

WUSEUW

critical
thinking
against
museum
politics



ISSUE 1 - MUSEUMS VS. TRUMP

WUSEUW 01 focuses on how museums and art world responded to Donald Trump's presidency. Through his four years of presidency, Donald Trump faced intense protests since the start of election campaign. While artists, curators, art critics were taking stand against Trump's policies individually and collectively; museums and art institutions such as Whitney, MoMA, Guggenheim and Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) have also stood up against the Trump administration and policies. Protests in the art world against Trump's policies were not only aiming him directly but also to the individuals and companies that supported Trump through his campaigning. Larry Fink, the CEO and chairman of the investment firm BlackRock, who is a member of MoMA's board member and Warren B. Kanders, the chairman and chief executive officer of Safariland, who was a vice chairman of the Whitney Museum of American Art was the center of the protests that questions museum policies deliberate over the members of the board of directors of the art museums. Since Occupy Wall Street movement, museums have also become areas of political protests. Different groups formed by artists, art workers and activists have mobilized against the current structure of the museums. While museums were becoming the target of the organized society, Donald Trump's presidency sparked the fire. From gaining political power over museum boards to decolonization, art workers' rights to unionization; this issue of Wuseuw tries to summarize and visualize the struggle over the museums during Donald Trump's four years presidency.



06.11.2012

Barack Obama won the elections for the second term, beating Mitt Romney with getting nearly 5 million popular votes more.

12.11.2012

Donald Trump signed an application with the United States Patent and Trademark Office requesting exclusive rights to use "Make America Great Again" slogan for political purposes.

16.06.2015

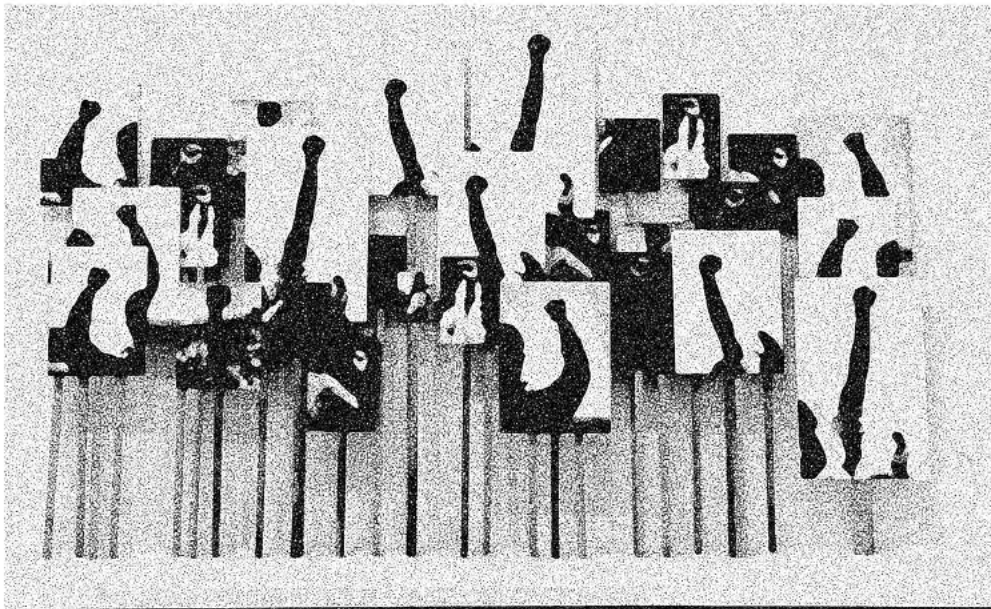
Trump announced his candidacy with a campaign rally and speech at Trump Tower in New York City.

19.07.2016

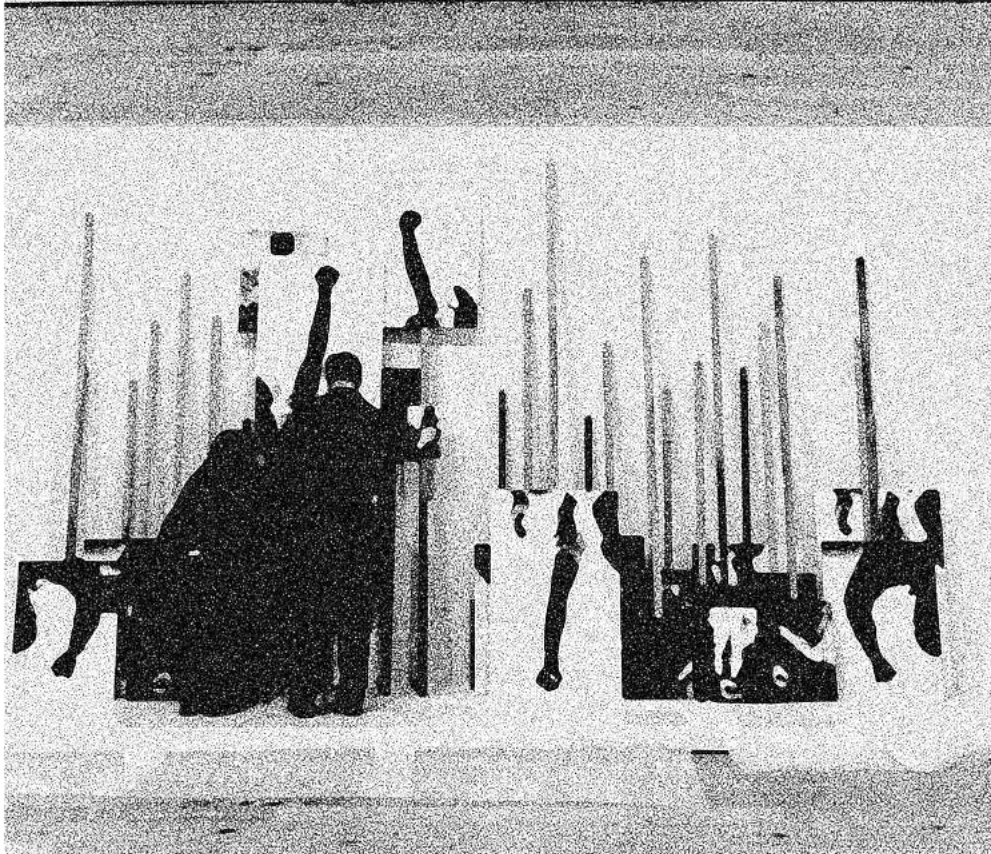
Trump and his running mate, Mike Pence, were officially nominated as the Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates at the Republican National Convention.

9.11.2016

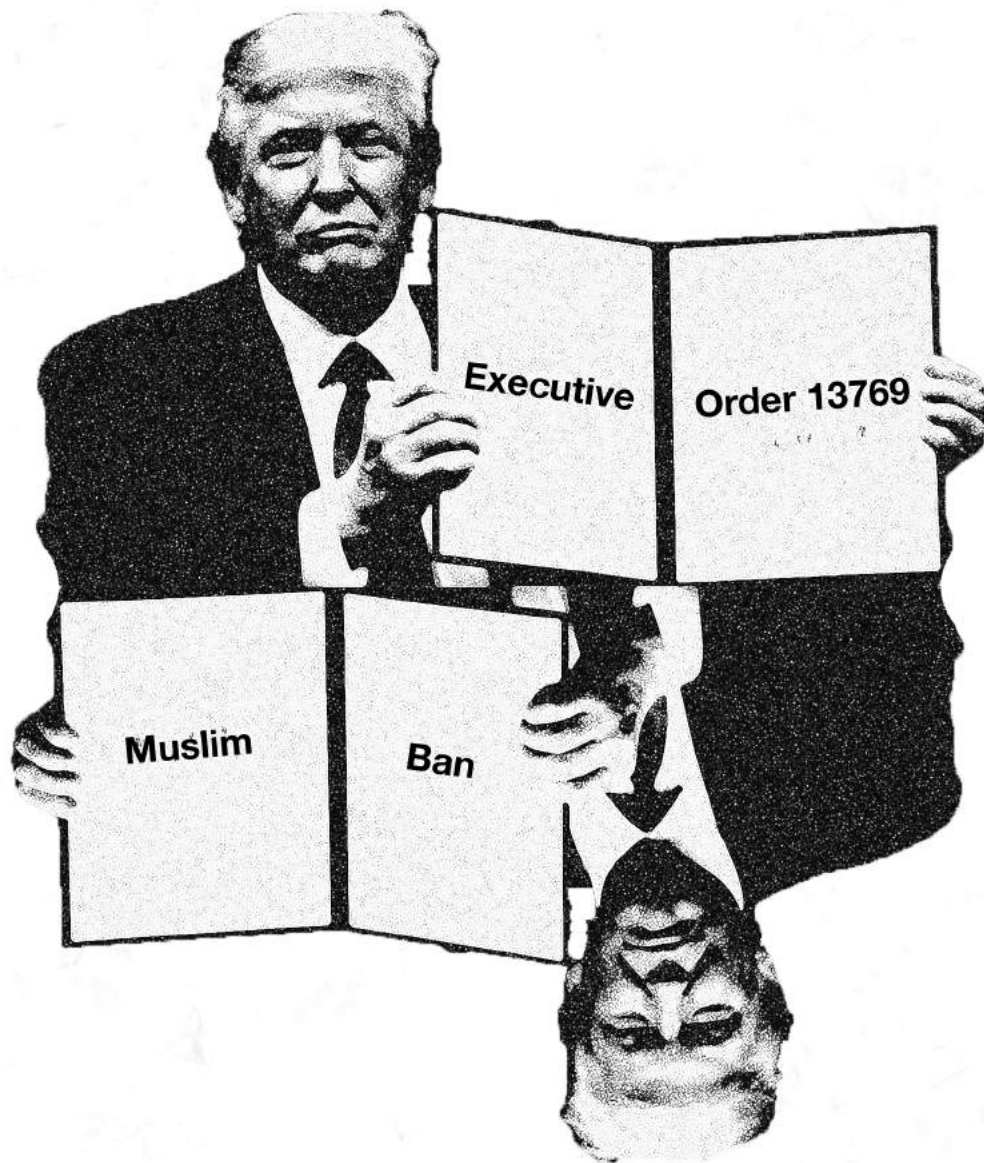
Trump won the elections beating Hillary Clinton and became 45th president of United States of America.



The first reaction from the art world against Donald Trump came from the artist **Annette Lemieux** on 16 November 2016. She requested that her work **Left Right Left Right** (1995) be reinstalled upside down at the **Whitney Museum**.



Lemieux's gesture suggests a commitment to individual agency, the continuing power of protest, and a feeling, in her words, that the **"world has turned upside down."** Lemieux's artwork consists of raised punches including **Martin Luther King Jr.'s** and **Richard Nixon's**.



The first controversial decision that Donald Trump took during his presidency was the signing of “**Executive Order 13769**”. With this executive order, citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen were prohibited from entering the country. Politically labeled as a “**Muslim ban**” received a great reaction from the public. Several art institutions including took direct action against Trump’s “Muslim ban” with different reactions.

A group of curators from different departments at **MoMA** decided to place artworks from banned countries and several artworks were placed in the galleries and halls where the permanent collection of the museum was exhibited. Bureaucratic institutions such as MoMA are not known for their quick response to current events; It is also known that the museum is not very keen to make changes to the permanent collection exhibition. However, curators **Ann Temkin, Jodi Hauptman** and **Christophe Cherix** took action by developing this idea while over 100 people were detained at the airports. The works of **Picasso, Matisse, James Ensor, Francis Picabia, Umberto Boccioni, Oskar Kokoschka,** and **Alberto Burri** were replaced by Iraqi-born architect **Zaha Hadid,** Sudanese painter **Ibrahim el-Salahi** and Iranian artists **Tala Madani, Parviz Tanavoli** and **Marcos Grigorian.** A statue of **Siah Armajani** was also placed at the entrance of the museum.

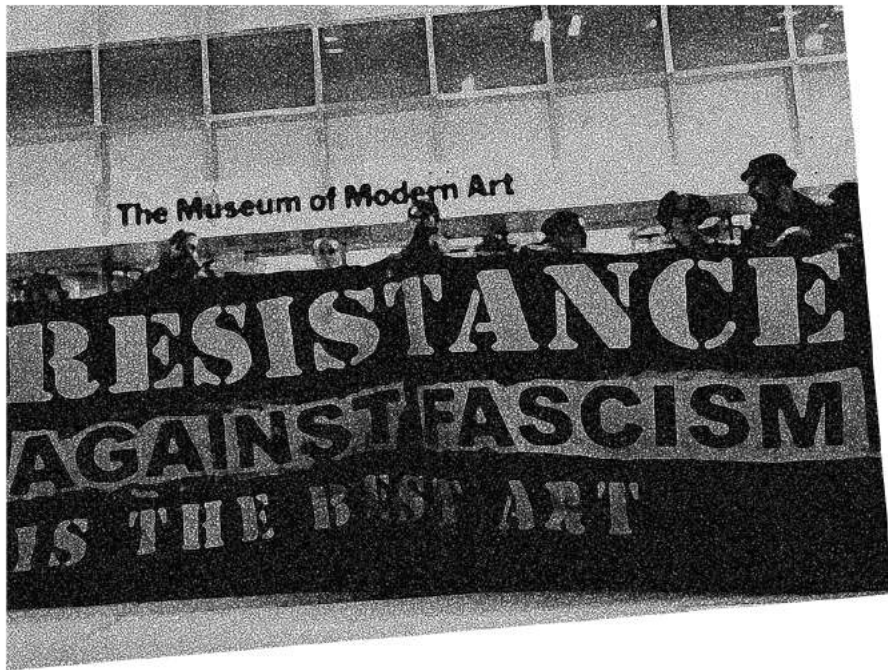
The artworks from seven countries that their citizens were not allowed to enter the United States with Trump’s executive order, were accompanied with this text label:

GIVEN BY AN



IMMIGRANT

The Davis Museum was one of the institutions that took a stand against Donald Trump's "Muslim ban". The museum at Wellesley College in Massachusetts made the powerful statement to highlight immigrants' contribution to the US by either removing or covering 120 works of art at the arts college museum as part of the '**Art-Less project**'. One of the main artworks missing is the portrait of **George Washington** which was created by **Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller** - an immigrant who came to the US in the 1790s. The work was also donated to the Davis Museum by **an immigrant family**.



On February 17, 2017, group of protestors including **Occupy Museums** members marched to the entry hall of **MoMA** and demanded that the institution remove **Larry Fink**, the CEO of BlackRock, from the museum's board because of his strong ties to the Trump administration. Protestors' statement was explaining the focus and reasoning for the action:

"It has come to our attention that a Trump economic advisor sits on the board of the Museum of Modern Art. The name of this advisor is Larry Fink. He is the co-founder and CEO of Blackrock Inc, the largest financial company in the world. Blackrock barely existed before 2008. Today it manages 5.1 trillion dollars of assets. If you hold any kind of debt to any bank, chances are that it's traded by Blackrock. The firm is deeply invested in Americans—and especially students to remain in permanent debt. Fink is also on the board of NYU.

Fink is not in Bannon's camp. He's a liberal. He was talked about as a potential Clinton treasury secretary. But now he's on Trump's team. And because Trump is waging a war of hate and lies against Muslims, Immigrants, women, LGBTQ, disabled, and the planet itself, one cannot reasonably advise or do any kind of business with this regime. To advise this regime is to normalize White Supremacy.

There is a long history of activism at MoMA. In fact, tonight's free museum entrance was brought to you by the Art Worker's coalition protests decades ago. So in this tradition, we are calling for MoMA to change its behavior. No More Normalizing Trump. We are calling for Larry Fink to be kicked off the board as a sign to your public that you care for our values of human dignity. MoMA! Why are you normalizing this regime by having a Trump advisor on your board?

Larry Fink of Blackrock Inc!

MoMA, time to Dump Trump!

Fink off the Board!"





On October 21, 2019, as **MoMA** was preparing to reopen with the \$450 million expansion project, more than 220 artists, curators and academics have submitted a letter to the institution's board and director **Glenn Lowry**. Since the beginning of Trump's administration, **Larry Fink** was still one of the top targets of the protestor. Fink's firm BlackRock has investments in weapons manufacturers, fossil fuel and agribusiness industries. The example of Fink itself is a good example of how museum boards are helping individuals like Fink use **art** to **wash** their public image. Statements in the letter addressed to MoMA's board and director were revealing this truth:

"MoMA Board member and CEO of BlackRock, Larry Fink, is the 2nd largest shareholder of prison companies, GEO Group and Core Civic. With over \$2 billion in contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), these companies have been responsible for 70% of all immigration detention including caged children and families separated at the border as well as in the interior. MoMA's own pension fund, Fidelity, is also one of the largest owners of these private prison companies. Prison companies are a part of the massive and racist state-sanctioned carceral system of the U.S., which has made the country the largest jailer in the world.

Again, we demand that Larry Fink and the MOMA board divest their funds from prison companies. We demand that Larry Fink & MoMA board members disclose any & all additional prison slavery-involved investments. We ask that they meet with concerned artists, community leaders, immigrant rights organizations, and detainees to hear the real story about the shares they own and how these funds should be redistributed."



Although one of Donald Trump's election promises, building a **border wall**, did not happen during his presidency; the president's attitude towards refugees was as strict as building a wall on the border in the 21st century. On November 25, 2018, an example of a harsh interference at **the US-Mexico border** ensued. Hundreds of Central American asylum seekers, including children, were tear-gassed by the United States Customs and Border Protection officers. Eventually, migrants forced to turn back. The clash between the asylum seekers and authorities rapidly became one of the controversial topics on social media. Several images of the canisters were showing the brand of the tear gas: **Safariland**. The defense company that is producing the tear gas and smoke grenades belongs to **Warren B. Kanders**, who is also a vice chairman at **the Whitney Museum of American Art**. After this truth revealed, the art world reacted quickly. More than 100 staff of the Whitney Museum published an open letter addressed to the museum management. Their demands were:

- *For leadership to convey our concerns to the Board, including that they consider asking for Warren Kanders' resignation.*
- *A public statement from the Whitney in response to the Hyperallergic article*
- *A museum wide staff forum for employees to discuss this and other issues, and related policies moving forward*
- *The development and distribution of a clear policy around Trustee participation.*



The director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, **Adam Weinberg**, replied to the demands of the museum's workers with a statement. In this statement Weinberg described the museum as "**a safe space for unsafe ideas.**" Warren B. Kanders's involvement in Trump's migrant policies, warmed the discussion of **artwashing** over.

2019 Whitney Biennial became the center of the protests against Kanders. First, one of the participants of the biennial, **Michael Rakowitz** withdrew his participation, calling Kanders's participation on the museum board as "**toxic phillantrophy**". 9 weeks of protest series were announced by **Decolonize This Place** members. Here is the timeline that forced Kanders to resign from his position at the Whitney Museum board:

February 27, 2019

Forensic Architecture, one of the participants of the Whitney Biennial, announced that it will support the "**9 Weeks of Art and Action**" protest series.

March 22, 2019

Occupying the fifth floor of the Whitney Museum, where the Andy Warhol exhibition is also sponsored by Warren B. Kanders, the members of Decolonize This Place started their 9-week protest actions with banners "**KANDERS MUST GO**" and "**WE DID NOT CROSS THE BORDER, THE BORDER GOES TO US**".



29 March 2019

Decolonize This Place held its second protest at the Whitney Museum, led by artist and poet Vaimoana Niumeitolu. An elderly visitor described the action by the occupation of the museum lobby as follows: **“Welcome back to the 60s.”**

April 5, 2019

The statement titled **“Kanders Must Go”** signed by more than 120 artists, critics and lecturers was published on the website of Verso publishing house. On the same day, members of Decolonize This Place performed their third act at the Whitney Museum.

April 12, 2019

In the fourth of the 9-week series of actions, the lobby of the Museum was occupied. Members of Decolonize This Place informed museum visitors about Kanders’ connections.

19 April 2019

Activists occupied the Whitney Museum lobby for the sixth time. This time, the focus of the action was **Palestine**: the tear gas produced by **Safariland** was used by the Israeli defense forces against civilians. Safariland is accused of supplying not only tear gas but other weapons to the Israeli army.

April 26, 2019

The seventh of actions for Kanders to step down from the Whitney Museum trusteeship is dedicated to **Puerto Rico**. Puerto Rico was one of the countries where the tear gas produced by Safariland, which triggered the protests, was used.



29 April 2019

100 new signatories joined the “Kanders Must Go” declaration. In addition to artists including **Martha Rosler** and **Hito Steyerl**, nearly 50 artists who participated in the Whitney Biennial demanded Kanders’ resignation in a signed statement.

May 3, 2019

In the eighth action carried out by student collectives, it was claimed that university boards of trustees were affected by “**toxic philanthropy**” just like museums.

10 May 2019

The last action was attended by anti-war veterans, activists opposing the new prison construction, and anti-war activists alongside members of Decolonize This Place. While the 9-week series of actions came to an end with this protest; The activists announced that they would continue their protest until Kanders resigned.

May 13, 2019

Forensic Architecture group, one of the participants of the Whitney Biennial, which will start on May 17, announced that they aim to “set accounts with the secret cooperation between the art world and human rights violations” in their work “**Triple-Chaser**”, which they proposed to be exhibited at the Biennial. They did a study focusing on the Triple Chaser, a tear gas grenade produced by Safariland, owned by Kanders.



17 May 2019

On the day the Whitney Biennial opened to visitors, more than 150 activists staged a new protest in front of the Museum after Kanders still did not resign from the board of trustees.

17 June 2019

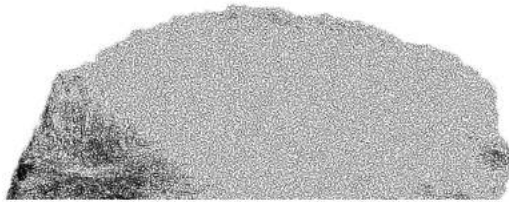
In the "**Tear Gas Biennial**" paper written by Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson and Tobi Haslett, the artists participating in the Whitney Biennial were recommended to withdraw from the Biennial, just like Michael Rakowitz did.

20 June 2019

Whitney Biennial participants **Korakrit Arunanondchai, Meriem Bennani, Nicole Eisenman** and **Nicholas Galanin** announced their withdrawal from the Biennial. Immediately after the announcement, **Eddie Arroyo, Christine Sun Kim, Agustina Woodgate** and **Forensic Architecture** also announced that they withdrew from the Biennial, citing Kanders' not resigning. In its research, Forensic Architecture revealed that the ammunition produced by Sierra Bullet, another company owned by Kanders, is being used in Gaza.

25 June 2019

Warren B. Kanders, the owner of the Safariland firm, resigned from the Whitney Museum board of trustees with "**great sadness and disappointment**". Kanders, who joined the delegation in 2006, had donated nearly \$10 million by the time he resigned.



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

Did a shoot in front of the Metropolitan Museum on 5th Ave for the 13th season of the Apprentice...

9:43 pm · 25 Sep 2012 · Twitter Web Client



Donald Trump's presidency was a good example of how society can react to totalitarian, right-wing state leaders. The art world has been an area of debate on many issues from colonization to the rights of art workers for a long time. Protest groups such as Occupy Museums, Liberate Tate, Gulf Labor, Decolonize This Place are trying to get the museums back on track with long-term protests. During Donald Trump's presidency, the protests targeting him or those directly related to him succeeded in creating an artistic public opinion. It is a fact that debates on museums will continue as long as museums continue to exist. While Donald Trump's policies were met by society for only one period; the influence of the art world in this is undeniable. Donald Trump left behind a country that was almost plunged into chaos and his Twitter account suspended during the election process. Interestingly enough, there was only one tweet that contains the word "museum" in that account.

WUSEUW

A Zine About Museum Politics

Cihan Küçük

Berlin/2021

HMKW- Visual and Media Anthropology

Artistic Practice in Transcultural Context