



Mark Perrince for BuzzFeed News

## The Public Square Belongs to 4Chan

In a few short weeks, "He Will Not Divide Us" went from celebrity-hyped exhibition to troll playground to dead. What happened tells us everything about the future of civic space and free speech in the age of the alt-right.

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**On January 30**, 10 days after the inauguration of Donald Trump, the actor and artist Shia LaBeouf sent an

were to happen to someone else:

**“It was diabolical. It’s disgraceful for a museum to behave in that manner, to have such contempt for an artist and an artist’s work.”**

“It’s a very bad precedent with long-lasting implications,” said Ben Davis, the national art critic for Artnet News. “It’s a model for trolls to harass any kind of internet-connected art.”

It’s true that “He Will Not Divide Us” belongs to a specific category of livestreamed art that has a history of being trolled in [sometimes upsetting ways](#). But in 2017, nearly everyone entering a gallery has a

smartphone loaded with live-video apps, and [museums have started to nander to social media](#).

**If you set** out to design a cultural event specifically to provoke the alt-right, it would be hard to improve on "He Will Not Divide Us." While the group contains multitudes — Trump fanatics, anti-social justice warriors, trolls, ethnic nationalists, neo-Nazis, anime experts, and every conceivable permutation thereof — the piece was expansive enough to incite them all.

Start with semantics. If nothing else, the alt-right is all about division: between nations, between races, between genders, between religions, between ideologies, and between trolls and non-trolls. "[The title] is almost daring people to divide the work," said Davis, the art critic. "From an art point of view, it was the point of the project, I assume."

The artists strenuously claim the piece is nonpartisan, and that the words can be, per the introductory text, "a show of resistance or insistence, opposition or optimism, guided by the spirit of each individual participant and the community." But the media immediately reported the work as an anti-Trump protest, and it's sort of hard to blame them: "He Will Not Divide Us" appeared the day of the inauguration, in New York City, where Hillary Clinton won nearly 80% of the vote, at the same time as protests against Trump massed in cities throughout the world. Realistically, who was going to be chanting those words?

"I'm not sure the artists are in control of the political meaning of the piece," Davis said.

If the event was alt-right catnip in theory, in practice it was irresistible. The footage from the first day is an unintentional masterpiece of Bannonian propaganda:

**"The general reaction was *this is going to be so fun to fuck with.*"**

Zucker, Jeffrey Katzenberg, a labor union leader, and a hedge fund founder.

"It feeds into the right-wing narrative about coastal elites and Hollywood liberals, Meryl Streep versus Trump," Davis said.

Perhaps most provocatively, as far as the alt-right is concerned, "He Will Not Divide Us" was