

RESIST. REVOLT.

A FIELD GUIDE FOR ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS

Guerrilla Art

The city is covered in ads telling us to buy. Take some of that space back and tell the truth instead.



What it is · Forms · Design · Steps · Legal & safety · Amplify · Worksheet

01 What Guerrilla Art Is

Guerrilla art is public art made outside official channels, placed where people don't expect it, to interrupt everyday life with a political message. It is fast, cheap, and made by many hands.

In an organizing campaign, guerrilla art does what a press release can't: it puts the campaign on the street corner, the bus stop, and the timeline at the same time. It surprises people, makes them look twice, gets photographed and shared, and signals that a movement is alive in the neighborhood.

A tradition of the people

- **The Mexican muralists** of the 1920s and 1930s, who painted workers' history on public walls.
- **Atelier Populaire**, the student and worker print shop of Paris, May 1968, that covered the city in screenprinted posters overnight.
- **The Chicano poster and mural movement**, which turned print shops and walls into tools for farmworkers and neighborhood struggles.
- **The Guerrilla Girls** (from 1985), anonymous artists whose posters exposed sexism and racism in the art world.
- **ACT UP and the Gran Fury collective**, whose "Silence = Death" imagery forced the AIDS crisis into public view.

Read through a class lens

Public space is not neutral. Corporations pay to fill our sight lines with messages that serve profit, while working people are fined for a flyer on a pole. Guerrilla art contests who gets to speak in the commons. It turns art from a commodity sold in galleries back into a collective tool for people to see their own conditions and imagine something better.

Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.

A LINE OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO BERTOLT BRECHT

Its origin is disputed, but it sums up the purpose of art in a campaign.

02 The Toolbox

Pick the form that fits your message, your people's skills, your budget, and the risk your group is willing to take. Many forms are fully legal with permission.

Posters & wheatpaste

Bold printed posters on walls and boards. Fast, cheap, highly visible. Use legal posting spots or walls you have permission for.

Stickers

Small, portable, and shareable. Members carry them everywhere; a QR code turns them into a recruitment tool.

Stencils & chalk

Repeatable images and slogans. Sidewalk chalk washes away and is low-risk in many places.

Projections

Light messages onto buildings at night. Nothing touches the surface. Local rules vary, so check first.

Banner drops

Large banners from bridges, balconies, and rooftops of supportive owners. Dramatic and photo-ready.

Subvertising

Parody ads that turn a corporation's own branding against it. Also called culture jamming.

Installations

Objects that make a point: empty shoes for the evicted, chairs for missing workers, a mock tombstone for a closed clinic.

Performance & flash mobs

Sudden, choreographed scenes in public: a die-in, a living tableau, a song in the lobby.

Murals & yarn

Permitted community murals and yarn-bombed trees or poles. Slower, more permanent, beloved by neighbors.

03 Designing for the Street

People walk or drive past in seconds. Street art has to land in the time it takes to glance.



SAMPLE POSTER (EXAMPLE CAMPAIGN)

Rules of thumb

- **One big idea.** A short, punchy line readable from across the street. Five words beats fifteen.
- **One strong image.** A simple shape or symbol people remember and can redraw.
- **High contrast.** Dark on light or light on dark. Test it from 30 feet away.
- **One clear ask.** Join, show up, call, boycott. Tie every piece to the campaign's next step.
- **A way in.** A QR code or short link to the sign-up page, so curiosity becomes contact.
- **A consistent look.** Same colors, fonts, and symbol across every piece, so scattered art reads as one movement.
- **Speak the neighborhood's language,** literally. Make versions in the languages people speak.
- **Punch up.** Name the landlord, the boss, the policy. Never mock the people you want to organize.

04 How to Run a Guerrilla Art Campaign

1

Root it in the campaign

Start from the demand, the target, and your power map. Art should advance a specific fight, not just decorate it.

2

Gather the artists

Recruit members, local artists, print shops, students, and sign painters. Hold an art build: a party where everyone makes things together. Skill-sharing builds the base.

3

Develop the message & look

Write the core slogans, pick a symbol and palette, and test drafts with the people most affected. Do they see themselves in it?

4

Map the terrain

Choose places where the target and the public will see it: near the landlord's office, the plant gate, the council chamber, transit stops, and busy commercial streets.

5

Secure permission where you can

Ask allied businesses, churches, union halls, and homeowners for walls, windows, and balconies. Legal walls keep art up longer and keep people safe.

6

Plan the drop

Assign teams, materials, and timing. Coordinate a wave: many pieces appearing at once feel like a movement arriving.

7

Document & amplify

Photograph every piece right away. Post, send to press, and link it to the action. The photo often travels farther than the wall.

8

Refresh and escalate

Replace pieces that get removed, update the message as the campaign moves, and build toward the big public action.

05 Legal, Safety & Ethics

Be honest with your people about risk. Putting art on property without permission can bring charges like vandalism, criminal mischief, or illegal posting, with fines or worse. Every participant should know the risk and choose freely.

LOWER RISK

Your own property, permitted walls, art builds, stickers on your own gear, chalk where allowed, permitted murals

CHECK LOCAL RULES

Projections, banner drops with an owner's OK, posters on community boards, performance in public space

HIGHER RISK

Anything placed on property without permission, or at height, near traffic, or at secured sites

Physical safety

- Always work in teams, with a lookout for traffic and hazards.
- Never climb, use ladders, or hang banners at height without training and gear.
- Stay off highways, rail lines, and active roadways.
- Use non-toxic paste and paints; ventilate when spraying; wear gloves.
- Plan for weather, water, light, and getting everyone home.

Ethics: art that builds power

- Target the powerful, never the homes, cars, or shops of working people.
- Respect murals, memorials, sacred sites, and other artists' work.
- Never cover another community's art or a memorial.
- Avoid images of real people without their consent.
- Clean up materials and trash. Be the neighbor you want to organize.

Before anyone takes a risk

Talk to a lawyer or your local National Lawyers Guild chapter about local laws. Make sure everyone knows their rights, has a buddy, and has support lined up. People at higher risk from any arrest — noncitizens, people on probation, caregivers — should stick to permitted and low-risk work. See the *Civil Disobedience* guide for know-your-rights basics.

06 Amplify, Measure, Organize

A piece on a wall reaches a block. A photo of it can reach a city. A good campaign is built so every piece of art leads somewhere.

Amplify

- **Shoot it right away** in good light, wide and close up, with people walking past for scale.
- **Post it everywhere** under a consistent campaign hashtag, and invite people to photograph and share the art they find.
- **Pitch it.** Reporters love a visual story. Send photos with a short note on the demand.
- **Put money behind the best images** as paid posts aimed at the people you need to reach (see the *Story Capture* guide).
- **Bring it to the target.** Deliver a giant version to the decision-maker's office, or project it outside their window.

Measure

- Use unique QR codes or links for each neighborhood or design to see which ones bring in sign-ups.
- Track how many pieces went up, how long they lasted, photos shared, press mentions, and new contacts.
- Notice what the target does. If they rush to remove it, it's working.

Organize

- Call every new contact within 48 hours and invite them to the next art build or meeting.
- Turn your art builds into recurring events: they are some of the most joyful, welcoming on-ramps a movement has.
- Credit the collective. The art belongs to the movement, and the movement belongs to everyone who made it.

07 Campaign Art Canvas

Fill it out together at your first art build.

OUR DEMAND	WHO NEEDS TO SEE IT
OUR CORE SLOGAN (5 WORDS OR FEWER)	OUR SYMBOL / IMAGE
COLORS & FONTS	THE ASK & LINK / QR
FORMS WE'LL USE	LOCATIONS (WITH PERMISSION?)
TEAM & ROLES	RISK LEVEL & SAFETY PLAN
HOW WE'LL DOCUMENT & SHARE	DROP DATE & FOLLOW-UP ACTION

**They sell to us
on every wall.
We speak to each other.**

Make art together. Put it where people live and work. Make every piece an invitation to organize.

RESIST. REVOLT.

Important & further reading

This guide is general information, not legal advice. Laws on posting, projections, and public art vary widely. Consult a lawyer or your local National Lawyers Guild chapter (nlg.org) before any action.

Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, a collective of movement printmakers. justseeds.org

Beautiful Trouble, a toolbox of creative tactics for activists. beautifultrouble.org

Guerrilla Girls. guerrillagirls.com

Companion guides: *Power Mapping*, *Story Capture*, and *Civil Disobedience* (Resist. Revolt.)