

Exhibition Curated by Artist Jonathan Horowitz Explores How Artists Have Responded to Social Injustice

Jewish Museum

Works by Horowitz, as well as Huma Bhabha, Robert Colescott, Adrian Piper, Ben Shahn, Kara Walker, Andy Warhol, Max Weber, and Others, Draw Connections between Oppression, Bigotry and Xenophobia Historically and in America Today

***We Fight to Build a Free World: An Exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz*
October 1, 2020 – February 7, 2021**

New York, NY, September 24, 2020 —The Jewish Museum is presenting *We Fight to Build a Free World: An Exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz* upon reopening to the public on Thursday, October 1, 2020. Originally scheduled to open in March 2020, *We Fight to Build a Free World* is an exhibition curated by Jonathan Horowitz, a New York-based artist who for three decades has made work that engages critically with politics and culture. Under his direction, the exhibition looks at how artists have historically responded to the rise of authoritarianism and xenophobia as well as racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of bigotry. On view through February 7, 2021, the exhibition also addresses issues surrounding immigration, assimilation, and cultural identity. Admission is free through December 31, 2020; [timed tickets required](#).

Conceived from a starting point in 2017 of addressing the resurgence of anti-Semitism, this exhibition uses a broader lens to look at oppression and bigotry. The relevance of this exhibition has become more acute as the country reels from numerous incidents of police brutality towards people of color and a reckoning with the history of systemic racism. In the organization of this project, Jonathan Horowitz has acted as curator, researcher, activist, and artist.

The exhibition brings together more than 70 voices, ranging from an 18th-century portraitist to contemporary artists commissioned for this exhibition. The installation juxtaposes diverse works, making thematic connections across time and place, raising questions and fostering dialogue.

Featuring more than 80 works of painting, sculpture, photography, and video, the exhibition includes examples of American social realism from the 1930s and 1940s, new works by Jonathan Horowitz, as well as 36 commissioned protest posters by contemporary artists, including Judith Bernstein, Marcel Dzama, Rico Gatson, Kim Gordon and Jason Smith, Cheyenne Julien, Christine Sun Kim, Guadalupe Maravilla, and Marilyn Minter. Also included are works by Asco, Huma Bhabha, Enrique Chagoya, Robert Colescott, Philip

Evergood, Luis Jiménez, Rebecca Lepkoff, Glenn Ligon, Abraham Manievich, Bernard Perlin, Adrian Piper, Fritz Scholder, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Henry Sugimoto, Kara Walker, Andy Warhol, Max Weber, and Charles White, among others.

Jonathan Horowitz (b. 1966, New York City) is an artist working in a wide range of mediums, including video, installation, painting, sculpture, and photography, exploring subjects ranging from environmentalism to the American political process. He regularly appropriates imagery from commercial media and art history, engaging critically with politics and culture.

“Three and a half years ago, the Jewish Museum invited me to organize an exhibition that addressed the resurgence of anti-Semitism,” Jonathan Horowitz said. “Today violent acts against Jewish people in the United States are at a historic level, and violence against Black, Muslim, Latinx, and LGBTQ individuals has increased alarmingly as well. Ethno-nationalism has become a dominant political force around the globe. It is within this broader context that I chose to think about the show.”

The exhibition’s title, *We Fight to Build a Free World*, is taken from a painting by Ben Shahn that includes a series of World War II propaganda posters for the United States Office of War Information. The painting, *We Fight for a Free World!* (c.1942), incorporates imagery by four other artists who address pressing themes of their time — Edward Millman (Suppression), Käthe Kollwitz (Starvation), Yasuo Kuniyoshi (Torture), and Bernard Perlin (Murder), as well as by Shahn (Slavery). Like much of Shahn’s work for the OWI, most of the posters were never produced. For this exhibition, Horowitz took inspiration from Shahn’s attempted project and invited a group of contemporary artists to make posters that respond to the realities of today. The 36 posters are presented in a captivating floor-to-ceiling installation against a “brick wall” mural backdrop designed by Horowitz.

A new work by Horowitz, “*Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*” *plus ninety-two more* (2020), is based on Andy Warhol’s series of screenprinted paintings “Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century,” which the Jewish Museum debuted in 1980. Warhol’s work features celebrated figures such as Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and Gertrude Stein. Horowitz’s installation, which covers the walls of the exhibition’s first gallery, is comprised of images of every portrait of a Jewish subject that Warhol is known to have painted. In many cases, the portraits are of people whose Jewish background is invisible or negligible as a part of their public persona.

Orthodox Boys, a 1948 painting by Bernard Perlin of two Jewish youth on a New York City subway platform, is expressive of an adolescent self-consciousness amplified by the lived reality of being visibly Jewish in



postwar America. The graffiti on the wall behind the two boys includes recognizably Jewish names, along with swastikas and the letters KKK.

In his 1975 painting *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook*, Robert Colescott recasts Emanuel Leutze's 1851 painting *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* with the famed Black scientist, inventor, and educator George Washington Carver standing in place of America's first president. In Colescott's satirical reworking of the classic American history painting, the artist fills his painting with racist caricatures of Black figures. The painting is conceived by Colescott as his "bicentennial statement on American history."

Horowitz's work, *Untitled (Arbeit Macht Frei)* (2010) refers to the sign bearing the German slogan "Arbeit Macht Frei" — "work sets one free" — which hangs at the Nazi concentration and extermination camp at Auschwitz in Poland. Over a million people were killed at Auschwitz, including an estimated 960,000 Jews. In 2009 the sign was stolen and later found in a field, cut into pieces. It was eventually restored to its original site. Horowitz's work recreates the sign in the cut-up state in which it briefly existed. The work reflects on the volatility of historical memory, asking what it means to preserve a symbol of evil, to destroy it, or to copy it.

For an installation of works from the 1930s and 1940s, Horowitz appropriates as a background an enlarged reproduction of a Thomas Hart Benton 1942 painting, *Invasion*, with the color removed and the image tinted sepia. Benton's work, using stereotypes and racist tropes, was part of a series intended to shock and to rally United States citizens to support World War II. The painting and others in Benton's *Year of Peril* series became some of the best-known American propaganda images of the war. As an ideological counterpoint to the Benton image, works by Charles White, Robert Gwathmey, Gordon Parks, Philip Evergood, and Henry Sugimoto cast a critical eye on racism in America.

A new work by Horowitz, on view for the first time in this exhibition, is the monumental sculpture *Untitled (August 23, 2017-February 18, 2018, Charlottesville, VA)* (2020). The work recreates the statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee at the center of the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville as it existed after the rally for six months, shrouded in a black tarp. For many Americans, the "Unite the Right" rally shined a national spotlight on anti-Semitism and white supremacy in the United States. The rally, which brought together hundreds of self-described neo-Nazis, white nationalists, and Ku Klux Klansman, was met with a vigorous counter-protest. In the days following the violent confrontations, the Charlottesville city council ordered that the Lee statue be covered by a black tarp. Horowitz's sculpture powerfully memorializes a crisis point in American history.



Several works in the exhibition look critically at how minority groups have been represented by the Hollywood film industry. These include a selection of photographs by the collective Asco, who took Chicano representation into their own hands in their “No Movie” photographs from the 1970s — stills for films which do not exist. A new video work by Horowitz, *Best Picture* (2020), focuses on the 2019 Academy Awards. In that year’s Oscar telecast, people of color saw increased representation but mostly by serving as presenters, rather than being honored as nominees and award recipients. The award for best picture that year was given to *Green Book*, the latest in a long line of Hollywood “white savior” narratives — movies where a white lead character comes to the rescue of a non-white character, whose plight is the purported subject of the film.

States Names Map (2001) by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith is a map centered on the United States that uses only the names of states derived from indigenous languages. The work highlights the inherently political nature of maps, whose borders and place names reflect particular versions of history. Another map work, Horowitz’s single-channel video animation *The Congressional Districts of America* (2018), shows two maps of the United States subdivided by congressional districts. One map indicates the party affiliations of each district’s Congress members: blue for Democrats, red for Republicans. The other map assigns a color to each district based on its racial demographics. Together with Quick-to-See Smith’s work, *The Congressional Districts of America* paints a picture of a nation divided.

The exhibition is a project by artist Jonathan Horowitz, organized in consultation with Darsie Alexander, Susan & Elihu Rose Chief Curator; Shira Backer, Leon Levy Assistant Curator; and Ruth Beesch, Senior Deputy Director. The exhibition and graphic design are by Topos Graphics, and lighting design is by Clint Ross Coller.

Artists in the Exhibition

Asco; Lisa Anne Auerbach*; Lou Beach*; Thomas Hart Benton; Katherine Bernhardt*; Judith Bernstein*; Huma Bhabha; Erwin Blumenfeld; Tania Bruguera*; Elizabeth Catlett; Enrique Chagoya; Sue Coe*; Robert Colescott; Jeremy Deller*; Gerardus Duyckinck; Marcel Dzama*; Philip Evergood; Sam Falls*; Nicholas Galanin*; Harry Gamboa Jr.; Eric J. Garcia*; Rico Gatson*; Jeffrey Gibson*; Kim Gordon and Jason Smith*; Robert Gwathmey; Jonathan Horowitz; Marc Hundley*; Luis Jiménez; Cheyenne Julien*; Baseera Khan*; Christine Sun Kim*; Zohar Lazar*; Cary Leibowitz*; Lynn Hershman Leeson*; Rebecca Lepkoff; Glenn Ligon; Abraham Manievich; Guadalupe Maravilla*; Marilyn Minter*; Malaquías Montoya; Hương Ngô*; Ernesto Oroza*; Frida Orupabo*; Gordon Parks; Bernard Perlin; Pat Phillips*; Adrian Piper; Puppies Puppies (Jade Kuriki Olivo)*; Edel Rodriguez*; Guadalupe Rosales*; Kay Rosen*; Wilhelm Sasnal*; Fritz Scholder; Ben Shahn; Xaviera Simmons*;



Tuesday Smillie*; Jaune Quick-to-See Smith; Sable Elyse Smith*; Henry Sugimoto; Tabboo!*; Kara Walker; Andy Warhol; Max Weber; Charles White

* Commissioned poster

About Jonathan Horowitz

Jonathan Horowitz (b. 1966, New York) has made art that engages critically with politics and culture for three decades. His early work — primarily in video — reflects the influences of both experimental film and Hollywood movies. In subsequent years, Horowitz turned to other mediums — installation, painting, sculpture, photography — to explore subjects ranging from environmentalism to the American political process. *We Fight to Build a Free World* is one of several instances in which Horowitz has involved others — whether fellow artists or members of the public — in the making of a project. Recent solo exhibitions include *Pre-Fall '17*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK (2019); *Leftover Paint Abstractions*, Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium (2018); *1612 DOTS*, Oculus World Trade Center, New York, NY (2017); and *Occupy Greenwich*, The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, CT (2016). Recent group exhibitions include *Brainwashed*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2020), and *Never Again: Art Against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland (2019).

Public Programs

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Jewish Museum will present a series of virtual public programs featuring lectures, discussions, and art workshops reflecting on the ideas raised by the art on view. Highlights include a lecture by James Young based on his most recent book, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between*, tracing memorial vernacular from Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, to Germany's Holocaust counter-monuments, to the 9/11 Memorial in New York City; *We Fight to Build a Free World – Confederate Monuments/Public Art*, a discussion with architect, designer, scholar Mabel O. Wilson and photographer Kris Graves, moderated by the Jewish Museum's Chief Curator, Darsie Alexander; *The Political Poster*, a series of conversations with artists such as Nicholas Galanin, Rico Gatson, and Kay Rosen, who all created political posters for the exhibition, speaking about their work and larger social issues, moderated by Shira Backer, Leon Levy Assistant Curator, The Jewish Museum, and Lumi Tan, Curator, The Kitchen; a video tour of the exhibition; and a discussion on the rise of anti-Semitism in America. Program dates to be announced.

Political Posters for Sale from Jewish Museum Shop

A selection of posters created for this exhibition will be available for purchase from the Jewish Museum's Shop. The print-on-demand posters retail for \$200 (\$180 to Jewish Museum Members), including shipping from the printer to the customer. Details and dimensions: Giclée, printed on enhanced matte papers



with archival inks, 20"w x 30"h. Artists will receive a royalty based on sales. The posters will be available [online](#) and in the Jewish Museum Shop.

Support

We Fight to Build a Free World: An Exhibition by Jonathan Horowitz is made possible by Toby Devan Lewis, the Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, and other generous donors. Additional support is provided through the Centennial Fund, the Peter Jay Sharp Fund, and the Barbara S. Horowitz Contemporary Art Fund.

Support of free admission is made possible in part by the Wilf Family Foundations.

About the Jewish Museum

Located on New York City's famed Museum Mile, the Jewish Museum is a distinctive hub for art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. Founded in 1904, the Museum was the first institution of its kind in the United States and is one of the oldest Jewish museums in the world. Devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, the Museum offers diverse exhibitions and programs, and maintains a unique collection of nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, and media reflecting the global Jewish experience over more than 4,000 years. Whether visitors come to our Fifth Avenue building or engage online, there is something for everyone to enjoy and learn.

Location: 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City

Museum Hours (beginning Thursday, October 1): Monday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 11am to 4pm; and Thursday, 11am to 8pm. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

Shop Hours (beginning Thursday, October 1): Monday, Friday, and Sunday, 11am to 4pm; and Thursday, 11am to 8pm. Closed Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday.

Admission: Free for all through December 31, 2020. Timed tickets are necessary for all visitors to help the Jewish Museum maintain a building capacity of 25% and a socially distanced experience for all visitors.

[Reserve tickets online.](#)

Information: The public may visit [TheJewishMuseum.org](https://www.thejewishmuseum.org) or call 212.423.3200.

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NOTE FOR PRESS: In order to maintain the mandated 25% capacity, media must contact the Press Office at pressoffice@thejm.org to arrange for a timed ticket in advance of their visit. Press photography or TV shoots must also be scheduled ahead of time, with ideally 48 hours' notice. All press materials are



located on our [online Press Room](#). Press kits will not be available for distribution at the Museum.

