Racial Encounters, Ruptures, and Reckonings:

Art Curriculum Futurity in the Wake of Black Lives Matter

Amelia M. Kraehe and David Herman, Jr.

IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE to suggest that history is a straight line from the past to the present, or that it can determine what the future will look like. Life is far too messy and unpredictable for that to be true, since our existence is always being worked out right in front of us. But it is also misguided to ignore how the past sets a course for today and tomorrow.

This editorial grows out of a conversation in which we, David and Amy, seek to make sense of multiple crises converging. One is the crisis arising from COVID-19, a novel coronavirus. Another is anti-black racism, a much older disease that has plagued this land we now call the United States of America for more than 500 years, as well as much of the world touched by European colonialism and American imperialism. Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic is powered by the complex biology of a coronavirus, racism is a systemic social malady powered by laws, institutional policies and practices, and a shared common sense or worldview that allows individuals in a society to perceive and interpret reality in similar ways.

We exist in the present moment of these crises as two art educators with different standpoints shaped by class, gender, hue, and circumstance. We also are Black people—David, a Southern Black Gullah Geechee, and Amy, a product of a biracial upbringing in suburban Atlanta. And more recently, we find commonalities in our roles as primary caregivers trying to raise and protect young Black children so they may enter adulthood with their human dignity, joy, and bodies intact. Not long before we met each other in 2013, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was pursued and killed by a vigilante while eating Skittles on his walk home in Sanford, Florida. Not long after, 18-year-old Michael Brown was gunned down by police in Ferguson, Missouri, his lifeless body left exposed in the street for 4 hours. Only a few months later, 12-year-old Tamir Rice was also lethally shot by a police officer while playing in the park with a toy pistol. So, you see, the observations and comments we offer here are part of a recurring conversation that began some years ago (Herman & Kraehe, 2018). However, it was rekindled by the flashpoint of watching the viral cell phone video of yet another

Figure 1. Sirius's Protect ME/US protest of Trayvon Martin's murder, 2013. Captured from digital video footage. Image courtesy of photographer David Herman, Jr.

Black person, George Floyd, having the life slowly squeezed out of him for nearly 9 minutes by a White police officer, all the while surrounded by onlookers—including fellow non-White police officers.

It is against a historical backdrop of white supremacy that we see this most recent spate of violence and harassment against Black people, from George Floyd to Ahmaud Arbery to Breonna Taylor to Christian Cooper to so many others—#SayTheirNames. The through line in all these stories is racism. Yet the word *racism* feels inadequate—too blunt and too vague a tool. Something more incisive is needed to make sense of the death, trauma, and loathing that wreaks devastation on Black bodies and communities in big cities and small towns across the country.

What is killing Black people is anti-black racism. According to education scholar Tyrone C. Howard (2020), "anti-Black racism speaks to the specific ways in which Black people are seen, targeted, dehumanized, and often killed in a manner that is unlike any other group of people in the United States" (para. 7). To understand anti-black racism, one has to confront anti-blackness, that is, the manner in which in white supremacist societies well-meaning White and non-White people alike unconsciously associate blackness (and thus Black life) with enslavement, the bottom of the Western hierarchy of Man, irredeemable and utterly disposable, the antithesis of humanness itself (Hughes, 1926; Weheliye, 2014; Wilderson, 2017; Wynter, 2003).

Anti-blackness takes many forms in art education. The psychology of color symbolism commonly taught in art classes as a universal schema for meaning-making is a racially encoded value system (Gude, 1999). The color white is associated with purity, goodness, and vitality, whereas black is assigned to evil, obscenity, and death. These symbolic associations are not natural to the way all humans perceive reality. They are western European cultural conventions rooted in the same aesthetic philosophies that seeded the creation of "White" identity (Painter, 2010).

Anti-blackness is also embedded in the seemingly nonracial materials and technologies with which we teach and make art. For example, how many art teachers know about the Shirley cards that Kodak used to calibrate light and shadows? The cards, which pictured a White woman as the ideal photographic subject, became the standard used in photo labs to color correct all skin tones (del Barco, 2014). In this context, the darker the skin, the more aberrant and ill-suited subjects appear before the camera (Lewis, 2019). Similar anti-black racial bias remains encoded in the algorithms used in digital camera technology as well as computer software and online programs (Benjamin, 2019).

There are other ways anti-blackness shows up in art education, but these two examples are enough to make the following assertion: Art does not reside on neutral ground, and neither do art educators. Art and its teaching are implicated in anti-blackness. They always have been. A narrow curricular focus on materials, processes, and techniques is not an escape hatch that will save art education from its entanglements with histories of colonialism and white supremacy (Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, & Carpenter, 2018). Within art education, as in daily life, each of us is enmeshed in the events that manifest these dynamic and contingent histories. Although there is no singular way to encounter or comprehend this

particular historical conjuncture of a global protest and pandemic, we are all brought to this vista, this vantage point where we are able to witness a broad swath of human beings taking up the call: BLACK LIVES MATTER. The questions that arise for many of us are: Why is this happening now? More critically, How will I decide to respond to the moment? What does it look like for art educators and leaders in the field to be anti-racist beyond the rhetoric of well-crafted statements and snappy hashtags? These are questions that individuals have to confront—together.

At a time when young people and elders of all different hues are stepping into the streets to put their bodies on the front line in defense of Black life, what is it that each of us is willing to risk to lean into the moment and respond to the demands for a more just existence? For us, three urgencies come to mind, if art education is to meet this moment with a renewed commitment to practices that are impactful and life-affirming. First, we will need to take a stand so that children do not inherit a world that is encumbered by the social waste of injustice. Secondly, we must be resolute in our commitments to align art curriculum, pedagogy, policy making, and everyday actions against white supremacy and anti-black racist agendas wherever we encounter them. And lastly, we must understand that numbers one and two will require that we open ourselves up to being decentered by the voices of other people and concerns that extend beyond our own immediate needs—that is, the voices of Black people, Black artists, Black thought leaders who show us that the only way forward is to confront the legacy of anti-black racism. In short, as art educators, we can choose to either hold the lines of history by not putting ourselves in the turbulence of transformation, or step into a future that no longer settles for the status quo. Either way, the world will continue to turn, and time will continue to reflect our individual and collective willingness and unwillingness to act.

This is the third and final issue comprising a special series on the future of art curriculum. It has been in the making for more than a year. Though no one predicted the anti-racist uprisings of summer 2020 and no one now knows what art curriculum will look like in the wake of Black Lives Matter, the articles in this issue offer fresh perspectives to inspire art educators to think about what should come next.

In part 1 of an open letter to art educators, **James Haywood Rolling, Jr.**, the inaugural chair of the NAEA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Commission and NAEA's President-Elect, explains why anti-racism is a responsibility of the organization and how art educators may take up that responsibility going forward.

Several authors focus on the teen years, a time in one's life when a futures orientation may line up well with developmental capacity. **Rachel Fendler**, **Sara Scott Shields**, and **Danielle Henn** observe in "#thefutureisnow: A Model for Civically Engaged Art Education" that young people are driven to impact society and describe a think/make/act model that educators can use to tap into that activist drive to practice artmaking as both a mode of expression and civic engagement. In "Flashpoints of Artist Identity Formation," **Sarah Travis** uses portraiture to illustrate how teens work to fashion artistic futures for themselves that intersect with racial identities and other social formations, and suggest ways for teachers to recognize and support that identity work in and out of the art classroom. In "Varsity Art Club: HOMAGO at the Yale University Art Gallery," **Jessica Sack** and **Shaelyn Moody** present the Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out method as it was applied in an art museum teen program and, through personal accounts of participants, show the method's efficacy for mentoring and preparing young people for the future.

Teachers are in the futures business, which is to say they educate and support the development of human beings so that individuals and society may be mutually enhanced. In "Traditional Futures: Prospective Art Teachers' Possible Future Selves," **Beth A. Thomas** looks at the common discourses that shape how new recruits to art education imagine what it is to be an art teacher and offers new insights for preK–12, higher education art educators, and field mentors as to the constellation of ideas and practices that mediate the profession's future. **Stephanie Baer** sees art educators as agents of change for the field. In "The Future Is Ours: Lighting the Fire With Preservice Advocacy Experiences," she tells the story of taking a small group of preservice art educators to the National Arts Action Summit in Washington, DC, and outlines the curriculum she and colleagues designed and implemented so that students could engage effectively as leaders in the field.

Paul E. Bolin, a historian of art education, speculates about the field of art education in his Commentary, "Looking Forward From Where We Have Been." He offers five considerations for art educators' work in the years and decades ahead that include an emphasis on dissolving familiar categories of "visual art"; developing strategies for meaningful multicultural studies of art; anticipating various purposes for art education in the future (as there have been in the past); partnering to sustain art education in schools and communities; and the increasing presence of digital technologies for making and experiencing art that will challenge the meaning of art education.

Luke Meeken presents "Forms and Bodies: Using Digital Fabrication to Interface the Virtual and Corporeal," an Instructional Resource that opens art curriculum to futuristic new assemblages by bridging digital technologies and the human

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body with lessons on making digital artifacts to be worn. A diverse sampling of exemplar artists is discussed, which includes women and people of color—groups that are underrepresented in digital media practice.

Artists have an important role to play in helping people imagine new ways of living and dream of a freer and more just future (Desai, 2020). Art educators also play a role in shaping the social imagination through the curricula they design for learners to experience. If, as a field, art education compartmentalizes its responsibility by delimiting action to only that which is apolitical, then we resign ourselves to a future created for us but without us. Therefore, we hope the field of art education will not ignore or half-heartedly participate in the most significant, potentially world-changing events of our time that just might move the country toward its unfulfilled promises of liberty and justice for all. This is a time for bravery. This is a time for us to creatively join in the work that others are already doing on our behalf. Let us enter the struggle in solidarity! ■

—Amelia M. Kraehe, Senior Editor, and David Herman, Jr., NAEA Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Commissioner, Higher Education

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