

A.I.R.

CURRENTS: Free Expression and the Inexpressible

January 6–February 4, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 6 from 6–8pm

GALLERY II & III

Max Bowens and Valerie Werder, Maura Brewer, Elaine Byrne, Abigail Raphael Collins, EBB / ЭББ, Avram Finkelstein, Mari Claudia García, Michelle Hartney, Clareese Hill, Jordan Homstad, Xandra Ibarra, Chuqiao (Chloe) Li, Melissa Ling, Katrina Majkut, Lydia Nobles, Viva Ruiz, Diana Schmertz, Asia Stewart

Curated by Aliza Shvarts



Viva Ruiz, *A Joyful Noise: Thank God For Abortion Pride 2018 / TGFA Vatican 2019, 2019*, Video, 6 minutes, 9 seconds.

A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to announce *Free Expression and the Inexpressible*, the eighth edition of *CURRENTS*, a biennial open call exhibition series in which artists respond to current topics. Curated by artist and theorist Aliza Shvarts, the 2024 iteration of the series addresses how artists navigate the paradoxes and promises implied by the idea of “freedom of expression.”

“Freedom of expression” is a principle and right that is meant to protect the voices of the disempowered. Crucially, it promises to safeguard our capacity to speak truth, critique systems of power, and demand a better world. Yet free expression has never been a right without exception, or even a right enforced and distributed equally. At times, the freedom of expression of some comes at the silencing of others—particularly women, queer people, people of color, indigenous people, and people with disabilities. In these instances, “freedom” can be an alibi for reinforcing domination: a term invoked to defend hate speech and otherwise disavow language’s violent effects.

We are living through a dramatic repolarization of the cultural debates over the meaning of free expression. Between the alarming rise in book bans, attacks on academic freedom, and legislation such as Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” law, there has been an unprecedented escalation in censorship and dismantling of First Amendment protections. At the same time, cancel culture, misinformation, and deep fakes have prompted us to reconsider the social responsibility that comes with freedom, while the advent of AI-generated text and images adds further dimension to the age-old question of what it means to “express.” How in this moment do we navigate the paradox and promise of freedom of expression as an alternately liberatory, retaliatory, and mutable idea?

Free Expression and the Inexpressible brings together eighteen contemporary artists staging connections between the personal and political dimensions of expression and inexpressibility. Through strategies that range from the discursive and polemical to the affective and abstract, they interrogate the edges of this freedom, mine its history, and posit new ways of thinking about what we can and cannot express. The artworks in *Free Expression and the Inexpressible* not only frame a deeply rooted and ongoing crisis, but also participate in an equally long legacy of resistance, imagination, and transformation. As visual, experiential, and affective provocations, they offer a vision of freedom in an unfree world, and new precedents for how we might make choices in conditions not of our choosing.

Aliza Shvarts is an artist and theorist who takes a queer and feminist approach to reproductive labor and language. Her artwork has been exhibited internationally at venues including the Tate Modern, Athens Biennale, Centre for Contemporary Art FUTURA, Galeria Municipal do Porto, Galerie Maria Bernheim, the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Leslie-Lohman Museum, Participant Inc, Art in General, and SculptureCenter. Her writing and interviews have appeared in *October*, *Artforum*, *The Cut*, *e-flux*, *Art in America*, *Whitechapel Documents in Contemporary Art: Practice*, *Art Journal*, *TDR/The Drama Review*, *Women & Performance*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, among other publications. She was a Helena Rubinstein Fellow at the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP), Joan Tisch Teaching Fellow at the Whitney Museum, Recess Critical Writing Fellow, A.I.R. Artist Fellow, and Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grantee. She has lectured and taught widely, including at Barnard College, Parsons School of Design, Pratt Institute, and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. She holds a BA from Yale University and a PhD in Performance Studies from New York University.

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains is the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two blocks away at 100 Jay St. No ID necessary for entry. Please contact info@airgallery.org for more information.



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