

ARTIST BLOC

NO. 1 IS ART LABOR?



NOVEMBER 20, 2011
SAN FRANCISCO



We are artists and art workers of the 99%. We are struggling to survive and sustain our creative practice in an economy that does not value us as workers, that privatizes cultural institutions and that continuously defunds art programs—from public education to government grants. We are the workers of the 99% because we are scattered, divided by the competitive nature of capitalism – a systems we did not consent to. Most of us are in debt from privately owned art institutions which churn out hundreds of professionally trained (but ultimately unprepared for the economic disillusionment of the art world) cultural workers. The same issues of bankruptcy, the average poverty, lack of employment and of government funding affect us. It is time to join hands with working class people everywhere, to BE the movement and to envision a better world for all of us.

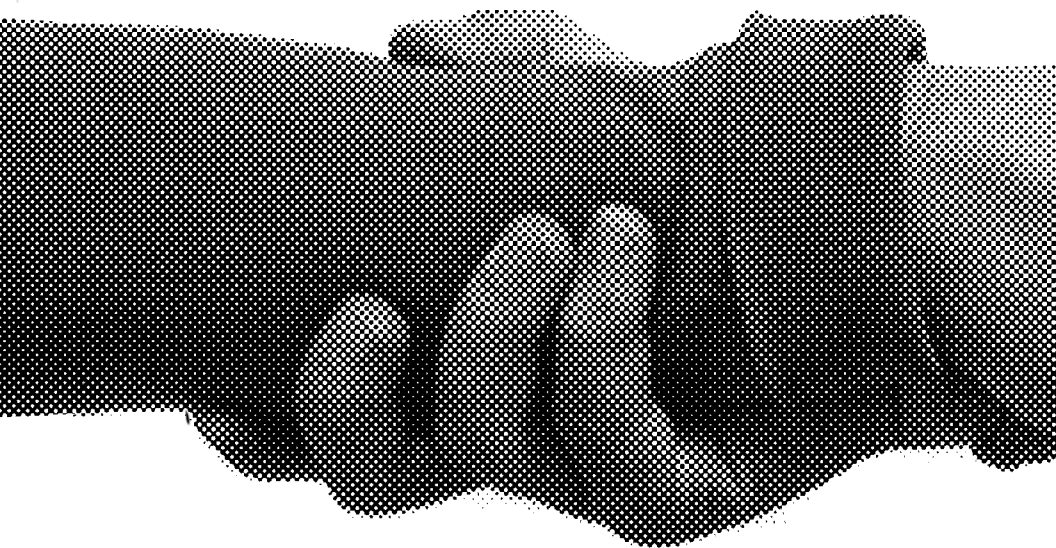


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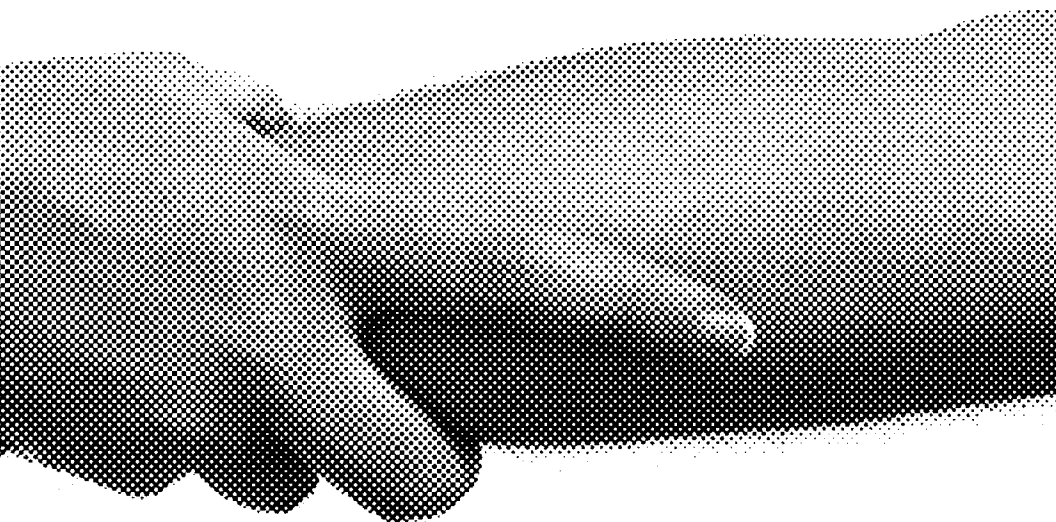


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**IF EVERY ARTIST IN AMERICA'S WORK FORCE BAND
SIZE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY. MORE AMERICA
THAN AS LAWYER, DOCTOR, POLICE OFFICER OR FA
MUCH AS THESE AND ANY OTHER PROFESSION?**

from: blog.thepresentgroup.com

WORKERS



THE!

**ED TOGETHER, THEIR RANKS WOULD BE DOUBLE THE
ANS IDENTIFY THEIR PRIMARY OCCUPATION AS ARTIST
RM WORKER. SHOULDN'T ARTISTS HAVE A VOICE AS**

QUOTES FROM “ART VERSUS WORK” BY JULIA BRYAN-WILSON

How is the making of a sculpture any different from the making of some other kind of commodity? At the heart of this question lie several critical issues: the division of labor under capitalism, the importance of skill or techne, the psychic rewards of making, the weight of aesthetic judgments, and the perpetually unfixed nature of the artist’s professional status since roughly the fifteenth century. The history of Western art is marked by the unstable distinction between artistic, “creative” production and the economics of “true” labor. The social value of making art has been in flux since the Renaissance, when the “author” of a work as a concept was born. The transition of art making from a mere manual occupation to an inspired vocation has been the subject of much literature, including Michael Baxandall’s key work on the separation of art from craft in the Renaissance and artists’ assumption of a specialized class position. Objects such as paintings were no longer the products of anonymous craftsmen but the singular creations of named individuals, and artists’ earnings began to rise along with their status.

In the 1960s art workers theorized how modes of human making are affected by specific economic strictures, the aestheticization of experience, and the production of sensibilities.

What makes the coherence of the phrase art worker challenging—even oxymoronic—is that under capitalism art also functions as the “outside,” or other, to labor: a non-utilitarian, nonproductive activity against which mundane work is defined, a leisure-time pursuit of self-expression, or a utopian alternative to the deadening effects of capitalism. While his writings on the matter vary over time and are by no means unified, Karl Marx’s contributions to this subject have been among the most influential. He makes many explicit connections between artistic making and labor, writing, for instance, “A writer is a productive laborer in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher who publishes his works, he is a wage laborer for the capitalist.” Because of the erosion of patronage models, the artist is often more subjected to the tastes of the market and its deadening effects than other wage laborers are. This casts art not as “play” or non-work but as another part of the capitalist division of labor. Yet Marx holds out the hope for expression or production beyond the market that might be unalienated, if still requiring skill: “Really free labor, the composing of music for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort.”

“Really free labor, the composing of music for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort.”

Drawing on Marx’s theoretical work, and prompted by a desire to make art legitimate, necessary, and meaningful, artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tried to erode the distinction between art and labor by insisting that their actions, and the products of those actions, were indeed work. These efforts were often specifically socialist, even as their products ranged from high-priced luxury goods (as in the utopian craftsmanship model of William Morris) to laboratory experiments and functional design (as in the productivist art undertaken in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution). The Mexican muralists of the 1920s identified themselves as workers, founding the

Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors in 1922 and attempting to create new iconographies that would be legible to peasants and the working class. ..

One of the legacies of Marx's thought is his assertion that art is a mode of skilled production—a form of work—much like any other and as such is open to categories of analysis that attend to its production, distribution, and consumption. Within this rubric even purportedly “autonomous” abstraction practiced by artists of the 1940s and 1950s came under scrutiny by the art workers. As early as 1965, Barbara Rose stated that “art as a form of free expression is seen as a weapon in the Cold War.” The Left, haunted by the specter of Stalinism, had seen abstraction as one way out of doctrinaire socialist realism. By the early 1970s, however, in no small part because of the efforts of Max Kozloff, an AWC member, artists had become acutely aware of how avant-garde art in the United States had been made to serve state power abroad.¹⁴ According to these accounts, abstract expressionist artists, who, for some, embodied the romantic ideal of working free from the pressures of the market, had, however unwittingly, been marketed and sold as part of an ideological program in which the American government trumpeted artists' freedom to create works seemingly unrelated to politics, in distinction to Soviet socialist realism. The Cold War era's volatile entanglements of abstract form, ideology, and politics cast a lingering shadow on artists in the late 1960s, and some pursued “difficult” artistic practices that were consciously removed from “expression.” As witnesses to the morphing of culture into what Theodor Adorno termed “the culture industry,” art workers understood how their efforts could become caught up in regimes of commodification as well as in the larger machine of the military-industrial complex.¹⁵ In the face of this instrumentalization, some sought to assert art's “unsaleability and functionlessness,” to quote Rose's assessment of the radical promise of minimal art, while at the same time organizing as workers to puzzle through their shared role in protest culture.

Thus the Vietnam War-era generation of leftist artists were influenced by numerous factors, including a rejection of previous forms of artistic labor within the United States. They were also aware—if unevenly—of contemporary international developments, not least the climate of radicalism of May 1968. As Guy Debord wrote about the Situationist International: “An international association of Situationists can be seen as a union of workers in an advanced sector of culture, or more precisely as a union of all those who claim the right to a task now impeded by social conditions; hence as an attempt at an organization of professional revolutionaries in culture.” Debord drew upon Marx's conceptions of how art is itself productive, for he understood aesthetics as formative to the education of the senses—art, that is, helps create social subjects. In fact, relatively recent translations of relevant texts by Marx emphasized the psychic effects of alienated labor, self-estrangement, and negation—useful concepts to apply to the psychologically dense act of producing art. One writer in 1973 provides a summary of Marx's notions that circulated at the time:

“The similarity between art and labor lies in their shared relationship to the human essence; that is, they are both creative activities by means of which man produces objects that express him, that speak for and about him. Therefore, there is no radical opposition between art and work.”

[“Art versus Work” (excerpted from *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, University of California Press, 2009). The book can be ordered from www.ucpress.edu.]



art by beehive collective



la·bor [ley-ber]

NOUN

1. productive activity, especially for the sake of economic gain.
2. the body of persons engaged in such activity, especially those working for wages.
3. this body of persons considered as a class (distinguished from management and capital).
4. physical or mental work, especially of a hard or fatiguing kind; toil.
5. a job or task done or to be done.

W.A.G.E RAGE / A NEW YORK GROUP DEMANDS FAIR TRADE PRACTICES FOR ARTISTS // BY MARY CHRISTMAS

Mary Emily O'Hara is currently at Reed College writing a thesis on the history and resurgence of the art workers' movement, and she also works as a freelance journalist under the pen name Mary Christmas.

"IT MUST NOT BE MANDATORY TO WORK FOR FREE FOR ANYONE, UNLESS ONE CHOOSES TO DO SO," wrote a member (who asked to remain anonymous) of New York-based arts activist collective W.A.G.E. in an October 2009 email exchange. The acronym stands for Working Artists in the Greater Economy, and sums up the main goal of the group: increasing stable economic circumstances for working artists through wages, fees, and other forms of compensation. Continuing the 1970's art world labor organizing tradition that included the Art Workers Coalition and Hollis Frampton's famous, incendiary letter to a MoMa curator, W.A.G.E. questions why art market economic structures tend to benefit everyone but the artist. The group's manifesto specifies some of the ways in which art-market ideologies can become a problem for an artist's survival, and ends with the slogan: "We demand payment for making the world more interesting."

The idea of "mandatory work," work that is not chosen, conjures historical and politicized images: at one end of the spectrum are various forms of slavery; at the other end, second-wave feminist interpretations that value domestic work. While labor movements at the millennium increased focus on wage inequities and global labor practices — and cemented a new labor lexicon with 'living wage' and 'fair trade'— it is often taken for granted that a universal definition of what work is exists. 1970's Feminism was successful in creating a public consciousness around women's domestic duties as work, but it was not successful in advocating that the work have a wage attached to it. Who would pay such a wage? In the heterosexual family model, one solution has been to try to redistribute housework along more equitable lines. **But what happens when the work being done cannot be divided and shared?**

Creative work is more akin to a science than to domestic chores, with specialized tools and training, hours of studio (laboratory) experimentation, and a wealthy economic infrastructure dependant on the artist's (scientist's) discoveries and output. Artists, ac-

cording to W.A.G.E., are an "unpaid labor force within a robust art market from which others profit greatly." There is a classically feminist ideology within such a statement, mirroring 1970's catchphrases such as "anonymous was a woman" and the ironic re-appropriation of "behind every great man there's a great woman," although in this case the exploited laborer is non-gender specific. Art worker movements such as W.A.G.E. have always sought to re-cast the artist as laborer in a way similar to feminism's insertion of "homemaker" into the labor vernacular. But the existence of a wealthy, luxury economy built around art problematizes this redefinition of the artist. Multi-million dollar auction jackpots don't necessarily bring any direct benefits to artists themselves, many of whom still struggle for stability while collectors become rich off of their work. W.A.G.E. clarifies that "even 'successful' artists are constantly hustling. There are a tiny, finite number of artists who actually live solely off the sale of their artwork."

The W.A.G.E. web site links to a copy of the group's own membership card, a pocket copy of the manifesto that allows anyone to immediately identify themselves as a member. There is a kind of open-door recruitment policy among these artists who refer to themselves as a "consciousness-raising group" in a conceptual nod to second-wave feminism. Also available on the website is Seth Siegelau's and Bob Projansky's Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement of 1971. This contract, drafted by an artist-lawyer collaborative team and distributed by the School of Visual Arts in New York, provides a standardized record of the value and resale of an artwork, as well as including percentages to be paid to the artist during every future transfer. The widespread use of such a contract could have staggering implications: artists could be paid what equates to royalties, as musicians are paid, every time their art works are re-sold. W.A.G.E. suggests that, though galleries and collectors do employ sales contracts currently, they remain inadequate: "Artists do not receive resale [value] or royalties on their works, nor have input into where and how their works are being used."

ACCORDING TO W.A.G.E., THE PERPETUATION OF RESALE SYSTEMS THAT STIFF ARTISTS RESTS ON TWO SUPPORTING FRAMEWORKS: THE ECONOMIC NAIVETÉ OF ARTISTS THEMSELVES, AND A "SYSTEM OF ORGANIZED IRRESPONSIBILITY" AMONG ART INSTITUTIONS WHO "REFUSE TO TAKE PART IN ETHICAL PRACTICES OF FINANCIAL DISTRIBUTION." A THIRD PROBLEM, AND ONE THAT IS ARGUABLY MORE PERVERSIVE IN THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS, IS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE STARVING ARTIST.

The mythology and romanticization of the starving artist is parallel to what feminist art historian Linda Nochlin called "the golden nugget the-



Emergency Exit Only
No Re-entry

W.A.G.E.

DONA



ory of Genius" (i.e., you're just born with it) in her 1971 essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*. The concept of the artist as a person who is driven by some sort of near-religious ecstatic drive to create, and the concept of the finished art product as sacred icon — both of these support the ideological horror that many feel when art encounters something so seemingly crass as money. But the fact is that artists need to live: to buy food, to pay rent (two rents, most of the time, on both a living space and a studio,) to wear clothes, to transport themselves from one place to another, and even to support families. The mythology of the starving artist and the pseudo-sacred qualities of art keep an artist's production conceptually separate from the economic regularities that most of the labor force takes for granted; i.e., wages. "Most artists have secondary and tertiary day jobs. Many float from one odd job to the next." writes a W.A.G.E. member, who describes artists as "binge workers" that often need to work overtime for weeks at a supporting job just to free up time required to fulfill the demands of being an unpaid artist. The result, according to W.A.G.E., is an exhausting cycle that keeps most artists — even 'successful' ones — engaged in two careers simply because structures of adequate compensation don't exist in the art world, no matter how many galleries an artist contracts with. "Artists who take their work seriously are art working at whatever moment they're not meeting their personal fiscal requirements at another job," writes W.A.G.E., "The idea that exposure provides a livable income for anyone is a farce."

THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE ART MARKET IS OLD. SO OLD, IN FACT, THAT PRETTY MUCH EVERYONE TAKES FOR GRANTED THAT ARTISTS ARE OFTEN UNDER-COMPENSATED (IF AT ALL) FOR THINGS LIKE GALLERY SHOWS, LIVE PERFORMANCE, AND INCLUSION IN MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS. WHY WOULD SOMEONE GET PAID FOR SOMETHING THAT NO ONE EVER GETS PAID FOR? HISTORIANS SUCH AS NOCHLIN HAVE BEEN ASKING "THE CRUCIAL QUESTION OF THE CONDITIONS GENERALLY PRODUCTIVE OF GREAT ART" FOR YEARS, BUT SOMEHOW DISCOURSE ON THE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS HAS BEEN FROZEN FOR A WHILE. ACCORDING TO W.A.G.E., "THE FIRST STEP IS FOR THE ARTIST TO BEGIN ASKING, THEN DEMAND AND THEN EXPECT CHANGE."

While a strong focus of the group seems to be engaging artists in a conceptual shift toward seeing themselves as workers, they also present a clear message to art institutions: "The directors, staff, and advisory boards... believe they're exempt from the financial responsibility of supporting cultural creators— that we should rely on other aspects of the art and job markets while producing cultural work for them for free." It makes sense that museums and other large institutions would be first in the line of attack; they are in a strong position to affect direct change in the lives of artists. But W.A.G.E.'s questioning of the lack of fair payment practices also raises questions about whether museums and art institutions can offer such payments. Arts institutions are notoriously undervalued and under-funded on the grand scale of U.S. economics, and many artists are lucky to even find day jobs, such as art handling, that take place in those institutional spaces. When asked about the difficult position museums are already in, W.A.G.E. responded: "The construct of fee systems should be based on the institution's size, budget, and annual plans. There is always something between 'nothing' and 'something'."

Defining something so static as an hourly wage for the artist would be tough. As in the homemaker problem, the question is who would pay such a salary? W.A.G.E. wants to follow the example of Canadian Artists Representation-Le Front Des Artistes Canadiens (CARFAC), an organization that has created a list of minimum fees artists should be paid for copyrights and professional services. The group updates the fees annually based on changes in the cost of living, and offers separate fee schedules for reproduction and publishing, exhibition, and general professional fees. CARFAC supports the need for minimum "wages" with a bleak report on Canadian inequities: "While the cultural sector contributes more than \$46 billion to the Canadian economy, visual artists earned an average of \$13,976 in 2005." In this same press release, CARFAC points out that the median income that Canadian artists bring in from art is actually \$8,000 a year, putting many into the category of extremely low poverty. Here in the U.S., the National Endowment for the Arts' 1999 study found a deceptively high median income among artists, \$30,000. Considering that this study included extremely wealthy artists (with actors, musicians, and architects among the categories,) it is unrealistic to assume that most performance and/or video artists are making anywhere near \$30,000 a year. Interestingly, the NEA study found that arts occupations with high percentages of women workers were the lowest paid; dancers, for instance, took in about \$15,000 per year. W.A.G.E. has the big arts NGO's in its sights, and is lobbying for policy-based approaches as well, through support of the Artist-Museum Partnership Act, which would allow artists to tax-deduct the market value of work they donate to museums.

SOME OF THE W.A.G.E. EFFORTS ARE MORE WITHIN REACH THAN OTHERS, BUT THE GROUP BLENDS ACTIVIST FIRE WITH SOLID GOALS: "IN THE LEAST, LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENGAGE BASIC LABOR LAWS TO MAKE SURE THAT CULTURAL WORKERS ARE PAID FOR OUR WORK, RATHER THAN EXPLOITED BY THE INSTITUTIONS... WE'RE TRYING TO ACTIVATE THE ARTS COMMUNITY."

State of the Arts

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- The state of California is the lowest contributor to public arts funding in the nation. California also has two of the richest cities in the US (San Jose and San Francisco), making it one of the richest states in the union.**
- San Francisco leads metropolitan areas in the proportion of artists in the work force, followed by Santa Fe (which ranks first in writers and fine artists), Los Angeles, New York and Stamford-Norwalk in suburban Connecticut. California has the most artists, it's one of the richest states and has the least state arts funding.**
- The 2003-2004 budget of the California Arts Council was slashed by 95% (from \$18.3 million to \$1.1 million) and the council was forced to suspend most of its grant programs to arts organizations.**

• Artists in SF are well-educated, stable and engaged in their communities, yet they are spending less time on their art each year, with fewer of them earning income from it and almost half earning under \$3,000.

• In 2002, when the U.S. job market conditions worsened; unemployment for artists was twice as high as for all professional workers. Note: This doesn't bode well for artists in the current economic climate.

• In the early 80s an unnamed non-profit art space in SF was paying \$500 artists fees. With the rate of inflation that \$500 today would be more like \$1500. Almost 30 years later, most non-profit art spaces in the Bay Area are still paying \$500 or less. On top of this, each year these same art spaces are bleeding the artist community with their auctions.

It's a legal obligation of the 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization to make the tax forms: Form 1024 and Form 990-T public. Note: You can go to <http://www.guidestar.org/> to find specifics. Posters by Joseph Del Pesco

ALLOCATE \$\$\$ FROM THE
HOTEL TAX FUND FOR
INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS!

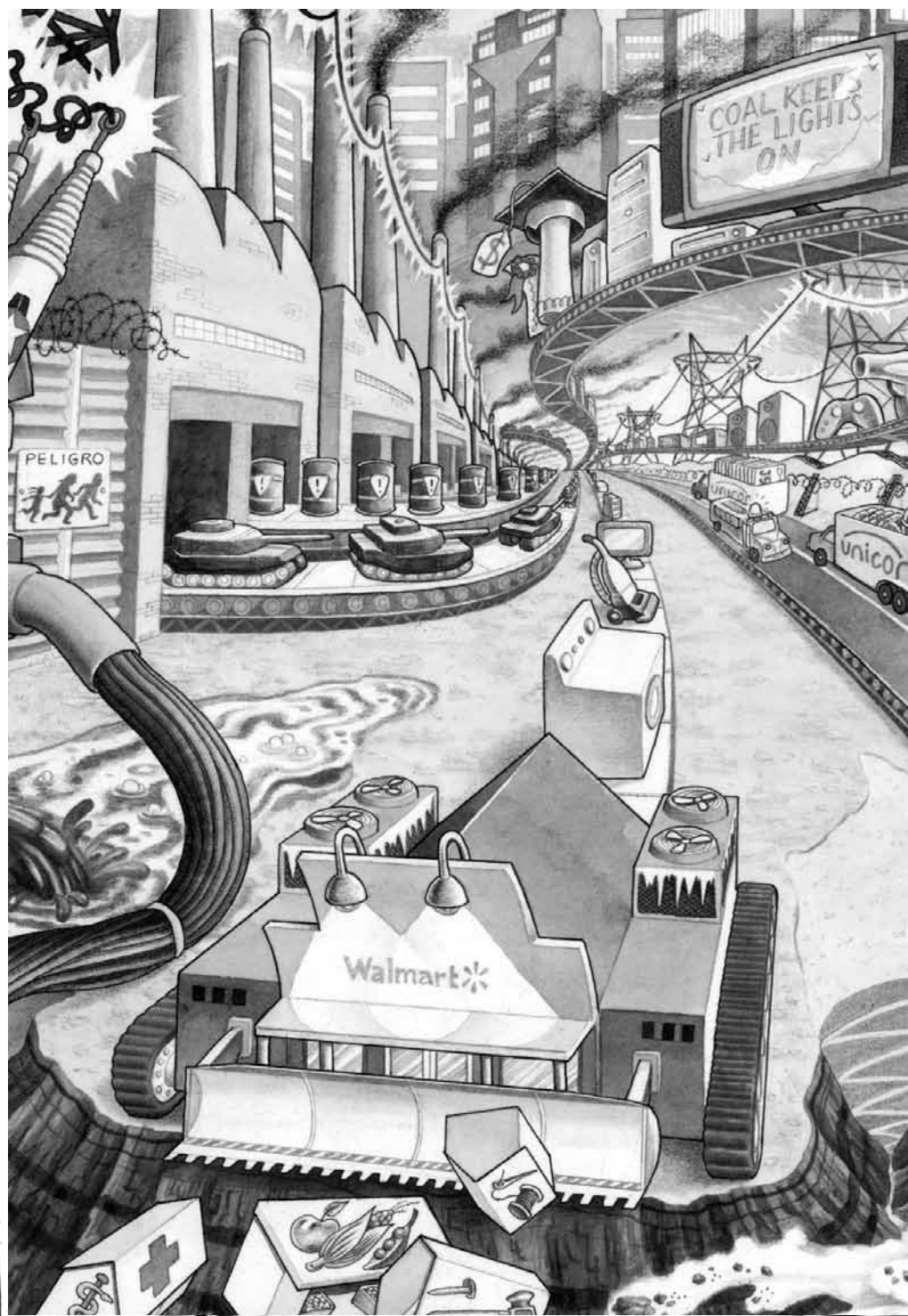
REQUIRE NON PROFITS
TO PAY A MINIMUM

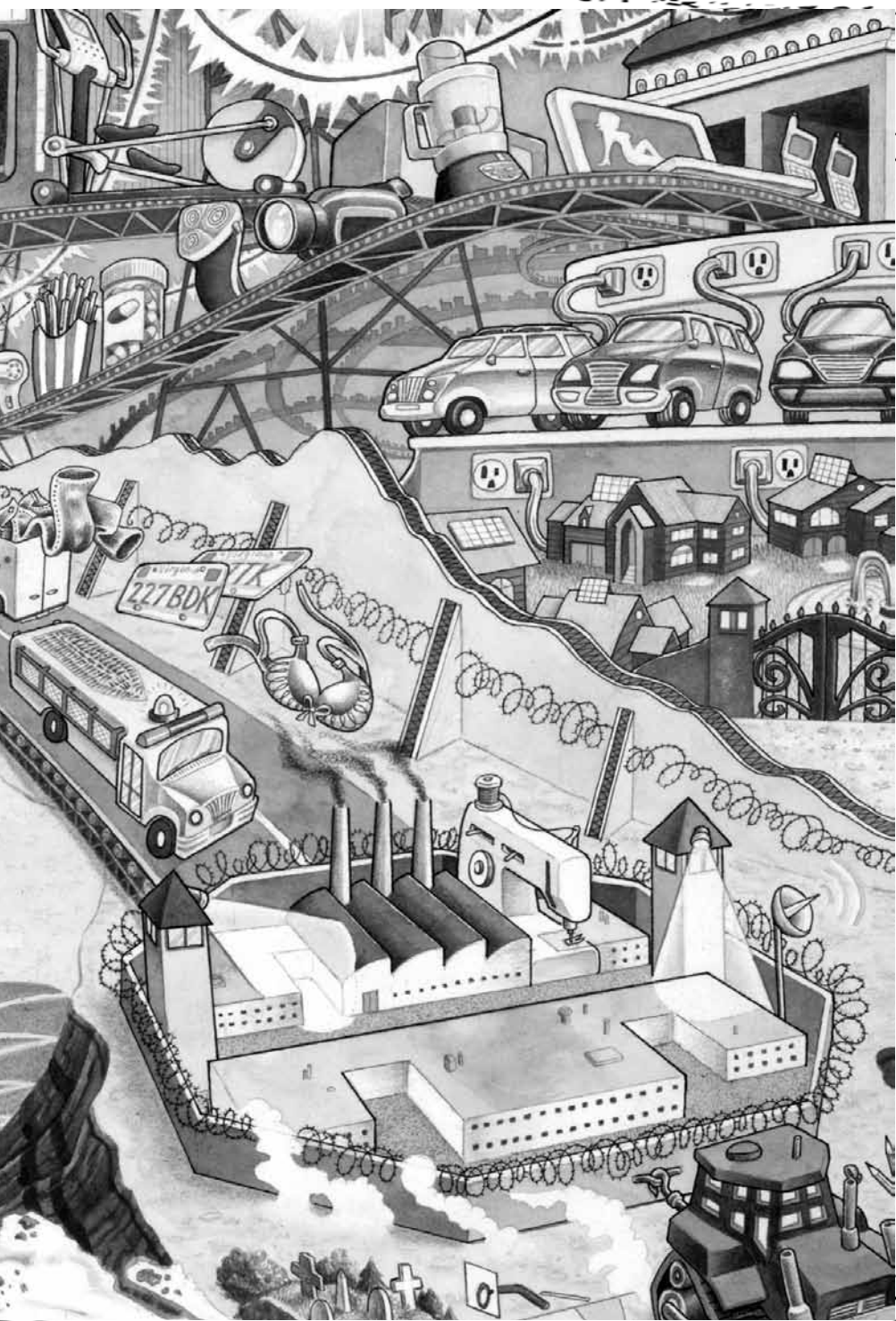
ARTISTS FEE!

ENFORCE CA RESALE ROYALTY
ACT FOR ALL ARTISTS!

MAKE CALIFORNIA
STATE OF THE ART!







BRODY

2. ✓

assassination, funerals, poverty and human wreckage. Mere helpless protest is not enough. We must collectively seek positive solutions and take action to overcome this propulsion through the ages. Why not start within the structure of the art community and the people of New York to strive for a new dictionary of definitions. Power, sustenance, potential, education can have a different institutional meaning. Each of us is a changing museum and our exhibition buildings should mirror the artists as well as the people of New York and the world.

We need to list the grievances, resources and sources for this endeavor and work with the entire community. Separatism is not the solution. New York City is a world collage and a cultivating center. Generations go by with only a murmur of reform. Revolution, dissent, succession, civilian war is not the solution. The artists fight alienation as well as all other groups.

The sponsors of our institutions and the artists must get together.

Art should not be restricted to the galleries, the studios, the museums or the homes of the wealthy: creativity is a spiritual need for everyone. The city buildings and streets need to be cleaned

up and painted. The people have to do it themselves but they need guidance. Historical architecture should be purchased for studio space and community workshops. Children and students should be involved and given responsibilities such as the planting and caring of flowers in the parks and playgrounds. The Museum of Modern Art should have rooms of changing shows for children and young artists and folk art.

New York City has to become the environment with radiating centers of groups of people gathered for the purpose of positive activity. This takes nothing away from the individual but should only enhance his sense of belonging and

DOES MONEY MANIPULATE ART?

Does money manipulate galleries?
 Do galleries manipulate artists?
 Do artists manipulate art?

Why do artists allow themselves to be manipulated?
 Why do artists allow their work to be translated into money values?
 Why can't artists be independent of gallery-fabricated trends?
 Because the gallery provides their only means of subsistence
 from their work?

What does the artist want besides subsistence?
 Is the artist's final goal money?
 If not, what is it?
 Love? Fame(i.e. temporary notoriety)? Immortality?

Does the artist care what anybody thinks about his work?
 Does the artist care if anybody understands his work?
 Who is the artist's public?
 Other artists?
 Critics? Curators? Dealers? Collectors?
 Everybody else?

How much fame does an artist need? one year? ten years? the top 10?
 the top 40?

How much fame can an artist take?
 How much of an artist can fame take?
 Is fame limited to saleability?
 Is fame better than immortality?
 Can immortality be a valid goal in a nuclear age?
 Can immortality be bought? simulated?

What are the steps to immortality?
 Studio-gallery-publicity-reproduction-private collection-public museum?
 Which of these steps are really necessary?
 Is being in museums enough for an artist?
 Is being in galleries enough for an artist?
 Is the gallery with its monetary basis a natural vehicle for art?

Do artists love their dealers because they do their dealing?
 Do dealers love their artists or do they love the money they
 make from art and artists?
 Is art making love to oneself, to another, to others?

Is art a career (career="highway, a running from or to, carting,
 carrying") ?
 Is a career carousing?
 Are galleries pimps for carousing artists cruising immortality ?

Are galleries selling art or selling artists?
 Are collectors buying art or buying artists?
 Are collectors collecting art or collecting commodities?
 Is art an investment? a social status symbol? decoration? fashion?

Art artists in galleries making art or commodities?
 If there were no art market would artists make art?
 Should art look valuable, cheap, or priceless?
 Is art that's worth money commercial art?
 Is commercial art fine art?
 Does commercial art aspire to immortality?
 Is art that's worth a lot of money worth more than other art?
 Is it worth a lot of money because its better than other art?
 Should art be sold? should art be given away?
 Should society support artists so they can give away their art?
 Should all human beings support all human beings?

Should art be free?
 Can artists be free?

OPEN ENDED DISCUSSION: ART WORKERS AND THE OCCUPATION

What are our stakes in the discourse around economics, labor, and access to cultural resources? **BY CHRISTIAN L. FROCK**

PROLOGUE

Consider, as a case study, the recent fundraiser gala organized by Los Angeles MOCA on November 12, 2011: Performance artist Marina Abramović was engaged to act as artistic director and conceived of a program that included live performance enacted by hired art workers. The following exhibits are excerpts from documents generated prior to the performance—a summary description written by an anonymous art worker who auditioned to enact Abramović's performance, an article published by the *LA Times* that provided an anticipatory summary of the event, and a protest letter circulated by artist Yvonne Rainer in response to the forthcoming performance.

EXHIBIT A

Written correspondence by an anonymous art worker directed to artist Yvonne Rainer, undated, distributed by Yvonne Rainer via email:

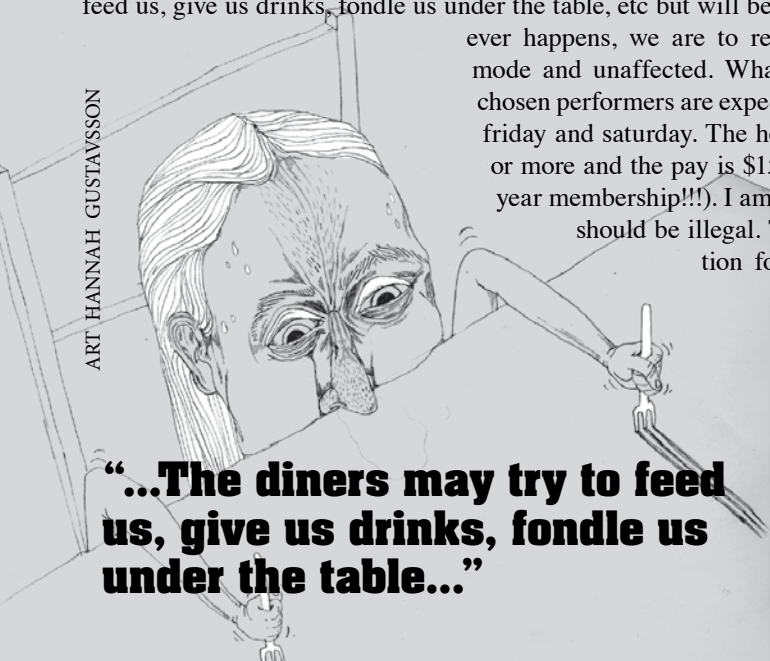
"So, I spent an hour today at the Abramović audition at MOCA. The deal is that the artists/dancers she will hire will spend 3(!) hours under the dining tables of the donor gala with their heads protruding from the tables. They will be sitting on lazy susans under the table and slowly rotating and making eye contact with the donors/diners. Of course we were warned that we will not be able to leave to pee, etc. That the diners may try to feed us, give us drinks, fondle us under the table, etc but will be warned not to. What-

ever happens, we are to remain in performance mode and unaffected. What the fuck?! And the chosen performers are expected to be there all day friday and saturday. The hours probably total 15 or more and the pay is \$150 (plus a MOCA one year membership!!!). I am utterly appalled. This should be illegal. There is another audi-

tion for another role where the performers lie naked on tables with fake skeletons on them. Since I cannot stomach being a turning, severed head while people get drunk in front of me, I am seriously considering

ART HANNAH GUSTAVSSON

"...The diners may try to feed us, give us drinks, fondle us under the table..."



taking a naked role and performing an intervention at the gala celebration where I use my body as a surface to communicate the fact that I worked x number of hours for \$150. I swear I need to do something...to speak for my community of artists who are being taken advantage of by major museums. sick shit. God, we need a revolution."

EXHIBIT B

Selected excerpts from an article written by Jori Finkel, titled "MOCA gala's main dish is performance art." *LA Times*, November 12, 2011. < <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-moca-gala-abramovic-20111112,0,5363689.story>>

"The performance will last over three hours," the Yugoslavian-born, New York performance artist warned a group of hopefuls at an audition early this week. "You will not be able to pee. Holding the position will involve a certain amount of pain. You will be vulnerable — someone might try to feed you or touch you."

"Abramovic responded by noting that Rainer had not seen these performances in any form, only hearing about them from a friend or student who had auditioned, "so it's extremely difficult for me to understand how she could presume to make all these allegations." She added that she had not heard any complaints directly from any performers who auditioned — about 200 over the course of four days."

"The L.A. performance, her [Abramovic's] first in the city, lasts only one night and takes place inside a rented party tent, not a museum. But she is taking it seriously and has spent the last week in town for auditions. She and her choreographers, Rebecca Davis and Lynsey Peisinger, winnowed 800 online submissions to meet 200 people to find 85 performers for the job."

"The idea also stemmed, she [Abramovic] said, from what she called "gala fatigue." A familiar sight on the New York art scene, Abramovic tends to go to the big museum galas there: the Modern, the Guggenheim and the Whitney. She has also been to the Metropolitan's annual Costume Institute ball, where this year she wore a stunning black gown by Riccardo Tisci from Givenchy."

"And what if a MOCA guest violates the trust created with the performers? "We will have rules printed out for them, and they will be asked to respect the rules," said Abramovic, who said she has developed a signal for performers to use to communicate to the guards if needed. "I'm very strict and controlling. If someone gets drunk and is behaving improperly, they have to be removed. At MoMA, a museum member of 35 years had to be removed."

"We are creating a vulnerable position with respect to the performers. You could do anything — you could take the fork and stab it in their heads. So we're asking guests for a certain kind of interaction."

EXHIBIT C

Protest letter written by Yvonne Rainer to Jeffrey Deitch, Director, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, dated November 10, 2011; digitally signed by an additional 49+ supporters, including Douglas Crimp, bell hooks, Mary Kelly, and Julie Ault among others. Excerpted text (read full length text at <http://www.facebook.com/YvonneRainerLetter>):

CALIFORNIA

THE MOST ARTISTS

THE LARGEST ECONOMY

& THE LEAST

State Government

ARTS FUNDING

OF ANY STATE IN THE USA

READ MORE AT: <http://blog.thepresentgroup.com/?p=260>

AVERAGE EXHIBITION FEE FOR ARTISTS: \$500
AVERAGE MONTHLY RENT IN SF: \$1800

PERCENTAGE OF ARTISTS WHO EARN LESS
THAN \$3000/YEAR FROM THEIR ART: 46%

PERCENTAGE CALIFORNIA STATE ARTS
FUNDING WAS CUT IN 2004: 95%

NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED ARTISTS IN
COMPARISON TO ALL PROFESSIONAL WORKERS
DURING AN ECONOMIC RECESSION: 2 TO 1

ARTISTS

★ NEED ★

A LIVING WAGE

"I am writing to protest the "entertainment" about to be provided by Marina Abramovic at the upcoming donor gala at the Museum of Contemporary Art where a number of young people's live heads will be rotating as decorative centerpieces at diners' tables and others— all women — will be required to lie perfectly still in the nude for over three hours under fake skeletons, also as centerpieces surrounded by diners."

"At the rehearsal the fifty heads — all young, beautiful, and mostly white — turning and bobbing out of holes as their bodies crouched beneath the otherwise empty tables, appeared touching and somewhat comic, but when I tried to envision 800 inebriated diners surrounding them, I had another impression. I myself have never been averse to occasional epatering of the bourgeoisie. However, I can't help feeling that subjecting her performers to possible public humiliation and bodily injury from the three-hour endurance test at the hands of a bunch of frolicking donors is yet another example of the Museum's callousness and greed and Ms Abramovic's obliviousness to differences in context and some of the implications of transposing her own powerful performances to the bodies of others. An exhibition is one thing — again, this is not a critique of Abramovic's work in general — but titillation for wealthy donor/diners as a means of raising money is another."

"Ms Abramovic is so wedded to her original vision that she — and by extension, the Museum director and curators — doesn't see the egregious associations for the performers, who, though willing, will be exploited nonetheless. Their cheerful voluntarism says something about the pervasive desperation and cynicism of the art world such that young people must become abject table ornaments and clichéd living symbols of mortality in order to assume a novice role in the temple of art."

Questions

- What is reasonable compensation for the art worker? How do we value the work of art workers who function as live elements in the creation of contemporary artworks?
- How are these arguments undermined by a surplus of "labor" within the market?
- How is our perception of the work impacted by the knowledge that it causes secondary, hired performers discomfort and/or subjects them to injury?
- How is perception of the work altered by consideration of its placement within the context of a fundraiser, as opposed to an exhibition; within the context of entertainment as opposed to experimentation?
- How is our perception of the institution and/or the artist and her work impacted by seeing artists put on their knees as entertainment for the wealthy elite?

Open Mic

Post responses to these questions, or post your own questions, to <http://www.facebook.com/YvonneRainerLetter>

THE END OF ART




By Elizabeth Sims

"IN REGARD TO...ART, THE ARTIST IS REFORMIST, HE IS NOT REVOLUTIONARY...BECAUSE HERE WE DISCUSS THE POLITICAL VIRTUE OF ART: DISTRACTION. PUSHED TO THE EXTREME, THIS WILL CREATE AESTHETIC QUARRELS WHERE OTHERWISE THE URGE TO REVOLUTION MIGHT HAVE BEEN BORN. ART IS THE SAFETY VALVE OF OUR REPRESSIVE SYSTEM. AS LONG AS IT EXISTS, ART WILL BE THE SYSTEM'S DISTRACTING MASK. . . AND A SYSTEM HAS NOTHING TO FEAR AS LONG AS ITS REALITY IS MASKED, AS LONG AS ITS CONTRADICTIONS ARE HIDDEN. THE ARTIST, IF HE WANTS TO WORK FOR ANOTHER SOCIETY, MUST BEGIN BY FUNDAMENTALLY CONTESTING ART AND ASSUMING HIS TOTAL RUPTURE WITH IT. IF NOT, THE NEXT REVOLUTION WILL TAKE OVER HIS RESPONSIBILITY."

Written by Daniel Buren in June 1968, in an essay entitled "Is Teaching Art Necessary?" this passage, in fact, brings into question the necessity of art-making in general. Art is, after all, only a context; a context into which anything at all- paintings, urinals, mounds of earth, even dinner parties- can be placed in order to demand a certain kind of attention and analysis. The beauty of this context, "Art," is that it can illuminate and transform objects in a way that gives them almost magical cultural powers. However, it must not be forgotten that this context is now, at least, also a product and mechanism of Capitalism. Whether corporate, institutional, governmental, academic or private, support for the arts under Capitalism is limited and defined by the imperative to build capital and concentrate power.

With these ends, art as a context often isolates creative activity from the common production of our lives. In order to concentrate its value as capital, collectors and institutions often fetishize art as something above or apart from everyday existence. In this system, art is necessarily removed from its studio, home, or community, in order to enter into an economic system that provides for the sustenance of the artist. Even art which is embedded in a particular site or community can often only do so through the benevolence (and oversight) of wealthy and powerful parties- Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses, a sustainable community project in Houston's Northern Ninth Ward, lends progressive prestige to its funders, Chevron, Shell, and Bank of America.



With oversight from ‘partners’ like these, funding for the arts often amounts to a patronizing concession meant to pacify and recuperate dissent; creative energy is supported as long as it is channeled in the proper, harmless ways. Artists receive a little financial security, and Capitalism receives an opportunity to masquerade as radical, while keeping all the radicals busy making art. This dynamic explains the never-ending procession of institutions eager to bestow legitimacy on once-radical practices like ‘Street Art’: it can be argued that Banksy’s rise to art-stardom resulted from his ability to easily commodify a rebellious sensibility inherited (stolen?) from May ’68 graffiti and ethnic-minority urban taggers. In today’s climate, there’s no need for actual political engagement when you can buy a radical poster or a tee shirt.

In short, under Capitalism, creative work either enters into the context of art in order to attain a privileged and exalted position at the cost of its autonomy and authenticity, or forgoes that context to suffer the kind of obscurity and poverty that prevents the artist from receiving the support or recognition that would sustain his or her creative practice.


SO, WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

If this critique is accepted, then it is important to reject any tactics that seek a reform (and therefore a strengthening) of the existing system. It is more important to consider how creative work might be liberated from the current system. It is even possible to consider how creative work might interrupt, subvert or break away from that system. The question is: how? Do we work towards complete negation, or attempt to inhabit the corrupt system by forming interstitial utopias? Are either of these viable programs?

Anarchist discourse is sometimes framed to imply a tactical choice between prefigurative politics and insurrectionary politics. Prefiguration attempts to prefigure alternative social organizations within existing ones, and encourage people to ‘act as though we are already free.’ It is generally perceived as ‘positive’ action, and suggests the dinner parties and communes of Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Suzanne Lacey’s social events designed to forge temporary intimacy between cops and urban youth, old and young women, and other alienated parties. Like Rick Lowe, these artists have appropriated institutional resources to build anti-institutional communities and events.

Insurrectionary action is often understood as ‘negative’ action, assuming that all positive projects are too easily corrupted or recuperated. These negative actions are usually expressed as critique, revolt or rebellion against current conditions, sometimes without a concrete end goal beyond destabilization. An insurrectionary sensibility is reflected in the institutional critique of artists like Andrea Fraser, who literally sold herself to the highest bidder, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles who spent one of her exhibitions on her hands and knees, washing the gallery floor, in order to call attention to its continuing complicity in an invisible social order supported by exploited labor. Beyond even these scathing critiques lies the pure negation of artists like Lee Lozano who determined to absent herself from the art world for a period of time, Keith Arnatt, whose omission pieces include *Is It Possible for Me to Do Nothing as My Contribution to This Exhibition*, and John Cage, whose *4’ 33”* was not a symphony of silence, but a dismantling of the artistic frame to emphasize the audience and the moment.

Work like this deals with absence and withdrawal- from object- and commodity-hood, from the art world, and from performance or “distraction”- and yet it is a powerful source of potentiality. The apparent opposition between negation and prefiguration is, of course, a largely false one- the Occupation itself is a perfect example. Positive, prefigurative projects are built upon the



destabilization of oppressive dynamics. Negative, insurrectionary projects create moments of autonomy and radical social transformation.

The real decision is between recuperable acts and resistant ones. Buren's condemnation of art was written in the moment of the May '68 actions, which derived at least some of their inspiration from the Situationists and their exhortations to realize creativity within the practice of everyday life, thereby liberating it from the confines of artistic context. Indeed, a consensus is forming around the necessity of withdrawal from all oppressive contexts, and the propagation of new, library ones. The new 'social practice' may be the construction of communities that manage resources collectively, free from the institutions of money and property, their creative work becoming indistinguishable from common production, possessed or experienced communally. This work need not be distributed, as it can simply take place, and belong. No museums, no galleries, no collectors, no grants or funding campaigns, no art criticism aside from neighborhood talk, and indeed, actually, no art.

Among our guides are, indeed, the Situationist International, and Tiqqun and the Invisible Committee, a mysterious and amorphous commune that has released anonymous texts incendiary enough to bring upon them charges of "criminal association for the purposes of terrorist activity." This radical, creative communalism is our task. We must follow Ben Morea of Black Mask, a collective that invited a rowdy public to disrupt elitist art events, when he claims, "we are neither artists or anti-artists. We are creative men [and women]- revolutionaries.

The participants in the Occupations seem to be involved in this practice in the deepest sense- working towards social change ostensibly without leveraging their accomplishments for status, celebrity, or personal exposure. As artists, this might just be the opportunity to relinquish the privileged yet alienated status of cultural producer, and step humbly into a more democratic space in which the construction of the impossible is a task shared by all.

AS ARTISTS, HOWEVER, WE DO POSSESS PARTICULAR STRENGTHS THAT MAY BE CONTRIBUTED TO THE OCCUPATIONS WITH A DIY ETHOS; FREE-SKOOLING AND SKILL-SHARING ARE WAYS ARTISTS CAN SHARE THEIR SPECIALTIES WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES. HAVING HONED A SENSITIVITY TO THE IMMERSIVE VISUAL, TEXTUAL, AND MUSICAL CULTURE THAT OFTEN REPRODUCES OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS OF SEXISM, RACISM, CLASS-ISM AND OTHER SOCIAL HIERARCHIES IN ITS POPULAR FORMS, ARTISTS MAY BE ABLE TO DEVELOP THIS LITERACY IN OTHERS. FURTHERMORE, THEY MAY ABLE TO PROVIDE GREATER ACCESS TO THE CULTURAL DOMAIN BY SHARING TECHNICAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE.

Inasmuch as art as a field of production has taken on amorphous and ephemeral proportions, artists may also be equipped to facilitate interdisciplinarianism within the Occupation movements, exercising an imaginative agility in anticipating the potential for synergy within different disciplines- translating, transforming, and transgressing. Fundamentally, this is the radical destiny of the artist- to leave the aesthetic exile of the art world, and nurture innovation in a new un-governed and borderless field.

Elizabeth Sims is an anarchist, artist, and arts educator living in Oakland. She works at the Bound Together Anarchist Bookstore Collective in San Francisco, and the Holdout Anarchist Bookstore in Oakland. She is also an organizer of the Annual Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair. She writes art criticism and radical pedagogy, and makes art in visual and social media. Her work can be found at ElizabethSimsProjects.com.



In “Reducing Pay for Cultural Execs” Pograbin and Kate Taylor write: “The major cultural organizations in New York was buoyed by a booming economy in America. **Compensation increases over five years** were not unusual, doubled. Reynold Levy’s annual compensation topped \$1 million. Carnegie Hall began with **than \$800,000. Glenn D. Lowry, Modern Art, earned \$2.7 million in 2008**, including several one-time bonuses in the tower beside the museum.” The public attention to cultural compensation. **M. Small departed the Smithsonian** revelations that he had spent it on **private jets and catered meals** from the J. Paul Getty Trust, Barry Munitz from the California attorney general’s office.



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For years chief executives at many
York City enjoyed salary growth that
and rivaled that seen in corporate
es of **25 percent to 50 percent**
and in some cases packages nearly
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... Certain events also have drawn
sation in recent years. **Lawrence**
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BE CREATIVE, BE INSPIRED AND SUPPORT THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT, HERE ARE SOME FOLKS WHO ALREADY DO!

FLASH MOBS SUPPORTING BOYCOTTS:

CAUGHT IN A BAD HOTEL: In the leadup to Gay Pride weekend, with hordes of GLBT tourists arriving in San Francisco, the Horizontal Alliance of Very Organized Queers and the Brass Liberation Orchestra stage a pointed dance number in a hotel whose striking workers have called for a boycott.

TARGET AIN'T PEOPLE: Following the Supreme Court ruling that corporations can make unlimited campaign contributions, Target gives \$150,000 to a rightwing candidate in MN. A flash mob stages an elaborate song-and-dance number using props from Target's own shelves, urging shoppers to support the boycott.

TACTICAL PROPS:

To protest a giant new freeway that displaced hundreds of London families in favor of cars, artists built giant puppets with huge hoop skirts. As the protest moved along the road, hidden workers under the skirts jackhammered holes in the concrete and planted trees.

To support an anti-war protest, a Bay Area collective constructed a giant inflatable fish that could be blown up with a portable generator and a box fan and could block an entire street, to the confusion and consternation of police officers.

THE DECONSTRUCTIONIST INSTITUTE FOR SURREAL TOPOLOGY constructed a teddy bear catapult to confuse and ridicule the police during an FTAA summit. <http://www.tao.ca/~wrench/dist/news/pultpics.html>

Others have used simple balls of yarn, woven from lamppost to mailbox to power pole, to block off entire intersections with a delicate webbing psychologically holding space for people to reclaim the streets.

INVADING SITES OF POWER:

In the middle of a foreclosure auction, a group of people stand up and sing a catchy song over and over again, interrupting proceedings:

*Mrs. Auctioneer,
All the people here,
We are asking you to hold off the sales right now,
We are going to survive but we don't know how.*



PHOTOS LESLIE DREYER: US Uncut crashes Apple's World Wide Developer Conference clad in full-bodied spandex suits (colors of the Apple rainbow) emblazoned with QR codes leading to a video detailing Apple's tax dodging efforts. "Occupy Sesame Street!" yelled protesters disrupting media mogul Rupert Murdoch's speech as he spoke to a conservative audience at San Francisco's Palace Hotel.

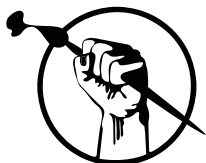
RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE

As a protest against the new Sit/Lie law (criminalizing people who sit or lie on the sidewalk), a group of "Angry Queers" install public benches made from discarded pallet wood in high-traffic areas around San Francisco. They also leave wheatpasted instructions for building your own bench.

THE BILLBOARD LIBERATION FRONT repurposes advertising sites for more useful messaging. billboardliberation.com

Some starting points for online resources for brainstorming interventionist tactics: destructables.org; yeslab.org, banksy.co.uk, spacehijackers.org, labofii.net, shopdropping.net

**ITS OKAY TO
COPY, SCAN
PASS IT ON
RE-WRITE
REDISTRIBUTE
CRITIQUE
DISAGREE
PARTICIPATE!**



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