

Learning another way to RESPOND... Flash Mob Workshop: "We Can't Breathe"

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A very significant exhibit is now at Smack Mellon gallery in Brooklyn, New York, from January 17 to February 22. RESPOND, a display of artistic answers to the epidemic of police murder and the refusal of the government to prosecute the killers. The exhibit is a significant and important event. It has been reviewed and discussed in and beyond the art world, including in articles in the *New York Times* and the *British Guardian*. (See ["RESPOND: Exhibit at Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, NY."](#))

In conjunction this exhibit, **Smack Mellon** is hosting a series of **events**, including film and video screenings, dance performances, poetry readings, an interactive theatre art making session, and a self defense workshop/performance.

On Thursday, February 19 at 7 pm there will be a conversation with Noche Diaz and Jamel Mims about the Dialogue between Cornel West and Bob Avakian on "Revolution & Religion." (Click [here](#) for more info on that workshop.)

On January 24, a Performance Protest Workshop titled, "We Can't Breathe" was led by Shamirrah Hardin, together with



Chazz Giovanni, Will Ferdinand, and Jamel Mims in collaboration with the Stop Mass Incarceration Network (SMIN). In early December 2014, SMIN hosted a meeting to plan the “Week of Outrage” in response to the numerous incidents of police brutality and police murder of Black and brown people in this country. As a part of this meeting, several artists came together to plan artist-led actions that would occur during the week. The group planned a big flash mob event that took place in Grand Central Station and an open mic that took place at Revolution Books. Since then, Shamirrah Hardin, a main organizer of these actions, has been using the performing arts in various settings as a form of protest.

The workshop taught people the simple flash mob movements: Walking back and forth with both hands wrapped around the neck symbolizing the chokehold used by an NYPD cop to kill Eric Garner; the “Hands Up” motion, symbolizing the stance of Michael Brown before he was killed by a cop in Ferguson; and the head going back, grasping for air with the last words of Eric Garner, “I can’t breathe... I can’t breathe.”

Gloria Leiva, whose son Dante Pomar was killed by the NYPD on July 29, 2004, participated in the workshop and told *Revolution*, “The idea of using art performance in public spaces to protest the ills

of society is great. A show will always make more people to stop and listen to what the artists are communicating. In this way perhaps it will inspire individuals to get involved in the movement to put an end to the unjust practice of allowing police officers to murder our children (especially Black and Latino) without facing any punishment or consequences.”

People left looking forward. The Stop Mass Incarceration Network encouraged people to attend a [February meeting in Atlanta](#) to plan for a national day of NO BUSINESS AS USUAL on April 14.

After the workshop, some people got together to plan more protest performance events including one on Wednesday, January 28: Meet at Times Square, SE corner of 42nd Street and 7th Avenue at 6:45 pm; at 7 pm people will go underground into the subway, Shamirrah will teach people the movements and the group will do the flash mob performance where the murals are.



Photos: Li Onesto/revcom.us

Read an essay submitted to revcom.us from a woman active in SMIN and whose son was railroaded into prison. She wrote this after seeing the RESPOND exhibit and attending the workshop. [Read the full essay.](#)