

Arts & Culture Committee of Community Board Nine

Savona Bailey McClain & Michael J. Palma, Chairs

Jordi Reyes Montblanc, Co-Chair

Tamara Gayer, Vicky Gholson, Christa Giesecke, Linda Walton & Diane Wilson,
Board Committee Members

Lee-Ann Pinder & Valarie Winborne, Public Members

Committee Meeting Minutes of September 18, 2006

Meeting called to order promptly at 6:30 PM.

Present: Savona Bailey McClain, Michael Palma, Vicky Gholson, Lee-Ann Pinder

Absent: No one.

Excused: Tamara Gayer, Christa Giesecke, Linda Walton & Diane Wilson, Valarie Winborne.

Guests &
Community Members: See attached sheets.

A quorum not being present, no official business of the committee was taken up for action. *(NOTE: Because the A&C Committee was recently created and Chairs appointed, and due to problems associated with scheduling the first meeting on relatively short notice, understandably not all committee members could attend the inaugural meeting, which should in no way be taken as a lack of interest on their part. Only one item was requested for action, as you will read below: a letter of support for the Gabarron Foundation's sculpture display in Community District Nine to the Parks Department. Since no quorum was present, the Gabarron Foundation was asked to make a presentation to the General Membership at their regularly scheduled meeting and request the letter of support there.)*

Nonetheless, the committee meeting proceeded with presentations by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the Gabarron Foundation, followed by a discussion on the need to create a "framework" for the creation of a Cultural Arts District Plan.

Also, while these presentations were formally made, it bears mentioning that in attendance, lending their enthusiasm as well as collaborating with their opinions, thoughts and ideas were representatives from Broadway Housing Communities, Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Faison Fire House Theater, APAC Inc., Mr. George Faison himself, West Harlem Assistance Group, Harlem Textile Works, the Nora Mae Carmichael Collection, the Quincy Troupe as well as a host of individual artists. (For a complete listing of attendees, please see the sign-in sheet attached).

It also bears mentioning that this was the first inaugural meeting of the Arts & Culture Committee of Community Board Nine, and while not an official meeting whereby action can be formally taken (no quorum), the number of local cultural institutions and individual artists in attendance surely attests to the need to make Arts & Culture a priority in the district.

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council to expand their "Swing Space" program north of Canal Street. (See who they are at lmcc.net, or see their information packet at the CB9 office.)

Several representatives from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council made a presentation whereby they expressed their keen desire to expand their "Swing Space: program to West Harlem.

Swing Space is a space grant program that connects artists and arts organizations with vacant commercial space. Studio, rehearsal, office, installation, and exhibition space awards are typically for two to four months and are accompanied by a project stipend of \$300-\$3,000. Individual artists working in the visual arts, performing arts, or new media; independent curators; dance and theater companies; arts organizations, and now it seems, community boards, can get involved! In the past Swing Space has included empty office floors, closed retail stores, an abandoned printing factory, and a former bank. Currently, Swing Space offers short-term occupancies of temporarily vacant spaces throughout downtown, and are now looking to move their program north of Canal Street with grant funds from the Manhattan Borough President and the New York City Council. West Harlem seems like a perfect logical choice to expand the program.

The committee members present suggested that there were other areas the LMCC could possibly help the Arts & Cultural Committee in, for example, creating a Cultural District Plan, utilizing Park Space for the programs, and perhaps making mitigation recommendations on how to handle the impact of Columbia University's development plans into Manhattanville.

By and large, however, the presentation focused around the Swing Space Program and it's duplication for the West Harlem art community.

The Gabarron Foundation Carriage House Center for the Arts makes request for a letter of support to place sculptures in Community District Nine for their touring sculpture exhibit called "The Mysteries of Columbus. (See who they are at carriagehousecenter.org, or see their information packet at the CB9 office.)

Chris Gabarron and Monika Abate made the following presentation:

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the death of Columbus. He died in Valladolid, where the headquarters of the Gabarron Foundation is located. The Foundation, dedicated to fostering cultural exchange between Europe and the Americas was founded in 1992 by artist, Cristobal Gabarron who has created "**The Mysteries of Columbus**". These ten abstract sculptures have been enjoyed in four Spanish cities and will be installed in New York this October as part of both Columbus Day and Hispanic Heritage celebrations.

The story of Columbus is periodically re-imagined and each retelling requires a leap of faith similar to the explorer's determination that by

sailing west he would eventually reach the other side of India. The gaps in our knowledge of his life are filled with considerations based on partial reports and ambiguous evidence, for example, Columbus maintained two log books on the first voyage, one for himself and one adjusted for his shipmates.

It is appropriate that Cristobal Gabarron marks the Quincentenary of the death of Columbus with a series of abstract sculptures that are intuitive reflections on this cryptic figure whose equivocal story has become fundamental to the history of the Americas. In these new works the artist explores the dynamic potential for abstract form and vivid color to evoke the mysterious impulses of the sailor whose dreams and skills changed the course of world history.

These sculptures vary in size from eight to nine feet high and immediately indicate the oversize personality of a man who coaxed financing for his incredible voyage from skeptical monarchs. Although completely abstract, the vertical orientation and occasional "legs" suggest figures in dramatic poses.

The elaborate compositions and intense colors create a charged atmosphere that embraces the spectator. Despite a rigid fiberglass construction, the animated compositions and paint-activated surfaces create fluid sculptures with an identity that cannot be grasped from one viewpoint. This sets up encounters similar to meeting strangers with mysterious backgrounds. At the same time, the vibrant colors evoke exotic flora and fauna contained within the tumultuous energy of the multi-faceted configurations. These powerful sculptures achieve a convergence of pictorial effects and sculptural form that invite the viewer's engagement with a vital emotional narrative. In this way they approach the mysteries surrounding Columbus, a man described as being of "obdurate silences."

After Cristobal and Monika made their presentation, they requested a letter of support for the NYC Parks Department in placing their sculptures in Community District Nine at the 117th Street Broadway Mall and possibly at the Montefiore Park located at 137th Street and Hamilton Place.

There was some question as to whether or not a sculpture would actually be placed in Hamilton Heights at the Montefiore Park. Cristobal and Monika indicated that they would try their best to place one there as well as the one in Morningside Heights at 117th Street.

The chairs of the Arts & Cultural Committee informed them that because the committee did not have a quorum and because we could not possibly send a letter of support in the time they required, that they should make a presentation at the General Board Meeting (which was scheduled later that week) and request the letter of support from the general membership. *(NOTE: this was done and the Board Chair wrote the letter, which also*

included in it that there should be a sculpture placed in Hamilton Heights at the Montefiore Park.)

Lastly, Savona Bailey-McClain leads discussion on the imperative need for a “Cultural Arts District Plan.” (Several very good hand-outs were given out as examples relating to this concept and how it was done in other cities. To obtain copies, the chairs of the committee will gladly make copies from the file.)

An extended discussion led by Savona Bailey-McClain was given with regard to creating a Cultural Arts District Plan that would help focus everyone’s immediate energy. Concentrating on first creating a “frame-work” whereby everyone on the committee and in the community can partake in its development, we can hopefully begin to specifically address such arts-supporting issues as grants, art materials, work space, affordable housing for artists, audience development and marketing, a centralized database of art resources, as well as an informed way to create an Arts & Culture addendum to CB9’s 197 Plan for the district.

The “framework” can start by initially creating three sub-committees as follows: Audience Development, Marketing, and Housing. Although more would be expected, these three were specifically mentioned as a start, and several organizations and community people present agreed to participate in specific sub-committees. For now, everyone involved was asked to think about their chosen field for formalization at the next committee meeting (where hopefully a quorum can officially begin the frame work process.)

At the end of the discussion, the unofficial yet constructive first meeting of the Arts & Cultural Committee was adjourned.