

Art as a Medium for ACTION

The exhibition *Art as a Medium for ACTION* is part of an ongoing Relational art project by artist Gyunel Rustamova and curator Cinthia Willaman. The project asks a series of questions about how art might inspire social or political changes, and what those changes might be. The exhibition will be presented at Hoxton Arches from the 8th until the 10th of September and subsequently at Chris Adams House, Cambridge, from the 13th until the 17th of September. The exhibition places special emphasis on the links between art, activism, and charity work, and collaborators of the project include UK branches of major charities such as the Helen Bamber Foundation, Greenpeace, PETA, Oxfam, and Shelter.

The project has developed across three stages. The first stage, prior to the exhibition itself, consisted of a series of surveys and focus groups investigating the power of images, videos, and other art objects to inspire social, political, and ethical change. Over 100 members of the public were interviewed, before a number of more intimate panel sessions took place. There was an emphasis on popular media, including graphic novels, music videos, and charity advertising. Participants discussed the form and content of the works, and were asked whether they felt the motivation to take action or make a change in their lives as a response to the pieces. And, if they were motivated to take action, what caused this change? Were participants inspired by the aesthetics of the works, or by their messages? Was there something in the works themselves that inspired change? And did celebrity endorsements contribute meaningfully to their responses?

The second stage is the exhibition itself, which will present the results of the previous focus groups alongside new artistic works that designate, discuss, and dissect political and social issues. These include works by the renowned National Geographic activist Asher Jay, environmental artist Rachel Wooller, Hollywood designer and PETA activist Larry Torro, the artist and academic Willie Baronet, visual and performance artist and academic Suzanne Lacy, and fashion designer Gyunel Rustamova. The exhibition aims to put further pressure on the question of art's relation to action and to activism, by bringing together within an intimate space a diverse range of artists and media that reflect on topics including climate change, domestic violence, animal welfare, and the current European refugee crisis. Visitors will be led through a variety of displays, and will be invited to add comments around the works they saw, and to respond to and engage with the art in their own way.

The audience's participation in the exhibition constitutes the basis for the project's third and final stage: that of action. Visitors will be encouraged to make a pledge relating to a cause and charity of their choice. They will be given a token that represents a real financial donation made by the exhibition organizers to a charity of the visitor's choosing. They will also be invited to make a pledge of their own; to change their attitude, actions, or thinking in relation to their chosen cause. This final, interactive element of the project is designed to explore the divide between monetary donation and activism. It aims, through participation, to draw visitors into the project, with the hopes that the parameters of the project will be broadened as visitors take their pledges with them to the world outside the gallery. The exhibition, and the project more broadly, represents a unique reflection on the role of art in charity work, art's power to communicate social and political ideas, and, ultimately, the power of art to affect real change.

Listings information:

Art as a Medium for ACTION

Hoxton Arches, London
8-10 September 2016
Opening Hours 1PM - 7PM
Admission free

Chris Adams House, Pembroke College, Cambridge
13-17 September 2016
Opening Hours 1PM - 7PM
Admission free

Media enquiries and interview requests:
Cinthia Willaman -- cw453@cam.ac.uk

List of Artists and Organisers

Willie Baronet is an artist and academic residing in Dallas, TX. He graduated from the University of Texas at Dallas with an MFA in Arts & Technology in 2011, and now holds the post of Stan Richards Professor in Creative Advertising at SMU Meadows School of the Arts. Since 1993 Willie has been working on the long-term project WE ARE ALL HOMELESS -- a vast collection of bought homeless signs that aims to raise awareness of poverty and to build an empathetic bridge between those afflicted with homelessness and the public. The collection has toured extensively and has been widely reviewed, and an Upworthy video about the project has, in the past year, been viewed over 5.7 million times. Baronet is currently working on a documentary about the project entitled Signs of Humanity. WE ARE ALL HOMELESS was shown in conjunction with the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, and was also displayed in concurrence with the Republican National Convention held in Cleveland.

Asher Jay is a National Geographic Creative Conservationist. Through both her forceful artworks and her capacity as an evocative public speaker, Jay strives to educate as well as empower her audiences. She is committed to a broad range of causes, embracing at once the human and animal worlds and our natural environment. Much of her best-known work focuses on the ivory trade, a theme which, in 2013, was vividly depicted on a gigantic billboard in New York's Times Square. Her forthcoming projects will tackle biodiversity loss during the Anthropocene, with the goal of exposing current threats to the world's most traded and endangered megafauna. Jay's ultimate aim in the creation of her art is to speak directly to her audience, and to persuade her viewers that they hold the key to the future of mankind, the animal kingdom, and the natural world alike.

Suzanne Lacy is a visual artist, writer, and academic based in Los Angeles, CA. She is best known for her performance works of the 1970s, which were produced as part of the emergent L.A.-based performance art movement of that brought together art and social engagement. She has written over seventy pieces of critical commentary, and her edited work, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, is now in its third edition. The project *Auto on the Edge of Time* (1993-1994) explores acts of domestic violence against women and children through images of wrecked and graffitied cars placed in public spaces. Recently, Lacy revisited a work of her own from 1977, *Three Weeks in May*, which addressed cases of reported rape in Los Angeles. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1993, and received the College Art Association Distinguished Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2010. Her work *The Crystal Quilt* (1985-7), which now exists as videos, sound recordings, quilt, and photographs, is held in Tate Modern's permanent collection.

aleXsandro Palombo is an Italian artist and designer. He studied design at the Istituto Marangoni, and has worked as a consultant creative director and illustrator for some of the biggest fashion houses in Milan. In 1998 he founded his own designer brand, aleXsandro Palombo -- with the uppercase 'X' and 'P' standing for the Latin symbols for *Pax Christi*. Palombo is best known for his illustrations addressing the prevalence of domestic violence. These include female characters taken from popular cartoons, including Simpsons characters and Disney princesses, which appear bruised and bloodied alongside their smiling spouses. His project entitled 'No Woman is Immune from Domestic Violence' controversially featured edited portraits of female celebrities, altering them to suggest they had been attacked or beaten. Palombo says of the work, 'Domestic violence is a social cancer that knows no boundaries or social status; it can affect anyone.'

Gyunei Rustamova is an artist and fashion designer from Baku, Azerbaijan. After graduating from the Azerbaijan State Economics University, she moved to the UK to pursue her education in fashion design, first at the London College of Fashion and then at Central Saint Martins University. In her South Kensington atelier, Gyunei transforms painted ideas into high fashion, producing, in addition to ready-wear, a couture line entirely in-house. She is increasingly interested in political activism, social justice, and public attitudes towards charity and charitable institutions.

Jonas Tinius is an anthropologist of art, museums, and theatre. His research explores contemporary artistic production in Germany and Europe with a focus on issues of German and European identity, political engagement, and the representation of alterity and diversity. From 2016-2020, Tinius is an Alexander von Humboldt-funded postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He studied at the University of Cambridge, where he also completed his PhD. He is the founding convenor of the Anthropologies of Arts Network and editor of *Anthropology, Theatre, and Development: The Transformative Potential of Performance* (Palgrave, 2015, with Alex Flynn) and 'Micro-utopias: anthropological perspectives on art, creativity, and relationality' (*Journal of Art and Anthropology*, 2016, with Ruy Blanes, Alex Flynn, and Maité Maskens). More info: www.jonastinius.com

Larry Torro is an L.A.-based artist and activist. Torro began his career working for Warner Bros. Studios as an artist and set designer. He has since embarked on a solo career, and has produced artworks, logos, and merchandise for Disney, Universal Studios, M.G.M, and 20th Century Fox. He also designs and makes Halloween masks, including a now-famous mask of then-Senator Barack Obama, worn by Obama himself on *Saturday Night Live*. His masks are often commissioned by the entertainment industry to transform stunt doubles into exact likenesses of leading actors. Torro is well-known for his animal rights activism and for his paintings that depict reversals of scenes of animal cruelty: horses that ride cow boys, lions that stand proudly over slain hunters, seals poised ready to club diminutive humans. He works closely with PETA, producing artworks and promotional material for its campaigns, and his image of a bull preparing to execute a bullfighter features in Morrissey's live shows during performances of the song 'The Bullfighter Dies'.

Cynthia Willaman is a curator, completing her doctorate in History of Art at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge. She specialises in early twentieth-century European and Russian modernism, and holds a Master's degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art. In addition to her academic studies, Willaman works as a consultant and curator of modern and contemporary art, photography, and fashion. She has worked as a curator in San Francisco, London, and Paris. Willaman began collaborating with Gyunel in 2010 when she curated the exhibition *Thirteen*. Since then, she has curated Gyunel's Couture AW13 presentation in Paris (2013), and assisted with her exhibition *Living with Nature* at the St. Pancras Hotel, London (2013).

Rachel Wooller was born in West Yorkshire in 1968. She went to Oxford to study English Literature before becoming a social worker in 1995. She discovered her passion for art in her mid-thirties – a life-changing revelation that helped her make sense of her relationship with the world – and subsequently went to Norwich University of the Arts to study Fine Art, graduating with an MA with distinction. At Norwich, she worked on sculptural representations of memory and temporal space and developed her love of material juxtaposition. Wooller is now a Cambridge-based studio artist. She works with recycled wood and metal as well as concrete, acrylic, and wire. She is at work on a series of floor-based pieces that explore the power relations between materials.

Charity Pledges

Greenpeace

Greenpeace aims to protect the natural world by investigating, exposing, and confronting environmental abuses, as well as championing environmentally-responsible solutions. www.greenpeace.org.uk.

Pledge: Help clean our air!

Air pollution is dangerous and deadly. 40,000 lives were cut short by air pollution in the U.K. 10,000 of those deaths occurred in London alone. Greenpeace is campaigning to get politicians to act but in the meantime there are a few steps that we can take to help make a difference:

Every day

For short, local journeys, opt to walk or cycle, instead of using fossil-fuel-powered transport.

Every week

For longer trips, use public transport or join a car-share scheme, ideally one with electric or hybrid vehicles.

World changer

If you need your own vehicle – many of us do – consider making the next one you buy a hybrid or fully electric model.

The Helen Bamber Foundation

The Helen Bamber Foundation is a human rights organization based in London. The HBF is dedicated to providing therapeutic care, medical consultation, legal protection, and practical support to survivors of human rights violations. It is founded on the understanding that survivors of interpersonal violence -- whether through human trafficking, war, or domestic and gender-based violence -- exhibit similar physical and psychological symptoms to those who have been tortured. The HBF team of professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and therapists, work with the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society: those who are haunted by memories of entrapment, rape and torture. www.helenbamber.org.

Pledge: Treat with compassion and humanity those to whom you owe nothing. When someone has had their dignity stripped away and their sense of self destroyed by acts of human cruelty, the simplest gesture of compassion and kindness can show them that they are not alone. Perform everyday the simple gestures that make lives more liveable.

Oxfam

Oxfam exists to combat poverty and the want of resources in the world, to provide firsthand support and care to those afflicted by humanitarian crises, and to campaign for the political changes needed to efficiently redistribute wealth and resources.
www.oxfam.org.uk

Pledge: Stand As One with people forced to flee

There are currently 65 million people around the world who have been forced to flee their home due to conflict, disaster, violence and poverty. These are people like you and me who have often been torn away from their families and are struggling to survive. To save and protect lives, we need all governments around the world to act and take responsibility. You can stand with us and those forced to flee by pledging your support for the campaign by taking one or more of the following actions -

1. Join us to welcome refugees at a march in London on 17th September.
2. Sign our petition ahead of the UN's General Assembly in New York
3. Share content about the campaign on social media using the #standasone
4. Join our network to campaign and tackle poverty, please contact Kelly Mundy

To sign the petition online, join us at the march or for more information about the campaign, visit - www.oxfam.org.uk/stand or contact Kelly Mundy, kmundy@oxfam.org.uk or call 0161 234 2786

PETA

PETA stands for 'People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals'. They are dedicated to establishing and protecting the rights of all animals, of ending human-inflicted animal suffering, and to educate the public on the horrors of animal cruelty.
www.peta.org.uk

Pledge: Take the vegan pledge.

Some people go vegan after looking an animal in the eye and realising that there's a 'who', not a 'what', looking back. Others avoid meat, eggs, and dairy foods to ditch unwanted pounds or because they want to help the environment. Whatever the reason, there's never been a better time to cut the meat and other animal-derived products out of your diet.

Make a resolution that will save lives and leave you feeling better than ever before.

Sign the pledge to try a vegan diet for the next 30 days. We'll send you resources, recipes and tips every week to help you on your way.

Shelter

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through advice, support and legal services. They campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to them for help.

"We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own"

www.shelter.org.uk

Pledge: Fix Renting

For too many people, renting is unsafe. Mice, mould and damp are far too common. One in six private rented homes in England contain a hazard that is a serious risk. But renters can't easily challenge their landlord if the home they rent is in bad condition.

The current law to protect renters is out of date. They are only protected from being rented an unfit home by their landlord when the annual rent is £52 or less, or £80 or less in London. Nobody's rent is that low anymore.

The new housing minister, Gavin Barwell, has an opportunity to make rented homes safer for all of us. He can do this by making it law so only homes which are genuinely fit for human habitation can be rented out by landlords.

Please add your name to our petition.