

THINGS DON'T HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS:

A CONVERSATION ABOUT DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY & CONTEMPORARY ART

FILM EDUCATOR GUIDE

Art21's film, *Things Don't Have to Be Like This: A Conversation About Digital Technology & Contemporary Art*, builds upon the learnings from Ford Foundation's New Media Leadership cohort. In an age where all aspects of our lives are mediated through technology, contemporary artists are crucial voices in defining how we engage with these new tools. Over coffee at a Brooklyn cafe, artists and friends Morehshin Allahyari, American Artist, and Mimi Qnūqha gather to explore the complex relationships between technology, knowledge, power, and identity. "It's clear that a lot of the world orders that we have inherited won't work," says Qnūqha. "But that's the space where artists are most needed." From American Artist's interrogation of social media and surveillance technologies, to Qnūqha's work calling attention to the data that is missing from our technological systems, to Allahyari's resistance against the techniques of digital colonialism, these artists offer new possibilities for navigating our digital world through an artistic practice.

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AMERICAN ARTIST

American Artist was born in 1989 in Altadena, CA, and currently lives and works in New York, NY. Working in new media, sculpture, video, and installation, Artist has exhibited work at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.



MOREHSHIN ALLAHYARI

Morehshin Allahyari was born in 1985 in Tehran, Iran, and currently lives and works between New York and San Francisco. Allahyari works in video, sculpture, 3D simulation, and digital fabrication and has exhibited works at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, the New Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Pompidou Center, the Museum of Modern Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Queens Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art, Taipei.



MIMI QNUQHA

Mimi Qnūqha was born in 1989 in Italy, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Qnūqha's work in video, installation, archival media, print, code, and data has been featured at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Transmediale Festival, and Mao Jihong Arts Foundation, and her public art engagements have been sponsored by institutions including the Pompidou Center, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Royal College of Art, and Princeton University.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating this film into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

BEFORE VIEWING

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ☐ How would you describe your relationship with technology?
- ☐ What are the rules of the internet? Do you follow them? Why or why not?
- ☐ What aspects of your daily life do you have the most control over? What aspects do you have the least?

DURING VIEWING

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ☐ What do these artists say about their relationship to contemporary technology?
- ☐ How do these artists challenge or break the rules of the internet?
- ☐ How do these artists connect real world experiences to their digital life?
- ☐ Why is data collection important to these artists?

AFTER VIEWING

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ☐ When does technology impact our relationships?
- ☐ What would a “new world order” look like to you? How could the internet or contemporary technology be used to make it a reality?
- ☐ What data does your digital footprint (i.e. social media accounts, email, browsing history) collect? What story does it tell about you or your community? What might be missing from that dataset?



RELATED ACTIVITIES

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas in students. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

What is the oldest technology you have access to (an old Nintendo, PSP, remote controller, TV cords)? How could it be useful today? How could it function differently? Can you take it apart? Can it be part of a costume? Collect these dated devices to create an artwork that brings new life into these objects.

The artists in the film both blur and emphasize the line between the digital sphere and the physical sphere in their art practices. Spend a moment scrolling through a social media platform of your choice and save 5-10 posts, tweets, memes, etc. from public accounts that you like. Print out these posts and deconstruct them to make a collage about why you liked those images. Hang them up in a public space to create a physical feed. Visit the space for the next few weeks and document how it changes.

Get into a group of 3-4 and come up with an open-ended question you have about your neighborhood or school. Consider questions that might have more than one answer, like, why do we have gym class? Or, why do we have report cards? Have half of your group input the question into a search engine, while the other half asks the question to different faculty at school (including teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers). How do the results vary? Make two sculptures that represent the differences you find.