

FRESH  
ART  
INTL

research  
guide

*Educate*

*Agitate*

*Organize*

where art meets activism

issue 6 | 2020



## FRESH ART INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CREATIVITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

This Research Guide is a digital publication featuring conversations and themes illuminated in the **Fresh Art International podcast**. A resource for individuals, communities, and schools, the podcast combines interviews with field recordings and rich sound effects that inform and inspire each conversation. Keeping in mind both the curious and the cognoscenti, Fresh Art promotes and supports public access and awareness of the arts through a free digital archive. The podcast brings you informed, balanced, and diverse stories through the lens of today's art, film and architecture. Extending to public talks, workshops, residencies and educational resources, Fresh Art engages with cultural communities at the center and fringe of art scenes around the world.

### Research Guide: Where Art Meets Activism Issue 6 | 2020

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**Andrea Bowers on Art and Activism**, October 2, 2014; Kris McConnachie  
**Ralph Rugoff on the 13th Lyon Biennial**, August 19, 2015; Kris McConnachie  
**Catherine Morris and a Year of Yes**, January 19, 2017; Guney Ozsan  
**Tania Bruguera on Art Activism**, June 19, 2015; Kris McConnachie  
**Maria Alyokhina on Political Art**, July 28, 2016; Guney Ozsan

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# introduction

Art is never neutral. Art holds the potential to persuade, to raise awareness, and to provide symbols and images around which we can rally. Art that moves us can serve as a catalyst for lasting change. In the United States, the work of pioneering activist artists has been central to major protest movements of the twentieth century, including those around the Vietnam War, the AIDS crisis, and the Civil Rights movement. The close link between art and activism continues today, as artists use their work to speak out against climate change, racism, misogyny, and political corruption.

In 2020, artists are highly visible on cultural and literal frontlines at protests and rallies. This year, the latest police killings of unarmed Black civilians, the COVID-19 epidemic, and the divisive presidential election have thrown into sharp relief the engrained systemic social, legal, employment, education, and health care inequities that persist in this country. Amidst a few glimmers of hope, such as Supreme Court rulings **protecting the LGBTQ community** from workplace discrimination and **preventing the executive branch** from immediately ending DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), continuing **voter suppression** and gerrymandering threaten basic democratic functions. Against this backdrop, cultural institutions are battling financial difficulties and public-health related setbacks, and questioning their own complicity in white supremacy. Across the U.S., the Black Lives Matter movement's calls for real racial equity—more than tokenism and social media performances of white guilt—compels museums to reevaluate their roles as makers of culture and keepers of history. During this fraught moment, we look to activist artists and curators around the world for inspiration. Their work is not only relevant, but vital to causes with evolving urgency.

In the original 45-minute podcast episode “Where Art Meets Activism” (published 2018), we meet artists whose creative work aims for real and lasting change. We interrogate the concept of “curatorial activism,” a term popularized by **Maura Reilly's 2018 book** of the same name, extending the dialogue to curators and museum professionals who amplify the voices of emerging and established activist artists in a range of exhibitions. In 2020, curators can no longer merely perpetuate the status quo in the museums with which they work. These times compel certain curators to **theorize their own modes of resistance**, including **collecting and curating the artifacts** of contemporary protest.

Andrea Bowers, a major voice in contemporary activist art, sets the tone for our complex conversation, describing three projects that respectively take on deforestation, immigration reform, and sexual harassment. Working across varied media and artistic formats, Bowers develops unique formal languages to call attention to each of these controversial issues.

In contrast to Bowers's overt activism, curator Ralph Rugoff is consistently circumspect when asked about art's power to effect change. We spoke to him in 2015 about his cerebral meditation on “modern life” in the 13th Lyon Biennale. More recently, he again refrained from overt activism as artistic director of the 58th Venice Art Biennale in 2019, instead highlighting artists whose



work offers a conceptual roadmap for how to live in “interesting times.” In 2017, Catherine Morris used her platform as Sackler Family Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum to coordinate *A Year of Yes*. This yearlong exploration and celebration of feminist art merged exhibitions and programming to rethink the achievements of prominent artists and promote the work of lesser known historic and contemporary creatives.

Politics and national identity emerge as central issues for our featured artists. We hear how Greek artist Manolis Daskalakis Lemos creates video art to counter the media’s portrayal of Athens as a “riot town” and how Cuban artist Tania Bruguera shares the writings of philosopher Hannah Arendt in a politically-charged performance in Havana while under city arrest. Curator María Elena Ortiz describes her collaboration with Bruguera on the Migrant People’s Party in Mexico City. Maria Alyokhina of the Russian punk protest band Pussy Riot recounts how her time in prison galvanized her activism around human rights and prison reform.



## Curatorial Activism

Thinking of bringing Maura Reilly’s 2018 book *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* into your classroom? Student Melissa Huberman’s 2020 review finds much to praise, lauding it as a must-read for curators and curators-in-training:

“*Curatorial Activism*’s unique introspection suggests a range of ways to amplify hidden voices. Curators that become familiar with the practices that Maura Reilly explores will recognize the strengths in inclusion and the common pitfalls faced by those working to cultivate equity in the field of contemporary art.”

Read the full review on [FreshArtInternational.com](https://www.freshartintl.com).

Photo: Tino Rodriguez, *Eternal Lovers*, 2010, featured in Art AIDS America, a touring exhibition organized by Tacoma Art Museum in partnership with The Bronx Museum of the Arts, cur. Jonathan David Katz and Rock Hushka, 2016-2017. The show is among those featured in the book *Curatorial Activism*. Image source: Tino Rodriguez.

This sixth issue of our Research Guide bridges Fresh Art’s longform guides and a set of topical playlists that offer even more resources to artists, educators, students, researchers, and writers. The shorter thematic playlists introduce a range of voices, ideas, and artistic perspectives around some of the timely and provocative issues that Fresh Art has documented across the span of a decade. We invite listeners to scrutinize the nuances in these topics as we offer contrasting viewpoints and open up the conversation for further discussion, critical writing, and creative action.

Within this episode, we identified the activist focal points of **feminism**, **politics**, and the **environment** as especially relevant to the year 2020. Delving into these three issues, our curated playlists highlight patterns in activist practices globally. As Fresh Art INTL approaches the tenth anniversary of its founding in 2011, these playlists give us an opportunity to reflect on the richness and range of conversations about creativity in our archive.

Our conversation about art activism is featured in Issue 8 of the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation’s 2018 online periodical *Exhibitions on the Cusp*. We’re honored to be among the publication’s contributors.

Sarah Rovang  
Publications Editor

## special COVID-19 acknowledgment

COVID-19 and the mandate for social distancing have altered the way that creators from around the globe make and share their work. While it remains to be seen how these changes will affect the art world in the long run, this guide provides critical information and inspiration during this difficult time. We designed this publication for creative thinkers, makers, educators, and learners across fields who seek the challenge of complex conversations around issues and ideas, art and culture.

More than ever, art as an activist practice is a necessity in the age of COVID-19. Artists and curators are called to respond to the inequities of wealth, housing, and public health that have been highlighted during this global pandemic. Especially for at-risk and marginalized populations, art becomes a way not only to bind communities together despite social distancing, but a venue for **communicating essential public health information**.

Produced in Summer 2020, this guide is designed to be used for individual study or research and as part of remote curricula while in-classroom learning has been suspended in many countries across the world. All of the opportunities for sparking discussion and creation can take place in the digital realm and with no in-person interaction required. Several of the educational elements directly address the relationship of COVID-19 and creativity.

### Get Informed

**The Coronavirus Outbreak**, free (no paywall) coverage on *The New York Times*  
**“The Art World Deals with Coronavirus—See the Latest Updates,”** *Widewalls*

### Stay Safe

**How to Practice Social Distancing**, Isaac Chotiner, *The New Yorker*  
**How to Wash Your Hands**, *The New York Times*  
**It’s Time to Make Your Own Face Mask**, Farhad Manjoo, *The New York Times*

### Pitch In

**How You Can Help During the Coronavirus Outbreak**, Kanyakrit Vongkiatkajorn and Laura Daily, *The Washington Post*  
**Find Your Local Food Bank**, *Feeding America*  
**Coronavirus Tech Handbook**, an open source list for makers  
**Schedule Your Blood Donation with the Red Cross**, *Red Cross*

### Keep Learning

**Resource Guide to Distance Learning**, *Fresh Art International*  
**Art Resources During the COVID-19 Pandemic**, *Southwest Contemporary*  
**Teaching Art Online Under COVID-19**, Kaitlin Pomerantz, *Hyperallergic*  
**Art Education and the Coronavirus (COVID-19)**, *The Art of Education University*  
**Art History Teaching Resources**

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## topical playlist 3: art & politics

Frank explorations of cultural identity question the arbitrary boundaries separating nations, genders, and incarcerated populations.



## fresh voices

In the episode that informs and inspires this guide, you hear from the following artists, curators, and creative thinkers. Speakers are listed in the order that they appear.

### Andrea Bowers

Los Angeles, CA, USA

The work of artist Angela Bowers consistently demonstrates her signature fusion of feminist and political activism. As we hear in this episode, Bowers is not content to sit on the sidelines of social activism. Instead, she operates as a witness, documentarian, advocate, and participant in broad-ranging actions. Her drawings, videos, and installation art address hot-button issues such as the environment, rape culture, gender discrimination, and immigration. Bowers works in a range of media that includes graphite, cardboard, neon lights, and reappropriated material artifacts of her own activist participation. Rarely subtle, Bowers frequently uses the visual language of protests, including signs, banners, and posters to communicate with audiences inside and outside museums. Indeed, transitioning fluidly from the privileged space of a museum, gallery, or art fair, to mass protests, public parks, and tree-sitting demonstrations, Bowers reveals how virtually any setting can become a site of activism. In “Where Art Meets Activism,” Bowers recounts the formative experience of learning from environmental activist John Quigley and reflects on her more recent engagement with the Me Too Movement.

**Related Episode:** [Andrea Bowers on Art and Activism](#)

### Ralph Rugoff

London, UK

American-born curator Ralph Rugoff is known for his ability to bring together artists who probe nuanced and sometimes difficult themes. Director of London’s [Hayward Gallery](#) since 2006, he often presents shows that break with formal convention, connecting with audiences in a more experiential and visceral way. We speak with Rugoff about his work on the 13th Lyon Biennial, *La Vie Moderne (Modern Life)*. Most recently, Rugoff curated another reflection on the contemporary for the 2019 Venice Art Biennale exhibition titled *May You Live in Interesting Times*. In his [introduction](#) to the show (named for a nonexistent “Chinese curse” frequently cited by Western politicians), Rugoff argues that while art has little power to directly act upon politics, “art can be a kind of guide for how to live and think in ‘interesting times.’” Though this more conservative stance towards art’s power to enact change stands in contrast to that of artists like Bowers, Rugoff demonstrates how curators can foster platforms for diverse activist art.

**Related Episode:** [Ralph Rugoff on the 13th Lyon Biennial](#)



Teresa Margolles, *Muro Ciudad Juárez (Wall of Ciudad Juárez)*, 2010. Wall of concrete blocks from a public school in front of which a reckoning with 4 people involved in organized crime took place in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Collection Frac Grand Large – Hauts-de-France, Dunkerque Exhibition view: 58th Venice Art Biennale, *May You Live In Interesting Times*, Venice, Italy, cur. Ralph Rugoff, 2019. Photo: Andrea Avezzi. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan, New York.

## Catherine Morris

New York City, NY, USA

Since 2009, Catherine Morris has been **Sackler Family Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art** at the **Brooklyn Museum**. Committed to exploring and responding to the multifarious ways that feminism, broadly understood, has impacted artistic production, Morris challenges us to reconsider what qualifies as art. She **explains**, “Feminism helped us to legitimize non-traditional objects, what some would call ‘craft-objects,’ as not ‘minor’ art forms, but forms of exploration in their own right.” We hear about the conceptual and art historical impetus behind **Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism** (2016-2018), a series of exhibitions and public programming that anticipated and spoke to gender-inflected flashpoints in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and its aftermath. **Marilyn Minter**, a groundbreaking artist and the subject of an **acclaimed retrospective** curated by Morris as part of the *Year of Yes*, describes the curator as “tenacious and supportive in all the best ways.” In her innovative engagement with big-name artists like Minter and Georgia O’Keeffe, and in her advocacy of under-recognized figures such as **Beverly Buchanan**, Morris demonstrates the potential breadth of curatorial activism in a museum setting.

**Related Episode: Catherine Morris and a Year of Yes**

## Manolis Daskalakis Lemos

Athens, Greece

Born and based in Athens, artist Manolis D. Lemos uses a variety of media to **create works** “that focus on the ways we dream about tomorrow and on examples of former states of prosperity that deteriorated—reflecting on the ways these could be projected onto the future.” For the 2019 exhibition entitled **Feelings** at Christina Androulidaki Gallery in Athens, Lemos collaborated with theoretical computer scientist and MIT professor Constantinos Daskalakis (also Lemos’s cousin) to investigate the potential for computers using **Deep Learning algorithms** that simulate biological neural networks to create art that rivals or surpasses that of a human artist. Lemos steps away from this cerebral work to challenge global perceptions and stereotypes of his hometown in the video **dusk and dawn look just the same (riot tourism)** (2017). He activates Athens’s central square in a furtive, fleeting way, blurring the lines between rioting, dance, and choreographed movement. Abstract and poetic, his engagement with activism suggests that entrenched and polarized thinking is first and foremost a failure of the imagination.



Faith Ringgold (right), and Michele Wallace (middle) at Art Workers Coalition Protest, Whitney Museum, 1971. Digital C-Print © Jan van Raay.

## Tania Bruguera

Havana, Cuba and New York, USA

Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's installation and performance art engages local communities to effect tangible social and political change. She refers to her artistic method as "**Arte Útil**," or "artivism," valuing the agency of art over its symbolism. Educated at the **Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana** and the **School of the Art Institute of Chicago**, Bruguera's work addresses immigration, the legacy of Spanish colonialism in Cuba, and freedom of speech. In 2015, Bruguera was the first artist to hold a **special one-year New York City residency** designed to raise awareness among undocumented workers about the City's municipal ID program. Her political statements continue to put her at odds with Cuban authorities, who detained her repeatedly in 2014 and 2015 after an attempted performance of **#YoTambienExijo (I Also Demand)** in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution. This piece, originally called *Tatlin's Whisper #6*, gave audience participants one minute on a microphone to express their beliefs and views with regard to the future. We meet Bruguera in 2015, while she is confined to her home in Havana. Undaunted, Bruguera moves ahead with launching the **Hannah Arendt International Institute of Artivism**. We learn through curator María Elena Ortiz that in Mexico City a year later, the artist introduced the Migrant People's Party, part of Bruguera's larger **Immigrant Movement International**.

**Related Episode: Tania Bruguera on Art Activism**

## María Elena Ortiz

Miami, Florida, USA

**María Elena Ortiz** is Associate Curator at the **Pérez Art Museum Miami** (PAMM). Previously Curator of Contemporary Arts at the **Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros** in Mexico City, she collaborated with Tania Bruguera on the Migrant People's Party discussed in "Where Art Meets Activism." In affiliation with these institutions and in her own independent practice, Ortiz's socially-engaged curatorial work calls attention to Black and Latinx identities and experiences across postcolonial Latin America and **the Caribbean**—often through the lens of film and video. In 2014, she received The Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC) and Independent Curators International (ICI) Travel Award for Central America and the Caribbean, a formative experience that Ortiz documented through **a series of posts** on the ICI blog. At PAMM, she curated ***At the Crossroads: Critical Film and Video from the Caribbean*** (2014), ***Firelei Báez: Bloodlines*** (2015), ***Beatriz Santiago Muñoz: A Universe of Fragile Mirrors*** (2016) and ***Teresita Fernández: Elemental*** (2019).

**Related Episode: Sounds of Summer in Miami**



Cathy Byrd interviewing Tania Bruguera in 2015. Followers of Fresh Art International might find this image familiar—it inspired the avatar that's featured in one version of our logo. See for yourself on the last page of this guide! Photo: Tami Katz-Freiman.



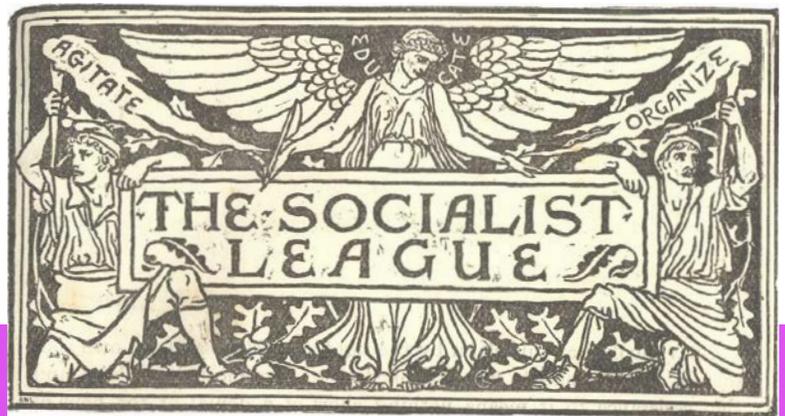
Installation view of *Teresita Fernández: Elemental*. Photo: Oriol Tarridas. Image source: PAMM.

## Maria Alyokhina

India (as of Summer 2020)

A co-founder of the Russian anti-Putinist feminist protest band Pussy Riot, Maria Alyokhina (also known as Masha) fuses music, performance art, theater, and protest. Alyokhina and two other band members were jailed in 2012 after staging a punk protest entitled “Punk Prayer - Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!” in Moscow’s Church of Christ the Savior. Convicted of “hooliganism,” Alyokhina served a 21-month prison sentence before being granted amnesty. Since then, she has become a leading advocate for prisoner’ rights, both in Russia and beyond. She continues to protest against Putin’s regime, **defying travel restrictions** and staging actions that call attention to human rights abuses. Her memoir, *Riot Days* (2017), recounts her experience of the trial and incarceration. Alyokhina credits the support of fellow band members and friends for helping her make it through the harrowing experience. As Alyokhina narrated in a **recent interview**, “I really believe in solidarity because nobody knows what will happen next. At least I know that I have really good friends who will not go away if I’m in trouble—and the other way around. That’s really a big thing. It can give you power for days and months and years.”

**Related Episodes:** **Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer Documentary**; **María Alyokhina on Political Art**



We are thrilled to feature a neon text work by Andrea Bowers on the cover of this issue. Bowers’s illuminated command to “Educate, Agitate, Organize,” perfectly encapsulates the goals of “Where Art Meets Activism.” Though Bowers sometimes works in a more conceptual and poetic register (see her *Memorial to Arcadia Woodlands* on page 13), her word-based works tend to be clear and unambiguous, carrying direct messages such as “Climate Change is Real,” “Trust Women,” and “Fight Like a Girl.” Melding the language of protest with the materiality of commercial signage, the artist composes a call to action. The slogan that appears here first appeared in print in 1883 in a pamphlet for a socialist U.K. organization known as the Democratic Federation. Two years later, the British activist artist William Morris (1834-1896) reused the motto on the illustrated cover of a book entitled *Chants for Socialists*, which you can see above. Read more about the history of this motto in progressive movements on our website.

Photo: William Morris, cover illustration for *Chants for Socialists*, 1885. Image source: [Project Gutenberg](#).

## take note

Become familiar with the other key figures we introduce.

### Hannah Arendt

Philosopher **Hannah Arendt** (1906-1975) significantly shaped the way we understand the nature of political power in the twentieth century. Her most famous work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), provided a theoretical framework and historical context for both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. Following the recent wave of strongman leaders, xenophobia, and populist uprisings across the globe, Arendt's work has **found renewed significance**. Both Tania Bruguera (founder of the **Hannah Arendt International Institute of Activism**) and Maria Alyokhina (winner of the **Hannah Arendt Award for Political Thought**) cite Arendt as a major source of inspiration for their politically-charged works.

### Kader Attia

At the heart of Kader Attia's artistic practice is the notion of *Repair*, a natural process that the **artist describes as** "closely linked to loss and wounds, to recuperation and re-appropriation." Attia's interest in *Repair* as a physical and cultural mechanism stems from his experience growing up in Paris and Algeria, and spending time in South Africa and the Congo. Attia situates his activist practice in an increasingly digital, interconnected world where the traumas of colonization and slavery still persist. At the **13th Lyon Biennale**, Attia's video installation *Reason's Oxymorons* and site-specific intervention *Traditional Repair, Immaterial Injury* addressed the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* terror attacks through multiple cultural and disciplinary lenses.



Kader Attia, *Reason's Oxymorons*, 2015. Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin. Image source: Kader Attia. Attia has presented versions of *Reason's Oxymorons* in the United States (Hanover, St. Louis, and New York), Germany (Berlin), and France (Lyon).

### Gary Carrion-Murayari

Gary Carrion-Murayari is Kraus Family Curator at the New Museum, New York City. In "Where Art Meets Activism," Carrion-Murayari introduces the New Museum's 2018 triennial exhibition, *Songs for Sabotage*. Capturing the ambiguities and contradictions of protest art, **this ambitious exhibition** centered on "interventions into cities, infrastructures, and the networks of everyday life, proposing objects that might create common experience." Along with co-curator Alex Gartenfeld, Carrion-Murayari brought together contemporary 26 artists and collectives from 19 countries, including Manolis D. Lemos. In 2016, Carrion-Murayari co-curated another exhibition including Lemos's work entitled *The Equilibrists* at the **Benaki Museum** in Athens. This show featuring the work of young Greek and Cypriot artists presaged *Songs for Sabotage*, tackling issues of political and cultural identity within the precarious economic landscape of Greece.

## Judy Chicago

For over half a century, Judy Chicago (b. 1939) has been a pioneer in the field of feminist art. In addition to being an artist, Chicago **describes herself** as a “author, feminist, educator, and intellectual.” Indeed, many critical elements of Chicago’s practice come out of formative years spent teaching an innovative women’s program at California State University, Fresno. The creator of many foundational feminist works including *The Birth Project* and the *International Honor Quilt*, Chicago is best known for her monumental sculptural work *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), which Catherine Morris and Cathy Byrd discuss in this episode. Revolutionary in its scale, content, and collaborative mode of production, *The Dinner Party* commemorates the undervalued role of women in Western history through the creation of a triangular dinner table set for 39 famous “guests.” Reclaiming craft traditions including ceramics and needlework, the work shocked some audiences for its frank and unblinking celebration of female sexuality. Critical acclaim was slow to come, but the work found a broad popular following. Since 2007, the permanent home of *The Dinner Party* is the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

**Related Episode:** **Catherine Morris and a Year of Yes**

## John Quigley

Described by the *Chicago Tribune* as a “**kind of Thoreau in suburbia**,” John Quigley is an environmental activist best known for his “tree sitting” actions. In order to protest development, deforestation, and habitat loss, he takes up residence in trees slated for destruction. Highly engaged in the early 2000s, Quigley has described how human supporters and the companionship of nature **kept him going** even through months-long stints living high in trees from California to British Columbia. Quigley has long inspired artist Andrea Bowers, who, in this episode, describes her own tree sitting in the Arcadia Woodlands outside Los Angeles.

## Petr Pavlensky

Petr Pavlensky is an **incendiary** contemporary Russian performance artist known for staging works in public places where he will almost certainly provoke police retaliation. Pavlensky first gained international recognition when he sewed his lips shut to protest the trial and imprisonment of the punk protest band Pussy Riot in 2012. In this act, entitled *Seam*, and in much of his other work, Pavlensky uses nudity and self-mutilation to call attention to issues of power and authority in Russia and beyond. For this artist, the act of getting arrested or put on trial is synonymous with the work itself—it is a kind of political theater. Pavlensky wove this idea into the performance of *Burning Doors* with Maria Alyokhina at the Belarus Free Theater, a play that dramatized the plight of persecuted artists.



Andrea Bowers, *Memorial to Arcadia Woodlands*, detail. Featured in *Unsettled Landscapes*, the first exhibition in the SITElines: New Perspectives on Art of the Americas biennial series. SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2014.

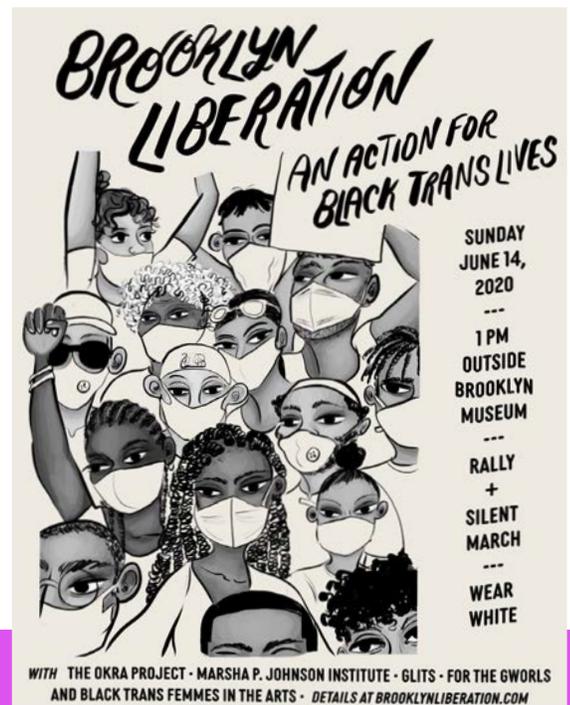
## Nancy Spector

Nancy Spector is the Artistic Director and Jennifer and David Stockman Chief Curator at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Spector briefly served as curatorial lead at the Brooklyn Museum, before returning to the Guggenheim in 2017. In “When Art Meets Activism,” Catherine Morris credits Spector for the title *Year of Yes*. In **one well-publicized instance** of curatorial activism during the Trump administration, Spector responded to a 2017 request from the White House to borrow a Van Gogh landscape from the Guggenheim by instead suggesting that they borrow *America*, a fully functional toilet made entirely out of gold by the trickster artist Maurizio Cattelan.

## Nadezhda Tolokonnikova

Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (also known as Nadya Tolokno) is a member of the punk protest band Pussy Riot. Along with Maria Alyokhina, she was arrested and convicted of “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred” in 2012 after the group staged an impromptu “punk prayer” in a Russian Orthodox church in Moscow. During her incarceration, she went on hunger strike to protest inhumane treatment of all the prisoners. Like Alyokhina, she was granted amnesty near the very end of her prison sentence, just in time for the Olympics in Sochi, Russia (in what the band members see as a clear political stunt on the part of Putin). Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina are now leading advocates for judicial and prison reform, using their international celebrity to draw attention to human rights abuses both in Russia and internationally.

**Related Episode: Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer Documentary**



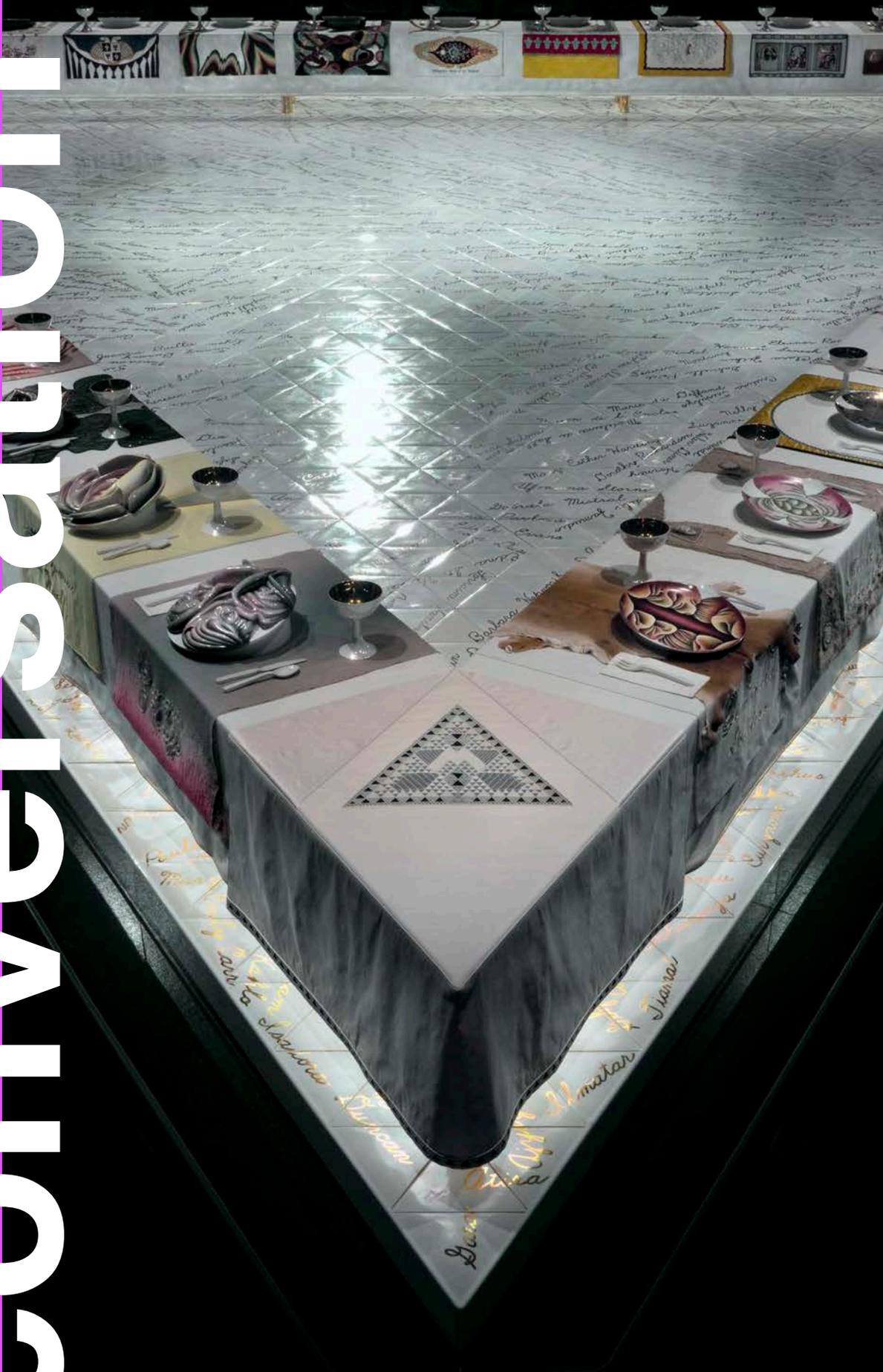
## Brooklyn Liberation

### Protest as Art and the Art of Protest Posters

In the age of viral media, when photographic images (immediate in both their content and their availability) dominate our news cycle, the images of a protest often take on a life of their own beyond the original, time-limited event. The organizers of the Brooklyn Liberation, an action in support of Black Trans Lives, recognized that the aesthetics of a protest contribute to its effectiveness as a messaging tool. On June 14, 2020, some 15,000 protestors made their way from Grand Army Plaza to Fort Greene in Brooklyn, New York. Photographs, captured by journalists, participants, and onlookers, depict a diverse group of protestors, unified by their silence and by the white clothing they wore. This unifying decision to dress in white was an homage to a seminal 1917 NAACP march to protest anti-Black violence. Over a century later, Queens-based illustrator Mohammed Fayez captured the look and feeling of the 2020 march in his now-iconic poster. As images of Fayez’s poster and photographs from the rally spread on news sites and social media, so too did Brooklyn Liberation’s message: that Black Trans people face staggering discrimination, violence, and oppression. Yet amidst the fury and calls for justice for victims of anti-Black, anti-Trans violence, there was also celebration of the queer Black identity—manifested in bold costumes, creative signage, and dancing. Even though the protestors marched in silence, their meaning was loud and clear: Black Trans Lives Matter.

Photo: Mohammed Fayez, Brooklyn Liberation Poster, 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

# conversation



## prologue

**Cathy Byrd:** Activism has long been a way for artists, curators, writers, and filmmakers to engage with global flashpoints, inspiring new perspectives on visible and unseen causes. Over the last century, public interventions, performative protests, and works created for public marches and events have led communities to participate in art experiences and make art themselves. The movements around **Me Too**, **Black Lives Matter**, **Dreamers**, and climate change expose sexual harassment and assault, race-based violence, immigrant rights violations, and the impact of sea level rise. The issues have energized today's culture production. Contemporary artists and curators increasingly lead and invite calls to action in response to these vital concerns. These conversations at the nexus of art and activism reflect on the power of creative civic engagement.

[Sounds of call-and-response chanting from a protest]



Listen along  
with the episode.

One of the things that art can do is bear witness. I think a lot about my role in documenting these under-told stories of incredible activists and activist events.

*Andrea Bowers*

## conversation



Andrea Bowers

**CB:** Los Angeles-based **Andrea Bowers** is one artist who has made activism a way of life. Her 2018 video titled *Disrupting and Resisting* documents the **largest single-day protest** in the history of the United States, a gathering on January 21, 2017 in Washington, D.C.—the day following the inauguration of the 45th U.S. president. The video is evidence of how Bowers participates as witness, protestor, and artist in service to professional activists. We meet for the first time at the opening of the **SITE Santa Fe Biennial**, *Unsettled Landscapes*, in 2014.



Andrea Bowers, *Disrupting and Resisting*, 2018. A video documenting protests and marches on the first two days of the Trump presidency in Washington D.C., 2017. Video still courtesy Andrea Bowers.

**Andrea Bowers:** I went to **CalArts** and I didn't take classes in how to draw. I took a class on how to secede from the country. I took a class on the Left and the failure of the Left. I took classes on not working as a radical political position. I took amazing, crazy political classes because it was a school founded by utopian Marxist feminists [laughs]. I think that had a lot to do with it.

**CB:** As you just heard, Andrea's studies were rather unconventional, but she was thinking like an activist long before art school.

**AB:** As a kid, I was always really passionate about politics. **George Bush's presidency** really made me rebel against him [laughs]. It made me feel like whatever I can do to help change things, I want to do it.

I started using my art to participate or help in any way I could with activists and activist campaigns. Those groups of people were so excited to have me participate. It was a very welcoming experience. I've become more and more involved and courageous. I don't think of it as courage anymore, though at the time when I first started, I did.

**CB:** These days, Andrea shapes entire exhibitions around activism. Her art is a call to action that gives voice to concerns often ignored.

**AB:** I've been thinking about what art can do and what art can be rather than what art can't do and what art can't be. One of the things that art can do bear witness. I think a lot about my role in documenting these under-told stories of incredible activists and activist events—in a much deeper, long term way than the 24/7 newscycle.

**CB:** A few years ago, Andrea made the news herself.

**Excerpt from Bowers protesting at Arcadia Woodlands:** Hey, that tree can fall on us! You better stop him! Come on!

**CB:** The artist explains how she ended up chained to a tree in the **Arcadia Woodlands** outside Los Angeles.

**AB:** My art practice has made me a more radical activist because I had [the example of] this famous activist, **John Quigley**, who's a famous American **tree sitter**. I've been following him for years. He was staying at my house because he was traveling so much. He's an activist, and he puts all his money into a cause. So he had no money, and didn't pay rent for six months. I said, "John, you have to trade me something. I want you to teach me how to tree sit and I'm gonna videotape it as a training video artwork." Well, I loved it. I was a little cynical about it, but I actually was *really* good at it. Six months later, he called me up and he's like, "there's a terrible situation in Arcadia; we're going in and we need you to go." They were ripping out this beautiful, pristine urban wilderness area. There were about 250 beautiful oak trees. But they wanted to clearcut this valley so they could put all of the debris from dredging the rivers there. They made it a dumping ground. I attempted to stop that from happening. I did not stop it. But it brought a lot of media attention and stopped this from happening in the future to other areas.

**CB:** Andrea wove artifacts of her tree sitting experience into the shimmering green sculpture that's now on view in SITE Santa Fe's 2014 biennial exhibition.

**AB:** As soon as I was released from jail after two days, I went out to see what the area looked like and it was devastating. Instead of cutting down the oak trees and at least using the wood—they put them in wood chippers and turned them into little tiny pieces. I didn't know what to do. I had no ideas. But I thought, I have this truck, I'm going to fill the truck up with wood chips until I can't make it move anymore. So for this piece I used all the climbing ropes that we used as tree sitters. I've used this climbing gear to make what almost looks like a chandelier. All the wood is tied in bundles at the bottom because I was really trying to pay homage to these trees and thinking, is there some way I can remonumentalize them?

**CB:** In a video she produced about the protest, Andrea remembers what happened in the late afternoon when her tree was the last one standing just before police officers climbed into a cherry picker to pluck Andrea off from her perch. She had a surprising encounter.

**AB:** The weirdest thing happened. All of a sudden animals started to come into the tree we were in because it was the only tree left. We were suddenly swarmed by bats encircling us, and all different kinds of birds. There were actually rats running into the tree. It was the last little bit of their ecosystem. It was depressing because you realized how many other animals' habitats and insects' habitats had been destroyed in an afternoon.

**CB:** Andrea believes in art as agency and in the potential for art to address social and political issues.

**AB:** Art has always been political. It's better for the market if we aren't like that because, if you think about it, just in the United States I'm cutting out



Andrea Bowers, *Memorial to Arcadia Woodlands*, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2014. Photo by Eric Swanson. Image source: SITE Santa FE.

fifty percent of the people who might want to buy my work. But that's not why I make art. I make art because I want to be in service of those political campaigns and activists that I believe in. That's my number one goal in my work. But I think about art, too. What important things can art do?

**CB:** And what can art do in the future? Are you setting a pattern for yourself? But you've had this pattern. It is not new for you to do what you're doing. That's who you are.

**AB:** Yeah. But you have to press yourself forward and try to do more and more and take on more difficult subjects.



Andrea Bowers, *Somos 11 Millones/We Are 11 Million* (in collaboration with Movimiento Cosecha), Part of *Agora*. Commissioned by High Line Art, presented by Friends of the High Line and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. 2018. Photo by Timothy Schenck. Image Source: Andrea Bowers.

**CB:** When I reconnect with Andrea Bowers in 2018, she tells me about the monumental sign she created for the **High Line Park** in New York as part of the art exhibition *Agora*. Taking its name from the ancient Greek word referring to the square, a public space at the heart of city-states like Athens, the exhibition transforms the linear park into an arena for the collective voice of contemporary social commentary. Andrea Bowers's huge neon sign represents her support for **Dreamers**, individuals who came to the United States at an early age without documentation, who have assimilated to U.S. culture and who have been educated in U.S. schools. **Somos 11 Millones/We Are 11 Million** speaks to the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Bowers's new video bears witness to the **Women's March** of January 21, 2017, when a sea of feminists and their supporters gathered in the U.S. capital the day after the inauguration of the 45th president. Wearing **pink hats**, bearing **handmade posters**, protesting, singing, and chanting, they proclaimed immigrant and reproductive rights, gender equality, and the power of a unified voice.

[Excerpts from Andrea Bowers's video *Disrupting and Resisting*]

After intense collective research, Bowers shipped off her latest project to Germany for a Summer 2018 solo exhibition at the **Captain Petzel Gallery** in Berlin [also displayed at **Art Basel 2019**]. Titled **Open Secret**, the 64-foot long, 13-foot high wall installation documents the **Me Too** movement.

**AB:** I created a database of every person accused of sexual harassment with their name, their profession, and their apology. Often I include a photo that I've chosen. Underneath that, there's a summary of the case or what they're accused of. I was able to fill this 64-foot wall with a hundred [profiles]. I still have over 250 to do. It becomes a giant wall that describes patriarchy and also marks this moment in time because all of the dates are from 2017 to 2018. I realized that I was watching all the names come up over the last year, but I hadn't *really* investigated what women were saying. It's about trusting and believing women. There is a huge divide in our country and our culture—not just our country [the U.S.], but in the world—between what men think is normalized sexual behavior versus how women feel about that behavior.

**CB:** For many feminists, the Me Too movement has been life changing. This is the first time in history that women are standing together to face their sexual abusers. In related projects, Bowers investigates and supports gender identity and sexual orientation rights through drawings that rework historic photographs and documents of sociopolitical struggles. The artist presented a selection from her non-violent disobedience drawings in the 2008 group show *Amateurs* at the **California College of the Arts Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art**. **Ralph Rugoff**, director of the **Hayward Gallery** in London, curated the exhibition to demonstrate how artists co-create works with communities outside the art world.

Rugoff organized the exhibition *Modern Life [La vie moderne]* for the **13th Lyon Biennial** in France. On that occasion, he invited artists to explore ambiguities and uncertainties at the core of today's immigration, national identity, and economic issues. In our conversation, recorded in 2015, Rugoff talks about his concept for the exhibition and how participating artist **Kader Attia** plans to **show his response** to the 2015 terrorist attack on the office of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in a suburb of Paris.

**Ralph Rugoff:** One of the things I hope to investigate with this analogy is our definition of the contemporary, which often seems very superficial to me. I'm hoping through the work of the artists (who are really the people investigating this) to raise a question about how history animates, shapes, and informs our contemporary moment. [I'm hoping that] rather than seeing the contemporary as something brand new and something that's divorced from the past, we actually experience how it's connected to different historical trajectories. There's a work that grew out of the artists' response to that **Charlie Hebdo attack**. This is an artist, **Kader Attia**, who grew up in both France and Algeria, and who knew quite well **the area outside of Paris** where the killers came from. He had family who are still living in that area and talked to lots of different people [there] about their responses to that event. He decided to investigate this and he began what will be an 18-screen video installation with each screen in its own kind of office, as if you're in a little archive. The screens show interviews he's had with ethnopsychologists, philosophers, psychoanalysts, patients in mental hospitals, many other people—all dealing with this question of what it is like to live in a foreign culture.



**Ralph Rugoff**

**[I'm hoping that] rather than seeing the contemporary as something brand new and something that's divorced from the past, we actually experience how it's connected to different historical trajectories.**

*Ralph Rugoff*



Les Espaces d'AbraXas, architect: Ricardo Bofill, Noisy-le-Grand, France, built 1978-1983. This dramatic postmodern housing estate on the outskirts of Paris was meant to offer another vision of French public housing in response to the modernist models influenced by architects such as Le Corbusier. The dramatic, neo-Greco forms are meant to evoke a theater. In keeping with Bofill's theatrical vision, when Publications Editor Sarah Rovang visited in 2019, a fashion shoot was in progress at the estate's center. Exurban estates such as these in the banlieues, or suburbs, are a part of the Parisian cultural landscape that are not part of the romantic mythos of the city. Image source: Sarah Rovang.

**CB:** As Rugoff explains, artists are investigating and revealing the historical roots of contemporary issues through stories that are both personal and collective.

Other biennial exhibitions and art institutions have also opened up to displays of activism and political movements. In 2016, the **Brooklyn Museum** dedicated a series of exhibitions and events to exploring **feminism** and to celebrating the tenth anniversary of the **Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art**. Curator **Catherine Morris** explains.

It's been described as a feminist takeover of the museum. I love that.

17:20

Catherine Morris



Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, detail. 1974-1979. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10. © Judy Chicago, Photo: © Donald Woodman. Courtesy of Brooklyn Museum.

**Catherine Morris:** [laughs] That is absolutely the idea. We do have a discrete space within the institution and in the exhibition and forum space. When the Sackler Center opened ten years ago, people originally thought that's what it would be: a discrete moment within the installation calendar of the institution. But for me, having been the curator here for the last almost eight years, it has seemed that the opportunity that the Brooklyn Museum offers a place like the Sackler Center needs to be explored. We need to get outside the confines of the physical space and get into the entire museum—historically, culturally, socially, and in all the ways that that culture and history is represented.

**CB:** Is looking at art history through the lens of feminism the motivation for this?

**CM:** It absolutely is. I have to give **Nancy Spector** credit for that title. And it's so appropriate and it feels so right on so many different levels. One of the things that's been a real challenge and a pleasure for me as the

curator of the Sackler Center is thinking about how the Sackler Center can function not only within the Brooklyn Museum, but within the larger art world.

**CB:** With that thought in mind, I think it would be great to talk about a work of art that is at the heart of the Center.

**CM:** *The Dinner Party* [by **Judy Chicago**] is the iconic work of art that defines this very important feminist project designed to revise history. That's what *The Dinner Party* set out to do. That's what it continues to do. So centering on that work of art was absolutely a brilliant opening for what we are today, what we will become; continuing to reference that history, think about the history, and also try to understand and see how it's being seen and used by a younger generation.

**CB:** Listeners from outside the U.S. might not know exactly what Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* is or what it looks like.

**CM:** *The Dinner Party* was made between 1974 and 1978. It is a monumental sculptural installation that re-envisioned Western Eurocentric history from the point of view of those who were not included in that history. Judy developed the idea of *The Dinner Party* [thinking about] who deserves a seat at this table of history. It is in the form of a triangle with 39 place settings representing 39 biographies of women that Judy prioritized as telling important stories within that history. On the floor around these place settings are 999 additional names of important women in history. So a total of 1,038 biographies are effectively made available, in the late 1970s, in a pre-Internet, pre-Google, pre-Wikipedia age. That's what Judy set out to do, in combination with making a really dramatic and beautiful visual representation of these people and their stories.

**CB:** It's pretty exceptional. I've been there and it's like a chapel. The design is intended to highlight the iconic presence of women in the field. The *Year of Yes* expands on the space of that one room to take it throughout the museum. If we were making a global statement about how the *Year of Yes* reimagines feminism, what would you say?

**CM:** Reimagining feminism from a historical point of view means acknowledging its very deep roots in our culture and the very profound impact it has already had on the way all of us live our lives—acknowledging that, pointing to that, celebrating that, and then really thinking about the priorities for future generations, because feminism is not something that's going to go away. I feel more than ever the real need for a place like the Sackler Center to exist and to continue to produce exhibitions and programs and to express the necessity of feminism.

**CB:** And how so the *Year of Yes* will influence the future?

**CM:** My feminist instinct is that it will help us participate in how we collaborate, how we support future thinkers about feminism, how we help describe it, how we help point to it, how we help illustrate it—this is absolutely what a museum needs to be doing.

**CB:** In 2018, the **Whitney Museum of American Art** was one New York institution that took up the flag. Following a stream of activist art within its own collection, *An Incomplete History of Protest* looked at how artists from the 1940s to the present have confronted the political and social issues of their day. Art as a form of activism, criticism, instruction, and inspiration challenges established thought to create a more equitable culture. The **New Museum's** 2018 triennial exhibition, *Songs for Sabotage*, revealed how a younger generation of artists is pushing against the forces that structure contemporary society, reflecting a shared sense of unrest in our world. They propose creative ways to interfere in political and social structures. I speak with New Museum curator **Gary Carrion-Murayari** about the artists that he and co-curator **Alex Gartenfeld** invited to participate in the exhibition.

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Catherine Morris

What I admire about the artists in the show [*Songs for Sabotage*] is that they're very familiar with the historical events and the historical memory that built the societies that they live in. They're very much aware of how their work is a continuation of art's capacity to resist.

Gary Carrion-Murayari



Manolis D. Lemos, *dusk and dawn look just the same (riot tourism)*, 2017. Photo courtesy the artist and New Museum, New York.

**Gary Carrion-Murayari:** All of these artists are involved in activist politics. What I admire about the artists in the show [*Songs for Sabotage*] is that they're very familiar with the historical events and the historical memory that built the societies they live in. They're very much aware of how their work is a continuation of art's capacity to resist.

**CB:** **Manolis D. Lemos**, an artist based in Athens, Greece, introduces the work he brings to the conversation. His video, *dusk and dawn look just the same (riot tourism)* responds to a decade of protests against political and economic conditions in his home country.

**Manolis D. Lemos:** I painted this abstract landscape of a sunset or a sunrise on the backs of these raincoats that the performers are wearing. There is this theme of the exoticization of riots and of this **portrayal of Athens in the media** and in the cultural field as "riot town." It's abstracting the way I conceived it but it's very dense in references.

**CB:** You filmed this video in Athens.

**MDL:** It's set on one of the busiest streets of Athens—the central square on the central street. I went there with 24 performers very early on a Sunday morning, at 6 a.m. So we kind of occupied the streets.

**CB:** It's beautiful choreography. It was joyful and sinister and surprising.

**MDL:** They are marching first in an organized kind of way and then at some point they start dispersing and running. It's ambivalent between chasing something, being chased by something, or chaotically running in the city (but without actually interacting with any objects). At the same time, there are these parallel narrations which are coincidental, but very essential for choosing the shot, such as one where you can see a worker opening a shop at the left and you can also see some birds flying.

**CB:** What do you want to say with this work?

**MDL:** I want the reading of the work to be abstract and poetic. I don't want it to be very straightforward. The energy of the piece is what interested me more: the portrayal of Athens and the history of Athens. It's very different to see these works here than to see them in rundown buildings in Athens. This contrast enhances the effect of the works. At this time and in this place I think it's very relevant.

 22:37

Gary Carrion-Murayari  
and Manolis D. Lemos

**CB:** Cuban-born artist **Tania Bruguera** is a controversial figure known for presenting performances in politically-charged public spaces. In 2015 during the opening days of the **Havana Art Biennial**, she introduced her newest project, the **Hannah Arendt International Institute of Activism**. I meet her in the doorway of her house near the **Museo Nacional de Bella Artes de Cuba**. Just months earlier, in December 2014, the presidents of Cuba and the U.S. **announced a rapprochement** between the two countries. But Cuba was still not ready for Bruguera's style of activism. Her unauthorized public intervention in late 2014 landed the artist in jail for three days. Determined to stay on course, she moves ahead with the performance, this time inside her home. Bruguera says the performance is the beginning of her new art activism project.

**Tania Bruguera:** I'm doing an opening session for a new project. I'm going to establish the **Hannah Arendt Institute for Activism** in Cuba. So hopefully the police come and learn what activism is.

**CB:** The artist launched her one-hundred hour ode to **Hannah Arendt** two days before the opening of the 2015 Biennial. Inviting volunteers to read from the book, she timed the performance to coincide with the 113th anniversary of **Cuban Independence Day**, May 20th.

So the performance started yesterday?

**TB:** We started yesterday at 10 a.m., and we have been going on uninterrupted reading ***The Origins of Totalitarianism***. I really like that [this project] is for the street. It's indoors, but [the visitors are] on the street and it still just is nice to have music [from the street] as the background and people listening to a little bit of this, a little bit of that.

**CB:** Where would you position yourself with this new institute?

**TB:** For me, this is my answer to everything that happens. [Arendt's book] is something people should read and think about. We can learn a lot. It's very interesting how she always understood that **totalitarianism** is not about Left or Right. It's about the desire to be in power and to not let it go. It is a beautiful book.

**CB:** What do you hope to achieve with this project?

**TB:** I have understood that **activism** is something needed in Cuba. It would be nice to have a place where people can exchange ideas about the future of Cuba, the prospect for social change, and to give art a role in that discussion. So we'll see.

**CB:** And you can't leave Havana?

**TB:** No, no. Not Havana, not Cuba. That's fine. I don't care. At this point, I am beyond so many things. I trust my work. I know this is a great piece. I know the idea of the Institute is good, and I just need to believe it. I think right now it's good to have activism in Cuba...art, in this moment, is good for Cuba.



Tania Bruguera and  
María Elena Ortiz



Tania Bruguera reading Hannah Arendt,  
Havana, Cuba, 2015.

**CB:** Tania Bruguera left Cuba not long after we spoke, to become the first artist-in-residence in the New York City Mayor's **Office of Immigrant Affairs**. Curator **María Elena Ortiz** remembers the 2011 immigrant empowerment project she organized with Bruguera in Mexico City through the **Sala de Arte Público Siquieros**. Born in Puerto Rico, Ortiz now works as a curator at the **Pérez Art Museum, Miami**.



Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Party gathering, Mexico, 2011.

**María Elena Ortiz:** Bruguera was very interested in the role of Mexico as this passageway from Latin America to the U.S. She decided to create a political party called **Partido del Pueblo Migrant**, or Migrant People Party (PPM). First, we had to do research on how political parties in Mexico work. We also had to make serious decisions about how real this was going to be—you can't just start your party and go into elections because there's a whole process to do that. We ended up at least creating the structure of it. We found a headquarters for the political party in the historic center of Mexico City in this place called **Casa Talavera**, which is managed by UACM, **Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México**, the biggest university there.

**CB:** You even had t-shirts and stickers.

**MEO:** We would meet every so often to talk about the party's next actions, because it turns out that this experience of migration affects other people. It had implications in their communities. We had to make a lot of partnerships and alliances with people who were already making immigration-related work.

**CB:** How did the community respond to this opportunity to join the party?

**MEO:** The people who were interested in the subject became members of the party and they would meet. The group members also did artistic actions related to the party. For one of the actions, we got different *voceros*, people in Mexico who tell the news, to walk through **centro histórico** to talk about the party. That was really neat as an artistic strategy.



Pussy Riot in Moscow's Red Square, 2012.

**CB:** In 2014, the Russian punk performance group **Pussy Riot** received the **Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought**. I reach out to band member **Maria Alyokhina** in London, to talk about how she has re-engaged in activism since she was released from prison in late December 2013.

It's lovely to meet you today. I'm so happy to have this opportunity to hear your voice after having **represented Pussy Riot on Fresh Art International** through the documentary ***Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer***.

Excerpt from Fresh Art INTL's earlier "***Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer Documentary***" episode: It's hard to imagine and, in fact, they never expected the repercussions. The two minute performance led to their arrests and to a **televised trial** where Maria transformed testimony and cross-questioning into political performance art. In late October 2012, Maria and band member **Nadezhda Tolokonnikova** were sent to separate prisons

to serve two year sentences for hooliganism. On December 23, 2013, they were released in an amnesty deal. Maria and Nadezhda have been politically active ever since.

**CB:** You have been involved in other kinds of protests and political actions since you've been out of prison and you've been awarded a Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought. How did it feel to receive that recognition?

**Maria Alyokhina:** I feel my life is a political protest and political action. Actually, that's the way life is for political artists in Russia, in general. Hannah Arendt, she's really important for me. I read her book about revolution [*On Revolution*] when I was in jail in Moscow. I had a serious fight with prison guards to have this book in my cell because prison guards really don't like the word "revolution" on the cover of the book. It's a real problem to have books with such titles inside prison. Our government, especially **Putin**, wants to somehow put back **Stalin's** cult. Figures such as Hannah Arendt, who are deconstructing the totalitarian concept, are the most important now for us.

**CB:** You and I have talked about the importance of Pussy Riot as a movement and a way of representing human rights. I wonder how it feels to be considered in some ways an icon.

**MA:** I don't believe in icons. I think each gesture and each action of every person is as important as ours, for example, and we all can be models. This is probably what I was trying to say in the courtroom—you should just not be afraid to be yourself.

**CB:** After you were released from prison, you and Nadezhda founded "**Justice Zone**" [*Zona Prava*].

**MA:** It's a human rights project, which was started after we were released. The main goal is to cover all the topics about violation of freedom in Russia. Our media outlet, **MediaZona**, is covering the topics of police violence, violence inside penal colonies and prisons, political courts, and political murders. Our lawyers are providing legal help for all those who are behind bars. For example, our lawyers were providing help to **Petr Pavlensky**, who is the main contemporary artist in Russia. He's actually in the show, which we are doing now was **Belarus Free Theatre**.

**CB:** Maria is in London now working with an independent theater company. They're preparing a performance by and about dissident artists titled **Burning Doors**, after one of Petr Pavlensky's radical protests. Maria performs as herself.

**MA:** I think Belarus Free Theatre is like Pussy Riot [in terms of creating] political art, which is fighting for freedom. This is my first theater project. This isn't like theater with the usual actors. These are people with amazing stories. These two years, which I've spent in so-called freedom after prison, I have a lot to say about it, actually. And I hope theater will help me.

 33:04

Maria Alyokhina

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Maria Alyokhina



Maria Alyokhina with Belarus Theater in Calais, France refugee camp, 2015. Read more about why this refugee camp is nicknamed "the Jungle" [here](#).

# start a conversation

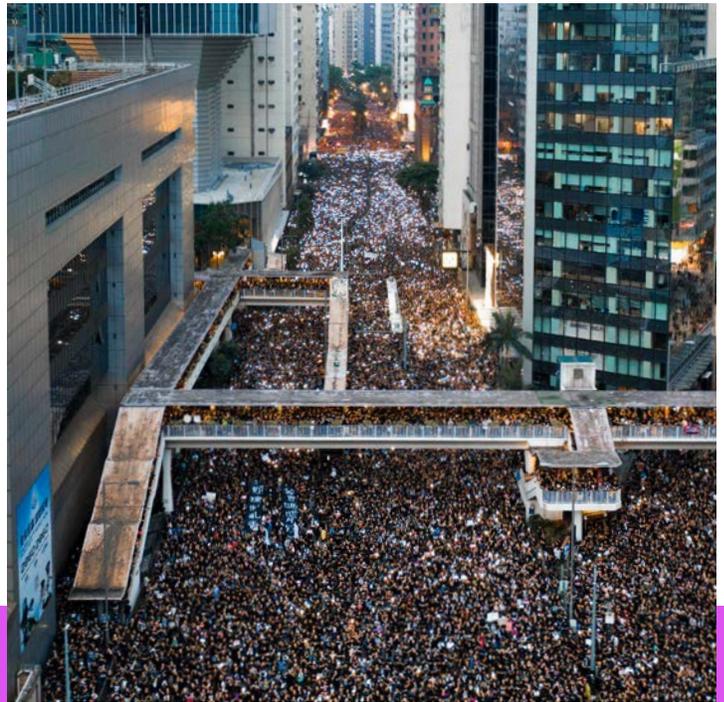
## questions to spark discussion

1. How does personal history and experience inform the mission and creative practice of the activist artists we introduce in this episode?
2. What role can curators play in activist art? What curatorial approaches can you identify in “Where Art Meets Activism”?
3. The work of politically active artists is rarely free from controversy. Sometimes, these works may infringe on the rights and freedoms of others in order to provoke or to make a point. For instance, in 1997, Russian artist Alexander Brener spray painted a green dollar sign on Kasimir Malevich’s *Suprematism* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. He dubbed this an act of protest against “corruption and commercialism in the art world.” Brener explained that he was starting a dialogue with Malevich’s work. He was sentenced to several months in prison. In 2019, Andrea Bowers **drew criticism** for using images of an abuse victim without asking permission in her Me Too-inspired installation *Open Secret*. Following a storm of criticism and protest from the woman whose image was used, Bowers removed the woman’s image and apologized. How would you compare these two art controversies? Where would you draw the line between “provocative” and art that “goes too far”?
4. Activist art can be overt or subtle. Consider Andrea Bowers’s bright, declarative neon signs versus the choreographed video created by Manolis D. Lemos meant to poetically undermine the perception of Athens as a “riot town.” What circumstances do you think call for explicit, unambiguous art? Where might oblique or lyrical works be more effective?
5. Activist art and curation can function in a variety of ways: it can persuade, shock, spur controversy, spark discussion, ignite action, subvert laws or norms, reveal hidden inequities, and more. How do the interventions and exhibitions discussed in this episode work on emotional, physical, and intellectual levels? What impact do you think that activist artists and curators are hoping that their work will have on the public? What real results do they want to see?



Above: Alexander Brener/Kasimir Malevich. *1 Dollar Sign on a White Cross/Suprematism* 1920-1927. 1997/1920-1927. Image source: [Arseny Zhilyaev - Moscow Etude](#).

Below: Andrea Bowers, *Open Secret*, Art Basel, 2019. Source: [design boom](#).



## get inspired

### Hong Kong Mixtape II

Original publication date: October 22, 2019

In our second guest-curated segment with [Contemporary Musiking Hong Kong](#), we explore sound art as both documentary and activism. CMHK is an incubator for cross-disciplinary practices in music, sound, and technology. In July 2018, composer and sound artist [Samson Young](#) introduced the first [Hong Kong Mixtape](#), a set of nine sound art compositions. One year later, musician [Him Cheung](#) takes us back to the former British colony to share Hong Kong Mixtape II, five sonic responses to volatile current events.

Our first Hong Kong Mixtape took us to the heart of [2017 student-led pro-democracy demonstrations](#), when the famed mass protests of the [2014 Umbrella Movement](#) returned to the streets. The city's uncertain future has sparked years of political protests. In June 2019, thousands of Hong Kong's citizens began to gather again, protesting against a [proposed law to allow extradition](#) to mainland China. Critics feared this could undermine the city's judicial independence and endanger dissidents. Clashes between police and activists became increasingly violent, with police using tear gas and protesters storming parliament. The bill was withdrawn in September 2019, but in 2020, the Chinese government has cracked down again with new security laws and aggressive policing. These measures, in addition to COVID-19, have [crippled the protest movement](#)—at least for now.

In CMHK's 2019 mixtape, we share excerpts from five sound encounters by artists based in Hong Kong. Capturing a variety of moods and settings, they evoke feelings of anxiety and hopelessness, bear witness to the strident demonstrations of 2019, and offer a sonic escape in the form of a supernatural walk in the woods.

Fresh Art International joins U.S.-based Montez Press Radio and Co-op Radio Vancouver to present Hong Kong Mixtape II. Sound Editor: Anamnesis Audio. Guest Producer: Him Cheung.

Featured sound works, in order of appearance: So Ho Chi, Take 2 (ver. 2) | Jantzen Tse, So Ho Chi | RC Team, Voices of Hong Kong "Rioters" | Alex Yu, 10pm shouting \_Free Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Time\_ Beverly Garden, Tseung Kwan O 2-9-2019 | Alex Yu, Temple.

Photo: Protesters in Hong Kong, 2019. Image source: Contemporary Musiking Hong Kong.

# 01 // art and the environment

In “Where Art Meets Activism,” we hear artist Andrea Bowers describe how she learned to tree-sit from activist John Quigley, and about her experience protesting the destruction of the Arcadia Woodlands near Los Angeles, CA. In this topical playlist, we meet other artists from the Fresh Art INTL archive who also “**speak for the trees.**” While Bowers shows us how artists can join activists on the front lines of protest, the artists in this playlist illustrate how environmental activism can also happen through an innovative approach to growing and eating sustainable food, by engaging the community with threatened natural areas through art, and in a residency on an island confronting the immediacy of climate change.

*Cover image: Yakusugi, or Japanese cedar, forest on the island of Yakushima. Image source: Sarah Rovang, 2018.*

## playlist



Lunch as "environmental sculpture" at Jorge Menna Barreto's "Restauro," 32nd São Paulo Biennial, 2016.

### 1 // Jorge Menna Barreto on Environmental Sculpture

We're taking you out for lunch with Brazilian artist **Jorge Menna Barreto**. The café within the pavilion that houses the **32nd São Paulo Biennial** in Brazil is no ordinary eatery. The artist created **Restauro**, or Restoration, in partnership with local chefs and farmers to encourage awareness about the way we use our land and the global consequences of how we eat. The farming practice behind this project is agroforestry, the simultaneous cultivation of crops and trees. To hear a longer conversation with Jorge Menna Barreto, listen to **the live radio show** we broadcast remote from São Paulo on September 8, 2016.

Original Publication Date: February 16, 2017  
Sound Editor: Guney Ozsan



Deborah Mitchell studio, detail of works in progress, Miami Beach, Florida, 2018.

### 2 // Deborah Mitchell: The Artist as Guide to the Everglades

What is it about the Everglades that inspires artists? We take you to meet **Deborah Mitchell** in her studio on Miami Beach, to talk about the ways that Florida's southwest coast influences her art. The contested landscape, endangered by encroaching urban development and sea level rise, is where she engages as an artist and an advocate for North America's only subtropical wilderness: the Everglades. Mitchell's mindful practice expresses her affinity for this fragile ecology, and her desire to learn, share, and preserve its science and history.

Original Publication Date: June 4, 2018  
Sound Editor: Anamnesis Audio | Special Audio: Deborah Mitchell



Robert Rauschenberg house, Captiva, Florida.



Christopher Cozier, designing his installation at the Rauschenberg Residency, Captiva, Florida, 2016.

### 3 // Rauschenberg Residency on Rising Water

At the **Rauschenberg Residency** on the island of **Captiva** just off the west coast of Florida, we meet artists, writers, and scientists working on projects related to the environment. They're here for a special session known as the **Rising Water Confab**, a month-long program exploring the topic of climate change.

**Featured in this episode:** **Amy Balkin**, an artist based in San Francisco, invites contributions to what she calls **A people's archive of sinking and melting**. **Christopher Cozier**, an artist from the island of Trinidad and Tobago, **reflects on the environmental extremes** of the Caribbean as a way of life. Los-Angeles based **Mick Lorusso** contemplates a **mangrove intervention** inspired by discoveries he made during his residency. **Rachel Armstrong** teaches living architecture at Newcastle University in England and much of **her practice is grounded in science**. On Captiva, her thinking about climate change **takes a spiritual turn**. **Buster Simpson**, a public artist based in Seattle, Washington, has organized two sessions of the Rising Water confab. He hopes that Captiva might serve as a model of environmental solutions for South Florida.

Original Publication Date: October 13, 2016

Sound Editor: Guney Ozsan

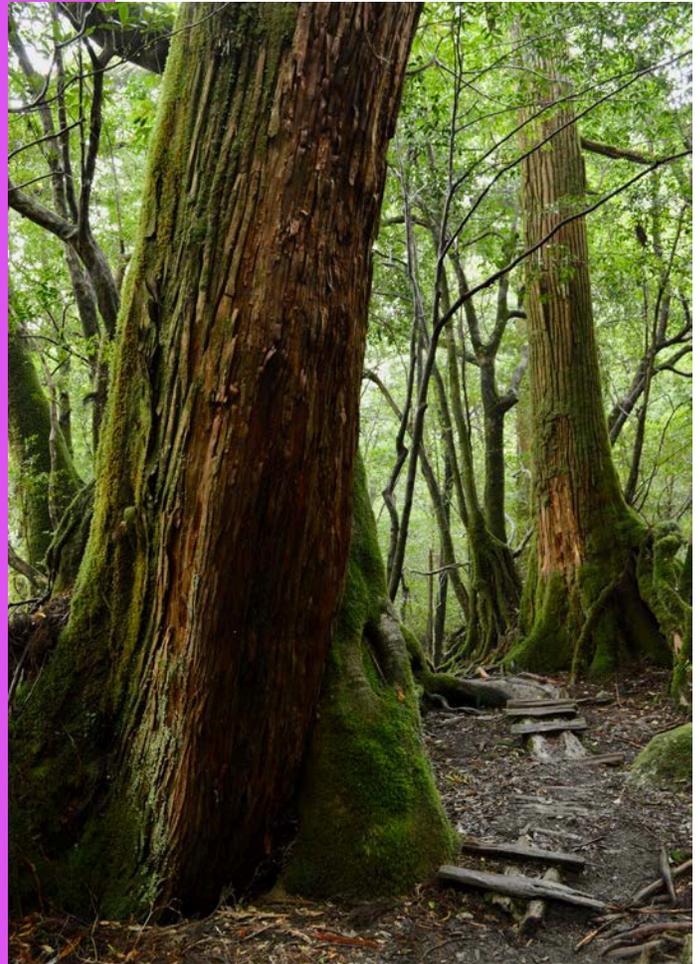
## fresh art connects

Find out how the Fresh Art Team relates episodes in the archive to their personal perspectives, passions, and histories.

Central to all three of these episodes and the Andrea Bowers segment from “Where Art Meets Activism” are amazingly lush but fragile and threatened forests. They are the literal and metaphorical root of the stories. Thinking about these forest ecosystems brought me back to being on the Japanese [island of Yakushima](#), which is home to a remarkable ancient cedar forest. Many of the famous yakusugis (Yakushima cedars) were felled by logging centuries ago, but new trees now grow over the stumps in an astonishing instance of [secondary growth](#). Yakushima is also one of the rainiest places on earth, resulting in a surreal, verdant canopy where the ground and trees are covered in thick moss. Japanese filmmaker [Hayao Miyazaki](#) modeled the environment of his celebrated environmental fable, [Princess Mononoke](#) (1997), on the forests of Yakushima. I rewatched *Princess Mononoke* while on the island, and was struck by both the animated depiction of the subtropical evergreen forests, and the nuanced storytelling. It’s fundamentally a parable of humans learning to live alongside nature rather than either side prevailing absolutely. The artists living on [the real island today](#) are allowed to carve the precious yakusugi wood only under very particular circumstances, for example, from a tree that has already fallen. With these rules in place, humans and forest should be able to coexist on the island for many years to come.

Sarah Rovang, Publications Editor

Photo: Yakusugi, or Japanese cedar, forest on the island of Yakushima. Image source: Sarah Rovang, 2018.



## concepts

In this topical playlist we introduce the following concepts and histories

### Agroforestry

The **Food and Agriculture Organization** of the United Nations defines agroforestry as: “land-use systems and technologies where woody perennials (trees, shrubs, palms, bamboos, etc.) are deliberately used on the same land-management units as agricultural crops and/or animals, in some form of spatial arrangement or temporal sequence.” This pattern of agriculture possesses environmental and economic advantages, especially for small and rural farmers. Versions of agroforestry date back centuries, but the practice has been used more recently as a way to promote (among other benefits) biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and soil remediation. In 2016, artist/chef Jorge Menna Barreto created a restaurant inside the Sao Paulo Biennial pavilion to introduce plant-based foods sourced from agroforestry systems in Brazil.



Agroforestry in Burkina Faso: maize grown under *Faidherbia albida* and *Borassus akeassii* near Banfora. Image source: [Marco Schmidt, 2004, Wikimedia Commons; CC-BY-SA 2.5.](#)

### Climate Justice

Because climate change is increasingly affecting the health and welfare of humans, many environmental activists frame global warming as an issue with political and social dimensions. Aligning with the “intersectional” dimensions of our other topical playlists, advocates of climate justice argue that already marginalized and at-risk populations are (and will continue to be) disproportionately affected by climate change. For instance, a 2020 study found that climate change is **linked to risks during pregnancy**, and that Black mothers in the U.S. are disproportionately affected.

**Related episode:** [Curators Consider Climate Crisis](#)

### Everglades

Spanning 1.5 million acres of southern Florida, the Everglades is a uniquely biodiverse area that encompasses nine distinct **ecosystem habitats**: freshwater sloughs, marl prairies, tropical hammocks, pinelands, cypress, mangrove, coastal lowlands, marine, and estuarine. The Florida Everglades was preserved as a National Park in 1934. Today, the area is also recognized as an International Biosphere Reserve, a Wetland of International Importance, and a World Heritage Site. Despite these legal protections, the Everglades is threatened by climate change and encroaching urban development. At the time of our conversation with featured artist Deborah Mitchell, she was advocating for the preservation of this fragile environment in her own work and facilitating other artists’ exploration as Executive Director of Artists in Residence in Everglades (**AIRIE**).

**Related episodes:** [Artist Residency in Everglades](#), [Live from the Everglades: Part One](#), [Live from the Everglades: Part Two](#), [Robert Chambers on Art, Ancient Plants, and New Technologies](#)

### Tree sitting

Dating back to the early environmental movement of the 1960s, tree sitting requires climbing skills and equipment as well as the gear and survival skills necessary to live high in a tree, sometimes for months at a time. Activists like John Quigley typically use tree sitting as a way to bodily impede the destruction of established trees that are threatened by new development and land-clearing practices. Tree sitters typically rely on human supporters on the ground for perishable food and other supplies.

### Sea Level Rise

A symptom of climate change, global sea level rise is driven by the expansion of the oceans as they warm and by the melting of the polar ice caps. **Sea level rise** can also be a local phenomenon, affected by regional ocean currents, upstream flood control, and erosion. A danger to both natural habitats and the human-centered environment, sea level rise can cause flooding, accelerate erosion, and increase exposure to shoreline storms. Around the world, the majority of the world's biggest metropolitan areas are located in coastal regions, placing major population centers at particular risk. In this playlist, we hear how artists invited to a special Rauschenberg Residency session are making art informed by climate science to raise awareness of this pervasive issue.

**Related Episodes:** [Art and the Rising Sea](#), [Ellen Harvey on Public Art and Climate Action](#), [Rachel Armstrong on the Idea Laboratory](#)

### Witch bottles

Although various cultures have created these talismanic objects since ancient times, witch bottles gained popularity during the 17th century in Europe and colonial North America. Witch bottles are apotropaic symbols, meant to ward off witches and other evil magic. They were traditionally filled with various symbolically potent substances and then buried near the home or structure they were meant to protect. In the “Rauschenberg Residency on Rising Water” episode, we hear artist and scientist Rachel Armstrong describe the witch bottles that she made as wards against climate change.



Artist [Simon Faithfull](#) explores the ruins of a 1970s [concrete dome house](#) off Marco Island, Florida, as part of the ArtSail Residency. Learn more about the ArtSail Residency in [Art and the Rising Sea](#).

## dig deeper

Suggestions for further reading to strengthen your engagement

Binlot, Ann. “Life’s a beach: exploring Robert Rauschenberg’s Floridian island home.” *Wallpaper*, January 16, 2017. [\[link\]](#)

Evans, Mel. “How Activists Made the Art World Wake Up to the Climate Crisis.” *Frieze*, February 11, 2020. [\[link\]](#)

Shaw, Anny. “Environmental art is on the rise – with a little help from Leonardo DiCaprio.” *The Guardian*, March 26, 2016. [\[link\]](#)

Souter, Anna. “Artists, Designers, and Activists Address Climate Breakdown in a Pop-Up Exhibition.” *Hyperallergic*, January 27, 2020. [\[link\]](#)

Tugend, Alina. “Can Art Help Save the Planet?” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2019. [\[link\]](#)

Wolfson, Sam. “From Baboon Raps to Extinction Gongs: Can Climate Art Save the World?” *The Guardian*, July 20, 2019. [\[link\]](#)

**Artists and Climate Change** maintains a comprehensive **Resources** page with links to sites for artists and arts initiatives.



Measuring sea level rise with Buster Simpson at the Rauschenberg Residency, Captiva, Florida, 2016.

## start a conversation

### Questions to spark discussion

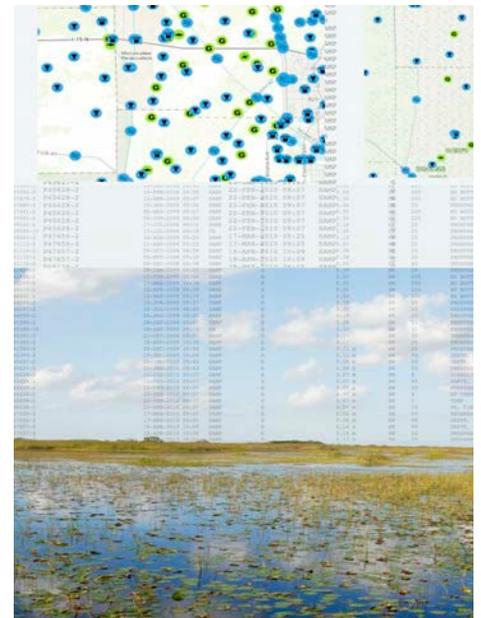
1. What is the relationship between science and art in the stories from this playlist? How are artists engaging with science and scientific methods to communicate ideas about environmental sustainability and climate change to a broader public?
2. Expanding on the first question, what is the relationship between creativity and documentation in the featured projects? How do artists like Deborah Mitchell negotiate the need to document (objectively record) their climate experiences and the desire to artistically interpret their findings?
3. What evidence of climate change do you observe in your community? Where do you see signs of global warming in your location? What objects would you contribute to Amy Balkin's *People's Archive of Sinking and Melting*? Why? (FYI: As of Summer 2020, the archive is still open for contributions. If you would like to submit an artifact, email [registrar@sinkingandmelting.org](mailto:registrar@sinkingandmelting.org).)

## write on

### An invitation to respond in writing

In the topical playlist inspired by the “Where Art Meets Activism” episode, we encounter a range of art geared towards environmental activism. Explore the photo gallery on [our website post](#) to view the projects we talk about. What do the images have in common with other climate art you've seen? Search “climate art” on the internet or click through the “Dig Deeper” reading suggestions above to look for patterns in the art and concepts represented.

Expand your search to environmental and eco-friendly architecture. What forms and symbols do architects use to signal their environmental engagement?



Artists Deborah Mitchell and Amy Balkin combine elements of data, documentation, and archival collection in their climate-driven art. Above: Deborah Mitchell, *Water Conservation area 3A*, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist. Below: Amy Balkin, *A People's Archive of Sinking and Melting* installation at the Rauschenberg Residency, Captiva, Florida, 2016.

## make it your own

A project to ignite critical thinking and creativity

### DIY Environmental Sculpture or Witch Bottles

In this playlist, you heard about artists confronting climate change on the local level. For instance, in the “Rauschenberg Residency” episode, we heard about artists in residence on the island of Captiva whose work addresses the issue of rising sea levels. What climate issues do you consider the most threatening to you and your community?

In this project, dive into one issue to create either an edible environmental sculpture (inspired by Jorge Menna Barreto) or a witch bottle (inspired by Rachel Armstrong). If you’re living in an agricultural community suffering the long term effects of monoculture farming, you might decide to build an edible sculpture to highlight your endangered landscape. Perhaps you live in a desert climate where droughts have intensified due to global warming. You might decide to make a witch bottle to protect the precious water in your arid geography.

If you decide to pursue an edible sculpture, listen again to our conversation with Barreto. How does he define an “environmental sculpture”? How can you craft your own locally-informed version so that it resembles a healthy landscape and eating it becomes a sculptural gesture?

If you choose to craft a witch bottle, listen to Armstrong describe the contents of her clear glass vessels and where she placed them. Following her model, what elements will you put in the bottle to symbolize the things you are trying to protect? What will act as your “purifier”? If you were going to bury your witch bottle in the customary fashion, where would you inter it?



Above: Jorge Menna Barreto, “Landscape Jar” at Jorge Menna Barreto’s *Restaura*, 32nd São Paulo Biennial, 2016; Below: Rachel Armstrong, witch bottle, created for Rauschenberg Residency, 2016.

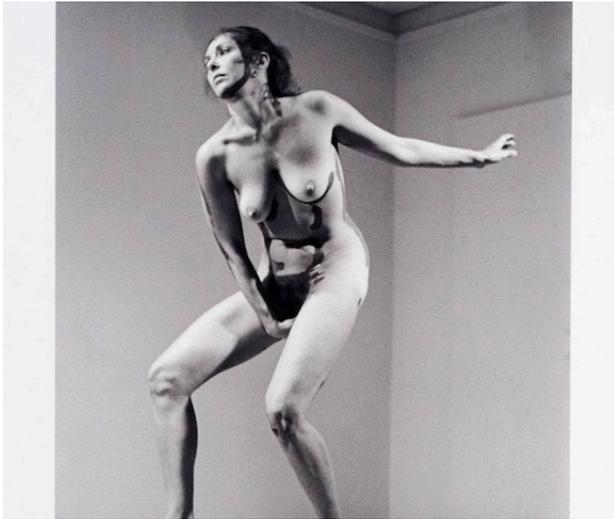
## 02 // art and feminism



Feminism takes on many forms and contains many sub-movements, both in the art world and beyond. But in the words of activist and author **bell hooks**, “Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” Curator Catherine Morris, artist Andrea Bowers, and performance artist Maria Alyokhina bring a strong feminist perspective to “Where Art Meets Activism.” In this topical playlist, we meet four other pioneering artists from three generations of feminist art. From the late Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019), who shocked the art world in 1975 by performing nude, unfurling a narrow roll of paper from her vagina, in the groundbreaking *Interior Scroll*, to millennial Allison Zuckerman (b. 1990), whose reappropriations of art historical tropes give rise to a bricolage of feminist figuration, each of the artists featured in this playlist takes on the patriarchal norms of the art world and society at large.

Cover image: Zoë Buckman, “Champ,” PULSE Art Fair, 2016.

# playlist



Carolee Schneemann, "Interior Scroll," 1975.

## 1 // Carolee Schneemann on Fearless Artmaking

**Carolee Schneemann** talks about painting, performance, censorship, and resistance in a telephone conversation we recorded just days before she received the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the opening ceremony of the **57th Venice Art Biennale**. Schneemann started as a painter in the 1950s. In the 1960s, she began using her own body as material in experiments with film, music, poetry, dance, and performance. For decades, she explored cultural and political taboos. Though Schneemann died in 2019, her revolutionary work continues to move us.

Original Publication Date: May 11, 2017

Sound editor: Guney Ozsan | Sound effects: *Interior Scroll*, *The Cave*, 1995, courtesy the artist and **Electronic Arts Intermix**



Micol Hebron, "Roll Call," 2014.

## 2 // Micol Hebron on Protesting Gender Inequality

**Micol Hebron**, a Los Angeles-based artist, is inspired by the work of Carolee Schneemann. We talk about her performance of **Roll Call** at the feminist exhibition **Auto Body, Miami**, in 2014. Building on Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, Hebron pulled a scroll from her own vagina, and read aloud from it the gender statistics of artists represented by 88 galleries in Los Angeles. In her long career of activist feminist art, Hebron often uses her body as a "conduit for information."

Original Publication Date: September 25, 2015

Sound Editor: Kris McConnachie



Zoë Buckman, "Grab 'Em By the Ballots," billboard created with For Freedoms, a public-art-as-civic-engagement initiative, Harrisburg, PA, 2016. Image source: Zoë Buckman.

### 3 // Zoë Buckman on Fight Mode

Artist **Zoë Buckman** is in fight mode. Her own boxing gloves figure in mixed media installations, spoken word, sound art, and public art projects that defend women's reproductive rights. British born, the New York-based multi-disciplinary artist explores themes of feminism, mortality, and equality. In **Champ**, she joins a pair of her own boxing gloves with a neon diagram of the uterus in poetic response to the attack on **Planned Parenthood** in the United States. A continuation of her ongoing series **Mostly It's Just Uncomfortable**, the sculptural installation raises questions about health care, sex education, and women's rights, while promoting female positivity.

Original Publication Date: January 25, 2017

Sound Editor: Guney Ozsan | **SWAMIJI**. spoken word performance audio courtesy Zoë Buckman



Allison Zuckerman, "Creation in the Earthly Garden," 2017.

### 4 // Paint and Pixels Power the Art of Allison Zuckerman

New York-based artist **Allison Zuckerman** explains what drives her desire to distort conventions of female beauty and push art appropriation to a new high. In bright, bold collages, she mixes paint with pixels to create absurd and exaggerated hybrids—women claiming their presence and power in the world. We meet during **her 2018 exhibition** at Miami's **Rubell Family Collection**. The paintings on view are the wild fruit of a 2017 summer residency, when she seized the moment to make her compositions larger than life.

Original Publication Date: September 2, 2019

Sound Editor: Joseph DeMarco | Images courtesy Allison Zuckerman and the Rubell Family Collection

## fresh art connects

Find out how the Fresh Art Team relates episodes in the archive to their personal perspectives, passions, and histories.

If art is the mirror of society, feminism is the reflection for artists Andrea Bowers, Micol Hebron, Carole Schneemann, Allison Zuckerman, and other influential voices we hear in the Fresh Art archive. The use of art as a tool for activism—a means to bear witness, call for change, illuminate imbalance, document stories, and confront inequities—is perhaps the most fundamental pillar of feminist art. Facing today’s global health crisis and in our current climate of public confrontation, I am reminded of just how much feminism pervades all aspects of everyday reality and women’s cultural presence in the world today—influencing the broadening embrace of equity, inclusion, and diversity, across race, gender, religion, and beyond.

Listening to the voices in these episodes, I am propelled back to January 21, 2017, to the worldwide [Women’s March](#), and the afternoon I spent in Miami’s Bayfront Park Amphitheater. Attending with one of the most influential women in my life, my partner, I remember the energy and emotion that filled the air that day as we gathered in hopes of not just uplifting women, but specifically Black women, queer women, Muslim women, young women, and future generations of women.

But I also remember the fear in that moment. In the wake of what PBS dubbed “[The Year of Mass Shootings](#),” months before some of the worst tragedies of gun violence, and following a tumultuous election that created such radical political unrest and uncertainty, we felt vulnerable about gathering, protesting, and speaking out. However, facing fear is the force of feminism—we achieve fearlessness by taking risks through activism.

Julia Rudo, Communications Director

Above: The Women’s March in Ann Arbor, Michigan, January 21, 2017. Image source: Sarah Rovang. Below: The Women’s March in Miami’s Bayfront Park Amphitheater, January 21, 2017. Image source: Julia Rudo.



## concepts

In this topical playlist we introduce the following concepts and histories

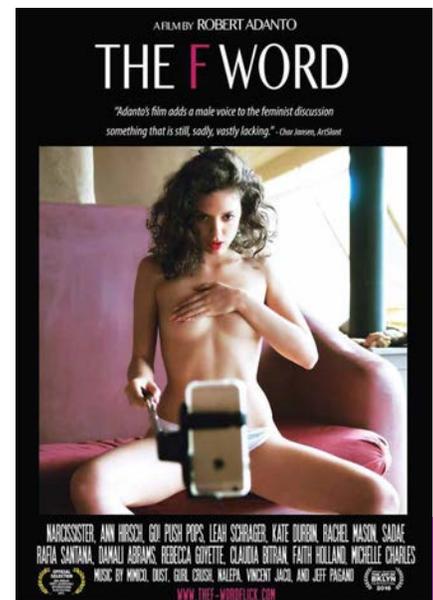
### Waves of Feminism

Scholars of feminism typically talk about the movement as having a series of “waves,” each characterized by certain values, beliefs, and priorities. First-wave feminism focused on the fight for female suffrage and other legal protections for women in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 1960s through the 1980s, second-wave feminists such as Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneemann fought more broadly against gender stereotypes, constrictive cultural norms, and systemic sexism, emphasizing solidarity for the first time across racial and cultural divides. The dawn of the internet age coincided with the birth of third-wave feminism in the 1990s, when the movement’s “grrl” culture promoted an even more inclusive, gender-fluid vision of equality drawing on postcolonial and postmodern theories. The fourth-wave feminists of today are consciously intersectional (see below), expanding the fight from women’s struggles and experiences to gender equality more broadly. The Me Too Movement (see below) has been an important facet of this most recent wave.

**Related episode:** [Fourth Wave Feminist Art](#)

### Essentialist Feminism

Some feminists, including several featured in this topical playlist, find power in the female body’s ability to have a monthly menstrual cycle, gestate life, and undergo childbirth. Calling attention to and celebrating these core attributes of womanhood were particularly important to earlier waves of feminism. New generations of feminist activists have argued that equating “womanhood” with certain biological and anatomical features (i.e. an “essentialist” view of who is female) excludes a wide range of woman-identifying and non-gender-conforming people. Essentialist feminism has been called out for dismissing the experiences of transgender and gender-fluid individuals. At the same time, female reproductive rights and access to reproductive health care remain a critical flashpoint in the United States and in many other countries. Many feminists have moved to focus on how norms of gender performance are shaped by societal expectations. New inclusive terms, including “womyn” and “womxn,” are being increasingly adopted.



Poster art from first and fourth wave feminism. Above: Women’s suffrage poster, published by the Artists’ Suffrage League, 1909. London: Carl Hentschel Ltd. Image source: Cambridge University Library. Below: Poster for *The F Word*, a film by Robert Adanto about radical fourth wave feminist artists, 2015. Image source: Robert Adanto.

## Intersectional Feminism

An increasingly mainstream understanding of feminism took hold in the 1990s, with third-wave feminism. Intersectional feminists recognize that various markers of identity (including age, class, gender, race, sexuality, cultural background, and ability) overlap and shape our experience of the world. Pointing to the particular challenges and discrimination faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community who are also people of color, the ascendant **Black Trans Lives Matter** movement underscores the need for a radically intersectional feminism. This movement calls for white feminists to examine their privilege and complicity in perpetuating a white supremacist and **heteronormative** culture.

**Related Episodes:** [Ira Kip on She’Baltimore](#), [Fred Nauczyciel on Men in Heels](#), [Athi-Patra Ruga on Global Human Rights](#), [Patricia Cronin on Making Art History](#)

## Me Too movement

The Me Too movement calls out sexual harassment and abuse, and provides support and solidarity for survivors. Founded in 2006 by activist and survivor Tarana Burke, Me Too (also known as #MeToo) began as a movement oriented towards empowering women of color and sexual abuse survivors in low-income communities. The movement gained global traction in 2017 following the myriad sexual harassment allegations against American film producer Harvey Weinstein and other prominent and powerful men. Actress and abuse survivor Alyssa Milano posted on Twitter, “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” That invitation sparked an unprecedented response, when women working in a range of professions shared their experiences online. As **Burke describes**, “What started as local grassroots work has expanded to reach a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to de-stigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of sexual violence worldwide.” Andrea Bowers and Zoë Buckman directly engage Me Too in their work.

**Related episodes:** [Jillian Mayer on the Nude Selfie Project](#)



Patricia Cronin, *Shrine for Girls*, (Chibok), Chiesa de San Gallo, Venice, Italy, 2015. Detail of an installation that transformed church altars into shrines, memorializing the loss of young women’s lives and “unrealized potential” in a world where women continue to be disproportionately subjected to violence and unequal access to health care and education., Official Solo Collateral Exhibition, 56th Venice Art Biennale. Photo by Mark Blower. Courtesy of the artist.

## dig deeper

Suggestions for further reading to strengthen your engagement

Bender, Abby. “Judy Chicago’s Collaboration With Dior Is Beautiful, but Its Feminist Ambitions Are Questionable” (opinion). *Hyperallergic*, January 23, 2020. [[link](#)]

Brooklyn Museum. “Educator packet for the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago.” [[link](#)]

Cascone, Sarah. “Zoë Buckman Sends Post-Harvey Hollywood a Message With Her Public Sculpture of a Boxing Uterus.” *Artnet News*, February 27, 2018. [[link](#)]

Dafoe, Taylor. “Behind Artist Allison Zuckerman’s Rapid Rise From Gallery Assistant to the Rubell Family’s Newest Obsession.” *Artnet News*, December 5, 2017. [[link](#)]

Frieze News Desk. “Breastfeeding Mothers Protest at Mexico City’s Museum of Modern Art.” *Frieze*, November 26, 2019. [[link](#)]

Jones, Christopher P. “The Changing Status of Feminist Art History.” *Medium*, May 19, 2019. [[link](#)]

Solly, Meilan. “Carolee Schneemann Pioneered the Way Women’s Bodies Were Seen.” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 14, 2019. [[link](#)]

Stender, Oriane. “A Woman’s Work is Never Done (Or, Too Often, Is Done and Attributed to a Man)” (opinion). *Hyperallergic*, June 6, 2019. [[link](#)]

**Feminism & Art**, Art History Teaching Resources

**Feminist Art Coalition** Resources

**Feminist Art Resources in Education** (FARE)

## start a conversation

### Questions to spark discussion

1. Though Carolee Schneemann is best known for her performance of *Interior Scroll*, she describes how painting was the creative source and inspiration for all her work. Micol Hebron reenacts Schneemann's famous work to honor that legacy. Allison Zuckerman's monumental paintings splice together art historical tropes and digital-age visual culture to draw on centuries of painting. Why do you think these feminist artists have seized on painting as an avenue for their work? In fact, painting is a medium that men have historically dominated. Women were typically depicted as objects in traditional Western painting. How does the reappropriation of painting reclaim power from its patriarchal origins?
2. Feminist artists and curators featured in this topical playlist and in "Where Art Meets Activism" all happen to be white. One of the biggest critiques of first- and even second-wave feminism (see Concepts, above) was that these movements responded predominantly to the concerns, issues, and experiences unique to white women. More recent iterations of feminism have stressed intersectionality, or the idea that other markers of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality also color an individual's experience as a gendered person. Yet, "white feminism" still persists today. How do the voices from this playlist and the episode represent an intersectional perspective? How might aspects of their work be critiqued as "white feminism"?



Top: Allison Zuckerman, *Athenian Scholars*, 2019. Image source: [allisonzuckerman.com](http://allisonzuckerman.com). Bottom: Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1509-1511. Image source: [Wikipedia](https://www.wikipedia.org).

## write on

An invitation to respond in writing

The American painter Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986) largely **rejected the term “feminist”** and frequently expressed discomfort with being referred to as a “woman artist.” O’Keeffe regarded being a woman irrelevant to her skill as a painter. Yet, as a young person, O’Keeffe protested in support of women’s rights. She also directly and indirectly enabled the careers of other women artists. She is represented as **the final “dinner guest”** in the historical lineup of great women in Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*. How important is the label of “feminist” for an artist? How can an artist be a “feminist” without accepting that label explicitly? Further, does a “feminist artist” necessarily have to make “feminist art”? What is “feminist art,” in your opinion?

Listen back to the topical playlist and to the relevant segments in “Where Art Meets Activism” as you consider these questions.

## make it your own

A project to ignite critical thinking and creativity

### Fourth-Wave Dinner Party

In “Where Art Meets Activism,” curator Catherine Morris describes how Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) made available over a thousand biographies of significant women “in a pre-Internet, pre-Google, pre-Wikipedia age.” Today, fourth-wave feminist artists and activists are using the internet as a tool to question, oppose, and dismantle the patriarchy. New voices and sub-movements within the broader umbrella of feminism have emerged since the debut of *The Dinner Party* over forty years ago.

How would you re-imagine *The Dinner Party* in the present moment? What media would you use? How would your installation occupy a physical or digital space (or both)? Whose names would you include? (Click [here](#) for a complete list of the women represented around *The Dinner Party* table and on the Heritage Floor.)

As you conceive the design of your updated *The Dinner Party*, hear what **Judy Chicago has to say** about the symbolism of her original work. How can your own artistic methods, forms, and curatorial choices communicate a new vision for what feminism might be in the 21st century?



Georgia O’Keeffe, *Series I White & Blue Flower Shapes*, 1919. Georgia O’Keeffe Museum; Gift of The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. 2006.5.87. Throughout her career, artist Georgia O’Keeffe made work, such as the one shown here, that many critics read as abstractions of female sexuality. O’Keeffe resisted those readings, claiming that her imagery stemmed from other sources, including emotion, nature, and music.

## 03 // art and politics



In “Where Art Meets Activism,” Ralph Rugoff, Gary Carrion-Murayari, Manolis D. Lemos, Tania Bruguera, Maria Elena Ortiz, and Maria Alyokhina share their perspectives on issues including immigration, financial reform, free speech, and human rights. This topical playlist introduces artists who are breaking down walls and transgressing borders, questioning divisions between insiders and outsiders, us and them, self and other, to propose an alternative politics of radical inclusion.

Cover image: Martha Wilson as Donald Trump, 2016. Courtesy of Martha Wilson and P.P.O-W, New York.

# playlist



Mark Bradford, with participants in "Process Collettivo," Bradford's project for the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017.

## 1 // Mark Bradford Connects Art with the Real World

We meet Los Angeles based artist **Mark Bradford**—known for connecting art with the real world—when he represents the United States in the **57th Venice Art Biennale**. While preparing for **Tomorrow is Another Day**, an exhibition of his signature layered abstractions, he launched a collaboration with Venice social cooperative nonprofit **Rio Terà dei Pensieri**, offering employment opportunities to men and women incarcerated in Venice. Titled **Process Collettivo**, Bradford's project forges a relationship with this marginalized community that raises awareness of the penal system and introduces a new business model. The project reveals the artist's strength as a culture maker; he acts on his belief that contemporary artists have the power to reinvent our world.

Original Publication Date: September 24, 2018  
Sound Editor: Jonathan Pfeffer



Martha Wilson as Barbara Bush. *Upstream Arts, Staten Island C.T.V, March 11th, 1991. Courtesy of Martha Wilson and P-P-O-W, New York.*

## 2 // Martha Wilson on Political Performance Art

Artist **Martha Wilson** talks about her political performance art and why she took on the guise of Republican candidate Donald Trump during the 2016 United States Presidential election season. Wilson is a pioneering feminist artist known for her politically charged photography, video, and performance work. She's founder of **Franklin Furnace**, an artist-run performance and exhibition space in New York City. Listen to this episode to learn how America's Culture Wars (see Concepts, below) have sparked her political satire for decades and hear the artist's impersonations of Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, Tipper Gore, and Donald Trump.

Original Publication Date: November 3, 2016  
Sound Editor: Guney Ozsan

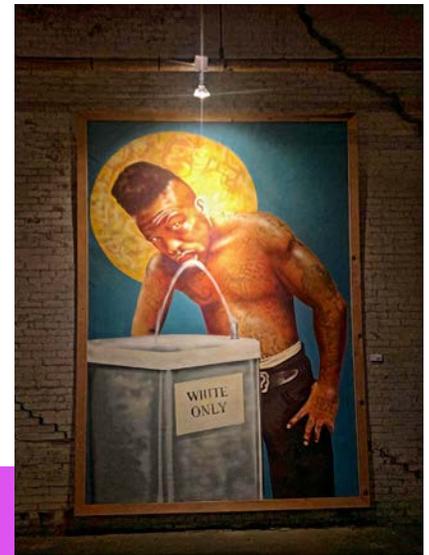
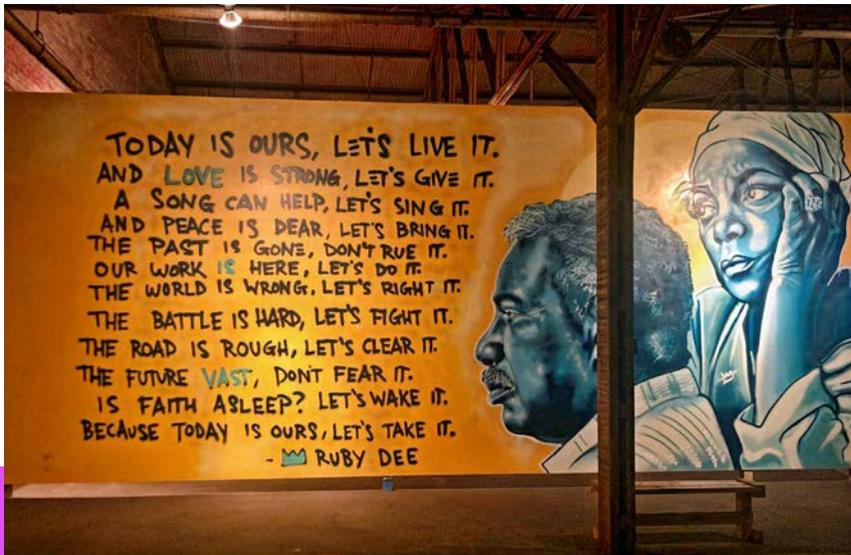


Athi-Patra Ruga, "The Future White Women of Azania," (performance video still), 2016. Courtesy of The Bass Museum of Art.

### 3 // Athi-Patra Ruga on Global Human Rights

South African artist **Athi-Patra Ruga** talks about the **fantastical multimedia performance project** that the **Bass Museum of Art** invited him to present on Miami Beach. Choreographed with local dancers, **The Future White Women of Azania** is a jubilant ceremonial enactment. The performance makes a vivid statement about human rights. The artist immerses us in the fantastical rituals of a utopian world where all are free to reveal their personal identity. He distances himself from what he considers the drag cliché of flamboyant cross-dressing—opting, instead, to focus on shape shifting. Presented in Africa, Europe, and the U.S., Ruga's serialized performance always takes place in the highly symbolic kingdom of **Azania**. Azania was the name given to the southern tip of Africa in 14th-century accounts of travel to the continent. During the **Apartheid era**, **Black activists in South Africa** referred to their country as Azania to claim its power as their own.

Original Publication Date: March 14, 2016  
Sound Editor: Guney Ozsan



## fresh art connects

Find out how the Fresh Art Team relates episodes in the archive to their personal perspectives, passions, and histories.

In my heart, this playlist echoes the voice of Tupac. Late, great poet, influencer, and lyricist Tupac Shakur (1971-1996) used his platform to highlight the marriage of art and activism. Embracing this duality, his art puts a mirror in front of society to create a context for future conversations.

The song “Words of Wisdom” appears on Pac’s first album *2Pacalypse Now*, released in 1991. In this song, Tupac explicitly reveals America’s deep-seated racism and emphasizes the mistreatment and insidious, systemic marginalization of Black people. In the opening bars, jazzy horns of the Harlem Renaissance float over the bounce of hip hop to lure listeners into a false sense of security. Then Tupac’s opening lyrics hit with the brutal truth: that America is finding “a way to eliminate the problem [troublesome Black youth] one by one.” This sentiment flows through the veins of each verse, monologue, and sonnet in this song. “Look!” he implores in the embedded sonnet—the white patriarchal supremacy that seeps through America’s inception has festered and created its greatest nightmare: Black reign. It is this very idea of Black power and activism that scared the KKK and continues to frighten hardcore white supremacists, casual racists, and bystanders. Holding up that mirror to reveal the ultimate fragility of white dominance paves a way for how we can have effective conversations today and tomorrow. Taking the role of judge in a spoken word interlude, Tupac charges America with rape, murder, assault, oppression, punishment, robbery of history, and false imprisonment. These monumental indictments still ring true, which is how Pac, and other artists, provide us with the answer to the question: “where do we go from here?” Tupac’s “Words of Wisdom” is evoked in this playlist as the featured artists use their platforms to shed light on cultural injustices. From parodying presidential grotesqueness to ridding society of “marginalization,” art speaks volumes, articulating ideas that transcend everyday language. It responds to our need for direction by silently shouting, “*this* is where we need to go.” Art builds the bridge between the stony road of Black history and the pathway of justice. This playlist charges me to use my poetic voice to speak up; we were born for such a time as this.

Jahné King, Fresh Art Contributor

Photo: Brandan “B-mike” Odums, Studio BE, New Orleans, LA. Image source: Jahné King.

## concepts

In this topical playlist we introduce the following concepts and histories

### Apartheid

Apartheid, the Afrikaans word for “apartness” was an official policy of racial segregation in South Africa from 1950 through the early 1990s. With some parallels to the segregation practiced in the Southern United States under **Jim Crow**, apartheid divided all South African citizens into four racial groups. Those categories determined entirely where citizens could live and work, whom they could marry, and the kind of education they received. The majority of privileges and land were accorded to whites, who made up a small minority of the country’s total population. Escalating internal resistance and international sanctions in the 1980s forced the conservative, racist National Party, which instituted apartheid and kept a stranglehold on South African politics for several decades, to end apartheid and form a new constitution. Athi-Patra Ruga’s *The Future White Women of Azania* harkens back to the country’s freedom struggle, when the **Pan-Africanist Congress** rejected the name “South Africa” as a vestige of European colonialism in favor of “Azania.”

**Related episodes:** **Donna Kukama on Unfinished Stories, Live from DAK’ART 2018, Anawana Haloba on Vanishing Cultures**

### Culture Wars

Political performance artist Martha Wilson has been satirizing the United States’ “culture wars” since the 1980s. Although the term “culture war” had been used before, it rose to prominence following the publication of sociologist **James Davison Hunter**’s 1991 book **Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America**. The 1980s and 1990s in the United States saw increasing political and social polarization along moral fault lines such as censorship, abortion, LGBTQ rights, separation of church and state, and firearm policy. Political figures and commentators exacerbated these rifts by framing a struggle over American morality in terms of secular versus religious and progressive versus traditional. The often hysterical character of this rhetoric comes to light in Wilson’s impressions, as she takes on the role of various “culture warriors” such as First Ladies Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush. Wilson’s timely satire of the 45th U.S. President Donald Trump captures the 2020 presidential election year’s escalating culture war in the United States. Conservative rhetoric has been described as pitting a discourse of racism, xenophobia, and nationalism against urgent calls for racial equity, social justice, and a more inclusive democracy.

**Related Episodes:** **Nato Thompson on Culture as Weapon, Charles Gaines on Philosophy and Politics in Conceptual Art**



The entrance to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa is framed as a processional route in which visitors walk “alongside” representations of people of all colors up a long ramp symbolizing South Africa’s transition from apartheid to a fully inclusive democracy. Image source: Sarah Rovang, 2018.

## Dreamers

Named for the **Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act**, which has been proposed in several different forms since 2001 but never signed into law by congress, Dreamers are young immigrants to the United States protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). President Donald Trump announced on September 5, 2017 that he was ending DACA, which left Dreamers unsure of whether they would be able to continue lawfully working and attending school, or whether they would face deportation. On **June 18, 2020**, the Supreme Court ruled that the executive branch could not immediately end DACA, citing lack of reasoning behind the decision. The political debate around DACA and the Dreamers reveals the tenuous status of both documented and undocumented immigrants in the United States more broadly. The Trump administration has made it increasingly difficult for foreign nationals from certain countries to gain legal status and citizenship in the U.S., and has made limiting border crossings from Mexico a major component of its platform and nativist rhetoric. Artist Andrea Bowers calls attention to the plight of the many undocumented immigrants in the U.S. with her neon sign installation, **Somos 11 Millones/We Are 11 Million**.

**Related Episode: SAIC—Imagining Tomorrow, Joana Choumali Embroiders Empathy**

## Greek debt crisis

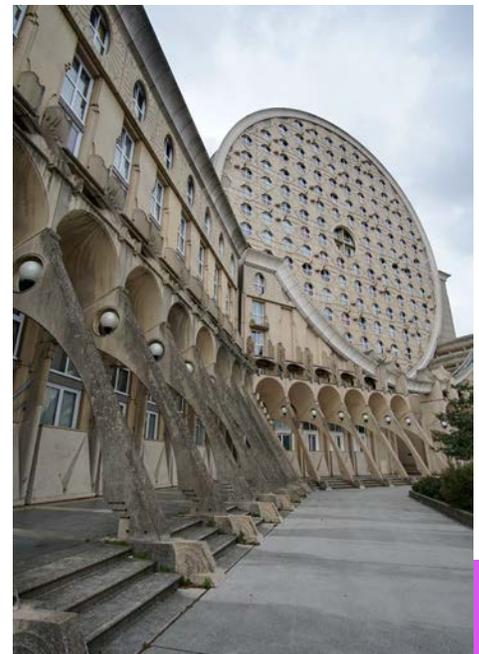
The Greek debt crisis began in 2008, ignited by the global recession and by structural issues within the Greek economy specifically and Eurozone monetary policy in general. In 2010, Greece reported that it might default on its debt to the European Union. Because that default could have wider repercussions across Europe, the EU lent Greece the money so that it could continue making payments. In exchange, Greece was forced to institute austerity measures, such as increased taxes and pension reductions, and other financial reforms. These stabilizing measures proved unpopular, sparking anti-austerity movements that culminated in protests and clashes with the police in Athens and other cities. Artist Manolis D Lemos questions the media's portrayal of Athens as a "riot town" in his 2017 *film, dawn and dusk look just the same (riot tourism)*.

**Related episodes: Sounds of documenta 14—A Tale of Two Cities**, and for more on responses to economic hardship, listen to **Juan Botta Makes One-Minute Movies in Puerto Rico**.

## Urban Fringe

Urban fringes, or the peripheral zones surrounding major metropolitan areas, have long housed politically marginalized and culturally subaltern communities. These zones have a variety of names, including “ghettos” and “banlieues.” Ghetto is believed to derive from the Italian word for “foundry,” since the first Jewish ghetto in Venice was built on the site of a foundry in the early 1500s. Mark Bradford’s engagement with the Venetian prison system taps into the history of that city’s ghettos, dismantling the social boundaries that still exist there. A “banlieue” can refer to any suburb of a French city. In recent decades, however, “banlieues” have become synonymous with disenfranchised communities, often with majority immigrant populations. Unlike many cities in the U.S., where more affluent white populations **abandoned inner city neighborhoods** (now frequently termed “ghettos”) in favor of the suburbs during the postwar period, French central cities are still largely desirable and increasingly expensive places to live. The impoverished ring of banlieues that surrounds Paris has been dubbed a “quasi-apartheid” zone. Minority communities—many originally from former French colonies—live there in **social housing estates** (also known as “grands ensembles” or “cités”), often with little access to public services. The strained relationship between central Paris and its banlieues gained international attention after the *Charlie Hebdo* terror attacks in 2015. In those attacks, the assailants were literal and cultural outsiders—French citizens born to Algerian parents who had lived on the outskirts of Paris. Artist Kader Attia explores social constructions of otherness in this landscape in his piece *Reason’s Oxymorons*, introduced by curator Ralph Rugoff in “Where Art Meets Activism.”

**Related episode:** Edwige Danticat on Toni Morrison’s work in Paris in **Cultural Complexity in Little Haiti**, **William Pope.L on Art and Endurance**, **Whithervanes: The Art of Anxiety**, **Filming Rhythm, Stories and Soul in the Toronto Subway**, **Marinella Senatore on Modern Life**



Arènes de Picasso, a housing development in the Parisian suburb, or *banlieue*, of Noisy-le-Grand, designed by Spanish architect Manuel Núñez Yanowsky and constructed in 1985. Notable for its futuristic postmodern architecture, the site has become a popular place for [fashion shoots](#) such as this one by designer Yannis Davy Guibinga. Image source: Sarah Rovang, 2019.

## dig deeper

Suggestions for further reading to strengthen your engagement

Bishara, Hakim. “3,800 Volunteers Have Joined an Artist to Challenge Trump’s Idea of a ‘Big, Beautiful Wall’ on the US–Mexico Border.” *Hyperallergic*, June 24, 2019. [[link](#)]

Denson, G. Roger. “Diego Rivera at MoMA Makes Us Ask, What Happened to the Radical Left in Art?” *HuffPost*, updated December 06, 2017. [[link](#)]

Ludel, Wallace. “Tania Bruguera Reportedly Detained by Cuban Authorities Hours Before Anti-Racism Protest in Havana.” *The Art Newspaper*, June 30, 2020. [[link](#)]

Schmelzer, Paul. “10 Artists on Rescinding DACA.” *Sightlines Magazine* (Walker Art Center), September 15, 2017. [[link](#)]

Steinhauer, Jillian. “President Trump Has Inspired Art. That’s Not Always a Good Thing.” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2019. [[link](#)]

Swanson, Carl. “Is Political Art the Only Art That Matters Now?” *Vulture* (first appeared in the April 17, 2017 edition of *New York Magazine*). [[link](#)]

Wilkinson, Alissa. “The New Deal’s Arts Projects Have Lessons for 2020.” *Vox*, June 22, 2020. [[link](#)]

“Art and Political Commitment,” *Art History Teaching Resources*. [[link](#)]

*Center for Contemporary Political Art*. [[link](#)]



Mark Bradford with Anita Hill, U.S. Pavilion Opening, 57th Venice Biennale, 2017. Read excerpts of an interview with activist attorney Anita Hill and Bradford at [Artspace.com](https://www.artspace.com).

## start a conversation

### Questions to spark discussion

1. What is the political power of dress and costume? Athi-Patra Ruga, Martha Wilson, and William Pope.L (in the episode **William Pope.L on Art and Endurance**) harness clothing as a mode of shape-shifting and transformation to make strong political statements that defy gender norms in their disparate performance art. When have you dressed to make a political statement? What did you wear, and what effect did it have?
2. Contemporary art, perhaps even more so than art of previous periods, has a reputation of being abstract, conceptual, and sometimes elitist. But Mark Bradford argues that the upper classes shouldn't have a monopoly on the important ideas often expressed in contemporary art. He strives to bring these art into his own community, in one instance, "giving an art talk in a church." What do you think that contemporary art has to offer outside the art world? How might greater art literacy affect other forms of public discourse, including conversations around political issues?



Costumed dancers weave through the neighborhoods of São Paulo in a politically-charged parade that marries aspects of a Brazilian *festa de debutante* with contemporary activism. William Pope.L, *Baile*, 32nd São Paulo Biennial, 2016.

## write on

### An invitation to respond in writing

When we talk about the borders that divide us, big, symbolic physical walls often dominate the political conversation, such as the Berlin Wall or the controversial border wall between Mexico and the U.S. But there are plenty of other walls that often go unremarked. Legal barriers, prison walls, and entrenched ideas about race and gender also play a powerful role in determining who “belongs” and who doesn’t in our society. What “walls” (physical, legal, or societal) are the artists in this topical playlist and in “Where Art Meets Activism” attempting to dismantle? How are they using art to do that?

What negative barriers exist within your own community? How might activist art help to call attention to those barriers, or even start to break them down? You might take inspiration from Fresh Art Contributor Jahné King (see “Fresh Art Inspires Me” on page 45), who draws a connection between the artworks featured in this topical playlist and Tupac’s 1991 song “Words of Wisdom.” Is there a particular song or artist whose lyrics have inspired *you* to fight for change—to challenge barriers or tear down walls? How could that music take form as art that calls attention to these physical and cultural divisions in our society?

## make it your own

A project to ignite critical thinking and creativity

### The Art of Protest Signs

Artist Andrea Bowers takes the visceral sentiments of activism—those thoughts and feelings most commonly expressed on cardboard protest signs and handmade posters—and transforms them into permanent installations. In this act, ephemeral signage is transformed into something lasting, eye-catching, and monumental. For instance, in the work *Somos 11 Millones/ We Are 11 Million*, Bowers heightens the visual impact of a message about undocumented immigrants in the United States by presenting it as an illuminated neon billboard. In Bowers's *Trust Women*, colored LED lights spell out an anti-misogynist command in the style of a classic theater marquee.

Review collections of recent protest posters such as [this one from Rolling Stone](#) or [this one from HuffPost](#). Find a message that speaks to you, or use let them inspire your own protest message.

Plan a hypothetical artistic installation based on your message. Will you reproduce the words themselves, as Bowers often does, or will you find an abstract way to represent them? What materials, colors, and forms will depict your message? Think about your target audience as you consider where you will display your creation. Who will see it if you install it inside a gallery or a museum, beside a busy highway or on the side of a prominent civic building? How about **emblazoned as skywriting** or **painted on a city street**? Think about the emotional tone of your message, too. Does your message aim to change minds, raise awareness, or incite righteous anger? How do representational choices and your installation site elicit the response you hope to spark?

Create a sketch, collage, or 3D model to represent your installation in situ. Then, write a short statement about what inspires your piece and what effect you hope that your art will have on viewers.



Andrea Bowers, *Trust Women*, 2018  
Image source: [Andrew Kreps](#).



Dive into activist art with this special edition of Fresh Art’s Research Guides. Find out how the voices of curators and artists featured in “Where Art Meets Activism” spark topical playlists themed around **art and the environment, feminism, and politics.**

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