

Editorial: **The Arts, Social Movements, and Public Pedagogy**

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In moments of geopolitical repression, cultural erasure, and contested truths, art education continues to carve out space for truth-telling, collective memory, and new imaginaries. Playwright, writer, and civil rights attorney Gloria J. Browne-Marshall (2025) reminds us: “Protest is an investment... the debt we all owe to the next generation” (p. x). When I issued the call for this volume, I asked: In what ways do the arts and forms of public pedagogy contribute to the goals of social movements? The responses we received not only engaged with that question—they stretched it, complicated it, and deepened it. Across classrooms, museums, community spaces, and digital platforms, contributors reflect on the evolving relationship between education, aesthetics, and activism.

This volume arrives at a time of heightened ideological surveillance and cultural gatekeeping. As recent headlines have revealed, even the Smithsonian Institution—long regarded as a symbol of public trust—is under political scrutiny. The current administration has launched a sweeping review of museum exhibitions, objecting to programming that references slavery, LGBTQ+ history, and immigration narratives. One federal directive calls for the removal of “divisive” language in favor of “American exceptionalism,” while another publicly lists exhibits deemed “objectionable”—those addressing racial injustice, historical trauma, or resistance art.

It is against this backdrop of cultural tension that the essays in Issue 1 of Volume 42 of the *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education* take root. In response to the overwhelming quality and diversity of submissions, we’ve decided to distill this volume into two issues. Together, they not only reflect the vitality of the field but also underscore the urgency of this moment.

We open with the work of **Rachel Fendler and Sara Scott Shields**, whose contribution explores the creative potential of youth-led social movements as pedagogical frameworks within art education. Drawing on participatory action research with high school students, they examine how zines, protest art, and visual storytelling become powerful tools for civic learning and social critique. Their work invites educators to view the curriculum as a living, dynamic space for activism—one shaped by young people’s voices, visions, and demands.

Carissa DiCindio looks back to two historic printmaking initiatives—the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project (WPA-FAP) and *El Taller de Gráfica Popular* (TGP)—to reimagine the civic role of contemporary art museums. Through a comparative lens, DiCindio traces how both programs embodied collective agency, community engagement, and democratized access to art. Her analysis shows how museums, traditionally seen as elite cultural institutions, can shift into participatory platforms for community-driven change. Grounded in historical rigor and institutional critique, this article offers a blueprint for transforming museums into spaces of care, collaboration, and social action.

K. Lynn Robinson’s essay, *Collective Actions: A Response to the Whitney Museum and a Case for Black Archival and Aesthetic Practices as Movement Building*, invites readers to view institutional memory through an archival lens. In the wake of the Whitney Museum’s controversial handling of BLM protest art, Robinson challenges traditional curatorial authority by centering four artist-led case studies that model more inclusive and equitable approaches to the acquisition, archiving, and exhibition of works by minoritized communities. Through this intervention, she not only critiques extractive institutional practices but makes a compelling case for Black archivists and curators as critical agents in shaping discourse, fostering accountability, and building aesthetic practices rooted in care, sovereignty, and justice.

The politics of memory extend into the digital realm as well: **Lingran Zhang’s** analysis of the viral short video series *Escape from the British Museum* demonstrates how humor, emotion, and fiction converge to critique imperial legacies. On platforms like Douyin, audiences witness cultural artifacts animated with voice and agency, seeking repatriation and recognition. These works illustrate how storytelling—whether grounded in data or folklore—invites us to reimagine power and cultural ownership.

Nikki Kendra Davis’s lyrical contribution, *Haunting as Public Pedagogy*, offers a bold, embodied inquiry into how spectral presence functions as both a form of social and political education. Through the creation

of her feminist play, *Women Who Know*, Davis explores the Pendle Witch trials as a conduit for processing the contemporary rollback of reproductive rights. Drawing from public pedagogy, haunting theory, and theatre praxis, she situates ghostly encounters as urgent teachings about historical violence, collective memory, and resistance.

Cover Art

This issue's cover features the work of **Lisa Whittington** (artist/art educator/scholar), whose work *The Black Women Coalition* (36 x 48, mixed media on canvas) honors the critical role Black women played in the 2020 U.S. presidential election—mobilizing, organizing, and ultimately shifting the trajectory of a nation teetering on the edge of authoritarianism. Through her layered visual language, Whittington portrays Black women not only as voters, but as cultural stewards and political protectors. With a palette rich in texture, symbolism, and ancestral resonance, this piece bears witness to the power of Black women's labor—then and now—and reminds us that protest, protection, and progress often walk hand in hand.

Together, the essays in Issue 1 of Volume 42 invite us to reconsider public pedagogy not as a fixed, singular concept, but as a living, breathing practice that evolves with the times. Whether through the creative agency of youth, the reclamation of cultural memory, or the radical act of embodied storytelling, each contribution challenges the boundaries of formal education and expands our understanding of what it means to teach and learn in a world marked by injustice and resistance. These essays remind us that public pedagogy pulses not only in classrooms and museums but also on the streets, in protest, and across digital spaces—everywhere art, action, and education converge to inspire change. In a moment of urgent social, political, and cultural reckoning, these scholars offer us pathways for collective engagement, solidarity, and the ongoing work of resistance.

With gratitude,
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Reference

Browne-Marshall, G. J. (2025). *A Protest History of the United States*. Beacon Press.