

PUBLIC TRUST

PAUL RAMÍREZ JONAS



About Public Trust

Public Trust is a public realm artwork, a series of interactive performances about promises that asks the public to vouch for their promises from a vast array of collaterals: taking oaths over sacred or civic texts, swearing over holy objects or materials, calling on a witness, making a pinky promise etc. As willing participants utter their promises, and then “give their word” in whatever way they see fit, their promises will go up on a large-scale marquee display board (anonymously) for much wider publics to read. The board will also display other promissory statements culled from that day’s news - political promises, the weather report, scientific predictions, promises from popular culture figures, economic forecasts and more.

Ramirez Jonas believes a work can create clearly defined situations, ones that allow participants to speak in public and invite self-reflection. Furthermore, works like Public Trust create a dialogue, where participants can learn from each other and themselves by reflecting on the premises of their speech. Together this framework creates the opportunity to question suppositions that typically go without question.

The best way to understand the project is to watch our short documentary [here](#). You can also see the documentary from the original Boston edition [here](#).

Making Public Trust Yours

Public Trust is an artistic project which offers opportunities for presenters to make local and relevant connections in a number of ways, making each iteration of the project specific for audiences and communities relevant to you.

‘Public Trust was an invaluable part of the festival programme for enabling impactful, authentic connections with the general public. The artwork rewarded peaked curiosity in a way that fostered countless heartfelt, genuine interactions. We couldn’t have been happier with the delivery and impact of this project which engaged nearly 10,000 people over a four day period. Fierce were very supportive partners whose expertise and deep care for the work was clear throughout our collaboration.’
Ema Boswood, Producer, Transform Festival



Sites

Where you place the project will inform the types of audiences you reach. The project is most successful in places of high footfall, where a wide range of people might visit such as civic spaces and / or squares, shopping centres, train stations, museum atriums and more.



The local item

People are offered the opportunity to swear on a range of items to finalise their promise (a sacred text, the Jupiter stone, water from the River Ganges etc...). On the promise table is space for a locally relevant item. At Fierce in Birmingham we open this question up to the public via a [public vote](#), adding a layer of engagement and audience participation ahead of the project, Birmingham voted for the famous Bullring Bull to be their local sacred item! At Transform festival in Leeds the local items were a Leeds United Scarf and an Owl (a city emblem).

Performers

Public Trust offers a fantastic opportunity to engage local artist as 'performers' or 'promise takers' on the project. Fierce will train your team (and in turn they can pass the training on to others) so they understand the process and can deliver the public facing elements of the work. Read a blog post from Birmingham artist Demi Nandhra about her experience of working on Public Trust [here](#).

Volunteers

There are supporting roles for volunteers within the project, which are engaging and meaningful in their own right, meaning volunteers have an opportunity to experience the project in an enriching way.

Practicalities

A full tech document is available, but here are some key headlines about the practicalities of Public Trust:

- You will need a site, where we can situation the marquee board which is 4.5 metres, by 4.5 metres, this can be indoors or outdoors, please note if outdoors some further practicalities need to be considered (eg rain contingency plans). Our Production Manager leads the install and de-install but must be supported by local crew. We require a day before get-in
- You also need space on-site for the tables to sit either side of the marquee board, and somewhere for us to display paper copies of promises made each day
- A local staff team to deliver the project, who will be supported and trained by a Fierce Producer who tours with the project
- A local volunteer team to support the project, they must be able to read and write English language

It is vital there is a collaborative partnership with the venue host – they need to understand what the project is, how it works, the way it attracts public attention and exciting conversations it can start.



History of the Project

Public Trust was originally commissioned by Now + There a non-profit organisation dedicated to redefining public art by creating impactful, temporary and site-specific public art projects in Greater Boston, USA in 2016. These situations continue Paul Ramirez Jonas' use of speech acts as both the means to engage the public; as well as the end itself - to have the participants perform a speech act in public

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In 2023 Fierce presented the UK premiere of the work, investing in the production costs to own a permanent iteration of the work designed for touring in the UK and Europe. This built on a longer-term relationship between Paul and Fierce after Fierce produced Key to the City in Birmingham as part of Birmingham Festival 2022, the Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme. Key to the City was a large scale, city-wide public realm project reaching awarding 15,000 people the 'freedom of the city' for a period of 10 weeks through giving away keys that unlocked 21 usually inaccessible sites, painting a picture of the city. Key to the City reached participatory audiences of over 50,000. You can watch a [short film about Key to the City here](#).



Previous Performances of Public Trust

August 27—September 17, 2016, Now + Then

Dudley Square, Roxbury, MA, Copley Square, Boston, MA, and Kendall Center, Cambridge, MA, USA

March 3 – March 18 2018, Museo Jumex
Mexico City, Mexico

October, 2020, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland
Cleveland, USA

July 29 – August 5 2023, Fierce
Birmingham, UK

October 11 – October 13, Transform Festival
Leeds, UK

About Paul Ramírez Jonas

Paul Ramírez Jonas was born in 1965 in Pomona, California, and raised in Honduras. He earned a BA in studio art from Brown University (1987) and an MFA in painting from Rhode Island School of Design, Providence (1989).

Ramírez Jonas's work ranges from large-scale public installation and monumental sculpture to intimate performance, video, and drawing, and traces the universal aspiration to an elusive perfect world. From driving west in pursuit of the sunset (Longer Day, 1997), to recreating failed flying machines (various

projects, 1993–94) and transcribing the communications of the Apollo space mission (Men on the Moon, Tranquility, 1990–), his practice is characterised by a bracing, albeit nostalgic, idealism rooted in a faith in human resilience. Sensitive to the processes of globalisation, he reveals its simultaneous tendencies towards interdependence and exclusion.

Exploring the parallels between various public gathering spaces, Ramírez Jonas's drawing series Admit One (2010–13) and Assembly (2013) chart a typology of assembly halls, churches, cinemas, stadiums, and theaters that underscore the fundamental nature of the human need for connection. In The Commons (2011) and Ventriloquist (2013), the artist revived the monument (here the equestrian statue and the portrait bust, respectively) as a vehicle for communication by replacing the form's immutable granite or marble with cork—a material that is both degradable and the traditional medium of community noticeboards.

Key to the City (2010) was a citywide intervention in which twenty-five thousand keys to private or normally inaccessible spaces throughout New York City were bestowed on certain individuals in a special ceremony, revealing that culture can still be a freely shared experience, while also highlighting the increasing privatization of urban space.

Ramírez Jonas has had solo exhibitions at Artists Space, New York (1990); White Columns, New York (1992); Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas (2007); Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (2008); and the Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo (2011). Selected group exhibitions include Fluxus Attitudes, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1992); inSite_05, San Diego and Tijuana (2005); The Quick and the Dead, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2009); Barely There (Part II), Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2011); Caribbean: Crossroads of the World, El Museo del Barrio, New York (2012); and Shine a Light 2013, Portland Art Museum (2013). He has also taken part in the Johannesburg Biennial (1995); Seoul Biennial (2000); Shanghai Biennial (2006); São Paulo Biennial (2008); and Venice Biennale (2009). His honors include grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (1991), Art Matters Foundation (2009), and Joan Mitchell Foundation (2009), as well as a Howard Foundation Fellowship (2009).

He is Professor and Chair of the Department of Art at Cornell University College of Architecture, Art, and Planning (AAP).

Ramírez Jonas lives and works in New York.

<http://www.paulramirezjonas.com>

Credits:

Lead Artist – Paul Ramírez Jonas

Produced and presented in association with Fierce

Originally commissioned by Now + Then