

HYPERALLERGIC

NEWS

Protesters Demand MoMA Drop Trump Advisor from Its Board

Dozens of protesters are demanding MoMA remove the CEO of BlackRock from their board because of his ties to the Trump administration.

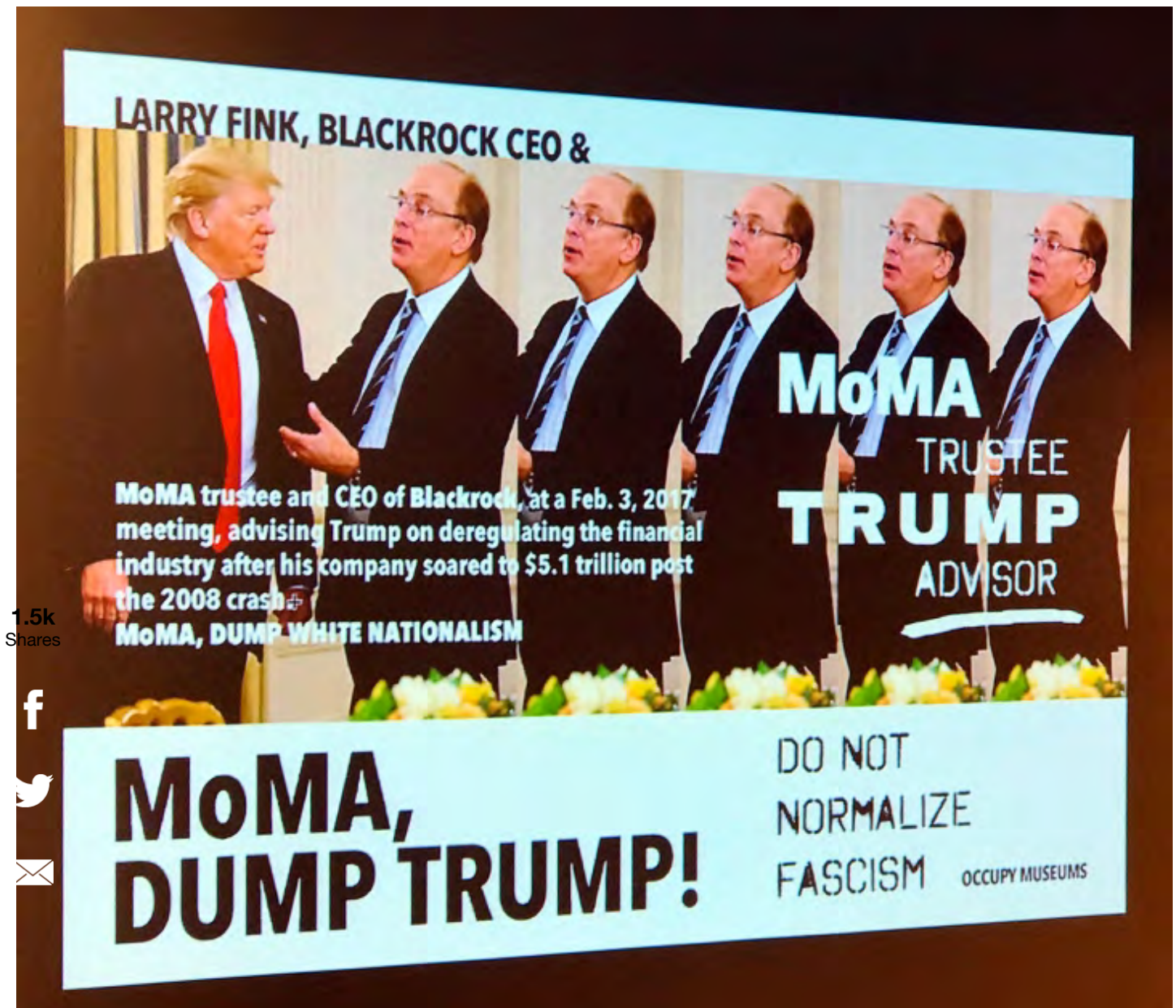
Hrag Vartanian

February 23, 2017



A view of protesters inside the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art on the evening of Friday, February 17, 2017, and at the start of the action. (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Last Friday, February 17, protesters marched from the [2017 College Art Association \(CAA\)](#) conference to the entry hall of the [Museum of Modern Art \(MoMA\)](#) to demand that the institution remove [Larry Fink](#), the CEO of BlackRock, from its board because of his ties to the Trump administration. The exact number of protesters taking part in the action was hard to calculate as many of them appeared indistinguishable from the MoMA visitors in the crowded lobby.



Projection at the Distinguished Artists Interview event at CAA.

The roughly hourlong protest was first announced Friday afternoon during the [Distinguished Artist Interview](#) between artist Coco Fusco and art historian Steven Nelson, which was part of the CAA's *ARTspace* series at the Hilton Midtown hotel. A projection greeted guests to the event and depicted a meeting between President Trump and Fink with the words "MoMA, Dump Trump!," "Do Not Normalize Fascism," and other phrases overtop.

Fusco read a statement from [Occupy Museums](#), which is an art collective that will be part of this year's Whitney Biennial, explaining the focus and reasoning for the action. The following is the statement in full:

It has come to our attention that a Trump economic advisor sits on the board of the Museum of Modern Art. The name of this advisor is Larry Fink. He is the co-founder and CEO of Blackrock Inc, the largest financial company in the world. Blackrock barely existed before 2008. Today it manages 5.1 trillion dollars of assets. If you hold any kind of debt to any bank, chances are that it's traded by Blackrock. The firm is deeply invested in Americans—and especially students to remain in permanent debt. Fink is also on the board of NYU.

Fink is not in Bannon's camp. He's a liberal. He was talked about as a potential Clinton treasury secretary. But now he's on Trump's team. And because Trump is waging a war of hate and lies against Muslims, Immigrants, women, LGBTQ, disabled, and the planet itself, one cannot reasonably advise or do any kind of business with this regime. To advise this regime is to normalize White Supremacy.

There is a long history of activism at MoMA. In fact, tonight's free museum entrance was brought to you by the Art Worker's coalition protests decades ago. So in this tradition, we are calling for MoMA to change its behavior.

No More Normalizing Trump.

We are calling for Larry Fink to be kicked off the board as a sign to your public that you care for our values of human dignity.

MoMA!

Why are you normalizing this regime by having a Trump advisor on your board?

Larry Fink of Blackrock Inc!

MoMA, time to Dump Trump!

Fink off the Board!



Protesters, including members of Occupy Museums, in the lobby of MoMA

Fink is a [MoMA board member](#) who was given the [David Rockefeller Award](#) by the museum in 2016. The Rockefeller Award is bestowed on an “individual from the business community who exemplifies enlightened generosity and effective advocacy of cultural and civic endeavors.” Earlier this month, Fink joined a group of [prominent CEOs who met with President Trump](#) to discuss economic policy.

On Friday, protesters met in the MoMA lobby at 6pm EDT and unfurled a banner that read “Resistance Against Fascism Is the Best Art,” while Fusco reread the statement, another participant read “Poetry is Not a Luxury” by Audre Lorde, and another read from Walter Benjamin’s “On History.”

Protesters unfurled two banners from the balcony around the information desks of the museum. One clearly took aim at Fink; the other was more cryptic and read, “Hocus Pocus vs. Focus.” The words of the protesters were echoed using the [people’s microphone](#) technique popularized by the Occupy movement.



A view of the protest in the MoMA lobby

Many visitors to the museum listened to the words, but some seemed to have trouble understanding the message, which was clarified by handouts that included a graphic by the Guerrilla Girls. One high school student from Virginia named Miranda was standing on the balcony when the protest began and told me she thought the protest was about: “The state of the world at this time and the election of Donald Trump.” She wasn’t clear about the action’s connection to the museum, but she thought most people visiting probably agreed with the protesters. When I explained to her that the action was directed at a MoMA board member connected to Trump, she said she understood the protestor’s intention. “I don’t agree with the state of the world now, it’s not safe,” she added to explain why she was unhappy with the new government.

DON'T LET MoMA reduce art to the small number of artists who have won a popularity contest among big-time dealers, curators and collectors. If museums don't show art as **DIVERSE** as the cultures they claim to represent, **TELL THEM** they're not showing the history of art, they are just preserving the history of

Wealth & Power



Graphic by the Guerrilla Girls handed out at the protest

Another group of visitors on the ground floor had trouble understanding what was going on even as they were reading the handouts. When I approached two visitors from Charlotte, North Carolina, I asked them what they thought the issue was and one said: "Cultures are not being represented correctly, is that it?" When they finally understood the issue, a woman named Rachel told Hyperallergic, "I think it's great that they are sharing their concerns."



Artist Coco Fusco reading the Occupy Museums statement at MoMA

The protesters repeated their chants and messages a number of times and even invited visitors to join the protest. Not every visitor was in agreement though. At one point a young man stepped forth into the circle near the beginning of the protest to declare: "I'm a hispanic man and I voted for Trump. Change the Narrative!" Then he darted off. Two other men were starting to speak amongst themselves a few steps away from the protest circle and they were complaining about the anti-Trump sentiment, until another man, who may have been a protester, joined in to insist this was freedom of speech.



One of the protesters at MoMA

Artist [Brian Fernandes-Halloran](#) was one of the protesters helping to hold a banner from the balcony. “I think it’s ridiculous that the Museum of Modern Art is allowing Larry Fink to stay on the board even though he’s an advisor of Trump. It’s normalizing his fascist tendencies ... and we won’t stand for it,” he

told Hyperallergic. He said he had been following Occupy Museums for a while and decided to get involved.

The protest then moved outside onto 53rd Street, where the [Illuminator](#) was projecting phrases onto the museum's façade, including "Fire Fink," "Evict Trump from MoMA," and "MoMA Don't Normalize Trump." Protesters repeated the readings from earlier and also invited anyone to add their voice to the protest.



1.5k
Shares



Protesters in front of MoMA with words being projected by the Illuminator above.

Noah Fischer of Occupy Museums told Hyperallergic that this was “the first action in a campaign to get Larry Fink off the board of MoMA and to speak out against the normalization of the Trump regime in the art world.” He explained that they targeted MoMA because it has a direct connection to Trump. “We know that many museums have Trump-supportive people on their boards ... but this is an actual direct connection. Fink was down in DC in the initial meeting with Trump to help deregulate the economy, and help make money for the 1% in the years to come.” Fischer said that we will all be hearing more about this, and how BlackRock impacts the lives of all Americans.

Artur Polando, another member of Occupy Members, told Hyperallergic the action was important because Fink was “so close to the administration.” Fischer pointed out that the group is inspired by the tradition of resistance in the arts, particularly at MoMA, and that it was “time for artists to take that tradition back? or art was going to become a very small insignificant thing, or a tool for those profiting from the deregulation and simply an asset. We’re not only fighting to get Fink off the board, but we’re fighting for what art needs to be in the coming years.”

I asked Fischer about the term “take it back,” and why he thought it needed to be reclaimed. “It went to art fairs, and record setting auction prices, while working folks and all kinds of people are losing money? and the 1% is spending money on art ... we need to take art back [and ensure] autonomy from the market, and even from the state ... to organize grassroots resistance.”



The Illuminator parked on 53rd Street

Betty Yu of Chinatown Art Brigade participated in the protest as, in her words, “an act of solidarity with Occupy Museums, artists, activists, and educators from across the country.” She explained they wanted “the Museum of Modern Art to do the right thing and fire Fink.” She said the museum “does not get absolved simply because they display work by Muslim artists,” referring to the recent installation of art in the permanent collection galleries by eight artists from the seven Muslim-majority nations targeted by Trump’s executive order. (Seven of the artists the museum recently installed are of Muslim cultural heritage, while one, Marcos Grigorian, is not.)

Mariangeles Soto-Diaz is an artist and professor from Southern California who was attending the CAA conference and decided to take part. “We’re a nation of immigrants and it’s important not to be complicit with the Trump regime,” she told Hyperallergic.



Protesters in front of MoMA

Fusco and Nelson were standing at the entrance to MoMA at the end of the protest and I asked them their thoughts about the action. "I am heartened by the resistance and we need more," Fusco told Hyperallergic. Nelson echoed the sentiment, "This resistance is terrific and I hope it is a harbinger of bigger actions." Fusco said she hoped MoMA will make a public statement responding to this call, whatever their position is, to "acknowledge that artists are asking them, and if they don't want to kick him off, then [to] let us know that."

I asked the pair how they would respond to those who say this issue represents the financial realities of museums today. "Museums are not sacrosanct spiritual institutions," Fusco said. "But it is also true that there have been other horrific political controversies involving art collections and museums ... and there is a history of responding to that and rectifying the issue."

"I think that's too simple of a statement," Nelson added. "Museums can find money in many many places and to ask for divestment or at least get a clear statement why you won't is vital ... not to divest is still a political statement."