

frieze

‘Tired of the Sweet Talk’: New Not Surprised Letter

Condemns Artforum

We Are Not Surprised group calls for the magazine to remove Knight Landesman as co-owner and withdraw move to dismiss Amanda Schmitt's lawsuit

February 8, 2018



***STILL
NOT
SURPRISED***

Courtesy of We Are Still Not Surprised

A new open letter has been released by the We Are Not Surprised group, responding to the latest developments surrounding allegations of sexual harassment made against former *Artforum* publisher (and still co-owner) Knight Landesman. Landesman resigned from *Artforum* in October 2017 after the allegations against him emerged. The new letter points out that while the magazine's editorial staffers are crafting 'intersectional feminist' content, its lawyers have filed motions to dismiss a lawsuit brought by former employee Amanda Schmitt, who alleges that Landesman subjected her to harassment both during and after her time at the magazine. The letter follows on from the original open letter published last October responding to the allegations. It calls on those signatories not to read, work with or advertise in the magazine, until Landesman is fully removed from co-ownership and the magazine has retracted its motion to dismiss Amanda Schmitt's lawsuit. [You can read the letter below.](#)

Last month, attorneys for Schmitt filed rebuttals to the motions filed by both *Artforum* and Landesman dismissing her suit – 'Artforum once again shamelessly joins forces with Landesman seeking to have Schmitt's claims dismissed', her lawyers commented at the time.

Schmitt's suit also includes testimony from eight other individuals who allege similar encounters. Schmitt was recently named by *TIME* magazine as one of its 'People of the Year', honouring women in cultural industries who have stood up to alleged harassment.

'From the day we filed suit against *Artforum*, we have demanded that *Artforum* acknowledge the awful conduct that took place in its name and undo the harm done by its leaders,' Schmitt's attorney Emily Reisbaum said in an email sent to *frieze*: 'At the beginning, Amanda Schmitt stood alone and demanded change from *Artforum*. We look forward to the day when *Artforum* finally makes good on its promise to act fairly, and we greatly appreciate that We Are Not Surprised continues to support Amanda in that fight.' *Frieze* has asked *Artforum* for comment but at the time of writing they have yet to respond.

Last October's Not Surprised letter was originally signed by 150 women working in the arts. It went on to gather 9,500 signatures from female, trans and gender-nonconforming artists, writers, and curators, including Cindy Sherman, Coco Fusco and Sadie Coles. It was shared on social media with the hashtag #NotSurprised and called artworld institutions to action against discrimination in the industry, stating, 'We will be silenced no longer'. It led to the creation of the We Are Not Surprised group, campaigning for improved conduct in the industry, and sharing experiences of harassment in the industry. The title 'Not Surprised' is taken from artist Jenny Holzer's 'Truisms' (1977-ongoing) series, and her phrase 'Abuse of Power Comes As No Surprise'.

You can read the new letter below:

Three months later, WANS is still NOT SURPRISED.

Knight Landesman remains co-owner of Artforum, and while new editor-in-chief David Velasco and the editorial staff have been busy crafting "intersectional feminist" content for the magazine, Artforum's publishers and lawyers filed a motion to dismiss Amanda Schmitt's lawsuit, calling the harassment she and other women suffered "irrelevant."

WANS can't stand for this. In October, we wrote, "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." This is precisely what Artforum has done, and Landesman profits directly from it.

And so we, the artists, art workers, curators, gallerists, and writers of WANS, call on signatories of our original letter to not read, work with, or advertise in Artforum or its affiliates until the following steps are taken:

- 1. Knight Landesman must be fully removed from co-ownership of the magazine. He must not benefit financially in any capacity from Artforum's new "intersectional feminist" editorial mission*
- 2. Artforum must retract its motion to dismiss Amanda Schmitt's lawsuit, as well as its request to strike all allegations of Landesman's harassment from the case. Artforum's publishers and lawyers must proceed along the same ethical line that its editorial department now espouses:*

remember, an intersectional feminist ethics is dependent on processes of accountability. Artforum, we want to be your readers, your supporters, your community. This is what a community accountability process looks like.

WANS signatories and supporters: as a show of your participation in this boycott, post this statement on your website or social media profile. Make it known to Artforum's publishers: your money, your labor, and your art will not line the pockets of an abuser.

We support the recent editorial work of Artforum's writers and editorial staff; 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're tired of the sweet talk and empty politics. Show us that you mean what you say in print. Until then, we won't be having any of it.

WANS

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