

TONYA GONNELLA FRICHER & AMALIA MESA-BAINS:

Tonya and Amalia discuss being grounded in their traditional communities: for Tonya, it is her Native American community, for Amalia, her Chicana. They agree that there was pressure from their family to “succeed in the other worlds.” Amalia admits that the next generation inherits the pros and cons of this professionalization. Tonya describes the expectation that, after she went out of the community and attended law school, she was to return and give back. They both discuss their shared sentiments about the importance of family. The topic changes to cultural rights. They detail some similarities and differences of their communities. Amalia notes that the histories both overlap and conflict, and that: “It is a story of overlapping struggles, of people separated by the very enemy that they have in common, because that enemy finds a way to define them in different terms, in a way that they have no common term.” Both share stories about colonization, and describe ways in which their communities contribute to the country and world. They discuss current issues, such as the environment, immigration, and human exploitation.

MONICA CORTES AND MARTA VEGA:

This chronological conversation begins at the beginning of Marta’s career, when she was a public school teacher and when she first noticed a disconnect between the training she received in arts education at NYU and the students she was teaching: “My training had nothing to do with Puerto Rican, African, Caribbean, Asian, or Native American history. After NYU, I could have gone to any private, European school and taught very well. But I could not go into my own community.” Then to her job at El Museo Del Barrio: Marta describes her job interview, initial impressions, first projects and exhibitions, and the reaction the community had. Marta talks about her upbringing, how her identity was shaped growing up, and the reactions of her Puerto Rican families on her first trip to Puerto Rico. She recounts how she got the idea to do an exhibition of 500 years of Puerto Rican art, which had never been done in Puerto Rico or New York, and the process of executing it in 1974 with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this same year, El Museo was also de-funded, and Marta talks about how it survived. Finally, Marta discusses her inspiration in creating the Franklin H. William Caribbean Cultural Center. Monica asks how Marta balances being an activist and academic, and shares her frustrations when the topics she researches are devalued. The interview closes with a conversation about mentorship. Marta shares her reflections about the past 30 years, and her thoughts about the future.

DUDLEY COCKE & NICK SZUBERLA:

Nick began by asking Dudley how a 30 plus year inter-cultural exchange began from a game of basketball. Dudley described Roadside Theater’s early collaborations with artists on the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico. Dudley recounted how Appalshop, the multi-media arts activist organization in Whitesburg, Kentucky began; as well as how Roadside Theater, the organization’s performance wing, began. Dudley went into detail about Roadside Theater’s history and methodology. Nick asked how one does social justice theater in Appalachia for more than thirty years, financially, politically, economically, and personally. Next Dudley speaks about the importance of having a reciprocal relationship between the artists and audience. Dudley continues talking about audiences, particularly, in regard to current demographics. Nick asks what Dudley would say if he were talking right now to the people with the purse strings.

The conversation ends about pluralism, cultural equity, politics, and community grounding. Dudley ends by citing two things he learned from Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Center: “One, if you’re not encountering some resistance in your work, you’re probably not that engaged. Two, you gotta be paddling waiting for the wave to form. He caught two great waves, the Labor Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. His responsibility in between the waves was to be paddling so he was in a position to catch it. That’s the motion of the ocean.”

ARLENE GOLDBARD & JAMIE HAFT:

Arlene recounts her first encounters with cultural equity work, as a visual artist doing posters and graphics for movement organizations during anti-war and the civil rights, through her first official “community arts” job at the San Francisco Neighborhood Arts Program. She describes the first time she realized she was more interested in the overall organization of culture than in making individual artwork herself, and how that evolved to being called cultural policy. Jamie asks why she thinks culture is the best mechanism to provoke change, as opposed to law or politics, and Arlene discusses how she measures success. Jamie asks about the future of the field: Arlene foresees problems as it becomes more legitimized and professionalized. Arlene takes technology and globalization into account, and describes how the work could be propelled into an international strategy. Arlene reflects that there are two principles she holds to in this work: to speak truth to power, and to puncture assumptions of privilege. The conversation closes with Arlene’s insights into not getting burnt out in this work.

SAN SAN WONG & PETER HANK PENNEKAMP:

The conversation began with a conversation about if art is a means to an end, or a means and an end. Peter pointed out that art has been used in times of social injustice, so it is not intrinsically good, but, he believes, art is intrinsically human. He shares some of his background, how he was raised in San Francisco Bay Area in a family of refugees, who fought the Nazis with art. The topic changes to funding strategies, as San San points out that Peter has gone from a national position at the National Endowment for the Arts to a community grounded one at the Humboldt Area Foundation. Peter compares working nationally and locally, and philosophizes about the way in which communities work within each other. San San asks what the difference is between art and culture, and they discuss. Peter asks San San to respond to the questions she just asked him. She describes how she began, with a love of both art and psychology: her background is in visual art and she is schooled in both community and clinical psychology. Then she talks about her current position as the Program Director of the Cultural Equity Grants Program at the San Francisco Arts Commission. The conversation evolves to philanthropy, particularly as it relates to social change. Peter asks San San to share an unexpected lesson she’s learned, and she talks about growing up in Boston during desegregation. San San questions how one can remain optimistic doing social justice work, or any other field rich in ideas but under resourced.

MARTA VEGA & E’VONNE COLEMAN:

Marta began by asking E’Vonne to talk about her position at the National Endowment’s Expansion Arts Program, which is integral to the community arts movement. E’Vonne responds that one of the most vital pieces of the Program’s vision was connecting people. She explains that the word Expansion in the title was about expanding the concept of what America thought in 1971 was art; it was purposefully not multicultural or minority arts. Marta asks E’Vonne what role Expansion Arts played in fostering the community arts movement, and she answers, by

putting the arts on political agendas and by identifying alternative funding opportunities. Next E'Vonne describes the period of the Program's peaking, 1983 through 1987, and the Program's dissipation. The conversation closes around Marta's sentiment that it is not most important for the organizations to survive, but the principles and passions that they were founded upon, to survive.

THENMOZHI SOUNDARARAJAN & JACK TCHEN:

Jack began the conversation talking about the biggest reward doing this work for him. He speaks about the need as a cultural activist to straddle many positions, and about his passion for hearing stories and sharing in the process of retelling them. He speaks about his experience founding the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas. Thenmozhi talks about using story as an organizing tool. Jack responds with a description of how freeing the storytelling process is, and suggests we develop a politics around that. Thenmozhi talks about being Dalit, from the Indian "untouchable" caste, and how that inspired her to take up this work. Jack begins a discussion about racism and *institutional* racism, which he encounters as a public historian working within universities. Thenmozhi responds with her experiences as the Executive Director of Third World Majority, a new media training and production resource center in Oakland, California. Thenmozhi talks about the appropriation of indigenous people through the popular American practice of yoga, which evolves the conversation about the politics of crossing cultural boundaries and linking our struggles. Thenmozhi sites the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in 2001 as one of the formative moments in her political learning. The interview ends with Thenmozhi singing a song inspired by her work.

ANAN AMERI & VANESSA WHANG:

"Vanessa, I and you – or you and I – are women, of a certain age. We're both ethnic minorities in this country. The connection I think we have is that both of us work in art, not that we're artists. But we both value the arts as an agent for social change." And so the conversation begins between friends and colleagues, Anan Ameri, of The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) and the Arab American National Museum, and Vanessa Whang, a consultant currently affiliated with LINC (Leveraging Investments in Creativity) and the Ford Foundation's Artography Program. The two discuss place, and how much it matters in who we are and who we become. Anan speaks about being a Muslim, Palestinian woman in America, and about the Arab American community. When the topic of mentors comes up, Anan says she was more influenced by events than individuals, and she names particular events. They share a discussion about the pros and cons of growing up and living in the very diverse United States. Finally, the conversation ends talking about the satisfaction of doing cultural equity work.

LINDA WALTON & DANIEL DAWSON:

The conversation begins as the two participants realize how nebulous arts administration is as a field. Linda describes her career at 651, Arts International, and now, the Harlem Arts Alliance. They discuss mentorship and ways of learning. Danny comments that he doesn't know if he's had mentors, but he has had friends. Linda asks him about working as an artist in academia; Danny asks her about working as an artist in administration. They joke about both their decisions to not work in corporate settings. A long conversation ensues about place and community: Linda speaks vividly about life working, living, and being involved in the politics of

Harlem, and Danny describes his relationship to and opinion of Harlem. This conversation evolves to a larger one about gentrification, capitalism, and greed.

STEPHANIE S. HUGHLEY & BARAKA SELE:

The conversation began with both participants sharing their earliest memory of the power of art connecting to social justice. Baraka spoke about how she joined the Shrine of the Black Madonna in 1973. Stephanie remembered being inspired by a dance group in college comprised of students from Africa. Baraka added that she used to write poetry, and was first inspired by Amiri Baraka. They agreed that both their college experiences shaped them, especially because it was the black power days: there was a lot of passion on campus, and students felt a real responsibility to the neighboring community. They spoke about formative moments in their post-college years, and each shared stories about their mentors. They also reminisced about how they met, finding out that they were doing the same work. The conversation wrapped up with a discussion on leadership succession, and ended with thoughts about spirituality.

CYNTHIA CARRION & SONIA MANJON

“Coming from a family exiled from the Dominican Republic,” Sonia began, “I had an early knowledge of politics, race, and culture, and I’ve always been involved in the arts. I found out that through creative expression I could be political without getting in trouble; and I saw that being creative and dealing with social, cultural issues, people were more willing to listen to me.” Cynthia is also from the Dominican Republic, and describes a video project she created. The two talk about assimilation and acculturation, and Sonia talks about dancing merengue with her grandmothers and sisters. Cynthia asks if there was ever a time when Sonia felt her work was threatened by a system that didn’t support community grounded work. Cynthia describes her earliest memory of the power of art as it connects to social justice: at a rally with her parents who belonged to a union. Sonia responds with a story about when her mother brought her and all of her siblings on a strike. The conversation moves to family: Sonia talks about what she hopes to instill in her children, and discusses how her colleagues in this field are her family. Sonia speaks about her mentors, including Marta Vega, and also, about mentoring younger generations. The topic changes to unexpected lessons learned in the field: for one thing, Sonia was surprised that she could convince someone to believe what she believes! The conversation closes about the future.