

David L. Johnson

Rule

Opening: September 13th, 2025

Until November 8th 2025

The production of Privately Owned Public Space (POPS) originated in New York City with the 1961 Zoning Resolution, which established the first systematic incentive zoning program. In exchange for constructing plazas, arcades, and atriums accessible to the public, private developers were granted the right to build larger and taller buildings. Since then, nearly 600 POPS have been created in New York, making them the fastest-growing category of state-defined “public space” in the city. Unlike municipal parks and plazas, the codes of conduct that regulate POPS are determined by individual property owners.

For decades, few regulations were posted in most of these spaces beyond bans on skating, biking, and smoking. This changed after the Occupy Wall Street movement’s 2011 occupation of Zuccotti Park, a 24-hour POPS in Lower Manhattan owned by Brookfield Properties. After a nearly two-month encampment, Brookfield—along with property owners across the city—introduced new codes of conduct prohibiting actions such as lying down, pitching tents, participating in demonstrations, playing amplified sound, and distributing literature. By law, these codes only exist in the physical form of a sign and must be visibly posted in order to be enforceable.

After my father’s passing last year, I found several cassettes he had recorded in the 1980s and 1990s, archiving DJ sets from East and West Coast radio stations, including WBLS and 106 KMEL. Using his collection of stereos, I began playing these tapes in POPS across the city, in spaces where “radio playing” had been explicitly banned.

In Milan, the privatization of public space has accelerated. Public-private partnerships, such as Apple’s redevelopment of Piazza del Liberty, have expanded the presence of privately managed piazza space. At the same time, autonomous cultural spaces have faced growing pressure, intensified by anti-rave and anti-squatting laws. Leoncavallo, one of Milan’s longest-standing autonomous social centers (founded in 1975), was evicted from its Via Antoine Watteau site this past summer. During *Rule*, archival dub and reggae recordings by DJ Vitowar—made at Leoncavallo’s original location on Via Leoncavallo 22—will be streamed on the gallery’s website.

FANTA

1.
Cleveland's Mix (WBLS 89), 2025
Video, monitor, painted iron case, speakers, electronics
49 minutes; 44 x 73.5 x 20 cm

2.
Rule, 2024-ongoing
Removed codes of conduct plaques
Variable dimensions

3.
Cleveland's Mix (The Quiet Touch), 2025
Video, monitor, painted iron case, speakers, electronics
48 minutes; 44 x 73.5 x 20 cm

4.
Cleveland's Mix (KMEL 1996), 2025
Video, monitor, painted iron case, speakers, electronics
36 minutes; 44 x 73.5 x 20 cm

5.
Cleveland's Mix (Random), 2025
Video, monitor, painted iron case, speakers, electronics
32 minutes; 44 x 73.5 x 20 cm

6.
Liberty, 2025
Slideshow
22 minutes

On the gallery's website:

7.
Leoncavallo, 2025
Playlist

