

News

Art Protest Groups Join Forces for Guerrilla Ribbon-cutting at New Whitney Museum

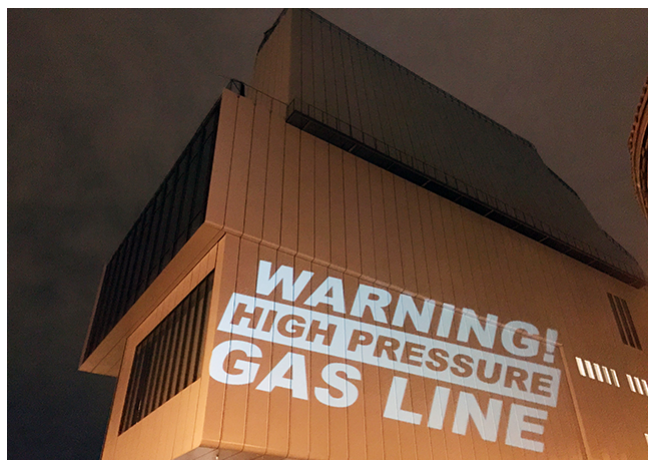


Hrag Vartanian April 15, 2015


Noah Fischer, Frida Kahlo of Guerrilla Girls, and --- of __ “inaugurate” the Whitney Museum’s new home atop a frack gas pipeline with a ceremonial ribbon cutting. (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Noah Fischer of Occupy Museums, Frida Kahlo of Guerrilla Girls, and Kim Fraczek of Sane Energy Project “inaugurate” the Whitney Museum’s new home atop a gas pipeline with a ceremonial ribbon cutting. (all images by the author for Hyperallergic)

Last night, **The Illuminator** was in Manhattan’s Meatpacking District to project mayday messages on the facade of the soon-to-be-opened Whitney Museum, while a group of two dozen protesters supported by 23 sponsoring organizations launched a guerrilla inauguration for the “fracked gas pipe museum.”



The event at the corner of Gansevoort Street and Tenth Avenue started with a two-part 10 minute projection by The Illuminator, and it featured both familiar slogans (“1% Museum”) and messages unique to the Whitney (“Whitney, The Finest Collection of 20th-century American Art in the World, Now Featuring a Brand New Pipeline!”). The intention of the projections was primarily to draw attention to the location of the museum atop a



The Illuminator branded the museum with various messages highlighting the hidden gas line underneath its pristine building.

Spectra Energy fracked gas pipeline that transports energy from Pennsylvania to Manhattan. The projections also included images of previous pipeline protests at the site, Hurricane Sandy (which flooded the area around the new Whitney), and ominous explosions.

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After the planned video program concluded, the group crossed the street and continued its ad hoc inauguration right off the museum's steps. It unfurled a symbolic ribbon; read prepared statements by Occupy Museums, a solidarity statement by Liberate Tate, and others; and then offered a pair of large, decorative scissors to Guerrilla Girl Frida Kahlo, who symbolically cut the ribbon. During the program, the organizers also presented an award to Susan Rubin of Chappaqua, New York, for her continuing fight against another Spectra Pipeline in upstate New York.



Last night's ceremony was only the latest in a series of symbolic events that have been taking place over the course of the last year and a half. A global network of art protest groups, including G.U.L.F. (Global Ultra Luxury Faction), Occupy Museums, Guerrilla Girls, Liberate Tate, People's Climate Arts, Not an Alternative, The Yes Lab, Peng Collective, and many others, has been working hard to highlight the art world's complicit acceptance of the status quo, no matter how immoral or unethical it may be. Occupy Museums has been particularly engaged in raising

Susan Rubin with her award

awareness about the Spectra Energy gas pipeline under the Whitney Museum, and last May they — along with Occupy the Pipeline — organized a theatrical tour of the area

featuring narrators who played the roles of famous artists, conveying the dangers the new Whitney Museum could face. I attended the event, which attracted a big group of predominantly tourists, who listened intently to their message.



The ceremonial ribbon cutting by Frida Kahlo of Guerrilla Girls

After I attended the May tour, I asked the Whitney Museum for comment on the growing concerns by some arts groups over the gas pipeline, and at the time a spokesperson responded with the following statement:

Although the Spectra pipeline does not cross directly onto the Museum's property, we followed the progress of the work because of its proximity to the site. Governmental regulators, who oversaw and monitored the pipeline's construction, are responsible for ensuring that the pipeline's ongoing operation meets all applicable standards and requirements.

At a recent community board meeting, a Whitney Museum representative said much the same thing to a concerned New Yorker who asked about the Spectra pipeline. Noah Fischer of Occupy Museums says the Whitney has not budged on the issue one bit, and it worries him that people aren't asking more questions. "This kind of inauguration by the people, which is unrelated to the official one, is so important because [the pipeline] is a problem, and if the official line of the museum as it opens is to not talk about it, then we need to open it in a completely different way. It is a perfect picture of how invincible the 1% feels with their money and business strategies, because a lot of people are making money off Spectra. Natural gas was sold to New York as a really clean alternative, and it's dirtier than coal in terms of its overall impact on the

climate,” he said.

The audience at last night’s inauguration

Fischer’s frustration was shared by many in attendance, including Susan Rubin, who lives 10.5 miles (~17km) away from [Indian Point Energy Center](#). She says she’s terrified by the prospect of the [Algonquin gas pipeline expansion project](#) landing next to the nuclear power plant.

The audience at last night’s inauguration

“We’ve all lost our values, and we think money matters more than health or safety or our future. We need to get back to basics. If you look at what happened in San Bruno, California, it’s insane — 1,000 foot flames,” she explained, referring to an [infamous gas line explosion in 2010](#) that

killed eight people and devastated a suburban neighborhood. “I don’t know if the first responders down here [in New York City] are prepared for a fire of this proportion. I know where I live, next to Indian Point, there’s no money going to get those firemen more prepared. This is a huge issue, and it doesn’t make it into the news. When you start to learn about it you can’t go back to sleep, so I’m just trying to wake everybody up that I can.”

Frida Kahlo, a founding member of the renowned feminist art group the [Guerrilla Girls](#), took part in the renegade ceremony. She spoke to Hyperallergic before the event and said it was important for her to be there. “We have been complaining about museums and trying to embarrass them for 30 years,” she said, “so this was a terrific opportunity to come together with other art activists and talk about another way of being an artist in the world without joining the art establishment.”

I pointed out that we had recently reported that [30% of the artists in the Whitney’s inaugural exhibition are women](#), and asked her what she thought about that fact. “That’s something that some people will be happy about, but when you realize for probably over 50 years at least half the graduating classes of art schools have been female, [then we have to ask] what happens? They obviously don’t get the same professional opportunities. Yes, that is better than ever before, but why should we be happy about 30%?”

I asked her if she thought the art world has changed at all in the last few decades. “Things have changed. It is better than ever for women and artists of color, but there are all sorts of other problems, such as the issue of tokenism, where institutions will show one woman artist — or 30% women artists — and think it’s fine,” she said. “And then there is the issue of economic inequality, because if you look at the money — the money all goes to the white guys, and it is hard to be productive and keep up in the art world if you don’t have the

means to make art ... The art world, instead of being avant-grade, is derriere.”

“Museums have always overlooked big political issues, because their money comes from those powers that create those problems, and that’s why we really need to be the eternal thorn,” she added.

The following video contains snippets from last night’s guerrilla inauguration: