Locating Downtown (New York, 23-25 Jan 26)

New York City, Jan 23–25, 2026

Tom Day, Yale

Attentive to the multifaceted and deeply interdisciplinary nature of downtown cultural production, Locating Downtown seeks to create opportunities to reconsider this period through cross-disciplinary exploration and cultural exchange. Underpinning this investigation is a desire to bring together different methodological approaches to the study of downtown New York—its artists, archives, institutions, and histories.

DAY 1: FRIDAY, JANUARY 23rd
Richard A. Chase North Reading Room and Event Space, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University

OPENING REMARKS: 9:20-9:30

SESSION ONE: 9:30-10:45
Ria Parzalis-Stiles — “Locating Downtown Through Provincetown: A Queer Reimagining of Place”
Julian Nykolak — “'A Bohemian Underworld': Nicolas Moufarrege and the Circulation of the East Village Art Scene”
Kanako Tajima — “Downtown Connections: When A.I.R. Travelled to Tokyo”

SESSION TWO: 11:00-12:15
David Getsy — “Gutter Art: Stephen Varble’s Costume Tours of New York in 1975”
Kara Carmack — “Rites, Rituals, and the Anthropology of Performance at The Mudd Club”
Meredith Mowder — “Living in Potatoland: Funding, Class, and Community in 1970s Downtown Performance”

LUNCH BREAK: 12:15-1:30
Lunch will not be provided; please consult the program for a list of dining options local to Bobst Library.

SESSION THREE: 1:30-2:45
Afonso Dias Ramos — “Rewiring the 1970s: alternatives and experiments in New York and Luanda”
Pilar Forrest — “London, New York, and the Downtown Spirit: Migration, Memory, and Activism in the Artist Archives of Rita Keegan and Cecilia Vicuña”
Tyler C. Spencer — “International Downtown: Boris Lurie and the Anti-Establishment Origins of Postwar New York’s Counterculture”

SESSION FOUR: 3:00-4:15

Bentley Brown — “It Was Like Shan-gri-la: Frederick J. Brown’s 120 Wooster Street and ‘the loft’ as a laboratory of Black intercultural inter-disciplinary action
Christa Noel Robbins — “Boundary Crossings: William T. Williams and the Downtown Avant--Garde”
Leah Pires — “Dislocating Downtown: Linda Goode Bryant's Just Above Midtown”

SESSION FIVE: 4:30-6:00
Ksenia M. Soboleva with Nicole Eisenman, Svetlana Kitto, and Nicola Tyson — screening of Trial BALLOON archival footage and panel discussion.

DAY 2: SATURDAY, JANUARY 24th

AT NYU SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, Bobst Library: 10:00-11:30
Limited to 20 attendees.

Amna Abdus-Salaam — Restricted Until Further Notice: Anonymity, Delay, and the Politics of Transmission
This session examines anonymity, restriction, and self-erasure as deliberate strategies of transmission within archives and special collections. Moving between medieval religious texts and contemporary activist archives, this session explores how individuals and communities have used masking, pseudonyms, redaction, and delayed access not as harm or disappearance, but as strategies of protection and endurance.

Drawing on activist ephemera from NYU Special Collections, as well as finding aids, and donor agreements, the session foregrounds how these practices are negotiated legally, ethically, and curatorially. It considers how acts of withholding challenge dominant assumptions about visibility, access, and authorship. Participants will engage directly with the Guerrilla Girls archival collection to reflect on how power, agency, and care operate within systems designed to preserve, and sometimes intentionally limit, cultural memory.

Adam Moritz — From the Mimeograph to 5th Avenue: 0 to 9 Street Works
In the short run of Bernadette Mayer and Vito Acconci’s 0 to 9 (1967-1969), the mimeographed pages of the magazine provided an exhibition site for works from artists like Steve Paxton, Adrian Piper, and Mayer and Acconci themselves that explored the ancillary aspects of the written word—the notational, scriptural, graphic, or procedural. These “uses” hint towards an activity that happened, or could happen, beyond the page—a distinct quality which would be foundational for the burgeoning conceptualism that would dominate downtown New York art in the following decades. Indeed, the magazine eventually culminated in a total exit of the page. For its final issue, released as a supplement in Summer 1969, contributors went out—most commonly to the block bordered by 5th and 6th Avenues, 13th and 14th Streets—to incorporate the city and its inhabitants into novel modes of intersubjective performance; the issue itself is only the documentation of these events.

During this presentation, participants will first look closely at the copy of “Issue 6 Supplement: Street Works” contained in NYU’s Special Collections, and contextualize it in relation to prior issues of the magazine, as well as to its artistic and political moment. Following this session, the group will walk the ten minutes north from Bobst Library to the exact site denoted in the issue, on

the way discussing the tripartite interplay between page, performer, and place.

AT SOFT NETWORK: 12:30-2:00
Limited to 15 participants. To RSVP, email info@softnetwork.art

Sheyla Baykal Archive Visit
Sheyla Baykal (1944-1997) was an artist, activist, and long-time Lower East Side resident, known for her photographic portaits of friends, neighbors, and fellow artists and involvement in the experimental theatre and performance scenes. Baykal is Soft Network's 2025-2027 Archive-in-Residence, and during this time we are working with a team to catalogue, research, and present her work and archive. Soft Network will present a selection of photographic prints, contact sheets, slides, and ephemera that highlight her involvement in the downtown scene of the 1960s-1980s, and reveal how downtown New York's cultural history is shaped by the friends and family members which are tasked with preserving and sharing artist legacies. The presentation will also focus on Soft Network's process and approach to working with and sharing Baykal's archive and considering her legacy.

AT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

SESSION ONE: 3:00-4:00
Eli Harrison — “We Glimpse the City in Pieces”: Tracing Downtown through the Whitney’s Collection
Taking inspiration from Douglas Crimp’s idea that we understand history and the city in glimpsed fragments, this workshop offers an opportunity to look closely at works on paper from the Whitney’s collection. The selection highlights key sites of artistic collaboration and production in downtown Manhattan from the 1970s and 1980s, drawing on the museum’s rich holdings of works related to the West Side piers, including Gordon Matta-Clark’s Days End, photographs by Alvin Baltrop and Peter Hujar, and works by Kiki Smith and David Wojnarowicz. Other selections include print portfolios published by A.I.R. Gallery and the Lower East Side Printshop, as well as drawings by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and G. Peter Jemison. Through close-looking at the photographs, prints, and drawings on view, Curatorial Fellow Eli Harrison will lead a focused discussion on the material legacies of downtown art in relation to the museum’s collecting history.

Register here: https://whitney.org/events/glimpse-city-pieces

SESSION TWO: 4:30-5:30
Barbara Moore, with Farris Wahbeh — The Avant-Garde Reference Files of Barbara Moore
Part of the Whitney’s Special Collections, the Avant-Garde Reference Files of Barbara Moore is an archive of printed matter, ephemera, announcements, brochures, artists' books, and editions collected and maintained by Barbara Moore, an art historian, writer, and former rare book dealer, who served as director of the Peter Moore Photography Archive for sixty years. This unique workshop offers participants the opportunity to study selections from the archive and to hear directly from Moore about her collecting practice as a witness and participant in the art and performance of downtown New York.

Register here: https://whitney.org/events/avant-garde-files

DAY 3: SUNDAY, JANUARY 25th
Whitney Museum of American Art

SESSION ONE: 1:00-2:30pm
Penny Arcade, David Hirsh and Agosto Machado, with Marcel Gabriel Yáñez and Kyle Croft — Artist Voices: The David Hirsch Tapes at Visual AIDS
Join Visual AIDS for an audio-visual panel discussion focused on The David Hirsh Tapes Collection. Artists Penny Arcade and Agosto Machado will be joined by art historian Marcelo Gabriel Yáñez to discuss Hirsch's project and larger questions that it raises about community archives and their methodologies in documenting queerness and the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as the challenges of recuperating the memory of understudied artists who died during the height of the AIDS crisis.

Between 1990 and 1995, the journalist David Hirsh recorded hundreds of hours of interviews and oral histories, spread over nearly six hundred tapes, with over three hundred artists who were active in the queer Downtown NY arts scene. Doing three to four interviews a week as he worked as the on-staff art critic for the Downtown LGBTQ weekly newspaper The New York Native (published 1980-1997), Hirsh's scope was wide-reaching in terms of the artists he recorded, spanning multiple generations from well-established older artists to the young and emerging. Hirsh's relentless preservation effort through the tapes, as well as the Visual AIDS Archive he co-founded in 1994 with artist Frank Moore (1946-2013), was a race against time during the most fatal years of the AIDS crisis in the United States. In 2025, Hirsh donated his entire tape collection to Visual AIDS, who has recently secured a grant to digitize and make the tapes available to the public.

The program features selected audio excerpts alongside a slide show of work by the artists discussed. David Hirsh and artists Penny Arcade and Agosto Machado will speak from both lived experience and a historical perspective, touching on the role of the weekly newspaper in the formation of "Downtown," community archives and their methodologies in documenting queerness and the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as the challenges of recuperating the memory of understudied artists who died during the height of the AIDS crisis.

The panel is introduced by Kyle Croft, executive director of Visual AIDS, and moderated by art historian Marcelo Gabriel Yáñez.

RSVP here: https://whitney.org/events/david-hirsh

SESSION TWO: 3:00-4:30pm
Latinx Art & Activism in Loisaida

This panel brings together leading voices in Latinx art and activism in New York City for a series of presentations and conversation about the evolution of Loisaida from the 1960s through the 80s.

Yasmin Ramirez — "Latinx Downtown"
Al Hoyos-Twomey — "Doing More with Less: Nuyorican Anarchism in Loisaida"
Maria Dominguez — Artist Talk

Register here: https://whitney.org/events/latinx-art-activism

Reference:

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