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Politics of Learning in Collective Art Activist Practices in the Public Sphere

Dipti Desai

New York University, United States of America; dd25@nyu.edu

Artistic activism as a form of cultural production is inherently pedagogical. It is a site that actively works to ignite our radical imagination in the service of human freedom and liberation. In this presentation, I think through, with, and around the sites of public art, activism, and education.

My students and I became an art collective for a semester, in order to design and implement a tactical art intervention based on a current social issue in the public realm. Our collective, called the NYU Flash Collective, was part of the “Flash Collective” social practice project developed by artist Avram Finkelstein, a new paradigm for rethinking activist art and social engagement within the public sphere. This exercise in political art-making is based on collaborative decision-making processes that mirror the experiences encountered when forming and working within art and political collectives. It involves a surgical and fast-paced format intended to break through the overwhelming nature of communicating complex ideas. In so doing, it employs a series of result-oriented exercises aimed at what is the very core of social engagement: collective action. This experience in collective art making as pedagogy provides an opportunity for me to explore what a politics of learning means when we connect public art to activism and what notions of the public we invoke in such interventionist work.