REVOLUTIONARY MOMENTS
ART, THE WORD AND SOCIAL ACTION

Dr. Robin M. Chandler
2018-2019 Inaugural Distinguished Artist Scholar in Residence
Bunker Hill Community College
Introduction

The 2018-2019 academic year marked a pivotal moment in the history of Bunker Hill Community College. The Center for Equity and Cultural Wealth (CECW) was founded and launched its inaugural Institute in May 2018. At the nucleus of the CECW mission is “design[ing] culturally inclusive learning environments that value the strengths of our diverse students, faculty, staff and local communities.” A major component of the CECW is the arts. At the Institute, Robin Chandler, Ph.D., was named the College’s inaugural Artist Scholar in Residence. During her residency, the College expanded arts programming and, created and implemented new initiatives supporting our commitment to cultivating equity and addressing issues of social injustice. Having a distinguished Artist Scholar in Residence was essential to awakening awareness and deepening appreciation of the arts throughout the BHCC community. It fostered creative and collective dialogue about the place of the arts in academia across all disciplines, both inside and outside the classroom.

Chandler’s presence greatly enriched the experiences of the BHCC community, be it the nine month showing of her gallery exhibit, “Revolutionary Moments: Art, the Word, and Social Action,” visiting classes or co-facilitating workshops with other artists. Students, faculty, staff and community members witnessed firsthand the intersections of the arts, teaching and learning, as well as personal and professional development. A scientist can also have a career as a visual artist; a dynamic and well-respected multi-media artist can also be a sociologist, with a rich history of academic research, publications and teaching. One has the ability to shape the other. Chandler demonstrated that disciplines do not live in silos, and that scientific inquiry and a sociologist’s perspective inform, if not directly speak to one’s mind and to one’s heart. In her artist statement, Chandler states that the “creative parallel spaces between the arts, sciences, and humanities run deeper than the conventional boundaries of disciplinary traditions.”

Chandler exemplifies how one discipline helps to inform another and the profit of being influenced by multiple disciplines. During a recent visit with an English class, for example, she told a story about sociologists helping medical professionals understand phenomena their specific branch of science could not answer. It was not until sociologists were brought into the conversation, and both disciplines worked in tandem to ask questions and discover life changing answers that helped to heal a community.

It is important that students’ educational experiences go beyond a grade on an essay or a grade point average. When the work they produce transcends the confines of the classroom, learning continues to occur in dynamic ways. After visiting The Institute of Contemporary Art-Boston’s recent installation of Radical Black Woman, students in a section of African American Literature wrote museum descriptions to many of Chandler’s collection art pieces. These descriptions then became a feature of the exhibit, mounted on the gallery walls as part of the show. Another class wrote ekphrastic poems (narrative art generated after analyzing a piece of art) based on her exhibit. These students were able to engage with art and with the artist directly—a new and enriching interaction for many.

For all the vitality, inspiration and expertise that Chandler repeatedly brought to classrooms and conversations in the gallery, BHCC students in Professor of Psychology Maria Puente’s class decided to honor the artist during a writing workshop in celebration of National Poetry Month (April 2019). She read an ekphrastic poem titled “Taking Away the Medicine” (after of one of her pieces in the exhibition with the same title) written by a student, Keila Alleyne. Reading Alleyne’s poem, Chandler stated, “Keila Alleyne wrote something beautiful… Isn’t that brilliant? It’s like she was in my head.” Moments like these evaporate, motivate and validate. They also bolster a student’s confidence, encouraging the very real perseverance needed to accomplish educational and life goals alike. Moments like these, foster success: they are, indeed, revolutionary.

The following pages include reflections by students, faculty, special guests and the artist herself that express the powerful impact and transformative capability of art. There are also several sections of “In the Artist’s Words” that generously offer Chandler’s thoughts, views and interpretations of her works, both visual and poetic. Instances of individuals encountering their own “revolutionary moments” are highlighted as well. Professor of Psychology Maria Puente, for example, summed up beautifully what many members of the BHCC community share in sentiment: “What has consistently struck a deep chord in me was Chandler’s genuine desire to use art as an avenue for building bridges of understanding, for amplifying our voices and experiences as people of color who are often overtly or covertly dismissed into the margins.”

Chandler’s residency illuminates the importance of deliberately incorporating the arts into our curriculum. She has taught us that the experience of art can be both personal and collective; that it unites us, and simultaneously broadens our individual perspectives. Chandler’s work does not isolate our understanding in time or space, but challenges viewers, in theory and in practice, to embrace change that is crucial to continuously make our campus, communities and world places where everyone is welcomed.

Emmanuela Maurice, Professor, English Department
Kevin Wary, Director, Office of College Events and Cultural Planning
“Collaboration across boundaries of gender and race and across the unfortunate chasm between what is art and what is science needs to be reduced and replaced with new ways of seeing interdisciplinary thinking.”

— DR. ROBIN M. CHANDLER

“The future of BHCC is brighter than ever. Learning leaders are being cultivated here.”

— DR. ROBIN M. CHANDLER

From the President

President Pam Eddinger, Ph.D. (PE): What stimulated the creation of this innovative inaugural residency at BHCC?

Robin Chandler, Ph.D. (RC): In the Spring term of 2018, I had been asked to do consulting for the College’s Center for Equity and Cultural Wealth, had participated in the exhibition Gathering, and had introduced faculty to my Colorquest model, a pedagogical tool that explores how race, ethnicity and representation is deployed in museums. A field trip to the MFA Boston was part of the Center’s agenda and faculty jumped in with both feet. The residency grew out of conversations that were already going on simultaneously at BHCC about diversity, inclusion and dialogue. Faculty and staff were also very clear about the value added in expanding the exposure and exchange with students on matters of arts and culture. I saw the workings of an institution that wanted to change to better serve its educational mission. We talked about possibilities. From my perspective, the residency needed to address both of my professional career paths—the sciences and the arts—thus the choice of “artist—scholar.” I saw it as a spiritual journey with art and science feet. It was a pleasant shift from being an academic for 30 years at a private university.

PE: As a social scientist and artist did you have particular goals in mind for the residency?

RC: One of the strengths of the social sciences is observation. As a scientist, I was compelled by the student demographic—predominantly students of color from nearly 100 countries. A statistically dominant women of color dynamic—including you—was also an attractive space to work in considering the contrast with a faculty and administration that was mostly white and European.

I love a good adventure! I was hoping that the work in my exhibition Revolutionary Moments could become a catalyst for events, activities and creative collaboration with the campus community, as well as the College’s satellite campuses and the Greater Boston art world. As an artist, my vision was to launch the installation of the exhibition with the talent of high school student apprentices from Boston Arts Academy and Artists for Humanity, and their Master Teacher Rob “Probk” Gibbs. The BHCC installation staffs were brilliant and generous. It was a real intergenerational experience and I was very flattered to be a part of it. And that was just the beginning! Soon we expanded the Residency exchange beyond the typical artist receptions to artist talks, dinner dialogues, community conversations and collaborations with visual and performing artists in the BHCC family. Lunching with the speakers in the College’s Compelling Conversations Series was a joy.

There have been many “sweet spots” in this residency: my interview with author Seng Ty (The Years of Zero: Coming of Age Under the Khmer Rouge) about the creative and cautionary resilience of surviving a brutal war in Cambodia; the classrooms and students I’ve visited and spoken to about both the works in the exhibition and sweeping current events; Poetry Month in April and more. It’s been an “embarrassment of riches”—truly enriching for all of us, I hope.

PE: You’ve referred to BHCC as a “next gen company.” How have you approached the design of a collaborative residency at a community college that connects with faculty, staff and students?

RC: We all talked about the central purpose of a typical artist residency—the production of a body of work for exhibition. My residency was the inaugural residency and I was moved that President Obama’s reference to the seminal work being done here in Boston was visionary. In the spring of 2018, I had presented on gender transformation issues at a dinner dialogue I referred to BHCC, at that time, as a “next gen company”, meaning we build for the future. Our thinking and planning as administrators and faculty from older generations needs to be aspirational, that is, focused on the perspectives and experiences of younger generations. The assets of a cohort of students who are mostly young women of color are astounding. Many of them are polyglots, code switchers and they bring with them socially situated identities that reflect a unique way of thinking, talking, framing issues, valuing, interacting and feeling. Those assets should be harvested. College can be a minefield of expectations.
and many students have stressors in their lives. I like to use the Yoda approach with students—"With you, may the force be"—by directing them to the threshold of their own knowledge so that they can bring that energy and resilience to their professional learning tasks.

Building from a vision is hard work. So a small circle of people at BHCC became a kind of think tank. How could we maximize the presence of an artist scholar at the College? I think we all wanted something more than a typical residency and there was a focus on more seasoned professionals, not merely someone who wanted to show their work, but someone who could share decades of experience with the BHCC community. I confess that I secretly used some of the strategies of sociological method to immerse myself in this new community. In most conversations, I recall that more and more, people desired a deeper relationship with the artist scholar. At many meetings, in online communications and in getting to know the BHCC community better, it was clear that we wanted to create something unique. With the support of your presidency, we have ended up with a model residency that has no comparison at any other community college in the U.S.

We built the model together from the ground up with novel opportunities for exchange with faculty, students and staff. This is the kind of "starfish" model of management thinking that brings everyone and their intelligences to the table to consult.

Building meaningful exchanges here has been a metamorphosis, too. We have modified the residency events to meet both the needs of the College and my needs.

PE: What are the interdisciplinary links between the arts and the sciences that benefit community college students through the exhibition?

RC: A number of my works deal with a spectrum of themes. Sling Shot Around the Sun is about the creative exploration of science, unconventional problem-solving methods, and the spirit of change. The idea emerged from the original Star Trek series in an episode in which Captain Kirk got his crew into yet another impossible situation that required breaking the rules to innovate success. The Coltrane Series examines a trio of harmonic themes in music explored by musician innovator John Coltrane, and his concept of "sheets of sound," his experimental improvisations with scale patterns and harmonic progressions, and his ability to incubate these concepts with Thelonius Monk and Miles Davis. Later, many suggested his preoccupation with "third relations" was a spiritual quest given his interest in Indian ragas. Whatever his inspiration, I could relate to the explorations in creative thinking that go on in the studio during the art production process and I thought this risk-taking was powerful.

Works from the Peace Series have asked us to set aside our preoccupation with centuries of war to re-examine the peace processes more closely and to try harder to break the cycles of aggression and the commercialization of war. Queens of the Baalapal-both the collage and the poem-investigate gender inequality within apartheid, asking us to rethink the reality of individual human nobility. I had worked in South Africa for 10 years, between 1993 and 2000, and was drawn to the paradoxes and the structural inequalities of that society, especially focused on women.

All of my curiosities and experiments ask questions across disciplines. They propose that we all rethink the artificial divisions, the disparities in our thinking about how to achieve social change based on new principles of equality and unity. This applies to interdisciplinary teaching, research, social organization, decision-making, and where we invest our time and money. Collaboration across boundaries of gender and race and across the unfortunate chasm between what is art and what is science needs to be reduced and replaced with new ways of seeing interdisciplinary thinking. I think it’s critical to demonstrate to students the importance of working across disciplines. Many of them are being prepared for career paths that require collaborative thinking across fields, teamwork, and learning how to respect one another across professions.

We have an unfortunate professional caste system in modern societies and in higher education. It needs to be dismantled. We need to relax the equal power of each profession, the dignity and the learning curve inherent in all professional paths.

PE: Beyond the exhibition, what other residency activities this year have provided cultural impact in terms of diversity and cultural wealth in the communities served by the College?

RC: The Center for Equity and Cultural Wealth has been the mastermind behind the College’s plan for inclusion, broadly speaking. In planning the residency, we have tried to accommodate their vision for BHCC. We fully expect that the cultural wealth of the inaugural BHCC residency will have a major impact, culturally and socially, on not only the College community, but the City of Boston as well, and beyond.

PE: What do you see as the future of the residency for BHCC and its mission for faculty, staff and students?

RC: The future of BHCC is brighter than ever. Learning leaders are being cultivated here. I’m a big fan of the Nelson Mandela playbook. He practiced the attitude that everybody should feel bigger in your presence, that you bottle the dream for future generations, and that you can turn bitter enemies into allies. My dad’s repeated phrase “keep it clean” also steers my hopes for the residency’s future. He was my first mentor as both an intellectual and an artist, and he fostered in me the notion that you can be successful while still being a moral person.
I am a person of mixed heritage and have been a practicing artist-scholar, educator, and consultant for 40 years in the U.S. and abroad. Since the late 1980’s, my work has focused on social and spiritual commentary, themes of peace and freedom, and using art to inspire, stimulate and promote thinking concerning unity and peace–building from the local to the global.

Crossing disciplines, I combine work as a social scientist and artist in lecturing and published works on how art worlds function and dysfunction globally.

For the last decade, I have experimented with multimedia applications and digital technology to explore studio production and 2- and 3-D projects. As a collage artist, I use sketches, hand cut drawings, photographs, digitized images, and handmade papers to construct traditional and digital collage works, some large scale. My technique—“drawing with scissors”—uses scissors to cut preliminary sketches freehand, rather than with pencil. I have produced several “series” (7 or 9 works in each) such as:

- The Seven Valleys, a meditation on spiritual journeying produced in France at La Muse Artist residency in 2009, the Peace Series, a set of nine collages that demonstrated humanity’s evolution in the stages of peace and war, and the Stone Tablets series (2014). The reconstruction of original handmade works and digitally generated images allows for a discovery of new means for expressing color, form, texture, and media and to explore socially relevant ideas.
- My themes cover broad global issues of peace making, the meaning of freedom, and transcultural heritage and identity.

In 2010, my work Capoeira became the book cover of Women, War, and Violence: Personal Perspectives and Global Activism (Palgrave Macmillan), a book I also co-edited. Frequently, my visual works have also accompanied poems to expand the impact of social commentary and to highlight issues of identity, such as my poem “Siouxjewgermanscotblack (Cherokee)” in Other Tongues: Mixed Race Women Speak Out (Inanna Publications, Inc., 2010), and also including poems published in a Black Arts Collective Macmillan CD.

Robin M. Chandler
September 2018
“Art is a process of cleansing, purifying. Through it we make war on the weary demons. The weary demons who walk the soil of the heart and the spirit looking for a way out, whispering ‘Let us out....’ Artists are the way out, the journeymen. Art is the long journey.”

— RUMI

Robin M. Chandler, Ph.D., has published and exhibited her work extensively since 1978, with a focus on social movements, arts and culture leadership, gender equality, post and neo-colonial studies, arts and culture, and race and cultural competency in nations undergoing rapid social, political and economic change. Primarily a collage and multimedia artist, Chandler has exhibited in the United States, Puerto Rico and abroad, and is represented in many corporate and international private collections. An early memoir—The Beautiful Flight Toward the Light: Reflections of An Artist’s Life—("Australian Journal of Baha’i Studies", 2000)—documents her career as a professional artist integrating spiritual principles into her work.

Chandler has taught at the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Wellesley College, Tufts/Museum School and Simmons College, and was a tenured professor at Northeastern University. As a practicing artist she is affiliated with the U.S. State Department’s Art in Embassies Program. A social scientist and gender specialist, Chandler’s research in international development is focused on the inclusion of girls and women into leadership by overcoming the crisis of gender-based violence.

Globally-seasoned as an artist-in-residence in France, the U.S., and South Africa, her work as a multimedia visual artist is being featured during a year-long residency and in a solo exhibition, Revolutionary Moments: Art, the Word and Social Action, Mary L. Fifield Art Gallery, Bunker Hill Community College (October 4, 2018, to June 19, 2019).
The Wall Writers

Dedicated to Darius, Jesse, Edileisi, Ananda, Jahnae, and Papi Problak
who made marks on my walls for the Revolutionary Moments exhibition, BHCC

Night fell.
One behind the other in single file they shuffled in off of the desserts of the world and, followed the North Star by night to the caves of the world, the canyons where ‘making marks’ was born.
To the rocks that had been there since the time forgotten, the rocks that called them to the Writing to the Telling, to the We-were-here story.
Taking their rest from gathering and hunting, tired and hungry for tradition, They grouped themselves about the fire telling stories and writing them. All at once, it was the beginning—the visual text and the written text and the oral text.

In the Tassili of Algeria to Altamira and Lascaux in Spain and France, to the Kakadu and Oolooloory in Northern Australian Dreamtime, to the Indonesian Maros-Pangkep, to the paintings of South Africa’s San people in the Drakensburg Mountains, miles distant to the Ute and Fremont graph art of Nine Mile Canyon in Utah and Colorado down to the canyons of the Anasazi culture and the ‘Great Gallery’ in Horsehoe Canyon.
Ubiquitous was this making of marks, this telling of stories, this call and response to the future.
After food, and caring for small people, and lovemaking, and planning for journeying to come, they stopped to make marks on the wall.

You wall writers are one in a mighty tradition.
You came in off of the dessert of your lives with your mentor to spread the glory of centuries of wall writers. It is a Guild of Wall Artists, a power guild.

I look on these walls you painted of my flying priestesses, and gingkoes, and the arms of Capoeira re membrances, and the celebrating figures throwing up their arms, these forms that fell from the frontier of my imagination. My works rest upon your drawings, your willingness to create.

Because I am blessed by your help, from one generation to the next, we are ALL renewed, and our guild of mark makers who now make marks on urban walls will live in the imagination of the future.

Robin M. Chandler
January 21, 2019
BHCC Launches Distinguished Artist Scholar in Residence Program

“Meeting Robin Chandler was the highlight of my semester. Holding a round table discussion with myself and my peers, she offered an unfiltered perspective of both the art world and society as a whole. While her story and body of work are impressive, it was her total engagement and raw honesty that I found most refreshing and inspiring.”
— KARL MILLER, BHCC STUDENT

BHCC welcomed the College’s first Distinguished Artist Scholar in Residence Robin Chandler, Ph.D., at a preview reception for the artist’s Revolutionary Moments exhibition at the Mary L. Fifield Art Gallery on October 4, 2018.

As a social scientist and artist who works primarily in collage and multimedia, Chandler uses art to inspire, stimulate and promote thinking concerning unity and peace-building from the local to the global.

The residency is designed as a way for students to have meaningful interactions with art and practicing artists, and art’s role in the College’s commitment to equity and preparing students to be agents of social change.

Co-sponsored by the President’s Office and the Center for Equity and Cultural Wealth, the inaugural residency includes Chandler’s fall exhibition, an interdisciplinary multimedia exhibition of her visual art, poetry and scholarship; and in the spring, the continuing exhibition and a series of community conversations and artist talks inspired by the works on view.

“Working with Dr. Chandler helped me expand my teaching to include non-traditional topics for Computer Science students such as equity, creativity and ethics.”
— LIZ MILLER
CHAIR, COMPUTER SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

Dr. Robin Chandler and Nuri Chandler-Smith, Dean of Academic Support and College Pathway Programs.
Revolutionary Moments

When I reflect on my own prejudice, and renew myself, I am building a spiritual civilization within me.

When I lose control to protect my children, and caution myself, I am a revolutionary.

When I tell you that you cannot impose your culture on me or put your hands on me, I am building a spiritual civilization.

When I embody my culture and my gender with nobility, I honor the revolution.

When I recover from a fall from grace, and heal myself, I am a revolutionary.

When I build something new and vital, a legacy that serves others, I am revolutionary and a builder of civilization.

When I work with aches and pains to feed my family or lead my nation, I am building a spiritual civilization.

When I put myself in harm’s way to protect my brothers and sisters, those of blood and bone and those I adopted, I am a revolutionary.

When I swallow my pride because I am wrong, I am building a spiritual civilization within.

When I stand up to defend a person who has been raped, and humility, compassion, and love flow through me, I am a revolutionary.

When I awaken to thank the Creator, the ‘tough instructor’, for the privilege of the wild and crazy ride that is life, where difficulty and goodness meet at the crossroads, I am building a spiritual civilization.

As the man said: ‘Pray for a tough instructor’.

Change yourself and every moment in this world will be revolutionized.

The spirit change…

A better world awaits.

Robin M. Chandler
January 21, 2019

"The opportunity to learn about commonalities of experience of various immigrants, as well as indigenous peoples in America, could not have been made more concrete and real than in the opportunity to share stories through artistic and poetic forms. Encouraging students to write their own stories, contemplate visual art, reflect on their own culture and speak in their own language was validated and honored in the poetry workshop conducted by Dr. Chandler. It was wonderful as a professor to hear from those who have been especially quiet in the classroom. It was also wonderful hearing ‘pride’ in reading the poems students wrote themselves in their first language, as well as witnessing new-found confidence expressed by them as a direct result of working with this talented artist and scholar.”

— Aurora Bautista,
Professor, Behavioral Science Department

The Blood of the Colonizer and the Colonized Flows in My Veins
Paper/Scroll Collage, 6’3” x 4’8”
As an artist, crossing media boundaries as well as transnational boundaries is rooted in my own mixed heritage. It motivates my passion for visual documentation through autobiography and “visual memoir,” and it has kept me moving across nations when “I am in the field”. As an artist, my work has focused on social and spiritual commentary including a set of nine collages that demonstrated humanity’s evolution in the stages of peace and war, and the Stone Tablets series (2014) that reflects on the sacred tablets from the four corners. The reconstruction of original handmade works and digitally generated images allows for a discovery of new means for expressing color, form, texture, and media and to explore socially relevant ideas. Similar to my work as a social scientist at the art crossroads, the art of handmade paper and the science of digitization blend into new forms and new ways of thinking about production issues. For example, Rapid Response (UMass Amherst, 2001), a group exhibition of artists addressing post 9/11 trauma, combines handmade images digitized with a poem “Instructions for the Year 2001: Remember the Way Home,” superimposed over the image.

Indigenous Series – Prologue to the Resistance
Collage, 17.25”x21.25”

In 2010, my work Capoeira became the book cover of Women, War, and Violence: Personal Perspectives and Global Activism (Palgrave Macmillan), a book that focused on gender-based violence globally including my own work in Liberia. In addressing issues of identity, my poem “Siouxjewgermanscotblack (Cherokee)” has been published in Other Tongues: Mixed Race Women Speak Out (Inanna Publications, Inc., 2010). My major community-based work The Peace Doors Project is designed to build and erect nine monumental “peace doors” in nine countries, a process of peace-building originally “workshopped” in South Africa, Australia, and currently in the United States.
I needed a revolutionary way to describe my technical approach to collage production. “Drawing with scissors” is the counterpoint to using a pencil to draw and it has taken a long time to be able to cut materials precisely. Paper-cutting is an ancient craft. In China, paper-cutting (Jianzhi) is a 1,500 year old tradition recognized by UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The craft traveled to Japan (kirigami or even kamikiri, performance paper-cutting in Edo), and is practiced in Jewish custom, Mexico (papel picado), and Slavic countries. Paper-cutting has many names and is part of traditional celebrations in many parts of the world. Since I work in mixed media and with varying types of paper, films, and photographs, I referenced my high school chemistry and experimented using test boards to observe how different types of adhesives interacted with varying paper surfaces over time and environmental conditions. All of this takes time. But beyond the making of paper (homemade or commercial), pulp painting, digitization, and traditional collage methods are part of my production process.

Handmade paper is a beautiful tradition that dates back thousands of years. Globally, the concept and manufacture of

“Collage is drawing with scissors.”
— ROBIN M. CHANDLER

“Go within every day and find the inner strength so that the world will not blow your candle out.”
— KATHERINE DUNHAM

Notes on Collage

Coltranian Series 2 – Africa Brass
Collage, 38.5”x54.5”

Peace Series 6—The Lesser Peace
Collage, 24”x30”

Peace Series 7—The Lesser Peace
Collage, 24”x30”

In the Artist’s Words: “Notes on Collage”
paper evolved. Papyrus (pressed and dried plants—organic material) in Egypt and the Mediterranean might be the original placeholder for a surface that could withstand writing, but its durability suffered. In the pre-Columbia Americas, amate (bark paper) was developed. In Europe, vellum followed. True paper was first documented by the Chinese during the Eastern Han dynasty (B.C. 202 – A.D. 220) and was made of mulberry, hemp waste and other fibers replacing the awkward and cumbersome bamboo and bone surfaces that had been current; the invention has been attributed to the Chinese court official Cai Lun (c. 50-121). In 1993, I received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts at Pyramid Atlantic Printmaking and Papermaking Studio in Maryland. I created my own friskets (stencils) of forms I use in my work - the flying priestess, gingko leaves, dance forms et al. I learned to make paper using pulp painting as a method with the extraordinary staff at Pyramid Atlantic. Many of my works are made with the paper I produced including the Coltrane Memorial, Taking Away the Medicine, Freedom and Madness, Jibarito, Sacred Bundles, Tell the Rich of the Midnight Sighing of the Poor, and The End of Everything.

Once the internet and digital technologies emerged, the science of “photoshopping” (Adobe Photoshop and its iterations) revolutionized my aesthetic capacity: thousands of 35 mm slides could then be scanned, color edited, and manipulated in my expanding archive. The first night I discovered the slide-scanning feature (planning to scan only 10 slides) it got away from me. My family had to call me home for dinner. And the first time I photoshopped a self-portrait, I totally lost it and continued with other works until I surpassed 100 new still images, digital storytelling, and videos. Regarding new technologies, I am just getting started.

But I go back to the dedicated and energetic staff of Pyramid Atlantic for my appreciation of papermaking and the more transformative skill for me—pulp painting. The friskets I cut in advance meant I could pulp paint by embedding the friskets into the paper and apply the pulp paint before it dried on many 30" x 40" sheets rather quickly. The synthesis of substrate, pulp/paint medium, and image is an unconventional strategy enabling the images and forms to be worked in the paper, not merely on it. I purchased this black acrylic travel case—my BFF—to transport my tools. The next year, 1994, I took this case to South Africa for an art residency at the Fordsburg Lab Factory and it has accompanied me on all of my residencies beyond the United States and through some perilous customs exchanges.
In Sanskrit, the meaning of the term guru is someone who leads others out of the darkness to the threshold of their own knowledge. Out of this belief, my work teaching and training at K-12 at the Commonwealth School, adult education, and at universities in many countries has proven that the integrity of the teacher is central to sustaining human nobility. The life of the mind has no equal and to be a teacher is a very great responsibility. If we are not all noble, what is the point of the experiment of living, of passing on knowledge, of building civilizations? And there are no “moon or stars” unless the status of the teacher is elevated, supported, and respected as a national treasure in every land. The vocation to train the human mind, spirit, and intuition, and to inculcate a sense of ethics, fair play, and equality is the higher ground on which the teaching profession rests. I call it “the floating classroom” because education is that one acquisition that is sacred—an entitlement and a human right. I have used the framework. Over 40 years of teaching this is the most important thing that I have learned as an elder, a scholar, and a creative worker.

Research is a professional pursuit. But it also happens when some new concept, some new way of solving a problem occurs to us in everyday life because we bothered to ask “why?” or “how?” In Brazil, my work focused on how the state’s cultural preservation agenda through Bahiatursa in a peri-rural area conflicted with racial and economic discrimination faced by cultural workers. By 1988, the Northeast Province of Bahia was celebrating the centenary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888). A new consciousness was emerging. The effects of blanquimento on the racial caste system in a nation that presented itself as “multicultural” were a mask that hid the scale and scope of racism. Meaning “the whitening of the race,” blanquimento is the colonial practice that continues to promote white supremacy on every continent. In South Africa, it was verblankensproses. In France, race isn’t even counted by the state. And in every one of those colonial spaces people of color suffer from the “stolen generation” syndrome—the policy of imperialism that removed native and indigenous children from their families in order to assimilate future generations to white culture. Simultaneously, the evil suppressed Indigenous languages, sacred belief systems, disrupted the fabric of the family, and denigrated traditional forms of social organization. In so many countries people of color have asked me, “Why did they do this?” I have always answered, “…because they don’t know they have souls.” Despite these crimes against humanity, indigenous people thrive even in the midst of the ongoing battle to resist annihilation and the struggle to protect Mother Earth and her environment.

Teaching must be reflective of the full narrative, the good and the bad, the victories and the setbacks that have made America and the world what it is—a nation of immigrants un reconcile to their history, but hopeful of a future in which “America will lead all nations spiritually.”

Amidst the destructive mythologies of American-ness, the duty of American teachers is to restore a true national history of Native American genocide, African American enslavement, the oppression of women, internments and forced removals, and the marginalization of ethnic others. These narratives help us face the truth, overcome our divisions, and give the gift of true knowledge to future generations. Its evolution as a military state that is excessively materialistic and brutal is tragic. Yet there are many “revolutionary moments” happening amidst the chaos of a collapsing national ethos. America is not a “white nation” nor is it owned and controlled to serve only whites. It never was. We need “the moon and the stars” to illuminate the darkness. It is a beautiful dream of a mystically beautiful land, a land of many nations that we must learn to cherish. We fight to protect that dream and to give new form to its future.

Walk in beauty.

* a phrase from the Bahá’í Prayer for America,
- Abdu’l-Bahá

In the Artist’s Words:
“Notes on teaching and research”

“Ignorance is the night of the mind; a night without moon or stars.”
- Confucius

In Sanskrit, the meaning of the term guru is someone who leads others out of the darkness to the threshold of their own knowledge. Out of this belief, my work teaching and training at K-12 at the Commonwealth School, adult education, and at universities in many countries has proven that the integrity of the teacher is central to sustaining human nobility. The life of the mind has no equal and to be a teacher is a very great responsibility. If we are not all noble, what is the point of the experiment of living, of passing on knowledge, of building civilizations? And there are no “moon or stars” unless the status of the teacher is elevated, supported, and respected as a national treasure in every land. The vocation to train the human mind, spirit, and intuition, and to inculcate a sense of ethics, fair play, and equality is the higher ground on which the teaching profession rests. I call it “the floating classroom” because education is that one acquisition that is sacred—an entitlement and a human right. I have used the framework.

Over 40 years of teaching this is the most important thing that I have learned as an elder, a scholar, and a creative worker.

Research is a professional pursuit. But it also happens when some new concept, some new way of solving a problem occurs to us in everyday life because we bothered to ask “why?” or “how?” In Brazil, my work focused on how the state’s cultural preservation agenda through Bahiatursa in a peri-rural area conflicted with racial and economic discrimination faced by cultural workers. By 1988, the Northeast Province of Bahia was celebrating the centenary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888). A new consciousness was emerging. The effects of blanquimento on the racial caste system in a nation that presented itself as “multicultural” were a mask that hid the scale and scope of racism. Meaning “the whitening of the race,” blanquimento is the colonial practice that continues to promote white supremacy on every continent. In South Africa, it was verblankensproses. In France, race isn’t even counted by the state. And in every one of those colonial spaces people of color suffer from the “stolen generation” syndrome—the policy of imperialism that removed native and indigenous children from their families in order to assimilate future generations to white culture. Simultaneously, the evil suppressed Indigenous languages, sacred belief systems, disrupted the fabric of the family, and denigrated traditional forms of social organization. In so many countries people of color have asked me, “Why did they do this?” I have always answered, “…because they don’t know they have souls.” Despite these crimes against humanity, indigenous people thrive even in the midst of the ongoing battle to resist annihilation and the struggle to protect Mother Earth and her environment.

Teaching must be reflective of the full narrative, the good and the bad, the victories and the setbacks that have made America and the world what it is—a nation of immigrants un reconcile to their history, but hopeful of a future in which “America will lead all nations spiritually.”

Amidst the destructive mythologies of American-ness, the duty of American teachers is to restore a true national history of Native American genocide, African American enslavement, the oppression of women, internments and forced removals, and the marginalization of ethnic others. These narratives help us face the truth, overcome our divisions, and give the gift of true knowledge to future generations. Its evolution as a military state that is excessively materialistic and brutal is tragic. Yet there are many “revolutionary moments” happening amidst the chaos of a collapsing national ethos. America is not a “white nation” nor is it owned and controlled to serve only whites. It never was. We need “the moon and the stars” to illuminate the darkness. It is a beautiful dream of a mystically beautiful land, a land of many nations that we must learn to cherish. We fight to protect that dream and to give new form to its future.

Walk in beauty.

* a phrase from the Bahá’í Prayer for America,
- Abdu’l-Bahá

In the Artist’s Words:
“Notes on teaching and research”

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A Year of Revolutionary Moments

“I met Dr. Robin Chandler during my interviews for The One Book Program at Bunker Hill Community College. I’m honored by her sincerity and impressed by her knowledge of Cambodian history and culture. She interviewed me and pointed out many key questions about my book, The Years of Zero, so the audience could better connect and understand.”

— SENG TY
AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR

“Dr. Robin Chandler’s expertise, acuity and passion for the arts has been a treasured addition to Bunker Hill Community College. It has been my utmost pleasure to share, collaborate, as well as learn from her multifaceted insight. The passion she has for her work has been a great benefit to students and staff alike. Her art, poetry and scholarship speak to the social, political and spiritual urgency of our time.”

— LARRY SPOTTED CROW MANN
AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, POET,
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“While most artists will face moments where they experience doubt about their work, it was uplifting to be able to speak with a talented artist about her work and her experiences. Both her words and her art were encouraging and powerful. She offered beautiful stories of her travels, which she was then able to portray in her work. A truly wonderful experience.”

— CAROLINE FORM, BHCC STUDENT

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Lunch with trailblazer Lt. Olgo Custodio [Retired], first Latina to complete USAF military training, first to become a USAF pilot, and later, one of the first Latina commercial pilots—with guests. Compelling Conversation Speaker Series, Thursday, November 1, 2019.

With Larry Spotted Crow Mann—Award-winning author, poet, Native American cultural educator and storyteller, October 2018.

The artist meets with BHCC visual and media arts students, April 2019.
Taking Away
The Medicine

Collage, 20"x30"

A Native American Indian Power Chant with Rattles

Generations of brooding silences, marching
Marching women with swollen bellies
Whispering lineage secrets to their men
Instructing children in heartbreak.

All sweatlodged
Disheartened by imperious herds of europeans, their endless comings, their fertile entrapments.

The Ghost Dance people - grandmothers and warriors, join.
Solemn this plea of spirit to Spirit.
Forsaken and empty of dream medicine
Cast out within the homeland, calling down the sky.

From the nightplain a fire breaks upon the worldhorizon.
And from four quadrants the songs peel, feet pounding at the Deafness of history.

From the place where the sun lives
To the place where it ages and dies
From the place where the sacred mountain sits that sees all colors together
Back to the place of dawning.

Mine. A steady circle of vanquished relatives.
With thunder and flowing rivers of electrified pain
Chanting, expectant for the Mythic Hero’s return.

Now ends our Ghost Dance prayer.
Cottonwoods strike upwards at a reluctant moon
Speaking to a people of much ceremony
Who know how to die well.
Remembering that
“A people who know how to die well are reborn well.”

I inhale the universe for the prayer’s answer.
Through me the Ghost Dancers breathe,
Are rich with family.
I do this art worship
To return the medicine

“ “If we are not all noble, what is the point of the experiment of living, of passing on
knowledge, of building civilizations? “
— DR. ROBIN M. CHANDLER

Offering this prayer as eagles gliding in full flight
drop to earth their wingfeathers
For the power is getting close
And the ground is hot and shaking

The ground is hot and shaking
Robin M. Chandler
2002
I. When courage finds you stepping, stepping cautiously into the gilded crucible of violence, humility and a sense of shame — one’s only departure from the beast in us all — will make you blush. Overwhelming dawn with headgear, pipe, and purses, egoli sidewalks, bus depots, then mansion gates flourish with the ancient busy-ness of callused feet. In public and private moments my eyes labor to meet theirs, the gazes of decades of invisibility. When eye meets eye, then, it is like a tome, a missile, a sting unreadable in its speed, targeting the bit of you that remains sacred.

II. More seasoned and a thousand nights betrayed, Zikes’ eyes collided with mine and I held her to me, gave her a bracelet from my wrist. How else could I gaze across the chasm and say: ‘I like and appreciate your being-ness?’ Simply offering her the customary tip in a sunset chase from the Drakensburg farm would have meant: ‘You are a good slave.’ I nested in the memory of her wide-eyed wonder knowing that no one had ever lavished her with such a frivolous and feminine gift. Exchanging involuntary, adolescent grins through the fire of history we bonded, queen to queen. All women are queens.

III. From the Cape Town coast the chasm reappeared when an unfamiliar utterance put me in my morning place: ‘Madam. My madam will pick you up at noon.’ In an instant her gaze domesticated my culinary indiscretion and the territory of the kitchen was reclaimed. Bessie prepared breakfast — mine a full course repast with crystal and linen — hers a day-old roll with cheese, no utensils. Beckoning her to join me at the table, it was my eyes that swept her up and into me. I became the compassionate listener enabling her tidal wave of spousal betrayals, chronic illnesses, and parenting failures. All accounts ritually interspersed with: ‘But the Lord, Jesus is my savior and Him alone do I serve.’ A river of betrayals running deep with Bessie, deep like Banyan roots. Wiping my mouth she masked her innocence with me and said: ‘It has been my very great pleasure to have you listen to me, madam. Thank you and bless you.’ Over therapeutic glances through the flood of unfulfilled dreams we bonded, queen to queen. ‘Baaskap’ women are vulnerable but they will open up a dark heaven in a shared nuclear silence. When all else fails we can embrace each other with our eyes — queen to queen. Empresses of the World.

*baaskap is an Afrikaans word meaning ‘slave ship.’

Robin M. Chandler

October 1994

Quote by Katharine Dunham

“Go within every day and find the inner strength so that the world will not blow your candle out.”

Queens of the Baaskap
For Black Women Domestics in South Africa

“Over therapeutic glances
Through the flood of unfulfilled dreams
We bonded, queen to queen.”
— ROBIN M. CHANDLER
FROM “QUEENS OF THE BAASKAP”
In the Artist’s Words: “Being in the field”

For three decades, I taught and conducted research in the social sciences as a senior tenured professor at Northeastern University, at the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) as a Fulbright Scholar, and at Wellesley College, MIT, and Simmons University. As an artist-scholar, I have stood my ground in interdisciplinary arts and culture to raise the public profile of the arts and humanities. Internationally, as a gender specialist, I have been focused on improving the status of women and girls in the world. The fortune of twin careers has taken me to work on six continents. In Liberia, we collaborated with Grand Bassa Community College and the Ministry of Gender Affairs and Child Protection to create a community-based gender studies certificate for Liberian higher education. In Uganda, my research centered on the extraordinary achievements of the School of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala. They have accomplished what no other institution in the world has been able to create. The Brazil collaboration over several years resulted in a new terreiro (sacred space) for Irmandade da Boa Morte and I cherish the honorary sisterhood given to me by our Brazilian sisters in Cachoeira. As I traveled throughout the diaspora I was distracted by the remains of colonialism from the U.S. to Australia, throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. One of the heart-breaking realities common to many countries is the concept of “stolen generations”—thousands of children removed from their families and sent away to schools and the tragic outcomes that have recently surfaced concerning exploitation, abuse, and cultural destruction of language, land, and custom.

Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Science Foundation, and the CIES Fulbright Commission, opportunities for service were part of the pathway to global citizenship in my career.

It was not easy sustaining acceptance and recognition as a dual career professional in the academic world. And I have regularly fought against what I call the professional caste system in the academic world. What is considered equivalent achievement as an artist-scholar has been an uphill battle to convince reviewers that a solo exhibition is a book. And by those standards I have dozens. Across all disciplines what is considered “professional,” “science” and valued remains based upon a dying class system that rewards some and marginalizes others in respect, social status, and unequal pay. Higher education is a patriarchal world that is in collapse. It didn’t expect women and people of color to revolutionize how we teach and learn in the “boys club.” My greatest thinking has come from being silent among rural women and men whose wisdom is eternal.

But the intellectual of the 21st century needs to be a big thinker who can apprehend complexity, diversity, and complacency, think and problem solve across domains, across race and culture, and immerse itself in women’s perspectives beyond the conventional. I believe, like Toomer, that “every new American spiritualizes America.” While I, like many others, are aware that “the blood of the colonizer and the colonized flows through my veins.” This vision has always been a spiritual vision filled with the spiritual enlightenment of the sweat lodge. The multiple identities of my Native American, African and European ancestors and the many spiritual guides I’ve been blessed with in the Baha’i Faith, have made my life a wonder and a blessing. As my identity has unfolded since my birth, I have always been nurtured by spirits that whisper, “I am the storm!”

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Selected Exhibitions

2018-19
Solo exhibition, Revolutionary Moments, Bunker Hill Community College, October-January.

2016-17

2009-11

“My greatest thinking has come from being silent among rural women and men whose wisdom is eternal.”
— ROBIN M. CHANDLER

2006-07

2006
Solo exhibition, Painting with scissors: Recent Collage and Digital Works by Robin M. Chandler, Northeastern University Cabral Center, JDOAAI. March-April.

2002
Solo exhibition, A Traveler’s Narrative, Gallery@ The Piano Factory, Boston, March.

2001
Group exhibition, Darius Gallery, Atlanta (GA), October-November.

2000-01
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2001
Solo exhibition reception, hosted by Honorable Boston City Councilman, Felix D. Arroyo, Boston City Hall. April 3.

1998
Solo exhibition, Recent Collages, Parish Gallery, Washington, D.C.,

1996-present
Art in Embassies Program, Touring exhibitions, U.S. State Department (Mauritius, DRC, South Africa)

1996
Group exhibition, Let the Dreams Begin, Bartel Arts Trust, Durban, South Africa, supported by the American Consulate/Durban, September-October.

1995
Group exhibition, Cinque Gallery, New York City, April.

1994
Solo exhibition, Fordsburgh Bag Factory, Johannesburg, Summer residency.

1993
Solo exhibition, Federal Reserve Bank Gallery, Boston, AAMARP ’93, February.

1991
Group exhibition, Montserrat Gallery of Art, Beverly, MA, February.

1990

1989
Solo exhibitions, Lois Malou Jones Gallery, Martha’s Vineyard (MA), Summer.

1985
Group exhibition, Black Creativity ’85, Museum of Science and Industry (Chicago), March-April.

1984
Group exhibition, Wellesley College, Jewett Arts Center, April.

1982
Four-person juried exhibition, Woman from AAMARP, University of Lowell, Gallery 410, February.

1979
Solo exhibition, Greater Roxbury Development Corp., January.

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World Dance
Cibachrome Color, 20”x25”
Selected Publications

Ph.D., dissertation
Dissertation Title: “Toward a Multicultural Epistemology: Reason and Memory in Artist Performance Practice”, Northeastern University, Department of Sociology/ Anthropology, 1992. 

Book

Book-in-progress
Transformative Change: Spiritual Journeys in the Americas, Ed., Robin M. Chandler


Lori & Me: A Memoir of my Mentor, Lois Mailou Jones. Robin M. Chandler

Book chapters, journal articles and exhibition catalogs
“However long the night, the dawn will come!” Rebuilding a Shattered Art World in the New Liberia,” Commentary, Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society, No. 43, Vol. 4, Fall Winter 2013.


Articles


Book reviews


Poetry


Online
Selected Curated Exhibitions


1979  Northeastern University, AAMARP, Primal Force (Art of Nelson Stevens) and Catalog.

Visiting Artist Residencies


2018-1978  AAMARP Visual/Performing Arts Complex, Northeastern University.

2009  La Muse. Carcassonne, France, August.


1993  Pyramid Atlantic Papermaking Workshop (NEA grant), Maryland.
“Spirituality and social action are probably the two strongest foundations underlying Robin Chandler’s work and out of that emerges a visual language that is both complex and engaging. Engagement breathes through her work at each level — social, political, spiritual — and her visual language is as deep and subtle as an ancient folk song.”

— DAPO LADIMEJI, LADIMEJI & CO, CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS & CHARTERED TAX ADVISERS, LONDON AND LAGOS

“Robin’s creative energy and the compassionate inclusivity of her work lends greater visibility to the underrepresented, real-life experiences of women and cultures at the margin. The vision in her art points toward a future where equity is not only a possibility, but a human right for all.”

— TATEV KHACHIKYAN, BHCC GRAPHIC ARTIST

“It is so important to recognize treasures when they visit us, especially in a society that is full of distractions and unproductive noise. Dr. Chandler is one such treasure who purposefully uses art to amplify the voices and experiences of people of color who are often dismissed into the margins, and to build bridges of understanding that are anchored on spirituality and honoring everyone’s cultural wealth. She brings to us a different kind of power that we all need to cultivate, especially at this time, in order to present a counterculture: the power to listen, the power to share, the power to practice equity in our lives daily, and ultimately, the power to build communities that thrive in genuine collaboration and peace.”

— MARIA KATHLEEN P. PUENTE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT & PROJECT DIRECTOR, AANAPISI GRANT
Thank Yous

Every exhibition in the world is produced by a vast array of support personnel. I would like to thank:
Kevin Wiley, Director of College Events and Cultural Planning
Exhibition movie loop—Mandy Chan and Kenny Chung
Gingko wall decals and catalog design—Tatevik Khachikyan
Exhibition wall images—Problak, Artists for Humanity, and students of Boston Arts Academy—Darrius Allen, Jesse Gonzales Camacho, Edileisi Romero, Ananda Toupin and Jahnae Wyatt
Exhibition installation—Luis Campos, Richard Cuevas
Photography—Richard Howard and Kenny Chung

“I have regularly fought against what I call the professional caste system in the academic world.”
— DR. ROBIN M. CHANDLER

Let the Games Begin
Collage/Handmade Paper, 20” x 20”

“...a wonder and a blessing”
— ROBIN M. CHANDLER

May 2019 Edition. All rights reserved. Text and artwork are used by permission. No part of this book may be reproduced in any way without the express consent of its authors and artists.
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— JAMES "ARI" MONTFORD, PROFESSOR, VISUAL MEDIA ART DEPARTMENT

“Over several months, I kept going back to the gallery to experience Dr. Chandler’s art. Each time, I would see something new to admire. The work is engaging and transformative. Each collage tells its own story and has a unique meaning. I feel her work is deeply spiritual, and the use of feathers makes me think of angels, freedom and strength. Both my mind and my heart were continuously moved.”

— LYDIA SULEMA PAGAN, BHCC STUDENT

“We were profoundly touched by your generosity of spirit in sharing your interpretation of your work. We hope the exhibit inspires the conversations that will move us forward as a planetary community.”

— DR. LEVI ZANGAI, WORLD BANK CONSULTANT AND ATIM GEORGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Working with Robin has helped me to better understand what to expect when going out into the world as an artist. She inspired me to trust myself more, and consider more carefully how to make decisions in art and life. I look forward to the day we can work together again.”

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