Paris, December 12th, 2022

We, the Fellows and Harriman Residents of the Columbia Institute for Ideas and Imagination, express our outrage at the events that took place on Saturday, November 26th, 2022 in Paris, when our friend and colleague the South African photographer Sabelo Mlangeni was aggressively searched and assaulted by three French police officers for absolutely no reason. Sabelo’s work “The Royal House of Allure” was recently shown at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. The book Tate Photography: Sabelo Mlangeni celebrates Mlangeni, as part of the Tate Museum’s series introducing some of the greatest photographers at work today. He is best known for his series “Country Girls,” which presents an intimate portrait of queer life within the rural areas of Mpumalanga province.

Sabelo was walking home at night when a group of members of the police force stopped him, and pushed him against a wall to search him. Two officers physically restrained him while a third shone a torch in his face, asking him questions. They treated him like a dangerous criminal, seized his camera, and destroyed the film which contained his work. He describes this experience as traumatic.

As academics and fellow artists we cannot carry on in the aftermath of this attack. Racial profiling is disgraceful. It must be eradicated in any society that calls itself democratic and respectful of human rights.

We denounce the actions of these police officers, call for an investigation, and demand reparation. No society should permit any of their institutions to function on the basis of racism and violence.

Signatures:

Natalka Bilotserkivets (Ukrainian poet)
Alessandra Ciucci (associate professor, Department of Music, Columbia University)
William Dougherty (composer, sound artist)
Nikita Grigorov (writer, journalist)
Isabella Hammad (writer)
Nadia Yala Kisukidi (associate professor in philosophy /Paris 8 and writer)
Zoya Laktionova (filmmaker)
Brian Larkin (professor of anthropology, Barnard College, Columbia University)
Melina León (film director)
Hannah Reyes Morales (photographer)
Katharina Pistor (law professor, Columbia University)
Yasmine Seale (translator and writer)
Bill Sharpe (professor of English, Columbia University)
Ersi Sotiropoulos (writer)
Anna Stavychenko (classical music producer, writer)
Eliza Zingesser (associate professor, Department of French, Columbia University)

Together with:
Mark Mazower (SNF Director)
Marie d’Origny (Associate Director)
James Allen (Operations and Projects Coordinator)
Justine Benedeyt (Programming Assistant)
Thomas Dodman (assistant professor, Department of French, Columbia University)