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ANAÏS DUPLAN

press@davidkordanskygallery.com
www.davidkordanskygallery.com
T: 323.935.3030 F: 323.935.3031

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ANAÏS DUPLAN

Anaïs Duplan is a trans* poet, curator, and artist. He is the author of a forthcoming book of essays on Black digital media artists, Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture (Black Ocean, 2020); a full-length poetry collection, Take This Stallion (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016); and two poetry chapbooks, 9 Poems/The Lovers (Belladonna*, 2018) and Mount Carmel and the Blood of Parnassus (Monster House Press, 2017). His writing has been published by Hyperallergic, PBS *News Hour*, Academy of American Poets, and Poetry Society of America. He has taught poetry as an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Iowa, Columbia University, and St. Joseph's College.

Duplan's video and performance work has been exhibited at 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 LA in 2021.

Anaïs Duplan (b. 1992, Jacmel, Haiti) is the founding curator of the Center for Afrofuturist Studies (CAS), a residency program for artists of color. CAS is based in Iowa City, where Duplan received his MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers Workshop in 2017. As an independent curator, he has facilitated artist 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. He now works as Program Manager at Recess, Brooklyn, New York, where he lives and works.

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ANAÏS DUPLAN

born 1992, Jacmel, Haiti
lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

EDUCATION

2017 MFA, Creative Writing, Iowa Writers' Workshop, Iowa City, IA
2014 BA, Bennington College, Bennington, VT

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
(* Indicates a publication)

2021 *The Condition of Being Addressable*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
What Is Feminist Art?, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

2019 *Joyous Dystopia*, curated by David Grynn, Daata & Leilani Lynch, Daata Editions x Bass Museum, Bass Museum, Miami, FL
Screenshots: Video Launch with Daata Editions and DIS, NeueHouse, New York, NY
Radical Reading Room, organized by Legacy Russell, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Harlem, NY

2018 **Give Up the Ghost,* Baltic Triennial XIII, Riga, Latvia

2017 **The Only Thing That's New Is Us*, Mathew Gallery, New York, NY
Post-Cyber Feminist International, ICA London, London, England

2016 *#WanderingWILDING: Movement as Movement,* curated by Legacy Russel, Daata Editions, IMT, Gallery, London, England

READINGS AND PERFORMANCES

2020 *Language is a Temptation: Daily Readings from Bernadette Mayer's Memory,* Poet's House, New York, NY

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Spring Broadside Reading III: Anaïs Duplan & Zahra Patterson, Center for Book Arts, New York, NY
QTPOC Meditation Hour, Montez Press Radio
Black Secrets: it ain't english words for it, Montez Press Radio
Sci-Fi Sundays: Ulises, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Endgame: Black Artists on an Urgent Black Future, The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA

2019 *Dan Poppick, Mónica de la Torre, Anaïs Duplan, & Christian Schlegel,* Greenlight Bookstore, Brooklyn, NY
Black Secrets: On Black Musics and the Occult, Montez Press Radio, 2020
A Listening Party with Sable Elyse Smith, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
In Conversation: On Top of All This, The High Line, New York, NY
The Artists' Voice: Anaïs Duplan, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
Emerging Writers Reading Series: Anaïs Duplan, NYU, New York, NY
Anaïs Duplan, a Reading and Conversation, Brown University, Providence, RI
Tuxedo Mascs: A Transmasculine Poetry Reading, Bluestockings, New York, NY
Anaïs Duplan and Julian Talamantez Brolaski, Iowa Writers' Workshop, Iowa City, IA
VERSES. VOL 1 x Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project, The Kitchen, New York, NY

2018 *unbag: Reverie Launch Party*, Local Project, Long Island City, NY
Anaïs Duplan, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN
Celebrate Winter While We Still Have Seasons, Housing Works, New York, NY
Brown Paper Zine and Small Press Fair, Barnard College, New York, NY
Belladonna Roll Call Reading Series with Anaïs Duplan & Yumi Dineen Shiroma,* Belladonna* Collaborative, New York, NY

2017 *jubilat/Jones Reading Series hosts Anais Duplan and Zach Savich*, UMass Amherst, Amherst, MA
University of Richmond Poetry Festival: Reading with Anaïs Duplan, Tarfia Faizullah, and Peter LaBerge, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA
Monster House Presents: A reading by Anaïs Duplan, Fell Gallery, Bloomington, IN
Poetry Poetry VII with Chen Chen, Anaïs Duplan, Rajiv Mohabir & Monica Sok, Asian American Writers' Workshop, New York, NY

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2016 *Anaïs Duplan & Loma (Christopher Soto),* Poetry Project
Segue Reading Series: Anaïs Duplan & Marie Buck, Zinc Bar, New York, NY

WORKSHOPS AND TALKS

2020 *Studio LIVE | Anaïs Duplan x Legacy Russell*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Harlem, NY

2019 Black Curators' Roundtable, Iowa City Public Library, Iowa City, IA
Black Secrets: On Black Musics and the Occult, Montez Press Radio
Outside the Box: Anaïs Duplan on Lubaina Himid: Work from Underneath, New Museum, New York, NY
From Score to Speculative Lit with Artist Kameelah Janan Rasheed and Writer Anaïs Duplan, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY

2018 *Visiting Curator Lecture,* Williams College Graduate School of Art, Williamstown, MA
Meet Over Lunch: Anaïs Duplan presents the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, Residency Unlimited, Brooklyn, NY
Poetics of Emotional Research, Poet's House, New York, NY

RESIDENCIES AND FELLOWSHIPS

2020 SHIFT Residency, EFA Project Space, 2020 - 2021
New York Foundation for the Arts Emerging Leaders Bootcamp

2017 Public Programs Fellow, The Studio Museum in Harlem and MoMA, 2017-2019
Plughaupt Fellow, Iowa Writers Workshop

2016 Curator-in-residence, Residency Unlimited

2015 Writer-in-residence, Ashbery Home School
Curator-in-residence, HEIMA

2014 Poetry Fellow, Bennington College

2013 Stadler Center Fellow, Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets

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SELECTION COMMITTEES

2021 A.I.R Gallery Fellowship

2020 NAACP Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics
Cogswell College Poetry Contest

2019 Brooklyn Art Council Community Art Grant

2918 Queer|Art|Prize for Sustained Achievement

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
(* Indicates non-periodical book, catalog, or other publication)

2020 *Duplan, Anaïs, *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*, Boston: Black Ocean, 2020
McCartha, Madison, "Anaïs Duplan," *Actionbooks.org*, April 16, 2020
"Queer Art Workers Reflect: Anaïs Duplan On "Becoming a Better Lover"—Not Just in a Romantic Sense," *Hyperallergic.com*, 2020
"The Bigger Picture: Recess," *Gagosian Quarterly*, 2020
"Why We Should Read Poetry," *BombMagazine.org,* 2020

2019 Darling, Kristina Marie "Silence in Mount Carmel & the Blood of Parnassus and Take This Stallion," *Ploughshares.com*, October 29, 2019
O'Connor, Chloe, "Black curators discuss 'insiders and outsiders' in the art world," *Dailylowan.com*, October 28, 2019
"In the Flesh: Body Modification as Art," *Studio Magazine*, 2019

2018 *Duplan, Anaïs, *9 Poems/The Lovers,* Belladonna Chaplets, #236, 2018
Henry-Smith, Sean D., "Going Into My Depths," *MaskMagazine.com,* February 2018
"Going Into My Depths," *Mask Magazine*, 2018

2017 *Duplan, Anaïs, *Mount Carmel and the Blood of Parnassus*, Columbus and Bloomington: Monster House Press, 2017
McSweeny, Joyelle, "THE TOXIC AND THE LYRIC IV: ON ANAÏS DUPLAN: RADICAL INTIMACY AS NEW HISTORY POEM; AS WOUND AND AS CO-BODY; THE SHAKING APART OF ROBERT LOWELL; STRANGE FRUIT AS IED," *Fanzine.com,* December 19, 2017

2016 *Duplan, Anaïs, *Take This Stallion,* Brooklyn: Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016

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Segal, Corinne, “Poet delves into a Civil War spy’s hidden history,” PBS News Hour, *Pbs.org,* April 18, 2016

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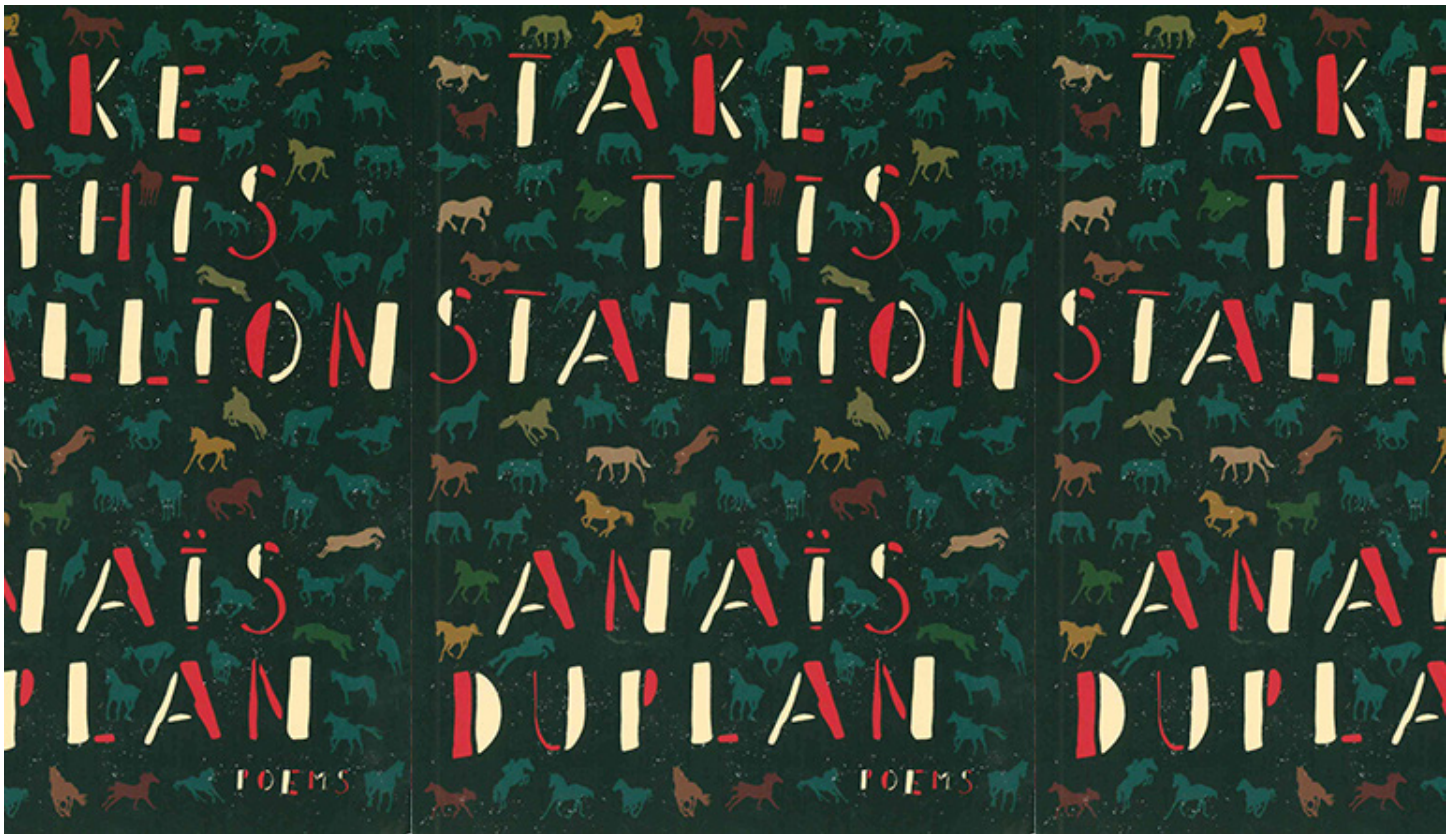
www.davidkordanskygallery.com
T: 323.935.3030 F: 323.935.3031

Darling, Kristina Marie, “Silence in Mount Carmel & the Blood of Parnassus and Take This Stallion,” *Pshares.org,* 2020

PLOUGHSHARES
AT EMERSON COLLEGE

Silence in Mount Carmel & the Blood of Parnassus and Take This Stallion



In a recent article published in *Political Theory*, Mihaela Mihai argues that in recent years, “complex injustices [have been] passing as ‘misfortunes’ that nobody feels responsible for.” Indeed, this displacement of responsibility has contributed to a culture of passive spectatorship, especially when considering instances of racial injustice. As Mihai rightly argues, a world of binary distinctions—good and evil, just and unjust, victim and perpetrator—allows individuals to overlook larger systemic problems that foster injustice.

At the same time, many writers, like Morgan Parker, Tommy Pico, Anaïs Duplan, and Danez Smith, have been turning to experimental forms as a vehicle for presenting both social criticism and alternative ways of seeing, representing, and understanding what Hannah Arendt calls “the active life”—in other words, the spheres of work, citizenship, and political action. These formally innovative texts naturally lend themselves to a complexity that is missing in much of contemporary discourse, while also fostering a more active role on the part of the reader. For these writers, the most effective way to present a new vision of social relations, and of the systems of meaning and value operating within society, is to model its workings for the reader, to involve them and implicate them within its structures.

Duplan has harnessed the power of both poetic tradition and its silences as he offers a vision of a more just society. Though drawing inspiration from New York School poets, Frank O’Hara in particular, Duplan bears their distinctive poetic techniques into new sociopolitical territory. By invoking the terse lineation of O’Hara’s well-known poems, among them “The Day Lady Died,” “Ann Arbor Variations,” and “Ave Maria,” Duplan creates a provocative relationship between speech and silence. In each of Duplan’s collections, the moments of rupture become both an indictment of the reader and a necessary imperative, as we are made suddenly and startlingly aware of the problematic systems in which we think, write, and relate to others.

For Duplan, literary tradition and this kind of systemic injustice are intricately linked. He writes in "A Love Song to Dean Blunt in Three Parts," an essay included in his multi-genre collection, *Mount Carmel & the Blood of Parnassus*, "I don't want to give up my body just because it's being read incorrectly by the people around me." Duplan skillfully calls attention to the unfair choices that society's broken power structures force upon historically marginalized groups of people. Further, by presenting this text on black paper, with white typeface, Duplan evokes the inversion of these same hierarchies through his visual presentation of the work on the printed page. Indeed, to revise our thinking, we must also reimagine the cultural imagination that we have inherited. After all, the construction of a literary canon, as described by Charles Altieri, is a "manifest power."

Duplan, in the end, claims such power for himself. For example, he writes in "On a Scale of 1-10, How 'Loving' Do You Feel?", from his 2016 poetry collection, *Take This Stallion*:

I don't love Yeezus as much as I love
Yeezus when I'm with you. And rappers
get lonely too. Zip-lining is not
a cure-all. Kim knows that
and knows how to backwards-
straddle a bike like a real woman's woman.

Though steeped in postmodern popular culture, the artistic lineage of this text is strikingly clear. Consider O'Hara's well-known poem, "The Day Lady Died":

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days

Though innovative in its enjambments, most readers would likely find O'Hara's presentation of an international literary tradition dated, dismissive, and problematic. Yet, O'Hara's distinctive lineation, in which the line exists in visible tension with the sentence, still proves provocative for contemporary readers. By rupturing the syntactic unit (for example, "buy / an ugly" and "poets / in Ghana"), O'Hara mirrors the violent impact of Lady's death on the speaker, evoking both postmodern experimentation and its discontents.

In "On a Scale of 1-10, How 'Loving' Do You Feel?", Duplan bears O'Hara's lineation into new and provocative sociopolitical territory. By placing the poetic line in tension with the sentence, Duplan evokes a familiar literary heritage while also revising it. More specifically, he uses O'Hara's literary tropes to create a space in which black popular culture is elevated to the realm of high art, placed squarely and prominently within a heretofore mostly white literary canon.

What's more, Duplan's use of silence, elision, and rupture within this poem, and many others, cultivates a novel relationship between the text and its reader. As each piece unfolds, the unusually timed enjambments remind us of the violence implicit in being made to inhabit a tradition that is hostile to one's voice, aesthetic, and identity. Duplan capitalizes on our culture's general discomfort with silence, anticipating that the reader will eagerly attempt to fill these spaces with narrative. In such a way, Duplan reminds us of the choices we are faced with in engaging with any cultural text: To what extent does our participation become an act of erasure? Can we reimagine speech as a kind of radical listening?
For Duplan, part of conversation is leaving room for the other to speak, a goal that he achieves with each enjambed line, each moment of rupture within the text. In such a way, the silences within *Take This Stallion* and *Mount Carmel & the Blood of Parnassus* become both cultural critique and readerly imperative. Duplan skillfully models radical listening in the relationship he cultivates between the text and its audience, prompting us to reimagine our interactions with artistic tradition and our lives in language.

Later in "On a Scale of 1-10, How 'Loving' Do You Feel?", Duplan writes:

There is so much you don't know
about me. I once met an Australian,
told him he could have my underwear.
He didn't want it. I'm better
when I'm mysterious.
I'm better when I've had a few
days to forget
how much I want you
to want me like you want Kim.

Here, Duplan uses each line break, and each oddly timed silence, to cultivate what Mary Kinzie referred to in *A Poet's Guide to Poetry as* "half-meaning." This gesture proves especially visible in Duplan's choice to break the line after "you don't know" and, similarly, "I'm better." As readers, we wait in suspense to see how the clause will end. After all, most of us have been acculturated to crave wholeness, cohesion, and the resolution of narrative tensions. The moments of silence become liminal spaces, where a transformation of meaning—and the logic that governs the poem—become wholly possible. The fact that Duplan cultivates liminal spaces within the sentences is perhaps most provocative of all. The sentence, and the predominantly Western, predominantly male definition of reason and causation that it represents, is promptly destabilized.

In such a way, the radical listening that Duplan requires of us as readers asks us to suspend the prevailing models for organizing and structuring experience to allow room for alternatives to be proposed. The space of the poem, then, becomes a hypothetical testing ground for new ways of imagining social relations and the communities borne out of them. Duplan writes in "On a Scale of 1-10, How 'Loving' Do You Feel?",

White people like to ask me about my hair.
They say did you get a haircut. I say no
it's the shrinkage. 'White people.'

Don't be so pessimistic.
Don't be so sensitive.
Don't go so slow do it faster
nevermind let me do it flip over.

Here, Duplan moves provocatively between two types of lineation: enjambed lines and lines that end at the same time as the relevant syntactic unit. What's particularly revealing is the fact that the moments of rupture come when the speaker of the poem is addressing the "white people" who appear as a collective throughout the poem. The lineation becomes a powerful social critique, calling our attention to the ways the speaker's voice and narrative are cut short, redacted.

Yet at the same time, this poem is rife with possibility. By the end of the quoted passage, the unusually timed enjambments become a space for transformation, where the rules laid out in the previous lines no longer hold. "Do it faster / nevermind let me flip it over," Duplan writes, his speaker reclaiming agency within the liminal space of the line break, its dangerous and brooding silence.

If the tradition we have inherited is "manifest power," how does a poet working within its confines become a pillar of the resistance? In a promising body of work, Duplan offers us a tentative hypothesis, calling our attention to the apertures, the liminal spaces where the rules of language no longer hold. Culling inspiration from his literary predecessors, Duplan uses familiar New York School tropes to cultivate silence within his poetry and, in doing so, creates liminal spaces where anything becomes possible. Here, in these moments of rupture and elision, the rules of society—and the language that structures our relationships—can be wholly transformed.

Lopez Cassell, Dessane, “Queer Art Workers Reflect: Anaïs Duplan On ‘Becoming a Better Lover’—Not Just in a Romantic Sense,” *Hyperallergic.com,* June 15, 2020

HYPERALLERGIC

Queer Art Workers Reflect: Anaïs Duplan On “Becoming a Better Lover”—Not Just in a Romantic Sense

LGBTQ Pride month is now. Every day in June, we are celebrating the community by featuring one queer art worker and asking them to reflect on what this moment means to them.

Poet, artist, and administrator Anaïs Duplan (all images courtesy Anaïs Duplan; photo by Walid Mohanna)

The month of June is a time to celebrate LGBTQ communities. It’s a moment to reflect on the rich history and culture of the queer community, as well as more recent advances made in the realm of civil liberties. This year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many queer individuals are navigating greater risks to their health, safety, and livelihoods.

Cognizant of the need to stay connected and elevate queer voices amid uncertainty, Hyperallergic is commemorating Pride Month by featuring one queer art worker per day on our website and asking them to reflect on what this time means to them. If you identify as a queer art worker, we’d love to hear from you. Click here to learn more about how to participate.

* * *

Lopez Cassell, Dessane, "Queer Art Workers Reflect: Anaïs Duplan On 'Becoming a Better Lover'—Not Just in a Romantic Sense," *Hyperallergic.com,* June 15, 2020

What's your name?

Anaïs Duplan

Where are you based currently?

Brooklyn, NY

Describe who you are and what you do.

I'm a poet, video artist, arts administrator, and teacher. I received my MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 2017. I'm also the author of a full length collection of poetry, *Take This Stallion* (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016), two poetry chapbooks, *Mount Carmel and the Blood of Parnassus* (Monster House Press, 2017) and *9 Poems/The Lovers* (Belladonna*, 2018), and most recently a book of essays, poems, and interviews called *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture* (Black Ocean, 2020). I'm the founder an artist residency program called the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, which is based in Iowa City. I'm also an adjunct poetry professor at Columbia University and St. Joseph's College. I currently work as Program Manager at Recess.

Tell us about your greatest achievement or something you've done lately that you're proud of.

Lately, I'm very proud of the Center for Afrofuturist Studies. We're coming up on five years, which feels crazy to say. We've always been very true to our DIY, people-centered, artist-run values. We've been lucky in the last few years to receive support from the local and national community, which has allowed us to not just continue our work but to thrive. I'm grateful for the team we've cultivated and the amazing artists (my personal heroes, really) we've been able to work with.

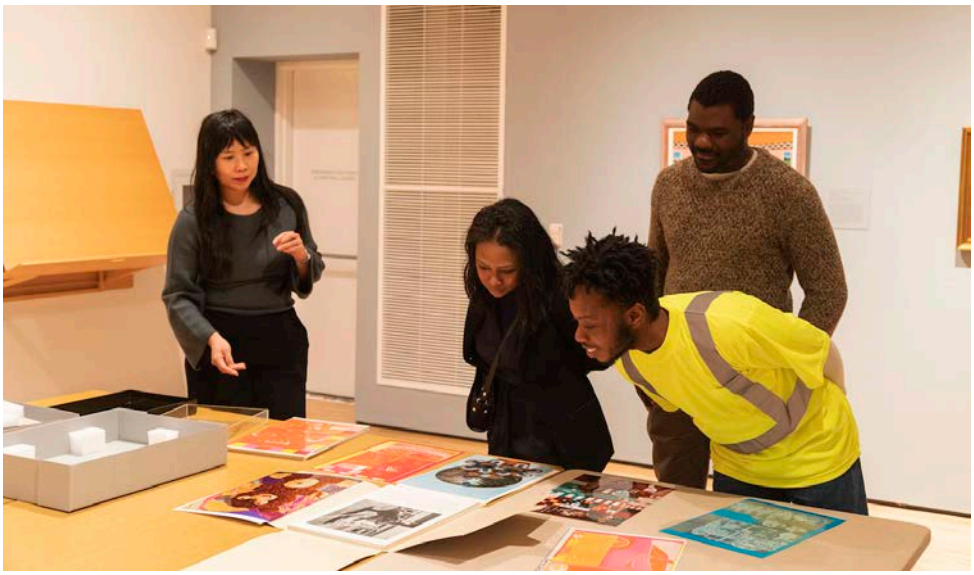
Favorite ways to celebrate your queerness and community?

As a queer trans man, my favorite ways to celebrate my queerness is just by living unafraid to be who I am in a visible way. I'm grateful to have an arts career; this gives me some visibility, a platform that I can then use to give visibility to other QTPOC. It's my professional commitment to uplift the work being done by other QTPOC artists and to provide them support that other, more privileged communities find it easier to come by. I do believe friendship is radical and that love is more than a feeling — it's a way. So, moving in the way of love in my personal and professional spheres and making sure that my work is always leading back to other people of color is how I celebrate community.

What's been top of mind for you lately?

How Black people have survived for so long. A lot of people's white friends are checking in on them right now, asking how we are. I'm not alone in finding it infuriating, because we've persisted for so long without that kind of support and now, to try to respond to it feels like another form of labor being asked by white people from us. So my own wellness practices, really clarifying what my values are, and putting my energy into my health and the health of my community — rather than trying to appease white people who are feeling a sense of fragility right now — is top of mind.

Talk to us about your immediate queer community/support systems. (Feel free to shout out other folks or organizations you think are doing important work.)



Moments from a program presented as part of the "Black Curators' Roundtable" at the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, October 2019 (left to right: Joyce Tsai, Chief Curator at the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art, Eileen Isagon Skyers, Anaïs Duplan, and Gee Wesley)

I'm an arts worker so a lot of my queer community are other QTPOC arts workers I've met over the years, who work across a series of art institutions in New York. We're consistently facing similar challenges, as we try to honor and protect our labor in settings that are eager to drain our resources.

How are you celebrating Pride Month this time around?

By becoming a better lover. Not just in a romantic sense, but really revisiting my philosophy of love, the way I love, and giving that love to the other beautiful queers in my life. That, to me, is the best kind of celebration: cultivated intimacy. Intimacy that you've worked hard for! Not just during Pride Month!

Are there ways you think queer artists and art workers could be better supported?

Oh my god, absolutely. I think institutions should do better at foregrounding the work that art workers of color do — both to non-POC staff and to the public. I think they should also make sure not to tokenize these workers or ask them to do the work of making an institution anti-racist. Institutions should commit to doing that work on their own. For organizations that work with artists, if by now you haven't achieved equity in terms of the artists you're working with––well, I have nothing to say about that! But again, here, not exploiting people, not virtue signaling, but instead making a really concerted effort to change.

In the communities that you're part of, what are you hoping to see shift in the future?

I hope to see more and more embracing of intersectionality. We're lucky to live in New York, I think, because there's more intersectionality happening here, but I'd love for my trans circles to be more connected to my queer circles and for those circles to be more connected to my POC circles and for all those circles to be fully represented in the arts sector. Better and better integration of communities, better feedback systems between these communities.

What's the first thing you're planning to do when it feels safer to physically gather again?

Hug people! Hug a lot of people.

McCartha, Madison, “Anaïs Duplan: An Interview by Madison McCartha,” *ActionBooks.org,* April 16, 2020

Anaïs Duplan: An Interview by Madison McCartha

1) Introduction
Anaïs Duplan is the author of the poetry collection *Take This Stallion* (Brooklyn Arts Press), the chapbook *Mount Carmel & the Blood of Mount Parnassus* (Monster House Press), and a book of essays and interviews, *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*, forthcoming from Black Ocean.

His poems announce: “I’m not opaque. I’m so relevant I’m disappearing.” Or: This body is not opaque, but a poetics of opacity. Indeed, *Mount Carmel*, as with Take This Stallion, makes relevancy and context both aesthetic and political stakes. Claiming, wryly, that “a poem should be…righteous good and true/ like my body/ this is thinly veiled disguise.”

“For me,” says Anaïs in an interview, “the truth is not interesting. I like frameworks and models of reality and thinking about poems as parallel universes to ours, where reality unfolds almost like it does for us here on earth, but slightly differently…In poems, [for example] it’s possible to be all the multiple genders all at once.” I’m reminded of the titular image in Dolores Dorantes’ Style. The way a flower’s style, as a hermaphroditic organ, can be at once phallic, vivid, and bold, yet tender, wet, and vulnerable, emblematizing Duplan’s body of work.

For him, as for other marginalized writers, this textual body, to ‘resist dehumanization’, must adopt, as he puts it, “an oppositional position in relation to the projections of the dominant culture.” At the same time, the artful wit required to maintain this resistance must make, via image, a vital game of disguise and disappearance. The way: “A single butterfly landed on De’Shawn’s back at the / barbecue…now put that image out of your head. / Next image, you a pauper in the desert. You, pushing spit from your mouth into your eyes and nostrils.” Here, ‘in the tick of it’, these poems make a farce between the “I” and the “not-I”—between the language and the “you”— “So that you and the body are in a room together. And so, a kind of ecstatic union may emerge.”

This is an intimate, resistant poetry that simultaneously, exuberantly, performs the exhausting “burden” of the “not-I” projected by white culture, wryly “making biscuits” for a you who is “blue-green-white-/grey-mauve-lilac-like”; You as, Duplan write, “a version of me without the shot wounds.” After all, as their poem proclaims, “you and I are filthy / but it is our filth.”

2) Questions
[Note: Anaïs was much earlier in his transition when we first met, and so while there’s a 2-year gap between now and when these questions were first pitched, we tried to bridge this gap wherever possible.]

Madison McCartha: In your earliest book, *Take This Stallion*, I was interested in how celebrity personalities might serve as proxies to help the speaker define themself, creating what Hilton Als describes as a kind of “twinship”; there is in other words a constant interpolation between public and private (even lyric) bodies. Your introductory essay to *Mount Carmel* explores this a little further. “It doesn’t work to try and reject what white culture says about my blackness by policing myself such that I don’t confirm any of its negative stereotypes.” You write about Dean Blunt’s tenuous relationship to the music press being “analogue for thinking about [yourself] as a queer poet of color in relation to the so-called ‘poetry world’.” Does this still feel true?

Anaïs Duplan: Sure, although now I can identify many more figures than Blunt who could serve as proxies for a sort of guarded relationship to the life of the professional writer or artist. What’s changed is that I feel less guarded about publishing. The irony is that the more comfortable with myself I’ve become, the less I relate publishing to my self-worth, and the less worried I feel about publishing.

MM: Were there other artists who served as early teachers in this way?

AD: I’m still perpetually fascinated with Actress (Darren Cunningham), who has historically had a similarly enigmatic public presence like Blunt. I’m also drawn to outsider artists like James Hampton, but it’s not just celebrities who can serve as twins or proxies. Loved ones, friends, strangers, animals can all be mirrors. As a queer, trans person of color, it’s easy to become subsumed with controlling how others see me, but at the heart of that desire to control is a tenuous relationship to self. Heal that relationship and others’ perceptions of you become less important, both the negative and positive perceptions—both criticism and praise.

MM: Are you familiar with the black model and singer, Grace Jones?

AD: Of course! Pre-transiton, I used to wear my hair in that somewhat square shaved-sides high top she so iconically wears, and once at a bar in Iceland I was mistaken for her. I mean hopefully that person didn’t actually think I was Grace Jones, but I’ll take the compliment.

MM: For those who don’t know, she’s a complex figure, somewhat out of vogue now, but was well-known in the 80s and 90s…they’ve just made a documentary about her, and there’s an excellent review in the New York Times. I stumbled onto a role she plays on the Eddie Murphy flick, Boomerang (which isn’t great, by the way). She plays a peculiar, abject parody of herself, a kind of drag called Strangé:

I’m moved by her story, and at times can relate to it, in so far as it becomes a model for the way someone’s queer and black body, while fighting to simply ‘be’, might also become hypersexualized, exoticized and of course, commodified in the process. Is this story recognizable?

AD: I think I’m much less concerned these days with others’ perspectives about my body. In part, that comes from the admittedly fraught privilege of being a transmasculine person. I felt much more sexualized and exoticized as a cis black woman than I do as a trans black man who is often received as cis. In general I think black men in this country suffer from other forms of commodification or dehumanization, but it’s not exactly sexual or exotic in nature. I guess there have been depictions of black men I would call sexually exotic, namely in Robert Mapplethorpe’s body of work, for example, but that’s specifically within a certain genre of white, cis gay art.

MM: In a recent panel, writer Vi Khi Nao spoke about the intimate connection between death and the erotic, and how, to paraphrase her advice to her students, speaking about the erotic as it relates to death gives a text greater intimacy than speaking about it in terms of romance or domestic life. Does this still feel relevant to you?

AD: Not exactly. I think I might’ve felt like this is in the past, but that’s because I was unable to access my eroticism authentically because I was pre-transition. I find great joy—and a sort of self-multiplying that feels like the opposite of death—in my romantic, erotic, and domestic lives. At the same time I do think, in love, that I come face to face with the fear or possibility of death. There’s that James Blake line, “You are my fear of death” from “Can’t Believe the Way We Flow.” I feel that. But in a sense, that’s what it means to come intimately in contact with difference. Intimacy has the capacity to overwhelm the mind the way tragedy, fear, and extreme joy do, and those moments of existing with an overwhelmed mind are spiritual openings. Maybe I’ve worked my way back to Vi Khi Nao after all. If you believe death is a spiritual opening, then yes, this feels relevant.

MM: I’m thinking of your poem, “Ode to the Happy Negro Hugging the Flag in Robert Colescott’s ‘George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware’”, where ‘black toes’ ‘black thighs’, a ‘black groin’ and maybe death itself are entangled and “a straddle” around a poem-body who is intertextually grafted onto the flag. The wryness of this act, and of this title reminds me of Kara Walker. An artist the poet Joyelle McSweeney also raises in her essay about your work from *Fanzine*. Could you speak to that poem?

That poem is a kind of homecoming. It’s a deeply erotic poem, but it’s also about encountering my own body. People ask me when I understood that I was trans and I believe it’s impossible to locate a moment because there are all these moments, in retrospect, where I knew without knowing. Transition is a process of becoming more united while at the same time, splitting from a former self. It’s deeply painful and joyful at the same time. I don’t know why I was compelled into thinking about all that when I saw Robert Colescott’s painting. There’s a figure in that painting who is hugging the American flag with a look of bliss on his face. (That kind of cynical, wry satire is what reminds me of Kara Walker.) I guess I was thinking about the contradiction of this black man being in a sort of romantic relationship with America and yet, maybe love makes that kind of thing possible, I don’t know. Colescott’s painting is also united, in some sense, with the Emmanuel Leutze painting it’s based off of. I wanted to think of my poem as the next link in this chain.

MM: There’s a moment when talking with Kaveh Akbar for *Divedapper*, where he directs our attention to this line “You and I are filthy but it is / our filth,” and then says something like: even in filth, there is “a turning towards joy”, a “channeling” of it into joy and community. While Kaveh is, understandably, interested in the miraculous and transformative power poetry can have, yours notwithstanding, I’m more moved by the ways filth, here, can be generative. Could you speak to that?

AD: Filth is shame, or vice versa. Just last night, I was thinking how entrenched shame as an experience is in my own psyche but also that of so many others, maybe almost everyone else. Whether we name it shame or not, there’s this internal sense of what I shouldn’t be, how I shouldn’t feel or look or act, etc. What I find generative is sitting with shame—in my meditative practice, I call it “sitting in the mud”—and just feeling it. Not trying to push it away or make it into something else. It turns out that shame can’t really survive you just spending time with it in this way; it always evaporates. That says something about what shame is at its core: a refusal to look, a turning or shunning away. Unfortunately, there are communities built around collective shame; it’s the binding agent that brings cultures, peoples, and other groups together and excludes others. Those others are excluded not just because they’re different but because their difference is shameful. There can be this turning toward joy that Kaveh is talking about. I think that might be his version of what I call sitting in the mud. When shared with others, that un-shaming is liberatory, maybe even more liberatory than it is to go through unlearning shame on your own.

MM: Thank you, that’s compelling. I recently started reading *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, by the late Palestinian writer Emile Habiby. Have you read it?

AD: No!

MM: There’s a quote that goes: “I do not differentiate between optimism and pessimism and am quite at a loss as to which of the two characterize me. When I awake each morning, I thank the Lord he did not take my soul during the night. If harm befalls me during the day, I thank Him that it was not worse.” I sense that there’s a connection, here, between your meditative practice, of “sitting in the mud,” and the position Habiby is talking about. I wonder also if in this practice you’ve found that writing with the mud, as a textural or material component, to be another way of spending time with shame?

AD: For me, god is reality. Whatever is real is god. As we know, reality can be both terrible and wonderful, sometimes at the same time. I don’t have to love god because that would assume that I am something apart from reality. So, all there is left is just to be.

I’m glad you ask this question because it’s reminded me that much of my writing has come from just sitting. I sit with a pen and paper (I can rarely write on the computer) and write lines down as they come, sometimes with long pauses in between. I like to think of that act as writing out of the mud, out from the mud, from the voice of the mud. From a place of being. Sitting in the mud, I have a sense of wholeness, union with my nature, so we

could also call this generative act writing from wholeness. A wholeness that is necessarily both positive and negative, or neither: a nondual wholeness.

MM: I bring this book up, not just for its specific philosophical and tonal angularity, but because your poem, “Showing a Boy Wearing an Oxygen Mask”, also seems to comport itself with the same tonal complex, between optimism and pessimism. To what extent did translation play into your relating to the character, Al-Halabi? Into your poetics? I’m thinking of something John Keene said in our interview, that translation is about “finding the hidden other in the Other, and the hidden other in the Self.”

AD: That poem is made up of fragments of found language (although I think a fair amount of it I modified) from journalistic sources. There’s a way journalists speak, and write, that we could call tonally angular. The posture of objectivity has a way of showing up in one’s voice, making it a little jagged, giving it strange, leaping tonal shifts. It’s like leaping around emotions. If I was translating anything, it was that tone. That particular kind of strained journalistic music in relation to some of the worst human tragedy there is. In truth, I felt like people weren’t paying attention to these air strikes and I wanted to write a poem that might prompt that attention. The unexpected result, and maybe downside, is that because it’s a poem, it may come off as more fictional, or more doctored than it actually was. I don’t know if my project of reporting these events alongside my objectives as a poet to create a viable, alternate world using language are in conflict with each other. I have mixed feelings about that poem and think, in some ways, it wasn’t my poem to write. I’m glad it was published, but I don’t often talk about it.

MM: I can relate to that, and thank you. From here, then, I wonder what you feel is sayable, ethically, about the violences inflicted on others, or on the ‘not-I’ of the poem, and the way those same violences might somehow be shared by the ‘I’? By you? What poems should we give ourselves the permission to write?

AD: I’m not sure. I return perennially to the Dana Schutz example. There are other examples we could cite, like Kenneth Goldsmith’s use of Michael Brown’s autopsy for poetry. Journalism is allowed, and is sometimes even required, to convey these kinds of violences because its mandate is to report on reality. There’s rarely a sense that journalists or publications are profiting from or exploiting this violence, although I’m sure some people feel like that. Once we get into the arena of art, however, people start to ask whether certain depictions of individual and social violence are ‘trauma porn,’ or at least, exploitative and inappropriate. Usually the problematic is that the writer or artist depicting it isn’t of the group being talked about, what you call the ‘not-I.’ Ultimately, my problem isn’t that the Schutz painting or Goldsmith poem exists, but that they are highly visible and ultimately profitable (if not financially then in terms of sociocultural capital) to someone who is not of the socioeconomic group being portrayed. My problem with my own poem “Showing a Boy Wearing an Oxygen Mask” is that in ‘showing,’ I reap benefits from the suffering of others, even if my goal was to help. Coming from Haiti, I’m aware of the downfalls of help—the way the presence of NGOs and other foreign government entities trying to ‘fix’ quickly makes too many cooks in the kitchen. That said, if we say that aid should never happen, we end up in precarious right-wing territory. And if we say that one should never profit (again, not just financially; there are many ways to profit) from helping others, we would have to ask how that would be possible for an artist, writer, NGO, government, etc. Long story short, I haven’t answered your question more directly because I can’t.

MM: What moved me initially about Jean Genet’s ‘wound’ (this idea that encountering the suffering of others can create a mutual wound: an opening through which a radically inclusive empathy might be felt), was that it seemed like he found a way out of this bind. And while I don’t think, now, that Genet has all the answers, I believe that our current political moment demands that we, as poets and artists, find ways of newly articulating this shared, yet inequitable, experience of state violence. Do you feel similarly?

AD: Yes, but my experience of state violence is different from that of someone from another racial, class, and/or gender identity category. You’re pointing that out when you say “yet inequitable,” but I think it’s kind of a main point. I understand empathy as the ability to make space, internally, for someone else’s experience and the ways it’s different from yours. Needless to say, attempts at empathy can end in projection or end up in fraught territory when entangled in a desire to ‘help.’

Art and writing are well-equipped to convey difference. The best art does this not just by telling us about an artist’s experience, but bringing us into an artist’s internal world so we can momentarily inhabit our shared world through another set of rules, assumptions, beliefs, shortcomings, etc. This happens most authentically when an artist tries to makes their own, rather than someone else’s, psychic experience available to others. In other words, if we’re seeking to build empathy via art, I would rather figure out how to gain access to other people’s art than try to make art about their experiences. The latter feels like a vanity project.

In terms of the political demands of the moment, I don’t think art has a duty to do anything and that may be an unpopular position. Art can convey pain, it can open up the way for more authentic empathy, it can create greater social cohesion. It can do all these things. But I don’t think it has to. Not everyone has to be everything. There are activists and organizers who put their bodies on the line regularly in order to protect freedoms that make my life better. While that work can be complemented by artists who also tackle themes of social justice, they’re not the same work and shouldn’t be conflated. That’s not what you were implying, I’m not saying that either. The point I’m making is pretty small—it’s can versus should—but has ramifications. I’m making it because I believe art that does social work and that does so from a place of freedom (the freedom to not do that work) is going to be of higher quality, in the same way that love given freely is greater than love from obligation.

MM: What questions feel most pressing to you?

AD: One of the most pressing questions to me now is whether art should persist. I know it will persist, but much of what we call art today has emerged from societies where many of the people supposedly have their basic human needs met and therefore have the resources to devote to art. But it’s clear, given the pandemic, that there are deep, deep cracks in our foundation (hopefully not new news to anyone) that need mending. I wonder what it would

mean for art to await the results of that social mending and then remerge on the other side. I’m speaking simplistically on purpose—as in, I know a perfect social mending isn’t on the way, I know it isn’t feasible to ask art to ‘wait’ but that’s my desire for this moment. I haven’t been making work for a long time. For some, living through a pandemic has spurred their desire to create but personally, I’ve lost my appetite. I have other concerns, like going internally, reflecting on my life and the world I live in. I’m excited for the work I’ll create six months from now, when I’m further along in this reflection. It’s like how you can’t write a very good elegy for a friend you just lost. You have to wait a while.

Anaïs Duplan is a trans* poet, curator, and artist. He is the author of a forthcoming 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). His writing has been published by *Hyperallergic*, PBS News Hour, the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, and the *Bettering American Poetry* anthology. Duplan is the founding curator for the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, an artist residency program for artists of color, based in Iowa City. As an independent curator, he has facilitated artist projects in Chicago, Boston, Santa Fe, and Reykjavík. Duplan’s video and performance work has been shown at Flux Factory, Daata Editions, the 13th Baltic Triennial in Lithuania, Mathew Gallery, Neue-House, the Paseo Project, and will be exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art in L.A in 2020. He was a 2017-2019 joint Public Programs Fellow at the Museum of Modern Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem. He now works as Program Manager at Recess and Adjunct Assistant Professor in Poetry at Columbia University.@comewancomeall

Madison McCartha is a black, queer multimedia artist and poet whose work appears or is forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review, Denver Quarterly, The Fanzine, jubilat, Prelude, Tarpaulin Sky,* and elsewhere. Their debut book-length poem, *FREAKOPHONE WORLD*, is forthcoming from Inside the Castle in 2021. Madison holds an MFA from the University of Notre Dame and is a PhD student at UC Santa Cruz. @MadisonMccartha

O'Connor, Chloe, "Black curators discuss 'insiders and outsiders' in the art world," *DailyIowan.com,* October 28, 2019

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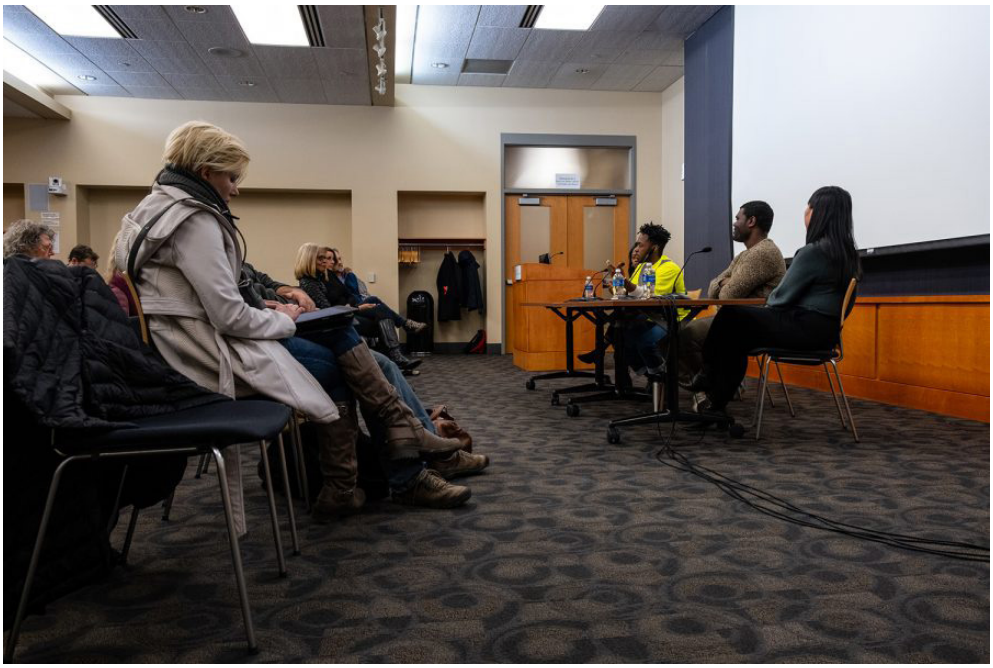
Black curators discuss 'insiders and outsiders' in the art world

At the Black Curator's Roundtable Monday evening, discussed how conversations surrounding black identity play into the art world.



Program Manager of Recess and founding curator of the Center for Afrofuturist Studies Anaïs Duplan answers a question from the audience during the Black Curators Roundtable forum at the Iowa City Public Library on Monday, October 28, 2019. The forum is part of the exhibition "Anonymous Donor" guest curated by Duplan and exhibited at the Figge Art Museum, facilitated by the Stanley Museum of Art.

Three black curators — Anaïs Duplan, Eileen Isagon Skyers, and Gee Wesley — sat at the front of a crowded room in the Iowa City Public Library as a group of Iowa City residents took shelter from the first snow of the year in the room where the Black Curators Roundtable took place Monday night.

New York-based trans curator, poet, and artist Duplan works exclusively with black artists in his curatorial work. He is a co-founder of the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, which co-sponsored Monday's event with the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art. Duplan is also an alumnus of the Iowa Writer Workshop.

Duplan discussed tropes within the art community and how each play into the view of race in the art world.

"What would it be like to create a space where black artists were allowed to be naughty, as it were, and really imagine something new?" Duplan asked.

During the roundtable, Duplan touched on his own experiences as a black trans man in the art world — which he said is generally centered around straight, white, male art and artists.

Duplan made the distinction between "insider artists" and "outsider artists," asking the audience to consider the difference between the two. He questioned what propels an artist "in the margins" versus "in the mainstream."

"A lot of the time, outsider artists are artists who don't have traditional arts training and aren't at play in the art world in a way that would make them an insider artist," Duplan said.

According to a study by BFAMFAPhD, a cultural equity advocacy group, 80.8 percent of artists that receive their primary income from the arts are white.

Wesley agreed with Duplan's ideas, adding that he believes it's important to challenge the narratives that exist about certain geographies.

"I'm attentive to the ways that contemporary narratives that exist about the Midwest, and this region involves a lot of forgetting about the fundamental nature of black experience and black artistic production," Wesley said.

Wesley continued to discuss what he referred to as "an archive of disappearance" in black art. He asked attendees what it means to understand that someone's existence, and history may only exist as a name on a slave ship ledger or promissory note.

"Blackness represents this kind of fundamental collection of threads about how the American experience has been shaped," Wesley said. "Any narrative about human experience in the United States that tries to grapple with and address Americanness and what contemporaneity is, is incomplete without the inclusion of the black narrative."

Skyers agreed with Duplan and Wesley, adding that conversations like that of the roundtable are imperative to education about contemporary black creation.

"They serve to center black contemporary art in a way that is often taken for granted when it comes to discussions of art at large," Skyers said.

Joyce Tsai, Stanley Museum of Art associate director of development and event coordinator, said the roundtable marks the end of Duplan's guest-curated exhibition Anonymous Donor. The exhibition was hosted at the Figge Art Museum as a part of the Stanley Museum of Art collections-sharing program called Legacies for Iowa.

In an email to The Daily Iowan, Stanley Museum of Art Director Lauren Lessing emphasized the relevance of the roundtable event in the Iowa City community.

"As we prepare to re-open the UI Stanley Museum of Art in its new building, it's a good time to think about the decisions that curators make and discuss how these decisions affect how we see and understand works of art," Lessing said. "I thought the question of how institutions define insiders and outsiders was particularly relevant."