

Decolonize
This Place

THE DECOLONIZATION STRUGGLE
INDIGENOUS STRUGGLE
+BLACK LIBERATION
+FREE PALESTINE
+GLOBAL WAGE WORKERS
+DE-GENTRIFICATION
MTL + 2016
SEPT. 17 - DEC. 17, 2016
ARTISTS SPACE: 55 Walker St, New York, NY 10013
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STRIKE ART
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO PARTICIPATE?



NEW YORK CITY

WELCOME TO DECOLONIZE THIS PLACE

We are here, in this place, with our friends, families, and communities. Where is this place? 55 Walker Street, New York City. First and foremost, this place is occupied Lenape territory. We begin by acknowledging the ground on which we stand.

This place is also a contested border zone. On the one side, Chinatown, one of the oldest immigrant communities in the city, and a place squarely in the sights of predatory developers. On the other, Tribeca, formerly a refuge for artists, whose presence paved the way for the 1% who now call it home and are eagerly expanding their frontiers. It is a place, like much of our city, where art and real estate have worked fist in glove, provoking our resistance in turn.

We recognize this place exists within an expanded field of capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy. In the process of decolonizing this place, we commit to rearranging the relationships that maintain business-as-usual in the artworld and beyond. This is a process of learning and unlearning in which people of color are centered—including queer, immigrant, and disabled folks.

We can see this place cultivating new cultural and political formations across communities, grounded in collective action and radical imagination with a call to decolonize all places, wherever we may be, because we know: When We Breathe, We Breathe Together.

Our struggles already resonate with one another. From prison abolition and anti-displacement campaigns to the BDS movement targeting Israeli Apartheid; from the struggles of cross-border migrant workers to the ongoing native insurgency against the Dakota pipeline and the stand for Standing Rock, which shows us that decolonization of the land and the planetary atmosphere are one and the same. Juntos Sin Fronteras!

Our work to Decolonize this Place has five political strands: Indigenous Struggle, Black Liberation, Free Palestine, Global Wage Workers and De-Gentrification. For the next three months, Decolonize This Place will be our base of operations. At the invitation of Artists Space, we have converted 55 Walker Street into an action-oriented space and a shared resource for art, research, and organizing. Along with a wide range of collaborators from around the city, we will be hosting events, workshops, and assemblies aimed at developing our radical movement culture.

We take the name, Decolonize This Place, from an action undertaken by the Decolonial Cultural Front at the Brooklyn Museum in May 2016. The target was two exhibitions--This Place and Agitprop!--which utilized arts and artists to normalize the ongoing displacement of populations, from neighborhoods in Brooklyn and from the hills and olive groves of Palestine. Communities on the frontline of arts-driven gentrification, in Chinatown, the Bronx, and Boyle Heights, are organizing and resisting the steady march of ultra-luxury development into their neighborhoods. Artists! Resist Becoming Weapons of Mass Displacement!

As we cultivate connections between our groups and movements, we will also undertake research into how alternative arts organizations, under pressure to “artwash” the escalation of real estate values, can reexamine their traditional self-image as holdouts within an art world increasingly quarried for ultra-luxury assets. At a time when so many people in this city are fighting to stay in their homes, or going into debt just to make rent, arts institutions, with sizable resources and infrastructures, have an obligation (and an opportunity) to avoid being part of the urban problem and to become part of the solutions emerging from the grassroots.

LOCATION

We have set up 55 Walker as an action-oriented space, and it will be open seven days a week. At the core of the project, we are planning a weekly program of public events, with collaborators coming from across the five boroughs to anchor assemblies, trainings, skill-shares, readings, screenings, meals, and healing sessions. We are also designing a specially equipped zone—including a print station and a kitchen—for artmaking, custom-designed to feed into organized political actions in and around the city. In the gallery, we will display banners and posters produced in the basement and used in actions citywide, closing a feedback loop between exhibition and demonstration.

COLLABORATORS

Collaborators whose participation is confirmed include: Aida Youth Center—Palestine, AKA Exit, Al-Awda NY, Black Poets Speak Out, Bronx Not For Sale, BUFU (By Us For US) Chinatown Arts Brigade, Common Practice New York, Direct Action Front for Palestine, El Salón, Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.), Hyperallergic, Insurgent Poets Society, Jive Poetic, Mahina Movement, NYC Stands for Standing Rock Organizing Committee, Queens Anti-Gentrification Network, Take Back The Bronx, Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy, Wing On Wo & Co., Woman Writers Of Color, with many more in the works.

SCHEDULE

From September 17 to December 17th, Decolonize This Space will be an open movement hub around the clock, with meetings and events constantly evolving. Our goal is for working groups and “plus brigades” to self-organize in the space and launch actions using the print station and available artmaking resources. Check decolonizethisplace.org for developing schedule and descriptions.

PLUG IN

Each Saturday from 1 PM to 3 PM, we will facilitate an Orientation meetup followed by an Action Assembly. The Orientation is designed to introduce newcomers to the work going on in the space, and the Assembly will be a directed discussion about how to develop the ideas that participants bring along. Far from being decision-making events, these will be convivial occasions (with refreshments) for meeting people and learning about ongoing projects. The process is designed so that dedicated action blocs and brigades will emerge. We ask that folks come as individuals, rather than representatives of any organization or party. Typically, Saturday Assemblies will segue into programmed public events later in the day.

PALESTINE

DAR MAMOUN CENTER FOR ART, LIFE, AND LAND: A PROJECT FOR PALESTINE

Over the next three months, Decolonize This Place will establish an autonomous arts space in the Palestinian city of Ramallah. The location is an unused residential compound currently owned by the MTL collective. When the space has been renovated, Dar Mamoun will be launched as a Center for Art, Life, and Land in the urban heart of the West Bank.

The mission of Dar Mamoun is two-fold. On the domestic front, it will be devoted to cultural, social and educational activities developed in collaboration with local communities both in Ramallah itself and across the fragmented landscape of the Palestinian territories. As a transnational undertaking, it will be set up as a resource hub for artists, intellectuals and activists visiting from abroad, and especially the United States, a country where the history and contemporary plight of Palestinians is largely obscured or distorted by mainstream media.

Dar Mamoun will facilitate cultural initiatives with populations all but excluded from Palestine’s existing artworld and academic circuit, both of which are typically geared to the interests of international development agencies, Palestinian elites, and the official power structures of the Palestinian Authority. Facing outwards, the Center will foster transnational knowledge-exchange and build solidarity out of the first-hand experience of visitors to the Occupied Territories. In this way, Dar Mamoun will fulfill a need in Palestine itself for a grassroots cultural center independent of the governing authorities and the constraining orbit of the local artworld elite. At the same time, Dar Mamoun will offer a much-needed alternative to programs like Artis, which each year brings delegations of artists, critics, and curators to tour the contemporary Israeli artworld while ignoring the Occupied Territories.

New solidarity ties with Palestine are being forged through the work of overseas social movements. Most recently, the declaration of BDS support by Movement for Black Lives is a significant step forward. Dar Mamoun will be a bridgehead for those who want to build international connections along these lines.

LOCATION

Dar Mamoun is centrally located in a residential neighborhood of Al-Bireh, near downtown Ramallah, and a mile away from the Palestinian Authority headquarters. The home consists of three bedrooms, two baths, two living rooms, and three verandas, and features a garden, driveway and garage. It is set on a large plot of urban-agricultural land, including a grove of olive trees. The compound is also surrounded by two ever-expanding illegal Israeli settlements known as Psagot and Beit El. The latter includes a military base from which occupation strategies are administered—including the tactic of allowing the squatting and expropriation of unused structures by boundary-pushing settlers.

SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATE

The building needs some renovation--plumbing, re-wiring, roof repair, painting, new furniture. --before it can be set up and launched as the Center. MTL+ invites financial contributions, and also the commitment of those who want to help realize the inspiration behind Dar Mamoun. This will be a community effort, inclusive of the energies and ideas generated by those who step forward to participate.

Please contact info@decolonizethisplace.org if you can support the Dar Mamoun Center project.

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