



FOR THE RECORD

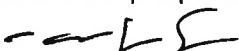
February 27, 2017

Good morning Chairperson Van Bramer and Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. I am Antonio Serna, an artist, cultural worker, and member of 'artists of color bloc'. 'Artists of color bloc' is a group of artists and cultural workers of color that have come together to address the intersectional conditions of artists, workers, and communities of color.

We are now coming together as a large coalition of artists and cultural workers of color working bring equity within NYC's first ever Cultural Plan of 2017. Our efforts are not without precedent, as there have been many artists and cultural workers of color who came before us that fought and continue to fight for inclusion in all levels of NYC's cultural institutions. In this regards and learning from the past, there is still much more work to be done. But ultimately we do believe, that with a strong framework, metrics, and accountability, a cultural plan can be created that will provide true equity for all past, present, and future of artists and cultural workers of color in New York City.

Strategically, our overarching goals can be summarized into four main themes: *to desegregate, to decolonize, to rebuild & restore, and to communalize the framework of nyc's cultural institutions*. What do we mean by this? **Desegregate**: Creating ways to bring people of color to all levels and positions in the museum. Currently we see the museum racially segregated in workforce, exhibitions, and public programming. **Decolonize**: Liberated and create empowerment platforms within museums and other cultural institutions. Currently much of the framework in museums has been built on colonial models of collection display, knowledge and education originating from the colonialist perspective. This framework has to be dismantled and rebuilt from the bottom-up by and for those historically excluded and marginalize within the American colonial context. **Rebuild & Restore**: Redistribution and/or subsidizing resources for repairing, restoring, and rebuilding cultural organizations and cultural histories that have a long history of neglect in NYC. And finally to **Communalize**: Restructure museums as places where culture is alive and evolving: created, experienced, and shared by every interested individual in our communities.

I am sure you are all wondering, *how can such abstract goals be attained?* No doubt these are difficult tasks and task that no groups should have to tackle alone, or with a top-down approach. As an latinx artist of color, having worked in the cultural sector for over two decades, I have seen and participated in many projects, working groups, think-tanks, and focus groups that touch upon these subjects. So in order to go deeper, 'artists of color bloc' has compiled various concrete recommendations that the Department of Cultural Affairs can include in the cultural plan, if it truly does believe in the need to bring equity to all areas of the cultural sector. They are grouped below and attached to this testimony that I will leave with you here today.

I urge the Department of Cultural Affairs and the various organization working on the cultural plan to look at these suggestions closely and establish with our coalition a working relationship so that we may relay back to our constituents the progress we are making together. As an artists cultural worker, and son of working class Mexican immigrants, I would like to leave here feeling secure that the art, cultural, creativity, and strong work ethic of people of color have a solid future within the cultural landscape of New York City. 

Artists of Color Bloc's Recommendations for Equity in NYC's Cultural Plan:

I. Equity in Artists Wages & Fees, Exhibitions & Collections, and Education & Research, within Cultural Institutions:

- A. Equitable Wages for Artists of Color:** That artists exhibited, thus artists' fees, reflect the population of the borough in question. Allowing for the equal distribution of artist fees matching the current ethnic and cultural makeup of NYC and it's five boroughs. This mandate should be considered for establishing a strong and equitable future for artists of color in New York.
- B. Creation of an Artists of Color Collections Fund:** Establishment of an artists of color fund that will re-balance the collections to include at least a demographically balanced number of artists of color in the permanent collections of our cultural institutions. This mandate would support work of part and future artists of color. **While museums like the Brooklyn Museum has a African American artist fund, they don't have a Latino or Asian artist fund for example- this would address art collection inequalities, to reveal that cultural production among ethnic and racial "minorities", are no longer on the the cultural periphery.*
- C. Museum Galleries dedicated the contributions by Artists of Color:** We encourage the creation of new museum galleries named after a popular figures in the struggle for social cultural equality.

D. Artists of Color Research and Education Labs: Research and Educational Labs devoted to artists of color should be established in at least the larger cultural institutions of New York. Most art history is taught from a Euro-centric perspective, this education and research lab allows for intensive and extensive study to boost learning of artists of color history, criticism, curation, and exhibitions and to promote future scholarship for artists of color.

E. Museum Decolonization Process: That Self-Determination Advisory Boards established to approve and verify exhibitions, catalogs and collection text, educational and public programming and any material relating to artwork, artifacts, narratives relating to native americans, people of color, and histories situated in or parallel/synonymously to colonial socio-political narratives.

1. **Accountability Clause:** *Institutions should be held publicly accountable for not honoring the advisory boards and in case where a ethnicity is misrepresented or disrespected according to their cultural values. A guideline to ethics, accountability, and reconciliation should be established by the DCA.*

II. People of Color in the Cultural Workforce

A. Workers of Color in all levels of Cultural Institution: Our cultural institutions must provide a fair and equal opportunity to the diverse workforce of each neighborhood. The CIG and larger CDF institutions' workforce should be reflective and in proportion to the ethnic workforce of each of the five boroughs in which the institution is situated. To make this possible several requirements must be put in place for institutions receiving DCA funding as described below:

1. Cultural institutions must **publicly disclose skill level requirements, salaries** and accompanied with **clearly defined career paths for job advancement**;
2. Cultural institutions must **publicly disclose workforce statistics** regarding cultural workers in respect to ethnicity, gender, and age of all candidates reviewed, subsequently employed, and discharged.
3. **Job training programs should subsidized** by the DCA in the case special skills are required to meet these equitable guidelines.

B. Equity in Freelance and Contract Jobs of People of Color

That job contracts for art handling, consulting, staging, catering, and other services be equally distributed to businesses of color reflective of the true population/workforce percentage in each borough.

C. Workers of Centers with focus on Cultural Workers of Color

That cultural workers of color centers be established within museums and cultural centers to tend to workers of color's career development and advancement, technology job training, and filing of grievances and worker-employer third party negotiations.

III. Equitable Resource Allocation and Subsidies

Research shows that very few resources such as studios, grants, and fellowships are being allocated to artists of color in New York. Overall artists of color with and without degrees are economically challenged with rent burden and limited employment opportunities. Therefore an effort must be made to balance the resources of the city to allow for more artists of color by allocating, redistributing or subsidizing resources in all the five boroughs:

- A. Studios:** Allocation or subsidizing more dedicated studios for artists of color.
- B. Grants:** To help fund projects by artists of color.
- C. Fellowship & Residencies:** To give time for artists of color to investigate and produce longer in depth projects or themes.

IV. Rebuild, Restore, Protect Ethnic and Neighborhood Museums

A. Protection and Support

Small neighborhood museums and ethnic museum receive the smallest bit of support, and often have to apply every year for funds, unlike the CIG group. These small museums also are usually located and or serve communities of color and thus are dealing with many other issues besides just exhibitions and programs, but also social and economic hardships of said communities, there for more financial support should be allocated to these small museum and institutions.

B. Rebuild & Reinforce

Special funds should be set aside for the rebuilding, repairing, and restoring of the cultural and legacy of pioneering organizations, art groups, and artist that have had long history of neglect in NYC*. Specifically, these funds would support research, archiving, education, publication, collection inclusion, and exhibition presentation by and for historically underserved communities of color in New York. **Most museums were segregated up until 1950s, therefore an important item of the DCA budget should be the retroactive inclusion of the cultural history of people of color and other non-european arts and crafts into the canon of what is considered American art.*