

Tips for Anti-Racist Allyship in the Art World and Academy

From [MATCHING MINORITIES//DOUBTFUL DOUBLES: A Conversation on Institutionalized Racism, Tokenism, Microaggressions, and Inclusion vs. Optics in the Art World](#)

Presentation by Astria Suparak, Jen Delos Reyes, Lisa Lee
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The following is an edited excerpt of the participatory discussion portion of this session, which took place in Zoom's chat function. Attendees were invited to share tips for allyship. The three presenters verbally responded and discussed additional tips contemporaneously -- please watch the [video recording](#) for that commentary (vimeo.com/422268158).

WHAT ARE TIPS THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SEE ALLIES USE TO ADDRESS RACISM IN THE ART WORLD AND ACADEMY?

Jade H : Speak up!

Lissa C : I would like white colleagues to demand BIPOC in leadership roles.

roshani : Uplift work being done by PoC on their platforms.

PJ G : We should have systems in place to support each other through the hiring process, how to find jobs, how to interview, and how to negotiate.

Dorothy (she/they): Re: the hiring process and related to PJ's comment, invite community members into the hiring process (there's a way to do this!). My org does this!

Jo : Transparency and being really upfront about what the demographics are within their institution.

Kristina M : Redistribution of power, esp by white ppl should also involve compromising their \$\$\$.

Jacquelyn G : Transparency about salaries and benefits.

roshani : Step back!

nick w : boards should join in/be prioritized in dei trainings.

Lissa C : I would like white colleagues to speak up more instead of waiting for POC to say they're hurt.

Sai (she/her) : Making it clear to leadership that representation matters to you as project leaders/managers, by pointing who the members are of decision-making groups.

Antonio S : Lets not forget there are "lean-in" IBPOC folk!! That work with the establishment for salary and career.

Kristina M : Similarly, promote evaluation w/i orgs!!

Lissa C : YES!!! SUPPORT SYSTEMS ARE SO NECESSARY!

Jojo G : Tell administration that inclusivity efforts have to include money. We as POC cannot pay our bills with "exposure and experience".

PJ G : Making sure to bring in and cite POC and highlight their voice, CITE CITE CITE.

Ari F : We white people can take a seat from major roles and be an amplifier to voices of POC.

chanell : I'd like to see allies address it directly rather than in private. Change requires "calling out" racism as it happens. No more hidden allies.

Also calling for more POC leadership that is properly representational of the full spectrum of POC: Black, Asian, Latinx etc.

Athena : Use their privilege to make space or a platform for BIPOCs to be seen/ heard, etc.

user : What about having a required training like they do with sexual harassment but addressing education in diversity and appropriate behavior.

Reyes R : Allies: be wrong sometimes. Being an ally/accomplice means you're putting something at risk. So pick a controversial artist, hire poc with less experience, etc.

nishat: Stop giving grants and fellowships to white people to make and curate work about POC bodies.

S: Like the policy of only hiring/collecting women or PoC - a policy of only firing white staff?

Kristina M : Thoughtful evaluation can more accurately point to lack of equity and access.

Academic Programs: White allies should all take implicit bias training.

Mari R : Stop putting the conversation about excellence vs. conversation about diversity.

PJ G : and yes, once inside definitely work on multiple avenues to support those in the institution/management, mentor up and down.

PJ G : Mentor Up and Down and Vertically.

Lissa C : @Lisa Lee absolutely. INTERSECTIONAL EDUCATION REQUIRED.

a.d. : As a white trans guy, I try to use individual and structural tactics. e.g., in meetings, I announce that white men can't leave until everything is cleaned up.

re: broader structural tactics - ask about racial equity and disability up front and continually, collaborate with BIPOC to organize for better conditions, etc.

Engagement EAP : When a WOC is asked or expected to do a "domestic" task at a meeting or event, allies can jump up and volunteer to do it saying "I'll do it. (Name) should be in this meeting" or something similar.

Kate C : White people become the tired ones!

roshani : White folks should also talk about doing this work with other white people.

Ashley S : Ending unpaid internship models. These barriers to entry prevent arts workers of color from ever even getting in the door.

Dorothy (she/they): ^^^100% agree with Ashley

Su(she/her) : Encourage decentralizing power on Boards and within leadership—rotate who chairs the meeting to get different leadership perspectives and mentor others involved in the organization.

DeLena F : Hire and promote from within, there are a lot of qualified POC in lower level positions who could move up if given the opportunity.

Jacquelyn G : Echo DeLena, Create avenues for growth into positions of power for POC.

Academic Programs: Creating more working groups that are cross-hierarchical and cross-departmental so that POCs have a voice at the table.

Lissa C : Promote the dismantling of hierarchical leadership! It is a strategic arm of white supremacy!

PJ: Call out all white staff, panels, curators, and thought leadership.

Latham Z : White people can/should highlight the expertise and good work and leadership happening by BIPOC folks on their teams, ask BIPOC their opinions in group conversations around broader issues (not tokenizing).

PJ G : there is no reason there should be all white anything at this point.

Juana W : @PJ I completely agree. There are so many bipoc doing great work and being ignored.

Elizabeth S - She: building in feedback/reflection/down time after projects in the process to have dedicated time to have conversations that address how inclusivity efforts were or were not successful.

Ashley : Come to terms with why giving up power/privilege is a challenge.

Xandra E : Participate in DEI training for all staff and board.

Marsya M (she/her) : Yes to all this!! This is a really great session. Sharing stories like this is how we map out the contours of systemic oppression. However, it does feel a bit weird sharing sensitive stories without knowing the audience, so thank you everyone for the generosity. I'm also now wondering, what considerations/strategies do you all implement to establish safer spaces for this kind of conversations? Asking because I'm forming a supportive network of BIPOC arts workers to share similar stories over a dinner series, hopefully to generate collective action (hey, maybe that human rights letter! Or writing to grant councils to call out institutions that are mis-rewarded).

Lissa C : Getting artists involved is super important. In order to truly change the institution, we have to be willing to destroy it and rebuild together.

Ashley S : Also, re: hiring, accepting applicable life experience alongside institutional experience when evaluating qualifications.

Antonio S: @Latham, usually the opposite happens... white leadership takes all the credit for the work we do. sadly. I'm speaking from a NYC institution's perspective, which is some of the most historical calculated racist institutions.

Cara D : How to address other white people feeling like allies but acting as saviors or actually carrying out tokenism? Thank you so much for this well-structured and organized and smart panel!!

Lissa C : If artists are continuing to provide work for institutional spaces that are predominately white, what is the incentive for them to change???

Antonio S : @Lissa I have to say, this is a big issue in NYC with the younger POC artists...

Lissa C : @Antonio absolutely. We have to build up our own communities so we don't rely on white institutions to promote each other and sustain our careers. Young artists are still looking for white acceptance and legitimacy but they should be proving they DESERVE us!

Jo : @Lissa refusal can be a really important mechanism for POC artists but threatens to leave them out of the larger institutions and 'canon'.

PJ G : When hiring: POC and White managers, challenge and redefine job descriptions and qualifications!!!

PJ G : Managers often lack imagination when hiring which is not only sad but really damaging.

Carmen H : White allies should follow up, follow up, follow up. Leadership likes to say "oh we heard X and thought about it" (whether hiring, exhibition content, programs, etc etc). If you take it on yourself to be "annoying" they are less able to move on and congratulate themselves for nothing, and have to face their racism/biases more directly. This is not fun or easy. Great session, thanks!

Sammy H : Working alongside social workers.

Practicing cultural humility rather than cultural competency.

Mira (she/her): Allies offering whatever resources they do have to other people, even if they are not in positions of "power" as usually conceived. some opportunities / forms of power come automatically to people w privilege and may not be specifically outlined.

Kim Y : Esp. w/in academia, go undercover/outside expertise and join committees that hold power and resources (budget, planning, research).

Beth R (she/hers) : We can all acknowledge that we are damaged by racism -- and be kind regarding our mistakes to ourselves and each other. This doesn't mean not holding each other accountable but trying to be kind and know we don't choose to be formed by this damaging system.

Kate C : White people: if you do have access to \$ or resources in projects, don't try to become "best friends" with BIPOC you are reaching out to to you if you aren't already collaborators. Just redistributing \$/resources to someone you respect in the most simple way is the most honest.

Margaret P : Transparency, stepping back AND stepping forward when the times are right.

Lissa C : One more thing for allies: It would be rad if when you realize you have harmed a POC in these spaces, or ever, that you name it and genuinely apologize for it. Whatever it is.

PJ G : No more funding on studies, fund positions