

**Biennale
Warszawa**

**+ Glen Tarman
(Liberate Tate)**

How



A

INTRODUCTION

B

STRATEGIES

C

RESOURCES

to talk about the climate crisis?

Art and Activism in a Time of Climate Change

For those of us who care about art – whether artists or art lovers – and also care about our climate and creating a fair and just world, we live in a time where our roles really matter. This does not mean that every artist should make work that is somehow related to climate breakdown or that our experience of art always has to be filtered through this lens. Yet art can be a part of addressing climate change, and powerfully so, and we can choose to be active in making that happen.

We can be activists in art (and with art), not just by asking what world we want to make now, but also what art world and cultural institutions we want and need. Too many of our public and cultural institutions have been found wanting when it comes to the climate. Yet many are now stepping up to be part of the solutions in this planetary emergency. There is inspiration to be found in art and activism for making sense of our world, for the challenges we face as humanity and for our own action on the climate: for art in the service of life.

You just have to be creative – Greta Thunberg.

Here Greta is speaking about protests during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet it is a truism that action on climate, and indeed all social justice issues, must almost always be creative to be effective. Protest and action in activism can be formulaic and mechanical: marching from A to B, speeches and so on. In being so, the risk is that any such action will not inspire others or help to bring about change. Imagination, beauty and fun are better paths to change.

Don't wait to begin, use what you have – Joseph Beuys.

Beuys reminds us that art and action can be undertaken with what is around us: we can use our minds, bodies, skills, knowledge, relationships and objects close to hand to intervene with others in a world of climate change and social injustice. Holding back until we have more resources can often mean acting late or not at all. Use what you have to make what you believe is useful art and activism. Learn, develop the language of your action and act again.

Why are cultural institutions important in fighting those creating climate change?

1.

Preserving culture and heritage for future generations is incompatible with supporting those who are destroying a safe climate, but so many arts and culture museums can be part of the problem. For example, they too often offer businesses that cause climate change, such as fossil fuel companies, ways to greenwash their reputations (e.g. sponsorship) and create a social license to operate in oil and gas when they should move fast to 100% clean energy.

Why are cultural institutions important in fighting those creating climate change?

2.

Cultural institutions can stage shows and commission work about climate change and inspire related thematic programmes in education and community work. They can also be part of wider initiatives in the arts and culture sector and beyond, engaging people on these issues.

Why are cultural institutions important in fighting those creating climate change?

3.

Museums are not neutral. They can take an active part in decolonialising and decarbonising our economies and societies by using their voice for positive change and helping their visitors take action.

Why are cultural institutions important in fighting those creating climate change?

4.

Art museums can have environmental and other strategies that address their own climate-changing emissions and support their stakeholders to address behaviours that contribute to climate change: bringing a new low-carbon cultural ecology that drives wider change.

Why are cultural institutions important in fighting those creating climate change?

5.

Art and other museums can provide an infrastructure for communities, artists and climate activists to support their work on positive solutions, helping everyone play a part in reimagining and creating a just transition to a better world.

Why are cultural institutions important in fighting those creating climate change?

6.

Climate change is a problem of culture as much as economics, finance and other drivers; institutions and practitioners have a contribution to make in the culture part of the problem in particular, as well as all its dimensions.



B STRATEGIES

Different ways of engaging artists in the politics of cultural institutions:

1. Artists actively raising ethical matters with decision-makers at museums.
2. Artists protesting how the art world holds back gender justice and progress on other inequalities.
3. Artists being part of movements to decolonise cultural institutions and society at large.
4. Artists opening up cultural institutions as part of a growing movement for institutional liberation – making them more relevant to communities in what they do and with whom.
5. Sustainable and inclusive cultural production requires critical work and active participation from artists.

How to make art activism
in a time of climate change?

1.

Promote a positive vision of ethical cultural institutions.

It's good to protest what's not right with the arts and culture, but showing what better looks like, in some way, can help make the change you desire happen.

How to make art activism
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2.

Use your target's PR assets against them.

Every significant organisation, including those in arts and culture, has to communicate with its audiences and stakeholders. These messages and channels can be used to make them more accountable for what they do in the public interest.

How to make art activism
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3.

Make visible how public and cultural institutions work.

Institutions can appear monolithic and impenetrable, but some research to find out how they work, formally and informally, helps to understand the levers of change.

How to make art activism
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4.

Create meaningful experiences of care.

Interventions based on art and/or activism are part of our lived experience and relationships. They require us to be inclusive and look after ourselves and others, both emotionally and with regard to mental and physical well-being.

How to make art activism
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5.

Persist and escalate action at the right time.

A single action is unlikely to create change and your target can adapt to it. It is likely you and others will need several interventions over time. When a window of opportunity opens, be ready to press forward to win.

Important things to consider
in creating and sustaining
a successful art-activist collective:

1. Be clear what outcome(s) you want.

As a group and individuals be clear what you want to achieve (and reflect on what you want to get out of being involved. beyond the goal of external change).

2. Be in it together.

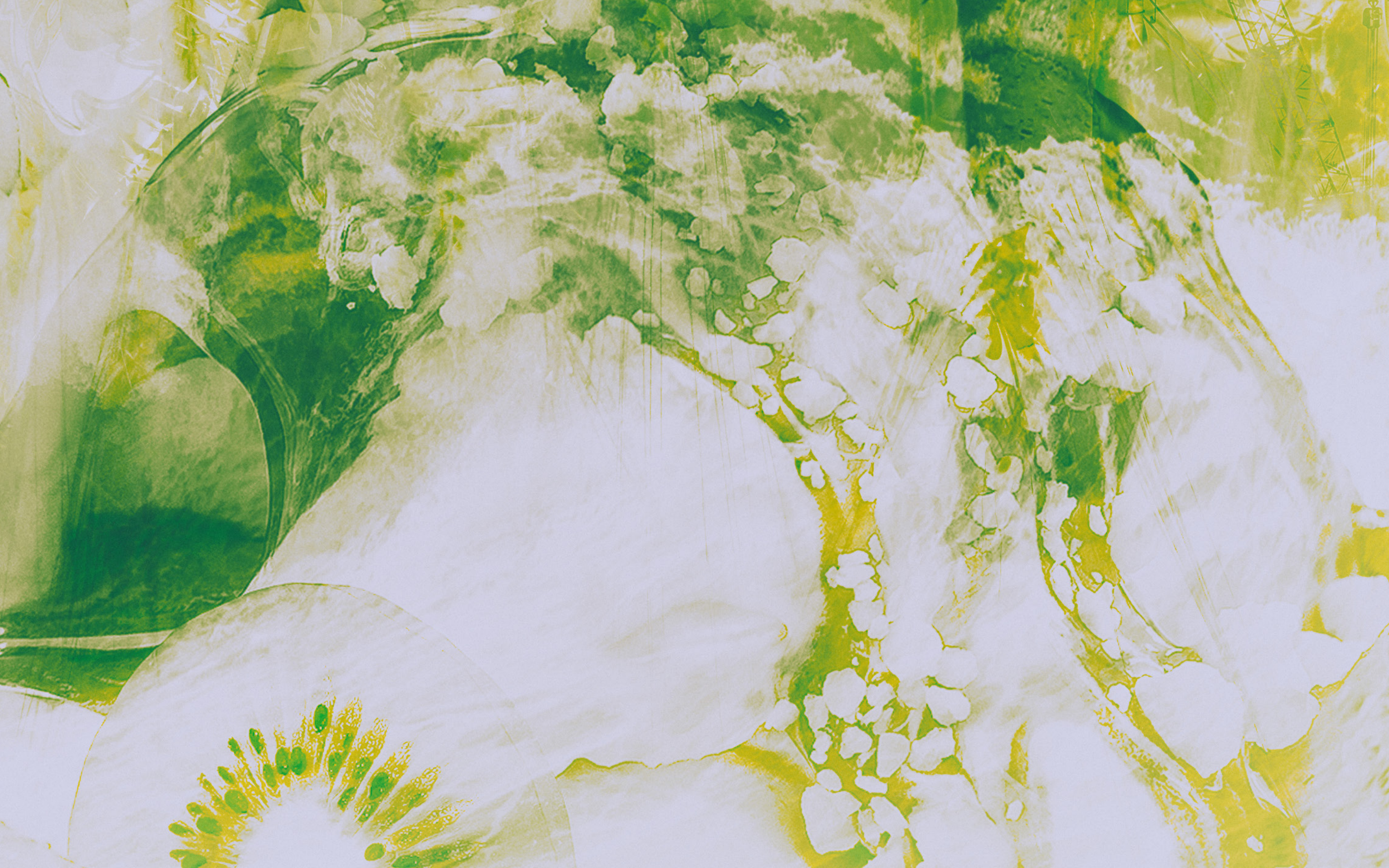
Everyone owning the creative, aesthetic or tactical decisions of the group (and recognising that respectful disagreements are healthy, as is constructive questioning) is part of the productive process of reaching a consensus.

3. Be participative.

The world is changed by those that turn up and do things, so allow space for people to make their contribution and ensure everyone is active when they can be (and when you cannot take part, trust others that can).

4. Be inspired and an inspiration.

Making art does not happen in a vacuum, and nor does activism. Talk about whose work you appreciate in art and activism, and think about who you wish to inspire, how and to what end.



WWW:

Art Not Oil:
www.artnotoil.org.uk

Climate Museum
<https://climatemuseumuk.org>

Liberate Tate:
www.liberatetate.org.uk

Platform London:
www.platformlondon.org

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Author:

Glen Tarman
(Liberate Tate)