



## Center for Artistic Activism

artisticactivism.org | 110 Bleeker St #20D, New York, New York 10012

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### Hello.

The Center for Artistic Activism is pleased to announce the beginning of the application cycle for our third year of School for Creative Activism Workshops, to be held in the Spring and Summer of 2013.

The School for Creative Activism is a participatory workshop infusing community organizing and civic engagement with culture and creativity. Thanks to the generous support of the Open Societies Foundation's Democracy and Power Fund, in 2013 we are pleased to offer this workshop *entirely free of cost* for three select groups of US-based activists – and we would like to invite you to apply.

We believe there is an art to every practice, and we take the art of political activism seriously. The first rule of guerrilla warfare is to know the terrain and use it to your advantage. Today's political landscape includes the ephemeral ground of signs and symbols, stories and spectacle. In order to be effective, political activism **must** harness the power of creativity and culture – but unfortunately, most activists are discouraged from applying creativity to the "serious business" of politics. We believe that this is a critical mistake, and the School for Creative Activism was designed to change it, one group of organizers at a time.

Over the course of a weekend, selected participants will meet to share ideas, discuss work, learn from one another, and discover together more creative and effective activist practices. At the conclusion of the weekend, participants will share a toolkit of creative tactics and strategies for use in a collective, creative campaign. But this is about more than just learning. SCA tools will be put to immediate use in a concentrated strategy session, and with structured support from SCA leadership, participants will begin implementing a creative campaign within one month of the workshop.

This year, we're looking for groups of diverse, experienced grassroots organizers who work on a single, collaborative activist campaign. Though participants need not necessarily work for the same organization (in fact, we encourage inter-organizational coalitions), they should be united by a well-defined political goal. After reading our application guidelines to determine if you are a good fit, we hope you'll submit an application. If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Skeen at [manager@artisticactivism.org](mailto:manager@artisticactivism.org).

We look forward to hearing from you.

Stephen Duncombe & Steve Lambert  
Co-Founders & Directors

## *ABOUT THE SCHOOL FOR CREATIVE ACTIVISM*

Founded and directed by Stephen Duncombe, a professor at New York University and long-time activist, and Steve Lambert, a professor at SUNY Purchase and recognized political artist, the School for Creative Activism is a participatory workshop infusing community organizing and civic engagement with culture and creativity. Working directly with community organizers and local artists, the SCA leverages the strengths of grassroots activism and the attention grabbing and complex messaging of the world of art through a curriculum designed to:

- Identify cultural tactics and creative strategies employed effectively by organizers in the past.
- Recognize and draw upon the cultural resources and creative talents residing within individuals, organizations, and communities in the present.
- Collectively run scenarios and plan campaigns that utilize culture and creativity.
- Build a network of organizers and artists using a model of creative organizing more effective in our media-saturated, spectacle-savvy world.

The workshop is context-sensitive and driven by the cultural expertise of the participants - that is, we work with activists on a diverse range of political issues and from regions throughout the U.S. We teach tactics and techniques, but we expect you to be the experts on the politics of your campaign and the cultural terrain in which you work.

Participants are expected to meet regularly immediately following the weekend workshop in order to put our curriculum to work. With structured support from SCA staff, groups will implement their new skills and hit the streets with a modest creative action within one month. We don't expect or even want these actions to be perfect. We believe that the most effective activist work is honed through the creative process – one of trial and error, critique and revision. These actions should serve as a foundation for a more sustained – and increasingly effective – activist campaign.

If this seems like a big commitment, that's because it is. All participants will be offered a small honorarium to support your participation and cover the costs of childcare, travel expenses, or whatever else you need in order to make this work happen.

## *WHEN & WHERE*

The SCA is a traveling workshop – we'll come to you. The retreat-style trainings take place over a weekend, from Friday evening through Sunday late afternoon. But this is no vacation; we'll collectively share new approaches and develop ideas all weekend long. Past workshop attendees have described it as simultaneously exhausting and invigorating. (You can read testimonials on the [SCA website](#).) Workshops may be scheduled between April and August 2013, subject to our availability and yours.

## *PARTICIPANTS*

We look for groups of applicants that reflect the diversity of the communities in which they work, as this enriches the creative process and ensures that political campaigns are approached from a variety of cultural positions. Groups should include 10-12 individuals with at least two years of solid political organizing experience, all of whom should be working on a shared activist campaign. Because we are committed to having as much impact as possible, we are also open to holding a workshop exclusively for directors of activist and advocacy organizations.

**\*Above all, participants should be open to exploring new ideas and approaches to activism.**

## APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Look over the [CAA website](#) and see if we're a good match.
2. Identify one or two co-leaders for your group. Co-leaders should have a strong working relationship with one another, and maintain regular, if not daily communication. Though CAA staff provides extensive support, the workshops require a significant amount of coordination, and leaders are expected to take part in the planning process, ensure group commitment, and drive collaboration after the weekend. If you work full-time, you'll want to share this responsibility. Trust us.
3. Identify experienced individuals affiliated with your activist campaign and confirm their commitment to participation in the workshop. The group *must* be diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity, and ideally represent different communities and organizations. Groups should include 10-12 participants. (We know that you're busy and schedules change – if accepted, we understand that some of these individuals may change. We just ask you to confirm participants two months prior to workshop)
4. CAA staff will reserve and cover the cost of food and lodging, but please identify three potential retreat centers within a two hour drive of your community. Requirements include:
  - Beds for 15 people
  - Generally available from Friday around noon through Sunday evening. (We'll choose specific dates after groups are selected)
  - Offer onsite catering or work closely with outside caterers (we'll need dinner on Friday, all meals on Saturday, and breakfast and lunch on Sunday). *\*Though we know that the cost of retreat centers varies greatly depending on the city you live in, in general, catering and accommodation should cost no more than \$4000.*
  - Have air conditioning/heat
  - Include a large meeting space
5. Write a brief, informal letter – no more than 3 pages – telling us about:
  - The issue or campaign you are working on and want help with.
  - How you think creative training might help in your campaign.
  - What ideas, topics, experiences and skills you would like to bring to the group.
6. Please e-mail your application to: [manager@artisticactivism.org](mailto:manager@artisticactivism.org). Application should include three parts:
  - a) Your letter
  - b) Names and brief (one paragraph is fine) biographies of confirmed participants. Please also specify co-leaders and their experience working together.
  - c) List of retreat centers with estimated costs, and any restrictions (please ask! Some retreat centers prohibit the number of cars that can be parked, or food that can be brought in. We'd like to know as much of this upfront)

Some questions to consider in your application:

- *How do you express your creativity through your activism? In your free time?*
- *How does your own cultural background impact your work and ideas?*
- *How does the culture of your region impact your work and ideas?*
- *What would you like to take away from your experience with the SCA?*
- *What have you discovered recently you would like to apply to your work?*
- *What inspired you in the past week?*

**Deadline:** March 1, 2013

## *School for Creative Activism Testimonials*

I've gone through a million campaign planning/organizing trainings. This was the first training in which the exercises actually helped me to brainstorm creative tactics to win, and really think outside the box in a realistic way to create the pragmatic utopia.

- SCA 2012 Austin participant

As an organizer, I am always trying to create new avenues to engage and inspire, but with no real creative bone in my body. The Steves and Lisa were able to draw me out to a new place.

- SCA 2012 Boston participant

It was incredible to spend the weekend with the SCA team. I felt inspired, hopeful, refreshed and empowered to think creatively about social justice action. Particularly helpful was the permission to have unconventional outcomes/goals and make room for failure.

- SCA 2012 Austin participant

In the day-to-day grind of our activism, we never get to think about this stuff. The workshop lit a fire in my thinking about social change. I can't wait to take this back to my organization.

- SCA 2012 Boston participant

Thank you for the reminder and the permission to have a big vision, be absurd, dream crazy and be creative. Watch us now!

- SCA 2011 North Carolina Participant

Thank you. I am encouraged now to start each action in the spirit of liberation and bring my full creative self forward.

- SCA 2011 North Carolina Participant

SCA was exactly what I needed to get my creative juices flowing again. Combined with healing laughter and critical thinking, the creative space was food for the soul. I will be better in my practice because of this weekend.

- SCA 2011 North Carolina Participant

While I always believed that the creative was the way to go, I now have an historical and social/theoretical framework through which to articulate it, to share it, to give it legitimacy, and to give myself confidence.

This was the best weekend ever!!!

- SCA 2011 New York Participant

## *ABOUT DUNCOMBE & LAMBERT*

**Stephen Duncombe** received his PhD in Sociology from the City University of New York and is currently a professor at New York University where he teaches the history and politics of media and culture. He is the author and editor of five books, including *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* and the *Cultural Resistance Reader*. A lifelong political activist, he co-founded the community activist group, the Lower East Side Collective, and worked as a key organizer for the New York City chapter of the international direct-action group Reclaim the Streets. Stephen is the co-founder and co-director of the Center for Artistic Activism. [stephenduncombe.com](http://stephenduncombe.com)

For **Steve Lambert**, art is a bridge that connects uncommon, idealistic, or even radical ideas with everyday life. In 2008 Lambert worked with hundreds of people on "The New York Times Special Edition," a utopian version of the paper announcing the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other good news. In 2011 he built a 20 x 9 foot sign that reads CAPITALISM WORKS FOR ME!, and allows passers by to vote TRUE or FALSE, and is touring it across the United States. His work has been shown everywhere from marches to museums both nationally and internationally, has appeared in over fourteen books, four documentary films, and is in the collections of numerous museums and cultural institutions. He was a Senior Fellow at New York's Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology from 2006-2010, developed and leads workshops for Creative Capital Foundation, and is currently a professor of new media at SUNY Purchase. He dropped out of high school in 1993 and picked up an MFA in Art in 2006. Steve is the co-founder and co-director of the Center for Artistic Activism. [visitsteve.com](http://visitsteve.com)