

# District Attorney Artist-in-Residence



*Points of Connection* portrait of John Pace by James “Yaya” Hough at Thomas Paine Plaza. Photo by Steve Weinik.

## Abstract

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At first glance, the idea of a District Attorney (DA) Artist-in-Residence is unusual. There is no known precedent for the type of collaboration that Mural Arts Philadelphia piloted with artist James “Yaya” Hough, Fair and Just Prosecution (FJP), and the Philadelphia DA’s Office. Indeed, press coverage played up the novelty, highlighting the unexpected nature of the partnership. But as this case study will reveal, the alliance, while innovative, makes a lot of sense. It is an excellent example of people and organizations with intersecting needs, offerings, and values coming together to advance a shared agenda: criminal justice reform with a focus on ending mass incarceration.

This case study describes the context, artist selection process, and the design of the resulting project entitled *Points of Connection*. It also offers a preliminary assessment of the impact of the DA Artist-in-Residence model and the elucidation of key learnings. Among many takeaways, two are especially generative and timely as people nationwide seek ways to build a more just society.

First, that a rigorous practice of caring for others can help dismantle oppressive systems, allowing those giving and receiving care to operate, even if briefly, outside of the rigid identities and adversarial dynamics imposed in the name of preserving control and upholding power. These moments of feeling humanized and recognizing the humanity of others are transformative, creating possibilities for imagining new ways of doing things.

Second, these moments of deep, human connection can be amplified through networks. Profound experiences of connection are often fleeting and private. How does one catalyze their transformational potential into a movement for systemic change? Hough’s approach to the DA’s Artist-in-Residence offers wisdom on how to balance intimacy and scale.



# OUTLINE



|                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Case Study Method</b>   | <b>p. 3</b>  |
| <b>Context</b>             | <b>p. 4</b>  |
| <b>Project Description</b> | <b>p. 8</b>  |
| <b>Signs of Success</b>    | <b>p. 13</b> |
| <b>Lessons Learned</b>     | <b>p. 14</b> |
| <b>Final Words</b>         | <b>p. 19</b> |
| <b>References</b>          | <b>p. 20</b> |

# Case Study Method

I was hired by Mural Arts to produce this case study during fall 2020, not long after departing a full-time role at the organization to pursue independent work in research and consultation. By the time I joined the project, there was a shared and public acknowledgement by all partners that the residency had been meaningful and impactful, despite logistical challenges produced by COVID-19. As a result, I was hired less to judge its success and more to unpack it. What were the components that had been vital to its impact? How might lessons learned inform future iterations?

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the core project team, including Artist James “Yaya” Hough, Assistant Artist Akeil Robertson, Curatorial Advisor Paul Farber, and Project Manager Ryan Strand Greenberg. I also spoke with Ebony Wortham and John Pace, two of the 10 people selected as portrait subjects. Until February 2021, Wortham served as an assistant district attorney, while Pace is program associate with The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program and reentry coordinator for the Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project. I reviewed grant materials, the request for qualifications issued to artists, transcripts from select conversations hosted as part of the residency, press coverage, a 12-minute film about the project, and an hour-long panel discussion hosted in October 2020.

To contextualize the information shared by these primary sources, I consulted reports and organizations referenced during the interviews, most notably *Resentencing of Juvenile Lifers: The Philadelphia Experience* by Tarika Daftary-Kapur and Tina Zottoli (2020) and Impact Justice’s Restorative Justice Project, led by Sujatha Baliga. In addition, I read Nicole R. Fleetwood’s extraordinary exploration of artmaking in captivity in *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (2020). Fleetwood’s research broadened my comprehension of the impact of artists operating within the penal system, in particular their power to humanize, mobilize, and give political voice in spaces designed to suppress all three.

I bring a participatory framework to qualitative research, which means that I understand those who consent to participate as co-creators of the knowledge produced and that I acknowledge my subjectivity in the construction of the work. Steps I took to implement this framework in this case study include: encouraging those I interviewed to guide me to what they think is most important; transcribing and coding the interviews to identify themes; centering the voices of people directly connected to the work through extensive quotes; inviting input on the text from those I interviewed before sharing it with others; and humanizing my authorship through the use of first person voice.



*Points of Connection* mural dedication at the District Attorney's office, September 30, 2020. Photo by Steve Weinik.

# Prosecution's Cultural Moment

In January 2018, Larry Krasner took office as Philadelphia District Attorney after campaigning on promises of criminal justice reform and reducing the footprint of the criminal legal system. Krasner understands his work as part of a larger movement, one seeking safety, healing, and justice for all people through effective alternatives to mass incarceration. He is part of a national network of reform-minded elected prosecutors (collectively “DAs”) who receive support from FJP in the form of technical assistance, information sharing, research, and opportunities for ongoing in-person and remote learning. Krasner sees art and artists as critical to successful movements, and believes in particular that artists are powerful communicators, often using nonliteral methods to support comprehension and help people think beyond the status quo (Points of Connection Virtual Panel Discussion, 2020, 26:55-27:45).

Krasner points to Agnes Gund’s work as a perfect example of the power of art and storytelling to shift behavior (Points of Connection Virtual Panel Discussion, 2020, 32:11-32:26). Moved by Ava Duvernay’s film *13<sup>th</sup>*, Bryan Stevenson’s book *Just Mercy*, and Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow*, Gund decided, in 2017, to sell a painting by Roy Lichtenstein in order to seed the Art for Justice Fund with a \$100M gift. Art for Justice, administered in partnership with the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, seeks to “disrupt the very processes and policies that lead to high prison populations in the first place”. Specifically, Art for Justice hopes their support will drive measures that reduce prison populations in priority states by 20% by 2022 (Art for Justice Fund, 2021).

By the time the artist-in-residency launched nearly two years into his term, Krasner was already well on his way to implementing reforms. One example is Krasner’s emphasis on restorative justice, a focus that came up in my conversation with Ebony Wortham, assistant district attorney and supervisor of the DA’s Office’s juvenile unit at the time of the residency. Wortham commented that historically the DA’s Office has taken an adversarial approach to individuals they charge, based on an unfounded belief that too much empathy for individuals suspected of committing crimes is a betrayal of the interests of victims. Restorative justice is an alternative approach that brings people who have committed crimes into intentional dialogue with those they have harmed to develop a plan for

accountability and repair of the harm. Wortham shared that the DA’s Office has made strides implementing a restorative justice model for youth with guidance from Impact Justice’s Restorative Justice Project, led by sujatha buliga (E. Wortham, personal communication, December 21, 2020).

In an interview with Krasner, buliga explains:

Restorative justice is an approach to justice that is more relational than it is punitive. It looks to attend to folks who’ve been harmed, their needs, and holding people directly accountable to those needs with family and community supporting that. So what that can look like is face-to-face dialogue with community and family, coming together to come up with a plan to repair the harm, and also to look at root causes (DA Krasner and Impact Justice’s sujatha buliga discuss restorative justice, 2018, 00:25-00:48).

Data supports Impact Justice’s approach, which diverts the responsible young person pre-trial to develop a plan for healing and accountability with the victim. If the plan is implemented successfully, no charges are filed, disrupting the destructive cycle that incarceration sets off for individuals, families, and communities. The model is in the process of being implemented in several U.S. cities, including Philadelphia. In its first 100 cases in Oakland, California, Impact Justice saw a 44% decrease in recidivism and 91% of participating victims expressed satisfaction with the process (DA Krasner and Impact Justice’s sujatha buliga discuss restorative justice, 2018, 06:22-06:39).

This is just one example and there is still much work to do - work that relies on demonstrating the success of measures already taken and nurturing a shared vision of justice that considers accountability within a larger framework of individual healing and positive community outcomes. There is a sense of urgency to make as much progress as possible to create new norms. As John Pace shared in our conversation, “Because what can happen is a new DA comes in and says, ‘let’s get this out of here.’ But if it impacted a lot of people, they’d be a little bit more reluctant to do that” (J. Pace, personal communication, December 22, 2020).

# Finding the Right Artist

The DA Artist-in-Residence was conceived as a result of the network Art for Justice has cultivated among a national community of justice reform leaders. Miriam Krinsky of FJP and Jane Golden of Mural Arts connected through this network and engaged in conversations that led to the creation of the artist-in-residence concept, and then built out the idea with the engagement of Artist and Curator Jesse Krimes. They approached Krasner, who enthusiastically agreed to participate.

In summer 2019, Mural Arts released a request for qualifications (RFQ) listing five goals:

- Deepen understanding between the DA's Office, justice-involved individuals, and communities impacted by incarceration.
- Center the lived experiences of justice-involved individuals in justice reform efforts.
- Create powerful artwork that expands public awareness about criminal justice reform and reform efforts being implemented by the Philadelphia DA's Office.
- Offer high visibility platforms to share the impact of the work and the powerful role that storytelling can have in shaping policy decisions.
- Help transform the culture of prosecution both in the DA's Office and more broadly, particularly with regard to how prosecutors view their role in the community and understand the impact of their decisions.

The RFQ initially attracted 16 artist applicants, eventually pared down to four finalists. The four finalists were interviewed by an 11-person selection panel consisting of three Mural Arts representatives, three DA's Office representatives, two FJP representatives, and three artistic/curatorial advisors with experience and expertise in socially engaged artmaking.

While the review of artist candidates was underway, Hough was released from prison after serving a 27-year sentence. Hough, an artist since childhood, worked closely with Mural Arts while incarcerated, participating in more than 50 community mural projects. He additionally produced a significant body of independent work, including portraits of friends, other artists, and public leaders; and taught and mentored countless

artists (Fleetwood, 2020, p. 126). In addition to his artistic talents and leadership capabilities, Hough's personal experience with the system gave him a nuanced perspective on the concept of justice. Originally sentenced at age 17 to life without the possibility of parole, Hough was resentenced and released in 2019 following a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012 that found that mandatory life without parole sentences for youth under the age of 18 violate the Eighth Amendment (*Miller v. Alabama*). In 2016, the Supreme Court determined that this prohibition applies retroactively (*Montgomery v. Louisiana*) (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020, p. 3).

Hough's story is a testament to the human capacity for growth and contribution, even under the most difficult of circumstances. Everyone I spoke with expressed tremendous respect for Hough: his talent, his character, and his generosity. Several spoke of the way he had taught and mentored them. Indeed, in the panel discussion hosted in October 2020, Golden gave him credit for influencing her leadership of Mural Arts over a long period of collaboration.

Originally from Pittsburgh, Hough was not resentenced by the Philadelphia DA's Office, but I learned during my conversation with John Pace that resentencing is something that Krasner has approached through a more holistic lens than his predecessor. In their report *Resentencing of Juvenile Lifers: The Philadelphia Experience* (2020), Tarika Daftary-Kapur and Tina Zottoli note that among a sample of 38 people whose resentencing straddled the transition from the previous DA, Seth Williams, to Krasner, the DA's Office's initial resentencing offers averaging 38.8 years were reduced to an average 27.6 years (p. 12). Daftary-Kapur and Zottoli provide data demonstrating juvenile lifers' low re-arrest rates following release (3.45% over an average of 21 months). They write, "in terms of risk to public safety, juvenile lifers can be considered low-impact releases" (p. 10). They also note the importance of Philadelphia as a test site, given the headway the Philadelphia DA's Office has made relative to the other states with significant numbers of juvenile lifers (p. 4).

For Krasner, Mural Arts, and FJP, Hough's qualities - artistic talent, leadership capabilities, and lived experience in a failed system in need of reform -

made him a strong fit for the specific opportunity presented by the residency. They invited him to submit his materials. Hough agreed, became a fifth finalist, and was ultimately selected. For DAs and organizations interested in transferring this model, it is worth noting that Krasner shared that the fact that Hough had been sentenced in a different jurisdiction, that he had taken responsibility for his actions, and that no public funds would be used to implement the project were important considerations for him. He believes these factors reduced the potential for criticism that would have distracted from the project's core message and purpose (Points of Connection Virtual Panel Discussion, 2020, 29:50-30:47).

Importantly, Hough was given freedom to shape the project and its specific focus within the goals

shared in the RFQ. No pressure was placed on him to take on specific topics or positions in the work, nor was he under any obligation to publicly center his own story and experiences through the project.

In our conversation, Hough described his response to the opportunity as follows:

The DA's Artist-in-Residence to me is so important, personally, but at the same time, it's great for an artist to be able to work in a city that he really loves, to be able to work with an organization he loves, to be able to work with a public official they really, really like. So all those things lined up in a perfect wave of opportunities (J. Hough, personal communication, December 8, 2020).



Press Conferene announcing the DA Artist in Residency program with inaugural artist James "Yaya" Hough, November 21, 2019. Photo by Edwin E. Luks.

# Best Laid Plans

At the outset, Hough planned to visit Philadelphia for several consecutive days each month and be physically present in the DA's Office, where he would have a workstation. Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of FJP, cites this as an important and intentional element of the residency model, referencing proximity (Points of Connection Virtual Panel Discussion, 2020, 03:36-03:46), an idea made popular by Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. The partners believed that physical closeness between this exceptional artist and members of the DA's Office would cultivate empathy, disrupting damaging stereotypes and stigmas that stand in the way of systemic reform.

Hough conducted a couple of initial visits but then the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented further travel. As a result, Hough largely led the project from Pittsburgh using video conferencing as his means of connection. He relied on a Philadelphia-based team consisting of a project manager, curatorial advisor, and assistant artist to support work on the ground, in particular production, installation, and audience engagement. Everyone I interviewed agreed that while the project was very meaningful for those who participated, it would be valuable to host future residencies in person or partially in-person to

strengthen bonds among participants and to allow for more organic relationship-building to emerge between the artist and staff in the DA's Office.

Hough originally envisioned a series of animated and live-action videos that would “share his ideas about what the DA's Office is doing, its impact in the community, who it's impacting, to what level” (J. Hough, personal communication, December 8, 2020). Hough also wanted to engage with data driving and documenting the impact of policy changes. Hough was attracted to video because of its shareability via social media. And while he did produce a 12-minute mini-doc, Hough ended up shifting his primary medium to portraiture in response to the restrictions posed by the pandemic. When I asked Hough whether he considered delaying the project, he shared that he suspected early on that COVID-19 would be a long and unpredictable force. Given the urgency of the issues, the window of opportunity around work focused on systems change, and the availability of key collaborators, Hough decided a revised approach during the planned time frame would be best. Even so, Hough believes that efforts to reform law enforcement policies and practices in Philadelphia “requires a residency without a pandemic” (J. Hough, personal communication, December 8, 2020).



*Points of Connection* portraits of Donnel Drinks and Ebony Wortham by James “Yaya” Hough at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Photo by Steve Weinik.

# POINTS OF CONNECTION



## Roles & Responsibilities

### Participants

*Points of Connection* invited 10 people impacted by the justice system in different ways to participate. All are leaders - within institutions and communities - with a shared belief that there are better ways to implement justice than mass incarceration. Four were connected to the DA's Office, three had been incarcerated, and three identified as victims' advocates. The full list, including titles at the time of the project, includes:

- Stanley Crawford, Founder, Black Male Community Council of Philadelphia
- Patricia Cummings, Supervisor of the Conviction Integrity and Special Investigations Unit, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office
- Donnell Drinks, Co-founder, G.R.O.W.N. (Gaining Respect Over Our Worst Nights)
- Tahira Fortune, Founder, Voices by Choices
- Dorothy Johnson-Speight, Founder and Director, Mothers in Charge
- Larry Krasner, District Attorney of Philadelphia
- John Pace, Reentry Coordinator, Youth Sentencing & Reentry Project and Program Associate, The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program
- Carolyn Temin, First Assistant, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office
- Michael Smokey Wilson, Restorative Justice Consultant, Beckett Life Center & Life Coach
- Ebony Wortham, Assistant District Attorney & Supervisor of the Juvenile Unit, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office

Though it was not raised to me as a selection criterion, project participants connected to the DA's Office currently or previously held titles listed in Daftary-Kapur and Zottoli's report as members

of the eight-person Lifer Resentencing Committee (2020, p. 4). Likewise, all of the formerly incarcerated participants were juvenile lifers who had been sentenced and then released. So far as I can tell, however, this particular topic was not an explicit focus of Hough's inquiry or work. Rather, he focused people on a broader exploration of definitions of justice.

### Artist

Hough's role was to envision and guide the engagement and material aspects of the project, and to offer feedback and thought partnership on PR and communications. He also gave a great deal of time to storytelling components, including interviews with the press, participation in public programming, and contributing to this case study. Hough made the generous choice to talk about his life story in relation to the project.

### Assistant Artist

Soon after being selected as the lead artist, Hough brought photographer Akeil Robertson onto the project. Hough had been a friend and mentor to Robertson while they were incarcerated and had confidence in the contribution he would make. Robertson, who is based in Philadelphia, indicated that his role was particularly important because Hough is located in Pittsburgh. Robertson could be on the ground in a way Hough could not. Robertson photographed the project, creating documentation that was used in its public presentation. He also supported relationship-building with the participants, indicating that he remains in touch with many and is in the process of framing some of his photographs to give as gifts (A. Robertson, personal communication, December 18, 2020). He also participated in a series of decisions relating to the public staging of the work.

## Project Manager

The initial project manager, Lindsey Boyd, departed her full-time role at Mural Arts in July 2020 for a new job opportunity. At that point, the role transitioned to Ryan Strand Greenberg, a contractor who frequently works with Mural Arts. The project manager serves as the administrative heart of the project, liaising between all of the individuals and organizations essential to realizing the work. Dominant aspects of the job include creating and managing a detailed timeline, drafting memoranda-of-understanding and contracts, overseeing the project budget, supporting artistic production and project installation, attending to the needs of participants and partners, and navigating operational systems at Mural Arts to ensure timely outputs, ranging from payments to press releases. It is a demanding role that requires people who are organized and detail-oriented, capable of navigating systems, knowledgeable about artistic production, and good at forming and supporting relationships. The project manager reported to Mural Arts' Director of Restorative Justice Greg Corbin.

## Curatorial Advisor

Paul Farber served as curatorial advisor, a more limited scope than what might be assigned to a curator. Farber participated in the artist selection process and was contracted to provide support to Hough as he conceptualized and developed the work. Farber led the process of figuring out how to display Hough's portraits in public space and where to site them. He also oversaw the production of the "wall texts" utilized in various public presentations of the work. Another artist and curator, Jesse Krimes, was also instrumental to the very early conceptualization of the residency. Krimes participated in the artist selection process, and specifically connected Hough to the opportunity. Krimes also served as curator for the Reimagining Reentry Fellowship, a Mural Arts program that ran alongside the DA's Artist-in-Residence, also supported by the Art for Justice Fund and featuring work by Hough.

## Point of Contact at the DA's Office

The residency had a dedicated point of contact at the DA's Office. Initially this person was Chief of Staff Arun Prabhakaran. After he departed for another opportunity in May 2020, Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff Isabel Ballester took on the role. The DA's Office point of contact ensured that the artist and project team were receiving the access to and support they needed from the DA's Office, and brought Krasner to the table when his involvement was requested.

## Points of Contact at FJP

The points of contact at FJP, Executive Director Miriam Krinsky, John Butler, and others on the FJP team, were part of the artist selection process. They also played a role ensuring others in FJP's network of reform-minded DAs were invited to learn more about the model, for example by attending the public panel discussion.

## Executive Leaders at Partners Organizations

Golden, Krinsky, and Krasner played critical roles at various phases. They co-conceptualized and secured resources for the opportunity, participated in artist selection, guided implementation, and served as spokespeople for the project. All three were featured along with Hough in the public panel hosted virtually in October 2020. It is and will continue to be their responsibility to consider and devise future steps for this work, within Philadelphia, their organizations, and in their fields more broadly.

In addition to the roles outlined here, Mural Arts' development, communications, finance, tours, and operations teams supported grant writing and reporting, project communications, press relations, public event logistics, fiscal management, contracts, and project installation.

# Project Components

Broadly, Hough designed the project around the idea that “points of connection” - defined as meaningful and empathetic human encounters that bridge divisions - spark transformational ideas and actions that gain velocity as people, altered by the experience, spread them through their networks. This theory of change offers a kind of conceptual webbing for several intersecting components, described here.

## Exploratory Conversations

Hough began his residency by conducting a series of intimate conversations with participants, during which he sketched their likenesses. Assistant District Attorney Ebony Wortham explained to me that Hough and Robertson asked her what justice means to her and about her motivations for the work. She described the experience as humanizing: she felt seen as a person first and a prosecutor second. Wortham is excited by the potential of restorative justice models to build stronger and healthier communities. She is grateful to Hough for giving her a platform to share those perspectives and experiences, and in doing so, reveal the way she honors her responsibility to all people who get caught up in the justice system. She shared that this is especially meaningful to her as a Black woman in law enforcement. “I felt seen, and walked away feeling good,” she shared (E. Wortham, personal communication, December 21, 2020).

## Portraits

As the conversations unfolded, Hough produced 10 intimate portraits in acrylics, one for each participant. As several people commented, the identical size and scale of each portrait suggested an equality among the sitters, lifting up their shared humanity. For me, it also positioned them as equally critical to devising new strategies and solutions for the implementation of justice. Hough explained the intentionality he brought to his representations during the October 2020 panel discussion. He said most are looking forward, designed to elicit empathy and connection between artist and subject, and between subject and viewer. He explains, “We can’t have justice without empathy. We can’t have justice without connection. So to me those are very important artistic modes or themes that I wanted to keep inside the work” (Points of Connection Virtual Panel Discussion, 2020, 38:04-38:21). One of the portraits shows Stanley

## Salons

After his one-on-one conversations, Hough organized two private salons that brought together different configurations of his participants to meet each other, learn about each other’s work, and address the question “what is justice?” Several people with whom I spoke found these conversations moving and powerful, sharing as an example the opportunity for Donnell Drinks to be in dialogue with his sentencing judge, Carolyn Temin. When I spoke with John Pace, he described it as somewhat unusual to be convened in dialogue with people who occupy other spaces in the system, though he speaks regularly about his experience in and perspectives on the carceral system as a part of his work with Inside-Out Prison Exchange and Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project (J. Pace, personal communication, December 22, 2020). Curatorial Advisor Paul Farber facilitated the two salons.



Points of Connection mural dedication at the District Attorney’s office, September 30, 2020. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Crawford mid-speech - also a choice on Hough's part to capture him, "using his voice." Crawford founded the Black Male Community Council of Philadelphia after he lost his son to gun violence in 2018. Crawford organizes to help law enforcement agencies more effectively prevent violence that disproportionately impacts Black communities in Philadelphia. In June 2020, Crawford was part of a press conference announcing a new collaboration between the DA's Office and the Philadelphia Police Department to install two prosecutors in each of Philadelphia's six police divisions. Modeled on a program in Chicago, the initiative is designed to help the City solve more homicides and non-fatal shootings, support victims, and prevent serious crimes (Moselle, 2020).

## Public Presentation of Portraits

When Hough's original concept for animated and live-action videos proved infeasible during COVID-19, he organically moved to portraiture without conceptualizing precisely how they would be shaped into a public presentation. A public component was essential to the residency's design, given its potential to engage a broad public in the ideas and themes of the project. Together, Hough, Robertson, Strand Greenberg, and Farber devised the idea of framing Hough's paintings to resemble the portraits of dignitaries that adorn government buildings. Various groupings of the portraits were displayed across five sites during October 2020: the DA's Office, City Hall, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), Eastern State Penitentiary, and Mural Arts' headquarters. In addition, Mural Arts installed vinyl prints of the entire collection on the exteriors of the DA's Office and Philadelphia's Municipal Services Building (MSB). The portraits were featured alongside Robertson's photograph of Hough and texts explaining the project and the people involved. The team additionally created a hand-held exhibition by assembling high quality 8.5x11" prints of the portraits in a folio that could be given and mailed to people. These were distributed at the exhibition sites, sent to public officials and appointees, and made freely available to anyone

who requested one through an online form. A selection of the portraits will remain on display at the Philadelphia DA's Office.

## Tours

In October 2020, Hough and Farber hosted roughly 50 people on a series of public walking tours beginning at PAFA, stopping at MSB and the Juanita Kidd Stout Center for Criminal Justice, and ending at the DA's Office.

## Film

While Hough's broader vision for video was not realized due to COVID-19's disruption, the project team was still able to collaborate with Greenhouse Media to produce a 12-minute film exploring the project, its participants, and its central ideas.

## Panel Discussion

Already referenced several times in this case study, a one-hour panel discussion occurred in October 2020 featuring Hough, Krasner, Krinsky, and Golden, as well as Art for Justice's Helena Huang and Agnes Gund. Introduced by Krinsky and facilitated by Golden, the conversation covered how the project came to be, why art matters as a powerful vehicle for moving hearts and minds and propelling change, and Hough's approach to the work. Huang and Gund took the opportunity to announce support for a next phase of work in which Hough, FJP, and Mural Arts will produce artwork to accompany a book about reform-minded DAs illustrated by justice-impacted artists. The panel was hosted online due to restrictions on in-person gatherings, allowing for wide geographic attendance. This was evidenced when Mike Schmidt - District Attorney in Multnomah County, OR - shared that lawyers in his office expressed interest in the model after seeing it highlighted on PBS NewsHour (Points of Connection Virtual Panel Discussion, 2020, 58:42-59:07).

# Why Art?

During my conversations with participants, most of them emphasized the value and impact of the dialogue they had with Hough and others. I asked, curious, if they thought the artmaking components were important. Everyone said dialogue needs to occur more often, whatever processes and supports are involved. But they appreciated the opportunity to have these conversations as part of a public art process and felt Hough's artistry was important to the success of the project. Below, I share a few excerpts from my interviews highlighting that value:

It doesn't have to be an artist in the visual sense. It could be a playwright, it could be a poet, it could be anybody that has that artistic ability to amalgamate disciplines and make meaning out of something. That's what it takes.

It doesn't take a bureaucrat, it doesn't take a specialist, it takes a jack of all trades. And that's pretty much what an artist is - an artist is a problem-solver at their core. For me, the larger conversation is about generating solutions.

Art experiences allow people to appreciate and hold the same emotion. It helps diverse people get into the same place, even if people don't see the same thing. It starts dialogue, opens up the opportunity for people to dive into why they see what they see and appreciate what they see.

I think it enhances the conversation. Because I think art is another form of communication...I think it brings a different quality to the conversation.



*Points of Connection* portrait of Stanley Crawford by James "Yaya" Hough at Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Steve Weinik.

# SIGNS OF SUCCESS



## Positive Experience of Participants

Everyone with whom I spoke shared that they had a positive and transformative experience. These were unique to each individual, but everyone felt that the growth they experienced was possible because of the project's focus on humanizing people. Here are a few examples of impact experienced by the project team and participants:

I became a lot more confident in my abilities to move in these spaces... [Someone told me] you build bridges, you make connections. And I really felt like I began to see a lot more of that in myself throughout this project.

It made me think about how do you dismantle this system piece by piece? And I left with this care of relationships...Care mode is something I saw throughout the project, no matter where we were, no matter what was going on. Care mode.

It made me think there would need to be more of this type of activity, in order to bridge the gap between social justice groups and law enforcement, not as a solution to social problems but as a way to effectively build a bridge...It made me think more broadly, or creatively, about the possibilities at a larger scale.

We can have these conversations and they don't have to be adversarial. We can look for ways that we all agree that we need to improve our criminal justice system from various perspectives. I think that was probably the learning point.

Everyone appreciated the art, so that was something people had in common. They started talking about Hough's talent, started humanizing him. It opened up deeper conversations with people inside and outside of the DA's Office.

## Press Impact

Significant press coverage does not guarantee that readers and viewers will be moved to participate in and support change. But it certainly increases the likelihood of it. Hough was pleased with the coverage the project received, and cited it as a benefit to collaborating with Mural Arts, which contracts a firm, Relief Communications, to lead its PR efforts. The residency received coverage from local and national outlets from the moment it was announced in fall 2019 to its culmination in October 2020. Press impressions totaled 48,080,217, with a publicity value of \$1,263,779.

## Interest from DA's Offices

Several district attorneys have expressed interest in the model. As a next step, FJP, Mural Arts, and Hough will collaborate on a book chronicling reform-minded DAs. The book will feature artwork created by justice-impacted artists inspired by the stories of the DAs and their values. In addition to telling the story of a changing approach to prosecution, the book will knit relationships between artists and DA's Offices that could pave the way to future residencies.

# LESSONS LEARNED



In this section, I identify six areas key to the design and impact of the DA's Artist-in-Residence and rich with learnings. For each, I aggregate feedback on what worked well with suggestions for growth.

## Clarify Intentions

### What Worked Well

Mural Arts, FJP, and Krasner gave time and attention to mapping out the intersections between their missions and work and identifying roles and responsibilities. This cultivated trust and established a shared understanding of the work. They arrived at and offered a clear set of goals in the RFQ, shared earlier in this case study. Once he was selected, Hough narrowed the residency's lens to an even more specific goal: fostering an atmosphere for change by cultivating trust and connection between people often placed into adversarial relationships. One can see this intention laced throughout the project design, from the specific individuals selected to participate, to the intimacy of the engagement process, to the choice of portraiture, to the selection of sites for public presentation. Hough and the project team rigorously rooted their decisions in their intentions.

### Growth Opportunity

A few people to whom I spoke suggested that in addition to specifying goals, project teams could concretely envision and communicate what tangible success will look like. This would enhance everyone's understanding of what they are driving towards, and how they will know when they get there. It would also improve the organizers' ability to assess whether the residency's design yielded the intended results.

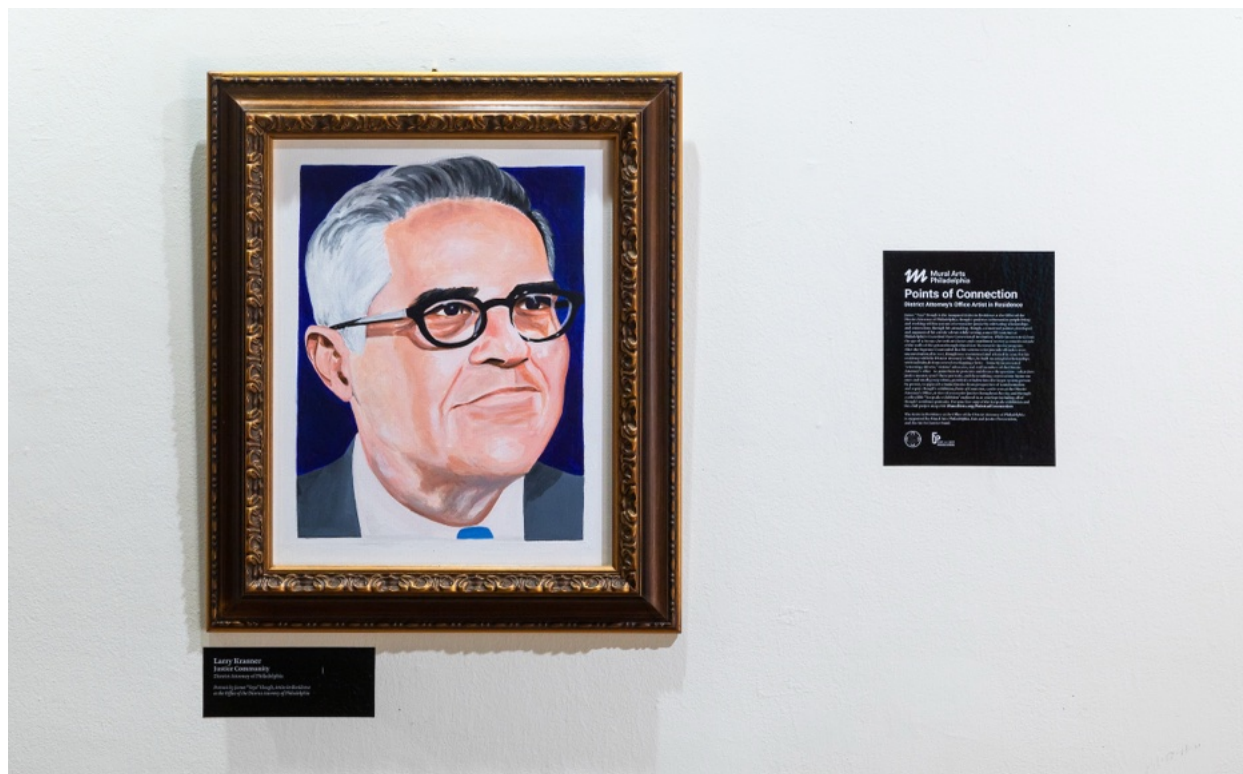
# Build the Right Team

## What Worked Well

During my conversations, it was evident that the project benefitted from a thriving project team. Hough, Robertson, Farber, and Strand Greenberg brought a shared set of values and commitments around social justice. They trusted each other and worked well together. To arrive at this outcome, Mural Arts managed a good balance between open calls and direct invitations. The partners used an RFQ process to identify Hough, clearly laying out the project goals and parameters, as well as the expectation that the artist be justice-impacted. They were able to assemble a strong pool of candidates thanks in part to Artist and Curator Jesse Krimes, who is part of a national network of justice-impacted artists. From there, Mural Arts trusted Hough and Farber to build their team. Hough brought Robertson onboard as assistant artist, and Farber brought Strand Greenberg onboard as a contracted project manager after the Mural Arts employee in that role departed for another job opportunity.

## Growth Opportunity

Hough, Robertson, Farber, and Strand Greenberg will carry their learnings and relationships into future work across a range of organizations and geographies. They will also likely continue to work with Mural Arts on specific projects. But their ability to link the project into centralized learning, planning, or future partnership opportunities at Mural Arts was limited - both because their contractual relationship to the project ended, and because they aren't embedded in the day-to-day operations, policies, and practices of the organization. One might assume the full-time project manager is poised to do this, but project managers tend to carry a large volume of logistical work and don't always feel like they have the time or directive to focus on bigger picture opportunities that materialize from projects. Future organizers should consider proactive ways to link project-specific relationships and learnings to longer term work, especially when addressing entrenched social issues requiring significant time and momentum to surmount.



*Points of Connection* portrait of Larry Krasner by James “Yaya” Hough at the Commonwealth Gallery at the Thomas Eakins House. Photo by Steve Weinik.

# Identify the Right Participants

## What Worked Well

All of Hough's participants are working on justice system reform through their jobs and in voluntary capacities. Even while representing different lived experiences of the justice system, they are united in their work as leaders. This was valuable for several reasons:

- It assured a certain level of shared knowledge and understanding.
- It meant that their experiences during the project, if impactful, could result in positive changes to how they lead and inspire others.
- It strengthened the ethic of the project by ensuring mutual gain. Every person at the table stood to benefit in professional and personal capacities from forging new connections and/or gaining visibility for their efforts through the public platform offered by the project.

## Growth Opportunity

When a person is invited to participate, they should understand why and to what end - even if it seems obvious to the organizers. Why were they chosen over others? Is there an aspiration that they will do something during or after as a result of their experience? What does success look like? Answers to these questions elevate people from participants in a conversation to partners in a bigger effort.

# Engage Participants with Care

## What Worked Well

A value embedded in the DA's Artist-in-Residence is that justice requires the equitable participation of every impacted group in identifying solutions. These conversations should bring people together across boundaries and entrenched divides. Doing so responsibly requires building trust and reducing the likelihood of harm. Hough did at least three things that supported this:

- He carefully selected his participants, seeking out those ready for these conversations.
- He spent time with each person in advance of the salons.
- He elected to have Farber, a skilled facilitator, guide the salons.

## Growth Opportunity

So far as I know, participants in *Points of Connection* did not experience harm as a result of the process, but organizers leading this kind of work may want to put together a plan for what they will do if it occurs. This might include preparing a list of outside people who can provide advice, mediation, counseling, or other forms of support if needed; developing a protocol for internal reflection and reporting; and training staff and contractors on the protocol, as well as how to identify and respond to conflict in the moment.

# Invest in Storytelling

## What Worked Well

Projects intended to shift culture, build movements, or support dialogue across divisions often benefit from proximity and intimacy. But they simultaneously need scale. Hough's project design reflected this. He focused on engaging a small group of carefully chosen participants, and then he leveraged video, social media, and the press to inform and inspire many others. Mural Arts, FJP, Krasner, and Art for Justice also value the role of good storytelling in reaching a large audience. They invested in PR, public tours, a panel discussion, and this case study.

## Growth Opportunity

Despite overall positive feedback on the storytelling dimensions, one person I interviewed felt the impact could have been amplified further by featuring more of the participants in public dialogue. There was also interest in seeing the storytelling continue. Suggestions included a national series of talks with DAs, and further efforts to attract press.



*Points of Connection* mural dedication at the District Attorney's office, September 30, 2020. Photo by Steve Weinik.

# Develop and Communication a Post-Residency Strategy

## What Worked Well

Mural Arts, Krasner, FJP, and Hough have an eye towards the future, each thinking about how to build on this work. Here are some of the ways post-residency efforts could proceed along with commentary on steps currently being taken to advance them.

- **Develop new project ideas seeded during the residency.** I heard two project ideas in my conversations: 1) exploring the distance between how one is actually seen and how one wants to be seen by others; and 2) exploring personal transformational processes that get people to the table, ready to talk solutions and systems change.
- **Offer future work or professional connections to the artists.** An immediate next step for Hough is the opportunity to curate artist contributions to FJP's forthcoming book on reform-minded DAs.
- **Continue the residency model.** Mural Arts and Krasner are open to collaborating in the future, but Mural Arts first needs to identify funding to sustain the program. In the meantime, Mural Arts has received an inquiry from at least one other City of Philadelphia agency interested in the model.
- **Transfer the model to other places.** Mural Arts and FJP hope that the upcoming book project may inspire some DAs to think more broadly around the possibility of embedding artists in their offices.
- **Engage participants over the long term.** Mural Arts could engage the leaders who participated in this process in future programs and projects as advisors, mentors, and other kinds of collaborators. Robertson spoke of his efforts to maintain those relationships, believing they are important to future work.
- **Sustain the kind of dialogues modeled by the residency.** Many participants reacted positively to the concept of hosting intimate conversations across boundaries. How might the partners use this concept in future work, even without an artist-in-residence?

## Growth Opportunity

Post-program steps should be shared back to those who gave time and energy to the original process, even if there isn't an obvious or active role for them to play. This is a way of valuing and recognizing their contribution while signaling an interest in keeping channels of communication open. Everyone I spoke with expressed curiosity about "what's next?" For some, this represented an interest in further engagement and conversation. For others, it was inquiry into the results of the project - a desire to understand what changed.

# Final Words

As I moved through my research for this case study, I found myself feeling much like those I interviewed: inspired by the project team and participants, excited about some of the new practices being championed by the DA's Office, and curious where all this will lead. But the dominant feeling was one of hope; hope that building points of connection will generate a sea change towards more humane and effective approaches to justice in Philadelphia and beyond.

*Susannah Laramée Kidd's Learning From the Process: Promising Practices From Mural Arts' Work in Communities (2020) offers a comprehensive inventory of practices critical to ethical and impactful participatory public art. My conversations reinforced Laramée Kidd's findings and I advise reviewing Learning From the Process as a more general companion to this case study.*



*Points of Connection* portraits by James "Yaya" Hough at Eastern State Penitentiary. Photo by Steve Weinik.

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*Points of Connection* portrait of Tahira Fortune by James  
"Yaya" Hough at Thomas Paine Plaza. Photo by Steve Weinik.



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