

Contemporary Social Media and Creative Practice 2018

Hosted by
the Social Media Narratives Class
Art and Technology Studies
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Facebook, November 1 - 6, 2018

Transcript: Joy Garnett



Joy Garnett

👤 Founding Member · November 2, 2018



Hi all, here's a little introductory text:

Social Media, Art & Censorship

Social media increasingly determines what people may or may not see or read about the world. Artists, who have grown to depend on visual platforms like Instagram (which is owned by Facebook) to share their work, are in a constant battle over the removal of their works and take-downs or suspensions of their accounts. These frequent removals often stem from a vaguely worded no-nudity policy and confusion over what constitutes “artworks” or images of cultural import in their Terms of Service.

That all-too-loosely interpreted wording frequently leads to the flagging and removal of images of historical, artistic or journalistic merit.

In the past, Facebook’s countless removals of images have included artist Frode Steinicke’s posting of Gustave Courbet’s 1866 painting L’Origine du monde (Origin of the World), which depicts a woman’s vagina as the origin of life; a Breast Cancer Awareness Body Painting Project by Michael Colanero that was deemed “pornographic”; drawings of nudes from the page of the New York Academy of Art (later reinstated); and last year, the removal of an iconic Vietnam War-era journalistic photograph.

A recent instance of egregious Facebook removal of an artwork over nudity occurred in December when it banned a user's image (and subsequent posts of the image, including one by The Art Newspaper) of the famous 30,000 year-old nude statuette known as the Venus of Willendorf that resides in the collection of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna. This has spurred outrage and a flurry of articles on the problem of Facebook's arbitrary and ongoing censoring of artworks. A Facebook spokesperson has since apologized for the error; in the meantime, the artist who posted the image is petitioning Facebook to change its algorithms.

While Facebook has admitted the difficulty in creating distinctions between different kinds of images containing nudity, it has done nothing to work with artists, whose problems remain unresolved. Twenty-first century artists, particularly those without global name recognition, depend on social media to distribute, advertise and even sell their work. They are understandably frustrated, but have little recourse and no clear alternatives to using existing social media platforms.

Of course, non-artists have also suffered the removal of images containing nudity and even the suspension of their accounts. In 2011, French primary schoolteacher Frédéric Durand-Baïssas sued Facebook for closing his account after he posted a photograph of L'Origine du monde, charging them with censorship and seeking €20,000 in damages due to his loss of contacts and content, the re-activation of his account and an explanation of why it was closed. Durand-Baïssas's lawyer posed a key question: "Where does art begin and where does pornography end? That is an interesting debate to have—but Facebook refuses to have it."

An online version of this text with rich internal links can be found on NCAC, as part of an interview and podcast with the photographer Savannah Spirit: <https://ncac.org/news/blog/savannah-spirit-i-am-a-camera>



You, Ben Grosser and 3 others

7 Comments Seen by 22

Like

Comment

Share



Judy Malloy Welcome [Joy Garnett](#); great to see you here!
Your student guide is Matt Ryerse

Both Joy's own work and her work as Arts Advocacy Program Associate at the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) are important in this forum. The Artists Rights website -- <http://www.artistrights.info/how-to-use> -- created by NCAC and the Center for Democracy and Technology -- is a core resource for artists.

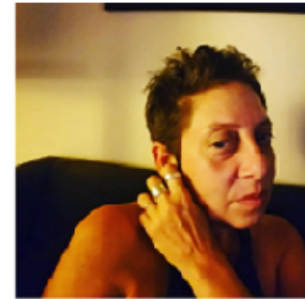
And here is Joy's bio:

...

Joy Garnett

- Art Censorship on Social Media Platforms

Joy Garnett is a visual artist and writer and works as Arts Advocacy Program Associate at the National Coalition Against Censorship in New York. She has a BA in Humanities and Middle East Studies from McGill University, studied painting at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and earned her MFA in Painting from The City College of New York. She served as the Arts Editor for *Cultural Politics* (2005-2016), a peer-reviewed cultural theory journal published by Duke University Press, and on the Committee for Intellectual Property at the College Art Association. She has written extensively about media and art, visual archives, copyright, and free expression for publications that include *Harper's*, *M/E/A/N*, *I/N/G*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Artnet* and *Art21 Magazine*. Her paintings have been shown at the Milwaukee Art Museum, MoMA-PS1, Whitney Museum of American Art, the FLAG Art Foundation, Boston University Art Gallery, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Museum of Contemporary Craft Portland, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK and Witte Zaal in Ghent, Belgium. She is currently writing an Arab American family memoir.



Judy Malloy In her statement on "Social Media, Art & Censorship," [Joy Garnett](#) observes that

"While Facebook has admitted the difficulty in creating distinctions between different kinds of images containing nudity, it has done nothing to work with artists, whose problems remain unresolved. Twenty-first century artists, particularly those without global name recognition, depend on social media to distribute, advertise and even sell their work. They are understandably frustrated, but have little recourse and no clear alternatives to using existing social media platforms."

In the SAIC ARTTECH Social Media Narratives class both censorship and relatedly copyright have been core issues in the practicum of creating online work. Thanks, Joy for bringing these issues to the forefront.

Like · Reply · 10w





Kate Pritchard Hi Joy! Welcome to our seminar. I am also interested in censorship on social media platforms, though I am more familiar with censorship on Instagram. I think it's extremely relevant during our current political climate to consider whose voices are allowed to be heard on these platforms and whose are not. For example, a stitch artist I follow on Instagram recently had her photo taken down for showing a piece that read, "White men are terrorists." Similarly, a year or so back, many people had posts taken down on Facebook that read "men are trash." I also received a community standard warning for posting "men are 🗑️".

Like · Reply · 10w



1



Matt Ryerse Joy, thank you for your words and participation in this panel! I appreciate the way you articulate this issue of censorship, specifically as it permeates the lives of artists. I'm curious if you have any thoughts on decentralizing Facebook as one of the main players in dissemination/creation of content? Platforms like Twitter and Tumblr have more lenient guidelines, particularly around nudity, but somehow Instagram and Facebook are still more widely used by creatives, progressives, etc. Do you see a future where artists and content creators construct digital counter-culture on alternative or new social media platforms, or do you think it's more important to find ways to reform existing platforms' policy? Thanks so much!

Like · Reply · 10w



2



Joy Garnett 🐦 The Q: "Do you see a future where artists and content creators construct digital counter-culture on alternative or new social media platforms, or do you think it's more important to find ways to reform existing platforms' policy?"

Having lived through numerous attempts to create alternative platforms that have all failed (you no doubt have as well!), and considering what happens to said alternative platforms once they succeed and are sold, it makes more sense to force the hands, so to speak, of existing flawed platforms. Just how to do that is always tricky, but it's not impossible.

An artist emailed me recently asking how he can protect himself from being censored for his political content on social media as well as commerce service sites like Paypal and Shopify, and I found myself saying that while the web is a robust medium for communication and functions as an exhaustive archive, it is also in flux and ultimately subject to forces beyond its control. Hence, always put contingency plans in place in the analog realm. As most new media (etc) artists know by now, anything we place online can disappear or be appropriated and retooled at any time. That goes for everything from "free" services such as social media platforms, which mine your data in exchange for your "content", to cloud services and blogging platforms that are paid for. They can be bought. Terms of service change. Use these services while knowing the risks, and always keep backups. Sounds lame? This is where we are right now. No lasting changes will be implemented overnight.

Like · Reply · 10w



Judy Malloy Thanks, Joy!

I'm happy to see the approach of working with existing platforms well stated! At the same time, I advocate a two pronged approach.

Attempting to create a more ethical and in Jim Brown's words "hospitable" environment for arts and arts organizations -- and for everyone -- on existing platforms is worth trying.

But also, having worked 11 years for Arts Wire, I know that social media for the arts can be done.

Arts Wire was in existence from circa 1992 - 2002 (I stayed on until 2004 to edit Arts Wire/NYFA Current) This year while I was writing *Arriving Simultaneously*, among the books I read were Julia Angwin, *Stealing MySpace: The Battle to Control the Most Popular Website in America*; Nick Bilton, *Hatching Twitter: A True Story of Money, Power, Friendship, and Betrayal*; and David Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World*.

My first reaction was shock -- as I compared Arts Wire's low-budget survival in a good-hearted arts funding environment -- with the huge amounts of VC money thrown at the missionless small groups of young men who founded MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter.

My second reaction, was: If they can do it why can't we?

Like · Reply · 10w



Joy Garnett 🙄 But isn't part of why artists gather on social platforms that aren't artist-centric precisely that they are broader and more inclusive, (aka: not ghettoizing) even with all the bad stuff that comes with that? How do we reconcile the need to be treated differently or specifically with the need to get past the art ghetto and be part of the wider mess?

Like · Reply · 10w



Judy Malloy Artists need platforms-- that of course foster diversity -- on which to incubate work and talk art-talk with other artists. On Arts Wire, we hosted The Native American Network; Michael Tidmus' AIDSWire; PROJECTARTNET, a San Diego-based community arts networking project that brought children in immigrant neighborhoods online to create a community history; an online component of the National Black Writers Conference; and much more.

But I would not like to see the arts lose the wider audiences and opportunities to be a part of the whole that the commercial social media platforms offer.!

Like · Reply · 10w



Joy Garnett 🙄 I agree, it's a conundrum!

