

BIAS

THE ARTS POLITIC

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EDITOR

Jasmine Jamillah Mahmoud

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Danielle Kline

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Kemeya Harper

CULTURE EDITOR

RonAmber Deloney

COLUMNISTS

RonAmber Deloney and Brandon Woolf

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS & ARTISTS

Melanie Cervantes, Edward P. Clapp, Rhoda Draws, Amelia Edelman, Shanthony Exum, Rachel Falcone, Arlene Goldbard, Robert A. K. Gonyo, Malvika Maheshwari, Ashley Marinaccio, Gisle Morey, Michael Premo, Bridgette Raitz, Betty Lark Ross, RVLTN, Gregory Sholette and Wendy Testu.

CONTRIBUTING VOICES

Chris Appleton, Sally Bagsaw, Phillip Bimstein, Joshua Clover, Dan Cowan, Maria Dumlaio, Kevin Erickson, Elizabeth Glidden, Joe Goode, Art Hazelwood, Elaine Kaufmann, Danielle Mysliwicz, Judy Nemzoff, Anne Polashenski, Garey Lee Posey, Kevin Postupack, Gregory Sholette, Manon Slome and Robynn Takayama.

FOUNDING EDITORS

Danielle Evelyn Kline & Jasmine Jamillah Mahmoud

SPECIAL THANKS

Department of Art and Public Policy at Tisch School of the Arts, NYU

THE ARTS POLITIC is a print-and-online magazine dedicated to solving problems at the intersection of arts and politics. Cultural policy, arts activism, political art, the creative economy—THE ARTS POLITIC creates a conversation amongst leaders, activists, and idea-makers along the pendulum of global civic responsibility. A forum for creative and political thinking, a stage for emerging art, and a platform for social change, THE ARTS POLITIC provides a space that is intelligent, that is visionary, that is thoughtful, that will *TAP* new ideas from the frontlines to get things done.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Lessons from Zinn

For the past few months, I have been practicing chamber music with a string quartet. I play second violin (a position ripe for “second fiddle” jokes) with three other women, who—like me—seek one moment in the week for word-free, string-filled harmony. In our quest, I noticed something curious. Our repertoire includes “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” (Bach), “Arrival of the Queen of Sheba” (Handel), “Air on the G String” (Bach), “Summertime” (Gershwin), and “Prelude from English Suite No. 3” (Bach). A lot of Bach. We string players, like everyone else, have biases.

This issue was born within a resonant field of bias. Tenth anniversary stagings of *The Laramie Project*. Uninformed words about the arts scene in Peoria, IL from the top arts official in the land, NEA Chair Rocco Landesman. Contested high school stagings of *Rent*. Jerry Saltz, a top art critic, decrying gender bias at the Museum of Modern Art, a top museum.

The above has mostly lived in the space of last year, 2009. Yet, the intersection of bias and the arts provides a stream of longstanding and current material. It’s the yearly recognition that the Academy Awards celebrate “bests” in a rather

homogenous and politicized field. (That said, landmark 2010 wins by Kathryn Bigelow for Best Director and Mo’Nique for Best Supporting Actress indicate, perhaps, the path towards a new and needed direction). It’s the recurring fight for arts funding—and by extension recognition that the arts are not “second fiddle,” but rather a valid part of society—at local, state and federal levels. (For more instances and solutions, see “Arts Policy Brief.”)

But there are also less told stories of bias. In San Francisco, artist Wendy Testu curated “The Welcome to the NeighborHOOD Project.” (See *Exhibition*.) This youth-led exhibition revealed untold portraits of Hunters Point/Bayview, a waterfront neighborhood plagued by neglect: where the city of San Francisco allowed toxic dumping near a community comprised largely of low-income African-American residents. In Cambridge, MA doctoral student Edward Clapp put out what became a controversial call for *20UNDER40*, for essays about how to improve the arts from those under forty-years of age. (See his thoughts on the controversy in the *Special Report* essay “Mistaking Inclusion for Exclusion.”) When editing this issue, I strived to unearth these stories of bias to best improve the arts.

But the significance of this issue goes beyond the arts. Earlier this year when Howard Zinn passed, I was reminded of his gift. Zinn, the *People’s* historian, chronicled history through the stories of everyday folk and their struggle for a more perfect society, a struggle to match the rhetoric of inclusivity, equality and justice to reality. Zinn’s bias—to cover untold stories—was his tool against bias.

Lessons from Zinn better illuminate why investigations around arts, politics and bias are necessary. Zinn wrote, “What we learn about the past does not give us absolute truth about the present, but it may cause us to look deeper than the glib statements made by political leaders and the ‘experts’ quoted in the press.” Information is a powerful activism tool. This Robert A. K. Gonyo and Ashley Marinaccio—founders and Artistic Directors of Co-op Theatre East, a New York City-based theater company that produces civically engaged performance—prove. During last year’s election season, they staged “The Living Voter Guide” on the streets of New York City—a performed and informative guide for passerbys about upcoming city races. (See *Opening Acts*.) Similarly the Brainstromers—an art collective, performance group and think-tank—forced discussion on gross gender bias in the contemporary art world. (Read about their activism in *TAP*MAP*.) We privilege information as a tool to cut through bias, and as a means to make better decisions. That’s

why, in “Policy Brief Update: Artists in Empty Storefronts,” I interviewed engineers of art-in-storefront campaigns to chart this trend for future practitioners.

A second lesson: “What matters most is not who is sitting in the White House, but ‘who is sitting in’—and who is marching outside the White House, pushing for change.” Teenagers in Staunton, VA knew this when they stormed their town hall—fifty youth strong—to protest the closing of Kronos Art Gallery, as chronicled in the *Special Report* interview, “The March for Kronos: All-Ages Arts Venues Under Attack.” Marching can take many forms—as artists Michael Premo and Rachel Falcone reveal. They curated “Housing is a Human Right,” (also in the *Special Report* section) a multimedia documentary portrait of everyday New Yorkers struggling to retain their homes.

Third lesson: “We don’t have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.” Take Betty Lark Ross, a teacher in Chicago, IL, who wrote to United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in “Letter to the Policymaker.” With frustration and proposed solutions, Ross implored Duncan to make the arts matter in public education. Her means to improve arts education—a letter—is an example that many of us can follow.

A fourth lesson: “The artist... is telling us what the world should be like, even if it isn’t that way now. The artist is taking us away from moments of horror... by showing us what is possible.” Some policymakers, like Seattle, WA City Councilmember Sally Bagshaw, know this. To best plan a new waterfront for the emerald city, Bagshaw incorporated artists into Seattle’s waterfront planning (See *Dialogue* for more). In *Exhibition* and *TAP*MAP*, artists like Garry Lee Posey and Joe Goode, two directors of anti-bias plays, speak about staging possibilities of justice and progress.

Throughout this issue, we celebrate Howard Zinn’s anti-bias ethos. (Flip the magazine to the back cover to find Shanthony Exum’s tribute to Zinn.) But we also identify, and even—when appropriate—celebrate, our own biases. We, each of us, have biases, which when recognized, can be a tool for understanding and action. Very much like quartet practice, an awareness of the ongoing concert of biases can act as needed moment for harmony, and for progress. **TAP**

Send your ideas, replies and letters to letters@theartspolitic.com.

COMMENTS

ON “THE UNREPORTED ARTS RECESSION OF 1997”

(Published Online)

I would like to think [that] this magazine represents a turn in sentiment toward the visual and all other arts. From 1975 to 1980, the NEA wasn't that great... as it was... known that most of the people who got grants had faculty heads who were often jurors on various panels... The usual practice when a department head or powerful faculty member of a well known educational institution got on a panel, they would come back to the faculty meetings and say in effect, “O.K. gang now's the time to ask for a grant.” There was so much abuse and favoritism. We all knew [former N.E.A. chair Jane] Alexander was a dupe, a rubber stamp. It really remains to be seen what will happen. I'll just try to keep hope alive.

Roberta Loach (Kensington, CA)

ON “AFRICA, AFRICAN ACCENTS & AFRICAN-AMERICANS”

(Published in Issue 1, *The Economy Issue*)

“To cast African-Americans as African people treads thin ice on boundaries where reifying concepts of the other can easily become trendy network programming.”

The author seems to argue for authentic cultural representation in the arts. And while one could argue that an African actress could have embodied more of the nuances of African speech and mannerism, I wonder at what point should artistic freedom and creative interpretation be given the reins over idealized cultural representation.

In other words: Is a white or black actress always “best” for a role simply because the part calls for it?

Vessey (New York, NY)

Vessey, I think you are asking the exact question I am also posing in this article. I don't think one race is better suited to portray one over the other. Here I am arguing that the historical fact of representation of others by those from

the outside that racial group should not be forgotten as we entertain ourselves... at the expense of others. The arts are partly about expression and interpretation, and achieving authentic representation can be a daunting task, even more so in network programming because one wants to attract and retain an audience. Yet as we converse about artistic freedom and creative interpretation we cannot leave out the conversation about idealized cultural representation (as you have pointed out) and [about] how the imperial imagination has impacted cultural groups throughout history.

RonAmber Deloney, Culture Editor, The Arts Politic (New York, NY)

ON “REMEMBERING MARY PERRY STONE”

(Published in Issue 1, *The Economy Issue*)

On February 9th, 2010, the Missing Peace Art Space in Dayton, Ohio will have a show opening of Mary's art on peace and war. I came across this quote of hers on capitalism that she had in one of her art books. “Oh what an evil prey this oily octopus circling, usurping the stars, the moon, and us.”

Ramie Streng (Ashland, OR)

[Note: Streng is Mary Perry Stone's daughter.]

ON “AN INJURY TO ALL”

(Published Online)

In these days of an economic downturn, it should be more important than ever to spotlight homelessness and poverty wherever it is found. But those who walk the halls of Congress often live in a bubble, one in which they are not attuned to the world other than the one inside the Beltway. It's time to burst that bubble

through art, through the written word, through music, and start a revolution to really say, and mean, that no person should be left behind. As artists in an increasingly visual world, we have access like never before to spread the word and raise awareness.

Bridgette Raitz (Atlanta, GA)



To reply to any article in THE ARTS POLITIC, post a comment online or send a letter to the editor at: letters@theartspolitic.com.

LETTER TO THE POLICYMAKER

Chicago art teacher Betty Lark Ross sent this letter to Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education. She was motivated to express her ideas “because of the need for change that exists within our current education system regarding arts education. Too many students are dropping out of school. Too many schools are still educating for a manufacturing society and most have dropped their arts programs.” Ross sought—and still seeks—an education system that positions creative problem solving as an educational priority.

Dear Arne Duncan,

I am the Chair of the Visual Arts Department at the Latin School of Chicago. I am writing to you with an idea for improving education. Make arts education matter. Change the ways in which the arts are viewed and validated. Do this in a manner which will create significant change by changing the college admissions expectations for the arts. Currently high school art courses have little significance in the college admissions process. Three credits are required in nearly every subject (Math, Science, English, History) but there is no credit requirement in the arts. Too often grades in the arts are further devalued by being removed from the grade point calculating system. College admissions are impacting secondary education in a negative manner. This small change could have a big impact in every school, across the country. Students need to be literate in the arts not only to understand themselves and their culture but to also have an appreciation of the rich contribution the arts have made to society and to our world.

I know you are interested in spurring innovation. Setting national standards in art education and making three years of art education required for college admissions would have a profound impact on our schools, but more importantly on students. I think making this change would keep more students in high school. Many students connect to learning through the arts. The arts provide thinking and production skills that are paramount to creating the innovative society we need. The arts inspire, build self-esteem, teach skills, develop respect for

different ways to interpret, and challenge all of us to imagine. Research shows that education in the arts also improves test scores. With your support, the arts in public schools could be valued and seen as equal partners in the education of students. You know this is what is happening at the best private schools. Please provide this in our public schools. We need a new vision for a 21st century education system.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,
Betty Lark Ross
Chicago, IL

Ms. Ross has been a high school teacher for 35 years and has taught in both public and private high schools. She serves as the Chair of the Visual Art Department at The Latin School of Chicago and teaches Art, Photography and Digital Video Production. She also advises students on the yearbook; a photography club; VIDI, a photography magazine; and, The Gay/Straight Alliance. She is also the sponsor of the Chicagoland (High School) Film Festival. Ms. Ross received an Outstanding Educator Award from the University of Chicago.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Ms. Ross received a reply from Edith Thomas Harvey, Director of Improvement Programs, who wrote:

“The Secretary’s primary task is to implement and administer laws made by Congress and give guidance and technical assistance to state and local agencies. Education in the United States is almost completely funded and controlled at the state and local levels; the federal government plays a very minor role. I suggest you express your concerns to your state education agency.”

Ross’s response:

“I felt saddened by this reply letter. The dreamer in me envisioned that Arne Duncan would take a bold measure and publicly set a tone by challenging university boards to discuss the impact of implementing this change. So I am wondering who else has the power to do this? Maybe some of your readers have suggestions?”

Let us know if you do have any suggestions. Send your ideas, replies and letters to letters@theartspolitic.com.



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BRIEFS & TRENDS

Late fall 2009 and winter 2010 reveal national arts budget cuts, local arts funding victories, mayors across the United States entrusted with arts planning, a high profile White House concert celebrating Civil Rights-era protest songs, and an award ceremony honoring incredible artists who fight for social change.

OBAMA CUTS NATIONAL ARTS BUDGETS IN 2011

Both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) would see budget cuts as projected in President Obama's FY2011 budget. The NEA would receive an allocation of \$161.3 million, some \$6 million less than the \$167.5 million that Congress allocated for fiscal year 2010. Within that budget, the Save America's Treasures program would be completely cut, and programs like Commission of Fine Arts and National Heritage Areas would have their budgets cut by half. Outside of NEA and NEH budgets, the Arts in Education program would be consolidated into the Department of Education's new "Effective Teaching and Learning for Well-Rounded Education" program. These cuts aside, Obama's arts budgets do allocate \$5 million in funding for "Our Town," a new program to strengthen cities through arts planning.

REGIONAL ARTS ADVOCACY DAYS

Although the national Arts Advocacy Day, sponsored by Americans for the Arts, doesn't take place until April 12, 2010 there has been a glut of regional arts advocacy efforts throughout early 2010. A key theme: ensuring that arts funding is not cut.

In late January 2010, Art Works for Virginia brought together artists, educators, tourism representations, and other arts stakeholders for an annual arts advocacy event. Notable: the first-ever rural arts roundtable, performances by the Richmond Ballet, and a meeting with state legislators at the Virginia General Assembly building, where arts advocates lobbied for more funding, and for greater understanding of the role of arts in communities and civic life.

On February 9, 2010, over five hundred arts advocates came together for Maryland Arts Day, the statewide annual meeting for Maryland's artists and arts communities. This year's theme was "Many Voices, One Song." True to that moniker, diverse arts advocates met with state legislators and lobbied for continued public support of the

arts. Legendary choreographer Liz Lerman gave the keynote speech.

In Washington state, 4Culture—a leading cultural services agency that provides arts programming, services, funding and support in the Seattle area—lobbied legislators in Olympia, WA to retain lodging tax revenue to support arts and culture. In 2013, this revenue will be redirected to pay for stadium debts; the redirection will gut 4Culture's budget by eighty percent.

In Los Angeles, CA, attempts by arts advocates to retain a key source of arts funding—a hotel room tax that provides the nearly \$10 million annual budget for L.A.'s Department of Cultural Affairs—were successful. In early February 2010, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously voted against a proposal that would have eliminated the guaranteed arts funding. That pro-arts vote came after an impassioned session with arts advocate speakers, and an advocacy effort led by Arts for L.A.

ARTS & MAYORS

On January 21, 2010, NEA Chair Rocco Landesman gave a policy address to the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and announced a new initiative to grant cities funding for arts planning, design, and engagement activities. The NEA Mayors' Institute on City Design Anniversary Initiative will grant 25 cities funding awards of \$25,000 to \$250,000 to support the planning of arts districts, to enhance livability through public spaces, and to revitalize neighborhoods through community arts engagement and new media projects. The initiative adds energy to several other disparate city-based arts planning commitments: that the U.S. Conference of Mayors has made the arts a centerpiece of its members' goals, and that the NEA plans to launch "Our Town," a new program funded with \$5 million to employ the arts in creating livable, sustainable communities.

NATIONAL ART INDEX

On January 20, 2010, the first National Arts Index was released at the National Press Club. The Index, created by national arts advocacy group Americans for the Arts, used 76 indicators (such as artists in the workforce, music instrument sales, nonprofit revenue, nightclub attendance and state funding) to judge arts activity over an eleven-year period, from 1998 to 2008. A few key findings: the arts follow the nation's business cycle and the index fell 4.2 percentage points in 2008; nonprofit arts organizations have grown dramatically, from 73,000 in 1998 to more than 104,000 today; the demand for arts education has increased; how the public consumes art has expanded even though attendance at mainstream arts nonprofits is in decline. [*Editor's Note:* the National Arts Index is

groundbreaking, comprehensive, and useful—however we believe that the index fails to capture often excluded arts communities such as all-ages arts venues, street graf artists and outsider artists.]

WHITE HOUSE MUSIC SERIES STAGES SONGS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Bob Dylan, Smokey Robinson, Jennifer Hudson, John Mellencamp and the Blind Boys of Alabama were among the artists who performed at the White House as part of the Celebration of Music from the Civil Rights Movement. The concert, which took place on February 9, 2010, continued the “In Performance at the White House” series, and was accompanied by an educational tour for high school students from across the nation. These students participated in a career-oriented q&a session with artists and producers, acted as journalists during a special press conference about artists as political agents, and participated in an interactive lesson about music from the Civil Rights era. The event was produced through a partnership among the White House, the GRAMMY Museum, National Black Programming Consortium, and PBS to raise awareness about the Civil Rights era, Black History Month, and the role of music in social change.

ART & THE PUBLIC PURPOSE

In Fall 2009, the Cultural Policy Working Group published “Art & The Public Purpose: A New Framework.” The Cultural Policy Working Group is a group of noted arts advocates, many of whom met with White House officials during the Arts at the White House day in May 2009. They include several contributors to Issue 1 of *THE ARTS POLITIC*, such as writer and speaker Arlene Goldbard (who also wrote this issue’s *Endnote*), Roadside Theater director Dudley Cocks, community muralist and professor Judy Baca, and writer Jeff Chang. The framework calls on Congress and the White House to support “art’s public purpose to mend our social fabric, promote freedom of expression and a vibrant, inclusive national dialogue, and revitalize both education and commerce with the creativity.” Some key tenets include: employing creativity for common good, building upon cultural memory, utilizing artists in national recovery efforts, and standing for free expression.

FREEDOM TO CREATE

On November 25, 2009, the Freedom to Create Prize honored artists who promote social change at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum. More than 1,015 artists, from over 100 countries, participated in the annual prize, founded by entrepreneur Richard Chandler. Winners received monetary awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$75,000.

“The Freedom to Create Prize... celebrates the power of art to fight oppression, break down stereotypes and build trust in societies where the social fabric has been ripped apart by conflict, violence and misunderstanding,” Chandler said. “Of most importance, the Prize also celebrates the bravery of artists who pursue their craft despite great danger to themselves.”

Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the celebrated Iranian filmmaker and official overseas spokesman for 2009 Iranian presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, won the Freedom to Create 2009 prize. Of his win, Makhmalbaf said, “People of my country (Iran) are killed, imprisoned, tortured and raped just for their votes. Every award I receive means an opportunity for me to echo their voices to the world, asking for democracy for Iran and peace for the world.”

Second place prize winner was The Kumjing Storytellers, a Burmese refugee women’s group who use giant paper maché dolls to represent their stories of ethnic persecution in Burma and the plight of migrants and refugees from around the world. The third place prize winner was Afghan female artist Sheenkai Alam Stanikzai, who uses video performance, installation and photography to tackle the subjugation and violent persecution of women in Afghanistan and neighboring countries.

The Freedom to Create Youth Prize was awarded to Poimboi Veeyah Koindu (The Orphan Boys of Koindu). This group of former child soldiers from Sierra Leone formed a theatre troupe under the guidance of David Alan Harris, a dance artist and mental health clinician specialized in torture rehabilitation. Citing the need for forgiveness, the group created a performance, “Healing and Forgiveness,” for the community in which they depict their roles in the war. Their resulting play portrays the agony of the boys’ forced recruitment and other coerced violence, eventually asking forgiveness from the local chief, neighbors and families.

Cameroonian singer Lapiro de Mbanga was awarded the Imprisoned Artist Prize. The popular singer, who was arrested in 2008, was charged with inciting youth unrest during the mass strikes and demonstrations in Cameroon.

Speaking from a holding cell, Lapiro sent a message to the ceremony. He commented, “Music is a sort of weapon ... instead of using a gun, you use music. You use the voice, you use the sound and people who are against the freedom will be shot down by a lyric, by a sound, by a musical attitude.” **TAP**

Send your ideas, replies and letters to letters@theartspolitic.com.

THE LIVING VOTER GUIDE

A CO-OP THEATRE EAST PERFORMANCE REPORT

By Robert A. K. Gonyo and Ashley Marinaccio

On October 31 and November 1, 2009, our theatre collective Co-Op Theatre East (COTE) performed what we called *Democracy in America: The Living Voter Guide* at different locations throughout New York City. Our intent was to bring politics out into the public through performance, encouraging participation in the process, spreading information, and generally trying to add a spark to what could be described as a lackluster election season. COTE has, until now, only produced more traditional proscenium-style theatre, guided by our mission statement:

Co-Op Theatre East believes in the power of art to foster a dialogue for social change. We provide an entertaining performance forum in which to ask evocative, challenging questions of artists and audiences on our way to creating collaborative answers.

With this project we attempted a different approach to create socially engaged theatre—instead of inviting people to come see us give performances dealing with issues of the day, we would instead bring political performance to the audience in a public forum.

In front of Robby on a music stand was a red binder turned on its side with pages that would flip over the front of the music stand (see the photos for an example), reading “The Living Voter Guide (not affiliated with any candidate or party).” Ashley, dressed as the Statue of Liberty, approached passersby with a flyer explaining the action, asking them if they had any questions for the eight candidates for mayor. Robby also tried to pull people in to the performance by calling out to them. We chose the Statue of Liberty costume because we felt it carried less political party baggage than other traditional American symbols; it is also a symbol of New York, and therefore an ideal character choice for encouraging New Yorkers to vote.

When asked about any candidate’s stance on a major policy issue, Robby would flip the pages of his book so the sign on the music stand would read with the candidate’s name and party affiliation. He would then perform the candidate’s position,

attempting simple mimicry of their vocal style and physicality. All text was taken from the candidates, combining information from their campaign websites, the Video Voter Guide from the NYC Voter Assistance Commission, the Campaign Finance Board’s Voter Guide that was mailed to voters, and video footage found online. If we didn’t have the answer to a particular question, Robby would respond out of character with, “The Living Voter Guide is unprepared to answer that question, but I’d encourage you to reach out to the candidate directly and ask.” This response was needed several times, but Robby had enough information in the script to give general responses to most questions on policy issues.

We performed in three different venues—a Halloween festival in Fort Greene, Brooklyn; a farmer’s market in Jackson Heights, Queens; and in Union Square, Manhattan—with very different results and types of interactions in each location.

At the Halloween Festival in Fort Greene Park, people were very curious and willing to engage the performance, perhaps encouraged by the very community-centered nature of the festival itself, but also due in no small part to the fact that it was Halloween and like Ashley, many people were in costume. The park was a warm, non-threatening, and friendly place to perform; kids (and more than a few adults) wanted their pictures with the Statue of Liberty; and there were people who were just plain curious about something out of the ordinary happening in the space. A campaigner for Green candidate Billy Talen cheered when Robby performed Reverend Billy’s position on education, and booed when he performed Michael Bloomberg’s positions, heckling with “What about term limits, Mike?”

The leisurely pace of the festival—with folks strolling by and milling about the craft fair and farmers’ market around us—helped create an atmosphere open to random performers like us. People were willing to ask questions, with particular interest in Michael Bloomberg (mayoral candidate endorsed by the Republican and Independence parties) and mayoral candidate William C. Thompson, Jr. (endorsed by the Democratic and Working Families parties) and in the issues of term limits and education. There was also a question about what Thompson had to say on women’s issues, but Robby had to default to The Living Voter Guide’s disclaimer that he wasn’t prepared to answer that question. Two particular interactions stuck out:

- A man came up and said that he’d watched the debates, but was disappointed that the candidates kept talking about “the middle class.” He wanted to hear what Bloomberg and Thompson would do for those who,



like him, weren't middle class yet. Robby performed for him statements from the two about job creation and retention, then flipped to the "Living Voter Guide" sign and told him the LVG wasn't prepared with anything further, that he should instead contact the candidates and their campaigns. He seemed satisfied that we'd given all we could, and took one of our fliers, but again stated something along the lines of, "what about the rest of us?"

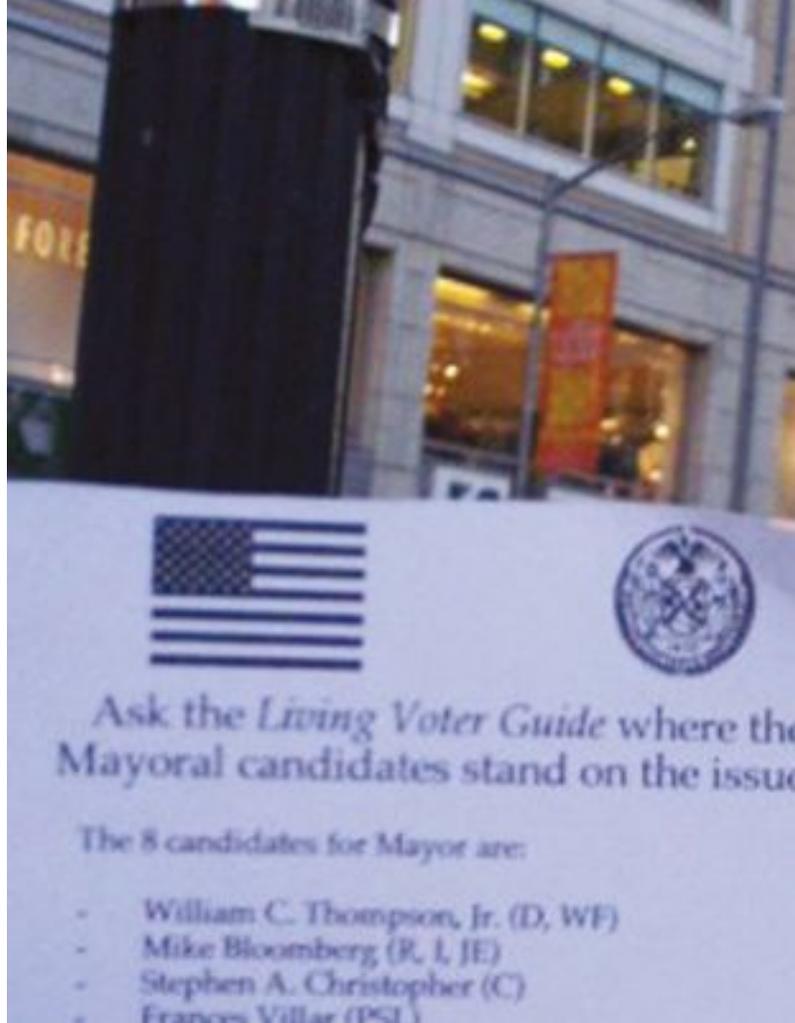
- Another man wanted to know more about "the young woman, the college student who's running" he'd heard about. A small introduction from Party for Socialism & Liberation candidate Frances Villar was performed, and the man then asked about what she was going to do to pay for all the things she wanted. Robby then read the following statement from Ms. Villar:

"The billionaires must pay for the Economic Crisis. A 5% tax on all wealth over \$100 million would alone raise over \$8 billion a year from the city's 55 billionaires; if they try to leave the city, their property and wealth should be confiscated. The \$5 billion that the city pays every year to the banks for "debt servicing" must go to peoples' needs."

The man raised his eyebrows and said, "She's got a point about the debt servicing, I'd forgotten about that..." and walked away.

At Sunday's farmers' market in Queens, we performed for only about 45 seconds before a man representing the city's Greenmarkets program (a project of NYC's Council on the Environment) approached us and asked if we had permission to be performing. We replied we didn't ask anyone for permission, we just wanted to spread the word about the upcoming election and offer some information. He asked us to relocate away from the market's space, explaining that although we weren't interfering with anything, the market had a policy of not allowing performers or non-market vendors to set up in the market for fear of making vendors or customers uncomfortable. We agreed to leave, and as we were packing up our small setup we chatted with the man; he explained that he was sorry to ask us to go, that he was a Government major in college and liked what we were up to and wished more people were engaged, but that it was his responsibility as a representative of the city's program to keep the market in order.

After leaving Queens, we took the subway to Manhattan and set up in Union Square, on the sidewalk near the corner of





where Broadway meets 14th Street—a very highly trafficked area. Here we experienced much more indifference than we had the day before at the Fort Greene festival, so we found ourselves talking to shoulders (then the backs of heads) as people walked by without looking at us. As Ashley approached people with the flier, Robby tried to get other folks’ attention and draw them in with, “Hello, this is the Living Voter Guide, do you have any questions for the eight candidates for mayor?” There weren’t as many interactions as we’d had in Brooklyn the previous day, but most of the folks who did engage the performance asked first who the eight candidates were (most had only heard of Bloomberg and Thompson), then asked questions of Jimmy McMillan of the Rent is Too Damn High Party and of Billy Talen. Notable interactions:

- Robby was asked for social services assistance by a woman who told us about her experience being homeless and looking for a job; we responded that we were not prepared to point her in the direction of further public assistance, but wished her well.
- A couple of gentlemen stopped by, and while one man explained to Robby how all politicians are crooks who didn’t get anything done for people and should be forcibly removed from power, the other proclaimed to Ashley his admiration and support for Ron Paul.
- One woman in particular asked many questions of the LVG, running through several issues and wanting to compare responses from many of the candidates, with a particular interest in Talen and Thompson but also wanting more info on Libertarian candidate Joseph L. Dobrian, Frances Villar, and Conservative Stephen A. Christopher; she was the person who most extensively used the Guide for “comparison shopping” the candidates.

COTE plans to replicate this model for future elections, perhaps with more actors performing multiple electoral races. We would also like to explore the possibility of doing similar public performances regarding major policy debates, though with many such issues there aren’t clear-cut personalities that can be performed. **TAP**

Anyone is encouraged to borrow from, or outright replicate, this performance model. If you do, we’d love to hear about your experiences with it. Please let us know by e-mailing cooptheatreast@gmail.com, and find out more about COTE at www.cooptheatreast.org. See REFERENCES (page 102) for photo credits.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL ART

A REPORT ON THE 11TH ISTANBUL BIENNIAL

by Gregory Sholette

“What Keeps Mankind Alive?” ask the curators of the 11th Istanbul Biennial. The title says it all. Borrowed from the raucous finale of the *Three Penny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weil, the series of three large exhibition venues stridently focus on issues of economic and social justice while displaying works by some seventy lesser-known artists and artists’ collectives. Opening September 10, 2009, the site of the massive arts festival was itself imbued with its own intricate politics. A city of over twelve million inhabitants, Istanbul is where Europe meets Asia, Islam encounters the West, and where the EU intends to locate its Cultural Capital in the coming year.

Global Art Biennials have multiplied fantastically since the 1990s, and while they often incite local controversy their presence can now be found in cities ranging from Havana to Ljubljana to Johannesburg. But this year’s Biennial has truly broken with familiar patterns. For one thing, there is little representation by artists associated with the major commercial galleries in New York, London, or Berlin, and almost none of the usual international art stars found, all too monotonously, in other venues. Instead the majority of participants hail from either Eastern Europe or the Middle East. Furthermore, the Biennial itself has been organized not by the usual art world insider, but instead by an all-female,

four-person curatorial group from Zagreb—Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolovic—collectively known as Who, What, and for Whom, or simply WHW. Strongly influenced by the radical avant-garde of the early Soviet Union, as well as the pedagogical poetics of Brecht, the curators have chosen to peel away the usual glossy surface of the Biennial itself, exposing the technical, economic, and soft social “wiring” underneath that makes the event function. One large exhibition room designed in collaboration with their long-time associate Dejan Kršić has no art at all. It is dedicated to a series of graphs, pie-charts, and statistics explaining how the Biennial was financed, what the geographical range and gender of its participants consists of, and even how disparities in national GDPs influence the cultural politics between the global North and South, East and West. This is not art world business as usual. There are also stats on insurance and transportation costs, including what it costs to keep the exhibition clean and how much the curators were paid for their work (split of course four ways). All this “making transparent” is reproduced in the Biennial’s catalog, thus enlarging the program’s pedagogical activism. Similarly, the art works chosen by WHW reinforce the critical, political thrust of their theme.

Among the many outstanding projects presented by the 30 Kadın (women), 32 Erkek (men), and five artists’ groups, the most

**The table is finished, carpenter.
Allow us to take it away.
Stop planing it now
Leave off painting it
Speak neither well or ill of it:
We'll take it as it is.
We need it.
Hand it over.**

**[Bertolt Brecht,
The Flight of Lindberghs]**

Masa tamam marangoz,
Bırak alıp gidelim.
Artık rendelensikten vazgeç,
Boya falan da istemez.
Övmen de yermen de gerekmez.
Olduğu gibi alalım.
Ona ihtiyacımız var.
Artık ver.

Bertolt Brecht, Lindbergh'in Uçuşu
(çev. Hulusi Beşirçen ve Güven İşreli)



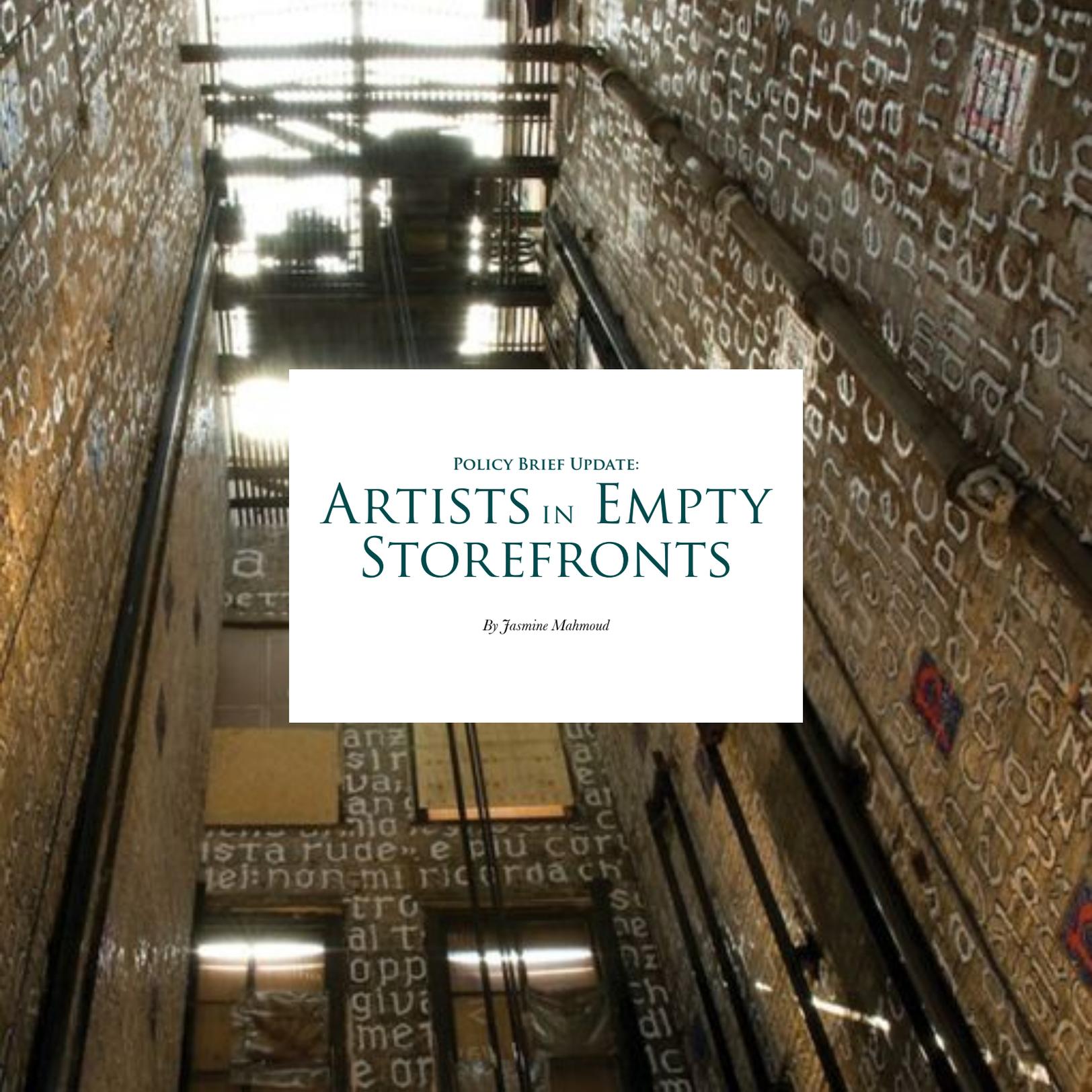


engaging installations and videos were made by Anna Boghiguiian (Egypt), Jinoos Taghizadeh (Iran), Igor Grubic (Croatia), and Marina Naprushkina (Belarus) all of whom addressed issues of power in failed or failing states. There was also excellent and often humorous work by Zanny Begg (Australia), Trevor Paglen, Sharon Hayes (USA), an enigmatic institution called Museum of American Art (MoAA), and the political performance collective Etcétera (Argentina). Pedagogical projects by Bureau d'études (France), and Chto Delat/What is to be Done? who work precariously in Russia contributed strongly to the overall success of the festival. Still, not every artwork was made by an “under 30” artist. Pieces by Turkish artist Yüksel Arslan, Berlin-based painter Ken Brehmer or British collagist Margaret Harrison reminded spectators that many of the critical themes associated with “What Keeps Mankind Alive?” were already being developed in the 1960s and 1970s. But if one project has to sum up WHW’s massive urban intervention perhaps that is a collaboration by two Istanbul artists, Aydan Murtezaoğlu and Bülent Şangar, who used their share of the Biennial’s “cultural capital” to provide day jobs for local out-of-work artists. Entitled “Unemployed Employees—i found you a new job!” their installation consisted of an enormous curved table that looked like it came from the city’s ultra-fashionable Kanyon Shopping Mall. Displayed on its magnificent surface were designer perfumes and t-shirts sporting graphics made by the artists. And all day long a changing posse of young, otherwise unemployed art students stand about folding, refolding, and pointlessly offering samples of the goods to Biennial visitors, merchandise that needless to say is not for sale. Potential “retail clerks” had to answer ads in the paper and line up for interviews in order to be employed for the project.

Two of those hired, Emre Akyüz and Imre Oymalpu, expressed both gratitude and dismay to me about their participation. While on the one hand they now possessed jobs, at least for the length of the Biennial, their own, professional training as artists remained untapped, and therefore literally “unemployed.” All of which suggests that along side the formidable question rhetorically posed by WHW we may want to add, “What Keeps the Art World Alive?” **IVAP**



Gregory Sholette is an artist, writer, and an Assistant Professor of Sculpture at Queens College, New York. He was an invited speaker at the opening of the 11th Istanbul Biennial and is currently at work on a political economy of art for PLUTO PRESS, UK. The 11th Istanbul Biennial ran through November 9, 2009. More information can be found at: www.iksv.org/bienal11/giris_en.html. See REFERENCES (page 102) for photo credits.



POLICY BRIEF UPDATE:

ARTISTS IN EMPTY STOREFRONTS

By Jasmine Mahmoud

In last issue's arts policy brief "Arts Policy Strategies for the Economic Downturn," Danielle and I suggested low-cost ideas to harness the arts during the economic recession. One idea combined the constant flurry of artistic work alongside an increasing presence of boarded up buildings. We wrote:

Revitalize shuttered communities with partnerships that leverage the arts. Across the nation, once thriving neighborhoods and districts, are now notable for "for lease" and "for sale" signs. The "empty storefront district" is ever-present and ominous. Artists can play a large role in economic recovery and community re-development by revitalizing neighborhoods where businesses and residents have left. Local and state policymakers should work more proactively with neighborhood and city development agencies, universities, businesses, and artists to create partnerships that grant artists and arts organizations free- or low-cost rent of vacant spaces in exchange for art that contributes to community development such as low-cost classes, regular concerts and film screenings, the creation of public works, and citizen involvement.

Cities across the United States—including Everett, WA; Philadelphia, PA; and Pittsfield, MA—have done exactly that. For example, Pittsfield's Storefront Artist Project located temporary studio/exhibition spaces for visual artists. Based on successes, more cities have implemented homegrown artists-in-storefronts campaigns. Storefront Artists Project in Fall River, MA actually modeled their campaign after Pittsfield's, and made it their own by incorporating performance into spaces. Philadelphia's campaign inspired an art teacher in Palm Spring, CA to convince city officials to create an art-in-empty-storefronts program.

Granting artists free empty storefront space seems like an ideal way to revitalize cities and fulfill artists' insatiable need for low-cost space. There are, however, questions and potential problems that accompany the free use of another's building. Who covers the cost to maintain the building? Who is liable for injury against storefronts? What are lease lengths? How are artists selected? Which arts genres are considered? How can art-in-storefronts best respond to community needs?

To answer these questions and to better understand best practices, I interviewed directors of two campaigns: Manon Slome of New York City's No Longer Empty, and Judy Nemzoff and Robynn Takayama of San Francisco's Art in Storefronts. Their responses are helpful for those looking to start their own campaigns, and for those seeking to understand the challenges and successes of these projects. Both programs root their successes in being homegrown collaborative initiatives, conscious of neighborhoods

and building history, and interested in generating a new platform for accessible arts in public and underserved areas.

MANON SLOME is the co-founder and curator of No Longer Empty (NLE), a New York City non-profit organization initially conceived as an artistic response to the economic recession. Ms. Slome previously worked as the Chief Curator of the Chelsea Art Museum in New York. Since spring of 2009, No Longer Empty has curated six thoughtful art installations with attendant public programming in empty spaces—such as the storefronts adjacent to the Chelsea Hotel, a yet to be occupied 500 square feet of commercial space linked to a condo under the High Line, a former belt factory in Brooklyn and, most recently, a former Tower Records store. NLE re-appropriates these vacated spaces and turns them into creative, site-specific art exhibitions free to the general public. No Longer Empty now has a stable and growing base of volunteers and curators, and plans to continue curating multi-genre arts programs in empty New York City venues.

TAP: Who conceived of No Longer Empty? Did models in other cities influence the plan?

SLOME: The idea came one day as I was walking along Madison Avenue in the Spring of 2009. Store after store was closed and the streets felt empty. I thought about doing an exhibition called "Empty" and then, I thought about where to place such a show. I had recently left the museum world and the idea of using empty storefronts seemed the most appropriate. When I asked colleagues Asher Remy Toledo, Julia Draganovic, and Julian Navarro to collaborate on the project, we came up with the name No Longer Empty to put a positive spin on what we wanted to do: art as healing, art filling the vacuum created by the downturn in the economy. We also thought that landlords would be willing to donate the spaces as the exhibitions and the energy they provided would show the properties in their best light and increase foot traffic to the communities. Only after we had started did we begin to be aware of similar projects in other cities. In fact several other organizations have approached us for help or advice in setting up similar models.

Previous page: A shot from No Longer Empty's installation in Brooklyn of Guiseppe Stampone's *Charon's bark* which is in the freight elevator and shaft. The text on the walls is from *Dante's Inferno* and the elevator takes you through *Heaven, Purgatory and Hell!*

Right: Images from *No Longer Empty's* show at the former Tower Records on Broadway and 4th in New York City. Manon Slome with Brent Birnbaum in his *Ice Ice Maybe* performance on the opening night.



NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE

FORMER TOWER RECORDS
Broadway and 4th Street

EMPT
NO LONGER
RETIKING OFFICE / DESIGNER CREATIV

OPENING:
Friday, Jan 15th
7pm-12pm

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:
Jan 15th-Feb 13th
Wednesday-Sunday, 12pm-7pm





TAP: What logistical issues were involved in making these spaces available to artists?

SLOME: A primary logistic was becoming an entity with a not-for-profit status, and the ability to carry both liability and art insurance. We registered with Fractured Atlas who became our fiscal sponsor, through whom donations can be made with a tax benefit to the donor. Backed with this, we were able to move forward and make contracts with landlords.

As each exhibition is created in response to its location—taking into consideration the building’s former use, value of the space, nature of the neighborhood and, of course, the architecture and structure—the challenges of each space become part of the exhibition and artists work toward those themes or challenges.

For example, in NLE’s first installation in a former fishing tackle store adjacent to the Chelsea Hotel on 23rd St., Michael Bevilacqua created an installation called “Ship of Fools.” The installation referred to the nautical connection of the store and the failing economy with the many layers of the installation—Michael created about two hundred silk-screened prints that covered the rather dilapidated structure of a store that had been empty for a couple of years. In our current exhibition “Never Can Say Goodbye,” we recreated a fantasy version of the now defunct Tower Records with Ted Riederer’s installation, “Never Records,” which is complete with record bins, album covers, music posters and a performance stage. Interactive installations by artists celebrate the stores’ historic role as the locus of the community—the old way to meet people face to face and share music and information.

TAP: How effective have leases been so far?

SLOME: We have no shortage of buildings being offered. Because some of them have not been occupied for a while, we have had problems with lack of air conditioning (we bought lots of fans) or the lack of lighting. But nothing so far that we have not been able to tackle.

TAP: What are community responses?

SLOME: We have had some really positive feedback, especially from people who have had little exposure to art. The local merchants love us! For one performance in Brooklyn, Improv Everywhere came and did a project with invisible dog leashes, and we had around 2,000 attendees who then went out and bought coffees at local stores. Property owners too have been pleased with the way the spaces looked and the increased interest they have received from potential lessees.

TAP: Going forward, how will No Longer Empty continue, adapt, and improve?

SLOME: When we started, we thought of NLE as a yearlong project. Six months later, with six exhibitions already completed and several projects in progress, we are all committed to being together into the future. Locating art in unexpected places in the public domain has also suggested to us new models of community art that offer a different experience and accessibility than the traditional venues. We are committed to art as a positive component for community and cultural development. Not only do our exhibitions have a salutary effect in improving the visual ambience of the site, but they also bring art to areas and audiences that are often underserved. We encourage our volunteers to reach out to people hovering at the door to help to remove the sense of ambivalence or even intimidation non-art community visitors often feel about entering a gallery.

TAP: What advice would you give to other cities looking to replicate No Longer Empty?

SLOME: It is hard work but as rewarding as anything I have done in my career. The best way to start is to just start. Speak to friends and colleagues, approach the owner of a local vacant site and explain the benefits you can offer to the space. Get a fiscal sponsor so as to be able to get donations and insurance. Be committed to creating a replicable and sustainable model for public art. Aim for quality in what you do and try to develop accompanying programs such as panel discussions, musical performances and children’s workshops. By challenging the traditional model of museums and galleries, as well as filling the art education void widened by cuts in public school funding, organizations such as NLE can shift the paradigm of how art is experienced, and ultimately, whom art is for. Log onto our web site at www.nolongerempty.com and get in touch.

ROBYNN TAKAYAMA is the Community Arts and Education Program Associate for the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC), a city agency that champions arts through education, planning and programming. **JUDY NEMZOFF** is SFAC’s Community Arts and Education Program Director. In October 2009, SFAC launched Art in Storefronts, which appoints local artists to temporarily display visual art in neighborhoods hurt by the economic downturn. With the support of San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, the Art in Storefronts pilot program has launched in several neighborhoods including the Central Market, Tenderloin and Bayview.

TAP: Who conceived of Art in Storefronts? Did models in other cities influence the plan?

TAKAYAMA: The program is a pilot project of both the Mayor’s Office Workforce and Economic Development (OEWD) and the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC). Ultimately, the project design was based on community input and meeting the needs of our community partners. Triple Base, the project’s curators, started a project called 24th Street Promenade in 2005 which involved pairing up artists and business owners in the Mission District on 24th Street to create mutually beneficial art projects in the community. The involvement of Triple Base brings previous experience and curatorial expertise to the project that also helps diversify and broaden the scope of artists and media selected for the storefront installations.

TAP: How did you work out logistical partnerships among landlords, artists, policymakers and others involved? Who is funding this low-cost project?

TAKAYAMA: The logistical partnership was laid out in a memorandum of understanding. Corridor managers were in charge of getting property owners to sign agreement contracts so that artists could enter the spaces, as well as spearheading each neighborhood launch event. Triple Base worked closely with the artists on preparing the spaces for installations and making sure the projects were altered appropriately for the assigned windows. SFAC handled all media and website design. The funding came from the Mayor’s Office Workforce and Economic Development (OEWD) and the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC).

TAP: Art in Storefronts debuted in October 2009. What have been some teachable moments since the launch?

NEMZOFF: We have learned so much. There were certainly challenges, some of them unexpected. We had an incident of violence against one of our artists. Chor Boogie was painting a 120 foot mural [and] was jumped because someone wanted his paints. It was certainly very distressing for him. The community support turned it around. The first Saturday that he went back, a bunch of people came out and said “yes you can do this.” He has gone on to finish the mural. We knew we were choosing very difficult neighborhoods. We purposely wanted to make a statement about change and transition.

We had some challenges with property owners. One of the lessons concerned how do we as a city get property owners to understand the value that Art in Storefronts brings? Property owners doesn’t usually think “I’ll put art in a building and this will turn things around,” especially in blighted areas. The hardest part of the project

was getting those property owners to give us those window fronts.

In terms of positives, the list is much easier. We are just now drafting an evaluation, a convening of the artists, the community development staff, the mayor’s economic staff, to see if we can actually quantify what people are anecdotally hearing.

TAP: What are some of those anecdotes?

NEMZOFF: We are hearing wonderful stories. The project in the Tenderloin is called “Fight For Your Neighborhood.” The Tenderloin used to have a lot boxing parlors. So “Fight For Your Neighborhood” is an analogy for fighting for the neighborhood now. There, the art actually juts out from the window, onto the street. There’s been no damage done to it. It has become interactive, and people from the neighborhood are adding their own art, like inspirational sayings about fighting for the Tenderloin, cleaning up the streets, with a boxing image that represents all that’s good.

The Mission District used to have a lot of fortunetellers. So the Art in Storefronts in the Mission is “Ms. Teriosa’s” and includes a little place where you can take a piece of paper and pencil and ask a question, and then the artist responds by posting a response in the window. It is so popular it has a Yelp page.

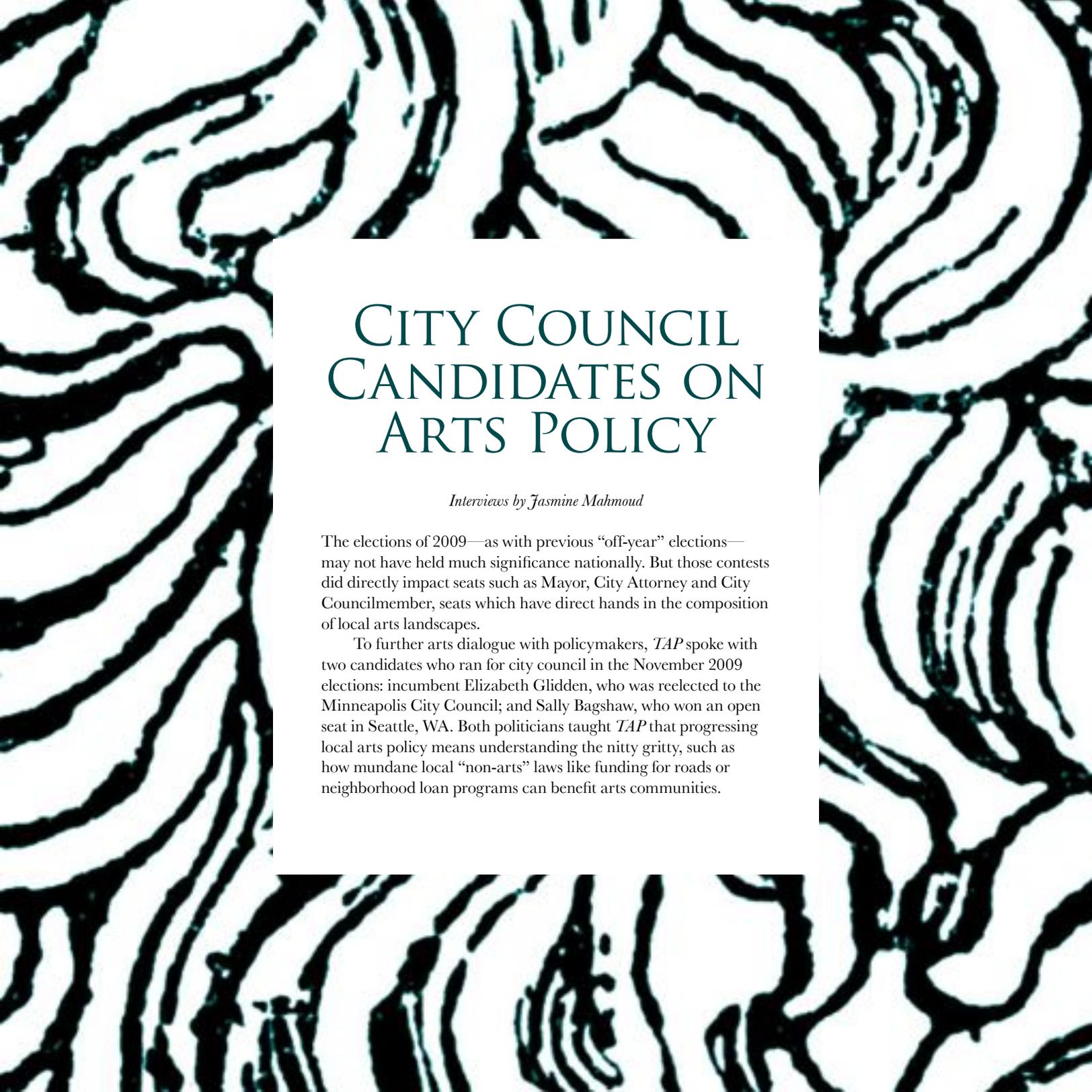
There has been an increase in foot traffic. We are hoping to expand into Chinatown, continue with economic development ideas, and do this next year along new commercial corridors. Also, we’ve received a number of phone calls from other cities: Pasadena, New York City, Atlanta. We’re starting to get cities or also associations within San Francisco interested.

TAP: What advice would you give other cities seeking to start their own campaigns?

NEMZOFF: We advocate for cities to take a look at a model the way we did it: a partnership with the economic development office. We could have done this easier, gone into high-end retail and put in safer art. We purposely wanted to make it something really unique.

We created a model that lives at the intersection of economic development and artist opportunities. That model was right for San Francisco, time consuming but rewarding. My hope is that other cities will look at our model and craft something that works for them. There may be easier ways to do, we just hope that other cities try something: artists painting billboards, or vacant storefronts or walls. The point is to use the creative capital that exists in every city to celebrate community and have fun. **TAP**

See REFERENCES (page 102) for photo credits.



CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES ON ARTS POLICY

Interviews by Jasmine Mahmoud

The elections of 2009—as with previous “off-year” elections—may not have held much significance nationally. But those contests did directly impact seats such as Mayor, City Attorney and City Councilmember, seats which have direct hands in the composition of local arts landscapes.

To further arts dialogue with policymakers, *TAP* spoke with two candidates who ran for city council in the November 2009 elections: incumbent Elizabeth Glidden, who was reelected to the Minneapolis City Council; and Sally Bagshaw, who won an open seat in Seattle, WA. Both politicians taught *TAP* that progressing local arts policy means understanding the nitty gritty, such as how mundane local “non-arts” laws like funding for roads or neighborhood loan programs can benefit arts communities.

“There’s this other layer of things happening in Minneapolis. From the grassroots up, people are becoming part of the arts community and influencing changes in their community.”



Elizabeth Glidden
Minneapolis Councilmember

During the November 2009 elections, **ELIZABETH GLIDDEN** was re-elected to her council position serving the 8th Ward of Minneapolis. On the Minneapolis City Council since 2006, Glidden is a classically trained violinist whose political career has been defined, in large part, by her support for collaborative arts initiatives. Her office has curated a series on Arts and Creative Economic Development and spearheaded support for a new community arts center, and her website features a prominent “Arts” tab (something all politicians should have!) that beckons local artists to display their work in City Hall and communicate with Glidden about arts opportunities.

TAP: *I read that you were instrumental in spearheading city support for the 8th Ward’s resident-led Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center set to open in 2010. Detail your work on that initiative. Why is Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center important to Minneapolis?*

GLIDDEN: This is a corner that used to be a beautifully functioning corner; the old streetcar went by. Chicago and 38th street has historically been one of the major east west bus connectors for Minneapolis. So around the 1930s and 1940s, you would find upwards of 20 to 30 businesses around that corner that ranged from professional to service and retail. But in recent decades this corner has had crime and safety problems, lots of underutilized property, and has become a symbol of decay. There has been a lot planning that happened about how to revitalize and improve the 38th and Chicago District.

When I was first elected in November 2005 and started in January 2006, there had been some planning that had taken place, but nothing that had moved forward to be adapted formerly by the city of Minneapolis. So we ushered the plan forward and incorporated it into the comprehensive plan that’s now been formally adopted by the city. One of the major components of that plan was the role of arts and emphasizing that there’s a lot of arts energy around the area, and emphasizing other uses of arts that happen near 38th and Chicago. Then, there was a group of residents involved in the planning efforts. This group put together a great business plan for an organization that they would call the Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center.

The plan itself had emphasized arts at the corner, and some who were involved from the neighborhood side and [who] became founding members themselves had been involved in the arts. I had been a big supporter of the arts component of the plan, so had my policy aide Andrea Jenkins, so we had really been pushing that piece. From the city end, there were shifts in city policy that weren’t

really specific to the arts but ended up benefiting that project and could benefit other neighborhood arts projects. We had a shift in city policy from doing gap financing and specialized loan programs—which used to be targeted on commercial corridors—to focus on neighborhood business nodes with a priority on business nodes that were in lower economic areas. So this ended up becoming a benefit to this new project, Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center, which applied for financing money from the Great Streets program.

In the process of all that happening, I had been involved—along with some other council members—in making connections with the board members of Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center with an arts developer Artspace, to figure out how they could really put all the pieces together to make this project happen. At the city end of things, we felt that this was a critical project, and it was in an area where there's been some market failure, where we needed some sort of catalyst project.

TAP: *What was Artspace's role? Are they going to do live/work spaces?*

GLIDDEN: So normally Artspace only does live/work spaces. Before the Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center even became a project, I had been involved with talking to Artspace, touring the director around 38th and Chicago because I really thought that this connection with arts and economic development that was promoted in the plan would be the thing to make a catalyst for change at the corner, even though normally Artspace does not do a project of the size of Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center. But the city talked to them about being the owner of the property with the transition plan so that at some point CAFAC could own the building themselves. This ended up being a really good match up: of an experienced developer, with a good track record of successful development, with this startup organization with very energetic board members, but not a track record of experience with development projects.

TAP: *Tell me about South Minneapolis Arts (SMARTS), the first artist-only business association. What has your involvement been and what are some of SMARTS' highlights?*

GLIDDEN: This goes back to trying to figure out how to stimulate more things happening with the arts. Early in my tenure in 2006, I had sought out Humphrey Institute Professor Ann Markusen. I had met with her in 2006 because I was really interested in her work on arts and economic development. One of the things that she pushed through is the importance of neighborhood centers [and] smaller arts projects. We had decided that one thing that

would be good to do, would be a series of meetings to draw out ideas from the artist communities about what would be some tangible things to do to help get artists more connected with the city, but also utilize their own economic development power better. At our kick off meeting, we had Ann Markusen and a well-known artist from the Twin Cities, Seitu Jones. From that series of meetings, the really concrete thing that happened was SMARTS. They have been developing some other strategies for keeping artists connected, and I'm hoping that they will continue to grow an energy so that they can be a place where we can look and say how the city can partner better with smaller arts organizations, and individual artists.

TAP: *I read "Minneapolis 2020: a clear vision for the future, a city wide plan for the future." One idea was "Arts-Large & Small-Abound and Surround." Coming off of what you just said, detail the relationship between the larger arts institutions and the smaller arts groups and why do you think it is necessary to support both together?*

GLIDDEN: I think it's easy from outside of Minneapolis to focus just on our flagship major arts organizations, such as the Minneapolis Orchestra. My little sister is a professional musician with the Buffalo Philharmonic. And I've been involved in playing instruments. Hearing my sister talk about the industry, I realize better now in what great shape the Minnesota Orchestra is in just financially as well as just being such a high quality organization artistically. We really have something very special here.

But then there's this other layer of things happening in Minneapolis. From the grassroots up, people are becoming part of the arts community, and influencing changes in their community and helping to feed into these flagship organizations. That's where you get in the energy of an arts town by showing that there's a whole atmosphere throughout the city, not just a few high profile exceptional organizations.

TAP: *You mentioned your own involvement with the arts and music. With that involvement, and with talking to arts organizations, what sort of issues do artists stress to you that are important to them in Minneapolis?*

GLIDDEN: Some of these issues are not unique, they are just a little bit different by profession. For individual artists and small organizations, it's just hard just like any other small business to figure out how you fit into the system, what are resources, how do you reconnect with your colleagues, how can you take

advantage of partnerships—whether with organizations or public partnerships—[and] understand the lay of the land, and be able to promote yourself individually. But also, it's a lot about community empowerment and involvement, how to continue that atmosphere that supports a high amount of artists. What are those things that do that? And sometimes it's a little bit organic. As a city we should be thinking about how do we continue to promote that.

One of the things that I think most people would not recognize about Minneapolis is that we have a huge number of community orchestras. These are not paid groups, they are all volunteer musicians. There are a very large number of high quality community orchestras, and also smaller chamber groups. That's not the part of community that's trying to make a living from their art. It's part of the atmosphere that is here. That says something about Minneapolis to me. I often think of Minneapolis as reflecting arts and parks.

TAP: *What are your favorite things about the Minneapolis arts landscape?*

GLIDDEN: One of my favorite things about Minneapolis is the Fringe Festival. We have a very large Fringe Festival, and I have always loved it. I often go to shows at the Pillsbury House Theater. They are good about doing new things [like] youth-inspired unique plays as well as some really traditional stuff. Intermedia Arts is another place where I've gone for some spoken word performances. I'll actually mention one of my favorite artists is my policy aide, Andrea Jenkins, because I love spoken word too. And she is a local spoken word artist who performs all over the city, and she has curated a number of reading programs.

TAP: *I'm curious about your senior policy aide who is a spoken word artist. How has she influenced your approach to the arts as a policymaker?*

GLIDDEN: It has helped both of us to keep [the arts] more on the front burner. Because she's involved in the arts in a different way than I am. Musicians are completely different than anybody else, were all nerdy. My crowd before was amateur musicians, and maybe knowing a little bit of the professional musician community. But Andrea knows this whole different realm of artists, more of the playwrights, and the spoken word artists. So I think she's more in tune, and that helps me be more in tune to the happenings around town, the performance art stuff. She is just part of that community, too. So it's not just that she knows about it, she's part of it. So I think it just helps to keep [the arts] on the front burner for us.

In the November 2009 elections, SALLY BAGSHAW was elected to Seattle's nine-member City Council. Prior to her council bid, Bagshaw led a thirty-year public service career in the Pacific Northwest, working for the Prosecuting Attorney's Office; for the Transportation, Natural Resources and Real Property legal team, and as an Assistant Attorney General. Throughout her career, Councilmember Bagshaw also served the arts, most recently chairing Allied Art Waterfront for All Committee based in Seattle, WA.

TAP: *Detail some of your work on the arts prior to your City Council bid.*

BAGSHAW: I'm the co-author of [Waterfront for All]. I was chair of Allied Arts Waterfront for All Committee. Are you familiar with Allied Arts in Seattle?

TAP: *Not so much.*

BAGSHAW: Allied Arts has been around for over 50 years. It has been known as the organization that has done some great urban thinking: saving Pike Place Market, and [making] Pioneer Square a historic area, and the place to go for music.

Allied Arts decided to take on the waterfront. We called for taking the viaduct down so that we could utilize the waterfront all the way from the stadium up to the sculpture park and Seattle Center. That way we would have the green pedestrian walkway promenade—a connected green space and place for people that was premised on the idea that when policymakers made a decision about removing the viaduct we would have all of this space downtown. This is the result of pull[ing] together all the [arts] organizations that were involved. Everybody donated their time, their input and ideas.

This was my heart, this is really what got me into deciding to run for public office because I wanted to be the steward of this vision to make sure for the next generations to come that we preserved our waterfront in a way that was second to none. We wanted to reconnect the waterfront with our neighborhoods. It is so often that the neighborhoods are left out. There's an "us versus them" mentality with neighborhoods versus downtown. We wanted to connect the neighborhoods and make some great new places for activities.

I met with many community groups. I was really reaching out to communities of color and I said "if you had a waterfront, that you could help design, if you had a park or an area in a park, that you wanted to model something that was really important in your culture, what would that look like?" So the Latino culture was saying a Piazza in Mexico might look like this. I talked to a

group from Somalia and they said ours would be really different. I talked to some Native American tribal communities and they said “perhaps a story pole park” where story poles could be integrated with trees and flowers and plants, so you could walk through a park area and know more about the Duwamish. It really was a cultural integration.

We’re looking at expanding affordable housing options to help low-income housing people. Having that as the forefront of our minds as we are building was important—we didn’t want it to become Miami Beach. We don’t want to see tall great big towers down on our waterfront. We wanted to say it’s going to be preserved for all of us. We wanted this to be Seattle. We didn’t want to copy San Francisco or Portland or San Diego. This was uniquely and iconically us.

TAP: What is the timeline on implementing the Allied Arts Waterfront for All?

BAGSHAW: It is actually starting right now. We called for artists and urban designers working in parallel with engineers so that the art on the waterfront isn’t just taking the leftovers. That we are in on the front end saying “as you are thinking about the infrastructure, remember that we’re going to be right there by your side, so that the art is part of it.”

TAP: That’s great. But plans—to take down the viaduct and build a tunnel—don’t seem concrete to me. What’s the feasibility of this: that this plan will be implemented?

BAGSHAW: I think we have the chance of a lifetime right now, only if we have the courage to go forward and recognize that we may not have every penny that we need right now, but no major public works project any where in the world has all the major public money at the start. We’ve got a history in this city.

In 1968, there was Forward Thrust, put together by some visionaries in our town, including Jim Ellis who said “lets think about what the Seattle area could look like if we did some brave things.” They put on the ballot 12 separate requests for support and bond money for public works like parks, swimming pools, the King Dome. One of those works was a 37-mile light rail line. Jim Ellis worked with our federal senators and congressmen to get 80% federal funding. We got it and we had it in our hands. We had to have a 60% approval rate to bond the remainder of that. We got 58%. So we missed it by two percent. The reason people voted no: six weeks before the election some big oil and car companies came in and said “you can have everything you want,

“People think the arts are dispensable and I think that is wrong. For a lot of kids, art and music is what holds them, what grounds them.”



Sally Bagshaw
Seattle Councilmember

you can have your parks, you can have your swimming pools, but you can save yourself \$50 a year if you don't vote yes." So we missed it by 2% so that money that we would have had went to Atlanta for their light rail line. But we could have had 47 miles of light rail to go up the eastside, the west side, the south end, the north across the bridges, paid for and done in 2007. Completely, totally done. We missed the opportunity because we lost the courage to have faith in our economy and have faith in ourselves. Where I am now is to say: we've got \$2.4 billion, let's not lose faith and courage again.

TAP: *Seattle does have a unique public works history that combines progress with works being stalled.*

BAGSHAW: You know, every city is that way. I just don't want us to lose courage and lose heart with this opportunity now. I absolutely do think this is going to happen. At the end of our Allied Arts Waterfront for All report we called for a steward for this vision. Only if there's somebody that is really on top of this, pushing it forward, will it happen. That's me. This is where my heart is.

TAP: *In working on Allied Arts Waterfront for All, and in talking with arts groups and artists and in campaigning now, what are some issues that artists have raised to you specific to Seattle?*

BAGSHAW: This whole project is arts groups and architect groups generated. We looked at flow of pedestrians and what we want our city to look like. The concept of starting at the sculpture park and going to the stadium is connecting our neighborhoods. Then we can have some iconic art, and create a ferry terminal that is really special. Whether you have a new clocktower, having something that is as unique to the waterfront as the Space Needle is. Anybody in the world sees the Space Needle and they know it's us. So something like that.

We have an economic development opportunity to bring tourists to Seattle because it's a lovely safe space, to connect them in a safe walkway to the arts. That's the part that I just loved about this project. I learned so much from my architect and artist friends. At the same time, we brought in the engineers to tell us, "ok how are we going to do this, how are we going to change this with the viaduct down here with a drab looking area into a lively pioneer square." Here's some ideas: there's place for people, there's place for cars. There's places for plants, using these fountains to clean the run-off, take the sand, oil, grit out of it, put the clean water back into Puget sound.

TAP: *There have been some innovative policies to harness the arts during these uncertain economic times. In Everett, WA, artists have been given short-term free leases of empty storefronts to revitalize shuttered communities. What are some of your ideas to harness the arts during this recession?*

BAGSHAW: That's a fantastic idea. Open it up for the arts, six weeks seems too short. What about a place where people can exchange their art and work there and live in space for at least ninety days where they don't have to be paying rent. Maybe we should go into six months. Give people a place where they can be, where they can settle in.

TAP: *This issue of THE ARTS POLITIC is about Bias. Sometimes artists think that policymakers have bias against them because in our society the arts are not well incorporated into our policies. What sort of advice would you give artists to get their message out to politicians?*

BAGSHAW: First, just to not be afraid. Don't be afraid to call me. Call me and tell me what you need and want. What your vision is. That is the name of my campaign by the way: unifying people solving problems. I would honor the fact that someone would call and say I have a good idea.

TAP: *Especially in this economic recession, there's been a lot of talk about how the arts are often financially inaccessible. I play classical violin and I have not once attended a Seattle Symphony Orchestra concert because tickets are too expensive. Do you have any ideas for Seattle arts institutions to be more accessible?*

BAGSHAW: I know there are negotiated tickets at the end of the day if something hasn't sold to get them for less. That's an area that I really don't know much about. I don't know if there's ways that we can be doing more, more than student rates or senior rates. But I feel like you do.

TAP: *One thing I've thought about is that many arts institutions are, in part, funded by local, state and federal money. I feel like if arts groups are funded by public monies, they should have at least one day a month, where tickets are free or very low-cost. The symphony should have at least one day a month where all tickets are \$5. And cities should work together to have a website that is called*

“low cost arts” where residents can find low-cost, high-quality arts offerings.

BAGSHAW: I know that there are cheap dates in the newspaper. And I'd love to see more of what you are talking about. How could a Tuesday night that may not be the most popular night, how could that be the free and low-cost night. That would have to be something that the symphony could work out. I don't know what there issues are, if it's costly to open up Benaroya Hall. But getting people who couldn't otherwise afford it downtown would be a fabulous thing. It helps the restaurants, it's a grand idea. Somebody would have to orchestrate it, but somebody could do that. Part of our recovery plan is to think about it.

TAP: *In education, the arts are often the first subject to be cut. Do you have any ideas for ways to increase arts education Seattle Public Schools?*

BAGSHAW: Sure, and I actually did this. I've got two sons who are now in their thirties, they graduated from the public schools here. When they were little and all the way through high school, I worked to keep to art and music in their classrooms because they are always being cut, this is not new news. People think the arts are dispensable and I think that is wrong. For a lot of kids, art and music is what holds them, what grounds them. You may not be playing football, you may not be running track, but art and music is what calls you.

So what we did in my kids' schools: we had a program before school when they were in grade school. This was partly to answer parents' needs because they had to be at work at 8am and the kids didn't have to start school until 9am. The parents sponsored early morning programs: drawing and painting class, and theater skills. And the parents paid for it. We also raised enough money where there were scholarships for all. So that anybody who wanted to go, could go. This worked great and the classes would start at 8am in the morning, and you know little kids are up then, and they would have something to do.

TAP: *As far as local Seattle, do you have favorite local arts spots?*

BAGSHAW: Absolutely. Down in Pioneer Square, there are some wonderful visual art happenings going on. Stonington Gallery, Foster White Gallery. Those are smaller galleries and they bring in local artists. Also, the Frye museum. I'm a landmark member of the Seattle Art Museum, which means that I have had a membership there for over 30 years. It's right across the street from me. **TAP**

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QUESTIONING CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

by Brandon Woolf

I come to Berlin as so many of my countrymen have come before. Tonight, I speak to you not as a candidate for President, but as a citizen—a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world. [...] People of the world—look at Berlin! [L]ook at Berlin, where a wall came down, a continent came together, and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one. [...] [H]istory reminds us that walls can be torn down. But the task is never easy. True partnership and true progress requires constant work and sustained sacrifice. They require sharing the burdens of development and diplomacy; of progress and peace.

— Barack Obama, *Speech in Berlin, Germany, July 24, 2008.*

Standing tall, donning a well-pressed navy blue suit with matching powder-blue tie and an air of confidence and humility that would help him to win the U.S. Presidential election in November 2008 (and the Nobel Peace Prize less than one year later), Barack Obama pledged to the world the dawn of a new era of diplomacy. Under the hot summer sun, Obama stood before booming crowds at the historic Brandenburger Tor in the center of Berlin and promised a new era of partnership, a new era of responsibility, a new era of mutual understanding, a new era of hope.

On November 5, 2008, just one day after Obama received the country's official endorsement, Alliance for the Arts—one of America's largest art's advocacy organizations—sent an email elaborating on (and celebrating) selected highlights from Obama's proposed "platform in support of the arts." One section of the "platform" enumerates Obama's call for the expanded promotion of "cultural diplomacy":

American artists, performers and thinkers—representing our values and ideals—can inspire people both at home and all over the world. Through efforts like that of the United States Information Agency, America's cultural leaders were deployed around the world during the Cold War as

artistic ambassadors and helped win the war of ideas by demonstrating to the world the promise of America. Artists can be utilized again to help us win the war of ideas against Islamic extremism. Unfortunately, our resources for cultural diplomacy are at their lowest level in a decade. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work to reverse this trend and improve and expand public-private partnerships to expand cultural and arts exchanges throughout the world.¹

While there is little doubt that the Obama administration is more committed to the value of arts and culture than the previous White House incumbents (in which "platform" was an oxymoron), we nonetheless find conflicting rhetorics in the President's language. On the one hand, he seems committed to a tolerant, open-minded, cosmopolitan even, notion of partnership and mutual understanding; this is the rhetoric of the Berlin speech. On the other hand, we see the all-too-familiar, uni-directional language of the greatness, the rightness of American culture and a hawkish commitment to victory in the "war of ideas," which could (or should) be read as synonymous with the "war on terror."

The easy slippage in Obama's rhetoric is indicative, in many ways, of the complexity bound by the term "cultural diplomacy." We are compelled to ask: Is cultural diplomacy a marketing tool for a damaged American image abroad? After all, research released by the British Council in January 2008 showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans were worried about how the United States was—and is—perceived abroad.² Or: Is cultural diplomacy a tool for disseminating the varied lore of neoliberal ideology? Michael Kaiser, President of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, recently issued a call-to-arms in the Huffington Post: "Given our reliance on private [arts] funding, Americans have a great deal to teach abroad."³ After all, what could America learn from those nations with long, distinguished traditions of government support for the arts? Or: Is cultural diplomacy—in a slightly more sinister light—a tool of American "soft power," as it was considered during the Cold War? Or: Is cultural diplomacy a strictly functional or transactional tool—veiled somehow by fuzzy invocations of "culture"—employed to achieve particular policy objectives. Or: Is cultural diplomacy, as recently conceived by the Executive Director of the Aspen Institute, a tool designed to engage "today's and tomorrow's leaders in the discussion and development of approaches, mechanisms, and actions that use culture as the keystone in effectively addressing and anticipating national, international, and human security concerns."⁴ Culture as/for security? Interesting.

During the first week of April 2009, I travelled to Berlin for a forum organized by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy

entitled “The United States Meets Germany.” Founded in 1999, with headquarters in New York and Berlin, the ICD considers itself the “center of a global network of independent partners in both the public and private sectors, whose collective mission is to enhance the process of international and interregional human interaction by improving the very fabric of social relations.”⁵ And, or so the rhetoric goes, the mission is to “enhance” relations by means of culture. The April forum set out to explore how cultural diplomacy “can be employed to improve and strengthen the relationships between the countries involved,”⁶ in this case, as the title implies, between the U.S. and Germany. Note: “employed.” While I was—am—not convinced that ICD knows just what it means by “cultural diplomacy,” it was clear that ICD is interested in a functional, instrumentalist approach to culture; interested in utilizing culture as a tool for, as their brochure confirms, encouraging “understanding” and “agreement.”

I am as unsettled by this merely functional approach, which seems congruent with the slippages in Obama’s language. And yet, I wonder if we are obliged to completely abandon “cultural diplomacy.” Rather, I wonder how we might work to re-conceptualize it: How is this aura, this ideal of trust, of understanding, of humanity to be achieved? How, by means of culture—distinguished from the use of it—might a new form of “diplomacy” be actualized? How does the Obama administration hope (or does it?) to avoid the rhetoric of more traditional, hegemonic modes of top-down cultural imperialism; one that imposes American cultural products on others and asks—demands—they be accepted? How will the Obama administration move beyond the mere mounting of a production of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* by the American Embassy in Cairo in 2004 or sending the New York Philharmonic to North Korea just last year in order to “enable mutually beneficial cross-cultural exchanges”⁷? How will the Obama administration move beyond former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s remarks at the first and only White House Conference on Diplomacy and Culture in November 2000:

[I]t’s nonsense to talk of America imposing our culture. [...] One way we strive to achieve balance in our own policies is by integrating cultural diplomacy into our programs here at the Department of State. These programs enable us to make connections. [...] When we were represented abroad by the Jazz Ambassadors, [...] we provide an example of how our free nation has made something new and incomparable out of really diverse roots.⁸

In other words, how might the Obama administration conceive of a cultural diplomacy that values cultural exchange and reckons with its challenges?

A recent publication from the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University explains that long-term efforts toward exchange and mutual understanding among nations is often beyond the short sights of diplomacy. Often, diplomacy is understood—and implemented—as a transactional relationship: I will give you x, and in return, you give me y. “Mutuality,” as the Curb Center report explains, “is not an easy sell. Governments tend to like transactional relationships best, because they have short-term goals and are easier to track.”⁹ Mutuality requires patience, dialogue, trust, bi-directional communication. Might we think, then, of the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh in September 2009 as a paradigmatic instantiation of a pervasive lack of patience for mutuality? What could be more “transactional,” more immediate, more efficient than a discussion—or power play?—between industrial and emerging-market countries on key issues related to the global economy?¹⁰

And then there was Michelle Obama: a solitary glimmer of light—of *hope*?—in steely Pittsburgh last autumn. While the President and 19 other leaders of the world’s economic powers met—transacted—in the city’s convention center, the First Lady toured the G-20 spouses through highlights of Pittsburgh’s art scene. We might raise our eyebrows here at the gendered (and other problematic) implications, at the “spousal” distraction while the real “men” do their real business across street. We might read this stroll through the Andy Warhol Museum and the Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts (middle and high) School as further trivializing creativity, culture, art in a world where the stability of the “international financial architecture”¹¹ takes precedence. But, we might also take to heart the sincerity with which Mrs. Obama is continually working to bring the arts into the public spotlight.

We might also take to heart the language of instability in Mrs. Obama’s prelude address to a joint concert by Sara Bareilles, Yo-Yo Ma, Trisha Yearwood, and students from the Creative and Performing Arts School: “Our artists challenge our assumptions in ways that many cannot and do not. They expand our understandings, and push us to view our world in new and very unexpected ways.”¹² We might take to heart her understanding that mutuality and exchange require understanding, acceptance, and a willingness to acknowledge difference as well. “It’s through this constant exchange—this process of taking and giving, this process of borrowing and creating—that we learn from each other and we inspire each



Is cultural diplomacy a marketing tool for a damaged American image abroad? Or, is cultural diplomacy a tool for disseminating the varied lore of neoliberal ideology?

other. It is a form of diplomacy in which we can all take part.¹³ We might take to heart her understanding of the arts as anything but transactional, as more than a functional tool. We might take to heart her understanding of the arts as essential to our re-thinking of (cultural) diplomacy.

Finally, as a strategic counterpoint—and possible source of inspiration—I would like to return to Europe for a final time to highlight another “institute” that works to explore the complex interrelation of culture and politics. The European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (EIPCP)—<http://eipcp.net>—is working in dynamic and ambitious ways to “reorder today’s hegemonic cultural politics in a progressive manner, and do it on a European scale.”¹⁴ EIPCP is also interested in cultural diplomacy, albeit of a different kind. And while its focus is mainly the European Union, I think it has something to teach us, as Americans; something very different than a forum at the ICD. As Gerald Raunig, one of the founders of EIPCP, explains: “[T]he concept of *eipcp* is one that cancels out abrupt field demarcations, avoiding sequential models and temporarily opening up border spaces, in which different positions of artistic practice, political action and theory production can oscillate.”¹⁵ EIPCP is interested in forging a multi-national network of artists, intellectuals, policy makers, and those that span the space between. EIPCP is interested in the language of “instability,” in promoting “transversal practices” of cooperation between different modes of knowledge—art, theory, politics—in the interest of both critiquing and forging new “tools” of cultural policy. These “tools” are interdisciplinary, and not merely functional, in their constitution. They can take the form of art practice, theoretical investigation, policy recommendations, or those, which at their best, work to find a way to oscillate between all three potentialities. And so, I wonder if EIPCP can help us to expand upon the First Lady’s language of mutuality, of exchange, of understanding, as anything but contrary to challenged assumptions, instability, difference. I wonder if EIPCP can help us to think differently about what cultural diplomacy could (or should) entail, perhaps by means of continuing to articulate/expose/explore the productive possibilities of the very slippages that so often go unspoken. As Boris Buden, another founding member of EIPCP, concludes:

The insufficiency or shortage in question is at the same time both the object and the product of this hybrid activity: the shortage of the political that is produced in an artistic practice; the shortage of a cultural politics that art exposes and theory conceptualizes; the shortage of reflection that reflects itself in the political, and so forth.¹⁶

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THE ARTS IS WHERE IT'S AT!

A SOAPBOX MOMENT FOR ARTS EDUCATION

By *Ron Amber Deloney*

I recall the summer of 2008 when I taught 11th and 12th grade students in an enrichment program at Columbia University. The Double Discovery Center there provides tutoring and academic enrichment programs to NYC public school students and I was teaching a class on Critical Thinking and Writing, and on German Language and Culture. I had just graduated from the Arts Politics M.A. program at Tisch School of the Arts at NYU a month earlier and was eager to find a space to merge my interests in arts and cultural activism with those in social justice education. The latter came in 2007 while co-leading a course on race, whiteness and colonialism in visual culture at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Later, my focus on group dialogue would be sharpened during the 2 months I spent as an Intergroup Dialogue Facilitator with The Center at NYU. Discussing race and ethnicity with undergraduate students had shown me the importance of linking the personal narrative with concepts of socialization to better understand everyday experiences of racism, gender and ethno-cultural politics.

Within all of my teaching experiences the arts recurred as a point of access for critical dialogue. For example, when I taught Anne McClintock's concept of commodity racism, my class deconstructed commercial advertisements such as the British Pearl's Soap. Likewise when introducing the concept was gender roles, we looked at 18th and 19th century paintings of women. Both of these can be read in conjunction with the other to discuss gender and racism in art and the media. My point is that the arts provide a platform for communicating beneath the surface on critical issues, and these conversations promote higher order thinking skills and can happen in a middle school or high school class as well as in a university or business setting. Though class discussions were often confrontational and, hurtful and difficult at times, the feedback I received from students and the reflection I could measure within their classwork pointed towards an increased awareness and appreciation for the ideas and experiences of others.

Art is a genre where inventiveness can be liberated. Crafting pedagogy that encourages the imagination can mean more

strategies for capturing and maintaining student interest in learning. According to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by educators Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, the argument that teaching is not a politically neutral enterprise presses the notion that literacy instruction is a form of cultural politics "...that functions to either empower or disempower people."²¹ The impact of spoken word, a literary deviation of hip hop and rap, has been heralded by spoken word poetry figurehead Saul Williams as a movement that will "evolve literature."²² The cultural and artistic similarities of hip hop and rap to spoken word create the potential for using this form of political poetry as a teaching tool. With the popularity of television shows such as Russell Simmons' *Def Poetry Jam* and *Brave New Voices*, which feature high school aged poets, critical pedagogy that encourages writing and self expression can be utilized greatly in school, and powerfully within the urban classroom.

One of the advantages of an arts centered curriculum is that it enables students' agency for creativity and critical thinking. Equally as important is the idea that educators view students and their community environment as necessary, central contributors to the learning process. This can be achieved by tapping into the experience students bring into the classroom from the outside or using the outside to inform and inspire classroom conversations within the curriculum.

Can you remember when a childhood teacher asked your class if anyone watched the news the night before? If so, what did you hear? What do you remember from these conversations? How did you respond? What did you say? From an educator's perspective, teachers ask questions like these because the nightly news—and other current media—shape perspectives of our communities, and how we choose to interact with and within those spaces. Often times, the neighborhoods we live in, however, are filled with many stories and events that may never make a televised newscast or an article in a local newspaper. When these stories are not talked about and discussed constructively they become lived experiences that have not been carefully deconstructed. Deconstruction is important because it leads to new ways of seeing the cause and effect of phenomenon and events that happen to us and around us. A new understanding can lead to new ways of responding in difficult situations and can promote better decision making by young people regarding education, sexual behavior, violence, social networking and life.

Teaching students to investigate the cultural products within their environments teaches these learners that their immediate world is a valid space of cultural production and that they are valid cultural citizens. Consider my own timely experience: just last week I walked past a piece of graffiti in Washington Heights near 173rd



and St. Nicholas. The image was of a male silhouette wearing a baseball cap, holding a paint brush, seemingly using the side of the building as a canvass. As someone who teaches in New York City and who constantly explores ways to add to my arsenal of teaching material, I was excited because I can take an image of this graffiti to my students and challenge them to interpret the work objectively, subjectively and contextually. By making the occurrence of graffiti in a local environment (often misinterpreted as only an illegal act of public defamation devoid of political voice) a topic of discussion, students are given the chance to reevaluate what is art, who the artist can be, and where art can be found. Arts education is where it's at.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music currently has an arts and justice after school program with the objective of using performance and visual art to help students develop artistic, decision-making and critical thinking skills. This is a great idea and awesome for students who can enroll, yet what about those who can't attend? Is there a way to reach these young learners on a wider, more frequent basis? Yes, by promoting arts education in schools.

This can be done interdisciplinary as well. Radical Math is an online resource with curriculum that teaches geometry and geometric concepts in the art of graffiti and break dance. Anyone familiar with New York City subways has witnessed the influence of those art forms while riding the MTA. The vigor of young dancers stepping and bartering donations for arts entertainment, and the spray painted tags and ink scratches on seats and windows of subway cars represent the presence of and interest in graffiti and break dance amongst New York City's young artists.

Renowned graffiti artist and painter Banksy has used NYC buildings as his canvass for public decry of Wall Street crookdome. Together with students I've created blogs and used mini flip cameras to create mock newscasts. There is no doubt that building a sense of community, responsibility and civic awareness amongst students through the arts implements a form of critical pedagogy that centers the student in what is being taught and shows them how they are intelligent because of what they already know. This method approaches the student holistically and builds on the culture and knowledge base students bring into the classroom, while allowing teachers to deliver content based material. Teaching is similar to parenting in that there is no right way to do the job, only theories, anecdotes and best practices. A combination of the three and a creative curriculum that hits home must be conducive to teaching students how to be better people. I sure am better for it. **TAP**

See REFERENCES (page 102) for photo credits.



SPECIAL REPORT: BIAS

Sometimes it is necessary to fight bias with bias argues *20UNDER40* founder Edward P. Clapp in his essay *Mistaking Inclusion for Exclusion: Fighting Bias with Bias*.

In their photo essay, *Housing is a Human Right: Stories from the Struggle for Home*, Rachel Falcone and Michael Premo tell the tales of marginalized New Yorkers struggling to obtain and maintain housing when homelessness and foreclosures are on a rise, and long-term renters are pushed out to make room for luxury apartments.

In *The March for Kronos: All-Ages Arts Venues Under Attack*, Jasmine Mahmood reports on an incident typical of the extensive trend restricting youth from accessing local, original and meaningful arts.

Malvika Maheshwari details bias against visual narratives of oppression, subjugation and resistance, and against the lowest caste in Hindu social hierarchy in her essay, *Dissecting Domination in Art: Positioning Dalit Artists in India Today*.

A music venue owner, arts professor, visual artist, theater director and former mayor give unique, regional perspectives on bias in this issue's *TAP*MAP*.

The Special Report section closes with a *Policy Brief*, imploring the arts to better address and confront bias.

MISTAKING INCLUSION FOR EXCLUSION: FIGHTING BIAS WITH BIAS

by Edward P. Clapp

In this article the author argues that not all bias is bias—and sometimes it is necessary to fight bias with bias for the purpose of being ultimately inclusive. The recent controversy over the 20UNDER40 project is used as a case study of what the author calls positive bias—an inclusionary measure that differs in purpose from negative bias—an approach to restrictive practice that ultimately has exclusionary ends.

I remember sitting in a massive, ornate symphony hall in Dallas on the final day of the Arts Education Partnership’s (AEP) 2007 National Forum. During the morning plenary session Warren Simmons was moderating a discussion amongst field leaders when the conversation turned towards providing services for minority children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. “That’s great,” Simmons said at one point in the discussion, then challenged the crowd by adding, “but you all look pretty white to me.”

The room shuddered.

A young man by the name of John Branam, then director of development for the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools, stood up to offer his response: “You all look pretty old, too.”

The room shuddered again.

Branam went on to ask the assemblage of arts education administrators why younger voices weren’t being represented at national arts conferences such as this one. I’m thirty-two years-old,” he said, “where are all the other thirty-two year-olds?”

Having already thrown down a gauntlet of his own, Simmons saw no reason not to follow Branam’s lead, “Ok,” he said from the stage, “Who’s thirty-two years-old or younger? Stand up.” I just happened to be thirty-two at the time. I stood up. In a room full of 200+ people—I think there were six of us.

The 2007 AEP National Forum, however, wasn’t the first time I noted any sort of generational schism within the field. For nearly a decade I had worked as an artist, teaching artist, and

arts administrator. Though I had no research to point to, all along I knew something was amiss in how different age cohorts approached their work in the arts.

Nonetheless, encountering John Branam served as the impetus I needed to act on my interests in studying the impending generational shift in leadership the field of the arts and arts education is about to experience.¹ After months spent speaking to young arts leaders and pawing through the literature on succession and generational differences in the workplace I concluded that young arts leaders are grossly under-represented (a) in the field’s literature, (b) around conference tables at senior staff meetings, and (c) as participants and presenters at national arts conferences.

BIAS IN THE ARTS: A GENERATIONAL THING?

On both a local and a national level, young arts leaders are lacking an opportunity to participate in the greater arts dialogue. This lack of voice paired with an inopportunity to act on one’s agency, an absence of clear and reliable career trajectories—and a host of other obstacles to professional success—are among the primary reasons why so many young arts leaders are leaving the field to pursue work in other industries.²

20UNDER40: GIVING VOICE TO YOUNG ARTS LEADERS

At the beginning of 2009 I established *20UNDER40*—a new anthology of critical discourse that aims to collect twenty essays about the future of the arts and arts education, each written by a young and/or emerging arts professional under the age of forty. Essentially, what *20UNDER40* intends to do is to bring the voices of young arts professionals out of the margins and into the forefront of our cultural conversation—to include the voices who have been largely excluded from the greater arts dialogue.

Within two weeks of the project’s launch controversy struck as a handful of veteran arts practitioners, dismayed about the age restriction of *20UNDER40*’s call for submissions, began to react negatively to the project.

“Heinous,” “repugnant,” “ageist,” “dangerous,” and “exclusionary,” were some of the words directed towards either the project or myself personally.³ What these individuals were responding to was an assumed act of exclusionary bias aimed at prohibiting their voices from a greater discussion.⁴

WHEN EXCLUSION IS INCLUSION: THERE’S MORE TO BIAS THAN MEETS THE EYE...

20UNDER40's call for chapter proposals explicitly stated that all prospective authors had to be under the age of forty by the August 31, 2009 submission deadline. Was this stipulation of the anthology exclusionary to older voices? Yes. Can this stipulation be understood as a form of bias? Without a doubt. Sometimes, however, in an effort to be inclusive, it's necessary to fight bias with bias. In this sense, the 20UNDER40 age cut-off is inclusionary (whereas the field excludes young voices) and anti-bias (whereas the field is biased towards veteran arts leaders).

In considering notions of inclusion, exclusion, and bias, it is important to ask what exactly is being inclusive, exclusive, or biased—and to what effect. In the case of 20UNDER40—the anthology itself intends to be but one element of a larger cultural dialogue. Indeed, submissions to the project are limited to authors under the age of forty, but the project will then be folded into a larger discussion that has hitherto “systematically boxed-out” younger voices.⁵ 20UNDER40's exclusionary measures, therefore, are an act of inclusion—a challenge to a larger bias that is tacitly engrained in the field's procedures and principles of leadership and practice.

Bias, then, can be thought of in two different ways. First, there is what I call negative bias—exclusionary measures taken to restrict a population from participating in some form of dialogue or activity for the purpose of limiting that dialogue or activity to a distinct group of individuals. Second, there is positive bias, exclusionary measures taken to include voices that have been restricted from some form of dialogue or activity as a result of negative bias at a larger systematic level. When understood in this manner, negative bias is ultimately exclusive, whereas as positive bias has larger inclusive aims.

CONCLUSION

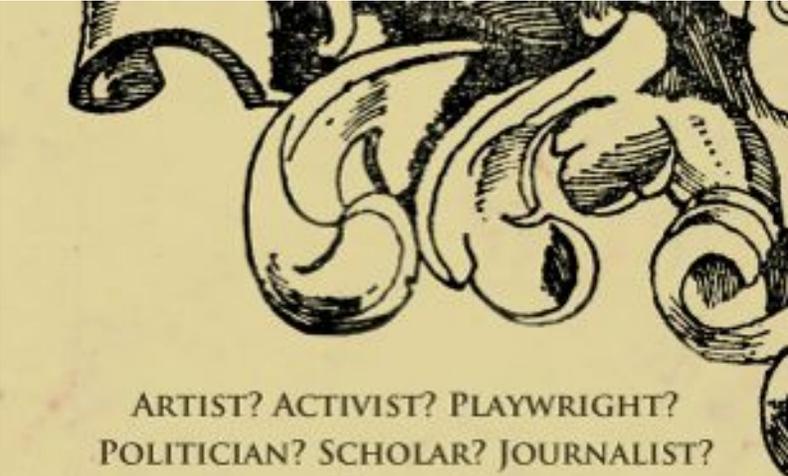
Not all bias is bias—and sometimes it is necessary to fight bias with bias for the purpose of achieving inclusion for a greater breadth of individuals. While 20UNDER40 restricted its call for chapter proposals to individuals under the age forty, this act of exclusion can be most easily understood as positive bias intentionally designed to bring more voices into our field's larger cultural discussion.

In our greater social surround, we practice positive bias all of the time. We have diversity committees at universities established to attract a greater breadth of racially and ethnically distinct faculty. We have literary journals designed to give voice to individuals from certain geographical regions—the New Museum in New York even hosted a recent exhibition entitled

“Younger Than Jesus,” a visual arts extravaganza developed to highlight the work of upcoming artists who are currently younger than Jesus was (presumably) when he died.

Rather than attempt to squelch the efforts of positive bias where they arise, those who are concerned about exclusionary measures taken to combat larger inequities in greater systems ought to focus their attention on the root causes of these modest uprisings. This is of paramount importance for those of us in the arts who make our life's work out of supporting, participating in, and advocating for the progress of our cultural landscape—a greater societal structure that should never be exclusive to one voice or another. **TAP**

Edward P. Clapp is the editor and project director of 20UNDER40 (www.20UNDER40.org). He is also a doctoral student at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education where his research centers on arts education, adult development, and issues pertaining to generational leadership succession in the arts. See REFERENCES (page 102) for citations.

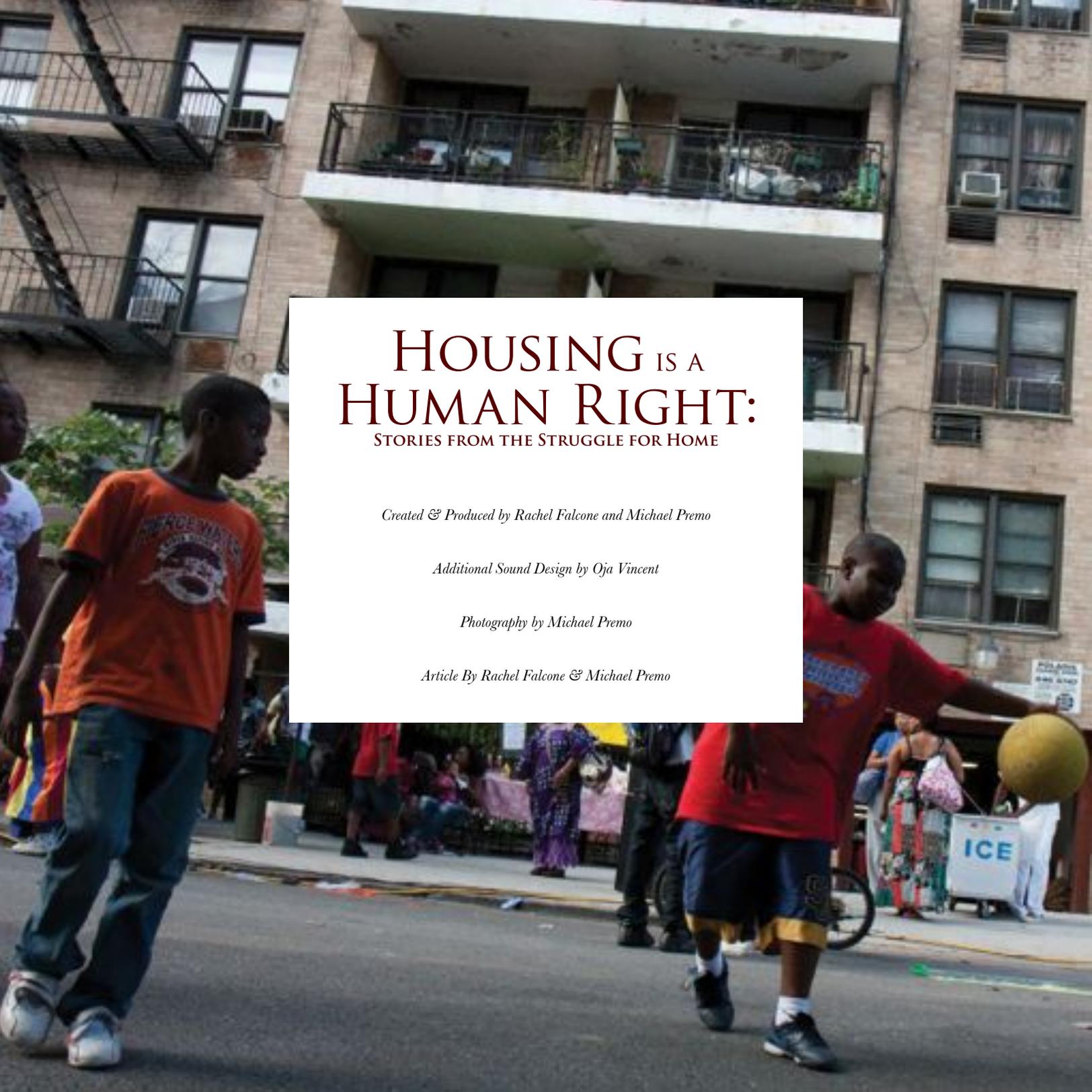


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HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT:

STORIES FROM THE STRUGGLE FOR HOME

Created & Produced by Rachel Falcone and Michael Premo

Additional Sound Design by Oja Vincent

Photography by Michael Premo

Article By Rachel Falcone & Michael Premo



In fall 2009, Brooklyn based artists Rachel Falcone and Laundromat Project Create Change Artist-in-Residence Michael Premo launched *Housing is a Human Right: Stories from the Struggle for Home*, with an installation at Wash and Play Lotto Laundromat on Lafayette Avenue in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. The installation ran from October 27 to November 8, 2009.

Housing is a Human Right is an ongoing multimedia documentary portrait of the struggle for home in New York City. Composed of oral narratives and photographs, along with testimonies and memories of home—woven and remixed with the help of turntablist DJ Oja Vincent—this collection of viscerally honest, first-person narratives aims to serve as a reminder that home is as tenuous a space as the shelter that sustains it.

Having seen our neighborhoods undergo rapid transformations, characterized by commercial and residential displacement, we became increasingly fascinated with development, neighborhood change and the complex fabric of community. Implicit in this story is the impact of generations of serial displacement resulting from the Great Migrations, Urban Renewal, the Crack epidemic, HIV/AIDS, and recent waves of gentrification.

The project chronicles modern tales of marginalized New Yorkers struggling to obtain and maintain housing at a time when the NYC homeless population has skyrocketed to levels unseen since the 1930s, predatory banking practices threaten thousands and unemployment has hit a staggering rate. Statistics don't always paint an accurate picture, as though it is as simple as either having or not having a home. These are the stories behind the statistics and terms like “predatory equity,” told by the people themselves. Though currently based in New York, we hope to expand the project to include stories from across the country and perhaps the globe.

In the last seven months, we interviewed nearly 30 people in their homes or neighborhoods and recorded hundreds of hours of testimony at rallies, protests, meetings and advocacy trips to the state capital. Many of the interviews came by way of our growing list of community partners: Picture The Homeless, Families United For Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), Pratt Area Community Council and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI). We are currently developing ways that these stories might be able to eventually live with these organizations for use in their work.

Young men play basketball as part of the *Play Street* program organized by Ms. Evelyn Williams every summer outside her building on Hawthorne Street. In 1986, Williams' landlord tried to burn down the building for the insurance money, leaving her and her young son temporarily homeless. Refusing to move she came back to the burned out building and worked with politicians and government agencies to get services turned back on and money for renovations.

We produced 11 first person stories for the Laundromat exhibit, woven together with remixed testimony. Constructed in part by the turntablistic wizardry of Oja Vincent, the remixed testimony is designed to be a tapestry of memory and aspiration; a rhythmic mash-up, like the snippets of conversation you might hear walking down a busy sidewalk. The sights, sounds, and stories played amidst the hum of washers and dryers in the laundromat from about 1pm to 9pm everyday.

The stories we gathered include a woman whose dream home was foreclosed on while she battled cervical cancer without health insurance. In another, a small business owner, on the verge of buying her first home, spiraled into debt after her successful store was suddenly displaced to make way for luxury apartments.

Although we hope that all the stories counter stereotypes and misconceptions, several were specifically selected to directly challenge bias. A senior citizen, who wishes to remain anonymous, shared how she grapples with living in New York on a fixed income. An educated woman, antithetical to the negative characters of welfare recipients, she explains the emotional tumult caused by the prejudices of housing agency gatekeepers and the excruciating purgatory of waiting lists that offer no indication as to when she will be awarded an affordable apartment in senior developments or in one of the city's many housing projects.

For many, human rights are an intellectual abstraction. Unfortunately, the rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled are often not visible until those rights are deprived. You don't realize what you got till its gone, so to speak. Often it is not until we become engaged in the process of acknowledging and physically actualizing these rights that they become tangible. By creating a space for people to share their experiences and, in turn, sharing them with a wider audience, we hope to increase the visibility and understanding of human rights. We believe that if the people see themselves reflected in the stories of others, they may become moved to understand, and at best perhaps become involved with one of our local or national community partners. *Housing is a Human Right* aims to contribute to the furtherance of a human rights culture, by building community, as well as contributing strategy and content to organizing, advocacy, and education campaigns, one story at a time.

James Roberts lies with his partner, William Barnes, who has been paralyzed and left blind by a series of HIV-related strokes. Mr. Roberts describes the process of learning to care for William—the diapers and the feeding tubes—as easy compared to the struggle to find and keep affordable housing. Mr. Roberts was forced to resign from his lucrative job on Wall Street when he revealed his sexual orientation to his employer to ask for time off to care for his ailing partner. They now survive only on Mr Barnes' disability check. When Mr. Roberts found out that their subsidized building in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn was facing foreclosure, it became a fight not only for their home, but for their survival.







On the day of his possible eviction, an elderly man stands before his bathroom in Crown Heights, where the floor of the shower is so rotted through that the basement below is visible, and the sink, the only in the apartment, has a basketball-size hole in it.



Jane Jacobs' description of the neighborhood "ballet" in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* illustrates the interplay of people and activities that occurs in a healthy community. Mixed use blocks populated by an array of commercial and residential activity create a vibrant street life, contributing to community safety and the natural growth of an entire city. This idea is perennially under threat by luxury developers and city planners who are inclined to bulldoze and displace communities to make way for "more productive" super blocks of big box commercial real estate and gated luxury skyscrapers. Here, young girls play in a Bronx community garden as part of their neighborhood ballet.





RACHEL FALCONE and **MICHAEL PREMIO** are Brooklyn based artists dedicating to drawing on the rich traditions of oral history to illuminate the experiences of people living in the darker corners of society. Their goal is to modernize traditional methods of oral history by “remixing” the findings—audio narratives and photographs—into performances that speak back to the neighborhoods from where these stories come. They have worked together recording and producing interview-based projects with StoryCorps, EarSay, Inc., and independently.

Michael Premo is also a freelance photographer, performer and theater consultant. Recent projects include the Hip-Hop Theater Festival and The Civilians’ Brooklyn at Eye Level.

OJA VINCENT is an educator, producer, and DJ/turntablist, engineer with progressive live arts collective Earthdriver and owner of Sun Sound/Sunchild Productions.

THE LAUNDROMAT PROJECT is a community based arts organization committed to promoting the well-being of low-income communities of color. Understanding that creativity is a central component of healthy human beings, vibrant neighborhoods, and thriving economies—The LP’s programs bring art to where people already are: the laundromat. Its two core programs—Works in Progress and Create Change Public Artist Residency Program—focus on making art education broadly accessible for all ages and skill levels, as well as providing professional development opportunities for artists of color looking to build or deepen a community-engaged art making practice by creating new public works in their own neighborhoods.

Each year, The Laundromat Project sponsors three artists of color to develop neighborhood-specific artwork through its Create Change Public Artist Residency Program. Following selection by a juried process, participating artists are charged with creating socially-relevant works using the space of their local laundromat to engage their neighbors. **TAP**

For more information on THE LAUNDROMAT PROJECT, please visit: www.laundromatproject.org/create-change-public-artist-residency.htm.

Lorenzo Diggs spent years battling addiction in and out of institutions and the New York City shelter system. He went into the Bedford-Atlantic Armory Shelter in Brooklyn trying to get off the streets and recover, but was surrounded by guys struggling with mental health issues, addiction and open drug use. He describes the violence and the filth that left him feeling like he had to get high just to survive the shelter. For Lorenzo, it was a long road to home. In this picture he plays cards outside his apartment in the Bronx on the day of his housewarming.

THE MARCH FOR KRONOS

ALL-AGES ARTS VENUES UNDER ATTACK.

Reporting and interviews by Jasmine Mahmoud

Much like an after-school television special on civic engagement, the histrionics surrounding Kronos Art Gallery combined teenage agency, character defamation, and... plumbing. Yes, plumbing.

During the summer of 2009, in the suburban and historic Virginia town of Staunton, an arts gallery and music venue frequented by local teenagers was shut down, ostensibly for fire code violations. Former teen patrons organized to save the venue by collecting signatures, and storming—fifty people strong—into a city council meeting. The venue's owner, **KEVIN POSTUPACK** defended Kronos's mission at a later council meeting, but was defamed in the local newspaper for using obscenities (obscenities, Postupack asserts he never uttered). In August 2009, Kronos left its old building and old woes behind, moved to a new location, received fire marshal approval and booked local bands through November. Things were looking up until Postupack was about to re-open Kronos, but was barred from doing so because the new location lacked enough toilets. Kronos never reopened, and instead left a cavity where an arts space that served those all of ages once thrived.

What happened to Kronos Art Gallery represents the often-unreported struggle of all-ages arts venues. These arts spaces—often galleries or music venues or unused industrial spaces—present local arts and are open to those under twenty one years of age. These arts spaces are also uniquely vulnerable to local government persecution and threats of closure, for reasons that have little to do with safety. For example, although Kronos was ostensibly shut down for fire code violations and then barred from re-opening due to arcane plumbing violations, these incidents followed community concern over teenagers loitering outside of Kronos, near high-end restaurants. Likewise, across the nation, other all-ages venues have closed because of teenage loitering, or because some in the community don't want youth to participate in "alternative" arts that many all-ages venues promote, like punk or hip hop music, or street graf.

All-ages venues actively call on youth to create culture, act as a needed creative home for those under twenty one, and fill in

gaps in a community's arts and education resources. This need is great—across the nation, teenagers find few sites to consume local culture. Various local arts venues—such as music venues that rely on alcohol sales for profit, or venues that charge high-price tickets—legally or economically bar those under twenty-one years of age. Thus shutting down Kronos Art Gallery, and other all-ages arts venues, weakens arts landscapes by making the arts more impervious to youth.

To better understand issues facing all-ages arts venues, I interviewed Kevin Postupack, founder of Kronos Art Gallery. I also interviewed **KEVIN ERICKSON**, Co-Director of All-Ages Movement Project (AMP), an advocacy group that champions, advises and connects all-ages arts community groups throughout the nation. AMP was founded by grassroots activist and music industry professional Shannon Stewart, who toured all-ages music venues throughout the nation to best digest and improve the arts scene.

I learned that the all-ages arts story is one of inclusion and exclusion. Youth in Staunton, VA were excluded from the arts because their community did not like to see them loitering. And as Erickson asserts, the NEA's study on participatory youth arts culture excluded alternative arts forms, such as punk and hip hop, and consequently (and incorrectly) found that today, less youth engage in the arts.

This report was conducted with journalism's great goal in mind—to defend the public—and seeks to expose **bias** against artists, teenagers and arts spaces that serve excluded populations.

Interview with **KEVIN POSTUPACK**, founder and former owner of Kronos Art Gallery, Staunton, VA.

***TAP:** Why were you guys shut down?*

POSTUPACK: A lot of the kids were hanging outside the front of the gallery. There's a restaurant that's nearby with older people and they didn't like seeing the kids walking around and some of them had skateboards—dear God. People don't like seeing teenagers around. So the police came and told us we have to police the outside area. This was unsubstantiated—they said there was vandalism, drug dealing, kids having sex, loud profanity. The kids were just hanging out there. Some of them were smoking underage, that's not a felony.

So we actually complied and we posted every show after that. We policed the area, and the police called us a few days later and said we were doing a good job. But then a week later six fire marshals came and six weeks after that they closed us down two hours before a show.

TAP: *Why? What did the fire marshals say, what was their reasoning?*

POSTUPACK: I view it as a fait-de-compli because we had a very old building it was post Civil-War, so it has original stone walls which are several feet thick, so on the second floor, they wanted us to add some exits which would be fiscally impossible to do, we would have to go through three feet of stone. Even if we had all the money in the world, we couldn't do that. So they just made it impossible for us to continue.

We had switched the focus of [the gallery] to music back in January 2009 because we had the gallery going for two years, viewing it as a cultural center, we had all sorts of things going on. But we couldn't afford to focus on the gallery anymore, because the kind of art we had was more modern experimental, and nobody was buying it. But meanwhile we had developed this thing with the kids, where kids were coming every week. And we started to focus on that, and that kept us going.

TAP: *Have you talked at all to local councilmembers about what you can do? And what are your thoughts about what you can do going forward?*

POSTUPACK: I had a meeting with one of the councilmen last week. He had some good suggestions. They didn't pan out, because there was a teen center that was run by the city, but it had been vacant for several years. It would have been ideal for us to take it over, but the stipulation was that it could only be run by city organizations. So therefore it will continue to be empty. It's just the kind of bureaucracy that maddens the soul. I've been continuing to look for spaces. One of the problems here—and probably in most communities—is that the rents are outrageous. This is not Seattle, this is not New York City. The wages are small town Virginia wages and they want things like \$5000 a month rent, which is more a big city kind of rent.

TAP: *I read that Staunton is a historical town and so many of the buildings are used for film. Why do you think the rents are so expensive?*

POSTUPACK: I think just because of greed. At any given time there's at least ten vacant storefronts on the main street of our downtown, which is the historic downtown area where all the tourists come to visit. Some of these have been vacant for three years or more. I can't understand any reason why something would be vacant for that long and still maintain rent. Obviously the market is not supporting \$5000 a month rent.

TAP: *I was reading the link you sent me about Art Gallery 101. You have a huge sense of honesty on your website in regards to art, and artists and society's consumption of art. What informs your point of view?*

POSTUPACK: I think this whole hard knocks and experience over the years, and thinking of a better way. I think that's how change came about in the past is people see what the status quo is and they respond against it. Impressionism was radical when it first came out. Now everybody has a Monet coffee mug. At one time it was very radical.

TAP: *Why did you start Kronos Art Gallery?*

POSTUPACK: I have a friend in Woodstock New York, her name is Christina Varga. She has her own gallery called the Varga gallery. I used to live up there and became friends with her. She runs a gallery that is completely flying in the face of traditionally galleries. That inspired me. When my wife moved to Virginia we thought we'd open a gallery and take off from where she started. Some of our inventions were [more] radical than hers. Our slogan at Kronos was "here we remake the world." And I wanted to do that in every aspect because we've also had lots of political things as well. We've always thought art and politics go together.

TAP: *What sort of political things have you had at the gallery?*

POSTUPACK: During the fall, we had a person registering voters during all the shows. We had several rallies for Obama. We also had a rally for a candidate for democratic governor.

TAP: *What is the reaction of people that come to your gallery?*

POSTUPACK: A lot of people are saying it's a breadth of fresh air. They would say "I haven't seen a gallery like this since when I was in Europe." Very positive. And also, well I could give you a little story. When you come up the stairs, there is a lobby area that has art in it, and there's two big rooms to the side that have art in them. We had an exhibit once where they were two photographs—very artfully done—of penises. Kind of blurry and evocative. And they were right up there when you first come up the stairs. And I heard this family come up the stairs, a mom and a pop and three kids. They tromped up the stairs. And immediately, as soon as they were up the stairs, I heard the father say "ok, let's go!" So people have accused me of having no taste in art because I have had erotica up.

We have a lot of beginning artists, people just starting out. I just try to find the spark in the work. They may have 20 pieces and only



one has that spark, but I want to support that and help people on. We had people in their 70s, and professional artists that have been doing it their whole lives, and people who just started. We wanted this to be a center for expression. Mostly, we've been getting good responses. The negative responses came from people entrenched in the status quo. There are other galleries in town [with] happy landscapes of cows or still-lives of downtown Staunton. But of course they don't have the vacant shops in their paintings. They never paint pictures of that.

TAP: *That is a really good point about art in local galleries emphasizing the idealized rather than current economic and social conditions. I wanted to get more of your opinion about the New York art scene. There was a line on your website about being against everyone who is in love with the New York art scene.*

POSTUPACK: They are looking for credentials instead of artists. They want to be an artist with letters after their name, they want to have awards. That's not what we are about. We are not about credentials. We don't accept resumes, that single fact differentiates us from every other art gallery in the world. We just look at the art itself. There are stories abounding on my website. People have had horror stories of this idea of resumes. Why don't you just put the resume on the wall.

As far as New York goes, with the internet, the internet is opening up the world to such a degree, there's not really a physical center. I think New York still thinks it is 1950 with Jackson Pollack and de Kooning. It's 60 years since then. With Kierkegaard. The public at large has trouble catching up to the minority, and when it finally does, the minority has moved on. And I think that's the thing with art. They'll have a retrospective of de Kooning, but when de Kooning was first on the out, these art galleries wouldn't show his work. And I think that mindset is still prevalent.

There's a lovely quote of most people would love to have a Van Gogh on their wall, but the prospect of having Van Gogh, that's another story.

That's the idea of our slogan "art is dangerous." 150 years since Monet was around, his art can be assimilated. He is not around to make any more waves. But someone right now, who is alive, they can actually speak up against someone. They rather have art that is silent or happy or fills space on the wall. That is what the scene is here to a great extent. Art as something that fills space on the wall, it's not provocative in any way at all.

TAP: *Those are really great points. How does your art gallery inform the lives of local teenagers?*

POSTUPACK: They also loved the art, we always had art up. In fact my intern last year she just turned 18. She had her portfolio and she has her own vision already. She was 17 when she was doing all this stuff unlike any body else's art—she wasn't trying to copy a style or carry a favor by pleasing her teachers, she was just doing her own thing. Her teachers in high school condemned her stuff and said that they were really bad. She took that same portfolio to several colleges, and now she is going to the Savannah College of Art and Design because of that portfolio. She also had a solo show at Kronos in the springtime of all the work from that portfolio. So there are so many people trying to put others down. I think it's because they feel threatened, their conventional viewpoint is threatened by somebody that has a different viewpoint.

TAP: *That raises the point for the need for art education in schools and galleries like yours.*

POSTUPACK: It does very much so. I think the kids on the whole have a great appreciation for art. Because they saw some of their peers had work in the gallery. They started to see really good art, people from all over the world had shows there. They got to see all these different kind of art that you wouldn't see in other places. One of the counselors said he couldn't imagine anybody else getting 50 or more teenagers to go to the city council meeting on their behalf like they did for us. They had 200 signatures on their petition. This all happened in the course of a week.

TAP: *Who organized it?*

POSTUPACK: Three different young people. They just took it upon themselves. Within a week, they had all these people mobilized. This little army marching over to the city council meeting.

TAP: *Were you there?*

POSTUPACK: We didn't go because we purposely didn't want the council to focus on us, as if we were the ringleaders. Because it was totally their idea.

TAP: *It seems like they kind of shut you down for bullsh*t reasons. When looking for another spot are you afraid that the same thing will happen?*

POSTUPACK: I do believe that we have to exist within the parameters that are allowed to us. I put a call into the Fire Marshall and I want him to meet me at the place and check it out with him. I don't want to have to history repeat itself here.

TAP: *[Editor's note: after our interview, I asked Kevin to give me details on the Fall 2009 happenings with Kronos. He e-mailed the following to me].*

POSTUPACK: Well, we found a perfect place in August. We brought the fire marshal over and he gave it his approval so we figured full speed ahead. We booked bands through November, we started planning the renovations, when two weeks later the city engineer appears and says the new place doesn't have enough toilets. (Can you frickin' believe it!?) We solved every safety issue they complained about in our original space with this new space and then they hit us with toilets! Well, to remedy this we would need to rebuild the bathrooms, expanding them to have four toilets in each bathroom—and they wanted us to have an architect design the plans for this. Of course we couldn't afford it—another *fait accompli!* And then after a city council meeting in late August where I politely pointed out how ridiculous this was, robbing the kids of a venue for such an absurd reason, they abruptly adjourned the meeting.

Interview with KEVIN ERICKSON, Co-Director of All-Ages Movement Project, Seattle, WA.

TAP: *Many people don't know that all-ages music venues that serve the under 18 population are often shut down. What are some of the issues particular to all ages venues, and what are some common reasons these venues get shut down?*

ERICKSON: Often, all-ages music spaces emerge organically, in response to a community's need. They're often started by artists and young people themselves—not businessmen and women or trained arts administrators. This isn't a bad thing, but it means there's often a gap between the organizers and the skills and resources they need to establish and sustain their projects. So the process of navigating relationships with government authorities can be challenging—stuff like getting the right permits and licenses. There's a language gap too; maybe because the field is still emerging, civic authorities often won't understand what you're trying to do if it's not intended as a money-making enterprise.

Finances can be a big challenge. Most commercial venues rely on alcohol sales to keep their doors open; not an option for most all-ages spaces. If there's no money to pay a staff, you're relying on the efforts of dedicated volunteers. People are often creative in finding disused real-estate: old warehouses, old lodge halls, old churches as sites for venues. But these can be hard to get up to code without money for renovation.

Another barrier is moldy attitudes about what counts as “real art.” Music that is born out of all-ages spaces often receives widespread critical praise, but nationally, most of the arts philanthropy and public art funding sector hasn’t really caught up to understanding the artistic contributions of these spaces. A recent NEA study found that arts participation among young people had declined, but the study explicitly excluded genres like punk, indie rock and hip hop that tend to be the most participatory!

TAP: *How widespread are the problems affecting all-ages music venues? Do any states or cities handle these venues better than most? If so, where and how? Do any states or cities handle these venues worst than most? If so, where and how?*

ERICKSON: Regulatory approaches vary widely across the nation. I think Seattle politicians learned their lesson well after the Teen Dance Ordinance debacle—now the city proactively supports all-ages venues, and we have some strong advocates within City Hall.

Unfortunately, many policymakers still see teenagers either as menaces to the public or as a vulnerable population at constant risk of being preyed upon. Either way, they feel that young people must be constantly monitored and controlled. They create laws that enforce and validate this circular thinking.

Here, let me just quote this whole passage from AMP’s forthcoming book, *IN EVERY TOWN: an All-Ages Music Manifesto*:

The idea of age-segregated establishments in connection with alcohol sales is unique to the U.S. Interestingly, the national drinking age of 21 hasn’t been with us that long (nor has it been statistically proven to decrease the number of young people drinking). It was established in 1984, when the advocacy group Mothers Against Drunk Driving orchestrated one of the most effective “blame the youth” campaigns ever, disguised as a public-safety measure, using questionable statistics, and disproportionately blaming teens for drunk driving accidents. For the next twenty-plus years, that lobbying tactic would become standard for anti-youth legislation. Designating 21 as the legal age for drinking, has, by default, made 21 the minimum age to participate in local music scenes and in many social and cultural events. Many state liquor laws go beyond regulating consumption of alcohol to regulating entrance into an establishment that serves alcohol. State liquor boards find creative ways to reclassify licenses and redefine the way different establishments can or can’t do business. Since most music shows are held in bars and cafes, young people are left counting down the days until they turn 21—three years older than the legal age to vote, go to strip clubs, fight in wars, or be locked up for life—or, if they are lucky enough to have money, lenient parents, and a car, they can drive hundreds of miles to a big festival to see indie acts that they could see for

a fraction of the cost if only they were the magical right age. Most people still can’t figure out why these kinds of laws don’t apply to sporting arenas and stadiums, where beer can flow freely between people above and below the legal drinking age. All-ages music activists have started to target these state agencies as viable places to apply pressure in order to change license classifications and open up more cultural venues to young people.

Young show goers don’t generally refer to concerts as “teen dances” or “sock hops.” Nonetheless, lots of cities have laws about teen dancing that classify music shows as dances and apply the same Footloose mentality to them. These laws are written as if young folks are at greater risk of having sex with one another, shooting one another, or being preyed upon by adults if there is music involved. Even New York City has anti-dancing cabaret laws that were created to target Harlem jazz clubs in the ’20s. Liberal San Francisco has had years of debate over dancehall permits and event ending times for different age groups. More recently, cities are enacting all-ages ordinances to regulate how and where all-ages shows happen. In the best cases, they are reasonable and written with young people and music industry folks involved in the process. In the worst cases, politicians and scared parents/voters try to make teenagers safer by banning all-ages shows wholesale.

TAP: *In Virginia, after Kronos Art Gallery was shut down, teens stormed the City Council and demanded action to keep the performance gallery open. What are some actions that the under 21 population can take to keep all-ages venues open?*

ERICKSON: It really depends on the context they’re working in, and what the specific challenges are. It’s important for young people to not take these venues for granted, and support them before they’re in crisis—through attending events, volunteering, and through communicating with city officials and media about the positive role they’re playing in their lives. Young people often will take responsibility for what we call peer-security; they’ll work to make sure that these places remain free of alcohol, drugs, and violence, because they know that those elements could lead to a place getting shut down—anecdotally, we find this is actually more effective than hired security. But once you’re in a crisis moment like the one in Virginia, being respectful but relentless, making your voices heard to the media, to politicians, to local businesses, to community figures, and building as much community support and pressure as possible is the best path forward. As Steven Englander from ABC No Rio told me, you have to figure out how to walk the line between militancy and reputability in a way that’s going to get you a positive tangible result.

TAP: *Have there been any recent victories for all ages venues?*

ERICKSON: ABC No Rio, a longrunning venue in Manhattan’s

Lower East Side, had a big victory this summer. That story ends with them being able to own their space, but also being forced to undergo expensive renovations—the building had deteriorated so much. Then the economic crisis happened and the tough work of fundraising suddenly looked even more daunting. The good news is earlier this year it was announced that they'd be granted \$1.67 million from various city funding sources towards their capital campaign, thus insuring that they'd be able to and continue to be a resource for that community's young people and activist communities.

TAP: *What tools does AMP use to help these venues? What are other ways that these venues can persist?*

ERICKSON: AMP began as a research organization. Shannon Stewart, our founding director, toured the country, trying to find as many different venues, projects, spaces and models as she could, and figure out what was out there, and what resources were needed. We put together a book: *IN EVERY TOWN: an All-Ages Music Manifesto* to be released in spring 2010, which compiles the best practices of long-running venues. The book is a road map; it isn't the definitive all-encompassing resource that will tell you right way to do it; there is no one right way! So we're also launching a web forum where people can connect directly with each other to share ideas and strategies. And we're building a resource wiki, full of information on everything from collective decision making to show promotion to fire sprinkler laws. Finally, we're organizing a series of regional events around the country where organizers can come together. That's exciting because we're creating conversation between the hip-hop kids and the punk kids, between DIY collectives and govt-funded teen centers, and finding there's a lot we can learn from each other. We also do direct support—I try and help folks strategize and come up with a solution that works for the situation they're in.

TAP: *Why are all-ages venues important?*

ERICKSON: As I've talked to organizers at different venues and youth-music projects nationally, I've realized that people get into this field for a whole range of different reasons. The reasons they're important vary from community to community. If you talk to folks at Elementz, a hip-hop youth center in inner-city Cleveland—they're using music as a vehicle for personal empowerment & community transformation—trying to get kids to develop the sense of responsibility and pride to finish high school. At a warehouse space in Baltimore, they might focus more on creative experimentation itself, creating space for small-



scale community not primarily ordered towards consumption. They help in orienting us away from mass culture and towards community-based economic models. In a basement punk venue in Walla Walla, they might be creating safe spaces for weird/outsider kids to feel accepted and connected, making it easier to survive adolescence in a culturally conservative community.

I do think we live in a culture that systematically teaches us all to be passive consumers of culture, not agents of culture. All-ages venues broaden our sense of what's possible. DIY ethics teach people that they can be full participants in culture; that their voices and actions matter. These aren't just spaces where the next generation of talented young people not only get to develop their craft, and try out new ideas, but also form authentic community. Concretely, these spaces often serve as hubs for community organizing and political activism; culturally, these are spaces where identity is shaped and values are forged. This has widespread political impacts as well, to the extent that there's a connection between cultural agency and political agency. The genius of the Obama campaign was that they understood the first step wasn't to convince people of the wisdom of a particular set of policy ideas, but to convince people first that they had agency: that they can take a proactive, positive role in creating the world they want to see. **TAP**

Send your ideas, replies and letters to letters@theartspolitic.com.



DISSECTING DOMINATION IN ART

POSITIONING DALIT ARTISTS IN INDIA TODAY

by Malvika Maheshwari

“If you tell your family and friends that you bought a painting of a Dalit artist their immediate reaction would be ‘why are you spending your time and money on these chamars (cobblers) and chuhras (people doing ‘unclean jobs’)?””

The above quote by an Indian artist—perhaps a lone Dalit voice in the modern Indian art scene, seeking redemption of various kinds—introduces the problematic of the essay. It immediately brings to attention two issues—the category of a Dalit artist and furthermore his problematic position in the modern Indian art world. Visual narratives of oppression, subjugation, resistance, imposed guilt and shame outline Savarkar’s canvases, which addresses and attacks the social stigmas attached to the members of the lowest caste in the Hindu social hierarchy. Traditionally segregated as untouchables, their position in the society was limited to cobblers, leather workers, cleaners, sweepers—basically people performing ‘unclean jobs’. Also the lower caste group is/was never in itself a homogenous category, having internal hierarchies within hierarchies. Since the last decades the Dalit movement has gained considerable ground in the political sphere but has ceased to break the deep rooted social and cultural prejudices and cleavages effectively kept alive by the elite, upper caste intelligentsia. In the cultural sphere the subaltern practices have strictly been limited to folk and tribal forms. This provides the context of reasoning and articulating Dalit absenteeism in the modern art world especially when discourses about equality and justice desist to arouse any meaningful response, more so from the Indian upper caste mob. Through this piece I wish to throw open some areas not generally dealt with when one speaks of Indian art and politics. The essay is purely exploratory in nature; not exhaustive but just a drop in the vast palette of the subject.

In the last twenty years the position of modern Indian art has reached grand heights especially in the context of international recognition and market acceptability. And predictably, interpretation of experiences of modernity has steadfastly hovered around its elite, upper caste practitioners. This art market boom has for reasons various and many refrained from addressing its Dalit professionals. The first inherited response to this, like for most professional fields in India is, that there aren’t many Dalit artists in the mainstream art world anyway. Thus, this brings us to the crux of the inquiry: to understand the contours of this bias and absence. Since the burst of very active market forces in the modern art world is a fairly recent phenomenon in India, parallel pronouncements on Dalit aesthetic interventions in the visual arts is a new field of inquiry for art and social historians which has led to some unanswerable questions while some more are in the process of being answered. My interviews with artists, across classes, regions and art forms—folk and modern—brought to fore some pertinent queries and questions. For example, how to define the category of Dalit artists? The one who belongs to the Dalit community or the ones who essentially ideologically hold on to their Dalit-ness? Is there a way for these

artists to overcome this sociological categorization—which in fact highlights the starting quote? Do they necessarily have to shed their ‘dalit’ status to be accepted as modern artists? Can they shed their Dalit-ness by resisting to visually articulate their struggle and still be hailed as Dalit artists?

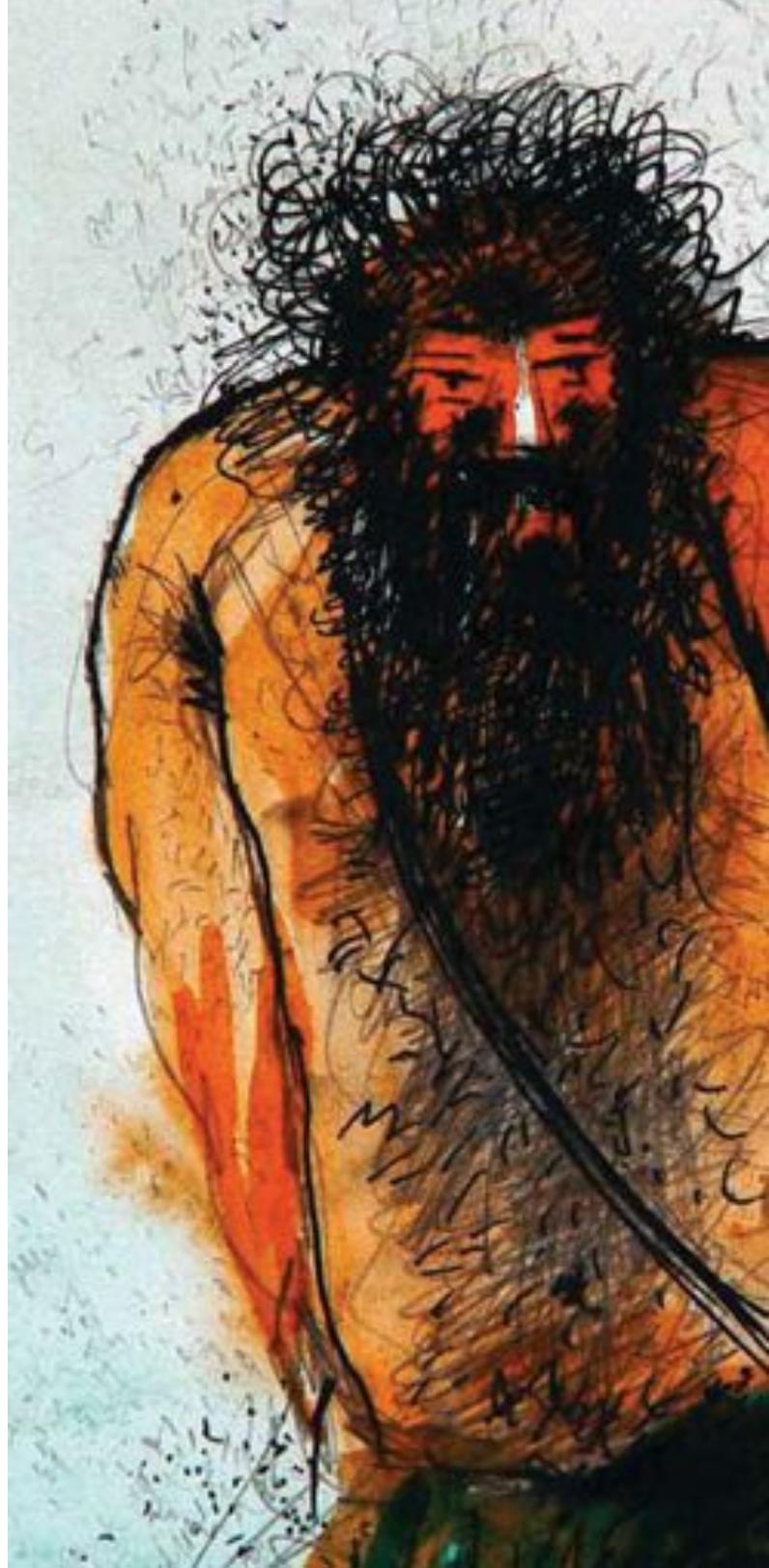
Understanding caste roles as foundations of the Indian society and positioning himself in the present day subaltern politics that identifies its first goal as equality and that also seeks rather not to speak of inclusion but to dismantle this very caste-centric foundation of the society, the Dalit artist, (the one simply belonging to the caste) first internally and then externally braves an encounter of uncertainty that rests on him for stepping away from his “traditional occupation”, to even think of expressing his anguish, and that too through the visual medium. “When I started to paint this subject I remember I was not allowed to. Why was not I allowed to? There was no freedom in art for downtrodden. They can’t even listen to music and bhajans. They can’t walk on the street. They took away all kinds of freedoms. That means because of this caste system they (the society) lose a lot of human resources, which is part and parcel of the creativity of the society.” The consequences were and remain grave for the artist facing the barriers of the upper caste institutions that resists an alternative understanding other than the lower caste’s ahistoricity, by keeping the Dalit practitioners from polluting modernity while at the same time acting as guardians of modernity preferring the Dalit to maintain the traditional, authentic folk and rural art forms from being contaminated due to the degenerating modernity. Various leading artists and art historians in the country, incidentally belonging to the higher castes, endorse the harmonious societal arrangements of the ‘earlier ways of Indian life’ when the ‘lower castes’ were assigned specific roles as back stage workers for sculpting idols for festivals, painting walls and murals etc. and ‘everyone was happy’. The ‘problem’ arose when the subalterns spoke and fought to appear, if not on stage then at least as audience, as writers of their own history, thus spinning the (illusioned) equilibrium!

What Savarkar calls ‘content crisis’ in modern Indian art and market as manipulation, the grammar of modern Indian art terms it as chaste, harmonious, beautiful and the market calls it ‘in demand’. Subjects dealing with abuse and coercion have long found expression in art practice but expression of oppression in the Savarkar’s practice assumes characteristics that intend to break the very limits of judging art as ‘counter cultural’ and ‘retaliatory’—terms itself given by the elite discourse. Pointed, sharp and depicting grotesque everydayness of humiliation, his works overlook aggregates and destroys abstraction. Not willing to simply locate caste discrimination within

boundaries of economic injustices, for Savarkar art is not for its own sake, it is for an absolute renunciation of the present Hindu caste order. A telling, shy acceptance by a gallery owner in Delhi touches the base of the argument, “We have no problems with Dalit artists per say but honestly when we have buyers they want to buy art that is soothing and not challenging their own position in the society. And also the biases of hanging a painting by an untouchable—few are willing to take up such philanthropy.” The accepted interchangeability of the words prejudice and bias is a telling highlight. While the former occurs without the person knowing the facts, bias is necessarily based itself on facts.

The impact on the Dalit art discourse, in the present context, with the burgeoning global imperialism has had an interesting impact. The rising popularity of various kinds of modern Indian art in the ‘West’ also led to a subsequent interest of some collectors to seek a minority, subaltern voice in art. While earlier the Indian domestic art market like galleries and private collectors were completely indifferent to ‘subaltern’ artists, the wake up pokes from beyond the borders led them to undertake a token search for a Dalit’s expression. While the galleries still show hesitance to patronize the lower caste, Dalit voice, it is in fact the academia and art critics who have started warming up to Dalit aesthetics and its articulations. But Savarkar is still unfazed about this since for him the Dalit emancipation and fight has to come from within the community itself and furthermore, he is adamantly suspicious of the opportunism of the jargonized art elites. ‘The fight has to be fought by one who is in the battlefield, not by cheerleaders.’ Predictably, Savarkar’s most ardent supporters and patrons remain the rising luminaries from the within the community, proud to hang his paintings on their walls, reminding themselves and others that numerous like them possess the same tangible, coded history and experiences. The lurking question though still remains—the whereabouts of another, a second modern artist from the community who has been able to break into the ‘mainstream’. Various Dalit artists, even practitioners in other forms of art apart from the visual medium, refrain from publicly identifying their caste from the fear of being further outcasted by the community. Additional career suicides for Dalit artists include when they start articulating their fight and resistance through the medium.

Accentuation of the Dalit art politics is variously interpreted by two art historians—Shivji Pannikar and H.A Anil Kumar—through the intersections of language and class. Remaining in the domain of elitism, art criticism and art history writing is dominated by the English speaking bourgeoisie, not comfortably affiliated with the Dalit discourse. While other subaltern issues like gay and





feminist ideas have been commendably dealt with—which also largely owes its acceptance in the mainstream Indian art world to the critics for making it fashionable along with international acceptance of these movements but most importantly artists addressing these issues came from affluent classes who could get away with the social constraints using their class affiliations—Kumar points to the bias that Indian art discourses are largely limited by the language structure much like the caste and class structure. Thus transcending one’s naturalness of English to other languages also means to transcend across to a particular class, thus holding back the elite historian from bending down to the common man’s language at the same time provides aspirations to the middle class to break the limits to rise up to the higher ranks. To complicate further, the English language, as a mediating tool continuously renews itself which systematically keeps the aspiring class tactfully in their place, with the bourgeois forging ahead to new ‘highs’, recapitulating its position in the socio-cultural hierarchies. Similarly, the language expressed by Dalit artists through the visual medium remains ‘uncouth and unsophisticated’—expressing their bare, struggle for equality. Much like renouncing the languages of the ‘unsophisticated class’, the expression of the subaltern classes, especially the lower caste and class Dalits remains an unimportant, inconvenient artistic highlight. On the other hand the recent proliferation and acceptance of Dalit literature by mainstream cultural bodies can be understood largely by this language/class structure since this literature is mostly in Hindi and other vernacular languages.

Perhaps the greatest irony of articulating a Dalit discourse lies in its ineluctability and dependence of being the ‘other’ to the elite art discourse, world and market. What about advocacy of Dalit politics by non-Dalit artists and critics? Would that art and artist be seen as a voice for the victimized other, a politically aware benefactor? Would his aesthetics fall within Dalit articulations? Can Dalit articulations finally be regarded as ‘art’ per say, for its own sake and not activism for the greater good? The nascency of articulations on the subject limit us in many ways to delve further. More questions remain unanswered than answered, more still pop up on the way, the quest continues to dissect bias from prejudices, the ‘other’ from the mainstream, decentering the centre. **TAP**

Malika Maheshwari is a doctoral researcher at Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI), Paris, working on working on the rise of religious nationalism and freedom of expression of artists in India. Her most recent publication includes a co-written article ‘Cultural Policing in South Asia’ in the Cultures and Globalization series: Cultural Expression, Creativity and Innovation (Sage Publications, 2010).



TAP*MAP

“There is a recurring ceiling of 30% representation for women at the gallery level.”

The Brainstormers, Gender Equality Arts Activists
New York City

“We don’t get any funding what so ever. What’s really strange is that we have this public money going up, and officials saying, ‘we are going to build an opera house.’ And who does that serve? The five percent.”

Dan Cowan, Music Venue Owner
Seattle, WA

“How deeply demeaning it was to have one’s rights ‘decided’ by a voting majority that clearly does not view us as deserving of basic rights. This led to a broader discussion of what to do with these feelings. Is it possible to transform them into something that is directed out instead of in?”

Joe Goode, Director/Writer/Choreographer
Berkeley, CA

“Policy initiatives that want to eliminate bias need to be directed towards community programs, art centers, art in prisons, art in schools. Allowing artists the freedom to work and give something to the community will create art that is strong and give the community the space to address their moral sphere.”

Art Hazelwood, Artists/Curator
San Francisco, CA

“It seems that some memories so disturb the present they cannot be tolerated in ‘public.’”

Gregory Sholette, Writer/Artist/Professor
Queens, NY

“Working in collaborative environments alleviates bias of self and others.”

Chris Appleton, Executive Director of WonderRoot
Atlanta, GA

“The arts and theatre have a responsibility to put a mirror up to society’s face. To reflect the plusses and minuses of the way we live and treat each other.”

Garry Lee Posey, Producing Artistic Director of Ensemble Theatre of Chattanooga
Chattanooga, TN

These are regional perspectives of BIAS in their own words.



**MARIA DURLAO, ELAINE KAUFMANN,
DANIELLE MYSLIWIEC AND ANNE POLASHENSKI**

Brainstormers (art collective dedicated to discussing gross gender inequalities in the visual art world) | New York City, NY

What techniques have Brainstormers found effective in changing perceptions about bias against female artists?

We have staged several performance pieces on the streets of New York that take place in conjunction with major events such as the Armory Fair or the opening week of the Chelsea Gallery Fall season. Each of our performances has an interactive component so that passersby can participate in the piece. For example, when we staged “How Good Are You?” across from the Armory, we created a multiple choice “ethical test” that included provocative questions regarding discrimination and ethics in the art world. People on the streets answered the questions and then received an educational publication with statistics about the representation of women in Chelsea galleries. Many people expressed shock and surprise when reading the publication and this kind of interactive event strikes up engaging conversation and debate that really gets people thinking and asking questions.

When we collaborated with the Guerrilla Girls on our performance “Get Mad,” we created a mad lib postcard that could be filled out and mailed to a gallery that shows more than 75% male artists. This piece encouraged participants on the streets to be an activist by filling out and mailing their mad lib to the gallery of their choice.

In what ways have you seen the arts and arts education work to alleviate bias?

One of our first research projects entailed contacting several MFA programs in the New York area and tracking the percentage of women and men enrolled in [those] programs. We found that in most programs the numbers of women and men are equal and generally when there is a majority, the majority is made up of women. This statistic proves that at the educational level, where commercial interests are not a priority, art made by women is judged to be equal in quality. We also found that slide registries at non-profit spaces such as Artists Space had equal numbers of male and female artists. It seems that the major shift in bias occurs at the commercial level. Here there is what seems to be a recurring ceiling of 30% representation for women and 70% representation for men at the gallery level. This is true for both new and old galleries in Chelsea. Jerry Saltz and Greg Allen [noted art critics] have illustrated in their research that this bias continues to widen as careers progress and affects not only the price of work (women’s work generally sells for three times less at auction and later in a career) and museum representation.

DAN COWAN

Owner, Tractor Tavern (live music venue) | Seattle, WA

Do you believe that the arts community has preferences for non-profit arts venues and biases against for-profit arts venues?

Opera or symphony or theater—they get funding, major funding. It's a class thing. It's a view of “what are the arts? Is rock and roll, is folk music the arts?” We get zero funding. Here, [rock music] is not viewed as the arts. The Mayor's office has been making a bit of an effort, but whether that will stick around....

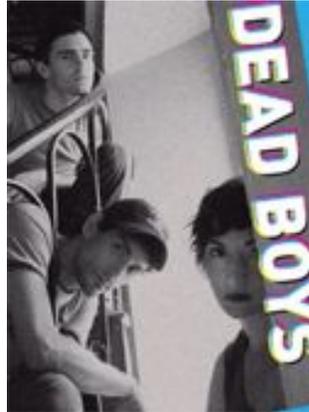
Have you had conversations with city councilmembers about the importance of a venue like Tractor Tavern?

Yeah. A lot of them were about the noise ordinances that were about to come into play, so we did have different representatives from music venues, through this organization called Seattle Nightlight and Music Association.

There's a lot of street noise at two o'clock [in the morning]. So we get targeted pretty quickly. And the reality is, for us to promote the music that we put on, we sell alcohol. It's tricky. That's the only way we can survive by selling beverages, 95% of those are alcohol. So it's kind of this weird catch 22. There's no real small arts organizations putting on [this music]. It's a weird balance between art and commerce.

We don't get any funding whatever. And sometimes we are looked on disdainfully. But it's a pretty vibrant part of the scene. What's really strange is that we have this public money going up, and officials saying, “we are going to build an opera house.” And who does that serve? The five percent.





JOE GOODE

Director/Writer/Choreographer, *Dead Boys* | Berkeley, CA

How did biases surrounding the passage of Proposition 8 in California influence the creation of *Dead Boys*?

Dead Boys grew out of the unfortunate moment of Prop 8 being passed in California. Holcombe [Waller, composer] and I had a conversation about how deeply demeaning it was to have one's rights "decided" by a voting majority that clearly does not view us as deserving of basic rights. Such a feeling of powerlessness and shame—do we really have to grovel and beg one more time for these bottom line equalities? This led to a broader discussion of what to do with these feelings. Is it possible to transform them into something that is directed out instead of in? This became a big issue in *Dead Boys*. How do we harness the power of so much feeling and make it productive?

I developed the main character with this in mind. Monroe is an artist who exists outside of any real form of participation; he is mostly an observer, a critic, a rather disembodied guy who's looking for a way to express all that he feels. In the play, he makes the first step towards a kind of activism in that he recognizes the power of his own feelings.



PHILLIP BIMSTEIN

Composer/Lecturer/Former Mayor of Springdale, Utah | Salt Lake City, Utah

How did your artistic and musical background affect your policy and executive initiatives as Mayor?

As a composer, I was happy to notice many similarities between musical and political forms and processes. Many times, as I chaired a meeting or conducted a public hearing, I'd hear a proposal and a counterproposal as the first and second themes of a classical sonata. Then the proposals would proceed to be discussed and argued in the same way that a sonata's themes are elaborated, extended or transformed in its development section. This is just one example of formal similarity, what I call the "music of dialogue."

I also noticed that the skills of a good jazz ensemble—listening, supporting the soloist, taking turns, building a new phrase out of previously heard elements, collaboratively improvising—were extremely helpful to all when participating in a town meeting. In this way my musical background affected the way I chaired the meetings and encouraged active public participation. Our town's political process had been deeply divided and desperately needed healing. Opening up a collaborative space and guiding the process "musically" was my way of making the community whole again.

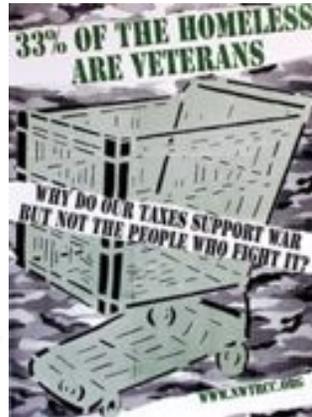
What kinds of bias have you confronted in your work?

I've been fortunate that bias has not been directed at me, so I've not had to confront it personally. However, the nearby Kaibab Paiute tribe has suffered a huge amount of bias in the form of governmental, cultural, and economic deprivations during the

past 150 years, culminating in the attempted economic and environmental exploitation represented by a proposed toxic waste incinerator. But the tribe courageously rejected the offer of an enormous amount of money and instead voted to preserve the sanctity of its native land. My work confronted this bias by recording Paiute oral histories—including their feelings about the incinerator—and incorporating them in my chamber piece, "Dark Winds Rising," recorded by Turtle Island String Quartet and Equinox Chamber Players.

In what ways have you seen the arts, arts education and civic arts programming work to alleviate bias?

Two examples: One, I served on the grants panel for American for the Arts' Animating Democracy initiative, which fosters arts and cultural activity that encourages and enhances civic engagement and dialogue. Coalitions of arts and civic organizations commission new art and present deeply engaged workshops that alleviate bias in their communities. Two, at the worst depth of our town's polarization, a humanities program entitled Embracing Opposites: In Search of the Public Good was designed to bring healing. It presented a series of lectures, roundtables, readings and discussion which enabled our community to view its divisive issues through a wider-angle lens. This allowed us to develop greater civility—to overcome our differences and find common ground.



ART HAZELWOOD

Visual artist, Independent curator | San Francisco, CA

How did bias against homeless people influence the choice to curate, Hobos to Street People?

The principle of the show is to draw parallels between the response to homelessness in the Great Depression and today. In the Depression bias against the economic migrants from the Dust Bowl that came to California led to attacks by organized vigilantes. Today, economic migrants from Central America are working in the fields and living in virtually identical conditions to the Okies and Arkies of the 1930s. And today the Minute Men, organized vigilante groups, are attacking them. In the cities the bias against homeless people is just as bad, cities pass laws to criminalize behavior. So now in many cities it is illegal to go to the park at night, it is illegal to sit on the street, it is illegal to sleep. Of course these laws are made specifically to target poor people and homeless people, to drive them out of neighborhoods, to contain them.

I wanted to draw attention to the invisibility of homeless people. Their criminalization and the violence against them are two sources of their invisibility. By focusing on artistic responses to homelessness, an antidote to their invisibility is presented. One way this is done is through the historical parallel. A 1937 photo by Dorothea Lange of a homeless family living in a car and working the fields next to a contemporary photo by David Bacon of indigenous families from Mexico living under tarps in the fields shatters the wall that hides the enormity of the current situation of homelessness.

Detail some of the feedback you received from viewers? How did the exhibit affect biases?

One common response from homeless people and homeless rights advocates [was] that the very fact of the show in a museum setting offered validation, and acknowledged that their issues weren't simply being swept out of sight. The show opened at the California Historical Society in San Francisco and tours museums, libraries and universities for the next three years. See: www.wrAPHOME.org/hobos.html

What were the limits of the show in changing biases against homeless people?

In general there are two responses that I encountered that I would categorize as unchanged by the show. One response [was] simply to deny the facts and say that in fact "those people want

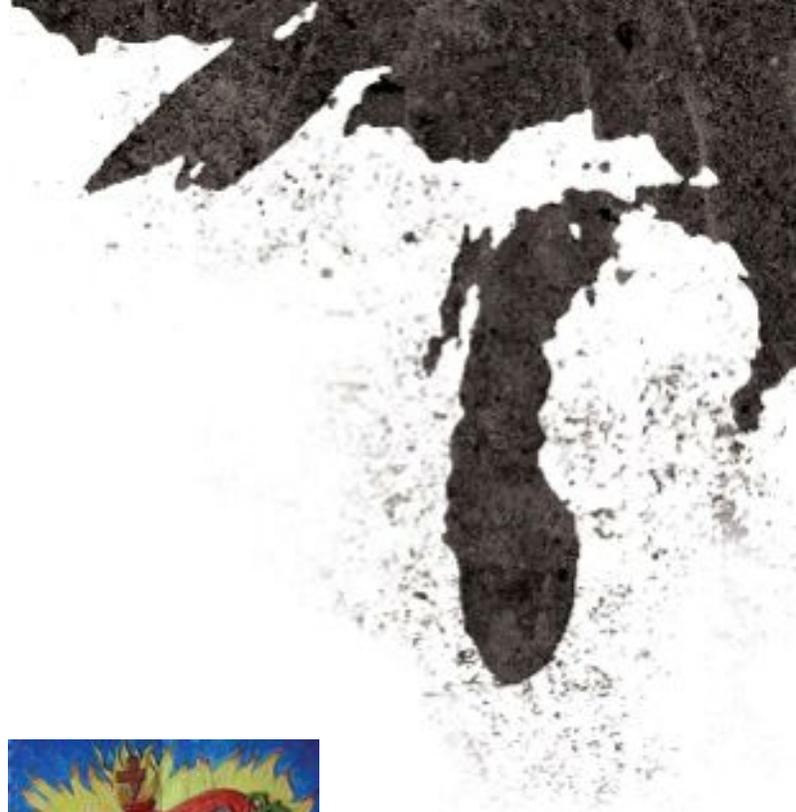
to be homeless.” The second [was] to focus on a particularly annoying individual who is homeless, a drug addict perhaps. Both are ways for people to pretend that it won’t happen to them. Both are magical thinking. In the end acknowledging that in this society we are all vulnerable and that any of us may end up homeless is too hard for some people to accept.

What role does visual art play in changing perceptions?

Homelessness is an indicator of what is happening to society, of how vulnerable people are becoming, economically, socially, communally. I would say that art can make the wider connections between issues, art can break the mold of what is the proper category to think in. An example from the show would be a poster from the San Francisco Print Collective, a group of street artists. The poster shows a silhouetted figure holding a machine gun in front of a shopping cart and says, “How many people does it take to start a revolution. There are 15,000 homeless people in San Francisco.” This piece connects to a long history of poor people’s protests and suddenly turns the invisible passive homeless person into an active potential. Works from the Depression of bread riots did a similar thing: they connected poverty with just resistance.

What policy initiatives that utilize the arts could be enacted to eliminate bias?

I believe that the WPA Federal Arts Project that employed destitute artists in the Depression provides a great model, as did the CETA program in the 1970s. Artists identified with issues, they saw themselves as workers on a local level, not superstars competing with each other. It is the nature of community art to address community issues. It is the nature of speculative art markets to address the purchaser. Policy initiatives that want to eliminate bias need to be directed towards community programs, art centers, art in prisons, art in schools. Allowing artists the freedom to work and give something to the community will create art that is strong and give the community the space to address their moral sphere.



GREGORY SHOLETTE

Artist/Writer/Assistant Professor of Art, Queens College: CUNY | Queens, NY

What kinds of bias have you confronted in your work?

An artists' collective I worked with known as REPOhistory (1989-2000) confronted several cases of public "memory" bias on the streets of New York City in 1998. One of these involved an artist-designed sign that "marked" a now historical confrontation between the Empire State Building and disabled activists.

REPOhistory was formed in 1989 with the mission of "repossessing" unknown or forgotten urban histories and then using artworks to mark these events and people in public spaces using artists. In 1992 we created our first public project and even received temporary permission from the NYC Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) to install over thirty colorful "alternative" historical markers in Lower Manhattan. Each of these signs had a graphic image and text that commemorated, for example, the location of the first slave market (which is on Wall Street by the way), or the shape of the original coastline of the City (now altered by landfill), or an African burial ground near City Hall that had been discovered that same year. This project took place when liberal Democratic David Dinkins was mayor and his administration was very supportive of these temporary, historical repossessions. However, a few years later when former prosecutor "Rudy" Giuliani came to power, REPOhistory began to have problems gaining city permissions. In 1998, the group proposed a new project for city streets, we went about getting permits just as before, and yet when it came time to install the signs the NYCDOT said "no." We immediately began mediations with the city to get the work into public view through a wonderful pro-bono attorney, Jeremy Feigelson of Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, and a few months later the City finally, reluctantly, gave in. But once the project went up on the streets, within a few days, several of the signs disappeared.

To focus on just one case, artist Janet Koenig created a graphic work that simply told the true history of how disabled activists seeking access to public buildings targeted the Empire State Building for protests, in some cases chaining their wheelchairs to its doors as a form of civil disobedience. The amazing bit is that these demonstrations, combined with legal work by New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) among others, eventually led the tallest building in the City to comply with federal law. Soon, its world-renowned observation deck was made accessible to handicapped people. And yet,

simply by describing this history using powerful graphics on a legally posted and temporary street sign outside the famed skyscraper, the building's managers had it removed. We replaced the lost history marker with a copy. They removed it again. This back and forth went on for the entire length of our yearlong permit. It seems that some memories so disturb the present they cannot be tolerated in "public."

In what ways have you seen the arts, arts education and interventionist arts programming work to alleviate bias?

Most good teaching tempers prejudice by improving the student's knowledge-based skills such as information gathering and reflective judgment, but the arts also educate in a very different way via representation. We might say that art confronts ignorance and bias not only through the transmission of information, but also through forms of tactical embarrassment using fabrications, fictions, and even lies.

Plato was amongst the first to caution against the power of representations (both visual and poetic), when he has the philosopher Socrates explain that an ideal Republic would exclude most artists, or, at best permit them citizenship only if they were carefully interpreted and managed by the State. It is art's capacity to mimic reality that makes it an especially complex, occasionally subversive, and sometimes paradoxical force. Bertolt Brecht encouraged the disruption of artistic illusion in his plays, which is something many interventionist artists have sought to emulate over the years. However, when artists intervene in public space this illusion-bursting denouement often takes place indirectly, or later, after an action has dissipated. For example, several years ago the art collective known as The Yes Men spoofed the BBC by pretending to be official representatives of Dow Chemical and then proceeding to claim the multinational company, which had just purchased the assets of Union Carbide, would finally make financial amends to 8,000 victims and offspring of the Bhopal chemical spill in India. The Yes Men used the arts of imitation and mimicry to produce a "tactical embarrassment" that "corrected" the image of the corporation, and yet at the same time they were also working "in cahoots" with activists in Bhopal. It was not until the next day that the newscast was publicly exposed as a fake. The cleverness of this artistic intervention is underscored by the fact that Dow was then forced to publicly admit it had no plans to assist anyone associated with the 1984 disaster.

CHRIS APPLETON

Executive Director, WonderRoot | Atlanta, GA

In what ways have you seen the arts, arts education and community arts programming work to alleviate bias?

Working in collaborative environments alleviates bias of self and others. Through WonderRoot, we are seeking to provide individuals and communities with the tools to create a voice. Bias, good or bad, is prejudice. When provided a transcendent communication tool, the arts and communities are able to surmount barriers and come together.

In what ways have you seen the arts work to create bias?

The arts don't create bias. People do.

What policy initiatives that utilize the arts could be enacted to eliminate bias?

More public funding for the arts, especially directed towards youth arts programming and education.

Do you find bias in any way helpful to your work?

Just the slightest amount. Bias allows us to get excited about seeing our grandparents before they arrive. It provides us [with] caution when walking down a dark alley. But the bias can only get us so far. When working as an artist, it is the exploration of the unknown that allows us to create powerful work.

Do you have any other thoughts on the arts and bias?

Bias is prejudice and preconception. It exists in our relationships to people, food, health, money, education, ourselves, everything. We must acknowledge the bias as artists in order to move past it. Embrace your bias. It might tell you something about who you are and why you create.





GARRY LEE POSEY

Producing Artistic Director, Ensemble Theatre of Chattanooga | Chattanooga, TN

What role has bias played in your work?

I think that the arts and theatre have a responsibility to put a mirror up to society's face. To reflect the pluses and minuses of the way we live and treat each other. The challenge, of course, is to present this information (ironically) without any bias. We do a horrible disservice to our craft if we come down on one side of an issue only, not to mention that a biased presentation about bias could exclude an entire group of people who would then experience their own idea of bias. So, as an artist, we present the facts as they are funneled through a playwright, a director and an actor so that opinions can be made and to affect change.

What sorts of bias do A Woman Called Truth and This Is Not A Pipe Dream seek to alleviate? Racial? Gender? What other biases has Ensemble Theatre of Chattanooga worked to eliminate?

A Woman Called Truth by Sandra Fenichel-Ascher focuses on racial and gender biases. Sojourner Truth, the title character and protagonist, fought just as much for her rights as a woman as she did for her rights as an African-American. It would be enough, most definitely, for us to choose to do this show based on that. However, Truth meets bias as a hard-worker and as a traditionalist intent on following the rules. In one memorable scene from the play, Truth is working hard for her current master, sun up to sun down, because he promised that if she worked hard, she could get her freedom within a year's time.

A fellow slave hand says to her "working hard is stupid in a horse and its stupid in a slave, it'll just kill us sooner that's all." In another scene, a policeman drops her son off at the house after he had got in trouble; instead of taking what he's been given to

make it work, her son decides to leave and join a whaling boat. He mocks his mother's work ethic, only to ask forgiveness later in a letter and never be seen again. Adding these two additional layers of bias really provides great depth for this piece which only runs about 75 minutes in length, but packs a powerful message.

This Is Not A Pipe Dream looks at the opinion people have towards the arts, presenting a bias most young artists experience because of their parents' lack of faith in the financial success of artists. It also addresses the bias [that] the shy, socially awkward student might feel in a classroom from the teacher or other students. Again, with this play it takes a step further to show the bias mainstream artists have against the avant garde artist. The play is a somewhat biographical account of surrealist painter Rene Magritte, using vaudevillian style performance techniques, a style often biased against as base and trite.

Are your tactics different for different biases?

No, I don't think so. My aim is to present separate sides to each bias. To use whatever means necessary or to go to whatever lengths necessary. If a play presents a scene with subject matter that might not be "pc" or might offend a particular niche, I don't dumb this down or make it less important. That would be a disservice. I might, however, present it more artistically or conceptually, but this isn't done with the intent of softening it. If, as I read it, it affects me a certain way, then I know that it might be the intent of the playwright to make his/her audience experience that as well. So the tactic is to present simultaneously (if possible) both sides of a bias, though the methods or styles might vary.

Why the decision to tour Woman Called Truth and This Is Not A Pipe Dream in elementary and middle schools? How receptive are those age groups to issues of bias?

One of the things about Rene Magritte is that he conceptualizes that images have been defined because of the words we have associated with them. Growing up in a southern household, I associated the word "gay" and all of its derivatives as negative connotations, ideas to smirk about. It wasn't until my freshman year of college that I was able to wade through the mire of my bias and eventually come out of the closet. Likewise, I don't think many of the elementary and middle schools in our area teach bias because of several reasons. One has to do with the fact that racism, gender bias and sexual bias exist pretty heavily still down here. I think that there is a sort of pink elephant in the room when it comes to certain social biases and one facet (as I have come to learn from our parents' generations) is that as long as we don't discuss it, it doesn't exist.

Several of our schools are clearly segregated, though not necessarily intentionally; the zoning rules just work out that way. What we have found is that *A Woman Called Truth* seemed to pique the interest of those schools with higher populations of African-American children, while *This Is Not A Pipe Dream* seemed more appealing to primarily Caucasian schools. However the actual bookings show that *A Woman Called Truth* is more favored 3-1 more [in booked shows] than *This Is Not A Pipe Dream*. What this says to me is that administrators see this as a safe way to introduce bias.

It has been my experience that children are more receptive to information when presented in abstract ideals, like theatre. When a child is forced to stimulate his imagination through play (or seeing a play), then I believe there are neurological connections being made that have psychological impact on their behaviors.

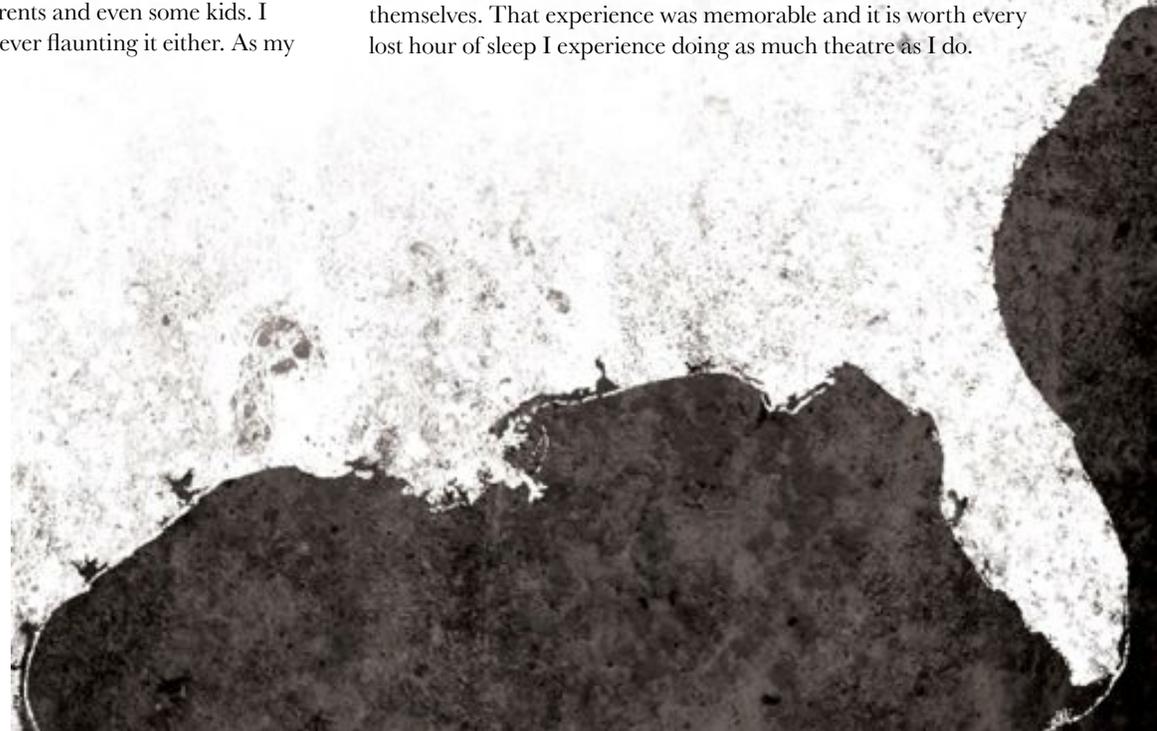
Do you notice a bias in your work?

I have been biased because I am gay and I have experienced bias because I'm young. With the gay issue, I have been pigeonholed several times as the "gay director" who only directs plays about gay people. I have a sensitivity to those, being gay, and I use theatre as a means to really explore what it means to be gay through scripts by gay playwrights which focus both on homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Furthermore, as the director of an internationally recognized youth theatre program, I experienced tons of bias in the workplace amongst peers and supervisors and also from some parents and even some kids. I never hid my sexuality, but I was never flaunting it either. As my

tenure continued on and strong bonds were established between myself and my students, my sexuality became more prominent simply because more of myself was being exposed. Despite huge successes with the program, I was asked to step down and then [I was] replaced with a married female who had children. It is my fervent belief that I was released because of something to do with my homosexuality, though there has never been a discussion about [my being replaced] nor has there ever been any information released about it. With the age issue, people have [been] biased against trusting my insight and creativity. I am constantly being compared to people who are my parents' age and although I hold my own very well, there is still a sense of unease or discomfort in admitting my talent.

In what ways do the arts alleviate bias?

I have directed *The Laramie Project* three times. I directed the show in grad school as an independent production with the Gay-Straight Alliance at the University of Mississippi. It was part of a Pride Week Festival. I didn't expect a huge turnout, but then several of theatre appreciation teachers offered extra credit to the students who went to see it. Several conservative southern students stopped me after the show and/or in class to express how satisfied they were for attending the show and sitting through the entire thing. Some of them cried, some of them changed their perspective on things and some of them found a piece of themselves. That experience was memorable and it is worth every lost hour of sleep I experience doing as much theatre as I do.



POLICY BRIEF:

ARTS POLICY STRATEGIES TO CONFRONT & HARNESS BIAS

by *The Editor*

Bias: a prejudice in favor of or against one thing; a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment.

President Obama signs the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into law. Artistic communities debate Emily Sands's undergraduate thesis findings that female theater producers perpetuate gender biases against female playwrights. Arts departments become the first casualties of recession-related budget cuts at many universities—University of Kentucky cuts their Dance Department, Washington State University cuts their Theater and Dance Departments, University of North Carolina cuts Theater, and Florida State University cuts art education and two graduate theater programs. Uninformed remarks by Rocco Landesman (“I don’t know if there’s a theater in Peoria... but I would bet that it’s not as good as [Chicago’s] Steppenwolf”) led the NEA Chairman to tour Peoria. Harvard Education School doctoral student, Edward Clapp, limits the call for “future of the arts” to papers to those under 40 years of age, and receives hundreds of entries. Parents in a Las Vegas, NV suburb sue to prevent high school students from performing *Rent* and *The Laramie Project*. Across the nation, arts groups perform *The Laramie Project*—about the brutal slaying of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man—to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the play. In the past year, there has been much ado about bias.

However timely, bias is also a fitting lens to digest perennial arts issues. Arts advocates often cite political biases against arts education, arts funding, and the coverage of arts in the media. Consider the lack of a national commitment to arts education requirements, American arts funding which wilts in international comparisons, the culture wars of the nineties, and the vitriol directed at Yosi Sergant, former NEA communications chief after the August 2009 conference call with arts leaders. In America’s public policies and public eye, the arts are a victim of bias.

But the arts also perpetuate bias. Major commercial film studios often exacerbate gender, racial and economic biases in casting and in content. Last fall, two-time Academy Award winner Meryl Streep lamented the paltry amount of quality film roles for women. To much uproar, marketing execs for the film *Couples Retreat*, removed the black couple from a British version of the movie poster. Various flagship arts institutions are notorious for enabling gender bias against female artists. Pay for and representation of writers of color and female writers continues to pale in comparison to pay for white male writers.

In face of bias against and within the arts, the arts do remain a highly effective site to confront bias. We see examples in popular television (*The Cosby Show*, earlier seasons of MTV’s *The Real World*), on stage, in cinemas, on the radio, and in street art. This is one of the reasons we culled a diverse set of voices in *TAP*MAP*, to understand many perspectives of bias. Understanding how bias mediates the arts and how the arts mediate bias ultimately improves practices, communities and arts policies. Here are our ideas.

MANDATE THAT PUBLICLY FUNDED ARTS INSTITUTIONS ADDRESS CONTENT BIASES.

It is major arts institutions that often receive the lion's share of local, state and federal public monies, and act as a flagship for their locality. Despite public funding and reach, arts institutions—such as major museums, symphony orchestras and theaters—often perpetuate biases within communities. Although some biases (such as historical opinions or coverage of one topic in favor of another) are understandable and even needed in cultural institutions, other biases are inexcusable. Notoriously, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City displays a paltry amount of female-created visual art. Of 483 works on the fourth and fifth floors (20th-century art), fourth percent are by female artists. Attempts to change MoMA's anti-female curatorial practices—by the Guerrilla Girls, the Brainstormers (featured in *TAP*MAP*), and *New York* magazine art critic Jerry Saltz—have done little to affect the gender makeup in MoMA's collections.

YES *Non-profit statuses and public monies that support major arts institutions should be tied to regular documentation and discussion of how that institution perpetuates and addresses gender, racial, economic and other biases.*

NO

An analogous measure has been effective in Iceland and Norway, rated as the first and third best countries for workplace gender equality. These countries sought to close the gender gap by demanding that workplaces annually document gender equality efforts. Even if the state refuses to demand analysis of institutional bias, funders outraged at biases should tie their support to regular action steps to confront bias. Measures could include surveys that account for populations represented, public discussions about how institutional biases affect community reception of the arts, and strategic planning efforts to confront biases.

INCLUDE GREATER REGIONAL, ECONOMIC AND CONTENT DIVERSITY ON ARTS COUNCILS, WITHIN BROAD ARTS CONFERENCES AND IN LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL ARTS PLANNING INITIATIVES.

Perhaps we can blame Rocco Landesman's parochial statements about Peoria on the makeup national arts groups, which often fail to represent rural, suburban, grassroots and community-based arts groups. Consider the President's

Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH), a high-profile arts advisory group. Although First Lady Michelle Obama (who in her first year has curated a thoughtful listening tour representative of hip-hop, theater, classical, country, contemporary visual and other arts communities) is the Honorary Chair; and Mary Schmidt Campbell (Dean of Tisch School of the Arts at NYU) is the Vice-Chairman; high-profile celebrities like actress Sarah Jessica Parker, actor Edward Norton, Vogue editor Anna Wintour, and cellist YoYo Ma are routine among the committee's Private Members. To be blunt, this arts committee is high-brow, not well-rounded, and doesn't go far enough to best represent this nation's robust, diverse arts communities. Similarly, the NEA's Cultural Workforce Forum—broadcast via web video in November 2009—included “academics, foundation professionals, and service organization representatives,” but failed to represent grassroots artists and arts venue owners.

YES *Arts councils must increase their representation of all-ages venues, rural and suburban arts groups, community and grassroots arts groups, small for-profit arts organizations, arts forms such as hip-hop, punk and street graf, and other traditionally excluded arts communities.*

NO

These arts communities comprise crucial arts constituents that reach into pedestrian communities most served by the arts. Failure to represent them only furthers the problems they face—such as inadequate funding, building closures and segregation from high-profile arts communities—and erodes meaningful arts communities and practices.

ADDRESS AND ALLEVIATE UNNECESSARY BIASES AND REGULATIONS AGAINST COMMUNITY MINDED FOR-PROFIT ARTS SPACES AND ALL-AGES ARTS VENUES.

Recently, former NEA Chair Billy Ivey spoke about the need to “reframe and refocus the realm of cultural policy from its traditional emphasis (almost exclusively) on the public and nonprofit arts.” For-profit arts spaces like music venues (often dumped into the “nightlife” category), and uncategorized all-ages venues are often excluded from community arts planning efforts. This is a shame because it is for-profit music venues, art galleries and film houses which often provide original, local, community-engendering arts for very low

cost, especially when compared to high-cost performance presented by some non-profits. What's more, all-ages venues provide a safe, creative space for those under 21 to consume original arts. For for-profits arts venues and all-ages venues to survive, however, they must wade through a web of nightlife, alcohol, zoning, land use and other regulations.

YES *Policy makers must study, and seek to alleviate the unnecessary regulations, which burden accessible for-profit and all-ages arts venues.*

NO

Local arts planning efforts must include representatives from accessible for-profit arts venues, from all-ages venues, and from other traditionally excluded arts groups to better understand which politics help and harm these venues.

ASSESS ARTISTIC IMPACT WHEN PROPOSING AND IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC POLICY.

This is a follow-up to the last policy prescription, a check on public policy that doesn't intend to harm arts practices. Often otherwise benign policies around zoning, land use, or nightlife ordinances can be harmful to arts communities, artists and arts spaces. Examples include New York City's Cabaret Law, adopted during the 1920s to prevent racial intermingling in Harlem dance clubs. Still on the books, this law harms for-profit arts venues seeking to stage dance performance. As reported in *Dialogue*, in Minneapolis, MN a change in land use law made public funding available for a new arts space. "Non-arts" policies such as land use and zoning regulations greatly impact arts constituents.

YES *Arts stakeholders should rate and publicize the Artistic Impact Assessment (AIA) of existing and proposed public policies.*

NO

Similar to Environment Impact Assessments, Artistic Impact Assessments will better inform artists and policymakers on how otherwise "non-arts" laws impact arts communities. AIAs will be a first step in improving the implementation of existing and new public policy, such that new regulations don't harm artists and arts spaces.

INCLUDE ARTS EDUCATION IN NATIONAL CREDIT REQUIREMENTS.

We're stealing this idea from Betty Lark Ross—the high school art teacher from Chicago who wrote this issue's "Letter to the Policymaker." Although the arts are a core subject under No Child Left Behind, the national public education focus on testing has diminished student exposure to arts.

YES *National education administrators should make two years of high school arts education a requirement for college admissions, and reward Race to the Top (federal state-based competition for education reform) candidates who include practical ways to sustain and increase meaningful arts education in schools.*

NO

INCORPORATE FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR ANTI-BIAS ARTS IN ANTI-BIAS LEGISLATION.

Ensemble Theatre of Chattanooga's production of *Woman Called Truth*, Joe Goode's production of *Dead Boys*, Art Hazelwood's exhibition *Hobos to Street People*—the arts are a highly effective place to confront and alleviate bias. These examples (further documented in this issue's TAP*MAP section) confront racial prejudice, homophobia and discrimination against the homeless. These examples are also just a tiny share of the copious set of music, television, theater, film, visual art and other arts media that have alleviated bias.

YES *Arts advocates should push for anti-bias legislation that includes support for the production of anti-bias arts.*

NO

The creation of anti-bias plays, music, film and other arts can act as one needed tool to increase understanding and reduce hate-based crime. **TAP**



EXHIBITION

Melanie Cervantes

Rhoda Draws

Bridgette Raitz

RVLTN

The Welcome to the NeighborHOOD Project

MELANIE CERVANTES

Melanie Cervantes is a Bay Area Xicana artist and cultural worker who translates—into images—the hopes and dreams of justice movements worldwide. Her work includes black and white illustrations, paintings, installations and paper stencils, but she is best known for her prolific production of political screen prints and posters. She contributes to social change through graphic agitation inspiring viewers to take action. Employing vibrant colors and hand drawn illustrations, her work moves those viewed as marginal to the center and features empowered youth, sage elders, fierce women, queer and indigenous peoples.

Trained in color theory by her mother when making fabric selections at Los Angeles swap meets for her school clothes, Melanie's other technical skills developed from watching her dad repurpose neighborhood junk into her childhood treasures. She grew this knowledge by studying library books, designing and constructing her own clothes and forging friendships with other creative people. Largely influenced by other politically engaged artists of color her most revered mentor is her partner and fellow printmaker Jesus Barraza. She is a graduate of University of California at Berkeley, where she received her B.A. in Ethnic Studies in 2004. Melanie fuses what she learned from this interdisciplinary study of racialized peoples, her art skills and her strong decolonizing politics in order to become a powerhouse "artist of the people."

Indigenous Women Defending Land and Life

As individuals, as organizations, as communities—we indigenous women continually prove our strength in the face of threat and adversity. Our responses show that we are not passive victims of oppression but fierce actors in indigenous peoples struggle for survival. We have formed organizations and networks and community-based projects to respond to basic needs of our people. We are at the forefront of numerous actions of our people to defend our land, our lives and our livelihood.





Building a Movement for Justice



Struggling to End Racism



Road to Racial Justice

The concept for this piece was to capture movement building and communities living their traditional cultures as a form self-affirmation and resistance to racism.

Mothers Milk's

This print features a Zapastisa woman who is breastfeeding her child, as an exercise of her and demonstration of her natural rights. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) declared war on the Mexico taking over the town of San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas in an attempt to start a revolution in Mexico. In the face of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Zapatistas took up arms against the Mexican government with the aim of taking President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and the PRI out of power to restore legitimacy and stability to Mexico. This poster was created to commemorate the struggle of the Zapatistas and their perseverance to create a world where many worlds fit.



DIA DE LOS MUERTOS



**RECORDANDO A LOS MUERTOS
DE LAS GUERRAS INJUSTAS**

Muertos de Las Guerras Injustas

Días de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a day of people gathering to remember friends, relatives and other important people who have died. Scholars trace the origins of the celebration to indigenous observances dating back thousands of years. I created this as an offering to all the people who have been killed in the war. It is important to me that people realize that not only are women and children being killed but that the soldiers of war are also dying.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE



**students uniting...
freedom fighting**

Power to the People

I designed this for the 7th Annual Ethnic Studies Conference. The goal of the conference is to introduce high school students to the strategies that have been created to help address racism in higher education such as the field Ethnic Studies. Currently, access by students of color to higher education is diminishing due to the attacks on public education funding. Over the last 7 years organizers have successfully provided this important opportunity to over 6,000 students.

RHODA DRAWS

American Values

This piece is by the artist formally known as Rhoda Grossman. It is a dark twist on Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. The pinched faced of the woman rests on a fluffy pink mountain of flesh, while her tense husband hovers behind her. His face is grimly lit from the church window, while hers begins to blend with the stars-and stripes. They are convinced that America was founded as a Christian nation and are determined to stick to their belief in spite of the facts.





BRIDGETTE RAITZ

Blind Justice

In watching the recent Sotomayor confirmation hearings, I was struck by the amazing display of political theatre. It appeared that an entire panel of partisan senators was questioning Judge Sotomayor about her potential for bias on the bench—despite a well-respected record compiled over years that showed otherwise. On the basis of one statement, they railed against an extremely competent woman.

That got me thinking—the senators appreciated diversity not because of the equality and richness it brings to any setting, be it the judiciary, a meeting, a playground or a school—but because of the potential voters their posing might bring.

As for Judge Sotomayor, I showed her looking into the mirror—held up by the scales of justice as looking at another side of herself, and coming from a multi layered background (like the skirt)—one who can apply the law impartially and whose experience of being on the other side of bias may ultimately help her see it more clearly.



BROWN

is not a crime



★ **STOP 287g**

Racial Profiling

RVLTN

RVLTN is an architect, artist, and community organizer living in Washington, DC. He works with local and national labor, and with human rights and environmental organizations on a variety of online and on-street campaigns.

Brown is Not a Crime

Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act deputizes local law enforcement to perform as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. The Government Accountability Office and human rights groups have denounced the use of 287g because of a lack of officer supervision, abuse of its powers to deport individuals, and racial profiling of brown individuals. President Obama has tabled immigration reform, yet Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has expanded the controversial 287g program and ICE raids have continued in communities across the country. These communities bear the social cost of these programs: separated families, unstable environments for American children of immigrant parents, and a fear of calling local officers who may be needed by vulnerable individuals.

This is a poster I designed and wheat pasted on a building under construction in the heart of Washington, D.C. While the subject matter of the poster deals with bias (racial profiling), the fact that it is illegally pasted in a public place makes people consider the bias of law enforcement as it prioritizes the preservation of private property (even on a boarded up building) over protecting our ability to make a public grievance in the “town square.”

THE WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT

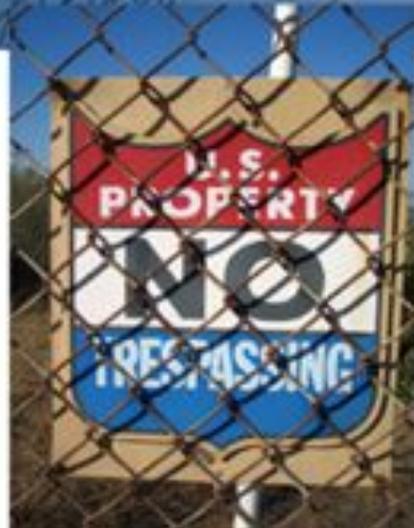
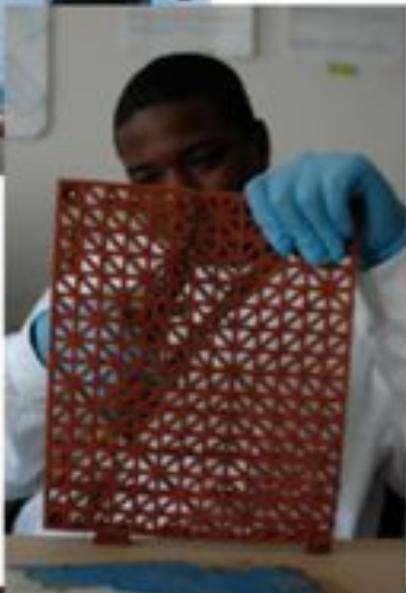
by Wendy Testu

The Welcome to the NeighborHOOD Project is a community arts project collaboration of seven artists (Wendy Testu, Robert Larson, Keba Armand Konte, Taylor Neaman-Goudey, Sam Slater, Monica Jensen and Eve S. Mosher) with 16 youth interns, aged 10-18 years, from the non-profit Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ). Before any work began, all of the artists and the youth went on walking “Tours” of the Bayview/Hunters Point area to learn more about the environmental history of the neighborhood. These walking investigations—along with in-depth discussions and journal writings—led the participants to create work about their personal experiences, gentrification and displacement, the opposing forces of man vs. nature, art as activism, and the positive people and influences in their community.

Various mediums were used, including: video, sculpture, photography, painting, graphic arts, screen-printing and assemblage. Each artist spent a minimum of 25 hours with the youth conceptualizing and creating art pieces. As paid interns, the youth were partners and the driving creative force for the entire project from conception and creation to installation and maintenance. Every meeting was filmed for a documentary about the project, its process and the redevelopment of the neighborhood. The title: *Welcome to the NeighborHOOD* speaks to the future of this rapidly changing area of San Francisco and references the newcomers who will be moving here, with 10,000 new housing units currently under construction over a redeveloped Shipyard/SuperFund site.

Historically there has been a bias against the Bayview/Hunters Point area of San Francisco, related to gang violence, low income populations, and as one of the most heavily industrialized areas of the city. But the Bayview also has the best weather, some of the best views, low rents, large artist colonies and strong community involvement.

Bayview/Hunters Point is a predominantly low-income community of color that has historically served as the dumping ground for San Francisco’s most toxic industries. More than fifty-percent of area households are considered low income or very low income. One third of the residential population is under 21 years of age and has the highest rate of Juvenile Probation Department referrals in the city. Twenty percent of children have







asthma, and the prevalence of chronic illness is four times the state average. Bayview/Hunters Point has the largest African American neighborhood in San Francisco—over 45% of the population—and is an important African American historical site. During the 1940's, thousands of families moved from the southern United States to work in the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard and many of these families still live in the neighborhood, but could be displaced by redevelopment. Several community action groups are working to keep the African American community in the neighborhood, and many of these organizations are focused on teaching youth to mobilize and inform their community such as the organization I collaborated with, Literacy For Environmental Justice (LEJ).

Founded in 1998, Literacy for Environmental Justice addresses the ecological and health concerns of Bayview/Hunters Point and the surrounding communities of southeast San Francisco. The organization's mission is to foster an understanding of the principles of environmental justice and urban sustainability in young people in order to promote the long-term health of their communities. They define environmental justice as the right of all people to have equal access to their basic needs. This includes safe energy, healthy food, clean air and water, open space, non-toxic communities, and equitable educational and employment opportunities.

The varied artistic forms of *The Welcome To The NeighborHOOD Project* highlight the diversity and intensely personal quality of these topics, allowing youth interns a range of ways to consider their experiences and communicate them to the Bayview/Hunters Point communities and beyond. This project represents the first time LEJ has sponsored an innovative and in-depth collaborative arts program for the youth to explore the environmental issues facing their community, and to work with the artists to translate their concerns into powerful new forms of expression.

3rd Street

Filming down 3rd Street in Bayview/Hunters Point in San Francisco, CA.

Insert Here (Full B-ball Court view with found fencing)

The youth explored art as activism, creating an "Insert Here Project" based on capitalizing on community awareness of place and environment. The youth chose a park next to the Superfund site to create signs that reflected what they would like to see changed. The signs were posted in the park and photographed in the park environment to create a 360 degree photo collage. Statistics about the surrounding area were included along with the youth's personal thoughts, collages and drawings.

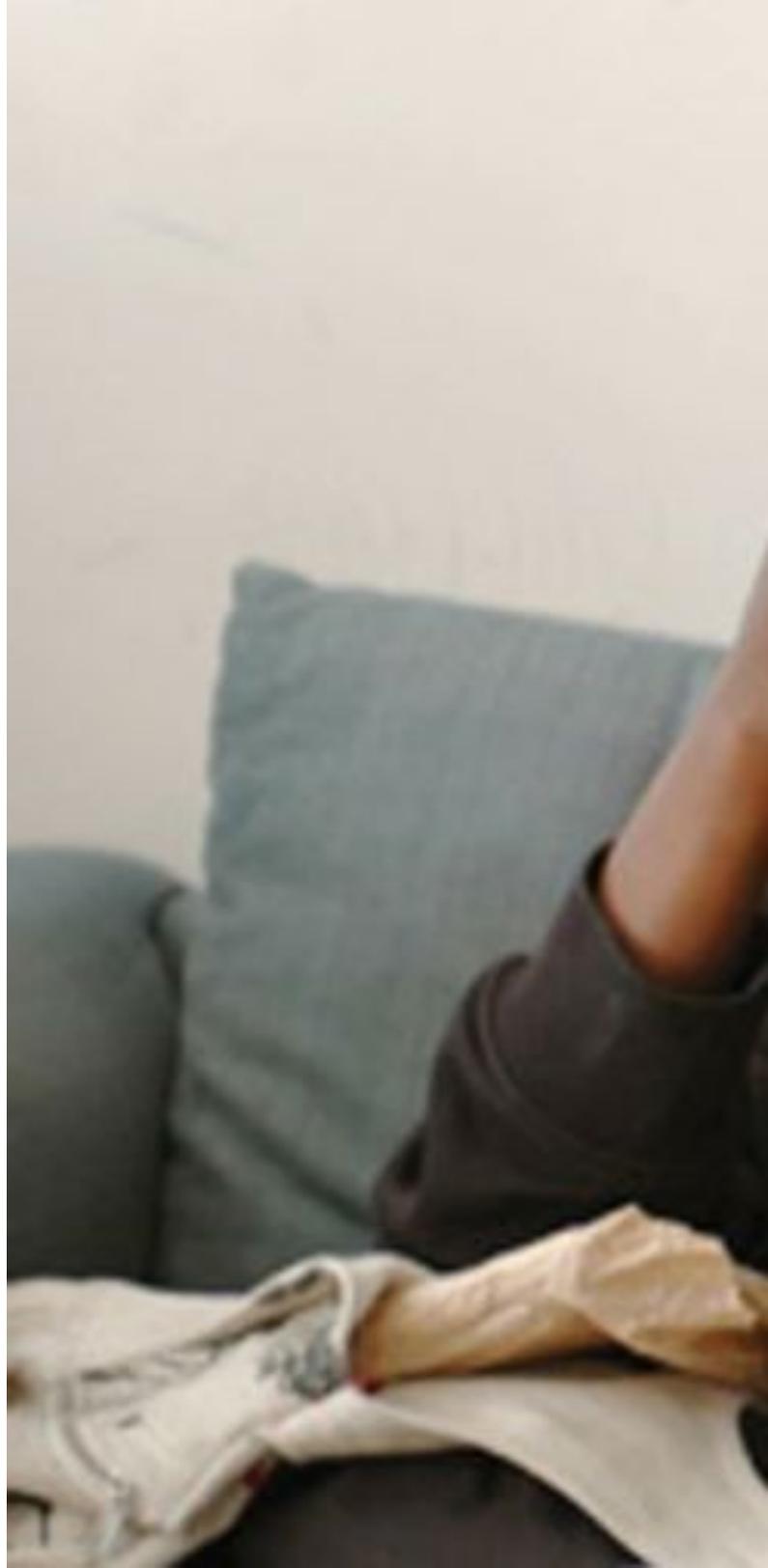
The youth and artists constructed a Fort in The Sargent Johnson Gallery. Visually it had a Puryear meets Rauchenberg appearance. The Fort was comprised of pods and shelters using scavenged materials and the actual art to create these structures. The Fort referenced the history of Hunters Point as a former military site, and how children everywhere build forts as a collaborative effort and a vision to create a safe haven. The use of reclaimed materials from Bayview/Hunters Point in the art and creation of the Fort structure referenced the environmental and social history that is naturally embedded in the materials.

Welcome To The NeighborHOOD began as a research project in 2005 about the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. The Shipyard is a Superfund site (Superfund sites are designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as the worst toxic waste sites in the country). I researched the environmental history of Bayview/Hunters Point for over a year, attended community gatherings, met with neighborhood activists, a doctor from the community and youth interns, and staff from Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ). After getting to know LEJ, I was inspired to create *The Welcome To The NeighborHOOD Project*. I then invited artists who are creating strong and important work around social and environmental issues. The collaborative meetings began in May 2008 after receiving a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission. Two more grants from the LEF Foundation and the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation enabled us to create the Fort installation in the Sargent Johnson Gallery. Another Grant from the San Francisco Foundations-Koshland Program will allow us to install and maintain the work at the EcoCenter in Herons Head Park in San Francisco.

The EcoCenter is currently under construction with an anticipated completion date of spring 2010. It is a landmark

The Revolution Will Be Texted (a TV & cell phone wall)

This was a work in progress exhibition where visitors texted and called in messages to phones installed on a wall of broken TVs, while other visitors answered the phone and read the texts. The interactions were broadcasted via speakers in the gallery space, and ran on solar cells. This piece talks to this generation of texters, the technological divide, and the consumer society. See more about this collection of work by the youth and artist Robert Larsen, on the following two pages.









environmental education community center and San Francisco's first 100% "off-grid" building, with all power and wastewater functions contained on site. Nearly every feature of this 1,500-square-foot facility is innovative and will be used to educate the public about renewable energy, pollution, greenhouse gas reduction, wastewater treatment, "green" building materials, and the green economy. As a facility intended to educate, inspire and mobilize current and future generations, it will be a perfect showcase for the youth's artwork after the gallery installation.

What emerged after working with the youth for over a year is, even though they deal with issues of personal safety on a daily basis and they wish there were less shootings and illnesses, they still manage to have positive attitudes and realize that their education is the key. The youth love their neighborhood and their community. Many of them attend the Muhammad University of Islam, which is a kindergarten through 12th grade private school in the neighborhood. The school expects a lot from their students and have them in school from 8:00-4:30. These kids are self-motivated and some of the most dedicated youth I've seen. All of the youth are challenging the biased ideas of the neighborhood and have been the driving creative force behind *The Welcome to the NeighborHOOD Project*. Through the exhibits at the gallery and the EcoCenter, the youth and artists hope to bring these issues to a greater audience and encourage community involvement.

Neighborhood Stories a Work In Progress a Brainstorm, Evidence & Investigation

Rob and the youth began with an exploratory walk to scavenge and observe, to get physically involved with neighborhood materials. Illegal dumping piles are plentiful in the Bayview and there was no lack of materials. Stories about the neighborhood unraveled as they found common materials such as: inmate wristbands, stuffed animals from a sidewalk memorial site and a SF Police Department Frisbee. The youth created a modular mixed-media wall installation and other mixed media sculptures using their journal entries and found objects from their investigations.

One of the youth's journal entry's:

*All right, I did experiences of
What I wanted to convey with
My art,
But I did like
Pro's and con's*

*Like a con would be, like
I got robbed
Like they lost family and friends
And stuff*

Got jumped

*But I would like to convey that Bayview Hunters Point
And many other communities in San Francisco
Are not just bad
And that they can be good places.*

*The streets are the way they are
Because some people are crazy in pain or evil
But not all of them are that way
There are allot of good people
The bad ones aren't always bad
They just need guidance,*

*So our communities are not bad
This is what I want to convey with my art.*

*Royale Eubanks
Age 16*

A Stroll Down Gentrification Lane

When Keba and the youth first met, they began by engaging in conversations about the various topics that concern them and their own personal experiences. A long list of themes was created, and by a process of elimination they chose the theme of gentrification. A photographic tour of the neighborhood produced images of symbols and objects that represented their theme. Materials were gathered in the neighborhood to use for their assemblage and to test out the multiple new techniques they explored, such as 'project and effect,' photo transfer and 'scrubbing.' The end result is a number of modular pieces incorporated into the Fort installation.



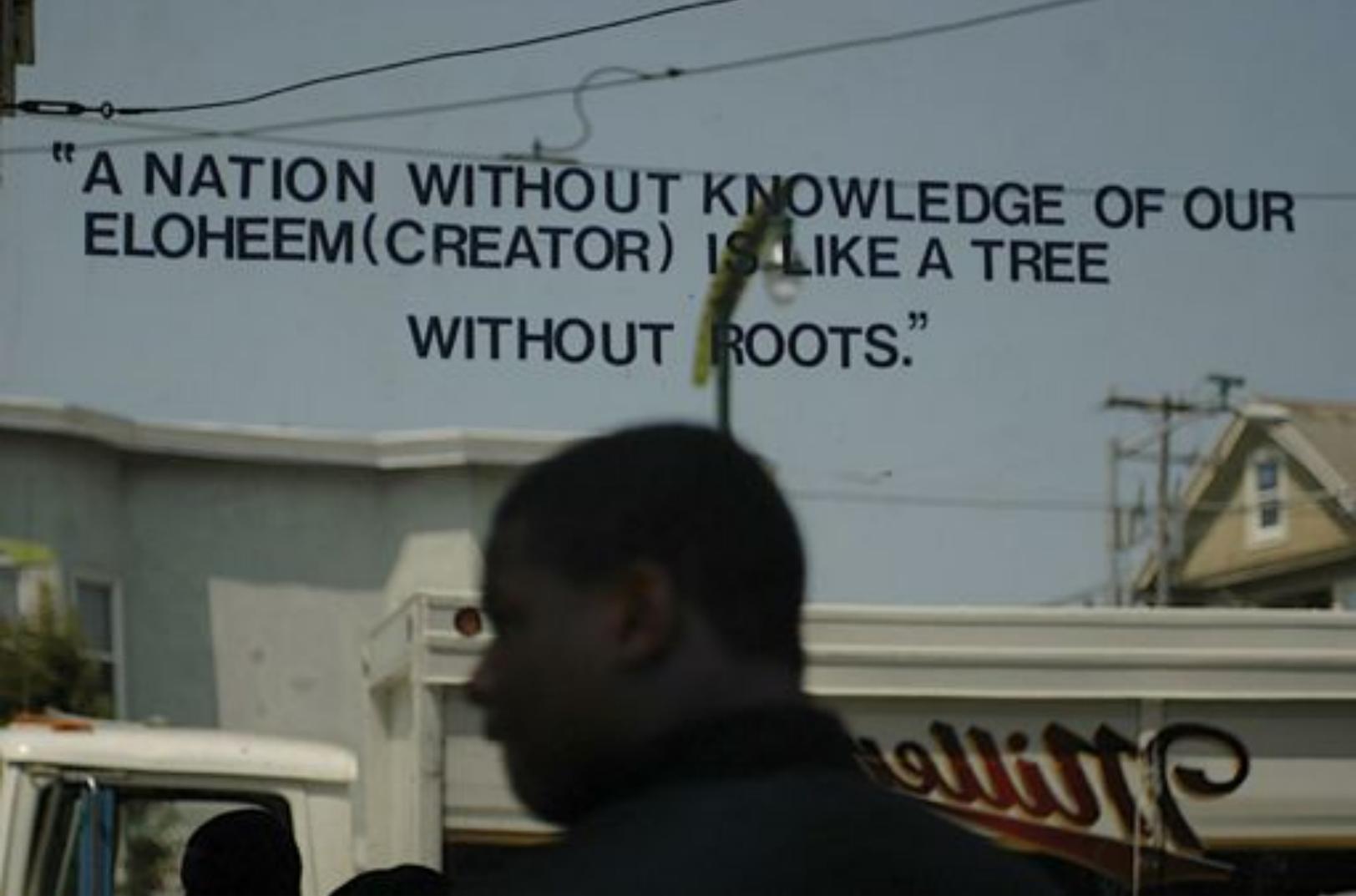




Tented Shelter

The youth explored topics such as how creativity can be used to look critically at man's effects on the environment, and how found objects and images can show the opposing forces of man vs. nature. The group started with a tour to take photos of Heron's Head Park (where the EcoCenter is being built next to the former PG&E plant). They also looked at slides and discussed questions including: What are some signifiers of industry and nature? What is our story? What do we want our audience to know? The youth developed concepts for their images and learned how to manipulate them in Photoshop in order to create printable screens. Garments were scavenged from the

streets, washed, and prepared for printing. They printed their first round of screens at Native Graphix Print House, a social enterprise of H.O.M.E.Y (Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth, a community-based anti-violence organization). Then they went to Oakland, CA to Taylor's print studio where they finished printing garments for the 'Tented Shelter' and pieces for the 'Family Ties' ladder. The garments were then sewn together to create the Tent and tied together to create the ladder. The graphics the youth created reflect and explore local issues. They presented during a 'live' screen-printing of these graphics at the opening event for patrons to purchase.



Welcome to the NeighborHOOD

The youth created a short film about Bayview/Hunters Point. This film played inside *The Fort Pod* structure in the gallery and was the first thing seen by visitors to the gallery. Visitors were introduced to the neighborhood through this film before moving through the rest of the installation. The youth chose to film down 3rd Street, at the Bayview Farmers Market, in Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, around the housing projects, and at the Superfund site. The music was created by youth in the program and local musicians such as Dan “The Automator” Nakamura.

Wendy is also creating a documentary film about the entire project: she filmed every meeting with the artists and the youth, interviewed the youth and community

members, and filmed the teardown of the Hunters Point PG&E power plant alongside the construction of the EcoCenter. She also intends to continue to document the building of housing on top of the Naval Shipyard.

To find out more about THE WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT, their forthcoming exhibitions and book releases, please visit www.welcometotheneighborhood.us. See REFERENCES (page 102) for artist information and photo credits.



POETRY

by Amelia Edelman

Amelia Edelman studied writing and literature at Vassar College, New York University, and St. Andrews University in Scotland. She has been published in *Helicon Magazine*, *Inlook Magazine*, the *St. Andrews Arts Review* and the *Connecticut Young Writer's Magazine*. She is Art and Fiction Reviewer for *Sotto Voce Magazine*. The highlight of her life was eating a pumpkin in Poughkeepsie with fabulous author Louise Erdrich.

THE ASSISTANT PROFESSORS FROM SOUTHERN MASSACHUSETTS

These are the Assistant Professors
From Southern Massachusetts
Who crawled out from under literary influence like maudlin mud.

They blink beneath Emily Dickinson's skirts and wrestle free
From the tentative grasps of Lowell and Plath
As they conceive brimming buckets of paper pulp reasoning.

Sucking their feet up and out
Muddy and befuddled
One at a time, buckling belts over damp tartan, tucked-in

And buckling beards to clean-tinged faces
They waver and wane, then stand sturdy
New-born and strange
They say: Here we are, now where is everyone?

Their heels to the hills and their toes towards the world.

EPISTLE TO BOSS

Dear Boss,
Your tweed is tragic.
Your hairpins
the tiny tin terrors
from your lonesome nighttime
leftover and weeping well into the daylight.

You stack boxes around you, a fortress
A grown-up kid captain piling pillows
With nipples upon which to trot your toy
soldiers. Your vision is so poor that it begs.

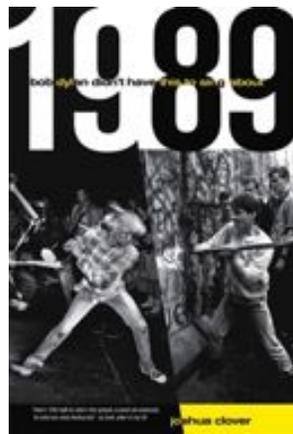
TO THE MAN ON 27TH STREET

Am I angry with you?
Or with them?
Or with the unimaginable god
Who once plucked you from some wet womb
and set you on the street
like gone-off meat?
I couldn't eat the day I saw you squat
prune-putrid and swollen
and laughing vinegar in the face
of a child like a lamb like a lily
until her eyes ran at the seams, tears
tumbling down the paper
of her cheek. The meek
may inherit the earth, but who
inherits the sidewalk?
The creature-crouched neighbor
of the street, two lawns cut
by the curb's picket fence?
And you: do you hang up your laundry,
your collection of confectionary
spider-web spun plastic,
sprawled across trash cans
as ornamentation?
Do you paint your face at demolition dawn
and fry up some soot for your breakfast?
Do you reach a dun hand
from your rotten porch,
traverse the fence-curb with delicate ease,
stretch a pleading beak to the street,
propositioning the kid cabs
and their aproned mother trucks, pleading
with hopes that they'll fill
your styrofoam cup
with sugar?

BOOK/TALK:
1989: BOB DYLAN
DIDN'T HAVE THIS
TO SING ABOUT

WRITTEN BY JOSHUA CLOVER (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2009)

An Interview with Joshua Clover by Jasmine Mahmoud



JOSHUA CLOVER—UC Davis professor, poet, cultural critic, contributor the Village Voice and author—talks about Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, and commercial music from two decades past, during “the end of history” era.

TAP: *In 1989, you write, “This is not a history book. How could it be, when history famously ended in the year in which the book is largely set.” But perhaps 1989 is not a history book for an additional reason: notation about the role of music in politics and the role of politics in music is largely missing from historical records. In researching 1989, how complete did you find history’s record of music, and how does your book buttress the role of popular music in cultural history?*

CLOVER: Because my musical subject is for the most part popular music, a term which doesn’t refer to a sound but to actual cultural superpresence, the stuff I went looking for was quite easy to find. Indeed, its obviousness and ubiquity is central to its character (which is not to say I didn’t discover interesting things in researching the book; the fate of “Listen To Your Heart” as a political anthem was a surprise). But that ubiquity produces its own problem, which is that the material takes on the anti-aura of the anodyne, the thoughtless, the intellectually hollow. Whereas the book argues that it was big stupid pop music that made the clearest and in some ways the most suggestive case about how it felt to be watching those political, historical events—watching the global situation get re-jiggered.

TAP: *I found your text not only educational, but also beautiful. Paragraphs like the following are evocative and lyrical.*

Clocks will still run in circles, but nothing can happen—this is the sense that one returns to over and over after 1989, phrased a thousand different ways. This is the ambiguous exultation of America’s geopolitical belle époque, the seeming restoration of its glory as global hegemon, a glory greatly tarnished over the previous quarter-century. The period from 1988-1991 is, for both pop music and the United States, the emergence of this new formation. It is the antechamber of the unipolar world, of the Washington Consensus and the last Pax Americana which contains within it the spectacle of the nineties economic boom.

What role did your own art form—writing—play in the transmission of content about popular art and culture from 20 years ago?

CLOVER: I was trying to develop an archaeology of a feeling, of a set of feelings, that even to this day aren’t entirely fixed or decided.

Music is very good for that exact thing, of course—and pop songs are particularly good at crystallizing and caching affects that might otherwise be entirely inchoate. But text has its own way of opening up a space for the reader, of making an experience that is both distant and diffuse at least somewhat present.

TAP: *Why did you choose the title reference to Bob Dylan? What are your thoughts about his role in cultural and political landscapes in 1989, 1969 and today, 2009?*

CLOVER: The book has almost nothing to do with Bob Dylan (though everyone wants it to, perhaps unconsciously—so great is the desire for Dylan to be about everything, and everything to be about Dylan). The phrase [Bob Dylan didn’t have this to sing about] is a crucial line from the greatest song explicitly about the Fall of the Wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc: “Right Here, Right Now,” by Jesus Jones. In the song it’s a complicated reference, but in the main it seems to raise a powerful, somewhat perverse question: pop music has a tradition of making political claims and demands that might be seen, cynically, as simply a formal gesture—one of the possible performances of the pop star, internal to the genre and the business, like hiring a choir or dating a model. But what does pop do when the events and the politics really and staggeringly overwhelm it? Is history bigger than pop? Were Dylan and Tracy Chapman and Prince, who the song also singles out, just posers? Anyone can shoot the political breeze; how will pop register the whirlwind? That’s the song’s question, and it’s a good one, though its answer is ambiguously empty. But one of the things the book argues is that pop is a useful tool for registering history, especially this particular era and instant, not because of something about pop, but about history itself—how history wanted, as desperately as any three minute song, to condense itself into a singularity, an image, a pure and irrevocable sign with nothing behind it. And so it was that the pop that most resembled that formula—that is, Jesus Jones or Roxette—was much better situated to capture “the magic of the moment” (per Scorpions’ “Wind of Change”) than was the nuanced and thoughtful manner of a Dylan, a Chapman, even Prince.

TAP: *You have received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and other public agencies. What role has arts policy and funding played in your work? What, if any, findings did you have about the role of local, state, national and international (arts) policy in the content of pop music around 1989?*

CLOVER: Well, again, because I’m interested in profoundly commercial music—commercial for better and worse—this is less relevant. Here in the west, art grants generally go to a certain

swath of upper-middlebrow stuff without much profit potential but with an agreed-upon redeeming social value. I suppose that's swell. Lord knows poetry—the category for which I got an NEA—doesn't buy many groceries.

Of course the situation is quite different in other places. Arts funding in even nominally communist nations such as China and the Soviet Union works quite differently, and I fear I'm no expert on this—it's certainly fascinating to remember that while there might be great stylistic differences in Chinese cinema between Zhang Yimou blockbusters and Jia Zhangke social realism, there's no such thing as “independent cinema” in the sense we would recognize.

But to return to your question, in part it is exactly the commercial quality of the music that I'm interested in—the commodity nature of the pop song. The epochal struggle named the Cold War was in many ways over the commodity form, over markets and what counted as a real choice or real freedom. This is part of the force of thinking about pop songs in this context—you are thinking about the power and pleasure (and vapidness and homogeneity) of the western, capitalist world.

TAP: *This issue of THE ARTS POLITIC is focused on Bias. What motivated you to write 1989? What were some of your biases when approaching the subject and time period of this book?*

CLOVER: I probably suffer from counter-bias. Which is to say that, beyond the occasional cultural studies program, most folks assume that pop music is a source of pleasure and revenue (which of course it is) but not a well-tuned instrument for thinking about the human experience of historical change, about politics and antagonism. Regarding that, I believe the opposite, and this counterbias is surely one of the book's principles.

But I guess I am also interested in that version of “bias” that appears in the form of ideology—in what it considered unthinkable, excluded from discussion. Every time we say that what has happened to Berlin is something like “freedom” rather than something like “privatization”—without debating whether this is right or wrong—we are engaging in a profound, an absolute bias, just to accept those as the terms of the conversation. Every time we say “democracy” when we might equally mean “capitalism,” the same.

TAP: *What role did music distribution channels play in the political tenor of society and the content of pop music in 1989?*

CLOVER: The music I'm interested in doesn't really require distribution channels except for the basic circulation structure of capitalism itself: it's the music you could buy at the mall, and everywhere else. The question of specific distribution is really, in

the west, one of subcultures. And, with apologies to Dick Hebdige, subcultures are exactly what I'm not interested in. I'm after the cultural experiences that are immanent, pseudo-universal, that “batter down all Chinese walls.” That's Marx on the commodity, and it's the absolute code of pop itself—and, to restate the book's premise, also the logic of everything that happens in 1989.

This is to say that, although the book is about the global situation and particularly about where the Western and the Eastern blocs rubbed up against each other, it basically concerns anglophone pop, albeit distributed and consumed around the world—what I call “anglobal.” The story would be different elsewhere. It seems clear that there were certain things you simply couldn't say, officially, in Soviet pop, in Chinese pop—and so songs either had to conform to those limits, or circulate clandestinely. But if you review the lyrics of Billboard's Hot 100, it becomes obvious that there is a different kind of coercion in place, perhaps just as strict. There are very few things you can say, and messages have to circulate underneath the perfect surface sheen as well as along its carapace. The practice of “reading” pop music in both situations is the work to unfold what can't be said explicitly, what must be suppressed—what we might call, following Fredric Jameson, “the political unconscious” of pop.

TAP: *With last week's twentieth anniversary of the falling of the Berlin Wall, many are re-defining the legacy of 1989. New York Times writer, Larry Rother wrote, “pop music was a profoundly subversive force, inspiration and vital tool of protest for challenging and undermining a totalitarian state stricter than any parent.” How do these definitions differ and resonate with what you detail of 1989 pop culture?*

CLOVER: That might be true, in the Eastern bloc. Because I write about the anglophone west, the situation is quite different (though it would be interesting to debate whether the US is itself “a totalitarian state stricter than any parent.” It certainly sends millions to bed every night without dinner). At the same time, I do think that anglophone pop is subversive—in the sense that it subverts itself, striving absolutely for a kind of blank universality but still managing to capture quite subtle and quite particular ideas, affects, sensibilities. The question of whether it can act on the political and economic sphere rather than simply reaffirming the situation or at best registering what happens there is of course one of the great thorny issues of culture. I certainly think pop is capable of caching away ideas and feelings that have been temporarily disallowed.

TAP: *Of the rave scene, you write “But apolitics is a politics—a fact that is always with us.” This statement*

seems very true today when current chart toppers like Taylor Swift and Miley Cyrus produce content devoid of political consciousness, and further when there seems to be a huge split between apolitical pop music, and political music that brews beneath the surface. Do you agree? How does 1989 help us understand the current placement of the (a)political pop musician, and the often political “underground” musician?

CLOVER: Here we may have a real disagreement. I will start by saying that I am a big fan of Miley Cyrus’s current single, and of Taylor Swift in general; I actually wrote about her on my blog three years ago, and it was obvious to me then she would be a huge star. I must say I am largely indifferent to the question of “political consciousness”; for my own thinking, I am interested in the ways that politics inheres to pop exactly in ways other than evident consciousness: the sounds, the way it circulates through social space, the uses that people make of it. One would say that Roxette’s “Listen To Your Heart” is devoid of political consciousness, and the author would probably say so too. But it was still Vaclav Havel’s campaign song, and it was still the #1 song in the west on the day the Wall fell, meaning it was a choice people wanted to make in that situation.

When I say “apolitics” is a politics, I am not at all chiding pop. I mean that when Jesus Jones says, basically, I am not going to hold forth on the political significance of this moment, in fact I am going to refuse to do so, I am just going to sit here and experience the intensity of the instant—well, that’s a political decision.

I would add, as a last caveat, that Miley’s current single (“Party in the USA”) seems eminently political, exactly in its attunement to markets. It’s a country-based track that announces that her favorite song is by Jay-Z, and moreover that takes its basic architecture from the rapper Nelly’s “Ride wit’ Me.” It may be that the only point is to expand her demographic. It may be that you take compositional ideas where you find them. But there’s no way it’s not political.

TAP: *Many of descriptions of 1989 seem applicable to 2009. You write:*

The end of history: a spatial version of the temporal account, a map painted in a single color to match the triumphal, monotonous unfolding of empty time.

At the same time the boundlessness that you define 1989 by, has in many ways, been replaced by severe cultural limits of 2009, and this era. In writing your book, how much thought did you give to the current state of pop culture and pop music? What, if any, residues of 1989 remain in pop culture today?

CLOVER: That’s a very complicated question. There’s no doubt that the era inaugurated by the end of the Cold War, a real belle époque in terms of the pop single and a somewhat illusory belle époque geopolitically (characterized by the unipolar world of a supposed latter Pax Americana), ended decisively by 2001. The economic crisis of 2007 only clarified the extremity of the collapse. It is not yet clear to me what pop will make of this situation, or if music will be where the action is. I have this sneaking suspicion about video games. The historians of the post-millennial collapse of US hegemony will spend a lot of time looking at Grand Theft Auto.

TAP: *Who are your favorite musicians from the 1989 era? Why?*

CLOVER: I honestly love almost every artist mentioned in the book. The singles by Jesus Jones and Scorpions and several by Roxette and George Michael give me shivers to this day; at the same time, Public Enemy and NWA are both incomparable. Nirvana remains the last rock band that could combine genius with market dominance. I actually sort of hated Nine Inch Nails then; I love them now.

The truth of it is this: at that time I was working in a nightclub, as a DJ. And so the music I feel closest to is the dance music, especially the more pop-styled: the KLF, Digital Underground, Dee-Lite, Black Box. But if there were two works that I could single out just now, even though they weren’t central to the book, I would choose Madonna’s *Like A Prayer*, the whole album, which was just astonishing, and a clear measure of how you could jump the category of “pop” to make something that couldn’t be contained in any simple understanding. Maybe even more so, Neneh Cherry’s *Raw Like Sushi*. Amazing song after song, you could dance to it, sing it, rap along, it was incredible knowing about those things that were such huge issues for the genre, especially gender and race. It seemed for a summer to have solved every problem in hip-hop, to have taken the unparalleled cultural momentum of the genre at that moment and blown it open, like anything could happen next, like every other kind of music would have to genuflect. Except it didn’t quite come off. Gangsta set in, and that was great, but it set the horizons for hip-hop, and—as I argue—turned inward, rather than extending the cultural possibilities. And Neneh married her producer, who made a lot of money writing and producing for British pop groups like Spice Girls. And Neneh, freed from any need to make a living, returned to her roots as a sort of boho avant-gardist. Totally her right to do so. But that seems like a real lost moment to me. **TAP**

- 9-11
Photography courtesy of Co-Op Theatre East and Thanassi Karageorgiou.
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A citation by Bertolt Brecht, by Zagreb-based the curatorial collective *WHW/What How and For Whom?* at the entrance to the 11th Istanbul Biennial *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* in 2009.
- 14
An installation shot of *an installation Antrepo No. 3* by Australian artist, Zanny Begg.
- Unemployed Employees—I found you a new job!* (2006–2009). Aydan Murtezaoğlu and Bülent Şangar (installation view and performance). Photos courtesy of the artists.
- 15
Photography courtesy Manon Slome.
- 17
Photography courtesy Manon Slome.
- 18
144 Taylor—Chris Treggiari & Billy Mitchell, photo by Jessica Watson.
- Ms. Teriosa: 3135 24th Street—Kelly Ordng & Jetro Martinez*. Photography courtesy Cesar Rubio.
- 28-30
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2 www.britishcouncil.org/new/Press-office/Press-releases/Obama-Restoring-US-standing-lies-in-restoring-cultural-relations
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14 Boris Buden, *What Is the Eipep? An Attempt at Interpretation* (cipcp.net/institute/reflectionzone/buden/en).
15 Gerald Raunig, *Temporary Overlaps* (cipcp.net/institute/reflectionzone/raunig/en).
16 Boris Buden, *What Is the Eipep? An Attempt at Interpretation* (cipcp.net/institute/reflectionzone/buden/en).
- 31
References for “The Arts is Where It’s At!”
1 Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 141
2 Camangian, 2008, p. 35
- 32
Art and City converge on 168th Street OR Building dialogue with graffiti. Photography courtesy RonAmber Deloney.
- 34-35
References for “Mistaking Inclusion for Exclusion”:
1 See Victoria J. Saunders, 2006. *Boomers, XTs and the Making of a Generational Shift in Arts Management*. *CultureWork* 10, (3).
Saunders, Victoria J., 2006. *Bridging the Gap in Arts and Culture Leadership: Taking the First Steps*. *CultureWork* 10, (4).
and, Saunders, Victoria J., 2007. *Listening to the Next Generation: Finding New Ways to Lead the Arts and Cultural Field*. [Cited April 16, 2008]. Available at: victoriajsaunders.com/Documents/Listening%20to%20the%20Next%20Generation.pdf
2 See Victoria J. Saunders, 2006. *Boomers, XTs and the Making of a Generational Shift in Arts Management*. *CultureWork* 10, (3).
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3 Issues relating to *20UNDER40*’s age cut-off were hotly debated on the New England Consortium of Artist-Educator Professional’s (NECAP) listserv, www.artisteducators.org, and on *20UNDER40*’s Facebook Group Page, facebook.com/group.php?gid=213154135054. During the week of October 19-23, 2009, American’s for the Arts will be bringing this discussion to a national audience through a week-long “webinar” event at www.artsusa.org.
- 4 At the same time, emerging arts professionals and supportive veteran field leaders came to the defense of *20UNDER40*.
5 Eric Booth, personal communication, July 14, 2009.
- 36
Photography courtesy Michael Premo.
- 46
Photography courtesy Kevin Postupack.
- 50
Untitled by Dalit artist Savi Savarkar.
- 52-53
Pune Untouchable by Dalit artist Savi Savarkar.
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Maria Dumlaio, Elaine Kaufmann, Danielle Mysliwicc and Anne Polashenski of *Brainstormers* (art collective dedicated to discussing gross gender inequalities in the visual art world). Images from a September 2008 performance, *Get Mad!*, in Chelsea done in collaboration with the Guerrilla Girls. Photography courtesy Selena Kimball.
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Photography courtesy Joe Goode.
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END NOTE

by Arlene Goldbard

I wish I could say it was a surprise that right-wing commentators and politicians fixed their sights last fall on artists and arts agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), demanding (and achieving) the resignation of NEA communications director Yosi Sergeant, for instance, on the putative grounds that encouraging artists to volunteer in public service constituted inappropriate politicization of public arts funding. Or when, a year ago, \$50 million in NEA funding captured a vastly disproportionate share of controversy over the \$787 billion stimulus bill, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. But it's predictable: when the ideologues of the right want to bash a liberal administration, they almost always pick up the same club, the National Endowment for the Arts, a minuscule federal agency with a budget amounting to a few cents per person. Why?

Whether through intuition or analysis, they understand that the way we craft our stories shapes our lives and collectively, our society. While (to my continuing frustration) Democrats and progressives tend to see artists as nice but unnecessary to real democracy, the right sees artists clearly, as in possession of powerful skills of expression and communication, almost always in the service of freedom, equity, diversity and inclusion. They understand that creativity and public purpose are a potent combination. They passionately want their story—that this country belongs to white Americans who think as they do, and that their ownership confers the right to exclude, discredit and scapegoat others by any means necessary—to predominate. Consequently, they are willing to do anything to disrupt the counter-narrative of art and public purpose. Racism and other forms of discrimination have clearly been one animating force behind right-wing scapegoating: most of their targets have been African American, or gay, or belonged to other vilified categories. But another is the invidious prejudice against artists as exemplars of freedom in action. In media blowhards' arsenal, artists have been a weapon of choice for far too long.

My worry is that they have also picked on artists and their supporters because, based on past experience, they are counting on us not to fight back quickly, or hard, or with much conviction—and in any case, to lay low until attacked. We are sadly used to seeing public arts officials surrender at the first

shot across their bow, sacrificing free expression in the hope of preserving their own positions. In the late 80s and early 90s, the NEA responded to smears by abandoning the programs the right had targeted. New NEA Chair Rocco Landesman has a reputation for outspokenness, but he seems to be following that tradition by treating the wild charges made by Fox News' Glenn Beck as worthy, and by dissociating himself from such controversy (while igniting other types of controversy with his own statements, such as, "I don't know if there's a theater in Peoria, but I would bet that it's not as good as Steppenwolf or the Goodman").

This past fall, we saw a handful of fringe commentators seize on any scrap of arts-related material in the hope of twisting, distorting and puffing it up into the next scapegoating campaign. There was an escalating absurdity to the charges, showing how desperate they were to inflame things, and how little actual fuel they could find. At this writing, the Tea Parties have caught their attention, so the arts have been returned to the arsenal until they are needed again.

There's also another reason the recent round of arts scapegoating has subsided: because we didn't descend into over-the-top alarmism or reactivity, which is what they wanted, and what would have kept the story going. There's half a victory in refusing to allow ourselves to be baited, refusing to strengthen our opponents' agenda by allowing it to control us.

The other half of victory remains to be fulfilled: rising not only to defend ourselves, but to persistently assert our truths, to keep up the drumbeat. We still have freedom of expression in this country, despite those who want to keep us from exercising it. The most important thing is to stand for what we know is true: that artists working for democratic public purpose are powerful, cultivating the empathy and imagination that sustain us in crisis and make real democracy possible. That artists' work helps to mend our social fabric, promotes freedom of expression and a vibrant, inclusive national dialogue, and nourishes the creativity has always been the wellspring of our energy and success.

Our challenge is to perpetually proclaim, protect and promote the public interest in culture, rather than waiting for a new attack. Otherwise, it's safe to predict that the next time the subject surfaces will be when Glenn Beck or someone like him decides it's time to pick up the club again.

Arlene Goldbard is a writer, speaker and consultant whose focus is the intersection of culture, politics and spirituality. She is also the convener of the cultural policy group that launched ART & THE PUBLIC PURPOSE: A NEW FRAMEWORK in Fall 2009. Her blog and other writings may be downloaded from her website, www.arlenegoldbard.com.

