

# Studies into Darkness: The Perils and Promise of Freedom of Speech



Tuesday, June 7, 2022  
6:30–8:00 pm

Vera List Center for Art and Politics  
Glass Box Theater, The New School  
55 West 13th Street, New York, NY 10011

# About

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a research center and a public forum for art, culture, and politics. It was established at The New School in 1992—a time of rousing debates about freedom of speech, identity politics, and society’s investment in the arts. A leader in the field, the center is a nonprofit that serves a critical mission: to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policymakers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change.

Amherst College Press produces pathbreaking, peer-reviewed scholarship and makes it available to readers everywhere as digital, open-access work. The press publishes titles in Art History and Visual Studies, Latin American Studies, Literary Studies, Music, and Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies with a deep interest in interdisciplinary scholarship. The Press publishes its books on Fulcrum, a platform created by University of Michigan Publishing, allowing narrative to be richly integrated with multimedia and optimized for long-term preservation and accessibility.

*Studies into Darkness: The Perils and Promise of Freedom of Speech* is co-published by Amherst College Press and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School. It is co-edited by Carin Kuoni and Laura Raicovich. The publication has been made possible by the Vera List Center Board. It has also been supported, in part, by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Kettering Fund, Marian Goodman Gallery, and The New School.

The publication features contributions by Zach Blas, Mark Bray, Gabriela López Dena, Natalie Diaz, Aruna D’Souza, Silvia Federici, Jeanne van Heeswijk, shawné michaelain holloway, Prathibha Kanakamedala, Amar Kanwar, Carin Kuoni, Lyndon, Debora, and Abou, Svetlana Mintcheva, Obden Mondésir, Mendi + Keith Obadike, Vanessa Place, Laura Raicovich, Michael Rakowitz, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, and Nabiha Syed.

[www.veralistcenter.org](http://www.veralistcenter.org)  
[www.acpress.amherst.edu](http://www.acpress.amherst.edu)

For information on related classes, please visit:  
[www.newschool.edu](http://www.newschool.edu).

This event has been recorded and the documentation will be made available on [www.veralistcenter.org](http://www.veralistcenter.org).  
Image Credit: Designed by Nontsikelelo Mutiti and Julia Novitch.

# Program

There have been few times in American history when the very concept of freedom of speech—its promise and its contradictions—has been under greater scrutiny. Emerging from a series of seminars guided by acclaimed artist, filmmaker, and activist Amar Kanwar at the Vera List Center, *Studies into Darkness: The Perils and Promise of Freedom of Speech* provides a practical and historical guide to free speech discourse and combines it with poetic responses to the contemporary crises around free expression.

This program brings together the book’s editors Carin Kuoni and Laura Raicovich, contributors Aruna D’Souza and Kameelah Janan Rasheed, and artists Mendi + Keith Obadike, who present their musical suite *In the Mouth of This Dragon*.

## PARTICIPANTS (in order of appearance)

*Welcome remarks*  
Carin Kuoni

*Performance*  
In the Mouth of This Dragon

Music and direction:  
Mendi + Keith Obadike

Musicians:  
Joan Anderson  
Sharae Moultrie  
Shoko Nagai  
La’nette Searcy  
Satoshi Takeishi  
Keith Witty

*Conversations*  
Carin Kuoni and Laura Raicovich  
Aruna D’Souza and Kameelah Janan Rasheed

*Roundtable Q&A*



Image Credit: Mendi Obadike (foreground) performing *In the Mouth of This Dragon* at the Closing Convening of Freedom of Speech: A Curriculum for Studies into Darkness, September 21, 2019.

## Participant Biographies

Aruna D'Souza writes about modern and contemporary art; intersectional feminisms and other forms of politics; and how museums shape our views of each other and the world. Her work appears regularly in *4Columns*, where she is a member of the editorial advisory board, and she is a contributor to the *New York Times*. Her writing has also appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *CNN.com*, *ARTNews*, *Garage*, *Bookforum*, *Frieze*, *Momus*, *Art in America*, and *Art Practical*, among other places. Her book, *Whitewalling: Art, Race, and Protest in 3 Acts* (Badlands Unlimited), was named one of the best art books of 2018 by the *New York Times*. Her most recent editorial project is Linda Nochlin's *Making It Modern: Essays on the Art of the Now*, published by Thames & Hudson in 2022. She is editor of Lorraine O'Grady's *Writing in Space, 1973–2018* (Duke University Press, 2020), and is co-curator of the retrospective of O'Grady's work, *Both/And*, which opened in March 2021 at the Brooklyn Museum and is traveling across the US. She is the recipient of the 2021 Rabkin Prize for art journalism and a 2019 Andy Warhol Foundation Art Writers Grant.

Carin Kuoni is a curator and writer, Assistant Professor for Visual Studies, and Senior Director/Chief Curator of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School. A Companion to the 57th Carnegie International, she is the editor of several anthologies, among them *Forces of Art: Perspectives from a Changing World* (Valiz, 2020) and, with Kareem Estefan and Laura Raicovich, *Assuming Boycott. Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production* (OR Books, 2017).

Mendi + Keith Obadike have exhibited and performed at the New Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art. Their projects include a series of large-scale, public sound art works: *Blues Speaker (for James Baldwin)*—a twelve-hour, twenty-four-channel musical work—commissioned by Harlem Stage and the Vera List Center at The New School and *Free/Phase* at the Chicago Cultural Center & Rebuild Foundation, among others. They have released recordings on Bridge Records and books with Lotus Press and 1913 Press. Their honors include a Rockefeller New Media Arts Fellowship and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Fiction, among others. Their recent projects are *Anyanwu*, a public sound installation; *Book of Light*, a sound and light show commissioned by Carnegie Mellon University; *Lift*, a meditation on the song known as the Black National Anthem (“Lift Every Voice And Sing”); the overnight (eight-hour) musical work, *Lull*, a sleep temple; a sound film entitled, *The Sun*; and a sound/video work entitled *Difference Tones*. Mendi + Keith Obadike serve on the Vera List Center Board.

Laura Raicovich is a New York City-based writer and curator whose most recent book, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest*, was published in 2021 by Verso. She recently served as Interim Director of the Leslie Lohman Museum of Art, was a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow at the Bellagio Center, and was awarded the inaugural Emily H. Tremaine Journalism Fellowship for Curators at *Hyperallergic*. While Director of the Queens Museum from 2015 to 2018, Raicovich co-curated *Mel Chin: All Over the Place* (2018), a multiborough survey of the artist's work. She lectures internationally and is the author of *At the Lightning Field* (CHP, 2017) and co-editor of *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production* (OR Books, 2017).

A learner, Kameelah Janan Rasheed (she/they), grapples with the poetics-pleasures-politics of Black knowledge production, information technologies, [un]learning, and belief formation. They are interested in the rituals and technologies we use to generate, share, and conceal knowledge. She is a 2022 Creative Capital Awardee and 2021 Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Arts. Rasheed is the author of three artist books: *An Alphabetical Accumulation of Approximate Observations* (Endless Editions, 2019), *No New Theories* (Printed Matter, 2019), and the digital publication *Scoring the Stacks* (Brooklyn Public Library, 2021). Her writing, including long-form essays and interviews, has appeared in *Triple Canopy*, *The New Inquiry*, *Shift Space*, *Active Cultures*, and *The Believer*.

## Vera List Center Publications

Vera List Center publications respond to and nurture a thriving field of politically engaged art practices throughout the world. With new initiatives including edited collections, monographs, artists' books, catalogues, and digital projects, our publishing work provides a space for writers, artists, designers, and scholars of all career stages who are committed to advancing scholarly and creative dialogues on art and social justice through collaborative, creative, experimental, and urgent critical discourse.

*Studies into Darkness* is the fifth book in the Vera List Center's print publication initiative, following *Considering Forgiveness* (2009), *Speculation, Now* (2014), *Entry Points: A Field Guide on Art and Social Justice* (2015), and *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production* (2017). The publication is born out of an open curriculum series of seminars conceived through the history of the four specific freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and protest, and freedom of religion. The seminar series, curated by Carin Kuoni, Senior Director/ Chief Curator, the Vera List Center, and Laura Raicovich, with a critical contribution by Gabriela López Dena, spanned fourteen months, and positions artist Amar Kanwar's film *Such a Morning* (2017), and his imperative to retreat "into darkness," as its conceptual basis. Seminars were developed in collaboration with partner organizations ARTICLE 19; the National Coalition Against Censorship, New York Peace Institute, and Weeksville Heritage Center, with each examining a particular aspect of freedom of speech, informed by and reflecting on recent debates around hate speech, censorship, and racism in the US and elsewhere.

Amherst College Press and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics launched a publishing partnership in 2022. The partnership furthers each institution's commitment to advancing the understanding of the intersection of art and politics and combine their extensive networks, centering exciting contemporary publishing on art and politics in an international discourse. All titles under this imprint will be available in print and, for free, digitally via Amherst's Fulcrum platform, thus opening the important research of both institutions to an entirely new generation of scholars and readers throughout the world.

## VERA LIST CENTER BOOKS

Carin Kuoni and Wilma Lukatsch, eds. *Maria Thereza Alves: Seeds of Change*. Amherst and New York: Amherst College Press and Vera List Center for Art and Politics, The New School, forthcoming 2023.

Carin Kuoni and Laura Raicovich, eds. *Studies into Darkness: The Perils and Promise of Freedom of Speech*. Amherst and New York: Amherst College Press and Vera List Center for Art and Politics, The New School, 2022.

Kareem Estefan, Carin Kuoni, and Laura Raicovich, eds. *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production*. New York: OR Books and Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2017.

Carin Kuoni and Chelsea Haines, eds. *Entry Points: The Vera List Center Field Guide on Art and Social Justice*. Durham and New York: Duke University Press and Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2015.

Vyjayanthi Venturupalli Rao, Prem Krishnamurthy, and Carin Kuoni, eds. *Speculation, Now*. Durham and New York: Duke University Press and Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2015.

Aleksandra Wagner with Carin Kuoni, eds. *Considering Forgiveness*. New York: Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2009.

For further information about our other publications or to order our books, please visit [www.veralistcenter.org/publications](http://www.veralistcenter.org/publications).

## VERA LIST CENTER BOARD

The Board of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics is an integral part of the New School community. They provide counsel to the Vera List Center, develop expertise on ways to support the academic enterprise, offer insight and guidance on programs, provide significant financial support, and serve as ambassadors to the communities in which they live and work.

James Keith (JK) Brown, Chair  
Megan E. Noh, Esq., Vice Chair  
Norman L. Kleeblatt, Secretary  
Mariana Amatullo, Vice Provost for Global Executive  
Education and Online Strategic Initiatives, *ex officio*  
Frances Beatty  
Linda Earle  
Marilyn Greene  
Susan Hapgood  
Pia Infante  
Carin Kuoni, *ex officio*  
Jane Lombard  
Louis Massiah  
Susan Meiselas  
Alan Michelson  
Naeem Mohaiemen  
Mendi + Keith Obadike  
Nancy Delman Portnoy  
Silvia Rocciolo  
Mary Watson, Executive Dean, Schools of  
Public Engagement, *ex officio*

## VERA LIST CENTER STAFF

Tabor Banquer, Director of Strategy and Advancement  
Re'al Christian, Assistant Director of Editorial Initiatives  
Carin Kuoni, Senior Director/Chief Curator  
Camila Palomino, Curatorial Assistant  
Eriola Pira, Curator  
Adrienne Umeh, Assistant Director of Operations

## ORDER INFORMATION

Studies into Darkness: The Perils and Promise of Freedom of Speech  
Edited by Carin Kuoni and Laura Raicovich  
Designed by Nontsikelelo Mutiti and Julia Novitch  
Publication date: October 1, 2022  
Co-published by Amherst College Press and the Vera List Center for Art and  
Politics at The New School

384 fully colored pages  
17 original text contributions  
3 new art commissions  
Over 30 illustrations  
8 historical manifestos  
Extensive timeline to developments of the concept of  
Freedom of Speech in the US  
Bibliography and sample curriculum

ISBN 978-1-943208-38-8 (paperback)  
\$29.99

ISBN 978-1-943208-39-5 (open access)  
Free

To read for free online, please visit this link:  
<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12625211>

For further information, please email [vlc@newschool.edu](mailto:vlc@newschool.edu).

UPCOMING

---

October 20–22, 2022

## Vera List Center Forum 2022

We look forward to welcoming you in the fall to the Vera List Center Forum 2022, an international, annual convening of artists, curators, and activists in the fields of art and politics, presented from October 20 to 22. This year's Forum introduces the Center's new 2022–2024 Focus Theme *Correction*\*. We will also be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the VLC, with an exhibition, conversations, panels, and a communal dinner celebration.

Join us as we welcome a new cohort of VLC Fellows and announce the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Fellows along with the recipient of the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice.

---

THE NEW SCHOOL

VERA LIST CENTER  
FOR ART AND POLITICS

Amherst  
College  
 Press

Vera List Center for Art and Politics  
The New School  
66 West 12th Street  
New York, NY 10011