30 Years of CounterPulse
Celebrating A Legacy of Art & Action in San Francisco
CounterPulse turns 30 in 2021!

CounterPulse achieving three decades of art and action is evidence that our worlding is working – collaboration and connection can displace dominance, oppression, and polarity. At this milestone, we thank those upon whose shoulders we stand, and we diligently prepare our shoulders to hold those coming next. We thank the 3000 square foot piece of unceded land that holds our home, and we commit to returning this resource back into the hands of the communities most impacted by histories of subjugation.

We need new answers to old problems. I believe the wisdom and spark of the intergenerational, transdisciplinary communities of CounterPulse can research new ways of being by continually (dis)organizing ourselves around shared values, experiences, conflicts, and conversation. In space and in time.

Together, we can be a future that refuses to forget the past.

May the next 30 years of CounterPulse continue to restructure the values of our societies towards new paradigms that center tender accountability with a generous curiosity of others. May we continue to tirelessly cultivate communities guided by a culture of mutual care and a belief that embodiment is a necessary function of radical liberation.

Toward Love,

Julie Phelps
Artistic & Executive Director
CounterPulse Turns 30 in 2021!

But What Did We Do in 2020?

In 2020 CounterPulse postponed an entire season of events and...

- Threw a virtual Gala with The Stud that raised over $30,000 to directly pay Bay Area artists and cultural workers
- Adapted Edge Residency 2020 to be presented at Golden Gate Park and earned $2,250 to support our Artists-in-Residence
- Hosted the first contemporary Two-Spirit contemporary performance festival in San Francisco, raising over $42,000 to support a multigenerational group of 25 Indigenous artists and cultural bearers
- Supported 9 transdisciplinary Artists-in-Residence with paid mentors and over 400 hours of free rehearsal space
- Fueled the Tenderloin’s vibrancy with 20 weekly neighborhood arts activations that keep artists paid and communities in touchless touch
- Rallied with The Transgender District to paint a monumental Black Trans Lives Matter mural on our block at the historical intersection of Turk & Taylor
- Subsidized 6,000 free or pay-what-you-can tickets
- Provided free consultation and gathering space to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and Tenderloin community members, leveraging our assets to keep San Francisco radical and diverse

And that’s just in 2020, and we were only in our 20’s!

In 2021 CounterPulse is turning 30 and we’re ready to celebrate both our legacy and our future of risk-taking arts and culture in the Bay Area.

Donate to CounterPulse and ignite another three decades of art & action.
30 Years of Queer Resistance
CounterPulse embodies many of the things I love most about San Francisco. It is authentic, innovative, and unapologetically queer. It is an institution that takes its role as a member of this community just as seriously as it takes its artistic reputation. I see this sentiment echoed in the diversity of artists that it highlights, and the ways in which it holds space for folks. It is so great to have CounterPulse right at the heart of the Transgender District in San Francisco where it plays a key role in carrying our legacy into the future.

Honey Mahogany, Co-owner of The Stud, Co-Founder of The Transgender District, 3rd Vice Chair of the San Francisco Democratic County Central Committee

Who Comes to CounterPulse?

CounterPulse’s community is a microcosm of the Bay Area’s dynamic culture of arts and action. Since 2012, 77% of our audiences have reported having a new or deepened connection to a social issue after engaging with CounterPulse. Every year roughly 15,000 people engage with CounterPulse as audiences, artists, and supporters.

On average 52% of our audience are LGBTQ+, 42% are BIPOC, 60% are women, 13% are disabled, and 46% of our audience report an income of less than $30K, and many report little prior involvement with the arts. Our dynamic community reflects the Bay Area’s cultural legacy of radical diversity and queer collective power.

Support CounterPulse and directly fund programs and artists steering a future for the Bay Area that is as radical as it is legendary.
30 Years of Risk-Taking Art
CounterPulse is dear to my heart. As its leader for fifteen years, I was fortunate to be part of CounterPulse’s evolution from an artist-led movement to an artist-led institution. Throughout this transformation, CounterPulse has remained a place for our community to share ideas, learn from each other, and in the process become more connected and resilient. In my current role advising the philanthropic community, I have grown more appreciative of how unique CounterPulse is as an organization that has grown steadily while remaining fiercely artist-centered and deeply committed to the multiple communities that call it home. At this moment for our city and nation, we desperately need artists to lead the way in imagining new and alternative futures. In other words, we need spaces like CounterPulse more than ever. “

Jessica Robinson Love  
Executive and Artistic Director Emeritus, CounterPulse  
Managing Director, Arabella Advisors

Since 1991, CounterPulse has provided over $4.1 million dollars in pay to 49 diverse arts administration employees.

And we’ve paid nearly 1 million dollars to countless cultural workers like event staff, photographers, designers, and others who keep the Bay Area (and world) vibrant.

In 2016, CounterPulse acquired 80 Turk St in the heart of San Francisco’s theater district as a permanent home to our community of experimental artists and adventurous audiences.

Since opening our doors in the Tenderloin, we’ve presented, produced, or commissioned over 550 events — all of which are No-one-turned-away-for-lack-of-funds or free to the public. Throughout this time, CounterPulse subsidized nearly 13,000 free or Pay-what-you-can tickets — that’s 35% of our total audience.

CounterPulse events maintain an average 80% house capacity. That’s 80 audience members having an intimate encounter with risk-taking and transformative performances.

Support CounterPulse and help build a more culturally engaged ecology of community members across social and economic divides.
CounterPulse has been willing to stretch itself for me in order for me to achieve the most of each engagement.

This accommodating spirit has built the cross-cultural trust I needed to host the first Two-Spirit Performance festival, Weaving Spirits, in March 2020.

The CounterPulse staff listened to my needs as an artist, and my priorities as a curator of Indigenous creatives. I am so grateful for all the spaciousness and for the ongoing commitment to respond to community needs. They opened their doors for urgent moments of need during the pandemic, which powerfully supported my life outside of my artistic practice. You see, there are profoundly different ways that various POC traditions think about art and performance, which are reflected in their/our creative processes.

I’ve seen how Indigenous methods and aesthetics are often sidelined, and subtly derided within the traditional arts space. CounterPulse is committed to diversifying the community it serves.

But writing this reflection, I realize that there’s something far beyond the acclaim and satisfaction of a job well done. I am left with deepest gratitude to all: from the land and all the nourishment flowing from it, to CounterPulse’s tireless staff, my artistic mentors, and the warm and receptive audiences who engaged with us each night.

Javier Stell-Fresquez, Weaving Spirits Co-Curator (2020) 2017 Performing Diaspora Artist-in-Residence

In March of 2020, the Weaving Spirits festival of Two-Spirit performance connected CounterPulse with Two-Spirit artists in ways that not only brought Indigenous artists to the table, but invited them to co-design the table. The project enabled it’s co-curators, J Miko Thomas (aka Landa Lakes) & Javier Stell-Fresquez, to address the visibility crisis for Two-Spirit Native American contemporary performance-based artists in the Bay Area. Weaving Spirits’ Co-Curators wove the power of intergenerational artistic collaboration into every part of the design and execution of the festival, attracting a very wide range of communities and a healthy presence of Indigenous peoples of many tribes. All festival artists are now able to continue their careers with a wider range of experience in a commission-based festival.

Weaving Spirits continues to adapt CounterPulse to be more inclusive of artists in the community, reflecting a need for more active accountability measures in response to the Ohlone land we’re situated on. By providing space and resources to the Native Two-Spirit community, this project sparked cultural dialogue between traditional Native American arts communities and contemporary dance communities, bridging artistic and cultural barriers.

Support CounterPulse and help us continue to bridge the Bay Area’s unique cultural communities through impactful opportunities.
Unique to CounterPulse is their commitment to community; we were encouraged and supported in cultivating new audiences and making connections with local advocacy and artistic partners. Our proposal was ambitious, including a large ensemble of international artists and complex production needs; at every turn the CounterPulse staff was communicative, organized, and imaginative, doing their best to accommodate our needs.

It was an honor to be presented by a venue with such long-standing dedication to radical and avant-garde performance. This legacy matters for the artists in residence, as it broadens exposure and opportunity for cross-pollination across artistic disciplines. This genuine support continues beyond the residency, as CounterPulse promotes future work and professional development.

Armineh Astanbous & Rachael Sharkland,
Edge 2020 Artists-in-Residence

Through our Artist Residency and Commissioning (ARC) program CounterPulse identifies emerging and innovative choreographers and provides rehearsal space and artistic/professional resources to support the development of their works, and springboard their careers. Impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, our Edge 2020 Artists-in-Residence worked with CounterPulse to adapt their productions to a Golden Gate Park site for live and virtual audiences – with 100% of ticket proceeds going to the artists.

CounterPulse is more than a space, we’re a dynamic platform that ensures powerful artistic projects can come to life. CounterPulse’s ARC program continues to springboard artists to greater career advancement, public visibility, and financial support.

Support CounterPulse and help us continue our vital work keeping Bay Area artists sustained throughout whatever’s next.
Since 1991
CounterPulse has paid over $4M dollars in artists fees to directly support artists.

CounterPulse has subsidized 9,000 free hours of rehearsal space.

Since 2015
88% of CounterPulse’s Artists-in-Residence have reported increased recognition through awards, articles, residencies and presentation opportunities since their CounterPulse residencies.

Since 2016
Since moving to our new Tenderloin building, we’ve supported over 180 Artists-in-Residence and collaborators, springboarding their career to new heights like global tours.

Who Are Our Artist?

Who Are Our Artist?

90%+
Reside In The Bay Area

50%+
Identify As LGBTQ2+

44%
Identify As BIPOC

50%+
Report Making Under $30k/Year
Since working with CounterPulse on the skateboard Block Fest activations and Black Lives Matter mural, my career has shaped and evolved in a way where I have more confidence as an artist. **CounterPulse has helped provide a viewpoint of the dire need for local creatives to have a voice and an outlet in their own backyards.** This builds community morale and gives the Tenderloin character. My work with CounterPulse has given me a sense of integrity and inclusion in a predominantly non-white neighborhood that is often overlooked. It’s imperative for this community to have diverse artistic representation. I **thank CounterPulse for letting the TL represent it’s creative vibrancy.**

CounterPulse’s role in the larger ecology of Tenderloin-based arts is a thermometer for what’s going on in the neighborhood. A cultural indicator of the Tenderloin’s creativity and voice. More than a place for the arts, CounterPulse is a spot for community therapy, an essential organization of abundant social relevance which is vital in the world’s ongoing social and political climate.

*Sylvester Guard Jr., Block Fest Artist Activator*

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**Galvanized by our legacy of art in community, CounterPulse’s Neighborhood Arts program, TenderArts, aims to keep what is beautiful about the Tenderloin thriving: a neighborhood that is diverse, expressive, and resilient.**

We work with Tenderloin-based artists to listen and respond to community concerns, such as lack of respite and access to social services, welcoming our Tenderloin neighbors to engage in creative activities and share their stories.

Through TenderArts CounterPulse is helping transform our block of Turk Street into an inspiration for what cross-sector arts projects can do for low-income and urban neighborhoods.

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**Since moving to the Tenderloin 5 years ago CounterPulse has...**

*70+ ART*

Programmed Neighborhood Arts Activations

*35+*

Local Social Service/Social Justice Organization Partners

*Mural Projects Involving 7 Local Community Organizations*

*300 ft*

*4,000*

Launched Urban Furniture Residency For Neighborhood’s Respite Crisis

*Community Members Engaged & Over 250 Artists—Most Of Whom Live In The Tenderloin*

Support CounterPulse and help catalyze a vibrant future for the Tenderloin neighborhood.
30 years of action.

30 years of innovation.

30 years of supporting the artists who enrich our lives.

In a time when our community relies on us most, CounterPulse’s threads are woven throughout and beyond the cultural fabric of San Francisco.

Join us in celebrating both our legacy and our future of risk-taking arts and culture.

Give CounterPulse an early birthday present and mark the culmination of our 20’s.

Your support will enable us to continue our vital work in keeping our city vibrant and resilient.

Donate to CounterPulse and ignite another 30 years of art & action.