

HYPERALLERGIC

Over 200 Artists and Scholars Urge MoMA and Board Member to Divest from Private Prison Companies

Hal Foster, Andrea Fraser, and Tania Bruguera have signed the letter released by New Sanctuary Coalition.

Hakim Bishara
October 10, 2019



Exterior view of The Museum of Modern Art on 53rd Street (courtesy MoMA, © 2017 Diller Scofidio + Renfro)

Over 200 prominent artists, scholars, and critics have signed an open letter demanding MoMA and its board member Larry Fink end their investments in private prison companies. The letter comes less than two weeks before the anticipated opening of the museum's refurbished galleries on October 21.

The statement, released by [New Sanctuary Coalition](#), has garnered the support of big names in the art world. Signatories include Tania Bruguera, Hito Steyerl, Xaviera Simmons, Andrea Fraser, Claire

Bishop, Omar Berrada, Hal Foster, Chloë Bass, Alejandro Cesarco, and Nikki Columbus, among many others.

“We denounce MoMA’s connections to mass incarceration, global dispossession and climate catastrophe, and demand that MoMA’s Board member Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, divest from prison companies, the war machine and the destruction of the global environment,” the open letter reads. “Stopping the global cycles of dispossession, displacement and detention, and reinvesting in the basic necessities of food, shelter, health and freedom are the best ways to ensure that communities worldwide thrive.”

Fink’s company BlackRock is ranked the largest investment company worldwide with its assets under management worth around \$6 trillion. BlackRock is the second-largest investor in two major private prison companies: GEO Group and CoreCivic. In the letter, the activists demand Fink divest from both.

“With over \$2 billion in contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), these companies have been responsible for 70% of all immigration detention including caged children and families separated at the border as well as in the interior,” the open letter says, adding that MoMA’s own pension fund, Fidelity, is also one of the largest owners of GEO Group and CoreCivic. “Prison companies are a part of the massive and racist state-sanctioned carceral system of the U.S., which has made the country the largest jailer in the world.”

Fink’s company, BlackRock, also owns “billions of dollars” in shares of weapons manufacturers, according to the open letter. “The company has more money invested in the fossil fuel and agribusiness industries – the biggest drivers of climate change – than any other company in the world,” the letter adds. “Despite their severe threat to the planet, BlackRock continues to invest in tar sands, coal, Arctic oil, Amazon crude, and rainforest destruction.”

Addressing MoMA, the activists say the museum “has spent over half a billion dollars to remake its image and its building in midtown Manhattan. We suggest instead that funds be redistributed towards alternative models of well-being, community-based creativity, land restitution/defense for indigenous peoples, and the material improvement of dispossessed communities worldwide.”

MoMA has not responded to Hyperallergic’s immediate request for comment.

In a previous action in April of this year, the group Art Space Sanctuary recruited panelists at a MoMa conference (some of whom signed today’s statement) for the same cause. Natalia Brizuela, associate professor of film and media and Spanish at UC Berkley, surprised the audience when she read a public letter against MoMA and Fink, co-authored by Art Space Sanctuary. The letter was signed by most of

the panelists in the conference, including artists Kader Attia and Jumana Manna; Zdenka Badovinac, director of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana; political theorist Achille Mbembe; writer and curator Omar Berrada; and 11 other participants. The letter reiterated the call on MoMA and Fink to divest from private prison companies.

Now, as all attention is directed toward the MoMA rehang, New Sanctuary Coalition is asking to revitalize its campaign, which started about two years ago. “MoMA’s director Glenn Lowry has said that the renovations will help us ‘explore the ideas that shape our world and find inspiration in the art of our time’,” the new open letter reads. “Indeed, this is the time and these are the moments that define us as individuals and as a society.” A coalition of activist groups [plans to gather at MoMA on October 18 at 7pm.](#)

“MoMA can choose to be defined by its silence over mass incarceration, climate change and global dispossession. We choose not to.”

Read the open letter, reproduced in full, below:

We denounce MoMA’s connections to mass incarceration, global dispossession and climate catastrophe, and demand that MoMA’s Board member Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, divest from prison companies, the war machine and the destruction of the global environment. Stopping the global cycles of dispossession, displacement and detention, and reinvesting in the basic necessities of food, shelter, health and freedom are the best ways to ensure that communities worldwide thrive.

MoMA Board member and CEO of BlackRock, Larry Fink, is the 2nd largest shareholder of prison companies, GEO Group and Core Civic. With over \$2 billion in contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), these companies have been responsible for 70% of all immigration detention including caged children and families separated at the border as well as in the interior. MoMA’s own pension fund, Fidelity, is also one of the largest owners of these private prison companies. P Prison companies are a part of the racist state-sanctioned carceral system of the U.S., which has made the country the largest jailer in the world, placing a massively disproportionate number of black and brown people behind bars.

BlackRock also owns billions of dollars in shares of weapons manufacturers. The company has more money invested in the fossil fuel and agribusiness industries – the biggest drivers of climate change – than any other company in the world. Despite their severe threat to the planet, BlackRock continues to invest in tar sands, coal, Arctic oil, Amazon crude, and rainforest destruction.

We demand that MoMA board member Larry Fink begin by divesting all assets from GEO Group and Core Civic.

Divestment is possible. New York City's pension fund has divested! Even JP Morgan, Bank of America and Wells Fargo have agreed to cut loans to these companies.

Larry Fink has stated that he wants to hold companies accountable for being "responsible corporate citizens." This can be achieved by removing funds from prison slavery and supporting campaigns such as No New Jails' push to close Rikers and block the promotion of new borough-based cages. MoMA has spent over half a billion dollars to remake its image and its building in midtown Manhattan. We suggest instead that funds be redistributed towards alternative models of well-being, community-based creativity, sanctuary, land restitution/defense for indigenous peoples, and the material improvement of dispossessed communities worldwide.

MoMA's director Glenn Lowry has said that the renovations will help us "explore the ideas that shape our world and find inspiration in the art of our time." Indeed, this is the time and these are the moments that define us as individuals and as a society. MoMA can choose to be defined by its silence over mass incarceration, climate change and global dispossession. We choose not to.

Again, we demand that Larry Fink and the MOMA board divest their funds from prison companies. We demand that Larry Fink & all MoMA board members disclose any & all additional prison slavery-involved investments. We ask that they meet with concerned artists, community leaders, immigrant rights organizations, and detainees to hear the real story about the shares they own and how these funds should be redistributed.

Signatories:

Kemi Ilesanmi

Omar Berrada, writer & curator

tania bruguera

Caron Atlas

Julia, Chang, MOCA

Monica Johnson

Dorian Mckaie

Hal Foster, Princeton University

Jessi Olsen, ALL ARTS/Resistance Revival Chorus

Andrea Fraser, artist

CAITLIN BAUCOM, artist and ex MoMA employee

Sandra Skurvida
Eva, Yaa Asantewaa, InfiniteBody
Anne Hamburger, En Garde Arts
Pearl Bhatnagar, Freedom Cities
Hannah Joo, Coordinator of Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives at Dance/NYC
Miriam Ticktin, The New School
Sophia Garcia
Amanda Pajak, American Federation of Arts
Michelle, Castaneda, Brown University
Kelsey S Brewer, Brooklyn-based artist
Chloë Bass, Artist
hito steyerl
Gregory Sholette Gulf Labor Coalition
Mika Rottenberg
Paula Chakravartty, Associate Professor, NYU
Arang Keshavarzian, New York University
Dipti Desai, New York University
John Singler, New York University
Rayna Rapp, NYU
Manu Goswami, Dept of History, NYU
Sally Guttmacher, NYU
Toby Lee, Cinema Studies, NYU Tisch
John M. Archer, NYU
Xaviera Simmons Studio
Julie Livingston, Silver Professor, New York University
Mary Taylor
Marita Sturken, New York University
Gil Anidjar, Columbia University
Kathryn Hamilton
Alejandro Cesarco
Noah Fischer, Occupy Museums
Dr. Jackie Orr, scholar & artist
Talal Asad, CUNY Graduate Center, Emeritus
Lauren van Haften-Schick, PhD Candidate, Cornell University
Bettina Funcke
Tavia Nyong'o, Yale University

Eve Meltzer, NYU
Terike Haapoja, The New School
Magdalena Moskalewicz, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Peter Walsh
Christian Xatrec, Emily Harvey Foundation, New York
Abou Farman, New School
Leah Mundell, Northern Arizona University
Etelle Higonnet
Alayne Unterberger
Hamid Dabashi Columbia University
Peter Mancina, University of Oxford
AbdouMaliq Simone, University of Sheffield
Stephen Duncombe, Center for Artistic Activism
Estelle Maisonett, Artist
Maira Duarte, Dance to the People
Ingrid Haftel
William Carden
Lauren, Nechamkin, Museum Educator
DEBBORA BATTAGLIA, PhD
Jackie Vimo
Anayvelyse Allen-Mossman, Columbia University
Saretta, Morgan, Arizona State University
Adam Fitzgerald, Rutgers University
Saul Chernick
darryl battaglia, none
Nadia Williams, Parsons School of Design
Prerana Reddy, Director of Programs, A Blade of Grass
Muriel Leung, PhD Student, University of Southern California
Mariam Ghani, Artist
Craig, Art + Design Education
Mandana, Independent Curator
Alexander Provan, Editor, Triple Canopy
Gerald Kelly, MOMA Member
Christina Dawkins, Founder, A4Abolitionist, LLC.
Elizabeth Hickman
Laura Tilghman, Plymouth State University

Aaron Scott, Aaron Scott Design
Lisa Cooley, art advisor
K. Eva Weiss, Temple University
Alfred Creymor, Artist
Basma Eid, Freedom To Thrive
Emily Fornof, art history student and patron of MOMA
Aziz Isham, BRIC
Sanaz Alesafar, MOMA visitor
Isabel Figueroa
Victoria Chen
Kamrun Nahar
Sarah Crumb
Nowrin Kashem
Ian Gerson, Artist and Educator
William, Felinski, Artist and Arist Member of MoMA
Masco, Joseph (University of Chicago)
Claire Bishop, Professor, CUNY Graduate Center
Nikki Columbus
Tyrone Williams
Olga Nikitina
Liz, Morina, Art Advisor @ Artist Atelier
Andria Hickey, Curator
Kirył, Kalbasnikau, Belarus Free Theatre
Miriam Margarita Basilio, Associate Professor, NYU
Eric Golo Stone, Writer, Artist, Curator
Carol Jacobsen, University of Michigan/Women's Justice & Clemency Project
www.umich.edu/~clemency
Anna Marín
Lyric Bada, CUNY Guttman
Luiza Proença, curator
Kadiatou Balde, student at SUNY Potsdam
Sun, Emily
Katinka Barragan
Laura Y. Liu, The New School
Celia K.San Felipe
Elvia Wilk, The New School, e-flux

Nico Baumbach, Associate Prof of Film, Columbia University
Rev. Micah Bucey, Judson Arts, Judson Memorial Church
David Deblinger Ensemble Force
Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa, Rhode Island School of Design
Marisa Morán Jahn, Artist
Dena Fisher
Timo Rissanen, Parsons School of Design, The New School
Camilo Godoy, Artist
Matteo Norzi – Shipibo Conibo Center, NY
Brynn Hatton
Ara H. Merjian, NYU
Sarah Walko, artist
Katayoun Vaziri Artist
Devin Kenny
Irene Small, Princeton University
Robert Slifkin, New York University
Julia Pimes Mata – C.I.S.P.E.S.
Thomas Bender, University Professor of the Humanities and History Emeritus, NYU
Carolyn Lazard
Natalia Almada
Andrea Gordillo
Aaliya Zaveri
Vital E.
Andrew H. Lee, New York University
Genevieve Yue, Assistant Professor at the New School
Cameron Russell, Model & cofounder Model Mafia
Kimberly Drew
Paloma McGregor
Janelle Grace
Jennifer Ifil-Ryan
Ni'Ja Whitson
Joseph Hall, BAAD! The Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance
Gabriela Lopez-Barry
Gigi
Leia Squillace
Vivian Crockett, Art Historian and former MoMA MRC Fellow

Rachael
Monique Velazquez
RAGGA NYC
lily bo shapiro
Christina Dawkins, Founder, A4Abolitionist, LLC.
Constantina Zavitsanos, artist
Angela Kingham
Danielle Johnson
Diya Vij
Teresa Ross Tellechea – The New School + New Sanctuary Coalition
Esther
Nicholas D Mirzoeff NYU
Natalia Brizuela, UC Berkeley
Molly Crabapple
Rachel Gugelberger, Curator
Andreas Petrossians, independent scholar and critic
Andrew Weiner, NYU-Steinhardt
Savitri D, The Church of Stop Shopping
Shaun Leonardo
Nathan Hewitt, (D)IRT
Sarah Ordway, (D)IRT
Benedict Nguyen
Shi An Tong (石安童)
Seph Rodney, Hyperallergic
Hatuey Ramos-Fermín, artist
Yumna Al-Arashi – Artist
Francisco, artist
Susan Cianciolo artist
Brett Wallace – Artist
New Sanctuary Coalition
Tiffany Hsu
Alison O’Daniel, California College of the Arts
Neferti Tadiar, Barnard College
Sarah Takesh / Collector
Park McArthur
Sonya Posmentier, New York University

Lizzie Scott
Ken Ehrlich, artist
Alexandra Délano, The New School
Zishan Ugurlu
Macushla Robinson, Art Gallery of NSW
Janice Dowell, Syracuse University
Alyshia Gálvez, The New School
Robin Dembroff (Yale)
Michael Rieppel (Assistant Professor, Philosophy, Syracuse University)
Anna Bailey
kate crehan, Professor Emerita, City University of New York
Elaine Gan
Maria Hupfield, artist
Harsha Ram, UC Berkeley
Gilda Merlot, DACA recipient and sex worker @redlightreader
Heather Davis, The New School
David Borgonjon, Columbia University
Gil Anidjar, Columbia University
Evangelina Jimenez
Royston Scott
Molly
D Ciralo
Katherine B. Hogan. Concerned human.
Shilpa Narayan
GREGG STANKEWICZ
Savitri D
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David Yap – City University of New York
Al Smith
Robin LaVerne Wilson
Jess Beck
Evangelina Jimenez