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THE SHELLEY & DONALD RUBIN FOUNDATION AT THE 8TH FLOOR ANNOUNCES

Emily Alesandrini and Lucia Olubunmi R. Momoh, Recipients of 2024 Curatorial Open Call



Emily Alesandrini photo by Kevin Li. Lucia Olubunmi R. Momoh photo by Stephanie Garcés.

New York, NY – April 4, 2024 – The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation is pleased to announce Emily Alesandrini and Lucia Olubunmi R. Momoh as the recipients of its 2024 Curatorial Open Call. Alesandrini and Momoh will curate a group exhibition exploring the in/ability of language and writing to encapsulate Black experiences at The 8th Floor, the Foundation’s gallery space, in fall 2024.

“Following the success of our two previous open calls for curators, we are delighted to invite this level of engagement with new voices,” explained the Foundation’s Executive Director Anjuli Nanda Diamond. “We received an immensely positive response from the curatorial community in the third year of this initiative, with Emily and Lucia emerging from many impressive applications as our ideal collaborators at The 8th Floor.”

Scrawl/space will bring together work by artists of the African diaspora who conceptually and aesthetically manipulate text, writing, and language. Lucia Olubunmi R. Momoh notes: “As curators and academics, we regularly confront the power and limitations of the written word. We’ve witnessed artists not only addressing this in their work, but aptly tying this tension to social, historical, and political issues that affect, but are far from unique, to Black people.” Emily Alesandrini adds: “It’s such a thrill to work with the Rubin Foundation, who I see as having set the standard for social justice-focused curatorial practice and audience engagement.”

In preparing for their fall exhibition, Alesandrini and Momoh describe how artists have rendered phrases and words illegible, glyphic, or coded to the point that letters and graphic gestures no longer constitute language but become images, demonstrating an opacity and multiplicity of meanings beyond sanctioned readings and definitions. The act of obscuring words and documents often references horrific histories, such as anti-literacy laws in the antebellum South, the threat and power of state documentation, the ongoing dominance of European languages in de/colonized lands, and unknowable silences and omissions within the archive. Yet artists also demonstrate how language can be utilized in acts of refusal, sabotage, liberation, joy, and world-building. Such instances speak to expansive communicative innovation and adaptation via code-switching, regional accents, or the development of Creole and Pidgeon languages — lingual means of social mobility, resistance, and assertion of personhood. Alesandrini and Momoh are compelled by artists who illustrate the inability of language to truly encompass the excess that is Black life, invent new vocabularies, and insist that we must keep writing. As Saidiya Hartman reminds us, “The story exceeds the words...”

Full details about the exhibition will be announced in summer 2024.

Emily Alesandrini (she/her) is an independent curator, art historian, and writer working in New Orleans and New York. Her research concerns contemporary representations of race and gender with a particular focus on issues of opacity, ornament, and the diasporic body in art by women and artists of color. She strives to spotlight underrepresented voices in the field and work in community-based collaboration to subvert systems of oppression and erasure within and beyond art history. Alesandrini has contributed to exhibitions and publications at The Studio Museum in Harlem, The Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, The Ford Foundation Gallery in New York, The Museum of Sex in New York, Prospect New Orleans, Wave Hill in the Bronx, The Art Institute of Chicago, and The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in New York, as well as Assembly Room Gallery and 1912 Gallery. Her essays, interviews, and reviews have appeared in *A Women’s Thing*, *The Offing*, *Burnaway*, and *BOMB*, as well as numerous exhibition catalogues. Alesandrini participated in Burnaway’s 2023 Arts Writing Incubator as well as Creative Capital’s 2023 Curatorial Workshop. Alesandrini graduated from Smith College with Latin Honors and a BA in Art History. As a fully funded Elizabeth Allison Emory Scholar, she earned her MA in Modern and Contemporary Art History from Tulane University. She continues her studies as a doctoral student in Art History at Bryn Mawr College.

Lucia Olubunmi R. Momoh (she/they) is an art historian, curator, and critic. Their research examines the role of art and arts institutions in constructing, challenging, and upholding ideologies of race, gender, class, and citizenship since the eighteenth century. Her dissertation looks at nineteenth-century portraits of Black, Indigenous, and interracial women from Louisiana, Mexico, Haiti, and Brazil, centering individuals who have been obscured, manipulated, or even erased from divergent national narratives forming simultaneously. Through her curatorial practice, Momoh aims to create spaces in which audiences can similarly challenge presumptions and embrace the complexities of life. Their writing practice aims to document artists who accomplish this and to reveal when and why institutions fall short. Momoh has previously held curatorial positions with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Prospect.5 *Yesterday we said tomorrow*, the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, and the New Orleans Museum of Art. Her writing is found in various publications, most recently *Hyperallergic*, *ARTnews*, *Burnaway*, and *Made in L.A.: Acts of Living*. She received a dual-BA in French and Art History from the University of Oregon and an MA in Art History at Tulane University, and is currently pursuing a combined doctoral degree in African American Studies and the History of Art with a certificate in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration at Yale University.

About the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation

The Foundation believes in art as a cornerstone of cohesive, sustainable communities and greater participation in civic life. In its mission to make art available to the broader public, in particular to

underserved communities, the Foundation provides direct support to, and facilitates partnerships between, cultural organizations and advocates of social justice across the public and private sectors. Through grantmaking, the Foundation supported cross-disciplinary work connecting art with social justice via experimental collaborations, as well as extending cultural resources to organizations and areas of New York City in need. sdrubin.org

About The 8th Floor

The 8th Floor is an independent exhibition and event space established in 2010 by Shelley and Donald Rubin to promote artistic and cultural initiatives. Inspired by The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, the gallery is committed to broadening the access and availability of art to New York audiences. Seeking further cultural exchange, The 8th Floor explores the potential of art as an instrument for social change in the 21st century, through an annual program of innovative contemporary art exhibitions and an events program comprised of performances, salon-style discussions, and those organized by external partners. the8thfloor.org

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#EmilyAlesandrini #LuciaOlubunmiRMomoh #RubinFoundation #The8thFloor #ArtandSocialJustice

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Image description: Two headshots. On the left is a white woman with long light brown hair, wearing a colorful striped sleeveless top and gold hoop earrings, smiling at the camera. On the right is a Black woman with short hair sitting on a bench in a grassy yard, wearing a light brown jumpsuit, softly smiling at the camera.