

# OURS

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# Democracy in the Age of Branding

## Exhibition dates

October 16, 2008–February 1, 2009

Parsons The New School for Design  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery  
Sheila C. Johnson Design Center  
66 Fifth Avenue, entrance at 13th Street  
New York, NY 10011  
[www.newschool.edu/johnsondesigncenter](http://www.newschool.edu/johnsondesigncenter)

## Hours

Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.  
Saturday–Sunday, 12 p.m.–6 p.m.  
Free admission

Presented by Parsons The New School for Design,  
in collaboration with the Vera List Center for Art  
and Politics at The New School.

Curated by Carin Kuoni;  
Web component curated by Marisa Olson;  
Bartholomew Ryan and Jakob Schillinger,  
curatorial assistants.  
Exhibition and graphic design by Project Projects.

[www.branding-democracy.org](http://www.branding-democracy.org)

Supported, in part, by The Andy Warhol Foundation  
for the Visual Arts.

**PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN**

## Participants

Yael Bartana  
Erick Beltrán  
Alexis Bhagat  
Paul Chan  
Simon Critchley  
Joseph DeLappe  
Alexandra Domanovic  
Sam Durant  
Kota Ezawa  
Andrea Geyer  
Liam Gillick  
Boris Groys  
Victoria Hattam  
Sharon Hayes  
Susan Hiller  
Ashley Hunt  
I Approve This Message  
Institute for Infinitely  
Small Things  
Emma Kay  
Komar & Melamid  
Asaf Koriat  
Runo Lagomarsino  
Steve Lambert  
Les Liens Invisibles  
Ligorano/Reese  
Miguel Luciano  
Michael Mandiberg  
Emery Martin  
Aleksandra Mir  
Carlos Motta

## Participants

Dave Muller  
Timo Nasser  
Ariel Orozco  
Trevor Paglen  
PETLab  
Nadine Robinson  
Anri Sala  
Hank Willis Thomas  
Johan Tirén  
Brian Tolle  
Judi Werthein  
Wooloo Productions  
The Yes Men  
Carey Young

When the U.S. launched its military campaign in Iraq in defense of democracy, it announced at the same time a “war of ideas,” a marketing campaign to export American values worldwide. These values invoke “freedom” and “individuality” as the twin poles of American identity and have become increasingly indivisible from the language of advertising. Democracy has become a global brand, available to any consumer and evoked by regimes of all stripes.

During the final stages of the American presidential elections, Parsons The New School for Design presents OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding to investigate democracy positioned as consumer brand. The exhibition acknowledges the emerging convergence of art and design, and invites practitioners in this hybrid field to ask questions about our democracy now: What does participation mean? What kind of commitment is made in a democratic election—by voters as well as by elected representatives? What is the extent of community, and what form does refusal take? What are the visible and the invisible structures on which democracy is built; who and what gets represented, and who and what doesn't? Does instant gratification apply equally to the electoral process and the global market economy? And, finally, is true democracy eternally deferred, a condition that is in constant formation and always entails speculation?

Step in and climb the stage to experience what democracy and participation mean. Make a chicken pee, and discover what people don't say in public. Re-shuffle the cards of history, and create your own protest posters with historic rubber stamps. Consider the cardinal points, and imagine “the North” and “the South” or the impermeable U.S. border. Go to Chicago—again—and celebrate history and future.

*continued on next page*



# Curatorial statements

In essence, the exhibition is a stage, conceived as a platform for debate, and consisting of four distinct structures that each feature analytical as well as generative elements. In keeping with Parsons' educational mission, OURS illuminates the practical implications of a critical position.

The first element of the show is a central platform designed by Liam Gillick that is the site of lectures, performances, charrettes (solution-driven workshops), and panels. Many works—both in the gallery and on the Web—surround this central site where democracy is generated (or consumed?), and field the ideas for those participatory processes and discussions. A second layer consists of interpretative materials that both contextualize the exhibition and create ephemeral brands themselves—this exhibition guide being one of them, supplemented by an audio guide with artists' statements, handouts, the stickers, and a number of posters, all of which act as vehicles for a self-reflective process. The third structure is made up of workshops inserted into existing classes at Parsons that, for the first time, are being held in the actual gallery space, on the platform. Modeled on design charrettes, which are effective and entertaining combinations of concept and mobilization, these workshops pose specific challenges and call for immediate practical solutions. The fourth structure includes public lectures and panels that further illuminate the subject.

All these elements have different temporalities, and last from a couple of hours to three months. The exhibition's Web site documents ongoing aspects of the show, such as evolving works on the blackboard and in the gallery windows. Election Day is marked by a daylong performance by PETLab, and a switch in one of the video booths: until November 4, the booth serves as a media headquarters, with transmissions covering the U.S. elections streaming in from around the world. A week later, it features Susan Hiller's *The Last Silent Movie*, with words in languages no longer spoken, erased by the global race for majority rule.

In an initial reading, OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding examines desires generated and promoted by the brand of American democracy—such as choice, participation, freedom of expression, a sense of belonging and the promise of individual success, all embodied in the notion of “liberty”—and looks at how and where these desires find fulfillment, or not. Works dealing with the decor of our homes or our cities are as much part of this discussion as those featuring the visual emblems of democratic governments and of material success. A second trajectory investigates both aesthetic and political systems of representation developed in response to these desires and, in particular, addresses the unrepresented: the voiceless excluded from representation on the one hand and the power structures that run parallel to democratic governments on the other. Works dealing with our media landscape, with secret military units and official government pronouncements fall within this segment of the show.

The central platform is a focus of OURS—simultaneously a place of confinement and a zone of privilege that highlights the speculative nature of both the democratic process and the brand: entering this space implicates the visitor in all actions that happen within. A decision to commit, participate, or refuse must be taken. Informed by notions of legitimacy, entitlement and desire, this decision or choice, however, never leaves us entirely satisfied. We remain in a state of perpetual speculation.

—Carin Kuoni, curator

The question of democracy's dissemination in the era of network culture is a tenuous one. The Internet has ushered in an era of illegal government surveillance, increased censorship, retrograde copyright enforcement, linguistic hegemony, and a new model for mediated power relationships in which agency and class are largely predetermined by access to technology. None of this is particularly democratic—at least not insofar as we envision democracy as a system in which everyone has an equal opportunity for representation and expression. With the spread of this invention (emanating from the U.S. military after all) and despite its predication on a model of democracy, these network conditions are also diffused. In turn, networks create opportunities for exchange across vast spaces and collaboration with others near and far.

Censorship notwithstanding, the Internet introduces people to new ideas and possibilities, and gives them a sense of choice—the other cornerstone of the democratic fantasy. Networked communication enables the articulation and distribution of this fantasy. But the codes, conduits, and cultural cues around which this communication is structured also invite parody, intervention, and deconstruction, not least by virtue of their copy-and-paste aesthetics that practically beg for appropriation, mimicry, and détournement. This is the interesting paradox that informs the works in this exhibition. Network culture has given us new challenges to our civil liberties and new tools for combating these challenges. And the question of branding is a perfect point of entry for such an enterprise. What is branding if not a highly-mediated, visually-based form of communication whose rhetorical and psychological impacts are just as precisely calculated as the military's psychological operations (PSYOPs) or the Soviets' “Cinema of Attractions.” The Internet makes the “source code” of these missives transparent and editable. Taking this DIY political aesthetic into their own hands, the Web-based artists in OURS reflect on contemporary politics—whether it is the state of things in the U.S. or abroad. While some identify specific problems and solutions, others simply afford us new ways to look at the world. What better aspiration for a work of art in these troubled times?

—Marisa Olson, Web curator



# Programs

**Locations of the various events**  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery, 2 West 13th Street

Theresa Lang Community and  
Student Center, 55 West 13th Street,  
2nd floor

Union Square South, along  
14th Street, between Broadway and  
Park Avenue

Wollman Hall, 65 West 11th Street,  
fifth floor (enter at 66 West 12th  
Street)

*Admission is free unless  
noted otherwise.*

## A Note on the Charrettes

Issues of (in)visibility and strategies of visualization are put on display in six workshops that take place in the gallery, on the stage-like structure designed for this purpose by Liam Gillick. These workshops are modeled on design charrettes, collaborative efforts that address specific challenges in order to generate immediate practical solutions within a limited amount of time. Charrettes are an effective and often entertaining combination of concept and mobilization.

The challenge of each charrette is formulated by a work in the exhibition, whose author moderates the workshop alongside a New School faculty member. Each charrette invites a class from Parsons to devote one lesson to the problem it poses. The workshops are open to the public and designed to produce results that reach out into the surrounding urban- and media-fabric. The goal of each charrette is to create documents, objects, platforms, or gestures that can enter the public sphere.

As distinct incidents of political agency, the charrettes aim to reveal concealed power structures and establish new schemas of representation that give visibility to those that are excluded. They visualize abstract data and draw meaningful connections; they deconstruct the identificatory mechanisms of branding and propose alternative aesthetic concepts.

Each charrette is followed in the evening, at 6:30 p.m., by a keynote statement by the artist, the faculty host, student participants, and select other speakers. The charrettes are thus conceived to act as hubs and connectors on many levels: they allow students and visitors to enter an in-depth dialogue with artists and exhibited artworks, and act as interfaces between participants and a larger public.

## **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18 SIMON CRITCHLEY: BARACK OBAMA AND THE AMERICAN VOID**

Lecture: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Theresa Lang Community and  
Student Center  
Admission: \$8; free to all students  
and New School faculty, staff, and  
alumni with ID

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School is dedicating its annual programming to the theme of Branding Democracy. The inaugural lecture is delivered by Simon Critchley, professor of philosophy at The New School for Social Research and at University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. His research focuses on the history of philosophy, literature, ethics, and politics.

In keeping with this political moment, Critchley approaches the subject of democracy through the current presidential elections and focuses on one of the two candidates: entitled “Barack Obama and the American Void,” Critchley’s lecture examines Obama’s subjectivity, the existential detachment that seems to haunt him, and its relation to democracy. Obama as the ultimate brand.

## **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16 MIGUEL LUCIANO**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
9:00 a.m. – 2:40 p.m.  
Presentation: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

Miguel Luciano’s work considers self-censorship and self-imposed silence. In this charrette, he works with students to explore one basic question: “What do you feel unable to express?” The responses to this question is translated into visual expressions: with computers and semi-automatic button making machines, the students design and produce right in the gallery their own pin back buttons. These buttons are then deposited in Luciano’s installation piece, *Cuando las Gallinas Mean (When Hens Pee)*, a repurposed vending machine, where they will eventually find their way to unsuspecting “consumers.”

At 6:30 p.m., a short film on political propaganda and election paraphernalia is screened, followed by the official unveiling of the buttons designed by the students. *This charrette is hosted by Parsons faculty members Charles Goldman and Carlos Teixeira.*

## **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19 Yael BARTANA, WILD SEEDS IN AMERICA, 2008**

Performance with 15 students,  
sound equipment, and mats:  
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Union Square South  
New work, commissioned by Parsons  
for OURS

In the first *Wild Seeds*, Yael Bartana filmed a group of 18-year-old Israeli pacifists playing a game called the “Evacuation of Gilad’s Colony,” based on Israel’s forced removal of Jewish settlers from the Occupied Territories. Against a breathtaking rural backdrop, the participants tried to resist and break away from two of their own teammates who had volunteered to act as “authorities.” The game’s serious subtext became more explicit as the players’ language mimicked the actual words used by the evacuated settlers.

In *Wild Seeds in America*, the game is repeated, but this time as a commissioned performance against the urban backdrop of New York City, with New School students who learn the original context of the game in progressive stages. The experiment looks at how one society’s rituals and behaviors of dissent are received outside of their original social context, and how knowledge shapes that experience. In a broader context, it is a portrait of a community that declares its ideology in opposition to the policy of the state. *Project assistance: Bartholomew Ryan*

## **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22 SAM DURANT**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.  
Presentation and parade:  
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

In this charrette, claims of advertising and branding intended to generate desire, are severed from their products and turned into political claims. Durant works with students to mine advertisements and branding campaigns to create “protest” signs timed to the upcoming elections.

A public parade around Union Square touting the newly created banners follows at 6:30 p.m., preceded by a conversation between Sam Durant and Janet Kraynak. *This charrette is hosted by Parsons and Eugene Lang College faculty member Janet Kraynak.*

## **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23 ASHLEY HUNT**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
3:00 – 5:30 p.m.  
Presentation: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

*A World Map* is an ongoing project which maps structures of power that determine political exclusion and inclusion, using soft pastel and chalk on chalkboard. The work is always generated through a collaborative effort; for OURS, it is created by Parsons students. By mapping concepts and discourses rather than specific geographies, the work traces how globalization as a supra-national system of economies, laws, and institutions, is built on the exclusion of certain persons—such as refugees or prisoners—and the inclusion of others.

An open glossary reinforces the public aspect of *A World Map*: terms and ideas generated by the charrette are posted on the blackboard, available to anyone for editing, discussion, changing, and erasing by the gallery visitors. Each week, the exhibition’s Web site is updated with the latest versions of the glossary.

With its large blackboard, *A World Map* is essentially a temporary classroom. At 6:30 p.m., a public presentation follows with artist, teacher, and students. *This charrette is hosted by Parsons faculty member Melissa Rachleff.*

## **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26 CAREY YOUNG, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, 2003/2008**

Performance with professional  
mediator, table, chairs, 2 notice  
boards, media advertising,  
photography, members of the public:  
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Union Square South

At the south end of Union Square, historically the site of political demonstrations and the place of a farmers’ market on other days, a small stall is set up in sight of the facades of high-rise luxury condominiums and multinational corporations. At the stall, the services of a professional mediator are made available, without charge, to anyone who desires them, for the duration of a day.

In mediation, an impartial third-party guides people who are involved in a dispute through a series of problem-solving steps to help them diffuse their conflict, communicate more effectively, and find their own solutions as an alternative to prolonged litigation or violence. Different from an arbitrator (or an elected politician) who makes a decision for—or on behalf of—the parties, the mediator does not make decisions or render an opinion of any kind.

The piece references larger questions of conflict. As mediation is inherently concerned with the attempt to create peace, this tiny site (at the feet of a bronze statue of George Washington) alludes to notions of a peaceful utopia, but it seems vulnerable, dwarfed by the size and architecture of the surrounding environment. The site offers poetic resonance: a tiny and temporary peace zone that will be dismantled all too soon. *Project assistance: Jakob Schillinger Mediator: Elena Bayrock, Safe Horizon*

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 27 ALEXIS BHAGAT**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
3:00 – 6:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

Alexis Bhagat, a sound artist, performer, and writer from New York discusses issues and concepts relating to democracy and branding. The recordings of these conversations that occur in both small and large groups of students

will then be incorporated into the live performance piece, *Lecture on Democracy as Word and Brand*, presented in the gallery on December 2. *This charrette is hosted by Eugene Lang College faculty member Jesal Kapadia. See also performance on December 2.*

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 27 JUDI WERTHEIN**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
10:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.  
Presentation: 6:30 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

This charrette is based on Judi Werthein’s work *Brinco*, a uniquely designed sneaker that was distributed for free in 2005 to Mexican immigrants who were about to attempt an illegal crossing into the U.S. Trademarked “Brinco” (Spanish for “jump”) after the local nickname for crossing the border, each pair contains a map of the border-area (on the inside of the soles), a compass, a wallet, pockets to hide money and medication, and other necessities, such as an image of Santo Toribio Romo, the official saint of the Mexican immigrant.

In the charrette, students in product design classes split up in groups and develop “survival kits” for different geographic regions of the world, taking into consideration local adversarial conditions whether political, environmental, or economic. The kits respond to contextual criteria such as poverty, mobility, and belief systems and must contain 10 items.

Public presentation of survival kits: 6:30 p.m. in the gallery. *This charrette is hosted by Parsons faculty member Robert Kirkbride.*

## **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3 ANDREA GEYER, SPIRAL LANDS/CHAPTER 2, 2008**

Performance: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

In her 90-minute performance, Geyer personifies the archetypal (male) scholar, speaking from the immanently authoritative position of academia and drawing additional legitimacy from citing a canon of academic authors. The subject matter of her speech is the erased memory of Native American cultures, and more generally the process of acquiring knowledge and its intertwining with power and oppression. Her talk is accompanied by slide projections of landscape photographs of the American West, taken by the artist. *Spiral Lands* is an unsettling consideration of oppressed identity, and a concise critique of the aggressive racism naturalized by capitalist democracy.

## **TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4 PETLAB, RE:ACTIVISM NYC, 2008**

Game gathering: 12:30 – 2:30 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery  
*Register online at <http://petlab.parsons.edu/reactivism>*

On Election Day, the streets are reclaimed—and the history of political protest embedded therein. Structured as a team-based urban street game using mobile technology, *PETLab: Re:Activism NYC* currently offers a tour of Lower Manhattan through an exploration of its history of activists, protests, and riots. Essentially an open and expandable platform, however, *Re:Activism* includes tutorials and open source tools for creating the game and investigating histories in any city.

As participants carry out a clue-based scavenger hunt and site-specific challenges, they are informed of the ongoing resonance

of historic issues fought for in the battleground of the city. Winning the game necessitates collective action and proactive problem-solving, thus teaching players how to be effective activists while challenging the definition of “playing by the rules.”

Gather in the lobby outside the gallery at 12:30 p.m. for the official take-off; bring your cell phone along.

## **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7 RUNO LAGOMARSINO**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Presentation: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

The aim of this charrette is to explore the dynamics of identifying and naming art production through the opposition of “the North” with “the South.” Participants are invited to create not works of art, but a fictional artist as means to achieve a position to speak from. In particular, the charrette explores the position of an artist to be both actor and symbol in discourses on nationhood, “race,” belonging, and politics. The intersection of these discourses with art production serves as an analytical lens through which to consider the nature and extent of social change regarding old and new forms of exclusion, and the ways in which these are created, represented, and potentially countered.

In the evening, at 6:30 p.m., the discussion between artist, teacher and students is followed by an introduction to The Artist created in the charrette.

*This charrette is hosted by Parsons faculty member Anthony Aziz.*

## **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17 THE JOHN MCDONALD MOORE MEMORIAL LECTURE: BORIS GROYS, ART IN THE AGE OF DEMOCRACY**

Lecture: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Wollman Hall

Philosopher Boris Groys on art as the most democratic of expressions.

A professor of aesthetics, art history, and media theory at the Center for Art and Media Technology (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, and Global Professor at New York University, Groys is a philosopher, essayist, art critic, curator, media theorist, and an internationally acclaimed expert on late-Soviet postmodern art and literature as well as on the Russian avant-garde. Groys’ writing engages the disparate traditions of French post-structuralism and modern Russian philosophy.

## **WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19 TREVOR PAGLEN**

Charrette with artist and  
Parsons class (open to the public):  
time tba.  
Presentation with Peter Merlin:  
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery

In this charrette, students in fashion design investigate the role that visual literacy plays in maintaining and decoding collective identity, looking specifically at visual codes and brand reinforcement in fashion and in the military complex. One of the focal points of their assignment is the transition from outsider to insider such as when a consumer morphs from oblivious ignorant person to a member of a “knowing” subculture and becomes a fashion cognoscenti. Base fabric and other materials available.

The presentation in the evening features a conversation between Trevor Paglen, Shelley Fox, and Peter Merlin, an aerospace historian and collector of military patches, who has worked amongst other places at the NASA Dryden Flight Research Center. *This charrette is hosted by Parsons faculty member Shelley Fox.*

## **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21 WHO KNOWS ONE! PROFILING THE CITIZEN/ CLIENT**

Panel discussion: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Theresa Lang Community and  
Student Center  
Admission: \$8; free to all students  
and New School faculty, staff, and  
alumni with ID

Following on the heels of the American presidential election, this panel discussion focuses on the techniques and implications of behavioral studies, corporate ethnography, political polls and profiling by which populations are defined and segmented into distinct target groups. The panel is moderated by Victoria Hattam, Chair and Associate Professor of Political Science at The New School for Social Research, and brings together artists, academics and marketing experts. Hattam is noted for her research on American political economy and development and on the role of class, race and ethnicity in American politics. *Additional speakers will be announced.*

## **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2 ALEXIS BHAGAT, LECTURE ON DEMOCRACY AS WORD AND BRAND, 2008**

Performance: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen  
Gallery  
New work, commissioned by Parsons  
for OURS

*Lecture on Democracy as Word and Brand* is a multi-channel sound performance by Alexis Bhagat, generated in parts from recordings made during a design charrette that the artist conducted with New School students on October 27.

Alexis Bhagat (born USA, 1974) is a sound artist and writer from New York. His work is dedicated to dismantling authorship and authority through the cultivation of new forms of radically poly-vocal sound, the transmission of promiscuous conversation, and obsessive, never-ending correspondence. He speaks and writes on anarchism, prisons, and sound art, and is a founding member of the August Sound Coalition. Bhagat is intrigued by the “lecture” as a form ripe for intervention.

## **TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2009 THE CRITS: PARSONS FACULTY ON THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION**

Roundtable: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.  
Theresa Lang Community and  
Student Center

A week after the presidential inauguration, Parsons faculty members critique not the students but the visual aesthetics of the country’s new leader: the fashion, the stage, the sound, and the lights of the inaugural ceremonies for the 44th President of the United States.

On the closing of the exhibition, this roundtable reveals how the pros judge what is served to the masses. Speakers represent various departments at Parsons, ranging from fashion to product design, from architecture to fine arts, from communication design to lighting design.

*Moderated by Tim Marshall, Dean, Parsons The New School for Design.*

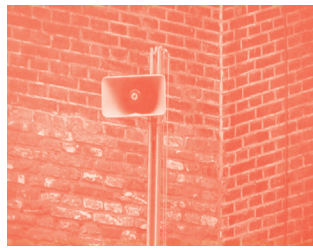


# Works

Please note, this listing is in alphabetical order and includes both gallery and online works.

Select pieces (identified here) feature additional audio information that can be accessed from any phone by dialing (718) 362-9597.

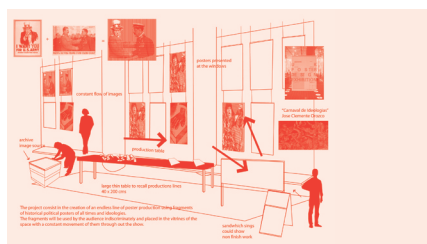
"Guide-by-Cell" organized by Bartholomew Ryan.



**Yael Bartana** (Israel, 1970; lives in Israel and the Netherlands) *Disembodying the National Army Tune*, 2001  
Loudspeaker, metal pole, motor, movement sensor, and sound 12' x 12' x 12"  
Soundtrack: Keren Rosenbaum  
Voice: Noa Frenkel  
Production assistance: Yuval Kedem  
Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and the artist

The reprise of an installation first exhibited in Israel in 2001, the piece is now positioned at the entrance to the Kellen Gallery.

A loudspeaker on a 13-foot pole plays a recording of the Israeli national anthem in the voice of a person imitating a trumpet. Triggered by the viewers' movements, the loudspeaker climbs up and down the pole, simulating the raising and lowering of a flag and emphasizing a phallic subtext to patriotic displays. The work satirizes tropes of nationhood that are arrived at through pomp and ceremony. See also performance on October 19.



**Erick Beltrán** (Mexico, 1974; lives in Barcelona, Spain) *Epistemic Merit Model*, 2008  
MDF table, wooden archive, wire, metal, rubber stamps, ink, sandwich boards, scanner, and paper  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy the artist  
New work, commissioned by Parsons for **OURS**

Guide-by-Cell : (718) 362-9597 / #4

Erick Beltrán's design-oriented practice investigates the way language and meaning are formed through structures that are often arbitrary, though they may seem universal and inevitable. The artist concentrates on the visual and graphic formation of language, whether in the graphic designer's use of typography or in the many variations that alphabetical forms can take across cultures.

For **OURS**, Beltrán has developed a "production site," stationed in the gallery. Users have access to an archive of 300 historic propaganda images that they can shuffle and combine at will: reproduced on old-fashioned rubber stamps, the images get printed on paper, scanned, and uploaded to the exhibition's Web site. Each week a selection of the works is printed in large-poster format and mounted on high wires crossing the gallery windows.

The posters, which evoke the photo collages of Dada and Constructivism, play with notions of artistic radicalism in relation to political ideology, and demonstrate one of the show's main themes: though participatory strategies often provide the appearance of democratic choice, this democracy is limited to the options outlined in the structure of the game. "Action" becomes "free play" within a narrow range of often compromising options.  
Project assistance: Bartholomew Ryan



**Paul Chan** (China/Hong Kong, 1973; lives in New York)  
*Untitled Video on Lynne Stewart and Her Conviction, the Law and Poetry*, 2006  
Video, color with sound  
17 minutes, 30 seconds  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled ...* is a video portrait of longtime defense lawyer and activist Lynne Stewart. In 2005, Stewart was convicted on charges that she provided support to terrorists by conspiring to smuggle messages out of prison from her client, Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. Straightforward, documentary-style scenes feature Stewart discussing her prosecution and what she views as its implications for fundamental democratic rights. These talking-head sequences alternate with cross-fading color fields that fill the screen when Stewart recites poetry, a strategy she often employed in court.

For Chan, Stewart's case demonstrates how the state takes redefines dissidents who operate in the name of democracy as traitors who need to be silenced. Through its free circulation on the Internet, Chan's work aims to counter the state's mechanisms of exclusion and to reintroduce the "dissident" into the circuits of representation.



**Joseph DeLappe** (USA, 1963; lives in Reno, Nevada)  
*Dead-in-Iraq*, 2006, ongoing  
[http://www.unr.edu/art/delappe/Gaming/Dead\\_In\\_Iraq/dead\\_in\\_iraq](http://www.unr.edu/art/delappe/Gaming/Dead_In_Iraq/dead_in_iraq)

This ongoing memorial takes the form of an intervention in "America's Army," the online first-person-shooter video game used by the U.S. Army to recruit new soldiers. DeLappe logged into the game with the user name "dead-in-iraq" and proceeded to use the game's text messaging system to type the names, ages, divisions, and dates of death of all recently deceased U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Then he waited to be shot by other players, died, and began the process again (after being reincarnated). *Dead-in-Iraq* is a provocative co-opting of the tools of digital culture in order to engage with the political issues raised in an era of high technology propaganda and war.



**Aleksandra Domanovic** (Slovenia, 1981, lives in Berlin, Germany)  
*Holivud*, 2008  
<http://aleksandradowanovic.com/holivud.html>

This online triptych notes the divergent paths Google Maps suggest to Serbians and Albanians for travel between Pristina and Beograd, based on assumptions about the citizens' political differences. The map is bracketed by videos of celebrities George Clooney and James Belushi speaking on behalf of Serbians and Albanians, respectively. The juxtaposition calls attention to foreign countries' use of Hollywood brands to galvanize national identity and support on the world stage.



**Sam Durant** (USA, 1961, lives in Los Angeles)  
*See You in Chicago in August*, 2002  
Electric sign with vinyl text  
55" x 46" x 9 1/2"  
Edition 3/3  
Photo credit: Achim Kukulies  
Collection of Rebecca and Alexander Stewart

Reproduction of source drawing  
*Washington D.C. 1968, 2002*  
Graphite on paper  
15" x 20"  
Courtesy the artist

*See You in Chicago in August*, 2008  
Print on paper, distributed in stacks throughout New School campus  
35" x 24"  
Courtesy the artist, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Photographic documentation of historic protests, culled mostly from newspapers, makes up the source material for Durant's light boxes and posters. They are faithful reproductions of slogans from protest signs—adopting their graphic shape, but isolating them from their context, thus transforming them into enigmatic and yet shockingly generic logos. Gestures of protest, freedom of speech, and public expression—essential elements of any democracy—are stripped of the cause they meant to support.

On the one hand, Durant seems to suggest that protest itself is what matters in a democratic society. On the other, he points out that the image of protest loses its meaning as it circulates in the mass media and is easily appropriated by those in power, for instance when President George W. Bush, questioned about anti-war protests, remarked, "See, this is what we're fighting for." Durant critiques the mechanisms of branding that transform desires and relationships into emotionally charged but essentially meaningless icons.

Project assistance: Jakob Schillinger  
See also charrette and parade on October 22.



**Kota Ezawa** (Germany, 1969; lives in San Francisco)  
*Hand Vote*, 2008  
Paint on wood  
11 1/2" x 17" x 6"  
Edition 1/3  
Courtesy the artist and Murray Guy  
New work, commissioned by Parsons for **OURS**

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Kota Ezawa re-presents iconic moments from the media and the history of photography in animated videos, slide projections, light boxes, and prints. Each project graphically reduces source material (such as the moment of the "Not guilty" verdict in the O.J. Simpson trial, or the Yoko Ono and John Lennon 1969 "Bed-in for peace") to a pared-down animation that explores the mutable role of the camera and photography in the reception and understanding of reality.

For **OURS**, Ezawa has produced a new sculpture, a laser-cut wooden tableau of a group of people, raising their hands in what is read as referendum but might just as well be a confession. The sculpture is based on an anonymous photograph found in a Web-encyclopedia under the entry for "Policy Making Process." The

detached gaze at democracy is free of any political view. All that is revealed in this picture are the pure mechanics of voting, which is the mode under which democracy operates. As a non-U.S. citizen, Ezawa embraces this agnostic look at democracy.



**Kota Ezawa**  
*Celebrate Your Everyday Life*, 2007  
Transparency on light box  
40" x 60" x 5"  
Courtesy the artist and Murray Guy

*A Space of Your Own*, 2007  
Transparency on light box  
40" x 30" x 5"  
Edition 4/7  
Courtesy the artist and Murray Guy

The artist's light boxes from his IKEA series feature his signature computer drawing style. They further simplify the physical properties of the overdesigned objects, suggesting that gesture, color, and context formulate lifestyles that lead, via branding, to contemporary identity. Reminiscent of President George W. Bush's post-9/11 call to shop as an act of patriotic solidarity, these works also suggest that self-fulfillment and power can be obtained through the material satisfaction of desire.



**Andrea Geyer** (Germany, 1971; lives in New York)  
*Parallax (Media)*, 2008  
Digital C-print  
20" x 30" each, 6 altogether  
Edition 1/5  
Courtesy the artist

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*Parallax* investigates notions of citizenship and national belonging, and their role in creating individual and governmental spaces of action. The work comprises two series of six photographs, one of which is on view in the exhibition, each taken in 2003 in Los Angeles and New York, combined with text excerpts from news agencies.

Some of the photographs document the peripheries of protests against the war in Iraq and civil rights infringements; others are staged and follow a kind of universal protagonist through her everyday life, anchoring the work through the projection of this subjective view. In combination, the photographs and the texts in them point to the gap between the "objective knowledge" of official news reports and state politics on the one hand, and individual experience on the other. See also performance on November 3.



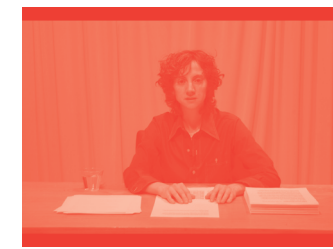
**Liam Gillick** (England, 1964; lives in London and New York)  
*Revised Sochaux Structure*, 2008  
Benches and platform, Ultralite and paint  
Platform, approx. 60' x 47' x 12"  
4 circular benches, 94" in diameter, 19 1/5" high  
Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York  
New work, commissioned by Parsons for **OURS**

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Gillick's site-specific installation occupies a central place in the exhibition and is the stage for a series of charrettes (solution-driven workshops) as well as other participatory events. It consists of four circular benches atop a low platform that divides the gallery space into zones of activities and of passive contemplation.

Participation demands commitment; in order to join the activities on the platform, the visitor must step into the limelight. This creates an area of heightened awareness, a border between inside and outside open to everyone, but demanding a conscious act of engagement. At the same time, the area does not have one center and thus—like the process of democracy itself—does not afford a truly unified perspective. Similarly, the circular benches are complex and contradictory, and offer both intimacy (by facing inward) and exposure (facing outward). The installation triggers a process of continuous reevaluation of one's actions and position. "Participation" is possible, but the facilitating structure also determines its limits.

Project assistance: Bartholomew Ryan

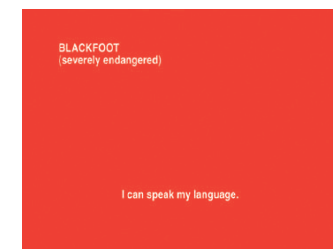


**Sharon Hayes** (USA, 1970; lives in New York)  
*My Fellow Americans 1981-1988*, 2004/06  
Documentation of performance  
9 hours, 30 minutes  
Courtesy the artist

*My Fellow Americans* documents a performance by Hayes in which she read all thirty-six of Ronald Reagan's official "Address to the Nation" speeches, beginning with the "Address to the Nation on the Economy" delivered on February 5, 1981, and ending with "Farewell Address to the Nation" from January 11, 1989. A specific category of presidential address, these speeches are always given from the Oval Office and are presumably spoken directly to the American people.

Hayes, however, strips them of the branded performance—the choreographed gestures and refined dramatic intonation—which presidents, and especially Reagan, employ on such occasions. As she reads the transcripts, which range in topic from the laissez-faire economic policies dubbed Reaganomics to the Iran-Contra affair, her affectless voice transforms the sentences into a series of dry, flat phrases.

The individual's recitation is perfected by a chorus of off-screen assistants who audibly correct the artist's at times flawed rendition.



**Susan Hiller** (USA, 1940; lives in London)  
*The Last Silent Movie*, 2007  
Video, black-and-white with sound  
21 minutes  
Exhibition copy  
Courtesy Timothy Taylor Gallery, London  
This work will be presented after Election Day.

*The Last Silent Movie's* black screen illuminates how individuals and communities become victims as they are swallowed up, involuntarily assimilated, into the global circulation of ideas and capital branded as "democratization." The work features archival sound recordings of extinct or endangered languages, subtitled on the screen.

However, Hiller's film not only looks at the marginalized but also addresses the mechanisms of cultural hegemony and homogenization, and of closure. In addition to her unsettling "anthropological" material as such, Hiller's spotlight is on the machinery through which we commonly approach it—the intellectual, emotional, and ideological processes whereby these materials are comprehended and classified. She addresses a fundamental problem of democracy, particularly in the age of branding: the ongoing muting of our differences and the spread of a common mindset in the service of conformity.



**Ashley Hunt** (USA, 1970; lives in Los Angeles)  
*A World Map: In Which We See ...*  
2005, ongoing  
Chalk and soft pastel on blackboard  
Courtesy the artist  
This work will be generated during a charrette on October 23.

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Ashley Hunt uses video, photography, mapping and writing to engage social movements, modes of learning, and public discourse. He is interested in how societal structures both allow some people to accumulate power and prevent others from attaining it, and in how people come to know, respond and conceive of themselves within these structures.

Hunt is presenting *A World Map*, an ongoing project in which he maps structures of power that determine exclusion and inclusion, using soft pastel and chalk on blackboard. The work will be created in collaboration with Parsons students via a design charrette (a solution-driven workshop) in the gallery space. The map will also generate an open glossary on the chalkboard where viewers are invited to expand on ideas raised by the piece, thus sharing in the ongoing classroom experience. Each week, the most recent version of map and glossary will be uploaded to the exhibition's Web site to expand the structure of the work itself beyond the gallery space. See also charrette and presentation on October 23.



**Walker Art Center, UpTake, and UnConvention** (USA, 2008)  
*I Approve This Message*, 2008, ongoing  
<http://theunconvention.com/iapprove/>

This participatory project was initiated by the organizers of the UnConvention, an umbrella for art projects and interventions happening in the region of the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul. Sidestepping efforts by authorities to keep voices of dissent or other visual distractions at bay during this quadrennial spectacle, and taking its title from the obligatory statement uttered by candidates at the end of campaign ads, "I Approve This Message" gives the public a chance to address delegates at both conventions. Touted as a "community-generated media response" giving people "a voice and an opportunity to promote thinking about what participating in democracy looks like," the project revolves around a Web site in which users' two-minute videos are posted to paint a collective picture of what this process means to them.





**Institute for Infinitely Small Things** (USA, 2004; active in Boston)  
*Transferring Patriotism*, 2008, ongoing  
<http://www.ikatun.org/transferring-patriotism>

At once a promotional ad and a speculative performance, *Transferring Patriotism* is the trailer or placeholder for an exchange in which the artists would—for the cost of their travel expenses—travel to a buyer's home country and sell their patriotism. The transaction has precise terms and must occur over a table evenly riding the border between the buyers' nation and the territory of the local American Embassy, around which the respective parties would first sit and consume an American beer. The terms of this contract recall the patriotism-stoking genre of American Westerns in which contention over frontiers entrenched imperialist fantasies.



**Emma Kay** (England, 1961; lives in London)  
*The Future From Memory*, 2001  
Digital animation, projected  
Approximately 12' x 16'  
55 minutes, looped  
Courtesy the artist and Galeria Toni Tàpies, Barcelona

Emma Kay's work deals with individual memory in relation to authoritative discourse. For *The Future From Memory*, Kay transcribed a text based on theories of the future culled from a variety of sources, ranging from science to spirituality, from culture to economics. But the transcriptions are not entirely direct: they are based solely on the artist's recollections of her wide-ranging materials. The film projects the text in an animated scroll that aptly resembles the title sequence of "Star Wars."

Democracy, as is evident from the fevered punditry around the current presidential campaign, is charged with anticipation and speculation about the future. It is, one could say, addicted to futurity. In integrating various ideas and voices into one memory, one discontinuous stream of consciousness, Kay addresses fundamentally democratic conflicts and asks: if the outcome of democracy is always deferred, does our subjective future remain forever open? If the future is both the object of constant anticipation in a process of endless debate and, at the same time, constituted through this process, is democracy essentially a mandate to challenge any authoritative claim to objective knowledge and truth?



**Komar & Melamid** (Russia, 1943 and 1945; live in New York)  
*America's Most Wanted*, 1994/2008  
Photographic reproduction of oil painting with statistical charts  
© D. James Dee  
Dishwasher size (32" x 42")  
Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

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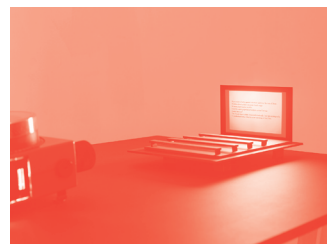
Public opinion polls and market research ceaselessly measure all aspects of society. So, in 1994, the conceptual artist collaborative Komar & Melamid wryly asked why the world of aesthetics should be any different. They went out and hired a market research firm to determine the public's aesthetic preferences and taste in painting. The poll was conducted in fourteen countries and resulted in a series of paintings by the artists titled *People's Choice* that attempted to translate the desires of each nation's public onto idealized canvases.

*America's Most Wanted* is the first work from that series. The work reflects the findings that 33% of Americans prefer the fall season, and 56% want historical figures in their paintings. Thus, in the hands of these Russian immigrants, the required historical icon becomes George Washington, depicted in a fall forest landscape reminiscent of the Hudson River School landscapes, and, in line with other poll results, standing near a beach and some deer. The project pokes gentle fun at rhetoric calling for the democratization of art, while also revealing traditional prejudices about artistic content. At the core is the immigrants' fascination with American consumer polls and the expectations of instant gratification they raise—not foreign to the political realm either.



**Asaf Koriat** (Israel, 1980; lives in Tel Aviv, Israel)  
*The Brave*, 2006  
Video, color with sound  
2 minutes, 15 seconds  
Courtesy the artist

*The Brave* is a one-channel, split-screen video simultaneously playing recordings of nine different celebrities singing the "Star Spangled Banner" at the opening celebration of the Super Bowl. Each performer attempts to make the anthem his or her own and to establish a claim to it in competition with his or her predecessors. In the temporal unity of the video, they melt into one uncanny disharmonious chant. This discordant national anthem provides both a concise critique and a celebration of mass culture: the singers embody the complexities of the democratic system, simultaneously touting the collective national identity and the insistence on individuality that are the contradictory parts of the myth of America. The video's presentation, via a large TV entertainment center, highlights the function of media events as the primary form through which the nation exists and perceives itself in unity.



**Runo Lagomarsino** (Argentina, 1977; lives in Malmö, Sweden, and New York)  
*Casi Quasi Cinema*, 2006  
Single slide projection, foam, table and wooden trestles  
48" x 39 1/2" x 16 1/2"  
Wooden trestles 27 1/2" high  
Courtesy the artist and Elastic, Malmö

On the flimsy worktable sits a model movie theater. Looming over it, projecting a text against the miniature movie screen, is a slide projector. The text reads,

"How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sounds familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film."

No film ensues, the slide does not surrender to a successor slide—the little cinema features this one lonely frame. Distributed by the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict at the Pentagon in 2003, the text stems from a flier advertising a screening of the 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers*. The film was shown within weeks of President Bush's "Mission Accomplished" speech proclaiming the end of "major hostilities" in Iraq. The Pentagon screening provocatively suggests that the lessons learned from the French experience—as rendered in a popular film—can successfully be transplanted to American circumstances.

*Casi Quasi Cinema's* aesthetics are not coincidental: popular culture and the mass media form the terrain for the "battle of ideas" and the branding of democracy.



**Runo Lagomarsino**  
*If You Don't Know What the South Is, It's Simply Because You Are From the North*, 2008  
Masonite and paint  
Two pieces, each approx. 12' x 13 1/2"  
Courtesy the artist and Elastic, Malmö  
New work, commissioned by Parsons for OURS

Lagomarsino's site-specific piece is a phrase divided into two parts, installed in the bridged gap that exposes the white box gallery's ceiling and walls as theatrical gestures by revealing the rough infrastructure of the building behind. The text reads, IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE SOUTH IS (left wall) ITS SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU ARE FROM THE NORTH (right wall).

Lagomarsino begins with the idea that communal spaces, such as nations, are both forms of inclusion but also of exclusion. He works in the space between universalism and the post-colonial realities defining the present day. This in-between space is home to classifications and discriminations, but also to potentiality and other forms of discourse of democracy and participation.

*Project assistance: Jakob Schillinger*  
See also *charrette* and *fictional artist debut on November 7*.



**Steve Lambert** (USA, 1976; lives in New York)  
*Whytheyhate.us*, 2006, ongoing  
<http://whytheyhate.us>

This Web site acts as a scrapbook for public photos uploaded to Flickr and tagged "whytheyhate.us." The site's call for contributors explains only: "The images on WhyTheyHate. Us fit a theme. If you don't know what that theme is, please do not add images." Viewers are thus left to draw conclusions about who "they" and "us" are, as they surf through thousands of images collectively documenting American patriotism, military bravado, homeland-centric rhetoric, naïveté, or blatant consumerism. This framing of the tagged photos raises the question

of local culpability for the image we export to other nations and the extent to which Americans "buy into" this image.



**Les Liens Invisibles** (Italy, 2007)  
*Peking2008*, 2008, ongoing  
<http://www.peking2008.com/>

This source project "Fake Is a Fake" by the Italian collective Les Liens Invisible makes it easy for Internet users with access to free Word Press blogging software to mimic high profile sites like news and government agencies, while inserting their own statements.

Constantly updated and refined by a group of devoted developers, the list of available spoofs continues to grow while blending art, advertising, and activism. The newest available Web site template, *Peking2008*, used the Olympic Games in Beijing as a backdrop for discussing China's attitude towards human rights. In demonstrating that the ubiquity and recognizability of branded messages make them particularly vulnerable to forms of plagiarism, the site looks just like the Olympics homepage, while addressing issues censored in China.



**Ligorano/Reese** (USA, 1955 and 1956; live in New York)  
*Pure Products*, 1993, ongoing  
<http://www.pureproductsusa.com/>

*Pure Products* is an online store initiated by the artists to sell "pseudo-patriotic consumer goods." In the fifteen years since the store first opened, there has come to be an ever closer, and unfortunately ever more ironic relationship between the items for sale and the lack of critical discourse about consumer debt, national debt, and even American obesity. Taking the form of t-shirts, tschochkes, and food products cleverly branded in alignment with American political personae and ideology, the site's inventory has a tongue-in-cheek reliance on the adage "you are what you eat." Highlighting the American ideal of capitalism, the novelty items become touchstones for a conversation about the ways in which national identity is packaged, distributed, and consumed.



**Miguel Luciano** (Puerto Rico, 1972; lives in New York)  
*Cuando las Gallinas Mean (When Hens Pee)*, 2003  
Coin-operated vending machine, with chicken and eggs  
67" x 32" x 32"  
Edition 1/2  
Courtesy the artist

*Cuando las Gallinas Mean* ("When Hens Pee") is a Puerto Rican saying meant to silence children: "You can speak again when the hens pee." And chickens never pee—except for the one in Luciano's vending machine. After the viewer inserts a quarter, the plastic hen rotates, pees, and releases one of 500 eggs, containing prizes.

The vending machine greets visitors upon entering the gallery, and anchors a complex and highly interactive process creating and propagating countless democratic mini-brands. The actual prizes—buttons expressing thoughts and ideas that today are not ordinarily voiced—are generated and designed in a charrette (a solution-driven workshop) with Parsons students. See also *charrette* and *presentation on October 16*.



**Michael Mandiberg** (USA, 1977; lives in New York)  
*Oil Standard*, 2006, ongoing  
<http://www.mandiberg.com/?q=oilstandard>

*Oil Standard* is a post-Gold Standard measure of the state of the U.S. economy, in relation to the current cost of oil. Internet users who download Mandiberg's Firefox plug-in can visit sites like Amazon or Orbitz and see U.S. dollar amounts converted into relative barrels of oil, according to their current cost. The project speaks to the relationship between American foreign policy and the branding of the U.S. economy, creating the context for a conversation about the impact that the often violent exportation of "democracy" is having on the U.S. economic health and about the ways in which consumer habits are implicated in this cycle.



**Emery C. Martin** (USA, 1984; lives in Los Angeles)  
*The Neighborhood Network Watch*, 2008, ongoing  
<http://www.dhsnnw.org/>

This project mimics the means by which Americans are, on the one hand, inculcated in a culture of fear, and on the other, sign off on policies that sacrifice their rights to privacy—protecting democratic processes in order to protect their self-image as participants in a democratic state. Modeled after the history and ideals of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *The Neighborhood Network Watch* (NNW) is a fictitious community organization recruiting residents to spy on themselves and their neighbors in vigilant protection against suspected terrorists. The Web-based organization boastfully updates guerrilla tactics and counterinsurgent warfare techniques by using emergent technologies in strategic, if vague, new ways.



**Aleksandra Mir** (Poland, 1967; lives in Palermo, Sicily)  
*Che and Concorde*, 2004/2008  
Posters displayed in stack in gallery  
32 1/2" x 23"  
Courtesy the artist and Mary Boone Gallery

*Che and Concorde* consists of posters designed by the artist and distributed for free during the exhibition. The work depicts two iconic brands: Che Guevara, a symbol of socialist liberation, and the Concorde, a symbol of capitalist ambition. Set

against a bold red background, Che, like the Concorde, is moving towards obsolescence. The lost potential of these icons to promote actual change (social or technical revolution, respectively) clashes with the aesthetic appeal they still carry and the delight with which visitors commonly take away their free posters. *Che and Concorde* documents the power of branding to condense complex ideas into effective signs and invites us to contemplate the traces of the ideologies they invoke.

As a further complication, the edition here is the copy of an invitation to a group show on communism at the Project Arts Center in Dublin. In its current reappearance, *Communism: A Group Show* flows into OURS: *Democracy in the Age of Branding*, and the mutability seems entirely natural in this relativistic time.

The back of the poster features an interview between the artist and the designer of the original iconic image of Che, the Irish illustrator Jim Fitzpatrick who released the image many years ago sans copyright.



**Carlos Motta** (Colombia, 1978; lives in New York)  
*The Good Life*, 2005, ongoing  
<http://www.la-buena-vida.info/>

*The Good Life* is Motta's expanding online archive of over 360 video interviews conducted with pedestrians in the streets of twelve cities in Latin America, regarding what the artist describes as "individuals' perceptions of United States foreign policy and its history of interventions in the region, local democracy, leadership, and governance." The archive can be searched in a variety of ways, for instance according to the content of the questions or the demographics of the respondent, thus serving as a sort of census of the large and diverse response about the local repercussions of the political, economic, and military actions of the U.S. Viewers can also make their voices heard by contributing answers to the central query of what constitutes the good life.



**Dave Muller** (USA, 1964; lives in Los Angeles)  
*Extensions (Interpolations and Extrapolations)*, 2008  
Acrylic on paper, four parts, either 32" x 40" or 40" x 32"  
Courtesy the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles  
Installed in atrium of Alvin Johnson/J.M. Kaplan Building  
66 West 12th Street

For OURS, Dave Muller has expanded his site-specific work *Interpolations and Extrapolations* from 2002–03, which features various signature logos and "looks" that The New School has adopted since its founding in 1919. Installed in the lobby of The New School's first "signature" building, Muller's work refers to the multiple re-branding initiatives of the exhibition's host institution, The New School, and reflects the changing political and economic conditions both within and outside the university.





**Timo Nasserj** (Germany, 1972; lives in Berlin, Germany)  
*Mimikry*, 2001  
C-print behind acrylic  
Edition 3/5  
40" × 40"  
Courtesy private collection  
Alexander Ochs, Berlin

A large group of Arab men, sitting on a small hill in a rural, mountainous landscape, looks directly toward the photographer. They echo the shape of a huge mountain in the background, forming a strong image of unity and strength. The photograph evokes an entire art history of representations of the "body politic", from Abraham Bosse's *Leviathan* frontispiece to Mount Rushmore. It also has the potential to confront the viewer with a range of prejudices about the Muslim world that are constantly reinforced within Western media and culture, among them the perceived threat of its vast anonymous masses.

There are more layers. The Pakistani men are watching a game of polo, which, while popularized by the British, is derived from the princes of the Tibeto-Burman kingdom of Manipur (now a state in India), who played the game while they were in exile in India between 1819 and 1826. The work thus alludes to a complex history of emigration and colonization, where exclusion from the sanctified brand "democracy" has been the norm.



**Ariel Orozco** (Cuba, 1971; lives in Mexico City)  
*Contrapeso*, 2003  
C-print  
27 1/2" × 19 1/2"  
Exhibition copy  
Courtesy Myto Gallery, Mexico City

*Contrapeso* shows the image of a man against the sky, holding a flagpole, stemming his body horizontally into the air. It is a photographic document of the artist performing his own flag, actually becoming the flag himself. *Contrapeso* aesthetically confronts the complex relationship between the nation and the individual, of the (in)divisibility of sovereignty. The half-naked, sun-tanned, muscular body evokes numerous glorifications of the worker appearing throughout Western art history. However, the viewer learns that the artist had to practice for months in order to attain the physical fitness required to perform the flag for one second, just long enough for the photograph to be taken. *Contrapeso* then functions as a critique of the politics of representation.



**Trevor Paglen** (USA, 1974; lives in Berkeley, California)  
*Five Classified Aircraft*, 2007  
5 fabric patches, framed  
15 1/4" × 32 3/4" × 2 1/2"  
Edition 2/5  
Courtesy the artist and Bellwether, New York

*Five Classified Squadrons*, 2007  
5 fabric patches, framed  
15 1/4" × 32 3/4" × 2 1/2"  
Edition 1/5  
Courtesy the artist and Bellwether, New York

Trevor Paglen's work is an exhibit unto itself, a collection of actual sew-on military patches depicting ludicrous, childlike symbols that acquire sinister connotations once we learn, or imagine, the purpose of these secret groups. The badges belong to the complex universe of secret visual codes, a subculture powered by the Pentagon's classified "black budget" that delivers billions of dollars each year to stealth armies of high-tech warriors. Paglen's work is a thorough investigation of the branding of democracy addressed to a different target group.

The installation for **OURS** also features texts by some of the designers of the badges as well as by Paglen himself that help decode the symbols and writings on the badges. *See also charrette and presentation on November 19.*



**PETLab** (USA, 2007)  
*Re:Activism NYC*, 2008, ongoing  
<http://petlab.parsons.edu/reactivism>

*Re:Activism NYC* is a participatory project initiated by Colleen Macklin and other members of PETLab at Parsons The New School for Design. Structured as a team-based urban street game using mobile technology, the project offers a tour of New York City through an exploration of its history of activists, protests, and riots. As participants carry out a clue-based scavenger hunt and site-specific challenges, they are informed of the ongoing resonance of historic issues fought for in the battleground of the city. Winning the game necessitates collective action and proactive problem-solving, thus teaching players how to be effective activists while challenging the definition of "playing by the rules." *See also game gathering on Election Day.*



**Nadine Robinson** (England, 1968; lives in New York)  
*Americana, Version Two*, 2008  
18 speakers, audio components, DVD  
Dimensions variable, sound looped  
Courtesy the artist  
New work, commissioned by Parsons for **OURS**

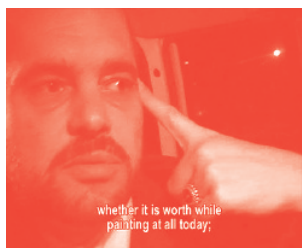
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*Americana* is a sound sculpture created for the Kellen Gallery and consisting of two speaker-stacks facing each other. Each speaker bears a logo with the American flag. The speakers play historic and present-day samples of American political speeches, with one change: the artist has replaced moments of applause with stock recordings of laughter. This slapstick-like gesture expresses Robinson's deep mistrust of democracy's power to bring about justice. It is her conviction that the "little improvements" that democratic politics offer are merely cosmetic, distractions from deep, long-term injustice that displace the desire for real change.

This critique of mild-mannered hope for progress, the better future that is so central to the democratic process, is reflected in the visual aspects of the work as well. The perfect geometric shapes of the black

speakers built into the white cube of the gallery allude to both Modernist art and Hip-Hop culture. Robinson confronts two sets of aesthetic codes as markers of social difference, and at the same time conflates them into a hybrid object of displaced desire, pointing out that in their respective cultures they both signify taste and status.

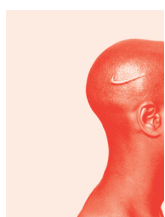
*Project assistance: Jakob Schillinger*



**Anri Sala** (Yugoslavia, 1974; lives in Paris, France)  
*Dammi i colori (Give Me the Colors)*, 2003  
Digital video, projected, color with sound  
15 minutes 25 seconds  
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Johnen + Schoettle, Berlin, Cologne, Munich; Gallery Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

*Dammi i colori* is an enthralling portrait of a city in transition, the Albanian capital Tirana, and its mayor, the artist Edi Rama. Shot in what one might call "documentary style," the video captures Rama as he speaks to the camera in a car riding through his city, reflecting on his project to have Tirana painted in vivid colors, the dramatic results of which can be seen in the background.

The mayor/artist conceives of the community as a super-brand, a literally all-immersive utopia for everyone to buy into, but derived from one central and sovereign mastermind (even if it is supposedly "popular sovereignty" in this case). As the mayor reflects on what comprises community, the artist in him suggests that political problems may really be problems of form and design. *Dammi i colori* highlights the conception of the (democratic) body politic as in fact one (sovereign) body, and poses the question of the form that a "multitude" in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's sense would take.



**Hank Willis Thomas** (USA, 1976; lives in New York)  
*Branded Head*, 2003  
Lambda photograph  
99" × 52"  
Edition 1/3  
Courtesy Beth Rudin DeWoody

Hank Willis Thomas' *Branded* series depicts the bodies of African-American men literally branded with a Nike logo. The muscular men bearing the scarred Nike swoosh—an international symbol of strength, freedom, and victory—evoke slavery as well as actual Nike advertisements. They become symbolic of the complex dualities of history and identity, explicitly connecting the brand to its original function as a sign of ownership and control. Now the brand has become a catalyst for purchasing a sense of identity in a society where cultural belonging has become ever more intertwined with the politics of consumption. The work proposes the urgency of developing alternative modes of identification.



**Johan Tirén** (Sweden, 1973; lives in Stockholm, Sweden)  
*Notes in Connection with the Celebration of a National Day*, 2007  
Poster series of 7 different posters  
Lambda photograph  
19 1/2" × 27 1/2" each  
Courtesy the artist

Tirén's posters employ familiar and somewhat generic-looking imagery: a line of people holding hands, scenes of nature and historical monuments—all of which suggest quotidian bourgeois life. The friendly black-and-white silhouettes are accompanied by familiar slogans often heard in debates about nationality and patriotism. Here, however, they are curiously devoid of any attribution to a specific political figure or party (not just for Americans as they are in Swedish). Some of the familiar slogans are slightly altered, like "A democratic nation has never started a war." The combination of the images with the texts is gently discordant as the seeming affability of the works is undermined by a deeper, more reflective sense of unease.



**Brian Tolle** (USA, 1964; lives in New York)  
*Man of Characters*, 2006  
Digital Iris print on paper, 100 parts  
Overall dimensions: 10' × 7 3/4'  
Courtesy Ann and Ron Pizzuti

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Franklin's head, as printed on the one hundred dollar bill, is blown up to cover the wall from floor to ceiling, greeting the gallery visitor from afar. Upon inspection, the lines comprising this giant drawing emerge as writing: aphorisms by Franklin himself. They reveal something of the complexity of this multi-faceted revolutionary. Brian Tolle's play with distance points towards the relationship between the iconic symbol and its everyday referent, i.e. money, and suggests how the manipulation of "character(s)" or letters produces both an iconic image as well as latent meaning. Challenging what we think we know, the work makes us look twice, and questions the ways in which a culture saturated with logos and icons allocates meaning.

Tolle's work is strikingly graphic, as if to acknowledge that the brilliant populist Franklin himself employed cartoons and then state-of-the-art public communications strategies to promote political unity.



**Brian Tolle**  
*DIE, or JOIN*, 2006  
Mixed media  
Approx. 7' × 9 1/2" × 6 1/2"  
Courtesy the artist and CRG Gallery

Tolle's elaborate sculptural installation refers to a famous political cartoon by Benjamin Franklin from 1754. Titled "Join, or Die," the original publication featured a woodcut of a snake severed into eighths, each segment of which was labeled with the

initial of a British-American colony. The cartoon appeared along with Franklin's editorial about the disunited state of the colonies. The impact of the work was such that during the wars the snake became a popular symbol illustrating the importance of colonial unity.

Tolle has updated Franklin's snake to reflect current political circumstances: made up of red and blue segments that signify the winning political party in each state at the time of the previous presidential election, its two heads further complicate notions of unity and the nation-state. By updating the historical image, Tolle creates a highly ambiguous and complex emblem that deconstructs the ideas and genealogies underlying present global politics and their imagery. After the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, the U.S. Navy created a new flag to be flown on all ships "during the global war on terror." It replaced a blue flag bearing 50 stars that represented 50 equal states. In the new flag, the snake is aggressively lashing out, all its segments in full support, with a text warning "Don't tread on me."



**Judi Werthein** (Argentina, 1967; lives in New York)  
*Brinco*, 2005  
Installation with 3 pairs of sneakers, vinyl, paper, and monitors  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy the artist and inSite\_05

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In 2005, Judi Werthein came to national prominence when she was accused by CNN anchor Lou Dobbs and Fox News reporters of aiding and abetting illegal immigration. Her uniquely designed sneaker, manufactured in China, had been distributed for free to Mexican immigrants about to attempt an illegal crossing into the U.S. Trademarked "Brinco" (Spanish for "jump") after the local expression for crossing the border, each pair contains a map of the border-area (on the inside of the soles), a compass, pockets to hide money and medication, a wallet and other essential necessities, such as an image of Santo Toribio Romo, the official saint of the Mexican immigrant.

Meanwhile, Werthein sold the sneakers for \$215 a pair at a boutique in San Diego, explicitly linking migrants' efforts to illegally cross the Mexican-American border to the global circulation of goods and labor. The heavily branded sneakers are exhibited in an installation that includes video documentation of the media firestorm that ensued. *See also charrette and "survival kit" presentation on October 20.*



**Wooloo Productions** (Denmark, 2006; active in Berlin and Copenhagen)  
*Rebranding Acts*, 2006, ongoing  
<http://www.wooloo.org/rebranding/>

*Rebranding Acts* is, according to this artists' collective, "an investigation into cultural identity in an age of global migration." The initiative uses the online platform wooloo.org to invite artists from around the world to consider the ways in which "nationality" is manufactured in their home country, and to "rebrand" these concepts, from their own perspective. While the open call is

predicated on the argument that such hegemonic nationalist constructions often exclude identities that don't fit the mold, *Rebranding Acts* invites anyone to add their voice to the discussion by uploading videos of their own public interventions. The project draws on previous interventionist and participatory works by the collective's founders in which the concept of national identity is revealed to be anything but black-and-white, and the resulting archive documents the myriad ways in which people around the world respond to this problematic notion.

**The Yes Men** (USA, 1999)  
*Even When Social Censorship of Beliefs Is Not So Strict, Social Conditions May Fail to (...) Provide Any Material Support and Reward to Those Who Entertain Them. Hence They Remain Mere Fancies, Romantic Castles in the Air, or Aimless Speculations (After John Dewey)*, 2008  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy the artists  
New work, commissioned by Parsons for **OURS**

The Yes Men use "culture jamming" and "identity correction" as devices to resist and expose the machinations of corporate and political culture. The activist group was founded by Andy Bichlbaum, a faculty member at Parsons, and Mike Bonnano. As an employee of the computer games company Maxis, Bichlbaum inserted controversial code into the game *SimCopter* which caused male sprites in swimming trunks to appear on certain dates and kiss each other. The code was intended to highlight harsh work practices.

In 2004, Bichlbaum appeared on BBC News as "Jude Finistera," a supposed representative of Dow Chemical, whose subsidiary Union Carbide was responsible for the Bhopal chemical disaster in India. Finistera accepted full responsibility for the disaster, igniting one of the biggest controversies in art activism as Dow virulently denied the claim. The Yes Men are presenting a new work that considers personal responsibility in an age of war. *Project assistance: Bartholomew Ryan and LeAnne Wagner*



**Carey Young** (Zimbabwe, 1970; lives in London)  
*Conflict Management*, 2003/2008  
Professional mediator, table, chairs, 2 notice boards, media advertising, photography, members of the public  
Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Carey Young investigates the spread of corporate branding techniques and interactions that are increasingly taking over the personal and public domains. Young appropriates these techniques, deconstructing them through a process of possession. In *Conflict Management*, the services of a professional mediator are offered to the general public on a fall Sunday in Union Square. Referring to the larger problem of conflict, and the necessity of agreement as the basis for social interaction, the performance points to the gap between dialogue and the law. It evokes Walter Benjamin's critique of the violence inherent to the law, and his conception of "pure means" such as diplomacy. *See also performance on October 26.*



# Design notes

The exhibition design of OURS operates as a participatory framework, actively shaping and altering visitors' experiences. Employing dislocative processes and visual form, the design strategy enacts the innate conflict in the democratic process between centralized control and individual choice.

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors are asked to wear an admission sticker resembling a campaign button. While this procedure is familiar from both art museums and political events, visitors have to choose between a red or blue sticker, marking them immediately as members of one of two groups (as well as of the larger group of exhibition-goers). Subsequently, visitors' rejection and disposal of the stickers may generate detritus in the exhibition space and beyond, thereby undermining the clarity of the exhibition's presentation and its sense of authoritative graphic identity.

Throughout the exhibition, the dichotomy between the colors red and blue offer the appearance of alternatives. This nod to agency proves to be illusory: color is used arbitrarily to both package identical contents, as well as to suggest choice between incomparable objects. Additionally, a multitude of typefaces are utilized to create the appearance of visual diversity. However, all nineteen typefaces are designs from a single hand—that of canonical Swiss type designer Adrian Frutiger (1928–). Frutiger is best known for designing Univers (1957), a systematized family of typefaces merging Fordist rationalization with a touch of calligraphic humanism.

The OURS design system is totalizing and open-ended, monolithic and chaotic, autocratic and motley. Through these unresolved contradictions, the design acts to extend, question, and comment upon the show's concept and contents.

—Project Projects, exhibition and graphic designers

# Exhibition credits

## Acknowledgments

Carin Kuoni

An extraordinary number of people have come together around this exhibition, due to two factors: the new, nationwide political awakening, and the opening of Parsons' Sheila C. Johnson Design Center and its Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery.

Spearheaded by Tim Marshall, Dean of Parsons' The New School for Design, OURS was from the very beginning inspired and nurtured by Lydia Matthews, Dean of Academic Programs at Parsons. Along its various stages, it received the support of numerous faculty members, among them Laura Auricchio, Steven Guarnaccia, Kent Kleinman, Cynthia Lawson, Colleen Macklin, Brian McGrath, Vyjayanthi Rao, and Joel Towers. Some continue their involvement as hosts of the charrettes: Anthony Aziz, Shelley Fox, Charles Goldman, Jesal Kapadia, Robert Kirkbride, Janet Kraynak, Melissa Rachleff, and Carlos Teixeira.

To reach that point, an extensive team of New School colleagues mustered their extraordinary talents. Sven Travis, Chair of Communication Design and Technology in Parsons' School of Art, Media and Technology, and his students Benjamin Bacon, Michael Ballard, Bruce Drummond, and Clayton Ewing produced the Web site and organized the audio-visual layout for the show. Glendon Jones focused on the sound pieces, and the crew from Parsons CDT 10FL Lab supplied the digital equipment, along with their expertise. A profound thank you to all.

Kristina Kaufman, Assistant Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs at Parsons and her resourceful team—Bairon Gazon, Philip Silva, Assistant Director for Operations and Sustainability, Sandra Wong, Interim Registrar, and especially Daisy Wong—were deeply involved in every aspect of the show with ingenuity and true dedication.

Technical advice in matters relating to cable television was generously provided by John Giampiccolo; Maurice Sherman helped with Beltrán's "production site." Lia Gartner, Vice President for Design, Construction and Facilities Management, was available whenever called on, and Susan Sawyer, Associate General Counsel, coached us through the legal aspects of this complex endeavor. The efforts of Francisco Tezén, Director of Development, The New School for General Studies, were essential to the show's realization. Our thanks also go to Susan Eddy, Associate Director, Office of Development. Deborah Kirschner in The New School's office for Communications and External Affairs, together with Kate McCormick, Public Relations Assistant, made sure that the show would actually be seen. Silvia Roccio and Eric Stark, Curators of The New School Art Collection, helped in their usual generous manner. In the Dean's Office at Parsons, the exhibition was helped along in substantial ways by Eleni Palmos, Executive Secretary, Luis Santos, Academic Programs Assistant, and Jesse Villalobos, Coordinator, Parsons Diversity Initiative.

Project Projects, under the direction of former Parsons faculty member Prem Krishnamurthy, assisted by Isabelle Vaverka and Chris Wu, clarified the content and look of the exhibition in the gallery, on paper, and on the Web. Their design of all installation and graphic aspects of the show is superb. Design & Build, with principals Ben Lawrence and Samuel Murray and supported by Timothy Osborne, The Organic Gardener, did just that—build many elements of the show—and in an extraordinarily beautiful fashion at that. We are most grateful to these exceptional companies and colleagues.

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No curatorial endeavor is ever solitary. In this case, however, the collaboration with curatorial assistants Bartholomew Ryan and Jakob Schillinger was unusual in its extensiveness and mutual trust, and I am grateful to them for their exceptional contributions. All three of us thank the curator of the Web component, Marisa Olson, for her insight that greatly enhances this project. I would like to acknowledge John G. H. Oakes who edited first my thoughts and later my texts. And I would like to mention Andreas Kuoni (1925–2008) who introduced me to the ideals of democracy. Bartholomew Ryan's thanks go to Adam Pendleton; those of Jakob Schillinger to Eva Marlene Hausteiner.

No exhibition can do without collectors either, those impassionate keepers of our collective heritage. We would like to thank them deeply, and in particular acknowledge the generosity of Beth Rudin DeWoody, Alexander Ochs, Ann and Ron Pizzuti, and Rebecca and Alexander Stewart.

The closing words—those that should linger longer than all others, like the impressions of the exhibition—belong to the artists. On behalf of Parsons The New School for Design, we would like to thank them for their confidence and trust, their generosity, and their extraordinary work. The conversations with them inspired our task, and their art clarifies ideas our minds barely sense. We are deeply grateful to all of them, and would like to highlight especially the commitment of the charrette artists Alexis Bhagat, Sam Durant, Ashley Hunt, Runo Lagomarsino, Miguel Luciano, and Judi Werthein, and the enthusiasm of those who created new works for the show: among them Yael Bartana, Erick Beltrán, Alexis Bhagat, Kota Ezawa, Runo Lagomarsino, Dave Muller, Nadine Robinson, The Yes Men and, of course, Liam Gillick.

## Curators

Carin Kuoni  
Marisa Olson, Web component

## Curatorial assistants

Bartholomew Ryan and  
Jakob Schillinger

## Texts

Carin Kuoni, Marisa Olson,  
Bartholomew Ryan, Jakob Schillinger

## Exhibition and graphic design Project Projects

## Audio-visual concept and Web site implementation

Sven Travis, Chair and Associate Professor, Communication Design and Technology, School of Art, Media and Technology at Parsons  
Parsons CDT 10FL Lab, with Benjamin Bacon, Michael Ballard, Clay Ewing, Bruce Drummond, Glendon Jones

## Installation

Kristina Kaufman, Assistant Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs  
Bairon Gazon, Production Manager  
Daisy Wong, Assistant Director of Galleries

## Fabrication

Design & Build, in collaboration with the Parsons installation crew

## Exhibition lighting

Eric Stark, Curator, The New School Art Collection

## Legal advice

Susan Sawyer, Associate General Counsel, The New School

## Public relations

Deborah Kirschner, Associate Director of Arts Communication, Communications and External Affairs, The New School

## The Sheila C. Johnson Design Center

The Sheila C. Johnson Design Center is a new campus center for Parsons The New School for Design that combines learning and public program spaces with exhibition galleries to provide a dynamic presence for the university at the highly trafficked intersection of Fifth Avenue and 13th Street in Greenwich Village.

Made possible in part by New School Trustee and Parsons Board Chair Sheila C. Johnson, the center features an award-winning design by Lyn Rice Architects, whose principal was part of the team behind Dia:Beacon. The center combines the ground level of four historic buildings to form an innovative, contemporary urban quad."

The Center's Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery and Auditorium, and Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries, present exhibitions and public programs exploring key issues within contemporary culture through the work of architects, artists and designers. Together they form an important new downtown destination for art and design programming. For more information visit [www.newschool.edu/johnsondesigncenter](http://www.newschool.edu/johnsondesigncenter).