Arts + Equity
in the Neighborhood:
The Role and Responsibility
of Arts Organizations in
Gentrifying
Cities
QUESTIONS

As artists and arts leaders, what is our role in considering and serving the needs of our changing communities?

What can we do to foster equity, and especially racial equity?
TERMS

Racial Equity

Racial equity refers to what a genuinely non-racist society would look like. In a racially equitable society, the distribution of society’s benefits and burdens would not be skewed by race. In other words, racial equity would be a reality in which a person is no more or less likely to experience society’s benefits or burdens just because of the color of their skin. This is in contrast to the current state of affairs in which a person of color is more likely to live in poverty, be imprisoned, drop out of high school, be unemployed and experience poor health outcomes like diabetes, heart disease, depression and other potentially fatal diseases. Racial equity holds society to a higher standard. It demands that we pay attention not just to individual-level discrimination, but to overall social outcomes.

- Aspen Institute

STRUCTURAL RACISM

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.

- Aspen Institute
PRIVILEGE

Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, access, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of marginalized groups. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned the privileges that they enjoy or that everyone could have access to their privileges if only they worked to earn them. In fact, privileges are not earned and they are granted to people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not, regardless of their stated intent.

— Aspen Institute

ACCOUNTABILITY

Acknowledgement that white people’s privilege due to historical and contemporary advantages does exist. And, the understanding that to deconstruct structural racism, we must be held accountable for being complicit in the current systems of oppressions and take action for its unravelling.

—c3 internal language
RECIROCITY

Programming that is supportive of the local community, but also leaves room for the institution's own identity.

— c3 internal language.

SAFE SPACE

A space where “marginalized groups have a right to claim spaces in the public realm where they can share stories about the discrimination they have faced without judgment and intrusion from anyone else.”

WHAT WOULD YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD BE LIKE IF YOU FELT THAT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AS A SPACE, AS A COMMUNITY, LOVED BLACK PEOPLE

SPEAKERS

image left: from the Portland People’s Plan image by Rob Lewis
SHIR LY GRISANTI founded the alternative residency program c3:initiative after working as an independent consultant facilitating community engagement between individual artists, arts and cultural institutions, and the public. Her work is guided by the philosophy that society moves toward greater social justice through individual growth, collaboration, and community-building. Prior to juggling the joys of entrepreneurial work and motherhood, Shir worked in the Education and Public Programs department of three wonderful and women founded museums: Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR; The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA.

She received her MA in Museum Studies at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA; a BA in International Relations at Tufts University, Medford, MA; and received a certificate in Mediation & Conflict Resolution from The Institute for International Mediation and Conflict Resolution, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

YAELLE S. AMIR is the Curator at Newspace Center for Photography, where she manages the exhibitions and public programs. Yaelle has worked as a curator and researcher for over a decade, focusing primarily on socially-engaged photography, video, and installation, with an emphasis on community engagement. She has held curatorial and research positions at major institutions including the International Center of Photography, Museum of Modern Art, and New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts.

She has curated exhibitions at numerous nonprofit institutions across the U.S. such as Artists Space, CUE Art Foundation, Center for Book Arts, Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, Franklin Street Works, ISE Cultural Foundation, Marginal Utility, and the Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University, among others. She is the recipient of several curatorial fellowships and awards by national organizations including The Luminary in St. Louis, BRIC Media in Brooklyn and the Art & Law Program in New York.
GIA M. HAMILTON is a cultural practitioner and entrepreneur who has worked at the heart of art, healing, food security and education to help build sustainable communities for the past 20 years. After 15+ years in New York, working first in the corporate sector and later with non-profits, grassroots collectives, and individuals while refining her individual practice, Gia returned to her native New Orleans where she founded Gris Gris Lab – a place based incubator and cultural exchange space.

Gia holds a Bachelor’s in cultural anthropology from New York University and a Masters in applied anthropology from CUNY. Following two years as a consultant for the Joan Mitchell Center, Gia was appointed its Director. In that role, she designed the artist-in-residence program, community engagement strategies, public programs and operational systems, and acted as lead director on a multi-million dollar capitol redevelopment at the Joan Mitchell Center.

She continues to act as a conductor of information between the New York and New Orleans communities, as well as a catalyst for change in contemporary art through designing innovative models for artistic and cultural exchanges. Most recently, Gia founded Afrofuture Society, an online platform for the arts community of color, providing a way and place to communicate across disciplines throughout the life cycle in arts and culture.

SHARITA TOWNE’S interests lie in unpacking the inherited struggles of past burdens and in affording collective catharsis. Through collaboration, stereo-photography, printmaking, video, and community art projects, she’s worked at memorials in Germany; in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria; Brazil; in gentrifying cities like Portland, Oregon; in schools, museums, and neighborhoods, and within her own family. She received a BFA from UC Berkeley and an MFA from Portland State University. She currently teaches at Pacific Northwest College of Art, and is a 2016 Art Matters grant recipient.