

# HYPERALLERGIC

## LGBTQ Activists Attacked by Trump Supporters While Leaving NYC Art Space

A group of people leaving the closing party of Decolonize This Place at the Tribeca nonprofit Artists Space were attacked by men who identified themselves as supporters of Donald Trump.

Hrag Vartanian      December 19, 2016



The people attacked after attending a party at Artists Space (left to right): Connor Hicks, Colin Ashley, Peter Soeller (photos by Patti Cruz, courtesy Peter Soeller)

On Saturday night, a group of arts activists in New York City was physically and verbally assaulted by four or five men who identified as Donald Trump supporters. The group was traveling to a restaurant after the closing party of the Decolonize This Place residency at the nonprofit Artists Space in Tribeca.

According to Michael Basillas, who was part of the group that was attacked, the nine individuals leaving the party — five women and four men — were chanting slogans from various actions at Decolonize This Place, including “Free Palestine,” “Black Lives Matter,” and “We’re Queer, We’re Here, We’re Fabulous, Don’t Fuck With Us,” when they were approached by a group of four or five men. The men started chanting “Trump, Trump, Trump,” and the group leaving Artists Space responded by chanting “Olé, Olé, Olé, Fuck Trump.”

The four or five Trump supporters then approached the group, according to Basillas, and one of the men, who appeared to be white, showed them his Blue Lives Matter bracelet and, according to Basillas, he “then started pointing out the queers in the

group” and making homophobic comments. Pointing to one member, Basillas said, the man said: “That one looks like a faggot.” Basillas said it was very clear the men in the group of aggressors were homophobic.

“When we were trying to leave they followed us and one of them — a white man with a lot of tattoos — started swinging at one of us across the face,” Basillas told Hyperallergic over the phone. “We spent 15 minutes trying to defuse [the situation].” The incident happened on Walker Street, near Broadway, less than a block from Artists Space.

“They were adamant they were Trump supporters ... and they made it clear where they stood,” Basillas said. Hyperallergic called the NYPD to see if a police report had been filed and was told that there was nothing on file about Saturday night’s attack. I asked Basilio why the group did not file a police report. “We didn’t file a police report because we don’t trust the police,” he said.

The group that attacked Basillas and his companions was composed of men of various ethnicities. It included men who, according to Basillas, looked white, South Asian, Latino, and possibly Middle Eastern. Basillas said the men didn’t appear drunk.

The white man with the Blue Lives Matter bracelet, whom Basillas described as roughly 5’11, was wearing a T-shirt at one point, which he took off to show off his muscles and tattoos before he started to assault the group leaving Artists Space.

“Connor [Hicks] got suckerpunched in the face first and Colin [Ashley] tried to stop it, then when Colin tried to stop it they started coming after Colin,” Basillas said. “And then everybody else tried to separate them. Then the guys [attacking] started yanking all the women out of the [group]. Claire got thrown onto the sidewalk, and Patti [Cruz] got thrown.”

Basillas said the white man used certain movements and gestures during the attack that suggested he may have been professionally trained in combat.

Peter Soeller, who was among those attacked by the men, told Hyperallergic that the group was aggressive. “All of them were like, ‘Yay Trump, yes Trump, we love Trump.’ ... Then the next thing we know, the big white guy starts attacking [one of us]. It was really confusing. It was a big brawl.

“Basically, from my perspective, I tried to pull the big white guy off of Colin as he was wailing on him, but I’m not strong enough. I’m very skinny and lanky. I couldn’t do it. He then turns to me and punches me in the face, knocked my glasses off. I pulled back. I grabbed my glasses and got the fuck out of there, and I noticed my nose was bleeding profusely.

“Then they run off. A couple of our guys chased them down, but we lost them.”

After the groups finally separated, the arts activists were concerned that their aggressors would go into Artists Space, so they watched them from afar. Afterward, according to Basillas, they saw the men approach a police car, talk to the officers in it, and then walk away.

After the incident, the group went back into Artists Space. "Because it was an activist party, there's medics there," Soeller explained. "They treated us for our injuries. Colin was probably the worst out of all of us. The pictures really don't do it justice. If you see the ice pack that he's holding up against his eye, that eye is very swollen, to the point where it's almost swollen shut."

The artist Marz Saffore, who has been involved with Decolonize This Place throughout the residency, was there the night of the party. She explained to Hyperallergic what happened after the group returned to Artists Space. "[One of the people who was attacked] came in and was just like, 'Mic check,'" she said. "Everyone was just like 'Mic check.' He said, 'These Trump supporters just beat up our dudes.'"

Saffore went outside to see the attackers at the corner cursing. She confirmed that they appeared to be of various ethnic backgrounds. She says they walked away after more people from the party at Artists Space came out and the men realized they were extremely outnumbered.

Saffore approached the NYPD officer nearby. "I told him what was happening. I pointed out the guys because, the three guys who were right there. They were just crossing Church Street [at this point]," she said. "They were right there, we were pointing them out and the police officer told me, he's just like, 'You need to get your people inside.' He completely ignored any claim, he completely erased everything. He just said, 'You need to get your people inside.' I was like, 'OK but I just need, we just need time.' He was just like, 'No you need to get your people inside because reinforcements are coming.'"

Soellers and another person who was attacked, Colin Ashley, eventually went to Beth Israel hospital in Manhattan to be treated for their injuries.

The group, under the auspices of New York Shut It Down, which is affiliated with Black Lives Matter, held a rally last night in front of Artists Space. According to Basillas, who was the first to speak at the rally, roughly 30 people attended and they may hold future events in response to the attack.

"Having a politician who is so open about violence directed toward marginalized communities gives them a gateway to not be policed on shit that they're doing now," Basillas said. "That's why they are comfortable doing that."

In response to the attack, Artists Space sent Hyperallergic the following statement:

The Board of Directors of Artists Space is deeply shocked that attendees of the Decolonize This Place closing event this Saturday were attacked as they left Artists Space. We stand in opposition to the white supremacy, homophobia, and hatred that this incident embodied. The Decolonize This Place program has been of profound importance and will continue to have multiple resonances both at Artists Space and in New York; its urgency is only heightened by such attacks. We hope that all cultural institutions will stand with us in rejecting hate and intolerance.

