

# ARTINFO

By Lyran Kilston, Quinn Latimer  
Published: September 19, 2008

## Political artists peddle ice cream and karaoke.

BROOKLYN—“Ice, ice baby, uh huh huh, uh huh huh,” panted a freshly painted ice cream truck on a recent muggy September afternoon. Parked on a Flatbush street at the southwest corner of Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, the truck rapped merrily about cold refreshments and cold girls as families loaded down with strollers and dogs, kids earnestly sucking on Capri Suns, and bicyclists and joggers breezed by. With the truck’s sides sporting a large fist clutching an ice cream cone with a cherry on top (its stem lit like the fuse to a bomb) and large Lenin-era red stars looming behind it, it was immediately obvious that this was no ordinary ice cream truck.

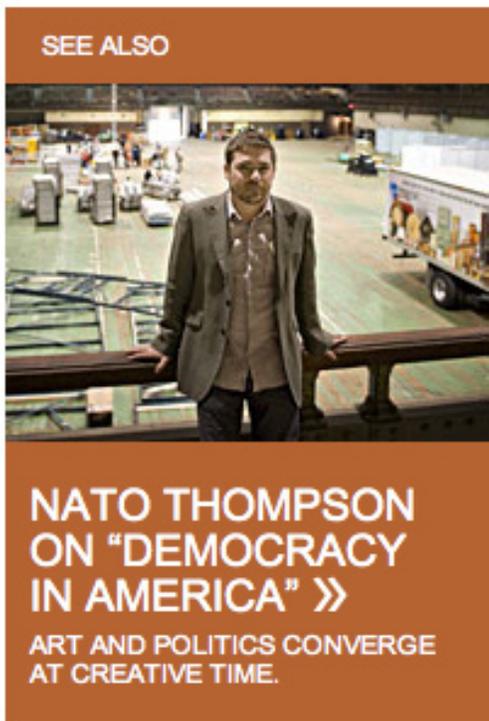
Creative Time, New York’s favorite dematerialized public art organization, was hosting two projects in the park as part of their nationwide “Democracy in America” series. The first, the ice cream truck, run by the collective Center for Tactical Magic, offered free popsicles along with a free political pamphlet of your choice. Aaron Gach, the mischievous, Abbie Hoffman-esque co-founder of the center, sported a mustache, cop sunglasses, and a sea captain’s hat as he handed over the icy treats and asked: “What flavor of political propaganda would you like with that?” Along with the ice cream varieties and popsicle flavors (orange, grape, cherry, chocolate), the menu, posted on the side of the truck, offered several options — Black Panthers, Anarchy, McDonalds, Hal-liburton, “Earth First,” “Know Your Rights.” People usually responded to Gach’s question with a confused pause, then would hesitantly mumble, “Um....anarchy?”

This was The Tactical Ice Cream Unit’s first East coast stop, after tours in the Midwest and along the West coast from Tijuana to Vancouver. Equipped with several surveillance cameras, the truck’s interior served as a complete activist headquarters: A bank of television screens showed views from all sides of the vehicle, cabinets were stocked with supplies from every civil disobedient’s wish list, from pepper spray (with the harmful pepper replaced with the sweeter peppermint) to artful gas masks. From outside the truck, however, everything appeared a bit more innocent. And as groups of lanky adolescent girls, kids bearing skateboards, and moms struggling with infants crowded around, it became apparent that in Brooklyn, the Panthers’ 10-Point Plan and Earth First were the big propaganda draws. Asked if this differed from the Midwest’s inclinations, Gach smiled and nodded. “Our ‘Know Your Rights’ pamphlet was real big there. Lots of people, whatever their political affiliation, just don’t know their rights,” he said. “And in the Midwest, they want to.”

Just then, as if in agreement with that Midwestern ethos, a song — the Clash’s jangly “Know Your Rights!” tarted up at the second, noisier art project, situated across from the truck. Another Protest Song, by Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere (who work together as the pirate radio team neuroTransmitter), featured a small stage, microphones, and a karaoke screen for lyrics. Nevarez and Tevere sat under the shade of an awning, poised for the public to stand up and sing. Hav-



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ing launched the Web site [anotherprotestsong.org](http://anotherprotestsong.org), which invites anyone to upload a 21st-century protest song, they took their project live with a selection of classic karaoke tunes that might not seem like protest songs at first, but morph into them in this context. Before three Creative Time employees launched into Devo's classic "Whip It," Nevarez prefaced the song with a whoop of "Whip social injustice!" (What was Devo whipping anyway?) As Tevere elaborated to reporters sticky with ice cream, the Web site and karaoke project are about allowing people to "project their political agency through song." Other crowd favorites included "Under Pressure" by Queen, "Land of Confusion" by Genesis, and "Satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones. Bob Marley, a popular choice among the neighborhood's Caribbean population, discoursed on Buffalo soldiers throughout the day.

As the race for the White House gets increasingly ferocious, an afternoon of politics by other means — popsicles and karaoke, for example — was a welcome respite. One Modern Painters reporter finished things off with Pat Benatar's "Love is a Battlefield," thrusting her fist into the bright Brooklyn blue during the line "No one can tell us weeeee're wrong!" That's right, so don't even try.

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