

BLACK LUNCH TABLE

(BLT) creates a space for people, art, Black studies and social justice issues.



WHAT WE DO



BLT Artists' Roundtable, at Dorchester Projects, Chicago, 2014



Wikipedia edit-a-thon, at Project Row Houses, Houston, 2016

The Black Lunch Table (BLT) is an oral-history archiving project. Our primary aim is the production of discursive sites, wherein cultural producers engage in dialogue on a variety of critical issues. BLT animates discourse and initiates a democratic rewriting of contemporary history around and among the people living this history.

Organized around literal and metaphorical lunch tables, Black Lunch Table takes the lunchroom phenomenon as its starting point. Our roundtable sessions provide both physical space and allotted time for interdisciplinary and intergenerational discussions, bringing together a diversity of community members and fostering candid conversations. The Artists Roundtable curates Black artists into discussions, while the People's Table invites participation from all community members. Our Wikipedia initiative includes workshops that mobilize the collective authoring of articles pertaining to the lives and works of Black artists. BLT has consistently provided a unique, critical platform for exchange by staging and recording community discussions at institutions internationally.

Resource equity means equal access to knowledge, health, wealth, and social resources for everyone. It is not just representation but reparations. Resource equity is only possible if our stories are told by us, creating a record of our cultural, intellectual, and social contributions.

BLACK LUNCH TABLE PROJECTS

Artists' Table

The Artists Roundtable, our founding initiative invites Black artists from local communities to engage in dialogue with one another. It provides a forum for the discussion of critical issues directly affecting our communities, reifying the visibility of connections that exist between contemporary Black artists.

People's Table

At the People's Table, community members participate in conversation around site-specific sociopolitical issues affecting historically disenfranchised populations. This session makes visible the connections that exist within local communities, while laying out new productive relationships to continue the movement for dismantling institutional racism.

Wikipedia edit-a-thons

91% of editors are white; 77% of editors of men. Our work intends to shift this demographic. At our edit-a-thons, we train participants to create, update, and improve Wikipedia articles pertaining to the lives and works of black artists. BLT edit-a-thons ultimately empower people to write their own history.

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Black Lunch Table Performance, at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, 2005

ABOUT HEATHER

Heather Hart, based in New York, is a Guest Lecturer at Rutgers University and an interdisciplinary artist exploring the power in thresholds, questioning dominant narratives, and creating alternatives to them through viewer activation. She was awarded grants from Anonymous Was A Woman, the Graham Foundation, Joan Mitchell Foundation, and the Jerome Foundation, NYFA, and Harpo Foundation. Hart's has exhibited at the Queens Museum, Storm King Art Center, The Kohler Art Center, Eastern Illinois University, Seattle Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and University of Toronto, Scarborough. She studied at Skowhegan, Whitney ISP, Cornish College of the Arts, Princeton University and received her MFA from Rutgers University.

ABOUT JINA

Jina Valentine is an Associate Professor of Printmedia at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her interdisciplinary practice is informed by the intuitive strategies of American folk artists and traditional craft techniques, and interweaves histories latent within found texts, objects, narratives, and spaces. She has exhibited at venues including The Drawing Center, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the CUE Foundation, and the Elizabeth Foundation. She has been awarded grants from the Graham Foundation, North Carolina Arts Council, Joan Mitchell Foundation, and Art Matters. Jina received her BFA from Carnegie Mellon University and her MFA from Stanford University.

THE ARCHIVE

Our roundtables conversations are audio recorded. We transcribe and metadata tag the conversations from the individual tables for inclusion on our dynamic searchable online archive. BLT archive is a unique and innovative fusion of Linked Open Data principles, network-based interface and analysis, and user-generated content and curation. As with its creation of physical spaces that foster community and generate critical dialogue, the archive provides a digital space for community driven approach to art, historical authorship, and discourse on Black studies and social justice issues. We are creating, a browsable network of linked concepts which show their relation not only to individual artists and projects, but to broader discourse unfolding within online spaces.

PROJECT SUPPORT

Black Lunch Table is funded by The Andy Warhol Foundation for Art, the Wikipedia Foundation, Rutgers University Faculty Research Grant, Creative Capital and generous individual donors. We have received support from Awesome Foundation, Tusk, Inc, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Common Fields, UNC Institute for Arts & Humanities, and the Rema Hort Mann Foundation.

We are keen to create partnerships with philanthropic organizations, arts institutions and individuals that not only provide fiscal support for BLT, but also encourage the development of our founding principles.

ENGAGEMENTS

We have programmed events at institutions such as Storm King Sculpture Park, Market Photo Workshop, UTSC, Banff Center, Staten Island Museum, the McColl Center for Art + Innovation, BRIC, Weeksville, MCA Chicago, Creative Time, Project Row Houses, the Joan Mitchell Center, MITH and The National Humanities Center.

PRESS + PARTNERS

We published an article in Art21 Magazine, chapters in "Wiki@20" and "Bridging Communities through Socially Engaged Art." BLT received coverage from Artsy, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Hyperallergic. We have ongoing collaborative investment in Art+Feminism, Whose Knowledge?, AfroCROWD, WikiNYC, MCA Chicago and Hyde Park Arts Center.