

Leading up to the 2020 presidential election, For Freedoms to present the inaugural For Freedoms Congress (FFCon): a nonpartisan, arts and culture-driven forum for civic engagement strategy slated to be largest-ever convening of its kind

FFCon will take place February 28, February 29, and March 1 in Los Angeles. Host venues—donated by FFCon cultural partners—include the Hammer Museum, the Japanese American National Museum, and the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

Glenn Kaino, Hank Willis Thomas, and Black Lives Matter cofounder Patrisse Cullors among creatives confirmed to lead planning sessions and public talks

Los Angeles, CA — January 2020 – For Freedoms, the nonpartisan collective for creative civic engagement cofounded by artists Hank Willis Thomas and Eric Gottesman, will this February present the inaugural For Freedoms Congress (FFCon). The three-day event is a first-of-its-kind convening of artists, academic and cultural institutions, and social justice organizations. Its objective—through a tightly curated series of artist-led planning sessions, creative workshops, and public events—is to build a collective strategy to supercharge civic engagement back in attendees’ local communities leading up to the 2020 presidential election.

“The people who make up our country’s creative fabric have the collective influence to effect change,” said For Freedoms cofounder Hank Willis Thomas. “Right now, we have a lot of non-creative people shaping public policy, and a lot of creative individuals who haven’t or don’t know how to step up. For Freedoms exists as an access point to magnify, strengthen, and perpetuate the civic influence of creatives and institutions nationwide. With FFCon, we thought, ‘what would happen if we brought them all together?’ The structure of the event embraces diverse creative processes, but it establishes a clear framework for attendees to start effecting change the moment they get home.”

As well as open-to-the-public ‘town hall’ events, FFCon’s core programming will consist of in-depth planning sessions to be attended, on an invitational basis, by existing For Freedoms ‘delegates:’ artists, arts administrators, and other creatives who have meaningfully engaged with For Freedoms’ past work or mission. For these planning sessions, each session leader is given free rein to design their session in a way that aligns with their practice, but the end goal and uniform output of each session will be a set of actionable tools for community engagement. These session outputs will be presented to the entire FFCon on Sunday and summarized for all attendees to implement in their local communities.

Making up a large portion of the For Freedoms ‘delegates’ invited to attend the closed planning sessions are individuals who participated in For Freedoms’ *50 State Initiative*, which took place during the 2018 midterm election season and constituted the largest creative collaboration in U.S. history. In addition to over 700 concurrent grassroots activations presented by over 250 partners across the country, the *50 State Initiative* entailed a coordinated public art demonstration whereby 150 artists (including Marilyn Minter, Rashid Johnson, Guerilla Girls, Jenny Holzer, Mickalene Thomas, and Theaster Gates) designed billboards across every U.S. state, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Like the billboard project—for which there were no official guidelines, as the purpose was to embrace artists’ creativity in order to inspire civic dialogue and participation—the *50 State Initiative* as a whole

sought not to push a specific cause or agenda, but rather to push civic engagement itself. Regarding the importance of continuing the *50 State Initiative*'s momentum by way of FFCOn, For Freedoms director Michelle Woo commented:

“The For Freedoms Congress is the first time our massive network has been provided a singular forum to physically come together to co-create tools, ideas, and shared plans for everyone to take back to their own communities in the lead-up to the presidential election. Given the caliber of our extended network, FFCOn’s artist-led workshops and planning sessions have the ability to fortify, maintain, and activate the very infrastructure of the United States’ creative sector.”

FFCon will be hosted in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Hammer Museum, the Sundance Institute, and the Japanese American National Museum. For Freedoms selected Los Angeles as the host city for FFCOn 2020 due to its stature as a cultural epicenter (with over 200 museums), and its storied history as the birthplace of legendary social movements pertaining to topics of race, immigration, AIDS, and many more.

As a precursor to the initiatives that FFCOn ‘delegates’ will lead in their own communities, museum visitors and the general Los Angeles public will have opportunities throughout the weekend to join in a variety of ‘town hall’ sessions. The resulting conversations from these forums will set the foundation for For Freedoms’ larger public campaign leading up to the 2020 presidential election.

“With the Los Angeles event, our goal is to find new and stimulating ways to empower our fellow citizens to use their voices to express their views and ideas,” said For Freedoms cofounder Eric Gottesman. “Nothing could be more important this year than to help citizens find their voices. Our partners in every state will be taking this message of engagement back to their communities because of the work and creative energy we produce at FFCOn.”

Support for the For Freedoms Congress is provided by Angeles Art Fund and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. For Freedoms’ work is made possible by the generous support of the Bromley Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the JPB Foundation, the Krupp Family Foundation, the Muriel Pollia Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Pop Culture Collaborative, the Sawyers Family Fund, quiet, and the Westridge Foundation. For more information, including public event schedule and ticketing, visit forfreedoms.org/ffcon.

ABOUT FOR FREEDOMS

“We believe citizenship is defined by participation, not by ideology. Through non-partisan nationwide programming, we use art as a vehicle for participation to deepen public discussions on civic issues and core values. We are a hub for artists, arts institutions, and citizens who want to be more engaged in public life.”

Founded in 2016 by artists Hank Willis Thomas and Eric Gottesman, For Freedoms is a platform for creative civic engagement, discourse, and direct action. Inspired by American artist Norman Rockwell’s paintings of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms (1941)—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—For Freedoms’ exhibitions, installations, and public programs use art to deepen public discussions on civic issues and core values, and to advocate for equality, dialogue, and civic participation. As a nexus between art, politics, commerce, and education, For Freedoms aims to inject anti-partisan, critical thinking that fine art requires into the political landscape through programming, exhibitions, and public artworks. In 2018, For Freedoms launched the 50 State Initiative: the largest creative collaboration in U.S. history.

FFCON CULTURAL PARTNERS

