

“How Important is art as a form of protest?” *Frieze*, March 31, 2017

Frieze

How Important is Art as a Form of Protest?

A survey of more than 50 respondents from over 30 countries



Given the current political climate, we here at *frieze* have been reflecting on the role of art in responding to conflict. With this in mind, we invited a cross-section of artists, curators and writers to answer two deceptively simple questions: ‘How important is art as a form of protest?’ and ‘How effective is it as a conduit of change?’ Responses could take the form of a statement, an image, a film or a combination of all three. The submissions, by more than 50 respondents from over 30 countries are provocative and enlightening. Further contributions to the print version are included here, from around the world.

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Shahryar Nashat

Shahryar Nashat lives in Los Angeles, USA. This year, his work will be on show the ICA, Philadelphia; Kunsthalle Basel, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Earlier this year, he had a solo show at Rodeo Gallery, London.

It's 4 February at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. I'm here to attend a tribute to David Antin, who passed away three months ago. Family and friends are gathered to pay homage to his poetry and his brilliant mind. His voice is omnipresent – talk-poems. He will be missed, I think, because though his written words will survive him, his argumentative voice was just as important a conduit for his stance on art, literature and politics.

A day later, at a movie theatre in Hollywood, I hear the voice of James Baldwin. He stands gamely at Cambridge University, debating civil rights with a conservative stiff. His dissident eloquence is a disarming weapon. The voice of the artist, again.

Art is a unique witness. It is a repository for observation. It is a mirror of the unrest and the struggle of a troubled, sometimes desperate, society. It is important for the conversations it will inspire and the conversations that inspired its making. It is a subjective time capsule. It is effective and yet, often, its greater impact will be recognized in retrospect, when political activism and organized dissidence will have paved the way for change.