

## *Active Hope* - A podcast collaboration Episode 3 Transcript

One of the things that I've found the most difficult about having an immigrant identity is that I never feel like I can stop, and I never feel at home. It's not a thing that will ever change. That's the immigrant DNA. It's a blessing, but it's also... It's complex.

My name is Marc Bamuthi Joseph. I am a poet, I'm a dad, I'm an educator.

I am Kamilah Forbes. I am a storyteller, a director, a producer, a wife, a mother, a daughter, and the executive producer of the Apollo Theater.

My name is Paola Prestini. I'm a composer, I'm a mother, a wife, and a collaborator.

For the Kennedy Center.

For National Sawdust.

For the Apollo Theater  
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Yeah.

I'm always interested in that conversation.

I love that moment in a collaboration where you trust somebody and you give something over. I always have a vision for what something's going to look like, but I know that the minute I give it over that that person's going to take it into some completely different place. And I think that kind of sense of wonder and of abandon and of trust is so crucial. One clip that we're about to hear is, I traveled actually to the border to Nogales this past month to visit a friend of mine named Evan Kory. Evan graduated from Juilliard in piano, and I had heard that he had gone back to Nogales to start a whole bunch of different things. I was really curious to catch up with him, and we're going to actually hear Magos Herrera performing "Gracias a la vida." This is a little snapshot of life on the border and of this beautiful human being who's trying to regenerate through art.

a bunch of artists got together and opened up La Linea Art Studio. So it was a direct response, I think, because we were thinking of ways to do maybe some public art that commented on the fact that we don't agree with the razor wire and little by little, it evolved to like, "Hey, let's open up an art space." One thing leads to the next. So you got to make changes one step at a time, and I think that the connection that we can have between friends and fellow artists, I really appreciate more than ever now. The human condition makes us strive for connection between each other, and that gives me hope.

[singing "Gracias a la vida" in Spanish]

Gorgeous.

So beautiful.

There's so much to take there.

I am so drawn by the theme of intersection, right? How he talked about that space at the intersection of a bridal shop. How poetic is that, right?



found them and they were the most extraordinary, welcoming, beautiful people. It made me realize how privileged I was to want to flee.

I just want to sit in that for a second because I want to escape, that's in my DNA. I always want to run. I'm not great at keeping in touch. So all of a sudden to see his joy in finding second, third cousins removed when I have it, and I keep running, was like, "Oh, that's privilege." Let's look at that fair and square, but then I have to address that psychologically. We're not going to do here, we can do that one day over drinks [all laughing]. When you ask me about being an immigrant now, I mean, to me, it's like, I'm lucky. My story is a lucky immigrant story. Let's face it. But there are many unlucky stories and like the week we're living in which it seems that every time we meet, just the times we're living in, there's always something huge. That's where the energy is devoted. Does that makes sense?

It makes all the sense.

Total sense, yeah, for sure.

Is it time to announce our special guest?

Yeah, let's do that.

I think it is. I think it is.

Alright. So I was bowled over by Regina Romero. I had been following her for many years, and I'm just excited to share this interview. Before becoming the first Latina mayor of Tucson, Arizona, she was on the city council where she led Tucson in becoming an immigrant welcoming city, and successfully led colleagues in passing a no-border wall resolution. As mayor, she's believed deeply in delivering equity, inclusion and opportunity for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, or background. She has done incredible things, including prioritizing the creation of the city Race and Social Justice Initiative, including an immigrant advancement agenda, and something that I find particularly incredible because it hasn't been done, prioritizing formalizing the governmental relationships with the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui tribes. It is such an honor to have Mayor Regina Romero here with us on our third Active Hope podcast. Thank you so much for joining us. It's a real honor.

Thank you so much for having me, Paola.

So I have just a few questions, and I really want to start with this idea of transformation. You ran for office on a platform focused on climate change, city infrastrucP0 kch fenrEthoqTmAlright.



When I was a kid, there was no wall like that.

No.

It didn't exist in this way. We used to call it the Disney Wall when it went up, because it was just so out of this world that this could happen.

Yeah. Most of the border didn't have like a wall, right?

Right.

You'd move back and forth from both sides of the border, the family on both sides. So as I approach immigration, being first generation born here, I connect to family and I do not see immigrants and asylum seekers as others. I see them as a family on the other side. So the city of Tucson has a rich history of being a sanctuary city. We are an original sanctuary city. This is where it was born, and I approach our policy as a city of Tucson, when I sat on the council, we declared our city an immigrant welcoming community. We changed policy and the face of SB 1070, and we really gave





children, in art, in education. I'm hopeful that we have a president that believes in climate change and wants to invest in resiliency, and green job creation and really doing something about what the effects of climate change are in communities of color and low-income communities, who are at the front lines of receiving the impact of climate change. I'm hopeful for those things and being in a position of being mayor, of being able to affect change in our city, that will take us in a progressive direction.

It's so exciting.

And being able to have front and center, the equity issue that affects this country, and so many people in so many different ways.

It's so needed here at the border. So we are very lucky to have you, and so lucky to have you on our podcast, and fue un honor inmenso, espero de conocerte un dia.

Muchas Gracias, Paola!

Thank you so much.

Wow.

She's a bright light.

So, so incredible.

So many gems.

Right. Yeah.

So many. Just really profound. It's funny as she talks, and this idea of, she exemplified how movement then influences policy just in her body, right?

Yeah.

In the way that our work is, when we think about cultural movements, cultural movements are about movement that births culture, we think about Great Migration, jazz, shoot, I mean Hip Hop even, right?

Mm-hmm.

But how this was really direct tie to policy change within her DNA.

Right.

It was just powerful and very straightforward. So clear cut, really powerful.



It made me think about something that I read about regenerative systems. It's this study from the University of Kansas, and it talks about interdisciplinarity and about the complex world and how we can think of creating a regenerative global community. It says, for example, imagine a healthy and beautiful city that generates its own renewable energy, returns all water back to nature cleaner than when it arrived, operates without waste, protects and regenerates natural systems and species, and this idea of trying to impose that thought onto artistic systems, right?



That piece was exquisite, and this idea of secrecy that gets passed on through generations. What does that do to protect the next generation? I'm curious, Kamilah, if you could talk a little bit about that in terms of perhaps your own experience or just your understanding of it?

Well, thinking about the piece, thinking about secrecy, and thinking about the migrants' movement, immigration or migration, it takes a great deal of courage and flexibility, and in some cases, how do we make ourselves lighter for the journey?

That's great.

Wow.

That's powerful. Wow.

What do we leave behind? What might be too heavy of a burden to carry along what is already a treacherous journey? And just thinking about even just my own family stories, just recently, I was on another podcast

Then I think for me, I'm remembering the story of Evan Kory and the studio that was opened up at the border, and this notion of art at a charged and contested intersection. That the most important and urgent art is birthed under pressure, that comes out of the stress of the things that are closing in around it, and what artists do is they find themselves in these charged places, and make beauty out of contested sites.

That is so beautiful.

Paola, how about you?

Oh, last night I went to go see my first show. I had had my own string quartet performed, but it not in New York City. To me, living in New York City is about music. It's like this is why I can be here and not in nature, it's that I get to be around music. So I went to see a show, and somebody came up to me and they said, "So when is National Sawdust opening?" I was like, "Oh my God." I was like, "We haven't closed. I mean, we've been doing art since like March. We haven't closed." But they want to know when the doors are opening, and I was just thinking, "I don't know when it's going to open," because what I implore institutions to do right now, and I'm not talking to both of you, but institutions that are legacy institutions, is that this is the time to take time and to recalibrate and to not come back the way we were.

So I think that idea of change one step at a time, but also really thinking about who your community is and why you're doing it, and if you're the right person to do it? I mean, these are questions that white people in power have to ask themselves, not to escape and to give the power to somebody else, right? But to say, "What does it really mean to thread community? What would it mean to build a city that could regenerate itself? Well, let's impose that on an institution." So I think what I took from all of this, which is that, we're at this really big intersection and yeah, and there's a lot to think about and all these beautiful, beautiful images that are running in my mind.

Well, with that being said, Paola, I mean, it's apropos ending on that. I just want to thank you both, Paola and Marc, for your brilli9( t)7(o)-5] TJETQq0.00000912 0 62 792 reWñBT74.RTf1 0o 0 62] TJEo4la