanting to learn... I think being at MOCAD in Detroit had kind of taught me that you just gotta be a good neighbor...because if you come in trying to project ideas you'll get your head chopped off. Because as nuanced as it is here, people have pride and passion for what they do. You have to respect that. And so for me, it was important to kind of come in, humble myself, you know just listen, ask questions and then when I recognize something—an insight— just make note of it.

And so, you know, it's a—for me it's a blessing. Because it's like, now this—for me, this experience now signifies another shift in my practice in terms of, like, now thinking about a larger diaspora. Right? So it's not like a 360 but it's a building-on. And, you know, during this time, like, I'm doing a show in Rome next year, you know, that I agreed to do as part of this experience because now thinking about what other conversations and dialogues can be had as a result of this experience.

So it's something that I will probably... for the rest of my life, just be meditating on and thinking about and chewing on. I've been blessed to meet artists, make friends, and I like to tell people this is only the beginning. You know, this is not— Even though the formal part of the residency is coming to the end, this is for me, only the beginning of my exploration of what's happening here.

ARISTIDES: It'll only take 18 trips to reach Dan. 18 more.

(laughter)

DAN: If I can pick up on something—and, not to preempt anything Daphne wanted to say—but I also was struck by... there's an aspect... Your curatorial process, Larry, is very expansive...

LARRY: Yeah.

DAN: ...and very catalytic. And I was thinking, in particular, about your interest—which is something I share—about finding artists who were overlooked, and under-appreciated... and trying... using your authority—whatever you have—to push them towards the center—or maybe the better way of saying is— to push the discourse outward

LARRY: mm-hmm.

DAN:... so that it begins to include and embrace that artist. You have to expand the dialogue. And as you were saying that, I kept thinking about Athens. I kept think about about the conversations that we've been having about Athens as a center—as a place where, you know, a new idea of a cosmopolitan identity for an artist can be explored. And you seem to have this fantastic tool kit that you've brought—that you've developed and assembled— that allows you to come into a context like this one, and offer possibilities that even you hadn't thought of until you got here. And I guess that's the thing that I'm most interested in: how this is provoking you... and stimulating you?

LARRY: Oh, well, I think it's a multitude of things. It's... growing up in the South Bronx where I grew up. Which statistically is one of the poorest counties in the country—in the US. But knowing that you have an art form like hip-hop that comes from there, right?

So for me, it's just... over time I've learned my interest had been the things that are on the margin, are actually the things that are the most interesting. Those are the things that end

up shaping culture. Those are the things that end up moving societies forward. And so, that's where I naturally go. One.

But I think, two, is also that I really didn't find mentorship in my practice until maybe 5 years in. So I had to figure it out myself, you know. So it was me and kind of like my bag of married men and women who were just trying to get somebody to care about what we were doing, you know. Doing exhibitions, you know, in basements, apartments... and understanding, you know, why we were in it. You know, it wasn't just to do, kind of like, these grand institutional exhibitions, but it was really to have a conversation.

So I try to keep that at the center, is that...you know, who is trying to have a conversation that offer us something that will help us think and consider questions and ideas in a way that we might not have. Because like that's the beauty of art, where... Stanley is a perfect example, where like, until I'd spent time with Stanley... you know, I thought he was just painting a bunch of squares. You know? But then to unpack what he's been doing since the 70s and, you know, his lens on abstraction and the nuance in it, for me, was mind-blowing and gratifying. And I think, you know, it's... it's almost like, you know, you're chasing a high, you know, so you do your first great project, your first great exhibition... you get a little bit of press, it's cool, but it's like...it's, it's this high that, like, you'll never really truly attain. You know, but you're continually trying to find ways to invigorate yourself, invigorate your ecosystem, your network, the people around you.

And you know, Toni Morrison talks about like, you know, the margins and the peripheries is the center. So for me that's where I look. I'm not going to look, kind of, in the more elited spaces because, like...nine times out of ten, that loses a little bit of its edge. Because I'm also trying to find what has edge, what has texture. So a lot of that comes from just growing up. A lot of that is also just kind of like the path that's led me to be here. So I try to keep those top of mind and never lose sight.

So when you say authority, like I guess, at some point I'll- I'll- I'll-I'll-I'll become comfortable with that. But like, you know, people are like, 'You're a gatekeeper.' And I'm just like, I don't want to think in that frame. Even though I'm conscious that I am, and that certain introductions and decisions that I make can open up doors. And I want to think about it from the point of view of it being generous...and not necessarily me trying to get something from that. So I'm hyper aware of it. But..yeah.

DAPHNE: Actually, I was also going to ask you about this debate between center and periphery—but I think you introduced this term of—somehow—centralized periphery and marginalized center. I don't know whether—I mean—definitely these days in New

York—and the cities you've been living and working—are definitely center in comparison to Athens.

But how does it—what are the advantages of being a resident in a city like Athens? The periphery, which is not so cosmopolitan, not so international—as we said before—situated in the southeast of Europe, and—How do you experience the notion of periphery or center in Athens?

LARRY: Cullen?

CULLEN: I think being here, I've started to think about what it means to be at large... and to be non-localized and not be an American that brings... all their '-isms'...like pocket change...

LARRY: mm-hmm

CULLEN: you, know, with them... you know, some of my -isms are silent.. and some that I have erased. But being here has caused me to think that I'm an artist at large...and so it's—it's a way of thinking, therefore a way of behaving. And so I see Athens as, you know, a microcosm of globalization, and diversity, and immigration, and progress...and the pains and the joys at that come along with that. So it's— it's really been a very fertile experience for me and also, you know, life-changing. And so how, then, do I re-insert myself back—this is something Larry and I were talking about—what do we do when we go back to New York.

LARRY: It's going to be hard...The food!

CULLEN: You know... the food, the people. You know, the other thing is...you know, really started to see how race is so subjective. And how categorization is so limiting. And so here, you know, I'm an American...not an African-American. I have been Haitian, and I have been Pakistani here, as well. So it depends on who's looking at me. So what does that say to me? That says that that stuff is fluid.

LARRY: Yeah.

CULLEN: And it doesn't—it has meaning—but it's so ephemeral and so non-concrete, and so then you can make up what the experience is. And so yeah, it's hard to kind of see this, and be a part of this, and then re-insert yourself, you know, back into that. What do you think?

LARRY: I mean, I think, for me, it's weird...A bit... Because you have one experience growing up in New York City and then, like, I didn't really realize it until I was having coffee with an artist whose first generation Greek-African or Afro-Greek. There's a privilege that comes with holding this blue passport... which is weird for me, you know, but I think in terms of Athens, I think Athens ...the mar— like I said before—the margins is the center. And people are paying attention to what's happening here, and people are interested in what's happening here, and they're asking me, 'What's happening?' Just like I talked to someone earlier like, 'So what's happening in Detroit?' You know, so that when people are asking those questions, that tells me that there is something beginning to germinate, right?

And so for me, I'm interested in, like, how we as a community, you know, water that, right? So I think a lot of people look at Documenta as a marker, which I think it was very important, but that shouldn't be the beginning or the end, you know. There were artists who were working before that, making incredible work and offering us things that were exciting. So how do we continue to support that, water that... I think it's been interesting to me, artists who live between Athens and maybe Berlin, or Athens and London, you know. So you know, looking at those bridges that are being developed. And how do we use that as a platform for more access for conversation and I think the mere fact that—

DAPHNE: Greek artists, or?

LARRY: Greek artists, yeah. Which for me has been interesting, but I think that's also just...that's more of a market-driven—probably—discourse that we can maybe, and maybe not talk about... but it's been exciting and I think for me it's rare in life, you have an opportunity to be in a place where it's happening at that moment. You either are too early, or you're too late. And so for me, it's like, it's happening right now. And I think that's where I know we talked about the possibility...that's what's exciting— is that we can shape the narrative how we see fit. And I think there's an opportunity to, you know, as Greeks have historically done— offer a new blueprint. In terms of how work can be seen, experienced, talked about, etcetera....

DAPHNE: Larry, I would also like to ask you about, you know, Detroit... and to think about it in relation to Athens. Since we have, you know, they're two very different cities, but they both have—maybe they have—they're both the largest and most populous cities in the country. And they also underwent economic decline. Both cities are now on the rise, in a way.

So a lot of—we have been talking in the art community here about how this affected the artists in the community in Athens. We can discuss this, but maybe it's a different—but I would like to ask you, how did this affect the local arts in Detroit?

LARRY: Well I see it's not an apples to apples, but I see a congruency in that a lot of artists... there was an emergence of a DIY scene, because pretty much in Detroit you have the Detroit Institute of Art... my institution, MOCAD.... the Wright Museum... and then everything else is pretty much—oh, and then institutions that might be affiliated with universities, but other than that, it's DIY spaces.

So I think, for me, you saw the fortitude of a community where it's like, you know, okay... there isn't a market, people aren't paying attention, but that doesn't mean that we're going to stop creating, you know. So you have, you know, acres and acres of land that artists just reclaimed, you know, to turn into sculpture parks, or to do urban farming... And now you're starting to see some organizations like Knight Foundation, Kresge... now support artists to develop institutions or develop projects.

And then I think because of the rhythm of economic flow, you're starting to see a lot of artists move there because it's affordable, you know. They can buy a house or, you know, I know an artist who...was in Eastern Market. And that neighborhood got bought by a developer—the developer kicked everybody out. And you know what the artist did?

DAN: Move somewhere else.

LARRY: He moved someplace else. Ended up buying a house that is going to turn into his studio. You know, so I think—and I see that in Athens too, where I think it's just like, you just have to become more solution-oriented. Because the circumstances are the circumstances, but no one gets into the arts to become—well, some people—to become rich. (laughs) But it's it's it's a it's a it's intuitive inclination to express, to share. And so I think that's why I see a congruency.

But I think, they're also both going through reshaping. I think some people like to say... it's reinvigorated, but I think it's just—it's a pivot point, you know, every city is like a living cell...you know, so it's going to have its ebbs and flows. And there's going to be moments where it's like high times, and there's going to be times when it's low times. And it's the times where—you know, low times—that really kind of defines a city, a community, an ecosystem, a society. So I think it's been great too kind of have the polarity of both of those faces and form. Not only in my curatorial practice but just how I live and where do I find value.

DAN: Actually it's interesting to hear you talk about Detroit that way...and to being in context with Athens, and what's happened in Athens over the last— let's say roughly the last 10 years. I can't help but think about New Orleans as well...

LARRY: Uh-huh.

DAN: because, you know, what we're talking about are cities—it's sort of like taking Naomi Klein's 'Shock Doctrine'

LARRY: Yup.

DAN: and turning it on it's head. Because these are instances in which the rush into a state of crisis was—happened for mercenary purposes, or intentions.

What happened was some—a wound took place, a trauma took place. And those in the community, in the wor—in the global community—who cared about that place that had suffered the trauma began to pivot, and think about it in a different way and try to mentally create an image of it in a different way. I know that was very much on our minds with Prospect, was that we had to stop thinking of New Orleans as a disaster site. And we had to start thinking of it as a place of hope, and a place of rejuvenation.

And we've talked about that a lot with with Athens as well. And Cullen, you had a phrase that was beautiful, I wrote it down...where you said, 'Everyone has a place at the table.' And I think what happens when these reshufflings of a city—especially a city of community—is going on, there's an opportunity that opens up where you can actually make the table bigger, or make more seats, or—and Larry, terms of some of the things that you showed—you can also identify people who are in the art community whose roles may not be articulated that well up to that point.

So we think, well, who makes up the art world? There are artists, and then there's everybody else. But who is everybody else? There's curators, there's collectors... or there are people who just love art. There are people who are art historians. There are philosophers that are thinking about art. There are all these—there are children... there are older people...there are people with disabilities...there are people who can enjoy art and and make art a bigger and more central part of their lives. If only there was a way, if only there was an access point, if only we did actually have a seat for everybody at the table.

And I think that's a little bit what we're talking about here with ARCAthens as well. Maybe I'm projecting too far down the road, but that's the feeling I get...is that more people are going to end up at this table.

CULLEN: Yeah, I think it's also a good opportunity to rebrand... and to create another mirror image. What I experienced here is the tensions between the old and the new, between the old way of looking at who we are, and then this new way that's that's gradually evolving and progressing. And so it could be painful and ugly, at the same time it is an opportunity. And so the pain of making the table larger... you're also restructuring, you're also creating another identity that is more plural and maybe less singular.

LARRY: And that's to a piggyback your question... so that's what we're going through also in Detroit, where you have old Detroit—new Detroit...you know, you have new Detroit that might not necessarily know the the history or the legacy of a certain space, or a certain individual, or a certain project, you know. So how do you get people to consider the nuance of that, you know, because I think that's also the trickiness of gentrification where it's like, you know, you have people who move into a space because it's cool. But then you omit the the cool...

CULLEN: Mmmm.

LARRY: you know, right? And so... it's how do you—it's not black and white, it's it's very grey and messy. So how do you create a platform where the table's enlarged and that all the stakeholders at the table really trying to figure out: how do we, together, cultivate the next chapter in this—in this...saga...this... Greek... episode...what is it? Greek—no, I don't want to say tragedy, that's negative... this of story. Yeah.

DAN: Well, because you're eminently quotable, Cullen, I'm going to quote you back again. Another phrase that you had that was beautiful, which is: analo—sorry— 'Abstraction is the analog for hope.' And most people, I think, in this audience probably know a little bit about the Hilma af Klint phenomenon that's happening, which is not just something that just happening at the Guggenheim Museum—although it's pretty wild to drop by there on an average afternoon and see throngs like no one has ever witnessed in that museum. All looking at an artist who no one had heard of 5 years ago.

LARRY: Exactly

DAN: So it's this desire to, I think, in part, to write a new history...to see the history that we were given, suddenly being rendered... at least semi-obsolete. Like, we sort have to start all

over again. Well, wait a minute, Kandinsky didn't have the role that we thought Kandinsky had—not that 'who's first?' is really such an important question, but suddenly we have to reorient what we're thinking about.

It wasn't until you said that abstraction is the analog hope, that I started thinking...really, that it is language that's universal, in a sense, that it goes beyond figuration—and the specific identification of a subject—into another language that could be geometric, it could be a grid, it could be expressionistic... Would you go further with that idea a little bit to sort of talk about abstraction in the future... 'cause I wonder if— I wonder if with these discoveries of the new roots—previously undiscovered roots of abstraction—whether we don't also need to think about where we're going... which direction we're heading in with abstraction. Because...Is it a visual language that can bring everyone together?

CULLEN: I think, by it's very nature, it could be exclusive and also inclusive. I was—just a few days ago—I was thinking about: what does it take? What's the environment that has to be present in order for me to think abstractly. If my shelter isn't taken care of... if my clothing isn't taken care of... if food isn't taken care of... I'm thinking survival mode. You can't possibly think about something abstract if your basic needs aren't being taken care of.

So in order for me to think abstractly, I have taken care of— above and beyond— all the necessary necessities. And so, what's the future of that? I think the future of it is... to make sure that more than just maybe the talented tenth can think abstractly. That we provide a good portion for everyone as they're sitting at the table. That we become more generous. I think the way to do that is by flattening certain hierarchies—what I think of as '-ers'...pretti-er, smart-er, rich-er, fast-er and, you know, those things... because difference doesn't necessitate better. It just means it's different. And you need difference for many reasons.

So yeah, I think that's—hopefully, that will be the future. That this idea of commonality becomes— when I say commonality, I mean that the common nature of humankind is thinking and feeling . And that we see that.. And hold that to be how we designate people, as opposed to race and all these other superficial things. That would be good—that's a utopia for me. I don't know if that will ever happen.

DAN: Well, there's global conceptualism so why can't there be global abstraction? In fact, somebody's working on that show right now, while we're talking.

CULLEN: Oh, cool.

ARISTIDES: We've run a little bit over the timing. And I wanted to make sure we have an opportunity to allow people to ask any questions you may have for the panel. We can keep talking but, please, if you have any questions, raise your hand and we can bring you into the conversation.

LARRY: Don't be shy.

ARISTIDES: Well maybe I can say something about abstraction... If we step back from the political nature of art world hierarchies. I've noticed that abstract language intimidates people. And then they politicize it. I think what would be very helpful is if there was a little more dialogue on the elements of an artwork as you see it... and just leave it at that sometimes with abstraction. I think that you can enter an artwork by just seeing the color, seeing the shape, seeing the texture, seeing the line, seeing—and then, and then meaning will come slowly.

I just wanted to say that because it's...abstraction can really be very simple a lot of times. You know, what you see is what you get, as long as you can open your eyes and enter it. And then you can get a lot of meaning. And then it can get really, really political. But some people never go that far because they don't see a representational image and they have almost a defensive reaction against it. So...

That way I think it could be maybe universal, which I know is not— is a difficult word—but I think if people are allowed to know that they have— they have the power to just enter a picture, you know. You could be in China, you can be in Argentina... and you're seeing the same picture, same lines—you're not seeing— Often. I mean, sometimes they could be culture-specific, the language in abstraction.

So maybe that could be part of what we ourselves help educate our peers... Sometimes our own peers don't know how to u— how to enter abstract language. But maybe also just the children. Just give them the power to enter a picture without being fearful of it.

CULLEN: I think one of the strategies that I use— or have used—for what I think of as entry points for people to enter into the work that may not have a history of looking at it—is seduction. And seduction takes its form in color. You'll notice I didn't—I haven't been using a lot of color in my pieces. But my current work has color in it and it's to say, 'Hey come on in.'

'Cuz it's something that's beautiful, right? It touches the heart, it touches the spirit. Everyone can identify with color. It may have different meanings depending on your locale, but people usually identify with beauty or color. And then the other is portions of a language that's

specific to a region. So maybe a part of a word that's recognizable and that's also a doorway, you know, for people to enter into a work. So...making work is a compassionate thing. And at some point you're thinking about: How do I share this with world? And...What type of conversation would I like to have? And so if it's an unlimited conversation then you want to try to facilitate that in the best way possible.

DAPHNE: May I say that I was feeling strange when you were talking about Athens and the grid. And for me, the grid is something very ordered. And I feel that Athens is disordered, you know? And thinking about the architecture of the city and this disorder—this...fracture and decay—so different, maybe, from New York.... And I was thinking about that, and I was—I don't know if it's an element that you might have—you brought from New York, or you found here, and how this may have influenced your work—the disorder part of Athens and the architecture?

CULLEN: Mmmm. Well two things. What I found at the history of Athens, in a nutshell, is structure, right? When I thi—when you think about old ...well, antiquity—the...kind of the ancient way of making work... and the anatomical correctness in the body... and going to the Acropolis and seeing the perfection in the columns... and it's just mind-boggling, right?

So in a word, I would say that's structural, right? And so you can equate that to the grid... maybe in a literal sense. The second part to that answer is the grid is about connective tissue. It's about connection. So it doesn't necessarily have to be equal in each direction. I may have something more to—That's the Agora, right? It's the assembly. It's the place of exchange, it's the place of speaking. And so, now it's the marketplace. But what's a marketplace? It's about exchanging goods and services. It's about exchanging ideas and thoughts, right? One thing that I've learned since I've been here is, like, Greeks like to hang...

(laughter)

DAN: It's true.

CULLEN: 12 o'clock at night, people are just being seated at restaurants. And that can go on forever and ever. So that's the grid. That's connection, that's community, that's not having to be by yourself. And so, I mean, I would like to bring some of that back. That's—yeah, I want to bring that back to New York. (laughs)

LARRY: And I think also, like, I don't find Athens to be disorderly or chaotic. I think every city has a rhythm...and a temperature, and a tempo... that makes it what it is. And so I think,

for me...when we were talking earlier about the margins and the periphery, I'm also trying to figure out: what is the rhythm of that place? You know...What is the cadence of that place? How do people communicate? You know... how did they share, you know, a meal, or drink, or engage with each other?

New York has its own kind of rhythm and tempo just like Detroit does, just like Acra does...and I think that's what makes these places special. I think the places that—you know, having lived in Switzerland—that are too rigid, have no rhythm, you know. So a place like, unfortunately, Geneva it's not—besides the lake—it's not really interesting. And I think these are what—these are the things that, for me, make these places interesting.

ARISTIDES: Any questions from the audience? Panel? Any additional questions that maybe we want to bring up or any other topics?

LARRY: There's gotta be questions. I know some of you people.

ARISTIDES: If you're wondering about ARCAthens and our future, we are working on our second pilot residency—not going to make any announcements yet—but please do follow us on Facebook or Instagram...go to our website, join our mailing list and we'll send you our news. We are very pleased with this initial experience and we very much would like to continue strongly with our program and we're also developing the possible reciprocal residency of bringing some Greek artists to the Bronx. So please—

DAN: Not New York. The Bronx.

LARRY: Yes. Very different.

DAN and ARISTIDES: The Bronx!

ARISTIDES: Because the Bronx is representing tonight, right?

LARRY: South Bronx.

ARISTIDES: South Bronx. Well, yes, south, south Bronx...which is a really dynamic and interesting area of New York, for the ones you that don't know.

DAN: Aris, can I just say one thing? Something that I really appreciate about the pilot program is that you didn't just bring in a couple of artists—which would have been fine,

there's nothing against artists. But speaking as a curator, I happen to think think it's extremely forward-thinking

LARRY: Yeah.

DAN: to bring in a curator—especially in a situation where—what we're talking about is a little bit of a breakdown of -isms, of genres, and, in a way, of professional identities...I mean, yes, you're an artists, and yes, you're a curator....you know, but these distinctions are meaning less all the time. And I think how we practice our work has a lot more overlap than we think.

And I think what you've managed to do— by having Cullen and Larry here—is to just sort of say, you know, this is a kind of a cultural...catalyst. This is a way of stirring something into a given cultural context. Where both parties are both dynamically altered by the resul— are dynamically changed. We already know how, Cullen and Larry are changed. We don't, yet, know how Athens has been changed. But I think that's the promise of moving forward with ARCAthens.

ARISTIDES: And...I've always felt uncomfortable with very rigid hierarchies and divisions within our community. I've curated. I've curated some good shows...which none of you know about because they were an alternative spaces, but... and I know plenty of other artists that have done some great curatorial work. Just as I know of curators that are making great work— I don't want to name names, 'cause it would embarrass them— but some of the people involved with ARCAthens, even peripherally, are branching out.

These hierarchies... I'm not very interested in maintaining them. And I think that curators do have a seat at the creative table. I think the practice is a very creative practice. I think exhibitions are art–artworks. That's my point of view. Visual artists and curators have something to contribute to a residency like ARCAthens, and gain from a residency like ARCAthens. And in our bylaws— Dan, which you well know— we have the word 'scholars.' So we're also open to going beyond curators or visual artists, although that is our focus.

Any questions?

(pause)

Well, we've answered all your questions, apparently. Thank you so much for joining us this evening.

LARRY: Thank you.

ARISTIDES: I want to thank the— our fellows, Cullen Washington Jr and Larry Ossei-Mensah, for agreeing to be... our guinea pigs.

(laughter)

And taking a big chance, and coming to Athens for this extended period of time. It's been a pleasure having you.

I would like to thank Daphne Vitali for believing in our vision and supporting us with her advice. I want thank Dan Cameron, founding board member for ARCAthens, for... making his flights and coming in at 4 p.m. today. Yay! And again, I want to thank all of you for opening your arms and joining us in making these folks feel at home

I don't want to speak for them but I think that Athens is in their heart at this point, and they know they're always welcome here, so... Thank you all for joining us.

- End -