

AN ENDANGERED IDEAS FILM



ASCENDANCE

SCREENING GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
ASCENDANCE FILM SYNOPSIS + KEY THEMES	5
KEY ORGANIZATIONS + ABOUT THE FILMMAKER	6 -7
ABOUT IMPORTANT SPEAKERS FROM THE FILM	8
HOW TO USE THIS SCREENING GUIDE	10
GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	11
SCREENING TOPIC 1: PUBLIC ART + MURAL MAKING	12-13
SCREENING TOPIC 2: MAINTAINING AND PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE	14-15
SCREENING TOPIC 3: BLACK LIVES MATTER; ACTIVISM AND COALITION BUILDING	16-17
ACTIVITY 1: COMMUNITY GRIEVING AND CULTURAL CELEBRATION THROUGH REMEMBRANCE MURAL	18-19
ACTIVITY 2: DESIGNING AN URBAN CITY WITH CULTURAL AND PUBLIC ART SPACES	20
ASCENDANCE SCREENING SURVEY.....	21

INTRODUCTION



- ASCENDANCE FILM SYNOPSIS
- KEY THEMES
- KEY ORGANIZATIONS
- ABOUT THE FILMMAKER
- ABOUT IMPORTANT SPEAKERS FROM THE FILM

INTRODUCTION



ASCENDANCE is the story of the creation of an immense and challenging 90 feet tall mural, born out of the Community Benefit Agreements won as a result of the Oakland community resisting the destruction of their beloved Alice Street Mural. As the pandemic shuts down Oakland's streets in the midst of the BLM Protests and fight for racial justice, artists attempt their largest mural yet determined to use their artistic expression to amplify the cause.

This leads to the exploration of various questions in the 17-minute short documentary ASCENDANCE:

- a. What is the role of public art in an ever-changing city?
- b. How can the social environment that an artwork is created in influence the art work?
- c. How can communities fight back against external factors that threaten to destroy their cultural history?

At this critical time following Black Lives Matter Protests bringing racial injustice of minority communities to the forefront and gentrification leading to loss of local culture in cities nationally and internationally, the inspiring ASCENDANCE story of community empowerment and coalition-building through art is key to shifting the national conversation towards a public art approach to social justice.

This screening guide provides a road-map for how ASCENDANCE can be used in your own communities to address the specific issues and concerns you may be facing. It includes a menu of options for reflective questions and activities that can accompany the screening to ensure thinking about how to bring about social change where it's needed most.

ASCENDANCE FILM SYNOPSIS

Amidst the pandemic shutting down Oakland's streets and the raging Black Lives Matter Protests, artists attempt their tallest and most challenging mural yet, determined to use their creations for justice. ASCENDANCE, a grandiose 90 feet tall mural, is to be created on the 'Greenlining Institute,' a building that houses an organization that advocates against systemic racism. This mural is born out of vital Community Benefit Agreements won by the Oakland community in their resistance to luxury condo developers covering up the culturally significant ALICE STREET mural.

Although initially initiated by muralist 'Desi Mundo', the creation of ASCENDANCE is led by a strong team of women of color muralists 'Marina Perez-Wong', 'Elaine Chu' and 'Priya Honda' from the Twin Walls Mural Company. Together, they embark on a journey to create a new mural to represent Oakland's rich history and cultural communities. It is a feat made even more challenging by the on-set of Corona-Virus, resulting in social-distancing measures, and a general atmosphere of panic and uncertainty in downtown Oakland. Just as the muralists and other community painters create a workaround for Co-Vid, horrific news about the brutalities against Black communities come to the spotlight and the nation is swept by the Black Lives Matter Movement. Oakland, a longtime hotspot for social justice and birthplace of the Black Panthers, takes to the streets. Though initially violent, the protests blossom into artistic expression, transforming broken windows into canvases. ASCENDANCE arises in this landscape of public resistance and art. As the city and country continue in turmoil, the mural stands as a monument against the gentrification that displaces its communities of color and as a reflection of the strength of their collective voices.

KEY THEMES

- PUBLIC ART
- MURAL MAKING
- AFRICAN AND ASIAN DIASPORAS
- ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL LEGACY
- BLM PROTESTS
- CO-VID 19 PANDEMIC
- COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTATION
- GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT



KEY ORGANIZATIONS



TWIN WALLS MURAL COMPANY

Lead Muralists of 'AscenDance' Elaine Chu and Marina Perez-Wong are the dynamic duo behind the mural arts collaboration **Twin Walls Mural Company**. They believe in the power of visual narratives to capture and reflect a community's history, struggles, dreams and intentions. They formed TWMC in 2013 and have since designed and painted over 30 murals in the Bay Area and New York City. Elaine and Marina are both motivated by the healing of trauma both current and generational, and the transformation of the viewer and themselves through visual language, color and collaboration. Their work reflects growing up in the Bay Area, celebrating the women and individuals who inspire them, and changes they wish to manifest through bright colors and semi realism. 'AscenDance' also features Priya Honda, a muralist associated with the Twin Walls Mural Company and talented muralist Lisa Max, long-time student of Marina Perez-Wong.

twinwallsmuralcompany.com



COMMUNITY REJUVENATION PROJECT

The Community Rejuvenation Project (CRP) in Oakland, California is an association of artists in Oakland, California that works with youth and other community members to revitalize abandoned buildings, neighborhoods, and other public spaces. In its own words, "The Community Rejuvenation Project cultivates healthy communities through beautification, education, and celebration." They achieve this mission through experiential programs that promote professional development, artistic and cultural expression, and community empowerment." CRP is known for its colorful and unique murals, which often feature social justice themes surrounding issues of diversity, immigration, civil rights, and the experiences of indigenous peoples. In the words of lead muralist on ASCENDANCE and Executive Director of CRP Desi Mundo "...we're targeting the most blighted areas; the places that the owners aren't taking care of. We're going out transforming these places to give them new life."

crpbayarea.org/about



THE
GREENLINING
INSTITUTE

Greenlining is building an abundant future that brings investments and opportunities into their communities – what they call Greenlining. Since 1993, they have successfully advocated and negotiated initiatives directing more than \$800 billion in corporate and public investments into communities of color in California and across the nation. The ‘AscenDance’ mural is painted on one of the walls of this prestigious 90-foot tall building.

[greenlining.org](https://www.greenlining.org)

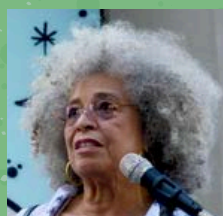
ABOUT THE FILMMAKER



**SPENCER
WILKINSON**

After a decade working with gang-involved and homeless youth in the San Francisco Bay Area, **Spencer Wilkinson** founded Endangered Ideas, a documentary production company in Oakland, to focus on stories of resilience. Spencer directed and produced ALICE STREET, a documentary depicting the struggle to preserve Oakland’s ethnic arts and culture communities amid rapid gentrification. The film won the ‘Audience Choice Award for Feature Documentary’ at the 2020 Oakland International Film Festival and ‘Social Impact Award’ at Thin Line Film Festival. The film’s festival highlights include Urbanworld, Mill Valley, Newport Beach, Milwaukee, Atlanta Docufest, DOCUTAH and London Rocks Film festivals. With support from the California Arts Council and San Francisco Foundation, ALICE STREET screened in communities and schools impacted by gentrification throughout California. In 2018, Spencer directed the feature-length “ONE VOICE: The Story of the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir,” which premiered at Mill Valley Film Festival and was a 2019 East Bay Express “Best Movie of the East Bay.” The film was featured in the 2020 “Truly CA” season on PBS. In 2021, he directed the KQED: If Cities Could Dance episode, “Oakland Boogaloo” in which he was awarded an Excellence in Journalism Award from the Society of Professional Journalists and won a regional Emmy award in 2022.

ABOUT IMPORTANT SPEAKERS FROM THE FILM



**ANGELA
DAVIS**

**ACCLAIMED
SCHOLAR AND
ACTIVIST**

Angela Davis is an American political activist, professor, and author who was an active member in the Communist Party and the Black Panther Party. She has continued to tackle oppression faced by the black community, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. After spending time traveling and lecturing, Davis returned to teaching. She served as a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she taught courses on the history of consciousness. Her interests in prisoner rights led her to found Critical Resistance, an organization working to abolish the prison-industrial complex. Davis is the author of several books including *Women, Race, and Class* (1983) and *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003).



**LAILAN
SANDRA
HUEN**

**CHINATOWN
COALITION**

Lailan is a strategist, facilitator and storyteller with over 20 years in education, youth development, public institutions, campaigns, and community organizing. She specializes in progressive education policy reform, youth-led participatory action research, targeted equity strategies, and culturally responsive practices. She has spent decades working with local and national community-based organizations, multiracial coalitions, and women of color alliances to build solidarity and ensure equitable voice in state, local and national systems change. Her work to preserve Oakland Chinatown is featured in the award-winning documentary *Alice Street*



**CORRINA
GOULD**

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF
'SOGOREA TE'**

Corrina Gould (Lisjan Ohlone) is the chair and spokesperson for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan—she was born and raised in Oakland, CA, the village of Huichin. A mother of three and grandmother of four, Corrina is the Co-Director for The Sogorea Te' Land Trust, a women-led organization within the urban setting of her ancestral territory of the Bay Area that works to return Indigenous land to Indigenous people, and the Co-Founder and Lead Organizer for Indian People Organizing for Change, a small Native run organization that works on Indigenous people issues and sponsored annual Shellmound Peace Walks from 2005 to 2009. These walks brought about education and awareness of the desecration of sacred sites in the greater Bay Area. As a tribal leader, she has continued to fight for the protection of the Shellmounds, uphold her nation's inherent right to sovereignty, and stand in solidarity with her Indigenous relatives to protect our sacred waters, mountains, and lands all over the world.

HOW TO USE THIS SCREENING GUIDE



- GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- SCREENING TOPICS
- ACTIVITIES

HOW TO USE THIS SCREENING GUIDE

This guide provides a framework to explore the issues and themes raised during the screening of ASCENDANCE. The target audience(s) in attendance at the screening should determine the focus of the post-screening discussions. These target audiences include artists and members of arts organizations, preservationists and culture keepers, community leaders and social justice activists, students and scholars and relevant government officials.

The short film ASCENDANCE could be paired with a variety of offerings to the community; Below you will find questions that can be used to facilitate post viewing discussions, as well as potential post-screening activities that include discussion and audience engagement. You can choose from these options to customize your screening depending on your screening goals:

- Screening + Panel Discussion
- Screening + Community Grieving and Celebration
Mural Making Activity
- Screening + Urban Design Activity

More than one topic may have relevance. If there are subject matter experts in attendance they can also reflect on and debate these questions in a panel format. The facilitator can note key words, phrases or ideas on a flip chart, whiteboard or overhead projector if available. The quotes from the film included with each key topic can additionally help to spark discussion by providing specific prompts.

Following the event, the audience members should fill out and turn in the post-screening survey, which has been handed out as they walk in.





GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some issues that people of very different backgrounds can come together around?
2. What are some social issues and causes that you are passionate about changing?
3. What is your view on murals and public art? Do they have the potential to generate change? What kind of change?
4. The Greenlining Institute aims to shift housing policies from red-lining to green-lining. What do you think of the impact of creating the mural on the walls of the Greenlining Institute as opposed to any other building wall?
5. How do you feel about the mural-making process? Do you think muralists should revise their design based on the feedback from the community members?
6. What are some tangible changes you would like to see happen in your community?
7. What are some ways to be proactive about addressing community needs as opposed to reactive?
8. What is the overall message you think you'll take away from the film? How will this experience impact your thoughts and actions going forward?'





SCREENING TOPIC 1: PUBLIC ART + MURAL MAKING

TARGET AUDIENCE:

ARTISTS, MEMBERS OF ART ORGANIZATIONS, POLICY MAKERS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What makes art valuable? How can art capture people's attention, motivate activism, and be used as a tool to educate the public in our neighborhood?
2. Who is allowed to represent the local community in creating public art? Who are the stakeholders who get to decide where and how public art is displayed and why? Should one person or a small group be allowed to make a decision for the public?
3. How should disagreements about how and why public art is created and/or destroyed in communities be mediated?
4. How can public art help to protect cultural communities while it's also seen as an early indicator of gentrification in neighborhoods?
5. What is the relation between public art and gentrification? Does public art help incentivize gentrification or combat it?
6. Should public art only highlight the positive aspects of our community? How should negative events or complicated histories be represented in public art? Can you think of some examples in our community or elsewhere?
7. The AscenDance mural features themes surrounding the Black Panthers and the founders of Oakland. Who are the culture keepers in our community who should be honored in public artwork?
8. What are some of the logistical challenges associated with creating a mural so large, like ASCENDANCE in our community?
9. Can there be other forms of art used to create change as well? We use the song Jerusalem in the film which was hugely successful in boosting morale and creating a sense of one-ness during the pandemic.
10. What is the significance of the phenomenon that has happened nation-wide where confederate statues are being torn down to be replaced by new art?
11. Post- Covid downtowns have had massive shifts and may never go back to the way they were; what has the impact of co-vid been on communities? Do murals potentially have a different impact and power in a post-pandemic era?
12. How can we encourage and promote more public art in our community?

IMPORTANT QUOTES FROM THE FILM:

"I've worked on some big walls but this one takes the cake - it's 91 feet tall!"

- Elanie Chu



"The way to manifest and kind of reiterate what we want to see is through this art"

- Priya Honda



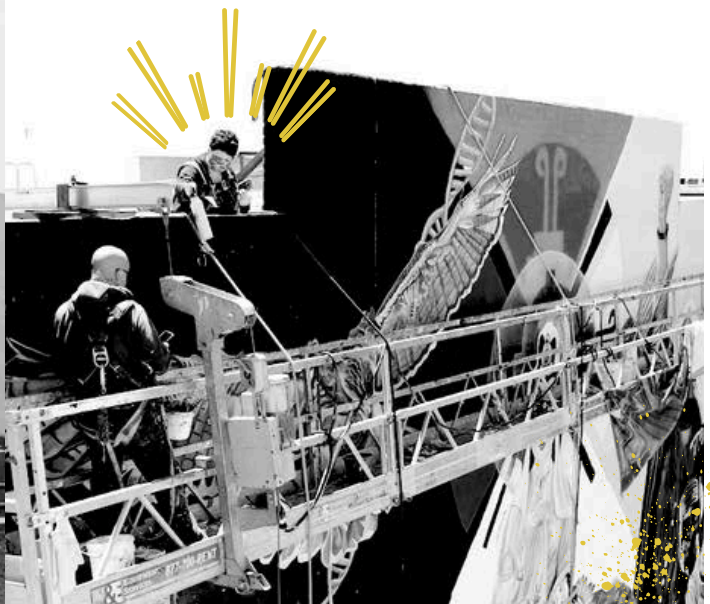
"For everyone, especially the youth growing up here, to be able to see something reflected in yourself on a wall.."

- Marina Perez-Wong



RESOURCES

- tinyurl.com/InclusivePublicArt
- tinyurl.com/SouthAfricanJerusalema





SCREENING TOPIC 2: MAINTAINING AND PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE

TARGET AUDIENCE:

PRESERVATIONISTS AND CULTURE KEEPERS, URBAN PLANNING PROFESSIONALS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What characterizes the different cultural communities in our city. Why are they important?
2. What are some of the cultural heart centers of our community?
3. How is our community changing? Are these negative or positive changes?
4. What are the anchors of a community? Art, the people, institutions, laws?
5. ASCENDANCE features community members from both African and Asian diasporas. Why is it important for people from various diasporic groups and cultural backgrounds to preserve their heritage within their communities?
6. How can a city develop and grow and still embrace its culture and honor public artwork? How can we save the places that people care about amidst new development?
7. How can we overcome cultural clashes within a community? Are there examples when this was done successfully in the past? If so, what was effective?
8. How can we build coalitions and develop Community Benefit Agreements that not only preserve our neighborhood's cultural heritage, but also promote housing justice and equity?
9. What are some public policy priorities we can encourage city officials to enact to address gentrification, displacement, and the protection of cultural spaces and public art in our communities?
10. How can we best design cities and communities to increase creativity, equity, social justice, and access?
11. Is displacement of people an unavoidable part of development? How can we have development without displacement? Are there pros to new development?
12. Are there some parts of the community that are not consulted in the process of urban planning? How can we engage new parts of the community in this process?
13. In ASCENDANCE, we see many of Oakland's important minority communities – those from the African Diaspora and those from Oakland's Chinatown gather to celebrate the creation of their new mural. What can we do as urban planners to help strengthen and protect these important cultural communities?

GLOSSARY

- **Diaspora:** The spread of people beyond their homeland.
- **Community Benefit Agreement:** An agreement made by community organizations and the developers of construction projects to include benefits for the local community such as affordable housing units.

RESOURCE

- tinyurl.com/MuralArtsPhil





**SCREENING TOPIC 3:
BLACK LIVES MATTER:
ACTIVISM AND COALITION BUILDING**
**TARGET AUDIENCE:
COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS AND LEADERS, PSYCHOANALYSTS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can art be a powerful tool in raising awareness and moving people to action in our community?
2. What are some tangible improvements and upgrades that you would like to see happen in our community?
3. What are some ways to be proactive about addressing community needs as opposed to reactive?
4. What are some examples of times in which activism has been successful at bettering our communities? What forms of activism (protests, petitions, etc.) have been most effective? Why?
5. What are some issues in our community that people of very different backgrounds can come together around? What enables them to come together?
6. How can creating diverse coalitions strengthen our voices?
7. How can we build coalitions and become leaders in our own communities while addressing the needs of various stakeholders?
8. In ASCENDANCE we saw people come together in light of the Black Lives Matter Protests - how can art be utilized to coalesce communities?
9. How can changing social factors such as the Co-Vid 19 Pandemic influence the way in which we approach activism?
10. How can art be healing in its creation, both to the artists themselves and also the people who view it?
11. Many topics covered in the film were challenges for the whole community; feelings of isolation, loss of life (George Floyd and others), transformation of towns.. How have things changed since George Floyd? Is there more divisiveness or is it more hopeful?

RESOURCE

- tinyurl.com/BLMCharlotteNC

EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC ART EXPRESSED IN THE WAKE OF THE BLACK LIFE TRAGEDIES:



Artists: Trust Your Struggle



Artist: Francis Mead



Artist: Dered

IMPORTANT QUOTES FROM THE FILM:

"There's definitely a shift happening.. With the pandemic..with the protests that followed for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and many more black lives that have been lost due to police brutality"

- Priya Honda

"this mural is about historic displacement and the role of redlining"

- Desi Mundo





ACTIVITY 1: COMMUNITY GRIEVING AND CULTURAL CELEBRATION THROUGH REMEMBRANCE MURAL

The ASCENDANCE mural memorializes cultural groups that have been displaced and was created during a very heavy and trying time with the nation-wide George Floyd inspired protests in addition to the pandemic. The mural is an important means of both Community Remembrance and celebrating Oakland's historic culture keepers through the eyes of its artists.

As a result of gentrification, local neighborhoods and businesses have been displaced and may never return to their original cultural landscape. The collective trauma to the community as a result of violence and police brutality have left varying residual impacts on the individual and the community. Especially with the isolation caused by the pandemic, people may not have had the opportunity to fully grieve in a judgment free community space.

The film ASCENDANCE showed ways in which the Oakland community used art to represent their grief and hope. This activity could be an important moment to give participants that space to both grieve what has been lost and celebrate important people who have been left off of their walls. Participants will create their unique murals, discuss the significance of what they represented in their creations, and reflect on how they feel post-discussion.



TOOLS:

Individual sheet of paper, pencils, crayons/color pencils

PRE-ACTIVITY DISCUSSION:

- What was lost and gained as a result of the Black Lives Matter phenomenon?
- What are your thoughts on gentrification and its impacts?
- Who has been left off of your community's walls?

ACTIVITY:

Participants will create their own individual Remembrance Art Mural that talks about their individual stories and events that have impacted their lives. Who and what have they lost? Who would they choose to reflect on a wall and why? Which events and places would they reflect on their murals?

DISCUSSION:

Have the participants discuss what they made and who they chose to honor in their mural. What did they feel they needed to say through their mural? Have them share their thoughts in small break-out groups or with the full audience.

REFLECTION:

How do they feel after sharing? Did the exercise help them process feelings that they had around that time period? Did it feel like a therapeutic experience? Ask how it might change their thinking or behavior going forward.





ACTIVITY 2: DESIGNING AN URBAN CITY WITH CULTURAL AND PUBLIC ART SPACES

TOOLS:

Big Chart paper, pencils, crayons/color pencils OR white boards + markers

PRE-ACTIVITY DISCUSSION:

- What are the important parts of your city's culture? Who are the important cultural groups who make up your city?
- What elements of your city's landscape should not be transformed because they are vital to the history and culture?
- What elements of your city's landscape can be transformed?
- How can public art be incorporated into your city's design?

ACTIVITY:

Participants will re-design the city they're living in in small groups, taking into account the local culture and key elements that they feel are necessary to retain. They will add in cultural spaces and room for murals and/or other public art in addition to areas for new development. Which places would they retain? What new spaces would they create to incentives cultural interaction and/or preserve pre-existing culture? What are some small steps that one can take on an individual level to see some of these changes in the city?

DISCUSSION:

Have each group discuss their designs and the cultural spaces they have created and preserved with everyone.

Have others give suggestions for potential changes, or factors to consider, and have groups re-work their design taking these suggestions into consideration.

OR

Create one new city design combining the best ideas from each of the groups

REFLECTION:

How do they feel after this activity? How did they incorporate the suggestions of peers into their designs? Did they feel like the design was enhanced or made more challenging by the suggestions? Ask how this activity will change the way they think about designing cities moving forward. Last thoughts on steps that an individual can do to see the city changed as designed.

ASCENDANCE SCREENING SURVEY

Name (optional):

Email (optional):

Location:



1. How important did you think public art was before watching the film?

less — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 — more

2. How important do you think public art is after watching the film?

less — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 — more

3. How likely are you to get involved in community action after watching the film?

less — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 — more

4. How important do you think protecting the local culture is after watching the film?

less — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 — more

5. Overall, what did you think of the film and the post-screening discussion?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

PUBLIC ARTS ORGANIZATIONS:

[Indigo Arts Alliance](#) (Portland, MN)
[559 Mural Project](#) (Fresno, CA)
[Equality Mural Project](#) (Atascadero, CA)
[Community Engagement](#) (Santa Ana, CA)
[Meeting Of Styles](#) (Wiesbaden, Germany)
[St. George Utah Arts Council](#) (St. George, UT)
[Greater Denton Arts Council](#) (Denton, TX)

RACIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS:

[Texas Freedom Colonies Project](#) (Dallas, TX)
[Don't Shoot PDX](#) (Portland, OR)
[Restorative Justice for the Arts](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

MUSEUMS:

[Arte Americas](#) (Fresno, CA)
[Hairpin Arts Center](#) (Chicago, IL)
[North Carolina Museum of Art](#) (Raleigh, NC)

ACADEMIC:

[Kwantlen Polytechnic University](#) (Surrey, Canada)
[University of Washington College of Built Environments](#) (Seattle, WA)
[Columbia University - Build It Green](#) (New York City, NY)

HOUSING/ARCHITECTURE:

[City of Calgary Urban Planning Conference](#) (Calgary, Canada)
[East Bay Housing Organization](#) (Oakland, CA)
[NOMA](#) (New York City, NY)
[AIA](#) (Washington DC)
[Monument Impact](#) (Concord, CA)
[Historic Denton Inc](#) (Denton, TX)
[Oakland Tenants Union](#) (Oakland, CA)

ACTIVIST FESTIVALS:

[San Francisco Urban Film Fest](#) (San Francisco, CA)
[K docs Film Festival](#) (Vancouver, Canada)
[Seattle Hip Hop Film Festival](#) (Seattle, Washington)
[Architecture and Design Film Festival](#) (Washington DC)
[Fist Up Film Festival](#) (Oakland, CA)

