The People’s United Nations (pUN) is an event and exhibition by Mexican artist Pedro Reyes. The event takes place November 23–24, 2013, and the exhibition runs from November 9, 2013 through March 30, 2014.

pUN is a playful homage to the United Nations, inspired by the fact that the global body’s General Assembly met from 1946-1950 in the building that now houses the Queens Museum. The event hopes to bring together 195 delegates: New Yorkers who are immigrants from or have family connections to the 195 member and observer states that currently make up the UN. This experimental gathering will test Reyes’ hypothesis that, since diplomacy has not yet solved the world’s problems, then conflict-resolution techniques proven in other fields should be tried instead. Over the course of two days, this singular group will use theater games, group therapy, and techniques from social science to grapple with surprising and provocative proposals as well as problems brought to the table by the delegates themselves. It is precisely the light-hearted spirit of play that will allow the participants to engage with crises whose magnitude would otherwise be overwhelming.

The pUN convening takes place amidst an exhibition specially created by Reyes for the Queens Museum’s new atrium, flooded with light from a massive skylight. These sculptures address topics like peace and dialogue through unexpected combinations of ideas and material. Overhead floats the Drone Dove, which merges the form of an unmanned military drone and a dove of peace. Also gleaming white is Colloquium, a sculpture of delicately interlocking marble panels which, on close inspection, turn out to be blank cartoon speech bubbles, energetically communicating without words. For the past several years Reyes has been reassembling destroyed weapons from the Mexican drug wars into musical instruments. For pUN, in a new twist on this series, he has made a chiming weapon-clock, a veritable memento mori. A miniature mountain of seating cubes is configured and reconfigured as needed for the different sessions during the event, and remains afterwards for the general public to climb and explore. Surrounding the atrium on the blue walls are two-dimensional works that explain the activities and ideas that the delegates will dig into during their Assembly. With their frank embrace of symbolism, these sculptures and wall works provide a poetic and inspiring backdrop for the pUN convening and represent its sincere optimism, serious and playful at once, to the Museum visitor after the event is over.

Please note: Museum visitors can experience the pUN General Assembly activities through special guided tours on the half hour from 12:30 to 4:30pm on November 23 and 24. First come, first serve.

Pedro Reyes works take on a variety of forms from penetrable vinyl sculptures (Capulas, 2002–10) to a TV production featuring Karl Marx and Adam Smith incarnated as puppets (Baby Marx, 2009). In 2008, Reyes initiated his ongoing project Palas por Pistolas, where guns were converted into shovels to plant trees. This led to Disarm (2012), where 6,700 destroyed weapons given to Reyes by the Mexican Army were made into musical instruments. In 2011 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City commissioned Sanatorium an itinerant clinic that mixes art and psychology. Reyes has exhibited in major exhibitions such as the Venice Biennial and Documenta Kassel.

Pedro Reyes, born in 1972, lives and works in Mexico City.