

# CALL Fellows Forum

## Artist Initiated Projects & NYC DDC

July 11<sup>th</sup> 2017 @ Moody's, 7WTC, NYC

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, CALL/City as Living Lab held its second quarterly Fellows Forum. The Fellows Forums are an opportunity for CALL's supporters to engage more deeply in the topics of CALL's work, through presentations, panels and discussion with key stakeholders, artists, experts and decision makers.

The July forum focused on Mary Miss's residency at New York City's Department of Design and Construction (DDC), and Miss's resulting proposals for how cities can employ Artist Initiated Projects (AIP) to deliver innovative sustainable solutions in urban planning.

Opening with an introduction to CALL's framework by Co-Chairman of the Board Charles Kinney, the forum began with a series of presentations from Mary Miss, Founder and Artistic Director of CALL, Margaret Castillo, Chief Architect for DDC and Construction and Tom Finkelppearl, Commissioner of DDC. These presentations were followed by a contextualization Olivia Georgia and introduction to artist Jean Shin, who discussed developing an Artist initiated Project Shin presenting a proposal she had submitted to CALL for a project in Chinatown. The evening concluded with questions to the panel, moderated by Charles McKinney.

### **Summary of Presentations** (*summarized & paraphrased*)

#### **Mary Miss**

I moved away from this idea of the heroic artist early in my career to the idea of network based arts, as a response to the lack of opportunity for women and a desire to address things on a bigger scale than the individual through crossing boundaries. Artists can play a huge role in redefining our cities as they need to be redefined, alongside the city planners, designers, experts. Adrian Cerzco introduced me to the interrelatedness of UN Sustainability goals, an example of how collaboration is key to a more future. Artists can offer something tangible; create a platform to help people reimagine the future.

Boulder Project for context: Flood level markers in boulder- scientists couldn't get anybody to pay attention to flood level risks. I placed markers in a line across the city mapping the different flood levels, which helped people understand what a flood meant in terms of own body.

The pressing question is: how can you get people to engage at ground level with big city policies? Bloomberg's "Plan NYC" had admirable goals, but they were focused on interagency work, not engaging communities in the planning

process. How do we deal with projects that take 30, 50 years? How can you make people aware of those things that are not immediately tangible?

Working at DDC, we figured out paths we could imagine for moving forward with Artist Initiated Projects. I am interested in how artists can have agency. (passes out DDC report)

1. Could artists take a position like a community liaison? The role exists, but how could an artist be the one on the street introducing a project to the community.
2. What about having artists on part of the design team, so ideas they come up with can be integrated into plans
3. Could artists have fellowships at DDC? So it's not just one artists as an artist residence but several artists

Talking about working with cultural community groups, benefit to communities, benefits to artists who can see how city works, benefit to local cultural institutions Projects can be listed and artists can propose, so they are initiating them.

Tom, what are the next steps?

### **Tom Finkelparl**

Mary and her colleagues were the Mothers of public art in the United States. Public art movement driven primarily by women. You can think about it as being born out of feminism- Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the first Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) helped create a framework through her residency at the Department of Sanitation; a feminist take on the role of the public artist and of public services and a truly artist initiated project.

It's about creative problem solving. We have several PAIR at the city, placed different ways in different contexts. In Immigrant affairs, the PAIR is Tania Bruguera (not open call- selected/appointed- question posed by Tanya was creating opportunity for trust between immigrants and the city) and the resulting project is a collaboration. A Staff member works on the project with Mujeres en Movimiento, a Latinix artist collaborative that has created bicycle based communication system of bicycles, working with a group called Migrantes, who created graphic informational images to give real information about real services peer-to-peer. Fluid collaborative project taking place in Spanish across city. It wasn't artist initiated, but also not percent for art. (which is another great program, with recently increased funding) but this sort of project has the artist in tune with the very structure of the project.

One other project resulted from a call for proposals, a PAIR for Administration for Children's services working in 5 foster homes for LGBTQ youth - very specific and focused. Selected artist group was 'Lost Collective' and had a specific idea of putting together play. Went to the homes and presented project to kids and the kids rejected it. The artists changed gears and ended up doing an autobiographic film and recording project with the kids. Artists presented the wrong project, but were flexible enough to get it and respond to community needs

Percent for art can be compatible with more experimental projects even though it is capital money for objects. We are playing with the idea of allowing artists to propose more social projects that involved residencies.

(Tom has to leave for an emergency call)

I want to honor Mary for her contribution to this work.

### **Margaret Castillo**

I will start with putting context to the department. We don't do housing, but are involved in 'build it back.' We don't do schools. But we do work with dozens of agencies from policy to sanitation, to libraries, courts, health facilities, shelters, all public buildings and more. We also have an Infrastructure division- streets, plazas, underground infrastructure (sewers etc) and have published a book 'We Build The City'

First thing we did when I started was to write guiding principles. I believe this lays the foundation for AIP. Equity, sustainability, healthy living. Principles are something we believe in and guide us, although they are not code. But our clients sometimes need to be educated about why they matter. A huge role of our department is advocacy.

Equity We work with other agencies to help us educate- we reached out to Prat to help us understand what Equity means- not just holding community board meetings but designing for the community. This is a great avenue to get artists involved. Turning the Tide of homelessness- artist can help guide the conversation about talking about most vulnerable and coming up with ways of designing for them.

Sustainability- no matter what project it is we will work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Energy use is always lowered if feasible. Talked to EPA about rain gardens, which are an amazing initiative. There is a communication issue with city & neighborhoods in terms of these initiatives. Communities can see rain gardens a place to collect litter and a blight, but they have a tremendous impact on cooling, drainage and mental health benefits of green spaces. We hope better communication can lead to good stewardship. After Sandy it is very important to think about these things and look at projections when we plan for the future.

Extreme heat is not on everyone's radar, but that conversation has to be had because we 'build to last.' More people die of heat than any natural cause. How can we design around this?

Health Lee Altman helped develop active design guidelines and is passionate about health, important to have people who care about issues working on them.

Design can address mental-physical-social health issues. Isolation is a problem (elderly, immigrants, marginalized) how do our public buildings bring people together to help address this? Artists can play an important role in making these issues visual and relatable

Mary came to an organization of 1300 employees and was told to change the culture. It was hard- she did her best!!! We have an advocacy role and we build for the public and see how artists can be integral especially to the conversation around equity under this administration.

## **Bringing it back to CALL**

### **Oliva Georgia**

At this point I would like to invite Jean Shin to talk about her process and bring the conversation back to City as Living Lab and the strategies we use; Mary's notions about what the relationship between artists and the city can and should be and look at specifics.

We have an iterative process of inquiry, discussion, and coming to consensus about different project priority and ideas, which culminates in collaboration. Over six years or so years, we have walked through a step by step process that sometimes goes backwards and forwards as well. We try to focus on specific locations through walks that are done as dialogs/performances with artist/ experts / community members. These test out chemistry and start to tease out ideas

and issues of importance locally ecologically and creatively. The conversation moves to deeper level through workshops and into proposals.

At the moment we have 6 proposals in the Bronx, 4 more in Chinatown, along the corridor of Broadway.

Tom brought up with LGBT group is wonderful- we experience this. A number of proposals we have brought back to communities, for them to say “good idea but we’d rather do something else.” This exchange is a really important part of the process

We’ve invited Jean to talk about this process in Chinatown- she is the kind of artist we can really collaborate with and who will collaborate with others.

## **Jean Shin**

I know Tom from an artist residency I was on in Skowhegan Maine, where he used to be the director. *(Chats about residency-artists anxious to get to work but waiting for studio assignments, had to be extroverts and meet people and hang out)*

Through this residency, it became clear to me that it was a social necessity for artists to get out of studios and meet each other, it left with best friends that I still have today. I learned it’s not always the outcome, it is the process- critical minds coming together and supporting each other.

I wanted to be an artist that activated- could I make communities come together- engage people to be participants?

Early in my career, I had to be resourceful, working in a low paying job before becoming a full-time artist. I got into using waste because it was a free material. The exchange was interesting. Why would someone just give it to me? It was such a resource. To tap into that as opposed to raising funds to buy something else [made sense].

It speaks to my immigrant background- my parents had no ability to work in their profession as teachers when we moved from Korea. So they opened a store- loans couldn’t be given to immigrants, but immigrant communities pulled together to fund loans, a process developing from being closed out of the system. I learned to invent opportunities- artists tap into this.

The Materials for the Arts Program collaborative program on creative reuse between DCA & Sanitation became a huge resource – they had space for artists. Was great to sit still and have someone collect surplus for me and I got to walk through the warehouse and be inspired. One project that came out of this was from a Met donation of old 35 mm slides. I made a major installation at Pioneer Works showing the archive. Reintroducing notion of old tech. I had residencies in different places/spaces. Non-art spaces that involved collecting detritus and surplus.

When Mary invited me I was asked to do a walk. I had never done one, I am not really a tour guide. I am interested in site specific. This was about finding a site for me. When I walked through Chinatown I was struck by the canners- elderly immigrant population- totally of the radar working in visible economies. These people are doing our recycling because no one else can be bothered.

I met a shop owner who was struck by the hardship of women bringing carts to redemption centers, getting ripped off by bottlers. He felt he wanted to do something about it so turned his store into a redemption center- labor intensive process for vary little value.

The walks and following workshops helped me to understand what mattered to the community- in Chinatown the lists of concerns are extensive.

Through this, my original project proposal shifted in response to stakeholder concerns. My proposal, briefly, which is likely to further evolve with community dialog/partnership, focuses on health and the elderly population navigating for cans, which strikes me to be like foraging- looking for something that had value that no one else recognized.

It made me think of foraging for traditional medicines in china. The Elderly population are experts about traditional medical herbs but have no time or access to use this knowledge. I have proposed to use non-recyclable bottles, remade into potting vessels, to make hanging medicinal gardens in windows, vertical green gardens.

## **Panel Discussion** *(summarized & paraphrased)*

**CM:** We all have a little artist in us. Who has taken a lick at something and said that's too good to be thrown away. What can I do with it? Such a tremendous resource/skill set to say that is too good to be thrown away. This opportunity is too good to pass up. In my opinion, as people who make things. Architecture- We're not actually paid to think about how it is going to be use to its fullest extent, often beyond the scope of the architect. But let's look at what's happening with police stations- they can become community gathering place. It took Jeanne Gang in Chicago to say the police station can be a community space. How can that change the relationship between the community & police? Form people saying there is something of more value here.

I want to talk about rain gardens. How do you feel if the place you normally park your car is now a tree bed? You wake up one day and a digger is digging it up saying the water needs somewhere to drain. How would artists treat it differently?

**MM:** One of my favorite topics looking at all these scraggly bits of green space. If you add them up it's probably as big as central park, or some park. What if everyone could begin to think of those as a piece of a park that they get to have- so lucky they get to have it. Maybe something visually can be done to link them and think of them in that way

Glad Jean got to talk about her process to show how an artist comes to a situation and thinks about it. Having working for a year thinking about what might be possible for construction going forward in NYC- thought about it, but what can happen now? What happens when there is transition in leadership? There is a need for a 3 year r&d period of how this could really work. I truly think this kind of thing is what is necessary. Other cities have interesting approaches. The Mayor of London has a completion for each borough, a million pound reward for best cultural idea proposed. St. Paul has a best city artist. How do we move forward?

**David (Former DDC Commissioner):** as a recovering bureaucrat, the point of art is meant to make us see the world in unexpected/different way. Bureaucracies are reductive- often take wrong approach to arts. An good example from corporate world- the artist in residence at Kohler was given free pass to do whatever she wanted for three years and did amazing and important work as a result. Bureaucrats need to put artists in place and resist the temptation to direct too much.

**Bobby (audience):** How do we integrate artists as guerrilla marketing popups? Resources are getting wasted. We need to look at how to marry resources of artist/scientist/physical structures we need over 10,20,100 year. We are wasting time.

**TF:** I don't agree. The cultural plan has come from extraordinarily broad research and consultation with communities and experts. There is so much good in New York City: huge audiences, international institution, vibrant public and

private, national foundations, a strong for-profit gallery, theatre, commercial & music world complimenting the nonprofit sector. There are problems but we are not wasting time/talent. It can be better used, but we are starting at an optimistic place. NYC is the third largest public funder of the arts in US. 95% of funding goes to artists. The threat isn't not being creative enough, the threat is the city is becoming too expensive. In 1979 you could live quite inexpensively. Artists need time (3 year residency). Then, artists had time because they didn't have to work much to afford their loft. Our places are rent stabilized, not expensive places to live. I worked part time and could make ends meet. That is what we need. Time for artists in residencies 2-3 years, but also time through more affordable live/work spaces.

**MC:** Picking up on Police/Community relationship, we are engaging artists in 40<sup>th</sup> precinct police. Time does make a difference. Huge intractable social problems we are trying to reimagine, and is not a quick process. It's hard to have an artist just come do art, they have to know the community and spend time to make something that works. We are taking a pilot project approach to arts initiatives. We're starting with the precinct, but we are looking at crime prevention design, and have. Reached DOT to DEP, getting them interested on the advocacy part. We have money from DCASS to do low energy pilot, from DET for green infrastructure, from DEP on artists in green infrastructure. They are small projects, but good examples and will only increase. It's hard to get bureaucrats to take risks on things they can't define- the pilots will create examples of how artists can be successful at addressing these issues without having a clear outcome defined at the start.

**MM:** I am not so optimistic. My frustration level reached a peak that I would form a nonprofit during a financial crash! There has been a promise for so long about what artists can contribute. It's talked about but never hits pay dirt. So many artists & designers here are such a resource- not just for the big things like a skyscraper, but also the pike in the ground. 3 mil was earmarked for the Valentino pier connector. Projects like that are small on the urban planning scale but huge amounts of money to for the individual communities – how can these projects be seen as a resource to be valued by communities?

These issues – equity, health, etc- are so pressing and need addressing, and the artists really are resources. How they can complement- not replace or be in service to [other essential roles]- but help build situation where people can begin to understand, experience and appreciate the things that are needed for cities to move forward. How can we help them imagine a future of sustenance and a vision for the possibility of their future in their neighborhood? These are truly pressing issues.

**CM closes the formal element of the event, with a vision of communicating ideas in a way where people are included, understand and are not threatened.** Informal conversation continues over drinks.