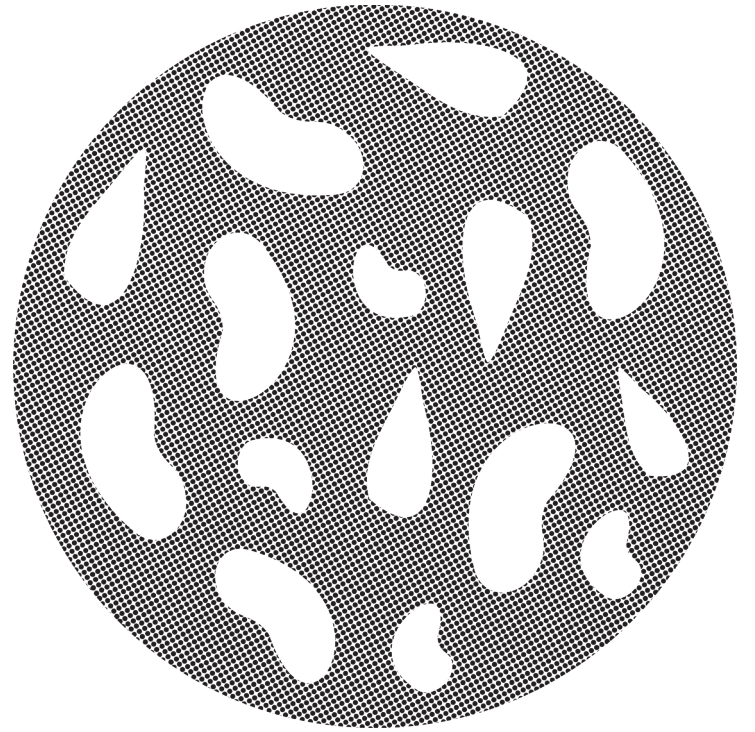


SOMOS SEMILLAS: AN INTRODUCTION TO

SEED
PROJECT

Issue One
Volume One



What is seed project?

seed project's mission is to foster a process of building relationships, connections and mutual support in Southeast Lancaster City, in hopes that neighborhood-centered artworks, projects, and collaborations emerge from our time spent together. This effort centers BIPOC artists and residents in or from Southeast Lancaster.

¿Qué es el proyecto seed?

La misión del *proyecto seed* es fomentar un proceso de construcción de relaciones, conexiones y apoyo mutuo en el sureste de la ciudad de Lancaster, con la esperanza de que las obras de arte, los proyectos y las colaboraciones centrados en el vecindario surjan de nuestro tiempo juntos. Este esfuerzo centra a los artistas y residentes de BIPOC en o desde el sureste de Lancaster.

How did it start?

seed project began when the Spanish American Civic Association (SACA) and Millersville University's South Central PA Art Partners applied for a grant through the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts. The grant (matched by SACA's award from Wells Fargo) funds community based creative projects over five years. SACA and the South Central PA Art Partners invited Josh Graupera and Salina Almanzar to initiate the project vision. We were awarded the grant in 2019 and have officially launched after postponing and re-imagining the project during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cómo comenzó?

El *proyecto seed* comenzó cuando la Asociación Cívica Hispanoamericana (SACA) y South Central PA Art Partners de la Universidad de Millersville solicitaron una subvención a través del Pennsylvania Council for the Arts. La subvención (igualada por la concesión de SACA de Wells Fargo) financia proyectos creativos comunitarios durante cinco años. SACA y South Central PA Art Partners invitaron a Josh Graupera y Salina Almanzar a iniciar la visión del proyecto. Recibimos la subvención en 2019 y lo lanzamos oficialmente después de posponer y reimaginar el proyecto durante el apogeo de la pandemia COVID-19.

seeds as metaphors

We've been talking about seeds and the act of growing from seeds as a way to frame the work we will do in the community. We like this metaphor because it calls attention to all of the factors that it takes to make something grow AND it allows us to talk about how sometimes things fail-sometimes seeds don't sprout. We can learn from the failure and sow stronger seedlings. We like that growth takes time and energy. As we grow, we need water, fertilizer, light and darkness, dry-spells, wind, and hands to harvest and hands to sow and so much time. We are thrilled that this project is locked in to one area, the Southeast, and five years. With this time, we plan to listen deeply and act proactively and out of abundance. Meaning, we have time to do this right and to do this intentionally. We have time to make sure our impact matches our intentions and that our community is actually heard and served.

semilla como metáfora

Hemos estado hablando de semillas y el acto de cultivar a partir de semillas como una forma de enmarcar el trabajo que haremos en la comunidad. Nos gusta esta metáfora porque llama la atención sobre todos los factores que se necesitan para hacer que algo crezca y nos permite hablar sobre cómo a veces las cosas fallan, a veces las semillas no brotan. Podemos aprender del fracaso y sembrar plántulas más fuertes. Nos gusta que el crecimiento requiera tiempo y energía. A medida que crecemos, necesitamos agua, fertilizantes, luz y oscuridad, períodos de sequía, viento y manos para cosechar y manos para sembrar y mucho tiempo. Estamos encantados de que este proyecto se concentre en un área, el sureste y cinco años. Con este tiempo, planeamos escuchar profundamente y actuar de manera proactiva y en abundancia. Es decir, tenemos tiempo para hacer esto bien e intencionalmente. Tenemos tiempo para asegurarnos de que nuestro impacto coincida con nuestras intenciones y que nuestra comunidad sea realmente escuchada y servida.



THIS IS WHAT WE HOPE YEAR ONE LOOKS LIKE



new community driven ideas and resources that emerge from our community partner check-ins



seed workshops and panels that share knowledge and resources for community members

existing community initiatives that intersect with seed and community partner work



Recap: Artists of Color Working in Communities Panel

On February 11, 2021 *seed project* hosted a Zoom panel with four community-engaged artists: Jezabeth Roca Gonzalez, Evita Colon, Nora Elmarzouky and Hawa Lassanah. Each artist answered a series of questions by the moderators as well as the public. Below are some highlights of the evening. A full video of the panel is available on our website.

How do you define your work?

Jez: I am from a place in Puerto Rico that is thought of as the “birthplace of Puerto Rico”. The story links the death of the gods (conquistadores) and the birth of Puetro Ricans and that story is present in my work. I explore colonialism and identity in many different mediums. Some of my work is installation work that includes native plants/soil from Puerto Rico and video footage of my grandparents’ and families home.

Evita: For me, I am looking back at family history to understand who I am.

Hawa: My work is defined by agency: I think about the choices that we make and the conditions or environments that shape the way we think about things.

Nora: My work isn’t so visual. I see myself at work in the intersection of art, public sector, and energy. All of these processes involve some kind of cultural organizing. The projects I’m involved in are often about changing the dominant narrative and increasing access. So it involves things like using food as a cultural exchange and as something to gather folks around.

What’s it like working as an artist/working as a community-based artist?

Jez: I map out independent projects that take a lot of work besides making the art, I apply for grants, look for funding and open calls all the time. It takes a lot of disciplined time in the way I hadn’t thought before. It’s a full time practice that explores my art as many ways as possible. I also teach and that’s important for me. It’s about the exchange: taking and giving, so I take what I’ve learned and my experiences and am able to give back or pass it forward. Community involvement depends on where I am. Currently I’m working in California and just doing a lot of learning at this moment. I’m learn-

ing how to use skills in a way that is “useful” to the community I find myself in. In general, I think an individual practice just takes a lot of self-practice and discipline.

Evita: Growing up in Lancaster, a lot of people know me. Students I work with are going through a lot of difficult experiences and I utilize the arts to heal. With that, I’ve learned that it is important to set your own boundaries in working with folks. In my experience, I can see that I’m very accessible. I have to make sure I make intentional time and space for myself and my work in order to stay present for the community I work in. I’m also always merging art and activism. I believe artist play a lot of different roles in activism or movement work.

Hawa: I started as a community creative and really started in a kind of antagonistic way. I come from an activist background. That frame of mind is what helped me start Discerning Eye in 2010. I was responding to the gaps I saw and I wanted Discerning Eye to serve as an underground arts scene and a response to the ways I saw the mainstream scene fail artists. That perspective evolved as I found ways to collaborate with local businesses and organizations, and maintain a sharp perspective on what artists needed. Eventually, I was able to create the physical space for Discerning Eye on the Northwest side of Lancaster.

Nora: I think for me it means the community takes the lead. There has to be some sort of flexibility and an effort to move folks from passive to engage as active participants and shapers of the work. **FPS:** This project was really about bringing art into unlikely spaces. I’m always thinking about and communicating questions like—How do global issues connect to the local? How do we think about displacement? With many of these projects I see my work as being able to build relationships where there might not be a natural connection to things like racism or capitalism or some other issue. It’s also important in this work to be slow and intentional. We’re conditioned by capitalism to think everything is urgent, but relationships take time.

What kind of artistic processes are part of your work?

Jez: I didn’t really start with an artistic background at all. I came into art as an adult making photographs and I went into the art world feeling a sense of playing ‘catch up’. I think because of that I see no limits to what my work can be or needs to be made of. In some of my projects I’ve made adobe tiles from dirt from my hometown. I’ve also used native plants from Puerto Rico and I also do performance in these spaces I’ve made. My work is really rooted in connection to my hometown and my family. Sometimes I play the roll of an editor and work alongside my family taking pictures. My family’s images

are present in my projects alongside my own. Project-wise it all depends on how it shakes out: I understand my relationship with people that are close to me--even though they may be geographically distant we are able to make work together.

Evita: One of the projects I'm thinking about is *Blk Voices*, a journal I recently launched. Leading up to that work, I was thinking a lot about my connection to my ancestors. I want my work to always be powerful and intentional--for it to speak to the souls of the people that engage with my artwork. The journal was a response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. It was also something I had been thinking about. I had an intentional action plan for *Blk Voices*. I just really wanted to create a publication for Black people to express ourselves.

Hawa: I want to facilitate people coming together. I'm interested in doing things and making things that bring people together. *Discerning Eye* was always a way to do that. In all of my work the goal is deep observation: seeing what's missing is my strength. I find the uniqueness of ideas in people is the power of the world. This is how we succeed as a collective culture. My work shifts to respond and I've done a lot of different things. It's important for me to release everything else that's in the way so the creative process can come through. So as *Discerning Eye* has evolved and I have evolved, I've gone from visual arts to meditation to help others tap into their intuitive voice.

Nora: My work is ALL process. How do we get to the goal we want to get to? It starts with deep listening. I see my role as a creative doula- I help birth artistic projects. I also think there are so many ways to build processes for community based work. It requires trust and really it starts with the self and asking: what are the interests and hobbies we have that can connect to the community around us? I want any process I do to open up community engagement and remove barriers that keep that from happening.

What advice can you share for someone who is just getting started? Are there resources (books, videos, websites) you'd like to share?

Jez: I would say, Listen to your gut. I think that overall, you probably are going to have to encounter so many people or organizations. And ultimately, you are the person advocating for yourself. Make a yearly declaration of pleasure. So much of my energy goes away from me. Defend your pleasure today and take time for yourself. Because there's just so much pressure in all of that. In terms of websites, maybe I think about the creative capital website (www.creative-capital.org),

because it refreshes every month, and it has a list of either individual opportunities for people who are seeking funding or people who are seeking residencies, even some education programming that doesn't involve higher education. They also share micro grants.

Evita: I would also say trust your gut. You have to discern who you're working with. It's okay to ask a bunch of questions until you're comfortable. It's good to know that every opportunity isn't a good opportunity. Also, I believe that you have to get used to being told no, everyone isn't going to like your art. And it's very, very important to ground yourself in your 'why' to know why you're doing it, why you're creating, and just keep revisiting that. It's also very important for you to take care of yourself and your mental health. Now, there is this push for creatives to create content every week, or every month and keep up with the ebb and flow of the rest of society. And it's very hard to do that. So I would just say, just stick with the pace that feels comfortable to you. Don't drive yourself insane trying to keep up with the times because at the end of the day, you want your content to have impact rather than just having a bunch of mediocre stuff out there.

Hawa: I'll say this: probably like most people, I suffer from the stories of, "I'm not good enough." And I definitely struggle still to this day with taking up space. So, I think trusting your gut is a big one. But also to go a little deeper into that is like, identify your guts voice. Identify the voice of your gut, so you can hear it before stuff goes wrong. Next thing I would say is participate in the art world beyond what you're doing. I participated as a judge in a couple of grant cycles that happened for artists in the greater Pennsylvania area. That really helped me to understand what grant judges were looking for, how the process occurred and really gave me a special kind of insight to be able to help the artists that I was working with at home, to be able to achieve those goals. I'll just second, ground yourself in your 'why'. And again, I think that 'why' comes from that intuitive voice when you can clear all the non-helpful noise out of your brain.

Nora: Just to build off that really quickly: I would also add to the 'why' is also ask yourself, 'to what end am I doing this thing or producing this thing? Where's that going?' Oftentimes, we might take on projects that are confined by certain grant regulation, grant requirements, or whatever. I strongly encourage you to figure out ways you can push it, push that budget, to filter out to the community as much as possible. We tried to do that a lot with the Friends, Peace and Sanctuary project, building in more opportunities for people to be speakers in different spaces. Also, this idea of a token tax, if you're gonna tokenize me, you're gonna pay for that. And in the same vein, don't ever accept it's going to be great exposure.

That's, you know, one of those things that is often used in replace of compensating artists for their hard work. I think one other thing to think about is documenting your process along the way. Again, the product is great, but like, how did you get there? It helps thinking about other projects, and reflecting on what I've done. Lastly, just being open to learning, being open to building relationships. Read to strengthen your philosophy. A movement I'd like to share is Movement Generation's work. Movement Generation is a collective that really looks at ecology and our ecologies. Another website is the US Department of Arts and Culture, that's another great source of inspiration of works that are out there. And lastly, reading Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown.

How do we set the standard for how artists engage with institutions that want to data mine us and tokenize us? How do we equip artists with resources and tools to navigate that?

Hawa: I definitely had a lot of experiences being the token, and it took me a long time to learn how to say no. But before that, what changed for me was my perspective. And I said, "Hey, if they're going to use my face, to promote what they're doing, I'm going to use their platform to promote what I'm doing." So it really became more of a symbiotic relationship, whether they knew it or not. I wasn't just going to be a face, I'm also going to take advantage of the attention and push what I'm doing.

Jez: I think as an individual, it might feel like I have no impact within institutions. But then I've had a lot of institutions reach out to me, and they're like, "Hey, we have an equity committee or something, and we're reaching out because blah, blah." And, when you're an individual, you, you should be like, "Okay, who are the other people that you're reaching out to?" I feel like, as a single person, you can create a lot of impact through that question, because you can really be aware. Maybe everyone's a person of color, but not everyone is a person of color who is queer, or maybe everyone is able bodied. I think I have rebelled in ways by saying I'm going to take all of this space, because I realized that I'm the only person here that is making this work. I know how they think of me because it's reflected by the fact that they've never say my name, but they always say, like, 'the Puerto Rican artist' or something. And that's something that I've also had to deal with in higher education, where I thought that I really deserved this opportunity. I worked really hard to only find out that they would never call me by my name, they would say, "Oh, what is the Puerto Rican up to?" So it's important to know when you are a token, if you are on the side of being a token, you are also in this somehow flipped position of possibly creating more tokenism.

Evita: And to piggyback off of that, I also feel like, when we get in these positions, I always pay attention to who they have speaking to me. A lot of times, they will send someone that looks like you to have that difficult conversation. And that makes me uncomfortable. And I've been calling that out lately a lot. But that's how a lot of organizations and structures will get us to play into that tokenism. And another one is, I like to see what my role is like, what am I able to do, if I'm able to come into this role or this position, and make decisions and hire other people and create opportunities for other people that look like me, I may feel a little bit more comfortable with it. But if I'm just that one person, and it seems like that one slot is only for me, and the door shut behind me, I feel like that is like a big red flag for tokenism. So you can make sure that other artists that come behind you aren't, you know, blocked to certain opportunities.

Nora: And to add to that, in terms of thinking about what tools and resources, I think it's really important to stress that cultural organizing, and creativity also means being in spaces that we're not typically in. Being in spaces of power, in philanthropy, in giving circles, there's a lot of ways to get involved in these things, both as volunteers, not even necessarily as work but it's really important to get into these spaces to be in places of power to make these decisions and direct where this funding goes and really shaping that. You know, really creating support groups, where you're mutually supporting and sharing resources about what the latest grants are, and that sort of thing.





Jezabeth Roca Gonzalez

Jezabeth is a multidisciplinary maker who uses Video, Performance, Photography, Land, and Live Plants through Installation. Highly influenced by their hometown of Añasco Puerto Rico known as “La cuna de la Puertorriqueñidad” (the birth of puertorican-ness) and the town “Donde murieron los Dioses” (where the gods died).

Focusing on re-examinations of Puerto Rico’s ongoing colonial status with the United States through family, personal migration and attachment to Añasco.



Hawa Lissanah

Hawa’s life mission has been to gain a wide breadth of education, knowledge, and experience about the world and its innovations in order to share it with her community. It began with the Arts Advocacy Organization called Discerning Eye Foundation for the Arts and Education™, and expanded to

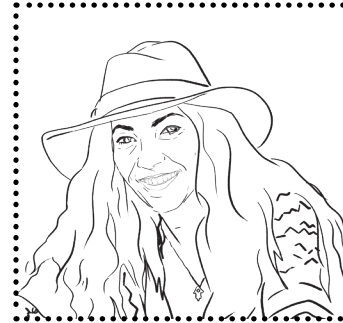
a gallery and community space called, Discerning Eye Center for the Arts™. Then, branching out from the Creative Arts to breath and movement therapy, Yoga For All™ was born. The latest iteration of this mission is Discerning Eye Community Agriculture™ (DECA). As the founder of this hybrid Social Enterprise, her intention is to create structures to help enable her peers and fellow citizens into lives of Leadership and to facilitate the Agency of their own possibilities, encouraging overall wellness for the individual as well as sustainable communities.



Evita Colon

Evita Colon is a published award winning poet and creative entrepreneur. She is the owner and founder of Speak to My Soul, an organization that uses the performing and media arts to empower, educate and elevate whilst providing opportunities and development for creatives of color. She is also

the co-owner of A Concrete Rose Bookbar, a bookstore that cultivates creativity, culture and community through African American books, wine and an intimate performing arts space. She believes understanding leads to compassion thus she is always looking for compelling ways to tell raw stories and amplify those that share them with her.



Nora Elmarzouky

Nora Elmarzouky is currently working as a climate justice organizer with POWER in Philadelphia working on statewide policies, coalitions, and base-building. I co-founded the Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary Journal, the first Arabic newspaper in Philadel-

phia in 100 years, a continuation of the Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary Project. I am part of in.site collaborative, a collective of seven other women who through our various work seek to address issues of unequal urban development. I am a cultural organizer working on projects at the intersection of arts, culture, community development, and energy democracy, especially focusing on community engagement, political education, and program design and evaluation. Prior, I worked in democracy activism and designed experiential learning programs in Egypt. I am on the board of YallaPunk, Barrio Alegria, community advisor for inLiquid and Philadelphia Contemporary’s Commonwealth project. Growing up and working between Egypt and the US has offered me insights into a multitude of cultures – similarities, parallels, differences – which has largely influenced my work.

What do you think?

Using the seed on the next page, answer one or all of the questions below. You can write it out or draw a picture!

Take a picture and send it to: southeastcreativecommunities@gmail.com. You may see your answer appear on a mural in Plaza Centro!

What are the seeds you'd like to plant? Ideas? Projects? Visions for the future?

What is bringing you joy right now?

What is a challenge you want to overcome?



¿Qué piensas tu?

Utilizando la semilla de la página siguiente, responde una o todas las preguntas a continuación. ¡Puedes escribirlo o hacer un dibujo!

Toma una foto y envíala a: southeastcreativecommunities@gmail.com. ¡Puede ver que su respuesta aparece en un mural en Plaza Centro!

¿Cuáles son las semillas que le gustaría plantar? Ideas? Proyectos? ¿Visiones para el futuro?

¿Qué te trae alegría ahora mismo?

¿Qué desafío quieres superar?

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