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Anatole Ashraf

Chairperson

Debra Markell Kleinert

District Manager

October 14, 2025

Arts & Cultural Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes

This meeting was teleconferenced using Zoom

Committee Members Present:

Karesia Batan, Chair
Eric Narburgh, Vice Chair
Kenny Greenberg
Pia Rahman
Akello Thomas

Committee Members Absent:

Anatole Ashraf
Lisa Charles
Stephen Cooper
Ryan Smith

Arts & Cultural Affairs Public Members Present:

Edjo Wheeler

Community Board 2 Staff:

Debra Markell Kleinert, District Manager

Guests:

Edjo Wheeler, Executive Director at Culture Lab LIC
Fernanda Contreras, Fine Arts student at LaGuardia Community College and winner of the LaGuardia Community Greenway Street Mural Contest
Harley Spiller, Franklin Furnace Achieve Inc
Madeline Best, The Chocolate Factory Theater
Andre Irving, Cucala Dance Company
Nancy Bruno, LIC-A
Rashmi

“Serving the Communities of Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, and Maspeth”

Karesia Batan, Chair of the Arts and Cultural Affairs Committee, welcomed everyone to the committee meeting.

LaGuardia Community College Winning Mural Design

The Chair introduced Fernanda Contreras, a Queens-based artist and student from LaGuardia Community College, the winner of the mural design competition on 29th Street between Skillman and 47th Avenues, which transformed the entire block into a mural with her piece, “Keep It Movin’!”.

Ms. Contreras provided a PowerPoint presentation (Attachment 1) detailing her background, artwork, and the inspirations for her winning mural design, which was part of a contest made possible by NYC DOT. She provided the following information:

- Her artistic name is Contreras.
- She is a Queens-based artist whose experience as a child of Ecuadorian immigrants led her to explore themes of identity and displacement in her art.
- When she was seven, her mother worked as a house cleaner. Her mother’s employer, who was affiliated with the Rhode Island School of Design, offered free art classes to Ms. Contreras in exchange for her mother’s housecleaning. These experiences made Ms. Contreras aware that individuals from different economic backgrounds can have a profound impact on one's life.
- At a young age, she wanted to pursue art, which led her to move to Georgia to improve her skills.
- She submitted two mural designs for the 29th Street competition.
 - The winning design was inspired by her own experiences and those of others. She recalled being late for class and waiting for a pedestrian light to change, during which she noticed others rushing to their destinations. This moment made her aware of how fast-paced life in New York is compared to Georgia.
 - Her other design focused on the daily lives of New Yorkers, drawing inspiration from the trains in Long Island City and incorporating graffiti elements.
- After completing the mural on 29th Street, she expressed that she wants to continue to create art that captures the daily lives of New Yorkers and can be enjoyed in public spaces.
- She acknowledged that the project was made possible with the support of LaGuardia Community College alumni, SYEP participants, and Professor Ari and Elsayed, who provided guidance throughout the process.
- NYC DOT was involved in the project, engaging with professors and reviewing design drafts. The mural design went through several board reviews, during which DOT made minor modifications before final approval.

The Chair encouraged Ms. Contreras to continue engaging with the committee and that she is an artist the community wants to support.

Ms. Contreras shared her Instagram handle (@contreras.nyc) so that committee and community members might follow her and her work.

The Chocolate Factory

Madeline Best, managing director of the Chocolate Factory Theater, provided the following information about the organization:

- The organization collaborates with artists at various stages in their careers.
- Its venue features a highly industrial interior, which supports experimental performance art and dance.
- The theater hosts community programming, including the Mother's Day Block Party, which offers activities for families.
- It partners with local businesses, such as Little Chef Café, which occasionally provides food for events.
- Upcoming shows include a performance by artists led by Netta Yershumalli, incorporating video, performance lighting, and sculpture. The show will run from October 30, 2025, to November 1, 2025.
- The theater uses a sliding-scale ticket pricing model to ensure affordability and accessibility to members of the community.
- Artists are compensated at the agreed-upon rate regardless of ticket sales or audience turnout.
- All commissioned artists, including dancers, performers, and collaborative staff, are paid hourly for time spent working in the space.
- Residency artists receive space grants and a stipend for the duration of their residency.
- During the early residency nomination process, artists who participated in the prior season nominate individuals who have not previously worked at the theater.

Franklin Furnace Archive

The Chair introduced Harley Spiller, Ken Dewey Director of the Franklin Furnace Archive. He provided the following information about the organization:

- Franklin Furnace Archive is a nonprofit, charitable organization that has been in operation for 50 years.
- It is located at 30-30 47th Avenue, Suite 470, Long Island City, NY 11101.
- The nonprofit has developed a strong relationship with Long Island City Artists, which has a gallery on the first floor of the same building. The two organizations are collaborating and will announce their new season of support for performance artists in mid-November 2025.
- The organization has two email lists to subscribe to:

- A general newsletter, which provides updates on the nonprofit and the artists it has supported.
- A newsletter for artists, which provides information on lesser-known opportunities such as studio shares, apartment sublets, and other artist resources.
- Link to the organization's website: www.franklinfurnace.org
- The director's email address: harley@franklinfurnace.org

Cucala Dance Company

Andre Irving of Cucala Dance Company provided the following update:

- On October 15, 2025, Cucala Dance Company will participate in LaGuardia Community College's Hispanic Heritage Celebration. A workshop will take place at the event, and there will be free salsa lessons.
- A Halloween Party with salsa dancing will take place on October 25, 2025.
- Link to the Cucala Dance's website: www.cucaladance.com

LIC-A

Nancy Bruno of LIC-A provided the following update:

- Several shows have recently opened, including the Pietra Prize exhibition at The Factory.
- LIC-A will host an "Off the Wall" event at the Plaxall Gallery, beginning in early November 2025 and running for about a month
- LIC-A open call :
<https://licartists.org/so/94PcdqwMT?languageTag=en&cid=32643463-774e-4d24-a662-670ff9ab9439>

Culture Lab

Edjo Wheeler of Culture Lab provided the following update:

- Culture Lab is partnering with LIC-A to host an affordable art fair at Culture Lab.
- An exhibition called "Fiber of Being" is currently on view. It is a textile show that showcases the process of textiles being transformed into art.
- Free comedy shows are held in the front gallery every other Thursday.
- Ayo Ohs will have a concert called "A Minor Relief" on October 17, 2025, at Culture Lab.
- Sunset Jazz, a free program, takes place every Friday at 8:00 PM.
- A trunk-or-Treat & Halloween Festival will take place in Culture Lab's parking lot, where children can trick-or-treat from decorated car trunks on October 25, 2025.
- Speak Easier Language Exchange takes place on the fourth Saturday of every month.
- Andy and Suzanna's Kids' Halloween Concert will take place on October 26, 2025.

- On Halloween, Habbina Habbina will perform at Culture Lab.
- Link to Culture Lab's event calendar: <https://www.culturelablic.org/calendar>

Committee Member Updates

Karesia Batan, the Chair, provided the following update:

- On October 16, 2025, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM at Lowery Plaza, an event she organized with the help of Sunnyside Shines, will take place to honor Filipino American History. There will be traditional Filipino Dance, traditional music, line dancing, snacks, and treats from local Filipino businesses.
- Flushing Town Hall's Go Grant is now available. The deadline to apply for the grant is December 18, 2025. The link to the grant is below:
<https://www.flushingtownhall.org/GOQueensGrant>
- She plans to invite Flushing Town Hall to a committee meeting to provide more information on the grant.
- Hunters Point Library is now open on Sundays. She hopes to have someone from the Queens Public Library system attend the committee meetings regularly, as libraries fall within the committee's purview.
- Previously, Queens Borough President Donovan Richards' office agreed with Ms. Batan's proposal to hold an event that would allow Queens arts and cultural committees or those interested in forming one to convene at Queens Borough Hall. At this event, they can potentially discuss these topics:
 - What are arts and culture affairs like in every district in Queens?
 - How to increase civic engagement from artists across the borough and how to address their needs better.
 - How to help each other with common issues, goals, or initiatives, such as creating an Arts and Culture Committee when enough members of a Community Board are interested in forming one and serving as members.
- Ms. Batan added that she is waiting for a confirmation date so that planning for the event can begin.
- There was a brief discussion about budget priorities, and the Chair stated that she is currently accepting requests.
- On October 29, 2025, the City Council will vote on the OneLIC rezoning.
- She expressed interest in exploring a potential long-term initiative related to the scope of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). While the DEIS outlines the scope of a project and provides studies on areas such as schools and resiliency, it does not currently include a study of the Arts and Cultural Affairs sector. She stated that she would like the committee to advocate for its inclusion in future DEIS reviews.

Eric Narburgh, Vice Chair of the committee, provided the following updates:

- Open House New York will take place on October 18 and 19, 2025.

- Materials for the Arts is hosting an open studio event, along with adjacent programming
- Additional links for drop-ins for October 18 and 19, 2025 Open House NY drop-ins this weekend in CB2:
 - Materials for the Arts: <https://ohny.org/place/materials-for-the-arts-warehouse/>
 - Nikolas Weinstein Studios: <https://ohny.org/place/nikolas-weinstein-studios/>
 - Stickbulb: <https://ohny.org/place/stickbulb-2/>
- Nearby:
 - Socrates Sculpture Park: <https://ohny.org/place/socrates-sculpture-park-2/>
 - Museum of the Moving Image: <https://ohny.org/place/museum-of-the-moving-image/>
- The Historic District Council's (HDC) Six to Celebrate survey is now live. The survey seeks community feedback on buildings, locations, and clusters of structures that may be candidates for preservation. He noted that he will discuss with Michael Zoorob, the treasurer, how to distribute the survey to get community engagement similar to that of the CB2's budget priorities survey.
 - Survey in English: <https://forms.gle/v98eDTrF8Bhb5gXz7>
 - Survey in Spanish: <https://forms.gle/TpFhCSjoampxdP6d7>
- On October 18, 2025, the Art Deco Society will conduct a tour in Sunnyside, and HDC will provide for a member of CB2 to attend in order to gather information on the sites included for the purposes of the community study. Link to the event: <https://artdecosocietyofnewyork.wildapricot.org/event-6312745>

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rafael Nava