

**Art, visual culture,  
activism**



Goya, Disastres of War 1810-20



Brutus, reacts to the death of his sons. Since they wanted to overthrow the government and restore the monarchy, Brutus ordered their death.

This painting is a representation of civic virtue and Brutus' immense sacrifices for the Republic. The government prohibited the exhibition of the artwork at the Salon because it could be interpreted as **propaganda supporting the French Revolution**. A ban on the painting was announced in the newspaper and it caused an outrage that forced the royal court to give their permission for the exhibition of the painting.

[Study for \*The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons\* by Jacques-Louis David, 1787](#)

# Aims of critical and activist art

- Create visibility
- Create awareness
- Create change

Persuade

Change attitude

Move to action





Käthe Kollwitz



Diego Rivera, Uprising 1931

# Modern art as a means of protest....





and raising public awareness



Leon Golub

Vietnam II

Leon Golub, Vietnam 1973



*Interrogation II* 1981



# Activist art vs critical art

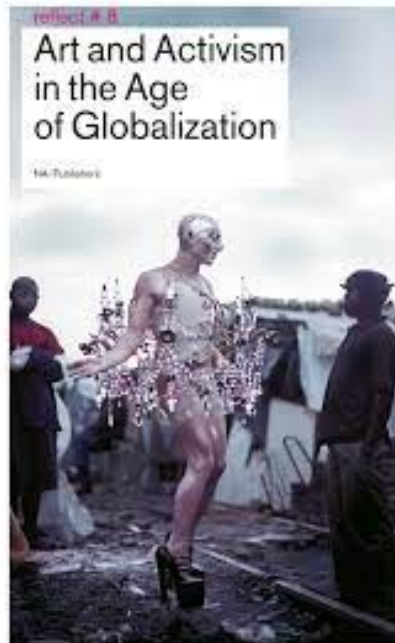
Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art—not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself.



# ART ACTIVISM FOR AN ANTICOLONIAL FUTURE



CARLOS GARRIDO CASTELLANO



# VISUAL ACTIVISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

ART, PROTEST AND RESISTANCE  
IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Stephanie Barron

## SOCIAL JUSTICE ART

A Framework for  
Activist Art Pedagogy

MARIT DEWHURST

## ART + ACTIVISM

What is the change that  
needs to happen now?

OPEN CALL FOR  
JURIED EXHIBITION  
AND PUBLICATION

APPLICATION DEADLINE:  
11:59pm on November 14th, 2019  
Exhibition dates: December 1-7  
Location: Main Gallery

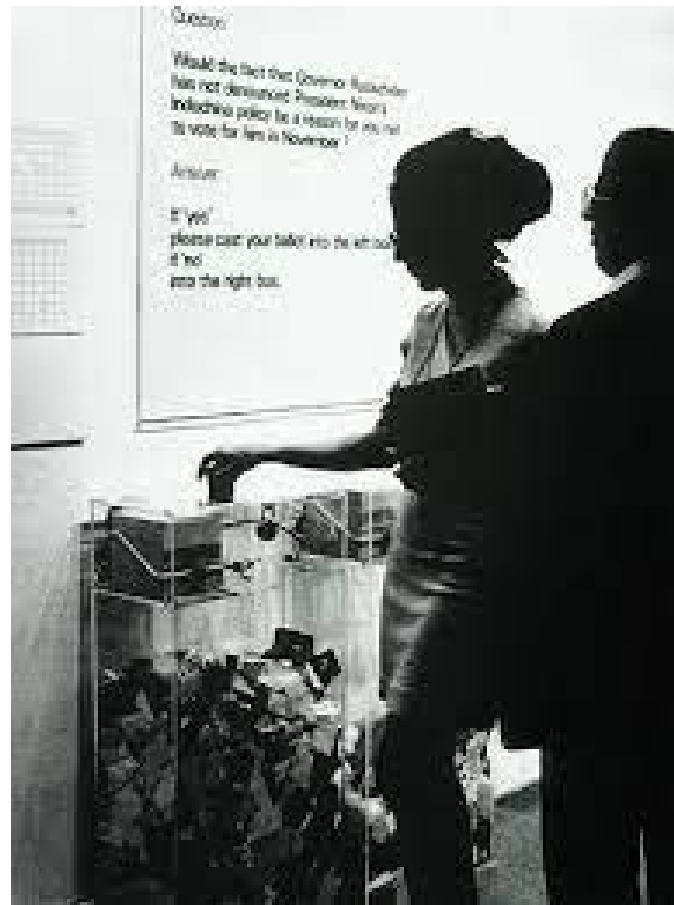
Open to current CalArts students in all mediums, accepting submissions of performance, dance, writing, visual and multimedia art

Each chosen project will be awarded a \$100 production grant. Following the exhibition, one winning project will be awarded a \$500 prize chosen by a jury of ArtChangeUS team members.

For application information, visit  
[www.artchangeus.org/art-activism](http://www.artchangeus.org/art-activism)

@ArtChangeUS

# A few examples....



Hans Haacke "MoMA Poll" 1970

visitors of New York's Museum of Modern Art were asked whether or not they would support Governor Nelson Rockefeller, whose family remains one of MoMA's major donors.

# Guerilla Girls (since 1985)



*Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?.*

According to their survey, only five percent of the artists in the Modern Art sections of the museum are female, but 85 percent of the nudes depict women.



# Banksy





# Visual culture and activism

## Street activism







Kawuart (Reuters)



Mexican artist Roberto Marquez paints a work inspired by Picasso's "Guernica" on a Ukrainian bridge destroyed in Irpin, near Kyiv, on April 26, 2022



What about art?

*Church for Sale* vertretenen Kunst als politische allgegenwärtige Gewalt und Zerstörung und mangelnden Schutz der Gemeingütern richtet. Sie kritisieren sie die Verletzlichkeit der Kunst in ihrer sozialen und kulturellen Kontext und untersuchen Machtstrukturen im öffentlichen Raum.

Nach einer Werkserie von 2013. Sie zeigt den finanziellen Bankrott auf den Verkauf von Kunstwerken. Die Ausstellung besteht aus einer Sammlung von Kunstwerken, die von der Nationalgalerie erworben wurden. Sie präsentiert die Tendenzen der Kunst. Mit der Ausstellung bestehende Zusammenarbeit der Kunst und der Architektur.

Brandlhuber, Florian Jaritz, Gregor Zorzi greift die Architektur auf. Sie nimmt kritisch Bezug auf den Hamburger Bauplan. Somit verweist sie auf die geklärte Zukunft des vom Hamburger Bauplan geprägten Gebäudeensembles, der Flucht der Baugrenze im Hamburger Bauplan. Die architektonische Wand übersetzt, von Norden nach Süden in die Flucht der Baugrenze. Für den Bau der Wand wurde Material eingesetzt, das in den Hamburger Bauplan genutzt wird. Die architektonische Intervention kann als Verweis auf den öffentlichen Raum, als Ort der Erfahrung von Kunst, als einmündigen Gesprächsverständnis ist.

The artists featured in the exhibition *Church for Sale* consider art to be a political activity against ubiquitous violence and aggression, exclusion and the lack of protection of the common goods essential to life. In their works, they explore the vulnerability of human existence in its social and cultural context and examine power structures in the private and public sphere.

The exhibition takes its name from a series of works by Edgar Arceneaux. Created in 2013, they depict billboards from the bankruptcy-threatened city of Detroit advertising the sale of church properties and, along with them, the community-forming meeting rooms they provided. In addition to works from the Nationalgalerie Collection and a few other loans, the exhibition features works from the Haubrok Collection which focuses on conceptual trends in contemporary art. This marks a continuation of the collaboration between the haubrok foundation and the Nationalgalerie which began in 2009.

The architecture conceived by b+ (Arno Brandlhuber, Florian Jaritz, Gregor Zorzi) addresses the exhibition's themes by making critical reference to the development plan drawn up for the area around the Hamburger Bahnhof. This indicates the fact that the future of the ensemble of buildings used by the Museum für Gegenwart, consisting of the historic main building and the Rieckhallen, has not yet been fully resolved. The two-dimensional line arising from the alignment of the adjacent buildings' boundary in the development plan is translated into a three-dimensional wall that divides the historic hall in two along its north-south axis. The wall has been constructed from a reusable material commonly used to enclose building sites. This architectural intervention can be understood as a reference to the fact that the sustainable safeguarding of the museum as a public space and a place to experience art, enjoy reflection and polyphonic discussions that is accessible to all cannot be taken for granted.

The exhibition is supported by the Freunde der Nationalgalerie.



# 12th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art 2022

gionen beschäftigen sich anlässlich  
sche Kunst mit den Hinterlassenschaften  
renden planetaren Notstand. Sie karto-  
n und Widersprüchen, entwerfen Gegen-  
v und erproben dekoloniale Strategien  
dekoloniale Ökologie gestalten? Welche  
ungen aus dem Globalen Süden bei der  
spielen? Wie kann die Debatte um Restitution  
Objekte hinaus produktiv gemacht  
das Feld der Emotionen zurückgewinnen?

On the occasion of the 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, artists  
from around the globe engage with the legacies of modernity and the  
resulting state of planetary emergency. They map the world with its ruptures  
and contradictions, create counter-trajectories to the colonial narrative,  
and propose decolonial strategies for the future. How can a decolonial ecol-  
ogy be shaped? What role can non-Western feminist movements play  
in the reappropriation of history? How can the debate on restitution be rein-  
vented beyond the return of plundered goods? Can the field of emotion  
be reclaimed through art?

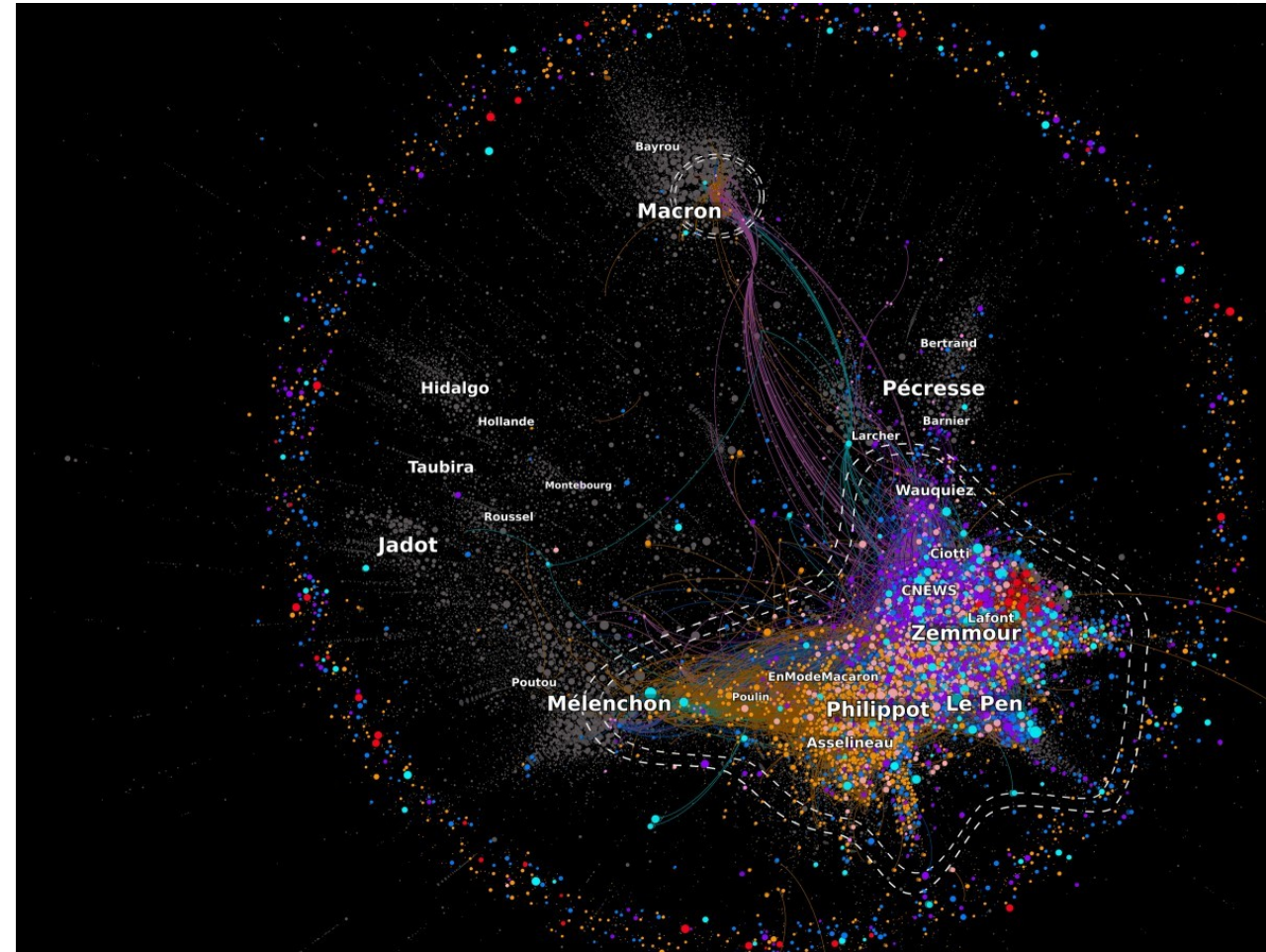
They create counter-trajectories to the colonial narrative, and propose decolonial strategies for the future. How can a decolonial ecology be shaped? What role can non-Western feminist movements play in the reappropriation of history? ....

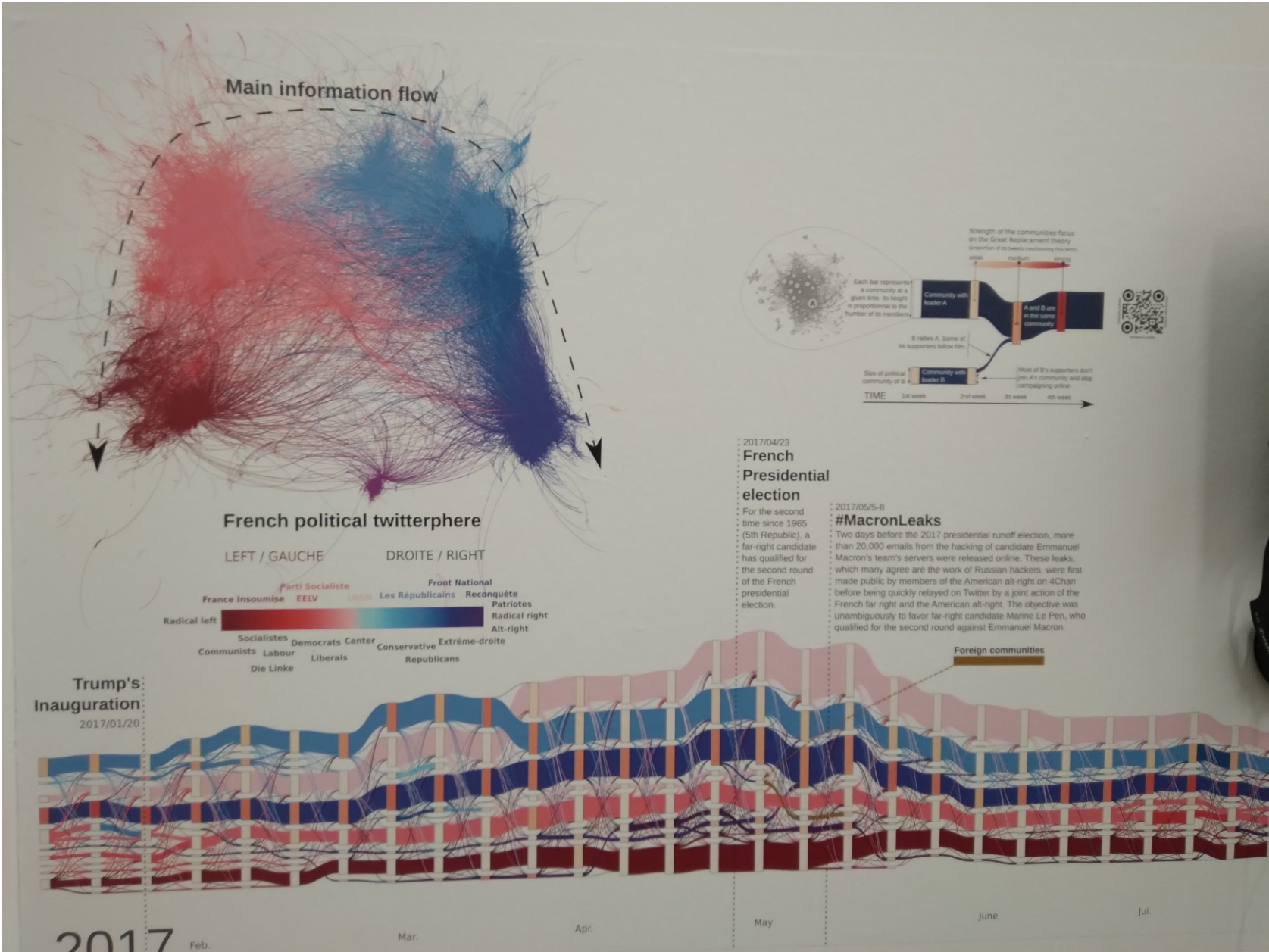


# David Chavalarias

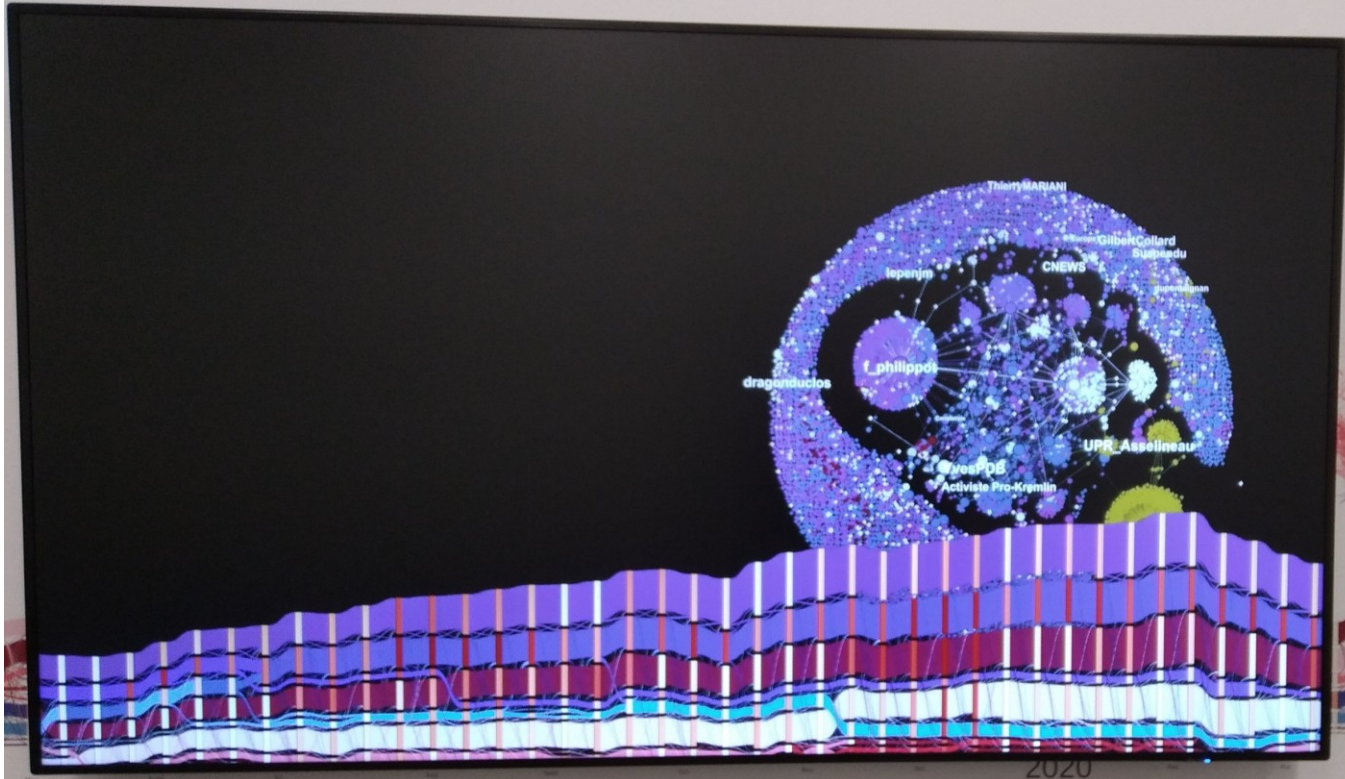
History is a constant state of flux channeled by social groups and their leaders. As a researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research CNRS in Paris, I try to understand the groups we form, how they evolve, how we shape them, and how in turn they shape us. This approach is rooted in my astonishment over the extreme nature of certain social events, such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide, during which a significant portion of the population engaged in brutal violence against fellow citizens.

From Brexit in 2016 to the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol in Washington D.C., the accession to power of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2018), and Viktor Orbán in Hungary (2010), we have witnessed in recent years a gradual weakening of democratic institutions accompanied by the rise of populism and fascist thinking. Through an interdisciplinary approach that is both scientific and intuitive, *Shifting Collectives* (2022) allows us to perceive the invisible social and cognitive structures that shape our identities and collective action by providing us with the necessary reflexivity to understand this ongoing social decohesion.





David Chavalarias, Shifting Collectives 2022



2020



Covid-19 pandemic





## Basel Abbas und and Ruanne Abou-Rahme

Leben und arbeiten in New York City, US, und Ramallah, PS  
 Live and work in New York City, US, and Ramallah, PS

### Oh Shining Star Testify [Oh heller Stern bezeuge] 2019/22

3-Kanal-Videoinstallation, 2-Kanal-Ton, Subwoofer 3-channel video  
 installation, 2-channel sound, subwoofer, 10'05"; Holzplatten wooden  
 boards

Courtesy Basel Abbas und and Ruanne Abou-Rahme

Basel Abbas' und Ruanne Abou-Rahmes Praxis beruht auf der Lebenserfahrung in den besetzten palästinensischen Gebieten. *Oh Shining Star Testify* zeigt die Aufnahmen von Überwachungskameras des israelischen Militärs. Am 19. März 2014 überschritt der 14-jährige Yusef Al-Shawamreh die Sperranlagen, um Akkoub zu sammeln, eine essbare Pflanze, die in der palästinensischen Küche eine große Rolle spielt. Akkoub zu pflücken ist in Israel verboten, seit die Pflanze unter Naturschutz gestellt wurde – eine Entscheidung, die angesichts der kulturellen Bedeutung der Pflanze auf Palästinenser:innen abzielt. Nachdem er die Absperrungen zum israelischen Westjordanland überschritten hatte, wurde Al-Shawamreh von israelischen Kräften erschossen.

Noam Segal

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme's practice emerges from lived experience in the occupied Palestinian territories. *Oh Shining Star Testify* shows CCTV footage recorded by an Israeli military surveillance camera. On March 19, 2014, 14-year-old Yusef Al-Shawamreh crossed the separation wall to pick akkoub, an edible plant important in Palestinian cuisine. Akkoub foraging is illegal in Israel—a law affecting Palestinians, given the plant's cultural significance. After crossing the Israeli West Bank barrier, Al-Shawamreh was shot dead by Israeli forces.

Noam Segal



Forensic architecture, Reconstruction of Russian attack on Kiev TV tower, 2022

Forensic Architecture (FA) is a research agency, based at [Goldsmiths, University of London](#), investigating human rights violations including violence committed by states, police forces, militaries, and corporations. FA works in partnership with institutions across civil society, from grassroots activists, to legal teams, to international NGOs and media organisations, to carry out investigations with and on behalf of communities and individuals affected by conflict, police brutality, border regimes and environmental violence.

Our investigations employ cutting-edge techniques in spatial and architectural analysis, open source investigation, digital modelling, and immersive technologies, as well as documentary research, situated interviews, and academic collaboration. Findings from our investigations have been presented in national and international courtrooms, parliamentary inquiries, and exhibitions at some of the world's leading cultural institutions and in international media, as well as in citizen's tribunals and community assemblies.



Video Tate

# Documenta 15



Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture, *The Rituals of Things*, 2022





# My thesis:

Work of art, which was not made with political or activist agenda can have a greater potential to engage the viewer in reflecting on contemporary events and problems.

Serving good cause or exploiting suffering of others?

Case study: The plight of refugees



Filip Singer, Lesbos 2015





© FILIP SINGER, EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY (EPA)



# Reflection in popular visual culture





Ai Weiwei, Soleil Levant, 2017





# Activism or exploitation?



Courtesy: Twitter/@LizSly



David Beard  
@dabeard



Powerful: [@aiww](#) recreates scene of dead Syrian toddler. [washingtonpost.com/news/worldview](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldview)  
... [#SyrianRefugees](#) [@IOM\\_news](#)



Ai Weiwei





Venice bienale 2019  
Christopher Büchel, Barca nostra

- a monument to contemporary migration" and a symbol of human tragedy that brings our collective responsibility into focus.
- It is a very important project, that boat is the symbol both of the human tragedy and of the political crisis that the migrant flow is causing to all of Europe", Giovanni Angileri, chief of staff of the Sicilian cultural heritage department, told CNN.[\[4\]](#)
- Carlotta Sami, a spokeswoman for the United Nations' refugee agency visited the boat and said: "I feel this cannot be considered a relic of the past. Today, a new shipwreck is telling us that that boat is our present.

*BARCA NOSTRA* surely is more than just a shipwreck; rather, **it is a signifier of our reality, a relic of a human tragedy**, as well as a monument to migration narrating the contemporary status of freedom of movement on a global scale. It is an indicator of collective responsibility and **the horridness of nationalist discourses** and current policies of the majority of European societies today.

Is it?



*Sunday Times* art critic Waldemar Januszczak, noted that: “There's been a lot of fake news spread about on Twitter about the [migrant] boat at the Venice Biennale. It is not true to say that it has no context and ignores death. The context is spelled out clearly in the catalogue. I found it dark, upsetting, accusatory and powerful....to suggest that the piece somehow glorified or ignored death is, at best, plain wrong.”



*Nauseous. This image keeps haunting me. It shows the cynical and ruthless logic of sensational exhibitions where politically correctness and marketing strategy govern upon ethics, research and sensitivity. How one could have thought for a second it was a good Idea to bring this boat (800 persons died in it in 2015) to the Venice biennale? Turning it into a western fetish and a selfie spot.....*

# The Guardian view on the Venice Biennale's migrant boat: pushing the limits of art

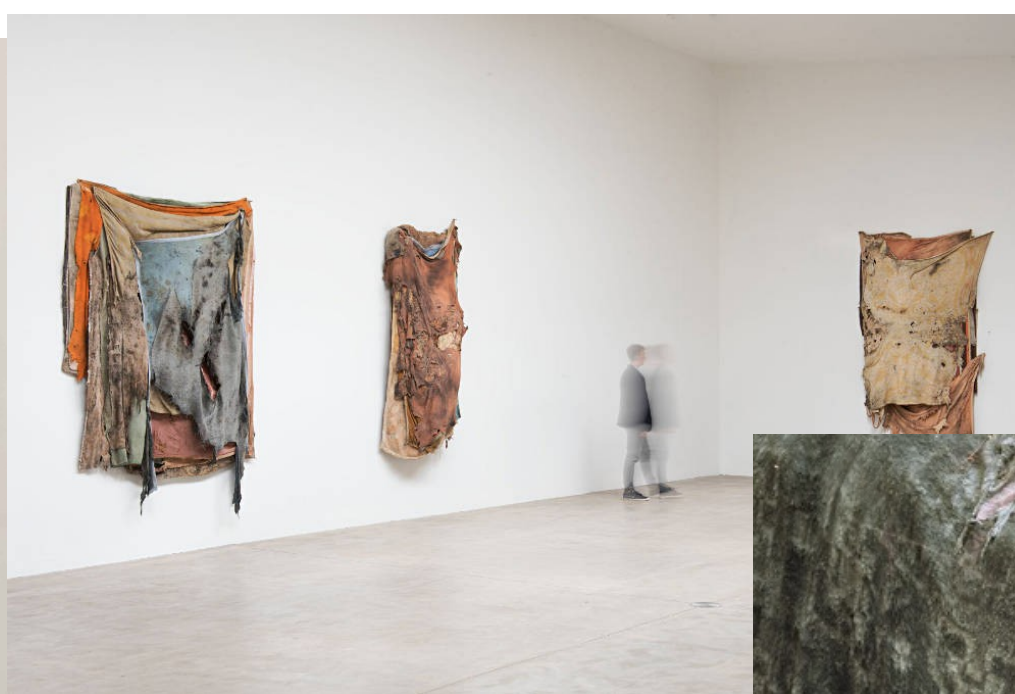
## Editorial

It is precisely this kind of contextualisation that Barca Nostra lacks. Mr Büchel has objected even to the placing of information boards near the vessel. There is no programme of discussions or debates (for example), no immediate connection with those directly affected by the migrant crisis. Mr Büchel seems to intend Barca Nostra to stand as a nakedly distressing, disturbing intervention.

Barca Nostra is certainly provocative. What is less clear is whether it is stimulating much that is productive for those who have lost their lives on the Mediterranean – and for those who will attempt to follow them over the treacherous seas.



- *Here, as with all of his previous projects, public response—including press articles, critical essays, and social media posts—is integral to the overall concept. Büchel's work comprises process and unmediated interactions. Therefore, it has always been his position with BARCA NOSTRA that physical signage and explanatory text at the Arsenale would disrupt the process by which questions are raised, assumptions are made, intentions are projected onto the project, and a meaningful debate ensues.*
- *Again, the fishing vessel is not the artwork; instead, the ongoing project and its journey are the artwork.*



## Courtyard Tales 2017-18

*„blankets are closest thing to your body....you feel the body even not seeing the body“*



# Berlinde De Bruyckere



Anderlecht 2018



# Contemporary (art?) activism once more

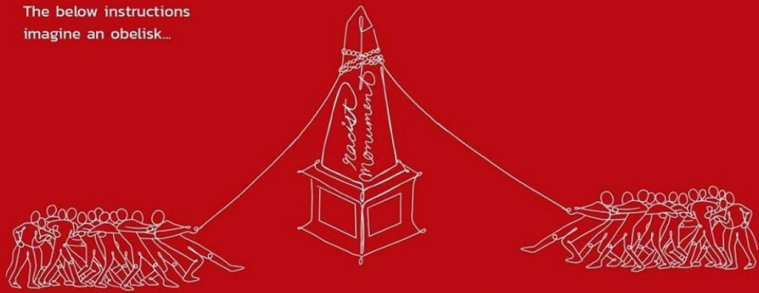
## How To Take Down A Monument

from Twitter by Sarah Parcak on Twitter as @indyfromspace

Key to pulling one down is letting gravity work 4 you. You want to get chains not rope extended tightly around the top and 1/3 down forming circles.

For every 10 ft of monument, you'll need 40+ people. So, say, a 20 ft tall monument, probably 60 people. You want strong rope attached to the chain---rope easier to hold onto versus chain. **EVERYONE NEEDS TO BE WEARING GLOVES FOR SAFETY** (there is a lot of safety first below).

The below instructions imagine an obelisk...



You probably want 150+ ft of rope x 2. You'll want to be standing 30 feet away from obelisk so it won't topple on you (your safety! first!). This gives enough slack for everyone to hold on to rope, alternating left right left right. Here's the hard part...pulling in unison.

You have two groups, one on one side, one opposite, for the rope beneath the pointy bit and the rope 1/3 down. You will need to **PULL TOGETHER BACK AND FORTH**. You want to create a rocking motion back and forth to ease the obelisk from its back.

I recommend a rhythmic song. **YOU WILL NEED SOMEONE WITH A LOUDSPEAKER DIRECTING**. There can be only one person yelling. Everyone will be alternating on rope left right left right not everyone on the same side. No one else near the obelisk! Safety first!

It's all about physics and cooperation!

Start by a few practice pulls to get into it. Think of it like a paused tug of war, pull, wait 2, 3, 4, 5 **PULL** wait 2, 3 4, 5. **PULL AS ONE, PAUSE 5 SECONDS**, you'll notice some loosening, keep up the pattern...you may need more people, get everyone to pull!

Just keep pulling till there's good rocking there will be more and more and more tilting you have to wait more for the obelisk to rock back and time it to pull when it's coming to you. Don't worry you're close!

#abolishwhitesupremacy #decolonizethisplace





# Why overtly political and activist art often (mostly?) fails

1) Hypocrisy of art world:

*(the art world's deep interdependence with the sectors of society benefiting most from the crises caused by capital—from the debt-induced deterioration of labor, the elimination of the middle class, and the global commerce of war to the fracking of our natural environment—has become obvious, a scandalous fact. )*

2) Many works with political or social-activist agenda in reality trivialize complex problems, and in some cases parasite on suffering of other people

3) Such works often miss their targets

4) Visual art is not the ideal platform for communication and discussion of difficult and pressing global problems.

*What's wrong with today's "protest art"—which occupies so much of our public space? Mainly this: it's long on protest and virtually devoid of art.*

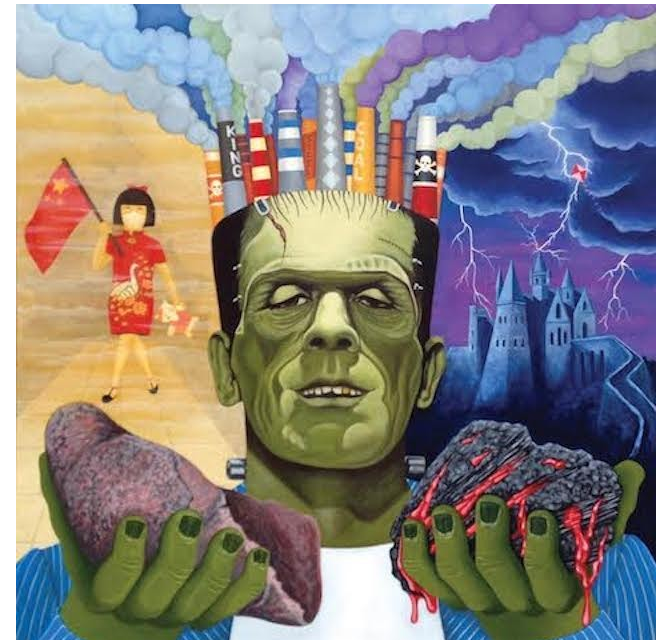


aestheticization and spectacularization of politics, including political protest, are bad things because they divert attention away from the practical goals of political protest and towards its aesthetic form. And this means that art cannot be used as a medium of a genuine political protest—because the use of art for political action necessarily aestheticizes....

Works of art can raise public awareness, motivate and mobilize individuals and groups for to do morally good things.

But they can do so only through their potential to offer an exceptional visual, cognitive and affective experiences.

If they are not capable of providing such experiences, they remain only a piece of propaganda or superficial comment, less effective than other forms of public discourse.





# My questions:

- Can art really help in addressing major problems of this world, such as climate crisis, wars, inequality etc?
- Is art activism making any difference, or is it largely tactics to make oneself visible within the contemporary art world?
- Have you encountered any contemporary artist/work of art, which you found effective as a tool of social change or activism? etc.