

RIOT MATERIAL

ART. WORD. THOUGHT.

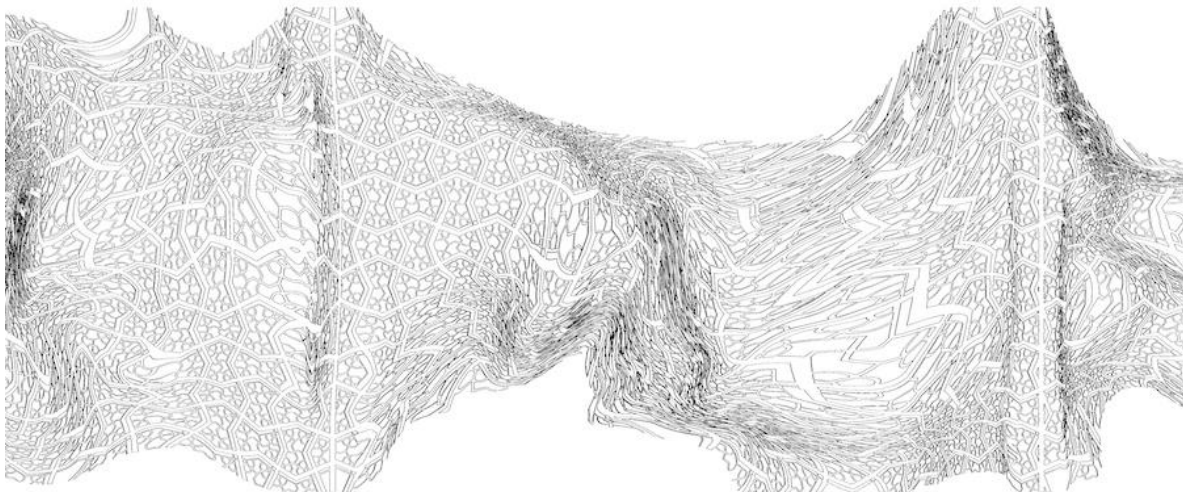
The Timely Call of *Revolution from Without...*

MARCH 18, 2019 BY [ELLEN C. CALDWELL](#)

at the 8th Floor, NYC (through May 4)

Revolutionary Cycles is an expansive two-year series of art showing at [The 8th Floor](#), a New York exhibition space run by the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation. The series will feature different themes such as issues around surveillance, gender, and media. Curated by Sara Reisman, [Revolution from Without...](#) kicks off the first installment of the series focused on the topic of resistance, with this exhibition featuring art from Tania Bruguera, Tony Cokes, Chto Delat, Raqs Media Collective, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Dread Scott, and Mark Wallinger.

The show's topic is of course timely and relevant in its selection of artists “whose practices engage structures of power that determine who is entitled to, and excluded from access to human rights and positions of privilege.” The gallery space features an array of mixed media ranging from video installations, to textile banners, to posters and ephemera.



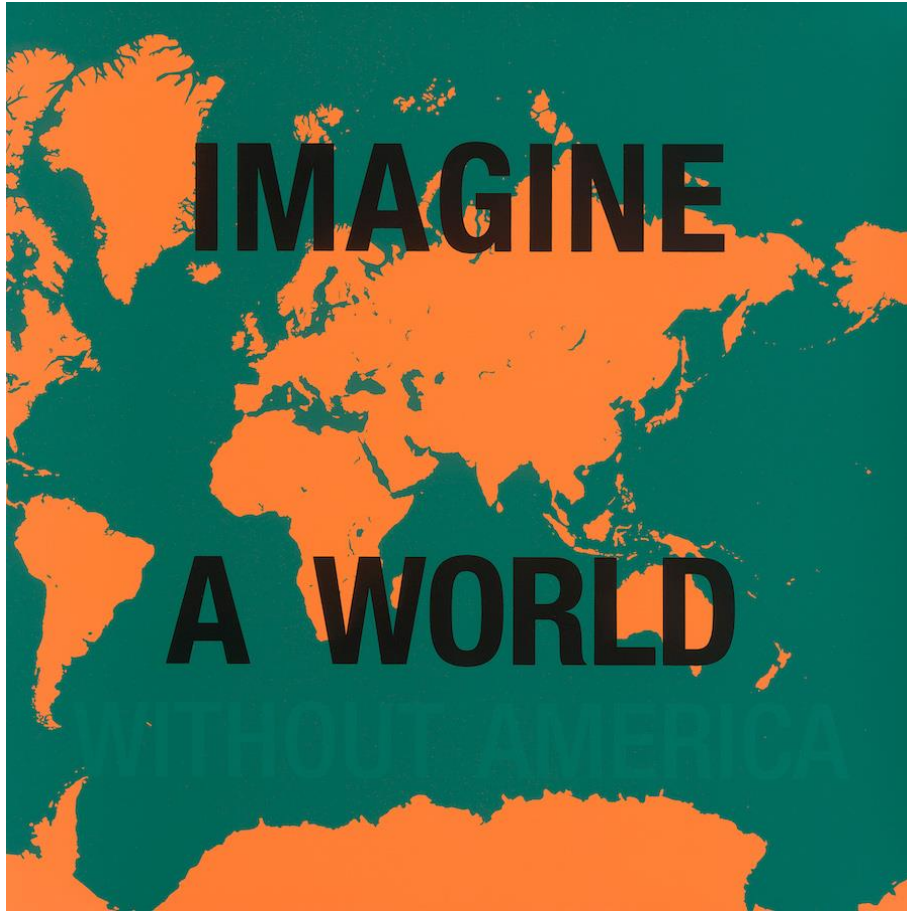
Raqs Media Collective, “Undoing Walls (detail),” 2017. Single channel animation loop projection.

Two artist collectives are featured in the show and their works highlighted my visit in many ways. Raqs Media Collective focuses on borders, liminality, and the rights to mobility between spaces. Their video installation *Undoing Walls* (2017) is an animation loop that abstractly explores and inverts the idea of international boundaries and borders. With it, [they challenge viewers to question the very nature of border wall structures, asking](#), “Can a ‘dysfunctional’ wall structure be imagined so as to question the original intentions of the Federal Government? Can a ‘welcoming’ and useful wall be created, one that serves the communities that it is meant to separate and proposes an alternative solution to human segregation, when it comes to issues such as immigration and asylum?”



Chto Delat, “Hunger, Anger, Joy,” 2011. Photo: KOW. Courtesy of Chto Delat and KOW, Berlin | Madrid

Chto Delat, a Russian arts collective whose name translates to ask “What is to be done?,” produces large scale textile banners and flags that mix visual and verbal cues with bold colors and iconography. Sara Reisman describes, “The words of the poem dedicated to migrants, titled *Migrants (To Those Who)*, 2019, is sewn like an elaborate flag, functioning as both a memorial and rallying cry.” The poem’s message, like that of the banners, is one of hope and despair — both a call to action and a memorial for those migrants who have lost their lives on an uphill journey.



Dread Scott, "Imagine a World Without America," 2006.

The work of artist and activist Dread Scott is also featured in multiple forms throughout the show. From the moment visitors exit the elevator to enter the gallery, they are greeted by the stenciled words of Scott covering the entry hall. *Overthrow Dictators* (2017) is a conceptual text cut into acetate, which was used to stencil the walls with a repeating warning label: "By reading this you agree to overthrow dictators." As if making an explicit agreement when entering *Revolution from Without...*, viewers are also reminded of the vow Scott asked museumgoers to take at the Whitney Museum of American Art when he first installed *Overthrow Dictators* on President Trump's inauguration January 20, 2017. This reminder feels particularly timely.

Additionally, Scott's newer diptych screen print *#WhileBlack* (2018) hangs as a pair of black panels with a seemingly endless scrolling of white text listing #whileblack hashtags. Here, he points to [the social media phenomenon](#) sparked by writer Black Aziz to document the [growing list of everyday activities that black people feel unsafe to do in America](#), for fear of police violence. Companion copies of this work are also available as a poster free for visitors to take. This ephemeral souvenir is especially fitting given that an entire room of the exhibition space is devoted to other ephemera surrounding both Dread Scott and Tania Bruguera's work and art practices.



Chto Delat, "Knowledge Is Power," 2011. Photo: KOW.
Courtesy of Chto Delat and KOW, Berlin | Madrid

Here in my favorite room of the show, glass displays and hung ephemera chronicle Scott's and Bruguera's work along with newspaper, media, and popular reactions from the public. [As the press release states](#), "[e]ach known for touchstone works pointing to the limits of free speech and freedom of expression, Tania Bruguera and Dread Scott present works that serve as prompts for participation. Their contributions to the exhibition elaborate on the legacy of artworks like Scott's *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag* (1988), and Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper* (2009), amplifying individual agency and collective efforts in making political change happen."

Controversial works such as Scott's *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag* are presented through an amalgamation of newspaper articles and visitor notes, capturing the divisiveness and mixed reactions to his work. This is a bit of a time machine in allowing viewers to take in the history of the art, while also evaluating it in the present, by simultaneously shining a real light on issues now. In seeing how an art controversy was framed two decades ago, we as viewers are left to question how and if times have changed. Would Scott's display of the American flag on the floor be as shocking today, for instance? Or perhaps, would it draw even more of a reaction? Viewers can wander and wonder in and through time and space here.

This review only begins to unpack a handful of the works and artists included in this show. As the kickoff for a forthcoming two year series of exhibitions, *Revolution from Without...* paves the way for future shows that will continue to highlight important art, relevant narratives, and necessary rallying cries for viewers to contemplate and bring home. The show runs through May 4th, 2019.

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