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Posted by **Blaire Dessent** 15 Sep**Tell me more with Yona Backer**

I am so pleased to have the *Tell Me More* series continues this week with Yona Backer. Yona is a producer, curator, consultant and the founder of [Third Streaming](#), LLC, an art and performance gallery and advisory service that supports the development of arts, culture and entertainment through collaborations and by mixing artistic genres to produce unexpected outcomes. Yona has a twenty-year career supporting artists and cultural institutions that fall outside of the mainstream, and she is committed to a collaborative approach to arts programming and management. It is really an honor to have Yona participate in the *Tell Me More* series in part because she has been a personal mentor for years. Third Streaming clearly serves as an innovative and creative platform in New York and it will be exciting see what the future programming will be.

**Q: When did you decide to create Third Streaming? How did it develop?**

A: The idea for Third Streaming came about when I was still working at the Andy Warhol Foundation where I worked for almost ten years. I wanted to create a platform for artists who are making socially relevant/conscious work. This was about three years ago when the commercialization of international contemporary art was at its peak. I was also very interested in expanding the definition of what art can mean (at least for me) and decided from the beginning that I wanted to work with creative producers of all kinds, regardless of discipline. It took a few years to find the right space that was conducive to experimentation and that had an intimate vibe. And, I was fortunate to eventually find the Soho loft space that is now home to Third Streaming. In many ways, the loft we're in, is a throw back to the 1970s when artists were organizing happenings in loft spaces in Soho. The founding of 3S: Third Streaming was officially founded by me in 2009; and I started programming in 2010 when I had secured the loft. Junichi Masuda came on board in May 2010 as Director when I opened the space. He has a background in music and art, and was particularly interested in our experimental approach to programming. He was also

drawn to the fact that we mix artistic genres. Anna Stein and Adrienne Edwards are frequent collaborators who work with us on specific projects.

**Q: I love the statement on the opening page of the Third Streaming website: "We highlight the crossover, connection and combination of the creative lifestyle." Can you explain the meaning behind that a bit and talk about your interest in a collaborative approach to arts programming?**

A: Many of today's artists/creative producers move fluidly between genres and we encourage that spirit of experimentation. For example, we sometimes open a restaurant for one night. This project, which is titled OOWIAH (Only Open When I am Here), was conceived by conceptual artist Mary Ellen Carroll whose one-person show inaugurated our space in May 2010. We also work with designers, musicians, filmmakers, performance artists in addition to visual artists. And, Third Streaming has a live music and art performance program in addition to the exhibitions. For example, we hosted a performance/event that featured work by Randal Wilcox, an artist and a musician, with a live performance with the Darius Jones Trio. Darius and Randal are frequent collaborators but had actually never done anything together in a public setting. Our next show, BITE: Street Inspired Art and Fashion is a good example of the collaborative spirit that we encourage. The show explores the interface between art and fashion within the context of today's global urban culture. For this show, many of the artists are producing limited edition clothing and accessories, and some are collaborating on new projects with under-the-radar fashion designers. In many ways, this project is about collaboration, cross over, and bringing people together as much as it is about the Street. To further answer your question about what having a "collaborative approach" means: I consider myself a facilitator and producer. I personally like collaborating and I think unexpected outcomes happen through collaborations. I often find that they lead to experimentation and can take me out of my comfort zone. I find it enriching and usually it's more fun. And, if artists are open to collaborating (it's not for everyone) than we will facilitate that. We also draw a very diverse audience and have become an informal meeting place for all kinds of people. This has already led to independent collaborations that happen organically and that are the result of bringing people together at the informal dinners we regularly host at the loft.

**Q: Why did you decide to have an exhibition space in addition to advisory services? How are the artists who exhibit in the space selected? Is the work available for sale?**

A: Third Streaming is an LLC, meaning we are a for-profit entity, though our programming seems to be more associated with that of a non-profit or artist-centered space. Our model is different and that is part of the challenge, though it is one that I am embracing. We are establishing long-term working relationships with artists who will be part of Third Streaming. Think "representation" but not in the traditional sense of a Chelsea gallery. That relationship is individually tailored to each artist. We work with artists who have not had a lot of visibility - at least not in New York - and whose practice is socially relevant and conscious.

The advisory services component - we provide strategic and fundraising advice - is a natural extension of my background working at the Andy Warhol Foundation. I was already providing that service when I left the Foundation two years ago as colleagues approached me for advice. So, in that sense, we are a hybrid company, but that totally falls in line with our mission.

**Q: Are you enjoying working for yourself and for your own business?**

**Different? Better? More Stress?** A: I love working for myself. It is definitely more work, and of course, at times it can be stressful, but it is very rewarding to create something I am passionate about and to have the opportunity to interact with so many amazing people. I find that very inspiring.

**Q: Are you working on other projects outside of Third Streaming at the moment?** A: I was doing some independent curatorial work when I left the Warhol Foundation. For example, I co-curated the exhibition Rockstone and Bootheel: Contemporary Art from the West Indies. For now, I am very focused on establishing Third Streaming in New York. There are a few international collaborations in the making as I'm very interested working within a global context.

BITE: Street Inspired Art and Fashion, opened on September 8 and will be on view through November 6th. Images are from the current exhibition, BITE, and past exhibitions "Olek Will Crochet Another Bike," July 2010 and "My Death is Pending..... Because..." by Mary Ellen Carroll in May 2010.

**BITE**

**Street Inspired Art and Fashion**

September 8 to November 6, 2010

Opening Reception:  
Wednesday, September 8  
9 pm to midnight



Hours:  
Wednesday to Friday to 7 pm  
Saturday noon to 6 pm  
or by appointment

Image by Jennie C. Jones



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