Negotiated Realities

October 7 – 20th, 2016
Opening Reception – October 6th, 5 – 7pm

Dr. Judith M. Burton, Director Art + Art Education Program
Negotiated Realities

Curated by Daniela Fifi
in partnership with
The Museum of Impact

Symposium & Workshops
Oct 14 - Oct 16, 2016

www.tc.columbia.edu/srm2016
The Program in Art & Art Education at Teachers College is honored to host *Negotiated Realities*, an exhibition curated by Daniela Fifi. *Negotiated Realities* takes place in the context of *The Socially Responsive Museum*, a symposium that investigates the ongoing and evolving relationship of museums and communities. In particular, the symposium invites participants to consider when and how museums respond to the needs and interests of communities that have been traditionally underrepresented in official institutions and discourses.

*Negotiated Realities* reminds us that artists’ practices are central to the dialogue between communities and exhibition spaces. The work of the eight artists featured in the show—Shirin Barghi, Simon Benjamin, Jacqueline Bishop, Gerard Gaskin, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, Vaimona Niumeitolu, Karina Puente, Kameelah Janan Rasheed— is proof of how art can activate traditions, stories, and issues that are not always seen or heard; of how artistic processes can propel otherwise silenced voices into the public realm, inviting dialogue and reflection.

Philosopher of education Maxine Greene believed that art experiences at their best can help us see more, hear more, and become more conscious of what has been obscured. Greene also spoke of art’s potential to help us envision the world as if it could be otherwise, and to compel us to act towards a better reality. *Negotiated Realities*—and the works within it—are eloquent examples of Greene’s vision. We trust that these artists’ efforts, and the voices they make palpable, will move us all towards ever more generative relationships between exhibition spaces and the communities they serve.

- Olga Hubard,
Professor of Art and Art Education, Teachers College | Columbia University
The Negotiated Realities exhibition is embedded within the broader themes of a three-day symposium that is taking place at Teachers College, Columbia University (Oct 14 - Oct 16). The symposium and its accompanying exhibition seeks to investigate the evolving relationship of museums and communities that have been traditionally underrepresented in these institutions. The symposium will feature a number of international and national guests who will present papers, give presentations, participate in panel discussions and spontaneous dialogue, and provide workshops that will illuminate various ways in which museums and communities influence and respond to each other, collaborate, and together construct productive models for learning, experiencing, and creating.

This exhibition explores the concept of Negotiated Realities within the museum space. To elaborate, museums interpret a specific view of history and culture within their societies and can be thought of as “artificially constructed repositories within which negotiated realities live” (Canizzo 1994, 27). Oftentimes within the context of underrepresented or marginalized communities, these “negotiated realities” originate from a contested past and a problematic relationship with the museum. Citizen artists who use conceptual, performance and visual art as a medium for social justice expression are often relegated to the margins of the museum world, and are forced to find alternative channels for showing. Many artists whose work is socially responsive, draw inspiration directly from community struggles, making art with political undertones that relate to societal issues. A new generation of artists insert themselves into conversations and spaces where their message can be understood and museums are making space and taking note, as audiences demand a higher consciousness in programs and practice. The artists in this exhibition give voice to communities, issues and artistic practices that are oftentimes underrepresented in the museum spaces. Through resurfacing invisible histories, illuminating contemporary issues, combating classical historiography and reclaiming imagery of self, the invited artists redefine notions of themselves, the museum and their communities through their practice.

- Daniela Fifi  
Ed.D Student Art and Art Education,  
Teachers College | Columbia University
Shirin Barghi

BIO

Shirin Barghi is an Iranian multimedia journalist and filmmaker based in New York. Her work has been published in the Guardian, the Huffington Post, Souciant Magazine and the acclaimed book Beyond Zucotti Park: Freedom of Assembly and the Occupation of Public Space.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Ode to a Dying Lake. Located in northwestern Iran, Lake Oroumieh is the third largest salt water lake in the world. The drought-stricken lake is gradually drying up and turning into a vast stretch of salt.

Some say it will vanish in its entirety in a matter of years. These photographs document the effects of climate change on the lake and nearby villages.
Jacqueline Bishop

The Gymnast & Other Positions is Jacqueline Bishop’s most recent book and has been awarded the 2016 OCM Bocas Award in Non-Fiction. She is also the author of the novel, The River’s Song; and two collections of poems, Fauna and Snapshots from Istanbul. Her non-fiction books are My Mother Who Is Me: Life Stories from Jamaican Women in New York and Writers Who Paint/Painters Who Write: Three Jamaican Artists.

An accomplished visual artist with exhibitions in Belgium, Morocco, Italy, USA and Jamaica, Ms. Bishop was a 2008-2009 Fulbright Fellow to Morocco, the 2009-2010 UNESCO/Fulbright Fellow, and is an Assistant Professor at New York University.

In addition to the OCM Bocas Award, Bishop has received several additional awards, including: The Canute A. Brodhurst Prize for short story writing, A Fulbright year-long grant to Morocco, a UNESCO/Fulbright Fellow, and is an Assistant Professor at New York University.

Artist Statement

My work engages an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary art practice to explore issues of giving voice to voicelessness, making the invisible visible, engaging with issues of transience- the ephemeral and the intangible. It also aims to explore issues of home, ancestry, family, connectivity, belonging, and gender.

As someone who has lived longer outside of my birthplace of Jamaica, I am acutely aware of what it means to be simultaneously an insider and an outsider, and also what it means to be rendered voiceless and invisible, especially in regards to being a woman. This ability to see the world from multiple psychological and territorial spaces has led to the development of a particular lens that allows me to view a given environment from a distance. Because I am a fiction writer and poet as well as a visual artist, the text and narrative are significant parts of my artistic practice.

I have been engaged in the “Female Sexual Desires” project for several years now. In this work I collected anonymously over 150 sexual desires from women. I then used the desires collected as the basis of several works in a multi-disciplinary format, to include: embroidery drawings, laser-cut and appliqued works, and woven pieces.

Because I wanted each woman to be represented in some form of the work, I culled at least one phrase from each of the responses received and compiled these statements into the video “Touch Me Secretly.” I utilized several paragraphs from six women who participated in the project in an audio compilation entitled “Six Voices.” Finally, I engaged the sexist, racist and misogynistic things said to me or about my work into two videos, entitled: “Ways of Silencing” and “The Desire to be Desired.”

“The Female Sexual Desires Project” is the only visual art project I have thus far been able to find that self-consciously treats female sexual desires as a viable visual art project. Consequently my work is informed by feminism, feminist discourse, and with its emphasis on silencing and invisibility the work is also informed by post-colonial discourse and reaches into the emerging discourse on inter-subjectivity.
BIO

Simon Benjamin is a New York-based Jamaican filmmaker and visual artist.

Recent projects include a solo exhibition at NLS Kingston in Jamaica, a commission by Tiffany & Co. to create several large installations for a private showroom at their flagship store and a group show at The Nordic Light – Stockholm, Sweden. His current work explores urban beaches and their place in community. Simon is the Director of COURTESY – a design and filmmaking studio based in Brooklyn.

Simon has also been awarded one of PRINT Magazine’s New Visual Artists (2007).

He teaches Motion Design at his alma mater, School of Visual Art in New York City.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work is investigative in nature. The subjects that interest me usually present themselves from travel or everyday life. History, myth and oral tradition serve as an invaluable material resource for my work. I do investigative research, ask questions, have conversations, hear stories from people who have first-hand or even second-hand knowledge of the subject matter. I then work all of this information into a singular narrative – creating a composite of fact, fiction, half-truths, myths, superstition, rumors and lies. The composite is presented as a body of artwork executed across different media.
Gerard H. Gaskin is a native of Trinidad and Tobago and has worked as a photographer for the last 22 years. His work is represented in the permanent collections at Duke University, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Museum of the City of New York and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Legendary: Inside the House Ballroom Scene (Duke, 2013), is a document of the performative and aesthetic history of the African American and Latino House Ballroom Community. Balls began as an underground form of community building, forged by minority queers who felt excluded from white gay culture.

My work covers a period where balls shifted from using club music of the 1980s to hip-hop in the 1990s when hip-hop culture created a desire for ‘realness.’ The ‘90s simultaneously marked a certain masculine ideal that took over the earlier period of femme queen culture. Since its 1950’s beginnings in Harlem, balls have come a long way. They have influenced popular culture through dance forms like Vogue, documentary films like Paris is Burning, and have been written about in ethnographies like Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit.

The late Marcel Christian, appointed grandfather and historian for House Ballrooms explains, “You can’t go to Paris to do the runway, you can’t go to Broadway. But to become known that’s what it’s all about. The people who participate want to be liked, accepted and loved; they go to the balls to be seen.” This speaks to the role that balls play in the lives of young African American and Latino queers, as spaces where they can find recognition and visibility in the face of marginalization. Today balls constitute a tradition of pageantry, where African American and Latino queer youths from inner-cities collaborate to challenge normative sexual and racial behaviors.
Nontsikelelo Mutiti

BIO

Nontsikelelo Mutiti is an interdisciplinary artist and educator whose work encompasses fine art, design, and social practice. Born in Zimbabwe, Mutiti holds a diploma in multimedia art from the Zimbabwe Institute of Visual Arts, and an MFA from the Yale School of Art, with a concentration in graphic design. Recently, she was a resident artist at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, as well as Recess and the Centre for Book Arts, both in New York City. In 2015, Mutiti was awarded the Joan Mitchell Foundation Emerging Artist Grant in its inaugural year.

Mutiti continues to develop her work around African hair braiding and themes related to African immigration. She is currently Assistant Professor in the New Media Department at State University of New York, Purchase College. She lives and works in New York City.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The beauty supply store is a site of commerce and exchange. These retail outlets are ubiquitous to spaces where a significant population identifying as Black reside. I am familiar with these spaces from the streets of Harare where I originate from, my home country Zimbabwe.

During my visits to Detroit, Johannesburg, London, and Maputo I have been intrigued and drawn to the sameness of beauty supply stores. In all these settings customers lean over counters, pointing to packets of synthetic and human hair to shop floor assistants who reach up with poles to unhook the desired product. The walls and shelves of these enterprises are covered with a mosaic of objects. Packets of hair extensions, boxes of hair dyes, tubs of hair gel, stray bottles of setting lotion, tins of hair pomade and hair food, mannequin heads wearing lace-front wigs, combs in plastic packets, rollers, hair ties and do-rags. Black women and black men with luxurious curls, slick waves and Rapunzel length braids look back at me from the surface of the packaging.

The artwork for this exhibition acknowledges images making techniques based within communities of people of African descent. The work draws on motifs and codified visual elements that are reinforced through our daily routine and rituals around grooming and self-styling.

The title of the work borrows the name of a hair relaxer produced in South Africa. The product was in popular use in salons and homes in Zimbabwe in the early ‘90s. It was the first relaxer product the artist used on her hair.
BIO

Vaimoana (Moana) Niumeitolu is an Artist (Painter/Muralist, Poet, Singer and Actress) and Educator. She was born in Nuku’alofa, Tonga; raised in Hawa’ii and Utah. She is the founder of Mahina Movement, an all woman music and poetry trio.

Kyle Goen is an Artist Painter, Printmaker and Graphic Designer. Kyle Goen’s work is exhibited nationally and internationally in galleries and on street corners. He recently collaborated with Vaimoana Niumeitolu in presenting work at the Smithsonian National Arts & Industries building in Washington D.C.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Telling people’s stories is important to me. My work is meant to represent and tell stories and histories that may not have been told or are totally forgotten. My art is meant to raise a spotlight on those communities that are not easily visible in our society’s mainstream oral or documented histories. My art is meant to share those stories that bring out the truth and humanity of the colonized in our society and the world. My art is intended to connect us and show that we are all a part of a whole and what we do or do not do impacts all of us.
BIO

My name is Karina Puente, I am a Mexican-American visual artist, and my last name means “Bridge” in Spanish. I am dedicated to increasing visibility for Latino artists through education and the creation of a traditional Mexican folk art called: Papel Picado. I have been a professional and working artist all my life. My goal is to stand alongside arts activists to untangle messages of hate such as: anti-blackness, white supremacy, and societal racism as product design. I make artwork that is beautiful and empowers people to reclaim political and expressive agencies. I make artwork that builds bridges for the black and brown community towards personal and social healing; artwork that paves the way towards equality.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Karina Puente will create a site specific 50’ x 5’ hand cut, hand dyed scroll of Papel Picado. The artist will carve names of black and brown martyrs who have been killed by police. The carved scroll will be hand dyed in deep red. Lights will shine above the work illuminating the art as viewers look above; all the names of people who have passed will glow. A faint shadow will be cast on the gallery floor.
Kameelah Janan Rasheed

BIO

Kameelah Janan Rasheed (b. 1985) is an artist-archivist based in Brooklyn, NY. Originally from East Palo Alto, CA with brief stints in Johannesburg, South Africa, Kameelah’s interdisciplinary and research intensive practice considers ideas of selective legibility and opaqueness as a political strategy; the tension between narrative contingencies and narrative resolutions; as well as black traditions of covert literacies and self-publishing.

Until September 2016, she will be a Keyholder Resident at the Lower East Side Printshop. She is also a recipient of the Triple Canopy’s 2015 NYPL Labs Commission where she is conducting archival research on early 20th-century Black religious movements through NYPL’s expansive archive. For the 2016-2017 season, she will be an artist in residence at Smack Mellon in DUMBO as well as on the faculty at The School of Visual Arts in New York City.

She has exhibited at Studio Museum in Harlem, Bronx Museum, Queens Museum, BRIC Art Gallery, Weeksville Heritage Museum, Smack Mellon Gallery, Vox Populi Gallery, TOPAZ Arts, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Leroy Neiman Gallery, etc.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Through immersive text-based installations, large-scale public text pieces, publications, sound projects, and discursive programming (including lecture performances, classes, and facilitated discussions), my work engages with both figurative and literal language to explore how we narrate the connections between the past, present, and future. In my interdisciplinary and research intensive practice, I consider ideas of selective legibility and opaqueness as a political strategy; the tension between narrative contingencies and narrative resolutions; as well as black traditions of covert literacies and self-publishing.

Her long form interviews and essays have been published in The New Inquiry, Gawker, The Guardian, Creative Time Reports and featured on the Creative Time Funk, God, Jazz, and Medicine: Black Radical Brooklyn’s radio station, Otabenga Jones & Associates (OJAK Radio). She is the Arts Editor for SPOOK Magazine and a contributing editor at The New Inquiry.
Negotiated Realities