

ARTE FUSE

Interview with Chelsea Escher from Chashama

35 MINS AGO by CARA VINCENT



Chashama supports artists and nurtures creative communities in New York City, and beyond, by partnering with property owners to transform unused real estate into spaces for artists to work and present.

Since 1995, Chashama has revitalized over 80 properties, providing invaluable opportunities to more than 15,000 artists. Chashama empowers artists at any stage of their career with affordable space to live, create and present. Chashama also brings vibrant, artistic programming to audiences of all ages and backgrounds by annually presenting over 130 free, public events to diverse neighborhoods throughout New York City (mission statement from Chashama's website).

CV: How did the concept for Chashama come about?

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CE: The Artistic Director, Anita Durst, founded Chashama in 1995 after she experienced firsthand the difficulty of finding space to create work as an artist. She was driven to create places for artists free of financial and subjective constraints. She wanted to secure spaces for artists to create and show their work to keep the cultural fabric of New York City vibrant. Anita had the incredible idea to transform vacant real estate properties into temporary art galleries and studios.

CV: How and when did you get involved with the organization? Are you an artist yourself?

I began working for Chashama last year, in June. The 2016 Gala was my third day at work! What a way to begin a new job. Yes, I am an artist; I am a dancer. My passion for the arts and performing drives the work I do at Chashama. Since I, myself, am in a position where space is limited to create and present, it feels great to be working towards giving space to artists of all mediums.



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CV: What is the main focus of Chashama? Why is it an important organization for New Yorkers and artists to know about?

Chashama is focused on keeping artists in NYC. At a time where rents are sky high, creating and presenting art seems like the most impossible thing for artists when they are struggling to pay their usual rent. Chashama's model is extremely important as it not only provides artists with space, but it also activates empty storefronts and buildings that would otherwise sit empty until someone with enough money can rent or buy it. It is so important for New Yorkers and artists to know about Chashama's mission and programs because art is crucial to the livelihood of NYC. It may seem impossible for New Yorkers to stay in New York City right now, given the increasingly rising cost of living. Chashama is working with the changing times to ensure that artists do not go anywhere. We want to be the organization that people think of when they see an empty space. Why not fill it with something beautiful and unique? Why not support the work of a local emerging artist? We are all in this together!

CV: What are some of the highlights of Chashama's past?

In the past year, we have granted free and affordable space to create and present to over 1,000 artists, presented over 150 exhibitions, including visual art, performances, dance, and music for free, provided 144 artist studios at an affordable rate of just \$1 per square foot, and transformed over 20 new locations to present the work of local, emerging artists.



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CV: What are some upcoming events or art shows we should look out for?

Our biggest event of the year, the annual Chashama Gala, is happening on Thursday, June 8! At 4 Times Square, the 22nd floor, where the SPRING/BREAK Art Fair took place this year. We have an Artist After Party – “Art is Everywhere”, from 9pm-midnight. After the Gala. Tickets are only \$50!

CV: What artist studios does Chashama sponsor?

We provide affordable artist studios to several artists, some early in their career, some already established artists. Artists apply for space online, and when a space becomes available, we contact them and see if the space fits their needs. Currently, we have an extensive wait list, so it is crucial for land owners to donate their permanently vacant space for artists to create! Our largest artist studio location is the Brooklyn Army Terminal, where almost 100 artists have their studios. The beauty of Chashama is that we will never kick those artists out. They can call the space their studio for as long or short as they wish! To name a few artists that we are fortunate to have in our studios are Kenneth Paris III, Caleb Nussear, Nicholas Fraser, Christina Massey, and many, many others. We also recently had Carole Feuerman presenting in one of our Spaces to Present!

CV: Can you talk a little about some of the programs that Chashama provides for artists?

The programs we offer artists are our Space to Create and Space to Present programs. Through Space to Create, we provide artists with low-cost studios in a professional, supportive, creative environment. When receiving studio space through Chashama, we offer artists access to materials for the arts, professional development workshops, and annual open studios events. Through Space to Present, we provide artists with free exhibition and performance space. We also offer logistical and marketing support for their presentations.

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CV: How does one get involved and/or participate in these programs?

You can apply online at chashama.org!

The Gala sounds fun and exciting! Can you tell me a bit please about Chashama's involvement with it and who is being honored at the 2017 Gala?

We are so pleased to be honoring Pentagram, Sir Shadow, and Joe McMillan of DDG at the 2017 Gala. These people and organizations share Chashama's values and work to highlight the importance of art in our vibrant city. The Gala is the artist party of the year! It is a free-roaming event where guests are invited to explore the installations and interactive environments of 150 artists. The Gala is a celebration of Chashama's mission, and that is to give space to artists to realize their creative visions!

CV: Is it open to the public to attend?

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Yes! If the full Gala experience is not for you, we have tickets for sale for the After Party, titled "Art is Everywhere". The After Party is 9pm-midnight. Tickets are \$50! chashama.org/gala2017

CV: What are some new and exciting things on the horizon for Chashama?

We are unveiling the new Chashama brand in the fall of 2017, created and designed entirely by Pentagram! The rebranding has been an exciting experience for the entire Chashama team, and we are so excited to share it with the world. Also, our chaNorth Residency will be back in action in the fall. Artists can apply for a 3-6 month creative residency at our farmhouse location in Pine Plains, NY. Lastly, we have expanded to New Jersey! We have a handful of artist studios in Matawan, NJ. These studios will operate under the Space to Create program.



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