

Tanya Selvaratnam



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TANYA SELVARATNAM producer/writer/actor/activist
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Tanya Selvaratnam is a writer and an Emmy-nominated and Webby-winning producer with more than twenty years of experience working in the areas of arts and social justice.

Selvaratnam is a Co-Founder of The Federation: a coalition of artists, organizations, and allies committed to keeping cultural borders open and showing how art unites us. Selvaratnam's collaborators are the artist Laurie Anderson and the producer Laura Michalchyshyn. She is also a team member and advisor of For Freedoms's 50 State Initiative to spark civic engagement and public discourse through the arts. Currently, she is producing for The Vision & Justice Project, founded by Sarah Lewis; The Shed, a new NYC multi-arts center that opened in April 2019; GLAMOUR Women of the Year; and UNSTOPPABLE ART/Planned Parenthood. Since 2007, she has been a producer with Aubin Pictures (founded by Catherine Gund). For nine years, she was the Communications and Special Projects Officer for the Rubell Family Collection/Contemporary Arts Foundation, based in Miami, FL.

Selvaratnam's career in the arts and social justice began with her work assisting Anna Deavere Smith on the development of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* about the human toll of the L.A. riots, and with her position as a youth organizer on the steering committee of the NGO Forum/Fourth World Conference on Women in China in 1995. In addition, she was an organizer and researcher for the World Health Organization's Kobe Conference on Women and Tobacco in 1999.

Born in Sri Lanka and raised in Long Beach, CA, Selvaratnam is based in New York City and Portland, Oregon. She is the author of *THE BIG LIE: Motherhood, Feminism, and the Reality of the Biological Clock*; and her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *CNN*, *McSweeney's*, *Artsy*, and more. In her various roles, she has been quoted in publications around the world including *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *CNN*, *NBC News*, *Hyperallergic*, *Slate*, *artnet*, *ARTNews*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Artforum*, *Cosmo*, *Redbook*, *Metro*, *Village Voice*, *PAPER*, *New York*, *Die Zeit* (Germany), and *The Globe and Mail* (Canada). She has been a featured guest on CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, NPR, WNYC, KCRW, Sirius XM, Modern Hero TV, and CBS Radio News.

Selvaratnam has participated in panels and conferences around the world, from Kobe, Japan to Abu Dhabi to Hanover, Germany to Aspen, Colorado. She has spoken on a variety of subjects, including the rights and safety of women and children, and the interplay of art and democracy. She has also conducted workshops with students of all ages, from elementary school through graduate school. In May 2017, she received a Woman of Resilience Award from The Memo, a vocational boot-camp for young women of color. She has been a fellow in residence at

Yaddo and Blue Mountain Center, and has received grants from the Ford Foundation, The Ettinger Foundation, and the MAP Fund.

Selvaratnam's producing range includes films, branded content, live events, and exhibitions. She has produced work by Gabri Christa, Lisa Cortés, Liz Garbus, Catherine Gund, Le Tigre and Laura Parnes, Tiffany Shlain, Mickalene Thomas, Lucy Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Jed Weintrob, among others. Her films have played on HBO, IFC, PBS, Starz, and the Sundance Channel; and have premiered at Sundance, Berlin, Tribeca, and SXSW. Selvaratnam has worked on projects at the Guggenheim Museum, Kennedy Center, The Kitchen, Park Avenue Armory, PS122, and Rubell Family Collection.

As a performer, Selvaratnam has toured around the world with companies including The Wooster Group and The Builders Association; and been a guest actor at New Dramatists, Lincoln Center Directors Lab, Voice & Vision Theater, and the Institute on Arts and Civic Dialogue. She has played on stages at prestigious venues around the world, such as New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music and Lincoln Center, London's Barbican Theatre, and Singapore's Victoria Theatre.

She has served on the boards of the Third Wave Fund, Boom Arts, The Wooster Group, and Groundswell Community Mural Project; and is an advisor to The DO School, a Germany-based and internationally focused creative educational organization that offers learning experiences to generate global impact.

She received her graduate and undergraduate degrees in Chinese language and legal history from Harvard University. Her Masters thesis on women's organizations in post-Tiananmen China was published in the Journal of Law and Politics.

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CURRENT

- Producer, The Vision & Justice Project, 2019-
- Producer, The Shed, 2018-
- Executive Video Producer/Director, *GLAMOUR* Women of the Year, 2017-
- Project Lead/Executive Producer, UNSTOPPABLE ART/Planned Parenthood, 2017-
- Co-Founder, The Federation, 2017-
- Producer, Aubin Pictures: 2007-

PAST

- Communications and Special Projects Officer, Rubell Family Collection/Contemporary Arts Foundation: 2008-2017
- Producer, Di San Luca Films: 2007-2018
- Benefit Producer, Yaddo: 2015
- Gala Producer, PS122: 2014 & 2015
- Producer, HERE Arts Center: 2009-2013
- Benefit Producer, The Wooster Group: 2007
- Research Associate and Conference Assistant Coordinator, World Health Organization: 1999-2003
- Producer, Internet Stories Productions, 1998-2003
- Special Projects Coordinator, Ms. Foundation for Women: 1996-9
- Co-Coordinator, Youth Tent; Producer, Youth Arts and Culture Events, Fourth World Conference on Women: 1995
- Assistant, Anna Deavere Smith: 1993-4
- Program Coordinator, Center for Chinese Legal Studies, Columbia Law School: 1993-4

EDUCATION

Harvard University, M.A., Regional Studies – East Asia, 1996

- Focus: Chinese language and the history of law
- Thesis Topic: the repression of women’s organizations in post-Tiananmen China
- Publication: “Backseat Driver: Steering Chinese Women’s Voices Through the 1990s,” *Journal of Law and Politics*, University of Virginia Press

Harvard College, B.A., East Asian Languages & Civilizations, 1992

- Focus: Chinese language and history
- Thesis Topic: the interplay of law and practice in the lives of widows in the Qing Dynasty

LANGUAGES

- Majored in Mandarin Chinese (work/study in China, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1995)
- Studied Classical Chinese and Vietnamese for two years
- Studied Spanish for six years (and live/study in Cuba, 2015/16)
- Studied Latin and Greek for six years

SKILLS

- Producing films, shows, events, and benefits
- Organizing large-scale convenings
- Developing and managing budgets
- Building and supervising teams
- Fundraising
- Communications and public relations
- Social media campaign strategy
- Writing
- Public speaking and performing
- Mentoring
- Connecting

SELECTION COMMITTEES

- Judge, Emmy Awards, Documentary section: 2016
- Panelist, MAP Fund/Doris Duke Charitable Foundation: 2014
- Panelist, New York State Council on the Arts, 2 sections—Film and Theater: 2010-12
- Panelist, Yaddo: 2009-2012
- Reader, Voice & Vision Theater, 2008

PRODUCER

Films/TV/PSAs (Select List)

1. “AGGIE” – a documentary feature in post-production about the collector/philanthropist Agnes Gund and her lifelong commitment to both art and justice. Director: =Catherine Gund. Intended release: early 2019.
2. “UNSTOPPABLE” – a video series for Planned Parenthood. Social media release: January 2018-April 2019. Webby Nomination, 2019 (to be announced in May 2019).
3. *GLAMOUR* Women of the Year – series of videos on subjects such as Samantha Bee, Viola Davis, Kamala Harris, Patty Jenkins, Nicole Kidman, Solange Knowles, Janelle Monae, Chrissy Teigen, Representative Maxine Waters. Event and online release: November 2017, November 2018.
4. “#StandUpForUs” – PSA of a non-partisan letter to Congress to stand up for civil liberties and protect vulnerable peoples. Featuring activists, faith leaders, and celebrities including Sally Field, Bishop Gene Robinson, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Keegan-Michael Key, Imam Khalid Latif, Ai-jen Poo, Steve Buscemi, and Yasmeen Hassan. Director: Liz Garbus. Facebook release: January 2017.
5. “Born to Fly” – documentary feature about daredevil choreographer Elizabeth Streb. Director: Catherine Gund. World Premiere: SXSW Film Festival, 2014; Theatrical Premiere: Film Forum, September 2014; Television Premiere: PBS’s Independent Lens, 2015; Emmy nomination for Best Arts & Culture Programming.
6. “Happy Birthday to a Beautiful Woman” – documentary short by visual artist Mickalene Thomas about her mother and muse, Sandra Bush. Director: Mickalene Thomas. Television Premiere: HBO, February 2014. Audience Award, Black Star Film Festival, 2014.

7. “Beginnings” – short film series of 13 episodes about creative leaders including Yoko Ono, Marjane Satrapi, and Christian Louboutin. Director: Chiara Clemente. Television Premiere: Sundance Channel, Season One in October 2010 and Season Two in March 2012. WEBBY Award for Best Online Documentary Series.
8. “MADE HERE” – HERE Arts Center’s 4-season documentary series of 50 short episodes and a website featuring about 100 NYC-based performing artists including Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones, Cherry Jones, and Philip Seymour Hoffman. Director: Chiara Clemente. Online launch from May 2010 through December 2013. Television Premiere: NYC Life (Channel 25), beginning May 2011.
9. “What’s on Your Plate?” – documentary feature about children and food politics. Director: Catherine Gund. World Premiere: Berlin International Film Festival, 2009; Television Premiere: Discovery’s Planet Green, 2010.
10. “Our City Dreams” – documentary feature about five decades of women artists, including Swoon, Ghada Amer, Kiki Smith, Marina Abramovic, and Nancy Spero. Director: Chiara Clemente. World Premiere: Art Basel, 2008; Theatrical Premiere: Film Forum, February 2009; Television Premiere: Sundance Channel, Spring 2009.

Events and Shows (Select List)

1. “Art and Civil Disobedience with Boots Riley” – event. The Shed, New York, NY, May 10, 2019.
2. The Federation’s Art Action Day – series of events. Various venues, New York, NY, January 20, 2018.
3. Rubell Family Collection Annual Exhibition Opening – event. Miami, FL, 2008-2017. As the Communications and Special Projects Officer, Selvaratnam worked behind the scenes on the openings during Art Basel Miami Beach of 9 exhibitions, including “NO MAN’S LAND,” “30 Americans,” and “28 Chinese,” and on events for touring exhibitions, including at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. She handled public relations year-round and liaised with dozens of artists affiliated with the Collection.
4. “Elijah Green” – theatrical production. The Kitchen, New York, NY, March 2016. Playwright/Director: Andrew Ondrejcek. In collaboration with the Ethical Fashion Initiative. Recipient of a NEFA National Theater Project Grant.
5. Annual Benefit for Yaddo – event. Tribeca Rooftop, New York, NY, June 2015. Hosted by Steve Buscemi and Kate Valk, honoring Laurie Anderson, featuring appearances by Ayad Akhtar, Eisa Davis, Young Jean Lee, and Joseph Keckler. Most financially successful Yaddo benefit in at least fifteen years.
6. Spring Gala for Performance Space 122 – event. Capitale, New York, NY, April 2015. Hosted by Alan Cumming, honoring Claire Danes, featuring appearances by Mandy Patinkin, Peaches, AndrewAndrew, and Faye Driscoll. Raised more than double the revenue of any previous year.
7. “CMW Live from the Guggenheim” – series of events. Guggenheim Museum, NY, April 2014. Featuring panels, performances, and lectures by 100 artists from around the world, curated by Carrie Mae Weems. Produced in collaboration with The Office.
8. “World of Wires” – theatrical production. Based on Fassbinder’s *Welt am draht*. The Kitchen, New York, NY, January 2012; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA, September 2012; French Tour, November 2012: Maison des Arts in Creteil, Le Lieu

Unique in Nantes, and Le Manege in Maubeuge. Director: Jay Scheib. OBIE Award for Best Direction.

9. "A Theater of Varieties to Benefit The Wooster Group" – event. The Box, New York, NY, April 2007. Hosted by John Waters, featuring appearances by the little death, The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, and Mikhail Baryshnikov.
10. "Artists for Tsunami Relief" – event. Marquee, New York, NY, January 2005. Featuring appearances by David Byrne, Lou Reed, Angela McCluskey, Nelson George, Colson Whitehead, Living Color, Sussan Deyhim, and Moby.

PERFORMER (Select List)

1. "The Shape of Things." Conceived by Carrie Mae Weems. Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY, December 2017.
2. "Summer Solstice Ritual: 12 Shouts to the Ten Forgotten Heavens." Playwright/Director: Sibyl Kempson. The Whitney Museum, New York, NY, June 2016, June 2017, January 2018, and June 2018.
3. "Test Match." Playwright: Kate Attwell. Director: Margot Bordelon. Portland Center Stage, Portland, OR, July 2017.
4. "I'm Bleeding All Over the Place." Playwright/Director: Brooke O'Harra. La Mama, New York, NY, July 2016.
5. "And That's How the Rent Gets Paid." Playwright: Jeff Weiss and Richard C. Martinez. Director: Brooke O'Harra. The Kitchen, New York, NY, July 2015.
6. "Sorry, Robot." Playwright: Mike Iveson, Jr. Director: Will Davis. PS122/New Ohio Theater, New York, NY, January 2015.
7. "9 Scripts from a Nation at War." (Video Installation) Director: Andrea Geyer, Sharon Hayes, Ashley Hunt, Katya Sander and David Thorne. Documenta 12, Kassel, Germany, 2007; Tate Modern, England, 2008; REDCAT, Los Angeles, CA, 2009; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, 2011.
8. "Super Vision." The Builders Association, Director: Marianne Weems. World Premiere: Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY, followed by world tour to 17 cities, 2005-7.
9. "Alladeen." The Builders Association, Director: Marianne Weems. World Premiere: Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY, followed by world tour to 24 cities, 2003-2005.
10. "House/Lights." The Wooster Group, Director: Elizabeth LeCompte. World Premiere: The Performing Garage, New York, NY, followed by world tour to 14 cities, 1996-2005.

BOOK

The Big Lie: Motherhood, Feminism, and the Reality of the Biological Clock (Prometheus Books: New York, 2014).

Through the lens of delayed motherhood, *The Big Lie* is about the choices women have to make and how those choices impact the future. Part personal account, part manifesto, Selvaratnam speaks to fertility doctors, adoption counselors, reproductive health professionals, celebrities, feminists, journalists, and sociologists. Through in-depth reporting and her own experience, Selvaratnam urges more widespread education and open discussion about delayed motherhood in the hope that long-lasting solutions can take effect. The result is a book full of valuable information that will enable women to make smarter choices about their reproductive futures and to strike a more realistic balance between science, society, and personal goals.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS include:

CNN, MSNBC, NPR, WNYC, KCRW, CBS Radio, WBZ, Sirius XM, PRI, WKCR, Al Jazeera

COMPLETE LIST AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS (Select List)

1. Speaker, “Can Art Save Democracy?” (with Patrisse Cullors, Ava DuVernay, Eric Gottesman, Tabitha Jackson, Lisa Kron, Susan Meiselas, Okwui Okpokwasili), Sundance Film Festival, Park City, UT, January 26, 2019.
2. Panelist, “The Art of the Accused” (with Maggie Mustard, A.O. Scott, and Deborah Solomon), Brooklyn Book Festival, Brooklyn, NY, September 16, 2018.
3. Panelist, “Carrie Mae Weems: The Personal and the Political” (with Carrie Mae Weems, Sarah Lewis, and Damian Woetzel), Aspen Ideas Festival, Aspen, CO, June 27, 2018.
4. Speaker, “The Role of Free Speech and Creative Expression in Democracy” (with Paula Crown, Eric Gottesman, and Hank Willis Thomas), Aspen Ideas Festival, Aspen, CO, June 24, 2018.
5. Plenary Speaker, “Artist as Activist Town Hall” (with Ping Chong, Sean Dorsey, Keryl McCord, and Lauren Ruffin), APAP, Midtown Hilton, New York, NY, January 14, 2018.
6. Panel, “Keeping Cultural Borders Open” (with AlSarah, Laurie Anderson, Sara Driver, Kali Holloway, Emel Mathlouthi, Jose Parla, and Barbet Schroeder), New York Film Festival, Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York, NY, October 11, 2017.
7. Panel, “Visible and Invisible Walls” (with Hassan Hajaj and Richard Mosse, moderated by Isolde Brielmaier), Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY, April 20, 2017.
8. Speaker, MAKERS Women’s Town Hall, MAKERS HQ, New York, NY, November 17, 2016.
9. Moderator, “How Can the Arts Advance Body Politics?,” National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., November 13, 2016.
10. Speaker and Conference Participant, “Reversible: Narrating Identity from the Inside Out and the Outside In,” New York University/Abu Dhabi Institute, Abu Dhabi, December 8, 2014.

BOARD/ADVISORY COUNCIL/MEMBERSHIP

- Member, PEN America, 2015-
- Advisor/Curator, Segal Film Festival on Theatre and Performance, CUNY: 2014-2015
- Advisor, Boom Arts (Portland, OR): 2014-
- Advisor, NGO Committee on the Status of Women, 2013-
- Advisor, The DO School: 2013-
- Board, The Wooster Group: 2013-
- Advisor, DeKeyser & Friends Foundation: 2011-13
- Board, Groundswell Community Mural Project: 2002-5
- Board, Third Wave Foundation: 1998-2004

ACTING AFFILIATIONS

- Company Member, JAW, Portland Center Stage, 2017
- Company Member, Sibyl Kempson's 7 Daughters of Eve Thtr. & Perf. Co., 2015-
- Company Member, The Builders Association: 2001-7
- Associate, The Wooster Group: 1995-
- Actor, New Dramatists: 1996-
- Company Member, Institute on Arts & Civic Dialogue, Cambridge, MA: 1999
- Actor, Lincoln Center Directors Lab: 1996 & 1997

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

- Watermill Center (with Carrie Mae Weems), Watermill, NY: April 2017
- The Orchard Project (with Mike Iveson, Jr.), Catskills, NY: July 2014
- Blue Mountain Center, Blue Mountain, NY: September 2007
- Voice & Vision Theater, Bard College, Annandale on Hudson, NY: August 2007
- Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY: May-June 2007

WORKSAMPLES

From *GLAMOUR* Women of the Year:

Intro

<https://video.glamour.com/watch/glamour-women-of-the-year-2018-introduction>

Viola Davis

<https://video.glamour.com/watch/viola-davis-tribute>

Betty Reid Soskin

<https://video.glamour.com/watch/betty-reid-soskin-tribute>

Maxine Waters

<http://video.glamour.com/watch/maxine-waters-2017-glamour-woman-of-the-year>

Solange Knowles

<http://video.glamour.com/watch/solange-knowles-2017-glamour-woman-of-the-year>

Patty Jenkins

<http://video.glamour.com/watch/patty-jenkins-2017-glamour-woman-of-the-year>

Nicole Kidman

<http://video.glamour.com/watch/nicole-kidman-2017-glamour-woman-of-the-year>

Peggy Whitson

<http://video.glamour.com/watch/peggy-whitson-2017-glamour-woman-of-the-year>

Planned Parenthood's *UNSTOPPABLE* video and two articles about the campaign:

<https://www.facebook.com/PlannedParenthoodAction/videos/10155327105514639/>

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/unstoppable-artists-rally-for-planned-parenthood>

<http://www.artnews.com/2018/08/02/carrie-mae-weems-mickalene-thomas-zoe-buckman-will-make-video-art-planned-parenthoods-unstoppable-campaign/>

trailer for *Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity* (played at Film Forum, aired on PBS, Emmy nomination for Best Arts & Culture Documentary):

<https://vimeo.com/84998946>

from the *Beginnings* series about creative leaders in NYC and how they got their start (Webby Award for Best Online Series):

Carmen De Lavallade

<https://vimeo.com/86023000>

trailer for *Our City Dreams* about Swoon, Ghada Amer, Kiki Smith, Marina Abramovich, and Nancy Spero (played at Film Forum, aired on Sundance Channel):

http://firstrunfeatures.com/trailers_ourcitydreams.html

from *MADE HERE* about performing artists throughout the 5 boroughs (for HERE Arts Center, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation):

<http://www.madehereproject.org/season-4/series-finale/>

<http://www.madehereproject.org/money/getting-it/>

review of *MADE HERE*: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/05/13/making>

two articles and a radio interview about The Federation's Art Action Day:

<http://www.cnn.com/style/article/trump-one-year-art-action-day/index.html>

<https://hyperallergic.com/421558/art-action-day-trump-inauguration-anniversary-j20/>

<https://www.wnyc.org/story/artists-rally-keep-cultural-borders-open/>

two articles and a radio interview about *The Big Lie* book:

<http://www.redbookmag.com/life/mom-kids/news/a16974/the-big-lie/>

<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/health-fitness/news/a18547/tanya-selvaratnam-the-big-lie/>

<https://www.wnyc.org/story/motherhood-feminism-and-reality-biological-clock/>