

2026 Arts Center Residency | Open Studios

April 18, 2026 | 12:00 - 5:00

Darla Migan presents Artist Zella Vanié & Experimental School for Black Imagination

How have we learned to make a way out of no way? In my curatorial practice at the 2026 LMCC Residency, I understand the theme of 'climate change' as another pathway to learning the arts of flourishing from my Black ancestors.

Empire after empire, we have lived through poly-catastrophe and were taught to be ashamed of identifying with our Mother Earth. Kith and kin! Now Indigenous and Black peoples of the global majority will save you from the civilizations we were once told were beyond our ken.

How might learning expand beyond our current imperial institutions in support of engaging civic life and tuning in to make and nourish the networks of trust we will need to survive?

As a teacher of philosophy and curator of exhibitions led by collaborating with artists, I am deeply drawn to the cultural producer Zella Vanié's community-activation practices. As one of the founding organizers of the Experimental School for Black Imagination (and a fellow queer Southerner meandering on the loving path of Black migrations) an ethos of ease guides the way.

Join us at Open Studios on Governors Island to learn more about ESBI's contributions to Black creators, including a rotating library of "revolutionary print, critical theory, poetry, and moving pictures spanning Black feminist thought," as well as invite-only workshops and the open call zine series We Be Comin' Free.

Dr. Darla Migan, Curator
Scholar-in-Residence
Lower Manhattan Cultural Council



Zella is an artist, cultural organizer, and designer working across painting, zines, and portal-making. Their work asks what it means to be free: how communities embody knowing, seed care across time, and create conditions for Black queer folk to see our beauty, divinity, and the boundless worlds that have always been ours to inhabit.

Zella's paintings have been exhibited internationally, with support from Mass MoCA, Flux Factory, the Canopy Program, and The Other Art Fair. Zella earned an MFA in Interaction Design from the School of Visual Arts, has taught design at New York University and California College of the Arts, and splits time between Brooklyn and Abidjan. Zella is a co-founder and design lead with Black Veterans Project.



Darla Migan's independent curatorial practice takes up an interdisciplinary approach to creating aesthetic experiences, wherein philosophizing also means learning from artists. As a participant in the Arts Center Residency, she is considering 'climate change' through the lens of her current research on Black disinheritance to curate an exhibition on flourishing.

Dr. Migan is based in New York City and holds the inaugural PRODIG+ Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of Philosophy at (SUNY) Stony Brook University. She enjoys teaching artists and scientists in courses such as PHI:104 Moral Reasoning, PHI 264: Philosophy and the Arts, and PHI 501: Theories of Race. Learn more at darlanyc.com

Earth Day Celebrations on Governors Island
Open Studios | Saturday April 18th | 12:00 - 5:00
The Arts Center at Governors Island
110 Andes Rd, New York, NY 10004

