

Artists plan “Fall of Freedom” protests against Trump dictatorship: “Artists are a threat to American fascism”

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Scores of artists and writers issued a call for museums, galleries, theaters, bookstores and libraries and other institutions and businesses in the arts to sponsor events across the US on November 21 and 22 to oppose the Trump administration’s attack on democratic rights.

The organization, called the Fall of Freedom, was organized by a group of artists and writers including visual artists Robert Longo, Dread Scott, Jenny Polak and Accra Shepp, Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist Lynn Nottage, novelist Hari Kunzu and curator and writer Laura Raicovich.

The call has already attracted many supporters from among other artists and writers and musicians, including Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Jennifer Egan, songwriter and actor John Legend, actor Jeffrey Wright and filmmakers Ava DuVernay and Laura Poitras.

Prominent cultural institutions have endorsed Fall of Freedom as well, among them New York City’s Public Theater, Apollo Theater and National Black Theater, the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. and the Berkeley Rep in California.

The brief statement published on the Fall of Freedom website explains:

Fall of Freedom is an urgent call to the arts community to unite in defiance of authoritarian forces sweeping the nation. Our Democracy is under attack. Threats to free expression are rising. Dissent is being criminalized. Institutions and media have been recast as mouthpieces of propaganda.

Art matters. Artists are a threat to American fascism.

Various artists have endorsed the call as a response to the growing assault on democratic rights. In an interview with *Hyperallergic*, artist Miguel Luciano commented,

This feels like a low point in American history. But rather than collapsing into fear, we want to bring people together by celebrating the power of our art, culture, and identity, and the freedom of our creative voices ... This is when artists go to work.

Speaking to the *New York Times*, novelist Egan, former president of PEN America, said, “I welcome this spur to act alongside other artists and insist on our right to think and speak freely.”

Fall of Freedom is a welcome development. Its announcement comes as millions participated in demonstrations in the US and internationally to protest the fascist politics of the Trump Administration. The marches brought out thousands of cultural workers including teachers, museum workers, musicians and artists from many regions.

The Fall of Freedom project also continues the struggle that thousands of writers, visual artists, musicians and actors have not only taken up against the Trump administration’s attacks on democratic rights, particularly against immigrant workers, for example, singers Zach Bryan and Neil Young, but also against Trump and Biden’s central role in the Gaza genocide over the last two years.

The Trump administration’s attack on basic rights such as freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, due process and the right to asylum are closely entwined with its efforts to suppress artistic and intellectual freedom.

Universities have been a key target of a Nazi-inspired *Gleichschaltung*, the effort to bring under control the entire cultural sphere and subordinate it to fascist conceptions and aims. This has long been a goal of the far right with its reactionary efforts to ban books, but has taken a qualitative leap with the attempts by the Trump administration to defund major universities such as Columbia and Harvard.

Trump’s attack on the Smithsonian Institution has

revealed his vile and dangerous assaults on the democratic historical substance of American culture. In August the president reprimanded the Institution, one of the largest complexes of museums in the world, for featuring exhibitions that showed, for example, “how bad Slavery was.” This comes after Trump’s order to remove images of slavery and the Civil War from national parks.

The president stated in his tirade against the Smithsonian: “I have instructed my attorneys to go through the Museums, and start the exact same process that has been done with Colleges and Universities ...” that is, a process of identifying, targeting and censoring any hints of left-wing or oppositional thought.

The administration’s Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal to Congress includes the wholesale elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), along with the National Endowment for the Humanities. Even before this, the NEA had withdrawn or canceled numerous previously approved grants for the 2025 cycle. These cuts have severely impacted non-profit organizations, particularly those focusing on programs related to diversity, equity, inclusion and LGBTQ+ issues.

This follows the defunding in March of the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, cutting off a lifeline to many smaller and poorer libraries across the country. In addition, the Department of Education has sustained broad and repeated attacks, most recently through the permanent firing of many of its remaining employees during the ongoing government shutdown, particularly those who service special education.

The efforts to remake, that is to degrade, distort and vulgarize American culture are on graphic display now in Trump’s tearing down of the East Wing of the White House and replacing it with facilities fit for the bankrupt French aristocracy of 1788.

Coinciding with the initiation of the Fall of Freedom project was the announcement by actress Jane Fonda October 1 that she would be reviving the Committee for the First Amendment, the organization set up in September 1947 to oppose the Hollywood witch-hunt, to which Fonda’s father, Henry Fonda, belonged. Many film industry personalities, including Humphrey Bogart, Lucille Ball, Bette Davis, Judy Garland, Burt Lancaster, Groucho Marx, Sterling Hayden, Edward G. Robinson and dozens of others joined the free speech committee. It collapsed rapidly and ignominiously, however, under the blows of an anti-communist smear campaign.

Hundreds of performers and artists have signed on to the new Committee for the First Amendment, prominently among them Billie Eilish, Cynthia Nixon, Barbra Streisand,

Anne Hathaway, Christine Lahti, Jon Hamm, Mark Ruffalo, Melanie Griffith and scores of others.

The new committee’s statement argues that the McCarthyite forces

have returned. And it is our turn to stand together in defense of our constitutional rights. The federal government is once again engaged in a coordinated campaign to silence critics in the government, the media, the judiciary, academia, and the entertainment industry. We refuse to stand by and let that happen. Free speech and free expression are the inalienable rights of every American of all backgrounds and political beliefs...

The difficulty, of course, is that the Hollywood left in general disintegrated in the face of the original McCarthyism, while American liberalism openly embraced the most vicious opponents of democratic rights. Sharp lessons need to be drawn from that experience.

The artists’ Fall of Freedom project and similar actions are positive signs. But, as noted, they do not by any means solve all the political issues. Attempts will be made to firmly subordinate such projects to “left” Democratic Party charlatans like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or the 2026 Democratic Party election campaign as a whole. Moreover, unions like AFSCME, the UAW and others have entered the cultural and educational sphere, with the aim of collecting dues and stifling the movement of museum, university and other workers. The artists need to orient themselves to the working class *rank-and-file*, the social force capable of driving Trump from power, and, bearing in mind the lessons of the Hollywood Red Scare, to the emergence of a *consciously anti-capitalist* mass movement.



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