



## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

### **Engage Journal 42: Ethics & Activism** (*working title*)

**Proposals are invited for the next issue Engage Journal, Engage 42, which will focus on ethics and activism within gallery education.**

*The outline below, stimulated by a discussion with the Engage Journal Editorial Advisory Board (EAB), is followed by a series of questions. Please address these or use them as prompts in proposals for articles.*

The notion of activism in gallery education stems from several factors, not least – as *engage 35: Twenty-Five Years of Gallery Education*<sup>1</sup> explored - ‘the extent to which the field developed through particular political commitments, for instance to community art or alternative education’. In this issue past and present Engage directors’ accounts ‘are suggestive of the deep roots gallery education has in activism’. Its first director, Felicity Allen, discusses how during the 1970s and 1980s ‘education was a central focus through which radicals hoped to develop popular criticality against racism, sexism and in relation to advertising manipulation, or public pedagogy... Repositioning the citizen as producer rather than consumer’<sup>2</sup>. People continue to join the profession with strong convictions and a desire to effect change.

Gallery education relates closely to contemporary art practice and reflects the often ethical and political concerns of artists. Contemporary art is complex to define; however, the Getty Museum’s website proposes on its education section, ‘Today’s artists work in and respond to a global environment that is culturally diverse, technologically advancing, and multifaceted. Working in a wide range of mediums, contemporary artists often reflect and comment on modern-day society’<sup>3</sup>.

The Whitechapel Gallery’s series of anthologies, *Documents of Contemporary Art* reflect the multiplicity of themes, practices and concerns of significance to contemporary visual culture, including *Failure, Destruction, Boredom, Queer, Ethics and Sexuality*<sup>4</sup>.

Whether working with art exhibitions, museum collections or archives it is difficult to avoid challenging ethical and moral debates. The publication *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* (2018) by Aruna D'Souza takes a critical look at three incidents reflecting the troubled history of art and race in American<sup>5</sup>.

*“In 2017, the Whitney Biennial included a painting by a white artist, Dana Schutz, of the lynched body of a young black child, Emmett Till. In 1979, anger brewed over a show at New York’s Artists Space entitled ‘The Nigger Drawings’. In 1969, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition ‘Harlem on My Mind’ did not include a single work by a black artist. In all three cases, black artists and writers and their allies organized vigorous responses using the only forum available to them: public protest.”*

These are extreme examples but institutions, curators and educators wrestle constantly with ethical issues; how they work with public collections that might reflect out of date beliefs and unacceptable prejudices (see artist Sonia Boyce, *Whoever Heard of a Black Artist?* BBC Four, 30 July 2018) <sup>6</sup>, how they represent and interpret the public collections they care for, how they reflect the concerns of artists, how they satisfy a range of funders and other supporters, how they maintain professional authority, how they best serve their communities and engage them in meaningful debate and learning. Programming with sensitivity to community is illustrated by articles in *Engage 40: Civic role, public space* ('Site: X marks the spot') <sup>7</sup> and *engage 39: Visual Arts and Wellbeing* ('Creativity, connection and soul joy: postcards from the land of the long white cloud') <sup>8</sup>.

*Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* <sup>9</sup> is a 'handbook of new curatorial strategies based on pioneering examples of curators working to offset racial and gender disparities in the art world'. Its author, Maura Reilly, proposes that institutions must be a driving force for change.

Design has its ethical and political dimensions, as illustrated by the V&A's exhibition *Disobedient Objects, 2014/15*, which examined the powerful role of objects in social change <sup>10</sup>. The Design Museum's exhibition *From Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008-18, 2018* <sup>11</sup> examined 'how graphic design and technology have played a pivotal role in dictating and reacting to the major political moments of our times'.

Ironically, in July twenty-five artists and designers whose work features in this show, wrote to the Design Museum demanding that their works be removed after it hosted a reception for one of the world's largest arms manufacturers <sup>12</sup>. The need for public galleries and museums to raise funding has often led to ethical tensions, with high profile protests against particular sponsorship. Protests against BP's sponsorship of Tate Modern went on for some years, including by the art collective Liberate Tate, which carried out an unsanctioned performance *Time Piece* in the Turbine Hall ahead of the Paris Climate Summit in December 2015 <sup>13</sup>. This month the V&A Dundee turned down a donation from a strip club owner, saying 'we regret we will be unable to accept this due to the nature of some of your business interests being contradictory to V&A Dundee's core aims and values' <sup>14</sup>.

In these febrile times it is not surprising that artists have participated powerfully in campaigns such as *Occupy*, against Trump's attitude to women, and the drive to repeal the eighth amendment of the Irish constitution. Dublin street artist Maser painted the *Repeal* mural, which became one of the symbols of the *Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>* movement <sup>15</sup>.

The rash of exhibitions looking at protest, an example being *Free the Pussy*, an exhibition of artwork made in response to the imprisonment of members of the punk collective Pussy Riot by the Russian Government in 2012, also isn't surprising. One of the most potent images of this summer has been the Baby Trump balloon, which was flown over London on 13 July 2018. Apparently, several London museums are vying to acquire it, the British Museum wishing to include it in the show *I object: Ian Hislop's search for dissent* <sup>16</sup>.

In the case of the *Repeal* mural, the Artistic Director of Project Arts Centre was unequivocal in stating the venue's support for the work: 'it is vital to me that we allow an artist's work to speak for itself and that their freedom of expression is supported'. However, there is a difference between the responsibilities of an individual artist and the institution. Exhibiting the former implies support for freedom of speech and creativity, but not a political position for the gallery or museum. It can be a considerable challenge for organisations, and for those working in education and participation, to represent the broad

community that they serve, and – in a case like the Trump baby – enable interpretation, debate and allow for differing views.

## Notes

1. Raney, Karen, 2015. 'Editor's Introduction', *engage 35: Twenty-Five Years of Gallery Education*, 6-7. Engage, the National Association for Gallery Education. <https://engage.org/article.aspx?id=140>
2. Allen, Felicity, 2015. 'Maintaining a Radical Vision', *engage 35: Twenty-Five Years of Gallery Education*, 21. Engage, the National Association for Gallery Education. <https://engage.org/article.aspx?id=141>
3. The J. Paul Getty Museum. "About Contemporary Art." Accessed August 2018. [http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/contemporary\\_art/background1.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/contemporary_art/background1.html)
4. MIT Press. "Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art." Accessed August 2018. <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/series/whitechapel-documents-contemporary-art>
5. D'Sousa, A. 2018. *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts*. March, Badlands Unlimited.
6. BBC 4. "Whoever Heard of a Black Artist? Britain's Hidden Art History." <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bcy4kd>
7. Nicol, Gill, 2017. 'Site: X marks the spot', *Engage 40: Civic role, public space*, 52-63. Engage, the National Association for Gallery Education. <https://engage.org/article.aspx?id=227>
8. Walls, Amber, and Muss, Asha, 2017. 'Creativity, connection and soul joy: postcards from the land of the long white cloud', *engage 39: Visual Arts and Wellbeing*, 17-27. <https://engage.org/article.aspx?id=205>
9. Maura Reilly, 2018. *Curatorial Activism Towards an Ethics of Curating*. Thames & Hudson.
10. Victoria & Albert Museum. "Disobedient Objects". Accessed August 2018. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/disobedient-objects/>
11. The Design Museum. "From Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008 – 2018". Accessed August 2018. <http://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/hope-to-nope-graphics-and-politics-2008-18>
12. *Frieze*. "Artists Protest Design Museum After Private Event For Arms Dealer." <https://frieze.com/article/artists-protest-design-museum-after-private-event-arms-dealer>
13. *The Guardian*. "Tate Modern's Turbine Hall daubed with graffiti by protesters against BP sponsorship." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2015/jun/15/tate-modern-turbine-hall-protesters-bp-sponsorship-video>
14. *Museums Journal*. "V&A Dundee turns down donation from strip club owner." [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/04092018-v-and-a-dundee-turns-down-donation-from-strip-club-owner?utm\\_campaign=1287407\\_060918&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,RLDB,27LF9W,2TUJI,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/04092018-v-and-a-dundee-turns-down-donation-from-strip-club-owner?utm_campaign=1287407_060918&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,RLDB,27LF9W,2TUJI,1)
15. Project Arts Centre. "Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>: Maser and the HunReal Issues at Project Arts Centre." <https://projectartscentre.ie/repeal-8th-maser-hunreal-issues-project-arts-centre/>
16. Artnet news. "The British Museum Wants to Borrow That 'Baby Trump' Balloon— But It's Got Competition." <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-trump-baby-balloon-1320611>

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**We are interested in contributions from colleagues in the UK and worldwide, reflecting on practices, shifting understandings, discussing policies and the challenges faced in different contexts, in relation to questions such as:**

- What do artists whose work is campaigning seek from gallery and museum educators?
- What are the challenges for educators in working with artists who make contentious work?
- What tensions arise between institutions and individual gallery educators and artist educators whose mission is to 'change the world'?
- What responsibilities do public institutions have to engage in ethical debate?
- Which ethical views can public institutions openly promote or campaigns support?
- What responsibilities do galleries and museums have to present a balanced view of contentious topics?
- What tensions arise between the duty to represent artists and a range of artistic commitments, and the duty to serve a diverse public?
- How do museums and galleries balance providing challenging, didactic experiences with visitors' desire for enjoyment and relaxation, and a resistance to being 'lectured'?
- What are the issues and sensitivities that can arise when working with diverse communities?
- Where do galleries and museums position themselves in relation to schools and the views of parents on ethical issues?
- What policies do galleries and museums put in place to protect their integrity?
- Are there examples of museums and galleries engaging directly in activism?
- Can gallery education be understood as activism?

**If you are interested in contributing to this issue, please send an informal proposal of no more than 300 words, your job/freelance title and contact details to [communications@engage.org](mailto:communications@engage.org) by 10am on Monday 22 October 2018.**

**Contributions may take the format of articles, interviews, collaborative pieces, conversations, photo essays or discussions, and Engage welcomes those which take advantage of the Journal's online format. As a guide, final articles lie between 1,500 and 4,000 words.**

**Issue timeline:**

Proposals deadline: 10am, Monday 22 October 2018  
Finished article deadline: 10am, Monday 17 December 2018  
Engage 42 will be published in April 2019.

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First published in 1996, the Engage Journal is the international journal of visual art and gallery education. Now a twice-yearly online publication, the contents of each edition follow themes linked to the visual arts and education, chosen through an open-submission process. The Journal acts as a snapshot of current thinking on a subject, a repository of references, a source of practical ideas, and a forum for exchange between different parts of the art and museum and gallery community. The Journal is edited by Barbara Dougan, artist, curator and visual arts consultant. The Journal is governed by a voluntary Editorial Advisory Board. The Engage Journal is accessible to Engage members and subscribers to the publication. To learn more please visit <https://www.engage.org/engage-journal>