

5-30-2020

Flying Solo: the Activist Artist Final Narrative Report

The Humanities Edge

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/humanities-edge-archive-faculty-programs>

Recommended Citation

The Humanities Edge, "Flying Solo: the Activist Artist Final Narrative Report" (2020). *Humanities Edge Archive Faculty Programs*. 4.

<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/humanities-edge-archive-faculty-programs/4>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities Edge Archive at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanities Edge Archive Faculty Programs by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcc@fiu.edu.

Humanities Edge Collaborative Research Grant

FINAL REPORT

Phillip M Church, Associate Professor, Theater
Florida International University

May 30th, 2020

“Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist-Artist”

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant for Collaborative Research between Florida International University and Miami Dade College offered a team of faculty and students representing both institutions a rare opportunity to bring about interdisciplinary research while exploring the universality of art, its meaning and the ethical role it plays in society, specifically through the agency of activist-artists. How effective is art as an agency for social change? Is art merely a passive spectator medium? What responsibility, if any, does the artist have in putting to right the wrongs of the world, to making the world a better place? “*Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist Artist*” was developed in two parts: Part I “Ethics, activist-art & performance” and Part II “Flying Solo with Artist X”. (See attachment)

While planning and research for both parts began in the summer of 2019 sixty-percent of the funded project was completed by April 1st 2020 and ready for public presentations at the Philip and Patricia Frost Museum of Art on April 18 and at the Miami Dade College Live Arts Lab April 21. However, on March 17 the coronavirus pandemic emerged and both Florida International University and Miami Dade College went into lockdown. All public presentations were cancelled denying researchers of the final public, interactive presentation and outcomes.

That said, the journey toward this point of postponement had yielded enormous benefits regarding the experience, knowledge, discoveries and creative production made by both faculty and students throughout the collaborative process. “*Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist-Artist*” brought together students from the MDC Department of Arts & Philosophy, the Department of FIU Theatre, the FIU School of Music, the FIU Department of Creative Writing, the Department of Art & Art History and the School of Journalism and Communications. The central objective was to research and present the two sides of art – on the one side the conversation and on the other side an example of going beyond the conversation. Mechanisms for public debate were developed through Miami Dade College under the leadership of Co-PI Professor Darrell Arnold. Students in philosophy, visual art and art-curation explored the importance of art through of the work of local activist-artists, including dance and digital artists, creating presentations and a forum platform in which to engage anticipated live audiences in the final project. Under the leadership of Project PI Professor Phillip M Church, FIU Theater a research team comprising playwright, choreographer, actors,

Humanities Edge Collaborative Research Grant
Final report
“Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist-Artist”
Pg. 2

composer, poet, and stage manager developed a script designed to be performed in the galley environments of FIU and MDC. The focus of the research was based on the work and philosophy of activist-artist Xavier Cortada. Multiple in-person interviews together with published articles and archival video created the basis for research. Video of Cortada’s studio together with images of his public works were folded into the body of the production. Cortada’s work, embedded in the principles of social justice and addressing such issues as human trafficking, immigration, sea level rise and climate change, have been recognized nationally and internationally for the astonishing impact it produces on the general public. Cortada is an exceptional example of an activist-artist whose work constantly takes its audience beyond the conversation resulting in palpable action.

“*Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist-Artist*” was to be a shared and interactive experience for audiences in which MDC students would lead a forty-minute presentation + forum/Q&A with guest panelists William Cordova and Mary Vickles followed by a forty-minute solo performance of “*Flying Solo with Artist X*. Aided by dramatic narrative, video, projections, dance, music the action climaxed toward a choral rendition of Obama’s inaugural poem, “One Today” by Richard Blanco, a poem we believed conveyed a collective sense of what all art, directly or indirectly, strives to achieve – a oneness and recognition toward the different voices and cultures in our diverse society as reflected through the prism of activist-artists throughout the nation, and by extension, the world.

The project team comprised two faculty leaders and nineteen students, some receiving stipends for internships and others serving in volunteer capacities. The students were assigned to serve in the following disciplines: acting, philosophy, creative writing, videography, music composition, art curation, marketing & PR, dance, and graphic design. Dr. Arnold’s cohort shared their research with various philosophy classes on the MDC campuses during the fall 2019 and first two months of spring 2020 semesters, as a means of developing presentational techniques for the general public in the final project. Monthly meetings were held in which MDC and FIU students and faculty met to update and share progress reports on specific research aspects of their work. The majority of the meetings were conducted at the Hibiscus Gallery in Pinecrest, a galley set within Pinecrest gardens under the management of Xavier Cortada. Collaborating within an environment closely aligned to art and in particular to one of the leading luminaries of art-activism in Miami was a significant element for the collaborators of this project. A commissioned, ten-minute documentary, “Flying Solo”, produced by Playard Studios successfully captures the industry of research that was necessary to bring about this project.(<https://vimeo.com/playard/download/412174074/6910b0d185>)

Even though “*Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist-Artist*” was unable to deliver its final conclusion on its announced dates in April 2020 the creative team anticipates that it will be shared with the Miami community at some point in the spring 2021. The team is also exploring the possibility of

Humanities Edge Collaborative Research Grant
Final report
“Flying Solo: Ethics + the Activist-Artist”
Pg. 3

Part II “*Flying Solo with Artist X*” being entered into the International Youth Theatre Festival in London, UK and the Fringe Festival in Scotland in the summer of 2022. By sharing with an international audience the results of an interdisciplinary research project funded solely through the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, FIU faculty and students will remind the world of the enormous impact philanthropic support continues to make on education and the arts in the United States of America.