

STILL TIMELY:

Michael Zinzun, Police Abuse, *Message to the Grassroots*, and Public Access

Thursday, July 6th, 7:30 pm

From 1988 until well into the 2000s, community activist Michael Zinzun designed and hosted his live cable access program *Message to the Grassroots*.

For this event, we will be screening an excerpt from the episode *Is Your Police Department Breeding Racism?* (1991).

Nancy Buchanan, whose work is currently on view at POTTs, assisted with the shows, and will discuss the issues raised by the video with filmmaker Karen Hayes and video/performance artist Ulysses Jenkins.

Message to the Grassroots: Is Your Police Department Breeding Racism?

June 17, 1991 (1 1/2 hours)

Produced and hosted by Michael Zinzun, Coalition Against Police Abuse at PCAC, Channel 56, Pasadena, California

Guests:

Robert Mann, Police Abuse Lawyer

John Burton, Attorney

Edgar Pope, Prison Rights Activist

David Lynn, Private Investigator

Michael Zinzun (1949-2006)

Michael Zinzun infused all his projects with high energy, from his early *Off the Roach* pest eradication program to silkscreen workshops for youth to the internationally-recognized Coalition Against Police Abuse. In his personal commitment to stopping police violence, Michael once rushed from his own house to call neighbors out as witnesses and was struck with a police flashlight with such force that he was blinded in one eye. A jury subsequently awarded him money that enabled him to devote himself full time to organizing work; youth contacts were his priority. Brad Carson, a Probation Officer in the Venice-Oakwood area, had this to say about Michael's assistance:

"...about 1999, it became apparent that we needed more jobs and more education in order to break the cycle of the repeat offender, with particular emphasis on the inter-

generational gang violence that was occurring. So, I went to Michael, and in his grand intellect, he schooled me up—on what to do, what to say, where to go, and, more importantly, how to put it down on paper to affect the entire criminal justice system.” Thousands of job opportunities were identified, and ultimately a suit was brought against the County Board of Supervisors, for not facilitating youth employment. Five years later, they settled for \$45 million, all of which was paid to at-risk youth, not a penny going to Michael or to Brad Carson.

Michael was a tireless organizer; at his memorial service, many spoke eloquently of the impact he made on their lives. Isaac Richards attested to Michael’s intellectual rigor: after reading all of Marx and Engels with Michael and local historian Don Wheeldon, it was easy for him to transfer to Columbia University because Pasadena Community College courses were far too simple. In 1988, Zinzun began producing his live monthly cable access show, *Message to the Grassroots*. Nancy Buchanan assisted with the show for many years.

Zinzun Centers were established in Haiti and Brazil. In the last ten years of his life, Michael was a member of the Carter delegation certifying elections around the world for the United Nations. Michael’s Resolution 435 Committee sent several members, including Buchanan, to Namibia to document that country’s independence from South Africa in 1989-90.

In addition to all these activities, Michael was deeply committed to art. Dealing with the terrible grief suffered by families who had lost loved ones due to police violence was draining and difficult. But he found great joy in life and beauty. His original jewelry won many awards. One of the works he had from Africa was a large chain carved from a single piece of wood so that all the links interlocked: “...which to me represents life and happiness and struggle. And they’re all interconnected, and you can’t separate them.”

Karen Hayes is a senior management and fundraising consultant for non-profits. She was Executive Director of Great Leap, a multicultural performing arts organization, and the Institute for Healing of Memories, founded by anti-apartheid leader Fr. Michael Lapsley. She worked as a major gift fundraiser for several organizations including the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance and the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers).

Karen Hayes is also a filmmaker, holding an MFA in Film and Television Production from UCLA. She was selected for the American Film Institute’s (AFI) Directing Workshop for Women (DWW) and Tribeca All Access fellowships.

Hayes wrote, produced and directed *An Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the story of an enslaved woman in the antebellum South facing a choice between freedom of body

and spirit. This dramatic short is based on the autobiography of Harriet Jacobs. It was screened in festivals nationally including the Pan-African Film Festival.

Hayes' production company, Ubuntu Motion Pictures, produced many documentary shorts for educational and non-profit organizations, including educational PSAs on HIV/AIDS featuring Nobel Peace Laureate Desmond Tutu. Hayes was also granted unique access to follow and film Tutu internationally over a 15-year period, and is currently completing the resulting documentary feature.

Born in Los Angeles, **Ulysses Jenkins** left to pursue undergraduate studies at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, majoring in painting and drawing. From 1970 to 1972 he worked with the Los Angeles County Probation Department as a counselor for psychiatric non-delinquent youth, teaching them art as part of their therapy. He holds an MFA from Otis Art Institute.

Jenkins moved to Venice Beach in 1972. For a short time, he painted theater backdrops, but after seeing the work of the Los Angeles Fine Arts Squad, he was inspired to try mural painting, which became an important aspect of his career. His first mural was located on the boardwalk at the corner of Rose Avenue and Ocean Front Walk near Venice Beach. While working on it, he was introduced to portable video recording equipment by painter Michael Zingale, which sparked his interest in that medium. He soon created a media group called Video Venice News and began shooting documentary work in Southern California.

His 1972–73 video *Remnants of the Watts Festival* (compiled 1980) is an important recorded documentation of the historic community festival commemorating the Watts rebellion of 1965, featuring Cecil Ferguson. This tape is also significant in its examination of covert surveillance of the African American community by the U.S. government.

A celebrated media and performance artist, Jenkins has completed many videotapes and several audio CDs. He contributed to *SIDE by SIDE Part II*, a collaboration with Maren Hassinger, Senga Nengudi, David Hammons, and Franklin Parker for the exhibition *Les Soriee Nomades, cycle Nuits Noires* at Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris (2006). His multi-media installation *Notions of Freedom* employs motion capture technology and video, as well as a soundtrack by Kei Akagi.

Jenkins is a full Professor in the Department of Art at the University of California, Irvine.

Nancy Buchanan earned her BA and MFA at the University of California, Irvine, where she studied under Larry Bell, Vija Celmins, David Hockney, and Robert Irwin.

Like other feminist artists of the 1970s, Buchanan has made videos and performances that combine the personal and the political.

Buchanan's early videos disrupt representational stereotypes through a feminist critique of formulaic narrative genres. Many of her later works document and critique insidious operations of political and corporate power, often with a wry sense of humor. Her video polemics of the 1980s and 1990s address such issues as government-sponsored fear tactics underpinning nuclear proliferation, American interventionist foreign policy in Latin America, and the role of exploitative real-estate speculation in the failure of the American dream.

Andra Darlington writes in *California Video: Artists and Histories*: “Nancy Buchanan began using video as a natural extension of performance and installation in the late 1970s and has continued experimenting with new media throughout her career. Her work explores the spaces between political essay, poetry, and performance. Video's reproducibility and its capacity for broad distribution have enabled Buchanan to disseminate her message outside the mainstream art establishment to a wider audience.”

Active in anti-war organizations since her student days at UCI, Buchanan served as a close collaborator of Michael Zinzun, helping produce his cable-access television show *Message to the Grassroots*. In conjunction with this work, Buchanan traveled to Namibia to document that country's passage from South African Protectorate to independence in 1990; as a result, she produced *One Namibia, One New Nation*, an educational documentary for Zinzun's LA 435 Committee.

