

**April 20, 2020**

**New Music Virtual Town Hall Meeting: Equity & Access  
Notes**

**Panel:**

Facilitator: [Rania El Mugammar](#), Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Oppression Educator, Multi-disciplinary Artist, Organizer and Consultant

Guest Speakers:

[Durell Cooper](#), Cultural Curator and CEO/Founder of Cultural Innovations Group

- Durell's Flow web series: [link](#) and [link](#)
- [Creative Generation](#)

Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders, [7 Names](#); instagram: @7nms\_  
[Nathalie Joachim](#), flutist, composer, vocalist

Questions answered:

1. I'm wondering what orgs are considering to better care for artists, policy wise/payment? Is there a vision (and opportunity) for systemic change?
  - a. Rania: seeing that we haven't done the reflection piece before this. Many are in crisis intervention. Recognizing they now have a responsibility where other orgs felt "this isn't my job." Orgs that have been thinking/taking on these aspects and already put in support for holistic wellness for artists in the community they work in. Culturally-specific orgs are unfortunately not going to make it. For many, these are the only spaces that artists can work within and speak to. Large institutions will be fine. Reality is how do we apply this to orgs that don't have the connections.
    - i. Can't celebrate resilience. Creating without support of our own ecosystem and institutions is a problem. Strategy – need to look at collaboration, cross-pollination and how does that ensure collective survival of our landscape.
    - ii. People haven't exercised this muscle. Not as intentional. But this is where the opportunity lies.
  - b. Rania: funders have taken an approach working with/prioritizing crisis intervention, resources that have pre-existing equity policy + multi-year plan. So even larger institutions can intervene. We have to intervene in radical ways to ensure that this doesn't get de-prioritize/defunded and that people don't lose focus on.
2. Related question above: Does anyone know what Ford Foundation is doing in response to this? Since they have been focused on this before the crisis?
  - a. Ford is part of the consortium funding the NY Community Trust Covid 19 Relief Fund.
  - b. Ford Foundation matched Mellon in the artist covid-grant program.

- c. When we say that the big institutions "will be fine" it raises the biggest fear I have right now. Dealing with the unknown is something we are all trying to deal with. But my biggest fear is that the big organizations will try to get as much back to the "before" as they can without thinking about how we NEED to change systematically.
  - d. Other fears: This is going to be a long road. Possibly prompting larger organizations playing it "safe" and creating less opportunity for collaboration, rather than taking positive steps in innovation, inclusion and advocacy. Hence the real need for radical intervention re: Rania.
3. How do we take care of non-US-citizen artists, left out of so many of the government resources at this time?
- a. *Action/Follow-up: ICE will do research + ask partners*
  - b. Tamizdat Resource: <https://www.tamizdat.org/>
  - c. Dance/NYC is prioritizing immigrants in their artist relief program for dance makers. <https://www.dance.nyc/programs/funds/FreelanceDanceWorkers>
  - d. Follow-up Q: By non citizen artists do you mean undocumented people and/or artists who are a citizen of other countries?
    - i. By Non-citizens, I mean those who are hesitant to apply for unemployment or loans for fear of a negative impact on future visa applications. Though yes, undocumented artists too of course.
      - 1. From chat: even the properly documented non-citizens, my family and I, are denied aid. We pay taxes and were told "no, you can't have part of this."
  - b. <https://www.gofundme.com/f/nyc-lowincome-artistfreelancer-relief-fund>
  - c. <https://maketheroadny.org/>
4. Jennifer: What promising practices – if any – are you seeing right now around how organizations are responding with a focus on equity and access? Nimbleness of organizations.
- a. Marjani: Scarcity that allows for remote development of work; responsible to artists for programs. 7 Names – requirement to create elsewhere. What does that mean? Support childcare? Building stipends? Shaping the future.
    - i. We're looking to be heard + be co-strategists as artists.
  - b. Rania: have to move away from transactional relationships between artists + institutions
    - i. Power sharing: allowing people to have space to be part of decision-making that makes them. More than a seat at the table. De-valuing artists and orgs – structures for partnership not accessible for those people. Recognizing our way is not the best way. What works for one community may not work for another. There has to be nuance + agency + collaborative decision making + transparency – be clear about making decisions.

- ii. To facilitate trust – decision making needs to be clear to all, not just the people making them.
5. In reference to opportunities in this crisis, I wonder how you are thinking about digital platforms as a means to amplify and prioritize the most historically-marginalized artists (now and ongoing). Digital platforms as means of amplifying historically marginalized artists. Any concerns about knee-jerk rise in live-streaming? Worry that it is less equitable.
  - a. Rania: cannot sustain an anti-oppressive practice in an oppressive world. We all have a social transformation responsibility. Digital spaces as primary spaces for human connection are not luxuries. Needs to be an advocacy space to give access. Equitable access. Especially since losing access to public libraries. Fill the gap. Account for the reality that there was already a pre-existing barrier. Re-imagining.
  - b. All of a sudden we have all these responsibilities? We are learning that a lot is possible in this moment! The reality is that so many of us were gaslighted “that’s not reasonable” but now learning these things are possible. Recognize this makes sense right now but what does it mean for a deaf artist? What does it look like? A willingness to recognize that digital space is not singular. Willingness for us to be uncomfortable in order to create space in which someone doesn’t have to negotiate a part of themselves to access space.
  - c. Reality: many of us have lived in isolation and have been very good at connecting online. Re-defining community.
  - d. Disability, digital accessibility

#### Chat Announcements

<https://singsolidarity.org/virtual-choir/>

<https://openspaceofdemocracy.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/baldwin-creative-process.pdf>

City-wide music performance for all, on April 29: <http://www.tenthintervention.com/workers.html>

#### Additional Notes:

#### **Rania El Mugammar**

- Long history of pandemic’s impact on indigeous communities. For the first time the world is more or less thinking about the same thing. Mindful of universalization. Singular experience. This Is falling disproportionately on so many communities, in the margins from the beginning.
- Contending with new realities. Continuing practice as an artist seems uncertain.
- Collective grief is present but we have the opportunity to redefine how we will be with one another. Redefine choices we will make as artists and as decision makers, leaders, strategists within our arts landscape. “The before time”

- Creating is not only an opportunity to negotiate/deal. Collective wellbeing. Escapism - negotiating space in the world. Unprecedented moment to choose what the “after time” looks like.
  - In this work we tend to create a dichotomy/binary – action in one corner and reflection in another. Opportunity for reflection to lead to mindful action.
- Big Picture Shifts
  - Challenge the 3 lies/myths:
    - Notion of inevitably (lays ground for apathy)
    - Myth of scarcity – within our capitalist reality
    - Myth of objectivity – fundamental position of “neutral” – discount experiences of communities not in the mainstream, on the margins.
  - These 3 myths coax us into inaction + feel immobilized/helpless – but we’re not! We have tools. We have knowledge.
  - Within institutions: contend with the life of artists. Intersectional Design Intersectionality → liberation; systematic reality – all fates bound together, all power structures can be challenged at once, cannot have single issues as we don’t have single lives. Alignment between systems, people, culture. Need to keep this as a priority. Critical lens to navigate the challenging, exciting time.

#### **Durell Cooper** ([Flow web series](#))

- Issues have existed long before covid-19 and will exist after covid-19. Seeing residual fallout of epidemic from the epidemic that has already happened in these different communities.
  - Many of these communities will not make it back in the same way as others. Doors will shut (such as orgs who serve people of color).
- The arts are not on the periphery of this epidemic. The arts are at the center. Recovery: civilizations judged by arts/culture that they leave behind. Not the time to hide. Time to create now more than ever.
  - Keep making art with the creative generation. Partnership is important. Collaboration. Do it intentionally.
- Open up your spheres of influence re: conversations and collaboration.
  - Find people; entrepreneurs – central in disrupting systems; adaptable/flexible in a position first. Think outside of the triangle, circle, etc. Help in strategizing how to move forward.
  - Pivot organizations – what are the strategies

Jennifer Kessler: how to balance continuing to make art alongside issues people are facing, like if they can’t make art, or if they’re taking care of themselves and/or loved one, don’t have energy, ill, etc.

#### **Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders** ([7NMS](#); instagram handle: @7nms\_)

- Reflecting on Rania’s points – Intersectionality
  - Calls for us to not be ahistorical.

- Reflecting on Durell's points – Frame this moment in the context of moments.
  - Everett: art is always the thing that is at the forefront of change in history. And for some of us that is not an easy thing. Difficult to find footing. Environment plays a huge part for artists. Finding the same source in the creative process that you had prior to this moment. Learning process. Learning how to continue to do what we do and be who we are in our creative lifestyles.
  - Still finding some footing as we maneuver in this moment.
- Artists – not just as producers but as strategists. Artists are strategists! We come from a lineage of strategists – innovating in hip hop culture, jazz artists. And here we are again. And we're going to do it again.
- How do institutions/orgs find themselves on the right side of history?
  - Collaborative ideation with artists
  - Want to be able to talk about blackness, culture, culture as power. Not stuck in tradition but as a driving force of innovation and radical strategy-making.
  - Innovation rooted in lineage and cultural power.
- 7NMS work
  - Looking to be in collaborative ideation with orgs in the way that our work unfolds from here on, to re-shape the future.

### Nathalie Joachim

- James Baldwin essay from Creative America about the creative process. Recommend reading it.
  - Baldwin is ever-present. Essay <https://openspaceofdemocracy.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/baldwin-creative-process.pdf>
  - Artist having to contend with a sense of aloneness
    - Aloneness is seen as idyllic but for most don't want to contend with this aloneness b/c you have to contend with your own history and who you are. Spend most of our time with others because it's uncomfortable to see how your past has shaped who you are. But it's the artist's duty to do this.
    - Thinking about my own artwork – which has been seeking connectivity + fostering a sense of collectivity within my own community and those I am interacting with. This is particularly challenging in the moment, where we are fighting to stay connected.
  - Artists in America – the system coming to a halt has proven that the system doesn't work for the most vulnerable, people living on the fringes of society/those who have been pushed out of view, that is all we are left to see in this moment.
    - Taking the moment to look to ourselves and others to contend with this. This is what this moment is about – our work, what orgs/institutions need to do – deep examination of what was to foster collectivity
  - What true aloneness means and the opportunity from it, how it can encourage and deepen sense of seeking out to unearth history, giving space for historic

narratives that have been covered up and seeing how that plays into current practice and bringing it out externally.