REFLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FROM

ART IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

2024 ARTIST RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Community Libraries of Providence


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Library
OLNEYVILLE

The Ministry of Future Access and the
Community Libraries of Providence present

ART
in the Neighborhood

Booklet designed by Ian Carlo Vicente
Edited by Hernán 'Nan' Joubá

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INTRODUCTION

New cycles are opportunities for trying new things. The approach we took this year, as we were designing the open call for the Artist in Residency program to take place at the Rochambeau Community Library, included a thematic invitation. Acknowledging the history of the neighborhood, and the recurrent concern over housing and gentrification in the city, we decided to invite artists to engage with displacement.

Filmmakers Melanie Hicken and Christopher Ransom, selected for the residency, delivered a series of film screenings followed by discussions with audience members over the course of three months. They also developed their own script and produced a 45-minute film, which they screened at their final, closing event. The film was projected in a packed community room –over 50 people attended, and many engaged in a lively discussion after watching the film. The Lippitt Hill Redevelopment Project, that drastically changed the neighborhoods of East Side/Mt Hope, took place in the 1960's –but still hits a sensitive nerve among audience members. The reception of the film goes to show that the consequences of displacing 659 families and closing 89 businesses to allow for such an "urban renewal" process can still be felt in the area where it happened.

Simultaneously, Festum Teatro, who were artists-in-residency of the "Art in the Neighborhood" program at Mount Pleasant in 2022, were invited by CLPVD to do 4 one-month residencies at 4 different community libraries during the Spring. This is a joyful result of the program; it shows one way in which the relationships between the artists-in-residency and the library staff carries beyond the scope of the program. After all, it was the trust cultivated during the program that brought back artists Yessica Alvarado and John Velasco to the

neighborhood of Mount Pleasant, and to the libraries of Knight Memorial, South Providence and Olneyville as well. Self-managed, they share with us some of their learnings and experiences in the following pages.

I hope you enjoy reading about them as much as i did,

Hernán ‘Nan’ Joubá
Ministry of Future Access, Founder

PROJECT 1

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD"

Christopher Ransom and Melanie Hicken were selected for the 2024 Art in the Neighborhood program that took place at the Rochambeau Library, in Providence Rhode Island. The following text is a reflection after the three months that they spent in residency holding community screenings and creating a 45 minute film.

"Ceremonies like these, understandable for the survivors. But, from a more serious point of view, worse than stupidities, hypocrisies; and worse than hypocrisies, succour to the worst. There was a very real way of forgetting the murdered - the way of the Italian ruling classes in the first postwar decade. Today, one prefers to speak of Nazi massacres to look away from the truth of Indonesia, Vietnam, Latin America, Congo...No, I'm still mistaken! Once again I notice I'm reasoning in old, and now false, terms: Vietnam is talked about, and how, it is talked about like one talks about Nazi crimes, and Nazi crimes are talked about like the Israeli war, and the Israeli war like a famine in India..." (Franco Fortini, The Dogs of the Sinai 1967)

To speak of displacement was a dangerous task from the beginning. In looking to, and commemorating the past, there is a very real danger of contributing to the systems of forgetting present realities. And present realities are already too overwhelming to conceive; reports of 1.9 million continuously displaced in Gaza, already almost several times larger than our entire state population. Even more dangerous, to suggest some fundamental continuity between displacement past and present. And yet, how can we begin to preserve the past if we can not learn to turn to it, to claim it as our own, in a moment of danger.

It is Gorin who so eloquently summarized the politics of the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet: "the insistence of preservation (of nature and culture) as the essential component of revolution." And this, already spoken a hundred years before by Chesterton, "The mob can never rebel unless it is conservative, at least enough to have conserved some reasons for rebelling," and Benjamin, "revolution is also reinstating very ancient but forgotten things." The victory over the arts and honors of the poor has been so emphatic that barely any trace of them can be found. Even the small contribution of our document of the present day Lippitt Hill neighborhood begins with a list of the black-owned businesses. The work to excavate the fragments of other lives, non-business owners, the occupants of buildings without adequate heating, plumbing, etc., would have far exceeded our time and ability. But it is a beginning. We hope that in the film's quieter moments there is an affirmation of the 'enormous presence of the dead' (Fortini), of all the lives and peoples whose lack of ownership inevitably means a lack of remembrance.

The meaning of the word political is also that

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of freedom (Huillet). No doubt it is difficult for the communities who have benefitted from urban renewal to imagine the freedoms of a community wrestling with such aggressive poverty. Yet, stories are still told of doctors and dentists, here and elsewhere, whose loyalties to their communities far outweighed their financial preoccupations. The cost of progress and well-being, rarely seen by the victors, has been unjustifiably high. The redevelopment programs of the last century not only failed "to provide a decent, safe, and sanitary home for every citizen of Providence", but also destroyed the communities and traditions that helped the poor protect a few of their last freedoms. The present realities of the poor are evidence that despite our greater distance from the events of the past, we lack any greater understanding.

"Understanding the past is not just a work of research but one of imagination."

It is only by imagining the potentials of the past that we can begin to construct images of the future free from hypocrisy and denial.

Can a library be the starting point of cultural reckoning for a community? Does its responsibility to serve its community and active patrons restrict it to be merely a passive inheritor of the results of the past? What does working towards the formation

of a future, imagined community look like? Institutional questions like these lie outside the limits of our work but even the tentative efforts made during the residency produced moments of hope towards the future. It is remarkable to see individuals, wrestling with all the difficulties of poverty and housing insecurity, find personal and political meaning in strange and ancient texts. Remarkable too for them to develop a deep, personal commitment to a work that is not their own. There were moments of hope in the surprise and confusion experienced by participants during the film screenings. The passionate and lively post-film discussion of the final event was an encouraging affirmation of our intentions, evidence that this community takes the questions of representation of its past seriously.

Whether or not the library can sustain the programs required to bring about community change, we are grateful that the short residency was able to produce a few moments that hint towards its possibility. This hope was potently summarized by one community member's reflections on the film screenings and final event. They spoke of the continuity between the themes of the film screenings and the final project; that the films and the final project reached for an answer to the political upheaval and violence of their times. Also, of the discomfort of facing the realities of the past and the present.

Stubbornly, we remain committed to organizing film-work outside of the world of commercial art production, asserting, perhaps idealistically, that in the present society, the material struggles of organizing a film make up the substance of its political and moral power.

"To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content

of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it...Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious." (Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History)


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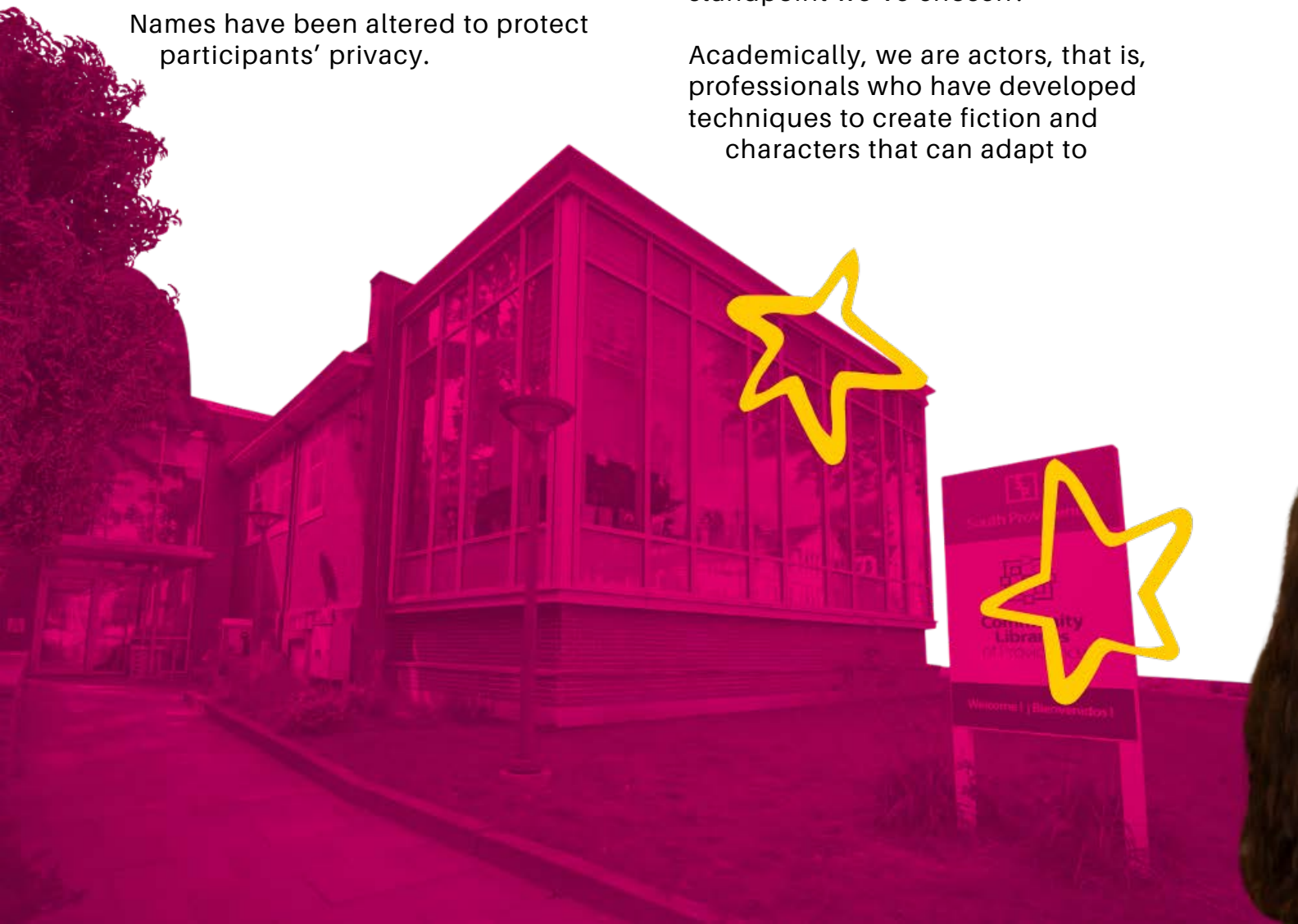
Yessica Alvarado and John Velasco, Community Artists from Festum Teatro, spent four months in residence across four different community libraries: Mount Pleasant; Olneyville; South Providence; and Knight Memorial. In the following pages they share some of their learnings and experiences.

Names have been altered to protect participants' privacy.

What does "community" mean to us?

In our work, we always consider the context that will frame our stance, our assumptions, and what we intend to express when creating. In this case, we ask ourselves: how do we write a report from our standpoint? But... What is the standpoint we've chosen?

Academically, we are actors, that is, professionals who have developed techniques to create fiction and characters that can adapt to



different contexts within contemporary performing arts: performance, film, television, and theater, among others. However, over the course of our travels, we have discovered that what made the most sense to us (besides interpreting characters and telling stories) was creating encounters, excuses, and pretexts for people to look at each other in the eyes, to share a moment and the same place with strangers, to play, to create something ephemeral, something momentary, and to make people also feel compelled to say (or shout) something to the world. That's when we realized that the answer to the question, "What do you do?" is: "We are Community Artists." This identity shapes our approach and defines our stance.

So we address the initial question: how do actors write a report? And how do community artists write a report?

Place is a context, a specific universe traversed by

people with very specific realities. There is no community without context, and depending on the context, the needs of a community are determined. In the term “community” there’s a spectrum of identities. But what interests us is creating encounters centered around celebration, theater, music, parades, or acting workshops.

Let me give you an example. One of the workshops with some of the greatest learnings in our journey as community artists was a project we developed in Cartagena (Colombia) in 2019. It was conceived for youth and children living in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city –far from the big hotels, the beaches, the colonial houses, and the elegant restaurants. Those who live there arrived fleeing the devastation caused by the armed conflict in Colombia, which has persisted for many consecutive years. They arrived there from very far away. They crossed borders, the borders of their village, the borders of unpaved roads, the borders of the big city, and the borders of segregation, to settle in a neighborhood with its own invisible borders.

In this particular neighborhood, imaginary lines were imposed by groups who divided the area into zones. This meant that if you were a young resident

of zone A, crossing into zone B could be fatal. I'm not sure who established these borders, but generally, in our country, these invisible boundaries reflect how drug trafficking has extended its control over territories and people.

Here, the workshops were a pretext to make children and adolescents realize how normalized violence was in their daily lives. Translated into our own words: It made them realize that sometimes it was easier for them to strike before looking at someone in the eyes.

It's very simple to tell a child not to be violent, but those are just words; you can't do that when their daily life is violence. Instead what we tried to do was to design activities that encouraged participants to listen to each other, pay attention to others' ideas, set common goals, and collaborate to achieve them. These activities are what we refer to as theatrical games. For us, a theatrical game is an activity with invisible objectives. The more participants collaborate with each other, the more enjoyable the game becomes.

The objective might be to touch another person with a beanbag, which is the visible goal. The invisible objective, however, could be to set aside competitive and individualistic attitudes

in favor of a collaborative approach. At the end of the process, we present a performance where the audience only sees the tip of the iceberg. However, participants gain valuable life lessons from their experience.

So, what is the context of the libraries we work with in Providence? What are the environments of these childhoods? The most relevant for us, was observing that these are boys and girls, aged between 5 and 12 years old, many of whom were born in the United States, but whose parents migrated from Latin American countries such as the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Most come from families whose parents face the inherent difficulties of lacking a work permit and have to take on jobs without benefits, sometimes temporary ones like in restaurants, construction, or cleaning. They reside in neighborhoods close to the libraries, neighborhoods with predominantly Latino populations with a notable presence of local businesses. This makes these neighborhoods places where different cultures and demographics intersect.

We're referring to Latin America within the United States, which means that the children for whom we design the program have realities very different from those of children in Latin America itself. They have a cultural legacy, have inherited a language, but their lives invite them to adopt a foreign culture, and in this context, the paths we choose to walk with these children have to do with this transfer between culture and language.

NOTES FROM A LOGBOOK OF THE PROCESS IN THE DIFFERENT LIBRARIES

1. Children often find it difficult to engage in play.

We say they find it difficult not because if left alone in the library they don't play; of course they do (video games, chasing each other, or playing with the different board games available in the libraries). But it is extremely difficult for them to organize into groups of more than two people to play towards a common goal –unless it's a game that seeks a winner, or when there is competition, a logic we invite them to detach from.

For instance, there's a game called "The Tagger." It's simple; you have to run and not let anyone touch you. If someone touches you, you are now the one who must chase someone else to pass the tag. The rule is easy to understand, but in general, the children from the libraries cannot play it. As

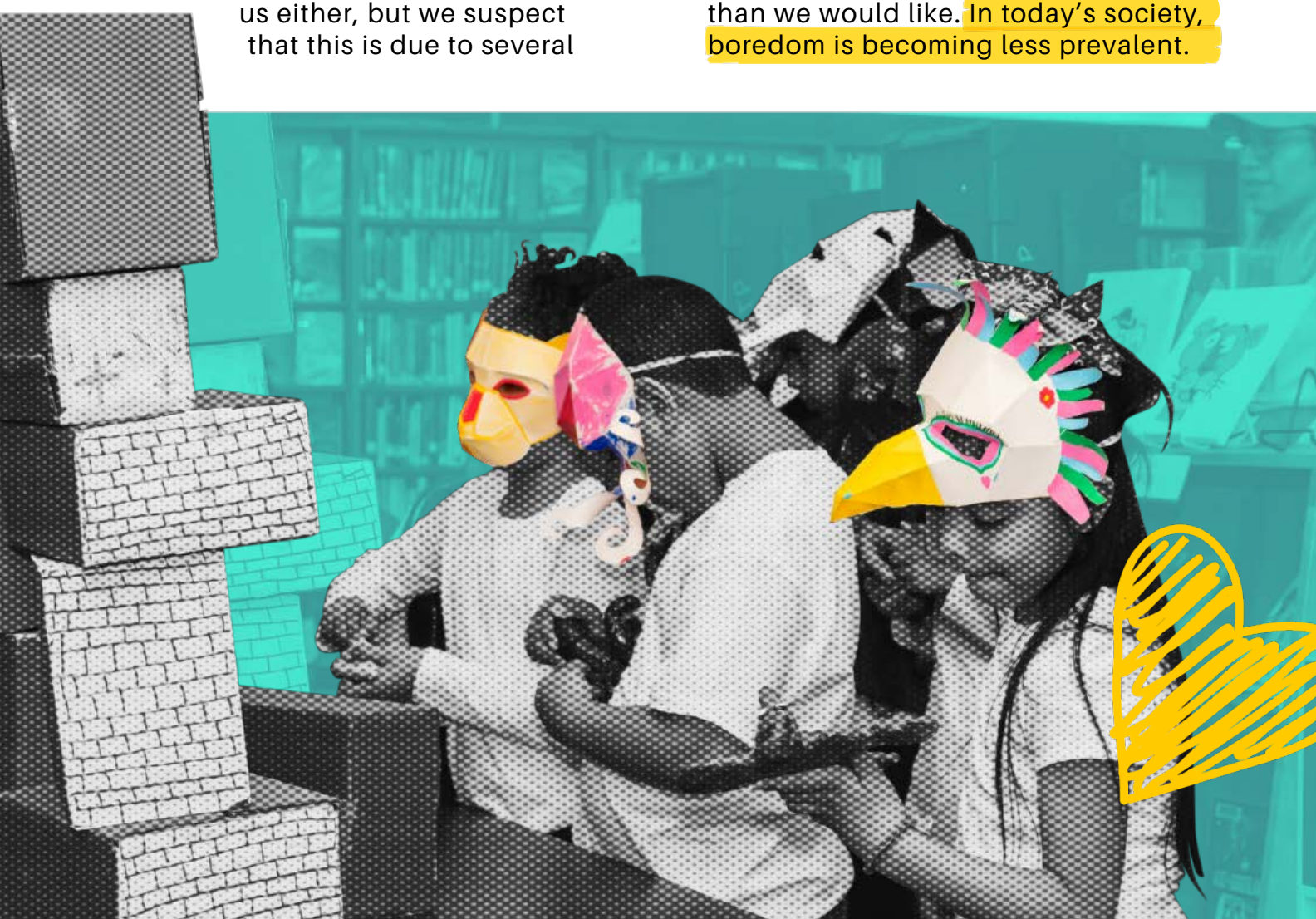
soon as they start running, they don't know who has the tagger. They enjoy running and feeling chased, but they can't identify who is chasing them, and if you're running in a confined space and don't know who is escaping and who is chasing, all movements become so random that the chances of bumping into someone else multiply. It would be easier for us if we established a rule by which if you are touched, you are out –but we don't do that. So, to reduce the risk of them bumping into each other, it's better for us to announce out loud the name of the person who is the tagger.

Nobody in our games will ever be out, and we avoid competition at all costs because we consider theater to be a place of collaboration and listening; competing is not compatible with the

way we approach theatrical work. Often, competition is used as a mechanism to drive results, but for us, it makes more sense to focus on each individual's process.

2. Sebastian may not pay attention when his teachers speak to him.

He doesn't pay attention to us either, but we suspect that this is due to several reasons. First, he is able to find more interesting moments for himself rather than listening to an adult speak, or he may have a low tolerance for boredom. This is a child who always had entertainment provided to him, meaning he always had access to some toy, a television, or a screen in front of him, and he didn't learn to be bored. It's something we see more often than we would like. In today's society, boredom is becoming less prevalent.



So maybe Sebastian is able to find more entertaining moments for himself, and maybe, for that reason, yesterday when we were explaining the rules of a game, he preferred to do something else, like talking to his friend Liam, or taking the boomwhacker as if it were a telescope and starting to play alone.

3. Collaboration Over Individuality.

The message that winning requires being the best carries a notion of individuality that we aim to counter. Instead, we focus on promoting listening, empathy, and collaboration, which we consider the foundations of theatrical art. We view our art as a space where people embrace their differences, peculiarities, and diversities to work together toward a shared goal, creating a moment of connection with the audience. For us, theater is the celebration of humanity, where we are diverse but also profoundly equal, where we listen to each other but also have something to say. Beautiful contradiction.

4. Joining the circle, when you are ready.

This is why we reminded one library manager that our workshops involve a process –and by process, we understand a beginning and an end. It's not like anyone can join at any time; you have to collaborate, take care of younger ones, and learn to trust and feel confident playing with strangers. It takes time for children to feel confident with each other, but as the encounters add up, they begin to collaborate more, to value more what another person says, and even to understand why we insist so much on forming a circle while standing and holding hands before starting each game. "Because in the circle, we are all equal, we can all see each other, we can all hear each other, and no one is in front or behind me."

Take Oliver, for instance. He has consistently attended the workshops, though he has his own pace. His mother encourages him to come, and when he arrives at the library, he finds a spot to sit, observes our activities, and watches the other children play. He approaches us when he feels ready, often saying, "I'm ready now," before joining in. It always requires effort on his part. Despite being only 11, he appears much older, almost 15, and has taken on musical responsibilities. He counts "one, two, three, four," signals the start of our singing, and conducts the group like an orchestra leader.

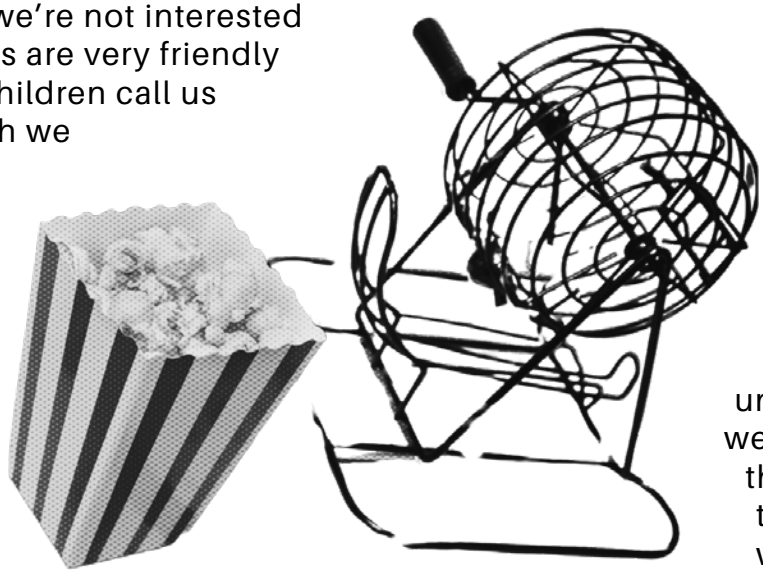
5. How children thrive in a space of free play.

One of the youth services specialists observed that Spanish is often used by parents to correct or scold their children. For example: “Sam, please, leave that alone, I’m working,” or “Sam, please, leave that. Go find your toys, I’m working,” and “¡Carajo Sam, deja eso quieto!” She explained that when parents use Spanish only during distressing moments, children start to associate Spanish with negative situations, such as when parents are upset or arguing. Several families have reported that their children resist speaking Spanish. Although the children understand the language, they respond in English. One child even expressed directly in English, “I don’t like Spanish.”

We always support the children’s development by involving their parents. Those we invited found it very meaningful and appreciated that the workshops helped their children practice, learn, or develop their Spanish. We share the children’s progress with their parents, discuss the discoveries we’ve made, and listen to their feedback. We aim to highlight the children’s strengths, emphasizing that sometimes they just need attention,

time, and encouragement to boost their self-confidence.
We sense that one of the reasons why the children enjoy our workshops so much and insist that their mothers take them to each session without fail is because it's one of the few spaces where they can play freely without an adult trying to control them.

Children don't see us with the formality of a class because we're not interested in that; our meetings are very friendly and informal. The children call us by our names, which we introduce in the first session through a game, where we present ourselves while doing a "crazy movement." So, we're not Miss Yessica or Mr. John because what matters to us is that the children feel that we're equal to them, that we can guide them, but ultimately, they are the ones who make the final decisions about where to take the workshop. Perhaps as a consequence of this perspective, moms at first understood the workshops as a space where two very charismatic young people were able to be patient with their children for two or three hours.



But they begin changing the way they see the workshops when we start talking to them. Agustin's mom, in fact, told Yessica: "Agustin only talks about you at home, he says that you listen to him, what do you do?" to which Yessica replied, "I listen to him, mom, that's what I do." At that moment, the moms begin to understand that our workshops are about something more.

Moms finally understand where we are going when they can come into the workshop room with us and can observe, knowing when to and when not to make comments. They no longer give instructions, scold in front of the group, or correct children. They respond very positively and encouragingly when their daughters or sons show them a painting, or when we ask them what they think about what they see.

There's one episode I remember a lot. We were painting some cardboard boxes that would be the scenery for our play, and a mom was helping her daughter, Ingrid, who is 4 years old, paint a landscape. The mom had already painted a sun, and at one point, I heard Ingrid complain. When I approached and asked what was wrong, Ingrid told me that she wanted to paint a sun, but her mom wouldn't let her. I crouched down and, looking at Ingrid's mom, I said, "Oh, I understand, but mom won't act in the play, you will. So if you want to paint another sun, it's okay." Her mom smiled as Ingrid reached out her little hands, asking for the paint. Ingrid squeezed the jar, making the paint come out and cover the entire landscape. She laughed and said, "Oh, wow, it's a very big sun!" I replied, "Yes, it's a very big sun." I looked at Ingrid's mom and said, "Ingrid is very happy painting her sun, that's what matters." For children, the experience itself is what matters.

The workshops are also about seeing children excited to start a new project, a new mask, try a new song, or a new musical instrument for the day of the presentation. Parents see that their daughters and sons have fun, talk a lot about what they do in each session, and well... They have one more reason to go to the library with much more pleasure.

Many children are even borrowing more books from the library than before, or have obtained their library card, which they didn't have before.

6. Regarding how to choose a book to be told.

We wanted to incorporate books into our workshops in Mount Pleasant. Despite being surrounded by books, we had never used them in our workshops. Therefore, we had to come up with a game to approach the books.

Our group of children in terms of interests and ages was very diverse; some can read, others still can't, some read in Spanish, others only in English... and we had to bring them all closer to a book. But one day, there was a revealing discovery: There are books specialized in telling stories without words, where the action unfolds through illustrations. These books are visually attractive and beautiful, so we decided to explore some of these books. After reviewing the ones in the library, we selected 3 of them. Now the question was how to present them. Yessica came up with the idea of a treasure hunt.

When the library staff saw us placing envelopes all over the library, they started murmuring among themselves. Library staff had seen us make a map

of the library, and even helped us make copies of it. And another person approached us and said, "John, you'll be working in the teen room today, right?
"Not exactly."
"What do you mean?"
"It's just that we've designed an activity that goes all over the library."
"Yes, I've seen that, you are preparing something."
"Yes."
"I don't know, John, I don't know. It's just that today we have a meeting with someone who... it's something... difficult."
"I understand, it's just that we have to do this activity today; we can adapt it, but for time's sake we need to choose the stories we're going to present in the showcase."
"I don't know, John."
"Okay, we trust our children; we can do a silent search, and if we see that it won't be possible, we'll do everything inside."
"Okay, John, that seems fine."

At the meeting, we saw that there were police officers... "Okay, everyone come on, today we have a secret mission for you." We explained the rules of the game... "but it's important that people don't realize you're looking for something. You're secret agents; we won't let any police officer know that

you're secret agents."

Taking turns, each group left the teen room and managed to find the clues for the hunt (even one under a table where a police officer was sitting). The secret agents had completed their mission silently. They were able to assemble each clue and find the envelopes with the books.

At the end of the afternoon, when we were heading home, we said goodbye to the library staff and I asked "Did you realize that we finally did the activity?"

"Really? I did wonder if you had done it or not, because I didn't see anyone around."
"Yes, they were all over the library."
"Seriously? Oh, well done, John! Very good."

It's wonderful to work with people like that. Thank you.

7. Children are our teachers.

Each session has brought us many memorable moments; the children have always taught us a lot. It's the children who have mobilized us the most in our

work and who have set our course as community artists. Their honesty is one of the most beautiful and challenging things for us.

If they don't like something, they say it;
if they don't agree, they say it;
if something doesn't seem right to them, they say it;
if they don't want to do something, they say it;
if they don't want to do anything, they don't do it;
if they're tired, they say it.

It's wonderful to work and create on these terms, and very responsible too.

8. The Showcase.

The children find out that there will be a presentation when there are about 4 or 3 classes left, and we have discovered that assigning responsibilities excites them a lot. We have found that taking on a task gives them recognition and makes them feel that they have an important role in the group. It might be contradictory that the children with more difficulties in

playing or paying attention are the ones who are given more responsibilities, but this is something that has worked for us. Like in the case of Agustin, we have decided that he will play the drum, and this decision does not stem from him being musically talented; that doesn't matter to us. Talent is wonderful when it appears, but talent alone does not build, not as much as an interest in learning does. By giving Agustín the drum, he can somewhat "hide" because sitting behind it makes him feel less exposed to the audience. He will be guiding the rhythm of some of the games while his classmates will be performing. Sure, it won't be a constant and strong rhythm, but that doesn't concern us. What matters more is that he realizes that he is very capable of leading and taking initiative. Whether it goes well or not is an adult logic that we abandon on this occasion.

9. Falling forward, a circus workshop transformed the library.

It's Adam's turn. He hears the presenters call his name and heads to the stage. He picks up one of the boomwhackers, throws it in the air, lifts his leg, and before the tube hits the ground, Adam tries to spin on one foot but loses his balance and falls. He even hits the ground before the tube does. He made a mistake and laughed at his failure. Adam gets it.

"It's okay to fail," we tell the kids, "sometimes failing is the only way we learn. It's like Adam," we continue, "he comes in, there's no rush, he greets the audience, does his trick, it doesn't matter if it goes well or not, he falls, it's his own accident, and it's funny, he laughs, and he even takes the time to leave the stage, walking on his knees. That was his trick, that was his accident, my trick might be different, and my accident will

be different too, it doesn't matter, what matters is that it's my own trick, and my accident will also be my own accident. The important thing is that it's fun. That's what the circus is about, knowing how to fail."

Our workshops invite us to reconsider our perspective on mistakes. Making mistakes shouldn't be seen as a deficiency or lack of something. In our workshops, we start from the fact that each person is participating with the best of themselves, and that's why

"we encourage thinking of mistakes as an opportunity, a fraction of chance that invites us to open the way to spontaneity and to think that we are already enough"

that making mistakes is the most honest part of any human process, it happens all the time, and that's how we learn, life doesn't come with instructions.

Failing might go against the expectations and logic of the children's moms and dads, "they have to be the best," one mom said referring to their two daughters in conversation with Yessica. It's understandable, this mom ordered two traditional Venezuelan dance dresses for their daughters' choreographies, and they brought several different outfits, one for presenting, another for tricks, another for singing, and the dresses for dancing. This was wonderful in artistic terms, the audience values it and rewards it with

admiration, but is it really what the girls need? Is it what they want to learn in this process? Did they ever feel pressured to stand out? We don't have the answer, but our workshop wasn't designed for that. What we were really doing was gathering to lose the fear of failing. With the rehearsals, which are nothing more than repeating and repeating the tricks, we did it not seeking perfection –what we were doing was trying to make children gain more confidence in their abilities and feel more comfortable when sharing a personal interest.

We live surrounded by systems invented to evaluate people: we have grades, scores, numbers, recognitions and medals –and one of the first places where we're forced to incorporate them into our lives is in schools. I myself remember some of my classmates from elementary school, proud of always

getting first place, receiving little flags every two months for their good performance, and displaying them proudly on their uniforms. They were the students who were considered representatives and teacher's assistants, but those of us who didn't have the highest grades, felt as though we were missing something to be like them.

The "Circus of Flowers" served to boost a series of very diverse and personal processes that involved not only its participants but also their families. With each meeting, we understood a little more about the needs of a varied and complex community, and with that information, we were able to strengthen the confidence and understanding of parents towards their children.

10. We insist.

The call: You have to go out on the street in search of that community that needs the workshop. Put up posters in nearby stores, hand out flyers and make calls, and have a database. Relying solely on the hope that flyers will catch the attention of passers-by and motivate them to attend the workshops is not sufficient. Distributing flyers is essential to formalize the invitation, and the printed materials reassure people that the event is genuine and that they are being approached with the purpose of inviting them. However, what truly motivates individuals to attend the workshop for the first time is personal interaction, which often arises while shopping in a store or washing clothes in a laundromat. Personally telling them about the workshop, inviting them, and asking for their name and phone number are crucial components of the outreach effort.

Let children be: they already receive too many "NOs" at school, at home, at church, the times of being adults will come, an unhappy child is a frustrated adult.

Listen not to give answers, but to try to understand what the other person is trying to say.

In general, all our workshops encourage each person to feel that they had a common physical space in which they could express themselves freely and in which they could share their culture and worldviews.
Arrive first? We don't believe in that, we prefer to arrive together.

11. Ubuntu

I recently had an epiphany, I discovered that the word Ubuntu is not just the name of an Operating System, (sorry

for the nerdy joke) as it encloses a much deeper meaning, coming from an African philosophy, and it doesn't have a unique translation in any language but could be understood as "I am through you, and you are through me". There's a legend I found that explains it much better:

One day, an anthropologist proposed a game to the children of an African tribe of the Xhosa people. He put a basket full of fruits near a tree and told them that the first one to reach the basket would win all the fruits. When he gave the signal to run, all the children held hands and ran together. Then, they sat down as a group to enjoy the prize. Surprised, the anthropologist asked them why they had played like that, when one of them could have taken all the loot. The children responded: "Ubuntu! How could one of us be happy if all the others are going to be sad?"

Thank you, Providence Community Libraries, for being the place where we could explore our instincts and develop our art. You provided a space where a circus of accidents and an African philosophy could come together and find meaning in our work with people.


THANK YOU!

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We live during a time of overlapping crisis –extending over wages, housing, and our environments. Our own systems of value and governance are being brought into question, and while this feels much needed, the "time being" carries immediate needs. The struggle is not only for job, food and housing security, but also one of meaning and belonging. Without the last ones, hope is hardly materialized and disintegrates without weight. Isolation –the aftermath of a global pandemic– and the distrust in the systems meant to support us – healthcare and higher education, co-opted by profit-driven markets– render a grim landscape where, as individuals, it's easy to feel powerless. When crafting and executing a community-engaging program, every one of these realities is present. And while the program may not "solve" the issues at hand, it should not fail to address them. Because even when we may not be able to cure a wound, we cannot ignore it. It is instead by way of tending to it, giving the attention it deserves, that we have better chances of staying present in the moment, making it an opportunity to learn if not to transform our realities.

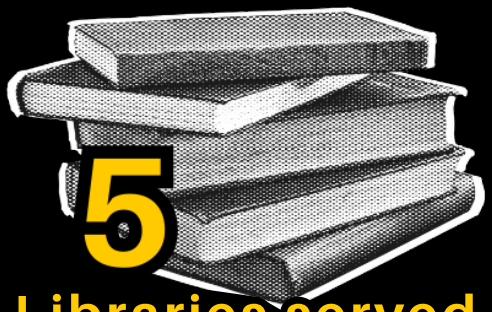
Here the "we" is not accidental. From the beginning, the partnership between the Ministry of Future Access (MFA) and the Community Libraries of Providence (CLPVD) enjoyed mutual respect and deep listening as well as an openness to try new models. Our approaches to engaging and serving neighbors went from single and reoccurring workshops to artist-residencies, and this year we added a modality of "commissioning new work" to

our existing Artist in Residency program as a way to bring additional intentionality to our work. Acknowledging the history of Mount Hope/Lippitt Hill neighborhood in East Side Providence, we decided to center this year's "Art in the Neighborhood" around gentrification and displacement. The so called "urban renewal" project of the 1960s removed over 600 families and 80 business from the area close to where the Rochambeau Library is today. We decided to invite artists interested in applying to the program to think how they would incorporate this history into their creative processes. Our "we" started between MFA & CLPVD, but reached out to former and present residents of the neighborhood to formalize the invitation and assess the artists' proposals. We felt like there were pieces of the story that "we" didn't have, and needed others in order to hold a process that would not fail to address it.

In turn, most successful artists articulated an openness to dialogue and engagement with the histories and people of the place. Christopher Ransom and Melanie Hicken, selected as 2024 artists in residency at Rochambeau Community Library, carried out research, held weekly film screenings, and captured new footage edited in a 45-minute short film that brought together over 50 neighbors in a packed community room. Festum Teatro, a theater duo from Colombia and previous residents of the program, established their own residencies with four different libraries and served neighbors with free and open theater workshops for youth –culminating each residency with theater shows where youth shared with parents the work and games they had practiced together. While very different in terms of approach, both groups of artists did their best to honor and engage with the stories and people around each library. More than seen, this could be felt during the events held in community. The air was thick with expectation and excitement as new creative work was about to be presented –combusting into laughter or applause, and generating conversations between audience members as it unfolded.

The numbers will go on to illustrate the reach of our work –but i prefer to stick with that feeling that took hold of me upon leaving those moments shared with others. A feeling that is hard to describe, but resembles possibility. A feeling that most certainly is in direct opposition to being powerless.

PROGRAM FIGURES



5

Libraries served with artist residencies

$25k

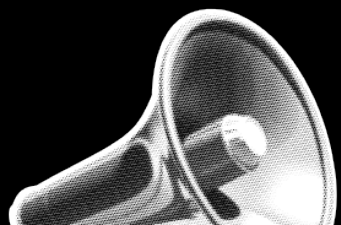
in Funds directly paid out to artists

20+

Free Public Events

40+

Recurring Youth & Adults Attendees



100+

Public Event Attendees

HERNAN 'NAN' JOUBÁ

Nan Joubá is an Argentinean-born, Providence-based director of artistic projects and cultural producer. After studying filmmaking in Tokyo, Japan, Nan Joubá hitchhiked across the Abya Yala/Americas and eventually re-rooted in Providence, RI, in 2014, where he cultivates an interdisciplinary practice through live performances, video and writing –while designing opportunities for local artists to amplify and support their creative lives.

MELANIE HICKEN & CHRISTOPHER RANSOM

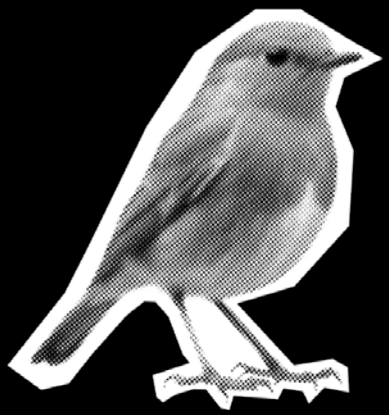
Melanie Hicken and Christopher Ransom are educators, filmmakers, and parents residing in Providence. Their video work is an effort to situate themselves within history, observe the inhabited world precisely, and participate in the collective labor of video production.

FESTUM TEATRO

Festum Teatro is an international group that uses performing arts to promote social transformation in various countries, including Colombia, Mexico, and the United States. Their workshops, based on non-competitive theatrical games, encourage collaboration and group listening, helping individuals build confidence and develop new skills. Among its members are Yessica Alvarado and John Velasco, both community artists and cultural managers trained in Bogotá, Colombia.

CINDY MIRANDA

Cindy is a professional photographer with 8 years of experience specializing in capturing vibrant moments for businesses, nonprofits, and events. Known for her unique ability to convey excitement and diversity through her lens, Cindy has worked with various influential clients and participated in numerous exhibitions.



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