
THE SHED Press Release

THE **BLOOMBERG** BUILDING
545 West 30th Street
New York, NY 10001

The Shed Presents Tomás Saraceno and Harriet A. Washington in *Conversations on Environmental Justice* as Part of Its Online Series *Up Close*

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Premieres on Sunday, August 2 at 6 PM EST



New York, NY July 27, 2020 - The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated connections between racial inequality, public health, and environmental health in the United States, as cases and deaths in communities of color significantly exceed those in white communities. In two conversations about the long-term, disproportionate effects of pollution on communities of color as part of The Shed's online series *Up Close*, artist **Tomás Saraceno** invites science journalist **Harriet A. Washington** to join him in discussion (part one) and then convenes New York City activists to reflect on the severity of the pandemic's inequitable impact in the United States (part two). These discussions bring together Saraceno's multiyear and long-term research collaborations with different activists, communities, and even species to study the air we breathe; for his forthcoming exhibition at The Shed, this research focuses on the inequities in the quality of that air. These **Conversations on Environmental Justice** will premiere on **Sunday, August 2 at 6 pm EST** on The Shed's Instagram ([@theshedny](https://www.instagram.com/theshedny)), website ([theshed.org](https://www.theshed.org)) and YouTube Channel ([youtube.com/theshedny](https://www.youtube.com/theshedny)).

For more than a decade, Saraceno has been imagining more equitable modes of existence with the environment, creating floating sculptures, community projects, and interactive installations that propose a sensory solidarity with the planet and nonhuman beings. In 2018, Saraceno exhibited *Calendrier Lun-Air de Paris*, a work consisting of filter paper strips—collected from Airparif, an organization responsible for monitoring air quality in the Paris region—that capture hourly samples of the toxic particles we breathe in, resulting in a series of dots ranging from gray (indicating light pollution) to black (heavy pollution). Inspired by Harriet A. Washington’s reporting on environmental justice in her book *A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind* (2019), Saraceno created his next iteration, titled *We Do Not All Breathe the Same Air* (2020). The work—which will appear in *Particular Matter(s)*, his upcoming exhibition at The Shed that was postponed by the pandemic—presents a visualization of air quality data from across the United States to demonstrate the uneven distribution of particulate matter, or microscopic air pollution. The work confirms the outcomes of Washington’s investigations: due to inequitable and disempowering racial policies, higher concentrations of pollution disproportionately harm communities of color.

In the first segment, Saraceno and Washington will discuss *We Do Not All Breathe the Same Air*, its historical context and causes, and what can be done to effect change in our communities and environment. A follow-up panel discussion moderated by Bronx-based urban designer and researcher **Oscar Oliver-Didier** and including New York City activists **Mychal Johnson**, a co-founding member from South Bronx Unite, and **Leslie Velasquez**, an environmental justice coordinator for El Puente, takes these questions further.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Mychal Johnson has a long-standing track record in community-based advocacy for environmental, economic, and social justice in the South Bronx. He advocates for greater access to green space and efforts that enhance quality of life

without gentrification in the South Bronx. He is a co-founder and member of South Bronx Unite and a member of the board of directors of the Mott Haven-Port Morris Community Land Stewards. He also serves on the boards of the NYC Community Land Initiative and the Bronx Council for Environmental Quality, as well as the NYC Waterfront Management Advisory Board. Johnson was also appointed as a civil society voting member of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Open Space Committee.

Oscar Oliver-Didier is a Bronx-based urban designer and researcher from Puerto Rico. His research interests include urban / racial phenomena and the role of memory in the formation of Latinx spatial imaginaries. He has published on public housing in Puerto Rico, the politics of language in the South Bronx, and the performative nature of urban protests. Oliver-Didier has recently served as the senior lead urban designer for the borough of the Bronx at the NYC Department of City Planning and as a member of the adjunct faculty at the Visual Arts Program at Fordham University.

Tomás Saraceno's practice is elevated by the concepts linking art, life science, and the social sciences. Enmeshed at the junction of these worlds, his floating sculptures, community projects, and interactive installations propose and explore new, sustainable ways of inhabiting and sensing the environment. Saraceno has activated projects aimed towards an ethical collaboration with the atmosphere, including *Museo Aero Solar*, endeavors which grew into the international, interdisciplinary artistic community Aerocene. His profound interest in spiders and their webs led to the creation of Arachnophilia.net and the Arachnomancy App. Through platforms and proposals like these, Saraceno invites people from around the globe to weave the web of interspecies understanding, emboldening practices of care that celebrate the radical interconnectedness of all things.

Leslie Velasquez is the environmental justice program coordinator for El Puente's Green Light District, a holistic 10-year community development program for the neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Bushwick in Brooklyn. In her work she

mobilizes community members and promotes public policy for initiatives related to a wide variety of environmental issues, with open space equity, air quality, and climate justice as major focus areas. Velasquez earned a BA in government and environmental studies from Skidmore College.

Harriet A. Washington is a science writer, editor, and ethicist who is the author of the forthcoming *Carte Blanche: The Erosion of Informed Consent in Medical Research* (2020, Columbia Global Reports) and *A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind*. She has been the 2015 – 2016 Miriam Shearing Fellow at the University of Nevada’s Black Mountain Institute, a research fellow in medical ethics at Harvard Medical School, visiting fellow at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, a visiting scholar at DePaul University College of Law, and a senior research scholar at the National Center for Bioethics at Tuskegee University. She has also held fellowships at Stanford University and teaches bioethics at Columbia University. She has written widely for popular and science publications and has been published in refereed books and journals.

ABOUT UP CLOSE

The Shed is committed to expanding the scope of how a cultural institution can serve its communities, a mission that is even more critical while distanced from one another. To creatively engage artists and audiences in this moment of great uncertainty and upheaval, every other Sunday at 6 pm, *Up Close* presents intimate performances, spoken word, dance parties, multimedia experimentations, conversations, and other forms of original content that explore what it means to make art right now.

New works have included a socially distanced vocal performance by the **HawtPlates**, dynamic street dancing within the confines of home by **Reggie ‘Regg Roc’ Gray** and the **D.R.E.A.M. Ring**, and a collaborative music-ritual created by **Troy Anthony** and **Jerome Ellis**. **Nova Cypress Black**, **Tasha Dougé**, and **Gabriel Ramirez**, teaching artists from The Shed’s *DIS OBEY* program for young writers and activists,

premiered *What Connects?*, a collection of poems and artwork. **DJ April Hunt and Rashaad Newsome with Legendary Monster Mon_Teese and Precious** celebrated Black queer sonic, visual, and performative traditions with *Go Off! Joy in Defiance*, and **Justin Allen, Yulan Grant, and S*an D. Henry-Smith** improvised live on the Zoom video conferencing platform in *Call*. In early July, artist **Kiyan Williams** shared their video, *Notes on Digging*, that explores ideas of engaging with soil / earth as a form of recovery from racialized and gendered violence.

Up Close's summer season concludes with new work by artist **Tony Cokes** on Sundays throughout August. Archives of all *Up Close* commissions are available to view at theshed.org.

Up Close is organized by Solana Chehtman, Director of Civic Programs, with Adeze Wilford and Alessandra Gómez, Curatorial Assistants; Justin Wong, Civic Programs Coordinator; and Lily Wan, Digital Content Producer. The Shed's multidisciplinary commissioning program is developed by Artistic Director and CEO Alex Poots with the senior program team, including Emma Enderby, Chief Curator; Tamara McCaw, Chief Civic Program Officer; Madani Younis, Chief Executive Producer; and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Senior Program Advisor.

ABOUT THE SHED

Located on Manhattan's west side, The Shed commissions original works of art, across all disciplines, for all audiences. From hip hop to classical music, painting and sculpture to literature, film to theater and dance, The Shed brings together leading and emerging artists and thinkers from all disciplines under one roof. The building—a remarkable movable structure designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Lead Architect, and Rockwell Group, Collaborating Architect—physically transforms to support artists' most ambitious ideas. Committed to nurturing artistic invention and bringing creative experiences to the broadest possible audiences, The Shed, led by Artistic Director and CEO Alex Poots, is a 21st-century space of and for New York City.

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