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Prominent Artists and Art Workers Demand Artforum Boycott to Avoid Lining the “Pockets of an Abuser”

Daniel A. Gross February 7, 2018



An anti-sexist sticker spotted in Seattle, 2009 (image courtesy [Jonathan McIntosh's Flickrstream](#))

On Thursday, a [widely-circulated open letter](#) called for a boycott of *Artforum* to protest its continuing ties to Knight Landesman, the former publisher who faces an ongoing lawsuit and more than 20 allegations of sexual harassment.

The group behind the letter, [We Are Not Surprised](#) (WANS), is a feminist art collective that rose to prominence after an October letter drew thousands of supporters. [Barbara Kruger](#), [Cindy Sherman](#), [Coco Fusco](#), [Marilyn Minter](#), Eungie Joo, Eugenie Tsai, and many others are listed as signatories. “As a show of your participation in this boycott, post this statement on your website or social media profile,” today’s letter said. “Make it known to *Artforum*’s publishers: Your money, your labor, and your art will not line the pockets of an abuser.”

The call for a boycott, which appeared on the WANS website and was first reported by [Artnet News](#), makes two demands. First, the letter calls on *Artforum* to sever its remaining ties with Landesman. Second, the letter asks the magazine to drop a motion to dismiss the lawsuit against *Artforum* and Landesman. The statement comes days after Hyperallergic [reported](#) that Landesman remains a co-owner of the magazine, and that there were contradictions between the statements made by *Artforum* owners, employees, and its supporters and the realities of the company.

In an email sent from an encrypted account, WANS organizers told Hyperallergic that they drafted the letter collectively, communicating via WhatsApp for security reasons. They cited

the Guerilla Girls as an earlier group that used anonymous activism to challenge gender dynamics in the art world.

The lawsuit in question was filed by Amanda Schmitt, a former *Artforum* employee and one of many women to accuse Landesman of sexual harassment. As was first reported last October, he stands accused of numerous instances of unwanted physical contact, sexually explicit messages, and threats of retaliation. But because of a statute of limitations, Schmitt was unable to sue Landesman for harassment.

Last year, according to court filings, Landesman approached Schmitt and two companions in a restaurant. In a pointed incident, her lawsuit says, he disparaged her professional reputation. Schmitt is suing Landesman for alleged slander and retaliation. Her efforts to hold Landesman accountable landed her on the cover of *Time* for their “Silence Breakers” issue.

Artforum and Landesman have separate legal teams, but both filed similar motions to dismiss the lawsuit. In addition to asking the court to dismiss the allegations of retaliation, they claim that previous allegations of sexual harassment are “irrelevant” to the restaurant encounter. Attorneys for *Artforum* and Landesman did not respond to requests for comment.



When WANS published its first letter in October, it criticized art institutions for failing to live up to their stated ideals.

Many institutions and individuals with power in the art world espouse the rhetoric of feminism and equity in theory, often financially benefiting from these flimsy claims of progressive politics, while preserving oppressive and harmful sexist norms in practice.

Recent issues of *Artforum*, led by Editor-in-chief David Velasco, have included numerous stories on feminist issues. WANS characterized such efforts as hypocritical.

Unfortunately, such content appears as little more than a façade of feminist, anti-abuse, and anti-racist rhetoric and posturing so long as *Artforum*'s publishers and lawyers fight to erase Amanda Schmitt and many, many others' experiences of misogyny, harassment, and abuse of power.

We will update this story as it develops.

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