

July 24-October 17, 2020

May Day and the People's Art

**REVOLUTION
ON TRIAL**

New Haven's Black Panthers at 50

artspace 

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Kwadwo Adae
Chloë Bass
Alex Callender
Melanie Crean
Ice The Beef
Paul Bryant Hudson
Miguel Luciano

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REVOLUTION ON TRIAL PROGRAM SERIES:

Curator & Artist Talk
Wednesday, July 29, 5:30-7pm

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REVOLUTION ON TRIAL PODCAST

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“Throughout time the colonized and the enslaved have taken action to break the yoke of violent subjugation and break free of social and economic chains. Power based in personal and structural greed is violent. Power based in love for humanity is sacred.”

— Ericka Huggins

KWADWO ADAE

Kerry Norm
2020 2020
36" x 24" 36" x 24"
oil on canvas oil on canvas

Addys Sarah
2020 2020
36" x 24" 36" x 24"
oil on Canvas oil on canvas

CHLOË BASS

A hand that held and loved someone (Personal Choice #3)
2020
video
running time: 4 minutes, 17 seconds

ALEX CALLENDER

History Constructs the House That Sometimes Holds Us
2020
installation size variable
graphite pencil and acrylic on Stonehenge paper, printed vinyl
Photo Tex wallpaper, wood

wallpaper layout, design by Ryan Paxton

wood fabrication, Jordan Waller

[Crown Street Window]
They Wrote to Tell Me of How It All Ended
2019
48" x 90"
graphite, acrylic, ink on paper

Vanesa
2020
36" x 24"
oil on canvas

Ericka
2020
36" x 24"
oil on canvas

MELANIE CREAM

untitled portraits, nine women, work in progress
2019-ongoing
nine 10'x8" pieces of paper, various configurations
ink on paper

ICE THE BEEF

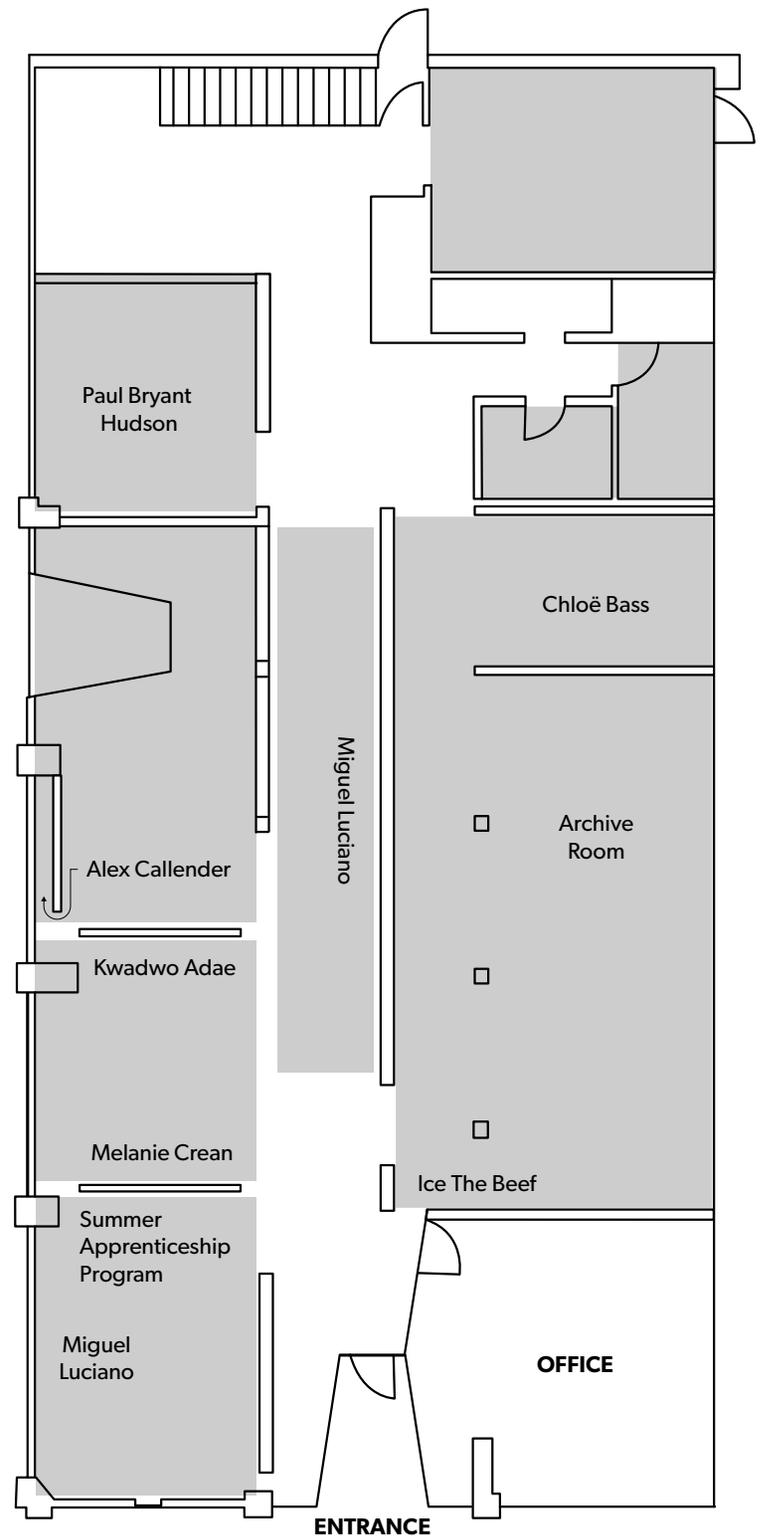
I Am You
video
running time: 12 minutes, 43 seconds

PAUL BRYANT HUDSON

Soundtrack
audio experience
running time: 12 minutes
Collaborators, Trey Moore and Jeremiah Fuller

MIGUEL LUCIANO

Shields / Escudos
2020
35" x 21" x 3.5" each
10 protest shields made from decommissioned school buses in Puerto Rico



The Art of Dreaming, Loving, and Thriving with New Haven's Black Panthers

REVOLUTION ON TRIAL: May Day and The People's Art, New Haven's Black Panthers at 50 spotlights the enduring spirit of collective action for liberation in this city and beyond. This exhibition originated as an homage to the May Day 1970 protests organized by the Black Panthers countering the murder charges against eight of the New Haven chapter members.¹ However, this process later developed into a richer undertaking. From the onset of the community-centered planning meetings, which started last summer with activists, artists, teachers, historians, librarians, and curators, it became apparent that the scope of this project exceeded the initial plan. The lens needed to embrace Black New Haven's deep organizing roots of the past and today. The abundant energy at those meetings signaled this critical narrative has something to offer everyone fighting oppressive forces in our troubling era of worldwide health crisis, escalating poverty, ongoing state-sanctioned murders, and mounting authoritarian rule across the globe.

The reunion of principal members of New Haven's Black Panthers, chapter founder Ericka Huggins and George Edwards at the first gathering, who had been out of touch since the 1970 trial, made it clear that this history is both real and spectacular. Today when many people reminisce about the Panthers, images of fists and Black people donning berets, leather jackets, and Afros come straight to mind. Others who know a bit more about the group's political organizing also reflect on its various community-based initiatives such as the free health care clinics, breakfasts for students, and other programs. Additionally, some even may recall that the arts were a significant factor in this revolutionary group's organizing. Back in 1969 artist Emory Douglas, the Panther's Minister of Culture, who managed their weekly newspaper, noted that "... art enlightens the party to continue its vigorous attack against the enemy, as well as educate the masses of black people."² The arts operated as a tool of empowerment through conveying working-class Black life and "visually theoriz[ing] black liberation."³ For the Panthers, art did not operate as fetishized consumer goods. Rather it belonged to ordinary people, aligned with the Party's action-oriented ethos, and radiated visions of freedom.

Artists Kwadwo Adae, Chloë Bass, Alex Callender, Melanie Crean, Ice the Beef, Paul Bryant Hudson, and Miguel Luciano take up the torch of this collective spirit. Drawing sustenance from existing New Haven archives and activists' oral histories, they work across a range of media to examine and reimagine the content, shape, erasures, and function of records, symbols of justice and revolution, expressions of Black joy and care, and global, decolonial ramifications of the "trial of the century."⁴ As the artists focus on liberation, dreams, love, and thriving, they concentrate on two paths – archives and protests in motion. *REVOLUTION ON TRIAL* honors and reissues the Panthers' revolutionary demand for self-determination. Ideally this call will spark more freedom actions by and for all Black and oppressed communities everywhere.⁵

Archive

Selections of certain histories are held in formal institutions. And only a fragment of those are widely known. Much of the past exists in people's memories, testimonies, belongings, on city streets, and in the land. As Chloë Bass, Kwadwo Adae, Ice the Beef, and Alex Callendar challenge the frames and erasures of institutional archives, they uncover how the people shape their destinies.

CHLOË BASS

A hand that held and loved someone (Personal Choice #3)

2020

video

running time: 4 minutes, 17 seconds

In *A hand that held and loved someone*, conceptual artist Chloë Bass bridges distances across time, space, and hearts by concentrating on histories of love that are typically overlooked in records of revolution. Breathing new life into film footage of Ericka Huggins and demonstrators at the May Day 1970 protests on the New Haven Green, the artist insists on giving words and space to feelings. Her annotative strategy operates as a form of care and aligns with Huggins' own poetry writing. While incarcerated at Niantic Prison before the trial, the activist reflected on her longings for freedom and reconnection with nature and people. Bass demonstrates that the careful attention to intimacies of life and social movements holds life's essence. Her meditative message becomes a part of our existence.

"Make revolution a place where we can stay. That's what love is."

— Chloë Bass

KWADWO ADAE

Kerry | Addys | Norm | Sarah | Vanesa | Ericka

2020

36" x 24"

oil on canvas

New Haven painter and activist Kwadwo Adae celebrates his compatriots and heroes: Kerry Ellington, Addys Castillo, Norm Clement, Ericka Huggins, Sarah Pimente, and Vanesa Suárez in his protest portrait series. Dressed in their "protest armor," these local activists and community organizers, who each have worked to improve the greater New Haven area, proudly hold their tools of dissent. While photography tends to dominate protest imagery, Adae's painted tributes align the subjects with honorific portraiture, a genre typically associated with elite classes. However, here the centralized formats and streamlined backgrounds retain a sense of ease and immediate accessibility.

Adae is known for uniting his passion for nature, justice, and art. His current Newhallville outdoor mural project, *Sparrows*, responds to the Hamden and Yale University 2019 police shooting directed at Stephanie Washington and Paul Witherspoon.

ICE THE BEEF

I Am You

video

running time: 12 minutes, 43 seconds

"There is an old African saying, "I am we." If you met an African in ancient times and asked him who he was, he would reply, "I am we." ⁶

In concert with director Chaz Carmon of New Haven's youth mentorship organization Ice the Beef, six young Black women recite poems Ericka Huggins wrote during her incarceration at Niantic Prison in the video *I Am You*. Embodying various female Black Panthers –

Huggins, Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown, Frederika Newton, Kathleen Cleaver, and others – the young leaders emphasize the communal kinship of the adage, “I am we.” Through occupying prominent New Haven sites, performers Ronisha Moore, Elaine Lester, Arianna Rivera, Catherine Wicks, Priscilla Adopo, and Nyrobi Vargas defy archival redactions and ground Black women’s histories in the city’s fiber. Similar to Huggins’ role as the founder of New Haven’s Black Panther chapter, these young women forge new paths. They reveal that the revolutionary essence of yesterday thrives today.

ALEX CALLENDER

History Constructs the House That Sometimes Holds Us

2020

installation size variable

graphite pencil and acrylic on Stonehenge paper, printed vinyl Photo Tex wallpaper, wood

Wallpaper layout design, Ryan Paxton

Wood fabrication, Jordan Waller

[Crown Street Window]

They Wrote to Tell Me of How It All Ended

2019

48” x 90”

graphite, acrylic, ink on paper

The individual haunting drawings of Alex Callender appear both otherworldly and archaeological. Rooted in historical maps, property records, and architectural sketches from the 17th century to now, *History Constructs the House that Sometimes Holds Us*, exposes centuries of housing inequality in New Haven.⁷ The wallpaper’s repeat design resembling toile fabric conveys the frequency of displacement Black communities experience. Callender’s use of toile also evokes a colonialist connection as traditionally this fabric often showcases images of othered people in so-called “exotic” landscapes. Through applying the wallpaper to the gallery, the artist grounds Artspace in this troubling archive. This history of land

displacement has shaped all of New Haven’s spaces, institutions, and people. It has created generational wealth for some and generational poverty for others.

While the artist exposes the reality of this longstanding extractive state violence and its relationship to desire, she also signals Black resistance. Images, such as those with silhouetted figures with arms raised or holding signs, acknowledge that Black people are active agents in fighting the conditions, fighting for their own liberation.

Protest in Motion

Liberation movements move people. People come together to educate, to care, to fight, to love. Paul Bryant Hudson, Melanie Crean, and Miguel Luciano embrace the power of orchestrating motion to create worlds of joy, justice, and self-determination.

PAUL BRYANT HUDSON

Soundtrack

audio experience

running time: 12 minutes

Collaborators, Trey Moore and Jeremiah Fuller

When considering the New Haven Black Panthers, Paul Bryant Hudson’s mind shifts to sonic landscapes. As a longtime New Haven resident, musician, and composer, his accounting of the May Day 1970 protests concentrates on dimensions of sound. His family felt the power of the moment. However, Hudson realizes his family’s recollection of that time is one and his another. As he explores the history, he charts his own journey and connections across time and music. His *Soundtrack*, a collaborative project featuring recordings of speeches overlaid over music, broadcasts the demonstrators’ feelings of community, optimism, and love.

MELANIE CREAN

untitled portraits, 9 women, work in progress

2019-ongoing

nine 10" x 8" pieces of paper, various configurations

ink on paper

In Melanie Crean's forthcoming video project, the artist considers embodiments of justice. Countering the New Haven Courthouse's 1913 painted murals by Thomas Gilbert White, which presents Justice as a White allegorical figure, Crean turns attention to nine New Haven Black, Brown, and Indigenous women leaders who have dedicated their lives to building up their communities and fighting for equity - Diane Brown, Beatrice Codianni, Sharon Dickey, Kerry Ellington, Debbie Elmore, Barbara Fair, Hanan Hameen, Hope Metcalf, and Vanessa Suárez.

The Covid-19 public health crisis interrupted the development of their collaborative performance. In the interim, the artist has asked the innovators to record their interpretation of various terms associated with liberation. In some ways movement has stopped, or slowed down. In this halting zone, we might reflect on their thoughtful responses in relation to the occasion of this 50th anniversary of the trial of the New Haven Black Panthers. In doing so, we might question the validity of the U.S. court system, which like White's paintings, was never designed to serve Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. The leaders' reflections appear to tap into the roots the Black Panthers' established long ago. "We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people, other people of color, all oppressed people inside the United States, We want freedom for all Black and oppressed people now held in U.S. federal, state, county, city, and military prisons and jails, We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black and oppressed communities."⁸ The rumble lives on.

MIGUEL LUCIANO

Shields / Escudos

2020

35" x 21" x 3.5" each

10 protest shields made from decommissioned school buses in Puerto Rico

Installed neatly in a row against white gallery walls, Miguel Luciano's nine repurposed steel panels from former school buses appear to function simply as a striking visual experience. However, *Shields / Escudos* takes on Emory Douglas' charge for Revolutionary Art in direct ways. Luciano, a native of San Juan, created these shields as actual tools of self-defense for Puerto Ricans rising up in protest against local and U.S. federal economic and political malfeasance. The people know their power. Last year nearly half a million demonstrators filled the streets of downtown San Juan calling for the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló due to corruption. While they were successful in ousting him, the road to well-being for all Puerto Ricans is long one.

As the artist notes:

Hundreds of schools have closed in Puerto Rico in recent years due to debt crisis austerity programs, Washington neglect and local corruption, natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes), and shifting populations. Over 25 % of public schools on the island have now been shuttered (all pre-Covid). Some of those schools were sold for \$1.00 to U.S. non-profits, while local, Puerto Rican non-profit orgs were ineligible to apply.

The metal bus armor that once protected children while in transit to local schools, are here repurposed into protest shields to protect those fighting for the future of our children's education, and for our right to be self-determined, and free.

I started this project over a year ago, after seeing more and more abandoned schools and school buses on the island as austerity increases. This work is inspired by those who continue to rise up in protest against the violence of racism and colonialism, from Puerto Rico to the U.S., and in honor of the historic solidarity between Black and Puerto Rican liberation movements, from the legacy of the Black Panther Party to the Young Lords.⁹

REVOLUTION ON TRIAL illuminates and demands insurgent futures. Steeped in archives and oral testimonies, the creations of Kwadwo Adae, Chloë Bass, Ice the Beef, Alex Callender, Paul Bryant Hudson, Melanie Crean, and Miguel Luciano acknowledge the state violence New Haven’s Black Panthers confronted, which in some ways resonate with today’s repressive measures. However, the artists also recognize the great optimism of that era. The Black Panthers built a revolution for liberation of all oppressed peoples. The surge of worldwide protests against antiBlack racism, increased organizing to abolish the police, and the proliferation of mutual aid networks indicate that our own time is swelling with that belief in freedom. Oppressed people around the world are building power. Similar to the Panthers, our political awakening is fueled by the arts, by dreams, by love, by thriving. We will know we have reached our destination when we are, as Ericka Huggins states, “not asking for freedom – but free.”¹⁰

1. Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Panthers in New Haven*, St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 2000.
2. Emory Douglas, “Revolutionary Art/Black Liberation,” *The Black Panther*, May 18, 1969, quoted in Amiri Baraka, “Emory: Douglas: A ‘Good Brother,’ A ‘Bad’ Artist,” in *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, New York: Rizzoli, 2007, 178.
3. Ericka Doss, “‘Revolutionary Art Is a Tool for Liberation’: Emory Douglas and Protest Aesthetics at the Black Panther.” *New Political Science* 21, (2), 1999: 245-259 (quoted in Farmer, Ashley D., *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 201, 61).
4. Paul Bass, “Seale/Huggins Transcript Returns to Public View,” *New Haven Independent*, May 12, 2015, https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/seale-huggins_trial_transcript_returns_to_public_realm/ (accessed 7/8/2020).
5. The first of the Black Panther Party’s Ten-Point Program is: “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black and oppressed communities.” See “The Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program,” University of California Press [blog], <https://www.ucpress.edu/blog/25139/the-black-panther-partys-ten-point-program/> (accessed July 22, 2020).
6. Huey, P. Newton “I Am We,” in *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs: The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation*, 2008, 151.
7. Each drawing with the toile wallpaper design, engages with or is inspired by archival materials combined with present day issues that deal with narratives around housing.

Imagery sources:

- New Haven Historical Society
Oak street, Dixwell, and Wooster Sq. residential relocation archives, Alvin Mermin and the Redevelopment Housing Authority papers, and May Day archival papers, that outline the federal and municipal roll in housing discrimination that leads up to the crisis and social unrest of the 1970’s and the May Day protests.
- Use of Historical Maps and architectural renderings from 1650-present, that help connect the historical lineages of housing inequity in New Haven. Also provides moments of historical resistance.
- State of Connecticut Archives, used to find the legal case of John Wahn, a formerly enslaved person who was granted freedom and land, only to face surveillance and legal challenge of his property from the state. His house or land that was in dispute was most likely on the block of Elm between Church and Orange, 1660-1690’s.
- The Mary and Eliza Freeman House, Bridgeport Connecticut
- William Lanson “Statement of Facts”, 1850, written by William Lanson. The landmark or bench piece, is based on a map entitled, Reference Map for Early Negro New Haven 1810-1850. In the Art Space folder, you will find a map designating the specific piece of area the map is constructed to represent in the “Negro Section”. However, the map represents more broadly, the landscape in which William Lanson was a pivotal figure, and the various areas of free Black communities that existed in present day Wooster Square neighborhood. William Lanson was an engineer and community leader in the first few decades of the 1800’s before he was defamed and financially ruined by the New Haven elite.

Some drawings are based on current day activism for housing justice as written about in the *New Haven Independent*.

Alex Callender, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2020.

8. “The Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program.”

9. Miguel Luciano, e-mail message to author, July 21, 2020.

10. Ericka Huggins, [poems from prison], in *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, London: Verso, 2016, 1971.

Acknowledgements

This exhibition would not have been possible without the guidance, wisdom, rigor, strength, resilience, perseverance, humor, and joy of Black Panther Party members George Edwards, Elise Browne, and Ericka Huggins. George, Elise and Ericka, we are forever in debt to you for your service to our community, for your willingness to die fighting for the liberation of oppressed people worldwide, for your anti-racist platform, and for your openness to working with anyone who wants to help solve the problems of our world. We tried to emulate your way of being in community, in its flow, as we planned this exhibition, starting from a place of listening and allowing for community members to lean in, critique, and shape it.

You consistently challenged us to answer the question, “why do you want to tell our stories in a place that shows art?” and we are grateful to you for allowing us to answer in so many different ways. Ultimately, we think of you as creatives, in both the traditional and philosophical senses-- George, you are a drummer, a vocalist, a stage performer, a wordsmith, and can command a packed auditorium and dance floor. You have given away your last cigarette and dollar on several occasions, knowing multiple pathways for pressing on. Elise, you are a creative care taker, whose quiet unflinching belief in the Party and the power of education is breathtaking. Ericka, you are a thought leader, an educator, and a poet, whose words have the power to stop time. You have taught us the most profound life lessons about forgiveness, being a woman, and that “freedom is an inside job.”

Diane Brown, Germano Kimbro, Ala Ochumare, Addys Castillo, Kerry Ellington, Ife Michelle Gardin and Hanifa Washington, you are the reason New Haven is the most incredible place to live. Thank you for reminding us that whatever this commemorative show turned out to be, it would be pointless if young people were not at the table. You model mentorship at every turn, and our field has so much to learn from you. Daniel Pizarro, Dyme Ellis and Rebecca Crocker, thank you for bringing young people in and serving as the mentors to this year’s group of summer apprentices, especially as you carefully moved the curriculum online.

Paul Bass, thank you for loaning us your personal archive and digging it out of your office with care and thoroughness. You continue to shed light on how easy it is for well-meaning white scholars to replicate the colonial projects they seek to work against when they author Black narratives. Of the six books written about the New Haven Panthers between 1973-2015, only two are authored by Black men, and zero are authored by Black women. There is work to be done and work to undo. I respect the times you have publicly questioned whether or not you should have been the one to author *Murder in the Model City*, and as a white woman, I have personally struggled with the question of whether or not I should have played a role in curating this show. I join you in the work of questioning and calling out manifestations of white-centered logic and power, especially when they are reinforced by the leaders in our fields.

Jason Bischoff-Wurstle, Mandi Jackson, Matt Jacobson, Bill Landis, Michael Morand, Risë Nelson, David Rosen and Elihu Rubin, thank you for sharing your archives and institutional wisdom.

Mercy Quaye, you are brilliant. We are so grateful to have had you lead us through the production of the Revolution on Trial podcast. When you first came on board, the thought was that you were going to serve as our communications consultant, but you are so much more. Your work expresses what it is to be human, to move through elements beyond our control, and to do work in an embodied space of writing and reporting on history.

Helen Kauder, thank you for planting the conceptual seed for mounting this show way back in 2016, for being a nexus of community building, local histories, and for your leadership in securing the funding that allowed Artspace to honor the artists and collaborators for their time and labor. Joshua Aiken, Minh Vu, Nyeda Sam, and Rebecca Amonor thank you for sifting through physical and online archives, helping us to make sense of the issues at hand, and vulnerably confronting the stakes of writing a living history. Katie Jurkiewicz, Shannon Blencowe, and Lisa Dent, thank you for holding down the fort, and for being interpreters of this show as it reaches new audiences this summer and fall. Paul Theriault, you always remind me

what a privilege it is to do the thing you love for a living. Thank you for being the unseen force behind all of Artspace's beauty.

This project was helped through the generous collaboration of Gateway Community College, who sponsored student Devon Reaves to serve as Kwadwo Adu's studio assistant, the Af-Am Cultural Center at Yale and the Stetson Branch of the New Haven Public Library, who hosted our working group during the planning stages of the show, and Yale's American Studies Department, who provided research support. We also appreciate the generosity of photographers Stephen Shames and David Fenton, who allowed us to use their 1970s images to build recognition for our effort, and the early enthusiasm of the New Haven Museum and the Beinecke Library.

To the artists in the show, I love you for making art that moves into action, for devoting your life to deep thinking, and making things with your hands. Throughout the planning phase, I often wondered if the Panthers would have visited Artspace were it 1970. Your loyalties to your own communities makes me think that you would have been among their comrades.

To my co-curator La Tanya Autry, you have taught me to be both cautious and bold, and to think with the body. It is rare to find someone who demands that our major art institutions live up to the promises they outline in mission and value statements. Between breaks, never stop fighting.

My deepest gratitude to the Grace Jones Richardson Charitable Trust, Connecticut Humanities, The Public Welfare Foundation, JANA Foundation, Connecticut Office of the Arts, and Friends of Artspace for entrusting us with the resources to produce this project, which fills in some of the gaps of this historic anniversary.

And finally, to all those unnamed who support people over profit, thank you for keeping culture alive.

Sarah Fritchey
Curator, Artspace

We are on Quinnipiac Land

Artspace is situated on the sacred homelands of the Quinnipiac people, the descendants of indigenous people who occupied Connecticut over 8,000 years ago. We pay respect to Quinnipiac peoples, past, present, and future, and their continuing presence in the homeland and throughout the Quinnipiac diaspora. *Revolution on Trial* acknowledges the ways in which U.S. imperialism, capitalism and the colonial project have strained our relationship to the land we own and occupy, permanently and temporarily, paralleling our relationships to each other.

