Socially Engaged Art's Histories and Tactics for the Neoliberal Era. Karen van den Berg and Melissa Rachleff Burtt in conversation with Angela Dimitrakaki and Nomusa Makhubu

Geschichte und Taktiken sozial engagierter Kunst in der neoliberalen Ära. Karen van den Berg und Melissa Rachleff Burtt im Gespräch mit Angela Dimitrakaki und Nomusa Makhubu

KAREN VAN DEN BERG[A*], MELISSA RACHLEFF BURTT[B**]

[A] Zeppelin University

[B] New York University

The conviction that art is capable of shaping and experimentally developing new social forms and new ways of living together is as old as the artistic avant-garde. The social situatedness of art and the interplay between artists, non-artists, institutions, and policy makers have changed considerably in the twenty-first century. Socially engaged art is broadly accepted as a new discipline or even a new field unto itself and is considered the generator of new social formations, transdisciplinary collaborations, and learning-through-participation pedagogies, due to how socially engaged artists operate. For example, communities that want to improve the social fabric of a neighborhood, to make it more livable and socially just typically follow a logic outside of art. Socially engaged artists have recognized the importance of community-building, and for that reason incorporate practices adopted by political activists and social workers. Museums are attracted to the community-building effects at the heart of socially engaged art and increasingly invite socially engaged artists and activists to produce projects for their audiences or—better—public. Indeed, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) advocates changing the definition of museums to "a platform for questioning and celebrating heritage and collections" and that they embrace "inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about pasts and futures" (ICOM 2019). Additionally, the Belfast-based, Northern Irish group, Array Collective won the 2021 Turner Prize in the U.K., and in 2022, the documenta exhibition

[*] karen.vandenberg@zu.de

[**] mjr2007@nyu.edu

in Germany was organized by Indonesia-based collective ruangrupa from Jakarta. It is clear that socially engaged art is now part of the cultural mainstream. Yet this is not a time to be complacent. To be embraced by the mainstream risks fetishization. Rather than producing actual social change, socially engaged projects for museums, biennials, and art fairs remain in the art field and so might not offer a catalytic experience to remake the world.

There is an additional concern in the socially engaged art field. Coincident with socially engaged art's emergence in the 1990s, democracies are at increasing risk due to the appeal of xenophobic and authoritarian politics. The hard right turn across the U.S. and Europe erodes the few victories of progressive politics that were part of the postwar geopolitical world order. How are scholars and practitioners of socially engaged art thinking through these challenges and contradictions? The editors of this special issue met with two scholars who have thought deeply about these issues from different vantage points and open up the framework for socially engaged art to concerns about history, rhetoric, and context. Angela Dimitrakaki, a writer and senior lecturer in Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Edinburgh in the U.K. and Nomusa Makhubu, an artist and associate professor of art history and visual culture at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, spoke with guest editors, Karen van den Berg and Melissa Rachleff, to share thoughts about socially engaged art during this period of social instability.

Make Worlds

Let's begin with how some collectives have founded new organizations, and how those organizations are finding their way into the museum and biennial system. Socially engaged art relies on public participation and is oriented towards a social concern. That should make the practice at odds with the function of museums, which are traditionally places to study objects. In the West, socially engaged practices are influencing cultural policies. At the same time, practitioners of socially engaged art generate micro utopias that are self-governed; in the U.S. the term 'mutual aid' has become prevalent. These are forms that ignore or reject the State and subsist as small, self-reliant societies—is this a concern?

AD: Can 'self-governance'—an enticing word, be realized in societies organized by capital–that is, when one is constantly under surveillance or defined through law or held hostage by the market? Increasingly, under totalitarian capitalism, protest and political agency are crushed by the State. It is ridiculous to speak about self-governance when you pay for privatized water and electricity; when you are hounded for taxes, which fund wars while less and less public money is used for public health, and you need a biometric passport to cross borders. In our existing historical reality, self-governance can be a dangerous fiction. It creates the illusion that tiny, dispersed, and exhausting (in terms of the energy and time they require) instances of a team—telling themselves what to do during an art residency or in setting up a communal garden—could lead to *political* self-governance, as if they are part of a dual power structure. I think that if self-governance is a tactic of socially engaged art, we must also think that socially engaged art has developed, whether we like it or not, in a counter-revolutionary period, where to speak of dual power would be counter-intuitive at best.

If self-governance gained traction in the arts, this is because it flatters the myth of autonomy. It also indicated the hegemony of liberal and libertarian naiveté, which is quite prominent in contemporary art. In this sense, art projects that become aquariums of goldfish, that see themselves as self-governed, can deflect from the large-scale, revolutionary organizing work needed to cultivate social agency from below. To deploy the myth of self-governance, in our historical context, honors the tenacity of the Anarchist Banker, a polemical character invented by Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa in a short story he penned in 1922, which explodes the abstraction of pure freedom. One hundred years later, we still see the quest for self-governance led by the libertarian and the neoliberal while most of humanity are being subject to capital's exploitation-oppression nexus. I think that when self-governance becomes a political principle in pockets for the few, it succumbs to Foucauldian heterotopias that can generate the illusion of escapism for the few. This is why I find the deployment of self-governance (as something achieved) rather problematic.

NM: For us, self-governance is an ideal. You find art networks like the Visual Arts Network of South Africa, which aims at finding ways to close the gaps within an iniquitous system. They do this through resource sharing, collectivizing, and creating support systems. But given the difficulties of doing all this in a country as vast as ours, with regional networks

across a vast continent, it remains the desired goal and not yet a reality. The state has continually failed its citizens. We pay taxes but we don't see where they go. Not all citizens are afforded the same rights, or in the Orwellian sense, some citizens are more equal than others. Artists feel abandoned by the State and the only way to survive, if not by selling one's soul to wealthy patrons, is through networks of solidarity. I'm not sure whether this may be considered a form of self-governance, but it is fast becoming a necessity. The idea of shared resources is also what artist networks present as a way out of the individualist and competitive mode of existing that is perpetuated in the arts. Curator Koyo Kouoh—who used to run the Raw Material Company in Dakar and is now heading the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art in Cape Town—facilitated a summit in 2020 that was based on Pan-African solidarity. She looked beyond the boundaries of our nation-states to consider modes of resource and knowledge sharing among African institutions. Most African cultural organizations have no government funds to depend upon, so this conference was catalytic. It is in this context of sharing resources that we need to establish those infrastructures ourselves. It aligns with Johannesburg artist Molemo Moiloa's notion of collectivity as social infrastructure (MOILOA, 2023).

In some ways, I totally get what you're saying about the myth of self-governance because we can't let the State escape that responsibility without challenging them on a political basis. But I can see how for artists, collectives, and art organizations to keep afloat self-governance as an ideal is inevitable.

The artist-activist scene in Germany, as one example, makes a different argument than what is presented by Dimitrakaki and Makhubu. Margit Czenki from the initiative Park Fiction and Planbude both based in Hamburg, talks about questions of self-government and the relationship to the State, again from a completely different angle. In a seminar she gave at Zeppelin University—located in Friedrichshafen at Lake Constance—she used the tech sector to explain the relevance of a collectively self-governed parallel social order. When computer programmers using the open-source-system FreeBSD, want to rebuild the entire system they use a command they named "make world" to trigger the new operating system while the old one is still running. In other words, they do not simply unplug the old system, because this would destroy the computer's functionality. Instead, they make a new parallel world and switch to the new system only when the new one is fully functional.

You need both, at least for a time. These worlds—the old system and the new open-source system—must coexist. This analogy shows that in the context of socially engaged art projects, self-government is by no means spoken of in a naïve way. Rather, the Hamburg initiatives mentioned are concerned with creating playful real life test zones for new forms of coexistence that challenge public administration and create counter publics. But this view is not solely Western.

NM: My lens is the African continent, and in that sense, one of the key questions is precisely who is the public under the shadow of neocolonialism? In former settler-colonial countries, public art institutions were not for African people. They were built to service settler citizens. I am evoking Mahmood Mamdani's notion of a bifurcated colonial state in his 1997 book *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism.* Today, we are faced with these troubled legacies and fragmented societies where citizenship remains unevenly differentiated and the idea of participation is formulated along the fault lines of what citizenship looked like under colonial regimes, impacting on what citizenship looks like today.

In many cases, public art institutions in the African context are competing for scarce resources and are therefore limited in their programming and initiatives. The bolstering of plutocratic ecosystems has led to the crippling of state-funded public institutions and flourishing, private, exclusive institutions that further widen the divisions between racialized and socio-economically segregated multiple publics. It is in this disintegrated landscape where the struggles and internal contradictions of social practice art surface. Having said this, however, I do not intend to overlook the discourse that is activated by artists responding to this situation, and art networks seeking to address the predicaments of biting the hand that feeds by being against the patrons upon whom they depend. The daunting politics of patronage and cultural funding revive older formulations of colonial citizenship and exclusive publics. They also create a situation where public spaces are not just spaces of encounter and collective participation, but are also spaces of confrontation.

It is in this sense that sometimes the idea of the public conjures a different image from that of the community, a point made by the American arts administrator Tom Finkelpearl in his 2013 book, *What We Made.* Social justice cannot focus on the one without addressing the complicity of the other. In South Africa, social practice often draws directly from protest strategies of civil society organizations precisely

because it cannot avoid the divided terrain in which it operates. The idea of an artist coming into a marginalized community, as a saint, creates hierarchies but would also fail to recognize the broader structures within which such inequalities are reproduced, and where social transformation can be enabled or disabled.

Considering these comments, it may be why the ruangrupa collective from Indonesia curated documenta fifteen as an ecosystem of artists and groups—selected as the artistic directors of the event as a way to break away from Western organizational forms. Ruangrupa premised documenta fifteen on the Indonesian principles of lumbung which means an "alternative economy of collectivity, shared resource building, and equitable distribution" (DOCUMENTA 2022). In other words, the predominately Western audience for documenta encountered a structure designed by a non-Western collective.

The articles gathered in this issue on Socially Engaged Art provide context for thinking about the form's relationship to private grants and the pressures in cultural sectors—including the university—to prove financial viability as a requirement of funding. The influence of large, international foundations is discussed in terms of impact. Some examples include the Open Society Foundations (begun by financier George Soros), which provided seed money to start new cultural organizations and activists across Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. In Germany, grants from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation support social justice projects that are aligned with Die Linke, a democratic socialist political party in Germany. Foundations have an impact on cultural production, and socially engaged projects have attracted international foundations to support democracy and justice.

But such foundations are not the main resources in the visual arts. International conglomerates promote corporate social responsibility and offer funding for community-based projects, which is not new in the U.S. but is becoming a pattern in Europe and the U.K. Additionally, a new generation of uber wealthy—the oligarchs—also support the arts. Their support is coupled with new accountability requirements, which have influenced State support. Proof of a project's community impact likewise affects the design of ancillary programming, and even the type of courses taught in universities. Dimitrakaki and Makhubu comment on these trends.

Funding Terrors

AD: This nasty neoliberal evaluative term "impact"—which enforces a legitimization system—is very much part of the global art system and all the other systems of metrics that surround it. Seeking impact through the imperative of *Show us results! Show what your research offers to society now!* is very much part of the neoliberal project of disciplining social action. You want funding? You need to prove social impact. So, we have an operative funding terror where you are forced to use social work to feed the monster that threatens you. I fear that, at least in the West, socially engaged art has been caught in this funding terror.

Today, you can have a capitalist entity (say, a cultural foundation that makes money from a corporation or an imperialist state that transfers wealth to the west/north) that promotes a social face that absolves them. Socially engaged art is highjacked in this process. And nowadays, these capitalist entities feel they have so much power that they can name a socially engaged art program, that they run, for an oligarch who supports the arts. Artists and curators will flock to their residencies, or whatever else these capitalist entities offer, because they have no option. If they don't like that, they might as well give up being socially engaged artists and start competing in the art market proper. To paraphrase Mark Fisher, this is capitalist realism for the arts (FISHER 2009). A question for socially engaged art, to the extent it wants to do things in the here and now, is how to stop feeding the logic of The Impact.

NM: I want to pick up on this term 'funding terror.' It can also be considered a kind of patronage prison—the phenomenon of being trapped in an echo chamber with patrons against whom one is dialectically opposed. It is being stuck in a paradigm of colonizer-colonized, unable to transcend that binary. Unfortunately, in South Africa, most social practice collectives and organizations struggle to attract private funding, unless if they break away to practice as individual artists, with more palatable forms of activism—or if they individually raise funds. Most depend on public funding, and for us, they find themselves having to tick that impact box. This renders them as social workers as opposed to activists. Not that these are mutually exclusive roles, but rather that these expectations hamper the unique voice of social engagement art practice in Africa. And the box they must tick is even worse than social impact. To attract government funding, applications must demonstrate that they will contribute to what has been termed: social cohesion. How does one

achieve social cohesion in a deeply divided society in one of the most iniquitous countries in the world? Clearly, the State realizes that there are so many internal conflicts and differences between people of different ethnicities, people of different races, and people of different classes. But it is erroneous to see the arts as a way to placate the citizenry that does not share the same fate, with interventions that will do very little to change their material circumstances. That kind of politics shifts away from the agonism that is necessary for achieving agency. So, the funding then gets used for short-lived, social-work-style projects, distanced from the bourgeois artworld that is fueled by private funding. Instead of addressing this inequity, this incongruence in art funding systems sustains it.

In South Africa the rise of neoliberal institutions in the arts is seen in the way investors have begun private museums to house their art collections. Playing with the politics of race, they appoint Black curators and appropriate the decolonial discourse. A few years later, the private investors pull their funding, and these institutions are left to the State. The State never has enough financial resources to maintain these new institutions. One example is the Johannesburg Art Gallery, which began as a private endeavor and ended up as an underfunded State institution. It will be interesting to see what happens to private institutions such as Zeitz MOCAA and the Norval Foundation, both in Cape Town. The glossy world of private institutions of wealthy patrons seems preoccupied with a particular brand of African art that has not yet fully grasped the layers of social practice art.

Socially Engaged Art's Historical Legacies

The challenges for socially engaged artists are not limited to requirements that align with neoliberalism. An important precedent are concepts devised by the Situationists in post-World War II France, about the public sphere as a product of collective action. Another is Joseph Beuys' concept of Social Sculpture formulated at the 1972 documenta and the integration into the exhibition of the Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, founded in 1971. Beuys's sphere of influence resulted in new institutions, such as the Free International University—founded in 1973, and even in the foundation of political parties. In contrast, the Situationists rejected such institution-making outright. Both of these historical strains are evident in socially engaged art where the attitude towards institutions is not strictly oppositional.

Understanding how socially engaged art intersects with art historical precedents, such as these and others, as well as how art history is taught in universities, is vital. Socially engaged art did not "just appear," as Angela Dimitrakaki puts it. Its practices extend back to the early decades of the twentieth century.

AD: Beuys's social sculpture is most definitely part of socially engaged art's history. Another was the Situationists. One of the earliest references to the trajectory is Claire Doherty's edited volume *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (2004). Additionally, art projects associated with institutional critique (that came in waves and can possibly be projected back to parts of the historical avant-gardes) are interwoven with the evolution of socially engaged art. If there is a difference between institutional critique and socially engaged art, it's precisely that the latter does not always and necessarily focus on changing the art institution. Instead, it becomes activist, and seeks to exist in society at large. Perhaps it seeks to undermine the implicit split in the formulation: art and society. If this is so, we can start with much earlier histories of art in modernity.

What is interesting however is that often activists say (or are portrayed as saying), *we have no more time for theory, no time for critique, no time for understanding things historically; we must act in the here and now*. So, to the extent that socially engaged art assumes this activist role, it risks just practicing the infamous micro-politics of postmodernism and redefines it as a good thing. As the sort of activism that has no time for the complexities of history, socially engaged art does not connect the various social tendencies to see the big picture. It may well leave us with micropolitical questions that concern the doable, such as: Can we make this developer not take over this public space? Can we get these two groups of opposing interests and unequal power to talk to each other? Can we step in where the State withdrew from, and provide health care to this or that disadvantaged group? Can we give food to the people hanging out in that square? Tons of socially engaged art projects are basically dinners—with a very small scope for opposing the structural causes of why people are deprived of food or time to share it.

Of course, the context in which socially engaged art takes place has shifted historically. There are activisms today, in the 2020s, such as helping refugees, that are criminalized by the increasingly authoritarian capitalist state. You will find fewer artists on boats helping drowning refugees in the middle of the Mediterranean. If socially engaged art is

about solidarity, the law (always on the side of power) will ultimately decide the limits to solidarity.

But from what histories do socially engaged art projects stem? I would start with history that extends further back from the postwar context of the 1950s because there is no artistic practice, certainly within the confines of what we call modern and contemporary art, which just appears out of the blue. The history of social engaged art is very complex. The case for extending it back to the October Revolution of 1917 and the avantgarde of that period is valid because this is when we had the reinvention of art's social role. The demand of undoing the divide between art and society was surely revolutionary. But during the 20th century, the revolution was defeated—it's impossible to get an accurate art history of the 20th century without paying attention to that. When we come forward to the 1960s, there are groups like the Artist Placement Group (APG) in Britain. And what do they do? They place an artist in various governmental agencies or business contexts that are not culturally focused. Arguably, APG practice almost the opposite of the Situationists. We could say that they integrate artists into the agencies that define the capitalist context rather than seeking to extricate them. Isn't this interesting, this ideological-political antithesis within the spectrum of practices that take art out of the studio? And we can look at America in the same period and follow Suzanne Lacy's exodus from the studio to projects designed to occupy public places with an emancipatory politics. These are just examples from a yet unwritten history that could illuminate why socially engaged art became a prevalent post-1989 paradigm. What does this tell us about the past thirty years and where we are today?

Even if we look at just these thirty-something years, we find a trajectory that needs clarification. For example, do Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and Grant Kester's dialogical aesthetics both form part of socially engaged art despite their different relationships to the art institution for the most part? Secondly, what is socially engaged art's relationship to community art? Community art claimed space outside the institution because collaboration from below is what is vital in that practice, not the artist's reputation and visibility nor the object or non-object produced. But then what counts as community within a class-divided, social body is also an issue. I highlight class because I see it as outside what we call identity politics and I think community was often pulled in the latter direction.

Effectively, we have a split between art in the institutional system and art as a common practice. I think this split is essential to understanding

socially engaged art's history, but it hasn't been adequately understood. It exists within socially engaged art as a schism. To complicate the divide, being part of institutions is not reducible to one thing because not all art institutions develop the same relationship to the (divided) social body. Overall, art institutions are forced to participate in a neoliberal economy, at least in the countries that I study, but some institutions allow for self-questioning and for programming that keeps the right to critique and intervention alive. Yet a commitment to critique and intervention hardly means that art institutions can operate beyond cutthroat competition for funding and visibility.

Finally, socially engaged art also incorporates the physicality of the artist, and this correlates to histories of performance art. During the 1970s, the body replaced the object that merely represented something. Yet, even if performance moved beyond representation, it did not defeat the market that, ultimately, subsumed the artist's body. There was a gesture that said we're going to put aside representational art and we're going to be there, in real time, and do precisely this kind of new critical body politics (let's call it that). In some ways, socially engaged art became a rejection of representational practices, despite some of them— for example, photography—being just as socially engaged. Maybe it is now time to rethink at least this split. I'm thinking about how to disentangle socially engaged art from being confined to the history of body art, action art, performance art and capture instead its broader, subversive aims beyond medium specificity. That is, maybe we should truly move beyond any kind of form and formalism and take the question of social engagement seriously.

Notably, this is also where the crossover with feminism happens, through this kind of breaking forth of the body, the active body, which replaced the term figure. But think of this: if we look at *when* the living body replaces the inanimate object in art, it happens precisely when neoliberalism emerges—in the 1970s. So, as an artist you give up producing art objects for sale maybe, but it is now your body, the artist's body, as the substitute object that gets a fee. A new set of complexities begin for the artist's body and, eventually, for the artist's life (what I and others have associated with biopolitical art) under neoliberalism—a capitalist governance project that captures everything as an opportunity for profit. This is too big an issue to examine in our discussion, but we know today that the commodification of bodies and the capture of life by capital increased since the time that performance became important—even more so in the period that witnessed the rise of socially engaged art. I think we

should stop ignoring all this and write a social history of socially engaged art that does not brush away these antinomies—the disjunction between possibly emancipatory intentions and where we have ended up.

And there are of course different origins for socially engaged art, which is not limited to the Western capitalist core. Yet the latter has real power. It wages an intellectual hegemony (hegemony that implies consent, not crude dominance) that is hard to even reveal. Everyone wanted to be postmodern in the 1980s and everyone wants to be doing socially engaged art since the 1990s. Understanding the formation of trends that become transnational (and even global) requires looking at often subtly exercised power. Yet I am not arguing for a return or retreat to locality because doing so would first disregard the actuality of historically formed entanglements and, second, the fact that all societies at present are divided as such. I am arguing for a historically materialist perspective on piecing together the trajectory (antinomies, breakthroughs, and containments) of socially engaged art.

NM: If one thinks about the histories of slavery, it becomes, of course, much more complex. This oscillation between the body as object and as commodity in relation to performance renders opaque the processes of decoding, or of seeing the body as legible and as engendered in coherent space. If one thinks about the way the conversation has been happening in South Africa, there is pushback against the term Performance Art as a category. Khanyisile Mbongwa, for example, says we cannot call ourselves performance artists as activists because as black people, we've always had to perform. In a racialized world, we're constantly performing. Mbongwa proposes the word demonstration. She says words to the effect that, I'm not performing. What I'm doing is demonstrating because then it's about the immediacy to social reality that I'm trying to show (MAKHUBU and MBONGWA 2019). As a result, there is this currency around live art as opposed to performance art, because then it's not just about the artist or the initiator. It's more around social situations, encounters, and confrontations.

This goes back to some of the genealogies of the Situationist and situational art. I can see how this plays out in different places. For example, if you think about 1960s Senegal under Léopold Sédar Senghor, there was State arts patronage that fetishized art objects. Under Senghor's regime, the idea of what would be a new, progressive, modern art in Africa was based on how Europe envisioned African art. Senghor built institutions, and he patronized the arts. But that also led to artists and

artist collectives, like the group Laboratoire Agit'Art, formed in 1973, that rejected that fetishization of the art object or the artwork as the end product. They focused on transdisciplinary performance. An example from theater is the performance of a parody of Senghor's poem, *Chaka* (1951) which in turn was inspired by Thomas Mofolo's eponymous 1925 novel. Laboratoire Agit'Art critiqued Senghor's cultural ideologies, specifically the affirmations of Black consciousness in negritude. In other words, the brand of negritude that Senghor introduced as a cultural policy was regarded as performing a particular form of African-ness seen through Western eyes, and it is through performance that they tackled this politics of the State's art-culture system. Using Marxist ideas, Laboratoire Agit'Art critically reflected on the socio-economic conditions at the dawn of independence. But in general, the oppressor/oppressed dialectic makes it hard to destabilize the idea of Black bodies being continually gazed at, consumed, and possessed. Demonstration reclaims agency so that we shift from truncating the body to addressing the person, this is Khanyisile Mbongwa's definition of demonstration. I should mention that Mbongwa is part of the artist collection known as Gugulective, known for having refused to show in typical art institutions, opting to make their work in Black townships for audiences there. This is a part of demonstrating against the predators of the art ecosystem. Of course, eventually they get invited to show in the very spaces they rejected. But demonstration is the process of showing. Within that concept is also protest. Khanyisile Mbongwa works with that double meaning.

AD: Demonstrating fits both the body and demonstrating; it can mean showing. But does it indeed not take us to a representational framework?

NM: Demonstration means being in the immediacy of social reality. A representational framework may be limited to showing what is involved, evoked in an image, but actually has no direct impact on the audience because they are distanced from what is represented as the detached spectator. Demonstration is a state of denunciation, it is not performance with a beginning and ending; it is accepting and being in the state of outrage, and not always inhabiting this state where audiences are called specifically to come and watch. With Gugulective, to be part of the experience one comes face to face with the disparities of economic apartheid. It generates immediacy. Mbongwa's research is part of a project called *Irhanga*, or *Passage*. It focusses on the endless and brutal migration of people from segregated areas to the central business areas in cities for

work (again evoking the oscillation between the body as object, and as commodity). Mbongwa did not perform this. She lived it. That is the groundwork for how she talks about this idea of demonstrating instead of performing.

Conclusion

It is vital for socially engaged art to incorporate practices and concepts in countries like South Africa, where sensitivity to terminology is necessary. Additionally, South Africa demonstrates the pressures and possibilities in a system with limited resources. Artists across the Global South and in countries like China are producing important projects that a Western centered discourse on socially engaged art has long ignored. Clearly, no single definition accounts for the plurality of practices that are categorized under socially engaged art, and while the form has garnered prestigious recognition, its viability is far from certain. Neoliberal economic systems favor the wealthy elite and international corporations, and this means precarity for those historically marginalized. Far from uniting to combat inequities, the twenty-first century emerges as a fractious period where a troubling rise of autocratic populism exploits social tensions rather than analyzing them. The scapegoating of the Global South and of those fleeing desperate conditions due to war, new and old colonialism, and failed States are all normalized as legitimate political discourse on the right. Concepts of social justice are prey to visceral, if not violent, reactionary forces that use zero-sum rhetoric as a weapon to generate hostilities.

Foundations have a long history in ameliorating the economic gaps generated when states are unable or unwilling to expend financial resources. But foundations are not immune to the pressures of neoliberal policies. New requirements about impact or social inclusion are placed on the already overstretched resources of organizations as well as on overburdened scholars. Moreover, such measures are impossible to quantify, given the short timeframe of most projects. Funding terror, as discussed by Dimitrakaki and Makhubu, describes this onerous task. The first half of the twenty-first century is indeed a different era from the one that saw socially engaged art's emergence in the twentieth. The difference is the context in which Namusa Makhubu and Angela Dimitrakaki produce their work, do research, and teach art. Their insights

*help us better understand the shifts and changes we confront, with so-
cially engaged art as a lens.*

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