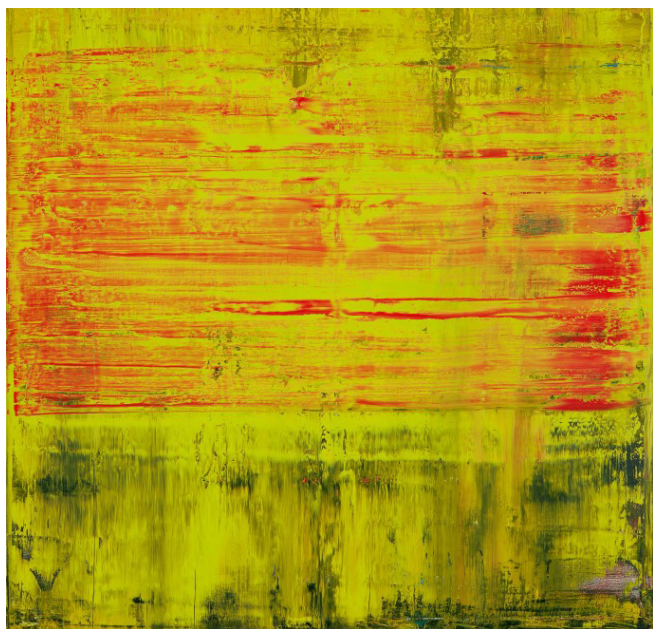


**WHITNEY**

# **MUSEUM GUIDE**



**SPRING**  
**2019**

# WELCOME TO THE CRISIS AT THE WHITNEY

Infuriating, outrageous, immoral, unethical. Warren B. Kanders, vice chair of the Whitney Board of Trustees has become the focus of protests after reports emerged that his company, The Safariland Group, manufactures the tear gas used against asylum seekers at the Tijuana border. We were horrified to learn that it has also been used at Standing Rock, in Ferguson, and in Gaza.

We invite you to learn why nearly 100 Whitney museum staff members wrote a letter calling for the consideration of Kanders' resignation, new ethical and moral guidelines for trustee participation, and a museum-wide forum to address staff concerns. The letter prompted over 25 activist and community groups to join nine weeks of protest organized by Decolonize This Place and over 200 scholars, theorists, critics, and artists (recently including 46 of the 75 Whitney Biennial artists) to endorse a letter, released via Verso Books, echoing the Whitney staff's demands.

The Whitney has claimed to be a "safe space for unsafe ideas" and we want to hold it accountable by examining structural problems with museum governance. The primary qualification for board membership is personal wealth. The Whitney Board, like the boards of many museums, does not reflect the diverse experiences that make up American culture. Currently, the Whitney has only four People of Color serving on their 52-member board.

The Whitney aims to provide a space for reflection, dialogue, and engagement with the world around us. We believe the museum is deeply connected to issues of land, labor, policy, and art washing that negatively impact our communities. The continuing presence of Warren B. Kanders has put the role that art and artists play in examining these issues into crisis.

We hope this document will challenge and inspire you to think critically about the protests leading up to the opening of The Whitney Biennial, an exhibition that will present exciting, important, and relevant art by the most diverse lineup of artists in the museum's long history. We ask you to consider the crucial differences of representation that exist between the artists, the staff, and the museum board.

Front:

**Gerhard Richter**

*Abstraktes Bild (910-2)*

2009, Oil on canvas

Recently sold by Warren B. Kanders at Sotheby's Contemporary Art Evening Auction for £6,918,100.

**(D)IRT - (De)Institutional Research Team**  
Accomplices

# WHY KANDERS?

We call out Warren B. Kanders because he is a prime example of toxic philanthropy. By donating to and serving on the boards of institutions like the Whitney Museum and Brown University Kanders uses the cover of art and cultural patronage to create a favorable public persona. Behind the scenes he amasses wealth through products like tear gas and rubber bullets sold by his company, Defense Technologies, a part of The Safariland Group, which includes nearly 20 brands.



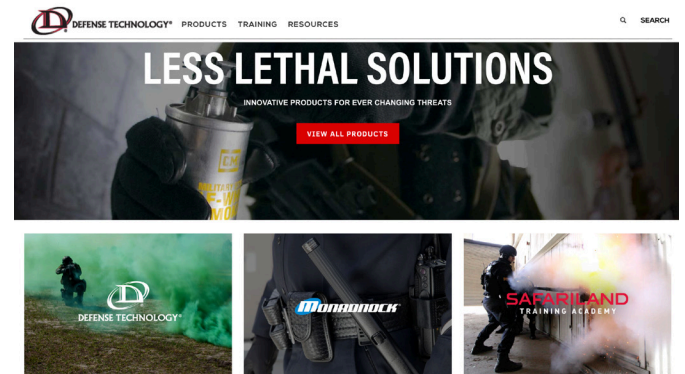
**2012 Whitney Gala**

Director Adam Weinberg with Allison Kanders and Warren B. Kanders  
Photograph by A. De Vos/artnetnews.

Safariland states that their products are “non lethal.” While tear gas may not be lethal, it causes bodily harm and inflicts psychological damage. When Safariland tear gas like the Triple Chaser™ is used against asylum seekers at the Tijuana border, against Native water protectors protesting at Standing Rock Reservation, against Black Lives Matter protesters in Ferguson, and against Palestinian refugees in Gaza, it serves as a tool to enforce white supremacy and the power of oppressive governments.

Kanders profits from the targeting, subjugation, and torture of Indigenous, Black, and Brown people. As a board member of the Federal Law Enforcement Homeland Security Foundation, which brings together business leaders with senior Federal law enforcement officials, Kanders knows exactly how the tear gas will be used. This is why we call him out.

The focus on Kanders is a call to look more critically at how our museums are funded. Kanders is just one of many toxic philanthropists. Kanders and the Whitney are just the tip of the iceberg.



**Screenshot from Defense Technology website**

(<http://www.defense-technology.com>), accessed 25 April 2019.

We see symptoms of the Whitney’s crisis at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, American Museum of Natural History, and many other cultural institutions near and far. It’s time for transparency about museum funding. It’s time to reimagine the way our museums are run. It’s time to say, “No more state violence. No more toxic philanthropy. No more Kanders.” We demand change.



**View of tear gas that border police used to prevent groups of people from crossing the US-Mexico border at El Chaparral on Sunday, Nov. 25, 2018 in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico**  
Photograph by David Guzman/EFE/Zuma Press/TNS.

# WHY LABOR?

## GUERRILLA GIRLS' DEFINITION OF A HYPOCRITE.

(hip' o-crit) An art collector who buys white male art at benefits for liberal causes, but never buys art by women or artists of color.

Please send \$ and comments to:  
Box 1056 Cooper Sta. NY, NY 10276

**GUERRILLA GIRLS**

CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

### Guerrilla Girls

*Guerrilla Girls' Definition of a Hypocrite*  
1990, Poster, Whitney Museum Collection.

The Whitney's recent exhibition, *Where We Are*, explored important themes including community, work, home, the spiritual, and the nation. Seeing the connections between the staff's emotional and physical response to the tear gassing at the border is central to understanding their demands. In their letter, the Whitney staff write: "For many of us, the communities at the border, in Ferguson, in the Dakotas, are our communities...we felt sick to our stomachs, we shed tears, we felt unsafe."

To create a safer environment, the staff called for the Whitney to consider removing Warren B. Kanders from the museum board, which aligns with an American Alliance of Museum core ethical standard: "The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum's mission and goals." The public response from Whitney Director Adam Weinberg failed to address how Kanders' continuing presence negatively impacts the staff's ability to fulfill their roles. In the letter the Whitney staff write: "We cannot claim to serve these communities while accepting funding from individuals whose actions are at odds with that mission."

The majority of the Whitney staff are currently not part of a workers alliance, union, or receiving assistance from a worker advocacy group and may not have the support to hold leadership accountable. Workers at the New Museum and the Tenement Museum recently voted to unionize this year, highlighting a need for an organized

way to address working conditions, livable wages, and job sustainability. In addition, museum staffers across the city are caucusing and organizing to ensure their institutions are held accountable when it comes to issues of diversity-from staffing to board membership.

Currently, despite \$75 million in capital investment from the City of New York, the Whitney is not part of the city's Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), and is not required to diversify its staff or board under the NYC Cultural Plan. While it's clear the Whitney has a diverse front-facing staff and we recognize that greater inclusion is an important step that many communities of color, artists, and activists have fought for for decades, representation itself does not address the systemic inequalities workers face. This reflects the nation's troubled relationship with workers fighting for their rights.



**Howardena Pindell**

*Free, White and 21*

1980, Video (color, sound, 12:15 min), Whitney Museum Collection.

The thread of labor also connects to exhibiting artists at the Whitney, who are often not paid for the educational content of their work. Recently, the Whitney has begun paying W.A.G.E.-standard artist's fees to Biennial participants after years of advocacy by the group. However the Whitney is not W.A.G.E.-certified and therefore under no obligation to pay artists featured in other exhibitions. This is unacceptable as the demand for greater economic equity connects the museum staff and artists to the broader struggle for greater workers' rights, which we unequivocally support.

\*Working Artists and the Greater Economy



# WHY THE BOARD?

The 52 members of the Whitney Board of Trustees feel, according to a December 2018 internal board email, that “it is unfortunate that Warren B. Kanders was singled out.” We agree; he is not alone, and below we list trustees (names underlined) and/or their families who profit from the military industrial complex that enables state violence through various financial institutions. This chart contains just some of the information we have been able to access.

Board Member	Connection	Military Investments	Impact
Whitney Co-Chairman <u>Thomas E. Tuft</u>	Chairman at Lazard, an international financial firm, and Firm Advisor at Arsenal Capital	Arotech Corporation, BWX Technologies, Boeing, CPI AeroStructures, AeroVironment, Aerojet Rocketdyne, Cyalume Technologies, and Spartech	Makers of military equipment, missiles, drones, fighter jet materials, and nuclear reactor parts.
Museum President <u>Richard M. DeMartini</u> and Executive Board Chairman <u>Robert J. Hurst</u>	Board members of Victory Capital (a subsidiary of their company Crestview Partners)	Aerojet Rocketdyne, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and Textron  <i>Also, via Blackrock:</i> General Dynamics, Science Applications International, Honeywell, Huntington Ingalls Industries, and L3 Technologies	Makers of military communications systems, deadly bombs, fighter jets, and more.
Vice Chairwoman <u>Nancy Carrington Crown</u>	Crown family (spouse Aries “Steve” Crown is a General Partner at Henry Crown & Co)	Holds a 10% stake in Global Dynamics, the world’s fifth-largest defense contractor	Producer of missiles and bombs for clients like the Israeli government. Conducts surveillance at the U.S. border with Mexico and manages cases of immigrant children who are torn from their families by U.S. Border Patrol agents.
Vice Chairwoman <u>Pamella G. DeVos</u>	Sister-in-law of Erik Prince, founder of the private security firm Blackwater		Blackwater’s mercenaries massacred fourteen unarmed Iraqis in 2007 when they fired machine guns and launched grenades into Baghdad’s Nisour Square.
Vice Chairwoman <u>Fern Kaye Tessler</u>	Husband is vice chairman of Cerberus Capital Management	Sparton Corporation and Navistar Defense	Sparton makes anti-submarine warfare devices for the U.S. Navy. In 2018 Navistar Defense won a \$475 million contract to manufacture armored vehicles for Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

This is what toxic philanthropy rooted in military investments looks like and it must be stopped. In addition to state violence, many Whitney Trustees are also complicit in climate change, gentrification, opioid addiction, and socioeconomic inequality. The Board of the Whitney may hope to be seen doing good, but it is time they started doing less harm. In truth, the Whitney, via its board, is complicit in many of the issues that they claim to be trying to solve.

Board Member	Connection	Military Investments	Impact
<u>James A. Gordon</u>	Founder and Managing Partner of Edgewater Growth Capital Partners	Unitech Aerospace, Orizon, WeStar, and NetCentrics	Westar is now part of QinetiQ Group, which provides defense R&D services to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, and Qatar.
<u>Kenneth C. Griffin</u>	Founder of Citadel	Astronics	Recently increased its stake. Astronics inspects the military’s airplanes, vehicles, and weapons systems.
<u>Bennett Goodman</u> , <u>Paul C. Schorr</u>	Blackstone Executives (including the spouses of <u>Julie Ostrover</u> and <u>Miyoung Lee</u> )	Among other defense investments, owns MB Aerospace	Builds engines for Boeing, United Technologies Aerospace Systems, Pratt & Whitney AeroPower, GKN, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and the U.S. Department of Defense.
<u>John C. Phelan</u>	Co-Managing partner of MSD Capital which is invested in Owl Rock (co-founded by <u>Paul C. Schorr</u> )	AC&A Enterprises Holdings and Perspecta	Manufactures military equipment and U.S. Armed Forces technological support.
<u>Paul S. Levy</u>	Founder, JLL Partners	Aviation Technical Services and Point Blank Enterprises, Inc.	Technical support for bombers and fighters, as well as body armor, bunkers, and covert vehicular surveillance systems.
<u>Jonathan O. Lee</u>	Founder, Lee Capital	Raytheon and Boeing	Two of the largest defense contractors in the world.

\*some research by Whitney Curry Wimbish, *The Baffler*.

# WHY MUSEUMS?

In order to fully understand what is at stake with the current Crisis at the Whitney, one first needs to situate the demand to remove Kanders from the Board of Trustees within broader questions of museum ethics and politics, accountability and governance.

The stated mission of most museums is to serve as public spaces for the sharing of knowledge. Museums control vast resources (human, financial, material, archival) and are considered the most reliable source of information in the U.S., ranking higher than local newspapers, the U.S. government, and even academic research. American museums attract 850 million visits each year, which is more than the attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks combined.<sup>1</sup>



**Puppies Puppies**  
*Liberty*  
2017, Performance, 2017 Whitney Biennial.

As custodians of knowledge and cultural heritage, museums supposedly present their information and objects from a “neutral” position. However, this neutrality is a myth. Museums exert significant political, economic, and cultural influence: they establish a specific understanding of our collective being, they define common sense, and they consolidate common beliefs and popular values. Museums also serve to legitimize national or cultural myths of identity and belonging.

Museums are sites of struggle; they are not monolithic entities. They are permeated by inner divisions that represent broader antagonisms in society. The staff letter that sparked the Kanders controversy shows how divided cultural institutions can be. Museums like the Whitney often deploy large-scale progressive exhibitions, such as the Whitney’s *An Incomplete History of Protest* (2018), but are often resistant to addressing deeper structural problems. Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Queer bodies can be used to shield the museum from critique.



**Jacob Lawrence**  
*War Series: Another Patrol*  
1946, Tempera on composition board, Whitney Museum Collection, currently on view.

Museums should be spaces open to dialogue, conflict, and radically opposing views. In his response to the Whitney staff’s exercise of their democratic right to dissent, Director Adam Weinberg writes, “We respect the right to dissent,” but he concludes that the “staff does not appoint or remove board members.” **We respond that, in fact, it is precisely the staff, as well as its publics and the communities that the Whitney serves, who should be involved in the museum’s governance.** Indeed, the Whitney’s staff has provided us with a clear set of questions about museum policy that can help us re-imagine museum governance. We quote a section of the staff’s letter below that includes one of their demands:

*The development and distribution of a clear policy around Trustee participation [...] we intend to clarify what qualifies or disqualifies a wealthy philanthropic individual for the Board. Is there a moral line? If so, what is that line? If this was an instance of a #metoo scandal, would we call for resignation? If this was an instance of overt racism, would we call for resignation? We believe the line should be that we not be afflicted with any Board member whose work or actions are at odds with the museum’s mission.*

We believe that the policy issue of trustee participation and the moral lines that define it need to be unambiguously articulated to help diversify museum leadership so that the museum is run by people who are more representative of the communities of New York City. We also demand transparency in the museum’s operations (sponsorship, board members selection, etc.). The People’s Cultural Plan, written in response to the first ever NYC Cultural Plan, offers a comprehensive vision of community-centered museum governance. **We recognize that removing war profiteer Warren B. Kanders from the Board of Trustees is just the beginning of a long process.**

1. According to the American Alliance of Museums (<https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museum-facts-data/>), accessed 25 April 2019.

# WHY ART WASHING?

Warren B. Kanders and the crisis at the Whitney present an opportunity to examine how art is used to sanitize the reputations of individuals and organizations engaged in activities related to state violence, gentrification, and displacement. This process of art washing is widely practiced within museums, often in partnership with real estate companies like TF Cornerstone, a recent partner for the Whitney's Derek Fordjour public art project on gun violence. TF Cornerstone is also the lead developer planning to build luxury housing on publicly-owned land in the Anable Basin site in Long Island City, where the Amazon HQ was slated to be built. Luxury development disproportionately displaces Black and Brown communities.

We take no issue with artists like Fordjour whose works engage issues impacting their communities. However, we question why the Whitney mounts shows about “the recent surge of gun violence in the United States, particularly as it affects schools and Black and Brown communities” while Warren B. Kanders remains on their board.<sup>2</sup> We also question their ongoing partnership with private real estate developers like TF Cornerstone who drive hypergentrification and displacement. We do take issue with this obvious hypocrisy, and ask you to consider who really benefits from these forms of toxic philanthropy and art washing.



**Derek Fordjour**  
*Half Mast*  
2018, Collection of the artist, courtesy Night Gallery, Los Angeles. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

These relationships reveal many layers of complicity between artists, institutions, corporations, and wealthy individuals, and can often be uncomfortable to discuss. But this is what happens when we hold each other accountable. We recognize that museums are also sites of struggle and serve to legitimize certain cultural forms and the voices of select artists, along with the reputations and credibility of patrons like Kanders, even when their values and actions may be in direct opposition. This tension is one of the central reasons why art washing poses such a problem for the role of art and the artist at the Whitney.

2. Whitney Museum Guide, Spring 2019.

# WHY DIVERSITY?

**What does diversity mean to an institution that perpetuates and benefits from white supremacy?** We recognize the word and practice of ‘diversity’ is a contested term because it can benefit both People of Color and the institution, creating potential conflicts and contradictions. The Whitney presents itself as an institution that celebrates and creates space for artists who represent the many races, genders, sexual orientations, and lived experiences that make up American culture. **On the other hand, the Board of Trustees is 92% white and representative of the ruling class.**

The Whitney's programming and exhibitions increasingly feature a diverse list of artists—over half of the 75 artists featured in the 2019 Whitney Biennial are People of Color. The exhibiting artists at the Whitney make pointed social commentary through their work. Not only does the Whitney provide a platform that amplifies these perspectives, it also offers exposure that can advance these artists' careers. The work and messages of these artists are used by the Whitney to frame itself as an institution that embraces diversity and offers a “safe space for unsafe ideas.”

As a whole, the Whitney is a diverse institution, but as you move up the administrative ladder there are fewer and fewer People of Color in positions of power. The presence of diverse artists and visitor-facing staff is contradicted by the majority-white leadership and Board of Trustees.

This contradiction complicates the Whitney's investment in issues of economic diversity and social justice through their exhibitions and institutional practices. Biennial artists, for example, will address issues of financial equity while Whitney trustees simultaneously profit from major real estate development deals that are dependent upon the removal of low-income communities. And we cannot forget that the Whitney itself is located on unceded Lenape land currently experiencing hypergentrification.

Artists do the work of addressing issues around economic disparity, race, gender, and sexuality, advocating for change. Meanwhile, Whitney trustees continue to function in, profit from, and perpetuate systems of oppression and inequality.

**Let's celebrate the diverse artists and museum workers who labor to present important and much needed commentary on issues facing America by holding the Whitney Museum accountable to their claim of fostering diversity.**



# WHY LAND?

The crisis at the Whitney, deeply embedded in disputes over land and belonging, was sparked by state violence against Central American asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border. This oppression mirrors the current US administration's villainization and degradation of Indigenous, Mexican, and Latinx communities. Many of these asylum seekers have endured decades of US oppression, political destabilization, labor and resource extraction in their native lands. Safariland teargas has also been used in other unjust land grabs and for enforcing other colonial borders, including against Palestinians in Gaza and against Indigenous water protectors at Standing Rock.



**Photo of 53 Gansevoort Street**  
1936, photo by Berenice Abbott, Image: public domain/Wikimedia.

As the Whitney Museum openly acknowledges “its building at 99 Gansevoort Street is built on unceded Indigenous lands, specifically the territory of the Lenape.” This settler colonialism has involved successive waves from the displacement of Indigenous people to the erasure of LGBTQ communities. This process also takes the form of hypergentrification. The Whitney anchors the south end of the High Line and is connected umbilically to Hudson Yards, the brand new island of ultra-luxury to the north.

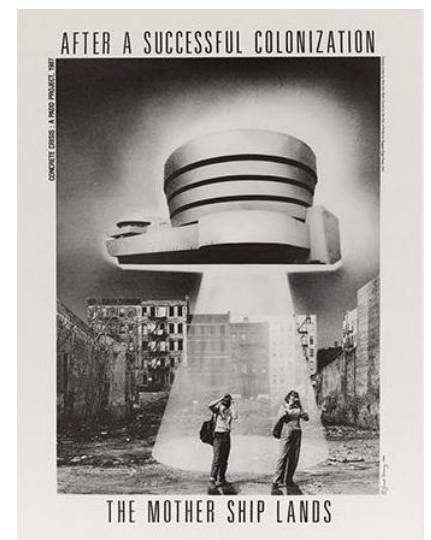


**Paper Tiger Television, New Neutral Zone, FIERCE**  
*Fenced Out* (PTT Episode 304)  
2001, Video (28:00 min), 2019 Whitney Biennial.

In the most recent wave the meatpacking district and the waterfront, which became havens for Queer artists, sex workers, and LGBTQ youth of color in the 1960s and '70s, was slated for redevelopment in the 1990s, and many of the former clubs were converted into boutiques and upscale restaurants, purging the area of artists and Queer life. In the 2000s, development in the area accelerated, with the luxury Hotel Gansevoort opening in 2004. As part of the Bloomberg administration's fire-sale of city-owned land, the Whitney secured its current site in 2009—just as the former High Line railroad opened as a public park—for \$18 million, or about half the appraised value.

As the Whitney Museum of American Art sits queasily cheek-by-jowl with luxury development on unceded land, enabled by a process of gentrification predicated on constant erasure, we ask—what is “American” art? Who is represented in this building, on this land, when the concerns and desires of the communities that make up the staff of the Whitney (most of whom are NYC residents) are systematically ignored? The Crisis at the Whitney demands that we re-evaluate the position of the museum as an institution, including its governance, and its direct collusion in harming, displacing, and detaining vulnerable people far away and at home.

**Janet Koenig**  
*After a Successful Colonization, The Mother Ship Lands*  
1987, Photo-offset lithograph, Whitney Museum Collection.





# PLAN

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Breaking false borders and combating displacement.

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### Why The Board?

Levels of complicity in climate change, gentrification, economic inequality, and the military industrial complex.

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### Why Labor?

Issues of vulnerability, precarity, and solidarity.

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### Why Kanders?

No more state violence. No more toxic philanthropy. No more Kanders.

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**Whitney Museum  
of American Art**  
whitney.org  
@whitneymuseum



Free Wi-Fi is available throughout the Museum.



Ask Whitney staff about accessibility services.



Nonflash photography is allowed for personal, noncommercial use, except where noted. The use of tripods and selfie sticks is prohibited.

### Museum Hours

Mon	10:30 am–6 pm
Tues	Closed
Wed	10:30 am–6 pm
Thurs	10:30 am–6 pm
Fri	10:30 am–10 pm
Sat	10:30 am–10 pm
Sun	10:30 am–6 pm

Admission is Pay-What-You-Wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm.

Please do not touch the works of art on display. Food and beverages are not allowed in the galleries.