

DECOLONIZE THIS PLACE



Week Two

Freedom Songs land. love. liberation.

These beautiful human beings and militants of life

**Free Abuzayed • Julie Brown • Gabriella Callender
Asmaa Elamrousy • Ghislaine León • Natalia Muñoz
Shani Nicole • Vaimoana Niumeitolu • Cleopatra Tatabele**
are taking over Whitney with freedom songs, rap and dance

Because there is no safe space for profiteers of state violence

Join us

Tear gas kills us so Warren Kanders must go!

week after week our
numbers will grow

6:30pm • Whitney lobby

#decolonizethisplace

WHY

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We begin today by acknowledging that we are standing on the homeland of the Lenape, which is, and always has been, a place of Indigenous movement. Our action today, at its most fundamental level, stands in solidarity with the Lenape and all Indigenous peoples, here and beyond, whose land was stolen to create settler states, and who continue to live under siege, surveillance, and colonial structural violence on their own occupied land. We stand with all those advancing Indigenous resurgence and decolonization in the face of colonial oppression. We stand in support of the return of their lands. This acknowledgement is a call to commit, and to take on the responsibility, to dismantle the ongoing effects of settler colonialism. This is where, together, we must begin and persist.

KANDERS MUST GO TODAY IS THE SECOND WEEK OF NINE WEEKS OF ART AND ACTION AT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM.

During this period of escalation, a diversity of tactics will be employed in order to amplify the demand first put forth by 100 staff members in a letter to museum leadership four months ago: Warren B. Kanders must be removed without delay.

These actions will involve the participation of dozens of community groups and collectives from around New York City. As we come together to pressure the museum to reverse its support for Kanders, participating groups will center their own struggles and draw connections between one another and to the Whitney itself.

These actions are offered as a call-in to the Whitney leadership: do the right thing. Removing Kanders will be a show of good faith, and can be the start of a new process for the institution, one accountable to its own staff and to the communities at its own doorstep.

Removing Kanders is a winnable goal. When the actions of a board member or a donor to an organization damage the public profile of that organization, it is not unusual for the organization to cut ties with the actor in question. In recent weeks, our ally Sackler P.A.I.N. has successfully used direct action to pressure major institutions including the Tate Galleries and the Guggenheim to refuse donations from the Sackler family, notorious for its role in the national opioid crisis.

WHY KANDERS?

Warren Kanders is the CEO of Safariland, a “law enforcement products company” that manufactures the teargas used against migrant families at the border, and against demonstrators in Ferguson, Standing Rock, Palestine, Egypt, Oakland, and more. Safariland provides weapons to police forces across the United States, including the NYPD, and its products are also widely used in prisons throughout the country.

All of the groups involved in these weeks of action feel a stake in removing Kanders, who profits from the violence inflicted largely on Indigenous, Black and Brown bodies. Safariland is intimately connected to the forces that our communities are struggling against: police terror, mass incarceration, white supremacy, land theft, and displacement. We know that Kanders is not an isolated case, and that he exemplifies broader patterns of artwashing and toxic philanthropy at our cultural and academic institutions. The Whitney board--and the boards of other major cultural institutions and universities--are packed with predatory oligarchs who enrich themselves from violent industries of all kinds that directly impact our communities.

AFTER KANDERS: REIMAGINATION AND DECOLONIZATION

Getting rid of Kanders will create space for a long overdue conversation about structures of funding of accountability in our cultural institutions. The staff letter itself calls for “the development and distribution of a clear policy around Trustee participation,” that would “clarify what qualifies or disqualifies a wealthy philanthropic individual for the Board. Is there a moral line?” A policy around trustees is one possible step. Another is to begin imagining together what more fundamental rearrangements of power, privilege, and resources might entail, starting with the very site of the museum itself.

The museum is on occupied Lenape land. It also stands in the Meatpacking District, once an epicenter for working class queer communities of color that were displaced with the invasion of the art economy. With the development of luxury structures like the Highline, the Whitney, and Hudson Yards, many galleries in turn decamped for Chinatown and Bushwick, raising rents, displacing communities, and increasing police presence.

Maybe when Kanders and others like him are gone, the museum does indeed look like a very different place with a different system of accounts and different relation to the city in which it is embedded. A place, for instance, run by and for workers and their communities as a cooperative platform rather than a money-laundering operation for the ultra-wealthy. A place that de-centers whiteness and dismantles patriarchy. A place that acknowledges that it stands on occupied indigenous territory, and takes material measures to redress that fact. A place that acknowledges the imperative of reparations, and takes material measures to enact this principle. A place that reckons with its own complicity in city-wide processes of gentrification and displacement. A place that provides sanctuary and self-defense from ICE. A place repurposes the remnants of luxury infrastructure in order to build power and make art with and for the people. A place that is hospitable to the healing energies of sage rather than a refuge for tear-gas profiteers. A place that is built on radical love and relationships of care. A place that understands that conflicts can be points of construction. A place, in other words, that is undergoing a process of decolonization.

ART-WASHING BLOOD MONEY

PARTICIPATING GROUPS AND COLLECTIVES IN CAMPAIGN

Art Space Sanctuary, Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network, Chinatown Art Brigade, Critical Resistance, Crystal House, Decolonial Time Zone, Equality 4 Flatbush, Hydro Punk, Insurgent Poets Society, Global Ultra Luxury Faction, Mahina Movement, Mi Casa Es Su Casa, Mobile Print Power, Movement to Protect the People, New Sanctuary Coalition, NYC Shut It Down, NYC Solidarity with Palestine, Queens Anti-Gentrification Project, P.A.I.N. Sackler, Semillas Collective, South Asia Solidarity Initiative, Take Back The Bronx, The Illuminator, The People’s Cultural Plan, The Whitest Cube, War Resisters League, We Will Not Be Silent, and Within Our Lifetime.

MUSEUMS?