

Politics and Permissibility in Art (San Francisco, 4 Apr 20)

SFMOMA, San Francisco, Apr 04, 2020

Deadline: Jan 13, 2020

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Is That Allowed? Politics and Permissibility in Art
2020 Berkeley/Stanford Symposium

Art has often caused controversy; perhaps it even courts it. Polarizing artworks have been censored, suppressed, destroyed, and removed from view. In each case, the question has been asked of artworks, is that allowed? Within this seemingly simple query lie a multitude of competing, historically contingent dilemmas that are fundamental to the nature of art itself.

Artworks such as Dana Schutz's *Open Casket*, exhibited at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, the U.S. confederate monument, *Silent Sam*, and the Temple of Bel in Palmyra have been deemed too offensive to be seen. In each case, contemporary politics have overridden the art's aesthetic or historical value. This phenomenon has recurred throughout history. Artworks have continually elicited violent reactions from their audiences, thus ensuring that their legacy is colored not only by their content but by their negative reception. Such censorial backlash highlights the shifting standards for art across time and place, exposing deeper questions about the mutable role of art in society: Who decides what is allowed? What is morally or politically correct for art? What are acceptable forms of political speech? What is the value of or limit to freedom of expression?

Controversial artworks exist as limit cases of the permissible while also pushing the boundaries of what is conventionally conceivable. This crucial capacity has been indispensable to imaginative avant-gardist projects as well as explicitly political art. By eliding that which is conventionally allowed, be it through engaging taboo or questioning social norms, artists have thought the unthinkable and reimagined what is possible. Transgression has been one of their most potent weapons in formulating social critique and envisioning alternative futures. Through their readiness to challenge what is allowed, artworks have prompted the questions: What are the political uses of art? Are certain boundaries of permission necessary? Can art critique institutions of power or is it within their purview? How can the politics of transgressive art be reconciled with its financial value?

Through the simple question, "is that allowed?" our conference seeks to explore the role of permission and prohibition in art. We welcome submissions from graduate students across disciplines and those working in the arts including but not limited to writers, critics, curators, artists, and arts educators. Submissions should be in the form of abstracts for formal papers.

Potential topics include but are not limited to: iconoclasm, conversion, censorship, avant-gardism, identity and cultural ownership, political art, institutional critique, the moral responsibility of art, political vs. aesthetic value, artistic boundaries, art and law, art and critique, politics of display, appropriation, alternative pathways for art.

Please submit:

- A 300-word abstract (with working title);
- A participant CV;
- A description of any necessary support and/or technical needs beyond a standard microphone.

All materials can be submitted via e-mail to berkeleystanford2020@gmail.com. Materials must be submitted no later than Monday, January 13, 2020.

Reference:

CFP: Politics and Permissibility in Art (San Francisco, 4 Apr 20). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 16, 2019 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/21832>>.