



# Assessing Arts for Change

## UNDERSTANDING AESTHETICS PERSPECTIVES

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*Barbara Schaffer Bacon, Co-Director, Animating Democracy*  
*Cristyn Johnson, Local Arts Advancement Program Manager*

# Agenda

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**I. Introduction**

**II. Overview of Aesthetics Perspectives Framework**

**III. Attributes Deep Dive**

**IV. Applying the Framework**

**V. Questions**

# What is Arts for Change?

**Projects at the intersection of artistic creation and civic engagement, community development, and justice**

**Arts for Change can:**

- raise awareness
- challenge current circumstances
- empower individuals
- reinforce individual and/or group identity
- inspire people to action
- build communal strength and capacity for action
- critique dominant social and historical narratives
- enable people to hear and understand different perspectives
- propose new possibilities
- create a focus and/or process for the exchange of ideas and perspectives



**“Arts for Change,” for the purpose of this framework, is an umbrella term that refers to artistic and cultural processes, products, and practices geared to progressive and positive change including justice, civic engagement, and community development.**



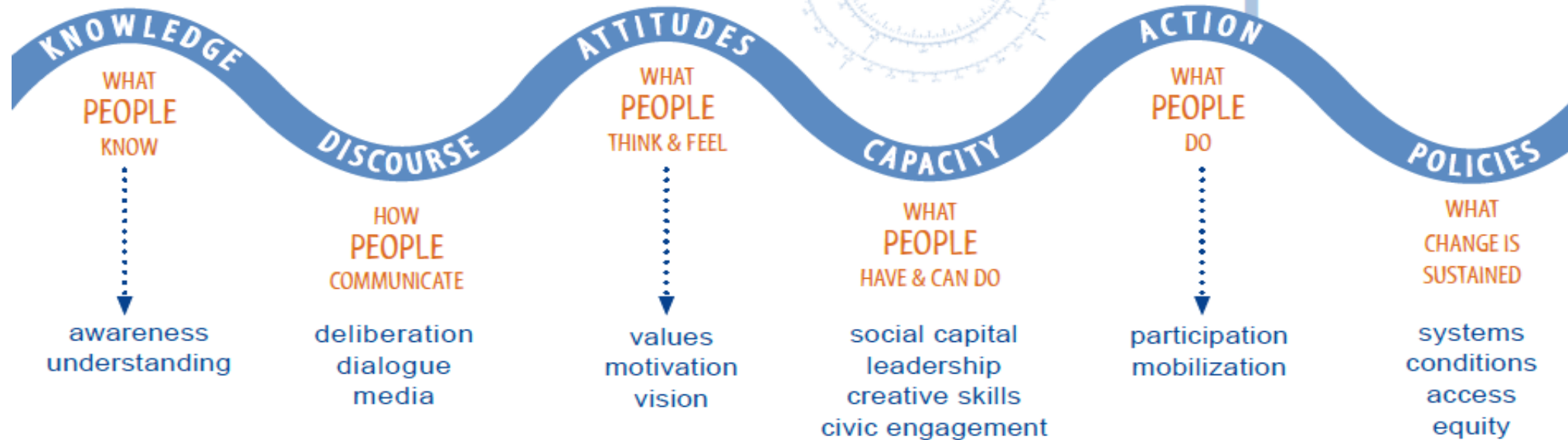
**Animating  
Democracy**

A Program of **Americans for the Arts**

ANIMATE  
INFORM  
INFLUENCE  
EXPRESS  
ENGAGE

what difference do ARTS and CULTURE make?

# continuum of impact



# Evaluation Learning Lab

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Promote evaluation that embodies values & practices aligned with arts & social justice work— equity, inclusion, understanding context, and the role of arts and culture.





# Discussion

**WHAT DOES EXCELLENCE  
MEAN TO YOU?**

# Why an Aesthetics Framework?

## *Enhance understanding & evaluation of artistic dimensions of Arts for Change*

- expand criteria for considering aesthetics in Arts for Change
- elevate aesthetics in civically & socially engaged art
- see aesthetic values in creative process and practice
- address historical domination of Euro-centric aesthetic standards

*“Aesthetics is an inquiry into  
how artists,  
in their products & processes,  
utilize sensory & emotional  
stimulation & experience  
to find & express meaning and orientation  
in the world  
& to deepen relationships  
amongst artists & their partners  
across differences.”*

Bob Leonard





# The Aesthetics Attributes



**Commitment** - Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.



**Risk-taking** - The creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.



**Communal Meaning** - The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.



**Openness** - The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.



**Disruption** - Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.



**Resourcefulness** - Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.



**Cultural Integrity** - The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.



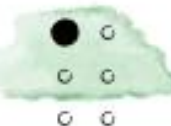
**Coherence** - Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.



**Emotional Experience** - Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between "heart space"—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the "head space" of civic or social issues.



**Stickiness** - The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.



**Sensory Experience** - Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.



# The AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVES framework is best thought of as ...

A pallet of possibilities	rather than	a checklist of requirements
A guide for description	rather than	a scorecard
Inspiration for shaping programs, projects and guidelines	rather than	a prescription of required elements
A tool to guide inquiry	rather than	a definer of success or failure
A spectrum or continuum	rather than	a hierarchical ranking system

# Aesthetic Perspectives: ATTRIBUTES of Excellence in Arts for Change

**pointed description**  
relating each  
attribute to Arts for  
Change

**reflective questions**  
to guide  
consideration of the  
attribute in Arts for  
Change work

**illuminating  
examples** of creative  
projects that exhibit  
the attributes

## OPENNESS

*The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.*



THE CREATIVE WORK is accessible and offers multiple entry points for people to engage in the research and development stages, artmaking, and presentation and engagement around products. There is transparency around artistic choices and ethical use of community stories or other material to help level power and build trust. Artists invite fluidity in and between process and product, allowing the creative work to change based on stakeholder exchange and input. The creative work embodies the nuances of issues, traversing between the extreme poles to allow exploration of complexity and ambiguity within opinions and attitudes.

### Consider:

- **How does the art** and its process offer multiple points of entry and/or forms of participation for people with varied expectations and aesthetic preferences?  
REFLECTIONS OF HEALING PG. 50
- **How do the artists** open their process to multiple viewpoints and show their willingness for the work to evolve based on what is learned?
- **Does the work** allow for multiple perspectives or conflicting truths, even within shared goals?
- **If the work** is designed to be adaptable to varied situations, how does it change in form or meaning with new contexts, participants, or input?
- **How does flexibility** align with the social justice intentions of the project or partners?
- **Is the development** and creative process of the work transparent to stakeholders and participants?  
MOBY DICK / DANCE EXCHANGE PG. 91
- **Is the artistic team** committed to analyzing, and possibly changing, creative choices in relation to context?

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There is **transparency around artistic choices and ethical use of community stories** or other material to help level power and build trust.

Artists invite fluidity in and between process and product, **allowing the creative work to change based on stakeholder exchange and input.**

The creative work embodies the nuances of issues, traversing between the extreme poles to **allow exploration of complexity and ambiguity** within opinions and attitudes.



**The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence, and able to hold contradiction.**





**OPENNESS**

## Vietnamese-American culture featured in Fields Corner mural

By Karen Morales | 9/28/2017, 6 a.m.



An Uong fills in details on aluminum panels to be installed on a Fields Corner wall. PHOTO: KAREN MORALES

**“I wanted the project to be something that the community could be proud of and I wanted to have their input, and what better way than literally for them to be a part of the process. Local projects that socially engage like this become so important because they are stories from the people by the people it showcases.”**

**Ngoc-Tran Vu**

**Community in Action: A Mural for Vietnamese Folks in Fields Corner**



Photos by Linh Pham



# Ngoc-Tran Vu

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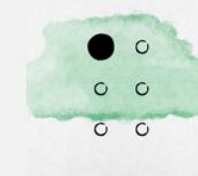
# Poll



commitment

communal meaning

cultural integrity



disruption

emotional experience

sensory experience

openness



risk-taking

coherence

resourcefulness

stickiness



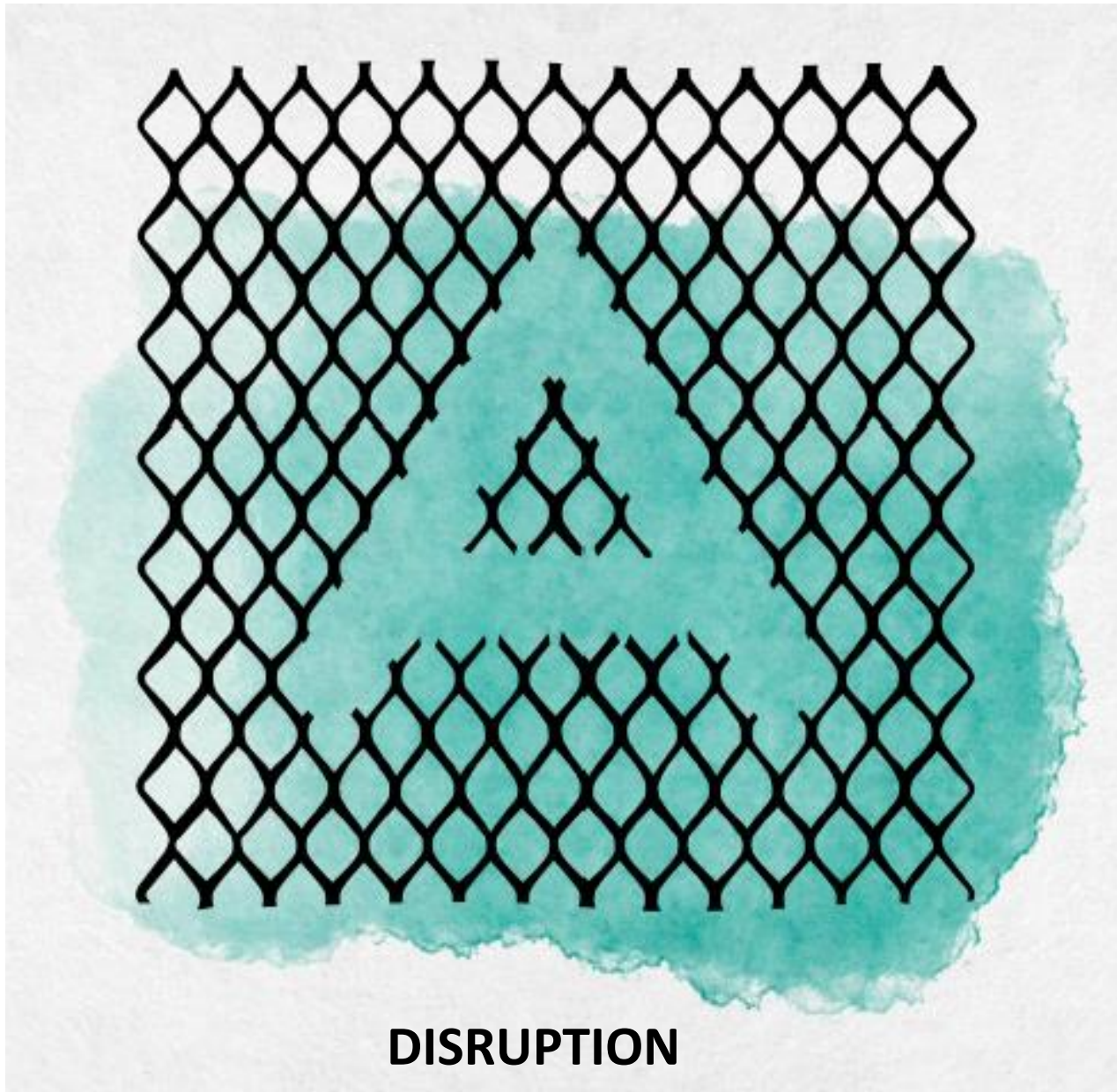


***Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.***

**Creative project/work?**

**What resonates?**

**What challenges, questions?**



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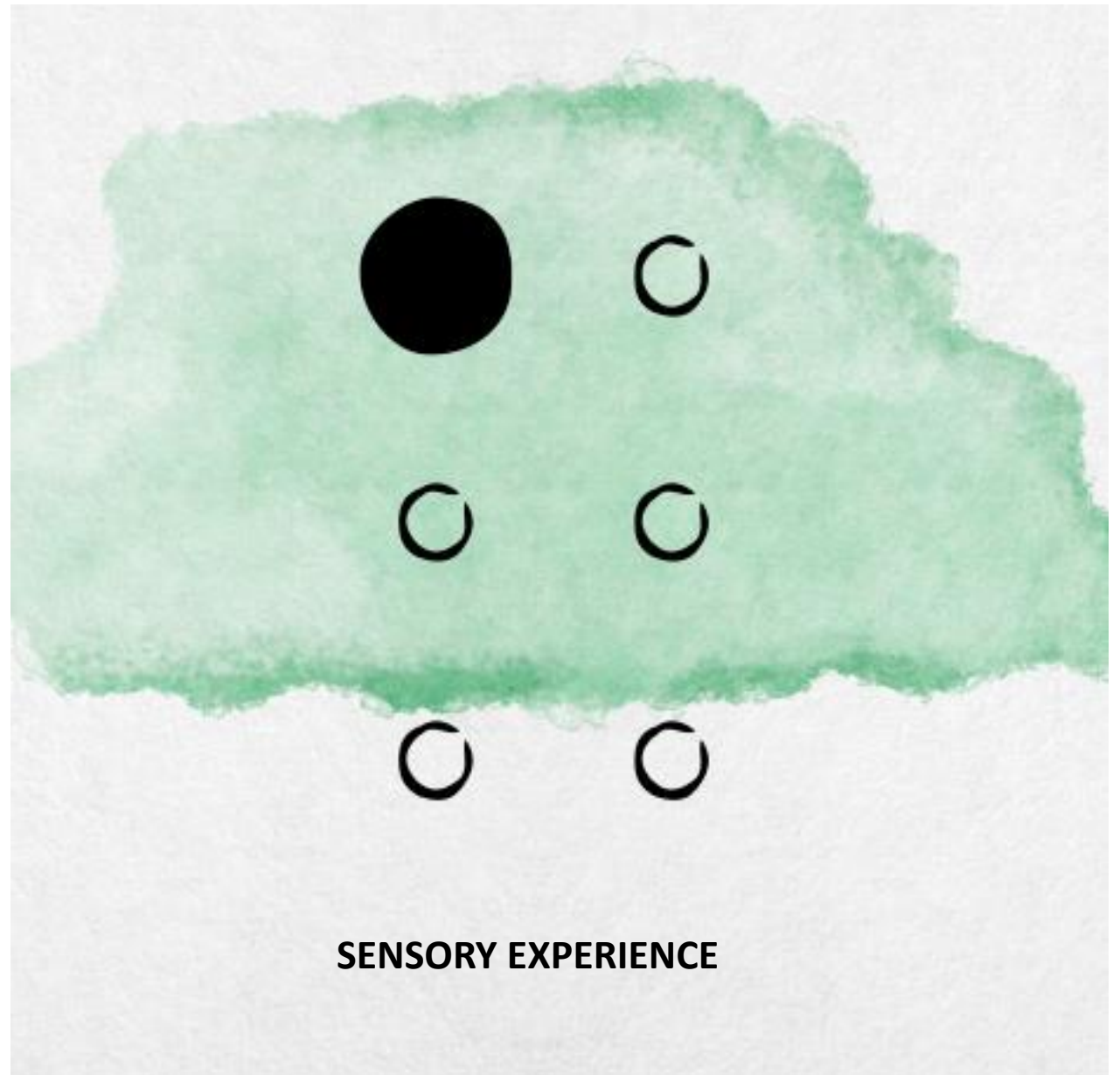


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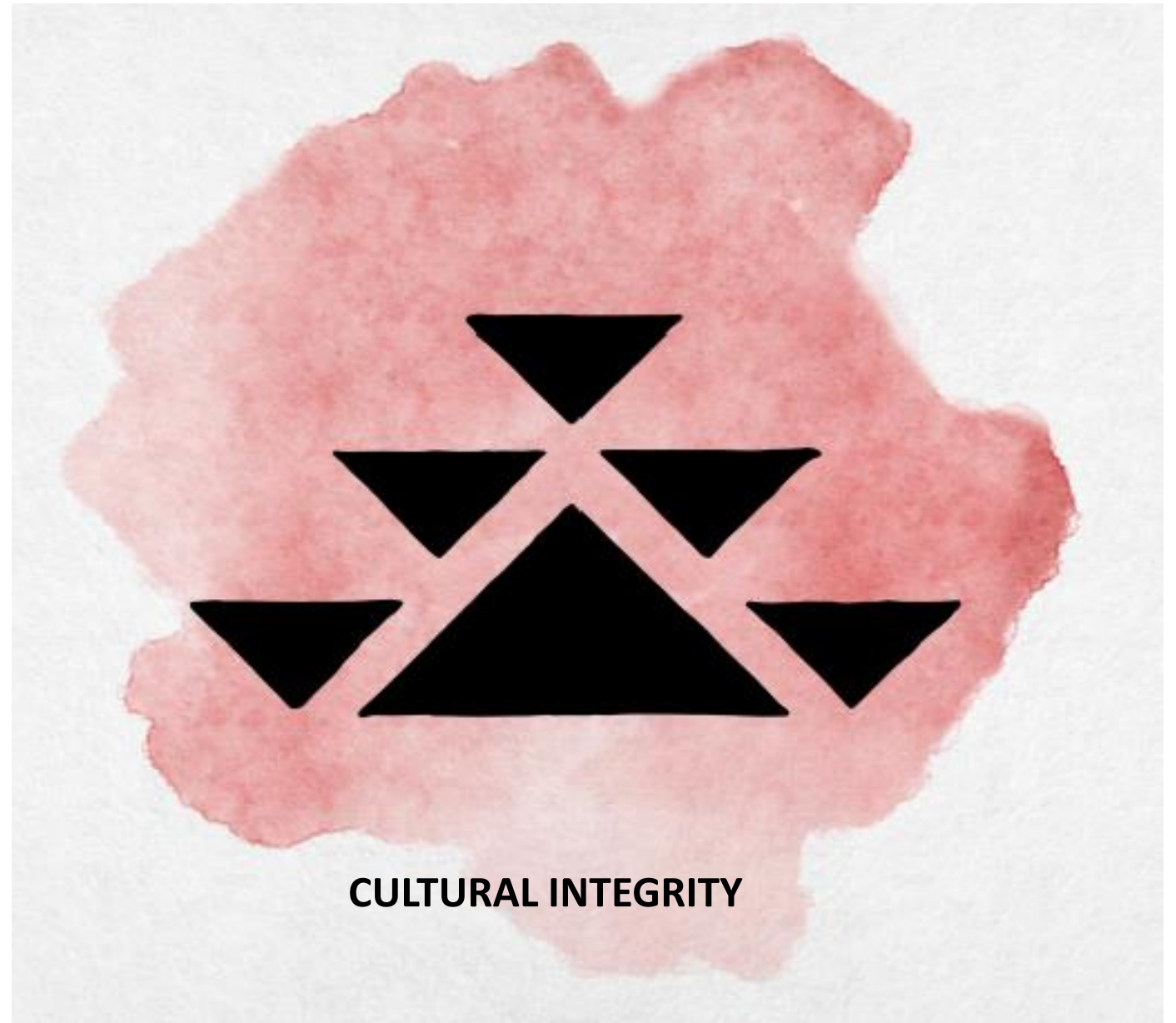


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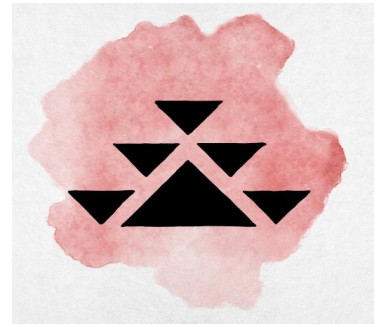
**What challenges, questions?**





## OSKAR LY

Artists who are of a culture may interpret their culture's traditional forms for new contexts, making a contribution to social change through the combination of old and new forms.



**CULTURAL  
INTEGRITY**

Minneapolis-based artist, Oskar Ly uses her location in the Hmong and queer communities to reinterpret traditional cultural clothing. She has created a collection called Little Black Shh, an exploration of gender expression through traditional Hmong clothing.







**RISK-TAKING**

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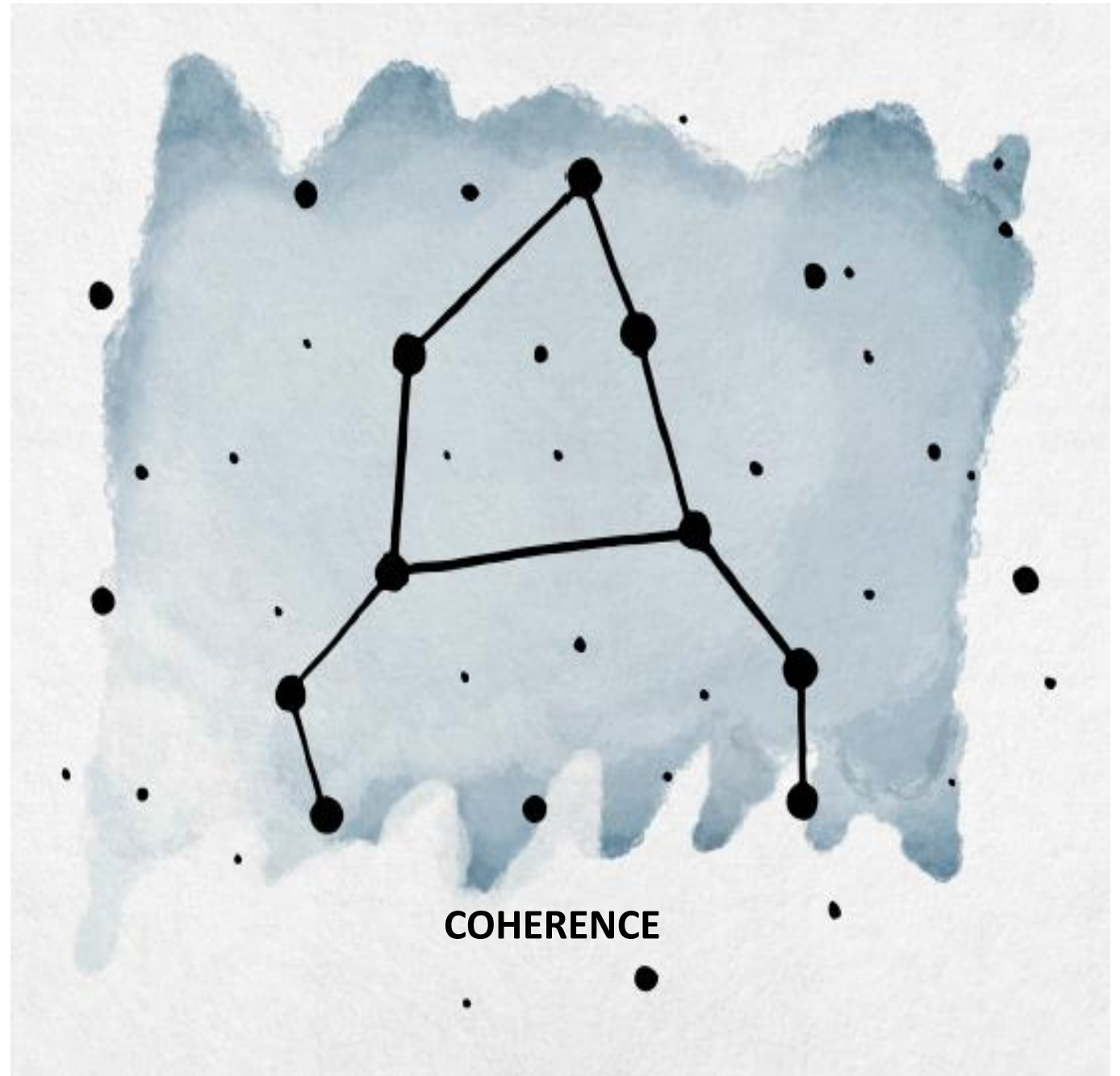
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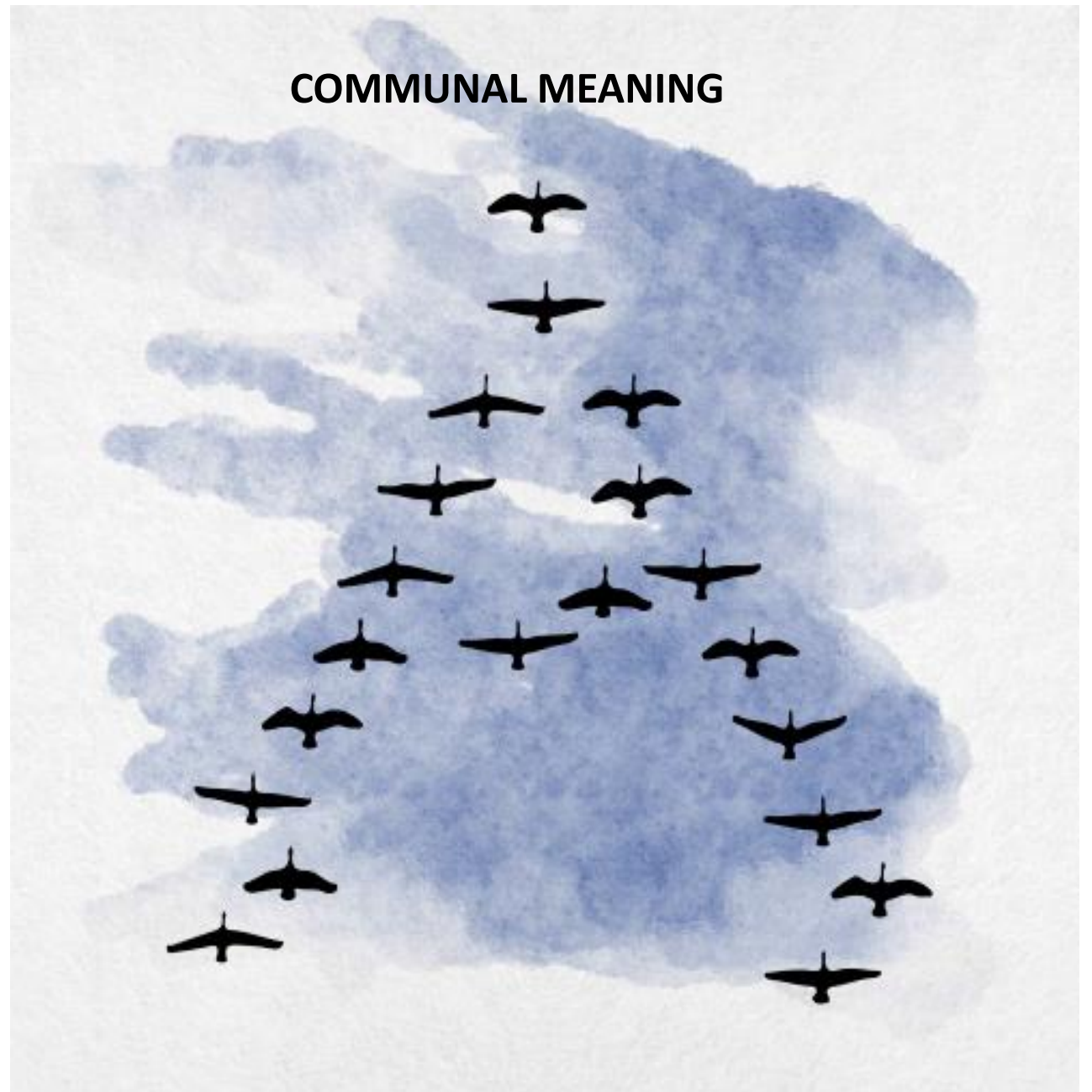


***The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.***

Creative project/work?

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**STICKINESS**

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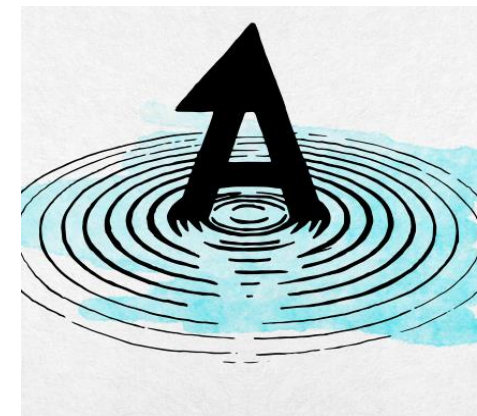
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# THE LARAMIE PROJECT

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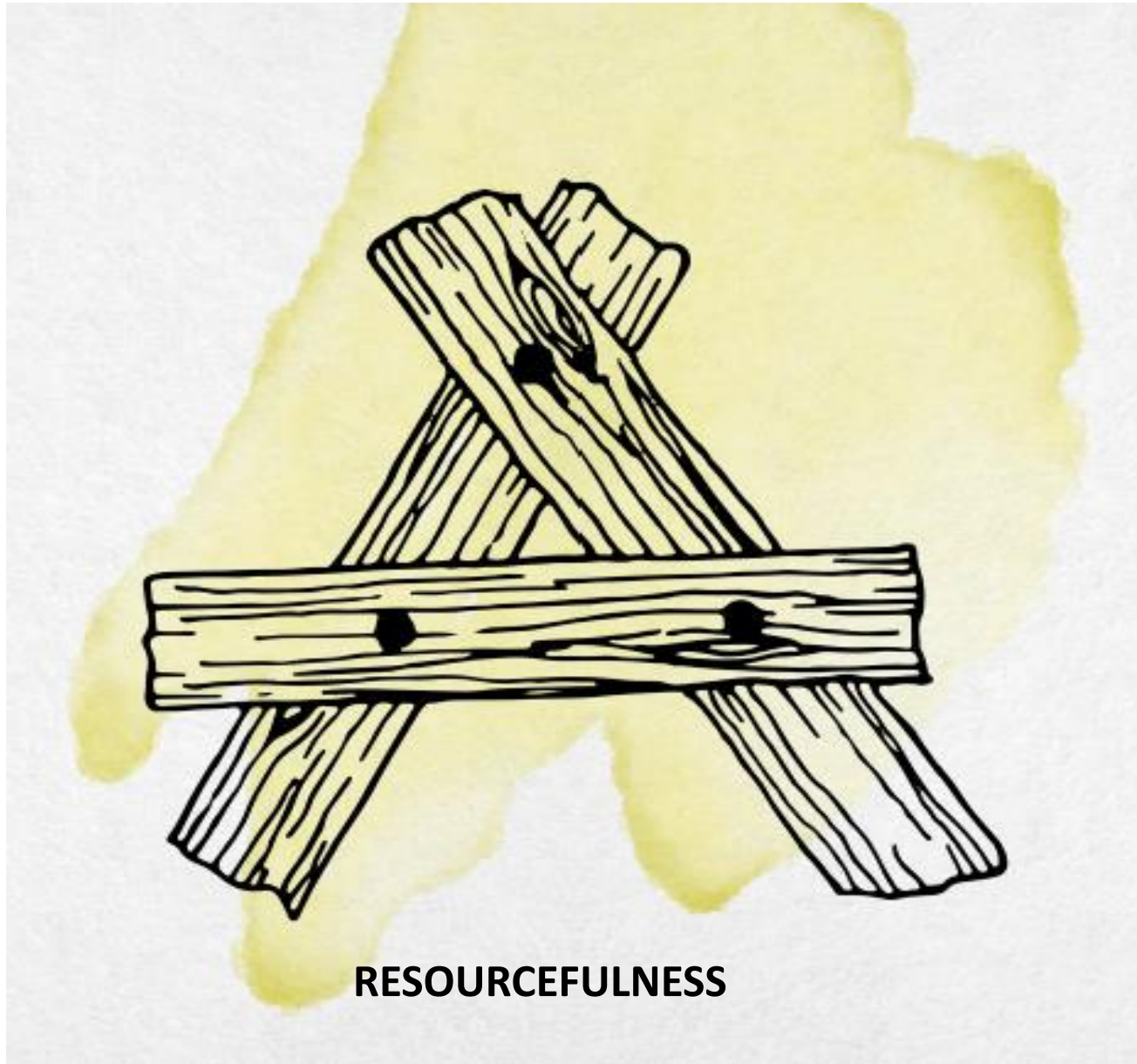
Tectonic Theater Project keeps The Laramie Project true and relevant in a national context of continuing education about homophobia, bullying, suicide, and hate crimes.

The Matthew Shepard Foundation provides creative consultation to enhance local productions and guidance on post-show discussions and community conversations, helping to maximize meaning and impact.



**STICKINESS**





***Imaginative use of  
available resources  
drives artistic  
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**Creative project/work?**

**What resonates?**

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*How might you apply the framework to your work?*



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- **POSTERS**

<http://www.animatingdemocracy.org/aesthetic-perspectives>



## COMPANION GUIDES

### Performing Artists

Mark Valdez, theater artist/organizer

### Funders

M. Christine Dwyer, RMC Research

### Evaluators / Researchers

Susannah Laramée Kidd,  
Metris Consulting

### Educators

Bob Leonard, Professor of Theatre,  
Virginia Tech

### Curators

Sara Reisman  
Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation





# Questions/Comments

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