

Arts and Activism:
Examining the relationship between activism, the
institution, and the arts administrator

BY KAREN TARKULICH

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Karen Tarkulich

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between art institutions and activism through the eyes of artists creating work that is socially minded with a particular emphasis on determining what that means for those administrators working within art institutions. My research focused on working artists in a range of disciplines including visual art, theater, music and education. Using interviews, I try to determine any common themes or insights when it comes to terminology, experiences and advice these artists can lend to administrators. My findings emphasized the importance of leadership, staff and mission when it came to whether or not an administrator or an institution is capable of taking on activism in an artistic context. The research also found no consensus on whether or not it was possible in the first place to create socially engaged work within any institution: some interviewees thought it possible, others impossible. The research conducted also found that many interviewees agree that facilitators and administrators need to recognize their own privilege and know when to back off.

INTRODUCTION

Art and activism: two things that many people paying attention to either the art world or the activist world see together with some frequency.

In our current times in the United States, we're seeing terms like 'artivism' and 'artistic activism' thrown around with a greater frequency to describe individual actions, typically occurring independently of a formal organization or institution. What about, however, the relationship between art and activism and institutions? Specifically, what about the relationship with arts organizations?

What I found was a lot of discussion about the relationship between art and activism, but not too much information or discussion around the roles of institutions and the individuals within those organizations with activism and art. How should institutions and organizations interact with activism and art? Should they interact at all? What should or could or does that interaction look like?

I took the question directly to a number of artists who create work that by many or some could be categorized as art with a political bent to try to uncover what the role of the institution and the people within in them could or could not be when it comes to art and activism. Through a series of interviews, I worked to uncover that relationship to determine how individual administrators working within larger organization could or should interact with art and activism.

SECTION 1: DEFINING TERMS

Before combining activism and art to see where they intersect, we should first look at them separately to see where the two ideas are, perhaps, different.

ART

Art is a term that has a thousand definitions, but we will not spend time trying to define the multitudes. That said, there are a few particular definitions of ‘art’ that are important to consider in our larger discussion of art and activism. The first of these definitions is Lucy Lippard, and American writer, art critic, activist and curator, who defined art’s basic function as communication.¹ In 1995, Lippard defines art again as a “communicative exchange.”² Also important to this particular discussion is Cleveland’s definition (1999 or 2000) that “art is created where people come together.”³ Finally, Lippard reflected that “all art making is potentially an organizing process since good art is that which connects with artist’s experience to the experience of others.”⁴ For the time being, let’s simply say that art is whatever is labeled as such—either by a single person, by a small group, by everyone, by an artist, by a non-artist or anybody else.

ACTIVISM

In order to understand what activist art, political art or activism is, we need to understand what activism is. Lippard has said that there should be “a distinction between passive and active

¹ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 237.

² Lippard, Lucy. “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power.” In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis, 341-358. USA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995, 342.

³ Cleveland, William. *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America's Community and Social Institutions*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1992, 235.

⁴ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 296.

politics, between lip service and activism. To be against the status quo and to be for change are not always the same thing.”⁵ In this, Lippard equates activism with a desire for change of some kind, but does not elaborate much beyond that.

Other more explicit definitions of activism have been offered up. Demos describes activism as comprising the 'rebel creativity,' which he says is the heart of activism.⁶ Osborne (2001) contends that activism in our current understanding of the word is meant to refer to a desire for action and a high level of political commitment.⁷

Permanent Culture Now (PCN) has the most basic definition of activism, saying that “Activism is quite simply taking action to effect social change.”⁸ PCN elaborates that there are three distinct strands of activism important to make note of. The first strand demands solutions to contemporary issues by taking an oppositional stance to a mainstream policy or policies in the forms of protests, strikes, demonstrations etc. The second strand undertakes activism that manifests itself by creating alternatives to the dominant system like food co-ops, squats etc. The third strand is revolutionary and concerned with fundamental change of society and its major institutions, like anarchist groups who wish to see the destruction of capitalism.⁹

Important to note is that activism encompasses many actions--including protest and organizing. Not all activism is protest, sometimes it is critique, and sometimes it is other things.

Ella Baker defined organizing as being focused on the task of “bringing out the leadership

⁵ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 30 and 237.

⁶ Demos, TJ. “Between rebel creativity and reification: For and against visual activism.” *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 1(April 2016): 87.

⁷ Osborne, Richard. *Megawords: 200 terms you really need to know*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2001, 17.

⁸ Permanent Culture Now. “Introduction to Activism.” Accessed March 1, 2017. <http://www.permanentculturenow.com/what-is-activism/>.

⁹ Permanent Culture Now. “Introduction to Activism.”

potential in all people, building group-centered (as opposed to individual) leadership in communities that would do the ongoing work of changing people and institutions.¹⁰

DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP: ART + ACTIVISM + POLITICS

Lucy Lippard said it well when she said that “the relationships between art and struggle changes, according to the historical moment, the place and the issue. There is no clear model for what these artists are trying to do.”¹¹ It is difficult to define the relationships between art, activism and politics. We are now tasked, however, with trying to define the relationships between art, activism and politics and the terminology and scope that comes with it. At the top of the food chain before we get to art and activism, we have art that is socially engaged or socially engaged art. It’s important to note that a close cousin of socially engaged art is community art--some socially engaged art is community and vice versa, but not all community art is socially engaged and vice versa. Underneath that umbrella of socially engaged art falls three terms we’ll talk about in a little more detail--although there exist more--which are: political art, activism and activist art. For all intents and purposes, these three categorizations are basically the term, just labeled slightly differently. We’ll also examine protest art, which can fall under the umbrella of political art, activism or activist art.

Turning to two visual artists, Joseph Beuys and Barbara Kruger, who are widely regarded as creating works of art that are socially engaged or politically minded, we can start to examine the relationship between art, activism and politics. Joseph Beuys said in his document *Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum (Free People’s Initiative) June, 1971* “only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues

¹⁰ Payne, Charles. “Ella baker and models of social change.” *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 885-99.

¹¹ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 324.

to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART.”¹²

Barbara Kruger has said, “Look, there are politics in every conversation we have, every deal we make, every face we kiss. There is always an exchange of power, an exchange of power—it happens every minute I make art about power, love, life, and death.”¹³ Both offer a starting point to understanding the relationships between art, activism and politics, but don’t offer any explicit definition of what “political art,” “activist art” or activism could be.

The specific term “political art” has been defined in many ways. Lippard has said that political art “is moving to incorporate social involvement as well as social concern. It is an advocacy art, taking advantage of the traditional notion of art as passionate and subjective... Certainly it is clear that the development of an activist art is dependent on interactions with broader social movement.”¹⁴

The term “activist art” or “artivism” has also been defined in a variety of related ways. Currently, the most in vogue term to describe the relationship between art and activism is no longer “activist art,” but “artivism.” Artist Eve Ensler has said of artivism that “this passion has all the ingredients of activism, but is charged with the wild creations of art. Artivism — where edges are pushed, imagination is freed, and a new language emerges altogether.” Talking about hip-hop, Asante has said that:

"The artivist (artist + activist) uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression—by any medium necessary. The artivist merges commitment to

¹² Weintraub, Linda, Arthur Danto and Thomas McEvelley. *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970s-1990s*. Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc., 1996, 179.

¹³ Cullen, Moira. “Words, Pictures and Power.” *Affiche* 13, no 13 (Spring 1995): 36.

¹⁴ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 313.

freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination. The activist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation." ¹⁵

Elliot (2016) described activism as “the understanding that, in the absence of social consciousness, art cannot reach its full range of potentials; and without creativity, activism risks being one-dimensional and irrelevant.”¹⁶ Beverly Ray has defined it simply as “Political art serves as social commentary and protest” making explicit mention of art as protest, which I don’t believe all political art is doing.¹⁷ Lippard has the take that “activist art is not only “oppositional,” although it is usually critical in some sense.”¹⁸ Goldbard says that activist art is sometimes called “the movement for cultural democracy... [That provides] a developing, shared consciousness whose impact we can’t predict...a kind of consensus in practice that is now at a stage of consciousness-raising and organizing.”¹⁹

The definition that gets closer to how the terms will be used here is Mesch, who said that political art seeks two things “to comment on, and also to elicit a reaction to, an issue or development that is of current concern to a social group in the decision-making process that is politics.”²⁰ Even closer still to our definition is what Lippard said that ““Political art doesn’t have to have political subject matter to have a political effect, so long as political awareness is a

¹⁵ Asante, Molefi K. *It's bigger than hip-hop: The rise of the post-hip-hop generation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008, 39.

¹⁶ Elliott, David J., Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman. *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016, 191.

¹⁷ Ray, Beverly. “Analyzing political art to get at historical fact: Guernica and the Spanish civil war.” *The Social Studies* 97, no. 4 (January 2006): 168.

¹⁸ Lippard, Lucy. “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power.” In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis, 341-358. USA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995, 342.

¹⁹ Goldbard, Arlene and Don Adams. “From the Ground Up: Cultural Democracy as a National Movement.” *Upfront* no. 8 (Winter 1983-84): 6.

²⁰ Mesch, Claudia. *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*. London, UK: IB.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, 12.

motivation.”²¹ For our purposes, we will define activism, activist art and political art as art that is simply created in reaction to a social or political issue. Art and activism together are reactionary to circumstances, but the motivations, intentions and goals of this activist art, political art or activism can range, which we’ll discuss in more detail. For simplicity’s sake, we will use all three terms interchangeably to mean the same thing.

Visual Activism

There are a range of categories that fall under “political art,” “activist art” and “activism,” including visual activism. Because the definitions of visual activism relate so closely to our understanding of political art, activist art and activism, we would be remiss not to present it. Demos (2016) defines 'visual activism' as "politically directed practices of visibility aimed at catalyzing social, political, and economic change" and as "politically directed practices of visibility aimed at catalyzing social, political, and economic change."²²

Protest/Resistance Art

Just as protest falls under activism, protest art falls under activist art. Elliot has said that “protest art tends to be interdisciplinary, with a focus on messaging rather than form/technical mastery, and, because public protests aim to have a widespread impact, protest art forms are often-times communally participatory acts.”²³ Protest art is most often understood to be art that is created to actively demonstrate--protest--against a particular issue or set of issues in order to accomplish particular ends. Elliot also goes into the forms that protest art can take, including performance-based, site-specific installations, graffiti and street art, and boundary-crossing art

²¹ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 33.

²² Demos, TJ. “Between rebel creativity and reification: For and against visual activism.” *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 1(April 2016): 102.

²³ Elliott, David J., Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman. *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016, 197.

genres, media and disciplines."²⁴ We will talk in more detail about forms that activist art can take more generally.

Community Art

Community art is, broadly, where art and community meet. But what does that mean, exactly? Knight defined community-based art as “Any form or work of art that emerges from a community and consciously seeks to increase the social, economic and political power of that community.”²⁵ Lippard contends that “some community art reflects its local situation, some stimulates active participation in its situation, and some criticizes and mobilizes for change in that situation.”²⁶ Cleveland defines community arts as those that art a catalyst for community development and community education.²⁷

Related to how community art is defined is the idea of community building. Mesch discussed how ““community-building” became an activist goal that sought to channel personal identifications and/or neighborhoods into participation in an agenda for social change, because of common interest shared by a community on specific social issues.”²⁸ Mesch goes on to discuss how new community-based activist art is being positioned in public spaces rather than galleries or museums, emphasizing the process of art.²⁹

Some community art is more political or activism driven than others; some community art is political or activist art, and some is not. Lippard has said that community artists vary in

²⁴ Elliott, David J., Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman. *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016, 197.

²⁵ Knight, Keith, and Mat Schwarzman. *Beginner's guide to community-based arts*. Oakland, California: New Village Press, 2005, xvi.

²⁶ Lippard, Lucy. “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power.” In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis, 341-358. USA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995, 349.

²⁷ Cleveland, William. *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America's Community and Social Institutions*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1992, 239.

²⁸ Mesch, Claudia. *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*. London, UK: IB.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, 7-8.

²⁹ Mesch, *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*, 10.

terms of their degree of politization, meaning that some art created by community artists will be more political than others.³⁰

³⁰ Lippard, Lucy. "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power." In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis, 341-358. USA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995, 349.

SECTION 2: WHO IS CREATING THE ART THAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT?

Before we can define the physical forms and shapes that activism-driven art can take, we need to address the critical question 'who is making activist art?'

Lippard defines three camps of individuals engaged in activist art. The first are those she sees as working in the mainstream or “high art” community, the second are “political artists” working together or within political organizations often both in and out of the mainstream art world and the third group being community artists working primarily outside the art world with grassroots groups. She also argues that there are two camps of artists--political artists and activists artists, who are often the same people, but that ‘political’ art tends to be socially *concerned* and ‘activist’ art tends to be socially *involved*.³¹

Lippard elaborates on this to say that, very loosely, ‘political artists’ create art with political subject matter or content in galleries and museums, while ‘activist artists’ face out of the art world, working primarily in a social or political context and are more likely to work with groups and less likely to create work for a museum or gallery.³²

Weintraub argues for the perspective of individuals engaged in activist art as coming from the art community, stating that there are politicians who enter politics to prescribe the

³¹ Lippard, Lucy. “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power.” In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis, 341-358. USA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995, 348-349.

³² Lippard, Lucy. “Too Political? Forget It.” In *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changes America*, edited by Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems and Philip Yenawine. New York: New York University Press, 1999, 49.

course of history, and those who enter to transfer power. Likewise, there are artists who create art to express their personal identities, and those who create art to address universal concerns.”³³

Demos argues that those making activist art as the so-called ‘artist-activists’ whose work operates primarily as visual activism, but also operates as part of a larger political activity and is tied to social movements.³⁴

For our purposes, we’ll say that the people making activist art only have to be those who create something that is intended to be both visual and creative and at the same time having some kind of political or social message that they wish to communicate.

³³ Weintraub, Linda, Arthur Danto and Thomas McEvelley. *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970s-1990s*. Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc., 1996, 178.

³⁴ Demos, TJ. “Between rebel creativity and reification: For and against visual activism.” *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 1(April 2016): 96.

SECTION 3: WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF ACTIVIST ART? WHAT DOES IT EXIST TO DO?

The most fundamental question that needs addressing is what the goals of activist art are, why it exists in the first place. If that can be understood, we can more readily understand who is or isn't creating it and what forms it can take.

One of many purposes activist art serves, Isaac Kaplan argues, is to re-contextualize the narrative surrounding a particular issue, like the photography Grey Eagle did with the protests surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline. Kaplan also posits that protest art can also be used as a means of financial support for a social movement, citing how people brought back works of art made at the protest camps and sold them at a benefit.³⁵

Vandagriff argues that the act of singing freedom songs was because of the belief that the music can be used as a tool to bind a group into a collective voice.³⁶ He also argues that protest music can be intended as direct calls to action, narratives, lamentations, that it produces thoughts, which must lead to actions.³⁷ Reagon argues that the performance of protest serves to foster group identity, link disparate peoples in their fights, and provide solace during difficult times."³⁸

³⁵ Kaplan, Isaac. "Native American Artists Shift Narrative of Standing Rock Pipeline Protest." Artsy. 2016. Accessed March 1, 2017. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-native-american-artists-shift-narrative-of-standing-rock-pipeline-protest/>.

³⁶ Vandagriff, Rachel. "Talking about a revolution: Protest music and popular culture, from Selma, Alabama, to Ferguson, Missouri." In *Lied Und Populäre Kultur/Song and Popular Culture*, ed. Knut Holtstrater and Michael Fischer (Germany: Zentrum für Populäre Kultur und Musik, 2015), 335.

³⁷ Vandagriff, "Talking about a revolution: Protest music and popular culture, from Selma, Alabama, to Ferguson, Missouri," 337.

³⁸ Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "The Civil Rights Movement." In *African American Music: An Introduction*, edited by Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, 598-623. New York: Routledge, 2006, 599.

Jasper argues that the role of music is forging identity of a collective.³⁹ Reed, talking primarily about music in American black civil rights journey, agrees with Jasper and expands the statement to argue that the primary uses of music were to mobilize, organize and used to create history and tradition.⁴⁰

Reed also talks about the feminist movement in the 1960s and how art was used as a tool for consciousness-raising, raising awareness and understanding of the issues at hand.⁴¹ Talking about Judy Baca and the Great Wall of Los Angeles, among other Mexican-American artists, Reed argues that this ‘new’ Mexican identity is the work of “countless organizers, including the cultural workers who made poems, paintings, dramas, movies, dances, and, most visibly and tangibly, murals, to represent the key components of this new identity.” He argues that the murals in particular were not only used to build this identity, but also served as a tool to unite different generations.⁴²

Along similar lines, Lampert argues that activist artists are making activist art in order to raise political consciousness and that they serve as a “communicative/esthetic bridge between the left and sympathetic artists who might otherwise have never addressed the subject.”⁴³

Lampert also argues that art can be a “graphic agitator.” Talking about late 1700s abolitionists in the US and UK, Lampert argues that they harnessed the power of print and illustration in order to “persuade a reluctant public to rally against an institution and ideology

³⁹ Jasper, James M. *The Art of the Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 192-194.

⁴⁰ Reed, Thomas Vernon. *The art of protest: Culture and activism from the civil rights movement to the streets of Seattle*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 13-15.

⁴¹ Reed, *The art of protest: Culture and activism from the civil rights movement to the streets of Seattle*, 76.

⁴² Reed, *The art of protest: Culture and activism from the civil rights movement to the streets of Seattle*, 120.

⁴³ Lampert, Nicolas. *A People’s Art History of the United States*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013, 266-267.

that had permeated and indoctrinated much of the American public for more than two centuries.”⁴⁴

Talking about the artists James Luna, Weintraub posits that Luna’s role and the role of the artist is to act as a catalyst for change.⁴⁵ Mesch posits agrees with this, stating that “artists still use their work to convince a larger public of injustice that necessitates a social change that would lead to the improved lived of these individuals, families, and nations, and even to the amelioration of global relations.”⁴⁶

Segal argues that art, at its essence, is a form of visual communication.⁴⁷ Mesch takes the argument that art is used as a communication tool, to emphasize that artists recognize and utilize the contextualization and description of their work to magnify the political impact of their work.⁴⁸

Staggenborg, Eder and Sudderth posit that music festivals, like the National Women’s Music Festival, serve to help individuals develop a feminist consciousness or identity, provide a retreat or reprieve to renew energy and mobilize individuals to action, provide new information, and arguments, and connect individuals to the larger movement.⁴⁹

Robertson and McDaniel propose that art can serve to recover lost histories and to deconstruct how history is recorded in order to change how we understand the present.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Lampert, Nicolas. *A People’s Art History of the United States*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013, 23.

⁴⁵ Weintraub, Linda, Arthur Danto and Thomas McEvilley. *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970s-1990s*. Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc., 1996, 102.

⁴⁶ Mesch, Claudia. *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*. London, UK: IB.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, 8.

⁴⁷ Segal, Joes. *Art and politics: Between purity and propaganda*. Amsterdam: AUP, 2016, 129.

⁴⁸ Mesch, *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*, 86.

⁴⁹ Staggenborg, Suzanne, Donna Eder, and Lori Sudderth. “Women’s culture and social change: Evidence from the national women’s music festival.” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 38 (1993-1994): 52-53.

⁵⁰ Robertson, Jean, and Craig McDaniel. *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art after 1980*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001, 133-135.

Eyerman argues that the goals of art in activist movements, generally, are to:

“Articulate as well as fuse a group, offering a sense of group belonging and collectivity as well as strength in trying situations, such as confronting violent resistance and oppressive authority. Through song, a collective, such as a movement, can objectify itself and its history, making it visible to others, as well as creating and establishing a sense of community. At the same time, such cultural expressions, texts and other material artifacts permit the presentation of the collective's view of events free from the censorship of the dominant culture. Finally, music and art can serve as a basis for recruitment and support, economic as well as moral, passive as well as active.”⁵¹

Talking specifically about African American freedom songs, Carawan and Carawan argues that they are sung to “to bolster spirits, to gain new courage and to increase the sense of unity. The singing sometimes disarms jail guards, policemen, bystanders and mob participants of their hostilities.”⁵²

Talking specifically about photography, Demos argues that the affective power of an image can inspire individuals to transform social issues.⁵³ Beverly Ray argues simply "political art serves as social commentary and protest."⁵⁴ Lippard posits that activist art exists to, among other things, provide financial support, communicate messages, public consciousness-raising and unlearning racism.⁵⁵ Clark argues simply that artists act as critics of society while also addressing issues of representation and to articulate revised narratives of national identity.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Eyerman, Ron. “Music in Movement: Cultural politics and old and new social movements.” *Qualitative Sociology* 25, no. 3 (January 2002): 447.

⁵² Carawan, Guy, and Candie Carawan. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Songs of the Freedom Movement*. New York, NY: Oak Archives, 2007, 7.

⁵³ Demos, T.J. “Between rebel creativity and reification: For and against visual activism.” *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 1(April 2016): 96.

⁵⁴ Ray, Beverly. “Analyzing political art to get at historical fact: Guernica and the Spanish civil war.” *The Social Studies* 97, no. 4 (January 2006): 168.

⁵⁵ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 84 and 154 and 244.

⁵⁶ Clark, Toby. *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997. P 10, 158, 35.

Eyerman argues that there is a difference between the purpose of art that is either time-based, like live performance, or not, like a poster--particularly when it comes to marginalized groups and subcultures. He argues that live performance and artistic interactions that involve face-to-face contact were central to the process of creating their collective identity, particularly in the case of white-power movements in the United States, because they historically had limited access to other art forms.⁵⁷

Adams states that art exists within a social movement to accomplish one of twelve tasks:

1. Providing a sense of togetherness, insiderness or solidarity for the movement
2. Means of communicating their worldview to a larger society
3. Raising political consciousness and conjuring up new modes of thinking
4. Help create a collective identity
5. As a vehicle for a movement to express their collective identity
6. To help mobilize and ensure the continuity of protest
7. Music from old social movements can inspire new ones
8. Music can stir up strong emotions useful to movement
9. Music can remove fear
10. Can allow people to express feelings
11. Art can generate financial and other resources useful for a movement
12. Cultural events such as the music festival provide an escape for participants, a retreat which leads to renewed feelings that social and political change is possible, creating the basis for political mobilization.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Eyerman, Ron. "Music in Movement: Cultural politics and old and new social movements." *Qualitative Sociology* 25, no. 3 (January 2002): 449.

⁵⁸ Adams, Jacqueline. 2001. "The makings of political art." *Qualitative Sociology* 24, no. 3 (September 2011): 314.

Sanger has a similar list to that of Adams, articulating that activist art serves to express feelings, forge individual and collective identity, create unity and community, symbolically transform feelings or perspectives, a tool for communication and engagement both within the movement and with the outside world, attract people of diverse backgrounds, stir up strong emotions useful to the movement, serves as an emotional outlet and generates financial resources.⁵⁹

Our definition of what the goals of activist art are is most similar to what Sanger and Adams bring together and more:

1. Creating togetherness/solidarity
2. Communicating both to the larger world and within a movement
3. Raising consciousness
4. Creating both collective and individual identity
5. Expressing identity and feelings
6. Mobilization of a movement and the individuals within it
7. Inspires new movements
8. Can create useful emotions, including bolstering spirits, removing fear and hostilities, provides escape and reprieve from harsh realities
9. Serves as financial resources
10. Transforming and re-contextualize existing feelings, perspectives and narratives
11. Attracting members to a movement and joining disparate members together, attracting a more diverse membership that can bridge divides in race, class, generation, sex etc.
12. Creating direct calls to action

⁵⁹ Sanger, Kerran L. "Functions of freedom singing in the civil rights movement: The activists' implicit rhetorical theory." *Howard Journal of Communications* 8, no. 2 (April 1997): 184-188.

13. Inspiring individuals to action

14. Unlearning untruths or bigoted tendencies towards a greater good

The short answer to the role and goals of activist art is that there are a myriad of different purposes that art serves when it comes to activism. Some forms of art accomplish different goals than others, some forms accomplish multiple ends at once, but to bring it all together: activist art accomplishes many different, useful things, within and for social movements.

SECTION 4: WHAT FORMS DOES ACTIVIST ART TAKE? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

To understand art with a political bent of any kind, we need to understand the forms that it can take. What does political art look like in practice? What are its forms? We find that there are a seemingly infinite number of possibilities for the ‘genres’ that political art can be. In order to be as inclusive as we can be, we’ll briefly go over many of the forms that political art takes.

The most comprehensive articulation of all the different forms political art can take was illustrated by Elliott, Silverman and Bowman who outlines a number of sub-categories of arts-based activism including: culture jamming, vandalism, puppetry, protest art, performance and guerrilla theater, and then a giant subcategory of “other” which includes:

“Spoken word, fake folk, hacktivism, impostors, pranks, zines, new media, site-specific digital installations, occupations, chants, virtual reality, voguing/whacking, drag, diaspora literature/theater, theater of the oppressed, feminist art, physically integrated dance, forum theater, hip-hop, jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, modern dance, contemporary dance, capoeira, and breakdancing.”⁶⁰

For our purposes, there are two very broad categories of political art that, in turn, encompass a whole lot of sub-categories: visual art and time-based art. Within time-based art we can include: plays and performances, guerrilla theater, demonstrations, culture jamming, rallies, parades, political writing and speeches, music, culture jamming, puppetry, dance, video and new media of all kinds, hacktivism, spoken word. Within visual art, we can include: graffiti and street art, murals, stickers, posters, symbols, site-specific installations, zines, sculpture, knitting, cartoons, painting, drawing, billboards, advertising.

⁶⁰ Elliott, David J., Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman. *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016, 198.

Time-based art

Plays/performances

Some of the most recognizable forms of political art are plays and performances. When putting a political bent to this, all you really have to do is create a script or direction for a play that has some kind of political motive. Yes, that's incredibly broad, which means that many, wildly different kinds of plays and performances can be categorized as political art. A performance can be anything from a recitation of a few lines to a dance with no words at all to a nuanced story with multiple characters--it really is kind of a limitless category in a lot of ways.

Let's first look at the different parts of a play that can be political art: the first being playwrights and the scripts that they create. Williams talks particularly of playwrights and argues that the myth a playwright creates was no less real than if it had actually occurred, stating that many political plays were "designed for the purposes of purgation and catharsis and intended, through stylistic incantations, to will into reality an actual revolution."⁶¹ Plays and performances, by nature, are written to create and showcase a reality that does not necessarily exist.

Sometimes a play has a script that is explicitly political and patrons opt in to seeing the performance. Other times, what's been termed "**guerrilla theatre**" occurs where a play or performance is brought to an unsuspecting public--like the no pants subway ride, where in other contexts (like your bedroom) it might not carry the same message.

Another popular political performance has historically been demonstrations, which can include political marches and rallies because of their performative aspect. Clark differentiates

⁶¹ Williams, Mance. *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement*. Westport: Greenwood P, 1985, 25.

between “artistic” performance and “street protest,” but argues that the two can and were brought together by American feminist activism in the late 1960’s in anti-war demonstrations.⁶²

A sub-category of performance that is often overlooked and not termed as ‘art’ per se is political writing, which includes speeches. For our purposes, we’ll say that all writing is art--not all of it is *good*, certainly, but it’s all creative and created. This definition broadens our understanding of political art and allows us to understand how demonstrations and rallies can be understood as political art.

Related to speeches is spoken word. Although not exactly just a performance and not exactly just a speech and not exactly just a recitation and not exactly just a poem, spoken word usually explicitly tackles an issue of some kind and makes it some of the most poignant and personal political art being created today.

Music

Much like a play can be written to include a particular message or its context can give it a particular message, music is another huge sub-category of political art. There is a long history of music being created with explicitly political messages as well as being the backdrop for plays, performances, rallies, new media and much more that are political in nature.

Culture Jamming

One particular kind of politically motivated art is culture jamming, but what is that exactly? Culture jamming and culture jammers can trace their roots back to the music group Negativland, who first introduced the idea of “culture jammers” or activists who altered billboards to subvert their meaning and constituted a rebranding strategy. Lasn expands this to explain that culture jamming includes a whole host of methods from defacement to parody to

⁶² Clark, Toby. *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997. P 149.

satire using the same techniques as the advertising industry itself.⁶³ Culture jammers are artists who according to Derry expose the ways in which “corporate and political interests use the media as a tool of behavior modification” and is a kind of “artistic terrorism” directed against the information society in which we live.⁶⁴

A much more succinct way of explaining culture jamming from DeLaure, Fink and Dery is simply:

“Commonly refers to a range of tactics used to critique, subvert, and otherwise “jam” the workings of consumer culture. Culture jamming commonly refers to a range of tactics used to critique, subvert, and otherwise “jam” the workings of consumer culture. These tactics include media pranks, advertising parodies, textual packing, billboard appropriation, street performance, and the reclamation of urban spaces for noncommercial use. Using various forms of semiotic defamiliarization, culture jamming seeks to interrupt the flow of mainstream, market-driven communications--scrambling the signal, injecting the unexpected, jarring audiences, provoking critical thinking, inviting play and public participation.”⁶⁵

A great example of culture jamming can be illustrated through a subset called ‘adbusting,’ which Lampert explains as when an individual creates a fake advertisement or logo in order to subvert the original image and its message.⁶⁶ Essentially, an artist uses existing media that is recognized--like the McDonalds logo--and subverts it by changing it something that still resembles the original media--like changing the logo to look like a person peeing the McDonalds logo--to make viewers do a double take.

⁶³ Lasn, Kalle. *Culture jam: The uncooling of America*. Toronto, Ontario: Torstar Syndication Services, a Division of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited, 1999, xvi.

⁶⁴ Derry, Mark. “The merry pranksters and the art of the hoax.” *New York Times*. December 23, 1990. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/23/arts/the-merry-pranksters-and-the-art-of-the-hoax.html?pagewanted=all/>.

⁶⁵ DeLaure, Marilyn, Moritz Fink and Mark Dery. *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2017, 6.

⁶⁶ Lampert, Nicolas. *A People’s Art History of the United States*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013, 299.

Visual Art

Visual art in pretty much any of its forms has at one point in time being used as political art. From posters to graffiti, most forms of visual art have been used to political means.

Symbols

Many times visual art is created for its symbolic value towards a political end: think the pink pussy hats or the American flag. These symbols can be knitted, painted, drawn, soldered, sawed, sculpted and more.

Visual Communication

Along the lines of being used as symbols, visual art is often created to communicate ideas. Art that falls under this category includes cartoons and all kind of advertising: from posters and magazine ads to billboards and public art monuments.

Graffiti and street art

Lippard broadly defines the term ‘streetworks’ to be either impermanent physical objects or remains, or performances which last only as long as the action and, ideally, leave no pollution behind.”⁶⁷ Within that category of ‘streetworks’ live street art and graffiti.

Street art and Graffiti are two huge sub-categories of visual art. Some people define graffiti as a sub-category of street art, while others see the two as entire separate from one another.

Speaking to their similarities, Miladi says that both street art and graffiti have “proven to be effective tools for breaking the government’s monopoly on information dissemination, public opinion and control over the communicative spheres.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 57.

Street art is often seen as synonymous with graffiti, when it is not. McDonald cheekily notes, however that “in many ways [street art and graffiti art are] indistinguishable, and many arts who make graffiti also make street art”⁶⁹

Street Art

Before digging too deep, let’s define what street art even is. Weisberg argues that on a very basic level, street art is art created for the general public to not just see, but to interact, understand what they are seeing and have an emotional response. Furthermore, the strength of street art is in its ability to captivate people as part of their day-to-day experience.⁷⁰

Maric describes street art as:

- “1. Street art incorporates a strong devotion to social activism (although this is not always the case, it seems that this was an attribute of artwork that survived the test of time),
2. Street art represents a phenomenon that is, through self-transformation, constantly transforming the reality of contemporary art and finally,
3. Street art, as a particular practice, has a role in shaping and constructing new cultural discourses.”⁷¹

McDonald argues that what distinguishes street art is its ability to provoke thought and action on social and political change, as well as to help the down trodden and minority groups, all while serving as a single artist’s voice trying to be heard and make a difference in the world. McDonald also argues that street art is generally seen as unsolicited art put into a public space

⁶⁸ Miladi, Nouredine. “Alternative fabrics of hegemony: City squares and street graffiti as sites of resistance and interactive communication flow.” *Journal of African Media Studies* 7, no.2 (June 2015): 130.

⁶⁹ McDonald, Fiona. *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present*. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013, 124.

⁷⁰ Weisberg, Jill C. “The Difference Between Street Art and Graffiti.” Schrift & Farbe Design Group. Last modified May 2012. Accessed March 1, 2018. <http://schriftfarbe.com/the-difference-between-street-art-and-graffiti/>.

⁷¹ Maric, Bojan. “What is Street Art and How Can We Define It?.” *Widewalls*. 2017. Accessed March 1, 2018. <http://www.widewalls.ch/defining-street-art/>.

that is not offensive, vandalistic or territorial. McDonald states that one of the distinguishing characteristics of street art is its use of multimedia to make artwork that typically makes social and political statements through juxtaposition of images plus words and phrases.⁷²

For our purposes, we'll agree with all these definitions and emphasize Weisberg's point that this kind of art is created for the general public. The form that street art can take is anything from murals to site-specific installation.

This distinction is important when we go on to talk about graffiti is or isn't. Weisberg states that the main difference between graffiti and street art is the intention and that graffiti writers do not care about whether the public understands or interacts with their artwork, but rather that other graffiti writers understand their tags.⁷³

Graffiti

What, then, is graffiti? Miladi likens graffiti to social media, arguing that at its core graffiti is something that can be viewed by an unlimited number of people from all parts of society, but does not define what it is, physically.⁷⁴ Thompson, Offler, Hirsch, Every, Thomas and Dawson lay out a more concrete definition, stating that graffiti is essentially just any kind of marking of public property, which can range from sophisticated stencils to more rudimentary and that it is frequently based on socio-political commentary. They also note an important component of graffiti--that it can be considered vandalism, but simultaneously that not all graffiti artists

⁷² McDonald, Fiona. *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present*. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013, 124.

⁷³ Weisberg, Jill C. "The Difference Between Street Art and Graffiti." Schrift & Farbe Design Group. Last modified May 2012. Accessed March 1, 2018. <http://schriftfarbe.com/the-difference-between-street-art-and-graffiti/>.

⁷⁴ Miladi, Nouredine. "Alternative fabrics of hegemony: City squares and street graffiti as sites of resistance and interactive communication flow." *Journal of African Media Studies* 7, no.2 (June 2015): 135.

commit acts of vandalism.⁷⁵ McAuliffe and Iveson takes a philosophical bent to their definition of graffiti, stating that graffiti fundamentally disrupts the aesthetic fabric of its urban environment, causing viewers to call into question the distinctions between private and public, legitimate and illegitimate expression, legal and illegal activities in the city, between art and crime.⁷⁶

Ley & Cybriwsky talking about graffiti from less of an arts perspective and more so from that youth living in what they call the “ghetto” argue that the intent of these graffiti artists is to leave a mark on an exotic space, to make a claim to the world outside of the ghetto.⁷⁷ They also argue that graffiti artists leave these marks because they are otherwise denied claim over the spaces and their marks are intended to allow them to claim control.⁷⁸ More explicitly, they state that wall graffiti is an indicator of turf ownership, that it is a means of communication someone’s claim to a space and their existence within in.⁷⁹ McDonald, talking about the origins of graffiti, states that ““statements made about ruling bodies are almost as ancient as writing itself. Graffiti in Pompeii and also in Athens would make accusations against rulers, or they’d support them or make rude suggestions for them.”⁸⁰ McDonald agrees with Ley and Cybriwsky, but elaborates to

⁷⁵ Thompson, Kirrilly, Naomi Offler, Lily Hirsch, Danielle Every, Matthew J. Thomas, and Drew Dawson. “From broken windows to a renovated research agenda: A review of the literature on vandalism and graffiti in the rail industry.” *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 46, no. 8 (October 2012): 1280-90.

⁷⁶ McAuliffe, Cameron, and Kurt Iveson. “Art and crime (and other things besides . . .): Conceptualising graffiti in the city.” *Geography Compass* 5, no. 3 (March 2011): 140.

⁷⁷ Ley, David, and Roman Cybriwsky. “Urban graffiti as territorial markers.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 64, no. 4 (December 1974): 492-493.

⁷⁸ Ley, “Urban graffiti as territorial markers,” 494-495.

⁷⁹ Ley, “Urban graffiti as territorial markers,” 496.

⁸⁰ McDonald, Fiona. *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present*. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013, 82.

argue argues that graffiti, in its essence, is used for two primary motives: for political slogans and protests, but also by gangs to mark their turf.”⁸¹

Our definition falls somewhere between McAuliffe and Iveson’s and that of Thompson, Offler, Hirsch, Every, Thomas and Dawson. Graffiti is simply a mark on a space that was made by someone after a space was originally built, with the intent to communicate either through words or aesthetics with whoever happens to see their mark.

Propaganda

We cannot talk about art that is remotely political without discussing propaganda and how that fits into this discussion. Art--in many forms, if not all--has been used by individuals or groups of individuals as a form of propaganda.

There are countless examples of propaganda, but often it is not talked about from the perspective of the propaganda as art. Most often, propaganda is associated with a political agenda particularly evident during times of war. In the United States, art and propaganda have a documented history going as far back as the 1700s with abolitionists in the US and the UK, when visual artists were employed to attempt to persuade reluctant publics to rally against an institution and ideology in favor of an antislavery message.⁸² During WWII, both the US and USSR began to deploy modern art politically to establish themselves as superpowers and during the Cold War, both the US and the Soviet States used art to persuade the world of their identification with particular sides of conflict.⁸³ Political cartoons, posters and images, TV and radio spots have historically been employed with the intent to propagate. Mesch posits that in order to make their politics visible, many artists turn to either methods that convey the “quick

⁸¹ McDonald, Fiona. *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present*. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013, 104.

⁸² Lampert, Nicolas. *A People’s Art History of the United States*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013, 33.

⁸³ Mesch, Claudia. *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*. London, UK: IB.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, 4.

legibility of illusionism” or a more traditional text-and-image combination to get their message across.⁸⁴

But beyond where we’ve seen propaganda, we need to determine what exactly what *is* propaganda? Qualter defines propaganda as “the deliberate attempt by some individual or group to form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups by the use of instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be desired by the propagandist.”⁸⁵ Most important to the definition, however is Qualter’s elaboration that propaganda is that it is an attempt at public-opinion control.⁸⁶ Artist Barbara Kruger defined propaganda as something that “indoctrinates youth, censors news, stages parades, and produces demonstrations. It regulates art, literature, film, radio, music, and theater.”⁸⁷ Talking about feminism and feminist art, Lippard states that “the goal of feminist propaganda is to spread the word and provide the organizational structures through which all women can resist the patriarchal propaganda and denigrates and controls us even when *we know* what we are doing.”⁸⁸

This begs the question: can art inherently be propaganda? For the purposes of this discussion, the answer is: no that art cannot inherently propaganda. It can be *used* as propaganda. It can be taken out of its original context and *be used as* propaganda. It can be created with the *intent* to use it as propaganda. That said, you could also take a form of art that was once used as

⁸⁴ Mesch, Claudia. *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*. London, UK: IB.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, 9.

⁸⁵ Qualter, Terence H, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc, 1962, 27.

⁸⁶ Qualter, Terence H, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*, 27-28.

⁸⁷ Weintraub, Linda, Arthur Danto and Thomas McEvelley. *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society 1970s-1990s*. Litchfield, CT: Art Insights, Inc., 1996, 192-193.

⁸⁸ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 116.

propaganda and use it for something else--for education, for aesthetic pleasure, for a whole host of other reasons.

The difference between propaganda and art with a political bent in general is intent. Much like all squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares, all art used as propaganda falls under the umbrella of political art, but not all political art is propaganda. I would argue that the main distinction is that political art is often intended to educate and enlighten without any kind of deliberate attempt at controlling larger, public opinion. Qualter would agree with this distinction between education and propaganda, stating, "Anything that is taught to anyone, anywhere, is propaganda if--but only if--it is deliberately disseminated by someone conscious of its propaganda function."⁸⁹ Lippard posits that effective propaganda must explicitly be aimed at a specific audience, "not just shot into the air to fall to earth we know not where."⁹⁰

Intent is not the only thing that determines whether art functions as propaganda: propaganda can be intended to be propaganda, but fail to be propaganda if the context is not conducive.

An important distinction is that art can be intended as propaganda and ultimately fail to be so. Qualter says of propaganda that in order to be successful and to be effective, it must be "seen, remembered, understood and acted upon."⁹¹ Clark would also agree, citing Abstract Expressionism as an example of how "propaganda in art is not always inherent in the image itself, and may not stem from the artist's intentions. Rather, art can become propaganda through

⁸⁹ Qualter, Terence H. *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc, 1962, 14-15.

⁹⁰ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 120.

⁹¹ Qualter, Terence H., *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*, xii.

its function and site, its framing within public or private spaces and its relationships with a network of other kinds of objects and actions.”⁹²

By our definition, then, there’s a whole lot of political art that is propaganda and there are a whole lot of people making what our definition would classify as propaganda, but the artists themselves would never classify as propaganda. Lippard argues that there are many artists “who try to convey their meanings directly are often accused of being propagandists, and their accessibility is thus limited to those not afraid of taking a stand” and that “political realism is usually labeled propaganda.”⁹³

It’s important to note, too, that the word itself has a lot of incredibly negative connotations. When we use ‘propaganda’ here, we’re not trying to imply any kind of positive or negative charge, but remain neutral in the use of the word.

Drawing the line of what is or is not propaganda or what is or is not political art is not easy, because as Lippard states so eloquently:

“Propaganda for the dominant culture is not called propaganda, but simply “the truth.” Both sides are trying to “propagate,” multiply, spread the seeds or the word.”⁹⁴

But what is activist art, *really*?

The long and the short of it is that anything that is art can be political art. Name an artistic method and you can find an example of it existing as political art.

⁹² Clark, Toby. *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997. P 13.

⁹³ Lippard, Lucy. “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power.” In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis, 341-358. USA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995, 347.

⁹⁴ Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade Of Art For Social Change*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984, 268.

SECTION 5: CHALLENGES TO ACTIVIST ART

Now, while activist art and activism is created in direct result of a particular challenge, that does not mean that it is without its own, inherent challenges.

Elliott, Silverman and Bowman argue that the main challenges to activism and art include when artists under the guise of activist art simply use that art as a means of reproducing oppression themselves. They outlines all the challenges to activism include de-politization and commercialization, art that reproduces systems of oppression, privilege in that it is without a doubt a privilege to be an artist and education of both the artist and the viewer.⁹⁵

I would agree wholeheartedly with his list and expand it to include the challenge of visibility as well as the challenge of articulation of vision--with activist art it is possible that the viewer may misconstrue the meaning of the work or not have enough understanding or context to recognize the issue being addressed.

⁹⁵ Elliott, David J., Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman. *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016, 202-204.

SECTION 6: WHAT ABOUT THE INSTITUTIONS?

What, then, is the role of the art institution in all of this? Where do institutions and the people that exist within them--arts administrators and managers--exist in relationship to art and activism? What does that relationship look like?

There is a significant gap in the literature here. When talking about this relationship, we most often see activist art existing either as one of two things. The first of these is that activist art is invited in explicitly--it exists as part of a curated show of some kind, where someone within an organization selects artists or work to bring to a particular space. In this case, the institution is acting as a platform. The second is that the institution or organization is the subject of whatever activist art is taking place. A prime example of this is the Guerrilla Girls, who are an activist art group that creates work with an explicitly political agenda to critique art institutions, art collectors and more. In particular, they created a series of posters about whether women had to be naked to get into the Metropolitan Museum in New York. They conducted a count of female artists and the gender makeup of the nudes within the Metropolitan Museum and created an image in 1989 (updated again in 2005 and 2012 with new numbers and counts) that decried "Do women have to be naked to get into the Metropolitan Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art section are women, but 85% of the nudes are female."⁹⁶ This image was turned into posters and billboards that were hung around New York, publicly shaming the art institution and forcing both the public and the Metropolitan Museum to think about the issue at hand.

⁹⁶ "Do women still have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?," Guerrilla Girls, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://www.guerrillsgirls.com/naked-through-the-ages>.

In fact, there are those that argue that activist art cannot *ever* exist in a museum, gallery or institution. Lampert argues that museums and galleries “are not the primary site for *activist art*. Politically engaged art can and does exist in museums and galleries, but activist art is altogether different and is firmly located in movements and in the streets and communities that produce these movements.”⁹⁷ Thus, that organizations can offer socially engaged art, but that it can never be activist art.

One very important thing to mention when it comes to political or activist acts and institutions is the legal restrictions that some organizations, like non-profit 501(c)3 organizations, have that prohibit particular activities. When we talk about museums, for example, most are classified as 501(c)3 organizations and in order to maintain that designation, 501(c)3 organizations are prohibited from “participating or intervening in any political campaign for any candidate for elective public office, both directly or indirectly. They may not contribute funding or voice favor or opposition to any candidate.”⁹⁸ This means, that an art museum, for example cannot curate a pro-Trump or anti-Trump exhibition because that would be seen as expressing favor or opposition. What they can do, however, is present an exhibition that includes individual works of art that expressly support or admonish a particular candidate. This is where it gets murky, however, because where the line of ‘how many artworks supporting a particular cause is too many?’ or ‘how many other works of art do you need in addition to that one expressly political work?’ or ‘can your curator express political preference as an individual working for an organization?’ is not always a clear one, but can be relatively subjective.

⁹⁷ Lampert, Nicolas. *A People’s Art History of the United States*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2013, ix.

⁹⁸ “The Restriction of Political Campaign Intervention by Section 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Organizations.” *United States Internal Revenue Board*. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501c3-tax-exempt-organizations>.

Looking to the role of institutions, one important point that is often made when it comes to museums in particular is that they should act as a platform. MacDonald argues that it is important for museums to respond to their social environment in order to meet changing need and to remain relevant.⁹⁹ Thus, acting as a platform for contemporary social issues is necessary and critical to the success of the institution. Communications theorist Derek De Kerkhov argues that the museum is a “ ‘cultural accelerator’ because it accelerates our awareness of technological and social change, both by collecting objects that demonstrate change, and by helping us understand change through museum interpretation.”¹⁰⁰

Supporting these findings, MuseumNext conducted a study where they looked into how participants viewed the relationship between museums and social issues. They asked survey participants ‘how much do you trust the following to tell the truth?’ and found that in a list of choices, politicians were least trusted and museums were seen as the most trustworthy. When asked ‘do you believe that museums should have something to say about social issues?’ 27.5% of respondents said yes, 31% said no and 40.5% said maybe. When asked if they would be more likely to visit a museum that took a stand on issues that mattered to them, 38% of respondents said that they would be more likely to visit a museum.¹⁰¹ Their findings support the argument that in order to survive and thrive, museums must address social issues.

Interestingly, there are examples of museums taking an overt stand against or for particular pieces of legislation, particularly in the United States. An interesting example of institutions took an implied--but not overt--stand against the Trump administration was the

⁹⁹ MacDonald, G. “Change and challenge: museums in the information society.” In *Museums and Communities-The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. I. Karp, C.M. Kreamer & S.D. Lavin. (Washington, DC, MD: Smithsonian Press, 1992), 158-181.

¹⁰⁰ Lord, Gail Dexter. “The importance of space and place.” *Curator*, 48, no. 1 (January 2005): 24.

¹⁰¹ “Should museums be activists? – Museums, Trust and Activism.” MuseumNext, last modified November 03, 2017, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://www.museumnext.com/2017/04/should-museums-be-activists/>.

#DayofFacts. #DayofFacts, an international social media campaign for cultural, scientific and arts institutions on February 17, 2018 where they shared factual content in order to “remind the public that facts matter.”¹⁰² The campaign’s mission statement says, “By not taking an overt political stand, but simply sharing mission-related, objective, and relevant facts, we will show the world that our institutions are still trusted sources for truth and knowledge.”¹⁰³ This was seemingly in response to the Trump administration’s use of inaccurate or incorrect facts under the guise of truth, although the participating institutions managed to circumvent a pointed critique or political stance. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Alli Hartley, a museum educator from Virginia who helped organized the campaign with her colleague Mara Kurlandsky, said that

“I thought it was brilliant in that there was no way an administration or anyone could question it, because on one level it wasn’t political, it was just sharing factual content. But on another level it really resonated with the political moment.”¹⁰⁴

We have also seen many arts and cultural institutions expressing their public support for funding the National Endowment for the Arts, which has been at risk for elimination and defunding under the Trump administration.

Expanding on this, is a study conducted by Feehan, which found that

“Texas contemporary art museums are acting as agents for change through choices of exhibitions, as well as through attitudes of museum administrators. Texas contemporary art museums seek to educate the viewer and meet societal needs by creating awareness of

¹⁰² “Day of Facts Information.” #DayofFacts. Accessed February 18, 2018, <https://dayoffacts.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁰³ “Day of Facts Information.” #DayofFacts. Accessed February 18, 2018, <https://dayoffacts.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁰⁴ Kaplan, Sarah. “Museums and libraries fight ‘alternative facts’ with a #DayofFacts.” *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2017. Accessed February 18, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2017/02/17/museums-and-libraries-fight-alternative-facts-with-a-dayoffacts/?utm_term=.7681322f2c5e.

current local and global issues. Awareness of current issues opens up dialogue and possible action”¹⁰⁵

Feehan argues that the activist act is creating a platform for dialogue and potential action. Not only that, but Feehan emphasizes expressly that the attitudes of museum administrators--including curators--is critical in whether a museum can act as an agent for change.¹⁰⁶

Many executive directors and curators agree that it is the role of institutions to act as a platform and engage in social issues. Mary Ceruti, the executive director and chief curator at SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Queens, says that

“Our public institutions, especially contemporary art museums, have an obligation to engage with the issues of our time. They have the potential to be both agents of change and forums for exploring difference. This potential cannot be realized passively” says Mary Ceruti, the executive director and chief curator at SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Queens.¹⁰⁷

Manon Slome, the chief curator of the art nonprofit No Longer Empty, agrees with the sentiment, saying “arts organizations, such as ours, have an obligation to create platforms of freedom that allow for the open discussion of ideas.”¹⁰⁸ In response to the controversy surrounding the stepping down of Laura Raicovich as the executive director of the Queens Museum in New York in early 2018, many curators, artists and academics signed a public letter in her support that said:

“In times of political polarization, arts institutions must fully commit to our responsibility to act as empathetic forums in which we come to understand human history, creativity

¹⁰⁵ Feehan, Catherine M. “A study on contemporary art museums as activist agents for social change.” PhD diss. University of Houston, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Feehan, Catherine M. “A study on contemporary art museums as activist agents for social change.” PhD diss. University of Houston, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Sutton, Benjamin. “Queens Museum Director’s Departure Call for More Politically Engaged Art Institutions.” *Hyperallergic*, January 31, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/424364/curators-letter-support-laura-raicovich-queens-museum>.

¹⁰⁸ Sutton, “Queens Museum Director’s Departure Call for More Politically Engaged Art Institutions.”

and society. Art institutions must respond to pressing issues facing our communities--this is not simply a right but an obligation, especially for those supported by public funds.”¹⁰⁹

Examining the role of the individual as activist within a museum, there are those who have argued that it is possible for individuals *within* institutions to support or promote activism. Cachia argues that it is necessary when it comes to attempting to de-colonizing the work of disability studies that curators must begin “begin to practice experimental, inclusive curatorial strategies to ‘crip’ art history and the mainstream contemporary art world.”¹¹⁰ Extrapolating that to other causes, the argument there is that the curator must be the radical activist within an institution by examining what they do or don’t curate and how that is or is not accurate or inclusive.

A cheeky example of curators acting towards a particular agenda can be found in a recent controversy surrounding an email from the Guggenheim Museum in New York City and the President Trump’s Administration. When President Trump asked the Guggenheim Museum in New York City to borrow a Van Gogh painting, after corresponding by email with the Guggenheim’s curator Nancy Spector, were told ‘no’ but that they could, instead, borrow a work by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan titled ‘America’ which is a fully-functional, solid 18-karat gold toilet. Presumably, Spector was expressing what she thought of the Trump administration through her choice of offering.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Sutton, Benjamin. “Queens Museum Director’s Departure Call for More Politically Engaged Art Institutions.” *Hyperallergic*, January 31, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/424364/curators-letter-support-laura-raicovich-queens-museum>.

¹¹⁰ Cachia, Amanda, “ ‘Disabling’ the Museum: Curator as Infrastructural Activist,” *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* 12, no. 3, (Dec. 2013): 283.

¹¹¹ Merica, Dan. “Guggenheim museum reportedly offered the White House a golden toilet.” *CNN*, January 29, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/25/politics/guggenheim-white-house-van-gogh-toilet/index.html>.

Another example of this is the stand that curators at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, along took against President Trump's immigration and travel ban in 2017. MoMA replaced some of its existing paintings with work by Muslim artists from the seven countries on the banned list, along with the note:

“This work is by an artist from a nation whose citizens are being denied entry to the United States, according to a presidential executive order issues on January 27, 2017. This is one of several such artworks from the museum's collection installed throughout the fifth floor galleries to affirm the ideals of welcome and freedom as vital to this museum as they are to the United States.”¹¹²

Another solution within an institution to address social issues outside of the curatorial staff, are the additional programming, particularly educational programming. McLeod argues, “In many instances, even if a museum is unable to take a political stance or social stand for whatever reason, museum educational programming can still address the needs of the community.”¹¹³

It is possible for an institution to attack social issues through both their curatorial and their educational programs. For example, take what the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) did in response to allegations of sexual misconduct against Chuck Close, who were hosting a show of Close's photography. PAFA decided to open a concurrent show about power and gender in an adjacent gallery in order to respond to those allegations instead of taking down

¹¹² Adams, Geraldine Kendall. “US museums take a stand against Trump immigration ban.” Museums Association. Last modification July 2, 2017. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/07022017-us-museums-take-stand-travel-ban>.

¹¹³ McLeod, Kate. “The Role Museums Play in Social Activism.” *Americans for the Arts*, August 2, 2017. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2017/08/02/the-role-museums-play-in-social-activism>.

the exhibition, as other institutions choose to do with Close's work and to supplement with other educational programming.¹¹⁴

In sum, we defined the terms that are related to activism, art and the institution, which are critical to make sure that the arguments made and topics covered are understood. We discussed the kind of people that are creating activist art, their goals of this art, the forms that it takes and the challenges that are at hand in order to give a basis for understanding the role of the organization and institution. We looked at the current state of the relationship between art organizations, their staff, and activism in order to determine a common point of reference. This knowledge combined sets the stage to examine whether there are other kinds of relationships that can exist between institutions and activist art, how these relationships affect the kind and content both of activist art and what that means for the institutions and those working within those institutions.

¹¹⁴ Voon, Claire. "Museum Keeps Chuck Close Exhibition, Supplements It with Show About Power and Gender Dynamics." *Hyperallergic*, January 29, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/423956/chuck-close-exhibition-pennsylvania-academy-fine-arts/>.

SECTION 7: RESEARCH, METHODS AND FINDINGS

Methodology

The main question at the beginning of this thesis was what artists who create work that is political or activist to some degree thought of the current relationship between institutions and activism and art. I was curious to find out how that relationship existed and what that meant for the individual administrators working inside those institutions, whether there was a place for art and activism within these institutions or not.

I interviewed artists working in a variety of different mediums--a performance artist, a musician, a visual artist and an actor--to see if I could identify any trends in their responses. In total, there were four interviews conducted--two were in person and two were email correspondence. First, I researched artists in my community of Durham, North Carolina whose work was socially engaged and identified Pierce Freelon, Stacey Kirby and Elin Slavic, among others. Looking to round out the group with someone who was in theater, I reached out to my networks after being unable to find someone in Durham, and was able to get into contact with Casey Wortmann, an actress. All interviewees were asked the same set of open-ended questions, using a structured interview process (see Appendix A.) I then transcribed and coded my interviews as necessary, identifying common themes and unique viewpoints.

Research and Findings

Section A: Pierce Freelon

Pierce Freelon is an activist, musician, professor, social entrepreneur and politician based in Durham, North Carolina. After obtaining degrees in Black Studies from UNC Chapel Hill (BA) and Syracuse University (MA), he has gone on to find ways for his art and his activism to intersect. He is the co-founder and host of the Emmy-award winning PBS series, *Beat Making Lab*, and the founder of Blackademics, an online roundtable for young black thinkers.¹¹⁵ He is also the founder of Blackspace, a digital maker space based in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina that offers Black and Brown youth a “breathing space to manifest their dreams by any medium necessary.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, he has taught at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and North Carolina Central University and is the front man of the jazz/hip hop quarter The Beast. Recently, Freelon has entered the realm of politics, running for Mayor of Durham, North Carolina in 2017 and subsequently for a seat on Durham City Council.

Sitting down to talk about his career that has straddled the worlds of art and activism, Freelon talked about his work on Blackspace. Rooted in Afro futurism, Blackspace is a digital maker space for youth of color to learn about beat making and digital media and has evolved to offer a range of workshops and programs. Youth involved with the programs have had cross-country cultural exchanges and done everything from learning to code to slam poetry. Talking about what he hopes Blackspace will grow into and the role he sees the organization having, he would love to see Blackspace become a “pan-African, cultural and creative ambassador program

¹¹⁵ “About Blackademics.” Blackademics. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://blackademics.org/about-blackademics/>.

¹¹⁶ “About.” Blackspace. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://theblackspace.org/about/>.

where in five years we're doing international residencies with kids from Durham, able to travel and explore art and identity through the space.”

One critical component of the work that Blackspace does is, he says, to tie the projects youth create and the programs they participate in to “a sense of identity within ourselves as people of African descent who happen to live in America.” Freelon created Blackspace because at its core, the organization serves to create a sense of identity both for the youth as individuals and as a larger collective. Freelon believes that arts and culture are “the tie--a tie that binds us as human beings” and that it serves as a “universal language.” He sees music and beat making and all kinds of digital making as the artistic tool, stating that “you can find connections through music and art that enhance empathy and build a sense of belonging or solidarity or connectedness that is important for our mental liberation.”

When asked about the intersections of art and activism, Freelon talks about how in an activist context, the arts serve to reflect experiences of oppressed people and to rewrite existing narratives, used as tools for organizers, a means of keeping sanity and building solidarity, an opportunity to tell your version of history, a way to share coded messages and communicate, to spread consciousness, to connect people, to get people through difficult times and to serve as symbols. He says that art has been integral because “in every social movement there's an artistic component and [art and activism] can't really be distinguished from one another.” Freelon cites the protestors of the Dakota Access Pipeline utilizing art as a means of keeping sanity when they were getting sprayed with hoses in zero degree weather. He talks about the ways in which slaves used coded language in lyrics to find freedom and the ways that musicians like Billie Holliday and journalist Ida B Wells conveyed messages and spread consciousness through lyrics and words. Freelon talks in depth about how images of Emmett Till helped to launch what he called a

“fuck-this-shit response” where the images of Till’s scarred, disfigured, brutalized body “connected you in an intimate and kind of personal way” that was humanizing and made people look at it and go “yo, these are human beings. Wrong. No. No more.” and catalyzed a whole social movement.

Freelon takes a detour to discuss where the idea of propaganda fits into a discussion of activist or political art. He says “Political art is also like propaganda, but it’s love propaganda. It’s propaganda to wake people and up conscientize them whereas some propaganda is to enslave people and to control them.”

He sees visual art based activism contrasted to performance art based activism is different, that it stimulates different senses, but that at the end of the day they’re both used towards the same end goal. Using the example of Senegalese culture, he talks about how

“Travelling to Senegal and seeing the drumming and the dance or even participating in some aspect of that gives you one sense of Senegalese culture and then eating...rice and fish or even meditating in a you know in a mosque these are just different sensations. Senegal is an amalgamation of them and you experience these slivers through your different senses. “

He uses this to show that something like a culture or a social movement are not made up of just one thing, but of many things--and you need to experience as many of them as possible in order to best understand the whole picture.

Freelon goes on to elaborate about the differences between the ways that art that is time or performance based differs from art that is not when it comes to where it intersects with activism, which he sees as fundamentally being the difference between a snapshot versus being in the moment. He sees things like recordings and photos of capturing of a particular moment, but that performance creates a new experience every time because it “can respond in real time to things that continue to evolve.” He sees performances as fundamentally more visceral and tactile in that it it’s impermanent and can never happen again. Talking about seeing a musician like

Lauryn Hill perform a song, Freelon says that “the song might be completely different if [you] were to see her perform it again tomorrow because there’s new things to be mad about.”

Talking about the relationship of the definitions of art and activism and artivism, Freelon talks about artivism and being, basically, some combination of art and activism. He says that “it’s kind of whipping [art and activism] together, it’s kind of chef-ing, it’s kind of different ingredients and you put them all together” and then you have artivism. When it comes to what constitutes art, he says that “we do life a disservice to categorize art only as that which can be seen in an exhibit” and that that activism is art.

Shifting gears, Freelon goes on to talk about the relationship between arts activism within institutions and organizations and whether or not it’s possible for arts activism to exist within a pre-existing institution or organization.

Freelon believes that it depends on the organization, what their values are and what they’re about whether or not they’re able to engage with arts activism, which is a pretty straightforward premise in some regards. He argues that not every organization can engage in artivism, that it depends heavily on the leadership and the structure of the organization.

That said, Freelon believes that artists need platforms because visibility is important and that venues can provide that platform for artists. He talks about how, for example, the Nasher Museum at Duke University displayed a work of art by the artists Sonya Clark, where participants in their gallery unraveled the confederate flag on a first-come, first-serve basis. Freelon had brought a bunch of black youth with him to the exhibit and although they were far down the line, which was primarily white people, the curator brought his students to the head of the line to participate in that act of actively pulling apart the flag. Freelon talks about just how powerful that moment was for the students and that if the Nasher had not brought in Clark, there

would not have been that moment, and that if the curator had not pulled those youth ahead of the line, there also would not have been that moment. Part of that experience can be attributed to the institution, but a large part is attributed to that individual curator, that individual employee *within* that institution.

Freelon argues that a lot of whether activism of any kind can exist within an institution comes down to the staff--like the curator at the Nasher--and who is calling the shots, who's in leadership. He talks about how Duke University is not in and of itself an organization whose mission is an activist one, but highlights how within an organization that is not, these moments of artistic activism is still possible.

On the flipside of that, Freelon talks about how there *are* organization that have an explicitly activism mission and that those are different from, for an example, an organization like Duke University whose mission is not that. Freelon talks about a queer-owned music venue in Durham, The Pinhook, which put on a series of dance parties called 'Party Illegal' explicitly as a political response to anti-LGBTQ legislation in North Carolina. He argues that these dance parties were only able to exist because of queer ownership and leadership of The Pinhook.

Freelon argues, however, that there is nuance to whether an organization has an activist mission or not is important when creating activist art, emphasizing the importance of intersectionality. He contrasts The Pinhook putting on Party Illegal with Blackspace's decision of where to host their poetry slams. Blackspace intentionally chose a black-owned business, even though that black-owned business was not explicitly political in its stance, like the Pinhook, although in some regards The Pinhook would have been the ideal venue for their slams. Freelon says, "it is important for artists to have platforms and it's important for platforms to be led by the causes and the communities that those artists are speaking on behalf of and through." He says

that “there are different intersections of our identity and our politics and our art and our culture and different roles that institutions play” when it comes to social and political issues.

Freelon takes a detour to discuss where the idea of propaganda fits into a discussion of activist or political art. He says “Political art is also like propaganda, but it’s love propaganda. It’s propaganda to wake people and up conscientize them whereas some propaganda is to enslave people and to control them.”

In his mind, propaganda is closely related to political agenda, which, he says that everyone has, whether or not they acknowledge it is another story. He says that you don’t necessarily see certain things as political, but that

“Football with the dancers and the black dudes fucking each others heads up--that’s totally political. But you know--it’s just entertainment, it’s just culture. It’s fucking SO political. The advertising--the super bowl commercials--it’s all political. Their political agenda is you know mass consumerism and misogyny and racist exploitation of black bodies and that’s their politics.”

Talking about the role of the facilitator, the individuals within institutions and working with artists to create socially engaged work, Freelon argues that one of the most important things the facilitator can do is understand their own place and their own privilege. He says that it’s important for the facilitators to have an understanding of how “their intersecting identities and experiences and privileges or lack thereof affect their ability to facilitate whatever group or be reflected in the leadership and facilitation of the process.” It’s incredibly important to understand privilege and place in the context of facilitators because Freelon says, “before we can do any kind of creative work, we need to have some motherfucking conversations about your perspective on the world and you.” To come in as a facilitator without this understanding would hamper any potential success or flavor a project or program in a way that could be detrimental.

Understanding of place and role is important so then the facilitator can make sure that the person who should be doing the work or the facilitation--whether it is them personally or someone else--is the one actually do the work. An understanding of privilege, he argues, should then be used by facilitators to provide the space for the people who are in that world to do. Freelon says that it is important for facilitators to “use [their] privilege to provide the space for the people who are in that world to do the work themselves” and “to provide tools for people to create their own things. And to not kind of interrupt that natural process.”

At the end of the day, Freelon had this to say about the role of the facilitator:
“I don’t know what the role of the facilitator is. To love, I guess. And to know. And to get out of the way.”

Section B: Elin O’Hara Slavick

Elin O’Hara Slavick is an artist, curator, critic, activist and professor based in North Carolina. She received her MFA in Photography from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and her VA from Sarah Lawrence College and is now a professor Visual Art, Theory and Practice at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography* and has exhibited her work nationally and internationally.¹¹⁷

Since 2008, her work centers on the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Fukushima and the nuclear disaster in Dai’ichi. She says of her work that

“I make this work to remember the horror so we don't repeat it; to speak to the present situation in a world that has 30,000 nuclear weapons and a U.S. president itching to use them; as a guilty American citizen whose taxes go to fund war and the military industrial complex; as a pacifist, peace activist, educator, mother, poet.”

Slavick has created a number of important works of art, including *After Hiroshima* and *Bomb after Bomb*. *Bomb after Bomb* is a series of drawings that are “manifestations of self-

¹¹⁷ Slavick, Elin O’Hara. “About.” Elin O’Hara Slavick. Accessed February 18, 2018.
<http://www.elinoharaslavick.com/about.html>.

education on the subjects of U.S. military interventions, geography, politics, history, cartography and the language of war.”¹¹⁸ The drawing themselves show all the places that the U.S. has dropped bombs and Slavick creates the images to be beautiful and seduce the viewer to take a closer look and learn more about the atrocities that have been rendered so beautifully.

Slavick’s work *After Hiroshima* are a series made using cyanotypes, photographic contact prints of large rubbings on paper and autoradiographs of Hiroshima, Japan. These photographic images “are attempts to visually, poetically, and historically address the magnitude of what disappeared as a result of and what remains after the dropping of the A-bomb in 1945.”¹¹⁹ Slavick says that these images focus on exposure--of radiation, sun, light and history.

Talking about the relationship between activism and art, Slavick first defines what she sees art as encompassing in its fundamental form. She says that she thinks “art, like any other discipline or practice, can educate other towards positive change.” Slavick points out that art is in its essence, powerful, stating, “Otherwise governments and other institutions of power would not censor and use it so regularly.” She elaborates on this to say “fundamentally, I believe art is a productive, positive act in and of itself--especially when done with activist/political intentions--but also in the context of reception, when others see and think about it.”

In essence, Slavick sees all art as having the capacity to instigate social change. Slavick says of art “it is a catalyst--one form among many.” Slavick sees art as a catalyst for social change, but a catalyst that is just one kind of catalyst among many others. Due to all art serving as a catalyst, Slavick argues that all art could be socially engaged art, saying “one could argue

¹¹⁸ Slavick, Elin O’Hara. “Protesting Cartography or Places the United States has Bombed.” Elin O’Hara Slavick. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://www.elinoharaslavick.com/statement3.html>.

¹¹⁹ Slavick, Elin O’Hara. “After Hiroshima.” Elin O’Hara Slavick. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://www.elinoharaslavick.com/statement.html>.

that ALL art is socially engaged due to the nature of making something and putting out there to engage viewers.” Talking about her own work specifically, she says that

“It is through beauty, art, the visual manifestation of ideology, hope, empathy and a commitment to the idea that we have to reach people in new ways that I find success/pleasure in this work”

Talking about the differences between artistic mediums that are socially engaged or politically motivated, Slavick maintains the sentiment that each form is just one of many and maintains that the different forms simply accomplish slightly different ends. Of art that is performance or time based, she says, “if it is only experienced once, live, it can be powerful and inspirational, but is not ideal for reaching mass audience.” On the other hand, she says that books or exhibitions are ideal for reaching that mass audience that a performance may not necessarily be able to reach.

At the end of the day, however, Slavick argues that although different mediums accomplish different ends, all of those means and ends are necessary. She says explicitly that “we need all of it--both visual and performative, the written and legal, the dogmatic and pedagogical and the ambiguous and mysterious.”

When it comes to socially engaged art, trying to distinguish further between artists and activists that make it, Slavick proposes that there is not a distinction. Citing the book *BUT IS IT ART?*, she talks about how most of the authors in that book do not make a distinction between being an artists or an activist, that they are “one and the same.”

She also argues that although there may not be a distinction when it come to work that is both artistic and activist, there are plenty of artists and works of art that are either activist or artistic and not both--context is key. She says, “I know many artists who are not activists in any way and many activists who are not artists. Sometimes they overlap and that is powerful.” She

elaborates, “That does not mean that all art efforts are activist or that all activism is art. It depends on the context of the intention/production and the context of reception.” This would mean, however, that sometimes if an artist self identifies only as an artist, that if their work is put into the right context it could be activist and vice versa.

While Slavick acknowledges there are many artists making only artistic work, she is clear that she believes all artists nonetheless have a profound responsibility to address issues in their work. She says, “In today’s climate (and every climate), I think artists have a responsibility to address issues in their work. By not addressing issues they are complicit.” So it’s to say that not making a statement is in and of itself being complicit, which is still an active political stance and an active act.

Whether or not it is possible for meaningful artistic activism to exist within institutions, Slavick agrees that it is not only possible, but also critical. Slavick acknowledges that there are often attempts to create artistic activist work inside institution where “often it is careerist and superficial” and ultimately unsuccessful. She cites a number of artists who have been successful in their attempts to create activist art within an institution, including Thomas Hirschhorn, Mark Dion, Carolee Schneeman, Judy Chicago, Hannah Wilke, Hans Haacke and Alfredo Jaar. She says that “critique and celebration can co-exist--in fact, it must within institutions.”

When it comes to how facilitators and arts administrators within institutions and organizations working with artists and art that are activist or socially engaged, Slavick believes that they should be committed partners rather than just backers or mitigators. Talking about curators, she says that they “should practice their work more like artists and play on the same team with artists, rather than as investors or censors.” At the end of the day, facilitators need to

be on the same page as and work with the artists and work, rather than working in any kind of opposition to it.

Expanding on this, Slavick says that facilitators should ground their choices and decisions in passion, rather than concerns over budget. Talking again about curators, she says that they “should take more chances and curate shows based on passion, not donors.” At the end of the day, facilitators need to be committed more to the artists and to the art than to the places and people the money comes in from.

Section C: Casey Wortmann

Casey Wortmann is an actor and current MFA student. Prior to graduate school, she lived in New York where she was a company member at the Flea Theater, which champions the voices least likely to be at the forefront of our culture.¹²⁰

While a company member at the Flea, Wortmann played Andromache in Ellen McLaughlin’s adaptation of *The Trojan Women*. The multi-language production focused on, among many issues, the refugee crisis and the commodification of the female body and was produced right before the 2016 presidential election.

Immediately after the 2016 presidential election, Wortmann collaborated on and performed in a production at La Mama Experimental Theater Club in New York called *Riot Antigone*. The production was a new take on the tragedy, told through a feminist lens from the perspective of a chorus leader and her all-female punk band.¹²¹ Wortmann explains that *Riot Antigone* explored the idea “that a woman finding her voice is inherently a political act in our current society.” Of the production, Wortmann says that “so many women spoke to me about

¹²⁰ “About.” The Flea Theater. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://theflea.org/about/overview/>.

¹²¹ “Riot Antigone.” The Flea Theater. Accessed February 18, 2018. http://lamama.org/riot_antigone/.

how the show affected them; how it spoke to their 16-year-old selves and their 30-year-old selves at the same time.”

Talking about art, activism, and artivism, Wortmann says simply that “in our current political climate, art IS activism.” She does not distinguish between the two, seeing them as one and the same. At the end of the day, Wortmann says “Both artists and activists create narratives that challenge how we see and interact with our communities.”

Wortmann says that, right now, all art is political. She argues “Even if you are trying to make art that is not political, I think our country is so focused on change and activism right now that your audience will interpret it in a way that best serves those missions.” Wortmann talks about how, right now in the United States, the act of simply putting a “complicated, opinionated woman on stage is a political act. Giving a voice to the marginalized is a political act. Even the act of entertainment is political.” On a fundamental level, she says that “art teaches empathy, and teaching empathy is a political act.”

She takes this a bit further, positing that it’s impossible for art to be neutral. She argues, “I don’t think art can ever be neutral. And you can never control your audience’s reactions. So like, good luck making boring, non-political art.”

Wortmann does, however, distinguish between activism and what she calls “political acts.” She argues, “It is impossible to make neutral art. Does that mean that all art is inherently activism? Maybe not, but I would argue that all art is inherently political.”

Talking about the differences in art forms, Wortmann believes that at the end of the day any art form is capable of influencing or changing ideas. She says that every art form “has an equal potential for social and political change/influence.”

Wortmann does acknowledge that there are differences or limitations across different art forms in their concrete abilities to change. She argues that one of the main differences between visual or performance art is the difficulty of sharing the medium. Citing how easy it is to share an image over, say, the Internet, she contrasts that with how much more challenging it can be to get someone to sit down and watch a two-hour recording of a theater performance on a computer. Wortmann also acknowledges, “any art form that is meant to be experienced in person will never be quite as affective in a photograph or recording.”

When it comes to whether artistic activism can take place within an institution, Wortmann argues that a lot of it comes down to the mentality of the institution and the mentalities of the people that work inside them. Wortmann has seen successful social engagement within “forward thinking institution.” and a profound lack of such in organizations who, as a whole, are not interested in thinking forward.

Speaking to one such experience where the organization she was a part of were actively not interested in engaging socially, she attributes their lack of interest in large part to the individuals working within that institution. In a particular organization, they put out programs that “rarely produces plays by female/trans playwrights or playwrights of color” and that in their current season, three out of four plays were written before 1950. When she challenged these choices, she found that “their excuse is that the audience in [redacted] is very old and don’t like to have their views challenged.” She says that in her experience, these particular facilitators and decision makers were “honestly kind of bigoted and don’t want to be challenged themselves.”

Talking about how individuals making socially conscious work can try to work within these bigoted institutions, Wortmann does have some insights. She personally tried to combat

these attitudes and culture by starting meaningful conversations and sharing plays that are particularly important to try to challenge the prevailing attitudes.

Another strategy to working within a challenging institution she says is to simply demonstrate that there is an audience for social-conscious work, that there is money in that work. As much as many people want social change to come about because someone's moral compass shifted, more often than not it is about conveying to them the monetary incentive. Wortmann says cheekily that "if an institution isn't interested in pursuing artistic activism, one option is to demonstrate to them that there is an audience for these kinds of projects."

She does note that sometimes those socially conscious discussions or work simply cannot happen within an institution and that they must instead happen outside of it. She cites a women's reading series that herself and other individuals have started to read plays written by and about women. She is sure to make clear that "this series is taking place independently, outside of the institution. It is not supported by the institution itself." Sometimes, new entities need to exist to *challenge* an institution's practices or attitudes from the outside when there is no avenue to do so within that institution.

Wortmann has a very clear suggestion for how individuals and facilitators working within institutions can support socially engaged or activist art: bring them to the table and give them a platform. She says that individuals should

"Hire people of color! Hire women! Hire trans people! If the voices in the room are all white and male, the art created cannot be intersectional and cannot truly speak to the marginalized experience, regardless of your best intentions"

Section D: Stacey Kirby

Stacey Kirby is an artist based in Durham, North Carolina. Her work centers on what she calls 'performative interactions' that combine installation and performance to address current

political issues and issues of citizenship. Her work has won numerous awards, including the North Carolina Arts Council Artist Fellowship for Visual Artists, an ArtPrize Pitch Night Grant, a finalist for the 1858 Prize from the Gibbes Museum of Art and she has been awarded residencies across the country. Kirby has performed and exhibited in various environments around the country--from traditional arts spaces to protests and festivals--including the Southeaster Center for Contemporary Art, the Nasher Museum of Art, North Carolina Museum of Art, the Mint Museum of Craft and Design and Flux Factory.¹²²

Kirby has created a number of seminal works of art, including *The Declaration Project*, *The Power of the Ballot* and *VALIDnation*, among other works. *The Declaration Project* (2013) is a “performative interaction” with the public. In a mobile office space, Officer Kirby has taken over 1100 participants through where visitors are asked to take part in a handwritten assessment of their personal belongings on declaration cards that are then archived and travel with the project. The aim of this project is to get participants to “step out of the virtual and into the physical world by reflecting upon their personal histories.”¹²³

The Power of the Ballot is another “performative interaction” that explores participation in government by establishing a site-specific voting precinct constructed of ballot boxes and privacy curtains where participants or “voters” were asked to answer questions about the U.S. Supreme Court’s gutting of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 (2012). Voters were asked to answer the question “what obstacle do you overcome to vote” and then the votes are tallied and a

¹²² “Bio.” Stacey L. Kirby. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://cargocollective.com/staceykirby/BIO>

¹²³ “The Declaration Project: 2013.” Stacey L. Kirby. Accessed February 18, 2018. <http://cargocollective.com/staceykirby/The-Declaration-Project-2013>.

‘winning obstacle’ is announced. All ballots are addressed and mailed to members of the House Bill 589 of the Voter Verification Act.¹²⁴

VALIDnation is an ongoing interactive performance art piece that explores civil rights and the validity of communities, families, and individuals throughout the United States, initially deriving from the campaign against the passing of Amendment One, which bans civil rights for same-sex families in North Carolina. During the performance, the ‘Civil Validation Officer’ asks the public to fill out a Civil Validation Notification card with questions about their family/lifestyle/partnership that the Civil Validation Officer then uses to determine each participant’s validity. Once approved, a large red VALID stamp is inked onto their card and sent to North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory or another NC legislator. Each participant received an ‘I AM VALID’ sticker for their participation.¹²⁵

Talking about important parts of her work, Kirby talks about how from the very beginning, she wanted interaction with her work on both a physical and an emotional level.

Speaking of her early work, she says that she wouldn’t classify it as socially engaged, but that it was about forging connections. Speaking of one early work in particular where she had people come into her open studio to stand on a pedestal and took a photo of their shoes and then had them fill out a whole questionnaire about shoe habits, she says that “it wasn’t socially engaged on any specific topics, but just having connections with people, bringing connections to people and having fun.”

Something that has always fascinated Kirby is the blurring of lines between work and life or--as the case may be--between art and life. Kirby describes her time working as a costumer for

¹²⁴ “The Power of the Ballot.” Stacey L. Kirby. Accessed February 18, 2018.
<http://cargocollective.com/staceykirby/The-Power-of-the-Ballot>.

¹²⁵ “VALIDnation.” Stacey L. Kirby. Accessed February 18, 2018.
<http://cargocollective.com/staceykirby/VALIDnation>.

The Lion King at Backstage Theater, where she was fascinated by the crossover that the performers who were cats brought into their “real” life, describing how they would be hanging out, off-stage and pet each other like cats. She thought that this “blurring of the lines-- performance and stage--where performance is happening was really fascinating” and that in her work people don’t actually know that they’ve walked into it sometimes, that she has to tell them that they’re already in it.

Kirby would not have initially described herself as a socially engaged artist, but simply one that makes work that reflects and poses questions that she’s asked herself. She says that “the questions I ask people are questions that I’m contemplating myself, and I would never pose a question for someone else just out of spite, that I’m not struggling with myself.”

Talking about her project VALIDnation, Kirby states that she created the work in order to have conversations, raise awareness, release emotions and give her a sense of control in a turbulent time. She says that she used the project “as a way to have a conversation and enter into a conversation, people wanted to kind of create some awareness around A1 and also release some frustration. I mean, feeling like I had some control over something, that I could do something.” She explains that she quickly found that many people who participated in her work simply didn’t understand the amendments, which allowed her to have frank conversations about the fact that she didn’t either and create meaningful connections with the participants.

Kirby finds that politics often just creates divisions between groups of people and then people never have an opportunity to talk or see one another--and her work serves to bridge that gap, to foster and create a space for those connections.

Not only did her work with VALIDnation serve as an emotional release for her personally, but she also continued to expand and develop it so that participants could also have

an outlet for their emotions. She describes how she realized that these participants “these people needed to voice something about A1 and they needed it to go somewhere, whether or not they supported what I felt like what I wanted to support--it’s not about our political beliefs matching.” She started creating the VALIDnation cards and that the act of her sending them to politicians, creating this outlet and new avenue for all participants in her projects.

Articulating the differences between artists and activists, Kirby says, is really challenging. If there is a spectrum of artist to activist, Kirby sees herself as falling more to the artist side; that her work honors the work that activists do.

Kirby sees activists as those who are

“Constantly putting themselves in harms way or in the front lines of things or like in the protests and they’re really educated about the issues to a point where they can tell you who to talk to or they can tell you where to go for more information or they can tell you the ways are to change the score, what we need to change in this bill.”

In her role as artist, Kirby does not believe that she shoulders the same responsibilities as activists, but instead sees her place as creating spaces and conversations that activists cannot on their own. Of her role as an artist, she says that she is “just holding the space and creating the space for the conversation around what people’s concerns are, and their relationships, and their lives, and so I’m not offering any answers or any political views.” It’s an important role that she plays and space that she occupies because, as she says, “sometimes activists can be so interested and passionate to a point it can be off putting for some people that are uncomfortable with the subject matter.” She says “art is an amazing way to enter into those conversations without putting people at a distance. It opens up a space.”

Kirby herself works as a conservationist in an art museum and knows from both the perspective of an artist and of an administrator the challenges that come with trying to facilitate a work of art that is socially engaged within an institution or organization.

An important component of working with an institution, Kirby says, is the ability of the artist to identify the audience of that institution and tailor the work towards that audience. She says that she spends a lot of time asking, “Who are the people that I’m going to be engaging with? Who are the visitors to the museum? Who are the staff members? Are there securities? Etc.” because that informs whether her work can exist there or--more accurately--*how* it will exist in a certain space.

Kirby argues that the organizational structure and where it gets its support are important for an artist to understand. She asks questions like “what is the hierarchy in the institution? Who are the people supporting the institution?” to determine not just who the audience is and what they’re about, but what the organization is about and who they are.

A small thing that Kirby points to being important in participatory work like hers is very simple: chairs. She says that at one venue they gave her 40 chairs and that “giving people places to sit has been important” to foster participation in her work.

Kirby says that it is always possible to engage audiences and always possible to be successful within institutions and organizations, but that it will be different every time and that cannot be ignored by an artist. She says that “At every institution, in every environment, there’s a way to engage the people that are coming in and they need [that engagement].”

She notes that sometimes the impact is not just on visitors to a space, but that there is also the possibility of creating works that impact the staff of an institution in some way.

Another important role that the institution plays is to bring people to see a work, to give artists a platform. Kirby says that in order for artists like her to be successful in a space that she needs organizations to “bring your people.” Closely aligned with bringing people in to see a work, Kirby argues that the organization really needs to commit to supporting the works of art that they bring to their spaces. In her case, she says that what an organization chooses to show her work, since it is participatory, the organization really needs to commit to bringing people into the space.

One of the most important things that Kirby stresses is the importance of clarity, transparency and honesty between a facilitator and the artists that they are working with. For her work, she bases what she does or doesn’t create or bring to a space off of assumptions about the potential number of participants. To her, it doesn’t matter the number of participants (although more is always better!) but she says that if an institution isn’t honest about how many people they think they can bring to a space, it can be hugely detrimental to the success of her work. Importantly, Kirby says of facilitators that they should not offer things that they don’t have or can’t follow through on just to get work there because, very simply, “It’s bad.”

One thing Kirby points out that facilitators should do is to back off, to not be so prescriptive, particularly when it comes to residencies. She says that administrators of artistic residencies should “give [the artists] space to do whatever they want to do and not be tied to the production of art”

Additionally, Kirby argues that administrators should advocate for more fluidity and flexibility for their artists within their institution. Talking specifically about artist schedules, she says that a lot of artists do not work within the traditional 9-5 parameters that many institutions

prescribe they work within. She acknowledges that this is a challenge for an administrator to work within, but that a bit of fluidity and flexibility would go a long way.

Kirby is clear that arts administrators and facilitators need to commit to financially supporting artists and works of art that they bring in. As she says, in order to create works in the first place “we all need financial support. You know, we really do” and administrators should not assume that an artist is willing to create or work for free.

Related to the importance of transparency and financial support, Kirby says that it is important to also have frank discussions about budget. She says that artists need to come to the table with clear budgets and be willing to have conversations with administrators about numbers and what is or is not possible.

Kirby argues that beyond bringing a work of art to fruition in the first place, the role of the administrator is also to make connections. Administrators, she says, are “part of a bigger network of people around the world and offering opportunities and making connections outside of your community for your artists that you’ve worked with is awesome.”

CONCLUSIONS

Talking with four different people who come from four different backgrounds, there were some common themes emerged and some other interesting takeaways that would be interesting to dig deeper into.

One finding was that there was no consensus on terminology, which although unsurprisingly was still interesting. Some saw artists and activists as one and the same, others saw artists and activists as completely separate, some saw them as either the same or different depending on their context.

Of those that saw a distinction between artists and activists, some interesting points came up. One was the opinion Slavick brought to the table, which was that it is possible for an artist to see themselves as only an artist, but that they are wrong in that assumption: to ignore issues is to be complicit and that is itself a political act.

At the end of the day, the distinctions are just semantics and all that can be done is make sure to define the terms that are being used because different people use the same terms to mean different things and different terms to mean the same things.

An interesting understanding of what art is, however, came up in a few different conversations: that all art is capable of influencing or changing ideas. Depending on your definition of activism, that is the definition: to do or create something that influences or changes or challenges ideas.

Another theme that emerged was that while all those interviewed saw different distinctions across mediums, they all agreed that all mediums were important and necessary.

Freelon articulated that each medium was successful when they worked in tandem with the others to create a more holistic understanding of an issue or cause.

Freelon had an interesting take on the relationship of propaganda and art, stating that “political art is also like propaganda, but it’s love propaganda to wake people up and conscientize them whereas some propaganda is to enslave people and to control them.” Freelon argues that we just don’t see things as very political, even when they are and that being political *is* having an agenda, which means that everyone and everything has an agenda. The same, then, is true of every arts institution and organization: they all have a political agenda. The issue is, then, whether or not the arts institution recognizes that they have a political agenda or not.

When discussing whether institutions and organizations are capable of supporting socially engaged or activist artwork, there was a surprising amount of consensus.

One of the themes that emerged was that the most important part of whether an institution is capable of supporting socially engaged or activist work was that the role of institution can be and should be that of a platform to amplify other voices. An institution can be successful if it serves as a platform for others because giving a platform increases visibility, which is key.

Another theme that emerged was that nearly all the interviewees identified that organizational structure, leadership and staff could make or break whether an institution could support art that is activist or socially engaged. There was consensus that these factors combined created a climate that was either hospitable or inhospitable.

There was *not* a consensus on whether it was possible to create socially engaged work within *any* institution. Some interviewees, like Kirby, thought that it is always possible and that it was simply a matter of the artist being aware and tailoring their work to the parameters of the

space. Others, like Freelon and Wortmann, believed that sometimes it is just not possible for a particular institution to engage in meaningful social engagement.

When discussing the role of the facilitator within an institution, there were not very many common themes to emerge, but there were a lot of different suggestions that came out. That said, two important and related themes to emerge here were: facilitators needing to recognize their privilege and that there's merit in facilitators backing off.

Freelon believes that it is important for the facilitator to recognize their privilege and place so that they know where to step in or, most importantly to step out. Wortmann emphasized the importance of facilitators bringing other voices to the table, stating that if the appropriate voices are not brought out, work cannot truly speak to their experience, regardless of the best intentions. Kirby agrees that it is critical to the success of socially engaged works of art for facilitators to know when to bow out.

There were a few other suggestions to facilitators that were related, but decidedly separate from those themes. Some suggested that facilitators needed to be honest and transparent about what is or is not possible, to not lie to an artist simply to get their work into their space. Another suggestion was that facilitators should not act as censors, but should be committed partners with the artist to the best of their ability. It was also suggested that facilitators should work to be more flexible and fluid to better meet the needs of artists with non-traditional schedules or needs.

Kirby also brought up the importance of funding: namely, that it is important to offer it to artists. She believes that there should never be an expectation that an artist do something for free because nothing is ever, really free, and facilitators need to be realistic about this and take it into consideration.

Finally, it was offered up that facilitators should strive to be connectors for the artists they work with. It is important for facilitators to connect the artists they work with to other people that could be important open other, new opportunities for the artist.

There are a few areas that would be interesting to dive into deeper, including issues of propaganda and the art institution, the role of both how institutional privilege within organizations and the systems within they operate and how individual privilege affects an institutions ability to engage with socially engaged or activist art and artists. Along those lines, it would also be interesting to determine just how well, if at all, institutions are in recognizing their political agenda, which is important to understand in order to make any kind of informed decision at an organization.

Overall, the findings make some important arguments for the ways in which institutions and individuals can interact with artists and works that are socially engaged or activist, including recognizing and leveraging privilege or lackthereof, exploring some non-traditional approaches to scheduling with more flexibility and fluidity and knowing when it is not the place of the institution or administrator to engage, among other suggestions. This understanding is critical because it illuminates the ways in which organizations promote or hamper particular political agendas, which is imperative to make a more equitable and just society.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thesis Interview Questions

1. Can you talk a little bit about some of your background and some of your projects, particularly those related to social change
2. What are your thoughts about the intersection of the arts and social change/activism?
3. What are your thoughts on the differences (or similarities) between socially engaged art that is strictly visual versus time-based?
4. What's the difference between artists and activists? Where do activists fit in? Do they have similar goals? What about intended consequences or actions?
5. Can you engage with meaningful artistic activism inside an arts institution? What does it look like?
6. What do arts administrators working with artists who create works that are socially engaged or active need to know? What is their role?

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