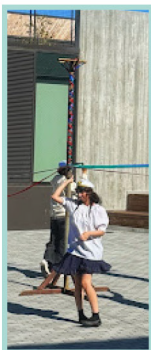
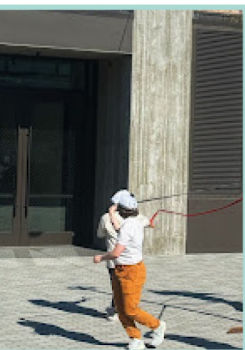




The Power of Insistence:

Free Speech and Academic Freedom in 2025



Photography Courtesy of Alyssa Bardge

By Alyssa Bardge

in·sist

/in'sist/

verb

to demand something forcefully,
not accepting refusal

VOL.11

On Saturday, October 18th, from 10 am - 3 pm, Professor Kim Anno and her class, "Citizens, Artists, Designers, and Journalists," hosted a symposium on free speech, providing an interdisciplinary offering of approaches and information to address the surveillance surrounding the roles of artists, journalists, communication, archives, and truth. The symposium was held in CCA's Timken Hall. This was done in collaboration with professors Mariella Polli, Tracy Tanner, Valencia James, and Anthea Black and their classes. A pop-up exhibition of screenprints from Anthea Black's screenprint course displayed a project addressing issues surrounding banned books and censorship. Prints ranged from individualized depictions of banned literature; works such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to a comprehensive list of banned literature addressing the Kashmir dispute. The symposium's mission statement, found in the program, quotes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "The arc of the moral universe bends toward justice." In the same statement, these questions were then posed: "But which direction is it bending now? What will history say about how we answered that question?" A stance of neutrality cannot stand taller than an insistence on truth. A gray area is too dangerous, too fleeting. And when ambivalence for a system and constitution is present, all around, standing firm in your beliefs is more pressing than ever.

Upon entering the auditorium, an immediate sense of urgency and undeniable seriousness pervaded the carousel of speakers, guests, students, and faculty alike. The morning started with Thomas Peele, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist. In his lecture, "The Media in Peril: A Veteran Reporter Reflects on the Meaning of the First Amendment," his main points included intellectual honesty in political journalism and the importance of validity. Peele states, "News is what a news professional says", emphasizing objective news telling while giving in-depth critique about our dynamic with reporting and our current federal administration's attitudes and practices. Later in his lecture, he goes on to say that "we are more dependent than ever on being 'right.'" Peele's statements speak directly to the relationship between the journalist and the reader, and to a sense of integrity that relies on truth-telling.

In a similar key lecture, "Against Authoritarianism: Docu-poetics and Subversive Modularities as Creative Practice", assistant professor and CCA alum, Dorothy Santos, delivered an empowering and inspiring talk about being responsive as an artist. She posed the question, "How can I practice being an artist during a time like this?" This being our rapidly changing political and cultural landscape, quickly transforming into a fascist, imperialist state. As a writer, author, educator, and media scholar, Santos shared that she often questions why she should be both an educator and an artist during a time of intense critique and political turmoil. A book she recommended for exploring such questions is Beth Pickens's *Making Art During Fascism*. Later, she began discussing the oppressive nature of the English language and the resistance one might mount against surveillance when "good English" isn't spoken or written. Santos highlighted a powerful quote from Cathy Park Hong, which relates to her practice of docu-poetics as an archive:

Making Art During Fascism

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Cover art of Beth Pickens's *Making Art During Fascism*

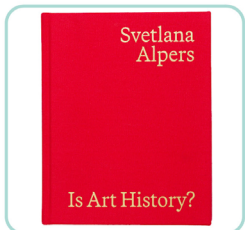
"Bad English is my heritage. I share a literary lineage with writers who make the mastering of English their rallying cry- who queer it, tweak it, hack it, calibrate it, other it by hijacking English and warping it into a fugitive tongue. To other English is to make audible the imperial power sewn into language to slit English open so its dark histories slide out."

Global perspectives were central to the symposium. Student speakers from Professor Mariella Polli's class, "Immigration-Storytellers: An Intersection of Policy, Identity, and the Human Search for Home" were featured presenters. During these presentations, the audience was suspended in awe and admiration as students Liza Nichols, Izzy Dier, and Shaina Belle shared stories from

their native countries that included Guatemala, Argentina, and Trinidad and Tobago. Each shared connections of familial and collective archives through first-person accounts and cultural touchstones such as music and poetry to mend narratives of resilience, migration, and beauty.

We also heard from Xiangi Chen, director of the world's first queer Chinese museum, Out Museum, located in San Francisco's Chinatown. Chen expressed, "It's been easier to get established in the United States." Chen went on to explain that mainland China polices queerness and has direct experience with such censorship when they shut down Chen's efforts to establish the museum there. With that, she emphasized Out's purpose: to ensure that queer Chinese history does not disappear, but instead to encourage cross-cultural and intergenerational knowledge from Chinese-identifying folks across the United States and the mainland. Chen's driving point was "historical authenticity".

In the same vein, Dean of Humanities and Sciences, Dr. Jackie Francis, gave a timely presentation on the Smithsonian Museum network, focusing on the Smithsonian Museum of African American History. She shared that she had previously had ambivalent feelings about attending museums and had to navigate the implicit respectability politics associated with specific exhibitions. She questioned what was not being seen, said, or heard. *Is Art History?* by Svetlana Alpers was reading material offered to generate new perspectives on art's role in communication.



Cover art of Svetlana Alpers' *Is Art History?*

However, Dr. Francis insisted on attendance, allowing the museum to be a site of knowledge and, simultaneously, a site of resistance, citing artists such as Faith Ringgold

and Sam Gilliam. Dr. Francis also cited Amy Sherald's refusal to display her work at the Smithsonian, in contrast to the administration's efforts to warp historical narratives. Artist Joyce Burnstein joined us as she gave her lecture, "Censorship in New Haven: The Orchard Street Shul Cultural Heritage Artist's Project." Burnstein spoke on censorship of religious art, formal boycotts of museums and galleries, and the importance of fostering an artistic community.

To close out the afternoon, Professor Valencia James' class demonstrated an embodied act of resistance by performing a Masquerade and Maypole celebration in Double Ground's courtyard. James explained that this Maypole celebration embodies the spirit of Barbados landship, honoring its traditions by using the body's wisdom to inform movement. Students in sailor attire performed the masquerade to represent the working class and seamen of Barbados. It begins with a procession that illustrates the movement of ships traveling across the Atlantic Ocean through the Middle Passage. With a towering wooden pole in the center of the courtyard, each performer held a different-colored ribbon: red, black, and green representing pan-Africanism and blue for maritime. Each student rhythmically ran under and over one another's ribbons to create a plait, symbolizing weaving for a new future. As the masquerade went on, Professor James invited the audience to speak about what they envision for a near future in which we are liberated, where we are free to talk. She says, "Words are really powerful, you have to speak it." Defending Knowledge was an urgent call to action to speak, even when our words may land on shaky ground, insisting on being heard.

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is a poet and printmaker. She describes her written and visual compositions as a body text that outlines her geography as a queer Black woman. In practice, her work serves as an effort to investigate the breaks in personal and collective lineages.

