

Art Works: How Organizers and Artists Are Creating a Better World Together

Ken Grossinger

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In *Art Works*, Ken Grossinger analyzes exciting new collaborations to enact social change.

With scores of detailed examples and insights from community organizers and artists, this book covers strategies for using art to reach broad audiences and shift social issues narratives. Immigrant rights, racial injustice, and the sociocultural work of musicians, filmmakers, museums, and philanthropists are covered. Thoughtful excerpts from a round table discussion about the challenges and future of the fusion of art and social justice round the project out, with commentary from artists including rapper Jasiri X, visual artist Shepard Fairey, and labor and community organizers.

Grossinger is upbeat about the growth and sustainability of such collaborations, noting that they create long-term shifts in public awareness of (and favorable attitudes toward) social justice issues that labor-intensive, costly actions tackling one problem at a time cannot. Positive examples from Alabama and Alaska show how artists enhance organizers' abilities to take control of traditional histories by assuming "narrative power." Social media and digital art formats also accelerate and magnify community mobilization, Grossinger says, though his balanced analysis reveals that conflicting goals or misunderstandings between parties can stymie projects.

Poignant, enlightening insights from artists and activists themselves reveal their personal motivations and describe some of the obstacles they faced in implementing their projects. The curator of a museum exhibition memorializing Breonna Taylor, killed by Louisville police in 2020, emphasizes the importance of an advisory board of residents, Black artists, and Taylor's family when it came to creating an appropriate, healing hometown show, for example, while also acknowledging the challenges of acting without delay or artistic censorship. Punchy illustrations, like vibrant images of monarch butterflies symbolizing immigrant aspirations and the sobering National Memorial for Peace and Justice sculpture representing American lynching victims, are included.

Art Works is an inspiring overview of the growing power of cultural organizing.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (July / August 2023)

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