Brand-New-Life
Magazin für Kunstkritik

www.brand-new-life.org
office@brand-new-life.org



Open Letter

Black artists and cultural workers in Switzerland

In an open letter, more than 50 Black artists* and cultural workers who are professionally active in Switzerland call on Swiss art institutions and organizations to translate their symbolic gestures on social media against structural discrimination towards Black people into concrete commitments in their own institutions.

We assume that in posting the black square or other comparable content, your desire was to signal outwardly that your institution does not align with racist practices.

We will now pick you up on this:

Art & cultural institutions, museums,
art spaces, galleries and artist-run spaces
in Switzerland

Switzerland, 9 June 2020

How will you be proactive in supporting Black artists and cultural workers in the future? How are you actively dismantling white supremacy and racial bias within the structure of your institution?

Dear cultural institutions, museums, art spaces, galleries and artist-run spaces in Switzerland,

In the wake of the brutal police killings of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and David McAtee over the last weeks in the USA, we've observed a wave of outrage across the world. Last Tuesday, many institutions and individuals decided to post black squares or other comparable virtue-signalling content on their social media as a sign of solidarity. We would like to invite you to have deeper engagement with anti-racist practices so that the black square doesn't become an act of performative activism. The aim would be to strengthen the relationship between Black artists and cultural workers with institutions here in Switzerland.

Although the outrage began as a public indignation against police brutality, and more broadly racism against Black people in the U.S., white supremacy is a global problem. It is one that we too face in Switzerland.

Within the last years, at least three Black men have been killed by the police in Lausanne and Bex: Mike Ben Peter, Lamine Fatty and Hervé Mandundu. None of their murderers have been convicted and therefore no justice has been awarded to these men or their families. One must also bring to light the fact that many assaults due to racial profiling by the police rarely end with the police being charged. The most prominent cases are those of Mohamed Wa Baile and Wilson A.

While these examples speak to some of the most extreme forms of racism, we must acknowledge that anti-Black racism is a direct derivative of white supremacy: an oppressive system of beliefs and discriminatory set of biases that is inherent in all structures of the Western World.

As Black artists and cultural workers who are professionally active in Switzerland, many of us have experienced racism and discriminations throughout our careers at the hands of art institutions and organisations of various scales. As a consequence of speaking out about these experiences, many of us have received threats and/or intimidation as a response. Some of us have spitefully had our professional reputations damaged. Much to our shock, these violent encounters have not decreased since diversity has become a common term and standard to strive for in recent years in the international contemporary art/cultural world.

Whether it be the police force or the art museum, there is seemingly no limit to the lengths and depths to which racism will go to perpetuate itself. It should therefore come hardly as a surprise that we are particularly frustrated and dismayed by seeing some of these same institutions now claiming anti-racist stances on social media.

We assume that in posting the black square or other comparable content, your desire was to signal outwardly that your institution does not align with racist practices. **We will now pick you up on this: We hereby ask you to be truly accountable and take action beyond the stage of social media. We ask you to implement real, tangible change and to become section leaders when it comes to anti-racist practices in the arts and culture landscape of Switzerland.**

We have compiled a set of questions to self-evaluate your practice of dismantling structural racism and white supremacy within your own structures. These can function as a guidance to bring light to which areas of your work that need more dedicated efforts. We urge you to take the time to truthfully respond to these questions and take all necessary steps towards being able to **respond positively to each of these questions with immediate effect:**

A. Programming, engagement with Black* artists & cultural workers

1. How many Black artists are represented in your galleries, collections and public programming, residency programmes and bursaries?
2. How many Black artists and cultural workers do you invite to participate in public programming around topics that are not centered on white supremacy, racism, identity politics or other topics centered on Blackness?
3. Are you remunerating all Black artists and cultural workers presented in your programme? Are they being equally remunerated for their work as their white counterparts?
4. Do you benefit from free labor from Black artists and cultural workers in forms of recommendations for programming and public speaking, as educators or as advisors? What forms of compensation have you considered?

B. Staffing, organisational structure and governance

1. How many Black people are employed in your institution? How many of them are employed in curatorial teams, selection committees or other senior decision-making positions within your institution? How many of them are employed with permanent contracts?
2. What are the political positions of the members in your boards, juries or other governing bodies? Are they sensitive towards Black artists' and cultural workers' lived realities? How many of them are Black?
3. Does your ethical policy restrict you from accepting funding from private donors or organisations that engage in colonial, racist and white suppremacist practices or who are making any direct or indirect harm to Black populations?
4. How are you ensuring that Black employees, artists and cultural workers have a safe space to voice discriminations they experienced while working in your institution? How have you actively and vocally supported someone who has experienced discriminations?
5. Have you ever been called out for racism? What measures are in place to allow the person calling you out to feel safe? How do you publicly address and archive complaints? What forms of reparation have you provided?

With these questions as a guidance for sustainable change, we encourage you to share your answers publicly as an example for best practice and transparency with your audiences, to set goals for improved practice and regularly monitor your commitment to being a fundamentally anti-racist organisaton.

Anti-Black Racism is just one of the oppressive and discriminating manifestations of white supremacy. Others include xenophobia and racism against non-Black People of Colour. Although our letter focuses on the issues related to anti-Black racism, we demand that similar steps are put into place to address bias against all those who suffer under white supremacy. We encourage you to also acknowledge the intersections of white supremacy with ableism, sexism, classism, homophobia and transphobia and to put all necessary measures in place to ensure the contemporary arts and culture in Switzerland will become sustainably more diverse and inclusive beyond outward-facing virtue-signaling.

Best,

Alfatih
Adji Dieye
Ananda Schmidt
Ann Kern
Ariane Mawaffo
Brandy Butler
Camille Luce Bibiwango Tomatala
Cédric Djedje
Deborah Joyce Holman
Diane Keumo
Doreen Yomoah
Edwin Arsenio Ramirez Garcia
Emmanuel Mbessé
Evariste Maïga
Fatima Moumouni
Gemma Ushengewe
Ivan Larson
Ivy Monteiro
James Bantone
Jasmine Gregory
Jeremy Nedd
Jessy Razafimandimby
Joshua Amissah
Juline Michel
Kapi Kapinga Grab
Kayije Kagame
Legion Seven
Lucas Erin
Lynn Aineomugisha
Lynne Kouassi
Maïté Chéniere
Marc Asekhame
Marlène Lokosha
Marvin M’toumo
Mathias Pfund
Mbene Mwambene
Meloe Gennai
Michelle Akanji
Manutcher Milani
Nayansaku Mufwankolo
Nina Emge

Noémi Michel
Olamiju Fajemisin
Rahel El-Maawi
Ramaya Tegegne
Ruth Noemi Bendel
Safi Martin Yé
Sherian Mohammed Forster
Soraya Lutangu (Bonaventure)
Tapiwa Svosve
Tayeb Kendouci
Tina Reden
Tisalie Mombu
Titilayo Adebayo
Tracy September
Yara Laurine Dulac Gisler
Yul Roy Tomatala

This letter has been sent to

Atelier Mondial Basel
Ausstellungsraum Klingental Basel
A.ROMY Genève
Art Basel
Art Genève
art-werk Geneva
Body Archive Projects Zürich
Bild Zürich
Cabaret Voltaire Zürich
Centre d'art contemporain Genève
Centre d'édition contemporaine Genève
CAN Centre d'art de Neuchâtel
Centre de la photographie Genève
Centre culturel suisse Paris
Christophe Guye Galerie Zürich
dampfzentrale Bern
Dr Kuckuckslabrador Basel
Edition VFO Zürich
Engadin Art Talks
Fabienne Levy Lausanne
Fondation Beyeler Basel
Fondation L'Abri Genève
Fri Art Kunsthalle Fribourg
Galerie C Neuchâtel
Galerie Eva Presenhuber Zürich
Galerie Gregor Staiger
Galerie Maria Bernheim
Galerie Mezzanin Genève
Galerie Peter Kilchmann
Halle Nord Genève
Hamlet Love Zürich
Hauser & Wirth Zürich

Haus Konstruktiv Zürich
Institut Kunst Basel
Istituto Svizzero Milano Roma
Je Vous Propose Zürich
Karma International Zürich
Kein Museum Zürich
Klöntal Triennale
Kunsthalle Basel
Kunsthalle Zürich
Kunsthalle Winterthur
Kunsthaus Glarus
Kunsthaus Zürich
Kunsthaus Baselland
Kunstmuseum Basel
La Becque Tour-De-Peilz
Les Créatives Genève
Lullin + Ferrari Gallery Zürich
Liste art fair Basel
Luzerner Theater
Mai 36 Galerie Zürich
Mamco Genève
Migros Museum Zürich
Mikro Zürich
Neverland Kunstland Creux du Van
One gee in fog Genève
Pasquart Biel/Bienne
Philipp Zollinger Galerie Zürich
Roehrs & Boetsch Stäfa
Sattelkammer Bern
Schauspielhaus Zürich
Smallville space Neuchâtel / smallworld Neuchâtel
Sonnenstube Lugano
Spoutnik Genève
Spiel Act
Südpol Luzern
Theater Neumarkt
Volta Art Fair Basel
von Bartha Basel
Vitrine Gallery Basel
Whiteframe Basel
Wilde Gallery Basel
Xippas Galerie Genève
Zurich Art Weekend

* In all these questions we primarily mean Black artists and cultural workers based in or active in Switzerland. As a second step, you could ask yourself the same set of questions regarding international Black artists.

BLACK ARTISTS AND CULTURAL WORKERS IN SWITZERLAND

https://blackartistsinswitzerland.noblogs.org/ [https://blackartistsinswitzerland.noblogs.org/]

This contribution is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0 International (Creative Commons, Attribution, Non Commercial, No Derivatives). Images and videos integrated into the contribution are not included in the CC BY-NC-ND License. For any use not permitted by legal copyright exceptions, authorization from the respective copyright holders is required.

doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13930093