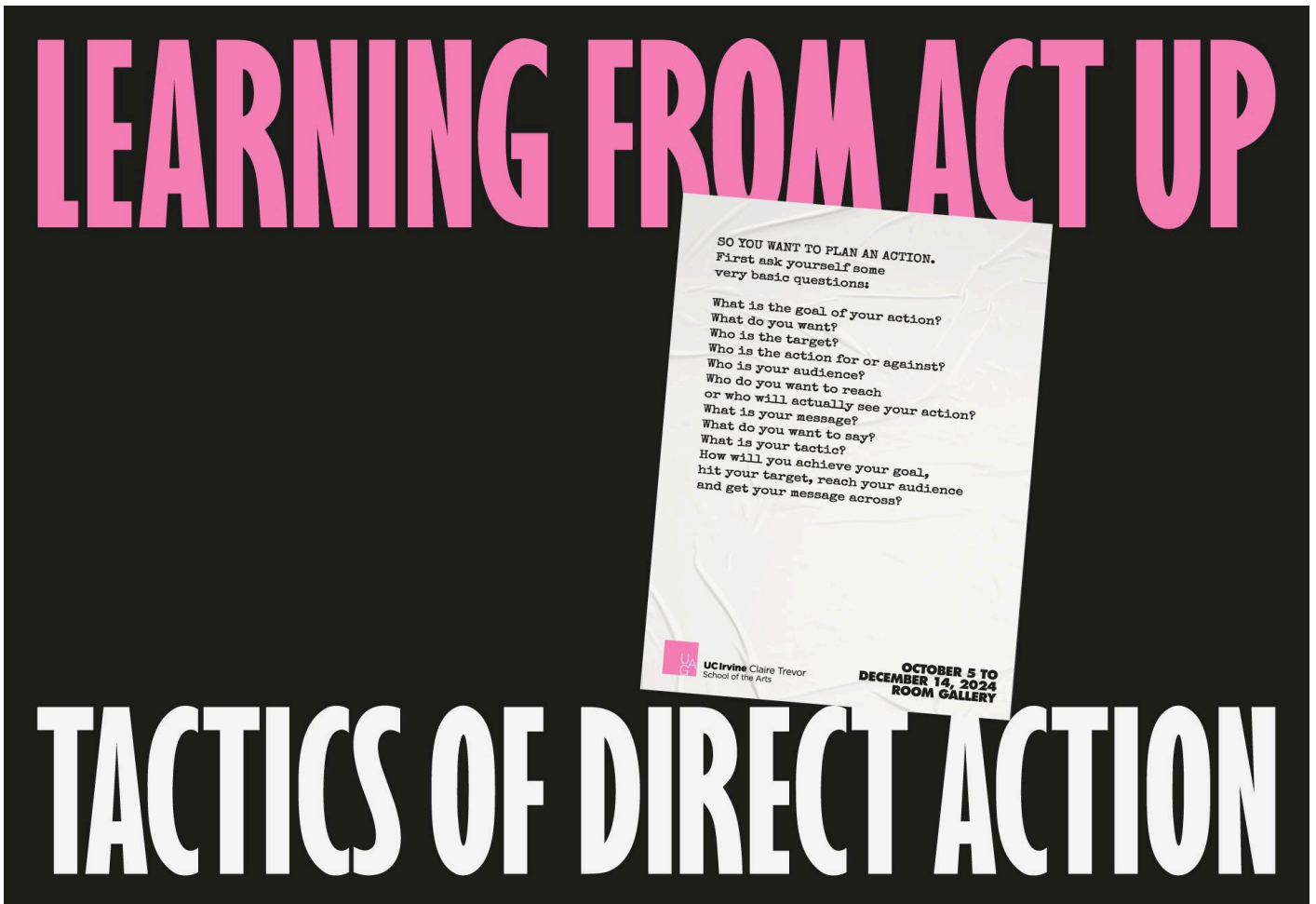




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gallery@uci.edu
uag.arts.uci.edu

Tues.–Sat., 12–6 p.m.

PRESS PREVIEW KIT



Learning from ACT UP: Tactics of Direct Action

Curated by Juli Carson and Sasha Ussef

Exhibition Design by Richard Kahwagi

Room Gallery

On View: October 5 – December 14, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, October 5, 2–6 pm



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IRVINE, Calif. – The University of California, Irvine’s Room Gallery is pleased to host *Learning from ACT UP: Tactics of Direct Action* by Juli Carson and Sasha Ussef.

So, you want to plan an action.

We live in tumultuous times. There are culture wars the likes of which we haven’t seen since the 1980s. Looming even larger is a pernicious anti-democratic turn—in both the US and abroad—that’s instilled a general sense of dread whenever elections approach. Unsurprisingly, there’s a strong desire to organize, act, and make positive change. To be the protagonist of an empowering counter-narrative. *Learning from ACT UP, Tactics of Direct Action* is a performative installation—comprised of film, graphics, and archival material—that demonstrate what dogged but peaceful civil disobedience might achieve. How, in fact, it might even change the world.

Our case-study protagonist is ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. Founded in March 1987, ACT UP defined itself as “a diverse, nonpartisan group united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis.” Their first “act” was the adoption of the famed graphic emblem SILENCE=DEATH, printed in white Gill sanserif type underneath a pink triangle on a black background, which came to signify a global community set on confronting the engines of the AIDS crisis: homophobic ideologies, government inaction, and outmoded medical protocols. *Learning from ACT UP*, by focusing on the actions initiated by the founding New York chapter from 1987-1993, performatively shows how one might react to a social crisis, reach a broad audience, change the discourse of “business as usual,” and initiate systemic change.

The endgame of systemic change is no small feat. It entails collective organization—the building of a counter institution itself, albeit one that’s contingent with no given “leader.” Towards this end, ACT UP held regular Monday night meetings run with Robert’s Rules of Order. Agendas were set by the Coordinating Committee. Facilitators ran the meetings moving discussion towards various actions, in coordination with focus committees—Fundraising, Treatment and Data, Majority Action, People of Color, Media, key among them. Simultaneously, other people self-divided into affinity groups not accountable to the larger body. Sarah Schulman recounts in her book *Let the Record Show*, “When the Monday-night general meeting decided to do an action at the FDA, it was organized through the Actions Committee, sitting at the Coordinating Committee. But at the demonstration, individual affinity groups appeared with their own artistic creative expression that no one had approved.”

If this all seems daunting, really, it’s not.

Alongside a timeline of other zaps and actions that forced the government and mainstream media to confront the AIDS crisis, *Learning from ACT UP* features *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP*, a documentary that reveals the group’s complex culture of meetings, affinity groups, and approaches to civil disobedience, on any given Monday night. Combining archival footage from activists, and interviews from the ACT UP Oral History Project, the film further explores ACT UP from a grassroots perspective and through the planning and execution of major actions including Seize Control of the FDA, Stop the Church, and Day of Desperation. Beating at the heart of *United in Anger* is the simultaneous grief, camp, and sexiness that defined ACT UP’s heterodoxical energy, a tenacious life drive intent on slaying the death drive from which the group originated. In these tumultuous times, *this* is a lesson we must learn from ACT UP.



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Curator Bios:

Juli Carson is Professor of Art, Theory and Criticism in the Department of Art at UC Irvine and Director of the University Art Galleries. From 2018-19 she was the Philippe Jabre Professor of Art History and Curating at the American University of Beirut. Her books include: *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics, Aesthetics, Love* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2007) and *The Limits of Representation: Psychoanalysis and Critical Aesthetics* (Buenos Aires: Letra Viva Press, 2011). Her two most recent books are *The Hermeneutic Impulse: Aesthetics of an Untethered Past* (Berlin: b_books, 2019) and *Mary Kelly's Concentric Pedagogy: Selected Writings* (UK: Bloomsbury Press, 2024).

Sasha Ussef is the Associate Director for the University Art Galleries at the University of California, Irvine. She received a Masters in Urban Planning and an MA in Art and Curatorial Practices in the Public Sphere from the University of Southern California. She has taken on curatorial and programming positions at the Sursock Museum in Beirut and the Vincent Price Art Museum in Los Angeles, among others.

UCI Claire Trevor
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Please follow our Instagram [@uag_ucirvine](#) for updates
For questions: gallery@uci.edu

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Learning from ACT UP: Tactics of Direct Action

Fact Sheet

Exhibition

On View: October 5 – December 14, 2024
Curated by Juli Carson and Sasha Ussef
Exhibition Design by Richard Kahwagi

Events:

Public Opening Reception: October 5, 2–6 p.m.
Parallel Public Program will be announced on our website: uag.arts.uci.edu

Location:

Room Gallery

Description: *Learning from ACT UP: Tactics of Direct Action*, by focusing on the actions initiated by the founding New York chapter from 1987-1993, performatively shows how one might react to a social crisis, reach a broad audience, change the discourse of “business as usual,” and initiate systemic change.

Gallery Hours:

Tues. – Sat. 12–6 p.m. Free admission

Parking:

UC Irvine [Mesa Parking Structure](#), 4000 Mesa Rd., Irvine, CA 92617
(Complimentary parking provided for the press preview with RSVP)

More Info:

<https://uag.arts.uci.edu/exhibit/learning-act-tactics-direct-action>

Note to editors:

Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from
[Google Drive](#)
(Key to images attached)



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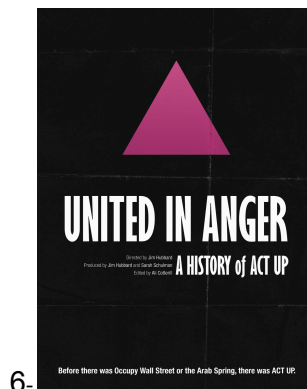
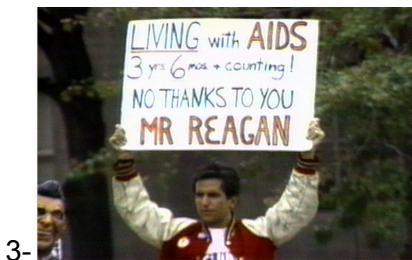
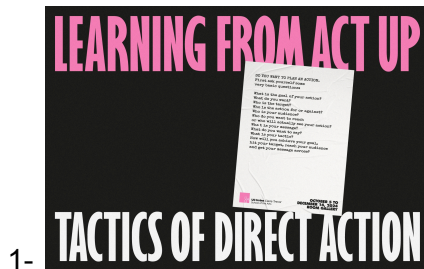
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University Art Gallery, UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts

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2. The Silence = Death Project used by permission by ACT-UP, The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power.



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3. *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (film still), Mark Fotopoulos (1956-1991) holding his iconic sign. Directed by Jim Hubbard, Produced by Sarah Schulman, 93 minutes, 2012.
4. *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (film still), A group of lesbians under the banner “Federal Dyke Administration” were among the many protesting the unfair bureaucracy at the FDA. Directed by Jim Hubbard, Produced by Sarah Schulman, 93 minutes, 2012.
5. *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (film still), ACT UP protesters use faux tombstones to represent the real causes of death for People with AIDS. Directed by Jim Hubbard, Produced by Sarah Schulman, 93 minutes, 2012.
6. *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP*, Poster. Directed by Jim Hubbard, Produced by Sarah Schulman, 93 minutes, 2012.
7. *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (film still), A giant banner reads “Money for AIDS not for War.” Released during a mass occupation at New York City’s Grand Central Station. Directed by Jim Hubbard, Produced by Sarah Schulman, 93 minutes, 2012.

The images are approved only for publication in conjunction with promotion of the exhibition. Reproductions must include the full caption information, and images may not be cropped or altered in any way or superimposed with any printing.



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About the UAG

The University Art Galleries are committed to promoting an intergenerational dialogue between 60s/70s neo-avant-garde art and contemporary visual culture. Accordingly, the curatorial mission is to keep an eye on the modernist past while promoting the most innovative aesthetic and political debates of the postmodern present. From this vantage, the projects commissioned provoke intelligent debate on the subject of art in its most expansive poetic definition. What distinguishes the program is its unwavering commitment to publishing scholarly texts in catalogue/book form in order to disseminate research-based information into the community, providing a venue for the promotion of innovative discourse surrounding mixed media production today. The UAG program provides several exhibition platforms for inter-generational and interdisciplinary dialogue. The Major Works of Art Series commissions original projects by canonical artists working today. The Emerging Artist Series features solo projects by a set of younger artists informed by the legacies showcased in the Major Works series. The Critical Aesthetics Program commissions new work by internationally renowned mid-career artists. Augmenting this intergenerational dialogue, UAG also produces larger thematic group exhibitions alternately showcasing historical and contemporary art and film projects. UAG further promotes an active dialogue between UCI residents and the local and international art communities through colloquia, conferences, visiting artist lectures and theme-based films series, all of which are open to the public. As the galleries continue to mature, they stand committed to being an experimental exhibition space different from the current - but largely traditional - art biennial and film festival platforms.

About UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts

As UCI's creative laboratory, the Claire Trevor School of the Arts explores and presents the arts as the essence of human experience and expression, through art forms ranging from the most traditional to the radically new. The international faculty works across a wide variety of disciplines, partnering with others across the campus. National-ranked programs in art, dance, drama, and music begin with training but end in original invention. Students come to UCI to learn to be citizen-artists, to sharpen their skills and talents, and to become the molders and leaders of world culture. For more information, please visit www.arts.uci.edu.