

SEMINAR III OF THE SERIES
ASSUMING BOYCOTT: RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

GOING THE DISTANCE: CULTURAL WORK IN FAR- FLUNG POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPHERES



DECEMBER 1, 2014
5:30-9:00 PM

Vera List Center for Art and Politics
The New School, Theresa Lang Community and Student Center
55 West 13th Street, 2nd floor
New York City

ABOUT

The third in a series of seminars investigating political engagement through various artistic and cultural practices including dis-engagement, boycotts, or other modes of withdrawal, **Going the Distance** delves into cultural and political work over great distances – physical, political, philosophical, social, financial, or cultural. In a world in which the technological innovations characteristic of late capitalism have collapsed time and space to diminish distance, how do we connect with other geographies and people via artistic production? In locations where the political situations on the ground are unclear, complex, dangerous or unstable, and information and news are unreliable and nuanced, how do cultural workers contend with knowledge-gathering, research, communication, and production? What methodologies do artists and cultural producers employ to activate the power of digital communication when the power of in-person human contact has been paralyzed?

The Back Room's **Ava Ansari** and **Molly Kleiman** kick off the seminar at 5:30 pm with the screening of a short film featuring architectural historian Craig L. Wilkins and Ava Ansari's joint reading of the Remix Section of Wilkins's *Aesthetic of Equity*, in English and Farsi respectively. A discussion follows with Ansari and Kleiman on the translation process and Wilkins's notion of "code switching" from academic to vernacular black register; the politics and challenges of translating vernacular speech; and specific examples of "untranslatables" in the English and Farsi texts.

From 7 to 9 pm Ansari and Kleiman present their work more broadly, connecting their specific practices to the larger problematics of cross-border engagement. They are joined by artists **Melanie Crean** and **Yevgeniy Fiks** in this conversation on modes of engagement that transcend borders of geography, culture, language; on disentangling abstract notions of working across great distances from the specific practicalities of realization; and on the importance of deconstructing cultural assumptions.

PROGRAM

5:30–6:30 pm Film Screening and Discussion

7:00–8:00 pm Presentations by Participants

8:00–9:00 pm Discussion with Questions & Answers
moderated by Laura Raicovich

PARTICIPANTS

Melanie Crean

Yevgeniy Fiks

Ava Ansari and **Molly Kleiman**, The Back Room

The program is organized by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics as part of the center's 2013–2015 curatorial focus on Alignment. It is curated by Carin Kuoni, director/curator, Vera List Center, and Laura Raicovich, President and Executive Director, Queens Museum.

PARTICIPANTS

Ava Ansari is an artist, educator, and curator. She is the co-founder of The Back Room, a curatorial and pedagogical project which facilitates exchanges between artists and scholars in Iran and the U.S. with Molly Kleiman. Recent curatorial projects include *Storytelling Symposium, Art, Culture and Technology Program* (MIT), Cambridge, *Fixed Unknowns*, Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York, 2014; *I am Only a Reporter*, Ardeshir Mohassess, Modern Section of Art Dubai, 2014; and *A Call*, a remote project with 80 performers between Tehran and New York. This project was conceptualized with Wafaa Bilal, and opened concurrently at Aaran Gallery in Tehran and White Box Art in New York in 2011. Ansari has presented work at ISEA2014, Dixon Place, La Mama, Eyebeam, the AC Institute and the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, among others. She has previously worked at Aperture Foundation, New York; Shirin Gallery, New York; Basement Gallery, Dubai; and Silk Road Gallery, Tehran. She currently works at the Edge of Arabia, where she serves as an associate curator. She got her B.A. in Public Relations and Journalism from Allameh Tabatabaei University in Tehran, and her M.A. in Art Politics from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

Melanie Crean is an artist and teacher based in Brooklyn, NY. She is an Assistant Professor of Media Design at Parsons' School of Art, Media and Technology, teaching production and theory classes in experimental time based work, interactive design, mobile media and urban intervention. Her artwork explores relationships between media, speech, history, and the social structures of control. Recent projects have focused on location-based narratives and the nature of histories encoded in urban landscapes through architecture and design. Often working collaboratively, Crean and her partners experiment with narrative form to explore who has the authority to be heard, and what happens when these voices are silenced.

Previously, Melanie was Director of Production at Eyebeam, where she founded and managed a cooperative studio that supported the creation of socially based media. She produced documentaries in Nepal, India and the United States, on subjects that include women trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS along trucking routes in South Asia. Crean has received commissions from Art in General, the Bronx Arts Council and Rhizome; fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, Harvestworks, NYFA and NYSCA; and participated in group exhibitions with Creative Time, Performa 11 and No Longer Empty.

Yevgeniy Fiks was born in Moscow in 1972 and has been living and working in New York since 1994. Fiks has produced many projects on the subject of the Post-Soviet dialogue in the West, among them "Lenin for Your Library?" in which he mailed V.I. Lenin's text *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* to one hundred global corporations as a donation for their corporate libraries; "Communist Party USA," a series of portraits of current members of Communist Party USA, painted from life in the Party's national headquarters in New York City; and "Communist Guide to New York City," a series of photographs of buildings and public places in New York City that are connected to the history of the American Communist movement.

Fiks's work has been shown internationally. This includes exhibitions in the United States at Winkelman and Postmasters galleries (both in New York), Mass MoCA in North Adams, MA, and the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art; the Moscow Museum of Modern Art and Marat Guelman Gallery in Moscow; Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros in Mexico City, and the Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon. His work has been included in the Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2011, 2009, 2007 and 2005), the Biennale of Sydney (2008), and the Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2007).

NOTES

Molly Kleiman is deputy editor of *Triple Canopy*, a magazine that has advanced a model of publication that encompasses digital works of art and literature, public conversations, exhibitions, and books. She is co-director of The Back Room, a curatorial and educational project that facilitates exchanges between artists and writers in the U.S. and Iran. She teaches at New York University's Gallatin School for Individualized Study.

Going the Distance is Seminar III of the series **Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency and Cultural Production**. Other seminars in this series are:

- The Legacy of the Cultural Boycott in South Africa
Thursday, September 18th, 2014
- Cultural Production During BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel)
Monday, October 20th, 2014
- Going the Distance: Cultural Work in Far-flung Political and Geographical Spheres
Monday, December 1st, 2014
- Self-Censorship
Monday, January 26, 2015
- Institutional Reviews: What New Forms of Organizations Emerge for Select Engagement with Select Initiatives?
Monday, February 2, 2015
- Marking the Moment: Colloquium on the Efficacy of Current Strategies of Disengagement
April 10 and 11, 2015

For video documentation and resource guides for events in this series, please visit www.veralistcenter.org.

VERA LIST CENTER FOR ART AND POLITICS

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is an idea incubator 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 pioneer in the field, the center serves a critical mission: to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policy makers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change.

We champion the arts as expressions of the political moments from which they emerge, and consider the intersection between art and politics the space where new forms of civic engagement must be developed. We are the only university-based institution committed exclusively to leading public research on this intersection. Through public programs and classes, prizes and fellowships, publications and exhibitions that probe some of the pressing issues of our time, we curate and support new roles for the arts and artists in advancing social justice.

www.veralistcenter.org

COVER IMAGE: YEVGENIY FIKS, POSTCARDS FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY PLESHKA, 2013 (ONE OF MANY). COURTESY THE ARTIST.

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