

# Where are we now, where to next? Reimagining cultural institutions



The big circle meeting during KUNCI's 20th birthday, Yogyakarta, August 29, 2019.  
Image: Nuraini Juliastuti

The symposium presents the output of the IMAGINART research project on Imagining Institutions Otherwise: Art, Politics, and State Transformation (2020-2026), while expanding its scope through a focus on Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and the current conjuncture in order to tackle core political urgencies affecting the role cultural institutions play in society.

IMAGINART has investigated a variety of creative counter-institutions in Palestine, Italy, Hungary, Indonesia, Germany, South Africa and the Kurdish diaspora. These are artist-run, mostly grassroots spaces and projects that set up socio-institutional experiments based on principles of collaboration, horizontality and resource sharing. These projects mobilise artistic practices to reconfigure organisational forms and reimagine self-organised, collective life according to ideas of social justice and freedom.

IMAGINART's main proposition is that these socio-artistic experiments produce an institutional otherwise in the here and now that may prefigure the future of cultural and other institutions. Thus, the symposium asks: What does it mean to 'imagine institutions otherwise' in this moment? What are meaningful responses to the ongoing fascist attack on cultural institutions? How do counter-institutions propose to change our organised ways of being and working together? Can their tentative proposals, their lessons in the minor key, show how cultural institutions could emerge from the current polycrisis? In the spirit of IMAGINART's 'practitheorizing' we invite fellow researchers, theorists, practitioners, artists, curators, cultural workers and activists to weave together theory and practice, the here/now and spatio-temporal elsewheres, in a collaborative exercise to engage with the current conjuncture from the point of view of a necessary institutional transformation.

## Program

10:00 – 10:15 Walk-in

10:00 – 10:30 **Welcome and introduction**

10:30 – 12:00 **Cultural institutions in times of genocide**

Panelists: Yazan Khalili (IMAGINART), Mohamed Abusal (Eltiqa collective), Marco Baravalle (ANGA/IRI/Sale Docks), Josien Pieterse (Framer Framed), Sruti Bala (UvA)  
Chair: Mikki Stelder (UvA)

12:00 – 13:00 **How Do Counterinstitutions Work I: Art commoning**

Panelists: Nuraini Juliastuti (IMAGINART), Aria Spinelli (IMAGINART), Jeanne van Heeswijk (Basecamp), Selçuk Balamir (UvA)  
Chair: Andrea Elera (IMAGINART)

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 **How Do Counterinstitutions Work II: An/archiving**

Panelists: Carine Zaayman (RCMC/IMAGINART), Jamila Ghaddar (UvA), Jessica de Abreu (The Black Archives), Lani Hanna (UvA)  
Chair: Emily Pethick

15:00 – 16:00 **How Do Counterinstitutions Work III: Cross-scale (trans)instituting**

Panelists: Eszter Szakács (IMAGINART), Reza Afisina (ruangrupa), Aline Hernández (Casco), Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes (UvA)  
Chair: Jeroen de Kloet (UvA)

16:00 – 16:15 Coffee Break

16:15 – 17:15 **Practitheorizing: Utopia, the otherwise and the radical imagination**

Panelists: Chiara De Cesari (IMAGINART), Amal Alhaag (Metro54), Barnita Bagchi (UvA)  
Chair: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes (UvA)

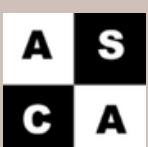
17:15 – 18:30 **The neofascist conjuncture: What is to be done?**

Panelists: María do Mar Castro Varela (ASH Berlin), Hilda Moucharrafiéh (Platform BK, (A)WAKE), Lara Khaldi (de Appel), Omar Salamanca (Free University Brussels)  
Chair: Nawal Mustafa (UvA)

18:30 Drinks & Dinner



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Information on the IMAGINART research project:

IMAGINART – Imagining Institutions Otherwise: Art, Politics, and State Transformation is a research project based at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) and Cultural Studies at the University of Amsterdam, funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO). Current and previous IMAGINART members include Chiara De Cesari, Andrea Elera Coello, Erick Fowler, Nuraini Juliastuti, Yazan Khalili, Abdulkerim Pusat, Eszter Szakács, Aria Spinelli, Jasmijn Stam, and Carine Zaayman.

IMAGINART explores how artists and cultural workers are collectively experimenting with and reimagining public institutions. Following the so-called social turn in contemporary art, a number of political and cultural theorists have argued that art's function is to 'imagine things otherwise' and incite social change. Still, despite this theoretical interest in art's capacity to reconfigure society and politics, there is a dearth of empirical studies showing how this happens in the everyday practices of artist collectives, artist-run spaces and political movements. Accordingly, this multi-researcher project undertakes a series of ethnographic studies of artist-run socio-institutional experiments in relation to transforming state infrastructures, exploring the concrete potential of artistic practices to reimagine and transform institutions, modes of being and working together. Against the backdrop of state failure, transformation or withdrawal under (post)colonial, postsocialist, neoliberal, postliberal and late, post- or neo-fascist conditions, art and cultural workers in different contexts have created counter-institutions that some call micro-utopias or even counterstates: alternative spaces of collaboration and cohabitation in which to prefigure new forms of self-organized collective life. IMAGINART researchers explore creative institutional experiments in Palestine, Hungary, Italy, the Kurdish diaspora, Indonesia, and South Africa. In these contexts, artistic practice has figured prominently in recent protest movements against oppression, colonialism, corruption, neoliberal restructuring, inequality, and racism. What does it mean for political and social projects to work with/as art and what agency does this enable and/or disable? Can we reimagine the state and our failing institutions through artistic practice? Ultimately, IMAGINART explores social practice or socially engaged art as generative platform for the radical political imagination.

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