

# Block Party Peter Krashes

Sep 15–Oct 28, 2017

## Exhibition & Programs

Sep 15	Peter Krashes
Sep 27	Brooklyn Community Advocates Peter Krashes Jaime Stein
Oct 4	Janani Balusubramanian
Oct 4	Susan Lerner Norman Oder Robert Perris
Oct 12	Marco Barravalle
Oct 13	Klara Kemp-Welch

**Block Party  
Peter Krashes**

**The James Gallery  
The Graduate Center, CUNY  
365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street**

[centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery](http://centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery)

**Hours:  
Tue-Thu, 12-7pm  
Fri-Sat, 12-6pm**

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**Exhibitions & Programs**



Peter Krashes, *Egg Painting*, 2015, gouache on paper, 65 x 48 inches.

Before it was displaced by Atlantic Yards / Pacific Park, there was a homeless shelter for families on Dean Street. It wasn't uncommon for the younger kids from the shelter to quiver as their faces were being painted during our block parties. It's hard to know why, but maybe it was an unfamiliar level of intimacy—whether of race, class, or gender.

I suppose to an outsider it could seem nostalgic to execute sack races and dance-offs in the shadow of Barclays Center, an arena dedicated to turning entertainment and sports into a mega-business. But it's really just about volunteers working together successfully and having fun, especially from watching kids enjoy themselves. It is a burden of our circumstances that a community-focused event is made political by virtue of its very existence.

When the arena developer's vice president tweeted a photo of professional dancers on Dean Street during the MTV VMA's red carpet, I tweeted her back a similar one of Dean Street residents dancing the electric slide at a block party in exactly the same spot.

We called for the demolition to be halted on the Atlantic Yards / Pacific Park project site when it was made public that the agreements did not bind the developer to complete it in the 10 years they had promised. In the interim, any empty lots that were created would become parking lots or construction staging areas. Then, the economy tanked in 2008. By that time, most buildings and even a public bridge had been demolished, and streets were closed without a realistic schedule for construction to start, never mind finish.

A neighbor reached out to me because he'd heard about seed bombs, a guerilla gardening tactic from the 1970s that could be used to plant flowers in lots that are enclosed by fences. For once, it was an opportunity to do something proactive. Plus, so much of what we had already done was public, even directed towards the media. This was an

opportunity to do something discretely, just for us.

A local florist donated used flower seeds and a potter contributed clay. We bought a few bags of soil. We had to guess how to make the bombs because the recipe is inconsistent online. For some, we stirred the seeds directly into the mix, and for others we made flat discs with seeds set on top, like chocolate chips on a cookie.

Ultimately, we made around 1,500. We had to be much less sneaky throwing them into the lots than we thought because so few people actually pay attention to others when they are outside. We even managed to throw bombs into the empty lot next to the police precinct as people walked by.

We have to work to make our concerns relevant. In the back and forth about the changes to our neighborhood, people telling their own stories has proven to be our most lasting tool. The sincerity of an impacted voice is more effective and harder to neutralize than a surrogate. The calculations are different for the developer; generally, their most potent voices are one step removed.

Elected officials have a bully pulpit if they choose to use it. Even when we are appealing to them for help with something our community needs, we have to keep in mind that their perspective is broader, and they balance a wider set of needs. If we have a large list of concerns, they are likely whittled down to a few, or even one, before the official steps in front of the camera.

The Appellate Court in Brooklyn Borough Hall is a particularly fancy room that conveys authority. The show *Law and Order* may have even used it as a set.

During the approval process of Atlantic Yards, I noticed that the borough president's meetings—held in this room—covered all issues associated with the environmental

review process except land use. I brought this omission to the attention of the community boards, and despite the fact that it was their time that would be wasted, they asked him to schedule a meeting. Although the developer and state were the only ones with information, they did not attend, so the community boards and elected officials met with city agencies instead.

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At the same time that changes to the timeframe of the project were approved, Governor Paterson got in trouble for an unassociated reason. He came to Borough Hall for a televised interview. His poor eyesight may have given me the opportunity: I shoved my way through the crowd and planted myself in his path. We spoke for a minute or two, and afterwards everyone asked me what we talked about. I'm pretty sure the governor understood what I was asking him for, but he said that he didn't have the power to do anything about it.

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The format of a public meeting can determine how productive it is. Sometimes the design is dictated by its legal or political function. Other times, it may be shaped to stack the deck or imply a sincerity that is in truth absent. In some cases, they are little more than theatrical stages with a row of flags and a bank of cameras.

How are the chairs arranged? Do the officials stand on a stage facing the public with a microphone, or do the public and officials sit in a circle with the microphone passed around? Is the room big enough for the meeting? Who gets to speak, in what order, and for how long?

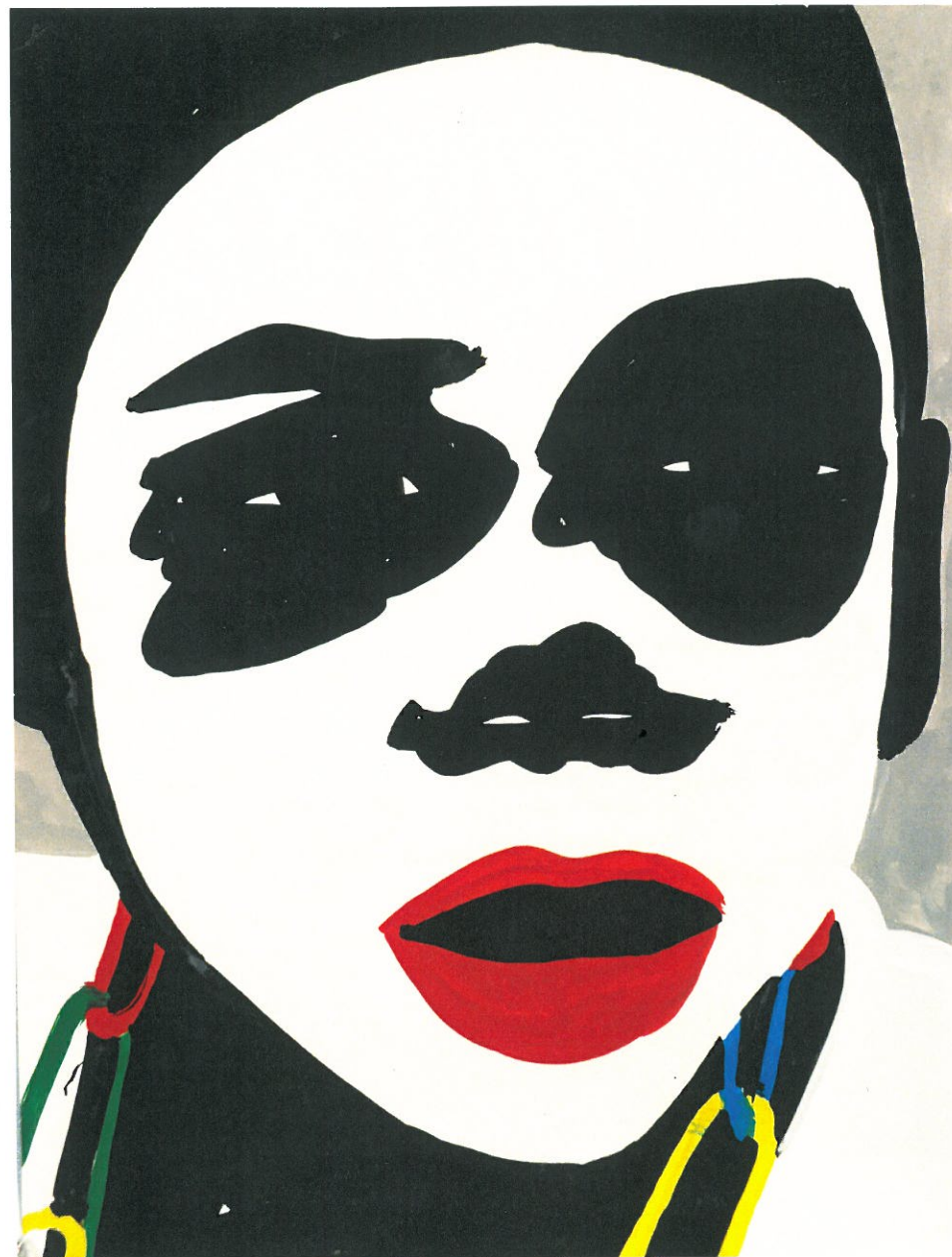
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Our coalition looked beyond the introduction of the arena to our neighborhoods and focused instead on pressing for a public role in decision-making. By the time of its groundbreaking, the developer and State of New York had skipped a required environmental review that was critical for us in order

for them to beat a deadline for tax-exempt federal bonds. Ultimately, we sued the state and won. But on this day, staged for the media, many of us joined arena opponents in a protest aimed at providing a counterpoint. We must have been successful because the police encircled us with plastic fencing and ushered us away.

Separation and marginalization are key tools used by some real estate developers, elected officials, and government agencies. Those in a position to mediate and organize information create opportunities for themselves and are better able to manage decision-making. Atlantic Yards / Pacific Park is a state project, and it is difficult for community members to reach the ear of a governor.

—Peter Krashes



Peter Krashes, *Block Party* (face painting), 2012–ongoing, gouache on paper, 10 ½ x 7 ¾ inches.



Peter Krashes, *Seed Bomb Factory*, 2011, Oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches.



Peter Krashes, *FOR! (Hand-painted Signs are More Effective)*, 2009, gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches.



Peter Krashes, *Cameras Always Find the Elected Official*, 2010, oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches.



Peter Krashes, *Empty Mics*, 2008, oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches.



Peter Krashes, *Making Noise to Be Heard*, 2017, gouache on paper, 26.5 x 40 inches.



Peter Krashes, *Governor and Flags*, 2014, gouache on paper, 56.5 x 63 inches.

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### Checklist

All works by Peter Krashes, unless otherwise noted.

1. *Block Party (Face Painting)*, 2012–ongoing  
Gouache on paper, 10 ¼ x 7 ¾ inches

2. *Seed Bomb Factory*, 2011  
Oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches

3. *Egg Painting*, 2015  
Gouache on paper, 65 x 48 inches

4. *Summer Streets*, 2017  
Gouache on paper, 48 x 72 inches

5. *Protest/Counter Protest*, 2017  
Gouache on paper, 36 x 60 inches

6. *Seed-Bombed Lot*, 2014  
Oil on linen, 24 x 20 inches

7. *Elected Officials Are Our Surrogates (Yellow Tish)*, 2009  
Gouache on paper, 24 x 18 inches

8. *More Filled Seats Magnifies the Message*, 2009  
Oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches

9. *Cameras Always Find the Elected Official*, 2010  
Oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches

10. *Camera Bank for the Governor*, 2012  
Gouache on paper, 48 x 72 inches

11. *Governor and Flags*, 2014  
Gouache on paper, 56.5 x 63 inches

12. *Empty Mics*, 2008  
Oil on linen, 63 x 84 inches

13. *Making Noise to be Heard*, 2017  
Gouache on paper, 26.5 x 40 inches

14. *Paid to Protest / Not Paid to Protest*, 2008  
Gouache on paper, 7 ¾ x 10 ¼ inches

15. *NG! (Hand-Painted Signs are More Effective)*, 2009

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches

16. *FOR! (Hand-Painted Signs are More Effective)*, 2009

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches

17. *Officer on the Red Carpet*, 2014  
Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches

18. *Zip Ties*, 2014  
Oil on linen, 24 x 20 inches

19. *Accumulation of Advocacy Materials*  
Dates, materials, and sizes variable

20. *Block Party Interviews*  
Dean Street Brooklyn  
June 24, 2017  
Conducted and recorded by Dominika Ksel

*Speakers Corner Interviews*  
The Graduate Center, CUNY  
September 15, 2017  
Conducted and recorded by Dominika Ksel

Fri, Sep 15, 6-8pm

## Block Party Exhibition Reception

Peter Krashes, artist.

Peter Krashes' studio painting over the past decade stands as one complete body of artistic research growing directly out of his other practice as an unpaid community organizer in the Dean Street area of Prospect Heights in Brooklyn.

As Peter says, "My work as an activist and my work as an artist extend from the same set of values. All of my works are derived from meetings I attend or events and initiatives I help organize. There is no room in political or governmental processes for many of the activities we involve ourselves in, but perhaps none more so than painting a nuanced image in the studio. As a result, the paintings are the last step in a process I have been engaged with from beginning to end. The imperatives I feel outside the studio are explicit so the outcome in the studio is particular and linked directly to the real world."

Linking the practices of painting and of activism points out the problematic of actions that can be consumed, ignored, and considered irrelevant by those in official political power. Their human scale and material presence as paint on canvas positions these paintings outside the processes in which decisions are made instead of seeking recognition in political discourses of power.

Taking a different approach to generating cultural power, Krashes has generated this body of paintings through working out questions that arise in his range of collaborative activist practices. For example, frustration with the narrow, sometimes apparently biased focus of the media has led Krashes to make paintings depicting the glare of cameras pointed in elected officials' faces or expansive interiors of government chambers with recurring images of empty

microphones. He also paints the flipside of this equation, namely that individual voices speaking collectively can exercise power. Neighbors painting protest signs, children's face painting, Easter egg hunts, seedbombs tossed into empty lots, and block parties claim space—marking the presence of the communities willfully neglected by those in power.

The James Gallery

Wed, Sep 27, 6:30pm

## Unintentional Community: From Shared Experience to Action

Brooklyn Community Advocates; Peter Krashes, artist; Jaime Stein, Urban Environmental Systems, Pratt Institute.

A major urban transition right in one's own backyard can bring together, or conversely divide, a community, throwing light on the question of what makes a group of people a community. When living standards, livelihoods, access to financial, educational, and other resources are on the line, how a community responds depends on factors that are intangible and powerful. Join community members affected by Atlantic Yards / Pacific Park, including from the Dean Street Block Association, for a conversation about how they have mobilized responses for over a decade and continue to build long-term structural change to benefit the community.

The James Gallery



## Learning from Atlantic Yards/Pacific Park

Susan Lerner, Common Cause; Norman Oder, journalist; Robert Perris, District Manager, Brooklyn Community Board 2.

A major urban development project can be quickly absorbed into the daily fabric of a city like New York. Such projects are happening on a massive scale and at a rapid pace in cities around the world; yet, fundamental, significant questions remain about the processes that unfold from the approval of a plan to the ongoing life of a project, including continuing implications for residents, businesses, schools, and other infrastructure. Such changes have profound long-term effects, and, in the case of Atlantic Yards / Pacific Park in Brooklyn, include construction that will affect multiple generations. This panel discussion with representatives of local government, experts involved in the project, journalists who continue to write about it, and non-profit advocacy groups will open a forum for discussion about what has been learned and what still needs action in the Atlantic Yards / Pacific Park Project in Brooklyn.

The Skylight Room (9100)

## Prelude Festival “Heisenberg”

Janani Balusubramanian, artist.

As part of the Prelude Festival, for the evening the James Gallery will be the site of “Heisenberg,” an audio augmented reality game about uncertainty, precision, and chaos. “Heisenberg” is a meditation on the events of the recent US election and Brexit vote and what we learn from this about the limits of our understanding of one another and our world.

A blend of technologies and characters—old and new—the piece brings together contemporary research in particle physics with political and social implications of uncertainty. The scene is set at the beginning of time and participants are cast as fundamental particles undergoing various matter and energy transformations and moving from the Big Bang well into humanity’s potential futures. Throughout, players receive instructions via audio modules that dictate their individual movements, motivations, and actions. Tensions and discontinuities emerge as the narrative proceeds; the chaos that ensues forms the heart of the piece.

*Cosponsored by the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center*

The James Gallery

## Art, Populism, and the Alterinstitutional Turn

Marco Barravalle, curator.

What meanings of populism can be carried by a work of art? The book “Writers and the People,” published in 1965 by the Italian thinker Alberto Asor Rosa (who was then part of the group of heretical Marxists called “Operaisti”), criticized the official Left Italian writers, including Pasolini. The populist approach of these official writers was dictated by the Communist Party following Gramscian rules. Rosa asserted that this cultural device closed down the real revolutionary potential of the working class.

Join Marco Barravalle of the experimental art and activities space S.a.L.E. Docks in Venice for an analysis of Rosa’s book and notions of populism in relation to a selection of artworks from the past twenty years. Can we define a populist approach in visual art beyond propaganda? Baravalle proposes the concept of the alterinstitutional as a place to begin.

*Cosponsored by Social Practice Queens, Queens College, CUNY*

The James Gallery

## Revolution in the Margins, 1907-2017: Modern and Contemporary Art from Eastern, Central, and South Eastern Europe.

Keynote: Klara Kemp-Welch, Art History, Courtauld Institute.

By pioneering a radical form of political governance and redefining the meaning and function of art, the 1917 Russian Revolution marked a critical turn in the political, social, and cultural history of not only Russia, but also the continent more broadly. This conference proposes the centennial of the 1917 Russian Revolution, with both its cultural and historiographical aftershocks in the region, as an opportunity to re-examine the last century of artistic production in the countries of Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe. While acknowledging the significant role of the Soviet Union as both a political superpower and an arbiter of cultural policy in the region, a central aim of this conference is to nuance the picture of art in the region by “provincializing” Russia and challenging the common perception that Eastern European art can be entirely equated with Soviet politics and aesthetics. Instead, this conference will highlight the ways in which modern and contemporary artists from these countries—East Germany, former Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Hungary, former Yugoslavia, Romania, Moldova, and Albania—negotiated their positions within the broader cultural networks of the region.

Among the questions this symposium hopes to address are the cultural and political relationships between East and West, questions of national identity in relation

to international avant-gardes, the formation and cultural influence of the politics of the interwar period, as well as artistic collaborations before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Foregrounding the relationship between conceptions of internationalism (emphasizing the collaboration in Soviet-aligned countries post-World War II), transnationalism (which transcends national boundaries and is characterized by greater cultural mobility and exchange resulting from independence), as well as national identity within a region in which borders, citizenship, and political allegiances have continually shifted, this conference hopes to disrupt traditional narratives of artistic production in these countries, which have long looked at specific states and artists in isolation or exclusively in relation to the socio-cultural and socio-political context of the Soviet Union.

*Cosponsored by the PhD Program in Art History, the Graduate Center, CUNY*

The Skylight Room (9100)

Peter Krashes lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He is a graduate of the University of Oxford (1987) and Middlebury College (1985). Solo exhibitions include University Galleries, Illinois State University, Normal, IL; Theodore: Art, Brooklyn, NY; Coop, Nashville, TN; Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY; Momenta Art, Brooklyn, NY; and White Columns, New York, NY. Group exhibitions include He Xiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, China; Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY; and Galerie Chez Valentin, Paris, France. He has taught in numerous institutions, including Cooper Union School of Art, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and American University. Krashes is a recipient of a Marshall Scholarship and a Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant. Reviews of his work have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, and the *New Yorker*. For the last eleven years his community organizing has focused on a wide-range of issues in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn.

Curators: Katherine Carl and Keith Wilson  
Graphic Design: Yve Ludwig

Special thanks to: Chris Lowery, Ray Ring, Polly Thistlethwaite, Cara Jordan, Dominika Ksel, David Chevtaikin, and to Tracy Collins's graphic design for banner and flier inspiration.

The Amie and Tony James Gallery, located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, is dedicated to exhibition-making as a form of advanced research embedded in the scholarly work of the Graduate Center across multiple disciplines. The gallery creates and presents artwork to the public in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists, and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries.

# The James Gallery