

Press Release

Artist Project

Ekene Ijeoma: A Counting—A Participatory
Public Art Project—Launches July 23, 2020



#BeyondCAMH
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HOUSTON, TX (July 21, 2020)—As part of its new *Beyond CAMH* initiative series, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston today announced the launch of the Houston edition of *A Counting*, a remotely accessible, participatory public art project by Texas-born, New York- and Boston-based artist Ekene Ijeoma, founder of Poetic Justice group at MIT Media Lab. Reflecting on the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the United States by capturing “voice portraits” of major U.S. cities, the project marks the first Museum collaboration of the artist in his home state.

Conceived as an ongoing series, the generative sound and video work will ultimately feature voices of Houstonians counting to 100 in their native languages, with a different voice speaking each number in a unique language and with the number 1 spoken in an indigenous language. **The Houston edition of *A Counting***

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Artist Ekene Ijeoma. Photo by Kris Graves.

will also include a separately edited time-lapse video featuring participants of the first 100 days from the project's launch, which will document the evolution of the work as more voices and languages are submitted during this period. Building off Ijeoma's practice illuminating issues of social justice through works of art and marking the first project from his Poetic Justice group, *A Counting* addresses the undercounting of marginalized communities in the United States census.

"Ekene Ijeoma's expansive practice brings form to unseen facets of contemporary life — spanning issues surrounding equity, race, class, and transformative justice — his work presents the renewed possibilities of approaching the world through the restorative lens of poetic justice," said CAMH Executive Director Hesse McGraw. "We are thrilled to partner with Ekene and communities throughout the city to represent the diversity of Houston through a vocal portrait. *A Counting* encourages us to truly hear one another, and to recognize the value of the many voices that make up our city."

Starting today, the Houston edition of *A Counting* can be accessed by visiting camh.org/beyond or by dialing 281-248-8730. Houstonians wishing to add their voice to the project can call the hotline where they are prompted to record themselves counting in their native language and invited to share more about where their language is spoken and how its numerical system works. Additionally, individuals from around the world are invited to contribute to the project by helping with the transcriptions of the recordings by texting TRANSCRIBE to the same number or visiting a-counting.us/transcribe.

The Houston edition of *A Counting* follows the launch of the project in New York City in June 2020, which expanded upon an early version of the project presented as an installation at the Museum of the City of New York in fall 2019. Following today's launch of the reimagined remotely-accessible work in Houston, the series will continue to expand over the course of 2020 to include new editions for other major cities across the country through partnerships with museums and cultural institutions, inviting the participation of the broadest possible spectrum of communities within the United States.

"In a divided society, *A Counting* is a meditation and speculation on what a truly united country would sound like," said Ekene Ijeoma. "Houston has reached majority minority status ahead of the curve across the country, and we look forward to partnering with CAMH and Houston communities to capture the myriad voices in unison."

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Further details about additional U.S. cities and project partners will be announced in the coming weeks. If you are interested in exploring an institutional partnership to bring *A Counting* to your city, please reach out to hello@a-counting.us. For additional information, please visit <https://www.a-counting.us/>.

About *Beyond CAMH*

Reflecting contemporary art's ever-expanding scope, the Museum's newly launched *Beyond CAMH* is a collection of exciting public projects and artist installations taking place outside the walls of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Art can exist in a multitude of manners that activate space in unique ways in non-traditional locations and through collaborations and initiatives that expand the Museum's reach beyond the physical space of CAMH to bring contemporary art and critical discussions into the community.

"CAMH's doors have been closed for the past four months as we prioritize the safety of our staff and audience in response to the increasing effects of COVID-19," said Executive Director Hesse McGraw. "During this time, we've amplified our digital engagement, performed a stunning renovation of the gallery (we can't wait to show you!), welcomed new staff, and most importantly — we've had time to think. To be quarantined and disconnected from daily, personal contact with artists and audience is disorienting for a museum that exists solely for that purpose. Yet, with our doors closed, we're working to re-imagine the ethic and practice of a more porous museum — one that spills onto the street, engages in long-term collaborations with artists, meets audiences where they are, and serves our communities' most urgent needs. We are working to reimagine and recommit to our role as a civically engaged institution. We know that by trusting artists, and working to expand their agency in the public realm, meaning will shine through."

As long as our doors are closed, you can find us outside and online. And when our doors reopen, you can continue to expect more — in, around, and beyond CAMH. For more information visit camh.org/beyond.

About Ekene Ijeoma and Poetic Justice group

Ekene Ijeoma is a conceptual artist whose practice encourages new ways of seeing and understanding social issues. Leveraging computational design and conceptual art strategies, Ijeoma translates research and data studies into multimedia and multisensory works of art. Recent exhibitions and commissions of Ijeoma's work include *Heartfelt* at The Kennedy Center (2019), *Who We Are* at the Museum of the City of New York (2019), *Landed* at Neuberger Museum of

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Art (2016), *New Americas* at Annenberg Space for Photography (2016), *Design and Violence* at the Museum of Modern Art (2015), *Design of the Year* at Design Museum London (2015), and the *Istanbul Design Biennial* (2015).

In 2019, Ijeoma was appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Media Lab at MIT where he founded Poetic Justice, a group of critical thinkers and makers who are exploring new forms of justice through art. *A Counting* marks the first major public art project by the group.