

# Life & Arts

FT Weekend



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Somewhere in London this weekend the rebel theatre group 'BP or Not BP?' will stage its most ambitious protest to date. It will happen unannounced, without publicity. "Only then do you create some noise," says Chris Garrani, a 29-year-old activist with a beard and a look of permanent dishevelment, despite the suit jacket. "Only then do you make people's eyes pop."

The question of who should and who shouldn't support the arts has raged for centuries. But today there seem to be more barits of outrage than ever, at least in London and New York. In recent years BP or Not BP?, along with eight other campaign groups that make up Art Not Oil, a coalition of protest groups seeking to end sponsorship of the arts by oil companies, has made so many "eyes pop" it is hardly surprising that Arts Council England recently felt compelled to publish guidelines for galleries on managing disturbances.

Nearly every major art and cultural institution in the UK has become weary familiar with Art Not Oil's stunts — or, as they call them, "creative interventions". A host of corporate sponsors have come into their sights. But ever since the Deepwater Horizon oil spill at the centre of the debate over the ethics of sponsorship should we resist relationships between companies and cultural institutions or do we have to accept that art needs corporate backing to thrive?

Memorable protests have included the time last year when activists sat atop each other at Tate Britain with the CO2 concentrations in the earth's atmosphere, the "evocation" of the "evil spirit of BP" in Tate Modern's Parkes Hall in 2011; the "splashmob" of 200 performers, dressed as mermaids and a BP-branded sea monster, that flooded the British Museum in July. The list goes on.

And the tensions increase. Some in the cultural sector talk of artists and curators — as well as sponsors — being under siege by the activists who resort to a range of tactics, from freedom of information requests to impromptu protests. Actor Mark Rylance says he has almost "inadvertently" become a spokesperson for Art Not Oil since he won an Oscar this year. "I have said for years I'm against BP sponsoring our cultural institutions," he tells me. "But only now does whatever I say make headlines. I'm aware that I don't know everything and this is complicated."

A classical archaeologist at the British Museum who wishes to remain anonymous says the media attention has been "stifling". He adds: "We're civil servants, meant to be working for an educational institution. Yet corporate culture is filtering down, and it feels like we can't speak out against our sponsors." All the while the protesters keep coming. A security guard at the British Museum says the new guidelines never leave his pocket. "The hippies like it here."

Garrani smiles when I relay the story. "It's just like that, mate. First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, and then you win."

The favour at a rehearsal in central London a couple of days before this weekend's planned event reflects the confidence of Art Not Oil. About 40 people will take part in a "ritualistic performance" lasting five hours. Danny Chivers, a performance poet, 38, runs through proceedings. Whereas some of the protests have "punched the irony button as hard as possible", this will be "bold, ornamental and durational".

Jon Worth, a 42-year-old full-time activist, argues the basic point case for the prosecution: "Art and culture are compromised if the financing of them is unethical." Companies such as BP, she adds, shouldn't be able to use cultural institutions to "greenwash" their image. "Galleries and museums have long engaged in the exchange of cultural and corporate capital: they get cash, the cor-



Below: rehearsals in London for BP or Not BP's weekend protest; Chris Garrani of the protest group, photographed by Hury Mitchell; main image by Omer Knaz



porations look good. At least that's the idea. But what happens to those corporations when we start making them look anything but nice?"

As one of the most significant British cultural sponsors, BP is the prime target. When Tate announced BP had ended its 27-year association with the gallery in March, Art Not Oil claimed responsibility. They did so again a month later, when BP ended its sponsorship of the Edinburgh International Festival after 54 years. "The decision is starting to fall," Worth said at the time.

BP, however, denied the campaign was a factor, instead citing a "chilling business environment". After roughly four years at more than £100 a barrel, in 2014 the price of oil tumbled, falling below \$50 earlier this year before recovering to about \$50. In July, BP renewed its sponsorship of four major arts institutions: the National Portrait Gallery, the British Museum, the Royal Opera House and the Royal Shakespeare Company will receive £7.5m over five years from 2018, maintaining a relationship with BP that, for three of them, dates back more than 20 years.

But those involved in making partnerships from the volatile nature of the protests could deter future sponsorship. And at a time of savings cuts to the UK arts budget — almost 50 per cent in real terms since 2010 — this could have damaging repercussions. Also, the departure of dozens of non-doms over the imminent loss of tax advantages may have depleted sponsorship budgets.

Lord Browne, chief executive of BP between 1995 and 2007, who is now the Tate's chairman of trustees, arguably understands the complexity of the debate better than anyone. "Most corporates recognise they can't buy love," he tells me. "But I sincerely hope they don't react too lastingly and say, 'Well, if you don't play with me I'll go somewhere else.' Because negatively first cuts away at the shell, at the apex of a corporate, and then at the corporation's ability to

use the institution as a platform for its brand and marketing."

St Richard Lambert, a former director-general of the CBI and former chief of the FT who is chairman of the British Museum, is also concerned. "I don't think BP will drop its sponsorship but there's a risk, clearly," he says. "The protests must be raising question marks."

Today pretty much every art form has to run a three-legged race with the sponsors that support its production. After all, big art costs big money. In many respects, of course, it has always been that. Without the support of the Medici family of bankers of the 14th and 15th centuries, there is a chance we would not have had the art of Michelangelo, Donatello and Leonardo da Vinci. Alfred Nobel, an arms manufacturer, was also keen to change his reputation following his astonishment at reading his newspaper obituary, headlined "The merchant of death is dead". It was actually his brother who had died. So in 1895 he devoted his fortune to creating prizes for those who confer the "greatest benefit on mankind".

But it took until the Thatcher decade for Britain's cultural institutions to fully embrace American-style enterprise culture. Tobacco sponsorship was so prevalent in 1960s Britain that three big London orchestras were supported by cigarette companies, with critics dubbing the London Philharmonic "the du Mauser band", according to the academic Chin-Tao Wu, who is a leading critic of what she sees as the corporatisation of cultural institutions. In Privatisation Culture, she writes that by the end of the 1980s, whether in Britain or America, art museums had become another "public-relations outlet for corporations".

"Across the Atlantic, Lexus sedans were regularly displayed outside museums and concert halls... while in Berlin both the Royal Academy and Royal Festival Hall converted their courtyards into car showrooms for corporate

sponsors." Of course, corporate sponsorship has benefited artists and their careers. Damien Hirst, without equal in suspending dead animals in formaldehyde, has from the beginning prospered from corporate sponsorship. At Goldsmiths College, they really encouraged breaking down barriers and finding new ways to do things, and sponsorship is in all part of that," he has said. Property development company Olympia & York sponsored his student show *Prove* since then. Beck's, Hagen-Euze and other brands have been associated with his work.

Clearly art will continue to depend — as it always has — heavily on corporations. So why is this protest movement gaining momentum? For many of the protesters, who are mostly in their twenties and thirties, the tipping point came after the Deepwater Horizon spill. Art Not Oil had been together six years by that point, its campaigning often falling on deaf ears. That changed on the evening of June 28 2010 when, with oil still spewing into the ocean from the April spill, Tate hosted a party to mark 20 years of BP sponsorship. "That party really brought the issues into focus for a lot of the general public," Worth contends. Garrani adds: "Corporate sponsors often promote their brands against subjects their activities are related to."

Where does he draw the line? He cites BMW rather than BP being a sponsor at Tate Modern as progress. "See, museums and galleries can cope just fine without oil companies." When I point out that BMWs use oil and pollute the environment, Garrani goes quiet. "At least it's a step in the right direction," he says eventually. "Yes, it's a sliding scale, but moral relativism might

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Travel

Into the death zone, in the comfort of your living room

A new virtual reality experience lets anyone 'climb' to the summit of Mount Everest, but how does it compare to the real thing? By Simon Usborne

In 1989, Paul Rose tried to climb the north-east ridge of Everest. The route, on the Tibetan side of the mountain, had always thwarted British mountaineers. In 1924, George Mallory disappeared there; his body would not be found for 75 years. And so Rose prepared for his attempt, climbers were still mourning the loss of Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker on the ridge in 1982. Reaching the summit would be part triumph, part tribute.

It would not be easy. Days in reaching Everest had tipped the expedition beyond the monsoon season. The team were stunned by the depths of new snow they found at high altitude. "We weren't so much climbing as treading a gook through it," Rose recalls. "One night we put up the tent and stashed some oxygen for later. I shoved a cylinder into the snow and it just disappeared." The team had pitched up, in low visibility, on an enormous snow overhang, or cornice. The oxygen tank hung and punched straight through it and plummeted down the 3,250 metres. Rose hung face below. One wrong step and

the climbers might follow it. After a speedy retreat, and a diversion via the North Col, fierce winds ended the expedition. Rose would not return to the mountain, until, almost 50 years later – inside a centrally heated room in Kensington, London – I watch him make a second attempt.

"Now that's bloody clever, isn't it?" Rose says. The 65-year-old, a former commander of the Rothera Research Station in Antarctica, is wearing jeans and loafers as he steps on to ladders to cross a crevasse in the Khumbu icefall.

Rose is in a virtual reality, at the cutting edge of a technology transforming the way we see the world. Everest VR – a new piece of software that is variously described as agame, an experience or a simulation – recreates the mountain inside a HTC Vive headset. Infrared emitters on tripod tracks the headset's precise location. So when Paul looks around or takes a step on the ladder, that's what he sees and does.

"How do I grab the summit?" he asks above the wind whistling in his headphones. The rope ascenders lie at his



Vertical reality: a scene from 'Everest VR', demonstrated to adventurers earlier this month at London's Royal Geographical Society

feet. Thor Gunnarsson, co-founder of Solaris, the software's Icelandic developer, explains how to reach down and trigger the controllers in each hand. As Rose does so, the large mittens in his view grab the jumars and moves them along the rope as he walks. He progresses with such determination that he hits a wall in the room, briefly returning to the real world.

We are at the headquarters of the Royal Geographical Society – in the same building in which, in 1865, Everest

got its name – where Solaris is demonstrating the new technology at Explore, an annual expedition planning conference. Everest VR is based on more than 300,000 photographs taken from land and air by BVX, a visual effects studio in Iceland. The company gathered the images for Everest, last year's 3D cinema blockbuster, and worked with Solaris to turn them into a 3D model using a process known as photogrammetry. Initially released in August, the game has now been updated to include material

from the RGS archives, such as photos of Edmund Hillary's 1953 expedition.

Anyone with a powerful PC can try the experience – an HTC Vive headset costs about £750 and the software itself is available online for about £35 (it will soon also be available for the PlayStation and Oculus Rift headsets). Virtual climbers can choose from 18 different routes and use the controller to "teleport" up the mountain in giant leaps. There are also several more detailed scenes, including the Khumbu icefall crossing and the summit ridge. I have a go at the notorious Hillary Step. Snow tumbles off the rock beneath me as I inch forwards. It is genuinely leg-wobbling stuff.

Solaris wanted to prove what the technology could do but came to see the software as a leader in what has become a virtual tourism race. Google launched Google Earth VR this month, which uses similar technology to allow the user to fly between Manhattan skyscrapers or over the Golden Gate Bridge. Visitors to London's Natural History Museum can now explore the Great Barrier Reef in

VR. "We're seeing a land-rush to develop the best VR experiences in iconic locations, whether it's the pyramids or the Great Wall of China," says Gunnarsson.

On Everest, a "God mode" newly added to the software allows Rose to hang above the summit, zooming in at will. Soon he spots the place where he dropped the oxygen cylinder in 1989, then Gunnarsson invites him to teleport to the summit.

Is there something inquietous about technology that offers such an easy alternative to a great physical challenge (especially when being launched in a building where so many real expeditions were planned)? Rose says later that nothing can or should compare to real exploration, but this is also close as he will get to the roof of the world. Once there, he stands in silence to take in the view. "I was only 600 metres below this would you believe," he says, looking at the Northeast Ridge. "But it's a flipping long way when you're down there."

Everest VR is available from steamspower.com and viveport.com

Should you ever have wondered why Collins Avenue, the 13-mile drag that runs the length of Miami Beach, is so named, the answer is to honour the memory of John Collins. He was the developer who, during the 1890s, bought the marshy, mosquito-ridden, alligator-infested northern half of the island and literally drained the swamp (by building a canal) in order to cultivate mangos, avocados and coconuts. He also built a bridge, connecting Miami Beach across Biscayne Bay to the city of Miami, so laying the foundation, so to speak, for the building boom that followed. Collins may have preferred borescuture to hospitality – he left it to his children to build the "new Atlantic City" – but by the early 20th century, Miami Beach had hitched its future to tourism.

There is therefore a precedent for real estate developers' names being appended to their creations but, even so, it's unusual for a city to christen a whole district after someone. Last year, however, the mayor of the City of Miami Beach, Filippa Marrero, announced that seven blocks that straddle Collins Avenue between 32nd and 36th Streets be named the Faena District after Alan Faena, an Argentine entrepreneur and self-styled "urban alchemist" who is leading a \$1.2bn project to transform this once run-down area into something of a destination in its own right.

First came the renovation and relaunch of two hotels and the construction of an elegant residential tower designed by Foster and Partners. Both Lloyd Blankfein, Goldman Sachs chairman and chief executive, and the artist Larry Gagosian own apartments in the tower, and its duplex penthouse sold for a reported \$60m, a new Miami record. This weekend, the second phase will be unveiled with the opening of the district's arts centre, the Faena Forum, designed by architect OMA. Rem Koolhaas, OMA's founder, says he believes the Forum "is destined to become one of America's most coveted event destinations for the world's creative elite".

The building – a white cube and cylindrical, both in poured concrete and punctuated by about 400 differently shaped windows – "is not a typical art space", Faena tells me. There will be not just performances and exhibitions but also talks, lectures, readings and debates, hence the circular amphitheatre, clad in pale pink marble, on its first level. "We want it to be an incubator, a laboratory not just for art but science, philosophy, politics, debates, fashion, discussions," says its artistic director, Ximena Carrilho, who has a long CV as a curator and is also Faena's "wife". "We want to create cultural turbulence." Its programming will also aim to cultivate collaborations between practitioners of different disciplines. This week, for example, it will host a specially commissioned dance work by Pam Tanowitz, designed by the building's lead architect, Shigeru Ban. Tanowitz's collaboration with the artist Olafur Eliasson, musician Jamie xx and novelist Jonathan Safran Foer, will play here before it gets to London. As Carrilho points out, Miami Beach already has three of the world's most technologically advanced concert halls: Miami City Ballet and the Bays Musicum of Art. The Faena Forum, she hopes, will come to be seen as their equal. Certainly it is a striking building. From the simple



The chandeliers can be found in the Living Room, a lounge/bar that is a riot of animal prints and big-cut ceramic sculpture (the creation of Frank Stella, best known for his work on Oracle founder Larry Ellison's yachts, and the furniture range he designed with Brad Pitt), and the restaurant Los Fuegos, where the celebrated Argentine chef Francis Mallmann oversees a kitchen where they cook over a wood fire and serve wonderful steak.

There is more fine cooking at the other restaurant, Pan by Paul Qui, which offers a kind of Asian fusion full of unexpected pairings: who knew sea urchin went so well with sweetcorn, a dish they call "The Unicorn", a nod to Damien Hirst's half-fayed-unicorn sculpture, "The Golden Myth", which dominates the decor.

There is another Hirst in the garden, a



Boardwalk empire

Neighbourhood watch | An Argentine developer has transformed a once dowdy area of Miami Beach – and named it after himself. By Claire Wrathall

theatre, one ascends via a ramp and a series of staircases to a much larger space, crowned by a huge dome ribbed like the inside of a conch shell and lit by a central oculus "like the one in the Pantheon", notes Faena. It can be contained as a circular room or opened out into the adjoining cube, allowing for flexibility and modulations up to 800. Last week they teased the amphitheatre acoustic with a solo recital of Bach cello suites; next week Madonna will perform in the main space in aid of her foundation Raising Malawi. Until four years ago, this stretch of Mid Beach was nothing more than parking lots, wasteland and four dilapidated hotels. Three of them – the Saxony, which opened in 1948, the Versailles

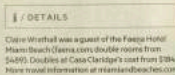
(1940) and the Atlantic (1939) – had been designed by Roy Francis, one of the masters of Miami Modernism, so their exteriors were protected, as was the fourth, the Spanish-style Casa Claridge's. Faena could simply have refurbished them or turned them into apartments but, in the belief that culture makes a neighbourhood, he insisted it needed a use-for-profit arts space, too.

Next he enlisted two stellar architects in the hope, as he puts it, that "Norman Foster and Rem Koolhaas would dance a tango together" around the existing buildings, so creating a cohesive area of landmarks old and new. The 14-storey Saxony, now rebranded the Faena, and Casa Claridge's, soon to become Casa Faena, retain their original purpose. The four-floor Atlantic, however, is poised to become a retail complex, Faena Bazaar, a "carefully curated space" (small might be better the mark), where emerging designers with no presence in Miami will have concessions of pop-ups.

He hasn't yet decided what to do with the old Versailles building but a second Foster-designed residential tower is being built adjacent to it. Opposite that is perhaps the world's most beautiful and mechanically sophisticated multi-storey car park, also designed by OMA, faced in perforated cast concrete through which one will be able to glimpse the colours of the 235 cars stacked within.

Most visitors to the district will be drawn by the Faena Hotel, on which the developer collaborated with the film director his Lutheran and his costume-designer wife, Catherine Martin (both of whom were plausibly chanting The Great Gatsby, so the decor is a couple of decades out of sync with the architecture).

As a hotel it is fabulous in the purest sense: fantastical, crazily extravagant Art Deco palace, bordering on the preposterous but realised with suchchutzpah that I could not help like it. Much of its splendour is attributable to the art that has been integrated into its fabric: Juan Gatti's exotic murals and mosaic floors in the lobby; the glorious black and gold painted-glass panels in the Saxony Bar; and Alberto Garutti's circular chandeliers of naked bulbs that are, in the words of the artist, "a designated million so metre stretch of Argentinian pampas."



DETAILS: Claire Wrathall was a guest of the Faena Hotel, Miami Beach's Faena Forum (over from 1400). Double doors of Casa Claridge's (not from 1940). More visual information at miamiandbeach.com

Miami Spice For more on this city's architectural exploration see Collecting Art in the Americas, a supplement in today's Weekend FT.