

2021 NYT Art for Tomorrow Sessions

Location: Doha, Qatar

Date: November 21, 2021

In collaboration with Qatar Museum Authorities/Qatar Curate

Main themes

As the world undergoes unprecedented change – from the pandemic and its fallout, to racial unrest, to deepening social and economic inequalities – people are searching for meaning. By grappling with these issues, the arts can help define that meaning, frame it and inspire change.

The Art for Tomorrow Sessions aim to analyze that impact, exploring the effect the arts can and does art have on society. Governments, institutions and the wider public are asking hard questions about the works they are showing, viewing or buying: Can and should collections be more inclusive? What are some specific instances in which the arts have ignited a movement or a policy shift? What is the interplay between politics and culture, and how has it evolved?

At the same time, the art market is reeling from the swift economic slide. Fairs, galleries, museums and artists themselves are experimenting with new business models, leading to serious hardship but also some new wellsprings of creativity. Technology has been a crucial driver of these changes.

In association with The New York Times, the carefully curated Art for Tomorrow Sessions will convene artists and art-world experts to look closely at these issues, exploring the social and economic impact of art.

Strapline:

Art for Tomorrow Sessions: Seeking Impact

Tentative format:

Hybrid event, with mostly in-person speakers but also integrating virtual ones. All content would be livestreamed, with the potential exception of a few exclusive talks.

Proposed Session Briefs:

1. Opening Panel: Why The Arts Matter

In difficult times, whether they be economic or social, the tendency might for people to turn away from consuming art. But what could be more essential than our connection to one another, and the shared moments – even at a distance -- that can help facilitate that? This panel will explore the historical precedents for art's power to anger, inspire, unite and push for change. What are some examples of art as a catalyst, and how could or should it be used in the future? What are its limitations?

2. Conversation: Igniting a Movement

Fireside chat with an artist who's achieved significant social change or awareness through the arts.

3. Roundtable: The Arts in Crisis Mode -- Taking Stock

What are the ways that the crises of our time have impacted the arts, from conception to funding and production? In this discussion, experts from a variety of disciplines will examine how the pandemic, its aftermath and parallel crises have tested their resilience, and their creativity.

4. Panel or Conversation: Art and Sustainability: Friends or Foes?

In the age of Extinction Rebellion, climate change is a rich subject for artists. At the same time, the industry hasn't necessarily been praised for its sustainable practices, with globetrotting art fairgoers, and entire collections being flown from one exhibition to another. How should the art world address this implicit contradiction? And how effective is art in raising awareness and spurring action?

5. Panel on Identity and Art: Who's representing and who's represented?

While museums are celebrated for the history and breadth of their collections, they are also being challenged to reconsider past contexts, and to explain the works' relevance to contemporary audiences. How are institutions coming to grips with a perceived lack of diversity in their collections, and have the protests and general reckoning on racial issues accelerated these changes? How are galleries and museums attempting to right historical wrongs through new exhibitions or campaigns? What are the drawbacks to the art world's current preoccupation with identity politics?

6. Panel: Tech and the Arts: A Paradigm Shift?

The pandemic brought profound challenges for artists and performers, but also an opportunity to experiment and to reinvent the way they work. What are the creative ways artists embraced digital tools in new ways, and are they here to stay? Has this led to a wider acceptance and appreciation from viewers?

7. Conversation: The Intersection of Democracy and Art

Culture has long been used as a form of “soft power,” in addition to more prominent diplomatic tools. But just how effective has it been in furthering democratic aims? How does -- or should -- education come into play? This session will look at how the intersection of art and politics has evolved, what it might look in the future.