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**GREEN LANTERN PRESS  
& THREE WALLS  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
THE HYDE PARK ART CENTER**

# THE ARTISTS RUN CHICAGO DIGEST

Edited by Caroline Picard and Shannon R. Stratton  
Assistant Editor Molly Sullivan  
Interviews Conducted by Dan Gunn

Cover Design by Young Joon Kwok  
Limited Edition Printed at No Coast Collective

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In association with (the exhibition) *Artists Run Chicago*  
**The Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, 5020 S Cornell Avenue Chicago, IL**

## **THE ARTISTS RUN CHICAGO DIGEST**

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### **Green Lantern Press**

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[www.thregreenlantern.org](http://www.thregreenlantern.org)

### **threewalls**

119 N Peoria #2D  
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[www.three-walls.org](http://www.three-walls.org)

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# THIS BOOK ISN'T EVERYTHING IT COULD BE

## An Ill-Advised Introduction

Shannon R. Stratton

*"Artist-run culture, like an iceberg, is 95% beneath the surface" – A. A. Bronson*

Very little in the art-world, at least on a small scale, is not run by artists; or at least run by bodies who have known the pleasure (or sorrow) of a creative practice and have moved that practice towards the production of culture collaboratively, either temporarily or sometimes, permanently. A great number of the gallerists, historians, critics, curators and administrators I have known are or were engaged in a studio practice. *Were* might be temporary anyway, or more indicative of a culture that puts demands on us to choose a singular identity over a plural one.

But I believe that the organizer, administrator, instigator roles are the roles artists should have, because it is in their best interest to be involved in the public side of their community. The fact is, as Heather Anderson points out in the third entry of *decentre: concerning artist run culture/à propos de centres d'artistes*, "an increasing number of people working in larger institutions have a background in artist-run centers [and that] means these more conservative structures are changing from the inside." Although that might not be strictly everyone's aim (to move from working in artist-run culture to the institution) or even everyone's concern (that these conservative institutions change, as opposed to simply building new sites of production), it is still promising that the lessons of the constantly changing, evolving, self-correcting and self-critical artist-run sphere, might (always have and continue to) infiltrate the established methodologies of art. Jens Hoffmann, in the same book, says in entry 44: *"the concept of 'artist-run' will not outlive its usefulness so long as it realizes the transgressive<sup>2</sup> potential that it holds within an increasingly professionalized and conformist art world. Here lies the real strength of artist-led initiatives, to propose meaningful and radical alternatives to the established art system"*<sup>3</sup>

With that in mind, this volume, *The Artists Run Chicago Digest*, consists of a number of essays and interviews about recent artist-run culture in Chicago. Although some of the respondents may not speak of radical alternatives, others may, and in fact, build their work specifically around those terms. But regardless, it is the transgressive potential that Hoffmann speaks of that shouldn't be

overlooked: how might these efforts and the art, ideas and positions they support, happening as they do in homes, warehouses, garages and stairwells, or online, in print and at large, challenge the assumption of what is normative culture and normative sites for the production of culture?<sup>4</sup>

**threewalls** was always an artist-run model in my mind, despite being organized around the goal of stability. It resembles the artist-run spaces I'd grown up with in Canada, meaning, there is a small staff, a group of volunteers and a committee of artists involved in the programming. As an undergraduate I had been nurtured in Calgary's artist-run community, with most of my mentors former founders of, or current board members/key holders at artist-run centers. The practices I was nurtured on were less artist-in-the-garret, and more, artist-in-the-public, so my 'art-work' bled into the sphere of the artist-run.<sup>5</sup>

I have taken a break from my studio, but that's where I began, before stumbling into **threewalls** with two grad school chums and a philosophy graduate.<sup>6</sup> Although we started with three 'artists' and one 'not artist,' we 'ran' on the contributions of both, with over 27 different people providing their intellectual and physical labor to this project as volunteers and another 35+ participating by committee or board. Both Executive Directors, Jonathan Rhodes (founding) and Elizabeth Chodos (current), were not-artists (or at least "studio artists," if to begin this debate, we start by splitting hairs – Elizabeth was a writer before completing graduate school), but both were instrumental in keeping things running, contributing to the philosophies and transgressive energies. They have been creatives in their roles. Will a ratio of 25:2, artists-to-non, mean **threewalls** is not an artist(s)-run organization?

This question of what artist-run is or means, in terms of participants, organization and philosophy became striking to **threewalls** when we were not included in the exhibition, *Artists Run Chicago*, on which this book expands. We went back and forth on whether or not we were satisfied with being edited from a roster of examples of artist(s)-run organizing in Chicago's most recent decade.

(Co)publishing this book seemed both a perfect and precarious place to question that definition, even if the curators (Allison Peters Quinn and Britton Bertran) never intended to hand anything down from on high, but instead made decisions based on their own intuitive and creative curatorial parameters.

The *Artists Run Chicago Digest* attempts to archive the words, sentiments and basic data of that generation (1999-2009) of artist(s)-run projects stemming from Peters Quinn and Bertran's aforementioned exhibition at **The Hyde Park Art Center**. The exhibition however, was only a starting point, as the *ARC Digest* builds independently on the decisions made by the curators and makes a number of additions by including articles, statements and interviews with projects not included in the original exhibition (these are interspersed throughout the contents). In this way, the *ARC Digest* is a companion to, appraisal of and extension for Peters Quinn and Bertran's original initiative. Some of these additions are openly critical of the original project, or at least, the 'definition' of 'artists-run' that might have been advertently or inadvertently presented,<sup>7</sup> emphasizing the importance of artist's opinions in regards to whom that definition applies, and how it is dispensed with.

**threewalls** and **Green Lantern Press** got involved in *Artists Run Chicago* when, while considering the content of *PHONEBOOK* Vol. 3,<sup>8</sup> we considered publishing a centerfold of images and text from Peters Quinn and Bertran's exhibition as a smart marriage between our ongoing attempt to archive current artist-run activity with Hyde Park's account of (recent) Chicago artist(s)-run production. *PHONEBOOK* and *Artists Run Chicago* felt like natural bedfellows; after all, we had a shared interest. When Caroline [Picard] and I collaboratively postponed *PHONEBOOK* Vol. 3 to negotiate the best format for that project, going forward, we opted to produce the *Digest* on its own – a natural extension of the collaborative interests **threewalls** and **Green Lantern** share.

But embarking on a project like the *Digest* only uncovers the enormity of a project like archiving, analyzing and discussing 'artist(s)-run' in Chicago. A sizeable task, even when focused on merely a decade out of several. Editing this publication now seems short-sighted, shoe-horned into the year as the various conversations, emails and brainstorming sessions I've had thus far, slowly reveal the iceberg lurking beneath: a vast body of thought that I wish the *Digest* could unpack to its fullest extent. It is, in the condition you have it here, only the very beginning of a dialog about artist-run culture in Chicago; an introduction in fact, since it starts the dialog with *introductions, interviews and summaries*.

What has become most apparent in these various exchanges is the slippery slope of defining "artist(s)-run." What does it mean?<sup>9</sup> And is it even possible that that meaning is (even remotely) shared and agreed upon by all its participants (not only those included or excluded from the show and digest in consideration, but by artist-run projects beyond our city)? A taxonomy of 'artist(s)-run' problematics emerges.

In a number of discussions about who should or could be included

in our extension of this project, the question kept arising as to whether so-and-so was an 'artist.' So: does artist(s)-run mean that all administrative participants were/are an artist at the time of starting the project, meaning, actually actively and aggressively practicing in the studio? Must they remain so throughout their tenure in or at an artist(s)-run project for it to remain thus? Should all members of the project, as I asked at the beginning of this introduction, be strictly studio practitioners in order for the project to qualify? This naturally raises the question: what is an art practice and what 'qualifications' are required?

But this seems the least important of issues – is the beating heart of artist(s)-run not the realization of the transgressive? Doesn't the intention of artist(s)-run guide the principle more than the details of the organizers' Curriculum Vitae? When the bulk of the spaces under consideration are *sites for exhibition*, are artist(s)-run projects strictly altruistic – that is, never to become ventures where the artwork is sold or the project leader(s) become proprietors? (Regardless of the hair-splitting over terms like not-for-profit, for-profit, or not-for-not-for-profit.) Are artist(s)-run projects always temporary and tenuous, with structure – like boards or operating budgets or business plans – implying some loss of sincerity or authenticity? Can a commercial venture also be a transgressive one?

If it's a matter of alternative sites for production, for the sake of *this* project, there are other alternative sites for production that, when artist(s)-run, are compelling inclusions because they illustrate the drive of artists to create their own platforms away from the institution. So: does artist(s)-run always require a 'space' – whether permanent or roaming? If media, and particularly the Internet, is a site, what about the blogs, zines, podcasts, radio shows or other formats artists might commandeer?<sup>10</sup>

Our additions are somewhat corrective, or at least, a splint of sorts. We have added, (or attempted to add – some organizers were unreachable by the deadline), projects active during the same ten-year period (1999-2009) that were absent from the exhibition in one of four formats: 2-page spreads, listings of new and defunct spaces and audio interviews.<sup>11</sup> Of course, in this attempt there was a second editorial process, not unlike the one enacted in the exhibition: which projects do we highlight further and draw attention to? What is the course corrective we're going to attempt, and in doing so, no doubt dig ourselves further into a debate that will hotly pursue this project until all 500 copies have been bought or burned?

*Artists Run Chicago* (the exhibition) was the first out of the gate, so it does take all the initial risk of proposing *something* about this activity insofar as it is particular to this city. The curators chose a 10 year time span, they 'curated' the participants, thus editing certain artist-run activity from the exhibition, and they chose an exhibition within an exhibition model; one which was compelling, dynamic and seductive on many levels, but also chaotic, a cacophony of perspectives, aesthetics and philosophies jostling for space in the gallery. I can't decide if as an outsider I would have been energized or enervated by the display, or in fact it would have,

could have, illuminated what artist(s)-run might mean. Maybe that's fine, maybe the exhibition itself is transgressive in its complete embrace of that cacophony.

In a sense, I'm introducing this book to you as only a piece of a puzzle, one that no doubt desires a follow-up, a challenge, as we collectively roll the definition of 'artists-run' around in our mouths and minds. I would like to hope that the *ARC Digest* has only just begun to re-introduce the topic of artist-run, and its recent history in Chicago, for more serious consideration. A more critical undertaking in written form, a more exhausting archive, a fatter book with glossy color photographs, an exhibition that considers artist-run organizing in the larger, national or international, visual arts community. So there could be *more*. More documentation of the art-work, projects and interventions; more response to the definition of 'artist(s)-run' with reflections on the future of such organizing by its initiators and participants. There could be more agitation, more analysis, more visual connections drawn between these spaces, projects and their frequently shared organizers and artists. More transgression in book form.<sup>12</sup> This is all hindsight of course, since the interviews, essays, records and images are due to the designer in one week's time.

But at this point it is clear: the definition of artist(s)-run is subjective, and a preference for what is important, historically, within a matrix of activity when space (whether square feet or pixels) is limited, is tellingly subjective as well. As **Temporary Services** communicated to me in an email: "After all, one reason for organizing things yourself is to avoid having your work treated in wishy-washy, half-assed, apolitical and uncritical ways by institutions that don't seem to understand why artists sometimes find it necessary to organize things without their input or guidance in the first place." To which, I have to agree. So on that note, I invite you to *organize things yourself*. Which no doubt includes, making another, (subjectively better), book, than this one.<sup>13</sup>

*Ed. note: The terms 'artist-run', 'artists-run' and 'artist(s)-run' are used throughout this document. 'Artist-run' is the more universally understood term, whereas 'artists-run' refers to the Hyde Park Art Center exhibition title and the possible introduction of a new term that might therefore have been 'authored' or defined by that exhibition's contents. 'Artist(s)-run' is used when I specifically want to collapse both terms into one and challenge and consider them together – both the understood idea of one and the possibly received definition of the other.*

1 pg. 17 *decentre* is a book published by YYZBOOKS (2008), also an artist-run center, in Toronto. The book is comprised of 103 short essays on artist-run culture by artists and artist-run leaders, participants and organizers from around the world.

2 "The genius of the artist is his ability to crap on the hand that feeds him." –AA Bronson

3 *decentre*, pg. 121.

4 "The genius of artist-run culture is its desire to crap on the hand that feeds us. The genius of artist-run culture is its lack-of-fear-of, its I-can-say-anything-I-want-to the hand that feeds us. A word of caution: beware of mimicking the hand that feeds us." –AA Bronson

5 "The artist is crap. The artist-run center is crap. Artist-run culture is crap. The artist is genius. The artist-run center is genius. Artist-run culture is genius. Therefore, crap = genius, and, conversely, genius = crap." –AA Bronson

6 threewalls was formed in 2003. The grad school chums were/are Sonia Yoon, now a fulltime graphic designer (and musician), Jeff M. Ward, who works in academic administration and the philosophy graduate was Jonathan Rhodes, a recent graduate of law who works in public interest in New Orleans. The four were involved for a number of years in directly shaping the project but moved on sporadically to other endeavors, meanwhile a number of other people involved in the art community have had a hand in both the starting and running of threewalls over the course of its 6 year history. Some of these people

are Marc Leblanc, Ruba Katrib, Jessica Labatte, Amy Sacksteder, Caroline Picard, Rachel Wakeman, Lucia Fabio and Lauren Basing, not to mention the (somewhat anonymous) members of the solo jury and recently formed junior board. Elizabeth Chodos, our first full-time Executive Director was hired in 2008, after having volunteered for three years prior, developing our public programs.

7 "Watch for the perverse, the objectionable, the disgusting, the politically incorrect." –AA Bronson

8 PHONEBOOK is a collaborative publishing project by threewalls and Green Lantern Press. We've published two editions thus far. The intent of PHONE-

BOOK was to create a current guide to the ephemeral artist-run projects/alternative sites of production across the country – a resource for travelers, artists, curators and the curious. The guide would be updated and republished in order to make additions and delete defunct spaces, but the guides would, as a collection, help to record the history of such projects while providing people with basic information about them for use in the present.

9 Although the curators developed parameters for a project's inclusion in the show (and these parameters are outlined in their statement published here), the title "Artists Run" plays on words in such a way that many organizers of projects (other than ours) were perplexed about their exclusion or, despite their inclusion, questioning from whom the definition of artist-run was being received.

10 For the sake of this volume, we did remove venues that were *primarily* focused on music as there were/are so many, they rightfully deserve their own digest and history that might grapple with the definition of 'musician' and the difference between an apartment rock show and a venue that starts out tenuous, but grows to establish itself – by selling beer.

11 "Watch for collaborations that remain unfunded, artists groups excluded from the artist-run network, collective projects that escape societal acceptability." –AA Bronson

12 "The artist who smells squeaky-clean is most likely a spy. The artist-run center that smells squeaky-clean is a zombie interlocutor. The artist-run culture that smells squeaky-clean is shit." –AA Bronson

13 Thanks to AA Bronson for unknowingly contributing these footnotes, taken as they were from his entry, number 9, in *decentre*. Bronson was actively involved in the development of Canadian artist-run culture, and as a part of General Idea, founded Art Metropole in 1974, a publisher, distributor and archive of artists' books and ephemera in Toronto. He is the current Director of Printed Matter in New York City.



# IF ONLY ARTISTS RAN THE WORLD

Lori Waxman

Take one spare living room, (or an unused basement, a neglected shed, an empty shelf, an abandoned storefront), add boundless creative energy, a belief that anything is possible, the ability to see far beyond economically-motivated transactions and a couple of friends who feel likewise. If the folks involved happen to be artists, the result of the above equation will likely be an artist-run space.

What's an artist-run space? In the most basic sense, it's a place for exhibiting art. But unlike a museum or a community arts center or a commercial gallery, it has neither institutional nor profit-driven obligations. It is imagined, founded, built and operated by and for artists—for their sculptural experiments, literary readings, one-off performances, political meetings, potluck brunches and everything in between.

Chicago is full of these spaces and has been for years. The reasons why most likely have to do with some combination of cheap real estate; a Midwestern sense of can-do; a plethora of good local art schools that draw students from across the country and often keep them here for a number of years after graduation; and, as compared to New York and Los Angeles, a relative dearth of cutting-edge commercial galleries. The historical precedent for these kinds of endeavors is the Alternative Space Movement, which began in the late 1960's in New York, when young artists, frustrated by the lack of venues in which to show experimental and unsaleable work, as well as work by women artists and artists of color, began to create their own display spaces in the abandoned industrial lofts of SoHo and later in the cheap storefronts of the Lower East Side and the East Village. Some, like **112 Greene Street Workshop**, (now **White Columns**), **The Kitchen**, **Artists Space**, and **ABC No Rio** continue to exist today in one form or another, while others, from Holly Solomon's **98 Greene Street** loft to Group Material's **13th Street** storefront or Patti Astor's **Fun Gallery**, sustained shorter lifespans more in keeping with the scenes from which they'd emerged.

Though it's the birthplace of the movement, New York long ago ceded its title as Mecca for these kinds of venues to the less saturated, less market-driven cities that really need them. Cities like Chicago have taken up that title, where artist-run spaces flourish, (mostly under the radar of even the most dedicated museum)

because of gallery-goers, (if not the local artists themselves). Whether because of sparse publicity, brief exhibition runs, limited hours, out-of-the-way locations, or the admittedly intimidating prospect of traipsing into a stranger's apartment to look at the work of a completely unknown artist, gallery-goers are most often part of a community. If this seems shortsighted or even somewhat pathetic on the part of otherwise enthusiastic viewers, consider a similar situation that commonly occurs around quite different cultural material, namely the keen gastronome who finds it too daunting to eat at a far-flung ethnic restaurant, be it on account of the unfamiliar neighborhood, unknown etiquette, illegible menu, baffling flavors, or the imagined discomfort of standing out as a foreigner in one's own city. That's why plenty of people who like Korean food eat it at their neighborhood restaurant instead of San Soo Gab San, where the waitresses speak little English, seem mean when they do, and the banchan comes in an astonishing variety of two to three dozen.

Enter the **Hyde Park Art Center**, a welcoming place if ever there was one. **HPAC** turned 70 this year and, as part of its anniversary as the oldest alternative exhibition space in Chicago, it offered visitors a sampler of some of the most important, provocative and diverse artist-run spaces that have existed in the city over the past decade. In-the-know viewers certainly noticed who'd been left out, but the show wasn't really for them, though it was a celebration in which they could thoroughly take pleasure and even pride. The real beneficiaries of *Artists Run Chicago* were the people who'd never set foot in any of these places, but hopefully would in the future, warmed-up by the generous and inviting introduction.

Curators Allison Peters Quinn and Britton Bertran wisely chose a polyphonic, free-wheeling exhibition scheme over an orderly, museological one. What got lost in terms of didactic information—the kind of who, what, when and why that this catalogue is all about, as will be the dedicated archive **HPAC** is establishing in its **4833 Resource Center**—was mostly made up for by the wildly ad-hoc, humorous, and resolutely non-homogenous presentation itself. Nothing could have been more appropriate to the vastly different locations, intentions, and spirit maintained by each of the chosen spaces than the commingling of **Roots & Culture's** plaid wallpaper backdrop, **Swimming Pool Projects'** diving board-cum-

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video player platforms, **The Suburban's** concrete-block white cube, and, in a supreme play on institutional strategies, **Modest Contemporary Art Projects'** fabulously pompous wall labels and **Julius Caesar's** "encumbered" audio tour guides.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the cacophonous nature of a show with dozens of curators—the two official ones plus all the gallery organizers—there was a lot of good art here. Not that most viewers would have agreed on what constituted it or why; consensus of style or taste or purpose is not, and should never be, the stuff of artist-run spaces. But arguing about that what and why is half the pleasure of viewing art, especially in unpretentious surroundings, surrounded by friends, with a can of Old Style in hand. So here's my own personal list:

The best stuff in *Artists Run Chicago* ranged from the weird—at **Suitable**, Ben Stone's "Drifter," 2001, a series of reliefs that hybridize driftwood and mounted fish—to the cheap 'n' charming—at **Second Bedroom**, Adam Farcus's "The Stars I Was Born Under," 2008, a twinkly false ceiling made with the admirably economic materials of cardboard, hot glue, latex and, of course, holes—to the politically trenchant—at **Polvo**, Juan and Ricardo Compean's "Immigration World Cup," 2008, a foosball table where surely no one wins, customized with players including a U.S. border patrolman, a Charro, Ronald McDonald, a dark-skinned guy in a wife beater, and Mexican waitress. In the brilliantly installed category, **Livebox** positioned Katy Higgins's "Looking," 2008, a close-up video of a baboon, um, looking around, on a monitor directly above the gallery's rear entrance, affording primate an excellent view of the exhibition. In the unbelievably sweet category, **Swimming Pool Projects** presented Aaron Hoffman's "Odonato," 2008, an endearingly animated love story of sledding and lonely apartment dwellers that turns out to have been nothing but a winter dream. In the locally-relevant category, **NFA Space** offered the five-man installation "Tired of Waiting," 2009, an elaborate multi-part spoof that meshed a history of labor rights protest and the death penalty with the fantastical sell-off of Chicago's history to Ripley's *Believe It Or Not*, (at least, I hope to hell they made it up). And in the not-quite-art category, **Fraction Workspace** addressed its own demise with Alex Jovanich's "R.I.P. Plaque," 2007, an inscribed commemorative metal plate, and the precious display of a cut-up "expired" credit card in a cushioned Plexiglas case.

Also on view were two appealing jabs at fund-raising. With their straightforward plays on nomenclature, these branded goods fared better than most. How to resist buying **Standard's** very standard set of pint glasses or **Joymore's** embroidered white cotton panties, (especially when one's own pair, bought eight years ago, have been washed so often they no longer stay up)? And, as appealing as affordable, functional objects with deadpan, tautological wit can be, how not to be even more seduced by both galleries' adjacent displays of less affordable, nonfunctional artworks with uncanny, expansive wit? At **Standard**: Heather

Mekkelson's pedestal-mounted blocks of compressed soil and wax, each titled with a different local address, of unknown significance, (anyone who's known her long enough could presumably figure out if these indicate where she was living at the time, but we only met last year, so I'm left wondering, happily, if the sculptures are more random or obscure than that). At **Joymore**: Mindy Rose Schwartz's quiet, super-smooth, cuddly yet hard "Ghost" from 2002, the minimal version of all she's done since, and Nick Black's vivid, silky mess of melted plastic toys from 2000, gorgeous and yet eerily suggestive of something gone very wrong. Do beer glasses and cotton undies really pay for all this?

Indeed, they do not. Hence Conrad Bakker's donation box, courtesy **Suitable**, situated right at the entrance of the show.

But charity isn't going to cover the tab of running any of these spaces either. Someone's paying, and in the vast majority of cases, it's the artist-organizers themselves. Though a couple of venues like **Green Lantern Gallery & Press** have official not-for-profit status which allows them to go through the time-consuming process of applying for grants, most of these galleries are run hand-to-mouth, with the help of friends, family, and whomever else happens to be passing by. Some of the displays at **HPAC** provided a sense of this collaborative network: **ArtLedge** decided to exhibit a plaque thanking the long list of people who contributed to the space throughout its duration. **Alogon** gave over their allotted space to **IncUBATE**, who hadn't been invited to participate. (**IncUBATE's** own project, the **Artist Run Credit League**, is itself about money, and trying to devise a new way of making it available to artists.) And **VONZWECK**, amid the remains of its defunct gallery, listed a beer cooler on "permanent loan" from **Deadtech**.

(The beer cooler, it must be said, is a crucial element of any artist-run space, to be replaced at will by a couple boxes of cheap wine or even a deep fryer. Why? Because social gatherings, sometimes even all-out parties, constitute a valuable part of how these places function as meeting points for far-flung artist communities, as hubs for human interaction, art discussion, and even networking. Festive fraternization forms part of the larger art world, too, of course, from museum and gallery First Fridays to the exclusive opening parties of Biennales, but here it occurs more intimately, among friends and friends-to-be. And it's part of the art world on a conceptual level as well, in terms of relational aesthetics, as when Rirkrit Tiravanija starts a Thai kitchen in his Chelsea gallery or Jorge Pardo opens a bar in L.A.'s Chinatown. But don't think too hard about all that next time you fill up a plastic cup from the keg at **Alogon**. Or do, and if you do, talk to the person behind you in line about it.)

So, no funding, no profit, little press, and a few cheap beers—why on earth do they do it? This catalogue is full of answers straight from the horses' mouths. I'm no horse, but coming at the question from the perspective of an art historian and critic, (which makes me either a donkey or a cowboy, depending on your perspective), I suggest that one way to understand these endeavors is to think

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about them as artworks in and of themselves. If some of these spaces function as miniature, DIY-versions of commercial galleries, many more of them provide laboratory environments in which not only the exhibiting artists but also the organizers can put forward new visions of what constitutes art. Their experiments can take form at the level of space—**Modest Contemporary's** proposal that meaningful art can be small enough to fit on a shelf—or publicity—**The Butcher Shop's** display of screen-printed exhibition posters—or installation—Peter Fagundo's "Material Assistance," 2009, a cardboard, acrylic, wood and wool pedestal used to display another artist's prints at **Devening Projects + Editions**—or even scheduling—**mini dutch's** live exhibition-within-the-exhibition, wherein five artists each had eight days to show their work at **HPAC**, with the provision that whatever they installed had to include a minimum of two elements from the previous artist's work.

For viewers still perplexed by these artist-run ventures, even after the friendly and broad introduction, **Deluxe Projects** offered a solution. Their "Instructions for Running a DIY Art Space," posted in the gallery and available as a take-home printed multiple, lists twelve directives that are less practical how-tos than calls for passionate engagement. Number 1 commands: "Fall in love with art." Number 8 insists: "Change your little corner of the world." And Number 12 reminds: "Keep falling in love with art and artists."

What more could anyone need in order to get it?

# "NOW THAT WE'VE FOUND LOVE, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH IT?"

—Heavy D and the Boyz

Dan Gunn

The following interviews are the abbreviated stories of capable groups of artists that ran or still run exhibition venues in garages, loft apartments, storefronts, storefront apartments, basements, basement apartments, architectural nooks and even projects that have no permanent home. The interview process was meant as an investigation into the (recent) history of the Chicago visual arts community, for which there is little official history, and a journey into the mindset behind the local production of visual culture. With an average lifespan of less than five years, the stories of these spaces represent successive waves of communities in a somewhat transient art city.

In the last decade, artist-run spaces in Chicago have increasingly inhabited marginal spaces. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the real estate market which prices them farther and farther away from central avenues and hubs. Although they are always located close to residential life, these spaces are serious attempts to generate public exhibitions of contemporary art through cost effective and humble means. To call these spaces D.I.Y. is not completely correct. "Do-It-Yourself" is partly the wrong term because it has taken on the connotation of things like paint-by-numbers — a group of materials and instructions with a prepackaged outcome — and while the form of the commercial gallery is usually the 'model' for most galleries, with its white walls, bright lights and tables of information, it frequently becomes the foil for the artist-run space.

Some artist-run spaces embrace the art market, acting as proto-commercial ventures that pursue exposure for their artists and generate significant amounts of art press. Others have reawakened the model of the not-for-profit art center, dedicating themselves to serving local artists and presenting innovative contemporary art to the public. Still other informal spaces relish social and domestic contexts that implicitly challenge the relevance of artistic practice to lived experience. Artists of all stages find opportunities in these varied artist-run spaces, to work experimentally, to build up their exhibition stagecraft and to connect with receptive audiences.

In asking people about their exhibition programs, four general questions were posed; "Why did you start your gallery?", "What was your gallery about?", "What were you able to accomplish?" and "How did it change your art practice?" The answers to each of these questions varied greatly, but whatever their final view of their gallery experience happened to be, each member clearly recalled why they had begun.

What follows is a picture of such spaces through the eyes of those who ran them. Their narratives are inextricably intertwined with anecdotes about artists and friends, specific remembrances of favorite art projects and lists of good and bad ideas. These interviews, especially from the defunct spaces, take on a different character depending on who is speaking. Some speak like old fraternity members, bragging about their former exploits; others speak as artists, without rose-colored glasses, telling cautionary tales; still others speak like old friends, wistfully revisiting a past that has been carefully boxed away.

Newer spaces invariably have younger people involved in their day-to-day operations; these youths seem still preoccupied with their to-do lists. They are proud of the work that they do, the kind of fulfillment that one gets for working towards something while in the midst of that work. Some are so new to the process that they don't know what they are doing, and make it up as they go along. In such cases, they are still feeling out their interests and modifying their approaches. Like a proving ground where one tests out a vehicle, these artists are searching out their position in contemporary art, often with little knowledge of earlier artist-run spaces, (except, maybe, their immediate predecessors).

The enduring legacy of artist-run spaces is two-fold. First, it is with the artists whose practices and careers these projects have helped further and second it is with the collective experiential knowledge of what it means to generate small-scale visual culture. The lessons that the people inside of this volume provide is built on the knowledge of years and years of experience. But what is this knowledge for? What does one do with these lessons, learned

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the hard way, or the other gritty, detailed clutter of producing visual culture on the cheap for a small group of fanatics?

I would like to argue that what has been missing in the local production of visual culture is the transferal of the practical, worked through knowledge that emerges from running an exhibition venue for art, day in and day out, for little recognition. What is that cliché saying? Ethics is what you do when no one is watching? There is a danger that without the transferal of knowledge, newer spaces will unknowingly repeat the mistakes of their predecessors. Rather than organically growing new exhibition forms through a competitive dialogue with other artist-run spaces, (past and present), they will simply adopt the commercial gallery as their primary model.

It is continually fascinating and tragic how so much spirited visual culture creates no lasting signature beyond the people involved. The marginal locations that these spaces inhabit as well as their short life-spans and locus outside of a major art center, have all contributed to the historical amnesia and critical blindness that fails to fully acknowledge their virtues as artistic proving grounds, as seedling exhibition models and as presenting excellent work not just in the context of Chicago, but in the broader context of contemporary art.

It is my sincere hope that these interviews will serve to extend the relationships and knowledge of artist-initiated exhibitions across generation gaps and link like-minded individuals together in common purpose.

# AS IT HAPPENED

B. 1995 - B. 2000

Stockyard Institute  
NFA Space  
The Butcher Shop  
Polvo  
FGA  
Law Office  
Margin  
STANDARD  
Suitable  
The Suburban  
Deluxe Projects  
Joymore  
Modest Contemporary Art Projects

**Dogmatic** is discussed in *(Art)ists Run Chicago* by Scott Speh and John Neff following the interviews.

A final copy of **Michael Thomas' interview with Dan Gunn** was not approved in time for publication.

**Temporary Services** (b. 1998 - ) is interviewed by **Bad at Sports** in the audio supplement.

1995-PRESENT

# STOCKYARD INSTITUTE

**LOCATION OF GALLERY** (earliest to latest):

4721 S. Damen abandoned elementary school

819 N. Leamington experimental school

Lake St. & Central Ave. Austin Town Hall Cultural Center

2450 N. Sheffield production studio

5020 S. Cornell Ave. radio station mobile travel trailer: behind Hyde Park Art Center

116 N. LeClaire studio/classrooms

1514 S. 9th Ave. Maywood, IL office/teaching studio

**FOUNDERS:** Jim Duignan

**WEBSITE:** stockyardinstitute.org

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** Stockyard Institute, Re-Wiring the School System Since 1995

The **Stockyard Institute** is an artist project and experimental pedagogical collective in Chicago. Our artistic interests attend to the city's less peaceful communities.

We design temporary public projects and sustainable, socially based programs that consider youth as producers.

We use the idea of educating as a medium to expose reasonable examples of an intellectual and spirited life for the communities we work alongside. For young people, personal issues and the fundamental social

tension of living in the city, often appear as impossibilities. Our energy is dispersed to establish relationships between youth and the people who can best help answer their questions. The desire for innovation, with the promise of a productive future, is a constant and positive objective.

We have over the years expanded and contracted in a natural extension of growth, adjustment and momentum. Artists, writers, composers, designers, poets, builders, educators, activists, photographers, DJs,

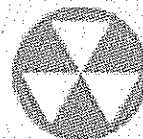
performers and others work with us as volunteers to organize large-scale projects as well as smaller, provisional experiences.

There is a broad effort, since our beginning to fund explorations about the city we want to live in. This serves to effectively function in the design of informal strategies for progressive, pedagogical investigations through the arts.



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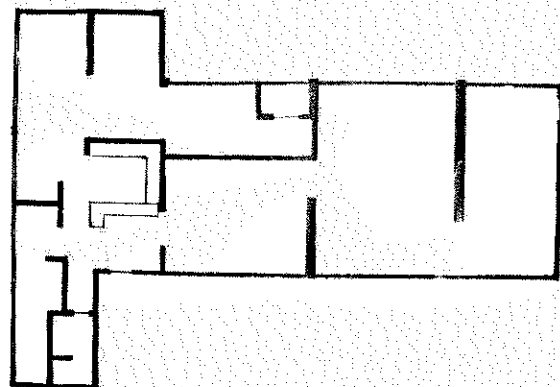
Stockyard Institute

1996-2002

## NFA SPACE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 4650 & 4652 N. Racine,  
119 N. Peoria

FOUNDERS: Iain Muirhead, Amavong Panya  
WEBSITE: [nfaspace.com](http://nfaspace.com)



### HOW DID NFA SPACE BEGIN?

*Iain:* When we were at the School of the Art Institute, in 1994, Michael Ryan became our faculty advisor. That was when [SAIC] was first putting together the **Student Union Galleries**. We were both **SUGS** directors during our last two years [at school]. Michael had this wealth of knowledge from being an artist in Chicago and from working for the Museum of the Art Institute. We underwent a crash course in exhibition planning, curatorial practice, exhibition design, and working with artists. That was the seed that started our thoughts on creating NFA Space. We started it right when we got out of school in 1996. Working with Michael was great because he was really trying to familiarize us with the history of the **Hyde Park Art Center**, **Randolph Street, N.A.M.E.** and the **Uncomfortables**. All of those spaces were closing while we were in school. Really, what would come next was unclear. River North was the only gallery district, and we didn't see a home there for what our interests encompassed and what we were making in school. We viewed their approach as dated. The galleries at that time were very provincial and they had a rigid stable of artists. As an emerging artist, one thought that it was impossible to break in through the traditional means. Further, as we wrote in our mission statement at the time, we wanted to "create exhibitions as events and experiences, rather than risk free whitewashed art dealerships." At **SUGS** we had seen the mechanics of putting together an exhibition, and we knew that we could produce something at the level of the gallery system. So we decided, "Why not just do our own thing?"

### WHT WAS NFA SPACE ABOUT?

*Iain:* **NFA** stands for Not Fucking Around. We were 21 and it was an adversarial period in Chicago. We felt like, "Fuck this, we can do this better." We were motivated and had the resources.

*Amavong:* In 1996 we rented studios at the intersection of Adams and State. One of the spaces shown to us was an old beauty shop. It was way too expensive for studio spaces but we asked the landlord if we could clean up the space and do a show there. *Cockfight* was our first show and *Sacred and Profane* was the second.

*Iain:* The shows in the State street building were only one night [in duration]. They were both theme based group shows that we organized with goals in mind. We wanted to realize exhibits that we couldn't do at **SUGS** and we wanted to ensure that they were well attended. Artists know only their friends and about five other people. If you put ten people in a show, you will likely have one hundred people at the opening.

*Amavong:* It's the critical mass idea, getting a bunch of people together at once.

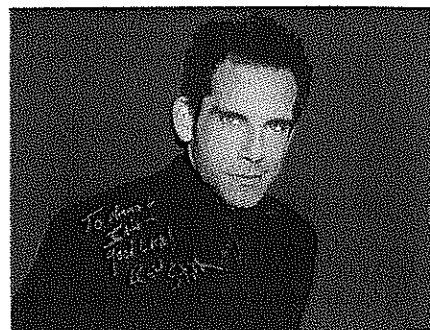
*Iain:* We moved from [State street] to Uptown into two storefronts on the corner of Leland and Racine. We were programming 3-month exhibitions out of both of them. We were doing group shows until the second year [in Uptown] when we expanded the group show into a series, with titles such as *Epic Moments* or *Débardeur: Labor Wearing Images*. It was our way of giving artists solo shows while still drawing a large audience. We spread the series out over 6 months and they consisted of three

pairs of one-person shows. From an advertising point of view, one would want to see the whole thing as it unfolded. Plus, it gave us more time to get press. We felt that press was important because we always thought this thing was bigger than Chicago. If we wanted to participate in the global art community, it meant art fairs and press. We adopted a commercial structure without compromising the work we were showing.

*Amavong:* **The Chicago Project Room** was really getting noticed at the time—they were in the space formerly occupied by **The Uncomfortables** in Wicker Park—but we were overlooked in Uptown.

*Iain:* That was a major issue, to get an audience outside the museums and River North. With art fairs came the demand for advertising and inclusion in magazines that exploded around 1998-99. It allowed us to bypass Chicago. The mentality in Chicago was, "If someone else values it then we'll value it, but if it's in our backyard then it's just navel-gazing." That's the feeling that we had. Some of it's true, but we were so focused that we created some of that mythology ourselves. Then when Conor McGrady got picked for the 2002 Whitney Biennial, Chicago decided that it cared about Conor McGrady, even though we'd been showing him for four years.

*Amavong:* On the topic of art fairs, we missed the deadline for Art Chicago 1999. But the feedback we got was "Where did these guys come from? How come they are not in Art Chicago? They should be in, but they missed the deadline. They should do Art Miami." We found it appealing to take



Ben Stiller autographed photo, 1996

this to a different audience. Our first fair was in 1999. We were meeting curators. We would get business cards and think "Wow!" We also had a really good Miami connection because we worked with William Cordova who was in the 2008 Whitney Biennial. He introduced us to a lot of really good Miami artists. Then, in 2000, we moved from Leland and Racine to Peoria Street.

**Iain:** This was another massive change that accelerated things for us. Curators from the Whitney were coming through the **Vedanta Gallery** that **Kavi Gupta** was helping to facilitate. That space had a massive campaign to get people into Chicago and we benefited from it. People from all over the world were finally coming to Chicago to see art and they were coming through our space. We were selling work and we were getting the artists into museum shows and collections. It was really exciting. After four years of trying to pull the right people into our space, it was all happening. We had been subsidizing **NFA** the whole time with an exhibition service business, which made it a challenge to administrate the gallery. We're both artists and the programming satisfied our creative interests, but it became clear once business picked up that we were functioning as dealers. We chose the structure. It was just working.

Nevertheless, the more that the gallery succeeded commercially, the more we felt imprisoned by it. It became a pretty clear decision. It was tough because the space had finally reached a level where we could clearly see viability but at a personally unacceptable creative identity cost. For me, it was when some of the artists we had been representing no longer viewed us as peers, but as facilitators, "What have you done for me lately?"

**Amavong:** I definitely felt the same way. By 2001, the label, "Dealer," was out there for us to take. No slight meant against the title of "Art Dealer," but it is literally a full-time job to run a gallery. There were still other interests that Iain and I wanted to pursue and our studio practice had suffered. Interacting with the artists was an aspect we found joy in. The interaction with the art world in the role of dealer was uninteresting. You have to put your face out there, everywhere.

**Iain:** [There were] constant dinners, openings, travel, etc... It also became very difficult, which may have been no different if we'd chosen the non-profit route, to form

any new genuine relationships. We were perceived as an opportunity; it was exhausting and it made every new interaction feel suspect or vice versa. That didn't feel good. It grew so far away from the reasons we started it.

**Amavong:** A proud and defining moment was when *Newsweek* did an article on Conor McGrady, Luis Gispert, and Sanford Biggers—all three of whom we had shown. We represented Conor and the other two had been in a group show. No one else in Chicago had shown them. It was definitely a proud moment because it was in conjunction with the 2002 Whitney Biennial. Iain and I chose to not go to the Whitney for the opening. I remember some other art dealers saying "What the hell are you doing?! You should be standing in front of Conor's work taking checks."

**Iain:** It was Conor's moment. The Whitney Biennial is for artists. Do we really want to be there as Conor's dealers? That would have permanently fixed us in the dealer role to the audience we'd been going after this entire time. In my mind it became clear that if this was how I'm going to introduce myself to the art world, then I'm screwed. We were very very happy for Conor, and at the same time we knew that the next decision was imminent.

**Amavong:** We went out the punk rock way. We chose not to become dealers and while The Biennial was still open we shut our doors.

**Iain:** [They were shut] right after Conor's show because his show [here] was up during the Biennial. We knew where the money was coming from, [it was] from the art handling business. I have no regrets about anything we did during that time. It's been nice to have the years to reflect back upon it, but I am such a different person than I was at that time. I like this person better. It's clear that we made the right choice. I do appreciate that in the last seven years the labels have relaxed some, the artist as curator or the artist as social entrepreneur has really developed. **NFA** was a company. We set it up that way, and it contained all of those elements as an exercise in ongoing artistic sustainability. That one arm of it was so big and so public and it still provides opportunities for us.

**HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?**  
**Amavong:** Running the space has been great for my art practice. I've been slowly working on stuff. To get my head in the

right place and to make time [for my practice] has been the struggle.

**Iain:** I adopted a long-range view when we were running **NFA**. We got to see a bunch of artists at different stages of their careers. I saw the mechanics necessary to have an art career. It reminded me how important it is to do work that's meaningful to you and to develop it in a way that doesn't necessarily require an audience in addition to the dialogue you [the artist] are having with it.

**Interviewees:** Iain Muirhead, Amavong Panya  
**Format:** transcribed audio interview  
**Location of interview:** Buffalo Hunters Studio,  
4541 N. Ravenswood #403

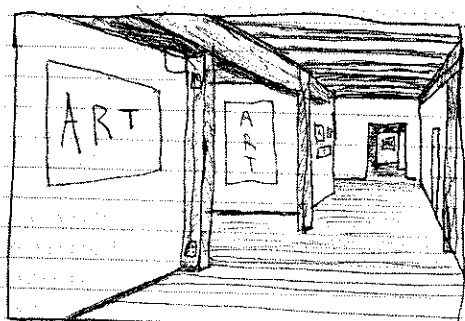
**NFA SPACE** is a collaboration between artist Amavong Panya and Iain Muirhead. Initially **NFA SPACE** (1996) provided an alternative exhibition space for emerging artists seeking challenges beyond those available in the local art community. **NFA SPACE** encouraged artists to realize ambitious site-specific installation works and at the same time sensitively incorporated their work into curatorial projects that articulated contemporary social, political, and aesthetic questions. In just 6 years, **NFA SPACE** produced its own catalogues, participated in international art fairs, sold work directly to major museums, and received critical attention from many of the leading industry publications. **NFA SPACE's** art service division started in 1998 to help subsidize the exhibition programming. **NFA SPACE** ceased gallery operations in 2002 when art dealer responsibilities eclipsed all other creative interests. Today, Muirhead and Panya maintain individual studio practices while **NFA SPACE** is a leading art installation company with long list of international clients that provides project based employment for themselves and other working artists.

1997-2008

# THE BUTCHER SHOP

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1310 West Lake Street

FOUNDERS: Mike Lavery, Kerri Sancomb, Jeff Mueller



an empty shot of the Butcher Shop, long and cavernous

## HOW DID THE BUTCHER SHOP BEGIN?

I wasn't really into the DIY art-space scene in 1997 when we were starting the space. I became more involved with the scene through the space. Maybe I wasn't as aware of what was going on, but it seemed like there were a lot less active DIY spaces then. **Randolph Street Gallery**, to us, was an established space and we were twenty-four, young and just starting out. In the mid 90's it wasn't too expensive to run a space and warehouse lofts were there to be found; anyone could make it happen with a little bit of effort. **The Butcher Shop** started as a big live/work warehouse space on the near West Side. We did a fairly decent job of building out the space, but the feel of the place was a little bit crusty and strange.

## WHAT WAS THE BUTCHER SHOP ABOUT?

There was always a sense that there could be something interesting and weird happening at **The Butcher Shop**. A great community arose in favor of the space and tons of people would come to exhibitions

regularly. We'd get really big turnouts, partially because of the beer, but also because of the accompanying entertainment. In addition to exhibiting art, we had bands, performances, or puppet shows during openings.

During **The Butcher Shop's** operation, there were three distinct iterations of the space. The first group of people to run **The Butcher Shop** was Jeff Mueller, Kerri Sancomb and Mike Lavery. That's what I call **The Butcher Shop, Mark I** (1997-1998). The space was mixed-use, people lived there and the art space was in the back. Then, as **Mark II** (1998-2002), people could no longer reside there. Mike Lavery stayed involved and, along with Roger Cooley and myself, we ran the space. **Mark II** was probably **The Butcher Shop's** heyday era. Around 2003, Mike Lavery moved out of town, Roger Cooley had a child and I went back to grad school. We lacked the time and energy to keep growing. I continued to curate shows, maybe, every 3 to 6 months. Sometimes people would contact me with an idea they had and the space existed in that way for a year or so.

I'd known Michael Thomas, who ran **Dogmatic**, since the early days [of the space]. We started our endeavors around the same time and I think that their first show opened the same week as ours. **Dogmatic** had to move out of the space they occupied and Michael still wished to curate shows. The first show he did at **The**

"...anyone could make it happen with a little bit of effort..."

**Butcher Shop** was with artist Julia Marsh. She took a scanner, and scanned every square inch of **Dogmatic**, printed it all out and rebuilt **Dogmatic** [in our space] as an installation. At first, he intended to do one show in the space, but during the course the show and through separate conversations, we decided that we would merge. Michael took over the space for the following years, 2005 to 2007. As **The Butcher Shop/Dogmatic** Michael regularly curated shows. The shows were often smaller in scale and he was a more professional gallerist than we had ever been. During **Mark II**, we would send out a press release to be listed in the *Reader*, send postcard invites and make posters, etc... But, Michael actually went the extra mile to get reviewers in, start a website and have more regular hours. After Michael moved to NYC in the spring of 2007, Carrie Ruckel and Karin Patzke took over major curation duties and founded **Lasso Gallery** at **The Butcher Shop**. Unfortunately, we were forced to close the doors in early 2008 due to complicated circumstances.

Definitely our philosophy, perhaps more my philosophy than some of the others, was, "Fuck the art world. Fuck professionalism. Fuck everybody else. We can do this shit on our own and not care about the wider art world!" I mean this in a positive "pro-us not an "anti-them" sort of way. It might seem silly to some, but we pulled it off under our own terms for a while. We wanted the space to be good, we wanted



people to come, we wanted the work to be treated well, we wanted to work for the artists, but we had no interest in running a gallery in the traditional sense. On many levels, we were opposed to the traditional gallery.

**WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?**  
I regard 1999–2002, as the core era of **The Butcher Shop**. During that time, we put up a show every 6 weeks or so. Every Christmas, for five years, we'd host the *Holiday Ball*—attendants were required to dress-up. Most people showed up wearing tuxes or thrift-store ball gowns. A band called Dave LaCrone and the Mistletoes would play Christmas music all night, and there would be an accompanying art exhibit. One year the theme was *Baby Jesus*, another year it was *The Three Wise Men*. The show was open, so anyone was welcome to submit a work that adhered to the theme. The whole space wouldn't be filled with work, only the back portion—the front was a dance floor. It was a relatively anticipated yearly event.

We had so many shows in the space—it takes a minute to consider which ones stood out. Rosie Sanders and Rebecca Moran (rNr), built an entire sidewalk in the space. They poured concrete, and had park benches, and street signs. They totally transformed the back of the space. Due to the state of the space's [dis]repair, we were really open to anything because the space could be easily messed up and fixed. We did a really great show—one of my favorites—called *This Way to the Egress*. It was loosely circus-themed; we had art from many different people and a clown who was walking around juggling and both a popcorn and cotton candy machine. We'd often try to add a silly element to the exhibition. Once we had a performance where one naked man and two naked women rolled around with a live giant snake. It seemed very Satanic and kind of cheesy, but awesome! [laughs] That was a time when I thought, "Ok, whatever, if you want to do something like that then great!"

One of our better shows was a rock poster art show—held in 1999. This was one of the earlier efforts to gather the new wave of

rock-poster screen-printers together for a show, before the advent of the **Flatstock** shows. For our exhibition, we contacted printers from all over the country. We had around 666 posters hanging on the wall—including submissions from Crosshair, Steve Walters from Screwball, Jay Ryan from Bird Machine, Keith Herzik, Bob Hartzel and some other folks from in town. We also showed work of the **Fort Thunder** guys from Rhode Island and around ten other artists from different cities. We hung it salon-style covering every square inch of the walls.

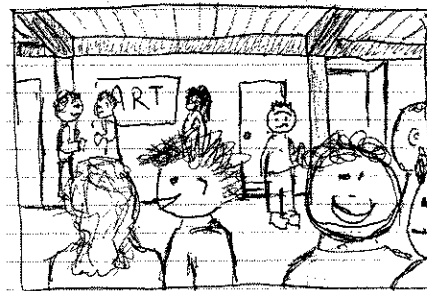
Another really great show that we exhibited there was the *Department of Space and Land Reclamation*. This event was about guerrilla public art. Nato Thompson, Emily Forman and Josh Macphee organized that show, and it was a really cool 3-day event. The space was open 24 hours a day; there was cool art, conference panel lectures, discussions and a library with couches. It was a very energetic, anarchistic, event.

On a few occasions, we collaborated with spaces in other cities. We teamed up with local space **Seven Three Split** to show work from the galleries **Vox Populi**, **Space 1026**, **BaseKamp** and **Project Room** from Philadelphia. We had a show here of Philadelphia artists, and a show there of work by Chicago artists. We worked on a few exchange-based shows in that same vein.

**HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?**  
I was making a lot of paintings and screen-printing with Crosshair when we started. In some ways, running the space killed me as an artist. Instead of devoting time to making art in my studio, I was running the space and working on exhibitions for other artists.

Now, I paint once in a while. I'm not trying to be a career artist and I think that the space had something to do with killing my desire to pursue that path. [laughs]

I sincerely enjoyed my practice, but I wasn't any good at promoting myself as an artist. I was skilled at promoting the work of artists exhibited in the space. Maybe I was better as a facilitator than as an artist, or at least I fell into that role. I found the role to



more typical shot of Butcher-shop w/ lots of people

haphazardly built out drywall in large 120 year old brick Chicago warehouse. Big wooden beams, dirty wood floor & less dirty wood ceiling. Kick-ass art on the walls & floors, corners and alcoves with micro environments/installations, many rooms one after another on the way back to the Bar. a band or some sort of performance just about to happen or just finishing. some chaos.

I did very little documenting at the Butcher Shop, so the photo is about 1/2 of a picture. I was attempting print these things.

be fulfilling—so I'm not at all bitter or upset about that, I don't want to emphasize my role as facilitator as a negative thing. If you are running a space, a certain amount of your creativity goes into it instead of into your own work. It's a potential hazard. You have to answer to a larger community than you would with your own practice. The space ran on the elbow grease from the people involved, and for every person that I've named, there were a number of other people who helped make it happen. The model of little money expenditure and a lot of elbow grease can work well for people in their twenties. But, as people get older, have children and become more involved with their careers, the model no longer functions. People are less willing to spend three nights a week hanging out and painting walls. Those are some lessons learned.

Interviewee: Tom Colley

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: 1310 Lake

1998-2007

# POLVO

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1458 W. 18th St. 1R

FOUNDERS: Miguel Cortez, Jesus Macarena-Avila, Elvia Rodríguez-Ochoa  
WEBSITE: polvo.org

## HOW DID POLVO BEGIN?

**Polvo** began as a collective of three people, Miguel Cortez, Elvia Rodríguez-Ochoa and Jesus Macarena-Avila. We published an art and poetry zine in 1996, one in 1997, and then on-and-off until 2003 when we switched to an 11"x17" newsprint format. In 1998, we opened our first storefront space because we felt that our work did not fit within the work of what local galleries and museums were showing at the time, especially for emerging artists. Before we opened the first space, we were part of different collectives in Pilsen. I was part of **Calles y Sueños/Casa de Arte y Cultura** (House of Art and Culture), and they had an alternative cultural space on 19th and Carpenter. Elvia and Jesus also participated in shows there and helped out with events. That space functioned from 1994-1999 and served as an inspiration to the type of space that could exist within the community. Jose David, who was responsible for the space, helped introduce us to many artists including Michael Piazza, Elizam Escobar, and Bertha Husband (all members of **Axe Street Arena**). I primarily helped out with postcard and flyer design. During that same time Elvia and Jesus were part of **Taller Mexicano de Grabado** (Mexican Printmaking Workshop), also in Pilsen, and were members from 1992-1998. It was there that we worked with Carlos Cortez and learned of his history in working on human rights issues in the Midwest. I joined that collective in 1996, and we all left the group in 1998 to concentrate on opening the first **Polvo** space.

We were frustrated that the collective (**Taller Mexicano de Grabado**) was not open to non-traditional forms of art making. We were also frustrated that mainstream galleries (in River North) judged us as too political and not Mexican enough since we did not create work that fit into what they viewed as "Hispanic." In addition, Elvia was also frustrated by the lack of opportunities for women artists on all fronts. We were in our 20's back then, right out of school, and wanted to experiment with more than traditional printmaking and painting. That was the main reason why we opened the **Polvo** space. We were very motivated to move forward and saw a movement of younger artists emerging to reject the idea that you had to leave Chicago to become noticed and that you had to wait for someone else to recognize you. We were more that willing to promote ourselves and the work of our peers.

## WHAT WAS POLVO ABOUT?

Within the Latino art scene, experimental art spaces were and are still lacking in Pilsen. But, we did not intend for the space to cater solely to Latino artists, it was both multicultural and multi-media. **Polvo** was a space where artists had the freedom to experiment. Artists were able to alter the space however they wanted [in order to create installation projects]. Aside from installation work, we also organized several group shows dealing with an assortment of issues: immigration, gentrification, the Iraq war, environmental issues, low rider culture, and graffiti.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

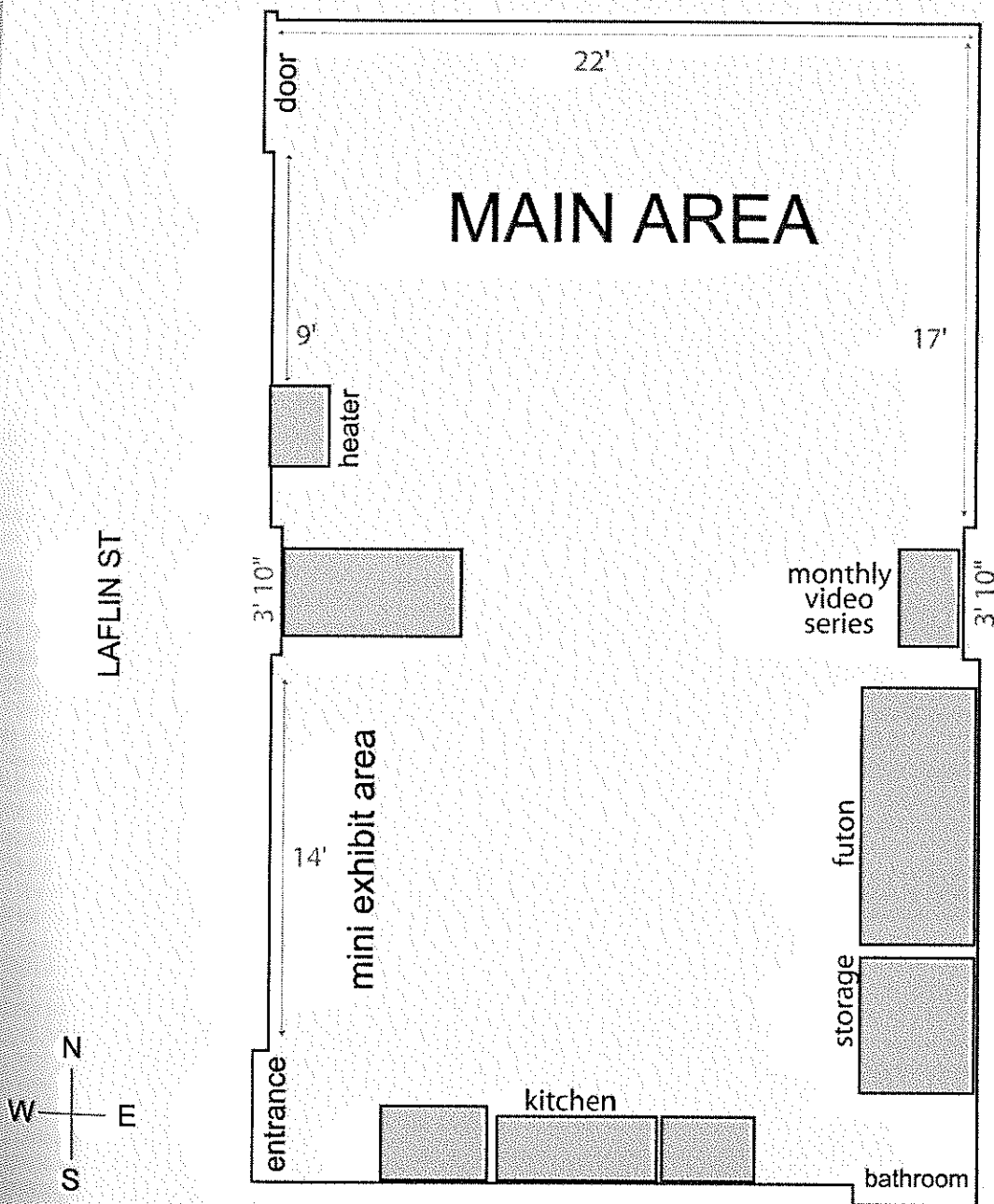
After engaging the space, people gained awareness about the aforementioned issues. Also, several artists used **Polvo** as a stepping-stone for larger and better things. We showed many established and emerging artists over the years. For example, we showed the work of Laura Kina in 1998. Other artists that exhibited at **Polvo** that are now more well known, include CarianaCarianne, Paola Cabal, Harold Mendez, Dolan Geiman, Edra Soto, Huong Ngo, Amy Mall, Gisela Insuaste, and others. Some of these artists are now showing at prestigious museums and galleries.

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Interviewee: Miguel Cortez  
Format: email interview



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 nd galleries.



\*\*walls are approx 12 feet high

LOCATION OF GALLERY: Roaming

FOUNDERS: Pedro Velez, Michael Bulka, Lena Kuffner

## HOW DID FGA BEGIN?

I don't really recall how it started specifically. I came here to grad school at the Art Institute and during those years in school I noticed that there was not enough coverage about the shows that I was a part of, or that I would go to see every weekend. I was bored with James Yood and Susan Snodgrass writing about the same five galleries—which is pretty much the same five galleries they write about today. The *New Art Examiner*, although it was a great magazine, was also very exclusive.

I was going to a lot of the **Uncomfortable Spaces**, apartment shows and events—like the ones by **LAW OFFICE**. Back then there was this cool zine by Adam Mikos called *Gravy* and he would cover these apartment shows. At that time, I started writing for the *New Art Examiner* because I wanted to contribute to the art scene, but it was very difficult to convince them to write about apartment shows.

I started **FGA** with Michael Bulka who was a critic for *Newcity* and *Art in America*. He was working with the Chicago Art Critics Association (CACA), but complaining that they were not very quick, critical, or energetic when it came to editing and writing. They took a long time to do anything and they wouldn't go to shows unless they were happening in River North. He would always see me around at every single show until one day he asked me to write something to put in his web-zine—*Bulka's Midnight Rants*. Once he included one of my own rants in the CACA newsletter just to make some people angry and it worked. That's how we started our collaboration.

I came up with the name of **FGA** or **Fucking Good Art**.

**FGA** started out as a one-page Xerox-made copy of the web-zine. The website component of the zine was housed at Jno Cook's **spaces.org**. A bunch of good people wrote for it including: Lori Waxman, Nato Thompson, Anthony Elms, Keri Butler, Ben Gill, Scott Speh, Shane Selzer, Julia Marsh, and Leah Finch among others. We would go to shows, see them, go home and write about them right away. To do so, most of us would get drunk. The idea was to get the reviews out there on the web quickly. We wanted to be angry and critical and not limited by editing grammar or anything formal. We wanted to be visceral and honest. Back then the **FGA** was put together in this big slow computer at Bulka's place. We would go to Kinko's and make these leaflets to pass out during openings. That's how it worked. We used different anagrams too. It started with **Fucking Good Art**. Then it became **FGA** then it became **PGA**. Then it became **Dog**.

## WHAT WAS FGA ABOUT?

The curatorial side of **FGA** developed in parallel with the zine. Artist Lena Kuffner was a big part of **FGA** curatorial. By 2003, the zine had run its course, partly because Michael was a critic and I was writing for major magazines so, we started seeing the conflict of me putting up shows using the **FGA** name, even though it wasn't the same thing.

The people that worked with **FGA** were interested in conceptual art, minimalism and music. We did sound exhibits and mix tape

shows too, which is sort of trendy now. Weinst organized events and exhibits in Chicago, she bar Miami, Puerto Rico and New York.

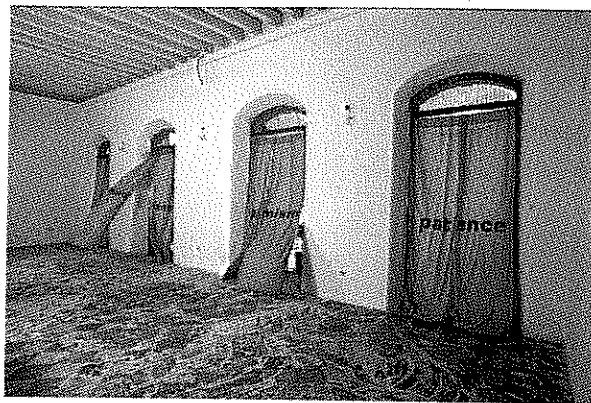
## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

We started in my apartment, then rented spaces around Wicker Park. But by renting spaces, we ran out of money and were forced to look for new strategies. We were not as advanced as **Temporary Services**. They have a system and manage to do everything pretty much for twenty bucks and always include the surrounding community.

We were more like teenage anarchists doing shows to draw attention to ourselves. In Chicago, the cycle gets tired once you realize that it's useless. It doesn't matter. The city is too provincial when it comes to art. You can catch the attention of whomever you want from the blue chip arena or the big curators from the city but they don't really give a shit. They always have excuses like, "This is an apartment," or, "You guys can't be serious enough because every opening you have is just a big party." So it was that kind of struggle. Plus, Chicago is not interested in putting money into art.

Once we left Chicago our focus changed and we were significantly successful. In 2004 we started participating in art fairs instead of renting spaces. Now our interest is mostly geared towards photography, video campaigns, sound, and web exhibitions. For example, the project we did for *photo Miami*, *The DAMS*, was about propaganda, advertisement, and partisan politics. A group of young artists from Puerto Rico made work on huge banners for a collective

Curtains are from an installation by Jan Estep



sort of trendy now. We did a second version of the installation. We did a second version of the show in Puerto Rico with some Chicago based artists—including Melanie Schiff.

## TO ACHIEVE?

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We also organized *What Future?*—a sound exhibition inside a trailer for *Circa Art Fair*. It was a battle between artists from Miami and Puerto Rico. We handed out free CD's for that one. There's always a viral, free component and off site production to every **FGA** show. The viewer is always an active participant—they have to complete a puzzle.

All the people that have worked with **FGA** at one point or another are always willing to work as a collective, even if they have never shown with **FGA** or they don't know what **FGA** is about. They're always willing to sacrifice their name for a greater good. The only show we did of a single person was for Gerald Davis in 2001 and that was our first show online also. Four of our past collaborators, including Javier Cambre, have participated in important Biennials. Also, some guys in Europe have used **FGA** as inspiration and even stole our name and format—I'm cool with it.

## HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

**FGA** moved around because you cannot just sit around and wait for things to happen. You get anxious. Chicago is a big city and a great city, if you love sports. The Second city complex is still alive and it leads to the other tiny justifications that become truths. Everywhere you go you hear the same arguments like, "We're not a part of the art market but we don't have to be because we are better than that," and "We like to make work in our apartments because it's our choice." I felt that that was

always just an excuse. When you're young, you think you can break down the system and win, but you never win. The idea of an apartment gallery might look good on paper,--- but it's very difficult to look at art when you have a couch in the way. It's kind of uncomfortable to invade an intimate space. It's just not the proper context. Our shows were great, but now I know that we didn't give them the proper context. That's not fair for the viewer, the artist, or even for me.

Interviewee: Pedro Velez

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: New Wave Coffee, 2557 N. Milwaukee Ave.



FGA at Schiller Street in Wicker Park

1999-2002

# LAW OFFICE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1837 W. Evergreen

FOUNDERS: Rob Davis, Michael Langlois, Rebekah Levine, Vince Dermody

## HOW DID LAW OFFICE BEGIN?

**Vince:** I guess we could spin all of the yarns that we've been spinning for so long. Mike and Rob had built an amazing studio on the fourth floor of 1837 W. Evergreen where I curated Vincent Dermody's *Evil Show*. I said that the show was at **LAW OFFICE** because I didn't want to say 1837 W. Evergreen.

**Rebekah:** We also liked it because it gave us instant authority.

**Vince:** So Rebekah was in the *Evil Show*. We clicked because we were all incredible multi-taskers with a lot of weird talents. The next show, *Sex Party*, was this insane idea that Rebekah curated. All of a sudden it was all four of us as **LAW OFFICE**.

**Rebekah:** I'd always been really enamored with porn sets; "Oh my god why is she wearing socks?" and "Look at that couch!" So I wasn't looking at the right thing in porn. So for *Sex Party*, I had four different groups design and build their fantasy porn sets in the space and then we had this party. The night before there were all these people who came and filmed porn there, but we didn't really talk about that.

**Vince:** That night was insane because we had created so much hype for some sort of actual sex party going down. I sobered up quick because the whole floor was bouncing at one point. We thought that we would have to evacuate because the floor was moving so much. This was actually an important conceptual nugget to what we did for the rest of the time as **LAW OFFICE**. We had this idea that all art shows or all holidays are about loss. It's nihilism but it's with a beer and a smoke. So then we started playing up expectations.

## WHAT WAS LAW OFFICE ABOUT?

**Rob:** After Rebekah's show we realized, "Oh this is how you manipulate the entire thing!"

You're not just controlling the artwork—you are controlling the audience, the artists, the art being fabricated: the whole thing. We were, for lack of a better term, a curatorial-collective, but **LAW OFFICE** really ended up being one artist. We looked for a tag but found that nothing fit, because nothing fit. We didn't just curate exhibitions; we would actually make the exhibitions our piece.

**Vince:** We also realized that curating objects was really important, so we would show work by Amanda Ross-Ho, Laura Owens, Rashid Johnson, Amy Sarkisian, Forcefield, Milhaus etc....

**Rebekah:** At the time there were the galleries that were serving little glasses of white wine at their openings. They were stodgy yet everyone our age was using the same model. That didn't seem to apply to any of us. I don't want any fucking bad white wine. I want a can of beer. That's not who I am, or who any of us were. Who says that is what you have to be?

**Rob:** We found art boring in fact. We had to make it really interesting for us to do and for people to come to.

**Vince:** We were essentially making the things that entertained us.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

**Rob:** We always loved to fuck with the art fairs. That was our bread and butter, our go-to thing, and the big event of the season. We thought a lot about how to get the world to come to our party so we did this show called *Beer Tasting* for the art fairs.

**Vince:** Rob got this Wu-Tang tape—come on, we're pre-digital—and he fucking called Wu-Wear off of the phone number on the back of the cassette to ask if they'd sponsor us. We laughed about it at the time but the next day he comes waving the tape yelling "We're sponsored by Wu-Wear!"

**Michael:** Rob pitched it like we were four white kids in Chicago that listen to way too much hip hop and had been inspired by the Wu-Tang Clan's business model. We're doing this big event during an international art fair and we'd like to be doused in Wu-Wear!

**Vince:** We had the notion that American beer was really fucked up and that the companies had all been slave owners. We were really interested in what the beer did to the art and why our exhibitions were much better because we had an insurmountable supply of beer. So we got sponsored by nine domestic American beers: Coors, Pabst, Strough's, Hamm's, Old Style, Miller, Budweiser and Busch and made this five hour hip-hop mix, sculpture out of the nine American beers and wore our Wu-Wear.

**Rebekah:** We used the art fairs as our own little way of getting attention. But we never paid for a booth. We would always ask magazines, "What are you doing for your booth? Do you want us to do something really kick ass in there?" And they would have their magazines there and we'd have our own little booth.

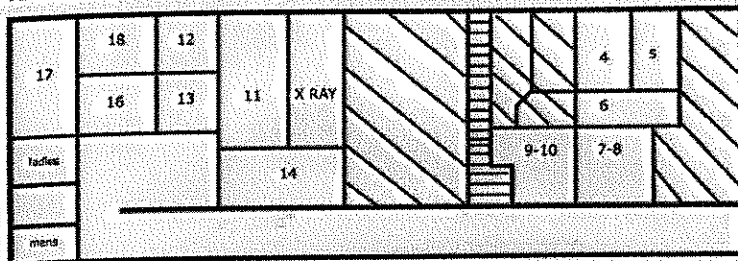
**Vince:** The whole project grew because we realized we could create an international presence for almost nothing. We were getting invites to do Art Basel and some significant shit. Any money we made we gave it away. We would take the \$1,500 bucks we got to do a slide presentation about our work at the University of Chicago for the gender studies department and give it away. Lauren Berlant completely fucked up and thought that we were gender artists because of *Sex Party*.

**Michael:** And Rob even called just to make sure she knew who we were!

**Vince:** For the U of C, we had a Valentine's Day paintball duel and raffled off the \$1,500. We had it sponsored by Gentleman Jack.

# LAW OFFICE

Bastard (son of hot sauce) @ Chicago - Ashland Office Building September 21 - October 19, 2001.



Rm 4.	Joe Sola -	gogogo Comeons	Rm 11.	Nicola Kuperus -	Untitled Untitled
Rm 5.	Amy Sarkisian -	White Queen Black Queen	X RAY.	David Servoss -	David
Rm 6.	Joe Sola -	Explosion Drawings.	Rm 12.	Ambera Ross-Ho -	Ink
Rm 7-8.	Rashid Johnson -	Traveling the Speed of Thought: Death of a Breakdancer	Rm 14.	Laura Owens -	Untitled
Rm 9-10.	Erika DeVries -	Perch Untitled	Rm 16.	Julian Feldt -	Untitled Untitled
			Rm 17.	Kirstine Roespfort -	Troll Haunting Little Death, Magic Haunting Troll
			Rm 18.	Annie Killelea	

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Daniels and the whiskey ambassadors came  
and served whiskey, which the U of C didn't  
know about.

**Rebekah:** The audience was involved too.  
Fourteen people had hearts under their chairs,  
making two sides of seven. It was according  
to the dueling code set up in 1777. Two  
people would stand back-to-back, walk ten  
paces, turn and fire their paintball guns!  
We gave away 100 ten-dollar bills because  
Alexander Hamilton died in a duel. People  
were going down left and right wincing in  
pain.

**Vince:** I remember Hamza Walker was one of  
the guys. He got shot and his hair was all yellow.

**Rob:** He had to sit down because he got shot  
in the fucking head!

**Vince:** Allison Ruttan almost won, but one of  
the students did.

**Rob:** We'd locked the doors when we came  
in. People were wasted from the whiskey and  
getting shot left and right...

**Vince:** The audience waited for the question  
and answer period and the first thing Rob  
says is, "Well it's pretty obvious that we're all  
hetero, right?" to all these gay and lesbian  
students. It was the best question and answer  
session period because we said all of the  
wrong things.

**Michael:** It sounds like chaos but it was all  
really controlled.

**Rob:** Vince was the barker, Rebekah was  
pulling people up from the audience and Mike  
and I were the seconds. It was traditional  
Victorian duel rules. If they had known about  
the rules they could have asked Mike or I to  
step in for them, (that's what a second is for),  
but we'd take them aside, load their gun and  
say, "Focus! Take ten paces, turn and shoot!  
Look, take a deep breath and calm yourself."  
People were shaking!

**Michael:** **LAW OFFICE** was so many different  
things.

**Vince:** We all agreed that we would stop  
doing things if it got at all repetitive or boring  
or mediocre. I think we were all so worried  
about mediocrity that we just burned out. The  
biggest thing that I think we learned that there  
are no rules in the art world.

## HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

**Rob:** It was a catapult because we used the  
name **LAW OFFICE: Davis, Dermody,  
Langlois and Levine**. Everybody knew who  
we were and what we were a part of. The way  
we got represented through our gallery is  
because of **LAW OFFICE**.

**Rebekah:** **LAW OFFICE** allowed me to not  
make art yet still feel like I was doing some-  
thing. I still use this same model to put  
together events. I don't like to be in the  
studio. I just hate it. I'm like a "conceptor."

**Vince:** It helps when there are four people

who really get along. It's always been insanely  
friendly and really entertaining. I've since gone  
back to school. It was fucking difficult to get  
an MFA after that experience. Going back to  
school was really interesting because I saw  
how radical we were through the lens of  
academia. We created so many weird oppor-  
tunities and spaces for ourselves.

**Michael:** What it did for me was prove that it  
didn't have to be painful to do something  
good. We could make things that we wanted  
to make and make it intelligent! It wasn't just  
flippant irreverent bullshit. It took a strong  
constitution to do all of this stuff with a  
straight face!

**Rob:** One of the things that artists have to  
have is thick skin. Collectively we got rejected  
from more things, but when you're with  
3 other people you just kind of laugh it off.

**Rebekah:** And make up a funny name for  
whoever rejected you.

**Michael:** [to Vince] What was that term that  
you picked up in your studies?

**Vince:** Oh, "relational aesthetics." That term  
came up when I got to UIC and I was like,  
"Oh that's what you call it! I've been doing  
that since 1990." And then I'd have to sit  
through these lectures where I'd be like,  
"God, I used to do this, now I have to learn  
about it?!" It was terrible. But I did love teach-  
ing. I'm a very anarchist teacher and I didn't  
realize it. I really blew out some student ideas  
about what you could do. I was passing cell  
phones to students and telling them, "Call  
the gallery now!" And they thought I was jok-  
ing.

It's sad to watch through the years. Nobody  
has even come close to **LAW OFFICE**. It's  
painfully obvious when somebody is just  
trying to keep the doors open or trying to  
pander to certain people. Art is the only place  
where there really are no rules at all and  
commerce still can happen.

Interviewees: Rob Davis, Michael Langlois, Rebekah  
Levine, Vince Dermody  
Format: transcribed audio interview  
Location of interview: Podhalsanksa, 1810 W.  
Division



1999-1999

# MARGIN GALLERY

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1306 N. Cleaver

FOUNDERS: Nathan Mason

## HOW DID MARGIN BEGIN?

The space came about physically when I was gentrified out of my apartment in Humboldt Park and found a very cheap apartment in Dog Patch. It was one of the really old Victorian tenements: a tiny old four-room apartment. I asked the landlord if I could have the basement too. From the sidewalk, I would walk up the stairs to the apartment, or walk down the stairs to the gallery. I got both spaces for about 600 bucks.

I had begun organizing independent shows in 1991 or 1992 at **Beret International**. Ned Schwartz and I did the *Queer Art Show* for **Queer Nation**. We did one in 1991 and one in 1992. I would send out a big call. They were sort of these large LGBT queer art shows—a lot of local people, (roughly a hundred people in each), and that was a lot of fun. I was doing that while I was working for **Ruth Volid Gallery**. When it closed in 1992, I went through a couple of years of marginal employment. Not having a steady job, I was lucky that I had a nice landlord at the time because I would've been homeless except that he forgave months of my rent. Roberta Kozuch also had a space and I also did a couple of themed shows there—a clown show and some others. I was just putting a call out to a lot of Chicago artists to do a clown painting because clowns are so

bizarre. The clown show was actually a lot of fun. So I got into this habit and every now and then I would get an itch to do a big show.

## WHAT WAS MARGIN ABOUT?

After my period of no income ended, I thought I could get this space where I could do projects in the basement and live in the upstairs apartment. I did about three shows in **Margin**. I called it **Margin** simply because I was paying for it on the margins. I was also on the margin because I didn't go to any of the art schools here. I came here in the mid-80's to do graduate work in art history at the University of Chicago. I did about a year of that, couldn't afford it and realized that I didn't want to be an academic. So I am not affiliated with the Columbia/SAIC/UIC crowd. I don't have that academic circle. I was just out there, free floating!

So I managed to do three shows all of which I liked. There were two reasons that I closed it. When I moved into the space I was told that I could have two years but later they decided that they were going to do the gut rehab thing and they kicked me out after one. That was at the height of the real estate and sub-prime idiocy and I was basically priced out of the market. At the same time I started working for the city and you can have conflict of interest issues if

you are organizing independently while organizing for them. The simple solution was to clean things up and just do my city work.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

*The Butter Show* was the best known. It was just another one of the large theme shows that I like to do. I asked a pretty good sampling of Chicago artists if they wanted to do a piece either made from butter or playing with the idea of butter.

A lot of people made things out of butter. *Butter* brings out the quirkiness in people. Barbara Koenen recreated her butter pole dot piece on the wall for the HPAC show. Joe Ziolkowski photographed a naked man holding a stick of butter. Kermit Berg slathered one of his prints in butter to see how that worked. So it was fun and doing [a thematic call] allowed artists to make temporary work, work that is basically going to be ephemeral. It didn't take them out of their regular art practice but it was a topic that they wouldn't have considered otherwise. When you do introduce the ephemeral into someone's practice, especially if they otherwise work in a permanent fashion, the risk-taking can be expanded. [The work] doesn't have to live forever. [Temporality] allows you to explore more. It's just a good thing, like exhibiting your studies or sketches.

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Partly why I started with butter was that it was January and I am cheap and don't like paying heating bills. It was going to be cold and at least I could 'use' the temperature of the apartment. That aspect also happened to appeal to the press. I got a huge amount of press for a first show and that's not how the Chicago press worked at the time. Fred Camper came and did a review for the *Reader* during the first week, so right at the very beginning I had that little *Reader* article and writers picked the story up from there. The mainstream press reads the alternative press for their stories; John Anderson came and did an article for the *Tribune*, from that the *TV*, *BBC Radio* and a Mexico City newspaper covered it. I think it was the theme and the quality of the work that caused the interest. It was serious professional artists engaging a subject that could help take the "fear factor" out of art for the general public.

This is what I always tell people: The Mapplethorpe exhibit came through here

and Chicago yawned. In Cincinnati there was a huge stink. Chicago can be very blasé about stuff like that and that can be a good thing. **Randolph Street Gallery** had Ron Athey's performances with the blood-letting. In Chicago there were no protests and no screams. I think we can either be very pragmatic in looking at art or the general public doesn't care about and ignores it, (which is not how it should be, but at least we seem to coexist).

I still curate shows with the city. The bigger shows that I do now are inflected by the older, free form, group shows. My interest is in asking artists to do something particular and then they surprise me with the work at the show. I don't like micromanaging. If I'm interested in your practice and I want to do a show with you, generally I'm going to have enough faith that you will give me good work.

One of the things that I emphasize with the general public when I give lectures or tours about art and artists is that art is work. It is

not a play activity or therapy. The product that you make professionally is not the same as that Romantic notion.

HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR PRACTICE? Well, my BA was in art history and ceramics but I've been away from the ceramics part for a long time. I also have always done 2D and sculptural collage. In 1995 or 1996 Dan Hug had space called **Rx Gallery** on Milwaukee Avenue; I had a show there. I've been in a number of group shows through the 2000's. This job takes up a lot of time. Back in my art schlep days I had more time, but I still make work.

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Interviewee: Nathan Mason

Format: transcribed audio interview

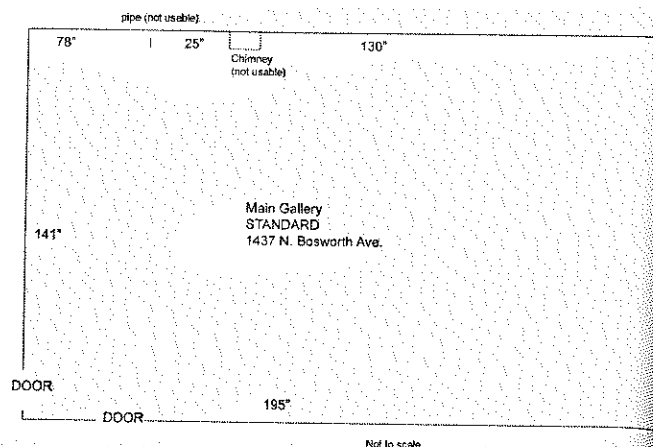
Location of interview: Chicago Cultural Center,  
78 E. Washington St.

1999-2004

# STANDARD

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1437 N. Bosworth Ave.

FOUNDERS: Michael McCaffery, David Roman



## HOW DID STANDARD BEGIN?

Michael McCaffery and I came up with the idea to start a space while we were drinking at Goldstar one night. We were complaining, saying that most of the work being shown out there sucks, and we could do a much better job. I called Michael the next morning after a typical hangover and we both agreed that it wasn't just drunk talk. At the time, I had a space in the front of my apartment (a storefront), so we scrambled and put our first show together in about three weeks.

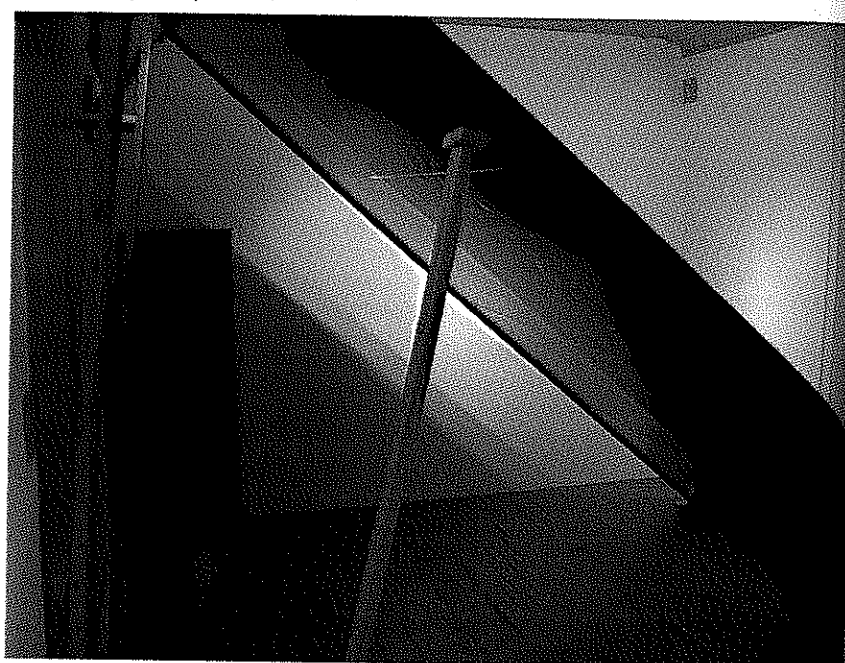
Michael had finished his MFA, (at U of I), a few years earlier and I had never gone back to grad school. We had met professionally as art schleps, working for the Terra Museum and things like that. We weren't the typical art mold of a recent Art Institute graduate. We went into the project with our eyes wide open. We didn't need parties; it was always about the work. We started in 1999, and around that time a few other spaces were already in existence:

**Suitable, Dogmatic, and NFA.** Our spaces kind of grew up together alongside a lot of people, who are now curator types or writers. We all started out at the same time. We were stylistically different from the other DIY spaces, although there were crossovers between artists.

## WHAT WAS STANDARD ABOUT?

We felt that there wasn't enough art that we liked being shown in Chicago. The work that we showed was primarily reductionist

Vince Como, *Object (Subject)*, 2004, installation



paintings or process-based abstractions. Around the late 90's, it seemed everybody was an "outsider" artist straight from an MFA program.

We really wanted an identity for the gallery. We focused on the name **STANDARD**. We had gleaned the name from a combination of generic consumer goods from the 80's and from Ed Ruscha, (Michael was a big fan). We felt it could be used in a number of ways—the good standard or the too conventional standard. We marketed our

announcement cards in an understated design. Instead of a crappy reproduction of the front of the cards we used our logo. Our design stayed the same for all of the cards but the colors changed. We also had a very slick letterhead and envelopes for our press releases. It helped us to have instant credibility because the logo appeared so clean and authoritative. The gallery's look and feel was also totally clean and put together. We were regimented regarding the space; we did six to eight shows a year—with one month for the holidays.

days, in addition to the summer off. Over time we realized that group shows didn't do much for local artists. We then adopted a strictly solo show format. At that point we started to curate seasons of shows, instead of one show at a time.

Our mentality from the start was that we could do it. I was living in the space, so our overhead was pretty low. I could do my taxes as a Schedule C or a home office and funnel my returns back into the space. After the initial investment the space funded itself for five years. We started developing our sales from the first show onward. The work that we showed was of high caliber—in the sense that it was really well made. That was one of our requirements. You could argue the content of the work, or the work itself, but you couldn't argue the craft. It was pretty straightforward. We were no frills.

We wanted to show non-profit type artwork and installations, but have the space fund itself. There was no business model to follow and that was one of the reasons we shut down. We didn't have a local or national space to look up to. We were pressured to come down to the West Loop area, but we weren't sold on the idea. I know we could have run **STANDARD** as a commercial space and succeeded, but we wanted to be able to nurture the artists more than the business.

#### WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

We had a couple of reviews in *Art in America*, and we've been in *Contemporary* as well and a few other international art mags. **STANDARD** got some notoriety.

Some people had their first solo show with us. For instance, Eric Dimas, Frank Magnotta, and Heather Mekkelson all had their first solo show with us. We'd get a bunch of reviews and we'd try to sell work for the artist, to get them money. If we made a sale we'd take one third of the profit, we felt we shouldn't take 50%. Taking a smaller commission kept the prices down and helped sell the work. Now it seems normal, but at the time, having a solo show was unusual. The other DIY spaces seemed to like to curate group

shows that strived to fit some vision.

It wasn't necessarily a good representation of each artist's work. Eventually we started to get people from outside of Chicago in the space.

I think we had twenty-six shows in the space. We did the **Stray Show** for a few years. We got together with other spaces a lot to collectively support one another. The first **Stray Show** wasn't the best looking one, but in my opinion it was the best feeling one; everybody pulled their talents together. We wound up putting together the press releases and graphics for the show. Tim Fleming from **Seven Three Split** did the website. Ian Muirhead from **NFA** wrote the content for the press release. It was a really nice, everybody contributed, a real group effort. After that it was slowly co-opted into TBA and it eventually became the typical satellite art fair.

What else? I got a wife! That used to be the joke when we were lecturing MFAs; I was running the gallery for women and Michael for power. We used that as an icebreaker, although I think a few students believed us.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

After a little bit I stopped making artwork while the gallery was in operation. I felt like it was a conflict of interest. We went to too many artists' studios and I was worried I would subconsciously pick up things from them. If I started showing my own work and it was similar to something that I had seen at some point—I didn't want other artists to think I was taking their ideas. A gallery is based on the reputation of the people that run it and the work that is shown. We wanted to try and have the highest caliber work that we could and assume the best ethics. Perhaps we pursued the ethics slant to the point that it was just stupid. However, it felt different back then for me. It may be because I was in the midst of it all.

Towards the end we got bored. It became routine, and it wasn't challenging. We'd already been reviewed in some bigger magazines and we were selling some work to some pretty big collectors. We were basically at the top of our game. It became

this thing where we needed to step up to the next level. This goes back to not being able to fit into a typical mold. The closest business model we could emulate would be, maybe, Discord Records. They are for-profit, but not really. They just exist, they don't use continued growth as a measure of success. They judge their success off of the music that they are able to produce. I kind of feel like that's what would've happened with the gallery, if we had continued. However neither one of us was particularly interested in continuing.

Michael was/is a practicing artist and he was getting apathetic about the space. I was tired of not being able to sit on a couch, (no room for one),--- with my girlfriend to watch a movie. It's not just every Saturday from 12–5. I worked a full-time day job and at the space I worked a part-time job. We had Saturday hours and several appointments a week. It's non-stop. You don't think about it when you're doing it, you just do it. We could have stepped it up, it was there for us to do, but we decided to stop while we were ahead. I think it pissed some people off [when we closed].

The one thing that I really enjoyed was all of the artwork. I got to live with regularly changing art. Dealing with all of the artists was fun, I would say that 95% of them were cool and 5% of them were A-holes. Most people knew what was up with the space, but the 5% that were difficult didn't have many shows after that. Information spreads through the grapevine. In retrospect, I miss running the space itself and the artists and the artwork. I don't miss sitting on my ass on a Saturday afternoon. I think if I ever won the lottery or something like that, I would do it again. I really enjoyed giving opportunities to artists, and reassuring parents that their kids were ok, that art is a good thing! {laughs}

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Interviewee: David Roman

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: 1437 N. Bosworth Ave./

Interviewee's home

1999-2005

# SUITABLE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2541 W. Thomas

FOUNDERS: Scott Wolniak, Derek Fansler

## HOW DID SUITABLE BEGIN?

It was a complete experiment. Suitable started in 1999, and fizzled in early 2005. It definitely lasted longer than we had anticipated. My wife and I had bought a building in Humboldt Park and we had a garage. It was a structure that could be designated as an exhibition space without spending money every month or giving up something of value. It was a great hybrid, domestic space that was both neutral and utilitarian.

We were inspired to start **Suitable** because the space was there. The **Uncomfortable Spaces** were definitely an influence too. I used to frequent **Ten in One** and **Beret**. At that time I was working with Derek Fansler, who would later become my partner at **Suitable**, as an art handler for Icon. It's just loaded with artists. It's a revolving door kind of place. I met a lot of serious artists that weren't really successful yet. That sort of chemistry was really good because it acted as an incubator for conversations like, "What are we going to do? I hate schlepping all of this shit!" Not that it was all bad, but there had to be something to strive for, to better our own positions, so that we weren't breaking our backs forever for someone else's gain and, more importantly, were infusing the scene with good art (which was definitely lacking). It was an activist gesture. Chicago always seems to be suffering from the "not-enough-good-spaces" syndrome and still is.

I would say that our first inspiration was actually **LAW OFFICE**, they had already

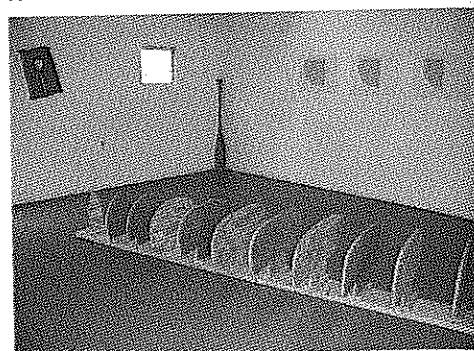
had a few apartment shows. It was always like, "They're doing what?!" I was kind of skeptical of what would happen if they exhibited a show in an apartment and they had an incredible turnout. The work was good and it was pretty exciting. Michael Bulka, who was writing for the *New Art Examiner*, gave a lot of attention to any up-and-coming spaces that were putting forth any effort. Upon seeing the turnout and Bulka championing their efforts, it made us feel like anyone could throw their hat into this thing. You could make it work if you wanted it to. So those were some of the factors that got things going.

## WHAT WAS SUITABLE ABOUT?

The first show [in the space] was a big, ridiculous, unwieldy group show where we invited 30 artists, right around the Fourth of July and loosely based the theme on pyrotechnics and celebration. It wasn't necessarily a good show, but it brought a whole lot of people to the space. It was a good introduction. We had a couple of smaller group shows after that. I think that our fourth show was a solo show with Cindy Loehr. By that point people knew what we were doing, so we could give the space to artists to do work that couldn't be supported by a commercial space.

The garage had a utilitarian feeling with its concrete floor. Artists could do what they wanted in there, and we weren't going to care. That focus crystallized after the first one-person show. We had a couple of shows that John Neff curated. One was

John Arndt Installation



called *Cold Conceptualism*; it brought together artists who did work that on the surface appeared to be really stark and analytical but had a real warm belly or heart. I think that the show was in February and the space was unheated. We had a yard right next to the space, so the open would spill out onto the yard. The space was usually empty, allowing viewers to easily see the show. That particular show was great because there had been a huge blizzard and we had all of the beer stuck in the snow. The ambiance of the whole event was really perfect. A snowball fight broke out. It felt really fun with people hanging out and partying for several hours in 10-degree weather. That seemed kind of special! {laughs}

For the most part, we only had solo shows from that point on. Then we could really give the artist an opportunity to do what they wanted to do. We wanted **Suitable** operate as a springboard. Most of the artists who did a solo show at **Suitable** later ended up showing at commercial galleries around town. In a way it was almost like a 12 x 12 situation. Here's a neutral space, here's what a young artist would do with a solo show.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

For the first three years, we got a lot of unexpected press—which we had hoped for. But, it was really a big surprise that we lasted more than a year. John's *Cold Conceptualism* show was written up in *Frieze*, and other shows were written up

*Flash Art*, the *New Artforum*. The press made us believe that worth continuing. We wouldn't have continued if it acted like a piece in some sense the space started proposing. We didn't get as many individuals as I had had any serious commissions during the pieces from one show. A piece was "bought" by a company (the piece our roof collapsed works on paper at **Shows**. Regarding that supported the diverse—from student artists.

The fact that we had the longevity of the space with cheap beer cards. Plus, my son of the house. During the last year involved started. The kicker was, it dwindled, and it was people. They seemed like we were new audiences weren't serving once did, partly worn off and a gallery scene. Though, in retrospect, the complete to the very end, an increase in last year and our energy for space) was a more profound desire to be to my own with the **Uncomfortable** two, the Chicago

*Flash Art*, the *New Art Examiner* and *Artforum*. The press we received really made us believe that there was something worth continuing. Not to say that we wouldn't have continued without the press, but it acted like a pat on the back; that in some sense the space was valued. Artists started proposing exhibitions to us as well. We didn't get as many curators or museum individuals as I had hoped and we rarely had any serious collectors. We sold few pieces during the run. We sold three or four pieces from one show to L.A. MOCA, one piece was "bought" by the insurance company (the piece was destroyed when our roof collapsed), and we sold a few works on paper at the various **Stray Shows**. Regarding the artist community that supported the space, it was great and diverse—from students to professional artists.

The fact that we weren't paying rent helped the longevity of the space. We were no frills with cheap beer and Xerox copies for postcards. Plus, my studio was in the basement of the house. During open hours I would just come out to the space if someone showed up. I could be working while the space was open. Since it was domestically situated, it wasn't like I had to do a job where there was no monetary income. During the last year or so, the effort involved started to take its toll on me. The kicker was that the crowds started to dwindle, and it was always the same people. They were people that I liked, but it seemed like we were no longer reaching new audiences with **Suitable**. It felt like we weren't serving the same purpose that we once did, partly because the novelty had worn off and partly because the commercial gallery scene had improved quite a bit. Though, in retrospect, after looking back at the complete program, we had great shows to the very end, and there was actually an increase in our programming over the last year and a half. So, while it seemed like our energy for the space had waned, [the space] was actually getting tighter and more professional. Ultimately, there was just a desire to have more free time to dedicate to my own work. When we first started, the **Uncomfortable Spaces** were down to two, the **Chicago Project Room** was real-

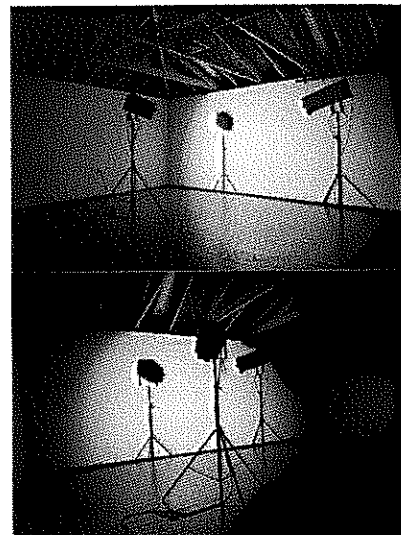
ly good, and **Bodybuilder** had humble beginnings, but had stepped up its game. **Kavi** was doing great stuff as was **Western Exhibitions** and **Bucket Rider**. These galleries were showing people our age, and doing it professionally, fulltime, in a commercial space. I always thought of **Suitable** as being for real.

Derek was always focused on his career, web design and game design. I didn't want to stop making work, so it wasn't an option [for me] to take **Suitable** to the next level. Plus there was an issue of guilt with me. For example, Katy Fisher did one of our more conventional shows: she hung paintings and drawings on the wall. It was a straightforward show with absolutely beautiful pieces, and in any sane world, the work would have sold out! I wasn't in a position to try to bring in artists, or to treat the space as a commercial gallery. I felt like **Suitable** did a disservice to her—we weren't in a position to promote or sell shows. In her case, the beautiful, highly collectible objects may have been better served in a more conventional commercial space. We however, offered a lot in the way of street credit and alternative caché, which shouldn't be underestimated.

At the beginning we wanted to provide an opportunity for artists to show their work so that other spaces would snatch them up. We wanted artists to show their best work because the root of our project was to challenge the commercial spaces to show better work. It was a critique of the established scene, which, to be frank, was pretty awful [in 1998]. I thought that if I can't put energy into representing the artists properly, then maybe we shouldn't do it.

The most successful shows were the ones that wouldn't have happened anywhere else in town. For example, Stan Shellabarger did one of his pine needle drop-ceiling installations. He strung fishing line from the tops of the walls across the space and suspended thousands of pine needles from the line. There was a gorgeous, hovering, inverted, shag carpet hanging there! Also, Vince Dermody did a piece that was all about his identity—wrapped in symbolic objects, including a headstone and a gravesite. He took some inheritance money from his

Christian Anderson Installation



mother's passing and used it to buy a large gravestone and a car. Then, he parked the new muscle car in the space next to his grave. That was a great project—it couldn't have happened anywhere else. You just can't bring a car into many galleries.

**HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?**  
I opened **Suitable** before going to grad school and prior to grad school I felt both disconnected from and critical of the establishment. **Suitable** was a response to that. Another response was attending graduate school. Both were good for networking, (even though that was viewed as a "bad" word at that time). By creating a situation for the community, by facilitating [that situation], I worked with and got to know a lot of artists. That was really helpful for me. It didn't feel like a drain on my practice and instead, working as an administrator in a community improved my practice. I got to see artists who were farther along in their own work than I was with mine. Helping them put their shows together and reading their proposals was a really great learning experience.

Interviewee: Scott Wolniak

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: New Wave Coffee, 2557 N. Milwaukee Ave.



1999-PRESENT

# THE SUBURBAN

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 125 N. Harvey Ave., Oak Park Illinois

FOUNDERS: Michelle Grabner, Brad Killam  
WEBSITE: thesuburban.org

## HOW DID THE SUBURBAN BEGIN?

In 1997 we moved from Milwaukee to Chicago. We finished grad school in the early 90's. I went to Northwestern and Brad received his MFA from UIC. We had many contacts and friends still living and working in Chicago so we were set on returning with our family when we could afford it. In retrospect it shows our lack of imagination because Milwaukee was really interesting at the time, as it is today. But we felt that we had to come to Chicago in order to be part of a meaningful art dialogue. I now regret that. We didn't understand at the time that we were shaping our own discourse in Milwaukee. We landed in Oak Park because we had two small children then and we were committed to giving them a good public school education.

We opened **The Suburban** in the winter of 1999. The first show was with David Robbins. Looking back it was both an ironic and telling opening reception. Suzanne Ghez came to the opening with Darren Almond in tow. It was one the largest turnouts we've hosted. From a local institutional-stamp-of-approval vantage point, **The Suburban** was fulfilling a hole in the city's landscape from the get-go.

I also think many people who where here during the era of the **Uncomfortable Spaces** were thinking that **The Suburban** would be a type of equivalent.

Neither surprising nor begrudging, local institutional curators turn up only occasionally to see projects here. From the start, we had only artists in our scope, so the lack of concern by local curators and institutional types is negligible to the success of **The Suburban**.

## WHAT IS THE SUBURBAN ABOUT?

**The Suburban** is not modeled after commercial galleries or non-profit spaces; rather it is modeled after the idea of a studio or a practiced space. **The Suburban** offers a small and congenial audience. Public and private are intertwined here. The close but separate proximity to our domestic context underscores relationships to the commonplace of the home. The familiarity of the studio and the home provides artists with freedoms not allotted in other "proper" institutions.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

Over the years we have achieved a number of remarkable experiments. For example,

Cip Contreras, summer 2008



David Reed, who previously hadn't exhibited his drawings—unaccompanied by his paintings, showed a collection of them here. His project at **The Suburban** led to an all-drawing exhibition in Stuttgart. Another great example is Cameron M. show in the spring of 2009. Martin, K.

James Welling and Walead Beshty, September 2008



for his paintings depicting landscape tropes has been included in exhibitions internationally, including the 2004 Whitney Biennial. When he was installing his new paintings here he commented that, "I'm taking a chance, I've never done these types of works before. They are so different in terms of their subject matter." Fundamentally, **The Suburban** allows artists to consider ideas that they would not consider in other contexts, including other project spaces.

Over our ten year run another pattern emerged. Artists of career-rank who don't need to undertake a project at **The Suburban** end up doing more compelling projects than those who find their way to us because they want another line on their resumé. In the latter, the work is often phoned-in and the freedoms and potential provided by **The Suburban** are not valued. This was not the case with Tony Feher, Dan Walsh, Gavin Turk, Shana Lutker, Rochelle Feinstein and many, many others.

As for our greatest advocates, I think artists are really the forceful promoters of the space. We've shown 150+ artists. If you have that many artists, in various stages of their careers, in separate locations promoting your space, it's bound to inherit

a reputation on some level. David Reed is a great promoter of **The Suburban**. He suggested that we show Gregg Bordowitz and Rochelle Feinstein. David Robbins introduced us to Alex Brown. We listen and follow up on the recommendation of artists.

The rise of artist run spaces boomed here in the early 2000's. There were, and still are, plenty of opportunities for Chicago artists to exhibit. We thought it would be important to show work by artists who live and work outside of Chicago. It was also becoming difficult in terms of who is shown, and who is not in this small and cliquey town. We would get students and colleagues approaching us regularly. It's awfully hard to say "no" to people you work with at your day job.

As an extension of our approach to exhibitions and our commitment to artists and their ideas, Brad and I recently bought a property in rural Wisconsin. It is a 19th century Poor Farm outfitted with a jail in the basement and graveyard out back. It was a complete social system from 1876-1933. The property was part of the American Poor Farm system—which is modeled loosely on the English almshouses. If you were destitute you could be arrested or sold into indentured servitude prior to the establishment of these institutions. Operated by county governments, they were often built in proximity to the county insane asylum and prison. The Waupaca County Poor Farm accommodated 280 people who lived and died there over the span of its administration.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

In terms of **The Suburban** and its relationship to my work, I find it to be a beautiful thing. There's **The Suburban**, there's my writing, there's teaching, and on occasion there is a curatorial project. All of these things are critically vast and promote their own kind of social and political exchange. Thus, the interplay of these external activities allows my studio work to be narrowly focused. So when I enter my studio I can consider the language of sameness, repetitive vocabulary, the reiteration of time and all the abstract things that I value. I would

not have been able to define and tame my studio practice in the ways I have if not for **The Suburban**.

I'm often guilty of slighting picture makers and narrative painters, privilege instead the virtues of abstraction. But if I only engaged in my esteemed studio practice I would be a very different type of teacher. I am constantly learning from the artists who come to **The Suburban**. I learn by helping them install their work. I learn by carefully listening to how they articulate their concerns about art making and their concerns regarding the larger art world. That mapping helps me both in my criticism and in my teaching. It also allows me to be wholly abstract, if not elitist, in my studio practice. And that is OK by me! {laughs} Don't get me wrong. I highly prize looking and critically assessing work and cultural production. But what I need and want from my own studio is very different.

Interviewee: Michelle Grabner

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: 125 N. Harvey Ave., Oak Park, Illinois

The Suburban, January 2009



2003-2003

# DELUXE PROJECTS

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 500 W. Cermak

FOUNDERS: Adam Scott, Carrie Gundersdorf, Danielle Gustafson-Sundell, Andrew Moore

## HOW DID DELUXE PROJECTS BEGIN?

In 1998, when we all graduated from our respective MFA programs—Danielle Gustafson-Sundell from Northwestern and Andy Moore, Carrie Gundersdorf and I from SAIC—there was an art space vacuum in the scene. The **Uncomfortable Spaces (Ten-in-One, Beret International, Tough)** had either packed up and relocated to the coasts or shut down completely. The four of us met through grad school or through group shows we had been in and we started to talk excitedly about possibilities at the *Sex Party* show at **LAW OFFICE**. We stood huddled, drinking beer and talking non-stop all night. The party just disappeared around us. We began planning a group-show called *deluxe*, (which would eventually become **Deluxe**, the project space). We loved the **LAW OFFICE** events, but when it came to making and thinking about art, their events weren't what we were all about. While we may have been suffering from some post-graduate school over-seriousness, we weren't immune to the infectious energy of their events.

We started with a big space on the 7th floor of 500 West Cermak. Adam had a studio on the 4th floor and he could get a cheap deal on rent for a big space. Our space was in an industrial building on the river—between Pilsen and Chinatown—so we weren't really part of a specific neighborhood. It was a bit isolated—it was better to travel by car, (or travel in a pack), to get to our openings. We ate a lot of Chinese food before and after openings.

The first show consisted of painting and sculpture work by all of us. The show was interesting and quite well attended for Pilsen at that time, (summer of 2000). The

show was called *deluxe*. After the show was dismantled, we started kicking around ideas about how to keep doing these kinds of shows. We quickly realized that showing our own work in a self-run space was a really boring proposition.

We then came up with the idea of mounting solo shows. We wanted to show artists who had just finished grad school and needed to flex their art muscles.

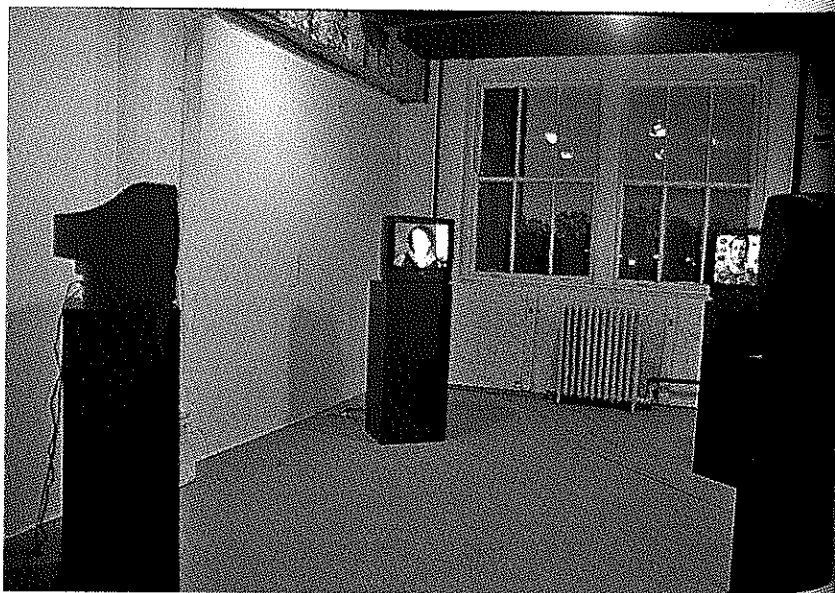
## WHAT WAS DELUXE ABOUT?

The idea of conducting (only) solo shows became our core principle. At that time DIY spaces in Chicago were primarily exhibiting curated group shows. All four of us were aware of strong artists who were ready for a concentrated viewing of their work and our name became **Deluxe Projects**.

**Deluxe Projects** was about extending the conversations we were having in grad school, decentralizing our own artistic

productions, getting us out of our studios and into the world in addition to dealing with work that was radically different from the work we were producing. We were the synthesis of raw-punk/DIY ethos and the visual and structural aesthetic of a Kunsthalle. The Kunsthalle is basically "a space for art" that doesn't keep a permanent collection or representation of artists. It's a very European thing and we admire that model. We just wanted to show the work because we liked it. We wanted to show work without strings, or if there were strings—they were ours. We built a glowing white cube in a crumbling, funky, old-ass building. That seems to mix the Kunsthalle approach with a feisty DIY spirit.

We had meetings where we'd bring ideas and images of work by artists, etc... We would discuss and argue and hash it out. We contacted artists whose work we liked.



Installation by Susan Giles, Danielle, Andy, Adam and Carrie, 2001, site specific video work

## Instructions For Running A DIY Art Space

1. Fall in love with art.
2. Go to a party, a bar, an opening, a lecture, etc.--anywhere where you can see art and find conversation. Get out of your studio.
3. Find other artists there who are as desperate as you are to explode into the world!
4. Hang out together, visit each other's studios, get high, and share your secrets.
5. Talk a brutal corporate management company into giving you a big space at a reduced rent for a month.
6. Come up with a name that suits the show and create a logo that feels instantly permanent.
7. Spend every day and night sanding, spackling, painting and coughing up drywall dust. Paint your friend's head!!! hA!
8. Realize that you are actually building a funky white cube with the earnest intentions of mounting an exhibition that will change your little corner of the world.
9. Fall in love with your partners and their visions and their voices and their arguments and their felt and paint and foam and dirt and bricks and geometry and goop, etc.
10. Open the show up to everybody no matter who they are or where they come from.
11. During the opening, let the summer breeze drift in through open windows while the city lights float in the night like electric fireflies. Realize that whoever you all were before this, you are all now changed and open and awake.
12. Decide to keep the shows happening in whatever way possible. Find a direction, a focus, a reason to keep falling in love with art and artists.

-- Our aim is true...

Deluxe Projects  
Push Pin Project 0014

Danielle Gustafson-Sundell, Carrie Gundersdorf,  
Adam Scott and Andy Moore

April 2009

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Artists also approached us with ideas and proposals and while we did receive unsolicited materials, that wasn't our main source [used to locate artists]. We loved curating and working with the artists. Installing and preparing a show was one of our favorite parts of the whole process. There is nothing like the late nights spent figuring out how and where and why work goes where it goes. Those times really push you to try and figure out what the work is doing; what it's all about. Some of the artists we worked with wanted our input, others just needed a set of keys to the space. We preferred being more hands-on; otherwise it was all administrative work, bill paying and handing out beers. We had to approach this on a case-by-case basis; in order to be respectful of the needs of each individual artist.

#### WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

We mounted thirteen solo shows during our three years of programming. Every show was conceptually tight and curatorially strong and we never ran out of beer at the openings. Some particular highlights: Michelle Grabner's flocked wall piece, or lying under Cindy Loehr's lead blanket for 45 minutes; Milhaus's 24 hour pancake cook-off, and Nancy Ford's pillow sculptures. We participated in three **Stray Shows**—which meant renting a booth. We had a no-sales policy, but in the end we did sell some work. We acted as a liaison, more so than a dealer, and the artists were generous enough to make a donation to us. At the **Stray Show** Andy Moore did his insane *Dirt Politics* show. That blew Philip von Zweck's mind.

We had a lease, monthly rent payments, postcards, supplies, (like light bulbs), paint, garbage bags and all that stuff. We took care of incidentals for openings—which means lots of beer and ice. We also renovated the space ourselves. The new walls and additional lighting were paid for out of pocket. We kept Saturday hours, so someone had to be there. We took turns. We always watched the gallery in pairs because it was really spooky to be there alone. We also kept a donation jar out during openings in the hopes that it would

cover the cost of beer for the next opening. It never did. The space was also broken into and we were robbed. An artist who was installing a show, prior to opening, lost all the equipment for the show. We had to replace everything from expensive stereo equipment to a hand-held steamer. We felt obligated—it being our space—even though we had essentially given our keys and our space to the artist and didn't even know what was going to be installed. This was a very hard lesson. Later, after closing the space, we produced two separate poster projects, which we paid for and disseminated freely.

We closed the space after two years. We continue to work with each other whether its curating or exchanging studio visits. We have traveled together to art fairs and still enjoy both discussing and arguing about art with each other. In a way it feels like **Deluxe** is an entity that still exists.

As for closing the physical **Deluxe Projects** space, there is no one straight answer. If you asked us all individually, you would probably get different answers—there were a number of factors that affected each of us differently. The list would include: it was a constant financial drain, the building we were located in was always an adventure to deal with, we had all gotten much busier with jobs and as artists, it started to feel more like administrative work and less like fun. It was like we were "working" for the artists instead of participating; really, the usual complaints that shut down most DIY and commercial spaces. And for all of that, in the end, we still miss it.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

**Deluxe Projects** continues to exert a heavy influence on all our individual artistic practices. Running **Deluxe Projects** was an education that no amount of money in the world could buy. We are a band that has never really broken up.

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Interviewees: Adam Scott, Danielle Gustafson-Sundell

Format: email interview



2000-2003

# JOYMORE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2701 W. Augusta

FOUNDERS: Melisa Schubeck, John Henley

WEBSITE: joymore.org

## HOW DID JOYMORE BEGIN?

I started the gallery/artist-run-exhibition space, **Joymore**, in the fall of 2000. I had finished with my MFA at University of Michigan and moved back to Chicago that spring. My former employer, Prehistoric Properties, donated the gallery space. I thought running the gallery would be a good way to get involved in Chicago's art community, learn how to organize exhibitions, write press releases and curate shows. I ran it on my own for about a year. John Henley, a fellow artist whom I met while teaching ceramics at Harold Washington College, got involved a year later and he became co-director until we closed it in January of 2003.

## WHAT WAS JOYMORE ABOUT?

**Joymore** was never really about any one thing or focus, more about supporting fellow artists, having fun, and giving people the opportunity to experiment and do projects that would not necessarily fit into the typical art gallery model.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

We did a lot of shows—once a month for two years non-stop. We worked on creating the first art fair for emerging galleries with Thomas Blackman Associates, the **Stray Show**. The **Stray Show** came about when the guys from **STANDARD** and **Dogmatic** decided to make a map of all the new art spaces that had opened around 2000 or 2001. They called the map *Stray*. Tim Fleming of **Seven Three Split** and myself thought it would be good to organize some sort of collector tour using the map so that the Chicago collector base could become

familiar with our spaces and buy work from us. We were talking with Tom Blackman and Heather Hubbs about this idea and how to get the collectors to come to our spaces. So then Thomas suggested that we do an art fair instead of a collector tour. After some discussions we agreed to organize a fair of the new artist-run spaces. Tom sponsored it and I found a donated space via Michelle Grabner. We put together the fair by including all of the galleries from the map and naming the fair after it, **Stray**.

We got some good press and had a lot of freedom to experiment. We worked with some great artists, some of whom are pretty successful now: Siebren Veerstag, Amanda Ross-Ho, Pedro Velez, Nick Black, Ben Stone and Mindy Rose Schwartz. Plus we threw some pretty awesome parties. I guess the big highlights were the first **Stray Show** we helped produce and the outdoor *Thrill Shows* that we put on in a vacant lot on Humboldt Boulevard, (that space was also donated by Prehistoric Properties). We tried to include as many artists as possible and everyone made interactive type work for the most part; Ben Stone did a great fireworks display, we had a swimming pool, dance performances, bands, DJ dance parties etc... Everything was free—food and beer—and open to the public. I racked up a huge credit card debt doing those shows!

## HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I learned a lot about how to put a show together, how to write a press release, collaborate etc... I don't know if it directly affected my art practice. I guess it changed

my art practice from studio-based work to curating and public art projects. The outdoor shows came about as a way to entertain myself, since I love throwing parties much more than running a gallery. Although I had never thought of them as "public art" before, I am an artist, so I guess the parties fell under the public art label!

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Interviewee: Melissa Schubeck

Format: email interview

2000-2004

# MODEST CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECTS

FOUNDER: Jason Dunda

## HOW DID MODEST CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECTS BEGIN?

**Modest Contemporary Art Projects** began as an elaborate joke. I think I had the first show in the spring of 2000. The gallery was a shelf, an architectural plastic niche I found at Home Depot that you could plaster around and make it look like an architectural element. I bought it for a show that I had when I was living in Toronto and I brought it with me to Chicago. I hung it on a wall outside my studio at the School of the Art Institute and every few months I put a new piece of kitsch from my collection on it. Soon I started thinking about what it would mean to show art in such a small place. One of the clichés about Canadians is that we're self-effacing, very polite and that we say sorry all the time. That's where the idea of modesty came from.

## WHAT WAS MODEST CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECTS ABOUT?

The first exhibition was *Fragile*, by Tegan Smith, a good friend of mine from Toronto. She constructed a little crate made of balsa wood and put eggshells in it. She mailed the crate, unwrapped and unprotected like one would mail a regular sized crate, and it arrived in Chicago completely destroyed. The US Postal Service placed it in a plastic envelope with a form letter apologizing for the damage. I showed it on the shelf, envelope and all. It couldn't have been more perfect.

At this point I just kept the show up and didn't think about further programming. One of my studio-mates at school had a friend in Philadelphia who made comics, zines and other multiples and was interested in the idea of **Modest Contemporary Art Projects**. The gallery was a mail art thing at first, but after a few shows, some of the grad students became interested in show-

ing on the shelf. During the last half of the spring semester I did a bunch of shows. At the openings there would be Dixie cups full of crème soda and I strategically placed mini Oreo cookies on a plate. Anything small. The openings were 25 minutes, between 6:05 pm-6:30 pm. I was trying everything at a reduced scale, including the pretension. Actually no, the pretension was greater once I really got into writing the press releases.

It became a big part of the project to make miniature invitations, press releases and brochures. I wanted to say the simplest and humblest things in the most convoluted language. I used two thesauruses and a dictionary from 1954 for everything that I wrote! (laughing) It came out of my love of vocabulary and hatred for artspeak and it progressively became more and more sarcastic as time went on. I buried the simplicity of the projects in useless vocabulary. Much of what I wrote was to apologize for bothering the audience with the show.

Sometime in the summer between my first and second year of graduate school, my very expensive architectural niche was stolen and I replaced it with a very cheap shelf I bought at the dollar store. That didn't last very long. I replaced it with an old end table in the corner of my studio and eventually the corner of the studio itself became the space. The exhibitors would install on the wall or provide their own pedestals. When the novelty of the shelf-as-exhibition-space disappeared, I thought it was even more important to have the writing and tiny opening aesthetic. In the fall, I mounted the '11 MFA Show with a handful of grad students from all over the school. Everyone really liked the idea and the openings became really well attended.

When I finished grad school I lost my

studio. I lived in a shitty apartment in Bridgeport and connected to the kitchen. It was a six by six foot room with a six-foot ceiling. It was a little nook, too big to be a closet, too small to be a bedroom. I didn't know what to do with the room, so for a couple of years I was just throwing stuff there for storage. Because it was an otherwise useless space, I thought it would be perfect for a gallery.

## Modest Contemporary Art Projects

became an apartment gallery. The first show was an intensive object-counseling project by Pete Fagundo. He removed and re-installed everything I had already put in the space over the previous couple of years. He very thoughtfully placed everything in the room to take advantage of its aesthetic and practical value. Just like all of Pete's work it was really beautiful, intelligent and kind; sad; it was the ideal way to transition the space from storage room to gallery.

In the press release for the first show I wrote that relocating to Bridgeport was a perfect move for the project because though we had enlarged the space, it was "less convenient to get to" and that we hoped that it would offset the grandeur of having more space. At that point people that I didn't know started coming and the project changed a lot as a result. Some of the audience didn't get the point and the reactions went from confusion to anger. Pedro Velez wrote about the first show and didn't really understand what I was doing, have a feeling he didn't spend much time with Pete's work or the press release because he wrote that I was in Pilsen when I was really in Bridgeport and he also criticized the project for being too small to be worth the trip, which was basically the punchline. Over the next several shows

hitty apartment in these awkward moments happened more and more often. During Carrie Gundersdorf's show, one of her collectors came out and it was clear that he was expecting a lot more and didn't really care about how clever and ironic my project was. Eventually, only my closest friends came out the openings. It was as just throwing stuff great holding parties for my friends, but eventually I got tired of the joke, tired of running a parody of a gallery.

## Modest Contemporary Art Projects

My Canadian heritage was a big influence—it kept the project humble and sarcastic. Just before I left Toronto in 1999 I heard Hans Ulrich-Obrist speak about reducing the scale of exhibits. He talked about how he let people curate shows within his shows. He spoke about a guy in Japan that had a gallery in a milk crate and carried it around with him. He also put together a symposium comprised entirely of coffee breaks, because the best conversations usually happen in the most casual of places. Looking back, I think that lecture really planted the seed for the project. These were difficult and interesting spaces.

like all of Pete's work, intelligent and kind. I way to transition the room to gallery.

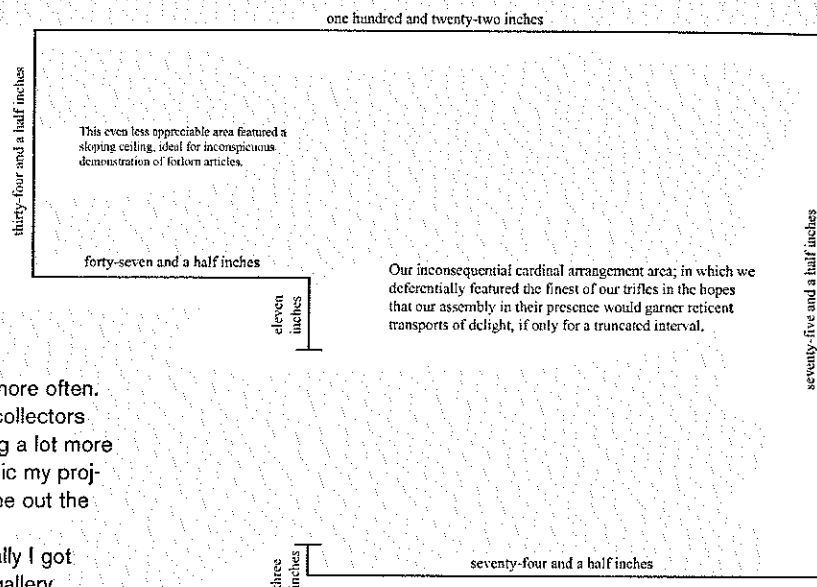
for the first show to Bridgeport was a project because I argued the space, it was "get to" and that we offset the grandeur. At that point people started coming and the not as a result. Some get the point and the confusion to anger. About the first show and what I was doing didn't spend much time on the press release. That I was in Pilsen where he also came being too small to be was basically the next several shows.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

I think we definitely went out with a bang—on Valentine's Day 2004, Duncan MacKenzie and Shannon Stratton curated 69 artists into that little room. There were so many people at the opening I thought the floor to my little apartment was going to cave in. The project had little flashes of legitimacy over the years and I had my fans. Lori Waxman was always behind it, as was Lisa Stone from the Roger Brown Study Collection, as well as Britton [Bertran] and a lot of other past and present Arts Administration students and faculty at the Art Institute. I felt that when people got the joke, the project really worked.

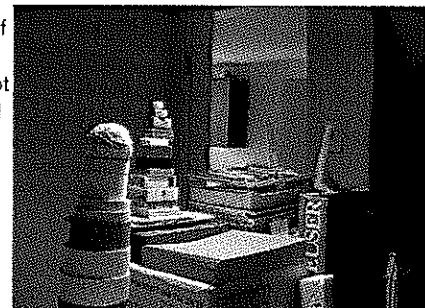
## HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I did a project a few years ago at **Gallery 400** with Teena McClelland as the Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators. We called it *Experiment 400/5* and it came directly out of a combination of our approaches. We divided the space into five spaces and then subdivided those into five spaces, so we had 25 spaces in the gallery. On a daily basis 5 or 10 people would be installing and de-installing, so the exhibition was in constant flux. By the end of the show, 125 people had exhibits and the show looked different every day.



**modest contemporary art projects** proffers this scale diagram of the arrangement of our erstwhile atelier so as to advance the understanding of the element aesthete on the constituency of this our discontinued laboratory of diffidence.

We wanted to talk about issues of accessibility in the gallery space. Everyone who wanted a space got a space in the show, but they had to complete a complicated and ridiculous written application. It was pretty great and it was a very nice way to see the wide variety within the art community of Chicago. We'll do it again when we recover because it was a logistical nightmare.



Peter Fagundo, *Intensive Object Counseling Project*, 2001

There is an implicit sense of humor in my work that this gallery was related to. Also, I always have issues with snobbery. I'm a total elitist, but I hate snobs. {laughs} In the last few years I've finally gotten into enough of a rut that I can work for eight hours straight. I always had issues with productivity and making time [to work in my studio]. It's something that I started to overcome a few years ago. It was never a choice between becoming a gallerist, or staying an artist. I was always an artist. The gallery was an art project. That was why it was doomed from the start! {laughing}

Interviewee: Jason Dunda

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: Intelligentsia Coffee, 55 E. Randolph St.

**"It became a big part of the project to make miniature invitations, press releases and brochures."**

# (ART)ISTS RUN CHICAGO

John Neff and Scott Speh

*Artists Run Chicago:* It is a history of artists' finding, or making, a place in their place. Artists, their spaces and a city. A term is missing and its absence is telling: art. What role do individual artworks or exhibitions play in the phenomenon dubbed "Artists Run Chicago?" What might we learn about the origins and uses of artist-run spaces if we shift our focus from the spaces to the art shown in them?

Just as there have been previous exhibitions dedicated to "alternative" galleries in Chicago, there are several histories of Chicago art. Often these investigations focus on the purportedly eccentric, independent or otherwise idiosyncratic nature of Chicago's art. Frequently, such inquiries link the apparent aesthetic quirks of art made in Chicago to speculations about the general character of the city. Raw, rough, unsophisticated—a city bound to the larger world by commercial rather than cultural cosmopolitanism. Chicago's alleged indifference to local arts is seen to spur artists into elaborate personal visions rather than participate in broader debates within the formal, institutional structure of international contemporary art. According to this narrative, scrappy artists-run spaces in Chicago grow from artists' super-local interests and flourish despite neglect by an elite that is concerned primarily with gaining status outside the city. In short, the spaces mirror the peculiarities of the art they exhibit.

But this is only one version of Chicago's art history. A second—and, perhaps, now more common—variation describes a Chicago art world shaped by a handful of conceptually-oriented graduate programs, all preoccupied by the historical development of art and theory made beyond the shores of the third coast. In this telling, Chicago artists' involvement with the local is a matter of site specificity rather than sensibility; even projects that are completely dependent upon the particularities of their exhibition spaces can have a *discursive* portability if they engage with the methodological mainstream of academic art. Seen from this angle, artists-run spaces are often an extension of—not an alternative to—elite institutional interests. Operating an "independent" space can be a way for artists to curry academic favor, connect with professional networks outside of Chicago, or court regional commercial galleries.

Surely, neither of these accounts of Chicago art and its spaces—as willfully amateur or determinedly professional—is entirely accurate.<sup>1</sup> If the discussion around *Artists Run Chicago* is to develop into a

discourse nuanced enough to sustain serious, productive attention (not just the sporadic cycles of celebration and complaint that have, for too long, constituted talk about the city's art), then it must include detailed analyses of the art made and shown in Chicago spaces. Further, it is important that this discussion interrogate the interrelations between that art; the artists who made and exhibited it; the academic institutions that educated and employed those artists; the commercial interests that supported or ignored their work; and the artists-run spaces in which the art was shown.

In addressing these and related questions, what kind of evaluative language will we use? Will we understand the artists-run phenomenon as a refusal of established terms, or should we assume a continuous hierarchy of taste and quality across the whole of contemporary art? If the first, can we live and work in obscurity with our skepticisms becoming a debilitating *ressentiment*? If the second, are we willing to concede that some of our own work may be less significant than we'd like to admit? However these questions are approached, we believe that this discussion requires both a solid understanding of the objective conditions of the art and spaces being discussed and a willingness to be as unsparing in judging one's self as in judging others.

As a first step towards a vocabulary suitable to discussions of the real conditions of Chicago art and spaces, we've invited some proprietors of Chicago artists-run spaces to respond to a series of questions about the work they sponsored. Our questions are broad but specific and the artists' answers are presented with minimal editing. In constructing this article, our intention isn't to draft a definitive history of artists-run spaces in Chicago, rather, we aim to multiply the variety of questions that are asked about art spaces from the city's recent past.

In particular, we're interested in expanding the discussion around a paradoxically under-analyzed aspect of *Artists Run Chicago*: specific artworks and exhibitions, (this focus is likely conditioned by the fact that one of us is a maker of object-based artworks while the other is an art dealer). For this reason, we've focused inquiry on galleries explicitly conceived as exhibition spaces—excluding galleries intended to be understood as "art projects" in their own right. Further, we've chosen to focus our research on a period that we, too, witnessed first-hand: the late 1990's and early 2000's, (this places our investigation both in parallel with the

ous, productive attention and complaint that the city's art), then it must be shown in Chicago (discussion interrogate the who made and exhibited and employed those who created or ignored the art was shown).

It is our hope that the following will, in some small way, both illuminate the complexities of the art in artists-run Chicago and provide material for further analyses of Chicago's art history.

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the discussion around *Artists Run Chicago* is likely conditioned by object-based artworks. In addition, we've focused on exhibition spaces—often called as “art projects”—and our research on the late 1990's and early 2000's runs in parallel with the

**Hyde Park Art Center's** periodization in the *Artists Run Chicago* exhibition and allows us to check facts against our own documentation and memories).

It is our hope that the following will, in some small way, both illuminate the complexities of the art in artists-run Chicago and provide material for further analyses of Chicago's art history.

**Melissa Schubek:** co-director of **joymore** (2000 - 2003)

**WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE SHOW(S) AND WHY?**

Michael Bulka's *Dirty Pictures*. He was primarily an art writer whose background was in art but no one ever saw his work. He kicked out about 100 awesome watercolors of bad Internet porn which were really right on and off in the best way, and way ahead of the times in terms of the bad painting that was happening, (or maybe in sync with the bad painting trend). I also liked Pedro Velez's show, *Porn*. I liked his attitude towards curation and how serious he was about what he was doing, and even then his fake postcards were so great! He has a great eye.

**WERE THESE EXHIBITIONS BETTER/WORSE/THE SAME FOR BEING SHOWN IN AN INDEPENDENT SPACE LIKE YOURS AS OPPOSED TO A COMMERCIAL OR INSTITUTIONAL VENUE?**

Well, I don't think that most of these shows would have even happened in those spaces to begin with. We never approached the gallery from a curatorial or commercial viewpoint and always wanted it to be an experimental space that allowed artists and curators to have the freedom to use the space to do projects that suited their individual approaches to their work. So in that respect I think a lot of good shows came about because of our hands-off approach. We also had a lot of very bad shows.

**WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC (USE WHATEVER CRITERIA YOU FEEL BEST)?**

*Realm of Lair*, curated by Ben Stone and Siebren Versteeg. Timely, trendy, great work, mixed it up with established and emerging artists. Big group show, pulled in big crowd and got a review. They also hosted a dungeons and dragons game which was ongoing

during the Saturday gallery hours which was pretty fun. Ben made these gargoyle like dragons that he hung off the wall and these fake torches with fake flames which were pretty hilarious and so “un-gallery” like.

**WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE CRITICAL ESTABLISHMENT?**

Umm, I don't think we got very many reviews from the shows we hosted despite the fact that now that I look at the list of artists we showed, a lot of them have gone on to have success in one way or another. Fred Camper gave us a review once for a show I did the first year with Larry Lee and Sarah Wilde in the *Chicago Reader*.

Apart from that we got support from the writers who were involved in the gallery scene at that time—Pedro Velez, Michael Bulka, Julia Marsh but never the big three art magazines or national art magazines, just local stuff.

On a side note, when I opened the gallery in Brooklyn in 2004, only a year later I got reviewed in *New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, *Time Out New York* and several other smaller zines which goes to show you how much more NYC is supportive of emerging galleries and artists, (although these are local papers as well).

**CARE TO DISCUSS ANY ARTISTS WHO HAVE GONE ON TO GREATER ACCLAIM?**

There were many artists that we showed who have had positive opportunities in the art world since they showed with **joymore**: i.e. Whitney Biennial, NYC Gallery representation, museum shows, teaching gigs etc., but they would have done that with or without showing at **joymore**. It just so happens that they were there and John and myself were doing the gallery and we connected in some way or another so that they showed at our space.

**Michael S Thomas:** Director of **Dogmatic** (ca. 1997 - 2008)

**WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE SHOW(S) AND WHY?**

*Pinpoints and Sparkle* (2006) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, James Leonard, sculpture and installation with accompanying essays. This was a beautiful program. Jim is remarkably insightful and the work was drop dead gorgeous.



*Re-Location* (2005) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, Julia Marsh, photo installation with accompanying essay contributed by Carol Jackson. Julia busted her ass putting together this show. It was to be our transition program but the work ended up running long. Basically she re-created the entire gallery from 1822 S. Desplaines as a series of mapped out, scanned images installed inside the new gallery at Lake St. It was an awe-inspiring commingling of space and history.

*re'al space'*, adj. (2003) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, site specific and multimedia work, Andrew Moore, Helidon Gjergji, Jee Eun-Kim, Jack Sloss. Andy Moore and Jack Sloss are two of the three artists I would do anything for. Andy is amazing. He simply does not have an off-button. Andy showed up with three overstuffed paper grocery bags filled with seeming random shit, sat down in the middle of the gallery and started assembling his show. He didn't know what it would look like until he got there. Nothing was precious. Nothing was safe. Jack and Jee Eun-Kim on the other hand were polar opposites. Their piece was palpable, noisy, and sweaty, it could only be truly described by big eyes and a complete brain to move the big pictures they saw. That being the case, the work was precise as a sliderule, and as planned as a trip to Disneyland.

*Happiness (Finally) After 35,000 years [Beta V.1]* and *Pioneer Renewal Trust* (2002) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, performance, installation, works on paper, projected video, new work by Paul Chan and Nato Thompson respectively. I always thought Paul and Nato working together would be great. I tried to make that happen a couple of times but it always fell through until this show. Once it happened I was shocked by the fact that they seemed to completely hate one another. Anyway, Nato put the house at 1822 up for sale as a conceptual allegory for gentrification and Paul showed his Darger girls for the first time. Good stuff all around, righteous, bawdy fun.

*Frank Pollard* (2001) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, three Installations featuring photographic contexts, Frank Pollard. Frank is the third artist I would give anything to work with. For this program Frank painted the interior of the gallery, including faux wood grained floors to match the interiors of dioramas he had constructed and photographed. The resulting disconnect that the viewer experienced was uncanny and stark. Chicago had never experienced work like this before.

*Instalation View* (2000) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, individual site specific works, Nicola Axford, Jeremy Boyle, Jack Sloss, Danielle Gustafson-Sundell, Pedro Velez, Siebren Versteeg with accompanying essay by John Neff. Instalation is purposefully misspelled. This was the second of three programs that summer to include Jeremy Boyle. The intended purpose of which was a 3-month walk through the types of programming that alternative spaces or galleries in general seemed to be constantly offering. The first was a big dumb theme show called, *Robot Love*, the second was the artist-curated group show and the third was a one-person program.

The work in each program carried over into the next and resulted in much high drama as the shows went forward. Good times.

*The Work Show: things artists do when they are being paid to do something else* (1999) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, group program Co-Curated with Philip von Zweck. Philip put this shindig together. We had 30 or so artists handing or mailing work on, by or about anything that wasn't nailed down or too valuable to be noticed missing. Sharpy on orange rind with white-out.

*Burnt, Fried and Set Aside: The Meat Show* (1998) **Dogmatic**, Chicago, IL, Group Program, Co-Curated with Paul Chan and Stephanie Halpern, Accompanying Catalog features Essays by Paul Chan, Stephanie Halpern, Melissa Oresky, Amanda Ross, Frank Pollard and Siebren Versteeg. Sponsored by Moo and Oink Grocery Chain. This was our third show. We put together our first catalog for this program. Moo and Oink not only sponsored the catalog, they donated a ton of sausages for our mid-winter, hibachi maneuvers and an oil painting from the company president's office.

WERE THESE EXHIBITIONS BETTER/WORSE/THE SAME FOR BEING SHOWN IN AN INDEPENDENT SPACE LIKE YOURS AS OPPOSED TO A COMMERCIAL OR INSTITUTIONAL VENUE?

- With very few exceptions, none of this work would have shown in another venue. Reasons being,
- The artists hadn't been "discovered"
  - The works in question were devised with **Dogmatic** as their contextual corpus
  - I was the individual that worked with the artists, and hookers and blow aren't cheap

WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC (USE WHATEVER CRITERIA YOU FEEL BEST)?

There are two programs that come to mind. The criteria being they are the ones that people seem to remember most when introductions have been made, they have to say something kind of seemingly witty because we are in public.

*Billie Jean* (2000) mixed media sound installation, Jeremy Boyle **Dogmatic**. This installation replaced a coal shoot cover on the sidewalk in front of the gallery with a light box that was synced to the first 20 seconds or so of, Billie Jean. It corresponded to the Michael Jackson video for the same song, in which the first 20 seconds he steps on lights up. Jeremy's track looped, so for about 6 hours every Saturday I had the honest pleasure of hearing the first 20 seconds of Billie Jean. And as an added bonus a lot of neighborhood kids constantly moonwalking in front of my house.

*Junkyard* (2000) mixed media installation, Installation View, Siebren Versteeg, **Dogmatic**. A small scaled model of a junkyard installed in the Dirt Room. Beneath the model in a hole under the shack was a small television playing WGN. Guests who visited

the next and resulted in a dark room could see its flicker in the shack's window and hear Xena  
ward. Good times. laying in real time. It was the first installation in the Dirt Room.

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WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE CRITICAL  
ESTABLISHMENT?  
Chicago has no critical establishment. **Dogmatic** had even less of  
ne. The only writer who did a review of any work in the space  
and never showed there was Fred Camper.

W (1998) **Dogmatic** ARE TO DISCUSS ANY ARTISTS WHO HAVE GONE ON TO  
with Paul Chan and GREATER ACCLAIM?  
g features Essays by they all seem to be doing very well. Some of them I miss very  
esky, Amanda Ross much. Some of them not as much. A few of them no longer make  
sored by Moo and O work and that saddens me even more.  
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**David Roman:** co-director of **Standard** (1999 - 2004)

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WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE SHOW(S) AND WHY?  
It's very difficult to define a favorite show. It all depends in the  
mood that I am in during one of the shows. As you can imagine  
one goes through a great deal of different emotions and moods  
during a five-year stint. I can break the shows down to two arche-  
types though. The quiet subtle shows that have reduced work as  
compared to the bright colorful, poppy shows. For the meditative  
quality of the work, I enjoyed Stevie Rexroth, Kathleen McCarthy,  
and Heather Mekkelson's shows. Bill Smith, Beth Reitmeyer,  
Donald Stahlke's shows had a bit of fun and nature influence that  
made me smile.

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WERE THESE EXHIBITIONS BETTER/WORSE/THE  
SAME FOR BEING SHOWN IN AN INDEPENDENT SPACE  
LIKE YOURS AS OPPOSED TO A COMMERCIAL OR  
INSTITUTIONAL VENUE?  
At the time we ran **STANDARD** not a lot of opportunities were  
available for younger artists to have solo shows. For some reason  
there seemed to be a glut of group shows with similar players  
being shown at most of the DIY spaces. The commercial spaces,  
for the most part, were showing boring, safe art. After our first  
year, I would say 90% of programming consisted of solo shows.  
We felt this allowed the artist the opportunity to be able to test new  
work or expand work that had only been a glimpse during a group  
show. This was very important to us and we felt to the artist. Since  
our space was not market driven, (although we encouraged sales),  
we could allow artists to basically do what they wanted. The physi-  
cal attributes of the space, (being a domestic storefront), allowed  
us to have a somewhat white cube to work in, with enough quirks  
to make it unique, especially for site specific work. Brandon LaBelle  
was looking for a domestic art space for an installation piece that  
was a commentary on *Seedbed*. Bill Smith installed a sort of retro-  
mad scientist laboratory in the storefront in which he changed the

whole feel of the space with rugs and furniture interspersed  
between his sculptures. Kathleen McCarthy installed three "walls"  
of monofilament that were basically invisible until one's eyes adjust-  
ed.

These are but a few examples of work that would have not had the  
same effect in another traditional space. However, there are some  
shows that would translate easily into commercial venues and  
have since we'd shown the work.

WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC  
(USE WHATEVER CRITERIA YOU FEEL BEST)?  
How about shows that were well viewed and received by the pub-  
lic that didn't get the typical quantifying markers, (i.e.  
reviews/sales)?

Stevie Rexroth (Minneapolis) installed a series of beautiful b/w  
photographs that didn't read as photographs. She used dark-  
room/studio techniques to achieve a reduced image. In anticipa-  
tion of the show, we repainted the tin ceiling to silver, painted the  
walls and repainted the floor. The show looked great and we  
received a very solid turnout. I remembered Buzz Spector came up  
to see the show. We had much interest (no bites) from a few col-  
lectors. Both Michael, (McCaffrey, the other co-director of **STAN-  
DARD**), and I think it was one of our best shows. It was very  
strange that it was "ignored" by the press.

Heather Mekkelson installed a grid of sixteen soil slabs on  
pedestals that filled the storefront without making the space feel  
heavy. The opening had a fair turnout, but was very well received  
by visitors during gallery hours. Julia Fish spent 45 minutes walk-  
ing in between the sculptures in an almost ritualistic manner. An  
artist from Iowa was so taken by them that he used it as an anchor  
for a group show at the, (then new), Figge Museum that he curat-  
ed. Once again, serious inquiries by a bigger collector in the city  
didn't pan out. The show was almost reviewed by a critic; it would  
have been if we hadn't gotten into an argument about show dates.

WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE CRITICAL  
ESTABLISHMENT?

I'll list some shows and the press they received  
(off the top of my head):

Bill Smith – *Art in America*, *Dialogue*, *The Reader*, *FGA*  
Eric Dimas – *New Art Examiner*, *The Reader*, *New City*  
Kathleen McCarthy – *Art in America*, *The Reader*  
Beth Reitmeyer – *New Art Examiner*, *The Reader*, *New City*  
Brandon LaBelle – *Chicago Tribune*

In general, the shows in our space were widely covered by most  
press outlets locally and nationally. We were very serious about  
the work and the prestige of the gallery, (it didn't matter that it was  
my apartment), and I think that was conveyed to the critics at the  
time.

CARE TO DISCUSS ANY ARTISTS WHO HAVE GONE ON TO GREATER ACCLAIM?

These are artists that we showed; I do not claim that their success is based on showing with us. I do think their practices are very strong and that is the reason for their success.

Frank Magnotta had his first solo show with us, his second was with **White Columns** (NY) and was represented by **Leslie & Cohen** before they closed, but I believe he was picked up by another Chelsea space. Bill Smith broke into the NYC scene with **PPOW** a few years back. Reviewed in the *New Yorker* among others. Scott Short went from a solo with **STANDARD** to his next solo show, (a few years later), at **The Renaissance Society**. Now he has dealers in LA and Italy backing him.

There are a bunch more artists that we showed that have thriving art practices: Molly Briggs, Vincent Como, Dan Gamble, Carrie Gundersdorf, Jay Heikes, Heather Mekkelson, Mark Murphy, Melissa Oresky, Chris Patch, Beth Reitmeyer, Catherine Ross, Pete Schulte, Mike Smith and many more.

CARE TO DISCUSS ANY ARTIST (FOR WHATEVER REASON) IN PARTICULAR?

I always enjoyed working and hanging out with Bill Smith. His work is unique, strange, and pretty. He introduced me to the term "dirty diaper" when talking about burritos. He lived the example of being green, (never preached), long before it was hip.

-----

**Scott Wolniak:** co-director of **Suitable**  
(July 1999 - December 2004)

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE SHOW(S) AND WHY?

I know that Derek and I have very different opinions on this, and also it is REALLY hard to narrow it down to just one, but I think that Stan Shellabarger's show was my favorite. He used the space in a way that optimized the unique functionality of the space. This included a long, extended install period, (the work needed to be made in the space). It was site specific and transformed the space, it was very very beautiful, and he did a performance in the space!

WERE THESE EXHIBITIONS BETTER/WORSE/THE SAME FOR BEING SHOWN IN AN INDEPENDENT SPACE LIKE YOURS AS OPPOSED TO A COMMERCIAL OR INSTITUTIONAL VENUE?

From the beginning, we were very interested in the differences between **Suitable** and more commercial models, and this definitely influenced our programming. We were initially interested in showing artists who were making serious work but who were 'under-represented' as they say, or even totally 'unrepresented'. To be clear though, we had no interest in representing artists, but

enjoyed giving opportunities to deserving artists who's work was maybe too adventurous, weird or big for the commercial space.

We had virtually no overhead so we could show what we wanted without commercial pressures. Commercial galleries in general, and Chicago galleries in particular, seem hyper concerned with market potential, and perpetuating pre-approved artists. We like showing things that subverted the object in favor of environmental and/or unwieldy monstrosities. This was not always the case—we definitely did show some 'pictures on the wall' too. So we were exactly trying to be a residential version of the **Dia Beacon** or anything, but felt our best potential for serving a unique function to the community was to use the space truly as a project space. I think that the shows that capitalized on the flexible neutrality of space, like Shellabarger, Sterling Ruby, Nicholas Frank, Reed Anderson, Vince Dermody, and others, were the best shows. For the most part they couldn't have happened in the same way in institutional or commercial spaces.

WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC (USE WHATEVER CRITERIA YOU FEEL BEST)?

That's a tough one too, but three shows come to mind as clear audience favorites: *Cold Conceptualism*, (curated by John Neff) which used the season as a backdrop for the work and created a really great atmosphere for the art and opening. It snowed for a few days straight prior to the opening; we stuck the beer in a snowdrift and late in the evening a big snowball fight broke. I know this delves into the lore of the space more than the actual work, but it was definitely a factor. Besides, the work in the show killed: Aaron Van Dyke, Miller & Shellabarger, Paul Dickinson.

Vince Dermody's show was wildly popular, what with the muscle car and a real full-size grave in the space. People sat on the hood of the car during the opening, and mix tapes were playing on the car stereo. What's not to love?

Reed Anderson's show was really cathartic, happening the week of 9/11 and inadvertently addressing 9/11 itself in a humorous, drunken sort of way...it was a good one.

WHAT SHOW WAS BEST RECEIVED BY THE CRITICAL ESTABLISHMENT?

Cindy Loehr's show was reviewed in the *New Art Examiner*, Dermody's show in *Art Forum*, Sean Rowe in *Flash Art*, and *Cold Conceptualism* in *Frieze*. Plus other smaller things like *artnet*, *flavorpill* and *FGA*.

CARE TO DISCUSS ANY ARTISTS WHO HAVE GONE ON TO GREATER ACCLAIM?

Sterling Ruby is doing extremely well. Cindy Loehr has continued to make strong ambitious work with quite a bit of success. Conrad Bakker is extremely busy and showing literally everywhere. Melanie Schiff of course.

artists who's work was looking back over the program history, I am quite proud of the commercial spaces choices we made. We were in the right place at the right time, had a good space, and also, occasionally, made some solid selections. show what we wanted galleries in general, most all of the artists we showed are still plugging away and /per concerned with making good work--Ben Stone, Paul Nudd, Katy Fischer, Nicholas /oved artists. We like Frank, John Arndt, Jason Robert Bell, Julia Hechtman, Dan Wang, favor of environmental.

t always the case--we're all' too. So we were ARE TO DISCUSS ANY ARTIST (FOR WHATEVER REASON) the **Dia Beacon** or A PARTICULAR?

ing a unique function would also have to throw a couple other favorite shows out is a project space. I'd like:

flexible neutrality of Ben Stone's show was amazing and weird and funny. I am just a holas Frank, Reed huge fan of his work and have really fond memories of moving that e the best shows. For giant octopus into the space. in the same way in

I already mentioned his curatorial project, but Neff's solo show was fantastic: a nice combination of objects and installation, with his typical blend of idiosyncratic specificity.

PUBLIC  
ST)?

me to mind as clear Conrad's Bakker's show was great--an almost full-scale carved urated by John Neff wood GTO! Plus, he listed it for sale in muscle car publications so we got as many visits to the space from car aficionados as we did from the art crowd, which was an interesting cultural crossover.

ing. It snowed for a Paul Dickinson's worm music project was awesome. We put our tuck the beer in a household table scraps in the compost box during the run of the vball fight broke. (I show, and kept a log of what and when things were put in, which more than the actual became a 'score' for the 'music'. the work in the show

r, Paul Dickinson! Nicholas Frank's project was really satisfying. It was a context what with the muscle specific faux documentary involving an alien visiting the gallery. eople sat on the floor The final sculptural installation of his books was gorgeous, s were playing on the luminous, subtle...

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Loehr has continued  
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#### Acknowledgments:

This article was born out of casual discussions between the authors, (long), before, during and after the **Hyde Park Center's Artists Run Chicago**; conversations that included colleagues from both inside and outside of Chicago. The completed article endeavors to maintain a conversational structure: the article's format was arrived at collaboratively, John penned the introduction and Scott wrote and conducted the interviews. After the text's components were completed, the two authors co-edited the material to arrive at a final draft.

1. Further complicating this question, it could be noted that we're using a fairly narrow definition of "art" here--one referring to a rarefied branch of Western culture dedicated to the development of aesthetic ideas and objects. Chicago's "art" history, (and the history of its artists-run spaces), includes significant contributions that fall on the fringes, or outside, of this definition.

# WHAT THEY DID AWHILE

B. 2002 – B. 2005

The Roof  
1/Quarterly  
Unit B  
Fraction Workspace  
Mess Hall  
artLedge  
The Green Lantern Gallery  
VONZWECK  
65Grand

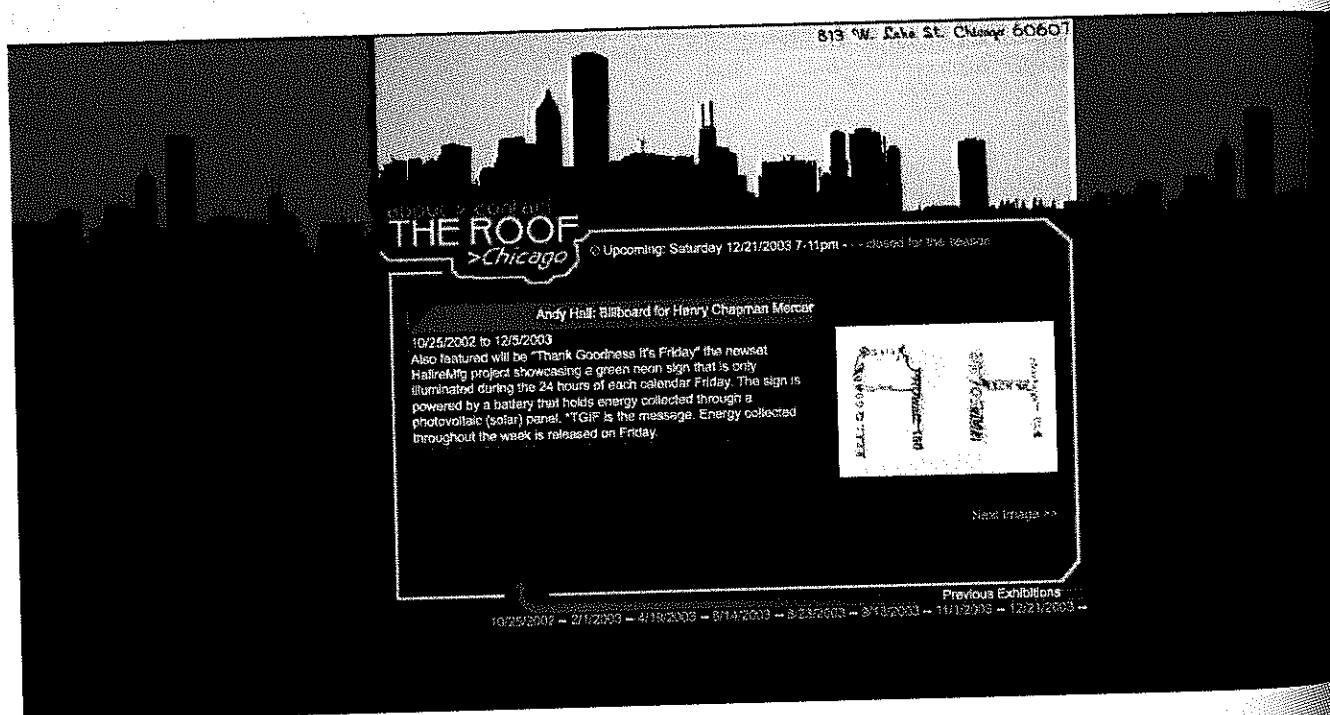


2000-2003

# THE ROOF

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 813 W. Lake St.

FOUNDERS: Amanda Ross-Ho, Siebren Versteeg



813 W. Lake St. Chicago 60607


about > contact  
**THE ROOF**  
>Chicago

Upcoming: Saturday 12/21/2003 7-11pm - - - closed for the season

Andy Hall: Billboard for Henry Chapman Mercer

10/25/2002 to 12/5/2003

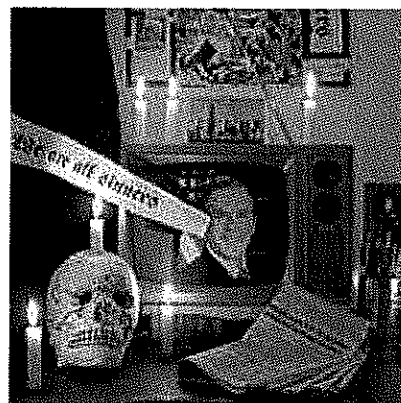
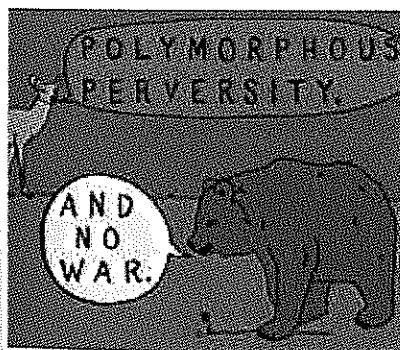
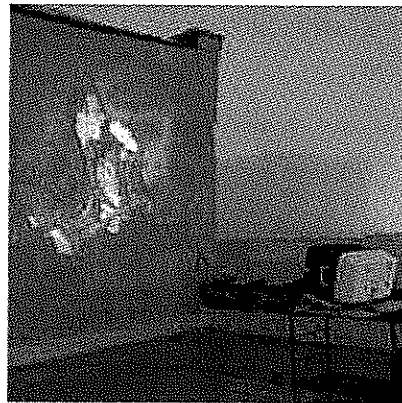
Also featured will be "Thank Goodness It's Friday" the newset HalimMo project showcasing a green neon sign that is only illuminated during the 24 hours of each calendar Friday. The sign is powered by a battery that holds energy collected through a photovoltaic (solar) panel. "TGIF" is the message. Energy collected throughout the week is released on Friday.



Next Image >>

Previous Exhibitions

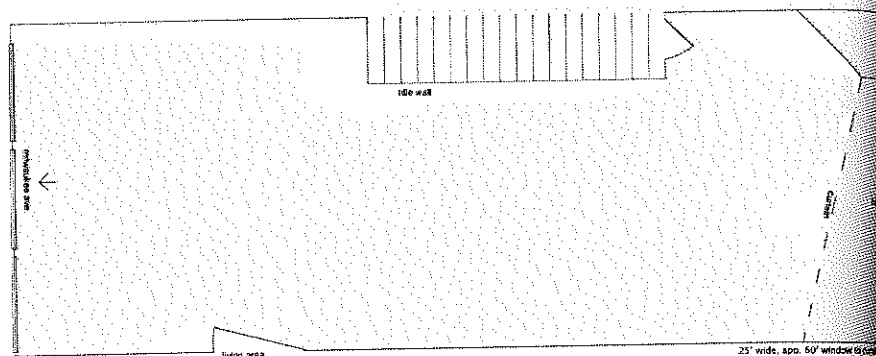
10/25/2002 - 2/1/2003 - 4/18/2003 - 5/14/2003 - 8/23/2003 - 9/13/2003 - 11/1/2003 - 12/21/2003 -



# I/QUARTERLY

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 355 N. Milwaukee Ave. #3

**FOUNDERS:** Deanna Hovey, Heather Mekkelson, Eric Ravenstein



## HOW DID I/QUARTERLY BEGIN?

It started out as an open studio night; I was going to show some new work and invited some friends over. I was talking to a couple of friends who also made work, and they wanted to put some things in too. The space was huge. It was a 2,500 square foot rectangular loft with big windows in the front. We partitioned the space off and once it was all set up, the space was obviously well suited for a gallery.

At that point, my other roommate was Eric Ravenstein; he eventually became Co-Director of the space. We didn't have a name or an identity. It was just an open studio party that turned into a thing.

The first real **1/Quarterly** show was called *Fort Quarterly*. We weren't yet comfortable with taking the next step, having big month-long shows and gallery hours. We just wanted to have a weekend event. For *Fort Quarterly* we invited nine artists and non-artists, who we called "civilians" to construct a giant fort of blankets in the space over the course of 48 hours. They built a nearly 1,000 square-foot blanket fort! It was really big! There were certain parameters they had to adhere to: no permanent hardware, etc... Everybody brought supplies in from their homes or from thrift stores.

We got some people from the **MCA** to the space the first night and they were crawling through the fort. I met Scott Speh, of **Western Exhibitions**, for the first time in the turret [of the fort] shooting water guns at people. It was pretty fun and the response was huge. Then we all got into it! Eric became the Co-Director and we made the space a bit more official. Shortly thereafter we took on a third roommate, Deanna Hovey and she ended up acting as an additional Co-Director. Running the gallery was such a good way to meet other artists. I had been out of undergrad for a couple of years and had created an ivory tower around myself. I didn't know anything about what was going on throughout the city.

## WHAT WAS 1/Q QUARTERLY ABOUT?

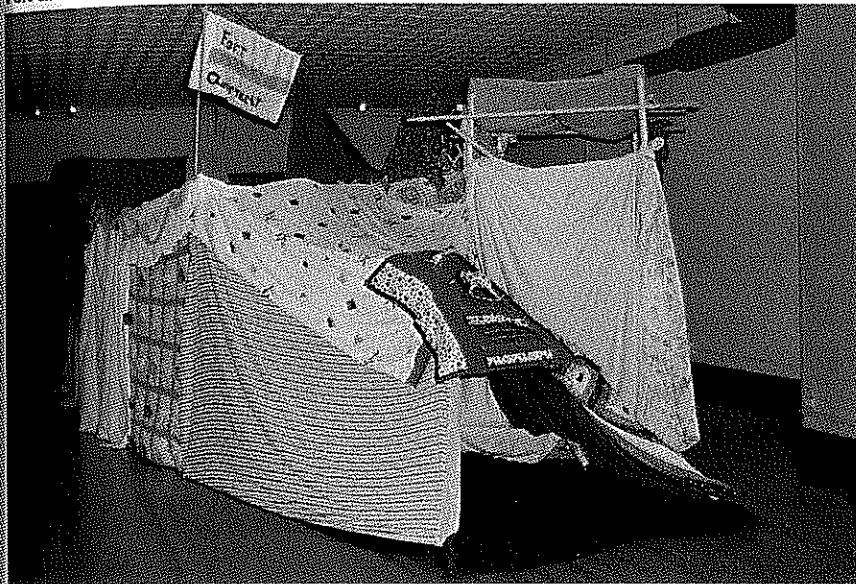
The name **1/Quarterly** happened because we were talking about doing one show per quarter. But, we ended up having many more than four [shows] a year. We were trying to be really professional, [meanwhile] I was Site Manager over at The School of the Art Institute's **Gallery 2** and I was running a my own business. It seemed like everything I had learned from **Gallery 2** and all of my financial resources were getting funneled into **1/Quarterly** and I knew it was going to be a limited project. I didn't

want to live in that loft forever. We never really had a mission statement. It was a place to show emerging art and we had a lot of one-night events; curated shows, events with **Versionfest** and parties. The place was the party loft—which was another reason I didn't want to live there forever.

We also tried to take turns curating shows. A lot of it was just sitting around a kitchen table talking and someone would get an idea. Other things just came to us. The *Pinewood Derby* that John Wanzel did to me came from a proposal that he submitted. This wasn't the first Pinewood Derby that an artist has organized in the city. I think **Gallery 312** had one before. But John looked at the historical correlation between the Boy Scouts and Henry Ford. He wanted people to build their own derby cars and



Invasion (2003)



““When somebody leaves there is a void. We fill in these little niches with our styles, our random visions of galleries and what [we think] needs to happen.”

It's a constant process of giving and after you get a certain amount of reviews or sales, that's pretty much the height of it.

But I still think the best thing that came out of it was meeting people. Some of my best friends came out of doing projects. When you come to a space as an artist yourself, it's nice when the other person has the sensibility of someone who cares about the work. There is some kind of beautiful, unwritten generosity between the artist run spaces and the artists who show in them. I've given work to a lot of the spaces that I've shown in and I've got a lot of work from **1/Quarterly**. It is all really great work that becomes a beautiful time capsule of that era.

Through **1/Quarterly** I gained confidence in curating [my own shows] in general, it got me to be aware of where I was and whom I was living around. Now, when I think about our community I take it all with a grain of salt. I know that if there are no galleries out there at the moment they are going to come back. I've seen the cycle a few times and try to take advantage of the spaces when they are there. Locally, people are still asking, "Are you going to have a space again?" Because when somebody leaves there is a void. We fill in these little niches with our styles, our random visions of galleries and what [we think] needs to happen.

Interviewee: Heather Mekkelson  
Format: transcribed audio interview  
Location of interview: 1437 North Bosworth Ave.

race them. There was an awards ceremony for the winners and it was a very big event. There was also a month-long exhibition of the cars and other artifacts.

#### WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

The main thing that I got out of running the space, in the long run, was becoming part of a community. I really thought it was going to take me a lot longer to get to know people, but I think it took me only three months. I also met my husband David Roman through his gallery, **STANDARD**, but that's another story. (laughing) We'll get to that later. "I submitted my slides," no, seriously I really did. Talk about learning lessons of what not to do! I walked right in on a false suggestion and gave David my work!

So that was a great way to start. Another thing that I learned was how *not* to approach spaces, how to *not* be a prima donna and to be self-sufficient. After that you understand that it can work similarly to a black list; gallery directors and curators talk to each other. If somebody is a pain in the ass, word is going to spread quickly. So, being self-sufficient was a big thing.

Regarding sales: we occasionally sold things, which was always really exciting for the artist. We were really thrilled when we could do that. About the expenses: once

you get the lights up and you get the space painted, it's not really very expensive; we lived there too. At that point, everyone was still doing postcards. The postcards, the postage, and the beer were the big expenses. We had the ubiquitous donation jar out, but that never really covered it, which was fine because we were hosting.

When you open a space, you get in the circuit. With **STANDARD** and **The Pond** nearby, we ended up having a trio of openings. We were really different spaces stylistically, but socially we all hung out together.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

Eventually I grew really tired of people finding out that I made work, and being like, "Oh I didn't know you made work too." There's no way that I was going to stop making work in order to run a space. It was never a professional goal of mine to be a gallerist. I had to choose my battles and eventually my practice won. Regardless of who you are or how you go about starting a space—with eyes wide open, or without knowing what you're doing—it is a huge sacrifice when it's in your place and you utilize your own resources. It's kind of thankless. It doesn't surprise me that the cycle for most of these places is five years.

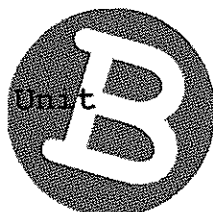


2002-2004  
2006-PRESENT

# UNIT B

LOCATION OF GALLERY: (earliest to latest)  
1733 S. Des Plaines St.  
500 Stieren St., San Antonio, TX

FOUNDER: Kimberly Aubuchon  
WEBSITE: unitbgallery.com

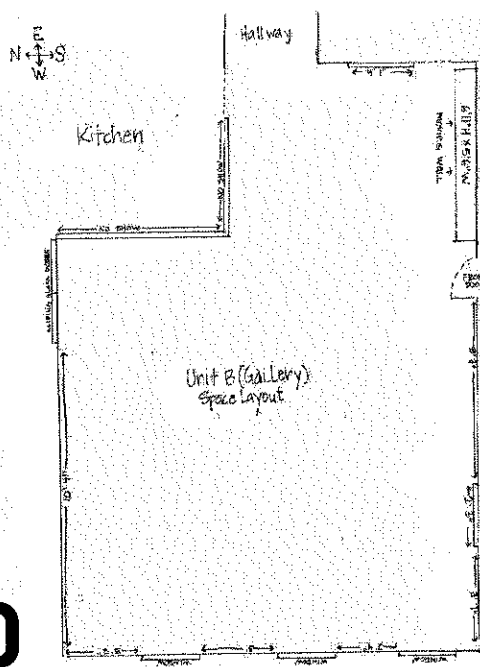
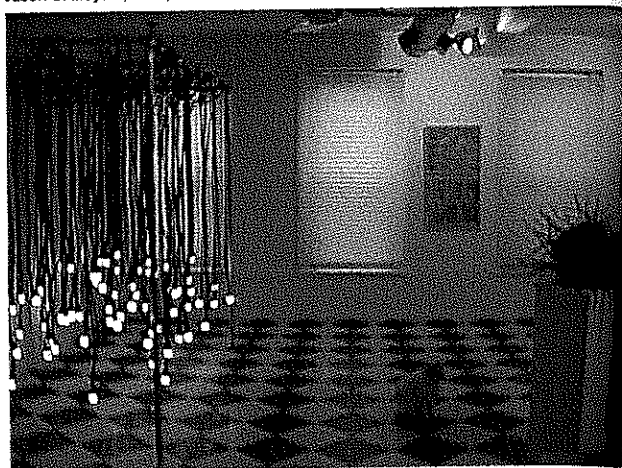


**Unit B (Gallery)** is an artist-run exhibition space that showcases emerging contemporary artists and curators in group exhibitions that are intended to engage, excite, and challenge our guests, as well as provide insight into the creative process.

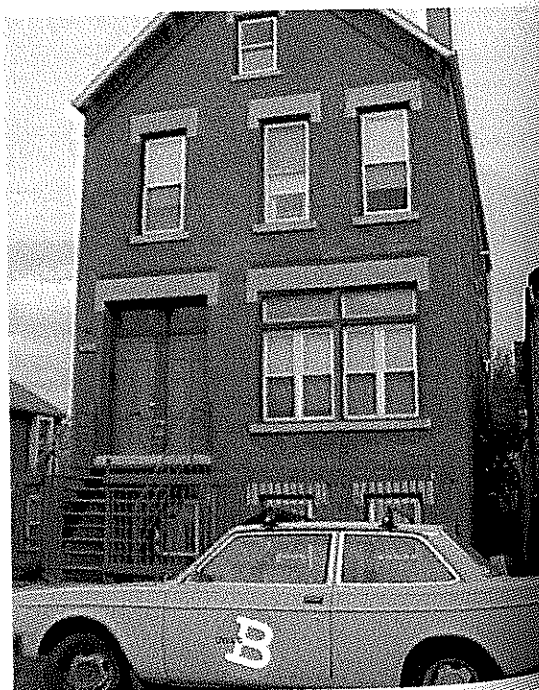
The gallery was originally founded in Chicago in May 2002 in a small garden apartment with killer black and white checkerboard tile and hosted 12 shows a year through October 2004. **Unit B**, along with several other artist-run spaces, that include: **Apt. 1R**, **Jesus Chrysler Gallery**, **Drivethru Studios**, **Gallery sixfourfive** and **Bucket Rider**, organized the monthly Second Friday art openings that still function today in what is known as the Chicago Arts District.

**Unit B** re-opened in San Antonio, Texas across the street from Sala Diaz, another artist-run gallery space in January 2008. The space is set in a duplex apartment with a kitchen gallery and a living room space and a spacious yard. Chicago artists have to fill the space several times a year, along with other national and Texas-based emerging artists and curators. **Unit B** is funded by exhibiting artists, curators, a volunteer gallery staff, and many art friends.

Jason C. Meyers, *Luna*, 2003. Installation view.



60



Unit B (Gallery), Chicago location, May 2002- November 2004



2003-PRESENT

# MESS HALL

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 6932 N. Glenwood Ave.

FOUNDERS: Brett Bloom, Marc Fischer, Dan S. Wang

WEBSITE: [messhall.org](http://messhall.org)

**WE DEMAND CULTURAL SPACES RUN BY THE PEOPLE WHO USE THEM.**

**WE CREATE THE SPACE TO REMIX CATEGORIES, EXPERIMENT, AND LEARN WHAT WE DO NOT ALREADY KNOW.**

**MESS HALL EXPLODES THE MYTH OF SCARCITY. EVERYONE IS CAPABLE OF SHARING SOMETHING.**

**THE SURPLUS OF OUR SOCIETIES SHOULD BE CREATIVELY REDISTRIBUTED AT EVERY LEVEL OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION.**

**SOCIAL INTERACTION GENERATES CULTURE!**

**WE EMBRACE CREATIVITY AS AN ACTION WITHOUT THOUGHT OF PROFIT.**

**WE DEMAND SPACES THAT PROMOTE GENEROSITY.**

**MESS HALL INSISTS ON A CLIMATE OF MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT – FOR OURSELVES AND THOSE WHO ENTER OUR SPACE.**

**NO MONEY IS EXCHANGED INSIDE MESS HALL. SURFING ON SURPLUS, WE DO NOT CHARGE ADMISSION OR ASK FOR DONATIONS.**

**MESS HALL FUNCTIONS WITHOUT HIERARCHY OR FORCED UNITY.**

**MESS HALL, 2007**

in San Antonio, Texas  
rom Sala Diaz, another  
pace in January 2006  
a duplex apartment w  
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staff, and many art-lo

2003-2007

# FRACTION WORKSPACE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1711 N. Honore

FOUNDER: Claire Britt

## HOW DID FRACTION WORKSPACE BEGIN?

I wanted to engage in the visual arts community in Chicago in a way other than just making and showing my own art. I have a background in business and it just seemed appropriate to become a facilitator and provide a space for emerging artists in Chicago. At the time that **Fraction** started --in the fall of 2003--there seemed to be a downturn of apartment galleries or artist-run spaces. Right now there are a lot of them and we all know the strong history Chicago has with alternative spaces. It is a citywide tradition that makes Chicago different from other big cities. I honestly think it is a vital part of the Chicago arts community and one that I hope younger generations continue to honor and participate in. It is hard to break into the art scene, to get into galleries, to show and sell your work. Instead of waiting around for someone to give me an opportunity, I decided to create my own.

I looked to spaces like **threewalls**, **The Suburban** and Peoria St. Galleries for inspiration. I also had experience helping Susan Kezon document the Marshall Fields, (now Macy's), department store windows--that inspired the window installation aspect of **Fraction**.

## WHAT WAS FRACTION WORKSPACE ABOUT?

**Fraction Workspace** was a public visual art exhibition space that focused on support and exposure for local emerging artists. We utilized the storefront windows of an apartment in Bucktown for a gallery. The goal was to reach a broader public audience by inviting artists to do installation based work in the store front, creating an exhibition space that was open to the public 24 hours a day 7 days a week. In addition to the window installations, there were rotating exhibitions inside of the space that included painting, photography, sculpture, installation, performance, slide shows and events.

Every opening at **Fraction** was an amazing party. I was always impressed at the attendance and how thirsty the scene was for spaces where people felt like they could experience the art and the camaraderie between artists. The discussion at **Fraction** was not, "How much does this cost?" but was about the current state of art. **Fraction** was a place where artists could experiment with their ideas; that was very important to the space.

I had a very hands-off approach with the artists. They had the freedom to show whatever they wanted to show in whatever

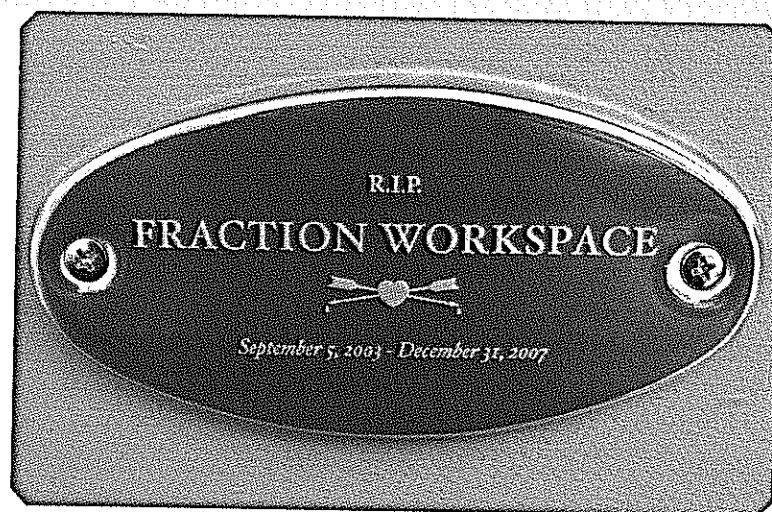
way they wanted to. I had a lot of artists tell me later how much they valued that experience after navigating the commercial art market.

**Fraction** was a 501c3 organization. The major challenge to becoming a non-profit was all the paperwork. When people tell you it takes a year, they are not kidding. It takes a whole year from start to finish to make that happen. The biggest challenge [once you get 501c3] is that you have someone bigger to answer to: the government and the public. It is a serious choice and one that should not be made lightly. It helps because you can get funding from the space--the downside is all of the paperwork for grants and end of year grant reports. It is very time consuming and you have to figure out if it is worth the time of navigating all the red tape.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

We were able to give multiple artists a venue in which they could experiment with their practice. This experience also gave the artists a new public audience. We were able to generate a dialog between artists, art historians and critics, as well as the general public.

Some highlights from **Fraction's** past



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m Fraction's past

include Jim Trainor's debut of his  
*Presentation Theme*. He worked with  
Caroline Nutley and she composed music  
to go along with his slide show. Other  
highlights include Duncan MacKenzie and  
Shannon Stratton's *Bone-A-Coaster* and  
Lauren Adams and Stacey Kirby's *Jungle  
Tender*. One of my personal favorites was  
Alex Jovanovich's Valentine's Day event in  
2007 where he hired a psychic to come  
and give readings to everyone present.  
Remember Rebecca Ringquist had the  
window installation and she used the  
windows to give a valentine to the neigh-  
bors. There was a perfect snowy landscape  
under the windows that added to the  
romantic tone of evening. Alex, Rebecca  
and I made valentines by hand for everyone  
who came. It was encouraging when  
Steven Husby's painting exhibition was  
reviewed on *Artforum's* website. Towards  
the end when we decided to put **Fraction**  
to rest, I needed closure, so we came up  
with the idea of a funeral. Although it  
was bleak it was definitely a special night.

Alex Jovanovich organized the funeral that  
occurred on New Years Eve 2007. It was  
a perfect way to start the New Year with  
new beginnings.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

The experience of running a space was very  
challenging. It taught me how to start a  
non-profit organization, how to manage  
a small arts business, how to work with an  
assortment of artistic personalities, how to  
market an alternative visual arts space and  
how to produce an art show with little  
resources in a small amount of time. I feel  
that the experience of running an exhibition  
space in Chicago helped put me on the  
radar of other gallerists and artists more  
quickly than just pursuing my art practice.

**Fraction** also added depth to my art prac-  
tice in a way that influences my conceptual  
formulations. My favorite part of running an  
apartment gallery was watching how artists  
work and how different personalities create  
and make meaning with their art.

As for the future, I am a practicing artist

with deep appreciation and dedication to  
the arts. I want to continue to create work  
and critical dialog in the arts community  
locally, nationally and abroad.

Interviewee: Clare Britt

Format: email interview

**"Fraction also added  
depth to my art prac-  
tice in a way that  
influences my con-  
ceptual formations."**

2004-2006

# ARTLEDGE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1638 N. Western Ave. #3

FOUNDERS: Brandon Alvendia, Caleb Lyons

## HOW DID ARTLEDGE BEGIN?

**artLedge** started in 2004 as a sharpie drawing on the closest Burger King napkin we could find. It was given life through the efforts of a community of hundreds of committed artists and friends. Like many spaces before it and many that follow, **artLedge** represents the desire for a place and reason of one's own to gather and celebrate.

## WHAT WAS ARTLEDGE ABOUT?

**artLedge** was an experimental platform committed to presenting projects created specifically for the unique parameters of the **Ledge** and beyond. Exhibitions were celebrated with a festive one-night social nexus for artistic contemplation. Originating at the

top of a spiral staircase that connected two floors of an apartment at 1638 N. Western, the **artLedge** initiative lent itself to an endless number of exhibition possibilities.

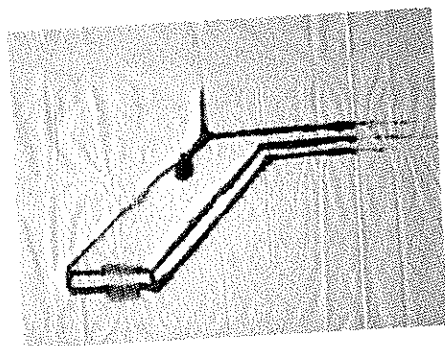
The ledge in **artLedge** refers to a patch of unusable flooring at the top of a spiral staircase in an apartment where Caleb Lyons and Alberto Hernandez resided. The ledge was a product of the slipshod renovation habits commonly found in Chicago apartment structures.

As a venue, **artLedge** provided an idiosyncratic exhibition space hampered by its small size, odd arrangement of walls and meager exhibition budget. These limitations have proven to be a great catalyst for artists in the execution of site-specific installations that reflect on the nature of the ledge as a raised viewing area that hovers over the domestic situation below.

## WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

Over the course of four years, **artLedge** was able to assemble 28 unique art exhibitions and events in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and London—featuring the efforts of over 200 talented artists. The highlights were: steps down to catacombs, un-monumental fireworks, *Chicago is for lovers*, head squish, vines of vivid blue and red, pinstripes, conversations about Duchamp and David Hammonds, a

chandelier crashing, everyone getting the flu after using the ice luge, catching people pleasuring themselves at shows, a fist fight that almost broke some art, Katie met Caleb, summer stoop action inside, people getting smashed by car bumper brought inside, PBR, dance parties, big fight over great stuff piece, smiley asking for beer bumping your head on the ceiling, the Miami deco sconce, PBR, long, long extension cord to the media van from Switzerland, Dr. Jekyll potion really worked, feeling like being in the contemporary art gallery scene in a b-movie, last second cabbage and boom-box, using a stud finder for the first time when building the drop ceiling, chili beard shaving contest, artist with shaped paintings meets gallery with shaped walls, dance parties, pastel painted walls for birthdays, the use of Old Spice, meeting Cerith Wyn Evans at a private champagne party at White Cube, London, watching the Wizard of Oz with the Wall, arguing the validity of the flamingo disguising a hanging, getting drunk on Peroni, silent dance party, the first Chelsea show, and only coffee for the show ever.

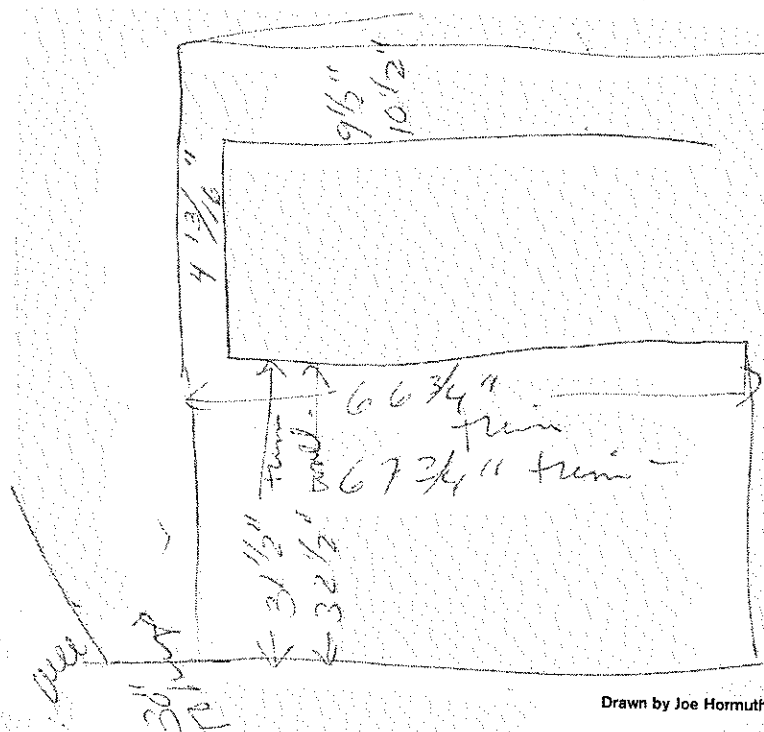


Drawn by Brandon Alvendia

Interviewee: Brandon Alvendia  
Format: email interview



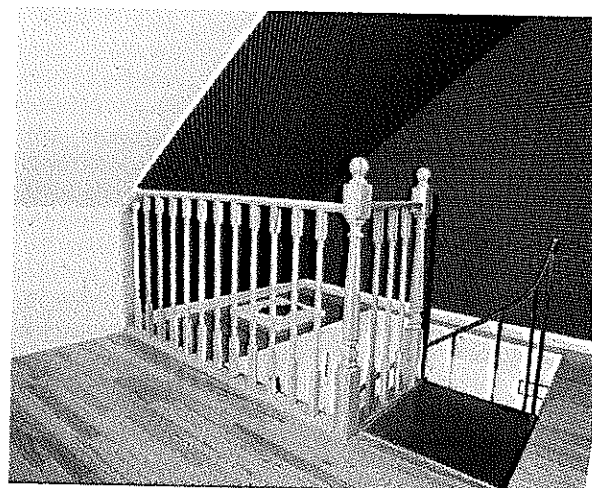
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Drawn by Joe Hormuth



Empty air-edge space  
photo: Caleb Jones Lyons



Frustum by Ben Foch  
photo: Tom van Eynde

on Alvendia  
view



2005-2009

# THE GREEN LANTERN

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1511 N. Milwaukee Ave., Second Floor

FOUNDER: Caroline Picard  
WEBSITE: thegreenlantern.org

## HOW DID GREEN LANTERN BEGIN?

It started as an idea when I was in college. I had a cousin who, with his friends, had slowly remodeled this warehouse by hand and turned it into an art space. I only went to one opening there but I was really impressed by how malleable a space like that could be. It seemed amazing that this group of kids could walk in and start building doors and walls to create this idealized space. Over the next four or five years I had conversations with friends trying to figure out how to start something like that. I moved to Chicago and worked at **threewalls**. I want to say that **threewalls** had been open for two years already and I was one of their first volunteers. It was run by Sonia Yoon and Jonathan Rhodes, Shannon Stratton and Jeff Ward. Ruba [Katrib] was working there also but that was it. It was amazing to see how doable [running a space] was.

I've always been interested in creating venues for independent culture and trying to build a gateway rather than wait for one. I feel like there are fewer and fewer opportunities to access culture that is not corporate, culture that is not being fed to you via streamlined access points where everybody receives the same kind of information. I think it's interesting to create hubs where things are a little more idiosyncratic or raw, even in the way that they are made, whether the art or the space itself. The way things are constructed is more transparent. If you watch a television show everything is so slick that you don't understand how it was put together. The experience of televi-

sion makes it really hard to believe that one's self, as an individual, could have anything to say, because anything an individual would make would, by contrast, be imperfect.

## WHAT IS GREEN LANTERN ABOUT?

I'm always daunted by the question of what it's about, maybe because it's so personal, like living in a place and people saying, "What's it about?" It's like somebody saying, "Who are you?" Giving people a venue for independent culture is a big part of what I'm interested in. Most of the people that I'm working with are artists and writers that are not being represented for whatever reason. They don't have a larger distribution. **The Green Lantern Gallery and Press** started about four years ago in 2004 but it took us about a year to actually release any books. A lot of it was that we really didn't know what we were doing. Nick Sarno, the editor, lived in San Francisco so we had to work out a way of communicating between the two of us. And then working with a silkscreen printer, Matt Daly, to coordinate the covers and then finding the right place to print the books. There were a lot of things to figure out and there still are.

Maybe this speaks to what the **Green Lantern** is about: we've been interested in trying to bridge different artistic communities. It seems like there is a live music crowd, a literary crowd and an art crowd. I'm interesting in creating a dialogue between those communities because you get a crossover between the people who

attend all of these different things. A good example of that is David Carl's book that we published last year called *Fragments*. Three or four months before the book release, Stevie Greco curated a show with Todd Mattei and Matthias Kristersson. Matthias does all of this work around language. For instance he'll write a poem and then cut out all of the words very meticulously and the words will be in a pile on the floor. David Carl's book, *Fragments*, erases the sentence and words and shows how a particular relationship collapses because two people can't seem to get beyond their own language. So I talked to Matthias and was able to get some images of his work and we published David Carl's book with those color plates. It was a way of presenting a contemporary piece of prose with a piece of contemporary art that wouldn't otherwise exist in the same place.

Attempting to integrate audiences has a lot to do with licensing, really. It's really hard to have legal music venues. You can go underground but the audience is going to be different than if you're the Empty Bottle. That's something that I've been more and more interested in lately because I've been having business licensing issues and I just feel like a lot of this activity is essentially illegal. So what does that mean? I think those kinds of complications end up separating your audience, because people who aren't already part of the contemporary or literary community are still going to go to places that are more visible, stable and able.

different things. A good David Carl's book that year called *Fragments* this before the book. I curated a show with Matthias Kristersson. of this work around language he'll write a poem and the words very meticulous will be in a pile on the book, *Fragments*, examining words and shows relationship between two people can't seem to own language. Matthias and was able to do his work and we published with those color plates representing a contemporary with a piece of contemporary that otherwise exist in the

grate audiences has a big, really. It's really hard to enues. You can go and audience is going to be. I're the Empty Bottle. That I've been more and lately because I've been discussing issues and I feel activity is essentially es that mean? I think implications end up speaking because people who of the contemporary are still going to be visible, stable and

My own trouble started when I had a sandwich board out and I guess it's impossible to get a permit for those. This guy was going down the street ticketing people and he came in to fine us for the sandwich board and he discovered that we didn't have a business license so then he fined us for that too. I had been under the impression that I could get a business license, I had just neglected to get one, (not on purpose), but over the course of several months I've learned that I can't get a business license for this location. I basically have to move. It's a combination of factors, my landlord would have to apply to change the zoning of this space to commercial, which would take a lot of time and isn't in his best interest or I would have to get a live/work permit which I'm not eligible for because too much of the floor plan is dedicated to the "business."

Part of why **Green Lantern** went nonprofit was to be in a position to apply for grants and I was interested in the kind of legitimacy that that label provided. I appreciate that there are a lot of people who aren't interested in that and I think their positions are important too. But at the same time I liked the idea of having an apartment space that was a 501c3 because that created an interesting kind of tension between the private informality of being in someone's home and the professional labels ascribed by a public bureaucracy.

The Press is really great with its crossover between screen-printers and writers. It's kind of modeled after the slow food movement. We print a small batch of books

and hopefully they all get consumed. And the *Phonebook* is also a big exciting project because it tries to connect different people in independent practices in order to expand the local community into a national community.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I think that running the gallery has affected me as an artist in huge ways but I don't know that I'm far enough away to be able to answer that objectively. In 20 years I'll have a really good answer! In a really basic way I have a much better understanding of what it means to be an artist and a better sense of what an artistic community is about. It's also made me really uncomfortable thinking about myself as a painter. And in other ways it has made me more comfortable being a painter. There is one part of my brain that is really active when I'm engaging in art and that is also a part of my brain that I resent when I'm trying to work on my own stuff. I would rather follow intuitive threads. Some artists can really do that. I don't know if I can. So that is the part that feels rather pinched because I'm inclined to ask, "Why am I doing this?" and then get angry because I can't just do it because I want to. But then on the other hand working in this environment has also given me the tools to devise strategies around that roadblock. One of the things that I like to do is to take something that I think is wrong and then do it. For instance at the moment I feel like portraiture is really gross and out of date. So I'm working on a series of portraits. I also feel like I've been taking my writing more seriously in conjunction with my

painting because making paintings about my writing gives me a way to avoid a painting conversation and paint within a context that my writing creates—on my own terms. The next thing that I'm interested in looking at is the division between myself, my living space and the public space and the organization. Now it is very murky, but part of the way I think about this place is as an extension of an idealized art practice. Again, I think I'll have a better answer in a few years.

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Interviewee: Caroline Picard

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: 1511 N. Milwaukee Ave.

2005-2008

# VONZWECK

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1626 N. Humboldt

FOUNDER: Philip von Zweck

WEBSITE: stopgostop.com/pvonzweck

## HOW DID VONZWECK BEGIN?

I was active in a number of art related things before going to grad school at the University of Illinois Chicago. I had co-curated a show at **Dogmatic**, I did a weekly radio program (*Something Else*, which I still do) and I had booked a lot of performances. While at UIC I worked at **Gallery 400** and learned a great deal about actually running a space. I worked on P.R. for them, set up the audio/visual stuff, did prep work, wrote press releases and made flyers for the *Voices Lectures*. After graduate school, I taught in New York for a year. When I was planning to return to Chicago, Rob Ray (who ran **Deadtech**) was talking about moving to New York. I had put on both music and art shows at **Deadtech** prior to grad school, so I thought, "If he's moving out I should take over the space." Rob decided not to move so I didn't get the loft, but it planted the seed in my head that I wanted to put on shows.

When I got back to Chicago I moved into an apartment in Humboldt Park that was one room larger than my last apartment. All of a sudden I had more space. I had purged a lot of things when I moved to New York, so now I had fewer possessions and more space than I was accustomed to. I didn't want to hang the same art in my apartment that I'd been looking at forever and the living room was already Benjamin Moore flat white, so I felt like it could be a gallery. That whole summer I mentioned to people that I was thinking of doing shows

in my apartment and everybody seemed excited and willing to participate.

I didn't even have a name for the space and I didn't want to put a sign out front because I didn't want to tell the landlord or my neighbors that I was running a gallery. Scott Speh advised me to use whatever name was already on my buzzer—then I wouldn't have to put a sign out. The buzzer spelled VONZWECK in all caps. The first press release that I sent out didn't contain the name of the space—I simply listed the address and stated, "The buzzer reads VONZWECK." The *Chicago Reader* wrote back and said, "What's the name of the space, is it **VONZWECK**?" So I said yes.

## WHAT WAS VONZWECK ABOUT?

For me having the space was really about the act of living with people's artwork. Early on I decided that people should receive a set of keys to my apartment to make installation easier. They would also keep them for the duration of their show. If someone wanted to make an appointment to see the show, the artists could take care of that without having to wait for me. I didn't want people to be stuck to my schedule. That ultimately became the main criteria for choosing the shows. "Who do I trust with my keys?" In the end I found almost thirty people that I trusted with my keys, so either I'm pretty trusting, or I have a pretty good group of friends.

For the first show, Brian [Kapernakas] wrote out the checklist and listed the

prices. He made the checklist thinking he was going to take fifty percent, but throughout the opening I just kept thinking, "the only costing me the beer." I proposed that he sold anything, he would just reimburse me for the beer and so that became the financial relationship that I had with every one who showed at **VONZWECK**. Over the overhead was low. Most of the people were local and I had been a preparator, I knew how to hang work; it wasn't hard. Expenses were one gallon of paint per beer and time. I would probably have been spending thirty dollars on beer in a given month anyway!

The first show was Brian Kapernakas, a classmate of mine from graduate school, the second was David Coyle, who I was a band with, and the third show was Scott Reinke, with whom I had studied at UIC. Deborah Stratman and Rob Ray's collaboration followed that and it went on from there. I had asked Vincent Como to do a show, but he moved to New York. (**Western Exhibitions** also had Vincent show, so Scott and I had decided to do the shows at the same time—a little art world collusion.) The very last show was Chris Deris, a friend of mine from high school who flew in from New Orleans.

I decided after completing eight or nine shows that I didn't want to do shows in the summer. It was too hot and the space wasn't big enough. From my time at **Gallery 400**, I knew that "real" galleries host a lecture series. My friends and people like me aren't invited to do lectures and



2005-PRESENT

## 65GRAND

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1378 W. Grand Ave.

FOUNDER: Bill Gross  
WEBSITE: 65GRAND.com

### HOW DID 65GRAND BEGIN?

**65GRAND** started, more or less, by happenstance. I had thought about running a space and had rejected the idea. I'm an artist—I don't have any background in galleries or business. The people who ran the **Guestroom Project**, (a space made from a converted guest room), were two couples that owned a building in Logan Square. They would find two people that hadn't yet worked together and then have them collaboratively curate a show. They had their openings on Sunday and barbecued. They did great shows. But then, one of the couples, David Corbett and Melia Donovan, moved to Portland. They were both artists. David is a friend of mine and when he was leaving we talked about hanging his work here and having a party. Even though I was reluctant to do it, I thought, "Well, we can just do this one thing." So, we cleaned up the space and at that point the refrigerator was still [in the kitchen/exhibition space]. We didn't adjust anything. We just hung some of his work. The show was up for a month, so we thought, "Well we'll just treat it like a show." Then at some point, later, I decided to do a show with another friend. We decided to list it in the local papers and we made a postcard. At some point during that show, I felt like I could offer something to the community by running a space—I had always appreciated apartment spaces for what they had to offer. Typically the people who ran apartment spaces were younger and just out of school, so there wasn't a sense that they were going to be around

for a long time. It's perfectly normal for a space to be around for two years and do great shows. I started thinking that I could do what an apartment space does, but I'm in a different place in my life. Since I was a little bit older I could keep it going longer and support artists in different ways than a typical apartment space would be able to. At that point I still didn't know what any of that meant to me, but I thought, "I want to give it a shot."

### WHAT IS 65GRAND ABOUT?

I was pretty comfortable with the idea that I'd be a "feeder gallery." I don't know if that's a real term, but hopefully I'd work with some artists, build their comfort level with showing and help them learn how the gallery thing works; then they'll move on to another gallery. I view it a little differently now, because I want to hold on to some of the artists that I work with. But on the other hand, if they had an opportunity with a particular gallery, I'd be happy for them to... well, "graduate."

I've gone very slowly because as I said before, I don't have a gallery background. I wanted to find out if I really liked running a space and learn some things about it. The one thing that I've always felt strongly about is that I'd like to work with artists and I want to try to find ways to support their career as much as possible—rather than just having an exhibition. It's key for artists to be able to do the shows that they want to do, that's the first thing and there aren't that many [flexible] spaces. I'd like to have an even

Bob Jones: New Work, Installation View, 2006



nicer space, allow artists to do the show that they want to do without interference from a dealer or other entity. The other thing that I want is to find other ways to support the artists that I'm working with—help them find residencies and other opportunities. I have a limited ability to do that because the gallery is funded solely from the sales that I make. I don't have a staff—do have people who help out. Jim Larter does the website and other graphics and Thea Liberty-Nichols, the Assistant Director, helps with the writing and is a sounding board for ideas. She will curate her first show at the gallery, our summer group show.

When I started to think about it, from my experience of making art and showing in galleries, I thought, "What would I really want from an experience?" So, that's how I measured what I thought I was trying to do and why I'm figuring out ways to support the artists. There's a lot of talent that comes out of the schools here—writers and artists—but there are not enough venues for them. So I decided to throw



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**WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?**  
I'm proud that I've been able to keep it going. I started at the end of 2005, in October. After the initial startup, I've been running a schedule of 8 shows per year. I've had quite a few reviews in local papers; the *Tribune*, *Newcity*, *Time Out*—also there has been two *Artforum* reviews for two of the artists, Ian Pedigo and David Ingenthron, so I was really happy about that, of course.

I feel that it is a personal victory [or success] that the artists who I started working with have a continuing desire to work with me. A couple of them have gone on to opportunities to show in international galleries, but they still want to show here, at **ESGRAND**. Ian Pedigo just did his second exhibition here in October, and now he has an upcoming show at **Rokeby** in London. He has also shown in Paris, throughout Europe and in New York and he is still happy to show here. So I feel good about that.

I don't know how to measure success. I sell enough work that I can keep doing things. If I could sell more, there are artists that I'd work with, but it's expensive to ship their work. I work with some Chicago people, one artist based in Milwaukee, artists from New York, L.A. and Portland. You know, in order to pay for the space,

**HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR PRACTICE?**  
Having exhibitions in my apartment is a great opportunity to experience the artwork over a longer period of time. I find that I know a lot more about the work by the end of the show than I had known at the beginning. A mistaken and idealistic notion I had when I first started was that I was going to do these shows and I was going to hang out around a table reading *Artforum* with people. I thought that it was just going to be discussions all of the time, but there is a lot of grunt work involved [instead]. That original vision didn't quite pan out, or at least it's not happening as much as I would have hoped.

When I first started **65GRAND** my studio was still here and I thought, "Well I can just be in the studio and if somebody shows up, then I can be a gallerist and go back and forth." That didn't work out; partly because I couldn't keep my work separate enough—(literally) people would peek [into my studio]—and partly because I really didn't want to talk about it. I absolutely wanted to keep my practice separate and I couldn't really work. When people popped in, it was just too hard for me to shift from one mode to the other. So, I shut down my studio a couple of years ago. I've only recently rented a

space and am trying to get back to work. So far it's pretty good, I like having a space to go to where I can get away from the gallery. So the question for me right now is—how to make both of these things work. I feel strongly that running the gallery is the thing that I should be doing for the artists that I'm working with. I feel a responsibility to stay focused on these artists and to try to further their careers.

The funny thing is, since I've been running a space, I've stopped wanting to exhibit my own work. Rather, I took a break from exhibiting and I still don't wish to. I'd like to get back to my practice and then see where I'm at after working for a while [but] I didn't like the idea of running a space while trying to exhibit my work. It seemed awkward to me [and] I thought I should just be focused on the gallery.

For me it's an interesting adventure. I'm kind of curious as to what the next step is. I've already been running an apartment space for longer than most apartment spaces, so I'm curious about what happens when an apartment space sticks around for more than two years.

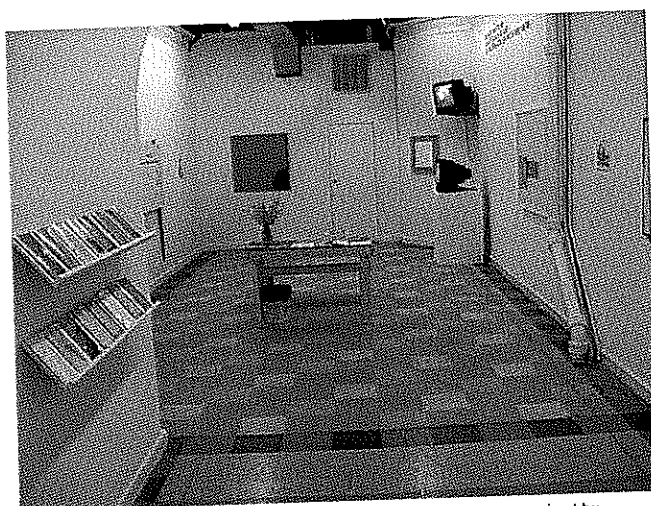
Interviewee: Bill Gross  
Format: transcribed audio interview  
Location of interview: 1378 W. Grand Ave.

2002-2005

# THE POND

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1152 N. Milwaukee Ave.

FOUNDERS: David Coyle, Peter Fagundo, Howard Fonda, Jeff M. Ward



The Pond, installation shot of the group exhibition *Ideal Avalanche* organized by Michelle Grabner, Brad Killam, and the Pond. Visible, from left to right, are artworks by NS5, David Robbins, Joseph Grigley, Stephen Prina and Gaylen Gerber, Greg Perkins, Martin Kersels, Bruce Nauman, Lawrence Weiner, Steven Husby, Sam Durant, Ben Kinmont. Not pictured: Tom Bamberger, Peter Fagundo, Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, Mike Smith, William Wegman.

# THE OBJECT OF GALLERY PAST

## The Pond

Maybe it is that art objects have, in recent decades, appeared their most formless and dematerialized—paintings, sculptures and other objects being joined by art that offers the sharing of food or people standing around naked. Perhaps it is that technological development now digitizes the tangibles of our work and play—artists shipping data or exchanging URLs as opposed to cumbersome crates. Whatever the reason, the old saw that art objects had any claim to immortality seems thoroughly debased. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that recent accounts of the twenty-first century activity among alternative gallery spaces in Chicago, Illinois would tend to focus on names, personalities and sites rather than artworks. As participants in that scene, we, too, fondly remember the intriguing gossip, regional reportage, overstuffed openings and incipient profundity. We fear, however, that the lynchpin of that activity—the art object—is being overshadowed. Especially in these alternative exhibitions spaces, which have a unique socio-economic position and idiosyncratic makeup among the museums, galleries, studios and homes where art usually lives, artworks seem particularly well served; furthermore, these objects may be our most resilient time capsules for posterity.

From May of 2002 until the same month in 2004, we undertook a finite project, an exhibition space and curatorial collective, known as **The Pond**. Primarily, we showcased art objects in various media in multi-generational group exhibitions. We also had two exhibitions in other cities as well as our final show at the local **Hyde Park Art Center**. For us, it was a satisfying, productive scene in which our activities were affirmed and provided a springboard to push against; however, the contemplation and display of artworks—rather than the fringe benefits to our neurotic egos or nascent careers—was the ostensible catalyst for the existence of our undertaking and

that of the preponderance of our contemporaries. Of course, some spaces were not object-oriented; instead, they cultivated the scene via events and parties or made long-term commitments to a community through a social practice model of artmaking. To our memories, though, the majority of alternative spaces established and maintained marshmallow-like rooms for the rotational display of relatively autonomous *objets d'art* in a fashion that more or less comported with the white cube model of museums and galleries. In spaces such as these, artworks seem particularly robust and memorable.

Part of this vitality had to do with the physical layout of these spaces, which were often in funky buildings, quotidian homes, junky storefronts, clandestine basements, or chock-a-bloc garages. Extreme physical proximity to works of art—verbotten in museums—was a matter of course. Most of these exhibitions involved discrete objects, but even the site-specific artworks had to contend with more pedestrian than churchy architectural proportions. Artworks in these spaces seemed, somehow, more alive and full of character.

Artwork here appeared to have more personality in part because these spaces split the difference among studio, gallery and museum. Though the architectural language of the gallery was approximated in many of these spaces, these alternative galleries did not need to emphasize either the commodity of art objects, as a commercial gallery would, or have their art historical *bona fides* in order, as would be expected in a museum. This often led to unorthodox arrangements of objects drawn together in a mannerist or thematic fashion that permitted the objects to show complexity by both playing to and asserting independence from an exhibition's conceit. This is not to say that these spaces acquiesce entirely into eccentric aberrations whose

oddity nullifies the communicative etiquette of public spaces. Neither does it suggest a complete disregard for their makers' intent. The quotation of normative aesthetics of art exhibitions, however amateurish, distinguish the alternative gallery from the private home of the collector—where artworks become indexical to taste and wealth—or the formative hothouse of the studio—where artworks have yet to fully differentiate from their makers' will. In the alternative spaces, however, objects exhibit a vivaciousness and moxie. Scrappily taking up space in *ad hoc* showcases, art objects come alive.

This willfulness is the central reason we remember the objects we lived with at **The Pond** and hung out with in the spaces run by our peers. In these unique yet knowable settings, one could become acquainted with an object without the exchange being too prejudicial or over-determined. Alternative spaces are a provisional territory where we are more conscious of manufacturing our experience through the objects on display, thus allowing us to glimpse the humanity of the artwork. Reflexively confronting one another, it may be perceived that the art object, too, has a lifespan, which, importantly, not so much exceeds as functions differently than our own. Objects do not necessarily perish in a timeframe that we can predict—a birth, some living and an inexorable demise—but function out-of-time—being destroyed or preserved or buried, transformed and rediscovered. They proceed from one contingency to the next, bringing forth with them the potential to meet another viewer with the same wonder and ease with which they met us. In this fashion, objects met in liminal sites of display may more successfully represent the electricity of our activity than our stories and reminiscences.

# PUPS DID IT

B. 2006 – B. 2009

Co-Prosperity Sphere  
COMA  
FLAT  
devening projects + editions  
Harold Arts  
InCUBATE  
LiveBox  
Roots & Culture  
Teti  
Alogon Gallery  
Golden Age  
mini dutch  
Old Gold  
Vega Estates  
antena  
He Said She Said  
Hungryman  
Julius Caesar  
Normal Projects  
Scott Projects  
Second Bedroom  
Medicine Cabinet  
Spoke  
Swimming Pool Project Space

# CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE

FOUNDER: Ed Marszewski

## HOW DID THE CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE BEGIN?

**C-PS** started because we were looking for a space after we left Wicker Park and **Buddy**. The people still with **Buddy** looked around for a space for a few months. We found some great properties, but they all were commercial. We needed a mixed space with residential and commercial space. One thing we learned is that you should not live and work in the same space. It gets real messy. Separating your personal life from the public is important to your mental health. So I'd been living in Bridgeport for a while, and I remember seeing this building all the time. I tracked down the supposed owner and I asked him if we could see the space and we went through the process of checking it out. It was a complete wreck and an abandoned crack house, but he assured me that he was remodeling it. I offered him a deal that we would rent and live upstairs and help him fix the downstairs—only if he would let us use the downstairs. Well, he never got back to me. As the months rolled by we just kind-of fell apart in our re-location strategy and we didn't find a space. I moved back to my old building in Bridgeport, and one day the guy that I talked to 8 months prior walked in to my mother's bar when I was working and said he wanted to sell his building. So I'm like, "Okay, I'll check it out." Well, the problem was that he had all of these different partners that I was unaware of and then one of the partners was revealed as a scumbag that was part of a family that owns tons of derelict properties. I think they used them as hydroponic weed farms. I remember one year, maybe in

2002, when the police raided this building and they took out, like, 100 garbage bags full of weed, and it was this guy's building. (laughs) I don't know what he was doing, but he was some entrepreneur? Right?

One of the families involved with the building was trying to foreclose on the guy I met because he had stopped making his secret payments to this family. And then these two banks started to foreclose on him. To make a long story short, we negotiated and got the building—it was a nightmare. This place had massive fire damage and water leaking everywhere and we spent about six months to a year working on it. I think I had a nervous breakdown at one point.

## WHAT IS THE CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE ABOUT?

The reason we got the space was because we'd been working all these different projects and needed a base of operations. I was used to the pace of activity at **Buddy** (we did over 200 events in three years) and I realized that the space was essential for facilitating projects and fostering communities of interest. It is nice to do whatever you want without having to ask 10,000 people if you can use their space and schedule it when they want to do it, etc...etc... Our goal was to create the space in the model of a **Mess Hall**, an experimental cultural center that would allow exhibitions, community events, workshops, screenings, performances and music.

Rachael, my wife, and I—along with a rotating cast of people that I've worked with forever, run the space's programs and events. Recently, in the past four or five

**"Our goal is to provide an exceptional facility that brings people together to enjoy the work of kick-ass artists"**

years, I've been working with Aron Gent and Ken Zawacki and many other people on different project threads. And we work with anyone who has an interesting project that we think pushes the boundaries of contemporary art practice in Chicago. We also create a physical link to artists and groups from around the world to provide exhibition space and a residency program to facilitate the exhibition of their projects and space and time for production of new work.

Our goal is to build upon our successes and failures of our previous projects and efforts to provide an exceptional facility that brings people together to enjoy the work of kick-ass artists and creators from around the world.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

We've curated some great exhibitions. For example we have shown a ton of Michael Rea's large wooden sculptural objects and thrown a lot of group shows that don't suck. I don't think they would fit anywhere else in the city except, perhaps, one of the local museums or art centers. Of course we have these group shows for the **Verde Festival**, many of which have been some of my favorites.

I think we have done a good job in providing innovative programming to mixed communities. We also have provided a lot of room for experimentation and development for many local artists. We're especially good at fostering networks and establishing cultural workers in town. And we



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the years we have tried to promote a lot of  
challenging work by these talented people.  
By exposing their work to a large audience  
we hope to nurture their desires and  
promote their work to others that can aid  
them in their careers.

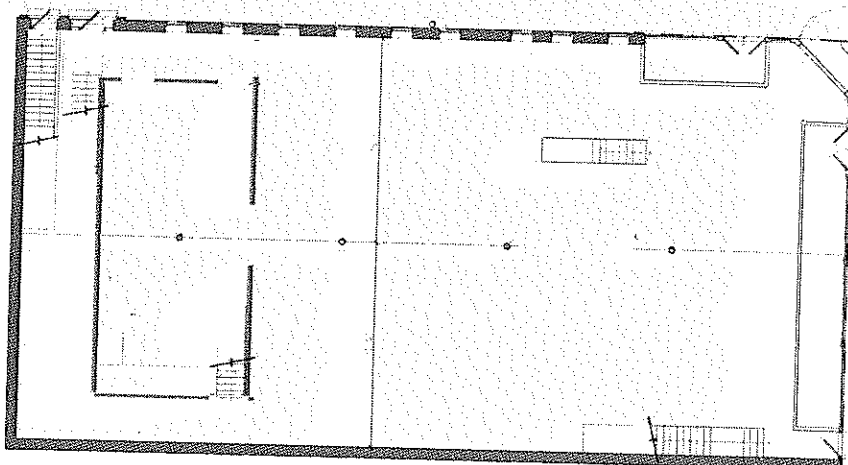
Lately we have been working with commu-  
nity organizations in Bridgeport. We want to  
embrace our local community. For example,  
we're working with a century old community  
center called the **Benton House**.

Historically, it was a boarding house for  
single women. At our last **Version**  
**Festival** we partnered with them in order  
to create awareness about the facility to  
our extended community. It is in an old,  
weird, mansion with a gymnasium and  
a series of classrooms. I think it was on its  
last leg—so we worked with them to help  
rejuvenate their programming.

We helped initiate some projects like *The*  
*Chicago Public School*, which is related to  
the social networking project *L.A. The*  
*Public School*. Essentially you work as  
a socially networked group, you propose a  
class and people from the network sign  
up for the class. Once you know how many  
people want to come to your class, you  
find a location for it and hold a free school  
session.

Just this year we created a project for  
**Version** called the *Bridgeport WPA*. We  
pretended that the Obama administration  
spent funds on cultural programming.  
That's what a lot of artists' groups have  
been looking for—some largess from the  
trillions of dollars being spent right now.  
So we imagined that he gave some money  
to us to do this pilot public art campaign,  
here, in the neighborhood. **Version Festival**  
is a way for us to start new platforms and  
also to repeat awesome programs like the  
**NEO XPO**, which is a mini art fair meets  
science fair, where different spaces, individ-  
ual artists or groups meet each other and  
share their latest projects. Of course we  
also work with **Zhou B Center** and we try  
to promote the activities of the surrounding  
art spaces like **Second Bedroom**.

We also opened up a satellite space,  
**Eastern Expansion**, it's a solo space for  
artists. But it used to be in **The Reuben**



#### Kincaid Project Room. Eastern

**Expansion** is this nice window display  
area that becomes a small gallery. It's  
important for us to have another public face  
within the neighborhood to confuse the  
locals. But the **Rueben Kincaid** function  
is primarily commercial. We represent  
artists and try to promote them through  
shows here or through touring shows or at  
art fairs. Many people might think we are  
not into the market. But we would like  
everyone to sell their work. Many times,  
people need room for experimentation in  
order to develop new bodies of work  
without worrying about selling stuff.  
And of course that is the role of the  
**Co-Prosperity Sphere** at times.

**C-PS** is also the HQ that facilitates the  
different logistics required for doing festi-  
vals, the shows and publications. We meet  
and plan and disperse from here, or work  
on projects here. And we also produce our  
magazines, there's *Proximity*, which is  
relatively new. There's *Material*, which is  
also new publication—a sister thing to  
*Proximity Magazine*, which features giant  
portfolio spreads of artists' and designers'  
work. There's *Pr*, which is a newsletter-  
poster that comes out between issues  
of *Proximity*. It's just a way of presenting  
interesting interviews or reviews that  
wouldn't fit, or be as interesting (or timely) if  
they were published in *Proximity*. Then,  
we just started this annual *(con)temporary*  
*art guide*. It's a little book of springtime  
activities that historicizes the activity in the

contemporary space scene. And of course  
we publish *Lumpen* out of the **C-PS**.  
We're trying hard to represent the incredi-  
ble activity going on in Chicago. [We want  
people to] stop moaning and get involved  
with the multiple opportunities contained in  
the pages of our publications. Our motto is  
if we can do it, so should you.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

Typically, I am able to incorporate the stuff  
that I do [within my own art practice] into  
gaps in the programming for our festivals.  
Or I create a project for the festival and  
collaborate with others as an experiment in  
testing out a new platform or project  
thread. Other times I have created work for  
some community art shows by meeting  
people here. And some of the projects and  
performances I have done, facilitated and  
planned at our space have been wildly  
successful, like the *Art War of 2007*. My  
current work deals with real estate specula-  
tion, gentrification, marketing and branding  
as well as squatting. But, I'm not interested  
in making art everyday. To me, making  
publications and working with people on  
these projects is enough of a practice for  
me right now. I get enough excitement  
and inspiration out of that. And the  
**Co-Prosperity Sphere** has been out of  
control. Some of the best moments of  
my life have happened at these spaces—at  
**Buddy** or this place.

Interviewee: Ed Marszewski

2006-2008

# COMA (CALIFORNIA OCCIDENTAL MUSEUM OF ART)

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1626 N. California #2

FOUNDERS: Annika Seitz, EC Brown  
WEBSITE: [occidentalmuseum.org](http://occidentalmuseum.org)

Annika Seitz and E.C. Brown co-founded the **California Occidental Museum of Art (COMA)** in January 2006, at 1626 North California Avenue, in Chicago's Humboldt Park. **COMA** was a periodic art space that housed contemporary group shows for one night only in a plant-filled, feline-friendly and fully furnished home environment. Some shows had a theme, such as *Beware of Darkness*, a show in which all works were self-illuminated, and *Bachelor Party!*, a celebration of Brown's upcoming nuptials.

Brown and Seitz took an artist-centered approach to procuring work for **COMA** and curated artists rather than specific pieces. Shows at **COMA** were dynamic, fun house parties, largely due to the copious flow of drink and the presence of music and dancing among the art. Seitz often cooked a large pot of soup to feed visitors. In many ways, **COMA** was more of a community building project than a gallery, more a gathering of souls than a collection of artwork.

**COMA** ended in April, 2008 after 18 shows. Brown moved out to live with his wife, Catie Olson, and to start **FLAT** (*Room Length and Tux*). Seitz stayed put for a while before she moved up to Anderson and became a yoga teacher.

**Floor Length**  
single evening  
(Catie Olson)  
formerly of **CO**  
conjunction w  
in contrast to  
**FLAT** gives us  
directly with a  
and perspective

2008-PRESENT

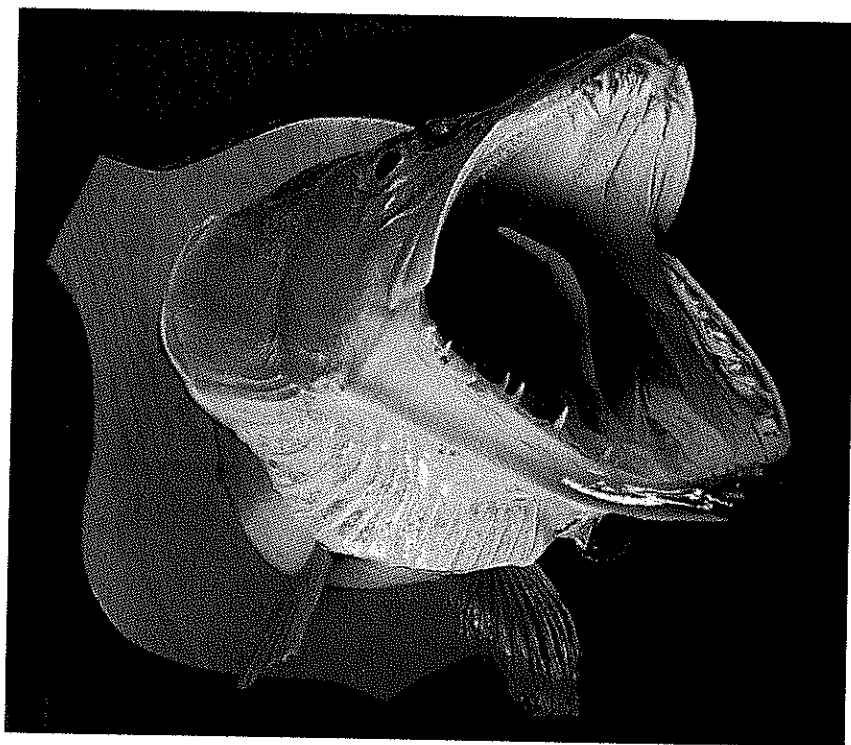
# FLOOR LENGTH AND TUX (FLAT)

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2332 W. Augusta #3 Front

FOUNDERS: Catie Olson, EC Brown  
WEBSITE: [floorlengthandtux.com](http://floorlengthandtux.com)

April, 2008 after 18  
ved out to live with his  
and to start **FLAT** (Flat  
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moved up to Anderson  
ga teacher.

**Floor Length and Tux** is a series of  
single-evening exhibitions, where we  
(Catie Olson of *Spiderbug*, and EC Brown  
formerly of **COMA**) work on new projects in  
conjunction with a few invited artists.  
In contrast to our other curatorial projects,  
**FLAT** gives us the opportunity to connect  
directly with artists to gain a broader insight  
and perspective.



# DEVENING PROJECTS+ EDITIONS

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 3039 W. Carroll

FOUNDER: Dan Devening  
WEBSITE: [deveningprojects.com](http://deveningprojects.com)

## HOW DID DEVENING PROJECTS+ EDITIONS BEGIN?

**devening projects + editions** opened in the spring of 2006; I've been the director and primary curator for more than two years. I work with one part-time assistant; usually an intern. The development of the **devening projects + editions** gallery came out of a slightly convoluted set of circumstances, but at the time the space came into my possession, my main interest was in creating a venue to show the multiples and editions that I began publishing a couple of years prior. As a collector of multiples from a wide variety of sources, I became interested in developing a program that acknowledged the experimental forms of contemporary editions I was seeing and collecting from Europe, primarily from Germany. The forms these editions were taking went well beyond traditional prints and printmaking parameters. [I saw] these developing positions as a way to locate myself within the Chicago art community in a new way, [by taking] my strong interest in editions into publishing and evolving the curatorial projects that had been important to my practice for several years.

Curating came directly out of my desire to work with other artists collaboratively—not on the production of work but on situating their work and my ideas within some kind of exhibition context. My interest in collaboration became about considering ideas that I didn't feel I could appropriately address in my own work as a painter. My work as an artist up to that point was mostly painting and works on paper; the ideas I was addressing as a curator took on much more varied concerns, well beyond the formal and physical constraints of my own practice.

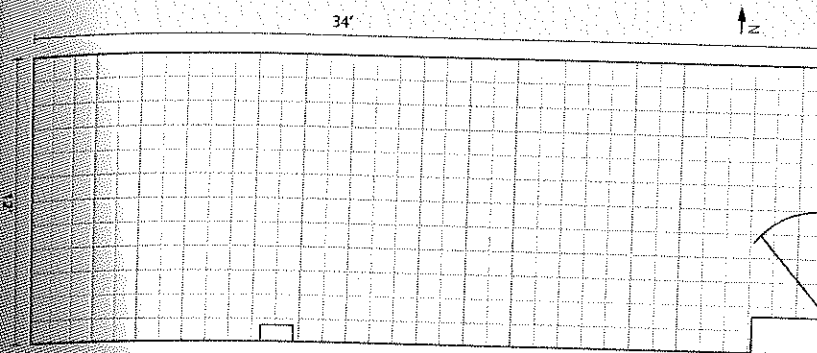
Beginning as early as 1987, I was curating about one show a year. As that developed, I realized that I was expanding my position within a social and political art structure that included roles beyond that of art maker—I became a facilitator of projects of my own design. The more I developed that role, the more I became intrigued by how it was possible to empower oneself within the narrowly defined structures defined by the art world. An artist was occasionally a curator or a writer but rarely a commercial gallery director. It was both a desire and a challenge to put myself in that position.

At the beginning of the edition publishing process, I did two curated edition projects. One was called *Wherever*, which included 17 artists; the participating artists were asked to address their interpretation of the word "wherever," then they were asked to produce a multiple edition with 30 impressions that would include 3 artist proofs. The project included Tony Tasset, Judy Ledgerwood, Laura Letinsky, Philip Vanderhyden, New Catalog and many others. At that point there was no gallery, so this was a curated exhibition—un-tethered to a physical space. I took advantage of the mobility of the project to bring it various venues for viewing and critique.

From that process, I learned even more about working with artists, curating, publishing and the art business in general. In 2005, I acquired the space that became the gallery. The space came to be out of a large open warehouse space occupied by a rag factory located near my studio...actually on the same floor. The company that rented that space moved and the landlord began

dividing the floor into individual studios. The gallery is a curious space because it's basically a room with only a door...no windows at all. At about 500 square feet, it would be difficult to use for any purpose other than a gallery.

It took me almost a year to find the time to do the work necessary to finish the space and make it gallery-ready. It was still my intention at that time to only use the space as a showroom for the editions I was publishing; the idea of running a gallery was just a vague glimmer. At the time, I was teaching at two universities and already had too little time to do my own work. Running a gallery wasn't the most logical pragmatic move. I realized after the space was finished and through conversations with artist friends, that it was perfectly proportioned and scaled for exhibitions. I decided to go ahead. My initial plan was to give it a year and assess the practicalities of the project after that point. I set up a website, did all the necessary marketing and started showing artists whose concerns were well in line with my interests, as well as work that was well outside of what I could speak to comfortably. I started with a group show that I called *Preview* featuring artists who were already scheduled to show later. I then did projects with well-established Chicago artists—paired with younger, emerging artists like More or Less. One of the first shows was *More or Less*, which featured Rodney Carswell and Dan Prekop. Or *Forever*, which was a two-person show with Susanne Dörries and her son Gregory—who had just received his MFA from Hunter in New York. In 2006 was a great year for the gallery in terms of the exhibitions presented and the critical attention we received. I was



also financially feasible enough at that point to keep running at a profit. Through sales, I was exceeding the overhead I needed to cover all my expenses and it even helped move me out of one of my teaching positions. I got ambitious and did a couple of art fairs as a way to bring both the gallery and the artists I was showing into a broader public context. I wanted to show that the gallery was in many ways very different from what was happening elsewhere in Chicago. I was also showing a lot of artists from Europe who already had strong and established careers—bringing them to Chicago helped expand their audience and add depth to my program.

#### WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

For me, having the space has always really been—in terms of a relationship to my personal art practice—about collaboration. My primary concern is with establishing a dialogue that isn't solely about producing work, but about producing situations where my ideas and the artist's work can come together. It's also about working within some kind of self-created cultural structure that benefits many and about establishing networks beyond our immediate community that might create opportunities for the artists with whom I work. I'm really interested in all that stuff because I really believe that it's a way of empowering myself and empowering the people with whom I work.

Part of it is related to teaching. I see so many of my students come out of school with basically two objectives: to get a teaching job and to get a gallery. I think that there are many other ways to bring one's practice to higher levels. As an artist who

has been part of the gallery system for so long, I was really interested in accessing these other components of our system as a way to somehow understand, control and open-up possibilities for others. I think there's always been a strong divide between the commercial side of art and the action of art making, but I find that few artists want to really acknowledge that the commercial side is incredibly necessary. It's flawed and exaggerated at times, but it's necessary for people to make work—unless they have some other source of income. Artists are really interested in trying to get to their work out there.

In the end, the collaboration that exists between me and the artists with whom I work, is very close. We talk about the work to be shown, we hang the shows together, we deal with all the pricing, we share collector information; we do everything possible to make their show as successful as possible for the given event. I try to be very upfront about my capabilities as an artist/educator/gallerist and the artists who show with me are willing to sacrifice a full-time dealer for someone who is willing to spend whatever time he has on getting people to see their shows. The business side of this project is extremely important—both to me and to the artists with whom I work. They need the show to be successful in order to continue to work; I need to keep things running and viable enough to keep the project from becoming a financial liability. On the most basic level, the love I have for showing artist's work isn't as strong as my need to stay financially stable.

I'm very lucky that I have a great teaching position at a significant art academy that allows me to maintain both my life and my creative pursuits. I teach, I try to make

my own work and I work with the gallery, constantly trying to find artists whose work makes sense with the project. I am able to travel quite often and have made very strong connections with artists, curators and gallerists I've met in Europe, primarily in Austria and Germany. This perspective is so important to me because the concerns and histories with which they come to the gallery are so different from our own. It enriches and expands the way we think about how objects and ideas operate. For example, I met Gerd Borkelmann through Volker Saul, an artist I've worked with for a couple of years. Gerd is an amazing painter but also works full-time as a curator. His perspective and his work have added a level of texture and clarity to my program. The connections I've developed have also allowed my US artists to find exhibition opportunities in Europe. Chicago artist Dianna Frid is scheduled for an exhibition at the Kunstforum in Cologne in March 2010. I love it when the networks that exist in our narrow strata of culture come together in such a generous and expansive way; artists love to meet and work with other artists and curators from out of their backyards. I really love when I can help in some small way to make this happen.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

For the past year, what I've been doing as an artist/curator/gallerist has evolved to become a kind of directed art practice. It's certainly been my focus. I have even extended the gallery program into my studio space to provide a kind of project venue for smaller shows. **The Off Space** gives me a chance to show work that may be more loosely curated or to make a smaller solo exhibition with an artist who interests me. The problem now is that my studio has become a very public space. I continue to make my own work but the privacy necessary to make that work has been difficult to achieve. The most recent solution became the acquisition of a third space—first as storage, then as a workspace. We'll see how this all plays out. I'm optimistic that I can somehow tie all three components of my place in the art world into some kind of feasible and working structure. So far, it's worked fine.

Interviewee: Dan Devening



# HAROLD ARTS

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 3039 W. Carroll  
4077 Harold Jeffers Lane, Chesterhill, OH, 2129 N. Rockwell Ave.  
1254 Bosworth Ave., 1550 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
1913 W. 17th St.

FOUNDERS: Jaimie Branch, Emily Green, Joseph Jeffers, Nicholas Wylie  
WEBSITE: haroldarts.org

**Harold Arts** is a non-profit organization based in Chicago, IL—which supports emerging and mid-career artists and musicians. The organization revolves around its annual summer residency program, which is complimented throughout the rest of the year by such programming as exhibitions, concerts and art fair opportunities featuring its summer residents.

Born of the desire for a collective artistic community outside of academia, **Harold Arts** emphasizes collaboration and skill sharing, and acts as an alternative network to both the commercial gallery system and the record industry. The organization strives to help artists and musicians establish sustainable practices by offering environments to nourish their artistic processes while providing venues to present their work.

The **Harold Arts** Summer Residency takes place annually on a large farm in rural Appalachia and is devoted to fostering collaborative and interdisciplinary projects. For 9 or 18-day sessions, artists enter into a dialogue with a new set of colleagues to collaborate on new projects and refine their own practices. Residents have access to shared artist studios, a serigraphy studio, wood shop and recording studio amidst the idyllic pastoral landscape.

Once accepted to the residency, participants become members of the evolving collective of **Harold** artists. Summer residents are incorporated in exhibitions, concerts, workshops and other collective endeavors in Chicago and elsewhere.

**Harold Arts** is an all-volunteer 501c3 organization.



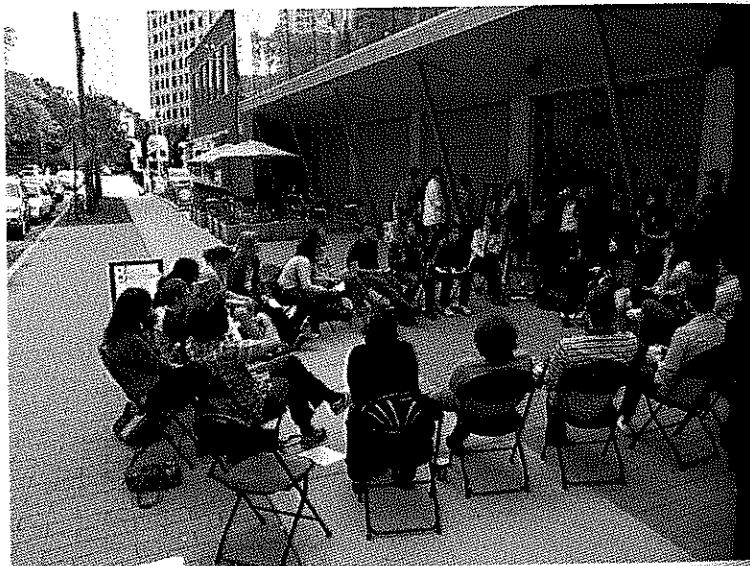
2006-PRESENT

# INCUBATE

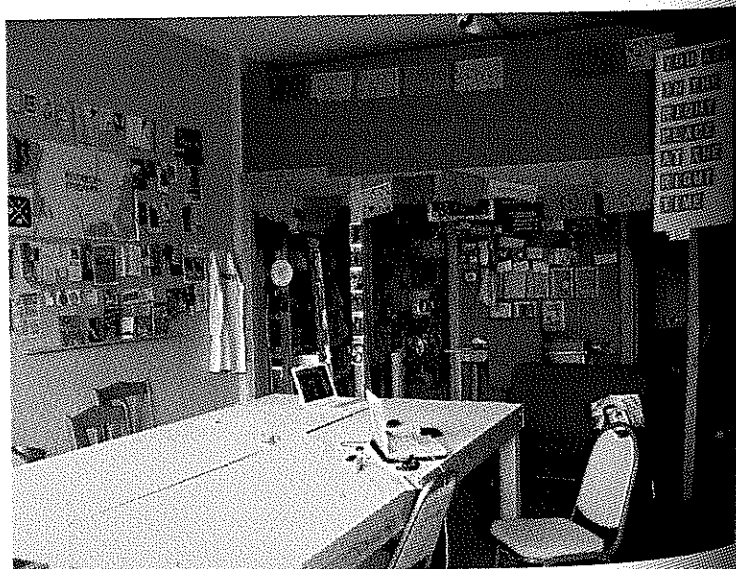
LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2129 N. Rockwell St.

FOUNDERS: Bryce Dwyer, Roman Petruniak, Ben Schaafsma, Abigail Satinsky, Matthew Joyn  
WEBSITE: [incubate-chicago.org](http://incubate-chicago.org)

**The Institute for Community Understanding Between Art and the Everyday (InCUBATE)** is an experimental research institute and artist residency program dedicated to exploring and documenting new approaches to arts administration and arts funding.



Launch of the Artist-run Credit League



Inside InCUBATE

opposite: Memorandum of Understanding

artistruncritleague.org

//// ARCL Member Agreement ////

### /// Why Start a Credit League?

Just like a community bank, together we can generate interest for each other.

### /// General Agreement

// Credit-Cycle & Individual credit

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// Rotating Payout
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## // Fundraisers

// Donations to the ARCL

## // Bonuses

## // Exiting & Joining the ARCL

// Modification of the Memorandum of Understanding  
A meeting to consider modification of the

Member Name

Date \_\_\_\_\_

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery. The edges of the paper are slightly irregular, suggesting it might be from a bound volume. There is no handwriting or other markings on the page.

## LIVEBOX

LOCATION OF GALLERY: Roaming

FOUNDER: Catherine Forester  
WEBSITE: liveboxgallery.com

## HOW DID LIVEBOX BEGIN?

Around the time that I graduated from SAIC in 2002 there were a lot of alternative galleries in Chicago. As a student I was pretty excited by the alternative scene and was keen to participate myself, but not alone. I tried to collaborate with numerous individuals, but everybody wanted to curate and nobody wanted to put in the time to administer a space or chip in to fund it.

Nothing happened for a while and I focused on my art practice. Around 2003, I started experimenting with video. I wasn't very interested in video while at school, but then I began a project that only made sense as a media piece. At the same time I started viewing galleries differently. I was always amazed and energized when I went to New York because of spaces like **The Kitchen**, **Location One** and **PS1**. There was a lot more opportunity to experience video [in New York] than there was in Chicago, particularly video installation. In Chicago, exhibitions of media art at museums and non-profits seemed pedestrian, not really an embrace of the medium. I also went to Berlin, London and other places in Europe. Even there, there seemed to be a much greater understanding of what video could do. I came back and decided that what was missing in Chicago was a better

opportunity for video. That got me thinking and led to **LiveBox**, initially a project focused on video, which now encompasses video and new media art.

## WHAT IS LIVEBOX ABOUT?

Initially the idea was to do single channel video only, exhibited via a flat panel TV screen in a storefront window. Video installation is what I was really interested in, video as architecture. I went to several Chicago neighborhoods and did a lot of talking to various people from building to building but that model [a regular site] was just not going to be viable. I just didn't have the money for it. So I decided to keep **LiveBox** roving.

I curated an exhibition in Ravenswood in a large loft space. It was an exciting installation with video and new media from ten artists. Participating artists were from Chicago, NY, LA and Europe. I find it fascinating when people enter a space that is transformed. I'm most interested in having viewers experience more than an individual piece. I want them to be involved in a larger experience. The trick is to maintain the integrity of each piece, yet have the collection of works within a larger space create an experience of its own.

I'm also fascinated by the audio phenom-

non too. It can kill or enhance an individual piece; at the same time it fills the entire space with a unique composition. When you walk into an installation and close your eyes, you hear a new composition comprised of all the audio, or you can experience each piece individually. That is something that I find fascinating about video, like individuals, when you get two or more in a room, it's different. I feel that video, as a medium, is powerful because each piece becomes interactive and participatory. The element of activation, led me to include new media work as well as video. New media is often condemned for privileging technology over art. When the artist gets it right, however, audience response can be very powerful.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

I started the gallery in 2006 and though I have done lots and lots of exhibitions, I haven't done as many large-scale museum exhibitions as I would like. Some have been truly ambitious to the point of nearly killing me in the process. In 2007, **Around the Coyote** gave me a 3,000 square foot building for media art! It was amazing, the space was very raw and needed a lot of work, as did the complicated tech installation. Finding available help for free was





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difficult and the process was exhausting.  
The exhibition was a huge success and  
I was very excited for the artists. I've since  
learned to guarantee help up-front and to  
expect more of artists during installation.

A lot has come out of the **LiveBox** activity.  
I do video screening programs for a number  
of art spaces both in Chicago and abroad.  
I do curatorial programs for the **Directors  
Lounge Berlin, Around the Coyote** and  
**Hyde Park Art Center** on a regular basis.

When I got out of school I wanted more  
than "studio time," I needed some process  
that would allow dialogue and exchange.  
Initially, I thought teaching was going to  
be that channel, but it really didn't provide  
the kind of stimulation I was looking for. I  
found I really enjoy working with artists;  
**LiveBox** has introduced me to some  
extraordinary artists and amazing art. In  
addition, the curatorial process for me is  
like creating another art project and in  
the process I get to investigate media art.

I also became very committed to the artists  
I work with and want to get their work out,  
both in and outside of Chicago. There are  
artists that I've shown in more than one  
setting and that I follow regularly. Kim  
Colmer is one artist from Seattle; she  
came to Chicago and did some teaching

but now lives in Germany. She connected  
me with the **Directors Lounge Berlin**.  
Kim does animation and live action films  
that I think are absolutely gorgeous. They  
have a poetic element to them but one  
that's very mystical and open. Carol Kim,  
who has a Korean background and lives  
and works in L.A. does live video in collabo-  
ration with dancers and musicians. They are  
huge productions and performances. I'd  
love to bring her to Chicago, but I can only  
afford to bring her single channel videos.

What I'm hoping to do in the future is to  
collaborate more with individuals. I've  
always wanted to do that. Right now I'm  
collaborating with Scott Kildall to create an  
online gallery called **Fast Forward**. Unlike  
other video sites, invited curators will curate  
**Fast Forward** every month. The site fixes  
one of the problems for video and new  
media artists, that they're work is only up  
for a few days or appears only once in a  
screening. At **Fast Forward** the work will  
be up for a month. I'm trying to make more  
opportunities for artists to have their work  
seen, and for it to be seen how they had  
envisioned.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I think my own work has matured. The best

thing is that I look at my work the way that  
I look at other artist's work. I can be more  
objective now, as if I was curating it.  
**LiveBox** has allowed me to sit in both  
places as the artist and the curator,  
but sometimes the biggest struggle is sep-  
arating the two, so that you can have time  
for each one.

Interviewee: Catherine Forester

Format: transcribed audio interview

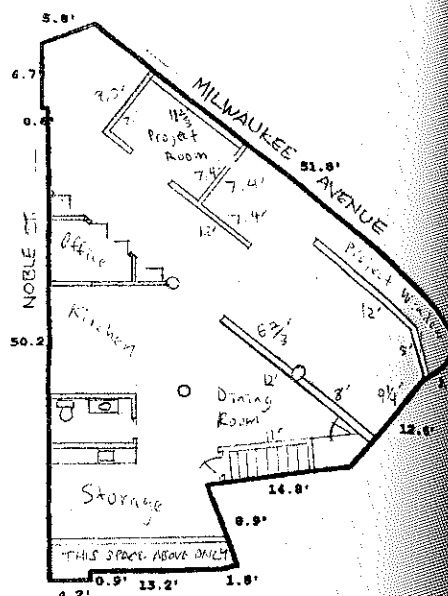
Location of interview: New Wave Coffee,  
2557 N. Milwaukee Ave.

# ROOTS & CULTURE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1034 N. Milwaukee Ave

FOUNDER: Eric May

WEBSITE: rootsandcultureac.org



## HOW DID ROOTS & CULTURE BEGIN?

I was sort of a hermit-type of artist for years and frankly, I got a late start in involving myself with the arts community here. In 2004 I went to work for **Beacon Street Gallery**, a 25-year-old non-profit space. Their programming has since shrunk considerably, but it was part of the thriving period of non-profits in Chicago in the 1980's. Pat Murphy, my boss, is definitely a veteran of that era. I was hired as a gallery coordinator and the job served as my early education in the non-profit art world. At **Beacon Street** I worked with Michael Piazza who schooled me on the history of Chicago spaces and he convinced me to one day do my own thing.

A really good friend of mine, Caleb Lyons, was in the midst of running **artLedge** at that time. I hung out there quite a bit. That was my point of entry into the alternative space scene; watching Caleb and Brandon [Alvenida] run **artLedge**. I was enthralled by the young energy. I was curating things at **Beacon Street**, but I was somewhat confined by their programming goals.

That's when I started to intentionally involve myself with Caleb. I was part of the first *Spring Break*, I was pretty much just the DJ, but that was the first time I felt included regarding organizing something. Then, Caleb and I organized a giant unruly Halloween exhibition at the space formerly known as **The Mansion** called *Spooktacula*. We had bands and two floors of exhibition space. The first floor had high ceilings and kind of clean walls—so we had more

conventional work upstairs and the basement turned into a haunted house zone, it had a low ceiling and the dusty, cobwebby effects of a forgotten-about basement.

There was a noisy chaos caused by video projections. That was my first meaty curating gig. There were interesting things outside too, Liz Neilsen had a 10-foot wide giant plush pink spider with light-up eyes, Jo Hormuth had a flat black spray-painted pine tree with a really slow pulsing strobe on it. It was a wild party, 600 people paid \$5 at the door, and a bunch more [people] snuck in through basement windows. It was pretty cool. So I started to get amped up for that sort of activity. **Roots & Culture** wasn't an accident, but it was as simple as relocating to a live/work environment.

I looked at lots of different spaces and this was the only one of its kind. The building is 120 years old. It's a flat iron [building] and has a triangular shape. We figured out that it had originally been a hotel, and this space had been the lobby. We also have about four studios in the basement.

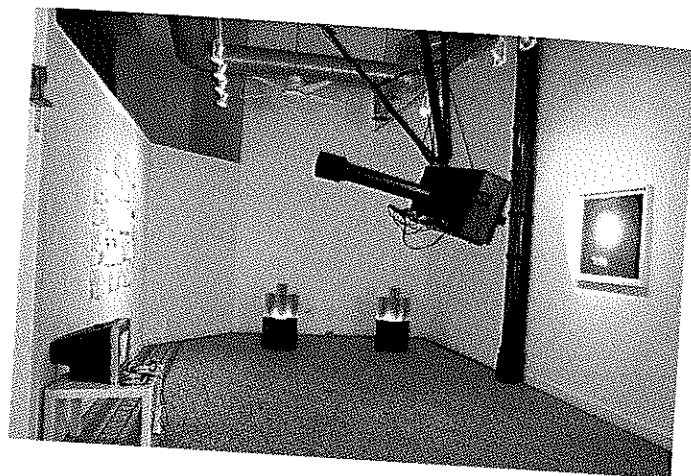
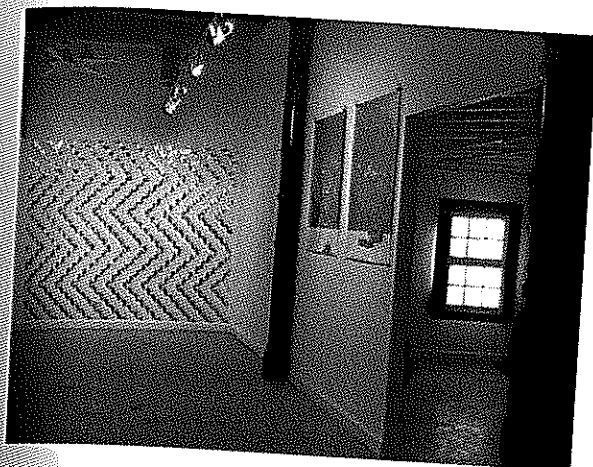
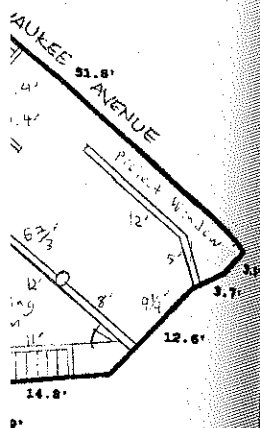
I started thinking hard when I found the space, as much as the apartment gallery was an appealing route, about the sustainable way to do something. There was something about the domestic clutter that I never wanted. My vision for a space was that there would be enough domestic effects to feel comfortable, but also a clean gallery area. It's the physical space that brought me into doing this. The first time I walked into the space I knew it would be striking and interesting as an art gallery; the

previous incarnation as a mortgage and realty office masked its architectural significance.

## WHAT IS ROOTS & CULTURE ABOUT?

We came up with a clear concise programming calendar and a mission statement. At first I drafted a mission statement, we opened with a bunch of fancy vague wording. Then we honed in on the mission to provide exhibition opportunities for leading edge emerging artists and to develop the city of Chicago's cultural community as a center for art production and a destination for artistic discourse." Once we knew how to state our purpose it came together, and now we have developed an evolving policy for accepting proposals and portfolios. There are two major components to our programming. First, we have two to three person exhibitions of emerging artists with a serious focus on supporting Chicago artists. Second, we help promote the state of art discourse in Chicago. We're about supporting the local. The main focus is to give exhibition opportunities to emerging Chicago artists and the other is to accept curator proposals. We're open to both national and international artists and communities. That's our way of connecting what happens here to activities elsewhere.

When you run a business that you love, it's not a grind. It's something that you do. It's just what I think about and put my energy towards. It has definitely evolved; the early days were less organized. We didn't have a structured administrative



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## CULTURE ABOUT?

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side, defined programming goals, or any  
organizational capacity. So it was like, "Hey  
friends want to do stuff?" That got me a  
little burnt out, agreeing to show anything  
and everything, but once I started thinking  
about developing the space as a non-profit,  
with a board of directors and applied for my  
501c3 status, that streamlined everything.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

Some recent successes at the space have  
been the five-person painting show [in  
January]. There wasn't a singular curator;  
instead a group of artists put that show  
together. Last month we had a show called  
*End of Analog*, curated by local artist  
Eric Fleischauer. The premise of the show  
revolved around the discontinuation of  
analog broadcasting. It was supposed to  
line up with the date of the show, but then  
Obama pushed the switch back to June.  
Concerning two and three-person shows,  
currently up is work by Jamisen Ogg, who  
was a Chicago-based artist who now works  
in New York and works by Oli Watt and  
Lauren Anderson, who both work in  
Chicago.

The process of obtaining a 501c3 took  
months. I knew a lot of the language from  
**Beacon Street** and Jonathan Rhodes  
(from **throwwalls**) helped me considerably.  
Lawyers for the Creative Arts are a really  
great resource. Anytime I ran into a stum-  
bling block, I called them up. The major  
issue that intimidates people is putting  
together a board of directors and being

accountable to that board. A non-profit  
board of directors has the final say on all  
the decisions. That was a little spooky for  
me, to know the organization could develop  
in such a way that I could lose control of  
my own ship. But I found the right people,  
people whom I trust and have really good  
dialogue with. They also trust me and that's  
the most important thing. Now that we're  
fully established, I'm working on grants a  
ton. I have a month-by-month schedule that  
I'm gradually chipping away at. My strategy  
is [as my dad says], "You got to throw a  
bunch of shit at the wall and see what  
sticks."

We also started to host brunch parties,  
keep it on the cheap and attract people.  
I'm looking for alternative funding models.  
I really admire **IncUBATE**. Talk about a  
labor of love. They're purely raising money  
to go directly to the artists.

## HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I don't know how my art practice has been  
affected. Going into this took so much  
energy that my practice had really fallen off,  
but a year ago I started to feel like I  
[as the curator] was part of the dialogue  
surrounding the work happening here. It's a  
sort of intimate relationship that happens.  
It's a two-way dialogue that definitely put  
some juice back into me and I started to hit  
the studio. I feel like the lesson I've learned  
throughout all this is that to be both an  
artist and a productive member of society

you have to keep a lot on your plate and  
there has to be multiplicity in your activity.  
There's an approach that we have as  
artists, we bring creative problem solving to  
everything we touch; it's the responsibility of  
a contemporary artist to interact with the  
community—whether you're teaching in a  
university or running a space. My practice is  
bound by a specific set of ideas that may  
be unrelated, philosophically, to some of my  
other activities. I work with inner city high  
school kids (after school), but I feel that the  
energy brought to that activity supports my  
other activities as well.

Food has been an interest of mine ever  
since I was a kid. I think that it's an activity  
that I may or may not consider part my  
artistic practice, but it comes out of the  
same motivation and energy. We have a  
kitchen, which is unique—in the sense that  
it's uncommon within a conventional gallery  
space. I like it when people walk in to the  
smell of cookies baking and I like to offer  
people tea. To me it's important to offer  
a welcoming environment. I hope to provide  
a space where people feel comfortable  
spending time looking at the art and also  
feel included in a sort of community  
moment. It's a cooperative, collaborative,  
experience that I hope to create. Food  
is such a direct and intimate thing. I'm inter-  
ested in the intimacy of nourishing someone.

Interviewee: Eric May  
Format: transcribed audio interview  
Location of interview: 1304 N. Milwaukee Ave.

2005-2007

TETI

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2250 W. North, 2nd FL

FOUNDER: Matthew Teti

#### HOW DID TETI BEGIN?

I started **Teti Gallery** because I wanted to be a curator, and I saw that there was a plethora of very talented artists lined up at the doors of the relatively few contemporary art galleries in town. A couple of the artists I worked with intended to move to New York the fall after they received their MFAs because there weren't enough opportunities in Chicago. I like to think that I influenced some of them to stay in Chicago longer by giving them a solo show for the forthcoming year.

I was inspired by spaces such as **Texas Ballroom, Polvo, Heaven, Buddy** and Edmar's festivals. The people affiliated with those spaces were taking art into their own hands with little money and a lot of heart. There was also a gallery/squat called **Transmission** on Washington in the West Loop above a car-repair garage. They had punk, electroclash, noise and experimental music shows, as well as visual art exhibitions. The spirit of DIY arts management, which I'd inherited from the punk/hardcore world, formed the basic model for my space. Music was always an integral part of it for me. There is so much spillover between the art and music scenes that the two are inseparable in certain circles.

#### WHAT WAS TETI ABOUT?

My central goal was to provide a semi-professionally run exhibition space that would promote emerging artists who lacked gallery representation. Many of the artists I exhibited had just graduated from the MFA program at The School of the Art Institute and others were working artists both from Chicago and elsewhere. They ranged in age from 20-40 years. One artist was from Taiwan and the others were American. They worked in all media: video, sculpture, painting, textiles, drawing, installation, film and sound. Thinking about it now, I realize

that I have a taste for graphic arts, which was strongly represented in a drawing salon that I held.

My self-conceived role was to garner recognition for artists in whom I saw promise, in the hope that other galleries and curators would take notice. There are a number of peripheral things involved in the act of exhibiting work that help promote an artist's career. I would first try to get the shows reviewed in local and national publications (from the *Reader* to *Artforum*). I would introduce artists to other curators. I wrote short synopses of the exhibitions, which I sent around with images, biographical information and resumes. I've moved on in my career, but to this day I continue to work with and promote a number of the artists I worked with at **Teti**.

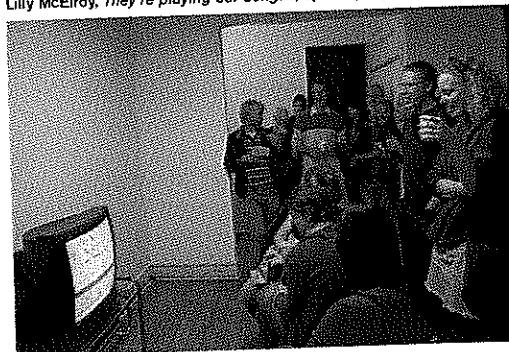
#### WHAT WERE YOU ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

One artist I worked with was picked up by a more-established Chicago gallery; said artist has had one solo show and exhibited in a couple group shows at that gallery. That was my goal.

#### HOW DID IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

Unfortunately, the most glaring effect [of running the space] has been the monetary debt in which I find myself two years after closing. People who are contemplating this track should know that it can be expensive. It was possibly more expensive for me than others because I utilized vinyl lettering, professional framing and served quality wine at openings, details that make an apartment gallery or warehouse space more sleek. The experience was also a great crash course in gallery operation. I learned a lot on the job. Instead of rationally considering this adventure beforehand, I charged right in and tackled obstacles as they arose. From, "Where do I put all my furniture?" in the beginning to, "How do I get out of the lease on this giant space I can't afford?" at the end.

Lilly McElroy, *They're playing our song....*, opening night



One of the most important lessons I learned was that galleries, artists, and patrons form communities that support one another. During the time my gallery was in operation in Wicker Park, many of the galleries joined together to form a gallery association. This type of initiative is critical in maintaining not only a larger community but also to help fledgling galleries stay open. However, this community building was not without its difficulties. Competition and jealousy were detractors to the process of collective promotion. I started off very jealous and competitive, but have since realized the perils of such stance. What I came to see was that the success of my neighbors only bolstered the image of my gallery within the community and I believe that is a very important lesson to anyone starting out.

Spiritually, the most affective aspect of running a DIY gallery was aiding the artists in the realization of their dreams. Working alongside them taught me some of the most important lessons that I've learned about creative problem solving. It was thrilling for me to participate in the creative process in such an essential way. I also taught them a great deal about how to best show their feathers, so to speak. A lot of artists I've met only think about work through completion. For a variety of reasons they don't spend a lot of time considering the work's subsequent presentation. Or, they can't remove themselves from the work to critically view its presentation. The curator can be an integral part of the process of creation through the act of exhibiting.

Interviewee: Matthew Teti  
Format: email interview



2007-PRESENT

# GOLDEN AGE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1744 W. 18th St.

FOUNDERS: Marco Kane Braunschweiler, Martine Syms  
WEBSITE: [shopgoldenage.com](http://shopgoldenage.com)

**Golden Age** is a concept shop that sells publications, music, apparel and other editioned works created by artists.

**Golden Age** makes a statement about an alternative mode of making and selling art; that it can be straightforward, accessible, and moderately priced.



Golden Age, new storefront



# ALOGON GALLERY

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1049 N. Paulina 3R

FOUNDER: Justin Berry, Tim Louis Graham, Ben Fain, John Friel  
WEBSITE: alogongallery.com

## HOW DID ALOGON BEGIN?

That's a good question. It's actually two different questions for us. **Alogon** was here, it was actually started by undergrads from the School of the Art Institute: Bless Tiv, Max Schubert and Wyatt Kahn. They were doing it for at least a year—maybe two, but they all moved to New York. So in June of 2007, Justin Berry, Ben Fain, John Friel and I all moved in. We wanted to keep the name because they were doing some interesting things and the apartment gallery had a reputation. People knew about it, knew where it was, so we took what they had started, built on it and tried to elaborate. It was really Justin Berry's initiative to keep the space going after getting the apartment. I don't think anyone leaving specifically asked any of us to keep it going. But the offer was there. It seemed like a really fun thing to do, connecting to the art community in a different way, to take on a role separate from the role of an artist and to give back to the community.

## WHAT IS ALOGON ABOUT?

When we came into the space, we decided to change the program. Previously, the organizers would curate the shows, but

we changed the whole structure of the programming. Our idea was to get outside curators to organize the exhibitions so that we wouldn't be constantly producing the same shows with the same kind of work. We wanted to make the gallery act as a platform for different ideas and conversations in contemporary art.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

It's been nice because we've had great diversity regarding shows due to our curatorial model. I think that we are a space that is open to both artists and curators; I don't think I would say that we're a venue geared towards curators more than artists or vice versa. Everyone seems to work really well together to finish the shows, but we step back and let the visions of other people come through. Once we ask someone to do a show, we really try to support the exhibitor/curator as much as possible—without restriction. Sometimes that has worked really great and other times it's been... I won't say unsuccessful, but I'll say not to my own personal liking—which in a way is also a success. By using outside curators, we've had opportunities to show really good work that we wouldn't have had

access to on our own. We've shown people like Douglas Gordon, Mika Rottenberg, Seth Price, Jose Lerma, Jordan Wolfson [and others].

We asked Gaylen [Gerber] to curate a show and I think he delivered one of the best shows that we've had. He was really professional and great to work with. We painted the entire gallery, but it felt like less work than a lot of the other shows we had had because it was planned out. It came out really well and was a great looking show. We were really pleased because he wanted to try a new idea in our space and since then he's been doing some similar things in other galleries. We feel proud that we gave him the opportunity to experiment with that idea. There have been lots of shows that I've really enjoyed. Working with Philip von Zweck and Anthony Elms on *Can Bigfoot Get You A Beer?* was really fun. Neil [Inflavi] did a Youtube screening; it was one of the first Youtube screenings that I'd ever heard of, maybe it was ahead of its time. I don't know. He curated the section of art videos from Youtube, but they weren't necessarily art videos, per se, just off the cuff weird stuff.

We've shown people on, Mika Rottenberg, a, Jordan Wolfson

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Theoretically it's supposed to be less work, but I don't think it is necessarily. It's just how much work you want to put into it. We could always do a lot more or a lot less. We try to keep the shows up for a month with two weeks off for installation. We try to keep it pretty consistent and adhere to a fixed schedule. If we do have time off between shows, we try to fill that time with screenings, events, or lectures. It's a really nice apartment. We're really lucky that we have big windows and a big open space. It's not something that I think about a lot, but I feel like having art in the space does have an influence on me and it's really pleasant. I was thinking recently about how nice it is to have an interior designer re-doing our house every month! So, your décor is always changing, if that's not too vulgar—to reduce the art to décor. Our space is a huge component of why the gallery has done as well as it has. While it's technically an apartment gallery (since we live here), it has none of the cozy domestic features of a typical apartment gallery. All of the bedrooms are hidden, and all you can see is the kitchen. It takes on the qualities of a commercial space more than those of an apartment space.

When Justin Berry left for New York we decided to keep the same programming and mission. We laid that out all together. It was really working well for us, so we kept that going. There is something kind of anonymous about the gallery that I really like. A lot of times people don't actually know the individuals that run the space, they don't know who I am or who my roommates are. So it becomes **Alogon** as **Alogon** and doesn't have a specific person behind it. That will hopefully allow for transitions between different directors to occur in the future.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

To be totally honest, for me, running the space has not been good for my artwork. It's a lot of work to run a space and I find myself investing a lot into the gallery. I don't think of **Alogon** in correlation to my own practice. I don't think of the gallery as an artistic project. I keep them very separate. [Running the gallery] is time consuming. An artist-run space becomes a bit of an oxymoron because it becomes more about running the space than about making artwork.

**"We wanted to make the gallery act as a platform for different ideas and conversations in contemporary art."**

We'd like to have a better website, with links to all of the artists we've shown and have everything really tight—but we're also doing our own artwork and making our own websites. We're not curatorial students or anything like that either—we're all artists first.

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Interviewees: Tim Louis Graham

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: 1049 N. Paulina 3R

2007-2009

# MINI DUTCH

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 3111 W. Diversey 1st FL

FOUNDERS: Lucia Fabio  
WEBSITE: [minidutchgallery.org](http://minidutchgallery.org)

## HOW DID MINI DUTCH BEGIN?

When I was graduating from the School of the Art Institute I began thinking about running an apartment space and I knew Chicago had a history of them but didn't really know how to start one. I knew I had to buy a domain name and write a mission statement. I knew that if I got the information to **threewalls** and the **Green Lantern** in time, they would put me in the *Phonebook*. Robert Andrew Meuller (then my partner—now my fiancé) and I started looking for apartments that could house an apartment gallery. We found one and signed the lease with the new landlord, called AT&T and found our new phone number in like a week. It was really, really, short and looking at it I can't believe I did it.

## WHAT IS MINI DUTCH ABOUT?

Before I started **mini dutch**, I knew [alternative] spaces existed but I wasn't as involved as I am now. That's why **mini dutch's** motto is "another apartment gallery," because I know that I'm not doing anything new.

I think that one of the great things about apartment spaces and the alternative art scene in Chicago is that it is a big community. If someone comes up to me and asks

how to start a space, I'm going to help. Patrick Holbrook just opened up a new space called **Eel Space** and he said that **mini dutch** inspired him. As silly as that sounds, if I inspired someone else to open something up, **mini dutch** has accomplished something. Now, if **mini dutch** dies, at least something came from it.

I like showing work that doesn't get shown often. The shows aren't commercial and are unfinished. It is really hard for a lot of people to deal with the unfinished part.

A show called *Prototype*, that was kinetic work in its first stage of production, got a review in *Newcity* and in *Time Out*, but the reviews were kind of wishy-washy, like, "Yeah, this is a great idea, but the work is not finished. So you don't know if the work is good or not." But that's how it should be for every show at **mini dutch**! It doesn't matter if the work as a product is good or not, but that you get a glimpse of the studio. Most people would never see this work unless they were actively doing studio visits.

I'm still interested in in-progress and site-specific work, but the mission really pigeonholes me into a specific genre and type of artwork. I keep looking at different

artists and thinking of different shows to curate, but I can't do it in my own space. I have to start finding other spaces to curate in.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE? Every time I show people I like, I feel like that's an accomplishment. I gave Peter Hoffman his first solo show. It seems crazy because he has been around a long time. I think that I pride myself on having given three people their first solo shows and people that should have had solo shows before they came to **mini dutch**.

Peter Hoffman's *Post-Paintings* was one of my favorite shows. He had these Q&A applications that visitors could fill out and mail to him and based on their responses Peter would make them a painting and mail it back. He got a CAAP grant for the project so that he could mail the paintings back free of charge. For *Post-Paintings* we tracked down 34 of his paintings from past owners and displayed them. They were all over the country, friends of friends of friends. For him the project wasn't site-specific; a work in progress isn't meant to be shown in a gallery space. Rather it is meant to be a quick sketch. After that show he got another 70 applicants. He

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#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

My art practice has diminished quite a bit. It is hard to make work when you are running a space, so I really admire anyone who can do it. [Running a space] drains you. I'm the only person who runs **mini dutch**, who writes press releases, curates, etc... Trying to balance doing all of that stuff, making artwork, going to work, having a relationship, petting the bunnies, cleaning and cooking. It just seems so ridiculous!

For the longest time I didn't make any work until *Mattress Bunny*, my collaborative project with Robert. That worked because I could fall back on him if I couldn't do something and we could pick days that we both had free. It is only recently that I have been able to get back to drawing and painting. I realized that I missed it. Watercolor was my medium and I hadn't touched it in two years.

The next show at **mini dutch** is curated by E. C. Brown who ran **COMA** and now runs **Floor Length and Tux (FLAT)**. He kept pushing me to show my own work at **mini dutch** because he showed his work at

**COMA** in these huge thirteen person shows. Talking back and forth quite a bit, he wanted to curate me into a show. At first I said, "No" but finally we decided [on a format where] Eric's work was up for two weeks and then Lucia Fabio metabolizes E. C. Brown (that is the title of the second part of the show). The show is called *Dusty Bunnyfield vs. Molotovia Cottontail*. Basically, I ended up curating my work in with his. I manipulated his show and put my work up within it. That version was up for two weeks and then there was a big group show of people who run alternative spaces, are artists and are part of our social network. It puts my work on exhibit at **mini dutch** in context with other artists who run spaces or projects in a domestic context, showing that we are all artists too.

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Interviewee: Lucia Fabio

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: interviewer's apartment

# OLD GOLD EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

## LOCATION OF GALLERY:

2022 N. Humboldt Blvd. basement April 2007-May 2009

3102 W. Palmer Blvd. basement & satellite locations November 2009-

FOUNDER: Kathryn Scanlan, Caleb Lyon

## HOW DID OLD GOLD BEGIN?

**Caleb:** Originally, when Kathryn and I moved in together, we were looking for a space in which we could run a gallery. I had been working on **artLedge** before and it was something that I wanted to continue doing and you [referencing Kathryn] had been doing events and things like that too. We weren't exactly looking for a wood paneled basement, but we just happened upon the space.

**Kathryn:** [To access the space] you enter through a side door into a dark, curtained passageway and then proceed into a basement covered with aged knotted-pine wood paneling, with a low ceiling. There are built-in speakers, cabinets, and a bar, and the fireplace has a light bulb instead of a chimney.

**Caleb:** It's not in the greatest condition as far as water damage goes.

**Kathryn:** There was a flood at some point.

**Caleb:** There are weird growths on the wall, and...

**Kathryn:** It's not heated. It's damp in the summer and cold in the winter.

**Caleb:** Not a good place to show works on paper.

**Kathryn:** No!

## WHAT IS OLD GOLD ABOUT?

**Caleb:** At **Old Gold**, usually we choose our artists specifically for this context and aesthetic.

**Kathryn:** When we first started there were a couple times when people approached us and wanted to do a show here simply because they wanted a space for a show. That's understandable because there aren't that many spaces [in Chicago], but they wanted to show preexisting drawings and things like that; we thought that it wouldn't look very good. Before we had the gallery we had a few things hung up on the walls and discovered that posters, unframed drawings and stuff like that looked terrible down here.

**Caleb:** One thing that makes it exciting for us is that we feel it is still a collaboration between us and the artists—we're not just curating solo or group shows down here. We've really only had two group shows, *Sausagefest*—which was more of an event—and Sze Lin Pang curated a group show.

**Kathryn:** We haven't done studio visits to inform the curation of the shows; we've found artists that we wanted to work with.

**Caleb:** Or artists send us proposals. The fact that we have these wood-paneled walls doesn't mean we're interested solely in work that has to do with the 40's or the

70's or with the fact that there is a built-in bar. Kendrick Shackelford built walls to conceal some of the built-in features. I think we're interested in the original context, or how somebody could alter it completely. [The space] isn't really able to exist as a blank canvas.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

**Caleb:** Each artist has his or her own way of transforming the space. Selena Trepp did a piece that was a projection onto a mirror ball; it was a minimal piece concerning how much work you actually saw, but it overtook the space and reflected onto all of its existing features. It was a different use of the space, one that we've never seen before. That's one of the coolest things about **[Old Gold]**.

**Kathryn:** There is a really interesting thing that's happened with these shows: sometimes one will do their installation and it will highlight a feature of the basement that has gone unnoticed prior to the show, so people think the artist did it. People thought Heather Mekkelson had distressed the wood on the floor to go along with her flood theme because they had never noticed it before. [The basement] is not a showcase really, it's kind of part of the work. We've been doing this for two years and [just] a week ago we had Alan Aronson come and talk to us. It takes a while for



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people to realize what you're doing and see  
that you're serious about it.

**Caleb:** The next space is going to be more  
group shows and generally opposite from  
what we have been doing here, in a way.  
[This is] both because of the situation that  
we'll be moving into and also I think we're  
both interested in trying something new.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

**Kathryn:** It's hard to think of specific ways  
that it has impacted my practice, but  
I feel pretty sure that it has. If for no other  
reason, it's brought us in contact with lots  
of different artists. We've gotten to talk with  
them about their work and see how they  
approach and install it. We never would  
have had that [opportunity] without the  
space. Whenever you talk to another artist  
about how they work, it's going to affect  
how you think about your [own] work.

**Caleb:** I think that working with other artists  
subconsciously informs how I work. I get  
tips and ideas from some of them. I have a  
huge community of people I've worked with  
that have distinct knowledge in different  
types of art making. I am able to connect  
with these people about my own work.  
There are a lot of people I've worked with  
that I can do studio visits with and they can  
do studio visits with me. I collaborate with

artists continually. I think of exhibitions as  
a large part of my studio practice which  
informs how I produce and view my work. I  
am very aware of the viewer when creating  
my work.

**Old Gold** began as a collaborative  
practice between Caleb Lyons, Kathryn  
Scanlan, and an exhibiting artist. We saw  
the context of our wood-paneled, idiosyn-  
cratic basement as an interesting obstacle  
or challenge for an artist to confront.

**Old Gold** was primarily a space for solo  
exhibitions or one-day events. Most  
exhibitions were made specifically for the  
context of the basement and its evocations  
of domestic history: speakeasy, juke joint,  
men's club, teenage rumpus room.

**Old Gold** will be relocating [fall 2009],  
and the new space will require a different  
exhibition approach. It is a space that has  
been loaned to us for our purposes and  
therefore we won't have the same control  
or freedom concerning what happens  
there. Although the new location is  
similar—a finished basement with an  
unavoidable history—our interest in site-  
specificity will be somewhat denied by the  
circumstance of the borrowed space. This  
is exciting. This will give us a chance to  
showcase work made in the studio, work  
that is relatively modest in scale, work from

around the globe and work by a number of  
artists exhibiting together. The name will  
stay the same because we are still direct-  
ing the show and are happy about our new  
approach being understood in conjunction  
with our old approach.

Interviewees: Kathryn Scanlan, Caleb Lyons  
Format: transcribed audio interview  
Location: 2022 N. Humboldt Blvd.

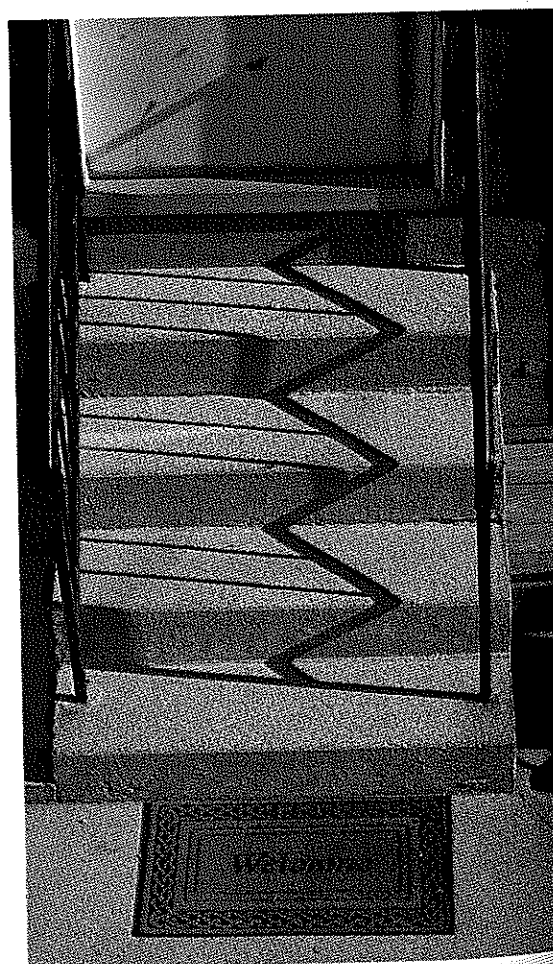
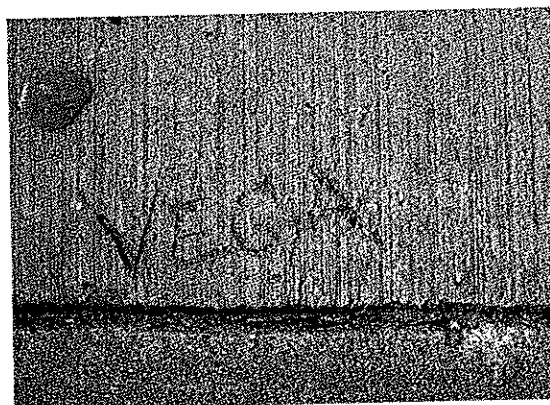
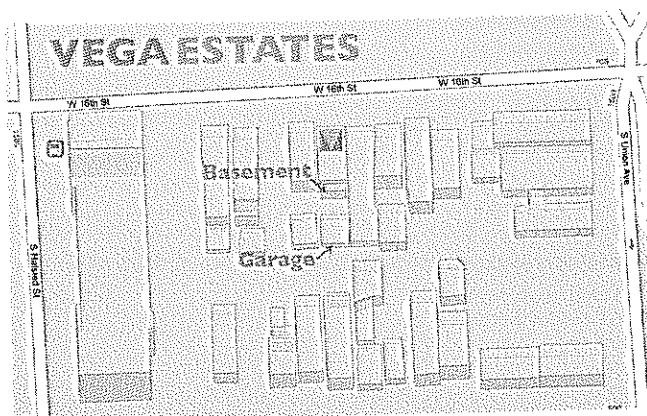
2007-PRESENT

# VEGA ESTATES

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 723 W. 16th St.

FOUNDERS: Roxane Hopper, Julie Rudder  
WEBSITE: [vegaestatespresents.com](http://vegaestatespresents.com)

**Vega Estates** is an artist-run project space in Pilsen, Chicago, where the garage and the basement of a two-flat becomes a platform for art and community. The architecture of the space provides an informal setting and reflects the mission of **Vega Estates**, which is to provide artists an opportunity for experimentation and dialogue. **Vega Estates** was started in 2007 by housemates Roxane Hopper and Julie Rudder who met while in graduate school at Northwestern University's department of Art Theory and Practice. Exhibitions are typically one-night-only events that take place during the warmer months of the year.



2008-PRESENT

# ANTENA

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1765 S. Laflin St.

FOUNDERS: Miguel Cortez

## HOW DID ANTENA BEGIN?

Chicago has long had a history of 'do-it-yourself' art spaces and I felt that the Pilsen neighborhood was lacking in contemporary art spaces. I have seen alt. spaces come and go in the Pilsen neighborhood over the years. So, I reopened a space on my own after **Polvo** closed.

## WHAT IS ANTENA ABOUT?

**antena** is focused on showcasing both emerging and established artists as well as new media and installation projects. There are usually one to three artists per show, but occasionally there is a group show of ten or more artists.

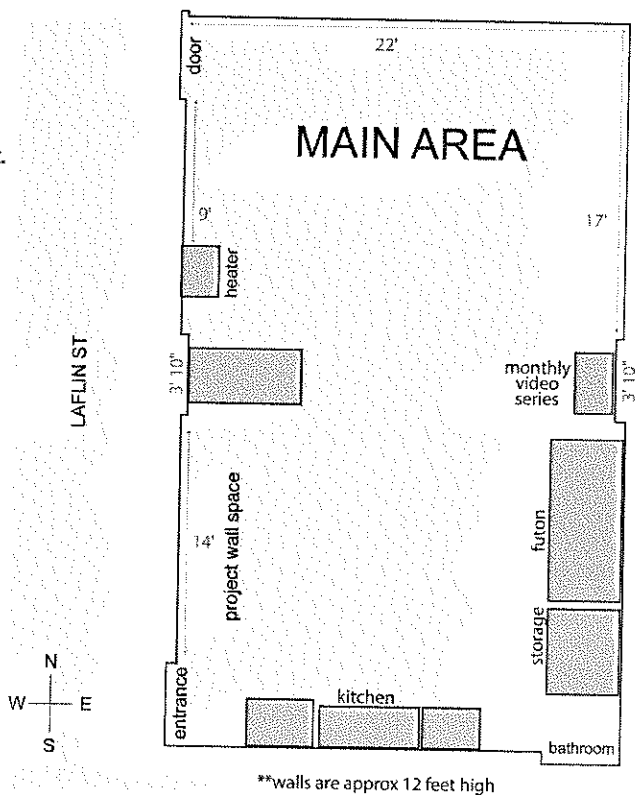
## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

The space is a year old and it has received some good press--so that helps spread the word out. I also utilize social networks and the Internet to publicize art shows. I stopped mailing postcards many years ago.

**antena** is not a commercial space so I don't depend on selling work to pay the rent. That gives me the freedom to show more experimental work.

Interviewee: Miguel Cortez

Format: email interview



Michael Piazza

# HE SAID SHE SAID

FOUNDER: Pamela Fraser, Randall Szott

## HOW DID HE SAID SHE SAID BEGIN?

**Randall:** We started it partially to have a public venue for working out a conversation that we were having privately all the time.

**Pamela:** And continue to have.

**Randall:** Well it's a conversation or argument or whatever you want to call it. We thought that since we have such disparate views on things we would let this thing take on a life beyond our own personal stake in it. The **He Said** thing for me is different than the impulse behind a traditional apartment gallery, because what I think I'm doing is not being done in those venues. The kinds of people that I'm trying to create a venue for don't usually have somewhere to display, or to talk about what they are doing. For me it was very much about finding a way to present things that interesting people are doing outside of an art context, or in some strange parallel art context—because these people aren't artists and don't think of themselves as artists.

**Pamela:** It definitely comes out of an ongoing argument about culture. The **She Said** part shows contemporary art in this domestic environment without altering it. A lot of apartment galleries make the space look very spare and more gallery-like. I really like the idea of having the art interspersed around the furniture and regular everyday living.

**Randall:** The drawbacks and advantages of using this crappy ceiling fan as a source of lighting instead of track lighting are interesting.

**Pamela:** It occurred to me that when I see a lot of the art that I like in a domestic

environment in pictures, it's in a collector's home. And this is a much more modest house than that and I like the idea of seeing art in it.

## WHAT IS HE SAID SHE SAID ABOUT?

**Randall:** I'm interested in what everyday people do in the context of their lives, what they find interesting and pursue outside of going to work. The first person that I showed here was Jessica Hagy. She has a blog called *indexed*. She writes copy for ads. She's not an artist but in her own free time she started, for no particular reason, making these little drawings on index cards everyday and posting them online. They are really funny and great and I thought it would be nice to see them in person.

The Internet is great because it provides a platform for people, but there is a difference between seeing something online and seeing it in person and having that person available right there in your presence to talk about it. And I'm more interested in that happening in a domestic setting than in a gallery. I'm not always interested in the way the gallery frames something. I'd like to believe that the apartment frames it in a different way. I don't know how true that is. I also showed Bill Keaggy's collection of grocery lists, I mean he's got like 3,000 or 4,000 of them that he's collected. He's got a great website with scans of them all but seeing them in person is a very different experience. He also gave a talk about his collection, where it came from and his relationships with the people who had sent him their grocery lists.

So it's really about "Here's a person who doesn't think of themselves in a particularly

**"There is a lot of 'just hanging out' which I think is the healthiest aspect of the whole scene"**

special way who is doing something interesting" and when those people are highlighted in an art context it does something that I'm not that interested in. I want to figure out how to present their activities in a personal setting that doesn't tie them into the history of art and art making, which has nothing to do with what they are doing.

**Pamela:** So the nature of the argument between us focuses on "everyday people" and "specialness of art." I'm the opposite. I think that artists are everyday people and I also embrace the specialness that art strives for. That's what we continue to argue about to this day.

**Randall:** I'm fine with the refined arena of art making. I'm fine with it.

**Pamela:** Refined! Refined is a tricky word. That's loaded and unfair.

**Randall:** Well the "specialness," whatever you want to call it, but [I'm interested] in these other people who are doing things that are interesting! Culture would be enriched from having venues for talking about those [everyday] things; there are already plenty of art venues.

**Pamela:** I agree with that. The problem is Randall's side of the programming is that because the genre that we exist in is the apartment gallery and because all of our friends are artists, our operation is located in art.

**Randall:** All of YOUR friends are artists.

**Pamela:** It becomes very difficult for us to get written about as art or talked about as art. That's a funny sort of conundrum.



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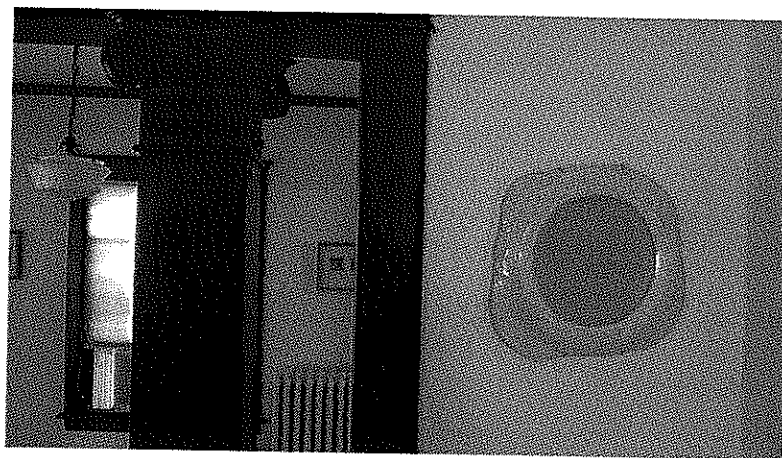
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We Drink to Your Health and Wish You Were Here, Michael Stickrod (detail), Cheryl Donegan and Meg Cranston

**Randall:** That just comes with the territory unfortunately. But you didn't really get at what you're doing here, what's driving the...

**Pamela:** I'm supporting art. I always feel like the boring one. Basically because we just moved here about three years ago, I felt like what I wanted to show here were people who don't ever show in Chicago. A lot of apartment galleries are kind of community oriented but because we're new here, I thought it would be nice to bring in people from outside of Chicago. So every single person that I've exhibited here has not come from here, that's important to me and probably will continue to be.

My choices of artists are very subjective, but I think that there would be something interesting about seeing their work in this domestic space. Either their work has something domestic about it, like Mike Stickrod, or it doesn't and it's completely institutional. As an artist I think about living with it and having an experience with it. Nothing against institutions or going to another site to experience art, but I like the idea of having it be an everyday experience.

**Randall:** Meg Cranston showed here and she's the sort of artist that is in super "fancypants" institutions, so there is something interesting about seeing work in an space where the kid's toys are scattered around when it would otherwise be in this pristine highly controlled environment.

**Pamela:** It's so funny because we really are **He Said She Said!** When he says words like "fancypants," I get angry because that's so pejorative. But it's true—I remember when I was in art school in New York,

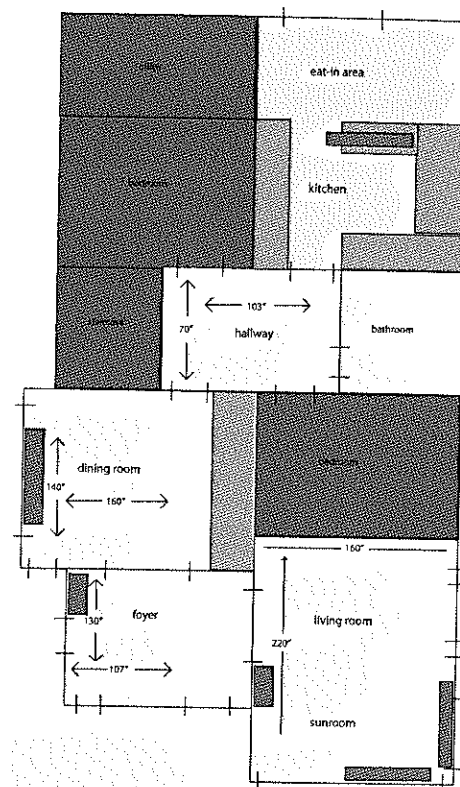
I used to wonder if I took my paintings onto the street, where it was visually chaotic and there wasn't such a privileged arena for contemplation, if my paintings would then suck. To solve that I would cover them up whenever I carried them outside. That's the thing that has really stuck with me, how significant the clean white space and the bright lighting is for saying, "This is important!" It's a challenge to the work to see how it holds up in a different sort of environment.

**Randall:** The other thing about having it in a house is that it facilitates people hanging out and sitting around talking and drinking. One of the big appeals about apartment spaces in general is that it's just a comfortable environment for people.

**Pamela:** I think that's true. Actually when I asked Meg Cranston to do the show I told her a little bit about how big apartment galleries are in Chicago, about what a tradition apartment galleries are and I found myself saying, "Yeah, the Chicago art scene is really just about hanging out." And that sort of just came out of my mouth before I had even thought about it, but I think that's true. She laughed and said, "That sounds great!" There is a lot of "just hanging out" which I think is the healthiest aspect of the whole scene.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

**Pamela:** I don't really think it has had an effect on my art practice except for the few days during installation when it might be disrupted. But that's fine because I'm doing something else. I think I just compartmentalize those things very differently. But,



it's been nice to have this different role in the artworld, one where I'm offering artists a venue and being part of creating shows that are separate from my own work.

**Randall:** That's another crux of the difference between us, you compartmentalize studio practice, daily life, this and that practice and I just try to integrate all of them. I try not to make those, "This is where I'm being this role and this is where I'm not," kind of distinction. Right?

**Pamela:** I guess.

Interviewees: Pamela Fraser, Randall Szott  
Format: transcribed audio interview



# HUNGRYMAN

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2135 N. Rockwell

FOUNDERS: Robin Juan, Sarah Koch, Kacie Lees, Olivia Swider  
WEBSITE: [myspace.com/hungrymangallery](http://myspace.com/hungrymangallery)

## HOW DID HUNGRYMAN BEGIN?

**Robin:** Kacie Lees and I were living together—she had just graduated from the School of the Art Institute, where I am still a student. We were both interested in art administration and thought it would be a really great experience to start a gallery. When we were moving out of our apartment we just happened upon this storefront space. The landlord tore down their office and gave us both sides so we made it our own. It was really about timing.

We just wanted to show good art because we hadn't seen anything that we were really thrilled about in Chicago. I can spend the whole weekend going to shows and still be let down. I want to show the art I want to see.

**Sarah:** I came on board when they were looking for roommates. I was open to whatever they wanted to do and was excited to see what would happen. We had our first show a month after we moved in.

We wanted to show all mediums in the space and wanted the name to be strong so we started talking about men and hungry men and Hungryman TV dinners. We all had different ideas about the Hungryman frozen dinner and found it amusing. It's a little bit of everything. So now sometimes people are like, "I thought that place was run by a man." I get to say, "Nope, four girls!" {laughing}

**Robin:** In the first months that we were here we did a lot more than I would have anticipated. For our first show we figured we needed some sort of introduction to our gallery, to hang out and get comfortable with the space, so the first event was *Forts and Tents*, a community event where anyone could come over and build something in the space. We surrendered the apart-

ment and made lots of food! Since the first *Forts and Tents*, we've done it again and might even repeat it in the future!

**Sarah:** We also have a band that practices in the basement. We've hosted a couple of music shows. We did a film screening that had live music that went with the film. We did an improvised music event for a sound piece. We've done a wide variety of different things! I think that's because we meet a lot of people that have different ideas for what they want to do. That's always fun.

**Robin:** One of our goals when we first started was about bridging the gap between high-end galleries and apartment galleries. We've been pretty successful in doing that. We have a storefront that definitely helps in terms of foot traffic and visibility from the front windows. We don't have to be open all of the time to have people in the neighborhood exposed to the art.

**Sarah:** At first I assumed that the only people that would come over would be people that we knew—which was kind of the case, but more recently I've been meeting people who see the place and want to stop in.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

**Robin:** I think Mathew's [Paul Jinks] show was really successful. He just submitted and we were like, "YES let's do it!" That was exactly the kind of quality that we want. We basically look for people who have a good idea of what they are doing, people that are excited and have everything together. We want people who have their artist statement, resume, supporting documents and a clear concept of who they are and what they are doing. That's pretty hard to find. We know that because we're artists and we're trying to do that too! {laughs} I hope that we continue and that we get more strangers to come over. I think that's

what makes you legitimate. {laughs}

**Olivia:** I hope we get a broader range of artists and a broader range of practices. I think that's what I'm interested in, more photography, more 2D, because we have had so much installation. I would especially like some more women artists! It's almost embarrassing. I feel like I meet a lot of girls who could have shows here and I don't know if they just don't like filling things out or what, because we just don't get their proposals. And I'm also interested in doing more group shows, because we've been doing a lot of solo shows.

## HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

**Olivia:** I think it changed my ideas of presenting myself as an artist more than anything. I realize how I present myself and what I need to say and how I need to come across to people when I am talking about my artwork. I see a lot of failed attempts. Sometimes there can be confusion between artist statements and proposals, or our experience with the work when we're in front of it versus how it looked online.

**Sarah:** I've also been interested in watching the artists who come in and seeing that transition from student to artist. I just think that's really interesting and terrifying to see those different stages.

**Robin:** I feel like I'm getting a sense of what it takes to organize an exhibition—a sense for the whole process. It's a lot more than you think it is. It's a good hands-on experience for sure and we are constantly learning.

Interviewees: Robin Juan, Sarah Koch,  
Olivia Swider  
Format: transcribed audio interview  
Location of interview: 2135 N. Rockwell

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Sarah Koch,

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s N. Rockwell



# JULIUS CAESAR

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 3144 W. Carroll Ave. 2G

FOUNDERS: Dana DeGiulio, Diego Leclery, Colby Shaft, Hans Sundquist,  
Molly Zuckerman-Hartung  
WEBSITE: [juliuscaesararchicago.com](http://juliuscaesararchicago.com)



## HOW DID JULIUS CAESAR BEGIN?

It was a Dadaist gesture. Everybody picked up a book and pointed to a page. We could've been cheese soup gallery. We liked the anonymity of the name and we're wary of the joke of personality whereby gallerists give their spaces their own name and those names accumulate this kind of grandiosity.

We had feigned attempts at a manifesto or an agenda but that wasn't going to function. That's the advantage of **Caesar** being this character. We are all the little limbs and organs of **Caesar**, a benevolent dictator that we've made up. What would **Caesar** do or not do? He ends up being demonstrative of our own best desires for showing local people or abstraction or whatever. **Caesar** is an actual person that has a one-year history of being. Maybe in the future we can look back and say what **Caesar** is like. Then we can ask questions like "Do we like how it's been or do we want to change it?"

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

For us there is a real conviction that people that we're interested in here are as good as anything that we want to see elsewhere. The more that we build **Caesar** the more we'll be able to platform people that we respect in other circles.

## HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I think it's a great opportunity to exhibit in an environment that we feel is experimental, free, sane, permissive and supportive. There is an expectation of openness on the part of people of who go there. We don't know what the motives behind other galleries are, whereas we know that the motive behind **Caesar** is pretty vague, if nonexistent and it feels transparent. We're artists and we're trying to make art. That's all we're trying to do. Being a gallerist is not our career option. We're interested in making art, in other people making art and in seeing art. It's taking a long time to figure out what **Caesar** is; it's not a garage, an arena for commercial exhibits or an avant-garde forum. It's a space.

We made a decision early on to meet in person, so things don't actually get tense if somebody is like, "This is upsetting me," we talk about it and a new level of understanding that is reached within the group. We all have ideas and a mutual respect for each other.

*Some text reprinted from Newcity, December 15, 2008.*

Interviewees: Dana DeGiulio, Diego Leclery, Colby Shaft, Hans Sundquist, Molly Zuckerman-Hartung  
Format: reprinted interview with updated dialogue  
Location: Exchequer

2008-PRESENT

# SCOTT PROJECTS

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1542 N. Milwaukee Ave.

FOUNDER: Brad Troemel

WEBSITE: [scottprojects.com](http://scottprojects.com)

## YOUR ART

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, Diego Leclery, Colby  
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with updated dialogue

## HOW DID SCOTT PROJECTS BEGIN?

**Scott Projects** was started in 2008 and is located in Wicker Park, 1542 N. Milwaukee Avenue. I ran another space prior to this one, **Satin Satan**, the earlier space was based on the idea that the only function of a gallery is to act as a social meeting ground. I had come to accept that no work I'd see would be new, that all art had an Internet presence and that the only purpose of people coming to meet in these spaces was to see each other in person and drink. So, as a gallerist, I wanted people to have the best time possible [socially]. The art, as I understood it, would serve as bait for attendance or as chic decor for a great party. I now understand that what I assumed fails in application and I based my new approach in response to that failure.

## WHAT IS SCOTT PROJECTS ABOUT?

**Scott Projects** is a gallery born out of the frustration of constantly seeing "new" work in galleries that has been previously exposed on the Internet. Also, it resulted from my lucky inheritance of a large space to exhibit art. All work at **Scott Projects** has never been featured online and the work often interacts with the gallery space in some way. I encourage the artists to create a truly one-time-only experience. I want to give people a reason to tear themselves away from their computers and physically enter my gallery.

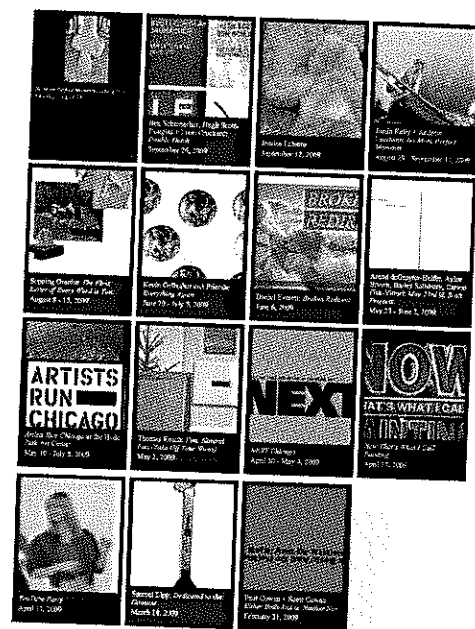
**Scott Projects** has no intention of selling work and has every intention of showing very young, progressing artists with difficult work. People think showing work in a gallery is what you do when you've "figured it out," but often the process of arranging your work and deciding what you want to show is just as helpful to your development as the creation of the work itself. I started the space because I wanted to help people that I like who are making interesting things. I'm glad when the artists that I show get positive reviews or attention, but I'm also glad young artists can treat exhibiting in my space as a learning process for other more important things.

## HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

As an artist, I've come to see the material object-hood of art similarly to how Calvin sees Hobbes. When we use our imagination in the right context, art becomes art. This has made me place an even greater emphasis on the conception of my art. Once the idea has taken hold of me firmly, its execution becomes secondary to that thought.

Interviewee: Brad Troemel

Format: email interview



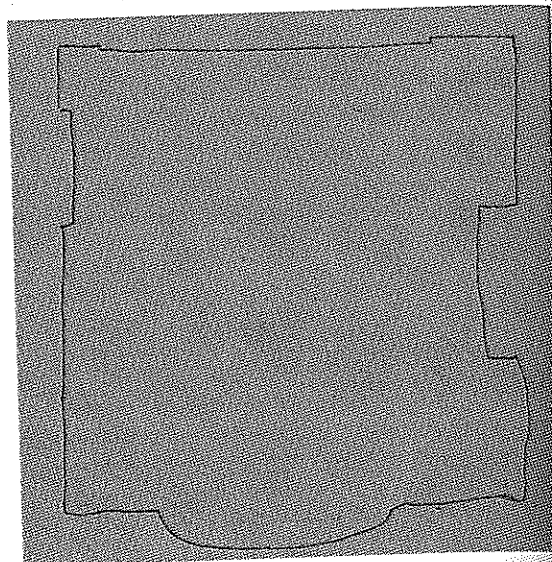


2008-PRESENT

# NORMAL PROJECTS

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 1905 W. 21st Place

FOUNDERS: Emily Schroeder



## HOW DID NORMAL PROJECTS BEGIN?

Working on the Maplewood, NJ garden project with Fritz Haeg assisted or enabled me to envision something outside the tradition of contemporary art. His garden practice has been of importance to me in understanding my place; that place that lies somewhere between contemporary art and landscape architecture. This may be one of the influential factors that started my project space.

I had a contemporary art background and he had an architecture background. He crosses over by doing things that are landscape based and semi-temporary and then translates them back into something that becomes a contemporary practice. He was in the last *Whitney Biennial*. I found his work on his website, and just emailed him and said, "I'm really interested in your work, if you ever do a project on the east coast, I'd love to volunteer." Basically, he finds a house, rips up the suburban lawn, and puts in an architectural vegetable garden. So that sort of practice is a good segue into the things that I'm interested in.

I came from a strict painting practice into something that integrates painting with design perspective, specifically through landscape architecture. Those sorts of activities keep me grounded within contemporary art.

I moved to Chicago to go to graduate school and I was getting sick of New York. I had been in New York, I was from New York State, and I had lived there for my thirty years. I always wanted to move to Chicago. For years I was like "I want to move to Chicago," and I finally did it. I found myself grounded, making friends and part of a community like I had been in New York. I knew some people [here] but my relationships were primarily based in New York.

## WHAT IS NORMAL PROJECTS ABOUT?

Things that I become immediately attracted to have either really blatant references to landscape, or they encompass it in some way. For instance: Hisham Bharoocha, he went to RISD, he formed *Black Dice*. One project of his that I like he did with *Black Dice* in collaboration with Peter Coffin. Peter Coffin did a sound experiment where he built a greenhouse in a gallery and invited musicians to play; he recorded it to document the interaction of the plants. [The experiment] comes from a book, *The Secret Life of Plants*. That sort of thing was of interest to me, as was the way that Hisham describes it. He's from Tokyo and then moved to New York after school. He's always had this urban system around him so nature becomes a really mystical experience.

Not to thematicize what *Normal* is about, but I concurrently understand myself to be moving away from a painting practice and getting into larger scope projects involving city planning and things that are designated as landscape architecture and landscape conservation. With that, what I'm interested in as a person and as an artist are practitioners like Hisham, (who've had an art practice), working with other individuals' work and curating it.

I want to keep to ideas that I am interested in subtly, so that it does not override or overwhelm the viewer or the artist's work. The space is quiet and it's in my apartment and it's exactly that. It's something that I like to look at and live with for a short amount of time.

Contextually, I'm very much interested in the landscape and I naturally gravitate towards artists who share similar interests. I've constructed specific parameters for using the gallery since it is a small space within my apartment. I decided to only show either works on paper or video art. I've kept the framework of having no budget and avoid hanging framed objects. I set the goal for the artists to be simple and also inexpensive for artists to ship work. Work on paper goes in the front room and video work in the back room. I want to engage people in the work rather than the scene.



Joe DeNardo & Aaron Henderson



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#### WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

If we want to think about the economic situation of keeping an apartment gallery or of having a space outside of my work, the format becomes the end result. The space cannot be kept as a commercial space. There's no guarantee of profiting or of being able to compensate artists for sending crates of large work. In the end, I think it's not compromising the integrity of the work or the space [to have these financial constraints]. I think that giving boundaries to the artist, saying that it has to be on paper, alludes to something a little more experimental or something that's just starting. And certainly this place is just starting!

I was an archivist at **Anton Kern Gallery** in New York. There were relationships formed through that experience that continue to this day. I worked on some book projects. It happened at a point when it was something I knew that I liked and I respected, but I was making a choice to return to academia and I couldn't really have both. I enjoy that structure in a way, and as much as they [galleries] are revered or hated, the white box amplifies the art experience; and it is just one type of art experience. It's not about the presentation or pretension, it's really none of those

things. It's certainly just a choice for me.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

The space is a good example of how I wanted to extend my relationships and find a new community here [in Chicago]. I put Luke [Dowd] in touch with **Tony Wight**. Luke lived in Chicago in the early/mid-90's, above Phyllis' Music Box. I had separately asked Luke to be a part of my apartment space, so we decided that my show would open and close right before his show at Tony's would open. So it's a really nice opportunity to meld that together and Luke will be in town to install the show [at **Tony Wight**] and be here for the closing [at **Normal**], which is great. That's the best way that I was able to assemble that particular relationship.

When I was working for Anton I was also particularly interested in moving to Chicago. I remember coming out here a few years ago. I was in a group show, and then spent the weekend here and walked around and looked at work. Seeing the contents of 119 N. Peoria was a sort of landmark in my education of Chicago art, that's when I found Rowley [Kennerk]'s space and told Michael Clifton about Rowley. Then I came back and moved here, and was able to be like, "Hi! Now I'm here." There was something really nice about discovering new relation-

ships. That also applies to my experience working with Fritz Haeg; it all unfolded because I was like, "Hi, I like you and what you're doing." I've been able to communicate my interest in things and then have them come to fruition in some form or fashion.

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Interviewee: Emily Schroeder

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: 1905 W. 21st Place

# SECOND BEDROOM PROJECT SPACE AND MEDICINE CABINET

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 3216 S. Morgan St. 4R

FOUNDERS: Irene Perez, Chris Smith

WEBSITE: [secondbedroomproject.blogspot.com](http://secondbedroomproject.blogspot.com)

## HOW DID SECOND BEDROOM BEGIN?

*Chris:* I was aware of the history of apartment galleries in Chicago and I had an extra bedroom in my apartment. Irene suggested that I use it as a space. I was also in a class at school taught by Dan Peterman that examined the levels of both institutions and grass roots organizing. That might have played a role. Also I think that growing up skateboarding made me kind of independent. It was a big part of my adolescence that taught me that it wasn't weird for someone to start something.

## WHAT IS SECOND BEDROOM ABOUT?

*Irene:* **Second Bedroom** offers space for artists to do new work referencing the surroundings, or to develop a project that couldn't otherwise be realized. For example, artist Michael Una incorporated sound and video into the apartment referencing surveillance. There is a police blue-light right outside of the building. It was a project within his practice as a sound artist, but he altered it for our space. Matthew Paul Jinks was able to complete a project that required the space itself. We provide the space to let you work on your art. I think that in that sense it might be different than other spaces, which allow artists to show work that is finished outside of the space and has no direct connection to it. There are a couple of options and you can always use the space to do something that you really want to do.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

*Chris:* There are a lot of different strategies that artists pursue [when they exhibit here]. Right now Raphael Barontini has a crystal formation projecting out of the window. It marks the architecture of the drab same-as-any-other building. I like that. He took full advantage of the architecture to make an impact.

*Irene:* The project might not have a conceptual kernel relating to the space as a social center but instead he employs the space as an artistic marker. There are different responses. We never define too narrowly what the response should be. We think that the artist's should come into the space before they submit a proposal so that they are familiar with it. We gear ourselves more toward installation work. We showed Anna Campbell for example. Her work is about boxing and she created something specific for the space. She covered the whole space in mirrors like a boxing gym and placed a punching bag in the middle of the room accompanied by a boxing video. That's how it's been working thus far. I think that apartment galleries are not only about the art. I think that in most cases the people who run them are artists too, so the whole experience is about taking charge of art production and display. I now can have a say in the exhibition process. We have our ideas and we opened a space to share them. I don't live in the apartment, it's

Chris's apartment. I don't get to dialogue with the artists as much, but one of the things I appreciate the most from running an apartment gallery is that during installation you can have a conversation with the artist and talk about the work. You can learn from their experiences.

*Chris:* Yeah I love that. I can just sit in the doorway while they are installing and ask annoying questions. That's great for where I am. I'm still in school.

*Irene:* So far all of the shows have been very different, but they have all used the space interestingly both conceptually and formally.

*Chris:* I have a disclaimer about not doing anything in the space that will get me evicted. I'd like artists to push what they can here, and I'm willing to take risks as long [the artists] are respectful of the building and as long as I still have a place to call "home." I think that when my landlord came to pick up my check he might have been a little concerned about the cardboard thing sticking out the window. He and I usually have a brief talk, and last time we didn't. One of the neighbors came up once when we had the punching bags up. He said, "Man I'm sorry to do this, but you're making a lot of noise, what are you all up to?" I said, "Oh we're installing a punching bag" and he didn't even flinch. He replied, "Well can you just do any sawing or drilling out-

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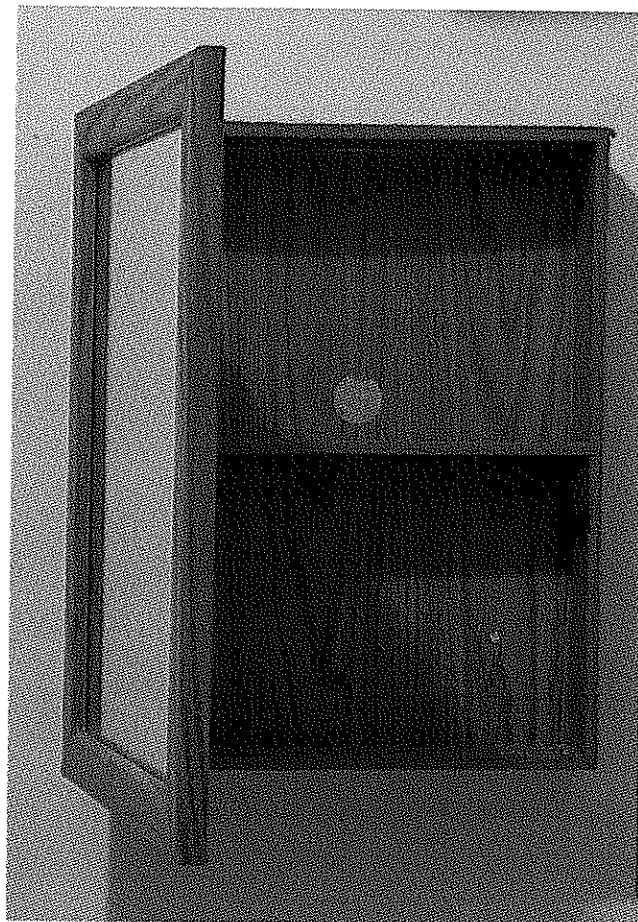
side on the back porch?" That was that. The neighbors have been really tolerant. A lot of people will mistake the front apartment for mine, and the neighbors will send visitors through their apartment into mine.

#### WHAT IS MEDICINE CABINET ABOUT?

*Chris:* **Medicine Cabinet** originated out of thinking similar to **Second Bedroom**. I had a space that I wasn't using. It was a nasty faux-wood medicine cabinet in my dirty Bridgeport apartment that I wouldn't even put my toothbrush in. It was available for art. We could coordinate with **Second Bedroom** events and maybe people would be interested to see art inside of the **Medicine Cabinet** in my bathroom. There is a mirrored door that you have to open. I think there is a romance to that, a diorama type of thing.

*Irene:* The response of artists to that project has been good. A lot of artists have requested to make something for the **Medicine Cabinet**.

*Chris:* I think it really highlights the idea of apartment galleries as private spaces. Apartment galleries have parts that are open to the public that you have shows in. You have a white cube setting with some, but with **Medicine Cabinet** you have a bathroom and the feeling that you are snooping around in someone's house.



There's the cliché that you look in someone's medicine cabinet to see what diseases they have. I like that sort of association. You know the art opening in an apartment gallery is a kind of social thing but with **Medicine Cabinet** you get a kind of quiet private viewing experience. {laughs} You have time to give yourself a breather, put yourself back together, and check out the diorama.

*Irene:* And sometimes when you want to see the artwork you have to wait because someone is using the facilities, or you have to knock on the door.

#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

*Irene:* I think the space adds to your practice, and it gives you an overview of the possibilities for your practice. I've worked

for art galleries for the past six years so I knew the background. Running the space opens doors for exchanges with other artists without the pressures of the commercial market. The gallery job always comes down to 9-5, for the most part it's an office job. There's an opening yes, but it's quite different [at a commercial gallery]. It's much more formal and it prevents dialogue in a way. The apartment gallery is more casual and relaxed.

*Chris:* I don't know if my practice has been affected, that's a hard question. I'll have to tell you when I'm done.

Interviewees: Irene Perez, Chris Smith

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: Morgan Street Café, 111 S. Morgan St.

2007-PRESENT

# SPOKE: AT THE INTERSECTION OF IDEAS, DIALOGUE, AND CHANGE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 119 N. Peoria St. Unit 3D

FOUNDERS: Monica Herrera, Rachel Moore, Heather Mullins, Rana Siegel  
WEBSITE: [spokechicago.blogspot.com](http://spokechicago.blogspot.com)

Situated in Chicago's West Loop gallery district, **Spoke** is a collaborative comprised of artist studios and a project space. We are interested in maintaining a spirit of resourcefulness, spontaneity, experimentation, access rather than exclusion, and interaction. We are dedicated to providing opportunities for creative individuals and groups to produce unique and innovative projects, events, performances, workshops, exhibitions and creative endeavors of all kinds.









# SWIMMING POOL PROJECT SPACE

LOCATION OF GALLERY: 2858 W. Montrose

FOUNDERS: Liz Nielsen, Josh Kozuh

WEBSITE: [swimmingpoolprojectspace.com](http://swimmingpoolprojectspace.com)

## HOW DID SWIMMING POOL PROJECT SPACE BEGIN?

I work in Admissions at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, so I've been reviewing portfolios for the past two years. Editing down people's work is a little like curating a show. Not exactly, but you can tell a person what you think their work is about and help them locate it within the larger context of current contemporary art.

I used to have a studio space at **The Butcher Shop**, so I know Tom Colley. They were originally going to renovate their roof, but they weren't sure when, so I decided to move out and look for another space. I have a friend, Josh, who works for a realty company and rents apartments. He came to me and told me about a storefront space. He was helping me fix it up so it could be used as my studio space, and while we were working it felt so public [because it was a storefront] and made me consider opening up an apartment space. Having an apartment gallery was something I had been rolling around in my head in general, and Josh said that he was interested in doing it with me. That's how it started.

We ripped up the carpet and decided that we wanted a painted glossy floor. I love glossy looking garage floors, and I'm really attracted to floors that appear to be wet when they aren't. We didn't want to paint the floor gray, so we painted it blue. It began to look like a pool, plus, we initially had running water on the wall. So, we named it **Swimming Pool**.

## WHAT IS SWIMMING POOL PROJECT SPACE ABOUT?

It's really small, that's why it is a project space. We did consider becoming a not-for-profit but I feel like we can sell things for people, (maybe not for a while, but at a certain point we could function in that way). Right now our intention and ideas aren't related to consumer objects.

The space is supposed to be fun and inspire conversations about art. We considered our mission in relation to ideas of a public pool. When you're inside an environment—like a pool, or a park, ideas happen, ideas that wouldn't necessarily happen other places.

We exhibit emerging artists as well as established artists, and we intend to provide an avenue for risk taking. It's supposed to be a risky environment. We have curators who could show art and writers who want to curate. I really enjoy curating. I never knew that I cared about it so much. It's become an art form of my own, and it occupies more of my time than my studio practice.

## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

Momentum is rolling and I actually want to open up additional **Swimming Pool Project Spaces** in other cities and create more places for people to take risks. I think of the blue floor as a type of brand. It creates an entirely different atmosphere—having a blue floor. We even rolled out a

blue carpet when we went to Miami for the Bridge Art Fair. That's what we wanted to do at the **Hyde Park Art Center** as well. If people get an experience in the space, then that is art.

We want to build a community with different types of people. Somebody had mentioned that when you have a person that acts as a hub, they connect to a number of other people, and in turn those people connect to a number of other people. I was thinking about that in terms of the **Pool**. If I can be a hub that connects to other hubs, then the **Swimming Pool** can expand like water. Sorry for all the references to water. We do it all the time at the **Pool**, "Come take a dip," or, "Step in," or we call each other and ask, "How's the water?" It is a connection thing, and I feel that different hubs can bring in other crowds of people.

There is always something that happens in conjunction with a show that the audience can get involved in. On New Year's Eve, the artist Young Sun Han did the *24-Hour Embrace*; he wanted to embrace a stranger for 24 hours and planned it to end at the stroke of the New Year. There was a celebration of the endurance of the project. People could view the performance through the window and we kept the **Pool** open for 26 hours. We also have interactive things that happen—we had patrons make badges for a show that dealt with earning badges in a queered way. So there is some audience participation and exchange of ideas.

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#### HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I still make my own art—mostly photography and installation. I've been focused on deep space for a while—as in outer space. For instance, I just re-photographed the Big Bang in my closet! I don't know if my own art has changed, but I feel a change happening inside of myself. I'm thinking about curatorial projects I'd like to do and they feel more like art projects.

I've been in Chicago almost ten years, so I've been to **NFA Space**, **LAW OFFICE**, **The Butcher Shop** and **1/Quarterly**. I used to go to all of the shows, but I never thought that I'd be running a space. At the time I wasn't ready to critically define where something stood, or how I thought about spaces. I just thought about whether I liked the show or not, not about whether the gallery provided a relevant social or critical dialogue. I didn't really understand a lot of the references, or the surrounding discourse. I just wasn't as aware. At that time it was about getting to get to know people in the art world in Chicago so that I could be a part of it because I was an artist too. Now I'm not thinking about that anymore; now I've got ideas that I want to share. I think on a level it's coming into oneself as an artist and a person.

Interviewee: Liz Nielsen

Format: transcribed audio interview

Location of interview: Intelligentsia Coffee,  
55 E. Randolph St.



# **MAKING-DO** **A PRAGMATIST APPROACH**

Abigail Satinsky

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Being an artist-cum-administrator is a process of constantly negotiating between art and its publics, engaging in the politics of mediation and developing a sense of criticality where one implicates oneself in the object of one's critique. In her essay, "When Water is Gushing In" curator Maria Lind writes that we have reached a crisis of mediation, where the demand for the spectacular has trumped attention to artistic projects that fall outside the realm of traditional exhibition strategies, projects that take risks and can result in failure, ones that offer a chance to reconsider the politics of context and the need for questioning the comprehensive phenomena of economic structure and the working conditions of everyday institutional practice. She asks, "What do we do with art where the process is as important as the art? What new forms of mediation arise when art works are radically heterogeneous, art work that willingly relates to its surroundings and shares many common interests with those who are not specialists?"

Arguably, new forms of mediation are continually needed to respond to the shifting parameters of art and therefore the terms of "crisis" are contingent on the present conditions for making creative work. Alternative modes of organizing have always been around, but today the heightened necessity of making-do may encourage their proliferation. The current economic recession is throwing a problem that has been ongoing for some time into relief, namely the considerable lack of arts funding in the US. But it's about more than simply not having enough money; artists, (and people in general, really), have never had enough money to get their creative projects done. It's better to say that the current infrastructures for supporting and cultivating emerging forms of art practice are just not cutting it these days. The popularized and polarized models of for-profit and non-profit are both struggling. Competition for private and public funding is fierce, forcing artists and organizations to base their programming on available funding streams. In an environment where governmental support for the arts is minimal at best, and private support is dictated by the values and priorities of granting foundations, innovative and potentially controversial work is compromised in order to fit within categories deemed "fundable."

So what is to be done? Today the way one goes about acquiring necessary resources is just as creative an endeavor as how those resources are then utilized. It seems necessary to develop a vocabulary of approaches around this creative way of making-do, one that takes into account the relationship between art, its organizing

structures, the conditions for participation, and how the underlying politics of these systems affect its reception. What is needed is a renewed approach, not necessarily to making art, but to navigating the underlying infrastructures that exist to support it. To start with, this means asking questions and challenging the traditional role of the arts administrator to be more of an intermediary figure attuned to critical inquiry and decision-making that involves mindfulness, commitment to open exchange and artistic integrity. The organizers of artist-run spaces are the ones directly involved with reformulating strategies that go beyond the traditional tasks of collecting, preserving, presenting and distributing to engage directly with practices that shift in and around "art" proper and imagine new possibilities for a revitalized cultural public sphere. One that, as cultural theorist Jim McGuigan writes, "provides a vehicle for thoughts and feeling, for imagination and disputatious agreement, which are not necessarily of inherit merit but may be of some consequence."

On an organizational level, artist-run spaces provide the opportunity to shift the typical benchmarks for a successful art organization from measurable goals and sustainability to those more conducive to experimentation and productive failure. Artist-run spaces fit all kinds of models. They are testing grounds and springboards to the commercial art world, intimate gatherings in apartments and places for reading groups and shared meals. They are little pockets of activity that serve particular audiences at particular times, filling gaps and holes for all that the art-world fails to provide. Sometimes they are meant to be temporary and other times they can grow to become professionalized institutions that a later generation of artists define themselves against. All of these options should exist; emerging and career artists alike need multiple networks and venues to make an art-world that serves their needs. Yet allowing for all these possibilities seems to beg for a greater degree of specificity, it's important to look at the ways people are already working and the challenges they are facing on a pragmatic level in making it happen. What types of economies are being participated in here in Chicago? What types of exchanges are taking place? What kinds of obstacles are being encountered?

I am part of a group called **IncUBATE** (The Institute for Community Understanding Between Art and the Everyday), an experimental research institute and artist residency program dedicated to exploring and documenting new approaches to arts administration and arts funding. While studying Art Administration at the School of the Art



Institute of Chicago we became uneasy about the professionalizing discipline of "administration" when it came to critical and experimental art practices. There seemed to be a disconnect between what we were learning about in school, namely the tools to maintain the idiosyncratic art system as it exists, and the socially engaged and critical art practices happening in Chicago which seemed in tension with that world. So a few of us decided to build a platform where we could openly question how the art-world actually works and what possible directions it could conceivably take. Together, we act as curators, researchers and co-producers of artist's projects, operate a storefront space that houses a creative research residency program and various other projects such as Sunday Soup (a monthly meal that generates funding for a creative project grant). Our main focus has been to address the lack of resources for artists operating outside the boundaries of institutional and market support and experiment with possible solutions.

**InCUBATE** is a learning tool to figure out how and why institutions function the way they do, who the people involved are and what interests they serve. It is an access point, a way of finding a seat at the table where resources are allocated and visibility is provided. We want to learn by doing. How can we participate in artist-run culture as it exists currently in Chicago without just analyzing and historicizing its practices? What does collaboration between administrators and artists look like when institutional authority is called into question? We are not experts; our process is directly dependent on a gradually accumulating group of people who want to be involved in collectively pooling resources, sharing histories on what's already been done, and imagining the conditions for an ethical and critical art world that would support its constituents. It's built upon social relationships that have to develop over time.

Part of our learning process is building loose-knit and as-needed coalitions with other alternative organizations. Our storefront space, the Orientation Center, houses a diverse range of projects: meeting and office space, our artist residency, a library and several regular community meals and lectures. We co-manage the space with two other local cultural organizations: **AREA Chicago**, (a magazine and events series about culture and politics in Chicago), and the **Chicago Underground Library**, (an eclectic library of publications and zines made by Chicagoans), as well as other co-workers who contribute rent and program events. Everyone that uses the space on a regular basis contributes towards rent. **InCUBATE** is not a

non-profit 501c3, because we didn't want to organize ourselves that way, financially or hierarchically. There is no magic reserve of money, our personal and collective financial situation is precarious and always being re-invented. Our economy is based on the fact that all the organizations and people involved contribute to each others' activities and share both personal and professional affinities. We have limited resources, but find that operating at a micro-scale and being as honest as possible about our capacity actually makes the fundraising we do manageable and immediate.

And then there are the communities we collaborate with outside our space, groups with radically different means of operating yet also with key affinities and areas of overlap. Experimental cultural centers like **Mess Hall** and **Experimental Station** inspired us to get working and start thinking through the issues of surplus, generosity, and community-building. **threewalls** exemplifies how becoming a nonprofit institution can be a thoughtful, slow-building process. **he said-she said** in Randail Szott and Pamela Fraser's living room is a dialogic space for cultural practices from inside and outside art contexts that parallels some of our own arguments about how to participate in the art-world. **Backstory** is a collectively-run café and infoshop that fuses radical politics with a functioning economic model. These spaces operate according to the needs of specific people and neighborhoods in the city. This specificity makes them do what they do well and is what makes artist-run culture truly valuable. We don't feel the need to join forces by operating out of the same space to amplify everyone's activities, but rather see ourselves as part of a functioning ecosystem; we are one site among many in which a set of questions are debated and contextualized. By truly partaking in each other's activities, beyond monetary investment, a healthy infrastructure evolves by virtue of our mutual support.

But even with the tangible benefits to be found within a social network, everyone's still got money issues (as **AREA's** latest issue was aptly titled). With the global economy in turmoil, our own relationships to the political and economic realms far larger and more complex than the art world are thrown into sharp relief. So we find ourselves concerned with keeping our own miniature economy functional, but also contemplating economies of scale. We are faced with the questions: How do we bridge scales? How do we operate locally, within our own network and simultaneously puncture its borders? When invited to participate in *Artists Run Chicago* at the **Hyde Park Art Center** through a collaboration with **Alogon**



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**Gallery**, we wanted to respond to the artist-run community as it was being formulated by moving beyond our individual situation and to see what we had in common with these other spaces also trying to make-do.

Our answer was to launch the *Artist Run Credit League* (ARCL), a rotating credit association for artist-run spaces in Chicago. The ARCL format is derived from that of the *tanda*, a monetary practice formed by a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund, which is given to each contributor in rotation. It basically acts as a collective savings account and micro-credit line, which is based on a mutual trust amongst the members and a shared faith in the value of keeping the community networked. Members can swap out the months that they will receive their credit based on their programming needs. They are also required to throw one fundraiser per credit-cycle that will raise at least \$200 dollars, the collective sum of which gets distributed equally to all members on a quarterly basis. Besides the participation of individual members, the league is also structured to accept tax-deductible contributions from outside donors wishing to support the entire community as a whole. We hope that artist-run spaces, by being mutually invested in the fund itself, will have an interest in attending each other's fundraisers and building the community of participants outwards. The fund will accrue value the more the community invests in its well-being, meaning that it will become a sustainable model based on the group's level of commitment to making it work. In essence, it is an experimental community bank in which artist-run spaces can have a platform for sharing resources and discuss creative fundraising tools.

I don't have any idea if this project is going to work, but in order for these new forms to have any real political currency, they need to be developed through a group process, creating alliances between artists and non-artists that are animated within particular contexts of power. The model is explicitly functional in the way it generates money, and implicitly critical as a way of generating dialogue about the availability and distribution of resources for the arts. Though **IncUBATE** is far from being an authority in creating credit associations, there are plenty of fundraising specialists from disciplines outside the art context who are willing to share their knowledge and experiences about how to combine traditional organizational models with more experimental approaches for social justice and grassroots causes. I would like to learn from them and hopefully they have something to learn from me. The language we are building can act

as a microcosm to address the distribution of resources within the art-world and extend to the ways in which we are implicated and accountable within the economies of culture. It's a means of learning how to operate in the world as it exists, but also imagining radical administration that can make it run.

*Thanks to InCUBATE (Bryce Dwyer, Matthew Joynt, and Roman Petruniak) for their input on this essay.*

*For Ben Schaafsma*

# R.I.P

*The following spaces opened or were prominent within the 10-year period covered by Artists Run Chicago, 1999-2009. We have placed an astrix beside spaces who we were unable to reach for expanded summaries or details.*

## \*MONK PARAKEET 1995-2000

Location: 6100 S. Blackstone  
Founder: Dan Peterman

## \*STOLEN BUICK STUDIO 1995-?

Location: 1303 W. Chicago Ave.  
Founders: Alexandra Buxbaum, Michael Buxbaum  
Website: stolenbuick.com  
Since the founding of **Stolen Buick Studio** in Chicago's East Village in 1995, the space has evolved into **The International Center for Documentary Arts**. **Stolen Buick** operates today as a part of the **Center** and exhibits an international range of street photography.

## BONA FIDE 1998-2000

Location: 2136 W. Chicago Ave.  
Founders: Patrick Collier (Gallery Director), Gillian Hearst  
Named the "Best New Art Gallery" by *New City* in 1999, **bona fide** exhibited both crafts and fine art in order to encourage a deeper dialogue about art issues and to remove a conceptual pretense.

## \*DEADTECH 1998-2007

Location: 3321 W. Fullerton Ave.  
Founder: Rob Ray  
Website: deadtech.net

## DRIVETHRU STUDIOS 1999-2004

Location: 626 W. 18th St.  
Founders: Eric J. Medine, Thomas R. Waters  
Website: ericmedine.com/drivethru\_studios/drivethru.html  
Dedicated: to bringing you the fastest, loudest, and crunchiest of all the fine arts. Specializing: in painting and hard to find items such as video installation and performance art. Your choice: destroy the old and bring in the new.

A wild and violent ride through the thorny business of making art all day, every day.

History: **The Drivethru Studios** was founded in October of 1999 by Eric Medine and Tom Waters with the intent to provide an affordable space to create and show work with no restraints on media, content, or size. The Pilsen neighborhood with its community of local artists proved ideal. Exhibitions included themes ranging from Heavy to Electric, with types of work as varied as performance art, photography, installation, web animation and painting.

Most recently the **DriveThru Studios** has been involved with art exchange programs with galleries such as the **Lessedra Gallery** in Sofia, Bulgaria, the **Faites de la Lumiere** organization in Paris, France, and the **Center for Political Graphics** in Los Angeles, California.

The **Drivethru Studios** was a member of the **East Pilsen Gallery District**, a collective of alternative spaces in the East Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago.

## SIXSPACE 1999-2000 (Chicago), 2002-2007 (Los Angeles)

Location: 1851 W. Chicago Ave. (1999-2000)  
549 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, CA (2002-2005)  
5308 Washington Blvd., Culver City, CA (2005-2007)  
Founder: Caryn Coleman  
Website: sixspace.com  
**sixspace** began as an alternative gallery space in Chicago in 1999. During its one year in operation the gallery provided solo exhibition debuts in the city of artists such as Glen E. Friedman and Shepard Fairey as well as local

artist Karl Erickson. The gallery re-opened in Los Angeles in 2002 as a commercial space where it ran for five years until owner, Caryn Coleman, moved to London pursue a different involvement of the art world as curator and writer. Though it evolved through the years, the mission of **sixspace** was always to provide a diverse program, engage with its audience and most importantly to champion and foster the careers of emerging artists.

## TRAUMASPACE 1999-2002

Location: 818 N. Damen FL 2  
Founders: Duncan Robert Anderson, Daniel Bruttig, William Driscoll  
A four-bedroom Ukrainian Village apartment converted into a Project Space for fellow Artists in Chicago and elsewhere. **The Project** was eventually shut down by the city for various capacity violations but enjoyed a successful run of exhibitions before the size of the openings began to interest the authorities.

## CAN GALLERY 2000-2001

Location: 1308 N. Milwaukee Ave. #2F  
Founders: Laura Shaeffer, Andrew Nord  
Website: thelarch.org  
**Can** was an experimental exhibition space run out of a large loft apartment. Our mission was to show emerging as well as established artists, with a focus on integrating art into daily life. We encouraged artists to use the space as a project incubator. Several exhibitions worked with the scale of the space, creating pieces that would not fit within a normal gallery setting. Others used the space as a stage for installation/performance pieces, while others approached the space as a traditional gallery. **Home Gallery**, a series of shows we presented in our home in Hyde Park, is a continuation of what we started with **Can**. Starting in 2007, we have tried to broaden our artistic community by creating an informal social space in which

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### \*SEVEN THREE SPLIT 2000-2004

Location: 971 W. 18th  
Founder: Tim Fleming,  
Website: [seventhreesplit.org](http://seventhreesplit.org)

### \*MN GALLERY+STUDIO 2000-2008

Location: 3524 S. Halsted  
Founders: Jim Molnar, Kuna Na  
Website: [mngallery.net](http://mngallery.net)

### BUDDY 2002-2005

Location: 1542 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
Founders: Jeff Creath, Ed Marszewski,  
Daniel Pope, Eric Ringbloom, Caton Volk,  
Enos Williams  
What happens when a few activists, sandwich makers, artists, furniture movers, new media makers, a carpenter, balloon animal artists and experimental musicians open a live-in gallery and share their home with a number of underground communities? **Buddy**.

It may seem naive to have believed that by opening a new cultural and social space in the center of Wicker Park we could stem the tide of monoculture and rejuvenate an area in the death throes of gentrification and its attendant commercial forces. But we tried. We became so successful in activating and providing an alternative to Culture-As-Usual that we occasionally alienated ourselves from our own audience and really pissed off our landlord.

When our three-year lease was up, it didn't get renewed. We hoped the fusion of art and activism would transform people—socially and intellectually—through installations, performances, happenings and events. This included many kinds of gatherings: collaborative anti-globaliza-

tion protest activities, symposia on art and politics, exhibitions, lectures and workshops, film screenings, experimental and improvisational live music, D.I.Y. fashion shows, festivals like Select Media and the annual spring Version convergence, pirate radio, stencil and street art demonstrations, dance parties, fundraisers, and the kind of informal and accidental encounters or happenings that can only arise at 3am, including make-out sessions. In the course of these three years, **Buddy** has hosted over 250 events and happenings.

### DESTROYER. INC. 2002-2005

(Chicago),  
2005- (Los Angeles)

Location: roaming  
Founder: Sarah Conaway  
**Destroyer, Inc.** is an independent curatorial project. Never a physical gallery space, **Destroyer, Inc.** began as a way to infiltrate the **Stray Show** art fair in Chicago in 2002. It's booth [*Maiden Voyage*] at the **Stray Show** exhibited the work of Christian Andersson, Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, Deva Graf, Carol Jackson, Melissa Oresky, John Parot, Steve Reinke, Sterling Ruby, Melanie Schiff, and Christine Tarkowski. **Destroyer, Inc.** does not seek to undermine the status quo by direct attack. It uses mimicry, assimilation, and adaptation. **Destroyer, Inc.** enjoys reading theory, but it prefers to show work with a certain vitality. In 2005, it relocated to Los Angeles, where it participated in **ArtLA 2006** [*Ground*] and **ArtLA 2007** [*Totemism*]. Artists shown in Los Angeles include: Sarah Conaway, Aaron Curry, Erik Frydenborg, Patrick Jackson, Ashley Macomber, Dianna Molzan, John Parot, Amanda Ross-Ho, Sterling Ruby, Kirsten Stoltmann, Kristen VanDeventer, and Lisa Williamson.

### GARDENFRESH 2002-[on hiatus]

Location: 833 N. Fairfield, 3039 N. Lincoln, 840 W. Washington, 119 N. Peoria, Chicago  
Founders: Andrew Rigsby (2002), Tom Burtonwood, Holly Holmes, Jeremiah Ketner (2003), Alain Douglas Park, Michael J. Hofer (2005), Vaughnda Johnson (2006)

Website: [gardenfresh.org](http://gardenfresh.org)  
Burtonwood & Holmes, Bradley Bullock, Ginger Wolfe, Chris Kerr, Ben Foch, Dana Sperry, Brian Taylor, Scott Wolniak, Brandon Alvendia, Alain Douglas Park, Lincoln Schatz, Bonnie Fortune, Jenny Walters, Duke and Battersy, Mican Morgan, Justin Goh, Chris Kerr, Marc Le Blanc, Shannon Wright, Greg Shirilla, Richard Gess, Jenifer Ramsey, Todd Mattei, Magaly Ponce, Terence Hannum, David Constable, Graham McDougal, Heather Mekkelson, Krista Peel, Christine Canepa, David Lohman, Tucker Nichols, Aaron Zimmerman, Ruth Pringle, Ben Woodeson, Nathaniel Rackowe, Andrew Rigsby, Michael J. Hofer, Melissa Ebbe, Lisa Kuppinger, Justin Schmitz, Chika Ito, Rory MacArthur, Thom Lessner, Cammi Climaco, Kathryn Martin, Primitivo Suarez, Ryan Bubnis, Nick Deakin, Rik Catlow, Colin Johnson, Jeremiah Ketner, Jeffery Laneright, Gabe Lanza, Jason Limón, Parskid, Gaea Todd, Nick Deakin, Julie West, PST, Troy Hagenbart, Mike Nordstrom, Elisa Harkins, Aaron Nather, Michael Pajon, Tiffany Holmes, Matthew Nelson, Trish Grantham, Brian Sorg, Brandon Sorg, Elisa Harkins, Vaughnda Johnson, Mike Lash, Holly Holmes.

### JESUS CHRYSLER GALLERY 2002-2003

Location: 722 W. 18th #2  
Founders: Jason Lazarus, Nathan Anderson

**Jesus Chrysler Gallery** ran a single season, mounting three solo exhibitions: Cat Chow,

Duncan Anderson and Michael Merck in an 1,800 sq ft space. In short, their mission was to mount dynamic solo exhibitions for emerging artists ready for the unique opportunity of mounting large exhibitions focused on their artistic voice only.

#### **MULE 2002-2007**

(Re-emerged as **SLAB 2007- )**

Location: roaming

Founders: Wendy Mason, Nancy Zastudil  
Website: slabprojects.com

**Mule** was an exhibition project initiated by then Chicago-based artists Wendy Mason and Nancy Zastudil. In 2002 while enrolled in the Committee on Visual Arts (COVA) MFA program at the University of Chicago, Mason and Zastudil recognized the need for COVA exhibition opportunities and engagement with the greater-Chicago arts and academic communities. They organized themselves as **Mule** and received a University grant in order to participate in the 2003 Stray Show. Independent of the University, **Mule** participated in **three-walls's** first program fundraising event in July 2003, and again in the 2004 **Stray Show**.

In 2007 Mason and Zastudil re-imagined the concept of **Mule** and re-emerged as **Slab**, an exhibition method that operates on a project-by-project basis to collaboratively facilitate artist's projects and events. Currently, Wendy Mason lives and works as an artist in Los Angeles, CA, and Nancy Zastudil lives and works as a curator in Houston, TX.

#### **THE SPAREROOM 2002-2008**

Location: 2416 W. North Ave.,  
4100 W. Grand Ave.

Website: spareromchicago.org

**The Sparerom** is a time-arts cooperative. Our members make artwork that crosses disciplines and takes risks. We support our member artists by providing rehearsal, curatorial, pro-

motional and exhibition opportunities. Unlike traditional galleries and theaters, our cooperative gives a community of artists the space to create and exhibit interdisciplinary work on their own terms.

Alumni Members: Stephanie Acosta, Poul Bachmeier, Antonia Baehr, Katherine Behar, Tawni Bell, Jaclyn Biskup, David Boykin, Angela Carini, Robin Cline, Ania Greiner, Jennifer Dowlin-Kelly, Becky Flowers, Todd Frugia, GinaMarie Gabriel, Corey Gearhart, Carol Genetti, Rachel Thorne Germond, GirlCharlie, Eleanor Hancock, Becca Hopson, Kelly Jackson, Abra Johnson, Chris Jones, Doug Jones, Connor Kalista, Jennifer Karmin, Nicole LeGette, Debra Levasseur-Lottman, Malin Lindelow, David London, Tyler B. Myers, Thea Miklowski, Marysue Miller, Maggie Moffett, Kevin Newhall, JT Newman, Erin Carlisle Norton, Jennifer Onopa, Justin Palmer, Liana Percoco, Jane Ping, Joseph Ravens, Shawn Reddy, Jaye Rhee, Mary Ellen Rieck, Jessie Rochon, Kairol Rosenthal, Sara Schnadt, Alicia Scott, Andrea Siering, Elizabeth Smullens, Rebecca Snook, Karen Sorenson, Carol Anne Stevenson, Ben Stuber, Charissa Tolentino, Sara Thompson, Catherine Tryzbinski, Anuj Vaidya, Jennifer Verson, William Wheeler, Shyloh Wideman, Liz Winfield, Sarah Winkler, Chi Jang Yin, Rebecca Zellar

#### **\*THE GUEST ROOM PROJECT 2003-2005**

Location of Gallery: 2714 N. Lawndale Ave.  
Founders: Deborah Bain, Rob Bain, David Corbett, Melia Donovan

#### **ALTERSPACE 2005-2005**

Location: 2430 N. Washtenaw #3  
Founders: Carter Lashley, Clint Bangers, Cayetano Ferrer  
Website: cayetanoferrer.com/alterspace  
**Alterspace** came out of an urge to experiment

with our domestic space as a site of the creation and exhibition of creative practices. We knew nothing about running a gallery and our relationship to Chicago's history and culture of alternative art spaces was limited to only a handful of experiences, so there was no clear path to follow. We were motivated initially by the urge to facilitate a space that could be an outlet for the creative energy and ideas of the people around us and we curated shows that pushed artists to engage with the space site specifically. The format of our shows was to pair up artists two at a time (one for each room) who's aesthetics and practices differed, yet when paired together could explore and elaborate certain themes and ideas. There were only four shows that we curated in the main space, and one more kind, offsite. We also did some screenings and music stuff.

#### **BUSKER 2005-2006**

Location: 1084 N. Hermitage,  
2159 W. 21st PL  
Founders: Nicholas O'Brien,  
Tamas Kemenczy  
Website: buskerchicago.com

**BUSKER** was an on-going project space started by Tamas Kemenczy and Nicholas O'Brien that was first located in East Village in 2005 and then relocated to Pilsen in 2006 before discontinuing events later that summer. During its operation, **BUSKER** curated, organized and initiated several projects showing film, video, new media and performance based works. The project revolved around the idea of bringing these projects into a space where multiple time-art disciplines could occur simultaneously within the span of one-night events. A primary objective for **BUSKER** was to create a node in the media art network for young and emerging artists, and to connect to other spaces/initiatives/ideas through the power of an extended community through open/transparent collaboration.

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### \*32ND&URBAN 2007-2009

Location: 3201 S. Halsted St.

Founders: Lauren Pacheco, Monika Lee,  
Pedro Soto

Website:

32ndandurban.carbonmade.com/about/

### \*BROWN TRIANGLE 2007-2008

Location: 2214 W. 21st St.

Founders: Vanessa Smith, Cameron  
Crawford

### \*DECKELEW & BENSLEY 2007-2008

Location: 1753 W. Chicago Ave. APT B

Founders: Joel Dean

Website: joel-dean.com/gallery/

### THE FINCH GALLERY 2007-2009

Location: 2648 W. Fullerton (above the  
Fireside Bowl), 2747 W. Armitage

Founders: Nicholas Freeman, Casey  
Murtaugh

Website: finchgalleries.com

Named after one of the most common  
species of birds, **The Finch** symbolizes a  
simple collaboration of artists and belies our  
humble and socialist response to the com-  
mercial art world. Operating in Chicago's  
west side as an independent nonprofit  
organization, our focus is to give artists the  
opportunity to exhibit outside the usual con-  
straints of a market-driven gallery. Of equal  
importance is communication within the  
community and to help bridge the gap  
between contemporary art practice and the  
public. Following the financial shenanigans in  
Spring 2009, **The Finch** has temporarily  
moved to New York and has teamed up with  
another nonprofit project named, **No  
Longer Empty**, in appropriating some of the  
numerous vacant storefronts in the city and  
revitalizing them into exhibition spaces. The  
overall concept is to continue to learn, travel,

and help expand the possibilities of artists  
and their interaction with the world around  
without having to engage in the restrictive  
practice of the commodity-driven art trade.

### \*LASSO GALLERY 2007-2008

Location: 1319 W. Lake

Founders: Carrie Ruckel, Karin Patzke

### \*MUTHERLAND 2007-2008

Location: 1125 W 31st St

Founder: Vicki Fowler

Website:

motherlandpresents.blogspot.com

### SATIN SATAN 2007-2008

Location: 1918 N. Wood

Founder: Brad Troemel

### LA ESPACIA 2008-2009

Location: 1437 W. 17th St.

Founder: Young Joon Kwak

Website: youngjoon.com/la\_espacia

I started my own apartment (window) gallery  
for the same reason many other artists do—  
because we can. By this, I mean we can  
grant ourselves the power of being our own  
gallerists and wield our creative potential to  
find an audience through alternative means  
of artistic display. I started **la espacia** after  
some gangbangers that lived on my block  
broke into my apartment through the street-  
level windows. Thereafter, I realized the great  
agency that lie in the windows—as a mode of  
communicating with the local community—I'd  
hang artworks on a moveable wall that I'd  
push against the street-facing windows and  
front light nightly. Having been kicked out  
after a year by my landlord, the first physical  
incarnation of **la espacia** is now defunct.



# INDEPENDENT

Mary Jane Jacob

Alternative then, artist run now: the naming of this enterprise has been telling. Alternative spaces were central to the 70's and 80's—allowing for new genre to germinate (performance, artists book, film, video...) and have a place when they didn't fit into museums and commercial galleries. They were the domain of the untested, the unwanted, the indefinable. There was an impenetrability about the mainstream then and alternative spaces arose in large part for that reason. New art could only enter the system if validated by critics and collectors. There were no project, matrix, or **12 x 12** shows.<sup>1</sup> If a work was made for a museum exhibition (and rarely was it commissioned for a permanent collection), it was highly circumspect, feared not a genuine product of the artist's personal creative genius. A new system had to come into being. Alternative spaces provided that system, allowing artists to carry out ideas that didn't fit elsewhere.

Moreover, to live and work as an artist outside New York was to occupy the frontier. Further, what lay beyond our national borders was pretty much absent, derided as conservative, retardataire, or even non-existent in contemporary terms. To be Latino, female, black...all such frames of reference stood outside the accepted identity of the artist, too. Alternative spaces played a role in bringing that work to light and ultimately redefined our expectations of what it meant to be an artist. At a time of political dissent and rising issues of feminism, multiculturalism and gay rights, alternative art spaces were a forum for social activism. Taking matters into their own hands, artists gave credence to art considered outside the mainstream by virtue of who made it, what it was made of, and what it was about. Marcia Tucker founded the New Museum just on that principle—to be an alternative museum that would address art outside the mainstream.<sup>2</sup> Much of the change that ensued was due to the work cultivated and exposed in alternative spaces and the parallel work of museum professionals who reshaped established ones. Alternative spaces didn't benefit from, (or get inhibited by), professional practice, "how-to" courses.<sup>3</sup> Rather they had passion and, most importantly, a clear sense of mission as to why what they were doing was important and needed *now*.<sup>4</sup>

I entered the field in the late 70's in the midst of all this, so the agenda of "outside the mainstream" seemed natural. When I arrived in Chicago in 1980 it was the heyday of the now-mythic alternative spaces, **Randolph Street Gallery** [illustration] and

**N.A.M.E. Gallery**, along with **ARC**, **Artemisia** and others—this city's responses to exclusions (of young artists, women artists...) and expansions (of media and forms of art). Adopting the mantle to expand the parameters of the institution led to a new set of curatorial values. These became honed and manifested in the museum exhibitions I did, first in Detroit, then Chicago and Los Angeles. It was newly significant to show the work of artists considered "local" because they lived in the museum's vicinity and deserved greater recognition; women artists on par with their male counterparts; artists whose use of materials was associated with crafts, (especially fiber), yet demonstrated valid contributions to the contemporary art world; as well as artists from Eastern and Western Europe, showing them for the first time in the U.S., and later artists from Asia and elsewhere who had been marginalized because of geography. What evolved in that curatorial process, too, was a way of curating *with* artists, initiating new projects, most often temporary ones, such that the investment between artist and curator might have longer-lasting outcomes.

By 1990 this way of working took me out of the museum world. The reasons had a lot to do with the emergent nature of artists' projects that required a larger or different kind of space than that of most museums, a social context that could only be found by being in the world where artmaking processes could be more open and fluid than the museum could practically sustain. My move was also motivated, not unlike that of those who started alternative spaces, by the fact that museums, (or so it seemed to me), were ultimately governed by collectors and therefore beholden to the market. The ephemeral or speculative art made by the artists with whom I worked often eluded conventional expectations. The alternative I found was to be an independent curator seeking to realize works that did not answer to the given space of a gallery, or agenda of the institution, or the interests of the board. Yet at the same time, and with some desire to provoke a critique, I wondered how such works could expand the space of the gallery, widen the audience for art, cause institutional self-examination and expand its realm of stakeholders. All the while I desired to enable and advance the practice of the artists engaged.

Independent curating, for me, meant making the dialogue with the artist the priority. Together we took up what were, to us, pressing questions of the day—about culture, artmaking and audience.<sup>5</sup> This

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So what's the territory of artist-run culture? Is it centered on the gallery function of temporary exhibitions, or does it reside somewhere else? And is there more—music, poetry, publications, web,



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While artists from the beginning banded together to make things happen, it was often in the service of solo studio work to show their work. An exciting development from earlier iterations of a more cooperative nature is Chicago's artist-run collaborative mode of working. Here artists have absorbed and furthered trends of "making as a collective force," sometimes authored jointly, under a group name, or anonymously; sometimes with the artistic intent to make a more relational kind of art. Yet the value of the enterprise through these decades remains the same: to share an environment that is electric, where things can happen and more ideas get generated.

One thing that seems positive about the artist-run spaces today is a strategy of self-organization without overbearing organization. You don't need to become a legal entity and, with this move, artists have found more affordable, maybe even more sustainable, ways than the earlier 501c3 grant-dependent route. You can put on a program without defining "the box," or legal framework for an aesthetic mission. You need not ensure the space, or box, will be there forever. With such an ambiguous status, you avoid adopting a problematic prescription for how the box needs to be filled. Administrative organization responds to projects rather than the other way around. You can offer events, projects and exhibitions now—and fast. This is independence. As Justin Berry remarked, "Chicago really has a dense field of these spaces. What we do is part of a much longer history. There are so many of these spaces in Chicago and I felt almost obliged to open a space when I moved here. I felt like, 'Well, you know, I'm in Chicago; I'm in art school. I guess I'll open a space; you know?'"<sup>12</sup> Shannon Stratton put this in terms of moving beyond the commercial art scene: "Chicago has a similar sort of makeup to other places in the world that feel they're kind of further away from the economic base. And so the response to that is to kind of try and do things on your own and support your own community so that you can bring some attention to your colleagues and what's going on in the city. Because there isn't a big commercial gallery scene or collector base, Chicago is put in this position to show itself and its artists off and everyone kind of takes that on differently from generation to generation." And, "Once you're outside of school," as Scott Reeder pointed out, "there's not much space for experimentation. So it's empowering for artists to take those matters into their own hands and show work instead of waiting around to be selected as the lucky few that can get gallery shows." Keep it creative. Keep it close. Keep it flexible and open. Keep it independent.

Today's self-organization also evidences a couple decades' of interpenetration of artistic and curatorial strategies, as artists and curators traded places and influenced each other's work, creating a rich discourse on the exhibition genre. From the start, self-organizing has also been a way of offering artists tandem or other career options. As entrepreneurs, they also become philanthropists, such

as Philip von Zweck, whose living room was his site for exhibitions. He said quite directly, "There's no budget. There's an email list. There're no postcards. There's a website because I have free web hosting. I spend about thirty dollars a show on beer and if anything sells, then the artists pay me back for the beer and if nothing sells, they don't. There's also a lecture series that happens and again, they're all friends, and they're all lectures that I'm sort of interested in engaging with. If I had an abundance of money, I'd just have a better apartment." So the results might be public projects, engaging with the city or using pick-up spaces, but it can also be a private space made semi-public, or closed forum, as being with the public might be an aim, or not.

What remains essential across all these modes is that the enterprise is generative. This is critical for cultivating and centering one's practice (though not necessarily establishing it in conventional terms or finding a collector base). It is a way of finding really interesting ways to work and people to work with, to engage in ways that can move your practice forward. At the panel, Shannon Stratton said, "We kind of generate a lot of young art-makers constantly, every year, that want to have opportunities to show their work, to have a dialogue about it and interact with other people in the community in other stages of their respective careers." This possibility for dialogue—both talking through as you are working through a project and critical discourse—is essential to the practice of art. Dominic Molon noted that even one of the artist-run entities in Chicago is itself dedicated to making a critical space for dialogue: "**Bad at Sports** has brought something lacking in Chicago—an alternative space for a certain kind of critical dialogue, where you actually do have people taking positions and expressing opinions about shows, about things that have [already] happened here and elsewhere or [things that] haven't happened, with the same kind of looseness and freedom as artist-run galleries."

It is the making and talking and being there for an artists' community that attracted me, ironically, back into the institution and led me to return to the gallery. It quite likely would have only happened at an art school and, dare I say, in Chicago. The School of the Art Institute is permeable: its students and faculty and alumni and their friends populate the city's art community. It's probably helpful that the edges of the school itself are fuzzy and not so distinguishable from the city. SAIC blurs inside and outside and maybe this makes the transition to being an artist out of school easier to imagine. The exhibition program we do these days seeks to make connections to the city and with those invested in making art and culture.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not our program is viewed as an alternative, (say, to its sister institution the museum of the Art Institute of Chicago), is no longer the point/my point. But it does share certain essential qualities with artist-run and other such spaces invested in contemporary artmaking—to be artist centered and to work with a sense of improvisation fueled by the necessity to try.

1. A few series of small one-person exhibitions allowed an established museum to break new ground. The Museum of Modern Art in New York began the *Projects* series in 1971 which not only allowed artists new opportunities, but also curators of all ranks and departments to participate in proposing shows—a groundbreaking move on both fronts for this institution. *Matrix* at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford began in 1975, followed by a series of the same name at the University Art Museum (now Berkeley Art Museum) in 1978. Of a related format, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art 12 x 12 series of one person and small groups projects began in 2001.
2. As a grad-school intern at the Detroit Institute of Arts, I accompanied Marcia Tucker to the auditorium for a symposium I'd help organize. She whispered to me as we walked, "I'm always so nervous to get up and speak, and I'm scared to death starting a museum."
3. This was still a period when the business-ification of museums was hotly debated: should a museum director be a connoisseur and scholarly art historian or a businessman? For Tucker, it was necessary to jump the gender barrier, too.
4. It is interesting the sense of mission held by Marcia Tucker, as well as those organizing alternative spaces, in contrast to the museum mission statement of today, crafted through corporate-like strategic planning.
5. This curatorial direction was launched by such group exhibitions on site as *Places with a Past* (1990-91) for the Spoleto Festival USA, *Culture in Action* for Sculpture Chicago (1991-94), and *Conversations at the Castle* for the Arts Festival of Atlanta (1994-96).
6. See my essay "In the Space of Art," in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), co-edited with Jacquelyn Baas.
7. "Alternative to 'Alternative'" took place in November 2007 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Betty Rymer Gallery and was organized by then MFA-candidate Justin Berry, a founder of the Alogon Gallery in Chicago, with SAIC's Department of Exhibitions. Panelists included Patricia Courson, Michelle Grabner, Dominic Molon, Scott Reeder, Shannon Stratton, and Philip von Zweck.
8. I undertook such a project in a show and book that surveyed the art scene primarily emerging out of Wayne State University, considering its intersection with art and poetry, and the catalytic role of the nearby museum, The Detroit Institute of Arts, which at that time brought avant-garde work to view through under then-curator Samuel J. Wagstaff. See *Kick Out the Jams: Detroit's Cass Corridor 1967-1977* (Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1980).
9. Of these periodic views at activity in a location through exhibition and publication, exemplary is: *The Downtown Book*, ed. Marvin J. Taylor, foreword by Lynn Gumpert (Princeton: Princeton University Press in association with the Grey Art Gallery and the Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, 2006). This book surveyed the downtown New York scene from 1974-84 and accompanied an exhibition of the same name at the Grey largely drawn from the Fales collection.
10. Outside of New York and L.A., the rest of the United States was seen as a provincial, scattered map of artistic outposts. American artists from the eighteenth to early twentieth century were told to look to Europe to be educated and travel, to seek their subject matter and style. A whole scene and infrastructure—of artists, historians, critics, schools, galleries and museums—had to grow up in the United States to dissuade this pre-conception that lingered until after World War II. Once a few major American cities earned that critical attention, the rest of the country—indeed the rest of the world—suddenly needed to be reincorporated.
11. Many have noted and romanticized Soho in the 70's and the forays into spaces and communal places by such iconic figures as Gordon Matta-Clark. Critic Katy Siegel cites a longing for community among artists today as she considers the nature of studios as live/work spaces. See Katy Siegel, "Live/Work," in *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists* (Chicago: The University of Chicago and School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2010).
12. This and subsequent quotes from the panel "Alternative to Alternative," School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Rymer Gallery, November 2007.
13. Here I would like to cite two institutional collaborative efforts in 2009-10: *Living Modern Chicago*, a collaboration of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Mies van der Rohe Society at the Illinois Institute of Technology in partnership with other cultural institutions; and *Studio Chicago* a yearlong collaborative project that focuses on the artist's studio with core partners include: Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, Columbia College Chicago, Gallery 400, Hyde Park Art Center, Museum of Contemporary Art, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and *threewalls*.



# TORCH BEARERS

ARTISTS-RUN SPACES B. 2008+

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**BARBARA&BARBARA 2008-**

Location: 1021 N. Western Ave.

Founders: Sierra Berquist, Kara Wabbel  
Website:

barbaraandbarbaraloveyou.com

**barbara&barbara** is an alternative gallery space featuring work by local and regional emerging artists. We are here to create an atmosphere where diverse artists come together, network, gain and contribute inspiration with other artists, musicians, and art lovers alike. **barbara&barbara** is a zero commission space, running entirely off donation.

**\*GOLDEN 2008-**

Location: 816 W. Newport

Founders: Jacob Meehan (Director),  
Lisa Baldini (Assistant Director)\*

Website: golden-gallery.org

**\*KNOCK KNOCK GALLERY 2008-**

Location: 3658 S. Wolcott #2F

Founder: Harley Young

Website: knockknockgallery.com

**NEW YORK CITY 2008-**

Location: 55 W. Chestnut St. APT #2205  
(NEW YORK CITY GOLD COAST)

Location: 1807 S. Peoria St. APT 1R,  
(NEW YORK CITY PILSEN)

Founders: Jared Madere, Kevin  
Gallagher

Website: newyorkcitygallery.net

*Re-Presentation*, October 25–November 21,  
2008, **NEW YORK CITY PILSEN**; *FULL  
QUALITY BEIGE WITHOUT PINK RED,  
BUT BLUE GRAY* Xavier Jimenez,  
November 15–December 12, 2008,

**NEW YORK CITY GOLD COAST**; *Endless  
Blockade* John Friel, December 13,  
2008–January 15, 2009, **NEW YORK CITY  
PILSEN**; *The State Itself Becomes A Super  
Whatnot* Maxwell G. Graham, February  
5–March 7, 2009, **NEW YORK CITY  
PILSEN**; *Confident Woman* Heather  
Guertin, February 21–March 21, 2009,

**NEW YORK CITY GOLD COAST**; *you*

*can't just change your mind* Elizabeth

Weiss, March 28–April 26, 2009, **NEW**

**YORK CITY GOLD COAST**; *Spring Jared*

Madere, April 18–May 18, 2009, **NEW**

**YORK CITY PILSEN**; *Fruit* Diego Leclery,

May 8–May 22, 2009, **NEW YORK CITY  
GOLD COAST**

**THRONES GALLERY 2008-**

Location: 123 N. Jefferson St. 3rd Floor

Founders: Easton Miller

Website: thronesgallery.com

**Thrones Gallery** is an exhibition space dedicated to the public exposure of talented emerging artists. The gallery came about as a method of bridging the gap between the 'professional' gallery and that of the alternative space, and as a way of contributing to the development of the Chicago art scene.

**BEN RUSSELL 2009-**

Location: 1716 S. Morgan #2F

Founders: Brandon Alvendia,  
Ben Russell

Website: dimeshow.com/benrussell.htm

Co-curated by artists Brandon Alvendia and Ben Russell and situated around the front two rooms in the apartment of its namesake, **BEN RUSSELL** began presenting a series of month-long group shows on Memorial Day Weekend, 2009. Participating artists are invited to produce and exhibit work that is in accordance with the title/theme of each show, the name of which will be derived entirely from the 10 letters in the words "ben russell" (i.e. BURNS, BEER, BLUENESS). In keeping with the structural conceits of the French Oulipo language group and the spatial and material limits of what is effectively a rented apartment, **BEN RUSSELL** maintains a set of restrictions for all exhibiting artists. As such, each show involves one large wall-mounted work, one small wall-mounted work, one single-channel media work (in the screening room), one 15-30 minute performance, and one outdoor sculpture (in the sculpture garden). Viewings are

available by appointment.

**EEL SPACE 2009-**

Location: 2846 W. North Ave. #1A

Founder: Patrick Holbrook

Website: eelspace.wordpress.com

**Eel Space** is an artist-run space that brings people and ideas together through its focus on Chicago artists and thematic group exhibitions. It takes pleasure in representing diverse strategies while locating common threads. It also attempts to cultivate new projects that may break out of the curatorial scope. It is a very small space located inside an artist studio building in Humboldt Park.

**\*[PRAK-SIS] 2009-**

Location: roaming

Website: prak-sis.org

# MAKING “IT” HAPPEN

Britton Bertran and Allison Peters Quinn

The *Artists Run Chicago* exhibition presented a selection of noteworthy artist-run practices that, while currently operating in Chicago, have existed for the past ten years. Participants included in this exhibition represent a wide variety of art-showing strategies: project spaces meant for one-time only installations, commercial galleries, not-for-profit organizations, storefronts, rovers (non-fixed spaces), garages, lofts and spaces that double as the artist's studio or home (and sometimes both). What unites all these physical entities is the fact that, specifically, it is *artists* who initiate them, manage them, program, market and curate them. Artists buy beer for them, just as artists clean them up at the end of the day. Usually such administrative activities are paid from the proprietor's own pocket and with a little help from their friends. These spaces may have completely different missions and objectives for their respective curatorial endeavors, but they all are, or have in the past, made the best of what they were given to make the Chicago art scene a fertile ground for risk-taking, play and experimental art production.

To curate a show like *Artists Run Chicago*, we needed a list of guidelines to develop an exhibition that represented what we experienced to be the best of what Chicago had to offer in the alternative art system. We chose to tackle the past ten years in an effort to connect the energy of the recent past with the current moment.\* By following these guidelines, we aimed to capture what makes Chicago's contemporary art culture distinct and so unlike other major metropolitan cities. As such, the basic principles we looked for in the spaces chosen included:

- A do-it-yourself aesthetic characteristic of Chicago.
- Exist in the Chicagoland area and are run by artist(s) that live in, or have lived in, Chicago and vicinity.
- Have had at least eight months of provocative shows between 1999 and 2009.
- Work from, or developed out of, a wide variety of "physical" exhibition spaces.
- Represent a wide example of exhibition practices.
- Present a mix of spaces that currently exist along with spaces that have gone to the "great Artist-Run Space in the sky."

The exhibition contained over 100 works by artists from all over the country at various stages in their career. We selected the spaces and in turn, the spaces decided what to contribute that best represented the spirit or mission of their gallery. Some galleries chose to feature artists they are exhibiting right now or artists they exhibited repeatedly in the past, while others created sentimental mementos of times past, commentaries on the socio-economic realities of such an endeavor and encouragements for the next generation of artists-run spaces. Whichever strategy they chose, their love, passion and dedication to this underground art system was self-evident and, we hope, contagious.

Ten years is a long time in a city like Chicago—especially since the structures that are set up to disseminate visual art contrast with structure belonging to other cities of a similar size. There have been at least over 100 artist-run spaces during this period of time. Some have lasted a couple of months, some years. Some spaces

have developed into non-artist-run spaces (and in one case an artist-run business), meaning that the artist stops making art to focus on furthering the career of other artists. Regardless, it is clear that these exhibition spaces are an extension of the artists' studio as the artist or artists running them are often applying their own knowledge and aesthetic to the type of work they champion. The most refreshing aspect of these spaces is that they have no fear of failure. The gallery is transformed into a fun laboratory, which allows a high level of freedom and experimentation. Keeping up with the flow, (the where, who, what and how), of these spaces—sometimes a trickle and other times a waterfall—is a difficult and often frustrating. But the rewards are plentiful, for those who relish in this particularly Chicago-like dynamic.\*\* The size, scope, durability, reach and success of these spaces are contingent upon a number of factors, the greatest being the continued encouragement for future artist-run spaces.

The programmatic side of the *Artists Run Chicago* was as integral to the success of the exhibition as the visual representations of the D.I.Y. spirit reflected in Gallery One of **HPAC**. Intentionally over-programmed with events every week, these artist talks, panels with local art professionals, various social functions, "competitions," demonstrations, block parties and on-site performances added to the experiential function that these spaces included in their own operations. The resulting interactivity between the artists, the public and the physical space, created an atmosphere that not only activated the gallery but also caused the repeated investigation of the work on display. By reflecting the energy of a city with limited critical engagement from established sources, the history of social interaction disguised as, or blatantly proposed as, works of art, is indelible. The results were extraordinarily eye opening and, as with the thesis of the exhibition, encouraged future examinations of Chicago visual art beyond just "seeing."

Another important element of this exhibition and one that will make use of the **Hyde Park Art Center's** invaluable library called **4833**, is the development of a living and continually evolving archive of such venues. We have asked each participating artist-run space to contribute any number of different items of ephemera and information to this archive with the hopes that it will live at **4833** into perpetuity. We encourage all past and current Chicago-based artist-run spaces, beyond the ones represented in the exhibition, to donate their own items to the gallery—regardless of the size, scope, durability, reach and "success" of their endeavor. It is our hope that visitors to the **Hyde Park Art Center** will sift through these items for inspiration, amusement, research and continued dialogue about what makes Chicago such a fantastic place for making "it" happen.

\*Read the exhibition catalogue *Alternative Spaces* for more information on the influential contemporary art venues in Chicago in the 1970's and 1980's.

\*\* Addendum: From the time this essay had originally appeared in the brochure for the exhibition (May 2009), no less than 5 of the participating spaces that were currently functioning, ceased operations. However, at least 4 new artists-run spaces (to this author's knowledge) have sprouted.

# ON THE MATTER OF PUBLIC SPACE OR MY APARTMENT GALLERY IS AN ARCTIC EXPLORER

Caroline Picard

"Oh, you have a roommate?"

"Yeah, she's actually here right now, but she's sick....Don't do that—she's trying to sleep."

"I heard them but pretended to remain asleep by keeping my eyes closed; [closing your eyes] is what passed for privacy then. My 'room' was in a corner of the kitchen on the other side of a folding screen. If you were tall enough, you could see me from either side at any time. The above exchange took place during the installation of a show when I happened to have a cold. I lived at the Green Lantern from 9/06 to 8/07. Recently out of college, I moved to Chicago to get my bearings. I had just spent two years living in the French countryside with no heat, no car, no Internet, no noise, no zines, no sushi, no shows, no jargon. When I moved in, I had never owned a computer. Suddenly I was in the middle of an art scene.

"Any Chicagoan who's hip to the jive knows that an apartment gallery poses a unique set of problems. Someone actually lives there—sleeps and cooks and poos there—and yet the obligatory neutral space of the gallery must remain white-walled, spacious, antiseptic. At the GL in the earlier days, the gallery was clean, airy, spare, while on just the other side of a makeshift wall was a seething and barely-controlled chaos. A visiting friend once described the living space as 'under a great deal of pressure,' like the lack of density in the gallery half had to be balanced by ultra-density in the living half. This density consisted of, among other things, a large mounted buck complete with antlers, a five foot plaster statue of a fat man with an umbrella, a bong made out of steak shellacked to a milk carton, a taxidermied rooster, two large Chinese screens, many works of art in various stages of undress, two living cats...enough plates and stemware to host a diplomatic gala, a sink doubling as a bookshelf, a home-made up-ended 'bar,' an enormous vintage fridge, a miniature vintage stove, an easel, double-stacked books, innumerable trinkets ranging from delicate Eastern figurines to an ancient can of spam, an old-fashioned sandwich press, two Dictaphones, one enormous toaster (not in use) and a tiny one (in use). People liked throwing around comparisons to Alice in Wonderland, but that was legit. The fact that the two-foot high pepper mill was three times as tall as the delicate teapot, for instance, made me wonder if I'd accidentally swallowed a pill. And keep in mind that I've listed perhaps a sixteenth of the contents of those two or three improvised rooms. I haven't even mentioned the huge quantities of building supplies, the aluminum ladder, the planks and tools and cans of paint..."<sup>2</sup>

This book is filled with the evidence of relationships. It is a book of conversations, including conversations about conversations and, sometimes, conversations about conversations about conversations. Each perspective constitutes one piece of an artist-run community reflecting on its endeavors. While it is important to archive these conversations for the community to which it speaks, it is also

important to examine the consequences of such a culture in the context of a larger world—a world unfamiliar with the pattern of organizations described herein. Particularly if the conversations outlined here claim to cultivate new models for achievement, one must consider what the artist-run community looks like from the outside, from the vantage of a stranger.

What, indeed, is transgressive about artist-run exhibition spaces? Certainly those contained in this book will have their theories and while some of these organizations were constructed as political experiments, a number of them won't characterize their activity as political at all, saying instead that running a space is done for personal/professional experience, or as an experiment, or a labor of love. And yet. Regardless of stated intentions, all action is political.<sup>3</sup> Such an opinion comes from within a community where the practice of running an apartment gallery is fairly common.<sup>4</sup> In order to categorize such activities as transgressive or political, one must label them somehow. In doing so, necessary comparisons must be made to the world at large. Generalizations must be made about what the world at large consists of, what expectations it places upon members of its society and, ultimately, how its constituents measure themselves. Other generalizations must then be made about the smaller niche of artist-run communities, in order to discover the tension between them.

When compared to the world we watch on television, the practice of apartment galleries seems absurd.<sup>5</sup> Compared to the stories told via sitcoms and commercials, all young women want to get married, everyone desires fame and all clothes look brand new. Obviously the average viewer is literate enough to know that television is a fictionalized hyper-reality. Nevertheless as a primary source of cultural consumption, most viewers recognize subtle conventions that support the more prominent story lines. A home, for instance, means something specific. As a cultural symbol it provides the framework for countless many sitcoms—a framework based on common expectations of what a home should supply to its occupants. The viewer won't likely conceive of their living room as a potentially public place, a place for cultural distribution. Building a public environment of cultural creativity in one's home challenges traditional boundaries between public and private spheres just as it encourages intimacy between the art object and its epicyclic community. In such a community, relationships become as important as the work on display and validation occurs through non-monetary, communal support.

The collusion of public and private space, mixed with a living contemporary art and the communities that support it, is trans-

gressive in and of itself. Such a recipe breaks down the societal expectations of public activity. Furthermore apartment galleries agitate common definitions of "home" and "domestic space."

The people who inhabit apartment galleries organize their homes according to the possible descent of an unknown body of people: the public. Meanwhile the public modifies their expectation of public space such that they are sensitive to the generosity of their hosts. A code of behavior has manifested between the host and the public. That code, while organic in its inception, facilitates the relationship between the audience, the art and their administrative hosts. While that code is not readily apparent,<sup>6</sup> Sarah Stickney witnessed that code as a newcomer only to embrace it as a resident.

In Chicago, the public consumption of visual art is not allowed by law to exist in intimate settings, (the house, the apartment, the garage, etc.). The apartment gallery is essentially illegal. The illegality of these spaces occurs when they struggle for some shred of sustainability (i.e. through the selling of goods),<sup>7</sup> attempt to operate legally (by way of purchasing the necessary licenses and tearing through the ensuing red tape of bureaucracy), or when they attempt to avail themselves to a larger audience, one not restricted to Facebook friends.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously that isn't to say apartment galleries don't happen, or (even) that city officials don't in some blind-eye-manner endorse cultural DIY activity; the city of Chicago seems to enjoy identifying itself with those practices.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, said practices are not technically allowed. Thus, while a private party is acceptable, a publicized, public exhibition is not—especially when money changes hands. The city maintains its ability to control the watering holes this community frequents; the city can shut apartment galleries down.<sup>10</sup>

In our day and age much of the cultural production that takes place within the art world has been tamed and funneled into pre-existing power structures that support the larger mainstream. Artists often seek gallery representation, striving to achieve standing in the commercial market, such that they might support and (thus) justify their art making practice through the pursuit of public acclaim and monetary compensation. It makes sense. It is almost impossible to expect anything else. After all, how does an artist justify spending hours reading, thinking, painting and writing in a studio while his or her significant other goes to work sixty hours a week in order to support both of them? And what if the artist has a child? How does the artist explain his or her non-commercial and largely interior processes when a kid needs school clothes? It is perhaps impossible to strive through consumer culture, where legitimacy is typically measured by purchasable signs of success—homes, cars, televisions, computers etc., making objects that are neither compensated by monetary sums nor attributed with an

inherent non-market value. Indeed, on such a quest the consumer landscape becomes a veritable wilderness.

It is thus essential to create alternative methods of public validation. Exhibitions are one way to take a potentially monkish studio practice and drop it into the public sphere in which an audience can respond. Apartment galleries, while affording meager monetary relief, at least appeal to different values, values based on esteem and reputation—ambiguous, difficult-to-define attributes.

In Chicago, they seem accrued by way of hard work, talent and generosity. Within such a community an artist with little to no interest in (or access to) the commercial world can relate to an audience comprised of other artists, art enthusiasts and, sometimes, the uninitiated. Further, they can contextualize their efforts to their family, the spouses or parents that might support them. The apartment gallery provides a different criterion for validation and empowers small groups of individuals to cultivate unique and potentially iconoclastic aesthetics.

Aside from those bastions of non-traditional/non-commercial artistic production, most cultural activity is distributed via mainstream arteries that reach millions of people at once. The same television shows are watched, the same movies, the same news sources owned by the same parent companies. Most people listen to the same music, read the same books and, therefore, refer to the same common body of knowledge. Contemporary America has a common vocabulary of cultural symbols that comprise the dreams of the individual. It is possible, for instance, that Tom Cruise made over a million cameos in dreams across the country last night. While the peculiar context for his manifestation would vary, he is nevertheless saddled with very similar associations, associations that stem from his public persona. As the mechanism of such a society continues, as the material for our thoughts sets, it will be harder and harder to transcend those ideas we take for granted: ideas about what a home is supposed to be, for instance. As we get locked into unconscious expectations of the world, it will be harder and harder to have new ideas, moments of inspiration, and innovation in which we might transcend ourselves.<sup>11</sup>

I believe that small hubs like the apartment gallery, the small record label, the small press, the underground movie theater: such venues generate and sustain micro-cultures that encourage unpredictable thoughts, ideas and enthusiasms. If anything, they might simply encourage people to believe once more in the capacity of the individual to influence the world. Exploring the tension between public and private, commercial and non-commercial, regulated and non-regulated business is good and valuable. It's worth always carving out our own identities, our own terms and communities, means of support, and methods of validation.



1. vs. Private
2. Excerpt by Sarah Stickney from *It's Your Turn*, a silk-screened zine edited by Young Joon Kwok and Rachel Shine. Printed in an edition of 90 in June of 2009.
3. John Huston, the Arctic explorer, gave a lecture about an expedition he conducted where he traveled, primarily on foot, along the Northwest Passage. The Northwest Passage had long been sought after. In the 1800's, Norwegian and British ships set out to discover a passage that would improve shipping routes. It was never found in the 1800's because it never existed. Those expeditions only ever found ice. Last year, the Northwest Passage came into being for the first time. Climate change has melted enough ice such that a passage opened up, connecting the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. Just this summer John Huston walked along its bounds. He suspects that in years to come the unassisted expedition he conducted with expedition partner Tyler Fish will be impossible. In the years to come there will be no ice upon which to walk. I suggested that his journey was political, that it had the appearance of a quiet protest. In walking so many miles with so much risk he was calling attention to the ways in which we are destroying our environment. He denied the interpretation, saying instead that he was only interested in the application of the human spirit against terrible odds. While I understand that he has his own intentions, I also cannot avoid interpreting those same actions in a different, and in this case, political, light.
4. Me for instance: I started the Green Lantern Gallery & Press in 2004. Over the last four years I have hosted between six and eight exhibitions a year. I have hosted countless other public programs, including live music events, screenings, performances and readings. Working with Nick Sarno, Editor for the Green Lantern Press, we have published ten small edition books. In 2007 we achieved 501c3 status. In 2009 we closed the gallery portion because we did not have a business license. Throughout this process I have lived in the gallery, assuming my day-to-day life as though the public might, at any moment, descend upon it. I am thus sensitive to the nebulous boundaries prescribed by such a vocation.
5. A real estate agent once bought a copy of the *Phonebook Annual Index of Alternative Art Spaces* from me. Her eyes were big and wet with this million-dollar idea: She wanted to rent a storefront out to artists. It made sense to her that artists would pay for exhibition space. It made sense to her that they would pay more than a store because their occupancy would rotate over shorter periods of time; further she felt she would do some larger service to the neighborhood. We shared a mutual bafflement as I explained that, by and large, artists did not pay for exhibition space. "The spaces in this book?" she asked, shaking the *Phonebook*. "Definitely not those spaces," I said. She asked me how anybody made money. I said, "With the exception of a few commercial galleries, nobody makes any money at all!" She asked me how people made a living. I think I shrugged.
6. A friend of Sarah's, call her Jennie, came through town once. Jennie was in the midst of what she called a "journey," leaving an old life behind in search of a new one. She left a girlfriend in Portland. She was in the process of buying a car from that ex-girlfriend's parents, parents who happened to live in the Midwest. Jennie and I went out for drinks the first night. We had a great time. She was full of anxious enthusiasm and kept shaking her hands in the air, as though to exorcise the frenetic energy of transition. Because the gallery was between exhibits, she slept on the gallery floor.  
After a few days, Sarah and I realized that we didn't know when she planned to leave. She was waiting on the suburban parents who couldn't find the necessary papers to change the car's registration. Over the course of ensuing days the radius of Jennie's personal belongings extended in a wider and wider arc. Her personal possessions could be found in any number of places, a mislaid sock under the gallery desk, a hairbrush on the window ledge. The more she seeded the gallery with her things, the more frightened we became. Sarah and I could not, for some reason, bring ourselves to directly ask about her plans. She provided a variety of unsolicited excuses, all of them likely legitimate enough: there were problems registering the car, the car wouldn't start, she couldn't get out to the suburbs that day, the train wasn't working, their family dog died. Yet palpable in those was a feeling that she

was very happy with Chicago. She dropped hints now and again about how the new life she sought might be staring her in the face. "This is so cool," she might say. "It's a great life. All I want to do is get drunk every night and meet new people. I've been having the most amazing conversations. Everyone I meet is on the cusp of some massive coming-into-being transition." There were rumors that she might have fallen in love again and she began conducting long, hushed conversations on her cell phone. Sarah and I found ourselves avoiding the gallery altogether, as though the 600 square feet had become Jennie's bedroom.

A few weeks later, one week before the next exhibit, I came home to find laundry hanging from a clothesline strung across the gallery. I went into the kitchen and a boy came out of the bathroom in towel. He had just showered. I don't think I said anything to him, but I imagine I was pale. He smiled naturally and struck out his hand. I ignored it. I went to the back porch and found another boy smoking a cigarette with his feet up. I didn't recognize either of these boys. "Where's Jennie?" I asked, snarky. "She's on her way," he said. I did not ask from where.

I'm quite sure Jennie would have stayed indefinitely. She said as much later; the space seemed so large and empty that a girl in a sleeping bag—or even, a boy and a girl, for that matter—in her mind, seemed inconsequential. She scoffed a little on her way out of town, because the space was not what it appeared, at first, to be. From her perspective, she said she thought it was a carefree environment where progressive people stayed up late, absorbed in bohemian activities, having lots of sex, doing exotic drugs, reading philosophy, dancing, automatic writing, drinking black coffee all hours of the day and smoking copious amounts of cigarettes.

I realized then that I was not bohemian. I also realized that the Green Lantern was more "serious" than I had thus far pretended. And then I realized that I was part of a community of artist-run spaces that had taught me, by way of example, what kind of space I wanted to run. I had never before had to define that model to anyone, because here in Chicago I was participating in a pre-existing custom. Unlike the wayward traveler, artists in Chicago understood the Spartan emptiness of the gallery space. To that audience, the space, while "empty" was in constant use. To my guest the empty space seemed wastefully idyllic.

7. ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES THAT TOOK PLACE AT THE GREEN LANTERN:
  - 1) Purchase of artwork
  - 2) Purchase of books
  - 3) Purchase of alcoholic beverages under the auspice of "donation"
  - 4) Live music performances for which people paid at the door (a PPA license is needed for this)
  - 5) Operating without a business license
  - 6) The burlesque show in the front window
8. The Green Lantern was ultimately shut down because we carried a sandwich board out onto the street. A man from the city came to ask if we had a license for said sandwich board. We did not. He then asked if we had a business license. We did not. Had we never put the sign out, the man from the city would never have found out about us. Neither would the five weekly strangers who stumbled in to an exhibit from the street. The sandwich board encouraged people from outside of our immediate community to come up the stairs and see contemporary art.
9. Upon receiving my ticket from the city I went to City Hall. They sent me to the seventh floor where I waited for three hours. When I finally spoke to an administrator—a chubby, self-deprecating man—we filled out paper work. He didn't make many jokes but he did laugh at mine, albeit nervously. He plugged the information into an archaic computer and the computer rejected my proposal. He sent me up to the ninth floor.  
On the ninth floor, I waited in line again, paper work in hand. When my turn came, I spoke to a woman behind glass. It was difficult to hear her and she seemed to carry on two conversations at once, the one with me and the one with a co-worker sitting next to her. When she saw my paper work she said, "Oh! You don't need a business license, you need a live/work space. You're an artist, right?"  
"Yes," I said.  
"It's like a studio, right? You show your own work?"

I waffled, "Sometimes," I said. (I never show my own work.) I hesitated. "What if sometimes I show other people's work?"

She smiled. She winked. "You only show your work." She winked again. "Oh. I get it. Yeah. I only show my work."

She sent me back downstairs.

After waiting another thirty minutes I spoke to the same self-deprecating man. Thumb tacked to his cubicle wall were several awards for Customer Kindness spanning almost ten years. "They told me I don't need a business license," I said to the award from 2006. Then I looked at him. "I need a live/work permit, they said."

The computer almost accepted my proposal. At the last minute it said we needed approval from another woman at another desk. This woman asked me twenty questions, after which she shook her head. "You need a business license," she said. "You need to research the history of the building to see if there have been previous businesses."

They sent me to the thirteenth floor.

I took the stairs.

On the thirteenth floor, I walked down a long corridor and into a corner office with two baskets—one brimming with paper work—on a front table. Behind the table there were several desks, all finished in faux-wood. The place looked like an office from an 80's sitcom that had fallen into disrepair: an old set no one had since paid any attention. I couldn't see anyone in the office so I called out, "Hello?"

A small, middle-aged woman stood up. She reminded me of the secretary from Ghost Busters. She had short, pink hair and very large glasses. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"I need to request a history for the building I live in?"

She pointed to the basket with fewer papers. "Fill out the form in that basket and then put it in the other basket." She pointed to the overflowing basket.

"When will I find out?" I asked.

"I don't know. We're all backed up," she said.

It has never before occurred to me to bribe anyone before. I didn't bribe her, though I think I should have because while waiting on the history of the building I got a second ticket.

After this second ticket I called my alderman. He put me in touch with a higher up at City Hall. Again, the woman I spoke to was very nice. "We don't want you to close," she said.

"What should I do, then?"

"You need a business license," she said.

"Can you give me one?"

"You can't get one at that location."

The Green Lantern was unable to get a license because of zoning; the building was not zoned for a business. Yet. Even if I had gotten a business license I would have had to move my apartment out of the space. They told me that if a) more than 12 people visited the space a week, b) objects were sold, c) there were two doors, d) either 100 sq. feet or more than 10% of the living space (whichever was less) was used for the business, then it was disqualified from the live/work permit. If I had qualified for a business license, I could not have lived there at all. You see? Apartment galleries are illegal.

10. In the recent year, The Aviary was shut down for not having a business license, as was Lloyd Dobler, as was Alagon. The Hyde Park Art Center also had some problems recently and were told not to serve any kind of refreshments.

11. We need new models of sustainability. Even as reports of global crisis encroach our daily consciousness, we continue to live lives dependant on fossil fuel. In order to remedy the current recession, we are encouraged once more to consume to resuscitate the country and our current way of life. Because consumable objects function as societal symbols of stability and success, members of society cultivate those objects. In order to alter the course of desire, we must change the meaning of those symbols and virtues for legitimacy/achievement, we might. If we do not, if we continue to follow our present mode of production in which more money means more exterior power and more self-worth, we will continue to ravage our resources. If, perhaps, we could find other symbols and virtues for achievement, we might make a better home in the world at large.

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**Britton Bertran** is a Chicago-based independent curator, consultant and Instructor at the School of the Art Institute. He is also the Educational Program Manager for Urban Gateways' Residency Program. Bertran co-curated *Artists Run Chicago* with Allison Peters Quinn.

**Dan Gunn** is an artist, writer and educator living and working in Chicago. Gunn received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. He has exhibited at the **Lloyd Dobler Gallery**, **LivingRoom**, the **Brown Triangle**, and the **Rider Project: Emerald City**. He also keeps a collaborative installation practice with Karolina Gnatowski as a part of *Gunnatowski* that produces interactive installations most recently shown at Northern Illinois University. Gunn writes about art for *Newcity* magazine and for *Proximity* magazine's (co)n*Temporary Art Guide* and *Pr*.

**Mary Jane Jacob** is a curator who holds the position of Professor in the Department of Sculpture and Executive Director of Exhibitions and Exhibition Studies at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. As chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and Los Angeles, she staged some of the first U.S. shows of American and European artists; then shifting her workplace from the museum to the street, she critically engaged the discourse around public space. The anthology *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (University of California Press, 2004), which she co-edited, is a popular reference; forthcoming anthologies are *Learning Mind: Experience Into Art* (University of California Press, 2009) and *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

**Allison Peters Quinn** is Director of Exhibitions at the Hyde Park Art Center and co-curator of the exhibition *Artists Run Chicago* with Britton Bertran.

In addition to working as a visual artist, **Caroline Picard** is the Founding Director of **The Green Lantern Gallery & Press**, and a

Co-Editor for the literary podcast **The Parlor** ([www.theparlorreads.com](http://www.theparlorreads.com)). Her writing has been published in a handful of publications including the *Phildelphia Independant*, *Newcity*, *Ampersand*, *MAKE Magazine*, the *Chicago Art Journal Review* and *Proximity* magazine. Twice a year she meets with a performance group and records improvised music under the collective alias Thee Iran Contrás. For more information please visit [www.thegreenlantern.org](http://www.thegreenlantern.org)

**The Pond** was a curatorial collaborative made up of David Coyle, Peter Fagundo, Howard Fonda, and Jeff M. Ward. In its storefront gallery, **The Pond** attempted to engender thematic, rigorous dialogue in an exhibition format. Rather than providing access to an art world network, the project worked towards accessing an ongoing world of discourse among a network of art objects, artists and art enthusiasts. Between 2002 and 2004, **The Pond** mounted over a dozen exhibitions and worked with a host of emerging and established artists, curators, critics and cultural thinkers. Today, David Coyle is an artist living and working in Brooklyn; Peter Fagundo is an artist living and working in Evanston, Illinois; Howard Fonda is an artist living and working in Scottsdale, Arizona; and, Jeff M. Ward is an administrator living and working in Chicago.

**Abigail Satinsky** has a BFA in video and electronic media from Carnegie Mellon University and a dual Master's degree in Art History and Art Administration and Policy from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is a Board Member and Director of the Visiting Artist Program for **Harold Arts** and is one of the founding members of **InCUBATE**. She currently works as an independent writer, organizer, and educator.

**Scott Speh** is owner and director of **Western Exhibitions**, a contemporary art gallery in Chicago. John Neff is a Chicago-based artist and writer who shows with **Western Exhibitions**. Neff had a solo show at **Suitable** in 2002 and wrote an exhibition essay for

**Dogmatic** in 2000. Back when he was an artist and writer, Speh was in a group show at **STANDARD** in 2001 and wrote reviews for shows at most all of the spaces discussed in this article.

**Shannon Stratton** is a cultural worker living and working in Chicago. She is the current Director and Curator of **threewalls**, a not-for-profit residency and exhibition space she co-founded in 2003. She continues to write, and curate independently, collaborating frequently with Jeff M. Ward, Judith Leemann, Luanne Martineau and others. Stratton teaches at The School of the Art Institute Chicago.

**Lori Waxman** writes criticism for the *Chicago Tribune*, *Artforum* and anyone else who will have her. She also teaches art history at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her performance piece, *60 wrd/min art critic*, will tour non-profit and artist-run centers around the U.S. in 2010 with funds from the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program.

Existing since 2005, **Bad at Sports** is a collective of arts professionals with an interest in arts coverage. With its primary hub in Chicago **Bad at Sports** exists as an international art podcast, (San Francisco, New York City, London and Zurich), and the Midwest's most trafficked art blog. Directed and founded by artists Richard Holland and Duncan MacKenzie the project has 25 regular contributors and a small rotating cast of regular supporters. It shares contributors with *Artforum*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *BUST Magazine*, *Proximity* magazine, *Modern Painters*, *Beautiful/Decay* magazine, *Art in America*, *Big Red & Shiny*, *Art Lies* and several others.

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