THE CULTURAL DIASPORA
AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND AFRICAN PLAYWRIGHTS
CREATIVE RESIDENCY AT THE CAMARGO FOUNDATION
MAY - JUNE 2018
ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Camargo Foundation, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Jerome Foundation, will be holding a four-week residency program for eight mid-career/established African-American and African playwrights from May 28 to June 25, 2018.

The Program was conceived by playwrights and theatre practitioners Carlyle Brown and Chuck Mike, who are the principle promoters of the residency in its process, outcomes, and aftermath.

The residency will bring together four participants from the United States and four from the African continent, who all have a common interest in the intersection and interaction, whether historic or contemporary, between the United States and Africa.

In selecting the participants, the Camargo Foundation worked with a panel composed of internationally recognized reviewers from the United States, the African continent, and Europe: Alicia Adams (Vice-President of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, US); Walter Chakela (Playwright, South Africa); Mamadou Diouf (Professor of African Studies and History, Director of the Institute for African Studies at Columbia University, US); and Jan Goossens (Director of the Marseille Performing Arts Festival, France). The members of the jury panel adopted the widest possible definition of "playwright" to recognize the plurality of ways in which contemporary theater is made.

The residency will take place at the Foundation’s location in Cassis, about one hour away from Marseilles in the South of France. This site is a place of extraordinary natural beauty and historical significance. Overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and surrounded by the natural beauty of Cap Canaille and the Calanques National Park, it is an exceptional environment in which to think, reflect, and create.
THE CONTEXT (1)

BY CHUCK MIKE
THEATRE DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, PLAYMAKER, EDUCATOR, AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
COLLECTIVE ARTISTES

In what ways has African society reverberated its cultural dynamism within modern day transnational artistic imaginings? Playwrights on the African continent and in the African diaspora are well endowed with tools to provide enlightenment. Creative methodologies and thematic concerns amongst playwrights in Africa and the African World of the Americas are derived from a plethora of sources and influences. The African has at his disposal a reservoir of resources, including the use of African languages, rituals, myth and other traditional and contemporary mores. Common topics include colonialism and the exigencies of cultural, social and political transformation into the modern world.

Storytelling in Africa has been a traditional event since the presence of the Griots who—through music and poetry—became the creative custodians of oral history. By extension some African-American dramatists view preachers, spoken word artists, stand-up comics, blues singers and playwrights as part of that tradition. They examine and record through text based platforms the trials, tribulations and conditions of a people who evolved from slavery to become one of the most celebrated cultures globally. The aesthetic values and humane concerns which hover their works clearly speak to an African continuum in the New World. Not only does the commonality of practices and history between modern day African and African-American playwrights deserve notice, of seminal importance is their mutual struggle to devote attention to their craft—as modern day Griots—in a hostile environment often imbued with racism, colonialism and inept governments.
THE CONTEXT (2)

BY CHUCK MIKE
THEATRE DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, PLAYMAKER, EDUCATOR, AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
COLLECTIVE ARTISTES

Questions abound towards the survival of these writers in separate lands. How are playwrights funded in Africa in the face of corrupt regimes that feel threatened by the pen and have little or no appreciation for the arts? What can be done about the disparity in funding which goes to the development of black playwrights in the US as opposed to their white counterparts? Where do these playwrights share or showcase their work and to what audiences given the limited building spaces available to them on both sides of the Atlantic? How do playwrights engage in debates about identity and authenticity within an African diaspora? What are the different ways in which international boundaries shape the African experience and how do they manifest in writing and performance? If the notion of Africa is to be broadened, the specifics of these playwrights’ experiences and practices must be examined.

The purpose of Camargo’s transatlantic black playwright residency would be to afford the opportunity of sharing work, discussing viewpoints and approaches towards enduring as Black artistes—in a safe haven—free of occidental screening and judgment with no self explanations and no obligation to represent anyone but oneself. Exploring one’s craft, voice and African-ness in a picturesque and encouraging atmosphere with kindred spirits would be an essential raison d’être.
PURPOSE OF THE RESIDENCY

The program is designed to offer participants time and space to:

- Research, experiment & create: applicants may apply either with a specific project or a specific area of inquiry on which they would like to work during the residency. An area of inquiry should be specific and represent exploration and investigation in the resident’s field. The Camargo Foundation welcomes both open-ended exploration, or more focused works and long-term research projects;

- Exchange & network: during the residency, discussions are held regularly to foster exchanges between the selected artists. In addition, the Camargo Foundation’s staff provides formal and informal links with local professionals to develop possible creative collaborations between the selected artists and the region of the Marseille-Provence area. The selected artists will also attend performances with other cultural organizations and artists in the Marseille-Provence area.
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**CARLYLE BROWN**  
Is a writer/performer and artistic director of Carlyle Brown & Company based in Minneapolis. His plays have been produced at theatres across the United States and he has received numerous commissions, fellowships and awards including 2006 Black Theatre Network’s Winona Lee Fletcher Award for outstanding achievement and artistic excellence, a 2009 Guggenheim Fellowship, a recipient of a 2010 Otto Rene Castillo Award for Political Theatre, a 2010 United States Artist Fellowship and 2018 William Inge Theater Festival Award for Distinguished Achievement in the American Theater. His most frequently produced play *The African Company Presents Richard III* and his solo show *The Fula from America: An African Journey* are creative explorations that led to the conception of the Cultural Diaspora creative residency at Camargo. Carlyle Brown is working on his latest play, *Malcolm X and the House on Sugar Hill*, a coming of age story about an African-American boy growing up in a community in diaspora between the years of 1959 and 1965, the year of Malcolm’s assassination.

**CHUCK MIKE**  
is an internationally acclaimed theatre maker, director and activist whose works have appeared at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., the Royal Court Theatre in London, the Edinburgh Festival and the National Theatre in Nigeria. His passion for initiating devised performances for social change in rural and urban communities have taken him across Africa, Europe and North America. Seminal to these efforts are *Sense of Belonging: The Tale of Ikpiko*, a play on female circumcision in Nigeria and *Zhe* (noun) undefined. A mentee of Wole Soyinka he is a published playwright and scholar and has been artiste-in-residence/workshop leader and educator in leading academic and artistic institutions around the world. Highlighting his producing efforts have been four festivals of theatre for CAFTAN (Collective Artistes Festival of Theatre Arts Nigeria). Founding Artistic Director for Collective Artistes (Nigeria and UK), Chuck has been the recipient of awards from Fulbright/International Telephone and Telegraph, MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation and the American Cultural Specialist program. Currently he holds an Associate Professorship at the University of Richmond in Virginia.
SELECTED ARTISTS
BODE ASIYANBI
NIGERIA

Born in Oshogbo, Western Nigeria, Bode Asiyanbi was educated at Obafemi Awolowo University and Lancaster University. He is a two-time winner of the BBC African Performance Playwriting Prize (2005 and 2011) and the British Council LTF Playwriting Prize (2016 and 2017). His short stories have appeared in Munyori Literary Journal, Kalahari Review, Lawino, Per Contra and Wasafiri. His stage plays include Shattered, Room 69, The Wait and One Chance!. He describes himself as "a restless troubadour from a long line of village weavers and palace bards; spinning colored yarns of errant stories and seeking lost songs to sing out from rooftops".

TRAUMA, IDENTITY, MEMORY, AND THE JOURNEY TO BLACK NATIONHOOD

There is power in the unity of a people; be it physical, spiritual, creative or ideological. The proposed research, Trauma, Identity, Memory, and the Journey to Black Nationhood- and its creative imperative- will explore the present state of black identity and how the power of the celebrated culture of black storytellers through their tools of language, culture, music and rituals can stir the hive of history for relevant memories and help redefine black identity, heal collective trauma, and forge a path to black nationhood where Africa and African diaspora speak in a distinct ideological voice.

DEUX FEMMES ON THE EDGE DE LA REVOLUTION

A pig is slaughtered and sacrificed, a goddess seduces a young bride, and enslaved and self-liberated Africans on the island of San Domingue rise up to end slavery and destroy colonialism. Duex Femmes on the Edge of a Revolution is a full-length play about the Haitian Revolution, told from the perspective of two women. Cécile, an enslaved healer of African nobility, and Valentine, a French woman sold into marriage to a plantation master form an unlikely alliance as they fight to preserve their pasts, protect their futures, and ultimately gain freedom.
KARA LEE CORTHRON
UNITED STATES

Kara Lee Corthron’s plays include *AliceGraceAnon* (New Georges); *Holly Down in Heaven* (Forum Theatre, DC); *Listen for the Light* (Know Theatre of Cincinnati); and *Welcome to Fear City* (CATF 2017, Kansas City Rep 2018). She’s the author of the young-adult novel *The Truth of Right Now*, Simon & Schuster. Awards include the Parents’ Choice Gold Award, Vineyard Theatre’s Paula Vogel Award, Princess Grace Award, Helen Merrill Award, Theodore Ward Prize, four MacDowell fellowships, and residencies at the Bogliasco Foundation (Italy), Skriðuklaustur (Iceland), and Hawthornden (Scotland). Development: Atlantic Theater, Berkeley Rep, and South Coast Rep among others. Proud New Dramatists member.

THE VALUE PROJECT

*The Value Project* is an artistic investigation of human value. The idea came to the author when she learned that approximately 21 million people are enslaved around the world today and most of us benefit from their blood without even knowing it. The play will depict three separate slave auctions. One will take place in 1619, another will be a digital auction in the 22nd Century, and the third will be a contemporary setting where young liberals will attempt to justify owning human beings. Despite the gravity of the topic, there will be a lot of humor though the laughs won’t always be comfortable.
Affectionately known as “Dr. Goddess”, Kimberly C. Ellis, Ph.D. is a scholar of American and Africana Studies, an artist, activist, and entrepreneur, as well as a playwright, world traveler and international thought leader on culture, gender and social technology. She is also the co-founder of #AskaSista, the founder of the civic tech project, #BlackPoliticsMatter, the author of the upcoming book *The Bombastic Brilliance of Black Twitter*, the creator of #ATripOffTheOldBlock, chronicling her world travels and group trips, and the producer of *You’re Beautiful to Me*, a feature documentary film chronicling the journey with her mother’s dementia.

*AFROROMA*

*AfroRoma* is both a scholarly memoir exploring the relationship between African, European and North American History, art, and popular culture, with a modern day twist and focused lens on the Black Madonna, as well as the creation of a romantic comedy based on an African-American woman’s summer in Europe.
BLESSING HUNGWE

ZIMBABWE

Blessing Hungwe was born in 1980 and raised in the Zimbabwean Midlands province capital Gweru. He studied for a Diploma in Journalism and Creative Writing in 1996 and is currently studying for a degree in Media and Society Studies. Blessing has worked extensively in the theatre, film, and television industries, winning two National Arts Merit Awards back to back in 2011 and 2012 for Most Outstanding Theatrical Productions. Hungwe is an all-round versatile artist working as an actor, producer, writer and director.

DOGS AND PIGS, AN AFRICAN JOURNEY TO SEXUAL FREEDOM

Dogs and Pigs: An African Journey to Sexual Freedom is a theatrical project that seeks to uncover the veil of LGBTQI rights and issues in a country and continent with strong traditional and political convictions set firmly against people who identify as LGBTQI. The project is inspired by public denouncement of LGBTQI people as UnAfrican and worse than dogs and pigs, and their persecution as they fight for recognition. Dogs and Pigs is an interrogation of the influence of the liberated African Diaspora on the issue of sex and sexuality and homosexuality in traditional African setups.
ZAINABU JALLO
SWITZERLAND

Zainabu Jallo is a scholar, playwright and portrait photographer. Her academic and creative works have been conveyed through Fellowships at the Sundance Theater Institute, The Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, Residenz Theater Munich, Chateau Lavigny, and House of Writers in Switzerland. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts England, and UNESCO Coalition of Artists for the General History of Africa. She is author of award winning plays Onions Make Us Cry, Holy Night, and My Sultan is a Rockstar and a Doctoral researcher at the Graduate School of Humanities, University of Bern, Switzerland. Her scholarly interests include Diaspora studies, Iconic criticism and Material Culture.

TRANSNATIONAL NOMADISM AND CULTURAL TRANSFER: DRAMA IN MOBILITY

This project investigates the functions of dramatic texts in mobility as well as the political factors responsible for their circulation. Although there is a strong focus on textual mobility, other areas of focus include their functionality as one of the modes of post-colonial transition. It may be useful to consider them as independent cultural objects in mobility. The principal concern for this project is the politicization of texts and performances by epistemic communities as a means toward specific purposes such as accentuation of cultural identity and Nationalist ideologies. Jallo approaches this topic with the idea that the principal factor accountable for drama in transnationalism is a paradigmatic shift from traditional theatre to literary theatre. There have been representations of Nigerian theatre troupes in festivals from as early as the 1940s in Europe, but this project concerns itself with professional/academic theatre where emphasis is not necessarily placed on performance creation but on dramatic creation. Ultimately the project investigates the modes of deterritorialization of the space of performance and how temporarily, the idea of rootedness is transformed into the habitation of a new space.
Genevieve Jessee is an actor and playwright based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She received a B.A. degree in Theatre Arts from Dillard University of New Orleans, and an M.F.A. in Playwriting from Boston University. Her work has been staged at PlayGround’s Center for New Works, The Source Festival, Solo Sundays, Atlanta Black Theatre Festival, San Francisco Fringe Festival, EXIT theatre and Those Women Productions. She is the recipient of commissions from PlayGround, where she is a resident playwright, and Planet Earth Arts. Her awards include the June Anne Baker Prize, Best of the San Francisco Fringe (2012), and Emerging Playwright Award (PlayGround).

In the spirit of August Wilson’s Pittsburg Cycle, a body of work encompassing ten full length plays, one for each decade of the 20th century, illuminating the African-American experience; The Diaspora Cycle chronicles generations of a single family originating in West Africa in the 15th century, following their lineage to modern day descendants in the United States, in the form of ten 10-minute plays. The multigenerational saga explores the role of inextricable tradition, trauma and joy across centuries and continents. Each 10-minute play is a stand-alone piece, and simultaneously crafted to be performed as a whole, assembling a full-length play. These pieces may be performed in varying order creating the opportunity to tell this story with a fresh perspective each time, and with significant input from the production team.
Restless artist and multiple award winner, Nigeria’s Femi Osofisan (aka Okinba Launko) wears many caps—as activist playwright, scholar, poet, novelist, journalist, actor, director, song writer, and so on. Osofisan was educated at Ibadan, Dakar and Paris, and after several years of writing, directing and teaching both at home and abroad, retired from formal teaching in 2011. He was subsequently appointed an Emeritus Professor of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan. A member of the Advisory Board of the International Research Centre, Freire Universitat, in Berlin, Osofisan became in 2016 the Thalia Laureate, the first African to win this prestigious Prize of the International Association of Theatre Critics. He has published, both in his own name and under the pseudonym of Okinba Launko, five novellas, six volumes of poetry, as well as dozens of plays.

In the late 1950s, when many African countries gained political independence, progressive African-Americans were encouraged by the new African leaders to come and help in nation-building. Ghana in particular, under the dynamic Kwame Nkrumah, attracted figures like WEB DuBois, Maya Angelou, and so on. But what was the result of this interaction between the Africans and their guests? What were the mutual gains or losses? How can these help us construct a more propitious future? Femi started exploring these questions in his earlier play, *A Nightingale For Dr Dubois*, and now wishes to continue, by looking at Maya Angelou.
ABOUT US

The **NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS** is an independent federal agency that funds, promotes, and strengthens the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation.

The **JEROME FOUNDATION**, founded by noted filmmaker, composer and painter Jerome Hill (1905-1972), supports emerging/early career artists in Hill’s home state of Minnesota and New York City, where Hill spent much of his creative life. The Foundation awards grants to artists, collectives and/or ensembles across all disciplines to create new work and to nonprofit arts organizations to offer programs, services and activities for such artists, collectives and/or ensembles.

Also founded by Jerome Hill, the **CAMARGO FOUNDATION** is a residential center offering programming in the Arts and Humanities. It provides time and space in a contemplative environment to think, create, and connect. The Foundation encourages the visionary work of scholars, artists, and thinkers in the Arts and Humanities from throughout the world.