

OUT

Five Contemporary Artists on Creating Political Work in Trump's America



How a socially engaged art practice can help critique, illuminate and push back.

BY MADISON MOORE

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A few days after Donald Trump was elected President, a friend of mine shared a video on Facebook of Amazon Mother Leiomy at Vogue Knights, and boy was she carrying. He appropriately captioned the video, “Storming into Trump’s America like...”

People like to talk about how everything went downhill the day President Trump—the world’s most successful stunt queen—won the election. Certainly the normalization of [white supremacy](#), the [erasure](#) of LGBTQ rights from the online portals of the White House, the travel [ban](#), the [removal](#) of protections for trans students and the [confirmation](#) of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General—show that the landscape for minorities, women and queer people is suddenly a whole lot scarier than it was before.

But girl, the threat Trump poses is not a new one, as marginalized people have always lived under extreme duress. The difference, though, and even the bright side, is that today’s resistance feels much more spectacular and mobilized. The resistance takes the form of protests, marches and think pieces, but also as art, joy and creativity. Queer and marginalized people will not be silenced, and art is one way to create community, social space and a dialogue with the political woes of the present.

OUT spoke to five contemporary artists, whose practice is as genre-defying as it is political, spanning and weaving new media into music into dance into performance poetry and beyond. We got their take on how a socially engaged art practice can help critique, illuminate and push back, even as the weight of resistance should be on every single one of our shoulders.

BRENDAN FERNANDES



***OUT*: What five words describe your art practice?**

Brendan Fernandes: Social, political, collaborative, performative... I was going to say "Postcolonial," but maybe now "Anti-Fascist" is more appropriate? Beyond the particular politics of each work, I tend to work socially and collaboratively because there's a necessary openness and honesty to those approaches to making art. There's something importantly "anti-authoritarian" about collaboration and collective actions.

In what ways can art with a political message impact social change?

Art is a powerful tool for social and political resistance, and a powerful means of finding agency in the world. In my work, the queer body is central. I understand the queer body as a representation of "otherness." It is often put in a position that is referred to as outside of the mainstream, or as sub-cultural. I put the queer body at the centre of collaborative works to give agency, critical mass and collective power to queer voices. In this way, the art becomes a social and political tool; a means of disseminating and embodying messages; and creates ways for marginalized communities to gain acceptance, find solidarity, and engage with new ways of acting, thinking, seeing and being. *We* come together as one to make change. Art with a political message can be both the ways we come together, and the message we have to share.

How can art be used to critique and challenge politics?

Art making creates new dialogues. It makes us reconsider what is happening in our society and world, and this includes the world under the Trump regime. Art can call for resistance (and can be the resistance) by asking people to question their wants, their needs and their purpose for living, thinking and surviving through these challenging times. In these strange political times, art can challenge the hegemony of government, can be a strategy for getting people to think and talk about the issues at hand, the broader issues that brought us here, and can be a tool to educate our way forward.

Discover Brendan Fernandes' work, [here](#).