

Propeller Fund 2019

Project: Loving Each Other

Lead Artist: Cat Mahari

Collaborator: Amir George

Collaborator: Robert Excell Tate

Collaborator: Daniel 'Brave Monk' Haywood

Description of Collective (500 words)

Amir George is a filmmaker and curator, born and bred in Chicago. Amir creates work for the cinema, installation, and live performance. Amir's work has been screened at film festivals including Ann Arbor Film Festival, Trinidad and Tobago International Film Festival, BlackStar Film Festival, Afrikana Film Festival, and Chicago Underground Film Festival as well as cultural institutions, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, Anthology Film Archives, Glasgow School of Art, Museum of Contemporary Arts, Los Angeles, and Museum of Contemporary Arts Detroit. In addition to founding The Cinema Culture, a grassroots film programming organization, Amir is the co-founder of Black Radical Imagination a touring experimental short film series with Erin Christovale. Cat Mahari creates work with personal and collective transformational possibilities. She is a free style hip hop and house dancer, also trained in modern, ballet, Krump, West African, Cuban Son, and Chen taiji, whose work is grounded in the upliftment of the African Diaspora and peoples all over the world. In 2017 Ms. Mahari received a Charlotte Street Foundation Generative Performance Artist Fellow, won Jit Vs House, House 1 v1 in Detroit, MI; and premiered Imprints & Traces, an AfroFuturist dance film based in krump. Ms. Mahari was a 2018 sponsored artist in residence at High Concept Labs in Chicago. Daniel Haywood is a 2017 Chicago Dance Maker Lab artist, and an internationally respected dancer and educator of House and Hip Hop culture. He has been commissioned to speak, judge, host, dance and teach at many cultural events. He has worked closely with the University of Hip-Hop, Temple of Hip-Hop, Urban Arts in Action Movement, Hip-Hop Congress, the Universal Zulu Nation and the U.S.A. States Department. Daniel has dedicated his energy towards understanding the origins, developing concepts and mastering the foundations of Hip-Hop's cultural dance form known as B-Boying/Breakin, while also focusing on Freestyle, House, choreography, music, and health. He is a member of internationally recognized breaking crew, Phaze II – Crosstown Crew, as well as a founding leader of Awesome Style Konnection (A.S.K.), a Chicago-based all-elements crew, and F.E.W. Collective which joined artist activists from across the City to create social change through the arts in Chicago and overseas. Robert Excell Tate has trained with Gloria Farr, Joel Hall, Gus Giordano, Eddie and Maria Torres, Maria Torres, Billy Fajardo, Katie Marlo Frankie Martinez, Josie Neglia, Felipe Pollano, Jesus Ponte, and Seon Bristol. He has trained, studied, and performed for Latin Street Dancing, Chicago Dance Ballroom, Clifford Fears Dance Theatre, Detroit City Dance Co., Unique Dance Theatre, and at Marygrove College School for Performing Arts. Currently, Mr. Tate is the CEO and Artistic Director of Los Caballeros de la Salsa, The Gentlemen of Salsa: Chicago's Hottest

Multicultural Contemporary Latin Dance Act. His company has gained international recognition for originality and choreography, and offers diverse dance forms such as Jazz, Ballet, Swing, Hustle, Stepping, Ballroom, and a full command of Latin dances including Mambo, Salsa, Merengue, Rumba, Bachata, and Cumbia.

Project Proposal (500 words)

Loving Each Other is a film that explores repetition as a catalyst for change in Black community and individual identities through intimacy. The process is in conversation with the creative ways Black people connect identity and relationships. It is an experiential tracing of repetition and Blackness in relation to the Great Black Migrations of the 20th century. Loving Each Other funds cover research and development, film production, and public engagements. Project R&D and public engagements will be held, respectively, at High Concept Labs and ThreeWalls: venues for emerging and adventurous artists that support avant-garde and under-heard voices in Chicago. This project centers Chicago-style Stepping, an African American partnered social dance, typically performed in late night bars, juke joints, and ballrooms. This pas de deux (step for two) dance is rooted and informed by the plurality of Chicago African-American culture since the advent of the Great Black Migration. Steppin' is rich in intimacy, sensuality, and grace. Its multi-genre music grounding (spanning R&B, Jazz, and House) is in conjunction with a performative tapestry of community. Steppin' is cultural dance form through which generational, stylistic, and musical changes strengthen bonds of commonality, and build on tension between individual expression and partnership. Chicago-style Stepping will be worked with as historical and sociopolitical embodied material, and its terrain will be expanded with Chicago style House and Footwork dance forms. The minimal presence of Stepping in the lives of Black youth, speaks to the generational tensions within Blackness. Thus exacerbating misrepresentations of Black intimate connection. This movement collaboration guided by Tate, and Brave Monk and Cat Mahari seeks to address this by connecting the Chicago styles of Stepping, House, and Footwork, into an expanded narrative of connection. The short film Loving Each Other, directed by Amir George, presents a series of stories communicated through movement, that capture the intense, awkward and exhilarating intimacy of Black touch - including non-heteronormative relationships. The film locations include domestic and public spaces in the West and South side neighborhoods in Chicago, including legendary Steppers lounge The 50 Yard Line. The public engagements for the projects, to be held at ThreeWalls, include the film premiere, a panel conversation and presentation on the history and development of Chicago-style Stepping, moderated by noted music historian and sound selector Duane Powell, a free intro to Stepping class, followed by an open session featuring sound selector Rae Chardonnay, and an Afrofuturist installation inspired by a Chicago-style 'Steppers Party'. The installation yields an imaginative field of interconnectivity amongst the audience-participants via mediated projected imagery, sounds, and objects. Loving Each Other: a movement journey of renewal in touch, intimacy, trust, land, love, and community - through film and music for the Afrofuturist 21st century.

Project timeline (100 word paragraph or bullet point list):

- January - May: Research and Development at High Concept Labs
- April 3rd: Panel conversation, moderated by Duane Powell at ThreeWalls
- April 10th: Free Steppers Class, taught by Robert Excell Tate at ThreeWalls
- April 17th: Installation/Steppers Party at ThreeWalls
- April 24th: Live work in progress showing of R&D, with live music at ThreeWalls, followed by Q & A
- June: Film premiere at Chicago Contemporary Art Museum, followed by Q & A with Amir George

What venues will you pursue and why? (150 words)

Venues ThreeWalls Gallery, CAM, and High Concept Labs will be pursued for Loving Each Other. ThreeWalls 2018-19 In-Session is framed by Claudia Rankine's 2014 collection Citizen: An American Lyric. Loving Each Other responds to Isabel Wilkerson's book "The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration" (part of ThreeWalls reference list). Wilkerson's work focuses on the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities, in search of a better life. High Concept Labs has consistently opened its doors to Chicago-based street/club dance styles - including Chicago Footwork and House - and lead artist Cat Mahari was a 2018 sponsored artist (focused in Krump, Hip Hop and Chen Taiji). Amir George films have been screened at contemporary art museums, and CAM has hosted other Chicago-style movement forms, and as such will be contacted to host the film premiere.

Describe how your project relates to the field of visual arts (100 words)

Loving Each Other - its film process, research and production, and additional public engagements offers the best way for community to deeply absorb the intertwined facts, feelings, and concepts of the powerful intimacy of Black touch. This project and its relationship to visual arts lays in the way in which it greatly enhances and re-imagines the issues of everyday Chicago Black life by placing Stepping in a broader creative context, whose relevance lies its facility of catalyzing how generational Blackness - its sensuality and its grounding is perceived and represented.

Describe your intended audience (100 words)

The intended audience for this project are current community members of the Chicago-style Stepping community, as well as Black youth and Black LGBTQIA+ people. We seek this out because whilst Stepping is undeniably an active part of the Black Chicago cultural scape - it also has suffered heavily from a lack of generational and non-heteronormative participation. Loving Each Other audience are participants of latter day street dance and club events, many of whom have had limited points of entry to the Stepping community, and due to that, have yet to experience for themselves Steppings rich healing and cultural memory.

What is the desired outcome or impact of your project? (100 words)

Loving Each Other impact in addressing Blackness and intimacy via Chicago-style Stepping, will diversify this partner-dance participation performance paradigms, cinematic avenues, and approaches to creating inter-generational bridges. We desire to create culturally effective change. Loving Each Other is an interdisciplinary engagement that centralizes the encompassing processes and practice of Blackness and touch in Chicago, through recognizing the ways in which Stepping has come to be, from its first appearance in a generation removed from majority agrarian systems, and the ways in which it can reach - to its descendants and the urban world in which they have inherited.

If your project budget exceeds \$6,000, please describe what an award of \$6,000 will enable you to achieve or what public programs you will be able to produce? Examples include research and development, an exhibition, workshops/discussions, a website, a publication, etc. (200 words)

Loving Each Other budget does exceed the \$6,000 offered through Propeller. The \$6,000 will go directly towards cost of research and development of Stepping with Chicago style House and Footwork, film production and score, website, and merchandise. The R&D for Loving Each Other consists of 2x times per week meet ups - over the course of 6 months, and includes a work in progress showing, that centers the creative and generational synthesis and conversation occurring amongst its participants. Its participant's nominal fees cover the process of R&D and film production. Fees also go toward director Amir George and composer Ben Lamar Gay. In addition we believe that Loving Each Other is the thing that all people should do. Propeller funding covers an exhibition of the film, and website creation, where people can watch film excerpts, and covers merchandised film, film score, tee's, and tanks.

Does your project have any other sources of existing or potential income (ticket sales, merchandise, etc.)? (100 words)

Loving Each Other will result in a film and soundtrack, which we will make available for purchase. Also we will have available for purchase tee shirts and tank shirts.