

ACRE (Artists Co-creating Real Equity) Platform

ACRE is an intergenerational, multi-racial group of artists and cultural workers committed to organizing for racial equity in the influential realms of art and culture. Creating in multiple genres and at various stages of growth in our artistic fields, we are artists and community organizers united by the foundational anti-racist principles of The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. In our current work based in the northeast United States, we are focused on five primary areas: racial equity in arts education, funding, coverage in media, curation, and casting. We invite specialists in these fields who are aligned with ACRE's mission to visit our monthly meetings to share insights, discuss new language, and contribute unique perspectives.

1. Arts Education: We envision a multiplicity of canons.

An equitable cultural landscape is one wherein teachers and arts curricula emphasize a broader and multi-faceted understanding of the canon, and these courses are equitably available in elementary and secondary school as well as universities and conservatories. Arts educators must understand and embrace the value of non-European and non-Western forms.

A recent Stanford University study analyzed a pilot program of ethnic studies classes at three San Francisco high schools and found that, on average, when ninth-graders are encouraged to enroll in the course, their attendance increased by 21%, while grade-point averages surged nearly a grade and a half— striking results, according to the researchers. <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/14/stanford-study-at-risk->

2. Funding: We envision charitable funding driven by racial equity.

Arts funding is a vital part of the arts and culture ecosystem in the United States and it is distributed with major racial disparity. Philanthropic organizations must shift away from using European standards for artistic excellence and away from staffing and artist engagement that prioritizes white organizational culture. Awarded artists should match the racial demographic makeup of the funder's area whether that be national, regional, or local. ACRE commits to working with funders to co-create this new reality while we also enact communal funding methods on our own.

A recent survey in arts philanthropy reports that the majority of arts funding supports large organizations with budgets greater than \$5 million. Such organizations, which comprise less than 2 percent of the universe of arts and cultural nonprofits, receive more than half of the sector's total revenue. Further, only 10 percent of grant dollars made with a primary or secondary purpose of supporting the arts explicitly benefit underserved communities, including lower-income populations, communities of color and other disadvantaged groups. <http://ncrp.org/paib/arts-culture-philanthropy>

3. Media Coverage: We envision media coverage informed by examination of racial bias.

News coverage by mainstream media outlets of arts events and books by people of color is paltry and when it exists, it is usually delivered from a patronizing or culturally ignorant position of unearned authority. We urge cultural gatekeepers who write about art to participate

in Undoing Racism work. ACRE lifts up writers and outlets such as Eva Yaa Asantewaa of *Dance Enthusiast*, and *Racialicious*. With our own outlets and dollars, we must center journalists who do their work responsibly, and de-center critics who work from unexamined positions of implicit racial bias. We particularly support innovative strategic media platforms that employ and cover art by people of color.

A recent review by a *New York Times* dance critic is one egregious example. In addressing the work of a company whose leader has nearly 60 years of experience and practice in African-American dance forms, he lectures that: "...much of the time it looks as though the dancers — six powerful women joined by one gentle man — have been left to themselves, asked to respond in the moment, as if they were jazz musicians. Jazz improvisation requires a lot more discipline and preparation than these dancers appear to have." <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/11/arts/dance/review-urban-bush-women-channel-john-coltrane-at-bam.html>

4. Casting: We envision casting directors who can lead public perceptions, not follow them.

Recent news responding to the lack of diversity in stage, screen and TV (#oscarssowhite, etc.) brings attention to the blaring inequity actors of color face in their profession. It also points to a massive underutilization of talent, and blandness in the creative growth of creative industries. We insist that all those working in performing arts hiring (ie: casting agents, artistic directors, choreographers, live music directors, producers, etc.) attend an Understanding & Undoing Racism Workshop as a first step in addressing their personal biases when casting projects.

Regardless of who is to blame, the statistics are bleak. The AAPAC's report found that Latinx people were cast in 3% of all roles, despite representing roughly 29% of New York City; while 13% of the city is Asian American, Asians comprised only 3% of roles on the city's stages. African American actors were cast in 16% of all roles, despite the fact that, according to 2010 U.S. Census data, they make up 23% of the city's population. Caucasians filled 77% of all roles, far outweighing their respective population size. Only 33% of New York City is white. http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/news/02-2013/less-than-a-quarter-of-broadway-and-off-broadway-r_64371.html

5. Curation: We envision curation that is informed by anti-racist principles.

Book editors, performing arts presenters, and curators play a pivotal role in guiding the popular imagination and use of leisure time. We urge our colleagues to engage in Undoing Racism work to better understand their power in this area, and to stop embracing and promoting art that is at its core based in cultural misappropriation or disrespectful tropes such as blackface (worn in New York recently by a widely presented choreographer). We are committed, as artists, organizers, and consumers, to partner only with venues and individuals who wish to deepen their understanding of their important role in co-creating equity within arts fields.

A 2015 Mellon Foundation survey reports that "although 28 percent of museum staffs are from minority backgrounds, the great majority of these workers are concentrated in security, facilities, finance and human resources jobs. Among museum curators, conservators, educators

and leaders, only 4 percent are African American and 3 percent Hispanic.”
<https://aamd.org/our-members/from-the-field/art-museum-diversity-survey>

6. Space: We envision rehearsal and performances spaces that embrace all disciplines.

We insist that performing arts studios and spaces/venues maintain accountability to a broad range of cultural performance practices by being prepared to facilitate and accommodate the varied need of these different practices (i.e. be able to accommodate live drumming, invest in floors that can be used by Tap and Flamenco dancers, etc.). These venues must expand their marketing and advertisement so that it reaches and reflects the range of communities who could benefit from their services. Most New York rehearsal spaces have neglected to invest in soundproofing, and have banned live percussion, which effectively blocks many artists practicing African Diaspora forms from having consistent work and practice space to perfect their crafts.

“NYC Space Finder lists 1605 rehearsal spaces in NYC. Only 493 of them, or 30%, allow live percussion. 271 of them, or 17%, allow tap shoes.” <http://nyc.spacefinder.org/>

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