

THE REINVENTION OF CULTURAL PHILANTHROPY

By Ela Troyano

When LPB asked me to write an article on Creative Capital and the new Taller workshops targeted towards Latinos, I immediately said yes. The questions: What is your experience with Creative Capital? How have they helped you? Why is it an important organization and why should producers be aware of them? What other Latinos have participated in the program? What are the new workshops and why are they reaching out to Latinos? First off, let me disclose that I am a Creative Capital grantee, I was funded in Film/Video in their first cycle in 1999 for my PBS documentary *La Lupe Queen of Latin Soul*. I've also been an artist leader (or presenter) in their Professional Development Program and recently became a consultant on Taller, a new offering presenting workshops in Spanish.

Creative Capital began as an experiment "to see what would happen if artists were afforded the same opportunities as entrepreneurs in other sectors." This was the vision that Ruby Lerner brought to the organization as the founding director (and currently the Chief Executive Officer/President) in 1999. Founded as a response to the 1990's culture wars, Creative Capital embarked on a mission to "reinvent cultural philanthropy and to fulfill the needs of innovative artists."

The other Latino filmmaker funded in this first round was Alex Rivera, for an installation that would eventually become his award-winning film *Sleep Dealer*. Both Alex and I and our projects had radically different needs. Like many of the original grantees we were curious to see how this ambitious experimental funder would evolve.

One of Creative Capital's signature programs (and one of my favorites) is the Artist Retreat. The first one took place in Skowhegan, Maine in 2000. I remember the artists were loaded on to two buses and we made the trek from New York to Maine. Ruby was looking for a site that was remote enough so the consultants would not leave. I believe there was little if any cell phone reception. The idea was

for all the participants to concentrate on the artists and their projects throughout the weekend. Each grantee had ten minutes to present their project. Later on we had short meetings with the staff and consultants. For the filmmakers these included meetings with attorneys, producers, film festival directors, museum curators, buyers for top cable stations, film magazine editors, etc. What Ruby described as a "swap meet" was truly an exchange of ideas and expertise among the participants. On the way back as we were boarding the bus I think it was Alex who said something like "this was the most jam packed month of ideas I ever had in one weekend."

At this first retreat, I gravitated towards one of the consultants, Colleen Keegan, a corporate strategic planner. As many artists have said after meeting with Colleen, it was life changing. It's really tough to say how Creative Capital has helped me specifically because their influence has taken place over a long period of time and in many different ways. First off, it had been impossible to receive funds for *La Lupe* until Creative Capital took the risk as a first funder. But I'd like to emphasize the "additional sources of support," the skills building that is a part of the Professional Development Program. For example, I was a pretty lousy public speaker - I could charm an audience after a film screening but was not very good at interviews, in panels or social situations. I worked on public speaking and was able to turn one of my phobias into a marketable skill, leading workshops that deal precisely with this issue.

Before Creative Capital, I disliked doing any type of publicity. (My feature *Latin Boys Go To Hell* was well reviewed by the New York Times but they referred to me as Mr. Troyano.) This was a marked contrast from my work on *La Lupe* where I actually enjoyed working on publicity. The Artist Services program, especially the consulting services have been invaluable. At one retreat I spoke informally to an attorney who gave me advice on how to deal with La Lupe's estate and I was able to secure a deal with them.

Creative Capital grantees have received numerous awards. Lisa Kron took her play *Well* to Broadway and received two Tony Award nominations. Sandi Dubowski took his documentary *Trembling Before G-D* to a different level with his outreach campaign "A Movie. A Mitzvah. A Movement." Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* won the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award and the Alfred P. Sloan Award. Natalia Almada received the Sundance Documentary Directing Award for *El General*. Alongside the awards and the high profile works, grantees have acquired skills enabling them to plan, to negotiate, pay back debt, save to buy real estate, have families, pay for education, travel, set up foundations, etc.

According to the Creative Capital website, the initial support offered for a funded project is \$10,000. With additional support, the average project receives about \$35,000 though it can go up to \$50,000. The additional professional services with an average value of \$37,000 bring the potential support per project up to \$87,000.

In 2003, Creative Capital launched the Professional Development Program under Alyson Pou's direction to bring the same professional development skills the Creative Capital grantees received to a broader community of artists. The weekend workshops included topics such as strategic planning, verbal communications, supporting your work (fundraising), time management, targeted marketing, web strategies, negotiating, etc.

Taller, a new Spanish language offering was set up to address diversity issues but the catalyst was an international workshop. I was leading a breakout group with Latin American artists and we ended up speaking in Spanish. The response was phenomenal. Even though the participants spoke English (they had attended Yale, Harvard, etc.) they were simply more comfortable in Spanish - we became a little community in that space. Alyson then asked me to work on a Spanish language workshop and we began to discuss issues - in English or Spanish? A bi-lingual workshop? We held a focus group. In the end it was left up to the partnering organizations. They would decide based on the needs of their artists. We have two upcoming workshops: one in partnership with NALIP in Puerto Rico (with Isla Films and Beta-Local) in May 2011 and one at El Museo in New York in July 2011.

There are eighty-three film/video projects funded by Creative Capital to date. Nine of these are by Latino filmmakers: Natalia Almada, *El General*; Edgar Endress and Lori Lee, *Carry On*; Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre, *Maquilapolis*; Cristina Ibarra *Love and Monster Trucks*; Anayansi Prado, *Give Us Your Retired, Your Rich, Your Americans*; Alex Rivera, *Sleep Dealer*; Alex Stikich, *Honesto - Corrupt Politician*; Ela Troyano, *La Lupe Queen of Latin Soul*; and Edin Velez, *Delirio Tropical*.



For more information on Taller and Creative Capital, please visit their website, www.creativecapital.org. Ela Troyano is a video artist, filmmaker, and theater director whose work explores language, performance, music, cinema, and gender. *Latin Boys Go to Hell* (1998), a gay coming-of-age love story in the form of a Mexican soap opera, was her debut independent feature film. She is the writer, producer, and director of *La Lupe Queen of Latin Soul* (2007), a documentary on the legendary Afro-Cuban pop singer that aired on the PBS series, Independent Lens. Troyano's work has been seen at venues such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, INTAR Theater, Performance Space 122, and the Stone. She is currently developing a feature film based on La Lupe and is also co-editing a book of essays on her with Alexandra Vazquez for Duke University Press (2010).