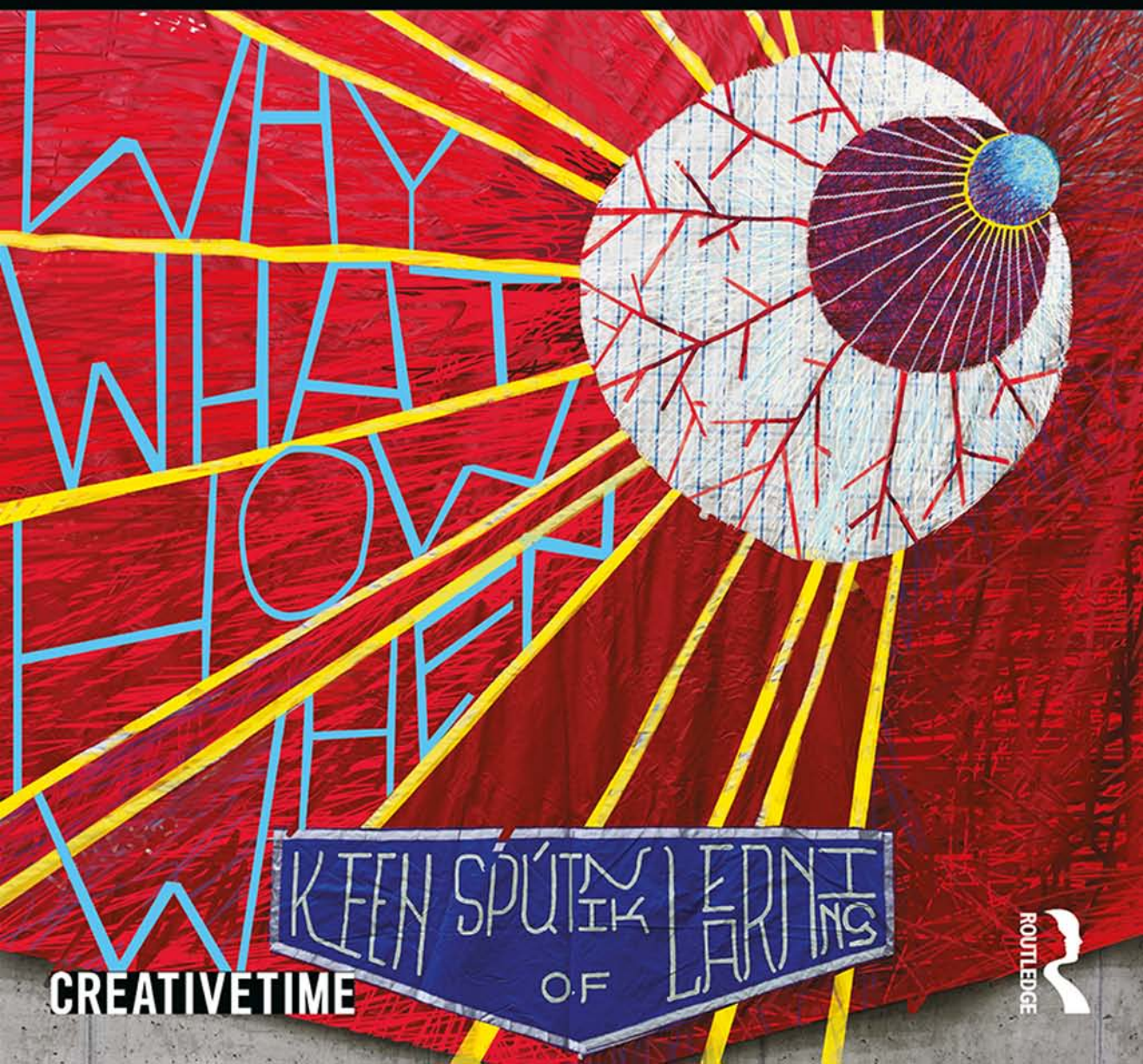


Edited by Corina L. Apostol and Nato Thompson

# Making Another World Possible

10 Creative Time Summits, 10 Global Issues,  
100 Art Projects



**CREATIVETIME**

KEEP SPÜTNIK LEARNINGS  
OF

ROUTLEDGE

# MAKING ANOTHER WORLD POSSIBLE

*Making Another World Possible* offers a broad look at an array of socially engaged cultural practices that have become increasingly visible in the past decade, across diverse fields such as visual art, performance, theater, activism, architecture, urban planning, pedagogy, and ecology.

Part I of the book introduces the reader to the field of socially engaged art and cultural practice, spanning the past ten years of dynamism and development. Part II presents a visually striking summary of key events from 1945 to the present, offering an expansive view of socially engaged art throughout history, and Part III offers an overview of the current state of the field, elucidating some of the key issues facing practitioners and communities. Finally, Part IV identifies ten global issues and, in turn, documents 100 key artistic projects from around the world to illustrate the various critical, aesthetic and political modes in which artists, cultural workers, and communities are responding to these issues from their specific local contexts. This is a much needed and timely archive that broadens and deepens the conversation on socially engaged art and culture. It includes commissioned essays from noted critics, practitioners, and theorists in the field, as well as key examples that allow insights into methodologies, contextualize the conditions of sites, and broaden the range of what constitutes an engaged culture.

Of interest to a wide range of readers, from practitioners and scholars of performance to curators and historians, *Making Another World Possible* offers both breadth and depth, spanning history and individual works, to offer a unique insight into the field of socially engaged art.

**Corina L. Apostol** is the curator of Tallinn Art Hall and previously served as the Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at Creative Time. She is the cofounder of the activist publishing collective ArtLeaks and editor in chief of the *ArtLeaks Gazette*. Her recent publications include the book *Theories and Methodologies of Art History: A Guide* (2016), as well as numerous essays for volumes, textbooks, and catalogues.

**Nato Thompson** is the Sueyun and Gene Locks Artistic Director at Philadelphia Contemporary. He served as the curator of the Creative Time Summit from 2009 to 2017 and has written two books of cultural criticism: *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century* (2015) and *Culture as Weapon: The Art of Influence in Everyday Life* (2017). He has also edited *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011*, *Experimental Geography*, *Ahistoric Occasion*, *Becoming Animal*, and *The Interventionists*.



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**Chto Delat?** Chto Delat? (*What is to be done?*) is a collective of Russian artists, critics, philosophers, and writers from St. Petersburg and Moscow. Responding to a sense of urgency on the need to merge political theory, art, and activism, the collective was founded in St. Petersburg in 2003. Chto Delat? produces art projects, theatrical plays, videos, radio programs, educational seminars, public murals, and political campaigns. It also publishes a newspaper named *Chto Delat?*, which covers culture and politics from around the world, printed in Russian and English. In 2013, the collective founded The School of Engaged Art in St. Petersburg and runs a space called Rosa's House of Culture.

**Maja Fowkes** is an art historian, curator, and codirector of the Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, an independent research center focusing on the art history of Central Europe and contemporary ecological practices. Curatorial projects include the *Anthropocene Experimental Reading Room*, the Danube River School, the conference *Vegetal Mediations*, as well as the exhibition *Walking Without Footprints*. Recent and forthcoming publications include *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde and Ecology under Socialism*, a book on Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950, as well as numerous chapters and journal articles on topics such as performative reenactments, deschooling the art curriculum and the ecological entanglements of deviant democracy.

**Reuben Fowkes** is an art historian, curator, and codirector of the Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, an independent research center focusing on the art history of Central Europe and contemporary ecological practices. Curatorial projects include the *Anthropocene Experimental Reading Room*, the Danube River School, the conference *Vegetal Mediations*, as well as the exhibition *Walking Without Footprints*. He is also an editor of *Third Text*, and is a regular contributor to magazines and artist publications.

**Gridthiya Gawee Wong** Her curatorial projects have addressed issues of social transformation confronting contemporary artists from Southeast Asia and beyond since the Cold War.

Gaweewong has curated numerous exhibitions including *Politics of Fun* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2005, with Ong Ken Seng), the *Saigon Open City* in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (2006–2007, with Rirkrit Tiravanija) and *Unreal Asia*, Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, Germany (2009, with David Teh), *Between Utopia and Dystopia*, MUAC, Mexico City (2011), and *The Serenity of Madness*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul survey show, produced by Independent Curators International (ICI), New York & MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiangmai. She recently served on the curatorial team of the 12th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea. Currently, Gaweewong is the artistic director at Jim Thompson Art Center in Bangkok.

**Pascal Gielen** Gielen is professor of sociology of culture and politics at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (Antwerp University - Belgium) where he leads the Culture Commons Quest Office (CCQO). Gielen is editor of the international book series *Antennae - Arts in Society* (Valiz). In 2016 he became laureate of the Odysseus grant for excellent international scientific research of the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders in Belgium. His research focuses on creative labour, the common, urban and cultural politics.

**Núria Güell** Güell's artistic practice focuses on the analysis of how power affects our subjectivity by submitting it to hegemonic law and morality. Her main methodologies include flirting with the established powers, acting as an accomplice to different partners, and using the privileges granted by institutional art—as well as those socially granted to her—for being a white, Spanish, European woman. These tactics, distilled into her own life, are developed in specific contexts with the intention to disrupt power relationships.

**Kinana Issa** Issa utilizes her writing and art as a form of loyalty to humanity. She has produced more than ten experimental audiovisual works and authored the script for *Gardens Speak*, an interactive sound installation containing the oral histories of ten people buried in Syrian gardens. She has also sat on the committee of the Syrian Film Festival in Toronto and has written for *Associated Press* and *Al Jazeera Children*. Issa is currently an honorary fellow of the International Writing Program at Iowa University.

**Athi Mongezeleli Joja** Joja is an art critic based in Johannesburg, South Africa. A member of the art collective Gugulective, he is currently pursuing his MFA at the University of the Witwatersrand on the critical practice of late art critic Prof. Colin Richards. His writing has appeared in publications such as *The Mail & Guardian*, *Art Throb*, *Contemporary And (C&)*, *Chimurenga Chronic*, and *Africanah*. Joja is also a Predoctoral Fellow in the Mellon-Funded Critical Theory Cluster at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

**Shimrit Lee** Dr. Lee graduated from the Middle Eastern studies program at New York University. Her research resides at the intersection of several disciplines: visual culture, political economy, cultural studies, performance, and critical security studies. She has a background in international human rights law and the politics of witnessing, with a regional focus on contemporary Israel/Palestine. She also writes on photography, film theory, and contemporary visual arts and is currently serving as a curator at Residency Unlimited in Brooklyn, New York.

**Miguel A. López** López is a writer, researcher, and chief curator of TEOR/ética in San José, Costa Rica. His work investigates collaborative dynamics and transformations in the understanding of and engagement with politics in Latin America in recent decades. His work also focuses on queer rearticulations of history from a Southern perspective. He has recently curated

*Equilibrio y Colapso. Obras de Patricia Belli, 1986–2016* at the Fundación Ortiz Gurdian, Managua (2017) and *Teresa Burga. Structures of Air* (with Agustín Pérez Rubio) at the MALBA, Buenos Aires (2015).

**Justine Ludwig** Ludwig is the executive director of Creative Time. She has curated projects with many artists including Shilpa Gupta, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Pedro Reyes, Laercio Rendondo, Paola Pivi, and Pia Camil. Her research interests include the intersections of aesthetics and architecture, violence, economics, and globalization.

**Wanda Nanibush** Nanibush is an Anishinaabe-kwe curator, image and word warrior, and community organizer. Currently she is the inaugural curator of Canadian & Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She holds a master's in visual studies from the University of Toronto, where she has taught graduate courses. Her curatorial projects include *Rita Letendre: Fire & Light* (AGO, 2017), *Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971–1989* (AGO, 2016), *Sovereign Acts II* (Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2017), *The Fifth World* (Mendel Art Gallery, 2015) and the award-winning *KWE: The Work of Rebecca Belmore* (Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, 2014).

**Hanka Otte** Dr. Otte is a postdoctoral researcher in the Culture Commons Quest Office (Antwerp Research Institute of the Arts—ARIA). The central question of this research group is how creative workers may contribute to the urban environment and what has been called “the commons” and how creative biotopes arise. Hanka’s focus is on how these creative biotopes can be maintained in a sustainable manner by city policies.

**Grace Samboh** Samboh is in search of what comprises curatorial work within her surrounding scene. She jigs within the existing elements of the arts scene around her, for she considers the claim that Indonesia is lacking arts infrastructure—especially the state-owned or state-run—as something outdated. She believes that curating is about understanding and making at the same time. In 2011, she cofounded Hyphen, a closed-door discussion group that seeks to sew together bit by bit the fragmented Indonesian art history by (re)reading Indonesian contemporaneity and by putting it into its own historical context. With Hyphen, her concern is to encourage Indonesian arts and artistic research projects and publications.

**Thasnai Sethaseree** With a background in philosophy, social science, and art, Sethaseree works as an artist, activist and lecturer at the Media Art and Design, Graduate School, Chiangmai University. His recurrent themes in his artistic practice have included issues of memory, migration, and a philosophical questioning of the nature of knowing. He participated in both local and international exhibitions including the solo exhibition *What You Don't See Will Hurt You* (VER Gallery, Bangkok, 2016); international group shows such as *Safe Place in the Future (?)* (Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok), and *Museum of Contemporary Art and Design* (Manila, Philippines, 2013); *The Way Things Go* (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, 2015). Recently he received Jurors' Choice Awards from Signature Art Prize, Singapore Art Museum, 2018.

**A.L. Steiner** Steiner utilizes constructions of photography, video, installation, collage, collaboration, performance, writing, and curatorial work as seductive tropes are channeled through the sensibility of a skeptical queer ecofeminist androgyne. Steiner is cocurator of *Ridykeulous*, cofounder of *Working Artists* and the *Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)*, and collaborates with numerous writers, performers, designers, activists, and artists. Steiner is based in Los Angeles and New York and is the recipient of the 2015 Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award, 2015–2016

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**Nato Thompson** is the Sueyun & Gene Locks Artistic Director at Philadelphia Contemporary. He served as the curator of the Creative Time Summit from 2009 to 2017 and has written two books of cultural criticism: *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century* (2015) and *Culture as Weapon: The Art of Influence in Everyday Life* (2017). He has also edited *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011*, *Experimental Geography, A historical Occasion, Becoming Animal*, and *The Interventionists*.

**Jasmina Tumbas** Dr. Tumbas is an Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art History and Performance Studies in the Department of Global Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. Tumbas curated Selma Selman's first U.S. solo show at Dreamland in Buffalo, an exhibition that traveled to Vienna, Austria, and she serves on the board of directors of Squeaky Wheel. She is currently finishing her first book, *The Erotics of Dictatorship: Art, Sex, and Politics under Yugoslav Socialism*, and serves as coeditor for the anthology *Radical Art in Transition: Counter-Culture, Protest, Resistance and Contemporary Art in the Balkans since 1968*. Her research has appeared in *ArtMargins*, *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, Media Studies*, and *Sztuka i Dokumentacja (Art and Documentation)*, *Performing Arts in the Second Public Sphere* (2016), and in the forthcoming anthologies *BODIES THAT MATTER AGAIN*.

**Syrus Marcus Ware** Ware is a Vanier Scholar, a visual artist, community mobilizer, educator, and researcher pursuing his PhD studies in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Syrus holds degrees in art history, visual studies (University of Toronto), and sociology and equity studies (OISE). In 2014, he was awarded the Slyff Fellowship/Graduate Fellowship for Academic Distinction by York University. Syrus has authored book chapters, journal articles, and peer-reviewed publications about disability, the diversification of museums, transparenting, and sexual health for trans MSM. In 2009, Syrus coedited the *Journal of Museum Education* issue *Building Diversity in Museums* with Gillian McIntyre. Syrus was voted Best Queer Activist by *Now Magazine* (2005), was awarded the Steinert and Ferreiro Award (2012) for LGBT community leadership and activism, and was awarded the TD Diversity Award from the Toronto Arts Foundation in 2017.

**Ala Younis** Younis uses archivally found materials in research-based projects that combine personal narratives with collective and national histories of the Middle East. Younis has participated in the Iran Biennial: *Art in the Contemporary Islamic World* (2005), Asian Art Biennial Dhaka 2006), New Museum Triennial: *The Ungovernables* (New York 2012), Gwangju Biennale (2012), and the Venice Biennale: *All the World's Futures* (2015). As a curator, she has organized several international exhibitions including the first Kuwaiti Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2013).

**What, How and for Whom/WHW** WHW is a curatorial collective formed in 1999 and based in Zagreb and Berlin. Its members are curators Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić, and Sabina Sabolović and designer and publicist Dejan Kršić. WHW organizes a range of productions, exhibitions, and publishing projects and directs Gallery Nova in Zagreb. WHW has been intensively developing a model based on a collective way of working, a collaboration between partners of different backgrounds and an involvement with local advocacy platforms. WHW curated numerous international projects, among which are *Collective Creativity*, *Kunsthalle Fridericianum* (Kassel, 2005), the 11th Istanbul Biennial *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* (Istanbul, 2009), and *One Needs to Live Self-Confidently . . . Watching* (Croatian pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennial, 2011).

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Why this book? Why now? A great deal has changed since 2009 when Creative Time organized its first Summit to discuss the field of socially engaged art and contemporary political issues. Since then, socially engaged art has moved from the margins of the art world to, if not quite its center, then certainly to a central part of the discussion on contemporary art and politics. This shift has taken place against the backdrop of a changing world, one defined by a growing global consciousness or awareness of a shared environmental, political, and economic fate and by a shared perception of crisis. With the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of the Summit, *Making Another World Possible* brings these two strands of art activism and global politics together.

In light of these urgent issues and the growing interest in socially engaged art, the editors have taken on the challenge of organizing this book. Rather than attempting an encyclopedic historical survey, the editors conceived of this publication in order to raise fundamental questions that ignite conversation and contribute to the understanding of socially engaged art in an ever changing field. In this pursuit, we turned to a group of advisors who have diligently guided our understanding of the field and introduced us to new artists and practices. We would especially like to thank Ala Younis, A.L. Steiner, Athi Mongezeleli Joja, Chto Delat?, Elvira Dyan-gani Ose, Grace Samboh, Gridthiya Gaweewong, Hanka Otte, Jasmina Tumbas, Justine Ludwig, Kinana Issa, Mari Bastashevski, Miguel A. López, Núria Güell, Pascal Gielen, Rashida Bumbray, Sally Szwed, Syrus Marcus Ware, Tega Brain, Thanom Chapakdee, Thasnai Sethaseree, Wanda Nanibush, and What, How and for Whom/WHW. Not only was their contribution critical, but, more, the book features essays by some of these renowned theorists, curators, and practitioners, each of whom approached the field and major social topics from their own unique critical and globally diverse perspectives.

Nato Thompson's introduction retrospectively reviews the Creative Time Summit from its inception in 2009 until 2017. His essay discusses the formation, evolution, and the major topics of the Summit under the global political environment. Next, for "On Arts, Politics, and Engagement: A Selected Timeline 1945 to Present" (Part II) section, we commissioned the Russian collective Chto Delat? to create an original chronology setting the Creative Time Summits against the background of major world events and highlighting diverse major projects of public art, key publications, and political initiatives, spanning from the end of World War II to the present.

Opening our Major Issues in the Field of Socially Engaged Art section (Part III), Pascal Gielen and Hanka Otte's essay includes two parallel shifts signaled and analyzed: one is the

transition from community art to so-called commoning art; the other is the transition from cultural policy to a politics of culture. Next, artist, writer, and architect Ala Younis discusses trust between people, technology, and the Internet in the context of the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan and in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War and former dictatorship in Iraq and Jordan. Curator and author Miguel A. López analyzes recent projects in Latin America that have generated important intersections between feminist and queer activism, pedagogy, and artistic practice. Taking Black collectivity as an ethical medium, or strategy, for public commentary, artist and writer Athi Mongezeleli Joja focuses comparatively on three prominent South African collectives—namely, Gugulective, Burning Museum, and iQhiya—and how their visual worlds shed light on history, archival knowledge, and exclusionary practices. Grace Samboh explores the practices of three Indonesian artists that began at the end of the 1970s: Gendut Riyanto (1955–2004), Semsar Siahaan (1952–2005), and Moelyono (b. 1947) who based their artistic practices in the city centers of Indonesia and who critically engaged with the New Order under Muhammad Suharto (1967–1998). In her discussion with artist Thasnai Sethaseree and fine arts professor Thanom Chapakdee, curator Gridthiya Gaweewong brings into focus examples of socially engaged art in Thailand's recent history that responded directly to the political situation, especially the collapse of democracy in the country. Next, curatorial collective What, How and for Whom/WHW's essay analyzes artist Victoria Lomasko's illustrated chronicles of hidden political conflict in contemporary Russia and the creation of new civic spaces through Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti's project *Campus in Camps*.

For the next major section of the book, "Dialogue: 10 Global Issues, 100 Art Projects" Part IV), we ask what roles has art played in the tumultuous last decade of social and political struggles around the world and how have practitioners used art as a tool with which to shape the world. In this section, we identified ten key issues and 100 projects that describe different strategies and tactics, mapping the broad field of contemporary political art and art activism. Justine Ludwig frames the "State of Siege" section, addressing methodological issues in analyzing the condition of cultural production in relation to the militarization of society and the violence and siege mentality related to the ongoing wars on terror, both domestic and foreign. For "Surveillance" (Section 2), artist and theorist Mari Bastashevski seeks to address the following question: can artists and art institutions devise a collective praxis that suspends normative production in favor of deliberate algorithmic stumbling within a negative space of surveillance apparatuses? Framing "Confronting Inequity" (Section 3), Núria Güell's essay is based in the press conference that Güell gave around her project *Aphrodite* (2017), investigating the conditions of labor as they apply to artists—and specifically to female artists. At the beginning of "The Uprising," Rashida Bumbray looks to the underground as a space of strength and revolutionary reimagining given the global turn towards fascism. Introducing "Exodus" (Section 5), Kinana Issa reflects on one woman's exile journey and the struggle to bring invisible narratives from self-identified women to light through art. Next, for "Cosmopolitics" (Section 6), Maja and Reuben Fowkes discuss how contemporary artists are responding to the unfolding planetary drama, against the backdrop of a virulent cocktail of climate change, species extinction, and toxic pollution. Thinking about how "Race Matters" (Section 7), Syrus Marcus Ware wrote a text exploring a world set in a time just after an apocalyptic set of events where the survivorship of this postapocalyptic moment depends on artists of colors. In her introduction to "Classroom in Crisis" (Section 8), Jasmina Tumbas addresses the contemporary state of higher education and art projects that push for a response to various global and local crises, including war, pollution, immigrant and refugee rights, as well as racism, sexism, economic inequalities, and gentrification. Opening the "Queer and Now" discussion in Section 9, A.L. Steiner wrote a poetic text, diagnosing human-centric freedom and catastrophe and examining how practices of queering may enlighten us in regard

## *Acknowledgments*

to the future. Last, but not least, “The Device” (Section 10) is framed by Tega Brain, who discusses art practices that blend strategies from modern art, tactical media, and civil disobedience to adapt, repurpose, and bend these technologies to breaking points in ways that reveal their blind spots and biases, as well as question technological narratives. The “Epilogue”, written by Justine Ludwig, brings us to some of the Summit’s responsibilities and aspirations for the future. Closing the book, our “Glossary of Terms,” written by Corina L. Apostol, explores the meanings behind key concepts in the field: “social engagement” in culture, “gentrification,” “art education,” and more. Her contribution addresses the necessity of developing a terminology to make theoretical articulations more clear and accessible to our readers. In addition, the section discusses key terms used frequently by contributors to our book.

Working with our editor Ben Piggott and Laura Soppelsa, editorial assistant at Taylor and Francis/Routledge, has been a great pleasure, and we are grateful for their commitment to making this book a reality. We are deeply appreciative to our talented editorial assistant Corinne Butta who led the research for this project, helped us to bring the manuscript together, and contributed brief texts on artists who engaged with timely issues by expanding their practice into public space. She was joined by our research assistants, Shimrit Lee, who also authored project descriptions, and Julia Hernandez, who played a key role in the initial research for this book. Special thanks also go to our intern, Tianyu Guo, who assisted us in completing this research, for her diligence in the crucial moments of manuscript delivery. We would also like to acknowledge artist Nikolay Oleynikov of the artistic collective Chto Delat?, one of our longtime collaborators, who created our elegant and engaging cover, inspired by a banner he created together with the Shvemy Sewing Cooperative.

We cannot express enough how grateful we are to all the donors and funders who recognized the importance of artists as global agents for change and generously invested in this project, as well as the history of the Creative Time Summit. We’d particularly like to thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their support of an Editorial Fellowship, without which this publication would not have been possible.

We are also grateful to the Creative Time Team members who have played an instrumental role in the success of the Summit over the years, especially Anne Pasternak, Katie Hollander, Laura Raicovich, Sally Szwed, Carolina Alvarez-Mathies, Teal Baskerville, Alex Winters, and Ben Bromley. Sincere gratitude also goes to Creative Time’s Board of Trustees who have supported us in making this book a reality and who continue to champion artists’ dreams to create meaningful change. Finally, we are deeply thankful to all the artists who are represented in this book, for generously answering our queries during the writing process, sharing their works with us, and for their inspiration in making a profound impact on our world. It is our strong belief that this publication will inspire even more vibrant socially engaged art projects and generate enthusiasm in the field.

## PART I

# A precarious assembly Ten years of art and activism

*Nato Thompson*

The Summit, a conference that tracks political art across the globe, has been transformed over the past decade, its form and content shaped by the contours of political events abroad and on U.S. soil and by the changing genre of socially engaged art practice. What started as a gathering to make the case for the relevance of art and politics in the main circuits of contemporary art evolved into an urgent coming together of disparate and politically telling artistic practices. Looking back over the last decade, the texture and content of this gathering reflect the mood, spirit, and political urgencies of this wild decade.

This book is an opportunity to reflect on the condition of both tendencies—political and artistic—across the vast geography of the globe and how they inform each other. The essays and projects contained herein offer a lens into a series of practices that could be inspiring to practitioners in a wide array of regions, while also possessing a specificity germane to their location. They tell a tale of the complex forces that give rise to and foreclose moments of aesthetic political action. The urgencies of political moments, coupled with the condition of support for the arts and the various intersectional dynamics within a given region, set the groundwork for specific manifestations of creative protest, resistance, community building, institutional critique, and more.

While art fairs and biennials offer a glimpse into different regional art scenes, much of what constitutes political art remains outside these networks. While the commercial world had, over the course of the 1990s and into the 2000s, begun to embrace a fever of globalism, the political art sphere still required much more conversation and spaces of international connection. At its inception, the Creative Time Summit also lagged behind in providing a global lens on these practices. While the Summit has always attempted to connect diverse practices across the globe, the reach and understanding of these practices and practitioners would take time to develop.

Over the course of the next decade, the Summit would take place annually (if not biannually), and each iteration would reflect tendencies happening both in political art and in the urgencies of the political moment. Reflecting on its modalities over time, the Summit provided a clear snapshot of the forces and events that would come to occupy the center of current political concerns. If political art exists at the fringes, then it is the fringes that usher in an emerging social landscape.

## The return of political art

On public memory:

[T]hose various types of distributed memories [collective memory, communicative memory, and cultural memory] reinforce the concept of memory as shared process, as a condition that takes us out of our immediate reality and allows for an awareness of connections and contingencies. Public memory resides precisely in that transitional realm of individual awareness and collectively scripted narrative of self-expression and context. To activate public memory, that is to render it an agent of the moment. We need to work in that ambiguous realm and to bring our audiences to it.

*Carin Kuoni, Creative Time Summit: Revolutions in Public Practice, 2009*

We shaped the Summit in order to uplift political art and to make the case for its relevance to the community of artists, scholars, and cultural workers that form not only the art world but also the world beyond. We, at Creative Time, wanted the Summit to introduce audiences to the vast world of political art production and to make a case for the power of art to transform society. That said, the first important task was to make the case to the art world itself.

The methodology and content of the Summit built upon a number of important precursors. One of the more significant conferences in New York history that guided our vision for the Summit was the *Town Hall* series at the DIA Art Foundation that took place in 1980. The first half of the project consisted of an installation by Martha Rosler titled *If You Lived Here*, which responded to questions of gentrification and housing. The second discursive exhibition and platform was by the collective Group Material, titled *Democracy*. Both featured a series of conversations on topics that would not only continue to be urgent at the time of the first Summit—including gentrification, intersections of class, race, and cultural production, AIDS activism, and strategies to resist capitalism—but also put forth a politically progressive agenda by way of an art institution.

In addition to these seminal projects at DIA, we at Creative Time (which, most importantly, included then Executive Director Anne Pasternak) found inspiration in the work of Okwui Enwezor, the artistic director of documenta 11. The 2002 edition highlighted art from the global South and brought colonialism front and center as an important rupture in the production of culture. In addition, Enwezor produced a series of discursive “platforms” that emerged in major port cities across the globe. These platforms, as they were called, featured philosophical and political voices from across the cultural spectrum. Urgent and necessary conversations on subjects ranging from truth and reconciliation in South Africa, to the concept of creolization, to the rise of neoliberalism were being addressed by the world’s sharpest minds. And what else could bring them together than art itself? It was within the field of art where these conversations that seemed both urgent and, strangely, beyond the bounds of contemporary political discourse could emerge.

It is also helpful to note that Creative Time itself had a history of organizing around art and politics. In 2006, Creative Time organized three roundtable dinners asking artists, curators, and academics about the state of art and politics. Many of these artists would continue to play a role in Summits to come, including Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Hans Haacke, Emily Jacir, Lucy Lippard, Daniel Martinez, Marlene McCarty, Helen Molesworth, Anne Pasternak, Paul Pfeiffer, Michael Rakowitz, Martha Rosler, Ralph Rugoff, Amy Sillman, Allison Smith, Kiki Smith, and David Levi Strauss.

Just a year previous to the first Summit in 2009, Creative Time organized a large-scale project at the Park Avenue Armory titled *Democracy in America: The National Campaign*. It could be considered, in some manner, a test case for what would become the Summit. With its cavernous hall, the Armory was transformed into an ad hoc hub for social politics, which brought

together voices ranging from David Harvey to the Guerrilla Girls, the Yes Men, Critical Art Ensemble, Brian Holmes, and Karen Finlay, among others. As part of *Democracy in America*, curator Daniel Tucker and I went to five cities—New York, Baltimore, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Chicago—to initiate in-depth conversations with artists and activists. It became evident, in 2008, that, rather than only fighting the Bush administration's role in Iraq or the Patriot Act, an issue that evidently had captured the imagination and work of many artists was a topic that would come to be a critical part of the Summits for the decade to come: gentrification.

The Summit also emerged out of a recognition of an ever shifting vast landscape of political art. The broad array of approaches provided an opportunity for a conference where these regional and aesthetic specificities could be explored, from the community-based work of Appalshop in Appalachia to the social practice art coming out of Portland and San Francisco, to the politically engaged social practice out of Chicago in spaces like Mess Hall, to the discursively rigorous work inspired by or in connection with the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York City. More directly activist work like the agitprop activities of the Guerrilla Girls or the Yes Men expanded this landscape even further. And that was just in the United States.

Admittedly, our knowledge of art making outside of our immediate, United States-based context would take some time to come into sharper relief. We began by highlighting the work of cultural workers and artists already familiar to us: the work of curators such as Lars Bang Larsen, Okwui Enwezor, Chus Martinez, Maria Lind, Bisi Silva, Gridthiya Gaweewong, and the Croatian collective What, How and for Whom, as well as the work of artists such as Dinh Q. Le (Vietnam), Etcétera (Argentina), Regina José Galindo (Guatemala), Chto Delat? (Russia), Minerva Cuevas (Mexico), and Yael Bartana (Israel). Many of these artists and curators are well-known in the arts circuits of biennales, major exhibitions, and art fairs. The Summit's network of international artists would expand over time as we continued to have conversations and grew our network and knowledge of practitioners.



Courtesy Creative Time.

Presenter Okwui Enwezor at the first Creative Time Summit: Revolutions in Public Practice, 2009.

The first Creative Time Summit took place in 2009, one year into the Barack Obama presidency, and in partnership with the New York Public Library. It was seemingly the dawn of a new era. Eight years of George W. Bush as president and the so-called War on Terror had somewhat come to a close; the country had clawed its way out of the big bank bailout of the subprime mortgage crisis. Obama rode into office with promises of closing Guantanamo Bay, and, after eight years of Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, the new presidency sent an electric shock that history was in the making.

The 2009 and 2010 Summits made a case for political art. We aimed to acknowledge its history and to make space for those artists and collectives that possessed active disdain for the mainstream art world and capitalism in general. Established contemporary global curators and artists such as Okwui Enwezor, Maria Lind, Thomas Hirschhorn, Carin Kuoni, and Alfredo Jaar presented alongside historically important art activists and social practice creators such as Gregory Sholette, Suzanne Lacy, Harrell Fletcher, and Mel Chin and off-the-circuit contemporary activists such as Baltimore Development Cooperative. This would be an evolving formula that would become more global and interdisciplinary as time went on.

Leveraging the social capital available from established artists and curators, we put forth a platform that was consciously resistant to power. We were cognizant of the world of conferences that were beginning to emerge in the media landscape. The dot-com-supporting blockbuster innovator conference TED haunted us with its flashy motivational speeches, solid embrace of popular education, and adoration for the rising world of technology. We wanted to keep the conference grounded by speaking truth to power and to simultaneously play a spotlight on many projects that remained hidden. In doing so, we walked the tightrope in the inevitable contradiction of being a resistant program at the center of global capitalism. This contradiction would become more apparent in years to come.

### **2011: take to the squares**

So, 42 years later, this manifesto is a world vision and a call for revolution for the workers of maintenance. For these are the workers of survival and sustainability. Look around, that's most of the people in the whole world. Together, if organized and in coalition, we could reshape the world.

*Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Creative Time Summit: Living as Form, 2011*

In 2011, the world erupted in a wave of protest and vast political transformation. The year of 2011 would come to be known for the Arab uprisings, the European Summer, and Occupy Wall Street—a domino effect of historic popular uprisings that took over the planet and rocked political establishments worldwide.

It was during this period that Creative Time launched *Living as Form* and the accompanying Summit of the same title. A sprawling exhibition that took place at the Essex Street Market surveying socially engaged art across the globe from 1991–2011, *Living as Form* placed into the conversation a diverse set of artistic practices that utilized the form of everyday life as their artistic medium. As artist Paul Ramírez Jonas said, “The public has a form and any form can be art.” The exhibition and Summit itself would coincide with the dawn of Occupy Wall Street located in Zuccotti Park in downtown New York’s Wall Street.

Three years after the financial crisis and related big bank bailouts, activists and artists camped out in the park and regularly held protests that demanded accountability from the financial sector. With adages such as “We are the 99%,” the movement—which continued



Open source/Wikicommons.

The Occupy Wall Street movement erupts, 2011.



Open source/Wikicommons.

Protesters occupy Zuccotti Park in New York's Wall Street.

to grow and to spring up across squares throughout the country—brought a much needed conversation about neoliberalism and class to television screens, newspapers, and plazas across the United States.

The occupation of the squares had first begun in the Arab world, kicked off in Tunisia with the self-immolation of the fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi. After having his wares confiscated by the police, Bouazizi set himself on fire, unleashing a wave of protest in Tunisia. The scale of the pushback would not go unnoticed in neighboring Egypt, where youth organized to gather in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011, to protest the Mubarak regime. As is well-known, the protests in Tunisia would unleash a wave of resistance in Libya, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Jordan, Morocco, and elsewhere. In Tunisia and Egypt, the governments would be overthrown; in other countries such as Syria and Yemen, events would lead to bloody and ongoing civil wars. But in the early days of the Arab uprisings, it felt like anything was possible. The horizon of political possibility remained open.

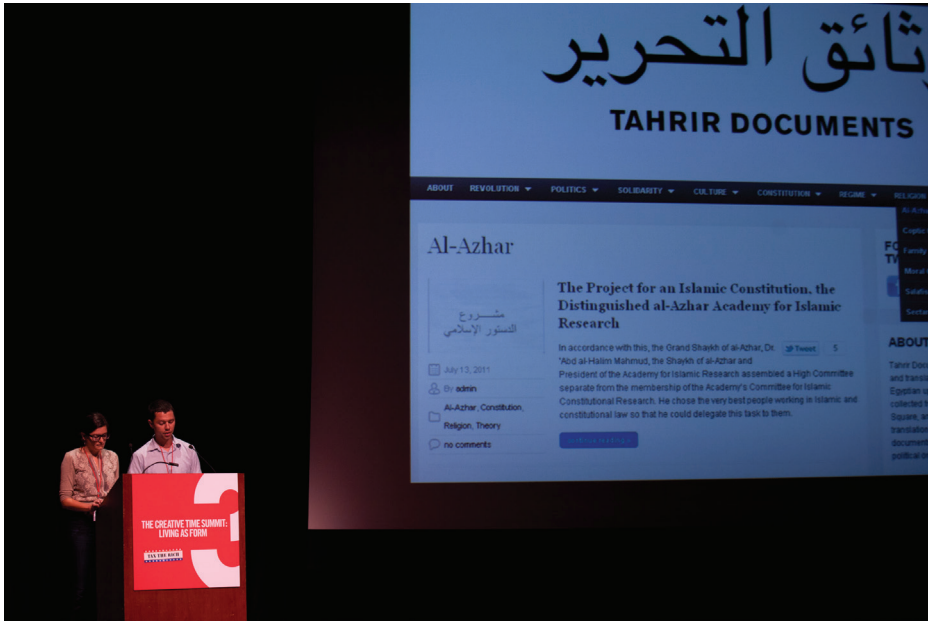
This movement spread to the shores of Europe where the Indignados movement erupted in Spain in May 2011 and took over Madrid’s Puerta del Sol Plaza. As for the events of the Arab uprisings, the use of social media outlets like Twitter and Facebook provided tremendous power for social organizing. Using a Facebook page, the Indignados movement called for people to gather on May 15, stating, “We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers.”

For the field of art and activism, the year 2011 would set the stage for all events to come. A certain urgency took over in political art. Rather than a desire to blend art and life, suddenly the point was to use art to transform life itself. Art was no longer a passive reflection but an active engagement and challenge to structures of power—from banking to the art world itself.



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Protesters gather in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt in January, 2011.



Courtesy Creative Time.

Founders of the Tahrir Documents Project Emily Drumsta and Levi Thompson present at the 2011 Creative Time Summit: Living As Form.



Open source/Wikicommons.

The Indignados movement sweeps over Madrid's Puerta del Sol Plaza.

## 2012: of critiques and boycotts

We occupy museums to reclaim space for meaningful culture by and for the 99%. Art and culture are the soul of the commons. Art is not a luxury!

*Occupy Museums, 2011*

If the Arab Uprisings began with the youth challenging the powers that be, the next phase ushered in armed coalitions ready to seize upon a power vacuum. Syria would descend into a complex interregional conflict that evolved into a proxy war between larger powers. The sheer brutality of the pushback from regimes would attempt to stifle the forces of solidarity that had unleashed the Arab uprisings.



Courtesy Occupy Museums.

Occupy Museums protest against MoMA board member Larry Fink, 2017.



Occupy Museums, as part of G.U.L.F. (Gulf Ultra Luxury Faction), protests Guggenheim Abu Dhabi's labor practices.

In the United States, the post–Occupy movement in art and activism would turn its attention toward the forces of neoliberalism in the art world itself. In 2011, Occupy Museums would challenge board members of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) for their antiunion policies with staged group discussions and readings in front of Diego Rivera murals. Through the action, the group promised to occupy the MoMA each week in order to open a meaningful conversation about economic injustice and the abuse of the public for the gain of the 1% in cultural institutions. They followed in the footsteps of a collective formed several years prior, a group called GULF Labor, which took to task the labor conditions in the construction of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.

A galvanized online and in-person movement, which set out to critique and hopefully reconstruct institutions central to the art world, began to emerge. In 2011, the Sharjah Biennale found itself in the crosshairs of a viral petition that castigated the organization for censoring Maportaliche/*It Has No Importance* (2011), an installation by Algerian artist, writer, and journalist Mustapha Benfodil. The petition was just the beginning of many more biennials to face artist backlash. The 2014 iteration of Manifesta, the roving European Biennial of Contemporary Art set to take place at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg faced boycotts after many found the partnership with the homophobic government of Russia irredeemable. The 2014 iteration of the Sao Paulo Biennale likewise faced protests from participating artists demanding the institution return the financial support it received from the government of Israel.

In 2012, the Creative Time Summit found itself in the crosshairs of a boycott due to a partnership with an Israeli organization. The artist petition, originally circulated by the Cairo-based media collective duo Mosireen, gained widespread attention. With claims that such a partnership

violated the boycott divestment and sanctions movement against the state of Israel, the incident sparked reflection within Creative Time and provoked a deeper understanding of how to navigate such complex political dynamics in our work ahead.

### **Things fall apart: of dictators and gentrification**

The research I do for my work is a single one: It doesn't happen around themes or subjects, but it represents the way I have decided to live and do as a political actor in any given context—taking art as the profession to do so, and interventions as the strategy.

*Minerva Cuevas, Creative Time Summit: Revolutions in Public Practice, 2010*

The period post–Arab uprisings fell into a tailspin of neoliberal and populist forces. The backend of the Internet revolution would be the rise of right-wing movements and in the world of art and politics, the overwhelming whiteness of art and activist forces would inevitably be confronted. Conversations began to circulate back to the spaces of privilege where the lines of race quickly became evident. Gentrification was a nexus of these issues and became a focus worldwide. The battles over gentrification may not be anything new, but the speed at which urban development took advantage of the financial crisis kicked in the teeth of activists and the poor alike.

In Syria, artist groups like Abounadarra documented the violence that plagued the cities of Halfaya and Damascus. With guerrilla-style clips, the reality of the war found its way to viewers globally across YouTube. The 2013 Istanbul biennale curated by Fulya Edremci, originally intended to work in public spaces across the city to celebrate the gains of the public protests in Taksim Square in Gezi Park, would be confronted with the increasingly fascist leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Taking place in a rapidly developing urban metropolis, the Istanbul protests were as much about the privatization of public space as much as they were about asserting class equity and civil liberties.

In Spain, artist Leonidas Martin worked with other members of the Indignados, developing the protest, “You will never own a house in your whole fucking life!” Pushing back on the widespread foreclosures, the left-wing Spanish political party Podemos made gains in Barcelona and Madrid. The Occupy Movement would also spread to Hong Kong, with citizens demanding a form of self-governance. Under the so-called Umbrella Movement, activists pushed back against electoral reforms that would make it easier for the Chinese Communist Party to control the electoral system of Hong Kong.

In the United States, the phenomenon of collective placemaking would bring to the fore issues of race and class., with gentrification making startlingly clear the vast differences in privilege between communities. At the 2014 Summit, critic and author Rebecca Solnit recounted how the overwhelming takeover of San Francisco by supposed “do-gooder” tech companies like Google and Facebook have displaced economically vulnerable communities. Architect Alfredo Brillembourg said of the squatting community in the high-rise known as Torre de David in the center of Caracas, “It doesn't look good, but it has the seed of a very interesting dream of how to organize life.”

In addition to gentrification, the conversation turned toward that of surveillance. On May 20, 2013, NSA-subcontracted employee Edward Snowden fled to Hong Kong to meet with documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras and journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewan MacAskill. Snowden would leak myriad files to the press revealing a vast level of surveillance by the U.S. government on its own citizens, its allies, and the world. While the United States wrestled with its own fears of the Obama deep-state, the Syrian War tore the Middle East apart and sparked the

largest refugee crisis of our time. Lebanese artist Tony Chakar asked Summit audiences—Where was the compassion? Where was the assistance? The fate of urban life and civil rights seemed very much in limbo. After the promise of liberation through the Arab uprisings and the Occupy movement, the fallout felt more bleak than ever.

### **Be careful what you wish for**

On the image of the Anonymous Accordion Player during the Gezi Park Protests in Istanbul, Turkey:

The supposition is that every era, every epoch, dreams of the next one and the dreams come in the form of these dream-images or image-texts. This one is from Ankara in Turkey that happened recently. . . . The promise that it is giving us about a life that is not possible now, but that can be possible again . . . about a life of Carnivale, like when we used to dream that everything was possible, that life could be inverted, could be viewed upside down. He is dancing in the street and behind him you have all this destruction, because no new life will come without the destruction of the old ways.

*Tony Chakar, Creative Time Summit: Art, Place, and Dislocation in the 21st Century City, 2013*

If the Summit began as an effort to prove the importance of political art to the art world denizens of NYC, then by 2014 the point had most certainly been made. That year marked a flourishing of political art. In New York City, Queens Museum director and advocate for socially engaged art, Tom Finkelppearl, became the Cultural Commissioner for the city under the De Blasio Administration. Community and social sculpture artist Rick Lowe won the MacArthur Prize. And Theaster Gates, the wunderkind of Chicago's South Side, took his art world largess and developed an intentional community arts center within a restored bank building. Suddenly, the "outsider" world of socially engaged art had become very much a central part of art discourse.

It wasn't just the museums that caught on. It was also the foundations. Foundations like Art Place, a placemaking foundation originally in the Richard Florida vein, had reshaped itself, looking toward the arts as a space for community development. Large amounts of money were being directed toward socially engaged art projects. Conferences began to proliferate as well. In the United States, social justice conferences and organizations had begun to gain traction, such as Hand in Glove, Open Engagement, the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, Blade of Grass, and the Queens Museum. These conferences helped to bring these discussions that were for so long limited to the periphery of the art discourse to wider audiences. They also expanded the conversation and communication among practitioners, allowing for the sharing of resources and the advancement of conversation.

In that year, Creative Time partnered with curator Magdalena Malm to bring the first international Summit to Stockholm. The following year, 2015, curator Okwui Enwezor invited the Creative Time Summit to participate in the Venice Biennale. As the Summit gained currency within the art world, new questions arose as to how resistance movements were being co-opted into the halls of power.

The 2014 Summit in Stockholm focused on the rise of the global right wing. As populism gave rise to xenophobic movements that were further heightened by the growing migration of people displaced by crises in the Syria and Yemen crises. The Summit aimed to provide a platform with which to respond to such destabilizing politics. Political candidates like Birgitta Jonsdatter spoke about the pirate party in Iceland; Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama spoke



Courtesy Creative Time.

Simone Leigh presents at the 2015 Creative Time Summit: The Curriculum NYC.



Courtesy Creative Time.

Keynote speaker Antonio Negri presents at the 2015 Creative Time Summit: The Curriculum at the Biennale Arte 2015.

about the power of art to change the lived experience of cities; and artists including Ahmet Ögüt warned about the dangers of tyranny being confronted in Turkey while also discussing his project, *The Silent University*, a university taught by and for refugees.

In Venice, the 2015 Summit continued to be a space to hear from those on the run from increasingly right-wing governments. Amar Kanwar spoke about his film and community development project *The Sovereign Forest* and the rise of the Modi regime in India. Activist Joshua Wong gave an impassioned speech regarding the right to self-determination in Hong Kong. While the platform's presence of the Venice Biennale can be interpreted as socially engaged art making some progress in the halls of art world power, the political reality on the ground couldn't be further from the truth. As more politicians, artists, activists, and academics presented, a picture emerged of a world where art and life had merged, but life itself was politically destabilized, violent, and precarious.

### **Hands up, don't shoot**

There are many in America that feel, every day, what it means to be under siege.

*Alicia Garza, Creative Time Summit DC: Occupy the Future, 2016*

The 2016 Summit took place auspiciously in D.C. on the eve of the United States election that brought Donald Trump to the presidency. A bellwether of the arriving political horizon, the Summit made clear that the antipathy for the right-wing agenda of Trump found an equal match with the disdain for the neoliberal policies of the Democratic Party. Political commentator Thomas Frank spoke to the corrupt nature of the election and focused on the rise of the Movement for Black Lives.

The keynote speaker was Alicia Garza, one of the founders of the #BlackLivesMatter movement that swept across the country as America's Black citizens were routinely gunned down by law enforcement. Spawned in the aftermath of the acquittal of white security guard George Zimmerman after shooting of Black 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, the hashtag would go viral, and so too would the campaign as it moved from tragedy to tragedy in a list of names that grows to this day: Eric Garner (NYC), Michael Brown (Ferguson), Tamir Rice (Cleveland), Dontre Hamilton (Milwaukee), Freddie Gray (Baltimore), Sandra Bland (Waller County, Texas) and so many more. Garza stated with force, "There are many in America that feel, every day, what it means to be under siege." Artist Sheila Pree Bright showed gripping documentary photographs from the protests in Chicago, New Orleans, and Baltimore. Filmmakers Arthur Jaffa and Elissa Blount Moorehead talked about Black cinema and the sadistic relationship between Black bodies and the silver screen. Finally, Carrie Mae Weems spoke to an enraptured audience on the need for grace in the face of racism and violence.

Historically, the Summit had hosted various collectives from Russia who faced persecution, from Voyna to Pussy Riot. In 2016, each presentation and performance pointed to the ruins of democracy within the United States.

Artist Shuddabrat Sengupta of the India-based Raqs Media Collective spoke about the vast sculptural project, *Coronation Park*, which featured nine denuded statues recreated from the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as emperor and empress of India in 1911, which investigate the ongoing impact of colonialism in India and globally.

It was the 100th anniversary of the birth of the avant-garde movement Dada, and perhaps that same sense of political absurdity had begun to well up. While the United States' news media would soon enough simply become a series of reactions to the tragicomic behavior of Donald Trump, on the eve of the election, the conversation lingered on the tragedy of the electoral



Photo by Tatiana Gulenkina. Courtesy Creative Time.

Journal Rappe presents at the 2016 Creative Time Summit: Occupy the Future.

system itself. A sinister picture of the future was certainly in place and, politically, attention began to shift toward the longer journey of injustice that had made such a system possible.

## Unlearning

What is my relationship to land? It is hard to think of it as something separate from myself, as something separate from the way I think about community, the way I think about love, the way I think about caring.

—Wanda Nanibush, *Creative Time Summit: Of Homelands and Revolution*, 2017

In April of 2016, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a Lacota Nation activist and Standing Rock Sioux elder, initiated a camp for cultural and spiritual resistance to the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota. The camp would quickly gain widespread attention and attract activists from across the country. This historic flashpoint would become known as Standing Rock and would become a site of conversation and active political resistance tying together many political concerns at the intersection of indigenous rights, activism, and environmentalism.

On the heels of Standing Rock, curator Adam Szymczyk put together a two-part documenta titled *Learning from Athens* that took place in 2017, half the exhibition and programming based in the historic German home of documenta, Kassel, and the other in Athens, Greece—the location of a deep financial crisis and battle for the fate of the European left. At the opening press conference, as Hili Perlson reports, Szymczyk stated, “We believe that unlearning everything we believe to know is the best beginning. The great lesson is that there are no lessons.” As an integral part of that unlearning, documenta featured a number of indigenous culture makers, including Rebecca Belmore, Beau Dick, Máret Anne Sara, Britta Marakatt-Labba, Synnøve Persen,

Kevelislie (Hans Ragnar Mathisen), Mette Henriette, Iver Jåks, Niillas Somby, and Joar Nango. If unlearning was part of the program, it was part of a larger discussion in academic, activist, and artistic circles described as “decolonial” practices.

That same year, Creative Time presented two Summits: one described as a “dispatch” in Athens, as well as a full Summit in Toronto. The Athens dispatch, presented in partnership with the Onassis Cultural Center, took place in the aftermath of the failed Greek election and in the midst of the Syrian refugee crisis and rising unemployment among Greek youth. Creative Time took a different approach to this Summit, inviting participants to be “delegates” and to present three artists, activists, or academics at the gathering.

Many indigenous and global south participants expressed skepticism toward claims of solidarity from Western nations. At the same time, U.S. artist Simone Leigh argued for the need for white progressive communities to get practical about politics (in a way, she asserted, that Black communities had long been). Artists and curators from Europe—including Adam Kleinman, Dephne Ayes, and Iiana Fokianaki—spoke to the dual forces of a rising left and right across the continent.

In Toronto, the Creative Time Summit took place in partnership with the Power Plant Gallery. This iteration, titled *Of Homelands and Revolutions*, would take into account the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution as an entry point into the history of colonialism and indigenous resistance. The Summit highlighted the voices of indigenous artists and scholars, including Standing Rock artist Canupa Hanska Luger, Maori artist and curator Dr. Huhana Smith, Sami artist Máret Anne Sara, Cree Canadian painter and performance artist Kent Monkman, and curator Wanda Nanibush. In addition, a talk by Srečko Horvat, an advisor to Yanis Varoufakis and the growing Democracy Movement in Europe (labeled DiEm25), spoke about the desperate need to take the electoral system seriously and for all social movements to focus on changing governmental structures.



Photo by Candace Nyaomi. Courtesy Creative Time.

Gary Sault leads a land acknowledgement at the 2017 Creative Time Summit: *Of Homelands and Revolutions*.



Photo by Candace Nyaomi. Courtesy Creative Time.

“The Rights of Nature” closing ceremony for the 2017 Creative Time Summit: Of Homelands and Revolutions. In collaboration with Public Studio, Hiba Abdallah, Haida lawyer Terri-Lynn Williams Davidson.

### So much more to do and learn

I remind the ruling class: Today you are depriving us of our future, but the day will come when we decide your future. No matter what happens to the protest movement, we will reclaim the democracy that belongs to us, because time is on our side.

*Joshua Wong, Creative Time Summit: The Curriculum, 2015*

Looking back over ten years of this conference of art and activism, we can glean much. The Summit has offered an artistic snapshot, blurry yet prescient, of the major events in social activism and world events over the past decade. Rather than disparate moments, these histories are interwoven; they inform and incite future events, with art at their core. Whether Occupy or the Indignados movement, the Snowden revelations, or the growing resistance of Occupy Hong Kong, the post-Apartheid landscape or the rise of post-civil war in Medellin, these events are intimately tied up with cultural spaces and artist-organizers on the ground. Just a cursory glance at the last ten years reveals something very simple and mesmerizing: artists were center stage in many of history’s most groundbreaking social movements and events.

But this is not meant to be an essay of boosterism. With humility, the Summit over the years revealed just how much further we had to go than how far we had come. It is certainly telling that only toward the end of the past ten years did the conversation around indigenous resistance take center stage. To take a broader look at history allows one to see beyond hot button political events and instead to focus on ongoing structural oppressions and inequalities and on the *longue durée* of colonialism. In doing so, ongoing questions of what constitutes art, what constitutes resistance, and what constitutes a subject and community suddenly appear with more force and with more relevance.

The Summit in Athens also pointed toward a different methodology in providing space for local actors to bring their agendas and constituencies to the table. In so doing, productive debate emerged, questioning the assumptions of the term “solidarity” on the Left, including different ideas around race, activism, and the meaning of solidarity.

But these failures, so to speak, in providing solidarity, also hinted at just how urgent it remains to provide a space for various cultural agents from across the globe to come together. Exposing difference, while also finding a creative space to share work, ideas, dreams, and concepts, allows for new forms of social cohesion and play. By presenting a complex ecology of resistance instead of conventional blue chip artists, the Summit hoped to avoid the pitfalls of the commercial and press-hungry vectors of art world alienation.

It also required no small amount of adaptability. Acting as a focal point for the resisters across the globe to come together means no small amount of patience and openness to critique. The Summit certainly found itself in the crosshairs of both boycotts and critiques and during these times had to wrestle with its values and how it could operate within a space of both political and activist discussions. As an organization operating in New York City (the belly of global capitalism no less), the Summit required both finesse and constant (self)evaluation of the contradictions and ironies of presenting political art and global resistance.

The value of cultural practices invested in social change remains more dynamic and urgent than ever. With a vast ecology of intersectional issues coming to the fore—from climate change to capitalism, gender equity and decolonialism (and the list goes on and on)—the creative approach to tackling these issues and speaking publicly about them will forever have value. In an era where the consolidation of power defines politics globally, those that speak truth to power will need sanctuary, support, and a platform. A glimpse at the last decade should provide ample evidence that art activists from across the globe are opening conversations, spaces, and new ways of thinking that make another future possible.

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## PART II

# On arts, politics, and engagement

A selected timeline 1945 to present

*Chto Delat? with an introduction by Corina L. Apostol  
and Nato Thompson*





# on Arts, Politics, and Engagement: a Selected Timeline 1945 to Present

A paradox exists in the effort to chronologically organize politically and socially engaged art from around the world. First, the two concepts “art” and “politics” shift meanings so dramatically across time and geography, that the terms themselves nearly collapse. Yet, secondly, in an age of already profound and only increasing regional retrenchment, it appears more urgent than ever for a spirit of internationalism to be embraced historically by political art.

We elected to present this timeline as a starting point for inquiry, reflecting the collective interests of our editorial team and our contributors, which range from activism to aesthetics, from the historical to happenings, and from the local to the global. Our selection includes landmark events that shaped and guided the practice of socially engaged art, including dramatic political changes and far-reaching social movements. This timeline recognizes the principal role of socially engaged art as part and parcel of art history, as well as everyday socio-cultural geographies.

**key:**

 arts\culture\knowledge  
 peoples' life  
 geopolitics  
 economics  
 time  space

 = zvezdá = very inspiring event  
 = red kónnitsa = movements  
 = grobý = deadly disasters  
 = mólnia or vnezápno = no one would expect this



The projects that we highlight critically deconstruct traditional, academic art history; they shift the focus from art-related texts and images to a consideration of the cultural construction of those artistic practices and works and their relationship to seminal social and political events. Our timeline extends the aspirations of a global art history by positioning key art projects not as objects of history within a predetermined Western canon, but as a set of active inquiries into historical processes, engaging propositions to imagine other scenarios for a changing world.

This collective timeline presents compelling socially engaged art histories from around the world in different ways, based on a selection of key projects, actions, initiatives, thinkers, and artists working in the rapidly-changing socio-political environments of their localities. The specific atmosphere in their respective working environments impacted the direction each work took as artists sought diverse responses to these pressures. Each project was both a reaction to, as well as a product of, the changing social times of which these protagonists were an integral part. Their engagements, aspirations, and propositions to a volatile and confusing era of complex struggles provide much needed inspiration for the challenges ahead

**Corina L. Apostol and Nato Thompson**

realized by **Chto Delat** research unit members: **Corina L. Apostol, Corinne Butta, Dmitry Vilensky, Julia Hernandez, Nato Thompson, Nikolay Oleynikov, Shimrit Lee, Tianyu Guo** graphic work: **Nikolay Oleynikov** inspired by **La Charge de la Cavalerie Rouge [Skachet Krasnaya Konnitsa]** by **Kazimir Malevich, 1928-1932** (see image above)

Paris, France:  
**Maurice Merleau-Ponty** publishes **Phenomenology of Perception**, introducing a paradigm shift in the humanities and social sciences towards acknowledging an embodied understanding of everyday life

Paris, France:  
 Artists **Isidor Isou** and **Gabriel Pomerand** disrupt a performance of **Tristan Tzara's La Fuite** at the **Vieux-Colombier**

Paris, France:  
 Northern European avant-garde international art collective **CoBrA** forms, focusing on spontaneity and experimentation rather than formalism in their work

**FINIS LES PIEDS PLATS**

Publication of **The Letterist Dictatorship: notebooks of a new artistic regime**. The subtitle proudly boasts that **Lettrism** is 'the only contemporary movement of the artistic avant-garde'

Bombay, India:  
**Bombay Progressive Artists' Group** forms following the partition. Artists break with the revivalist nationalism of the modernist **Bengal School** to encourage an Indian avant-garde



End of World War II (1939–1945)  
 70 to 85,000,000 victims



U.S. bombs **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki** in Japan, over **100,000** people are killed

**UN General Assembly** passes a partition plan to separate **Palestine** into two states: **Palestine** and **Israel**

Fulton, U.S.: British Prime Minister **Winston Churchill** gives a speech, stating that an "iron curtain" has descended across Europe. Beginning of the **Cold War** (1946-1991)

**RED SCARE** intensifies in the U.S.; the **House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC)** arrests 10 Hollywood writers and directors for affiliations with the Communist Party. The playwright and theatre practitioner **Bertolt Brecht** is among those blacklisted

**Apartheid** system of racial segregation is implemented in **South Africa**

**North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** is established, composed of signatories including the countries of the **Western European Union**, the **U.S.**, **Canada**, **Iceland**, and **Norway**.

Berlin, Germany:  
**Bertolt Brecht** establishes  
his theatre company, the  
**Berliner Ensemble**

**FINIS LES PIEDS PLATS**

Berlin, Germany:  
The **Soviet War Memorial** is  
built in **Treptower Park**,  
designed by Soviet  
architect **Yakov Belopolsky**.  
It commemorates **7,000** of  
the **80,000** Soviet soldiers  
who fell in the **Battle of  
Berlin** in April-May, 1945

Paris, France:  
**Picasso's first Dove of Peace**  
is chosen as the emblem for  
the **First International Peace  
Conference**

**FINIS LES PIEDS PLATS**



People's Republic of  
China forms headed by  
**Mao Zedong**



Beginning of McCarthyism in the U.S.



Kassel, Germany:  
**Arnold Bode** founds  
**documenta**,  
an exhibition  
of contemporary art  
which takes place  
every 5 years

**FINIS LES PIEDS PLATS**

Paris, France:  
**Frantz Fanon**  
publishes **Black Skin,  
White Masks**,  
a theoretical  
work critiquing  
colonialism and  
Western hegemony

**FINIS LES PIEDS PLATS**

The **20th Congress**  
of the Communist  
Party of the Soviet  
Union takes place,  
introducing  
*de-Stalinization*

Osaka, Japan:  
**Jiro Yoshihara** founds  
the **Gutai** group, who  
explore boundaries  
through audience  
participation

**Bandung  
Asian-African  
Conference** brings  
together the first  
generation  
of post-colonial  
leaders from  
both continents  
to formulate  
an international  
relations  
policy

**György Lukács**,  
a Marxist philosopher,  
is appointed Minister  
of the brief communist  
revolutionary government  
in Hungary

Tokyo, Japan: **Jikken Kobo** (Experimental Workshop), a self-taught collective of artists, musicians, and writers, is founded in Japan within the context of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs

**FINIS LES PIEDS PLATS**