



Image of Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL painting mural on the exterior of MACLA (photo by Melina Ramirez)

The Art of Outer Space: VAN Residency Has Lift-Off

New York-based visual artist Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL studied astronomy and art history at the University of Texas at Austin, and his early interests are imprinted all over his current installation being prepared at MACLA (Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana). Read more about the Visual Arts Network's exhibition residency currently underway in San José.

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Photo of Kaamila Mohammed by Joel Benjamin

Theater Offensive Uses MLI Grant for Seamless Transition

When Kaamila Mohamed at The Theater Offensive in Boston moved from program administrator to program coordinator, she was lucky to have a built-in mentor with Trina Jackson, who was also moving into a new position at TTO. Read Kaamila's report here. See below for the most recent awards in NPN's Mentorship & Leadership Initiative (MLI), funded by MetLife, American Express, NEA, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

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NPN Receives Ford Grant

The Ford Foundation awarded a two-year grant of \$450,000 to extend the benefits of NPN's commissioning, creation, residency and professional development programs to organizations participating in Ford's Supporting Diverse Arts Spaces Initiative. Funding is through the Ford Foundation's Freedom of Expression Program, which promotes a new generation of 21st-century arts spaces and arts leadership that reflect the cultural richness of diverse communities.

The Art of Outer Space: A Visual Artist Residency in San José

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MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana is presenting COSMOS CODEX, a commissioned, site-specific work by the artist Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL, May 2 – August 2, 2014. This is MACLA's first art exhibition dedicated to the relationship among art, astronomy and space research. This is also the artist's first solo show in California, and the first time he has publicly exhibited sculptural objects.

Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL, who also goes by VSU, is primarily known for large-scale murals, paintings, drawings, and sound recordings. He sources American and Russian spaceflight programs, astronomy, and aerospace architecture to create commissioned and public artworks for museums, galleries, private and public spaces.

A major aspect of the exhibition is VSU's dialogue with scientists and other experts at the NASA Ames Research Center, located in Silicon Valley, to gather information directly informing the artwork. Vargas-Suarez is exploring concepts for retrieving materials from Mars, asteroids and other orbiting bodies in our solar system, with the intention of allowing artists, architects and designers

access to these materials to expand and explore possibilities that not available to them with traditional materials available here on Earth.

The exhibition installation in MACLA's gallery is set up as a mock "clean room," or spacecraft processing facility, typically found at NASA operations centers. The installation will include hand-intervened new digital prints, murals, paintings, sculptural objects, and a video produced in collaboration with artist Barbora Bereznavova.

MACLA, positioned in Silicon Valley – a fertile area for art, science, and innovation – is the ideal setting for COSMOS CODEX. San José, in particular, is a place where artists, scientists, thinkers, and other creative minds can find ways in which science can inform art and vice-versa. This is an opportunity for both disciplines to come together to create unique projects that engage a broad community of artists, scientists, students, and others to discuss questions that both art and science ask: What is our place in the universe? How do we conceptualize, idealize, or represent our position here? How can art present scientific data in compelling ways, and how can science

be a source of inspiration for artists?

Further, this exhibition presents an exciting educational opportunity for the hundreds of middle school and high school-aged students that MACLA serves every year. MACLA hopes that the exhibition and the artist's residency will encourage their students to engage with art and science in a different and meaningful way. VSU, who studied both astronomy and art history in college, and himself has been inspired by the data collected by space/ research entities, including NASA, is an inspiration for Latino youth who may be considering studies and careers in the arts and sciences.

Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL is based in New York. He was born in Mexico City and raised in the Houston suburb of Clear Lake City adjacent to the NASA Johnson Space Center. He studied astronomy and art history at the University of Texas at Austin and moved to New York City in 1997. ■

MACLA and Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL thank the NASA Ames Research Center for its support.

NPN 2014 Mentorship & Leadership Initiative

Pangea World Theater – Minneapolis, MN
Unique Solutions to Space

Through mentoring by Gayle Isa from Asian Arts Initiative, and additional guidance from Kelley Lindquist, Meena Natarajan and Dipankar Mukherjee will research the creative solutions to the challenges of space, in a unique feasibility study.

Wesley V. Montgomery MLI Award for Emerging Leaders of Color
The Theater Offensive – Boston, MA
Queer Latino Artistic Leadership and Mentorship

This project will develop the relationship between Nick Bazo, TTO's director of True Colors and assistant director of programs, and artist and director Octavio Campos of Camposition, through shadowing, coaching, and feedback.

The Yard – Chilmark, MA

Animate your community: "Making It" happen through the classroom

Jesse Keller, director of Island Programs & Education, will be mentored by master teacher Deborah Damast (NYU) and choreographer/ Guggenheim Fellow David Parker in the development of a dance-making curriculum, "Making It," to be implemented over the next three years in the Martha's Vineyard public/charter schools.

The Mentorship and Leadership Initiative, as part of the Community Fund, is made possible by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, MetLife Foundation, and American Express.



MetLife Foundation



A Lesson in Listening

by Kaamila Mohamed, Community Activities Coordinator for The Theater Offensive



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A Story Circle around the table at TTO, photo by Nicki Morris

The Mentorship and Leadership Initiative (MLI) award gave me the opportunity to deepen my relationship with my mentor, Trina Jackson, and to deepen the work that I do at The Theater Offensive (TTO). The award came at a moment of internal restructuring within TTO. Trina was moving to a position coordinating the Pride Youth Theater Alliance, shifting her focus towards international arts organizing. At the same time, I was becoming part-time programs administrator, filling the role that Trina had served.

The Theater Offensive's work focuses on the Boston neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, South End, and Jamaica Plain. We are rooted in these communities and the wealth of history, culture, and resilience found here. I had been living in the Boston area for two years at that point, excluding the years spent ensconced within my undergraduate bubble. I was already developing relationships and leading community building activities, particularly with queer people of color, a community with which TTO works to highlight and serve. Through our mentorship relationship, Trina participated in those spaces and gave me feedback that allowed me to grow as a community leader and facilitator.

Trina's decades of work as an organizer of communities of color and as a staff member of several community organizations have given her a large amount of experience and connections. She was generous in passing along her relationships and resources. She also invited me to be an active participant in the work that she remained heavily involved in, such as the Network of Immigrant and African American Solidarity.

My increased connections have served me immensely as I moved into the role of TTO's community activities coordinator. Beyond that, I gained valuable insights about what it means to work in community and with community. Trina emphasized a mentor-mentee relationship built upon a foundation of trust, naming our similar and different experiences around identity as black queer women, mutual sharing and learning. She did not shy away from investigating the challenging and bountiful places where the personal, political, professional, and artistic meet. As a part of our MLI activities we led story circles, a model that has its roots as a form of cultural organizing used during the Civil Rights movement. In connection with the artists and art TTO was working with, we listened to the stories of the people who work tirelessly for the well-being of their neighborhoods. What a wellspring of wisdom poured forth! The core lesson learned threaded itself throughout my work with Trina as part of the MLI – a lesson in listening. ■

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MetLife Foundation





GiveNOLA Day Success!

The board and staff of NPN/VAN are overwhelmed with appreciation for the support we received from our supporters across the country on GiveNOLA Day. We had 59 friends donate for a total of \$3,437. The day was quite successful for New Orleans area nonprofits: 19,625 gifts were made for a total of \$2,264,512 to more than 300 organizations in our area. All organizations will receive additional matching funds thanks to the generosity of the Greater New Orleans Foundation and its supporters. GiveNOLA Day was part of a national initiative organized by Community Foundations countrywide.