

## Highlights from the Creative Capital Retreat: Part One

by [Paddy Johnson](#) on August 7, 2015 [Events](#) + [Reviews](#)



Creative Capital consultants take the stage at the conference to give thanks for all the work the organization does on behalf of artists.

The Creative Capital Retreat took place two weeks ago now, and I'm still thinking about it. Nearly [every year the organization](#) invites grantees from their latest grant cycles to give seven minute presentations on what they have or will do to a room full of professionals. This year, though, was more emotional than usual. Ruby Lerner, Creative Capital's Founding President and Executive Director announced she would be retiring earlier in the year, and it's her vision and guidance that has helped make Creative Capital so unique. With the help of the Warhol Foundation, a strong board and staff, and a robust philanthropic community, the granting agency has done more to help artists than almost any other I know. It's not just that artists receive a \$50,000 grant—though that's certainly helpful—but that they get access to an incredible array of professional development programs. This retreat is their flagship event.

In my experience, Creative Capital grantees often make work that is socially and politically engaged and/or an uneasy fit within the commercial gallery or film world. The exceptions are often superstars, funded well before they rose to the top of a more traditional art world circuit. (Theaster Gates and Cory Arcangel are just two examples of many.)

Typically, I spend the next few days frantically posting about every amazing presentation I saw. This year, that wasn't possible, so I'm trying something a bit different: I'm drawing my posting out for as long as possible. Every Friday I'm in New York during the month of August I'll be discussing some of my favorite works. Let's get started.



Mlle Bourgeoise Noire

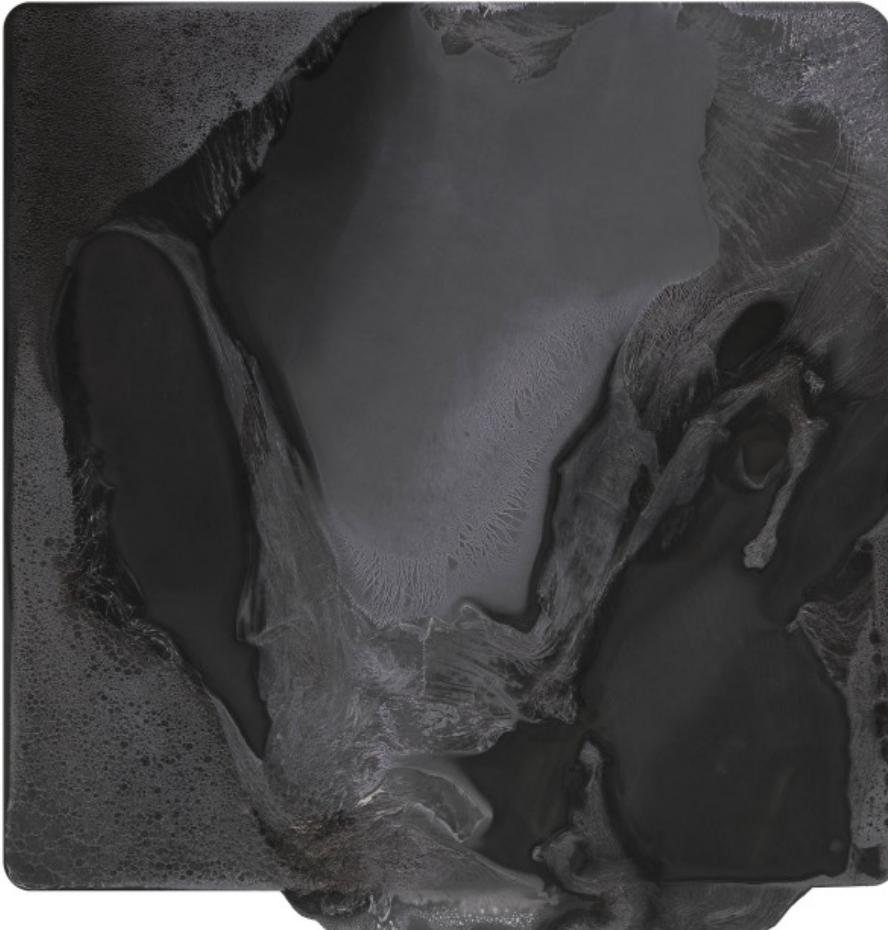
## Lorraine O'Grady

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Every time [Lorraine O'Grady](#)'s ongoing performance as the glamorous debutant wearing a gown made of white gloves comes up I get shivers. Mlle Bourgeoise Noire bombed New York gallery openings and museum events in the early 80's as a means of forcing a conversation about the segregated art world. "That whole segregated art worlds business was such an unnatural thing and we had to take such unnatural attitudes in order to oppose it," O'Grady told [Art F City in 2012](#).

Now, in a presentation she calls *30 Years Later*, O'Grady plans to bring Mlle Bourgeoise Noire back to life, transforming her into a figure who rails against the money-driven art world as a means of restoring the cultural purpose it once had.

During the presentation O'Grady took a moment to reflect on all the success she's had as an artist. Indeed, after more than three decades in the field, her name and work are ubiquitous. And yet, she says she still needs grants to survive. So the struggle for many artists to make ends meet, regardless of their fame, never stops.



## Brittany Nelson

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[Brittany Nelson](#) feels like an unusual fit within the Creative Capital ecosystem because her photography is so engaged in materiality. (If this year's conference is any indication, a stereotypical grantee has a socio-political motivation and is hoping, in some small way to make the world a better place.) This particular project probably won't change the world—she uses chemicals to destroy the silver in photo paper—though I did question even that assumption while listening to her talk. She spoke persuasively about how few people there were exploring the photographic process itself as a medium, and explained just how transformative the process actually was; at one point she described a caterpillar walking across one of her photographs and dying in the chemicals. “Oooh, I'm dangerous!” she proclaimed sarcastically. The audience roared with laughter, but actually, those photographs scare the shit out of me. They're black droppy forms preserved digitally with her scanner that have been put through hell to get that way. It's like looking at death. I hope Nelson's wearing some heavy duty protection when she works with this stuff.



## Narcissister

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It's hard to explain just how exciting [Narcissister](#)'s reverse strip tease was for everyone at the retreat, but there was a literal buzz in the auditorium after she finished. Backed by Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman," Narcissister began wearing only a creepy plastic mask and an enormous afro, from which she pulled out a variety of clothing items. This included a skirt and even a pair of shoes. When she failed to find items in her hair, she grabbed them from her mouth and vagina, much to the thrill of the audience. I don't think I remember ever being so happy watching a performance. Eventually, her outfit was assembled and the music stopped. "I'd like to thank Creative Capital for this opportunity," she told us, soliciting a roar of laughter from the crowd. The project, we learned, was to create an experimental art film on this character. I can't wait.

Tagged as: [Brittany Nelson](#), [Creative Capital Retreat](#), [Lorraine O'Grady](#), [Narcissister](#)