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Because we need a reminder, there's now a Human Rights Arts Festival

The non-partisan celebration of life and creativity takes place this weekend in Manhattan.



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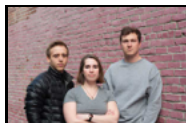
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In the ultimate sign of our times, there's now a festival for human rights.

The International Human Rights Arts Festival (<http://dixonplace.org/performances/the-international-human-rights-art-festival/>) (March 3-5) will gather more than 70 artists in Lower Manhattan for an inclusive festival that's all about social engagement and enlightenment.



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You'd be forgiven for thinking those values add up to yet another anti-Trump event. While we can't have too many of those, festival organizer Tom Block has something else in mind.

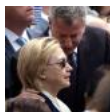
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“We want to engage without accusing,” says the Queens-based artist, activist and playwright. “Oppositional art does nothing but create opposition. If you want catharsis, then make angry protest art. If you want to genuinely affect change, you have to move beyond that. This festival will represent that.”

The three days of the festival will bring 40 events to Lower East Side art hub Dixon Place, ranging from performing arts to painting and film. Find humor and love in Mashuq Deen’s story of growing up as a transgender kid in a South Asian family; hear from the first openly gay pop star in the U.S., Ari Gold; and be transported as the environmentalist theater troupe Superhero Clubhouse present a play about extinction based on “The Last Unicorn,” just to name a few.

There are also workshops, panel discussions, and a kid’s fest with activities to introduce children to making socially transformative art.

Block saw the need for a festival that values inclusion when he started planning the event a year ago. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were duking it out on the presidential campaign trail over what many consider basic rights, from

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reproductive freedom to immigration policy, welfare and anti-discrimination laws.

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Trump's win has further stoked these activist fires. "Art has to be socially engaged to be meaningful to me. The one good thing about these times is that Trump is making people engaged again," he adds, riffing on Trump's campaign slogan.

Without the confrontational nature of protest and other forms of resistance, art is a unique way to win hearts and minds. "One example is a human rights painting festival we did in Maryland that was to be in a public building," recalls Block. "A very tony public figure protested, and we were kicked out of that space. We went instead into a university and the same man came and heard what we were saying. He reached out to us and apologized.

"It's all about enlightenment."

By **Linda Laban** (</profile/linda-laban>) Published : February 28, 2017

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