

Anaïs Duplan, Maia Chao, Yxta Maya Murray

Drawn Together

Curated by Mira Dayal and Simon Wu

January 22 through March 20, 2021

Etymology of contract:

“drawn together:” via Old French from Latin contractus, from contract (“drawn together, tightened”), from the verb contrahere, from con (“together”) + trahere (“draw”).

MEMO

Part I: Introduction

This memo sets forth the objectives and strategies of “Drawn Together,” an exhibition that will facilitate the creation of updated organizational bylaws through the work of Anaïs Duplan, Maia Chao, and Yxta Maya Murray at Cuchifritos Gallery in January of 2021. “Drawn Together” was devised by the aforementioned artists as well as curators Mira Dayal and Simon Wu in response to Cuchifritos’ 2019 open call; Dayal and Wu proposed an exhibition that contemplated Cuchifritos’ relocation from the Lower East Side’s historic Essex Street Market building to the new gentrifying¹ Essex Market complex. Cuchifritos has long engaged its mission with an awareness of its position among New York art spaces and local businesses, and has sought to support artwork that contributes to its distinct and overlapping communities.² “Drawn Together” will continue in this tradition. Through conversations with the gallery’s immediate and wider community of those who work for, with, and around Cuchifritos—a selection of whom will hereafter be referred to as “constituents”—the project will propose amendments to the organization’s bylaws, which govern the

¹ See, e.g., Michael Kimmelman, *Essex Crossing is the Anti-Hudson Yards*, N.Y.T., Nov. 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/07/arts/design/essex-crossing.html> (“Rising real estate values on the Lower East Side have accelerated neighborhood gentrification but also helped subsidize the project’s abundance of affordable housing and community services.”); [No author], *What The New York Times Got Wrong About Essex Crossing*, The Lowdown: New From the Lower Eastside, Nov. 14, 2019, <http://www.thelodownny.com/leslog/2019/11/what-the-new-york-times-got-wrong-about-essex-crossing.html> (“A lot of Lower East Side residents have mixed feelings about Essex Crossing. We can appreciate what has been brought to the neighborhood: more affordable housing, a sustainable Essex Market (we hope), Trader Joe’s! At the same time, everyone recognizes that the Lower East Side, one of New York’s last authentic neighborhoods, will never be the same. The project is without question an engine of gentrification.”).

² See, e.g., Cuchifritos’ 2015 show by Liene Bosquê and Nicole Seisler *Shifting Impressions* (March 28 through April 26), which Artists Alliance describes as a project designed to study “the Essex Street Market and its impending redevelopment in 2018. [In this project,] audiences will have a chance to join the artists on an expedition through the neighborhood, where they will investigate the multiple histories of the Lower East Side and create impressions of forgotten or overlooked spaces.” Artists Alliance, *Shifting Impressions*, <https://www.artistsallianceinc.org/shifting-impressions>.

contractual agreements made within the gallery program, in ways that reflect the community's needs and understandings of the gallery's role.³

Through the project, the aforementioned artists will facilitate a series of virtual dialogues/storytelling circles with constituents of Cuchifritos about their understanding of contracts generally and specifically in relation to Cuchifritos. Through a video piece that will be presented in the gallery and employed as a facilitation tool during the dialogues, Murray, Duplan, and Chao will insist on physical connections and properties alluded to in the etymology of much contractual language. Within the video, common household objects (bandages, elastic bands) that carry the aforementioned material properties will be used as instructional props to evoke the embodied consequences of contractual situations.

The conversations with constituents and our collection of responses from gallery visitors will aim to elicit an understanding of what constituents desire and need from the contracts that they enter into with the gallery. The question is, do the community members and the emerging and unrepresented curators and artists with whom Cuchifritos does and might work perceive that the contracts they enter into with the gallery contribute to their human flourishing?⁴ And if not, what kinds of contracts and contractual processes would help fulfill that flourishing?

Once the artists and curators learn from constituents what changes would best elicit those social and human goods, they will translate them into a set of contractual terms under the primary counsel of Murray, who is also a law professor specialized in community constitutionalism and property law. The added terms will encourage the pursuit of the gallery's mission in ways that are alert to and critical of capitalism and the many different types of displacement that can occur in this society—familial, economic, personal, and artistic. Artists Alliance, Inc.'s Board of Directors, which oversees the exhibition program at Cuchifritos Gallery along with staff, will then vote, under the protocols set forth by Article X of their bylaws, to amend Section VI of their bylaws, which articulate contractual rules to which the nonprofit will be bound. The amendments to Section VI would incorporate clauses to be included in all future exhibition contracts, and would be premised on the insights derived from the dialogues with constituents. Duplan, Chao, Dayal, Wu, and Murray understand that this process may either be successful or be unsuccessful. They believe that either outcome will be part of the process and objective of “Drawn Together.”

³ “Drawn Together” exists in a tradition of social practice art that has examined artists' contracts and sought anti-subordination strategies for them. *See, e.g.*, Seth Siegelaub & Robert Projansky, *The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer And Sale Agreement* (1971), <https://primaryinformation.org/product/siegelaub-the-artists-reserved-rights-transfer-and-sale-agreement/> (“Developed through conversations with members of the art world and written with the help of lawyer Robert Projansky in 1971, Seth Siegelaub's Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer And Sale Agreement was designed to safeguard the economic interests of artists, particularly in the case of an artwork's resale, reproduction, or rental.”); Alta Starr, *Cultivating the Self: Embodied Transformation for Artists* 49 (no date), <https://makingandbeing.com/pdfs/Making%20and%20Being%20Cultivating%20the%20Self%20Embodied%20Transformation%20for%20Artists%20by%20Alta%20Starr.pdf> (“Liberation requires each of us to become aware of and dismantle the systems of domination and exploitation, not only in society, but also as we have internalized them, inevitably, whatever our social location.”).

⁴ There is a lengthy tradition of seeking social and legal reform with the objective of enhancing human flourishing. The philosopher Amartya Sen is perhaps the most visible proponent of seeking to cultivate human flourishing within a wide variety of settings. Sen defines human flourishing according to his “capability” theory, which provides that people must have access to resources that will help them be capable of living a worthwhile life. One must be capable to function, Sen argues, and that requires both well-being and the freedom to pursue well-being. *See, e.g.*, Amartya K. Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (1992).

Anaïs Duplan is a trans* poet, curator, and artist. He is the author of a book of essays, *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture* (Black Ocean, 2020), a full-length poetry collection, *Take This Stallion* (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016), and a chapbook, *Mount Carmel and the Blood of Parnassus* (Monster House Press, 2017). He has taught poetry at the University of Iowa, Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence College, and St. Joseph's College.

His video works have been exhibited by Flux Factory, Daata Editions, the 13th Baltic Triennial in Lithuania, Mathew Gallery, NeueHouse, the Paseo Project, and will be exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art in L.A in 2021. As an independent curator, he has facilitated curatorial projects in Chicago, Boston, Santa Fe, and Reykjavík. He was a 2017-2019 joint Public Programs fellow at the Museum of Modern Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem. In 2016, he founded the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, an artist residency program for artists of color, based at Iowa City's artist-run organization Public Space One. He works as Program Manager at Recess.

Maia Chao is an interdisciplinary artist based in Philadelphia. She is co-creator of *Look at Art. Get Paid.*, which is currently sponsored by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Chao has shown at The Shed, The New School, Tufts University, Brown University, and RISD Museum; and given talks at ICA Philadelphia, Queens Museum, and MFA Boston. She was recently an artist in residence at Haverford College and Pioneer Works. She is faculty in the Sculpture Department at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD).

Yxta Maya Murray is a novelist, art critic, playwright, and law professor. The author of nine books, her most recent are the forthcoming story collection, *The World Doesn't Work That Way, but It Could* (University of Nevada Press, 2020), and the novel, *Art Is Everything* (TriQuarterly Press, 2021). She has won a Whiting Award, an Art Writer's Grant, and has been named a fellow at the Huntington Library for her work on radionuclide contamination in Simi Valley, California.

Mira Dayal is an artist, editor, and critic based in New York. She is a co-organizer of the residency program rehearsal, co-curator of the collaborative artist publication *prompt.*, founding editor of the *Journal of Art Criticism*, and a regular contributor at *Artforum*, where she was previously an associate editor. She is currently editing a book about intersectional solidarity and feminism in art criticism, to be published this fall.

Simon Wu is a writer and curator involved in collaborative art production and research. He currently serves as the Program Coordinator for the Racial Imaginary Institute and is a contributor to *Artforum*, *BOMB*, *Frieze*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. He was formerly a Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. He is based between Brooklyn and Philadelphia.

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