

WEEK NINE

KANDERS MUST GO!

ALL OUT / BRING FRIENDS / MASK UP
FRIDAY, MAY 17 AT 6:30PM MEET AT THE WHITNEY



#decolonizethisplace #decolonizethiscity

FROM CRISIS TO DECOLONIZATION

To Adam Weinberg and the Board of Trustees

It has been six months since the crisis began. The Whitney Museum has a teargas problem.

The staff have spoken. Community groups have spoken. Scholars have spoken. Journalists have spoken. Artists have spoken, including 52 participants in the Biennial. Everyone agrees that Warren Kanders must go. Yet the museum remains silent. What will it take to finally remove Kanders from the board?

We know this goes beyond Kanders. He is a stand-in for an entire system. Toxic philanthropy can no longer be normalized. The landscape is changing, as we can see with the repudiation of the Sacklers by the Met, Guggenheim, and Tate.

Had you asked, we would have told you: the removal of Kanders is a gesture of good faith by the museum, a signal that you grasp the historical moment, and that you recognize business cannot go on as

usual. It would open a pathway for a collective process to address deeper structural questions about the distribution of power and the shape of institutional governance.

The crisis started with teargas, and it now points to decolonization. In the open letter signed by more than 400 writers, curators, and artists calling for the removal of Kanders, they invoke the prospect of a Decolonization Commission that would “include community stakeholders and guided by a variety of urgent principles: Indigenous land rights and restitution, reparations for enslavement and its legacies, the dismantling of patriarchy, workplace democracy, de-gentrification, climate justice, and sanctuary from border regimes and state violence more generally.”

The letter reminds us that “There is no blueprint for decolonization.” We agree. The process is the plan, and we are here for it.

A Notice to the Whitney Museum

We could have shut the museum down today. But after nine weeks of action, we offer the museum leadership a final window to do the right thing: remove Kanders and participate in the formation of a process with stakeholders: staff, community groups, scholars, artists, and more.

Fall is the deadline. We will be back if necessary, and our tactics will escalate further. In the meantime, we expect others will act and organize.

When We Breathe, We Breathe Together

One of our banners today reads “When We Breathe, We Breathe Together.” This is the same banner that was used in shutting down Brooklyn Bridge in 2014, after a Grand Jury failed to indict the cop who choked Eric Garner to death. As we speak, Officer Anthony Pantaleo is now undergoing a departmental “disciplinary trial,” one that by design cannot result in criminal charges. Our allies, including Why Accountability, NYC Shut It Down and Copwatch Patrol Unit, have been at the forefront of the struggle to hold this killer cop and the NYPD accountable for their violence.

We know that the same forces that stole the life of Eric Garner are those represented by Warren Kanders, who counts the NYPD among his clients. The banner also has the design of the keffiyeh, which signals solidarity with the Palestinian freedom struggle. From Staten Island to Gaza: chokeholds, teargas, handcuffs, batons, bullets, body armor, occupation, displacement, land theft, incarceration...These are the sources of Kanders’ wealth and profit, which he launders into his profile as a board member at this Whitney Museum.

A Note on White Supremacy and the Reviews of the 2019 Whitney Biennial

We want to congratulate the 75 artists in the 2019 Whitney Biennial artists, over half of whom are artists of color. This is the most diverse Whitney Biennial to date. Shout out to you for making history with your work, and also for the public stand that 52 of you have taken against Kanders. Your presence is monumental, and you are sculpting the future of the arts landscape.

The Whitney Biennial has taken an important step in decentering whiteness as an exhibition. But it remains embedded in a museum and a broader artworld that has white supremacy at its core. It cannot be separated from the settler-colonial condition, and the interlocking systems of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and imperialism that affect how contemporary art is produced, circulated, and critiqued. We see this play out in the reviews of the biennial so far. We note the condescension of those white art critics who are now lamenting that the artists in the Biennial are not properly political, that they “play it safe.”

White supremacy doesn’t get to decide whether or not our work or actions are “radical” enough to liberate our peoples from white supremacy. White supremacy doesn’t have the tools to examine white supremacy. White supremacy doesn’t get to dictate whether or not our frustration with white supremacy is expressed most effectively via “melancholy,” “outrage,” or anything in between. White supremacy doesn’t get to measure the level of risk (or the level of “safety”) we take in resisting white supremacy. In fact, white supremacy gets no say in the ways in which we choose to survive, live, and fight as people of color in this world. White supremacy doesn’t get to separate us from each other in the name of art and protest, while uplifting its own dubious agenda. We won’t let it. So, make no mistake, when we resist Warren Kanders on the board, we are pushing back and resisting against Whiteness dictating what constitutes contemporary art and aesthetics.

Nine Weeks of Art and Action: Participating Groups

About Face: Veterans Against the War, Art Space Sanctuary, Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network, Brooklyn Defense Committee, Chinatown Art Brigade, Comité Boricua En La Diáspora, Copwatch Patrol Unit, Critical Resistance, Crystal House, Decolonial Time Zone, (De)Institutional Research Team (DIRT), Direct Action Front for Palestine, Equality 4 Flatbush, Hydro Punk, The Illuminator, Insurgent Poets Society, Global Ultra Luxury Faction, Mahina Movement, Mi Casa No Es Su Casa, Mobile

Print Power, Movement to Protect the People, New Sanctuary Coalition, Nodutdol for Korean Community Development, No New Jails NYC, NYC Shut It Down, NYC Solidarity with Palestine, Queens Anti-Gentrification Project, Queer Youth Power, P.A.I.N. Sackler, People’s Cultural Plan, Semillas Collective, South Asia Solidarity Initiative, Sunset Park for a Liberated Future, Take Back the Bronx, The Whitest Cube, War Resisters League, We Will Not Be Silent, Why Accountability, Within Our Lifetime, and more.

#decolonizethisplace