

# GLADSTONE

Maya Pontone, "Artists and Poets Gather in Chelsea for 'Cathartic' Night of Community," *Hyperallergic*, November 6, 2024

## HYPERALLERGIC

### Artists and Poets Gather in Chelsea for "Cathartic" Night of Community

An election-night event featured free readings and performances staged around Carrie Mae Weems's installation at Gladstone Gallery.



Brooklyn-based poet and artist Funto Omojola read verses from their forthcoming poetry collection, *If I Gather Here and Shout*. (all photos Maya Pontone/*Hyperallergic*)

When I arrived in Chelsea last night, November 5, it was 5:30pm — hours before the polls in New York City and across the United States had closed, before the votes had been counted and another Donald Trump presidential victory had been called. On what was otherwise a vacant street stood a loose conglomeration of people in light jackets smoking cigarettes, drinking free

Modelos, and eating chicken and lamb paella-style dishes out of cardboard bowls that were being served from a makeshift kitchen out of Gladstone Gallery on West 21st Street.

Inside the gallery, within the blue-curtained walls of Carrie Mae Weems's cyclorama installation *The Shape of Things* (2021), poet Terrance Hayes read his 2019 poem "American Sonnet for the New Year" and a few works from his 2018 collection inspired by Trump's first presidential term, *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*.

"Things got terribly ugly incredibly quickly/ things got ugly embarrassingly quickly/ actually things got ugly unbelievably quickly," Hayes spoke into a microphone set in front of a crowd seated in folding chairs and splayed across the floor.



Poet Eileen Myles read their poem "Them (Palestinians)" via Zoom.

He was one of dozens of readers and performers featured in the gallery's *Remember to Dream: Election Day Reading*, a free public event consisting of live readings and music performances from 3pm to midnight on the night that voters across the country decided the next president. It was organized by Nigerian-American poet Precious Okoyomon, poet Vincent Katz, and multidisciplinary artist Brian Degraw, in collaboration with Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija and the queer food project Spiral Theory Test Kitchen.

While the country would ultimately swing red, opting to reelect a convicted felon and serial sexual assaulter to the White House, for about nine hours, Weems's cylindrical installation



functioned as a haven of sorts, void of polling booths, ballot boxes, and binary politics.

“I’m just sighing this morning,” Hayes told me over email today. “Last night’s event was wonderful for its intimacy and its timely distraction from the election.”

In a phone call, poet and sound artist LaTasha Nevada Diggs, who read three poems from her second collection *Village* (2023), added how “pleasantly surprised at how easy and comfortable” the gathering felt, and how she envisions such arts spaces extending into more sustainable forms of mutual aid like soup kitchens and food pantries.

“We have to learn how to live. We have to learn how to be fearless,” Diggs said. “We have to learn to be artists that are not stressed out by the modes of production.”



A crowd gathered inside Carrie Mae Weems’s cyclorama installation *The Shape of Things* at Gladstone Gallery’s West 21st Street location in Chelsea.

In front of black and white multi-channel projections of racial injustices and colorful clips of a laughing Weems on a botanical swing, Brooklyn-based poet and artist Funto Omojola read verses from their forthcoming poetry collection *If I Gather Here and Shout*, which draws from Yoruba cultural practices and grapples with Western medical violence toward Black populations. From a Zoom screen, poet and arts journalist Eileen Myles read “**Them (Palestinian)**” — a work contending with the US-backed Israeli violence in Gaza and the Occupied West Bank which **human rights officials** have called a genocide. Poet and organizer Erica Hunt read selected poems while avant-garde jazz musician Marty Erlich played saxophone.



LaTasha Nevada Diggs read from her book, *Village* (2023), which grapples with grief, aging, and the dual experience of being an artist and caretaker.

“I love being in a space with people who are activated to appreciate art, especially at a time when a lot of people have a lot of tension in our minds and bodies about where this country is going,” said one attendee, novelist Farai Chideya. Her friend April Chapman, who accompanied her that evening with her spouse Felipe, further described it as a type of “catharsis” during an evening of uncertainty.

“It’s so important for people to gather and convene, especially when there are important events affecting our various communities,” Chapman added.

While Election Day may be over, Weems’s exhibition remains on view through November 9, concluding with another [free evening event](#) that will center on a discussion between video artist and cinematographer Arthur Jafa and writer and scholar Saidiya Hartman.





Poet Terrance Hayes read pieces from his 2018 collection inspired by Trump's first term, *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*.



Visitors ate freshly-served paella dishes outside the gallery at community tables and on the sidewalk.



Poet and organizer Erica Hunt read selected poems while avant-garde jazz musician Marty Erlich played saxophone.



The Election Day readings event at Gladstone Gallery lasted from 3pm until midnight.