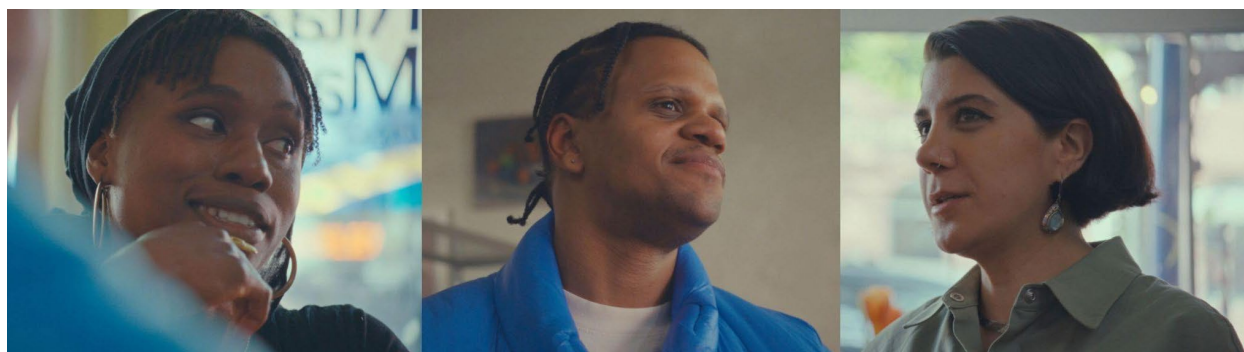




Art21 and Ford Foundation Debut Film
“Things Don't Have to Be Like This: A Conversation About
Digital Technology & Contemporary Art”
Exploring Creativity in the Digital Age

Featuring Artists Morehshin Allahyari, American Artist, and Mimi Qnūḡha, and Directed by J.M. Harper, New Documentary Short to Premiere on July 2, 2025

[Watch the Trailer](#)



Mimi Qnūḡha, American Artist, and Morehshin Allahyari

New York, New York—June 16, 2025—Art21 and JustFilms, Ford Foundation today announced the release of “Things Don't Have to Be Like This: A Conversation About Digital Technology & Contemporary Art,” a new documentary short that provides an intimate portrait of three artists and friends—Morehshin Allahyari, American Artist, and Mimi Qnūḡha—grappling with the complex relationships between technology, knowledge, power, and identity. Directed by J. M. Harper, the film will premiere on Wednesday, July 2, at 12:00 p.m. ET on [Art21.org](#) and [YouTube](#).

“Things Don't Have to Be Like This” builds on the learnings of the JustFilms New Media Leadership cohort, conceived to further explorations of technology, community, and making through a critical lens. This is the first time that JustFilms has collaborated on a film with Art21, a nonprofit that documents the art of our time through the words and works of today's most impactful artists. While Art21 films often focus on an interview with a single artist, “Things Don't Have to Be Like This” is unique in bringing together a group of artists for a discussion.

“At Art21, we're proud to share the stories of artists—how they create, how they see the world, and how they confront the urgent questions of our time. With ‘Things Don't Have to Be Like This,’ we're pushing the bounds of our storytelling, opening a broader conversation about the ways that

technology is transforming our society, both good and bad,” stated **Tina Kukielski**, Susan Sollins Executive Director and Chief Curator, Art21. “We’re grateful to our partners at the Ford Foundation for their collaboration in amplifying these artists’ voices and perspectives.”

“At a time when the pace of technological change often outstrips our ethical and cultural frameworks, these artists are doing the essential work of slowing us down, of asking urgent questions about power, identity, and care. Through this partnership with Art21, we’re honored to lift up the vision and leadership of artists who are shaping the future of new media on their own terms. Their practices reflect not just critique, but also imagination—reminding us that another digital future is indeed possible, one rooted in equity, accountability, and community,” stated **Jon-Sesrie Goff**, Program Officer, JustFilms, Creativity and Free Expression at the Ford Foundation.

As rapid advancements in technology transform our world, contemporary artists are crucial voices in defining how society engages with these new tools. In “Things Don’t Have to Be Like This,” the featured artists gather at a coffee shop to discuss the problems and opportunities that technology presents through the lens of their respective creative practices. Viewers are invited inside the process of artistic creation through visually rich sequences that traverse the digital and physical worlds, narrated by each of the artists, who balance critical perspectives with hopeful visions.

American Artist shares how they leverage sculpture, software, and video to critique social media and examine the proliferation of surveillance technologies in daily life. Mimi Qnūḡha explains how she explores the way that missing or hidden data affects society’s perception of what’s credible and important. Morehshin Allahyari illuminates how she uses 3D tools and digital art to retell myths and challenge imperial histories about Southwest Asia and North Africa.

“Collaborating with Art21 and Ford Foundation to direct this film presented the unique opportunity to experiment with the documentary form and to take viewers on a journey inside the distinct perspectives of three artists working at the vanguard of art and technology,” stated filmmaker **J.M. Harper**.

[Download high-resolution images.](#)

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The Ford Foundation seeks to reduce inequality in all of its forms, and artist-driven documentary and emerging media projects are crucial to this effort. As part of the [Creativity and Free Expression](#) program, JustFilms funds social justice storytelling and the 21st-century arts infrastructure that supports it. The projects and people we support inspire imaginations, disrupt stereotypes, and help transform the conditions that perpetuate injustice and inequality.

About Art21

Art21 is the world’s leading source to learn directly from the artists of our time. The mission of Art21 is to educate and expand access to contemporary art through the production of documentary films, resources, and public programs. The organization recently embarked on

capacity-building efforts to grow its operations and services to bring more artists to more audiences worldwide. Art21 opens the world of art to everyone. Learn more at Art21.org.

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