

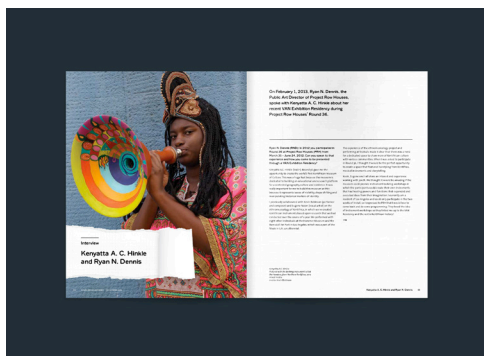


City Council Meeting Comes to Order

Last year, Aaron Landsman and his collaborators received a Creation Fund award for a co-commission led by NPN Partner DiverseWorks of Houston, to develop the genre-bending City Council Meeting. Accompanied by a subsequent Forth Fund (supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), this support made the critical difference in the creation and honing of the new work, which will tour to San Francisco's Z Space in 2014. Photo by Rachel Cook.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 02

The Creation Fund is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Visual Artists Network Announces New Catalog

With an introduction by VAN program specialist Alec De León, the new VAN catalog features three artist interviews (De León/ Wura-Natasha Ogunji, Shelly Spector/ Theaster Gates, and Steve Lambert/Emily Bivens), thirteen project profiles from the VAN Partners across the country, and 122 pages of handsome full-color photographs of artists' work.

Download a free pdf copy at npnweb.org or order a soft-bound copy from Amazon.com for less than \$20: amazon.com/Visual-Artists-Network-Exhibitions-2012/dp/1484147472/

VAN is supported in part by the Ford, Andy Warhol and Joan Mitchell Foundations.



Funding Available for Japanese Touring & Collaborations

The Japan Foundation is now accepting proposals for touring and collaboration assistance for FY14/15. Non-profit organizations in the U.S. and Canada that aim to introduce Japanese performing arts to local audiences, with an emphasis on locations outside major metropolitan areas, are eligible for touring support. Collaboration support helps Japanese and American/Canadian artists develop a new work, which will further an appreciation of Japanese culture when presented to American/ Canadian audiences.

For information on eligibility and additional criteria, visit jfnj.org/arts_and_culture/paj.html. Deadline is October 21, 2013.



Thank You!

The National Performance Network (NPN) is proud to announce continued support from the Lambent Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation in the amount of \$100,000 for general operating support.

City Council Meeting: Politics Meets Theatre

by Aaron Landsman

City Council Meeting is unruly; it depends entirely on the audience to succeed; it is procedural and non-narrative. There is always the sense, which we have built into the piece intentionally, that it could go off the rails at any moment. The piece lives at the border of art and non-art. You can imagine, then, that the process has involved a lot of twists and turns, and has necessitated different kinds of targeted support at different points along the way.

Created by Mallory Catlett, Jim Findlay and me, *City Council Meeting* is performed by the audience, with the help of a local working group whom we train as staffers. The piece is about empathy, democracy and power, and involves found and original text, live and recorded video and a simple set made up of a few folding tables and chairs, flags, microphones, video cameras and flat screen monitors. It takes the form of a local government meeting and is inherently about the virtues and limits of democracy; increasingly it has also become about the consolidation of power by various interests, either governmental or corporate.

The project began when I saw a really theatrical city government meeting in 2009, and I began attending similar meetings whenever and wherever I could. We evolved the project through trial and error, work-in-progress showings, roundtable discussions and workshops with actors and non-actors. It works best when viewers feel thoroughly and equally invited into the room together: maybe they get a tour of the set; maybe we do a little talk at a school; maybe they know someone who is part of the process.

We developed *City Council Meeting* through concurrent residencies at DiverseWorks (Houston) and the University of Houston's Mitchell Center, at HERE Art Center in New York, and at ASU Gammage in Tempe. So far, it's lived in a courtroom, a couple of theaters, a high school "gymnasium" and a gallery under construction.

In each city, instead of touring it with a full cast and tech staff, we've spent from two to eight weeks teaching the piece to local artists and non-artists, who become the staffers in that location, while also making an ending specific to each city at the same. We're doing this to try to build real locality into the process rather than simply crating and shipping a New York-work out of town.

We started approaching presenters we knew, or who had been recommended to us because they were already doing work beyond the confines of traditional performance spaces. In HERE's case, we applied to their HARP residency program because it offered three years of development. With every venue, whether or not they have ultimately taken on the project, we brought them into the process — we invited them to in-progress showings, kept them up on what we were learning, and asked for their input regarding specific concerns in their city.

All our partners so far have committed to the process we were embarking on because it was part of what they did already, which allowed them to advocate for it in their own communities, and to help us evolve the work in a more fluid and embodied way. HERE took on the project when it was just an idea on a page. Gammage committed to it in order to spark a longer conversation among its audience and among performing artists in Phoenix/Tempe, about the form of theater and the form of politics. Before the curtain went up on *City Council Meeting* there this February (2013), they had already decided to continue that conversation with me through new projects. DiverseWorks drew on our several-year history of working together to build on an inquiry that was already happening locally.

Creation Fund support — which included co-commissioners HERE, DiverseWorks and Z Space in San Francisco — meant that we could build the piece in multiple cities at the same time. To have NPN on board, with its flexibility and

significant input of resources, plus the attached commitment from three sites to present the work in its finished form, allowed us to secure more resources to the project sooner, and to approach other presenters with confidence. We were creating the project to last.

The Forth Fund was a godsend. We had presented the piece in progress in Boston and New York, and had begun rolling premieres in Houston and Tempe, with our New York opening scheduled a few months later. There were issues with our framing of the audience interaction that we needed to fix, and which a typical New York production timeline would not allow us to get into deeply enough.

Using Forth Fund monies, we did two things: we added a round of rehearsals with our NYC working group, where we implemented some changes that made the piece much more solid in terms of its structure and its content; and Mallory, Jim and I worked outside of those rehearsals to conceive of a "festival" or short-engagement version of the piece, which will be more dependent on local artists' ownership of the ending of the work. We'll try that out for the first time at Z Space in San Francisco next year, with additional dates pending.

The combination of significant support early, with targeted support for both our presenting partner and the project itself, later in the game, made *City Council Meeting* successful and more able to travel. The script and an article is being published in the fall issue of the journal *Theater*, and we are looking forward to Z Space and beyond in the coming years.

The hyperlinks I'll use when I post this on the website:

www.diverseworks.org
www.here.org
www.zspace.org
www.asugammage.com
www.mitchellcenterforarts.org
www.thinaar.com/shows.html - Aaron Landsman's website
www.citycouncilmeeting.org - *City Council Meeting* website