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Contact: Ami Bennett 617-797-8267, ami@ashmontmedia.com



ArtsEmerson Announces the next Public Dialogue Series: INTERROGATING WHITENESS, PART II: CONTROVERSIES AND INTERVENTIONS IN THE THEATRE

Free Public Conversations
With Artists and Community Leaders

Tuesday, February 9, 2017 at 7PM
Emerson/Jackie Liebergott Black Box, Boston

[Email for high resolution images, interviews, and more information.](#)

[BOSTON, MA – January 25, 2016] ArtsEmerson announces the next event in its new Public Dialogue Series entitled *Interrogating Whiteness Part II: Controversies and Interventions in the Theatre*, moderated by Sylvia Spears, Vice President for Diversity & Inclusion at Emerson College, and featuring panelists Summer Williams, Director of An Octoroon (and Co-Founder of Company One), Ralph Pena, Producing Artistic Director of Ma-Yi Theatre Company, and Polly Carl, Co-Artistic Director of ArtsEmerson and Director of HowlRound.



Sylvia Spears



Summer L. Williams



Ralph Pena



Polly Carl

The event is Tuesday, February 9, 2016 at 7pm in the Jackie Liebergott Black Box at the Emerson/Paramount Center, located at 559 Washington Street in Boston's historic theatre district. The event is open to the public and admission is free with RSVP by calling 617.824.8400 or online [here](#).

About Interrogating Whiteness: Part II: Controversies and Interventions in the Theatre

In the past year, the theatre community has seen its share of controversies regarding racial representation on stage, including productions cancelled because of inappropriate casting choices. Across the country, artists and producers are working together to create productions and initiatives that actively respond to questions of racial identity in and through theatre. As artists and audiences, what can we learn from these conversations and interventions? What do we need to do to position theatres as vital spaces for civic conversation inspired by art?

“Our free Public Dialogue Series is in service to our organizational mission—to foster civic transformation through the shared experience of art and public dialogue,” shares ArtsEmerson Co-Artistic Director Polly Carl. “The series is aimed at connecting the work on our stages, our artists, our community partners, and our audiences through conversations that address the concerns and challenges of our contemporary moment.”

“As many of our audience members know, we regularly do talk-backs after our performances, this series is an opportunity to go deeper into conversation—to discuss where art intersects with the cultural questions and concerns of our current political moment,” says David Dower, Co-Artistic Director.

According to Executive Director David Howse, “this will be the first of an ongoing series each year. We have so many great artists and community members we connect with during our season, we see this as the first of a regular series that brings the artist from our stages together with our local and national community—bringing the smartest minds to critical topics.”

About ArtsEmerson’s Public Dialogue Series

This past fall ArtsEmerson launched a new Public Dialogue series, featuring 5 stand-alone events not tied to performances, entitled **Naming Ourselves: Provocative Conversations on Identity and Representation**. The free, open to the public series features conversations surrounding current topics exploring different aspects of identity including the physical body, race, the art of listening, and more. For more information on the series and upcoming events, click [here](#).

About Dialogue Three Participants

Sylvia Spears, Vice President for Diversity & Inclusion, Emerson College

The Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion provides strategic leadership and guidance for all matters related to diversity and inclusion. The VPDI is responsible for the development and implementation of strategic plans, policies, programs and operating structures that advance the College’s diversity and inclusion goals. Critical areas of engagement for the VPDI include academic affairs, student affairs, international affairs, and civic engagement. The VPDI also develops trainings and programs that build institutional awareness and accountability; supports programs to enhance the recruitment, retention and success of faculty, staff and students from underrepresented groups; and engages with faculty to develop curricula, scholarship, and pedagogy that promotes an academic atmosphere reflecting Emerson’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. The VPDI serves as a member of the President’s Council, chairs the Council for Inclusive Excellence, and consults with senior leadership on major institutional issues regarding diversity and inclusion.

Sylvia joined the Emerson community as Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion in August of 2012. Her background includes more than twenty of experience in higher education in student and academic affairs, with leadership positions at Dartmouth College, the University of Rhode Island, Bryant College, and most recently, New England College, where she was the Assistant Vice President for Academic Initiatives. At Dartmouth College, she oversaw diversity and academic support programs, first as Associate Dean of Student Life and Director of the Office of Pluralism and Leadership and later as Associate Dean of the College. Sylvia went onto become Acting Dean of Dartmouth College overseeing a 32 million dollar budget and a staff of 500 employees. In addition to her administrative experience, Sylvia has served in faculty roles in departments of education and human development. She earned a BA in Speech Communications and MS in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Rhode Island. She received her PhD in Education from the Rhode Island College/University of Rhode Island Joint Doctoral Program in Education.

Summer Williams, Director, An Octoroon

Ms. Williams has been with Company One since its inception in 1998. An active member of the Board of Directors, Summer is a producer, director and educator for Company One. Her most recent directing credits include SHELTER OF LAST RESORT by Miranda Craigwell as a part of XX PlayLab 2014, the New England Premiere of Jackie Sibblies Drury's WE ARE PROUD TO PRESENT A PRESENTATION ABOUT THE HERERO OF NAMIBIA, FORMERLY KNOWN AS SOUTHWEST AFRICA FROM THE GERMAN SUDWESTAFRIKA BETWEEN THE YEARS 1884-1915, Idris Goodwin's HOW WE GOT ON and Lynn Nottage's BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK at the Lyric Stage Company of Boston. Regional credits: THE BROTHERS SIZE and MARCUS; OR THE SECRET OF SWEET as part of the THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS (2012 Elliot Norton Award nominated for Outstanding Production and winner of the 2012 IRNE Award for Best Play), NEIGHBORS, GRIMM, THE GOOD NEGRO, VOYEURS DE VENUS (Winner of 2009 Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Director), THE BLUEST EYE (IRNE and Elliot Norton Award nominated), THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT, SPELL #7 (IRNE nominated), JESUS HOPPED THE A TRAIN (2004 Elliot Norton Award for Best Fringe Production) TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES 1992 (IRNE nominated). Ms. Williams has also directed for the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Clark University, Brandeis University, The Theatre Offensive and Huntington Theatre Company. She is a teacher of drama and director at Brookline High School and holds a BA in Theatre, as well as a MA Ed. in Theatre and Urban Education. Ms. Williams serves as a member of the Board of Directors of both Stage Source and The Coolidge Corner Theatre.

Ralph Pena, Producing Artistic Director, Ma-Yi Theatre Company

Ralph is the producing artistic director of Ma-Yi Theatre Company, an Off-Broadway theater based in New York City focused on developing and producing new works by Asian American playwrights. Recent directing credits include developing a new musical at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, *The Orphan of Zhao* for Fordham Theater, Lloyd Suh's *The Wong Kids in the Secret of the Space Chupacabra Go!* (Children's Theater Co. and Ma-Yi, Off Broadway Alliance Award), Joshua Conkel's *Curmudgeons in Love* (EST Marathon), and Mike Lew's *microcrisis* (Youngblood, Ma-Yi). He is currently slated to direct the premiere of A. Rey Pamatmat's new play *House Rules* for Ma-Yi Theater in March 2016. Ralph is the recipient of an Obie Award for his work on *The Romance of Magno Rubio*. He is a member of The Ensemble Studio Theater.

Polly Carl, Co-Artistic Director, ArtsEmerson and Director, HowlRound

Polly Carl is Co-Artistic Director of ArtsEmerson where s/he co-artistic directs an annual season of international work for the downtown theaters of Emerson College. S/he develops, dramaturgs, and presents an eclectic array of work from diverse artists from around the globe. Operating from the core belief that theater is for everyone, Carl seeks to use the work of the theater in concert with opportunities for public dialogue to foster civic transformation through the shared experience of art. In addition, as a Distinguished Artist in Residence on the Emerson faculty, s/he has developed a creative producing curriculum for Emerson College students to fully explore the professional work of ArtsEmerson and HowlRound. Carl is also the Director and co-founder of HowlRound, a knowledge commons by and for the theater community. HowlRound is an online platform as well as an in-person convener of theater practitioners that explores key issues in the field and extends an open invitation for international participation. S/he previously worked as the Producing Artistic Director at the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, and as the Director of Artistic Development for Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago. S/he holds a PhD in Comparative Studies in Discourse and Society from the University of Minnesota.

About ArtsEmerson

ArtsEmerson is the professional presenting and producing organization of the Office of the Arts at Emerson College. Through its international programming and local community partnerships ArtsEmerson serves the city of Boston, the Emerson community (students, faculty and staff), and the global field of performance practice. Founded in 2010, the same year that the U.S. Census confirmed Boston as a majority-minority city, ArtsEmerson is committed to building a cultural institution that embraces and reflects the changing

demographics of the City of Boston. ArtsEmerson operates from the core belief that the arts are for everyone. For more information on ArtsEmerson, visit www.artsemerson.org.

ArtsEmerson's History

ArtsEmerson aims to address gaps in Boston's cultural landscape by putting the world on stage and inviting diverse audiences from across the region into its historic downtown venues. Founded in 2010 by Robert J. Orchard under the auspices of Emerson College, ArtsEmerson quickly established a reputation for putting great work from diverse cultures on its stages—work that emanates from the language of theater, yet pushes the boundaries into dance, music, and opera.

ArtsEmerson's first seasons focused on building a world-class cultural institution that achieved visibility and a leadership role in the city in short order. By 2012, *Boston Magazine* named ArtsEmerson the Best Theatre in Boston. By December of 2013, WBUR critic Ed Seigel cited in his annual "Best of" round-up, saying: "In four short years, [they] have established ArtsEmerson as one of the most important cultural institutions in New England." In 2015, ArtsEmerson repeated as Boston Magazine's Best Theatre in Boston, this time with a special citation for our dual focus on quality programming and deep community involvement. ArtsEmerson continues to evolve its practice on both pillars: artistic excellence and civic impact, committed to building an audience for the work that reflects the diversity of Boston's demographics, and to establishing ArtsEmerson as an active civic partner in Boston.

In 2015 Orchard moved into the role of Creative Consultant. Currently ArtsEmerson is led by Artistic Director, David Dower, Creative Director, Polly Carl, and Managing Director, David Howse. This shared leadership model reflects the organization's values — that multiple voices are essential to leading a 21st century arts organization.

About Emerson College

Based in Boston, Massachusetts, opposite the historic Boston Common and in the heart of the city's Theatre District, with sites in the Netherlands and Los Angeles, Emerson College educates individuals who will solve problems and change the world through engaged leadership in communication and the arts, a mission informed by liberal learning. The College has 3,750 undergraduates and 750 graduate students from across the United States and 50 countries. Supported by state-of-the-art facilities and a renowned faculty, students participate in more than 90 student organizations and performance groups. Emerson is known for its study and internship programs in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., the Netherlands, London, China and the Czech Republic. The College has an active network of 32,000 alumni who hold leadership positions in communications and the arts. For more information, visit emerson.edu.

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