

# **Guiding Hands Help Immigrant Artists Connect**



Librado Romero/The New York Times

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

REPRINTS

OR SAVE THIS

PRINT

Hatuey Ramos-Fermín, 30, right, and his mentor, Ricardo Miranda Zúñiga, 37, visit the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

By TINA KELLEY Published: June 15, 2008

Something about the man in the banana costume appealed to Ricardo Miranda Zúñiga. Maybe it was the sign he wore that read, "A banana from my country can travel easier than me." Maybe it was the fruit-wearer's free-spiritedness as he paraded in his peel through public places. Or maybe it was the Latino roots they shared.

So when Mr. Zúñiga, 37, a graphic artist from Brooklyn who also works with new media, was looking through the portfolios of immigrant artists who were seeking mentors, he picked Hatuey Ramos-Fermín, 30, a conceptual artist from the Bronx who has made videos of himself playing Benito Banana, a character he created to reflect on migration.

The two have met at least 10 times, attending lectures and museum openings and discussing their work and the common themes within, like <a href="immigration">immigration</a> and globalization. They are part of a mentoring program run by the New York Foundation for the Arts that helps artists from abroad gain a toehold in the city's diverse arts community.

Mr. Zúñiga's parents are from Nicaragua, and Mr. Ramos-Fermín was born in the Dominican Republic, raised in Puerto Rico and educated in the Netherlands.

Mr. Ramos-Fermín says that being an immigrant inspires him. "I really enjoy being in a place I've never been to before," he said. "I see things differently than someone who has lived here all your life."

Michael L. Royce, the executive director of the arts foundation, said the mentoring program began in 2007. It is an offshoot of the foundation's New York Creates program that helps folk and craft artists, many of whom are immigrants and need to connect with established artists.

"The mentors know the galleries, what's hot, what's wanted, what can sell," he said. "They can help the mentees become fully immersed in what it takes to be successful."

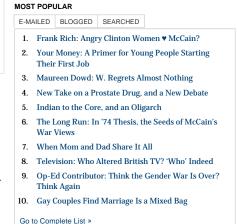
The mentorship program, which this year has 15 pairs of mentors and mentees, costs about \$100,000 to run, and is supported with grants from the Deutsche Bank Americas

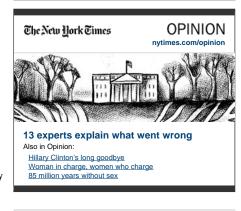
## More Articles in New York Region »

## Get UrbanEye by E-Mail









ADVERTISEMENTS

Foundation and the Independence Community Foundation. Mr. Royce said his foundation was seeking financing to expand the program, which does not inquire about the immigration status of the artists seeking mentors.

To get Mr. Ramos-Fermín closer to his dream of putting on a solo show and supporting himself through art, Mr. Zúñiga helped him with creating his Web site, <a href="www.hatmax.net">www.hatmax.net</a>, which recently netted Mr. Ramos-Fermín work with an Argentine magazine. Mr. Zúñiga also advised him on editing his artist's statement.

"This idea of transmuting home, it needs developing further, in a separate paragraph," Mr. Zúñiga told Mr. Ramos-Fermín as they sat in the Bronx Museum of the Arts last Wednesday working on the statement. He suggested adding spaces between the paragraphs, finding a better word for "utilizes" and switching an "of" with an "in."

"That sounds better, that definitely sounds better," Mr. Ramos-Fermín said.

The relationship has helped Mr. Zúñiga as well. He included Mr. Ramos-Fermín in his Web project, at <a href="www.votemos.us">www.votemos.us</a>, which asks immigrants whom they would vote for in this year's presidential election.

"We bounce around ideas," Mr. Zúñiga said. "Anyone who has done a Master of Fine Arts will tell you what they miss most is the community and the studio visits."

Mr. Zúñiga, who won a fellowship from the foundation for his work, chose the mentoring program as part of the community service requirement. "I was actively missing teaching," he said.

Likewise, Ted Mathys, 29, a Brooklyn poet and fellowship winner who had a valuable relationship with a mentor while in college, said he was glad to become a mentor to Pinky Vincent, 30, a poet from Calcutta.

Ms. Vincent, who had worked as a journalist in India, came to the United States in 2002 with "\$2,500 in traveler's checks and the blessings of my parents." While studying, working at a nonprofit organization and trying to send money home, she found it hard to continue with her poetry.

"She came to me with a small group of poems and wanted more than anything, in the beginning, confirmation, a set of eyes, a person who reads a lot of poetry to tell her if she was wasting her time," Mr. Mathys said. "I put it all back in her court, to think of the role of poetry for her in her life."

Their time together since has been quite fruitful, he said. "Her work is crisp. She has very strong images, and some of the subject matter she was writing about was really quite wonderful," said Mr. Mathys, the author of two books of poetry. They fine-tuned Ms. Vincent's poems, discussing where they might sound anachronistic to an American ear, and explored how to carve out time to write poetry while trying to make a living.

"To do writing, to be honest with you, seemed to me as a very, very selfish thing to do," Ms. Vincent said. "I have to work. I have a lot of big dreams to follow in this country."

The mentorship program helped her feel connected to other artists.

"I had the luxury of having that artist's soul sort of come back, nurturing that a little bit more," Ms. Vincent said. She and Mr. Mathys discussed giving readings, and she gained the confidence to do a reading in Manhattan that was sponsored by the South Asian Women's Creative Collective. She read her own vivid lines, like these from "Calcutta":

Inside the bus, body on body

Starched saris drenched in sweat

Talcum powder becomes dew drops on temples

Smudges necks like plaster of Paris

For poets, whose market is small and not particularly profitable, the help of a mentor can

World business and analysis from the IHT and Reuters - iht.com/biz

Need to know more?
Get 50% off home delivery of The

In a world of second opinions, get the facts first.

Which movies made the 1,000 Best



be crucial, Mr. Mathys said.

"If you're not being trained in a formalized setting, if you're not into an M.F.A. in poetry, or involved in workshops, you really can feel unmoored and alone in this kind of pursuit."

More Articles in New York Region »

### Free trial. Read the complete New York edition of The Times on computer, just as it appears in print.

Ads by Google Immigration Law Firm Specialty in Deportation & Appeals Free Office Consultation in U.S. www.eimmigration.org C & S Law Group Abogados
Attorneys at law (Costa Rica) Full legal service derpublico.net **Look Trendy**Autumn-Winter 2008 Collection Buy Exclusive Accessories today at

To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

### Past Coverage

www.bryce-danice-aime.com/Store/

JERUSALEM JOURNAL; Honoring Survival, And Gifts To a Nation (May 6, 2008) ABROAD; In Hungary Roma Get Art Show, Not a Hug (February 6, 2008) Coming to America (February 3, 2008) ABROAD; Ready or Not, France Opens Museum on Immigration (October 17, 2007)

### **Related Searches**

Add Alert Art Immigration and Refugees Add Alert Add Alert Mentors Add Alert New York City

## INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



Age Becomes the New Race



Op-Ed: The Heir Up There



EMI's New Boss Sees Cracks in Music World



column on politics in the classroom.



Kosovo's New Constitution Takes Effect



**-**

Old Love, New Love, Ev'ry Love but True Love

Home | World | U.S. | N.Y. / Region | Business | Technology | Science | Health | Sports | Opinion | Arts | Style | Travel | Jobs | Real Estate | Automobiles | Back to Top Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company | Privacy Policy | Search | Corrections | RSS | First Look | Help | Contact Us | Work for Us | Site Map

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/15/nyregion/15artists.html?\_r=2&ref=todayspaper...