

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Launched in April 2017, *Public Knowledge* is a two-year project that aims to promote public dialogue on the cultural impact of urban change. Through artist projects, research collaborations, public programs, and publishing, it builds new connections between ideas, individuals, and communities. *Public Knowledge* is based in San Francisco and takes place at multiple locations in the city. It is organized in collaboration with the San Francisco Public Library and takes place primarily at library branches in San Francisco's neighborhoods. All activities will be free to access.

The project grew in a response to the profound changes taking place in the San Francisco Bay Area due to the rapid growth of the technology industry. While many have benefited from the resulting boom, it has also led to increasing inequality. Rising costs and unevenly distributed gains create ever greater difficulties for those excluded: a fraying sense of community as everyday life becomes more precarious; the disappearance of an inclusive and diverse cultural ecology as nonprofit organizations and cultural spaces are priced out of neighborhoods; and the loss of cultural memory for those without the means to represent themselves.

San Francisco may be an extreme instance of this process of hyper-gentrification, but it is not unique. Many other cities in the United States and around the world have shared similar experiences. The changes are so fast and so deep that it can be hard to interpret and respond to their impact on public life.

At the same time, the technology industry, with both a deep local impact and a global reach, has disrupted what knowledge is, how it is produced, and how it is circulated. As information and resources are increasingly privatized and public trust is eroded, how can the forms and institutions of public knowledge be maintained?

Public Knowledge brings together artists, scholars, librarians, community organizers, and San Francisco residents to consider these questions. By sharing their varied expertise and creating new knowledge through the project's activities, participants can learn from each other and, collectively, begin to develop new approaches to strengthening the fabric of civic life.

As part of the exploration into impact of urban change on public culture, the project will explore the following related themes:

- The effect of digital technologies on the circulation of knowledge
- The evolving civic role of public libraries and museums in American cities
- The complex cultural history of technological innovation
- The relevance of public engagement as a form of art

Public Knowledge will involve collaboration between humanities scholars and artists, specifically artists whose medium is not painting or sculpture, but public engagement. This mode of art making has existed since the 1960s (in the work of Joseph Beuys or Allan Kaprow, for example) but has become much more prevalent since 2000. It is nevertheless not widely recognized as a form of contemporary art, partially because it can take many different guises and is harder to exhibit in traditional galleries. Artists working in these modes rely on humanities research. They need an expanded knowledge base and an understanding of social relationships that very often become part of the work itself. *Public Knowledge* aims to broaden awareness of public engagement as a form of art with emphasis on the role of artists as researchers into the contemporary dynamics of public life and as the creators of visions of new social possibilities.

Staff

Public Knowledge is co-curated by Deena Chalabi, Barbara and Stephan Vermut Associate Curator of Public Dialogue, and Dominic Willson, Leanne and George Roberts Curator of Education and Public Practice. Stella Lochman, Program Associate, Public Dialogue, is head of production.

Michelle Jeffers, Chief, Communications, Programs & Partnerships, and Cathy Delano, Chief of Branches lead the partnership at the San Francisco Public Library.

Participating Artists

- [Burak Arikan](#) is an artist based in New York and Istanbul. His practice involves working with communities to create digital maps of complex networks of social relationships. Arikan is the founder of the Graph Commons collaborative network mapping tool. Arikan will enable San Francisco residents to build interactive digital visualizations that explore power dynamics in their communities.
- [Bik Van der Pol](#) is an artistic team comprising Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van der Pol. They live and work in Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Through their work they aim to understand how art can produce a public sphere. Their method entails creating opportunities for communicative activities that explore the histories of publics and places. For *Public Knowledge*, Bik Van der Pol will develop a project on the role of libraries as places to gather the expertise of community members and reimagine their role as citizens, through guided walking tours and regular gatherings.
- [Josh Kun](#) is a music scholar, writer, professor and curator whose work focuses on popular music and culture. Kun collaborated with the Los Angeles Public Library and the Library Foundation of LA on two public humanities projects that used library collections to explore, analyze and reanimate Los Angeles history and culture rendered in music, cultural ephemera and visual art. In San Francisco, Kun will create an interactive installation using the SFPL's popular music archives and community stories.
- [Stephanie Syjuco](#) creates large-scale sculptures and installations composed of collected cultural objects and archival materials. Often these often inviting viewers to participate directly as producers or distributors. Syjuco is concerned with equality in access to knowledge. Syjuco will create an interactive artwork and set of resources with community members that circulates unrecorded knowledge necessary for survival in today's San Francisco.
- [Minerva Cuevas](#) is a conceptual and socially-engaged artist who creates sculptural installations and paintings in response to politically-charged events. Cuevas will engage library users in dialogue about the city's changing ecology through a project that explores the theme of fire," culminating in events, a series of bookmarks developed with community and participatory displays at branches.

Participating Scholars

- [Julia Bryan-Wilson](#) is an associate professor of art history at the University of California, Berkeley with a focus on modern and contemporary art, and the history and theory of art as public engagement.
- [Jon Christensen](#) is an adjunct assistant professor in the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, the Department of History, and the Center for Digital Humanities at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).
- [Teddy Cruz](#) is a professor of public culture and urbanism in the Visual Arts Department at the University of California, San Diego, the co-founder of the Center for Urban Ecologies and the co-founder of the Blum Cross-Border Initiative with political theorist Fonna Forman.
- [Fonna Forman](#) is a political theorist and founding co-director of the University of California, San Diego Center on Global Justice and the Blum Cross-Border Initiative.
- [Jennifer A. González](#) is a professor of the History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz.
- [Shannon Jackson](#) is the Cyrus and Michelle Hadidi Chair in the Humanities at the University of California and the Associate Vice Chancellor for the Arts and Design.
- [Fred Turner](#) is the Harry and Norman Chandler Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at Stanford University.