

HYPERALLERGIC

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NEWS

Brooklyn Gallery Responds to Police Brutality With an Open Call

by [Benjamin Sutton](#) on December 18, 2014 2 



Smack Mellon's main gallery (photo courtesy Smack Mellon)

The nonprofit art space [Smack Mellon](#) in Brooklyn's Dumbo neighborhood is planning an open call exhibition in response to the recent killings of unarmed black men by white police officers, and the [protests](#) that [followed](#). The gallery has issued an [open call for works](#) in any medium, with a submission deadline of December 28. Artists [Erica Bailey](#) and [Michael Kukla](#), who were slated to have exhibitions at the gallery early in 2015, have pushed back their shows to accommodate *Respond*, which will open January 17.

"It was December 4th when the announcement from the grand jury [in the Eric Garner case] came out, I was sickened by it, like everybody else," Kathleen Gilrain, the executive director of Smack Mellon, said of the exhibition's inception. "But also confused, because what can you do, aside from go to protests?"

For an organization that plans its exhibitions months and years in advance, *RESPOND* has been a remarkably rapid endeavor to launch, with every member of Smack Mellon's small staff and all of its current [artists in residence](#) helping. The resulting show will be curated, and hung salon-style, with programming and performances happening throughout its run.

"We who work at Smack Mellon have something that very few people have, which is a platform for artists. Once you have the platform it's easier to conceive of making your ideas concrete," Gilrain said. "We want it to be a real, broad example of artists and people making things. It's going to include high school students' work, and we hope to get some really well known artists to contribute works."

The show at Smack Mellon is the latest and among the most high-profile in a series of responses from different sectors of the art world to the killings and the subsequent protests. In October, the [Alliance of Black Art Galleries](#) in St. Louis organized *Hands Up, Don't Shoot: Artists Respond*, an exhibition that took place at more than a dozen venues throughout the city and in Ferguson. Last week, a group of bloggers who write about museums and the arts released [a statement](#) urging museums to join the conversation that has been taking place since the death of Mike Brown.

"Museums may want to use this moment not only to 'respond' but also to 'invest' in conversations and partnerships that call out inequity and racism and commit to positive change," they wrote. Hopefully, Smack Mellon's example will lead other major art organizations to formulate responses of their own.

RESPOND opens on January 17 at [Smack Mellon](#) (92 Plymouth Street, Dumbo, Brooklyn) and continues through February 22. The [open call](#) deadline is December 28.