

Racist Scenarios & Solutions

From [MATCHING MINORITIES//DOUBTFUL DOUBLES: A Conversation on Institutionalized Racism, Tokenism, Microaggressions, and Inclusion vs. Optics in the Art World](#)

Presentation by Jen Delos Reyes, Lisa Lee, Astria Suparak
Common Field Convening, April 25, 2020

The following is an edited excerpt of the participatory discussion portion of this session, which took place in Zoom's chat function. Attendees were invited to present racist scenarios for the group to offer support, guidance, and feedback on. The three presenters verbally responded contemporaneously -- please watch the [video recording](#) for that commentary (vimeo.com/422268158).

IS THERE A RACIST SCENARIO THAT YOU WANT THIS GROUP TO COME UP WITH SOLUTIONS FOR?

Sammy H : **How to correct people pronouncing my name wrong and how they need to accept it?**

Ginger B : Send audio file of correct pronunciation via email.

Loring : The only thing I've done is to continue to correct them, but then I end up being an "angry asian person".

April D : As that white person sometimes - I WANT to be corrected until I get it right!

DeLena F : Answer, just keep correcting them, that's what I do when people mispronounce my name.

Astria Suparak (her) : scenario: When people of power keep mispronouncing words.

Antonio S : How about asking HR to intervene and ask the person to take a course on USA language diversity?

Sarah F : I added an audio file of my correct name pronunciation on my website's about page.

jake m : Audio files have been critical tools, as well as making present the alphabets engaged.

S : Parallel: when your name contains non English characters and even if your colleagues are willing to change it in print, the payroll system & most fonts literally can't spell it correctly (W love Susanō).

user : **When art handler coworkers made a racist comment about an Asian artist video installation piece by calling the piece "the Bruce Lee guy." I questioned why they were being racist.**

lydia s: 1. Say the artist's name.

Janice B : Sometimes I ask "What do you mean by that?"

Janice B : If you ask enough times, they get it.

Engagement EAP : "What do you mean?" is a great response.

Kristina M : Also, pausing for a moment signals that things are not right.

lydia s : Like "oh do you mean the work by .. so and so... yes they - insert information about artists using appropriate language which represents their work without".

Kristina M : And collect yourself and respond asking "what do you mean?"

Latham Z : Agree with Astria - asking questions is my default of interrupting racism - like something to the effect, "why did you call them Bruce Lee when their name is written right there?" It puts the discomfort back on the person perpetuating racism... Also relieves the pressure of trying to come up with the best response.

Juana W : @Janice B - That's what I say. if they have to explain it, that seems to make them notice it's a problem to say that.

Courtney W : I'm an ally for bg, but when someone uses racist descriptors, I try to say "they're just Asian, they're not Bruce Lee. A better way of describing that piece could be 'the video installation that shows xyz' can work better" giving people a new blueprint is important sometimes.

petrina : **I held a curatorial position for a municipal government. After 1.5 years, I brought up issues of equity with the museum's larger ethos of programming and was fired a few weeks later. I'm currently in legal mediation - but my question is: to receive any**

severance, I will have to sign a NDA. Any advice on how to still mobilize community support when I cannot speak about it at all?

Elizabeth S - She : UNIONIZE!

Janice B : Also think about severance packages and benefits offerings.

C. S : **I am part of a group/meeting where there is a dynamic that is uncomfortable and microaggressive. Since I am not identified as POC, what are productive ways to be an ally that doesn't take away the voice and agency?**

Jacquelyn G : @C. S is the uncomfortable & microaggressive vibe coming white people? If so, you can set agreements for behavior at the beginning of meetings, and also speak privately to white people who seem to be perpetuating this vibe outside of the meetings.

Liyen C : **I was in a show, and had submitted my bio with my background as an Asian-born person right at the end. The exhibition manager rewrote my bio with my background in the first line ahead of my valid accomplishments. They would NEVER have done that to a white person. I got my way in the end, but never pointed it out that it was a racist thing to do.**

Jo : @Liyen, good on you for speaking up about that and not backing down.

Liyen C : @Jo Thanks. But I feel bad for not confronting it and many other similar professional experiences as an artist because I'm too afraid to burn bridges

user : Taking the time to explain why there is an equality that exists, was my way of confronting their ignorance of their privilege.

Lissa C : @Liyen It's important for us to talk about this very thing! How do we make sure people are supported when they show the bravery to call something out?

Jacquelyn G : @Liyen did you have a contract for the exhibition? Not altering your bio/statements can be part of that.

Christine W (she/her) : this came up recently in a discussion with other artists. We ultimately agreed, that's a form of colonialism.

Jo : Yes, I'm curious about identifying by my race in written statements. I've never thought to do it before, but recently (and I feel terrible about this) I thought it could be advantageous to play on the optics.

Engagement EAP : I have gone back to marketing folks and curators and said they had an error in my bio and re-sent my original.

DeLena F : Answer: I think artists should have control over whether that information is included in writeups. And the institution should respect that.

Liyen C : @Jacquelyn, I always feel no power in situations like that. I'm so tired.

Astria Suparak (her) : **QUESTION: How do you speak up when you're the only person of color in the institution? Please respond in Chat.**

Lissa C : I would love to have a coalition of POC that we can tell our situation to and we all come full-force to back them up!

Braydee E : Suggestion - Find an ally, ask them to consider speaking up regularly.

Amanda M (she/her) : Or how can we as the white coworkers assist in these ways. Speaking up is the best way but is it better to deal with it later one on one with the person who is doing this.

Jo : It's a fine line not to get into institution bashing, but maybe some of these situations should be talked about more on social media.

Lissa C : With an open letter, media contacts, mutual friends in high places.

roshani : Always put more expectations on allies.

Kristina M : Which is still frustrating bc then that white person gets clout and more respect bc white allies can take up so much space.

Antonio S : @all. Many of these complaints can be filed with a Human Rights Commission in your city for investigation. FYI...

Juana W : What if there are no allies?

allison g (she/her) : I've heard a shift allies to accomplices.

user : When I have dealt with frustration of speaking out and fear of making too many waves I have tried to find a safe person in middle management who I could open up to and vent to to try and talk things out.

DeLena F : I think a lack of true HR in museums contributes to employees not feeling comfortable addressing racial issues.

Antonio S : @Nyc folks.. Here is the form. @Lisa, it's a serious violation. Unless we up the ante in the legal realm, this will be repeated with every generation.

Antonio S : <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/about/report-discrimination.page>

A L (she/her/hers) : Museum "diversity" initiatives always featured are centered on white staff "helping" BIPOC/disabled/survivors/etc., erasing the predominantly POC education staff leading the vast majority of programming.

allison g (she/her) : Also HR is frequently in bed with senior leadership.

Frances D. (she/her) : And museums don't always budget to hire diversity training.