

TRANSCRIPT

'ARCAthens Presents: Tomashi Jackson & Miranda Lash'

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Auditorium of Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation

Athens, Greece

Aristides: Hello, good evening. Welcome everyone, I'm very happy to see so many friendly faces, and new faces here are the wonderful new Goulandris Museum. We're very pleased to have our second public presentation in Athens today. The name of our organization is ARCAthens, which stands for Artist Residency Center Athens. And we're very pleased to be hosting tonight our Fall 2019 Fellows. Curatorial Fellow Miranda Lash and Visual Art Fellow Tomashi Jackson. Tonight's program will introduce you to the wonderful work of our fellows and it be followed by—they will do an audio-visual presentation, which will be followed by a conversation.

Our fellows will be answering your questions. I hope you all received a program. Inside the program should have an index card. And maybe you should have a pencil as well. So please, don't be shy. Whatever question you're interested in come up, please write it down. Once the audio-visual presentation is over, we'll come around, collect the questions, and we'll answer them for you.

So thank you for joining us. And I'd also like to thank everyone who helped organize this event—particularly the Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation, which has so generously provided space and support for this presentation. Athenians, including myself, have been eagerly awaiting for this new museum for many years and with great excitement. And we're thrilled to be introducing our fellows here. The museum is a much-needed addition to this culturally-rich city. And if you haven't yet had a chance to visit the collection, I strongly encourage you to do so.

Our presentation and discussion tonight takes place in conjunction with our second residency here in Athens. We're a nonprofit organization from New York City. We're supported mostly by people like you. Our 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 their research, build bridges, and cross-pollinate advanced ideas. Through their relationships with the local Athenian community, which I—as well as many others—believe is uniquely dynamic.

Last time I spoke to some of you at the Acropolis Museum, I shared with you a vision that is alive in many people here in Athens, as well as in the Greek 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, pulsing city. I'm thrilled to see that in 2019, this idea of residencies exists with many others. There are several new programs active in Athens, and we have already begun dialogues and collaborations with them. I look forward to more residencies opening up, supporting artists, enriching dialogue, and collaborating in the great city.

Before we jump into tonight's program, I'd like to thank everyone who helped make our program a reality. The success of our program is rooted in hard work and service of our excellent team. Among them, our talented fellows, our board of directors, our advisory council, and our staff—with a particular note of thanks to our Communications Director Maggie Lam, who is joining us tonight from Madrid. And our Assistant Director Iris Plaitakis—or 'Iris mou' as the fellows now lovingly call her. I'd also like to thank all the funders, particularly the McComb Foundation, and our Founding Patrons— The Daphne & George Hatsopoulos Fund, The Helis Foundation, Louis Katsos, and Charlie Kiriakos Perperidis & Dr. Roda Plakogiannis. Special thanks also to Nico Lazaridi for providing us with some delicious wine for the reception that is following.

Now, without further ado, I'm incredibly pleased to introduce our Fellows—both exceptionally talented, dynamic women pushing the boundaries of their fields.

We're going to start with Miranda Lash, who is the recipient of the ARCAthens Curatorial Fellowship for Fall 2019 Program. Lash is the Curator of Contemporary Art at the Speed Art Museum and a Board Member of the Joan Mitchell Foundation.

Her recent exhibitions at the Speed include 'Yinka Shonibare: The American Library' (co-curated with Alice Gray Stites), 'Keltie Ferris: *O*P*E*N*', and 'BRUCE CONNER: FOREVER AND EVER' (co-curated with Dean Otto). Lash is the presenting curator of the

exhibition currently on view at the Speed, 'Ebonie G. Patterson...while the dew is still on the roses...', organized by the Perez Art Museum Miami.

Her 2017 exhibition 'Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art', co-organized with Trevor Schoonmaker, garnered praise from sources including *The New York Times*, *Hyperallergic*, and NPR. Lash was recently a member of the Artistic Director's Council for the international triennial Prospect.4 in New Orleans (2017-2018).

From 2008 to 2014, Lash was the founding curator of modern and contemporary art at the New Orleans Museum of Art. There she curated over twenty exhibitions, including the large-scale traveling retrospective exhibition 'Mel Chin: Rematch' and the exhibitions 'Rashaad Newsome: King of Arms'; 'Katie Holten: Drawn to the Edge'; 'Swoon: Thalassa'; 'Wayne Gonzales: Light to Dark, Dark to Light'; and 'Parallel Universe: Quintron' and 'Miss Pussycat Live at City Park'. Lash also presented several artists' first solo museum exhibitions in the United States including the Venice Biennale Silver Lion awardee Camille Henrot in 'Camille Henrot: Cities of Ys' and the British artist Marcus Coates in 'Marcus Coates: Animal Instincts'. Lash's essays have been published in the *Harvard Journal, Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, the anthology **Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art**.

Please let's all welcome Miranda Lash.

[applause]

Miranda: Thank you so much Aristides. Good evening everyone. Can you hear me okay? Before I launch into my talk I feel like I want to give my own thanks to the incredible team of ARCAthens—Aristides Logothetis, Iris Plaitakis, and Maggie Lam, as well as Eleni and Joshua. I feel like you've constructed a deeply thoughtful, deeply rich, and deeply diverse experience for myself and my colleague Tomashi Jackson and I feel like it's fair to say it's been life-changing. And I'm honored to be here and I also want to extend a special thanks to ATOPOS cvc offering up your space and giving us a haven— a little creative paradise—for us to discuss our ideas, and live and contemplate other possibilities and our lives. So thank you for that.

I've—as a curator—I've worked in a number of different institutions, but the focus of my practice has been working in city museums. And I feel deeply committed to the role of civic institutions as

places not just to show art, but to engage deeply with their communities. And I realize as I go through the slides and there's a lot of—hi, there I am— as I go through the slides, I feel like I'm going to show you lots of different types of projects and, in part, the diversity comes from being receptive to where I am and the issues that are meaningful to the museums that I work at. And I never saw this as a constraint, but rather I feel like institutions are at their most powerful and their most effective when they allow the communities inform what they do. So you can show the very best art and you can bring in the very best ideas, but there's a responsiveness that I think makes the interaction—where the rubber meets the road, so to speak—between people and art. It gives it another level of meaning. So that's a strain in my practice.

I consider the foremost role of museums to serve artists and help others hear their voice. And on that note, I feel like I want to also thank the many artists that I've done studio visits with while in Athens. You've been consistently generous with your time and ideas and it's been an honor for me to partake in that.

So I'll just start off by showing you a picture of New Orleans Museum of Art. As Aristides mentioned, I was the founding Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at this institution where I started in 2007. Maybe it's worth pointing out, it's a neoclassical building. It's one of the many many many in the United States since they're inspired by the legacy of Greek architecture. NOMA...To provide context for why I moved to New Orleans and why I started there, I feel like it's relevant to explain the after-effects of Hurricane Katrina and the flooding and the levee failures which followed. Prior to coming to NOMA, I worked at a private collection known as The Menil Collection in Houston with a modernist focus. In 2005 there was massive levee failures in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, which caused a devastating flood throughout the city. So I show you this map because, I think, not everyone knows the extent to which the flooding took place in the devastation it wrought. So I'm essentially showing you that 80% of the city went under water. The levels you're seeing are the levels of where the water level stood four days after the levee rupture. So in other words there were parts of the city that were over 15 feet submerged under water. That is blue. And I don't know what that is in meters, but it's about three times my height. It was catastrophic on many levels. At least 1,400 people died immediately—many more in the aftermath. Many many people— the vast majority of the city—lost their homes. Many of them also lost their jobs because of the extent of the economic

devastation. In the United States when you lose your job you also lose your health insurance, so it was a critical time for the citizens of the city, as well as the institutions.

So NOMA, that museum that I just showed you, it was located right here—about here in City Park, which also flooded. To give you a sense of how high the water came, you see how it's elevated on these steps right there. The water actually came to the very top step but did not spill over into the building, so thankfully the collection was spared. But the rush of water into the park was so strong that it cracked the foundation underneath the museum. So before the storm there were 110 employees. After the storm there were eight. I started in 2007 when I was about the 50th employee to be hired. So about—in the process of coming back—I was the first employee at the museum that was not a Katrina survivor, which actually was a role I took very seriously because a huge part of my job when I first got there was actually, literally, to listen to the stories that my colleagues had experienced and try to understand what had happened.

Fascinatingly, the museum at the advisement of many other arts leaders decided that was the moment to launch a contemporary program. So believe it or not this Museum in 2005 was already 95-years-old and they decided that one of the aspects of returning to the city and having an effective recovery would be to start exploring contemporary art. And I mention this because it was very clear to me upon embarking on this program that contemporary art was seen as a survival strategy and part of the overall goal of New Orleans to not just survive—survival wasn't actually the ultimate goal. The goal was to thrive. The goal was to come back as a city. It was a city where Jazz was born and which really prized its cultural riches. So the goal was to not just be able to come back, but actually come back with some kind of cultural force. So I did a lot of different projects at NOMA. I'll just show you a sampling of some of them. Part of being responsive, as I mentioned before, was paying attention to what was going on in the city.

There were actually quite a number of artists in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that came to produce art in the city and contribute what they could culturally. Some of those were street artists. We had Banksy a lot in town, JR...and Swoon, whose work you're seeing here— or also goes by Callie Curry. She created wheat paste artworks all over the city, focusing specifically on areas that had been particularly hard-hit. She partnered with an artist run organization in the city known as New Orleans Airlift and together they worked on the idea of creating a musical village or a music box. The idea of a house or a complex of structures in New Orleans that you can

actually play as you move through the house. So in other words, the house would be a musical instrument. And I thought what they were doing was so exciting, I wanted to invite them to participate in doing a project at the Museum. And after a number of conversations, we agreed that they would do a site-specific commission. They would create a sculpture and she— this is Thalassa, this is what you're seeing. A sea goddess—sort of rising out of the waves. Some people asked me, 'Why a sea goddess?'... A lot of it has to do with Louisiana and New Orleans' relationship to water...the fact that the seafood industry—shrimps, crabs, oysters—are a huge part of the economy. What you're seeing on her chest, for example, crabs, the bodies of eels, manta rays, the aquatic life that sustains the city.

And so, we presented it as a suspended sculpture—right as you enter the museum—this was the main entrance to the space. But it was also a platform for the community to learn about the work that New Orleans Airlift was doing. And they were called Airlift actually because they were dedicated—actually, not unlike ARCAthens— to bringing New Orleans artists out of the city and being exposed to other experiences and bringing artists from outside New Orleans to the city to get to know it better. This is us, sort of preparing the piece to go up. There's Callie and I. We are trying to just get it ready. She preferred to work through the night most days. So this is— I don't know what time that is when we took that photo, but it was a nice wonderful process actually where the mounting of the sculpture was generally—during the day—fully visible. We didn't try to hide the process from her audience.

Another project I'll mention that, I think, goes along the lines of being responsive to dialogues in your community was a project I did with Camille Henrot, who is a French artist based in New York. She won the Venice Biennale Silver Lion a few years back—but this is before all that. And she was fascinated to learn about the history and the legacy of french-speaking tribes—Native American tribes—in Louisiana. So, some of you may or may not know, there are a number of tribes located on the south edges of Louisiana that their native language has been French for almost two hundred years. They traded early with the French, they intermarried with the French, they consider French part of their official culture. A number of these tribes, including the Houma, have not received federal recognition. And essentially, what that means is, the US government does not recognize them formally as Native American even though throughout the 20th century they experienced legalized discrimination. So for example, they were not allowed to attend school with white children, they had to go to Indian school. But they do not received— to this

day—federal benefits such as designated tribal lands, designated federal scholarships, things like that. So what they are currently seeking, and continue to seek, is federal recognition which has very specific requirements. And Camille was interested in engaging with this tribe. Helping them better articulate—or maybe I shouldn't say better articulate—working with them on articulating how they define being Houma. 'What does it mean to be Houma?'

So it was actually a project directly between the artist and tribal council and both voices had equal weight. So we worked directly with the chiefs on every word of text in the exhibition, on how the exhibition was constructed. And this is a slot actually from the Tribal Nations Office. I love this phrase... 'If it's not in writing, it didn't happen.' Because one of the arguments of the US government has put against the Houma was that their tradition was oral and not written— and, therefore, not as official. So Camille documented young Houma women engaging in traditional dance. A lot of her installations actually reflect the Contemporary ways that people articulate their identity. So in other words for a lot of people—and I think you might be the same— if you're asked to explain who you are and who your family is, a lot of people bring out their phones and they show you photos of their families. So for example when she asks people to explain, 'Well, what makes you Houma?', often the tool that was used most commonly was the phone. 'Here's my family...'. Here are photographs of archival images—she included a laptop as part of her installation, as well.

And here she was inspired by the history of the narrow boats that have been traditionally used to navigate the waterways called pirogues. They're deliberately narrow so you can get through the bayous. And she designed a pirogue for the installation that bisected her art and a related gallery with basketry. And the reason—in conjunction with Camille show—we did an exhibition of craftwork and baskets by the Houma tribe was because they articulated to us that something that would help us in the path towards federal recognition is having formal institutional recognition of their basket making tradition. So we put together, for the very first time, an institutional history of basket-making traditions for the Houma. And this was important to them. One of the reasons they were interested in the project—as well as working with Camille—but I say that in the sense that it wasn't just about sending an artist into a community to learn about them, we also wanted to provide something to the community.

Next, I'll you work by Rashaad Newsome, which...I feel like every artist I invite to New Orleans— or, really, to anywhere— they have, obviously, very different approaches to the very same place. Rashad was born and raised in New Orleans, he grew up there. And his art was more specifically interested in a number of things—including the tradition of Rap coming out of New Orleans. Dirty South Rap...artists like Lil Wayne, Mannie Fresh, Juvenile... and so capturing the legacy of that music coming out of New Orleans—as well as Mardi Gras tradition. Some of you may, or may not, know that there's a huge carnival tradition in New Orleans. Its very French-influenced, full of elaborate floats, and full of parade kings and queens and krewes. This is a tradition that is almost 200 years old. So his art reflected the more Baroque side of New Orleans. He used literally Baroque period frames and covered them in his own laquers and chrome textures. And his collages—this is a detailed collage that he created—were directly inspired by musicians coming out of New Orleans like Lil Wayne, like Mannie Fresh. We not only displayed the collages, but he wanted to create a procession called 'King of Arms' where he was in the role of the king. So here's Rashad in front of the museum in a custom-wrapped Lamborghini. And this parade of opulence was made in direct emulation of a Mardi Gras parade—of a carnival parade—in a procession which took place in front of the museum.

So here he is with his royal accoutrements the symbols that you see on his jacket are fleur-de-lis, which is the symbol of New Orleans because of the french legacy—the magnolia flower associated with the South, among other things. This is his royal procession—this is once again the central atrium of the museum—where he has worked with...in New Orleans there are many bands, often high-school musicians, but that sometimes other musicians who present music. And so we hired a local bands—these are high school bands right here—as well as Mardi Gras Indians you can kind of see them in the corner as part of this procession.

It wasn't just a simple act of self-aggrandizement. That's way too simple an interpretation of what he did. I think as a backdrop, as context, it's important to understand that a lot of the Mardi Gras traditions in New Orleans have a legacy of racism even within them themselves. There are, to this day in 2019, still Mardi Gras krewes in New Orleans that won't allow members who are black to participate. So Mardi Gras is very festive, a very a long affair in New Orleans that takes place over a month. But there is built into these traditions, legacies of racism. There are black krewes—and some of them very famous like Zulu, which you know Louis Armstrong the jazz musician was, one year, King of Zulu. But to articulate, for him to position himself in a

position of royalty and to demand respect and honor, this is all very deliberate political act. So it's part of the live performance that he then recorded and made into subsequent video pieces.

To shift gears from there, I think one of the goals of the talk was to give you a sense of range in my practice. I've shown you a couple of specifically commissioned works that I've created at NOMA. But now I'll talk about another big project I did, which was a retrospective of an artist. This is Mel Chin. A month ago he won the MacArthur Genius Award. I was so happy for him and deeply pleased. Mel is an artist that has been practicing for about 40 years and really an innovator in the realm of dealing with ecological issues, environmental issues, and the integration of art and science. So his work, in terms of incorporating science into his practice, is actually so revolutionary that it was questioned by the National Endowment for the Arts in the States of whether this is even art. Shouldn't this just be science.

And he really made an argument for an artist using scientific research as part of their practice. I think it's important to acknowledge this because research-based practice is so widely accepted now as normal. And it's part of what an artist does. But Mel was really at the forefront. So this is a piece he did called 'Revival Field' where he collaborated with scientists on the fact that there were plants which were believed to have the capability to soak up lead through the roots and help diminish the toxicity of certain landfill sites. So what you're seeing is him growing several species of corn and Thlaspi, which is a specific type of weed that was known for its capability to absorb lead through the roots. And he made his into several works for this is a maquette of the design of Revival Field. It was all done directly in a conversation with US Department of Agriculture scientists. So in other words, the research didn't just live in the art gallery, it actually lived within governmental institutions and within scientific practice.

I chose to work with him because he did a lot of groundbreaking work in bringing attention to lead awareness—lead poisoning in the city of New Orleans. In addition to the flooding, as I mentioned, associated with Hurricane Katrina, there were in many parts of the city exceptionally high levels of lead in the soil. In part because of lead paint and lead gasoline used in cars before lead was outlawed. We know now that lead poisoning in children can have very damaging effects to the brain. So he basically took a house that had been wrecked during Katrina and made it into what he called 'The Safe House'. In other words a space where it's safe to discuss issues, safe to meet. He knew that he needed to raise money for the government to take action upon this issue. So he garnered attention for this issue by asking people to draw

money, to draw dollar bills. So in other words if you were to open the door of this safe house, which by the way is swung all the way open like a giant safe, you would find the walls lined with money. And what it was guarding and advocating for was the safety of the citizens.

So now I work at the Speed. I left. I've been working there now for 5 years. It was a hard task leaving New Orleans but I was invited to launch the Contemporary Program at the Speed Art Museum. This gives you a sense of what the building looks like. This is two floors dedicated to Contemporary Arts and it's been my pleasure to bring projects now to them. This just to give a sense of our collection galleries.

I'll just mention one more project that I worked on to see the sense of my work at the Speed, because I think we're getting long on time. 'Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art'. I wanted to focus on—in this show, which is was a large show, 60 artists—mythologies associated with the American South. So I don't know if you've heard about the American South, but it's usually defined as a region of the US below the Mason-Dixon line where slavery was legal until 1865. It's typically associated with lower education levels, higher levels of poverty. But even positive stereotypes— like, oh, life there is just slower, people there are friendlier, people have a certain accent, hence the southern accent. I thought—to me it was amazing that this region of the country had simultaneously produced some of America's greatest cultural fruits. it's the birthplace of Jazz, of Blues, of Rock 'n' Roll, of Country, and yet also some of its darkest chapters. Legalized slavery and, later, legalized segregation.

So how do we unpack these processes? This is where I think art can be very effective. You're looking at a piece by Thornton Dial. A really important artist who has had shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but for the majority of his career was essentially given the label of being a self-taught artist—i.e. not a formally trained artist. In the US sometimes we use the phrase Outsider artist to sort of articulate this difference, which is often racialized between artist who have had formal training and artists who have not. So this project continued in terms of the labor of trying to do away with those boundaries. It included historic images of the South such as, for example, the photographer Gordon Parks' documentation of legalized segregation. So this is part of his well-known segregation series that appeared in Life magazine in 1956. Even though segregation was legally— technically—outlawed in the 1950s in the US, it's legacy is so strong and so felt on so many levels. I felt like it was important to revisit images from this time

period, to talk about the American South, and also to include images of the ways the South has changed. So for example, the artist articulating the fact that now many rural populations in the South have gotten so small due to migration to urban areas. Most people in South now live in big cities, by the way, like Atlanta and Houston. So many rural communities have gotten so small that the government is actually decommissioning zip codes. So in other words, for mailing codes, for sending mail to certain towns. This is an example of a post office in a rural area of Alabama that's been shut down because that region no longer has its own ZIP code—because the population has gotten so tiny.

And I also wanted to highlight artists who are attempting to present alternative visions of the South so this is work by the photographer Catherine Opie. A really important American photographer who, as part of her trek through the US, specifically sought to document queer communities in the South. And the havens they had created for themselves in different cities. So this couple is from Durham, North Carolina.

This is Skylar Fein. Black flag. American flag. So black flag traditionally is the symbol of anarchy—highlighting the fact that there's a huge Punk community in New Orleans many of them self-proclaimed anarchists. This was important to articulate because not everyone associates punk music with the South, many people associate Blues and Jazz but not necessarily Punk. And the flag is covered with cuisines from the South like crawfish, oysters, okra, collard greens, pork shoulder, things like that.

And then, of course, artists like Kara Walker creating videos about essentially psychosexual power dynamics. The problem of generations of rape and forced labor and manipulation—except she does it through a surrealist lens. So we included that. We also included video documentation of the continuance of the KKK. This is a video shot by the artist Michael Galinsky and 1986, in part to articulate that the KKK didn't go away in the 1950s or 60s. It was alive and well in the 1980s, unfortunately it continues to resurface. But also to show that even when there were marches in the 1980s in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, there were citizens of Chapel Hill protesting—protesting these parades. So in other words, not all Southerners were totally okay with this, they were actually just as many people in the crowd depicted that were unhappy, but the KKK was there.

And then I'll mention Douglas Bourgeois. Highlighting again the cultural fruits of the South. This is the famous singer Irma Thomas being glorified in this image. But there are signs of Katrina all around her. Like for example, the emptied-out refrigerator, you know, if you lose power during a hurricane you have to dump all your food. And then the fact that her pants are soaked with mud from walking through flooded landscape.

And then this is the artist Diego Camposeco who wanted to articulate through his art the fact that Latinos—people of Hispanic descent—are one of the fastest growing communities in the South. So here he is depicting himself, his name is Diego, and he's depicting himself as the American cartoon character Diego working in a tobacco field because most of the agricultural work in the South is done by Latinos.

Ok, so, how we doing on time? Okay, so I think I'll stop there so that I can turn it over to my colleague. But I look forward to answering questions

Aristides: Thank you so much, Miranda. We didn't even get to Yinka Shonibare or Ebonie Patterson, so many other incredible shows you've created. But maybe we can talk about them later. I've been told that some new people have come in since we began. So to remind you, in your program there's an index card, and you were given, hopefully, a pencil. Please do write any questions you might have for Miranda or Tomashi and we will read those questions after Tomashi's presentation.

Now I would like to introduce Tomashi Jackson who is an artist that I have been interested in since I first saw her work at the amazing exhibition at Mass MoCA a couple years ago. Visual artist Tomashi Jackson is the recipient of the ARCAthens Visual Arts Fellowship for our Fall 2019 Program. Jackson is a multidisciplinary artist who uses the formal properties of color perception as an aesthetic strategy to investigate the value of human life in public space. Jackson was born in Houston, Texas in 1980 and grew up in Los Angeles, California. She received her MFA in painting and printmaking from Yale University School of Art in 2016 with Pedro Barbeito there as Professor—who was just here a couple weeks ago and one of our beloved advisory council members. Tomashi earned her Master's of Science, Art, Culture and Technology from the MIT School of Architecture and Planning in 2012 and her BFA from the Cooper Union in 2010. Tomashi is represented by Tilton Gallery in New York. Her recent exhibitions include a solo show at Tilton Gallery 'Time Out of Mind' and a group exhibition at

Matthew Marks Gallery in Los Angeles, ICA at VCU, Charles Moffett Gallery in New York, the Lehmann Maupin Gallery in New York, as well as David Castillo in Miami. Tomashi's work was also included in the Whitney Biennial 2019 in New York City and in 'Hinge Pictures: Eight Women Artists Occupy the Third Dimension' at the Contemporary Art Center in New Orleans. Her first solo museum exhibition 'Interstate Love Song' took place at the Zuckerman Museum of Art in Kennesaw, Georgia. And her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including 'Give and Take: Highlighting Recent Acquisitions' at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles and 'In the Abstract' at Mass MoCA, North Adams in 2017— the show that I saw and fell in love with her work. So please, let's all welcome to Tomashi Jackson.

Tomashi: Hi. Ef haristou for coming. I'm trying not to be as nervous as I am and I'm going to say some thank you's. And while I'm doing that, let you see the other things that we didn't get to see in Miranda's talk. I would like to thank the entire ARCAthens team of visionaries, directors, and advisors, mentors for creating this residency and fellowship and for inviting me to be a part of its first year. I'd especially like to thank Iris, Aristides, Maggie, Eleni and Josh—without whom none of this would be possible. I felt things here that I've never felt before. I'm so inspired by the people we've met and the vibrance of this beautiful city. I would also like to thank the wonderful people of ATOPOS Center for Visual Culture for housing us in their historic space and caring for us so graciously. And I'd like to thank my gallerist at Tilton Gallery in New York and my gallery in Los Angeles for supporting me from the United States during the six-week ARCAthens Fellowship. And finally I'd like to thank the amazing staff of the Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation for hosting this evening and for having us all in the space during this inaugural month of activity in this beautiful space. Thank you for having us.

All right so let's get to it. My work visualizes public narratives. Public narratives and their implications—the implications of past and present—through painting, printmaking, sculpture, video, and performance. Tonight I'll discuss projects on voting rights, housing, transportation, and education in the United States.

I entered this summer of 2019 with an idea for my newest body of work. I have questions about voting rights in the United States and I decided—oh, I got to set my time because we're going to look at some videos at the end so I can't show you stills for very long...

So I came here with an idea. I have questions about voting rights in the United States and I decided to focus on voting for research and visualization through my work—with a specific focus on the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the contemporary experience of voting in the United States. I brought books with me on them to help me with this research on the matter of democracy in the United States. I brought the 'Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.', edited by Clayton Carson. And to welcome you into my thought process, I'm going to read from the text. From page 166 first, from a chapter...on the Albany movement:

'Tears welled up in my heart and my eyes last week as I surveyed the shambles of what had been the Shady Grove Baptist Church in Lees-burg, Georgia. I had been awakened shortly after daybreak by my executive assistant the Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker, who informed me that a Southern Negro—ummm, SNCC...'

yeah the acronym is SNCC and because I'm nervous, I'm not remembering the acronym, but we'll get into that later—

'...Wyatt Tee Walker, who informed me that SNCC staffer had just called and reported that the church where their organization had been holding voting clinics and registration classes had been destroyed by fire and/or dynamite.'

'The naked truth is that whether the object of the Negro Community's efforts are directed at lunch counters or interstate buses, First Amendment privileges, or pilgrimages of prayer, school desegregation, or the right to vote—he meets an implacable foe in the Southern white racist. No matter what it is we seek, if it has to do with full citizenship, self-respect, human dignity, and borders on changing the 'Southern way of life,' the Negro stands little chance, if any, of securing the approval, consent or tolerance of the segregationist white South—Exhibit 'A': the charred remains of Shady Grove Baptist Church, Lee County, Georgia. This is the terrible cost of the ballot in the deep South.'

That was a from a newspaper column September 1, 1962. And then I'll also read from the chapter titled 'The Expanding Struggle'. These are the papers of King that were organized and edited and published after his death:

'Give us the ballot. Our most urgent request of the President of the United States and every member of Congress is to give us the right to vote. Give us the ballot and we will no longer have

to worry the federal government about our basic rights. Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti-lynching law; we will by the power of our vote write the law on the statute books of the South and bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence. Give us the ballot and we will transform the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens. If the executive and legislative branches of the government were as concerned about the protection of our citizenship rights as the federal courts have been, then the transition from a segregated to an integrated society would be infinitely smoother. But we so often look to Washington in vain for this concern. In the midst of the tragic breakdown of law and order, the executive branch of government is all too silent and apathetic. In the midst of the desperate need for civil rights legislation, the legislative branch of the government is all too stagnant and hypocritical. The dearth of positive leadership from the federal government is not confirmed—is not confined to one particular political party. Both parties have betrayed the cause of Justice. The Democrats have betrayed it by capitulating to the prejudices and undemocratic practices of the Southern Dixiecrats. The Republican have betrayed it by capitulating to the blatant hypocrisy of right-wing reactionary northerners. These men so often have a high blood pressure of words and an anemia of deeds.'

On the matter of my hometown of Los Angeles, the black community, my family, and the lived experience of perversions of the democratic myth in the United States, I brought 'Dark Alliance: the CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion' written by the late journalist Gary Webb. A harrowing true story that reveals to the world how the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush funded CIA-backed Nicaraguan contras via a Bay-Area drug-ring that sold tons of cocaine to Los Angeles street gangs for more than a decade.

Webb's text 'demonstrates how our government knowingly allowed massive amounts of drugs and money to change hands at the expense of our communities. The devastation of this plague is difficult to comprehend.' Both texts were published in 1998.

That's my family and we were affected by the plague enormously. So when making work focusing on researching the 1954 Supreme Court decision on Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas—the case that formally outlawed Jim Crow laws and segregated schools in the United States—this image of the Supreme Court came up alot, the image of which is based

on Athenian architecture—specifically the Parthenon. Spending time with Iris and Miranda inside the civic and religious centers of ancient Athens, the Agora and the Acropolis, I cannot help but be overwhelmed by the grand beauty of it all. The extraordinary ecosystem of assembly and participation within the site of the Athenian direct democracy experiment. I was reminded of the mythic democracy that we're taught to revere in the United States in rhetoric and the glaring contradictory experiences of perversions of that myth.

So I've been piecing these things together in the studio at ATOPOS. Building surfaces that will visualize this conflict. This work will be exhibited in January in Los Angeles at Night Gallery this body of work is called 'Forever My Lady'.

Love songs have arisen a significant this summer. While at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture—that all artists in the room, all young artists, I hope you're ready to apply. The application opens next month. [referring to slide] That's here at ATOPOS. So while I was at Skowhegan, I joined a boy band. I wasn't expecting that. I wasn't expecting that to happen, so yeah, I don't really have many, like, very clear words about what's happening with this. I think of it— but I think of it as the pursuit of love and its absence. There are songs that my mother and I sang together in the car driving in Los Angeles and at home. Songs that my friends and I sang together and that we all know. I enjoy lip-syncing the songs and they keep finding their way into the making of my work.

So my recent solo show at Tilton Gallery, in New York City, and my contribution to this year's Whitney Biennial Exhibition focus on a specific history of housing dispossession in New York City, where a village that held the highest concentration of black property ownership in New York City in the 1800's was demolished in 1857—through what was then the new and innovative use of eminent domain for the construction of Central Park. This history collides with the contemporary use of what's called the Third Party Transfer Program being used by the current mayoral administration of Bill de Blasio to seize fully-paid-for properties only in black and brown communities in New York City. Oh this is one of my favorite pieces. I love the awnings in the architecture and then the daily residential architecture around this beautiful city. And you will see why—over and over again. So these are the pieces from that show. I use the photographs from the journalism. I was following journalists Kelly Mena, Stephen Witt, and Tsubasa Berg as they were the only journalists in the city covering the story of people losing their homes and trying to get them back—literally waking up to notices on their door saying that they no longer own their property and if they wanted to stay there, they had to pay rent to a not-for-profit

organization that's actually a shell company for a developer. It's unreal. And I as soon as I started reading about that, I began thinking about what little I knew about Seneca Village. So my work tends to operate as an opportunity for me to ask questions about things that I don't know enough about. This is the work from the Whitney.

'Interstate Love Song'. This body of work focused on transportation and voting in and around Atlanta, Georgia, where decades of voting referenda and also innovatively racist voting systems that were created to devalue the votes of residents in urban city centers after desegregation and prioritize the votes of rural areas with fewer voters. Specifically the county unit voting system. This is my first awning I was really excited about this.

Yeah, so there's the restriction of public transportation funding and expansion to maintain segregation and whites-only suburban areas. And I wanted to show you what videos look like when they're installed the way I like them. These are more works from 'Interstate Love Song' where I used Georgia red clay—the famous Georgia red clay—as a part of my palette.

And then finally, education and desegregation. What began as research on the history of school desegregation in the United States eventually opened up into an exploration of the language of color. Color perception and its influence on the value of human life and public space—with a particular focus on the lives of children, black children in the United States.

Investigating color as a formal chromatic theory and as a societal construct of value. Key to my growth at this time was the close reading of Josef Albers' 'Interaction of Color and the Color Problems Therein.' And this is, like, the clearest example of that.

The two video collage works that I'm about to show you were born of this body of work—made between 2014 and 2016. The first—and I have to tell you this—I was just going to, like, drop this on you, but have to tell you this first. So the first is an excerpt of what's called 'Self-portrait: Tale of Two Michaels' or 'Untitled Self-Portrait: Tale of two Michaels'. The two Michaels being Michael Brown Jr., who was killed by police officer Darren Wilson, and Michael McDonald, the successful world famous singer songwriter—famous for his work with the Doobie Brothers and Steely Dan. Both Michaels grew up in Ferguson, Missouri.

I'm going to hop in real quick and just remind people please write on the cards. I mean we have plenty to talk about, but it's really fun to be able to actually steer our question & answers with your actual question and answers. Also please write down your thoughts. All right so that's

Mike Brown was killed in Ferguson. Michael McDonald grew up in Ferguson and he's still alive. And at the time, I was asking myself can a video function as a painting. So that's kind of like what's at stake in the first piece, which is an excerpt—it's only 3 minutes. And then the second piece was made in Houston, Texas at Project Row Houses. Houston is the location of the first successful case of school desegregation in 1949 after a melee at a Dallas —the summer of 2015—after a melee at a Dallas Suburban neighborhood pool party where local police attacked a group of mostly black teenagers. I thought that I would go to that site and re-enact the stress positions endured by two girls who were there that day. However after a 28-year-old black woman scholar name Sandra Bland died in police custody—was found dead in a cell two days after being taken into custody, after being snatched from her car and arrested near Prairie View University—one of the schools that I was actually going to go to to ask questions as a part of my research driving around by myself. Yeah, so after she was found dead in a cell I did not feel it was safe for me to do these performances outside. Rick Lowe, Ryan Dennis, and then-summer artist resident William Cordova offered me studio space among the row houses to complete the final piece 'Vibrating Boundaries the Law of the Land'. This work—and trigger warning—this work incorporates the complete recording of Sandra Bland's arrest and assault. And they saw that she suffered at the hands of a former officer Brian Encinia. Yeah let's, let's do.

[video projections: 15 minutes]

Aristides: I'd like to welcome Tomashi Jackson, Miranda Lash, and Iris Plaitakis to the stage. And Maggie Lam will be coming and collecting your questions.

I've never seen that video before, thank you for showing it to us. For an Athenian audience to get a little taste of some of the concerns of some of the current artists working in the United States....

I'm going to step off the stage and we're going to begin a conversation that is going to be directed by your questions, which are going to be arriving on the stage momentarily.

Tomashi: So Miranda, how you doin'?

Miranda: Yeah, I'm doing well. Can you all hear us okay?

Tomashi: Thanks for staying with us through both of our presentations. I think there was something I forgot to mention.... Since being here, we talked a lot about a lot of things but some of the things that I've been talking with you about is this feeling of what freedom might feel like and not realizing that being a black American with—I have international friends but I don't have international family.

Aristides [from off-stage]: You do now!

Tomashi: I do now. Ef haristou. But this... I've been outside of the United States before but this—what ARCAthens is doing for us, bringing us here for not quite long enough. [laughs] I wish it was longer. Yeah, I don't know. We talked about this, that that piece is, like, really difficult for me to watch. It was really difficult for me to make. It's the only time I've ever felt...disabled in the making of something. Like I didn't mention that when Patrick Renner and I were holding those stress positions, it was incredibly hot outside. This is the height of the Texas summer. I wish that we had been able to properly gauge and chart the temperature of that concrete slab in the backyard of Project Row Houses that we were on top of. But our hands and feet were nearly blistered by those endurance poses. And that was nothing compared to doing the editing back at Yale and listening to that over and over and over again. I almost fell down the stairs getting out of the studio building after the night of working on that. And I was—I had to, like, stay in bed for two days after that. And the critique was funny because people actually thought that I was going to go back into that and touch it again. I never touched it again.

Yeah so Miranda helped me choose these videos. I have a whole lot of video collages and she thought it was important to show part of the first one so that there's an understanding of what the fiber work is doing. And what the lip syncing is doing. I'm learning about that—but the last one was important to show as well. [To Miranda] I'm actually interested in finding out more about why you thought these two were important to share with this—a group of Athenians.

Miranda: Yeah, well I think that's for a number of reasons. One, I think until I saw the video piece— your video work—I have of course seen you knit, and seen the examples of the knitwork and freestanding sculpture that you showed in the slides. But I didn't realize the power of the performative capability of the knitting work 'til I saw the video. I also think the second piece, especially, really brings you very close to the pain and intensity of experience by Sandra Bland, who I think you mentioned was found dead in her cell two days after arrest.

And you know, I think as a curator—and I know as an artist you have to be selective about when you allow that kind of intensity to be presented to audiences—but sometimes a measure of that intensity is needed, especially when an audience might not be familiar with all the variables. Like, maybe not everyone here know the story of Sandra Bland and sometimes bringing that forth can be important. And we talked a lot in our conversations about the importance of art acknowledging certain phenomenon. The role of art in acknowledging certain phenomenon which people know about, but it's not explicitly acknowledged or registered in an official capacity.

So for example in your work, you talk about the devastation wrought by the crack cocaine epidemic in Los Angeles, which many people in the U.S. understand happened but there's never been a formal acknowledgement by the U.S. government that this took place—that it was a concerted effort that wrecked the lives of countless people. And to me, I'm really interested in the role of the artist in creating—filling a void of—formal acknowledgment when it doesn't exist.

And [I'm] also sensitive to the toll it takes on you, Tomashi. You talked about this desire for freedom in the wake of creating work like this.

Tomashi: Yeah, yeah... we've also— it's a lot. I'm just going to get the pointer, in case we want to look at any of it. Just in case there's something else we need to go back to when people's cards are coming in. Their coming in—so exciting.

Yeah, freedom or something like it... Democracy or something like it. You know? Iris so incredibly heartbreakingly brilliant and the time that we spent walking through the archaeological sites with her...I can't even express, I haven't even fully processed how illuminating it's been. But, you know, the ideals. Because we're fed these ideals of the United States in school. I'm not

one, although my family was definitely devastated by that epidemic. I have not—I came out of it all not wanting for proper education. So you know, in my public and private education, there's always this democracy—the notion of democracy is on a pedestal. And it's funny that in my phone, I had that picture holding the souvenirs that we bought from our first trip to the Acropolis, because the Parthenon is upside down. And that's what I've been thinking about, and feeling—all the time—is that we live in an upside down world. [laughs] Where we're told this rhetoric, but what I actually experience is something else in. And around this topic of mythology...rhetorical mythology...I was really interested in your work on mythologies of the South in that regard.

Miranda: Yeah, I think we both have this huge fascination—being here—with the origins of Athenian democracy. Not because we believe it—

Tomashi: ...perfect.

Miranda: ...or not because we believe it's perfect but because the mythology—as it translates to the United States as the birthplace for their ideas—carries a lot of weight. And it doesn't mean it was an accurate translation or transcription. The way it was translated into U.S. context, as we've talked about, is deeply flawed. But it's always fascinating to me to go back to where the origin myth started—in terms of the U.S. context of how a democracy is represented. So I think that's why we love walking around the Agora, why we're going to walk around the Pynx.

Tomashi: Where voting actually took place... So looks like... [to audience] How are you all doing you guys? Okay, you all okay? So we're going to get into it. This is guided by you. Thank you for participating with us in this way.

Iris: So I wanted to see the questions before coming up here. Well, there's a lot of them, for one. And also, I think I can divide them into two packs. There's a bunch of questions here that are about advice—like practical advice for young artists, young curators. And then the other ones...many of them are similar in nature....

So social issues appear to be a major part of your work— both of your works—and the question is: **What are the dominant social issues that you have seen here in Athens? And do they relate to your work? And how might you incorporate them into your work?**

Miranda: Yeah, [to Tomashi] so do you want to...

Tomashi: I want you to start, because you've been having all those incredible studio visits and conversations.

Miranda: Yeah, I've had really wonderful studio visits. I'm going to do more, want to do more. I wouldn't say that there are their dominant—I should say, maybe there are common areas, but not to imply that every artist is interested in similar things. I feel like the refugee crisis and the phenomenon of refugees being pulled out at Athens and put in camps has come up repeatedly. I've talked with a lot of artists about the role of different neighborhoods in Athens—the role of Exarcheia for example, as a place...where refugees are being pulled out of—it's come up a lot. The role of Greece as the gateway for a number of these refugees and what that means. For example, people coming in on boats in Lesbos. But also what it means for Athenians in terms of people living here and/or in the detention camps. I feel like that's come up a lot.

I talked with a number of it artists about gender issues. What does it mean to be a feminist here? What does it mean to support people who are transgender? That's come up a lot. And also the aftermath of the economic crisis...and also the aftermath—in positive and negative ways—from Documenta. I feel that has to be acknowledged too. To me it's really interesting time to be here two years after Documenta. And actually I'm really happy to here two years after Documenta, because although I didn't get to see the actual event, I feel like from my experience—seeing a biennial pop up in New Orleans two years after a major phenomenon is when you actually—I feel like—can start to get a read on what were the lasting effects, and what did it mean for artists. And, you know, what are some of the takeaways—you can start to get a sense of what takeaways were from a big project. So that's just skimming the surface. There was a lot more, but that's skimming the surface.

Tomashi: There's a question coming. There's a question coming.

Miranda: Yeah, Tomashi, your thoughts in terms of what you've been hearing.

Tomashi: Yeah, I guess I've been hearing about the same things because we have been together a lot also. I guess I'm thinking about the part of the question about, like, how being here may influence...

Mirada: Yeah—I should have answered that, but yeah you go first.

Iris: **And specifically, some of the issues—the political issues—that you're picking up on, that have reference to your own work, and that might feed your own work.**

Tomashi: I want to be really—I feel like being really sensitive and careful about my words around that just because I haven't been here very long. And people are going through a lot. And there's, you know, as the research and the research-based nature of my work shows, I actually want to be clear and accurate about these human histories. But I've been relating a lot to narratives of relearning what you all have been telling us about. Well, just like this distinctly Greek history inside of Europe of enduring all of these invasions and surviving as a people. And then this economic crisis that the people of Greece have been enduring. I've been thinking a lot about the economic crisis—the the Great Recession in the United States—and how we haven't actually recovered. One of our early conversations with Iris—while we were walking around somewhere—she was talking about how this country is still reeling from the effects of what happened: 'It's actually not over, unlike the United States'. And I was like well it depends on what neighborhoods you're from. It depends on who you are in the United States because there are whole black and brown communities that just don't exist anymore. And black property ownership—I can't recall the exact percentage, but it's some horrific number, like, in the 90s of the reduction of black property ownership. There were there were more black property owners during the Jim Crow era in the United States than what's happening right now. So... in my hometown—I was born in Texas, but I grew up in Los Angeles. Los Angeles there are people living in tent cities. These are legislated policy-oriented crises that have been created in my experience where I'm from. Like the gutting of affordable housing legislation and policies. Literally people who are working, people who have families, are aren't people who were living on Skid Row who are turned out by a drug epidemic. These are, like, families with kids and bikes, and jobs who were living in tents in tent cities all across California. So, I'm also.... And

the energy here is so alive and so beautiful. I mean, like, New York City is just being chopped apart. Like, the vibe that made people want to be in New York City as a place where all of us could collide and then go back to wherever our homes were, and come back again—where our contemporary understanding of vibrant artistic culture from the eastern seaboard of the United States has just been chopped up by these same sort of inhuman policies. So, yeah...I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

One of the things that affected me the most is fantasizing about leaving the United States. And imagining what a life—like, imagining a freedom...I think my exact words were, 'a freedom from the notion that that's the only place that I can end up.' A place that shows me over and over again how much it hates me. No matter how much—I'm doing well. I also live a very good life. But I'm also very aware that it could be me at any time. So um, yeah.

Can we have another?

Iris: Well, since it's on the subject of displacement...moving a little bit. **Any thoughts on the displacement of people in Athens? Exarcheia? Because of airbnb. People come for the culture and local people, including artists are displaced.**

Miranda: Yeah, yeah. Exarcheia—we can talk about that. Exarcheia has come up a lot in conversations with artists. I think gentrification throughout the U.S. and its adverse effects on artists are a huge problem. And Tomashi and I have talked about this extensively. Like the need for cities to either impose rent control for spaces where artists can still live and work.

Tomashi: And families also. There's also always been artists in all these spaces. Like there's this language—this redevelopment language in the United States is that you have what they call a 'no-man's land' where impoverished people have been or underserved communities have been post-desegregation—starving the city center of resources. And that 'artists' will go where other people don't go. And then they make the place cool, and then the development follows—like luxury development follows. But my argument has always been that there have always been artists at all of these places. Among families. When I lived in San Francisco for three years, my grandparents had a home there for forty years. I remember a black and brown, asian-pacific island, a thoroughly, culturally, ethnically diverse San Francisco—an economically diverse San

Francisco. And there were like elders, and little children, babies, children playing in the street. And artists among all of us. I dropped out of school and learned from those people. And lived there as a part of that community. This weaponizing of artistic productive culture as like what attracts displacement development, and also what causes displacement development is extremely disturbing. I'm sorry I jumped in like that.

Miranda: No, no. It's something I think about a lot in terms of like...So what does it mean for a museum. Does a museum become a place to talk about this? How does it affect the way we compensate artists, if we know their places of work are being endangered. Airbnb was a big issue in New Orleans as well.

Tomashi: Completely wiping out whole communities.

Miranda: On the subject of displacement, I thought a lot about, you know—to my shame—there are large-scale detention camps in the U.S., on the US–Mexico border, maybe many of you know this, where you know, until.... There are phenomenon of parents being separated from children.

Tomashi: And then the children are being quietly adopted out while their parents are being deported.

Miranda: Yeah and you know, toddlers having to testify for themselves in court. But there are in the U.S. artist want toing address this. Just as their artists in Greece wanting to address this subject matter and I thought about what kind of contacts can we provide to bring these dialogues together so that it's not just American artists by themselves trying to figure this out and Greek artists by themselves trying to figure this out. What are lessons we can learn from each other. I've been thinking about that a lot.

Iris: So keeping it on Athens for now. **To Tomashi, during your stay here did you meet the black community in Athens?**

Tomashi: I was invited to a reggae festival by a black man who was spotted me on the Acropolis. But I didn't get to go. We really had a packed schedule. I didn't get to go to that. I

have had the Good Fortune of being, like, taken under the young and vibrant wing of a brilliant young black Greek artist who has opened up his studio space to me, and worked with me on one of the love song videos that I made. And he took me to his neighborhood and we were talking about that, but so we were talking about where black people are. And I've been really interested in that cuz of course in the back of my mind I'm fantasizing about what if I could actually leave the United States. What if I could actually, like, have part of my life be here? What if I could come here and contribute to this community? To you know, like, not as a tourist but you know like I don't know—a tax paying. Pay taxes all over the world whatever, you know. Whatever that means. I don't know what it means yet. I don't know what it is cuz like you know like I'm like woefully—I think of myself as woefully American in that regard. As my best friend is a black Caribbean woman whose family is from the islands and that was one of the first places one of the first stamps outside of my passport was to go to their nation. I'm like, 'wow'...there could be other places.

But yeah so so I don't feel like I have I missed a party we went to Aegina and came back and I was too exhausted to go to this African fashion show we were invited to. So I'm embarrassed to say that the opportunities for assembly that I've been invited to, I've missed. But something that Dimos and I were talking about when we were over in his hood was the absence of black shopkeepers—of African shopkeepers. He was telling me that since during the economic crisis, they all went bankrupt and they had to fold up and leave or they no longer existed. There were certain things, you know, I could use a do-rag you know, for Tommy—oh, the character's name is Tommy Tonight, the love song singing lad that has emerged this summer...totally unexpected again.

But yeah, Dimos and I went shopping for clothes so I could make some love song music videos in different places and there were other things I thought I might need. And there was no where to get them. He was telling me that, like, certain things that he needs, as a black man, he has to order online because those—the shopkeepers don't exist anymore. So part of my desire to come back to stay longer—or how to use my next few weeks—is actually to find out more... There's some African cultural centers—a couple—that I'm that I'm seeking out so thanks for asking that question.

Iris: Okay well at least three I think should be read together. They are for Tomashi.

Tomashi: What?

Iris: We'll get to Miranda... Ok,...obviously this is my commentary now—but that, you know, your work is showing a reality that I think it's—for people here is a bit—it's a U.S. reality. So take these questions in this light.

Tomashi: I mean, it's not lost on me that white supremacist fascism it's an international phenomenon. Because I haven't been here you know— I want to be careful not to impose the perspective that's born of this regular trauma I'm also recognizing that being able to be here—actually our time at the DESTIE foundation was really eye-opening. There was a show 'Dreams and Trauma' that has an amazing catalog with all these amazing Greek artists from the collection in the show. The text from that—I wish I'd brought the book with me to read from it—but it's helped.... Being here is helping me to realize and I'm, like, deeply traumatized and that my work keeps responding to that.

So when I imagine the possibility of freedom here, I'm imagining, like, what might be on the other side of being, like, constantly re-triggered into having to respond to this over, and over, and over again. Like what would my work be, if I were free?

Iris: I feel like you're already answering these questions, but I'm just going to read them because they have been asked. **Your art presents a U.S. that still seems to live in the Jim Crow era obviously race matters have dramatically progressed since then. What about violence of African Americans against their own, which is also a frequent phenomenon. Why not focus on other issues that African-Americans or people of other races face as human beings and not as people of color?**

I'm going to keep reading...

Are the police allowed to arrest you without committing a crime?

Tomashi: Yes.

Miranda: Well, they're not supposed to. But yes they do, they do. But they technically...

Tomashi: Yeah, and also we learn that things are ok when there's no recourse.

Miranda: Yeah, there's no real recourse for doing it. Yes.

Iris: **And what can we learn from the black lives matter movement and how can the audience be educated here— the audience here?**

Tomashi: Oh gosh. What a trio. [To Miranda] Will you help me?

Miranda: Yeah, yeah.

Tomashi: Well, you know, we've talked a lot about education and, like, what we think we know about ourselves and the world, about... And how education arrives in front of us through, like, a nationally oriented agendas. And how they are all these questions—these things that should come up—like about people of the world.... I've come to focus a lot on selective humanism. I focus on these things because I'm aggravated by them. I'd rather not be aggravated. I consider it an imposition, you know? Like I've talked with you about this too. That I consider visual language—formal visual language—to be my first language. It's the way that my earliest art teachers understood me. It's the way that, like, you know when I was six the people who were my are teachers in my public magnet school that was the product of the effort to desegregate schools. Like the funding for arts in the United States—public-facing cultural institutions, the National Endowment for the Arts, Humanities and Sciences, public broadcasting—huge surges of funding happened in an effort to participate—in an effort to push forward an integrated Great Society this is the Great Society legislation but, like, there's so much that we don't—we growing up in United States—that we were beneficiaries of, like, bloody battles for like full human citizenship, and we have no clue. We don't know the story. We're not even presented—like we're presented again, like, this myth of democracy, this myth of like.... a Melting Pot.

Now there are textbooks around the United States talking about how indigenous people who were massacred... 'moved out'. They voluntarily moved out. The enslaved people, who were laboring, coerced by violence—raped, and tortured, and mutilated—that they were voluntary workers. This is the language in children's textbooks. So there is a complex of policy-oriented decisions. And I should also disclaimer, my best friend—that Caribbean woman—is a policy

analyst and researcher. So our last 20 years of friendship has really influenced the way that I seek out to complete these questions. I had these questions. I always have these questions about why things were the way they were. But being with—hanging out with Mia as she does her work and education policy, I realize that there are whole, documented narratives around actual policies and legislation that we are all governed by and that do impact the world. This is, you know, it's not just my family, or my neighborhood, or my community where we do take care of each other. Like we are—that's always happening. But...something that I remain interested in is understanding narratives that have, like, woefully incomplete.

So some of the things that we've been talking about is how, like, maybe some things come up in high school that ...tickle your interests, like, 'Huh, that seems like an incomplete story'. And then maybe you go to college and then you have the opportunity to seek out, you know, to seek to really answer to really answer those questions. But you have to go for it, you know. And I think that's kind of—there's something really wrong about that to me that there's like a an international history of human contribution to the human narrative that in its incomplete narration that is selective humanism—a selective notion of humanism—becomes more and more tolerable and normalize and then we just go on. And these things happen and I know for a lot of us it will feel like—like the weather. Like a storm. Like it's just like falling from the sky, but, like, there are patterns to be observed. And I feel like it's important for us to—I don't—it's not a given that one is going to go to college or graduate school and seek that stuff out. I mean, there are certain classes that I had in graduate school—my second graduate program—by the time I got to Yale, I was like, 'Wow, I totally didn't even have to end up in this classroom'. I didn't think I was going to. You know, like, I wasn't planning, after MIT, to apply to Yale for painting and printmaking. And I ended up in this amazing class with Mobena Mercer—a historian that people should know. A Black, British, queer art historian that just completely blew my mind. He wrote an essay every week. His introduction to us every week was an essay he had just written. I couldn't capture fast enough. But he was talking about Europe, he was talking about the Windrush generation, he was talking about the rebuilding of Great Britain after World War II and who did that. He was talking about—I mean, I was like, 'Why haven't I heard this before'.

Miranda: Yeah, well, but I feel like—one of the questions was, 'What can we learn from black lives matter?'. And something you and I talked about a lot is the importance of coalition-building. And actually, I think, something we both feel very strongly is that...how to learn the hard way,

frankly, is that when something is bothering you, and when you want to take on something, don't do it alone. And it's really important to identify other creative producers, or people in your community who are interested in doing it with you. And one of the takeaways from Black Lives Matter has been the role of a concerted, organized effort in bringing awareness. And I know that's something you talk about as well, Tomashi—finding like-minded people and taking a proactive stance with them.

Tomashi: And that's even sketchy, 'cause, 'like-minded'—what does that even mean? If so many of us are so mutually under-informed about each other's human value.

Miranda: Sure. But the point in not trying to do it by yourself is important. And I mean that even in terms of the U.S. context. I think, so often, the U.S. is enamored with the idea that our experience is very unique, we're such a big country that we just I don't know—I think we float around thinking, 'No one does it like America, blah, blah'.

Tomashi: That rhetoric.

Miranda: And it's very helpful, actually, to be put in an international context, to realize that there are shared problems. And get out of the idea that we have to solve it all by ourselves, that we can't pull on creative voices from other places.

Tomashi: And scholarly voices. I mean, like, I think it's good to have friends who don't do the same thing. It's been really, really important for me to have friends who are scientists, and who are researchers, and who are focused on matters of English—of language—writers, architects... that we all bring different things, that we enlighten each other with the things that we don't know. I would encourage people to—like people who—like, like book lists are really good. The 'Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.' by Clayborne Carson. I didn't even know this place existed until Nia shared it with me. It's a collection of his writings—of his work domestically and internationally—that were collected after his murder and published in 1998. Yeah and 'Dark Alliance' was a really important book for me to understand what happened to us in Los Angeles—and eventually all these other urban city centers in the United States. [It's] being looked to now as an opioid crisis that's swept the entire country....So I think reading is good.

Miranda: Reading is important, yeah.

Iris: I'm going to shift gears, simply because there appear to be a lot of aspiring young artists and writers in the audience. **Miranda, what's the most difficult part of your job? What piece of advice would you give a young curator? Would you curate an exhibition you don't believe in? Would you curate an artist that you don't appreciate or like?**

Miranda: Wow, these are great questions. Let me start with the advice for the young curator. I think that...so let's say, you find a context to curate. And I don't want to cause trouble by saying this, but usually you're given parameters as a curator. And that's good, that's important, especially with a museum—there are reasons for parameters. But I also think it's important to generate ideas that I don't want to say defy those parameters, but think more expansively. And at least see if they're possible. And I say this to young curators, don't wait for the mu—let's just say those site-specific commissions I did from the rooftop with Swoon. The museum, they never told me, you know, 'Hey you know what'd be great? Can you suspend something from the ceiling with a street artist?' Like museum never proposed that to me. They never specifically asked me to do that. I think it was a dialogue that I was willing to have with the museum of, 'Can we do this?'

And my advice to a young curator is when you're generating the ideas, don't be afraid to think a bit more expansively about what's possible, and propose it. All they can say is 'No'. But it's a mistake to, sort of, take a passive role and say, 'Okay they want five things I'm going to find five things. That's the end.' You know, it can be more. And sometimes you'd be surprised—when you bring enough passion to an idea—how much more flexibility there is. I don't advocate going and flying in the face in defiance of your institution. Because your institution is your host. But I think if you are willing to have the patience for dialogue with an institution, you'd be surprised where you can find wiggle room, I guess is what I'm saying.

I think that's really important because I would say, above all—I don't care if you're young or old—your job is to advocate for your artists. And your job is to present their work in the most—in the truest way possible—in a way that honors their vision. And so, doing that sometimes requires a push-pull relationship with your institution. And finding where those spaces are. And you won't know till you try—which kind of segues into the most difficult part of my job, which

sometimes is being that liaison. It's being that go-between—between institutional structures...funding. I love my funders. I love you. But being the liaison between these variables and the artist. And because it's a tightrope walk sometimes. It's a negotiation, an ongoing dialogue. And actually a mentor figure of mine, Bill Fagaly—part of ARCAthens advisory committee—

Iris: President of the Board.

Miranda: President of the Board, Bill. He's a huge inspiration to me as a curator. And, you know—again without trying to inspire trouble in the audience—he always told me, 'Don't take 'No' as the first answer'. You know, use your powers of persuasion, charisma, advocacy, education as tools in your toolbox for trying to help realize the artist's voice.

And then I think the last question was, 'Would I ever do a show I don't believe in'. So I feel like—I won't name the show...[laughter]... I won't name the show.... Would I ever do a show with an artist whose work I truly detested, that I find no common ground with? No.

That said though, sometimes you're asked to do a project where you're not super excited about it for one reason or another. There've been a couple of occasions where I've been asked to do this. And in the calculus of the other projects I had going, I'd be honest and say, I knew that doing this project would enable me to do other projects. And so for example, showing an artist whose work I would consider more conservative, enabled me to do a project with an artist whose work was not at all, on any level conservative. But they serve different audiences—the audience that wanted to see this art—I will not name—it catered to their taste and it brought in different people through the door. And it provided the museum with funding that floated the overall operating cost of the institution, which enabled me to do something else.

Now, that said, I've had countless talks with colleagues about 'where is that line?', you know. Like, where is that line you won't cross, that you just won't—I think it's really a case-by-case thing. If you have no integrity for your work, people sense that. And, honestly, more bad projects come to you, 'cause they're like, you know. They're like, 'She'll do it!' [laughter]
So I think is a really careful calculation you have to make. What are you willing to compromise on? I feel like, you know—we've talked about the importance in negotiations—never going in

without demands. And so, if you do say 'Yes' to something, I always feel like, 'Okay, but this means... and therefore we're going to do this.' I feel like 'I'm gonna do this, we're gonna do this'. Like that's the best way I've been able to navigate it. Um, yeah.

Tomashi: I'm going to miss you.

Iris: Well, there's one more question that's for Miranda. Maybe we'll ask that one before we move on to Tomashi—even though we're running out of time. How do you approach a foundation when you ask for funding? And what's the best way to present an idea or a concept?

Miranda: How do I approach a foundation for funding? So...sometimes it's in grant form, like, literally writing a grant. Like say to the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Sometimes it's a person-to-person—there's a contact at a foundation, I ask if we can have a meeting. And it's a face-to-face thing. The commonality between both contexts, I would say, is in a way distilling the most compelling parts of your project in the briefest and clearest way possible. So in other words, I never go in assuming that I'll have more than 15 minutes. If I get more than 15 minutes, I'll be so happy. But go in assuming that's all you have. And that means you really have to spend time distilling—and not just what's most important to me, what's most important to them. So in other words, if it's a foundation whose priority is education, you have to highlight the educational components of the project. If the foundation, their priority is a supporting LGBT artists, then that's something you have to emphasize. So it's also recognizing what is going to be compelling to a supporter. This is so cheesy but have you ever seen the TEDTalk on power poses?

Tomashi: No.

Miranda: So okay, if you want to feel more confident when you're approaching someone, they actually advocate going to the restroom and exercising—making your body feel bigger. Like literally putting your hands up, like, in the air and coming in with confidence. It does help.
[laughter]

And also, a really great museum director told me once, 'Don't ever be bashful about asking for money because, remember, you're not asking for yourself for a personal loan—for me'. I'm asking for the artist. And if you believe in what you're doing, there's no reason to feel shy, or that

you don't deserve to ask, or that's it's an imposition. You're doing—you're asking for something that, I believe, is one of the most important causes in the world. So like, why should I be shy? Why should I hide that I care about it? And so that was really helpful advice.

Iris: Okay, I'm just going to move to Tomashi, because there are questions related to advice for young artists including: 'What is your opinion about participation fees in an exhibition?'

Tomashi: I don't know—I don't know if I know what that is. I mean, we got—we received artist fees from The Whitn—I don't know.

Iris: The question is 'participation fees'

Tomashi: That's what I'm talking about...

Iris: Like when an artist has to pay.

Tomashi: Oh, when an artist has to pay?

Aristides [off-stage]: Yeah, this is a site-specific issue.

Miranda: The artist paying?

Tomashi: To show. I actu—I have heard of that. I mean, you know, I think it depends. I think it depends because there was a small gallery in New York that I don't think—it might not exist anymore. But I know that a part of their ability to remain open for as long as they did—and to publish a magazine, which they did for a long time—was because they provided the space that the people could—I don't know how it all happen—but people did pay fees to show there. And so people who otherwise, like, had not ever shown... [Sigh] it doesn't even feel right coming out of my mouth—but there's a question that I didn't fully answer before about, like, black communities and what we do, like, with and for each other...and about each other under these conditions. And I'm thinking about this in the same house of collective economics and communal effort.

So, like, there were so many small organizations in the Bay—and there continue to be. It's a site for revolutionary community movement in the United States. So I saw this a lot—when I was very young—there. People want to go in on the space, the space has to be paid for. There are many different ways that people can figure out how to make that happen. A space that is meant for community members to participate. I feel like my words are just like—just like dropping all over the place. Boston Ujima Project is a really good example—it's my best friend's organization. There's an article...about the economic ecosystem that they're creating—on *Forbes* if you were to Google 'Boston Ujima Project Forbes' it's going to be the first article that comes up. It's not the best, but it is one of the really good ones that explains their economic ecosystem.

So I'm thinking—I want to think hyper-positive about what it could mean to participate in a show, in a space. I'm thinking the person maybe they're talking about space inside of Greece. Like under conditions of economic duress, so Boston Ujima Project is rising out of Boston, which is notoriously, like insanely, normatively racist. And so the goal—it's the of the country's, it's the United States' first democratic economic investment fund with the sole purpose of funding businesses that otherwise, historically, do not have access to formal streams of capital to start and maintain small businesses. Indigenous people, brown people, black people in the communities in Boston. And there's research about this from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Also going back to the other question, like, there's facts about about the targeted nature of these disparities. So I'm thinking about what I've seen come out of communities—under-resourced communities—and how people will collectively make decisions that do require other people put in. So like Boston Ujima Project, everybody has to put in at least \$50 to be a member. And then you can vote about, like, vote on what businesses get funded by—what will eventually be—a 5 million dollar fund, for example. So if it's a community gallery, if it's a collective gallery where everybody puts in some money to show. And so there can be refreshments, there can be paint to patch the walls, you can pay the rent, you can mop the floor. I think that's actually a worthwhile endeavor. But if it's something that feels exploitative, I would question it.

Miranda: I would just say that. Like, 'cause there are juried shows in the US where you have to pay to enter.

Tomashi: You have to pay to apply to things. I put in money to apply to Skowhegan, which—to the young artists in the room—it's an international residency. Please please please apply. It's a magical place. It's been there since 1946. But the first window of opportunity to apply, it's like what, like \$20 maybe \$15— I don't know what that is in Euros 'cause the exchange rate. And then, at another time—after that window closes—the second part of the application, it'll go up to \$25 or \$40 and then at the very end—right before it closes—will be most expensive \$80. And that money goes to the school. So I have paid the \$80 fee. But I appreciate where the money's going, so.

Miranda: Well I would—so I guess the one brief thing I would say that if you're contemplating whether it's worth spending the money for a show, don't just think of it as carving out money. If you're going to go through the expense. Also plan in advance to carve out time—if you get in the show—to maximize the opportunities. So in other words, plan to dedicate time to invite people to see it, reach out to curators, reach out to press, blah, blah, blah. Basically do everything you can to so that if you pay the fee and you get your art on the wall, you're actually maximizing that opportunity, which doesn't end with getting it on the wall.

Tomashi: Mhmm. Was that good? Are they still here, whoever asked that?

Iris: Ok, if we can answer this in two minutes—I think we can.

Tomashi: We can do it.

Iris: **As an artist, what's the best way to present yourself? And to present your work? And what is the procedure in making an exhibition? Do you approach a gallery? Or does the gallery approach you? And what about costs?**

Tomashi: Oh boy! Is this person still here? 'Cause sometimes people ask questions on cards and then they leave. [To audience member who rose their hand] Hi, I'm Tomashi. What's your name? Jordan? George, Nice to meet you. Thanks for the question. I'll answer as much of this as I can. And then as they kick us out, we can talk outside on those nice benches they have.

Aristides [off-stage]: um, there's wine—

Tomashi: Oh, there's wine. I mean, ok!

Aristides [off-stage]: We're not kicking anybody out.

Tomashi: Ok. Well, cool. Well, relax. Oh boy. So how do you present yourself, and how do you show? When I was very young, I approached people. I was aggressive. Like I went to shows—the first place that went after I graduated high school in Los Angeles was San Francisco. Had a very vibrant artist—art community—I don't want to say artists—but again the ecosystem.... When I suggest you look at Boston Ujima Project it's to really, like, jump into the reality of, like, a multi-faceted ecosystem—like the Agora! Like what we saw at the, you know, spaces for assembly, spaces for presentation, spaces for voting and leadership.

And in that spirit, I would encourage you to start imagining spaces for yourself. I actually want to start with that, as opposed to, like, how you present yourself to others and get them to do what you want—to get them to take your work seriously and do what you want them to do. Whoever your friends are who are also thinking about space and showing. I would start there with like envisioning what your ideal is. Like, what your expectations are together. And then how to, like, make a space where you all can support each other. So there were workspaces like that when I was like 19, and I dropped out of school. So I, like, hanging out with those people who put on incredible shows, incredible parties, DJ's coming in from all over the world. It was the spot. It was a good time. I was actually very interested in having a good time. While I was taking my work very seriously in my studio-slash-bedroom, I was a part of this community that was multifaceted so I had something to offer in certain situations that other people didn't have.

So like, when the spoken-word poets who were working with the DJ's to put on like this big fashion show on a monthly basis—like a regular show that was called Fabric at the time—when they were thinking about 'how do we bring visual art into this?' because Hip-Hop is actually—this was like a really golden time for Hip-Hop in the Bay—and Hip-Hop is elemental. Hip-Hop is visual culture, it's emceeing, it's DJing, it's breakdancing. So you know, the DJ's and emcees are going to bring all the dancers. But then the question would often come up 'How do we spotlight visual art? How do we spotlight visual culture?' and I was there. And they were like 'Tomashi, do something ...' So I started, like, painting live at shows. And then I started giving

the work away. I was in the middle of a block after I dropped out of school, I didn't know what to paint or why. And I remember thinking that was the missing link—kind of like Tommy Tonight. Kind of these love songs, lip-syncing love songs—keep showing up as a mystery missing link. At the time, I remember thinking 'I'm in a block, I don't know what to do. I should be generous. I should be generous, I should give it away.' I'm not encouraging people to give away their work. This is just, like, where my head was at the time.

So then suddenly it felt like magic when I was asked to come and paint live. And so I came with an agenda. My agenda was studio-oriented and I put together a big tapestry of colored paper from the art-supply store that I worked at. And I painted all night. And as the night went on, I just started—people came up and would talk to me, and I would just give them things. I wanted to practice radical generosity with my work at the time. And it opened up—I made all these really good paintings in the studio after that, that ended up getting picked up by a gallery and sold. The whole show sold out. I was like 20 years old in San Francisco. Another gallery that doesn't exist anymore.

So I'm actually, like, really concerned about these economic landscape— these hostile economic landscapes that we're existing in. And how we protect each other, move through them as artists, who are members of families, and part of larger communities. And thinking about longevity. I don't really know what the answer to that is, except that we have to, like be working together to figure out what, like—like spaces that aren't just showing up to take. Like, what that looks like. I don't know what the answer is for y'all, but I'm looking forward to seeing what your answers are.

When I had my first studio visit with my gallerist, who passed away a couple years ago— Jack Tilton—I saw many of my dreams had come true at that point, like, unexpectedly. So many of my dreams had come true at that point. It's important for me to have dreams. To, like, see—be able to recognize when they're happening. And I remember waking up the morning of that studio visit, thinking, 'Wait a minute I don't have... I don't have a want. I don't know what I want, you know? He had heard about my work. He came all the way up to New Haven to see me. And I started kind of, like, envisioning in my head. Aris and I—Aris and all of us—have been talking about positive visioning. What is it—positive visualization. That's really important. And I remember thinking, like, what do I want. I want a show. I want him to offer me a show. What do I want at the end of this. I want him to offer me a show. I want him to offer me representation. Did not know this man. But I knew that he was historically, like, a really important gallerist—a

good gallerist, who came from a very distinct history of showing abstract expressionist work. Well, discovering people, but having come from this history of abstract expressionism in the New York Painting School of the 50s and 60s, under the tutelage of Betty Parsons. And yeah I pictured it. And in the end, he ended up.... Like, how I presented myself. I wore my grandmother's dress. This really, like, one of the only things that I still from my grandmother. The button comes all the way up to here, so there was, like, no opportunity for me to even, like, slouch. I thought about those little things 'cause I have really bad posture. I have the posture of visual artist—the posture of a child who, like, was always like this drawing pictures, right? So, like, I did little things. I did a little things, like, you know, how to make sure that I bathed. And I smelled good, you know, as far as my personal presentation. And then I showed the best work that I could show. I got space in the school to put up all the work that I had made up that couldn't all fit at the studio. And we had a good conversation and he ended up giving me his card at the end, and asking me how long it takes me to make a show. And it was my first—my first solo show in New York was after I graduated after that. That also means, like, my experience after—I'm in my thirties at this point when this is happening—so I'm kind of, like, trying to draw on both of these experiences. Like being out there and hungry—to relate to yours. Because things can happen all kinds of different ways. Like, we don't all have the exact same story.

But one thing that is consistent, I think, is that working with people, maintaining friendships with people who write. It's important to know people who write. Whoever your friends are who are really interested in language—I picked that up from my friend Eric N. Mack, actually because when he was at Yale he made friends with our historians. He was like it's really important to get down with the people who are going to be the future writers of our history. I do the work that I do because I believe that our history is social history. I think that the notion that there's some sort of non-political place in our history is absurd because we're talking about things that people have done. And people are governed by policies in the world. Like, there's no way around that. So like, be good—good to people, be good to yourself, and be good to people. Read and be interested. Go to the DESTE Foundation and ask them to open up their periodical library. Desire to be the writers of the next history for Greek Contemporary Art, you know. Like you're in it. You're it. It's you. It's you already. And the spaces that you all make together, make it so, like, we can't—we won't be able to help but buy that 5 million dollar ticket to come back here and see what you're doing. 'Cause then you create that then other people will come to you. People who

have a vision for how to push your contemporary art— to push you off further, they're around. You have, like, people who love art in this place—that we've met—and don't just love art as a commodity, they love it. Like, we've visited collectors who love, LOVE work—don't make it themselves, they love the work, you know. So I think imagining, you know—it's like, I feel like the space that we have to make art and share art is, like, it's like the salve on my soul in the middle of all this madness that we're all enduring. So I would encourage you to be like hyper-positive. Inform yourself, like, whatever is happening with the economic policy around here—locally, nationally, and internationally—know that. Get to know it. Form some study groups with your friends who are also willing to actually print out some PDFs, real documents about real stuff. And inform yourself and at the same time b- super positive about making a space that will attract other people who will want to help push your vision forward as a visual artist.

Aristides [off-stage]: Well...

Tomashi: We're getting kicked out now.

Aristides [off-stage]: Yes. We're not getting kicked out. For those of you who can stay for a glass of wine and maybe you can talk more. To our Fellows, Tomashi Jackson and Miranda Lash, thank you so much for doing this.

[applause]