With Najmah Abraham, Djali Brown-Cepeda, Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation), Ronald Moten, and Betty Yu. Moderated by Brian Tate. Opening performance by Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache).

PANELISTS

NAJMAH ABRAHAM is a Brooklyn native, mother, spoken word artist, educator, and fashion photographer. She is the 2018 Zanette Lewis Martin Luther King Jr. Social and Environmental Justice Slam Champion at Yale, and the 2018 Black Writers Conference Slam Champion at Medgar Evers College. She is program manager for Green Earth Poets Café, where she teaches poetry and creative writing to senior citizens and youths. She also teaches computer literacy and digital photography to seniors, and media, design, and entrepreneurship to youths. In 2022, her justice-involved youth published an anthology, Chasing Thoughts, in partnership with NeON Arts and the NYC Department of Probation. As a multi-recipient of the SU-CASA grant, Abraham has published three anthologies featuring the narratives and poetry of senior citizens in Brooklyn and Queens, NY. She has worked in the fashion industry for over 15 years, designing for Jordache, Rocawear, Guess Jeans, GAP, and more. Her fashion photography has been published in Vogue Arabia, Teen Vogue, and Newsweek, among others. Abraham is Head of Visual Marketing for Halalyywood, an international halal entertainment production company whose film was featured in Cannes Film Festival. She is the founder of Najm Designs, a digital media service providing marketing, graphic design, web design, and photography to businesses. She also founded a storytelling project featuring Muslim women, “I Am More Than a Scarf,” to counter the idea that Muslims don’t connect to everyday issues such as gun violence and gentrification. “As a human being living in America,” Abraham says, “these are our issues too.” najmdesignsny.com

DJALI BROWN-CEPEDA is an Afro-Indigenous Dominican archivist and filmmaker from Upper Manhattan and the Bronx, NY. She is the founder and curator of Nuevayorkinos, a digital archive and multimedia project that documents New York City Latino and Caribbean cultures and histories through family photographs and stories. She runs the project with her life partner, Ricardo Castañeda. Nuevayorkinos has exhibited at El Museo del Barrio and MoMA PS1 in New York City, and the MACLA in San José, CA. The project has also been featured in various publications, including The New Yorker, Dazed Digital, New York Times, and Latina Magazine. A film and tv director/producer, Brown-Cepeda’s credits include numerous industry and independent projects. imdjali.com | nuevayorkinos.com

CANDICE HOPKINS is a citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation and lives in Red Hook, NY. She is the executive director and chief curator of Forge Project, a Native-led initiative centered on Indigenous art, decolonial education, and supporting leaders in culture, food security, and land justice. Her writing and curatorial practice explores the intersections of history, contemporary art, and indigeneity. She worked as senior curator for the 2019 and 2022 editions of the Toronto Biennial of Art and was part of the curatorial team for the Canadian Pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale, featuring the work of the media art collective, Isuama. She is co-curator of notable exhibitions including Art for New Understanding: Native Voices 1950s to Now; the 2018 SITE Santa Fe biennial, Casa Tomada; documenta 14 in Athens, Greece, and Kassel, Germany; Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada and Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years in Winnipeg, MB. Her essays include "The Gilded Gaze: Wealth and Economies on the Colonial Frontier," for the documenta 14 Reader; "Outlawed Social Life" for South as a State of Mind; and "The Appropriation Debates (or The Gallows of History)," for New Museum/MIT Press. In 2021 she was a recipient of the inaugural Noah Davis Prize, along with Thomas Lax and Jamillah James. forgeproject.com
RONALD L. MOTEN is a peace activist, political advisor, and Go-Go promoter known as a passionate advocate for his native Washington, D.C. He attended Roosevelt Sr. High School and earned his GED from the State of Connecticut while incarcerated in Danbury Federal Correction Institution. Majoring in History at Park Community College, he studied the activism of such leaders as Kwame Ture and Winnie Mandela. Guided by their examples, Moten took up the practice of nonviolence to address the struggles of African Americans. A skilled trainer in conflict resolution, he has negotiated many truces between gangs and crews, helped send dozens of at-risk youths to college, and founded, supported, or co-led major initiatives to combat violence. Moten is the co-founder, with Dr. Natalie Hopkinson, of Don’t Mute DC, an organization dedicated to battling Black displacement and cultural erasure in Washington, DC. The #Don’tMuteDC uprising began on April 7, 2019, when a longtime local small business owner was ordered to turn off his music, sparking a springtime battle over music and public space on an iconic corner. Since then, the movement has activated thousands of Washingtonians to help secure crucial policy victories in the arts, preservation, health care, and education. Moten and Hopkinson now use their decades of experience and connections in DC’s, media, arts, and political landscapes to drive strategy for this social enterprise. don’tmutedc.com

BETTY YU is a socially engaged multimedia artist, photographer, filmmaker, educator, and activist born and raised in New York City to Chinese immigrant parents. Yu’s artistic practice integrates documentary film, new media, and community-infused approaches. Her documentary, Resilience, about her mother fighting sweatshop conditions as a garment worker, screened at major film festivals, and Yu's multimedia installation, "The Garment Worker," was featured at Tribeca Film Institute’s Interactive Showcase. In 2020, Yu worked with housing activists to create "Resistance in Progress," a multimedia installation at Queens Museum. Her first solo show, (Dis)Placed in Sunset Park, was held at Open Source Gallery in New York City in 2018. She has exhibited at numerous cultural institutions and galleries throughout New York and received prestigious artist residencies and fellowships. In 2015, Yu co-founded Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB), a cultural collective that uses art to advance anti-gentrification organizing. CAB’s recent exhibition, Degentrification Archives, was presented by Pace University Art Gallery. bettyyu.net | chinatownartbrigade.org

MODERATOR

BRIAN TATE is a cultural curator and marketing strategist who develops major public programs that examine the issues of our time. He has built forward-looking projects at the nexus of arts and ideas for more than 20 years, and he is expert at convening fearless thinkers for discussions of ethics, politics, and the future. He is the director of community partnerships for The WNET Group, America’s flagship PBS station. He is also the president of Tate Strategy, a Brooklyn, NY-based consulting firm that advises innovators in the arts, media, philanthropy, and economic development. Tate is guided by the example of his parents, Charles and Florence Tate, brilliant civil rights activists who espoused selfless action to drive social change. tatestrategy.com

OPENING PERFORMANCE

A soloist musician, composer, and collaborator, LAURA ORTMAN was inspired by her adopted grandmother to learn violin at a young age; when she excelled, she was invited to join the St. Louis Youth Symphony. She received a BFA from the University of Kansas, then moved to New York City to start her art career – first as an installation and performance artist, then recording her compositions in her apartment on a 4-track cassette recorder. As she shifted from installations to music, Ortman took up more instruments and experimented. Today, she still records on her 4-track with a variety of textures, from the small, earthy sounds of the Apache violin to the bass chords of an amplified piano. A self-described sculptor of sound and atmosphere, Ortman composes challenging new music that crosses genres, moods, and ideas. She has composed countless independent film scores and built an extensive list of performances and artistic collaborations, making music that simulates isolated, ambient sounds from environmental surroundings. thedustdiveflash.bandcamp.com

Presented by The WNET Group
Curated by Brian Tate
Project management by Jasmine Wilson