

RADICAL PARTICIPATION:

A Series of Interactive Exhibitions at the
Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts



Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts
Curated By Maiza Hixson · 2012–2014

CONTENTS

Introduction to *Radical Participation: A Series of Interactive Exhibitions at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts*

IMPERFECT CITY: A FAILED UTOPIA

Maxine Gaiber, Executive Director: Forward, *Governing an Imperfect City*

Sarah Ware, Introduction to DCCA Art & Community Visual Arts Residency

Maiza Hixson, Essay: *A Utopian Community and Exhibition at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts*

Annette Giesecke, Essay: *Utopia Above the Law: Social Progress or Fanciful Dream?*

Town Hall Meeting Minutes

Imperfect City Guide to Proposals

Annette Giesecke & Donald Dunham: Utopia Above the Law Wall Proposal & Images

Ashley John Pigford: Museum of the Hand Proposal & Images

Lauren Ruth: Athletic Club Proposal & Images

John Muse & Jeanne Finley: Imperfect City/Imperfect State Proposal & Images

Chris Golas: Micro Farm Proposal & Images

Eric Leshinsky: DCCA Artist in Residence

Radical Reading Room Proposal, Images & Poems

Jules Bruck: Who's Downstream? Proposal & Images

Jane Chesson, Sarah Ware, and DCCA Guides: You Are Here Proposal & Images

Laura Hudson: Imperfect Painting Proposal & Images

Stephen Ruszkowski: Civic Seats Proposal & Images

2013 Gretchen Hupfel Symposium: Imperfect City: Participation, Art, and Activism

Imperfect City Collaborator Bios

Imperfect City Collaborators

DRIFT: ARTISTS' WALKS AND RUNS

Lauren Ruth: Three Month Marathon

Todd Shalom: You Name It

CUR(EAT): CURATE + CREATE: A FOOD-BASED EXHIBITION

Michael O'Malley: Community Oven Building Project

Tom Marioni: The Act Of Drinking Beer With Friends Is The Highest Form Of Art

LITTLE WHITE CUBES: ARTISTS' MAKESHIFT SPACES

Matthew Jensen: DCCA Artist in Residence

Little Berlin: An Undefined Artist Space

DCCA University: Gallery as School

2014 Gretchen Hupfel Symposium: Pablo Helguera: *The Iconoclast Arguments*

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Colophon

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Introduction to

RADICAL PARTICIPATION

A generous grant of \$75,000 from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts allowed the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts to truly create a “forum for new ideas, new art.”

Moving toward an interactive exhibition model, the DCCA presents *Radical Participation*, multiple living exhibitions conceived and executed between 2012-2014 that hinge upon visitor engagement and institutional transparency, and broaden our scope with projects that call attention to the act of curating itself as an aesthetic medium and form of social practice.

Imperfect City: A Utopian Community and Exhibition, DRIFT: Artists' Walks and Runs, CUR(EAT): (Curate + Create): A Food-Based Exhibition and

Little White Cubes: Artists' Makeshift Spaces push the boundaries of the DCCA beyond traditional definitions of contemporary art while engaging new audiences and supporting new artists.

The Warhol Foundation's support enabled us to engage the public in an array of conversations as cultural participants and to integrate multiple curatorial voices while expanding our programming to include artists working in the field of social practice.



Maxine Gaiber,
Executive Director

Governing an Imperfect City

By Maxine Gaiber

“Utopia Above the Law” read the bold letters that confronted me daily during the run of Maiza Hixson’s brave foray into the uncharted waters of a truly participatory exhibition. Hixson embraced each citizen’s proposal to fill the gallery space of *Imperfect City* with gusto and enthusiasm while I retreated back to my office wondering how I could “govern” such an enterprise – what if someone decided impulsively to do a pole dance over the Radical Reading table, what if an unsuspecting child was hit in the head with a swinging gym weight, what would the paint cost to bring 60 feet of red wall back to respectable gallery white, what if a major donor totally withdrew support in the face of such unorthodox activities?

In the end, a remarkable exhibition unfolded, lots of intriguing intellectual territory was explored, many new friends participated in the creation of an exhibit, and, with appropriate planning and a little cajoling, none of my fears came to pass. It wasn’t quite Utopia, but an honest and courageous attempt to approach it, which is what Utopia, in fact, is all about. There are many people and organizations to thank for helping the DCCA on this journey.

Firstly, we thank the visionary leadership of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts for funding this exhibition as part of the DCCA’s Radical Participation initiative and for funding similar experimental exhibitions and programs throughout the United States. We thank the Delaware Humanities

Forum, a state Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, for helping to fund the *Imperfect City: Participation, Art & Activism* Symposium that accompanied the exhibition, and our marketing partner University of Delaware for sharing the opportunity to participate in their *Earth Perfect? Nature, Utopia and the Garden* Symposium.

We applaud the citizens of *Imperfect City* for participating in the town hall meetings that led up to the exhibition and for their diverse proposals that explored the intersection of creativity and social interaction, and we thank all the visitors who attended the exhibition and related programs and who shared their comments on our Utopian wall.

We especially thank Maiza Hixson, the DCCA’s Gretchen Hupfel Curator of Contemporary Arts, for conceptualizing this project and for her guidance, grace, and tenacity as this project evolved, and Steve Ruszkowski and J. Gordon for handling the myriad details of this complex undertaking with professionalism and patience. We thank all of the hardworking members of the DCCA team, especially Sara Teixido for her marketing and design efforts and Sarah Ware for assisting with related programs. And we thank the Board of Directors of the DCCA for their unwavering belief in the power of contemporary art and for their encouragement to explore new territory in DCCA exhibitions and programs.

An Introduction

to DCCA Art & Community Visual Arts Residency

Neighborhood parks seem like unlikely spaces in which to witness radical participation taking shape. They are spaces we all know as ordinary parts of our daily landscape, often quiet and underused, yet intended for engagement. Over the course of the DCCA's participatory exhibitions, the DCCA Art & Community Visual Arts Residency program capitalized on the dynamic of these recreational spaces to turn both the formation and experience of local parks into a community driven artistic practice.

With keen eyes, our resident artists envisioned parks where there were vacant lots, curios where there was strewn trash, Victorian specimens in weeds, and love letters in graffiti. Matthew Jensen drew out the photographic and aesthetic talents of the twelve members of his *Wilmington Center for the Study of Local Landscape (WCSLL)* to teach them a new way to participate in their urban/suburban environment and explore their responses to their local parks. The opening reception of the *WCSLL* drew a public audience to a formal discussion on improving local parks led by Jensen and the residency participants. This desire for change and improvement was echoed in the work of resident artist Eric Leshinsky who, with the input of hundreds of Wilmington residents and visitors, transformed an empty building site on a crowded, urban street into an inviting repose for workers and residents.

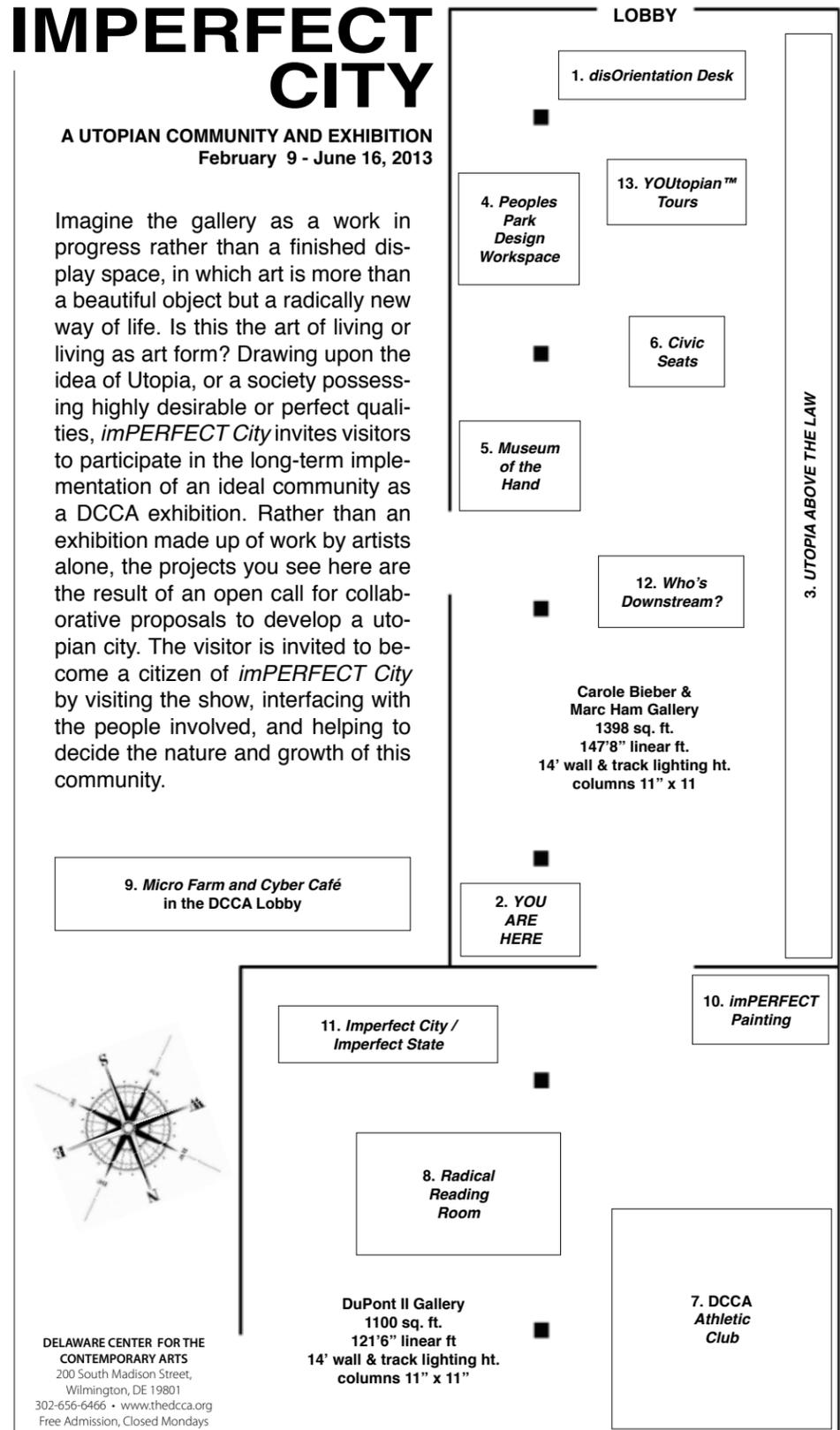
These two residencies embodied the ideals of radical participation by bridging the space between the gallery and the street. By bringing community members into the creation process, what would customarily be a simple park experience became an experiment in social practice.

Sarah Ware
Curator of Education

IMPERFECT CITY

A UTOPIAN COMMUNITY AND EXHIBITION
February 9 - June 16, 2013

Imagine the gallery as a work in progress rather than a finished display space, in which art is more than a beautiful object but a radically new way of life. Is this the art of living or living as art form? Drawing upon the idea of Utopia, or a society possessing highly desirable or perfect qualities, *imPERFECT City* invites visitors to participate in the long-term implementation of an ideal community as a DCCA exhibition. Rather than an exhibition made up of work by artists alone, the projects you see here are the result of an open call for collaborative proposals to develop a utopian city. The visitor is invited to become a citizen of *imPERFECT City* by visiting the show, interfacing with the people involved, and helping to decide the nature and growth of this community.



Imperfect City Exhibition Floor Plan

A Utopian Community and Exhibition at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts

By Maiza Hixson

Utopia translates from the Greek “ou-topos” to mean No Place. Contextualizing the museum gallery as a microutopia, *Imperfect City* rhetorically asks what constitutes an ideal exhibition. It imagines a broad range of experiences in the gallery, including education, conversation, and activism alongside the traditional act of looking at fine art objects. One philosophical question engaged by the exhibition is whether the destination of utopia can ever be reached or whether the creative, collaborative process of striving for perfection is utopian in and of itself. What are the limits of the museum to create utopia and does building a city within the DCCA’s walls reflect a desire to expand the utopian boundary to the real world beyond the museum? Entertaining such questions, one might imagine that an ideal city within the museum could include tangible solutions to real world problems or fantastic solutions to unreal problems. All absurdity aside, what are the implications of a museum pursuing a utopian process?

For context, making museums meaningful to their surrounding communities and improving civic life is the familiar struggle of the Queens Museum, and myriad other institutions across the United States. Like these museums vying for relevance in disparate urban locales, the DCCA struggles to maintain local and regional visibility. Located in a formerly industrial area set off from downtown Wilmington, Delaware and part of a newly developed Riverfront, the museum is also situated near neighborhoods where extreme poverty and high crime rates call for immediate attention. Similar to most contemporary art museums, the DCCA is charged with being nationally renowned while stimulating its immediate public’s interest in contemporary art, bolstering attendance, and reaching a wide audience (in a state with fewer than one million people). Doing little to improve the image of Wilmington to the outside world, a 2012 article published in Parenting Magazine stated, “A short drive from South Philly and Camden and midway between New York and Washington, Wilmington managed to snag the number one spot on our list for highest rate of violent crimes per 100,000 people. And while the overall state of Delaware ranked moderately well in the peace index...Wilmington came in the top spot for sex offenders per capita.” In addition to having a population of only 77,000 people and a corporate commuter class that takes its money back to Philadelphia by train after 6:00 p.m., Wilmington vies to compete against other major cities economically. While far from utopia, the DCCA remains one of many examples of Wilmington’s urban renaissance.

As a participatory exhibition, *Imperfect City* upholds the motivation of socially engaged artistic practice to democratize the construct of the term Artist. The exhibition opened in September 2012 with a series of public Town Hall Planning Meetings to ask all participants—artists, scholars, and non-artists alike—to serve as contributing members of this intentional museum community. People met, discussed definitions of utopia, and how to proceed to make an exhibition. The utopian community initiated an open call for proposals for an ideal city within the DCCA’s Bieber Ham and Dupont II galleries. Several proposals emerged, including: a workspace where people could design their own public park, a machine that would teach cursive handwriting, a free athletic club in the galleries, a community vegetable garden, a utopian boundary wall designating the limits of the law, bench seating, a reading room with radical texts, a memorial to people who have died in fatal accidents in Delaware, and an installation that visualizes the path of storm water through polluted areas in Wilmington.

Starting in February 2013, twelve projects were implemented in the *Imperfect City* galleries, including: *Utopia Above the Law*, *Peoples Park*, *Museum of the Hand*, *Civic Seats*, *Imperfect Painting*, *Athletic Club*, *Radical Reading Room*, *Imperfect City/Imperfect State*, *Disorientation Desk*, *Who’s Downstream?*, *You Are Here*, and the *Micro Farm*. Each proposal asserts a particular vision of utopia. People express a desire for nonsense and fantasy within the museum as well as a more pragmatic wish for public participation in urban planning. Participants value increasingly obsolete forms of writing and the human hand as a source of individuality and creativity. They seek universal access to locally grown food, clean water and a healthy life, a relationship to nature, a creative public outlet, access to knowledge, a space for mourning, and perhaps most importantly, the basic need to feel part of a community.

Imperfect City brought disparate voices together around a common goal of civic engagement. The exhibition initiates an organic model for museums to generate increasingly lifelike and empowering exhibitions that re-connect people to a democratic society. Other museums can foster a similar style of grassroots engagement by providing greater curatorial transparency and sharing of curatorial authority. Beyond providing access to pleasurable activities, educational opportunities, and resources, museums can encourage people to access their own political voice by allowing them to curate rather than merely attend exhibitions.

Providing access is the metaphorical key to making democracy matter. In 2010, the public art organization Creative Time commissioned a participatory project called *The Key to the City* by artist Paul Ramirez Jonas, who provided people off the street with keys to little-known spaces

throughout New York City. Regarding the project, in her essay *Microutopias: Public Practice in the Public Sphere*, (included in Nato Thompson’s book *Living As Form*), critic Carol Becker states, “According to written and spoken testimonies, the piece created a temporary community, as people waited to gift and to receive the keys. And it spread across the city, encouraging citizens to explore and experience greater access to one of the least intimate global cities in the world.”

It is incumbent upon cities to understand the value of participatory, public art projects such as Ramirez Jonas’s *Key to the City* and *Imperfect City*. Organizations like Creative Time and museums such as the DCCA are inviting publics to complete the artwork by engaging directly with “elite” artists and attending typically closed door conversations. The subjects of utopia and cities are also contemporary themes for many historic exhibitions and public art events. In 2003, Curators Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and artist Rirkrit Tiravanija organized the *Utopia Station* exhibition for the 50th Venice Biennale. In 2011, the New Museum also inaugurated a biennial festival and exhibition entitled *IDEAS City* that featured several days of lectures, symposia, and workshops on a variety of topics related to cities and creativity as an untapped civic capital. *Imperfect City* combines such ideas of audience participation, utopia, and exhibitions to enable disparate publics—including citizens of Wilmington, local and visiting artists, scholars, museum staff, and visitors—to be the collaborative architects of civic experience, creating public relevance for socially engaged artwork both within and outside of the museum.

Throughout the ten-month planning and implementation period of *Imperfect City*, participants and DCCA staff confronted: 1.) The limits of utopia under institutional rules and budgetary restrictions; 2.) Challenges posed by a fully collaborative curatorial model; and 3.) A public and institutional lack of familiarity with socially-engaged artwork. These challenges functioned to underscore the *Imperfect City* premise that contemporary curatorial practice is fundamentally different from traditional art connoisseurship in museums and that exhibitions can be generative models for professional development within the museum and a template for public participation and ultimately civic change.

In *Artificial Hells*, leading contemporary art critic Claire Bishop’s book on participatory art, the author asserts the three-fold historical context for the contemporary artistic interest in collaborative strategies:

From a Western European perspective, the social turn in contemporary art can be contextualized by two previous historical moments, both synonymous with political upheaval and movements for social change: the historic avant-garde in Europe circa 1917, and the so-called

‘neo’ avant-garde leading to 1968. The conspicuous resurgence of participatory art in the 1990s leads me to posit the fall of communism of 1989 as a third point of transformation. Triangulated, these three dates form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of society. Each phase has been accompanied by a utopian rethinking of art’s relationship to the social and of its political potential—manifested in a reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed, and debated.

Acknowledging Bishop’s account of the historical foundations for contemporary collaborative artistic engagement and attempting to define the term of social practice as it exists today, in his concise manual *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Museum of Modern Art Curator Pablo Helguera writes that, “‘Social practice’ avoids evocations of both the modern role of the artist (as an illuminated visionary) and the postmodern version of the artist (as a self-conscious critical being). Instead the term democratizes the construct, making the artist into an individual whose specialty includes working with society in a professional capacity.”

In addition to the DCCA’s incorporation of conviviality and the visitor in the creation of utopian artwork as exhibition, several artists and museums have introduced interactive exhibitions that involve the public in the creative process and final product. At the Guggenheim in 2010, artist Tino Seghal paid museum interpreters to engage visitors in a conversation about ideas of progress. In that same year at MoMA, artist Marina Abramovic invited visitors to sit across from her in the gallery for hours on end. Critic Carol Becker discusses the emphasis many contemporary artists place on reinvigorating and connecting people with public space through microutopic communities. Becker writes, “By asking her museum audience to sit with her in deep silence, Abramovic created such a microutopian moment. Similarly, Tino Seghal, in *This Progress* at the Guggenheim...asked visitors to discuss the concept of ‘progress’ with performers who greeted them as they walked up the ramps. As visitors approached the top of the museum, the age of the performers increased and the nature of the dialogue they initiated became less overtly philosophical and more narrative. These were interventions that engaged audiences in unexpected acts with an unspecified result.”

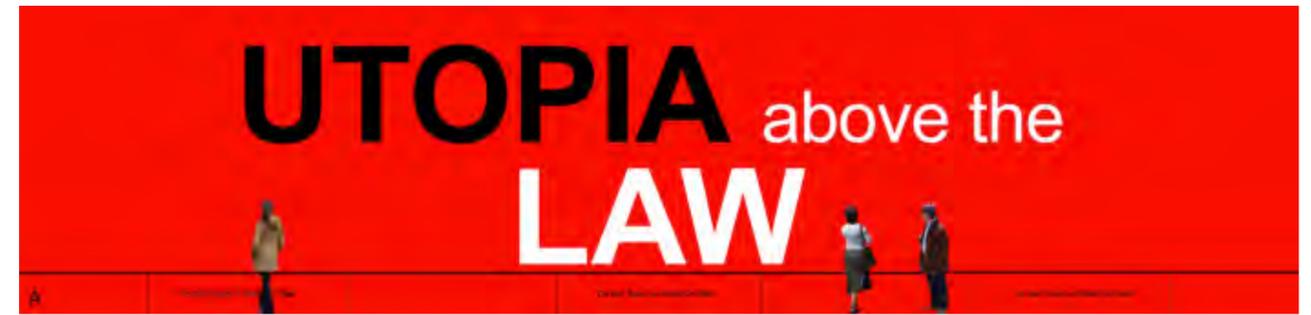
The question that follows socially engaged artworks like those of Abramovic, Seghal and the *Imperfect City* exhibition is how one determines their quality or impact. If the masses show up to gaze at an art star or puzzle over progress or help plan a city in an art museum, then what exactly is the artwork beyond looking, thinking, and talking? How are these socially engaged projects more or less successful? Beyond blockbuster attendance and spectacle, what is the museum hoping to achieve after the exhibition is over?

Imperfect City poses an alternative to stereotypical exhibitions and spectacle. It invites people to imagine the art gallery as an ideal space, in which art is more than a shiny consumer object but a radically new way of life. In 1917, the inventor of Conceptual Art Marcel Duchamp placed an upside down urinal on a pedestal in the gallery and signed it R. Mutt, suggesting that art could be found in mundane objects. He elevated a toilet to the status of Sculpture in the gallery. Now the converse might be necessary. As performance artist Tania Bruguera recently quipped, “It’s time to put the (Duchampian) urinal back in the bathroom.” One interpretation of Bruguera’s statement is that art is no longer confined to anointed spaces but exists all around us. In keeping with this philosophy, *Imperfect City* is an exhibition that invites viewers to consider everyday experience—from athletic training to gardening—as potential aesthetic form, and art-making itself as a social rather than solitary experience. *Imperfect City* contextualizes social engagement as more than a wine and cheese party for well-heeled guests but as a way of grappling with a world mediated by Walmart, Wall Street, and Washington.

As utopian scholars Annette Giesecke and Donald Dunham observe, museums are historically and by definition utopian spaces and utopias are always already imperfect because they are impossible, in which case calling a utopia imperfect is redundant. However, this titular acknowledgement specifically serves to reframe the medium of exhibitions as works in progress or theoretical movements toward an elusive definition of art.

As Giesecke and author Naomi Jacob note in their introductory essay for *Earth Perfect: Nature, Utopia, and the Garden*, nostalgia is inherent in utopian thought—indeed, the biblical Garden of Eden is predicated upon a fall, which creates a profound longing to get back to what was—before corruption and evil entered the world. Beyond nonsense, nostalgia, past, future, perfect, or imperfect, what are the boundaries of utopia—the specific perimeters in which an “exhibition” can be held? If the museum is utopian, what can it allow within the realm of human imagination that the presumably dystopian world around it cannot?

As organizer of the Imperfect City exhibition along with artists, the DCCA staff and local community, I invited people to share in a collaborative creative process. Eschewing the persona of the cold institution, lone artistic genius, and passive spectator, we created the foundation for an unusual exhibition model that offers alternatives within and beyond the museum.



UTOPIA ABOVE THE LAW Social progress or fanciful dream?

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.”

OSCAR WILDE (*The Soul of Man under Socialism*)

Not everyone would agree with Wilde. In fact there is a long history of utopian dreamers being disparaged as wild-eyed dreamers—or worse—dangerous megalomaniacs. Utopian communities have been seen as laughable, utopian hopes as futile. Such opinions, however, are uninformed of the genesis of utopian thought and its purposes.

It is commonly believed that utopia and utopianism had their origins with St. Thomas More, author of the 1516 book entitled *Utopia*, which portrays an “ideal” society supposedly existing in the New World. More’s society was an urban one, an island state containing 54 cities. The word “utopia,” for its part, is More’s invention based on a conflation of the ancient Greek “*eu* (epsilon, upsilon)/good” plus “*topos*/place” with “*ou* (omicron, upsilon)/no plus *topos*”: hence good place/no place: a good place that does not exist, an imaginary good place. The word itself is paradoxical; it is the fundamental paradox among many that lie at the heart of every utopian endeavor.

While Thomas More is credited with being the father of utopian thought, this is far from true. Utopian thought has been defined by leading utopian scholar Lyman Tower Sargent as “social dreaming”; in other words, dreaming of the betterment of human society. And such dreams predate More by several thousand years. In fact, the earliest utopian text in the Western world is Homer’s *Iliad*, an epic poem based on an oral tradition but committed to writing in about 750 BCE. Most would describe the *Iliad* as a work glorifying war, the Trojan War in particular, and the warlike deeds of its protagonists, the Greek warrior Achilles and the Trojan prince Hector. This

too is a misconception. The *Iliad* is the story of a man (Achilles) transitioning from a social order based on hereditary kingship to an urban social order based on democratic principles. The Trojan War happens to be that story’s backdrop.

At a central point in the narrative, the hero is given a shield that, for a long time, he does not understand. On it are portrayed two cities, one at war and one at peace, both surrounded by defensive walls. Outside the cities’ walls lie the fields and pasturelands that sustain the populations of the cities, and around the whole people dance, hand in hand, signifying that everything here is the result of collaborative human endeavor. But what does this schema mean? The Shield is a map of utopia. In particular, it is a map of a utopian social order suited to Greece in the middle of the eighth century BCE. The Greek ideal at that time was a new urban form, the *polis* or city state. The *polis* was organized around an *agora*, an open space for social discourse, worship, and commerce. And it possessed defensive walls to keep all manner of enemy at arm’s length, including hostile men, animals, and every threatening form of Nature. Agricultural lands, Nature tamed, lay outside the city walls. Indeed, the Greek *polis* contained no pleasure gardens; houses had no ornamental plantings. Nature, unpredictable and fierce, was conceived of as the enemy.

As on every map of utopia (Thomas More’s included) dystopia also appears. Dystopia highlights what is preferable and good about its counterpart. In the case of Achilles’ Shield, the dystopia is the city at war, which contrasts starkly with the city at peace. The peaceful city—another utopian paradox—is ironically not entirely peaceful, strictly speaking. In it Homer portrays a court proceeding; a man is on trial for murder. However, unlike the city at war, this city deals with its conflicts in a progressive manner. No eye-for-an-eye here. There is a constitution. There are laws. The guilty party will pay a price, but his peers will determine it. There is conflict *and* there are laws in utopia. Ultimately, it would be the city Athens that came closer than any other Greek city-state to achieving Homer’s ideal.

In antiquity an urban ideal was not the only one. There existed also a dream of returning to a lost Golden Age in which humanity lived in harmony with Nature, sustained by her bounty. The Golden Age was an age predating cities, walls, and laws, these last viewed as the marks of decline. Importantly this dream of harmony with Nature became pronounced as the discomforts of urbanism intensified: poverty, crowding, filth. Thus the ancient Romans, who had learned a great deal about social systems and urbanism from the Greeks, began to modify the anti-Nature stance of the urban utopia. Theirs became a nostalgic, pastoral dream of introducing the countryside into the city. Gardens spilled over city walls; the walls of houses (barriers against Nature in the Greek world) were illusionistically deconstructed to open onto painted garden vistas; and gardens were planted at the heart of every home.

This Golden Age-dream is inevitably linked with the notion of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic concept of Eden—an ideal existence in bountiful nature, a plentiful garden in which flawed humanity could not remain and which has been described by some as the deepest archaeological layer of the Western utopia. Eden was long held to be a real place on Earth; even Christopher Columbus anticipated finding Eden in the course of his journey to the New World. But belief in the enduring physical existence of an earthly Eden inevitably waned.

What *has* endured, however, is the notion of the city as an ideal, but a city that integrates nature in the form of gardens that provide nourishment for the body and the soul. Take for example the urban schemes of the late Paolo Soleri, an ardent, life-long utopian. Having long perceived that humanity must reduce its footprint on the planet in order to preserve what Nature there is left, Soleri had conceived of a variety of high density, urban schemes—massive other-worldly looking structures that, importantly, feature gardens.

So much, then, for the beginnings of utopian thought in the Western world. What of the perception that utopia and utopian schemes are far-fetched, useless dreams? What is the point of utopia if it can never be realized? Why bother to contrive schemes for ideal social systems that can never come to fruition? Have not all utopian schemes proved frangible and flawed? The answers to these questions lie at the heart of the utopian paradox.

Envisioning an ideal condition, a utopian condition, is the only way that humanity can realistically improve, progress. It is also the case that, since humans are flawed, imperfect creatures, the ideal conceived of by any individual or collective must also be inherently flawed. Humans are not capable of achieving perfection or even of perfectly imagining it. The better a utopian scheme—the more elastic and able to accommodate changing social pressures—the more durable it is.

It has been observed that personal or collective crisis, not contentment, tends to breed utopias and utopian thought. This, the age in which we live, is such a time of crisis. The environment is irretrievably impacted, undermined—our cities (many of them) woefully lacking in basic amenities and critical infrastructures. Imperfect City is no fanciful undertaking. It is a collective, socially-driven, utopian enterprise imperfect because no utopia is actually perfect, and imperfect too because it seeks to mediate between its larger context, the City of Wilmington, and the inherently utopian space (the museum) in which it resides, both claiming it as their own.

This brings us finally to the red wall bearing the inscription “Utopia Above the Law.” As has been demonstrated, every utopia possesses a physical boundary that separates it from its opposite, the dystopia that must exist for utopia to be envisioned. This is perhaps simplest to see in the case of a walled city, but it is also true of Eden, the garden from which humanity was expelled, now impenetrable by all except the divine or, according to Islam, by the faithful upon their death. Thus it is the case that every utopia, whether city or garden, is walled, separated from what is “not-city” or “not-garden.” *Utopia Above the Law’s* red wall represents the boundary wall of the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts’ “perfect” Imperfect City.

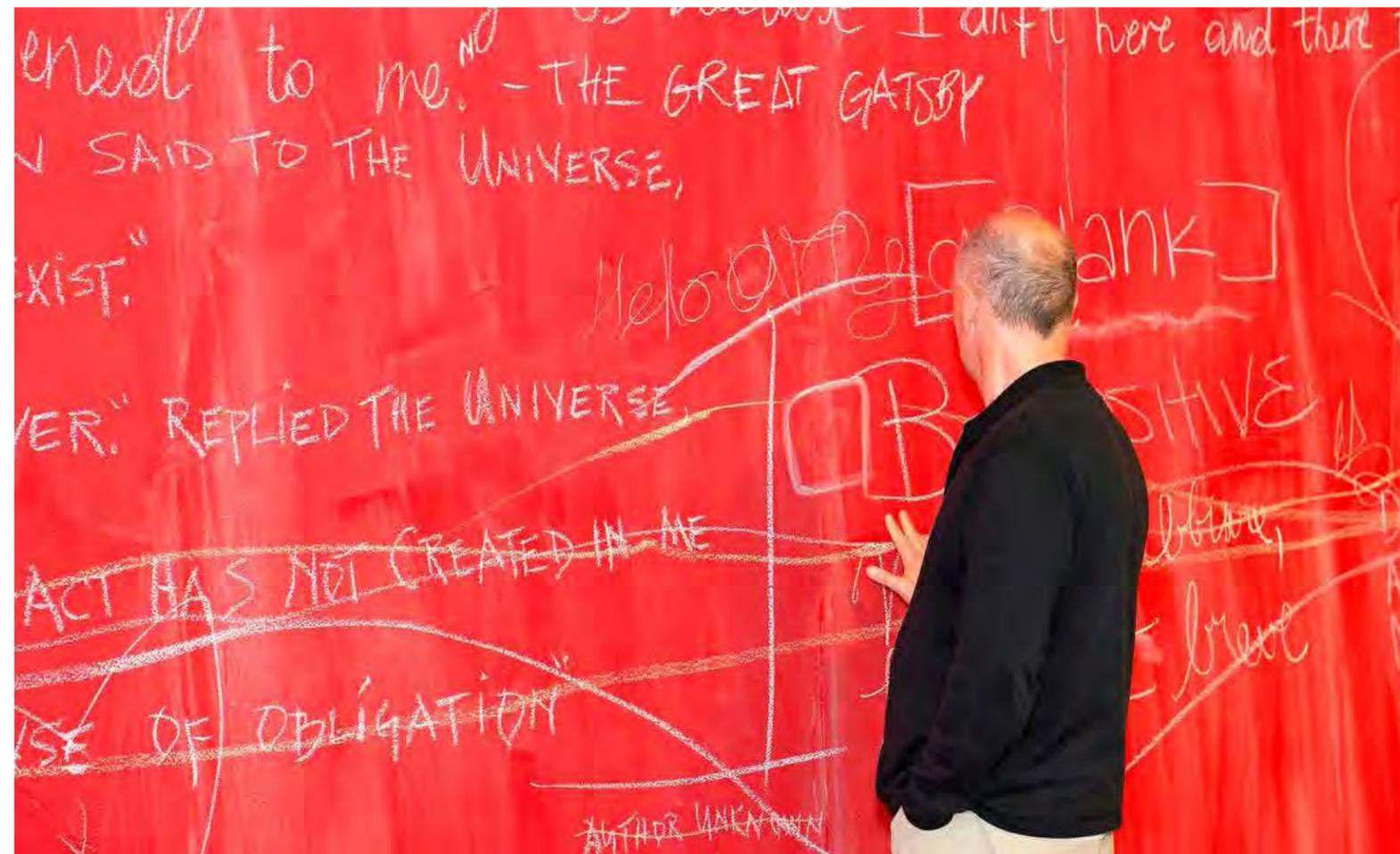
While utopia depends upon boundaries, it is also paradoxically the case that some would “ideally” like to exist without metaphysical boundaries—that is, without laws, or at least with as few of them as possible. Yet even Eden had laws; there was just one, and it was broken. Every city has laws as well. It was during a mythological, primeval Golden Age that people required neither walls nor laws. This red wall and its graphic are intended to elicit the citizens’ response to the tension between the desire for anarchy and the need for some regulation for our behavior. Importantly, the word ‘anarchy’ is used here not to connote chaotic mob action



but a state of social harmony where laws are not needed. At the base of the “boundary wall”—which is in reality nothing more than a thin membrane of red chalkboard paint applied to the wall’s surface—chalk is provided for every visitor/citizen to enable his or her response. Writing on the wall, or otherwise inscribing it, activates its surface (however ephemerally) and reveals its participatory potential. As a typographic piece communicating words and ideas in public spaces, the red wall is evocative of the work of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. As a piece exposing Imperfect City’s boundary and that boundary’s fragility, it is deliberately reminiscent of Chris Burden’s 1986 site-specific installation *Exposing the Foundation of the Museum* at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

By breaching the museum’s taboo of “no permissible contact with the wall” and defying it, the citizens/visitors undeniably engage a utopian space. Is utopian space not an ideal space allowing for self-expression and all good things that life has to offer, the fulfillment of our dreams of prosperity and peace? In this space—within utopia’s boundaries—the visitor/citizen is directly confronted with the anarchic paradox and the paradox of utopian space more generally.

Annette Giesecke / 41 UTOPIA
University of Delaware



Town Hall Meeting Minutes

Town Hall # 1 - September 7, 2012

-People present: see sign in

-Maxine introduces Maiza, announces that she is now full-time -Maiza welcomes everybody and calls meeting to order

-Maiza explains the concept behind the exhibition-- We want to educate and engage the public; to create an exhibition as city as work of art. Funded by Warhol foundation. Deciding fate of future city inside the DCCA. Imagine the DCCA as a blank slate for the creation of a city that acknowledges itself as imperfect, but still strives for perfection.

-Want people to brainstorm values a city should uphold, and a list of key elements and communities that should be included in the city. Will cull ideas over several months—they will shape the exhibition. Curatorial process will be transparent. You will be able to witness and participate in the conversation. We want to be as inclusive as possible, while also having our profession and experience taken seriously.

-Maiza introduces Stephen, J. Gordon, Maxine, Jane

-Want people to think like artists, think beyond cars, concrete and parking lots. The exhibition is an example of curating in progress. Exhibition will open as empty space; it is conversation-based and will eventually evolve into a form. It is experience-based, not object-based

-Maiza highlights similar participatory exhibitions: Tom Marioni, Free Beer Wednesdays (experience to sculpt social interaction, made new people come to the museum); Mel Ziegler and Kate Erickson, American Idyll: Contemporary Art and Karaoke

-View of Wilmington from NYC: we don't exist. Art centers are all across the U.S., not just LA and NYC; the idea of multiple centers, not just one dominant center.

-More examples:

CurEAT- exhibitions as buffets of ideas. Also a radical participation show funded by Warhol Foundation. Notion of assembling ideas in space as an exhibition; art is food for thought, edible.

Z.O.U, Hou Hanru- cities and galleries are zones of urgency. Redefining notions of culture. Interventionist works: tried to disrupt traditional notion of museum; performance-based. Exhibition as place for social transformation

Arden- a local utopian community

Utopia Station- architects built small structures; open call went out for posters, adding another layer of activity; fill station with life through performances, etc.

(Imperfect City is also durational, not fixed and perfect; we're deconstructing the idea of the finished product and bringing people into the conversation from very beginning)

Fritz Haeg- conspicuous gardens in suburban communities to overturn idea of monoculture, alienated suburban neighborhoods

Feast: Smart Museum of Art- radical hospitality; artists creating a relationship with the visitor through food and drink

Michael Rakowitz, Enemy Kitchen- serving a minority community as a way to engage the public

-Maiza poses questions to engage people. Opens floor.

The following summarizes citizen responses and contributions

Citizen: What realm are we working with? The gallery? What are the perimeters?

Maiza: In Bieber Ham and Dupont II. Something can also form outside the galleries, though—don't feel limited.

Citizen: Interested in something not ephemeral. Have it happen in the community- go on a tour around the city: region, neighborhood, blocks. Look for a workable scale. Empty lots, for example. Someone from the city to work with us to develop that lot. People in community with interest in gardening, a basketball court, a performance space. Have a series of projects. Get a landscape person, architect, nonprofit, church, neighbors. They form in small groups around doable size projects.

Maiza: I like the idea of an offsite location, engaging a larger community.

Citizen: Is there a city planner in the mayor's office? People dealing with water, energy, crime, education, churches...

Maiza: Maeve is taking notes and we can send them out. We've discussed departments, a newspaper, media, etc.

Citizen: I'm impressed by the dynamics you're creating. Interfacing with film would be worth it-moving images.

Maiza: We're filming this [the town hall] and turning it into a video to get people involved.

Citizen: Wilmington is dealing with a horrendous violence problem. Are we really trying for perfect? Are we staying away from the negativity of the problems of the city?

Maiza: This is not going to solve all social ills and we acknowledge that it cannot.

Citizen: Utopia is flawed because it is human. The success of it depends on its flexibility. A utopia can never be perfect.

Citizen: The word 'utopia' was created by Sir Thomas Moore. That history could be a part of the exhibition.

Citizen: It's a word play from ancient Greece. It comes from 'good' and 'no place'.

Citizen: Cities usually develop around cars. A product generated in that region needs to be moved. What would the commerce be about? What would be going on that we would build a city?

Citizen: Cities come together for a purpose. What is the purpose of this thing? If you shoot for utopia, you shoot for nothing. I like the idea of this and the double-play; realizing the fallibility of the idea [of utopia] is an interesting purpose.

J: We can address issues in the community creatively. We can build conceptual models of Wilmington in miniature

Citizen: Locke said men form societies to protect their private property. This utopia could be void of the political realities that we deal with. Will we be able to steer clear of that divide?

Maiza: A city without private property?

Citizen: Just, will we have to choose?

Citizen: It might be interesting to look towards nature and the intent of its system—why do things happen in nature? Getting away from human systems towards natural systems

Maiza: The city as organic, not artificial

Citizen: People are now looking at utopia as process—it's a way of moving forward. Never being able to provide all the solutions; utopia is real, political and activist—it shouldn't be dismissed. Also, cities first arose to run away from nature; takes a long time to realize they're too far removed and need it back. Initially throw up the walls to keep out beasties, then we start to think we're not part of nature

Maiza: City doesn't mean urban only—it can be a combination, without creating binaries [between urban and rural]

Citizen: Cities are structures and systems. The frustrating aspect of interacting with these systems is that they're like software. We should include self-organization from citizens, so they can participate (without free-for-all)

Citizen: There are many subsystems: water run-off, air quality, etc. Many levels interact. We need to recognize all these systems and interactions to optimize everything. That's why you need representatives.

Maiza: One thing affects another; we engage with restraints on a daily basis in the museum—there are many factors in the politics of museum-work and exhibitions. The system is extremely delicate. Understanding all the components of the city is important

Citizen: Systems make me think about the role of government and oversight—who has control over all the systems. What is our role as citizens? Are we governors? Are we deciding the hierarchy? Will there be a hostile takeover? How will we make the decisions?

Maiza: This is the first in a series of meetings—there are no decisions at this point.

Citizen: The systems at the DCCA are there to share art with the public—that's their purpose. Systems are not for no reason—they're always for a need. I'm still struggling with the why. Because that will determine what we produce, etc.

Maiza: Is this an opportunity to teach people how social engagement can be art? It's up to us to think about what we want to do with this as a model—that's part of the dialogue.

Citizen: If it's just conceptual, nobody outside will care. If you engage in something taking some degree of art into something real in the world, then you have another set of players, a different venue.

Maiza: You'd like to see a garden? Let's talk specifics. What would be the tangible manifestation?

Citizen: Make the city better by making it more beautiful. Graffiti was turned into the Mural Project in Philadelphia. People are less inclined to trash something that looks nice.

Maiza: The notion of beauty is subjective. We need to negotiate different conceptions.

Citizen: Transport could generate spaces.

Citizen: We could have powder bins and watch how people move around—study movement

Maiza: The staff mentioned using bicycles to power the electricity.

Multiple citizens express agreement/interest.

Citizen: We've talked about infrastructure, systems, commerce, etc. But is a city defined by walls or people? Don't we frame it based on the community and how they want to come together? It's not about the walls.

Citizen: Is it a city with no people?

Citizen: We have lost communities in so many cities, and that's the essence of the city. Our goal could be to bring that back by bringing people here, to the DCCA.

Maiza: Museums are less about traditional fine arts now as they are about the idea of community and ideal urban environments. It is about people and not structure, but we do want to design those structures so that we can inhabit them.

Citizen: Food, drink and performance bring people together.

Citizen: Back to the idea of utopia. Cities are associated with mass murders. You can't imagine a city in this country without these stretches of serious housing issues and homelessness. A component of this would be dealing with that issue, which is always associated with cities. We need to address housing structures. Unless only certain people can live in our city

Maiza: An artist at the Guggenheim created a hotel within the museum—how real do you imagine getting within the space?

Jane: Literally having the homeless live in the DCCA is one thing, but creating space for the urban poor at the DCCA—we're already doing that. We have high-level attendance by lower income people and we do outreach. We could extend these as more than just separate education programs. We can create a space where people can come and enjoy, focusing around the people as opposed to just creating a house. How will we attract people different than the people in this room right now?

Citizen: I'm struggling with the lack of definition of a city. Cities develop for certain reasons—trade, etc. Will there be environmental constraints? Can we grow horizontally or vertically? Like DC or Phoenix? I need parameters.

J: That's the point of the discussion tonight. We have a lot of ideas, but this is for you. What is your purpose for the city?

Citizen: We haven't talked about entertainment at all.

Maiza: This city would be an ongoing site for people to be in the space, have conversations and program entertainment

Citizen: Sports, music...

Citizen: Who's going to do this? Some of this needs to be with kids, some with adults. We could have events with food where aspects of the city are constructed. For example, this week we'll create a river that goes through the city and the transport that comes to that, then next we'll create the structures for the natural environment. Construct it like a city really grows.

Maiza: Groups can work on individual projects as an event, for kids and groups to attend. (Maxine gives five minute warning.)

Citizen: Community is huge. To get people to interact, start with the question of what people's utopia is.

Maiza: We could interview people on the streets of Wilmington about their idea of utopia.

Citizen: We could have a city that doesn't take its own power from the DCCA; a city as a meeting place for the community—audio record these meetings and play them back within the space

Citizen: This is similar to my Neighborhood Association meetings. People out there are doing this, just in context.

Citizen: I live in Arden, which was started based on political purposes. Community dinner is every week—everything is focused on building a community: concerts, etc.

Maiza: That's a great model to start from. We want to address the idea that museums are places that are difficult for people to understand and feel matter in their daily lives. I'm trying to make art museums matter for the community. The DCCA should be meaningful for Wilmington.

Citizen: In terms of building a city within the DCCA confines, on my bus from Philadelphia I saw mayoral candidates' signs. What about having the top two mayoral candidates at an informal dinner within the DCCA—our city intersecting with the people actually running Wilmington

Maiza: Maybe someone wants to run for the Imperfect City mayor.

Maiza thanks people for coming out. Please send along ideas that we didn't get to. Next meeting will be announced shortly and meeting notes will be sent out.

Town Hall Meeting Minutes

Town Hall # 2 - November 8, 2012

People present: Maiza Hixson (DCCA Curator), Steve Ruszkowski (DCCA Preparator), J. Gordon (DCCA Curatorial Associate), Maeve Coudrelle (DCCA Curatorial Intern), Hetty Francke, Hans Francke, Lauren Ruth, Jeanne Finley, John Muse, Lynne Templeton, Jules Bruck, Ron Meick, Felise Luchansky, Ashley John Pigford, Randal Wimberly, Jane Chesson (DCCA Curator of Education), Annette Giesecke, Donald Dunham, Jay Headley, Maxine Gaiber (DCCA Executive Director)

Maiza recaps last town hall and steps taken to implement ideas: more visibility through blog, made minutes available online for more transparency

Imperfect City is part of Radical Participation, in which audience participates in creation of artwork. Imperfect City is a real-time exhibition—no finished product in galleries; works on display will be part of an experience for visitors to share

Ideas generated: visitors bureau, navigate space of DCCA in different way, blog/zine/newspaper, free wall, festivals, radio, PSAs, powering city through people power, open mic night, alternative currency, job board, history of utopia, form of citizen self-organization, invite community in and include different constituencies

Talked about social ills and how to alleviate them in Imperfect City—clean public pool, nightclub in afternoon

(Watch trailer)

Maiza recaps Independent Curators International (ICI) program—about curating beyond exhibition-making. Museums are about curating to create knowledge; curators now interested in curating something discursive—creating a way for people to have an educational dialogue and integrating many different fields of inquiry, in addition to fine art

Imperfect City is about utopia. We want to announce it, but it's still taking shape. It's an intentional community around a still nebulous idea. It still requires a language system to describe itself, though. We assume there's a presumed reader. By showing up, we announce ourselves as a public. Think about language, lexicon, values, stylistic markers—how we signify what it is

Maiza presents logo—incorporates the industrial, the natural city. One potential image of Imperfect City—introduced as a starting point for a conversation

Imperfect City is about curating beyond traditional exhibition-making styles; about collaborative, non-

traditional, self-organized structures

One Flag Competition, sponsored by Adbusters—competition to design a universal flag. What would the Imperfect City flag be?

Think about Imperfect City as a process, not a destination. What symbols, aspirations and motto would apply?

We need activism in the form of participatory democratic platforms, not 'art as activism.' Contemporary exhibition curating is moving to the interdisciplinary, possibly appearing different from traditional exhibitions

Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona show, Instant City: An Inflatable Camp; became a convergence of design, experimental art and architecture; idea of sustainability, participation, solidarity

Utopia is activist, and can be about process, not a 'pie in the sky' idea. Can the gallery be an activity space, not a representational idea of a city—not a literal approach?

This will take time, and it's about people negotiating, using problem-solving skills to imagine something mutually agreeable—that's part of what it means to make an exhibition

Group Material: rethought curatorial role, did shows based upon collaboration and dialogue, idea of past/present/future. Early progenitors of discursive practice

John Muse—Haverford College exhibition, Skee-ball Tournament—participatory exhibition that illuminated many things about the campus-- inspiration for the Imperfect City show

Preston Poe will join us to talk about incorporating new media into Imperfect City; His project is called Youtunes: customized folk songs

Anton Vidokle did an Exhibition As School—Unitednationsplaza; biennials became homogeneous—wanted a less formulaic approach to an exhibition

Fernando Garcia-Dory—Shepherd's School, took city people to rural area and taught them shepherding

Martha Rosler experimented with exhibition model. She says that the public has been replaced by audiences—audiences consume museum shows like movies, without necessarily participating in political dialogue; garage sale at MoMA

Suzanne Lacy created public projects to bring attention to crime; Los Angeles Police Department rape map, where the community could drop by to see where violent crime happened in area

Chan & Mann recreated Lacy's performance to bring attention to violence against women Pablo Helguera wrote a Manual of contemporary art & style performance

Michael Rakowitz, Enemy Kitchen, a food truck that provides cuisine from countries America is at war with; Rakowitz is an artist whose work could be categorized as a form of social engagement

The Earth Perfect? Symposium at the University of Delaware (June 6-9) is a four-day symposium showcasing the garden as an emblem of the ideal human relation with nature: <http://www.udel.edu/ihrcc/conference/earthperfect>. The DCCA will host a garden tour on June 8 as part of the symposium

Jules Bruck will create a community garden, which was one of the suggestions from last town hall

Eric Leshinsky created the Museum of Missing Places; for Imperfect City he is proposing a project for an empty lot in downtown Wilmington

Will publish a catalogue for Imperfect City; Marshall Brown will contribute an essay—designed a community activist space in Chicago

Ashley John Pigford will speak. Interested in intersection of design and art practice—uses new media to create a sense of atmosphere in context of city landscape

Tom Marioni—said 'Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art' Museums don't have to be spaces of hushed reflection. Feast: Smart Museum, Utopia

Station, Zone of Urgency

What do you think the motto for an ideal city should be? Maiza passes out handouts

Randal: What if people in city had cameras, gathered images & sounds from city and then came & announced what was important in their community? We could have a whole collection of these, and then knit them all together in a book or song. Older kids could write a book for younger kids about values, what they should know, what's important—cross-generational teams work on projects together. Includes gathering things, creative process, and a final product for kids to take home. Would include a lot of diversity from city, and allow others to observe the collaboration of the teams.

Maiza: I like how you involve young people and collaboration. What would the values of the city be? Would you pose that question to them?

Randal: Teenagers could say—here's what my 6 year old sister needs to know—easier to think about than, abstractly, what the values of a city should be

Maiza: Mottos?

Ashley: Welcome. Come in, we're open. Do it together. About being inviting, breaking down the barriers

Jules: Unity. A Place to Be (without the 'Somebody,' it gives you the opportunity to explore many different things, as opposed to making citizenship competitive)

Annette: Le Corbusier says the city is a machine for living—This is a Machine for Living Well

Maiza: That idea suggests a process. Last meeting, Ashley asked the reason for the city.

Annette: Our biggest worry is not what it should be, but why do it? Why build a city in a museum, and how is that a utopian enterprise? A museum, since its inception (as an institution) is a de facto utopian space. If we are mounting a city in a museum—Lewis Mumford, The City in History—shows that a city is another de facto utopian enterprise. Aristotle says people create cities to live, and stay in the city in order to live well

Donald Dunham introduced

Maiza: We have the desire to eliminate hierarchy, but it's a necessary evil—financial limitations and other restrictions. Museum as battleground—articulates conflict

Randal: My motto for Imperfect City is A Place to Become. A Place to Thrive

Lauren: Is the focus on the place or the people? Mottos are poignant in their simplicity.

Will we define this as a place, or as the people that are coming in?

Jules: It should be—welcome, be, thrive—take the place out of it

Annette: Aristotle defines the city as not its building or its walls; a city is its people

Maiza: The way we choose to describe it is the way we will manifest the actual thing. There's a tension between discussing utopia and giving form to it. We are generating knowledge and using words to describe it, so how can the exhibition reflect the process here through an activity or workshop space?

Steve: We talk about what we could want, what it could be. I'm thinking about how we can make it happen in the gallery and involve visitors in it as well. How can we set something up so people can walk into the space and contribute to it—whether they contribute their motto and it gets displayed, or some other way. What's in the gallery for visitors to interact with?

John: What made the Skee-ball Tournament really easy was the social form of the tournament, that comes with procedures, etc—everything else that followed was a matter of course. How many social forms are involved, if we're not trying to represent a city, but the idea of one? The city can be understood as a space of commemoration (objects to remind us of something—plaques, bricks, bridges), a permeable membrane between things we want to look at and things we don't—a social form for hiding things away (on ground, on top of buildings). What are ten social forms that go with living in a city? A table with stencils is a social form being borrowed from elsewhere—how seriously do you want to take this as a city? At the tournament, everyone knew what to do, and we had a fully formed community. Why can't people just live here? If it's empty at the end of every day, is it a city? Does it have to be full? Do people live and die there? Does it have homeless people? How much do you need? How far are we willing to go to turn this into something where people could get hurt?

Hans: There are so many different people in the city. If it works well, the city is exciting—there is play, but there is also hard work. My motto is 'Diversity Celebration.'

Maiza: Tradition, ritual, festivals are a social form in the city

Randal: Tournament was competitive—people live their lives in micro-environments—people don't occupy the whole city evenly. A city is sum of all of this, which is why we need diversity to give a sense of the bigger whole.

Maiza: There's an emerging idea of utopian space being not about work, but something else. Not about toiling—scraping by in cities—but possibly being free from that burden

Hetty: I played with an old saying, 'Think Globally, Act Locally'—it's about soil, air, water: keeping our one planet earth clean

Maiza: This idea acknowledges that systems are connected and inform each other

Donald: The idea for Imperfect City is fantastic, and so broad, which makes it more interesting. A city requires cooperation. Without cooperative spirit, cities don't work well. Cities also have boundaries. In utopian literature, utopia is an island; this is a central element for all utopias. There is construction and deconstruction. Classical utopia was a construct, fixed. Ruth Levitas broke fixed utopia and modern (evolving) utopian ideas. Utopia and cities require place, but utopia also requires no place. It requires space that has a boundary. It's an organic construction, beginning with a seed or idea; within the boundary, it can go anywhere. We're talking

about rules—there can be specific rules, like no killing, and that's up to the museum, which is the frame for the construction.

Maiza: It's not anything goes in the museum, which is a struggle when you start turning galleries into hotels, food trucks and garage sales—you beg the question of what is permissible in art and in life? The curatorial department of the DCCA wanted to bring in an outside chef for a community project, which was a difficult conversation institutionally—it's an artist, not necessarily a chef—but seen as competition for the DCCA's exclusive caterer. Aesthetic forms based upon living force institutions to answer—how real are we going to get? We need to have this conversation. It would be great to have the idea of living reflected in the gallery space. We're dealing with something that grows over time, but within a finite period of time for a traditional exhibition—but Imperfect City is a beta/workshop exhibition beginning with a conversation, which never actually dies. Creating flags for Imperfect City could serve as one potential project—as an experience-based opportunity for people, maybe it could be a public art project—starting point of trying to articulate the poetic way that we're trying to frame this city. Would the name of Imperfect City change every day? Perhaps we have a problem of becoming fixed in our thinking about these places we inhabit.

Felise: I'm thinking about inclusion. My motto is An Un-Gated Community—as welcoming, open, inclusive and not a suburban monoculture. Wilmington closes down in the evening—we have fine art institutions, but it's dead

Jeanne: My motto is A Place to Imagine. What does it mean to allow imagination to evolve and develop over the duration—you start with the empty gallery and propel it forward with the imaginative process?

Ashley: Can we get rid of the presenting format (e.g. long table at front with rows of seats facing forward)? (Others agree; suggest circular format for next meeting) Pixar and other companies put bathrooms in the middle of the office building—best conversations are unplanned. Best ideas flow freely. Love the idea of the workshop—people can share ideas.

Maiza: Spontaneity is important. Can't create meaning within a script.

Maxine: We can't make everything for everybody. We should free ourselves from worrying about fixing everything (crime, homelessness, etc) and give way to imagination

Randal: People in Southbridge would disagree—that's part of the story too. The easiest thing to think about is the physical structure, but there are relationships, other ways to look at this...

Maiza: Question of ethics, values of this exhibition--

we articulated organic processes, spontaneity, but I'm also sensing conflict embedded in the social form—is our version of utopia sans conflict? John, can you talk about operating under the auspice of no competition in your exhibition (which was inherently competitive)?

Annette: Conflict is part of utopia, which is inherently imperfect, not untouchably perfect—it's a human concept—we are imperfect, so utopia is too.

John: I'm attached to this small conflict (Maiza mentioned) with the caterer. The food comes from without—so, is the caterer a citizen? Let's turn the museum inside out and make the spaces that people live in a satellite of the museum—what goes on in your house is now the museum (since people can't live in the museum itself). Also, DE outlawed vernacular roadside memorials—we could find a way to build these (since they can't be in the city), here. When commemorative activity becomes fully professionalized, we've lost something. Things that can't happen here happen outside, and vice versa.

Maiza: What does everyone think about declaring spaces outside the museum as part of the museum? Could we have a tourist's bureau in the gallery? A souvenir shop? Not trying to create a commercial city, but something beyond tourist industry...

Lauren: I like the idea of simultaneously interrogating the idea of the city and of the museum.

Maiza: Implicit in that is the idea of giving people what they want. If you restrict that, then you get into the discussion of 'what do I get out of this experience?'

Randal: For people to glean meaning from it, we could have them write down what they learned, didn't understand, how their perspectives changed, etc. Give them time to reflect and then display their reflections

Ashley: Let's let all these people do what they want in the city—they're all great ideas.

Maiza: We're trying to create transparency in this curatorial process—we produced video interviews, recorded the first town hall to create awareness of the project as a model of discursive exhibition practice, we created a reading list. If we're all considering ourselves cultural producers rather than artists (goal of exhibition), then we're all producing and part of the exhibition. How do we transition from a discussion to a physical articulation? Liam Gillick created benches and conversation spaces. How can our conversation grow beyond the DCCA's walls? Look at this as an ongoing thing. My solution is a workshop activity space.

Steve: How do we incorporate visitors into the experience, so they're not just seeing something

made by us here? These discussions could be at the core of the city all the time, more than I first thought—it could be an ongoing discussion with people taking action in the gallery.

Donald: That smells like a plan—like the grid, which started with the Greeks and continued into the present. A plan brings physicality to the construct—can we imagine this in a different way?

Lynne: It could be like a puzzle—we can create the framework, people come in with puzzle pieces. Imperfect City builds upon itself. We can include mirrors, so the city reflects people back at themselves? The community is building this thing as we go—people need to get their puzzle piece in.

Maiza: In architecture, if you talk about starting 'from scratch,' you assume nothing was ever there before (creating in a void). We could include some indication of there having been a conversation that happened before the gallery was activated.

Hetty: I think of the metaphor of an apple as the center for a community of worms.

John: Who gets paid, who gets money to execute these ideas?

Maiza: There's a budget.

John: What process could we imagine to allow for certain project proposals?

Maiza: Proposal process. Is there a currency in this scenario? Or, some way to generate it?

John: Everybody who comes to the gallery gets paid?

J: We've talked about this process self-organizing and growing. I don't see why the meetings would dictate the structure—we should find the structures that work in here (the DCCA auditorium) for this conversation and plant them in the galleries—e.g. moving the chairs into a circle; we can incorporate more elements that we decide are necessary over the course of these meetings.

John: Should we have these meetings in public so that people can walk by?

Maiza: This museum is isolated due to its location—what do you define 'public' as?

John: Community centers could host a meeting—stipulate that everyone there is invited. That's automatically a different public than here, without the colonizing assumption that we're doing good for them

Ashley: We could allow community organizations to meet here for free

Maiza: If the museum is to become reflective of cultural modes in the world today, we need to be in the community. Can we become known as a space that's also a community center? DCCA is part of a landscape of struggling institutions trying to be useful, welcoming.

Ashley: There is the notion of the democratic vote; proposal as a way to move forward—compromise

Maiza: When would proposals be considered, presented? J: Electronic submission?

Maiza: Next town hall meeting will be in December. Can we vote on when proposals are due?

Randal: Where's the manpower coming from?

Maiza: This exhibition is meant as a free education—and anyone who is a part of the exhibition can put it on their resume. I propose that every idea is taken and somehow presented

Ashley: Invite people from other organizations to be a part of the discussion of proposals—people who know about the community that will be affected

Lynne—We could hold a charrette of several workshop groups, which is sort of what we're doing here, but on a huge scale—pare it down to certain criteria and smaller teams. When architects are going to build a project, we start from scratch about how we're going to sit the house on the site, options for heating and cooling—everyone involved is there, so as we design the house, everyone knows what will be there. All experts are at the table, so decisions are made up front, and no issues come up later. Weigh pros and cons at the beginning, and acknowledge the holistic nature of the project

Ashley: In that model (of the charrette), you know the site, the budget, etc.—we don't have that here. Also, we have a small enough group to have a discussion as a whole

Lynne: We could create a framework of the criteria we might or might not have, and then have people discuss possibilities within that framework.

Randal: We should involve the Boys & Girls Club, churches, etc.—to include issues that this group might not come up with.

Maiza: Bring people from different Wilmington organizations to discuss the ideas we propose and then propose their own?

Maxine: You have a community of the imagination, or the intellect, not a problem—solving one. You need to figure out the ground rules. There's nobody from our surrounding community here.

Maiza: What constitutes 'community'? Are we talking about one notion of the underserved community? Is this not a real community? Let's close on that note and take it up at the next meeting. Stay tuned and think about proposal ideas for next time. Thank you, everyone.

imPERFECT CITY: A Utopian Process
Guide to Proposals

Please type and feel free to add pages to document
Proposals may be emailed to mhixson@thedcca.org

Title of proposed project:

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Number of people involved in producing the project, their names & their individual roles:

Availability of primary facilitator between 2/9/2013 – 6/16/2013:

Preferred days/dates/time/duration of proposed project (e.g., Mondays 3-5:00 p.m., April 3- May 6):

Is this a:

Workshop ___ Activity ___ Performance ___ Experience ___ Other _____

Will it involve a physical component in the gallery? Will wall space be necessary? If physical component is involved, please describe in as much detail as possible:

Proposed location (in DCCA Gallery or elsewhere):

Proposed spatial requirements:

List of necessary materials and supplies (include associated costs):

Description or narrative of proposed project (1-2 paragraphs):

Please answer the following questions regarding the conceptualization of your *imPERFECT CITY* project (include as much detail as possible):

1. How is your proposal intended to be interactive? Who is the audience?
2. How is your proposal geared toward or related to the particular space/locale where the activity is to be held (e.g. Bieber Ham and DuPont II galleries at the DCCA and/or offsite locations in the city of Wilmington)?
3. How does your proposal acknowledge particular art historical and cultural precedents?
4. How does your proposal critically and creatively initiate a dialogue with the premise of utopia as a collaborative process and intentional community?
5. How does your proposal favor a collective or social approach to artistic expression (i.e., does it involve multiple “artists” or “assistants” who help realize the work)?
6. Is your project both educational and pleasurable for the viewer? How so?
7. Does your proposal include a realistic assessment of your ability to complete the activities you are proposing? Please consider: staff, time, gallery space, materials, and visitor attendance.

UTOPIA ABOVE THE LAW

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

41 UTOPIA (Annette Giesecke and Donald Dunham)

Description and narrative of proposed project:

This installation is designed at once to expose the inherent contradictions in any utopian endeavor or construct and to underline the very real potential of such endeavors—in this case, the *Imperfect City* itself—to positively impact society’s evolution. In particular, this installation engages the concept of the boundary, physical and metaphysical alike, in utopian schemes.

Historically, every utopia possesses a physical boundary that separates it from its opposite, the dystopia that must exist for utopia to be envisioned. Thus Thomas More’s 1516 utopia is an island, and those utopias that are specifically envisioned as cities, like Campanella’s City of the Sun, are walled to separate them from the “not-utopia” that lies beyond. “Utopia,” Thomas More’s play on words which combines both Greek “eu” (good) and “ou” (not) with the word for “place” (topos), is inherently an impossible construct: a good place that does not exist or cannot be reached. Its boundaries cannot actually be penetrated. But utopia is not therefore a vain construct, without any practical application, for envisioning an ideal society is humanity’s only path to improvement. In the case of the *Imperfect City*, utopia’s boundaries consist of the walls of the museum itself. Dystopia is what lies outside, and the utopian construct is inside. *UTOPIA ABOVE THE LAW* appropriates a museum wall and reveals it as the utopian space’s boundary.

Annette Giesecke and Donald Dunham

<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/dr-annette-giesecke/>



Museum of the Hand

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Ashley John Pigford

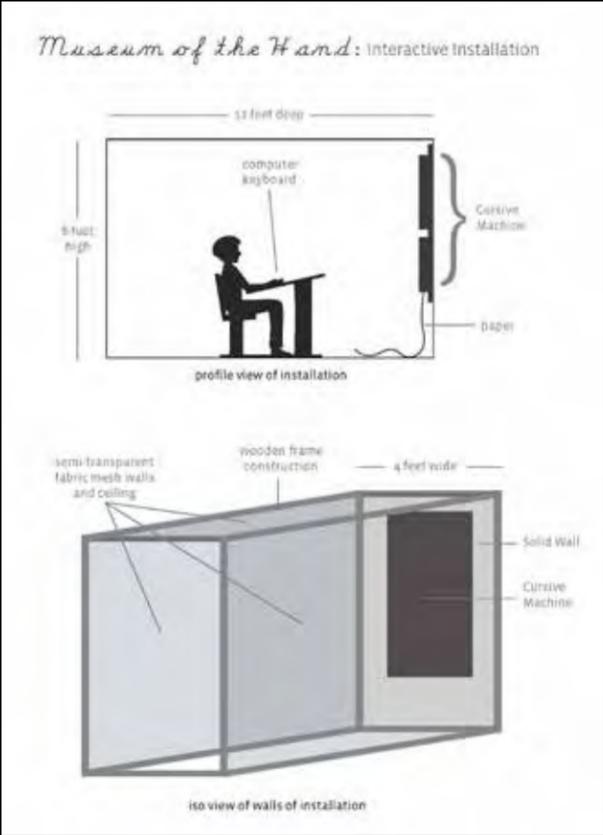
Description and narrative of proposed project:

Museum of the Hand takes place in a future city where writing by hand is no longer part of one's life. In this future city, touch-screen interfaces and computer keyboards are the only known mechanisms for recording information from human to computer and human-to-human. Fingerprints and retina scanners have replaced written signatures for authentication and individual acknowledgements. People are educated without the messiness of ink, graphite and physical interaction with material. This interactive installation invites people to sit at a desk, type their name on a computer keyboard and enjoy the spectacle of ancient Latin script (also known as cursive writing). A thin, semi-transparent fabric forms the walls and ceiling of the installation in order to separate the users from reality and heighten their experience of this most archaic form of written language. In addition to the interactive installation, *Museum of the Hand* will offer hands-on workshops to people of all ages on how to utilize domestic technology to make machines that draw.

Forty-five states in the U.S. have chosen to adopt the Common Core State Standards in order to give the nation a shared curriculum. The Common Core State Standards do not require children to learn how to write in cursive. The Common Core Standard for writing (W.4.6) states that by the end of fourth grade, students should demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting.

Ashley John Pigford

<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/ashley-john-pigford/>
University of Delaware





DCCA Athletic Club

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Lauren Ruth

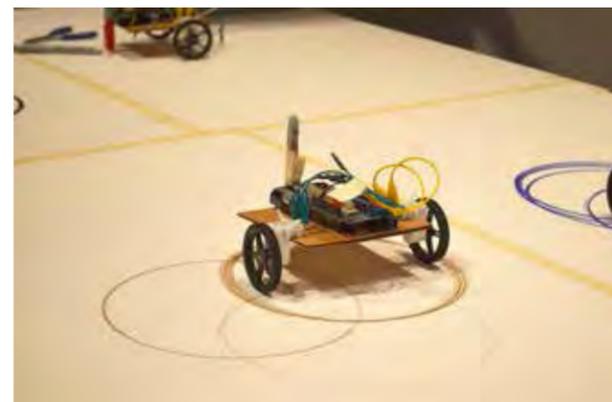
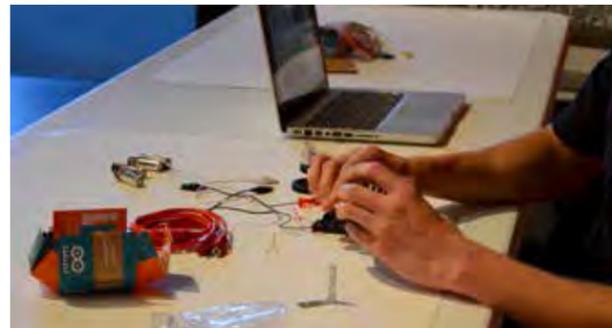
Description and narrative of proposed project:

The *DCCA Athletic Club* is a gym and exercise area that invites visitors to get fit in the galleries. Join us for Friday afternoon abdominal class, take a jab at the punching bag, or stretch out on a yoga mat. Treating artwork as a site for interaction, the athletic club offers visitors a place to stretch their physical and mental faculties, to reflect upon themselves in a utopian wall of mirrors, and to become the subject of their own artistic gaze. Working out is literally a means of sculpting the body, and the *DCCA Athletic Club* encourages visitors to perform their daily exercise rituals within the context of the museum.

The *DCCA Athletic Club* is also excited to present the *Three Month "Marathon,"* Wilmington's first participatory artwork AND running club! Join us for a series of eight 3.275-mile runs totaling the full distance of a marathon. Runners and walkers of all abilities are invited to participate in this athletic artwork, presented as part of the *Drift* exhibition. To sign up, grab a "marathon" flyer at the disorientation desk or email dccamarathon@gmail.com

Lauren Ruth

<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/lauren-ruth/>





Imperfect City / Imperfect State

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

John Muse and Jeanne Finley

Description and narrative of proposed project:

Inside/Outside moves a feature of the Wilmington community—its roadside and street memorials—from outside the museum to inside, and moves the community of the museum out into the surrounding city. We became interested in outdoor vernacular memorials created and tended by loved ones when someone dies, either in a vehicular accident or because of criminal activity. We learned that they have been outlawed in Delaware. Officials believe:

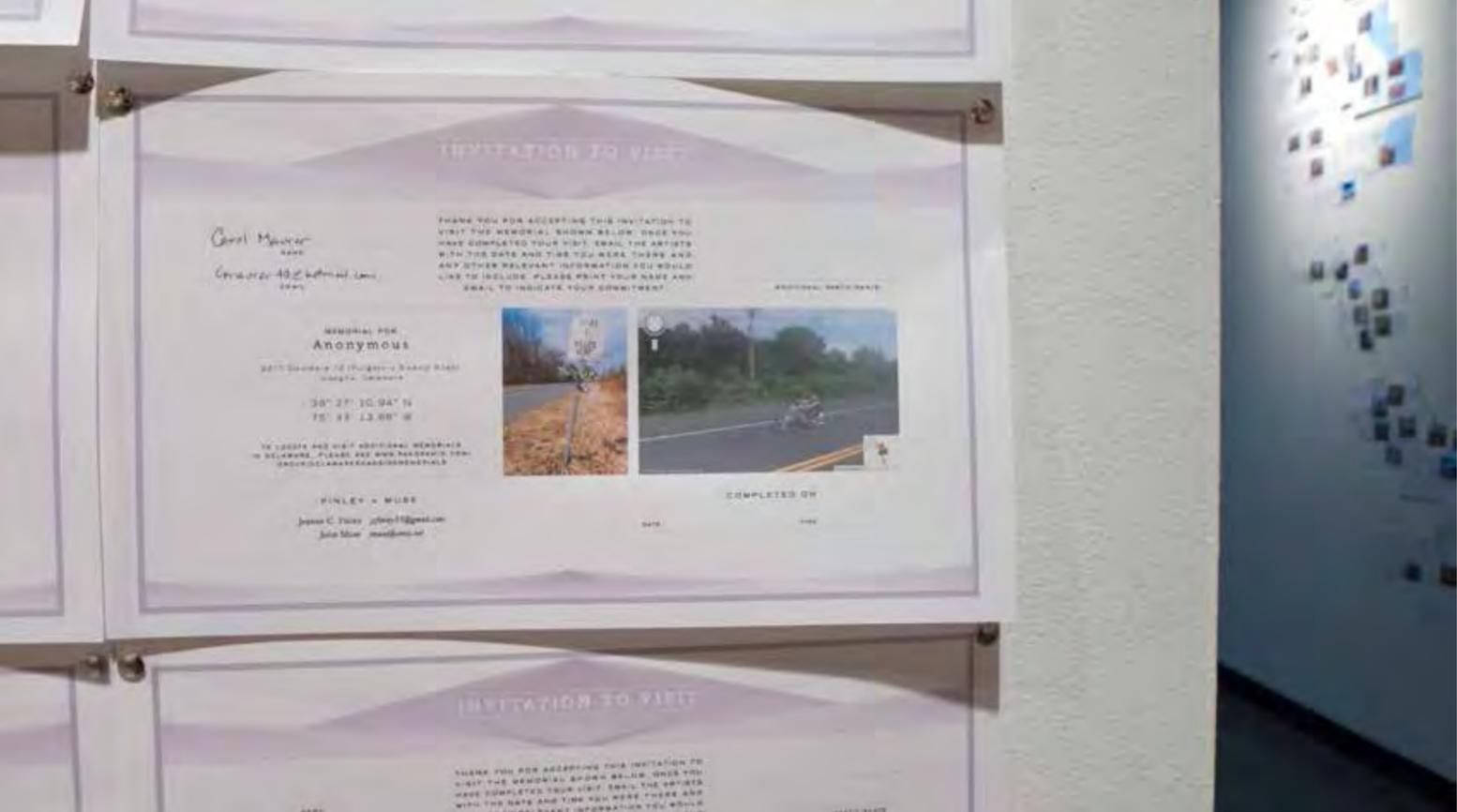
- A. That their presence created additional work for road crews during snow removal and grass cutting.
- B. That roadside memorials distract drivers and posed a hazard both to motorists and to the citizens placing and tending the memorials.
- C. That the proliferation of these memorials, especially as they deteriorated, adversely affected Delaware's tourist industry.

In their place, the state created an official Highway Memorial Garden at the Smyrna Rest Area 36 miles south of Wilmington. The garden's pathway is outlined with bricks engraved with the names of individuals who were killed on Delaware's roads and highways. While a noble effort to offer common grounds to families, the garden severs the link between place and event. Vernacular memorials maintain this link. How might *Imperfect City* maintain this link as well?

The city of Wilmington is already an Imperfect City. In this regard, there is no need to create a new one. We propose to identify specific places/people who are the city and make them part of the exhibition in the following ways. We will invite the community leaders that we work with on the memorial project to identify themselves as part of *Imperfect City*. We will create a bus tour to these locations and to the memorial locations.

John Muse and Jeanne Finley
<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/john-muse/>
<http://www.panoramio.com/group/146900>







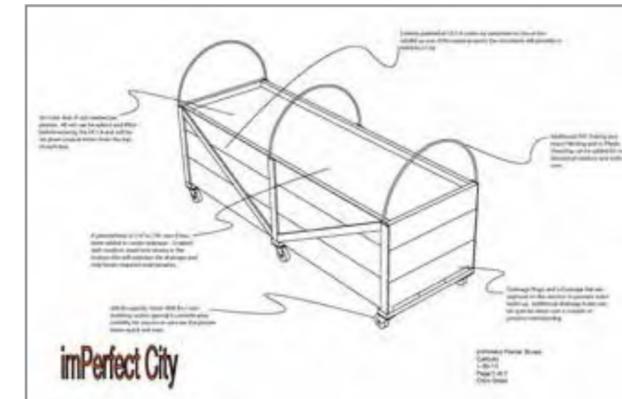
DCCA's First Locally Sourced Micro Farm and Cyber Café

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Chris Golas

Description and narrative of proposed project:

DCCA's First Locally Sourced Micro Farm and Cyber Café (DEFILOSOMIFACY for short) has the primary goal of establishing a fully functioning farm coupled with the latest in cyber technology within the walls of the DCCA. Through simple and cost effective means of construction and management, a new type of farming will be developed that exists between the size of the average backyard urban garden and the timeless tradition of indoor container gardening. Using the latest in cyber social communication, the farm will attract new participants to come experience life on a true micro farm through social networking and the web.



Planter design drawings



Artist Chris Golas and volunteer Andrew Nardone next to the Micro Farm seedlings in the DCCA lobby



Micro Farm with Chris Golas and Hetty Francke



DCCA visitors watch the micro farm grow

Art takes many forms through nature and the objects nature has the power to inspire, for example, the gardens at Versailles, one of Andy Goldsworthy's works, or a flower that Van Gogh paints. We have a connection to all these things when we see them in a photograph in a book or in a museum on a wall. If we can recall consciously that we have the power to create and shape the world through what we grow (growing the roses so they can be trimmed, growing the trees to shed the leaves, and growing the flower to be put into a vase), and apply ourselves to plant the seeds, literally, for our future, then we become the greatest proponents and preservationists of art and culture. If growing plants is not Art or Art history then we shouldn't be here.

In almost all utopian environments or communities, the farm or garden is a key element that helps to sustain life for the residents. Agriculture plays a key role in any self-sustaining community, such as that of *Imperfect City*. Without the efforts of many, the yield would be less than its potential. If every person helps watch the garden in smaller shifts then everyone commits the minimum amount of effort to yield the maximum amount of product in the end.

Chris Golas
<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/chris-golas/>



Micro Farm moves outdoors



Micro Farm in Full Bloom in June



People's Park

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Eric Leshinsky

Description and narrative of proposed project:

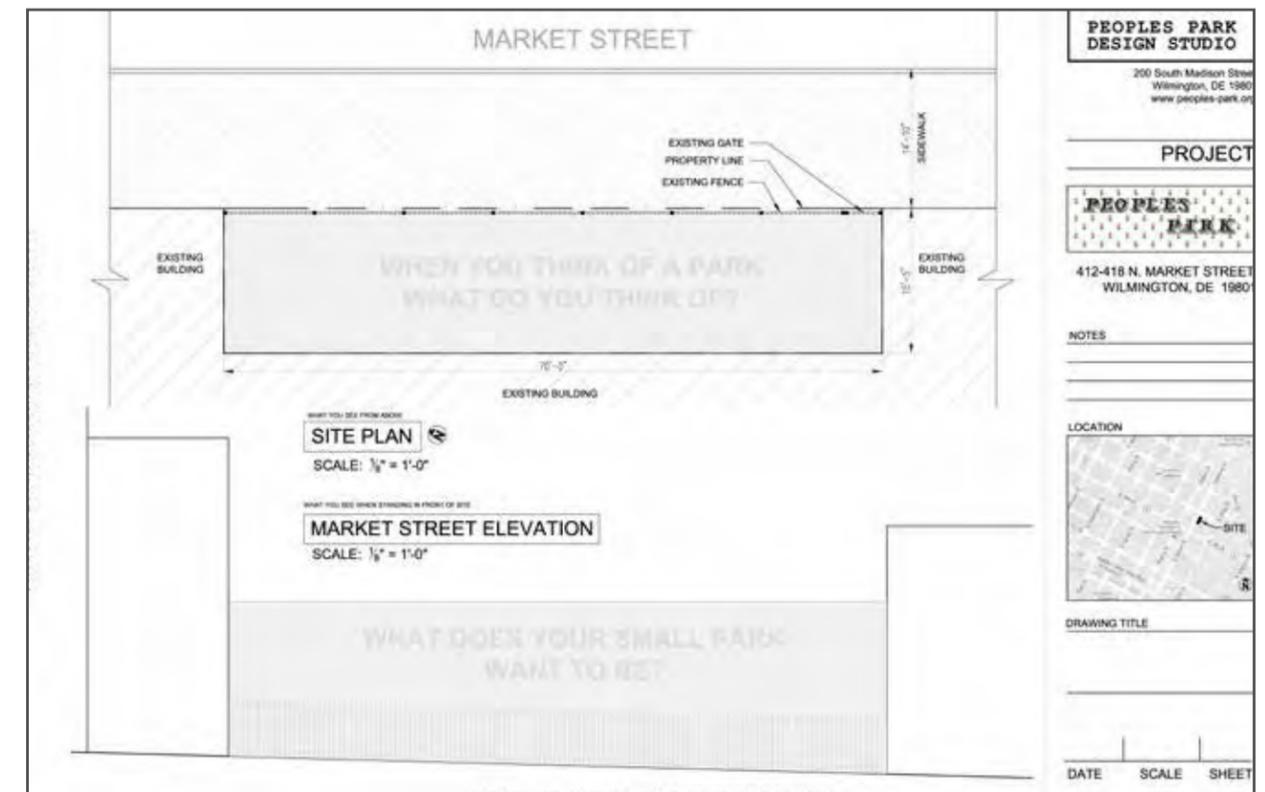
People's Park is an effort to develop a plan for a new public space for downtown Wilmington from the everyday insights and ideas of Wilmington residents. Central to this effort is the *People's Park* Design studio, an evolving public work space within the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts where the design process for *People's Park* will take shape.

The process to design *People's Park* will unfold over four weeks from February 4 through March 4. During this time, the *People's Park* Design Studio will be accessible at all regular museum hours, and will welcome the participation of anyone interested in helping to conceive *People's Park*. Focused design workshops led by Eric Leshinsky will take place at the *People's Park* Design Studio from noon-5pm, every Tuesday and Saturday.

Eric Leshinsky
<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/eric-leshinsky/>



People's Park planning session in DCCA galleries



People's park design template

People's Park

DCCA Artist in Residence Eric Leshinsky (Houston, TX) partnered with Preservation Initiatives and members of the Wilmington community to conceptualize and construct a *People's Park* during the spring of 2013. His project was first introduced to community members through the *imPerfect City* town hall meetings in the fall of 2012. A *People's Park Design Studio* was subsequently installed in the exhibition in February 2013. This location provided a gallery "classroom" for a month-long series of intensive planning workshops in which visitors began to lay out the plans for a public space that incorporated the everyday insights and ideas of Wilmington residents.

Leshinsky held both formal and informal workshops using the *People's Park Design Studio* during public events, scheduled sessions, and regular gallery hours. Each week, participants were asked to work on a new design phase including identifying issues surrounding the site, what types of programming and uses of the park should be encouraged, what elements would be necessary to make the park usable, possible design schemes, and what planned installations or activities would be required to bring these ideas to fruition.

Following the planning process, *People's Park* was installed during a one-week period in a vacant lot owned by Preservation Initiatives on lower Market Street in downtown Wilmington. With the assistance of a team of local volunteers, Leshinsky reshaped a bland patch of grass into a functional environment by adding welcoming signage, seating, a performance stage, and a text-based mural incorporating residents' thoughts on parks, Market Street, and the City of Wilmington. Although the park was designed to be temporary, it is still in place and functional as of the date of this publication.

Reflecting on the artist in residency and involvement with *imPerfect City*, Leshinsky stated, "The project allowed me to engage all of the elements that have come to define my work: site specificity, public installation, public process and community engagement, response to lack of planning vision, and graphic design. And I was able to do the project in a highly visible way and in a place where people were able to appreciate it."

About Eric Leshinsky

Eric Leshinsky is an exhibiting artist, designer, and design educator. In 2009, after several years working in both innovative architectural practices and nonprofit planning organizations, he founded *GRAPH*, focusing on collaborative projects at the intersections of art, architecture, and advocacy. Leshinsky holds a B.A. from Columbia University in Political Science, Economics and a Masters of Architecture from Rice University. He has taught at Morgan State University School of Architecture & Planning, the Delaware College of Art and Design, George Washington University, University of Maryland School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation, and the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines School of Architecture.

From 2006-2009, Leshinsky served as a project designer on residential, institutional, and urban design projects for PARAMeter Inc., a Baltimore-based architecture firm. In 2008 he co-founded *D:center*, Baltimore and the Baltimore Design Conversations to foster the local design community. He is currently living and working in Houston, Texas, where he established Shrimp Boat Projects, which works to bring public art and the shrimping industry together to benefit the local community and economy. He received a 2011 Artist in Residence position with the University of Houston Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts for the Shrimp Boat Projects.



Volunteer Antonio Valenzuela and Eric Leshinsky paint People's Park Fence



Eric Leshinsky and University of Delaware students at People's Park, Market Street

HELP DESIGN

PEOPLES PARK

A NEW PARK FOR DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON!

PEOPLES PARK is an effort to create a new public space for Wilmington from the everyday insights and ideas of Wilmington residents. Central to this effort is the Peoples Park Design Studio, an evolving public work space within the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts where the design process for Peoples Park will take shape. The project is organized by artist Eric Leshinsky in conjunction with the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts Community Arts Residency Program and the exhibition *Imperfect City*.

For more information, just visit the Peoples Park Design Studio during normal museum hours! or visit the project website at www.peoples-park.org

FEBRUARY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	1	2

Peoples Park Design Studio will be open at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts during all museum hours:
 Tues/Thurs/Fri/Sat: 10am - 5pm
 Wed/Sun: 12 - 5pm

Design workshops led by artist Eric Leshinsky will happen every **Tuesday & Saturday In February: 12 - 5pm**

Participate for an hour, an afternoon or a whole month!

People's Park poster

Radical Reading Room

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Maiza Hixson with Maeve Coudrelle
Chris Golas: creator of the “coffee table”
DCCA staff and guides: facilitators and regular users of the space

Description and narrative of proposed project:

The *Radical Reading Room* is intended as a space of introspection, where citizens can rest and enjoy a respite from the outside while meditating on their intellectual experience in the exhibition. A lounge and dedicated reading space, the room uses warm lighting and comfortable seating to simulate a serene, convivial atmosphere.

Based on both the idea that “reading is radical” and my own wish for citizens to be exposed to the theoretical underpinnings of the exhibition, the room will contain a number of books culled from the *Imperfect City* reading list (<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/related-content/>). In addition, citizens will be encouraged to deposit books (or suggestions for books) in the room to share with their peers and shape the content of the room. Because the space is intended to spark an interest in reading as an activist activity, emphasis will be placed on reading material relating to concepts that could be considered “radical”—anything that citizens feel is unjustly restricted or stifled in their daily lives (due to societal, political, monetary or time restraints, etc.), or that challenges preconceived notions and norms. These can include current or former banned books (as in *Finishing School's Patriot Library*), political satire, how-to manuals, ‘underground’ literature, and any number of illicit or taboo publications.

<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/maeve-coudrelle/>



Radical Reading Room Poetry Reading

Bank Lobby Poem

by JoAnn Balingit, Delaware Poet Laureate

They also serve who only stand and wait especially if they dance in place. This man, whose hands fly up to puppeteer his hips, whose brow downbeats in dustgold air he swings into—seems not to mind if he must lean a tender bit onto his cane between each song. Muzak. Bonnie Raitt? The blunt toe of his oil-grimed boot begins to nod again. The blue fields of his full-blown butt bob too. Fluorescent light daubs glitter on his dreads. I tell you what: the ATM is Out of Service, hence this fucking line is slow. But here's Cathedral Man to shed his grace on me! I want to heave his oak doors wide and climb inside his rocking ark. Hear ye wads of gum stuck to this carpet—you Powdered man, you Business tree, you Rail-thin waitress lugging bags of change and yes the Goth kid in aluminum, and me. Oh Everydancingman, we want what you're depositing. Oh Everydancingman—Toss me that cane. You're next, you Holy Cow.

A Woman Walks Along the Streets of Her College Town Forty Years Later

by Linda Blaskey

The bookstore still has copies of *Franny and Zooey* in the front window. And Howl. The smell of yeast still leaks from the open co-op door.

She goes in, buys a loaf, sits among ghosts on the art-building steps, eats small pieces of crust.

A beautiful boy with rasta hair plays a vintage Martin on a bench in the quad, pauses to write notes on blue-lined paper.

She wills him to look up.
I'm here. Still here.
She has forgotten for a moment how long it has been since the songs were for her.



Who's Downstream?: An Exploration of the Impact of Urban Water Runoff

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Jules Bruck: *primary facilitator*
Jon Cox: *co-producer*
Tony Middlebrooks: *co-producer*
University of Delaware Students: *creative team*

Description and narrative of proposed project:

Working with a group of undergraduate students at the University of Delaware, three professors will examine the path of storm water through urban and industrial areas to reveal the beauty and the mystery of what happens to our downstream neighbors who rely on healthy water.

As we explore the path of water around the region, we will connect with the Wilmington community and conduct video interviews of people's responses to questions regarding what happens to the rainwater that falls on the city and where inlets lead water. We will follow the path of water and see where it leads us, perhaps even starting farther north in the areas of Pennsylvania where fracking for natural gas now plays an important economic role in the region. In that situation, we the citizen's of Wilmington are "Who's Downstream." We will take photos of pipes, inlets, outlets, landscapes, wetlands, and

put together a pictorial compilation of the story of urban stormwater. We will explore how water is cleaned by the landscape or otherwise dumped into a neighbor's backyard. In the exhibit space, we will create the pipes and motion that represent water and we will ask our visitors to float their 'wishes for water' downstream. Ideally, we will identify an area in Wilmington in need of rehabilitation and re-vegetation to improve water quality downstream. We propose a day of site clean up and re-planting on a specific site so that our participants can interact with the landscape and do something real to make a difference.

Jules Bruck
<http://imperfectcitycca.wordpress.com/dr-jules-bruck/>

URBAN WATER RUNOFF

What does this mean?

Urban water runoff is surface runoff of rainwater created by urbanization. This runoff is a major source of water pollution in urban communities worldwide.

What is the problem?

Water running off impervious surfaces picks up gasoline, fertilizers, heavy metals, trash and other pollutants leading to water quality problems.

How it effects YOU!

This runoff is combined with natural sources of water which we use for consumption. Due to the pollution of urban runoff it costs you a lot more money to filter the fresh water that comes out of your faucet.

You Are Here

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

DCCA Education Department with Sarah Ware, Jane Chesson, DCCA Guides

Gallery text:

Welcome to *You Are Here*.

You are standing in front of a blueprint of *Imperfect City* and we've been waiting for you. This is a space to let your mind wander, to imagine all the possibilities for this utopia-in-progress, to explore, to create, and to communicate. Every building, park, and bridge starts with a blueprint. Every great idea starts with a rough draft. Every new citizen needs a map to chart his or her course. Begin your journey here and lead the way for others.

On the shelves you will find bins with an assortment of images, shapes, and colors, as well as artifacts from within *Imperfect City*.

DCCA Education Department
<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/jane-chesson/>
<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/sarah-ware/>



Imperfect Painting

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Laura Hudson

Description and narrative of proposed project:

Artist Laura Hudson sketches and photographs *Imperfect City* visitors as they stroll through the gallery and uses her documentation as source material to create multiple figurative paintings. Integrated into the *Imperfect City* exhibition over the course of three months, the canvasses reflect the individuals who have given life to the city. Hudson's painterly process functions as both an archive as well as an ongoing participatory event that shapes the visual culture of the City. Hudson will sketch at designated times in the galleries from February to June and talk with visitors as they explore *Imperfect City*.

<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/laura-hudson/>

Civic Seats

Name of primary facilitator/proposer(s):

Stephen Ruskowski

Description and narrative of proposed project:

The project is interactive in nature, with seating consisting of six to eight sections. The benches are designed specifically so that they may be arranged together to create a center-facing or circular arrangement for *Imperfect City* Town Hall meetings or be moved apart for individual and/or sectional use as needed. The seats will acknowledge cultural precedents in that simple bench seating is ubiquitous throughout human history, particularly in places of meeting for spiritual or civic purposes.

Stephen Ruskowski
<http://imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/stephen-ruskowski/>



Imperfect painter Laura Hudson talks with and sketches Andrew Nardone on Civic Seats



imPERFECT CITY

Exhibition Workshops:



Give it to the Worms!

Master Gardener Hetty Franke's Composting

Saturday, May 11, 2013

10:30 am – 11:30 am

Ages 7 – Adult

FREE

Registration required

In association with the *imPERFECT CITY* microfarm, this program includes a presentation on composting and live worm handling.

Imperfect Healing Day

Sunday, May 12, 2013

12:30 am – 4:30 am

FREE

The Awakened Heart community of Arden, Delaware introduces massage, Raiki, Chakra Balancing, and Magnetic Healing into the city and gallery.

Visit www.thedcca.org/ICWorkshops to register.

Contact the education department at 302-656-6466 x7101 for information.

DELAWARE CENTER FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS
200 S. MADISON ST. WILMINGTON DE 19801
302.656.6466
www.thedcca.org





Thank You Imperfect City Collaborators

Maria Anupol
 Emily Artinian
 Awakened Heart -Spiritual Community
 Badwaterjournal/Clarence Hixson
 JoAnn Balingit
 Michael Bethun
 Boy Scouts Troop #301
 DE College of Art and Design Students
 DE Sports League
 Dennis Beach
 Independent Curators International
 Linda Blaskey
 Gina Bosworth
 Marshall Brown
 Jules Bruck
 Barbara Bullock
 Shayna Cacho
 Radisha Caldwell
 Jane Chesson
 Zach Chupa
 Jill Confer
 Maeve Coudrelle
 Jon Cox
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 Sgt. Walter Ferris
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 Kimberly Fields
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 Bob Field
 Emma Field
 Andrea Field
 Kim Fields
 Pam Finkelman
 Jeanne Finley
 Jackson Fleagle

Hans Francke
 Hetty Francke
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 Maxine Gaiber
 Jason Garthwait
 Annette Giesecke
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 Chris Golas
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 Ken Grant
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 Brianna Hansen
 Jay Headley
 Debbie Heaton
 Nanci Hersh
 Sarah Hinds
 Maiza Hixson
 Ronna Hochman
 Jerry Hodge
 Laura Hudson
 Pam Huxtable
 Michael Kalmbach
 Christian Kaye
 Brendan Keegan
 Eric Leshinsky
 Barbara Levitt
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 Carol Maurer
 Ashlee McCullough
 Benjamin McCullough
 Faith McNamara
 Ron Meick
 Wesley Memeger
 MICA Students
 Tony Middlebrooks
 Meagan Mika
 Ahlen "Angel" Moin
 Carrie Moore
 Margaret Morton

Aimee Moulder
 Susan Murray
 John Muse
 Rigena O'Brien
 Mary Ann Organ
 Dr. Yasser Payne
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 Lourdes Puig
 Michele Quinn
 Brianna Repella
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 Vincent Ryan
 Brian Scatasti
 Debra Schwartzreich
 Delona Seserman
 Justin Shaw
 Carol Sherman
 Dan Shyne
 Wes Short
 William Slowik
 Leilah Stone
 Jessica Taylor
 Sara Teixido
 Lynne Templeton
 U of DE Students
 Antonio Valenzuela
 Sarah Ware
 Nicole Wasilus
 Andy West
 Daniel Westfield
 Latoya White
 Mayor Williams
 Randal Wimberley
 Lance Winn
 Anne Yoncha

Imperfect City Collaborators



Brendan Keegan



Ashley John Pigford



Carol Maurer



Debbie Heaton



Sarah Ware



Emily Artinian



Jeanne Finley



Maiza Hixson



Maeve Coudrelle



Annette Giesecke



Donald Dunham



Jules Bruck



John Muse



Margaret Morton



J. Gordon



Laura Hudson



Vincent Ryan



Eric Leshinsky



Maxine Gaiber



Lynne Templeton



Wesley Memeger



Stephen Ruszkowski



Chris Golas and
Hetty Francke



Sara Teixido



Lauren Ruth

DRIFT

Drift: Artists' Walks and Runs

Lauren Ruth: Three Month Marathon

Todd Shalom: You Name It

DRIFT: Lauren Ruth

Three Month Marathon

March 3, 2013—June 8, 2013

Based upon the idea of the French Situationist derive, or a playful-constructive walk rather than the classic journey or stroll, DRIFT focused on the city as museum and the abundant visual culture surrounding the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts through a series of artists' walks and runs.

For her DRIFT project, Chattanooga-based artist Lauren Ruth organized the world's slowest marathon in the city of Wilmington. Evolving out of a running club that Ruth organized for Imperfect City, the

artist bought local communities together through her interactive DRIFT project. Ruth's "marathon in installments" invited the public to participate in a 26.2-mile race, taking place over the course of three months. The artist partnered with participants who created legs for the marathon by designing running routes for the group through their neighborhoods.

<http://threemonthmarathon.wordpress.com/>

Maiza Hixson





THE DCCA ATHLETIC CLUB presents

THE THREE MONTH "MARATHON"

A PARTICIPATORY ARTWORK AND RUNNING CLUB!

Join the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts and artist Lauren Ruth for a series of curated runs in Wilmington. Over the course of three months we will tour different neighborhoods and discover new and exciting parts of the city in a series of eight 3.275-mile runs totaling the full length of a marathon!

Runners and walkers of all ability levels are invited to participate in this athletic artwork, presented as part of the *Drift* exhibition at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts.

Do you have a favorite running route? Design and submit your own 3.275-mile loop that highlights the neighborhood you live in. This is an opportunity to share YOUR Wilmington, meet new people, and be part of a first-of-its-kind participatory artwork.

Email dccamarathon@gmail.com with 3.275-mile loop suggestions and we will add your route to the schedule!

Participation is free, 18 and over
Space is limited so sign up now!

SIGN UP:
imperfectcitydcca.wordpress.com/lauren-ruth/

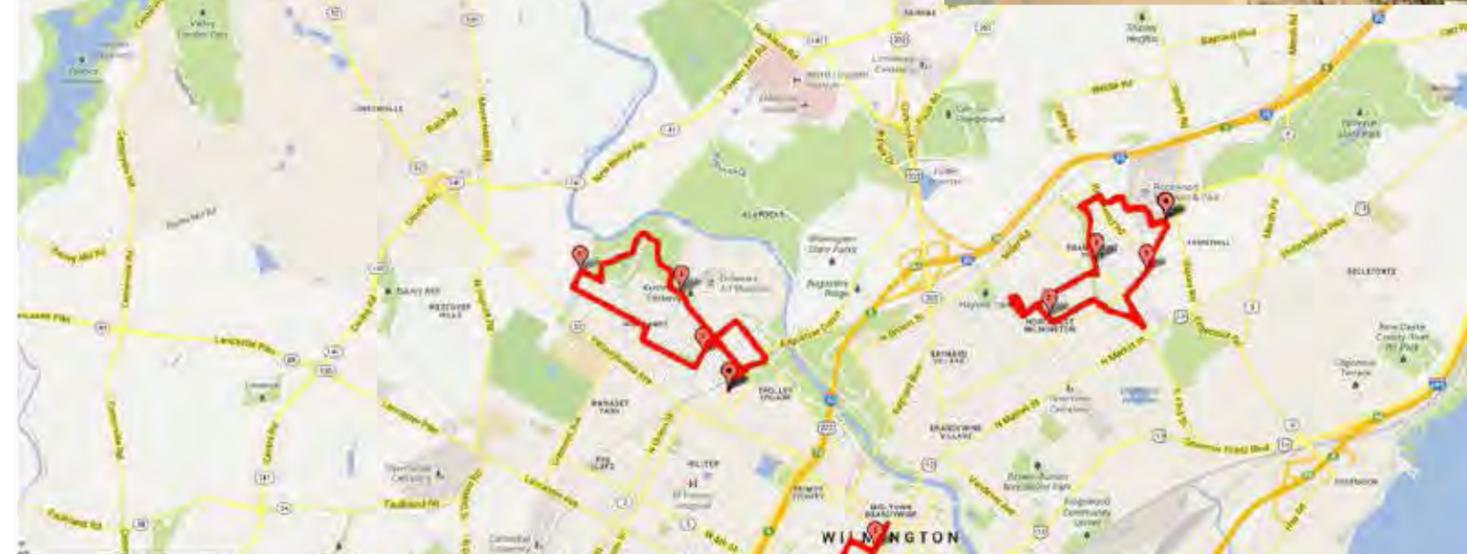
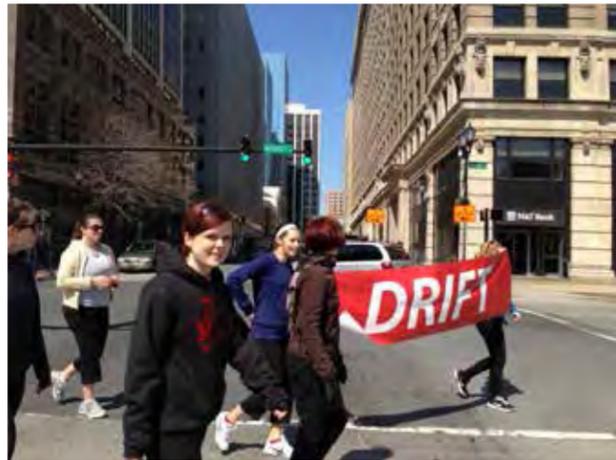
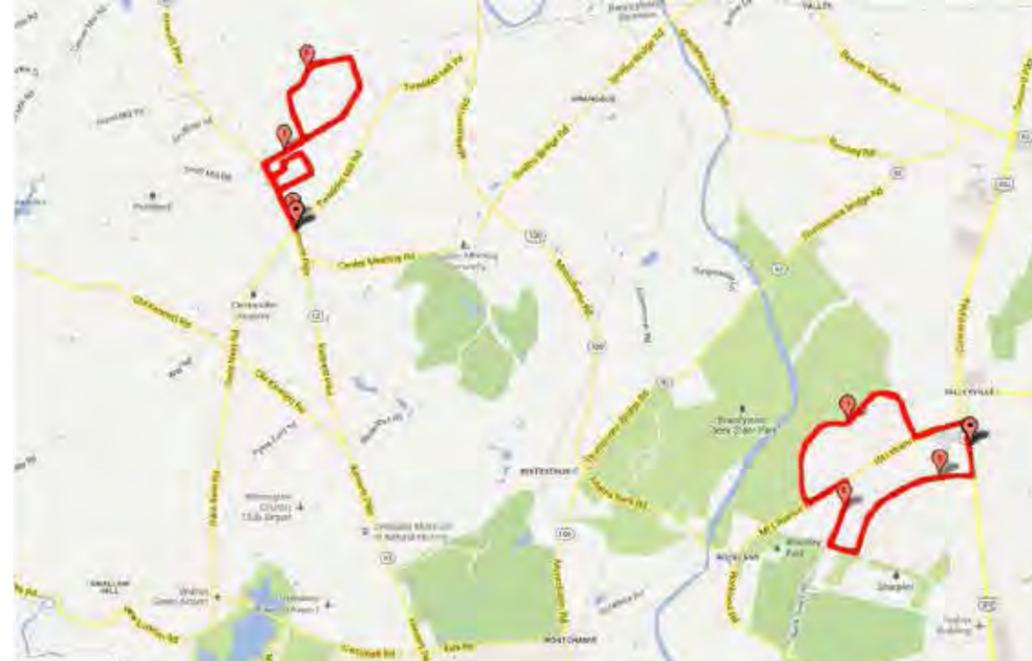
Sun, Mar 3	START! Run #1	12:00 pm @ The DCCA (run starts at 12:30 pm)
Sun, Mar 17	Run #2	10:30 am @ TBD
Sun, Mar 31	Run #3	10:30 am @ TBD
Sun, Apr 14	Run #4	10:30 am @ TBD
Sun, Apr 28	Run #5	10:30 am @ TBD
Sun, May 12	Run #6	10:30 am @ TBD
Sun, May 26	Run #7	10:30 am @ TBD
Sat, Jun 8	FINISH! Run #8	3:00 pm @ The DCCA (plus party + more!)



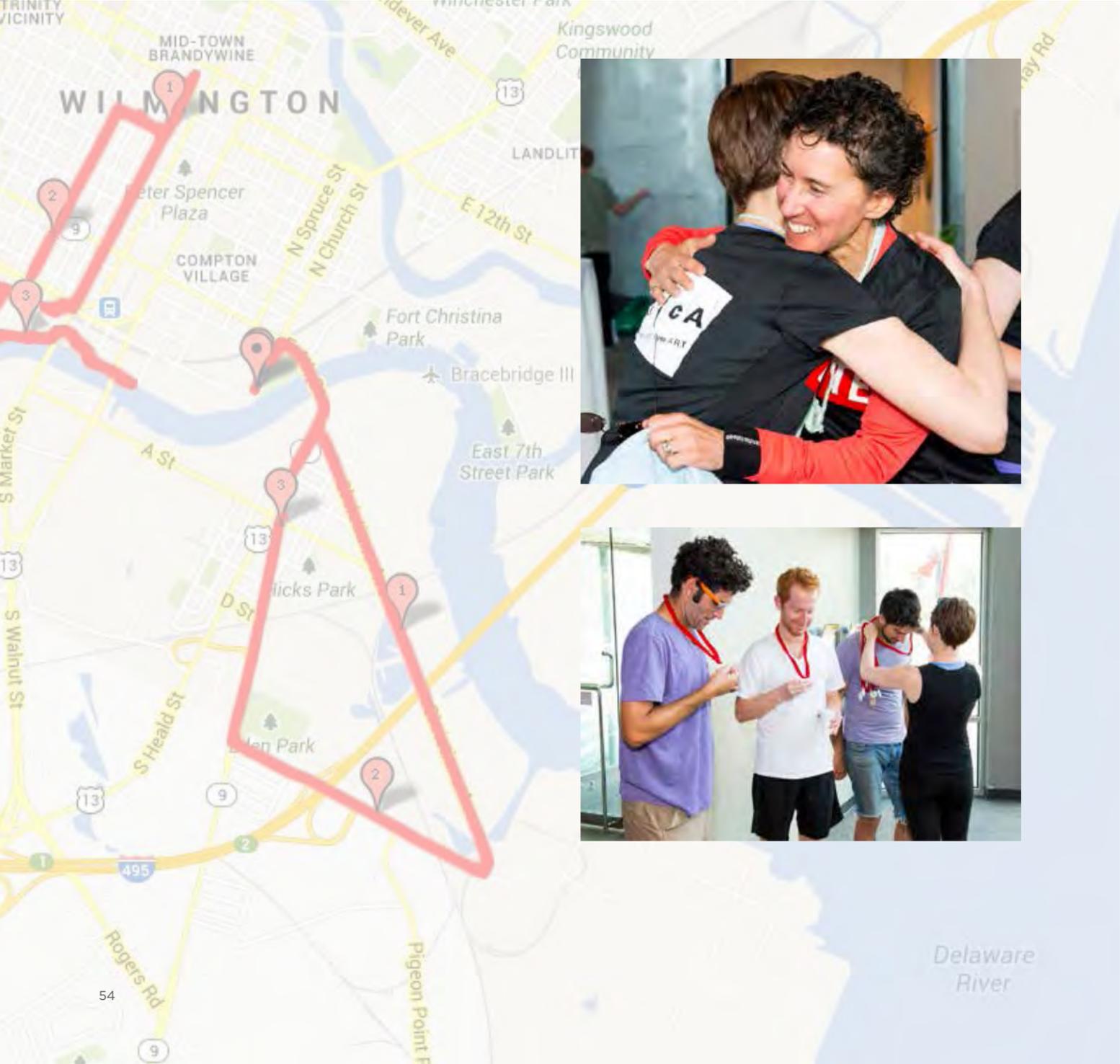
Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts
 200 South Madison Street, Wilmington, DE 19801
 302-656-6466 • <http://www.thedcca.org/>

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Illustration: Lauren Ruth, Three Month Marathon, poster, 2013



Map of Wilmington showing individual Marathon routes



DRIFT: Todd Shalom

You Name It

**Wilmington, DE
July 27, 2013 & July 28, 2013**

For the 2nd Drift project, Todd Shalom led two improvised, participatory walks for groups of 12 through the City of Wilmington. He facilitated the creation of collective poetic responses to the unfolding landscape by incorporating techniques from poetry, movement, sound, and photography.

Shalom is the founder and director of Elastic City, NYC and works with text, sound and image to re-contextualize the body in space using vocabulary of the everyday. As director of Elastic City, Todd leads his own walks, collaborates with artists to lead joint walks, and works with artists in a variety of disciplines to adapt their expertise to the participatory walk format.

Shalom's work has been presented by organizations such as Abrons Art Center, Creative Time, ISSUE Project Room, The Kitchen, The New Museum, P.S.122 and Printed Matter. He is a graduate of the MFA Writing Program at California College of the Arts and also holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Boston University.





curate + create

CUR EAT

a food based exhibition

CUR(EAT): Michael O'Malley

Community Oven Building Project

Exhibit Dates: August 3, 2013—September 1, 2013
Constance S. & Robert J. Hennessy Project Space

"The oven project serves as an artistic gesture aimed at re-considering the built environment . Using a workshop format to teach oven building and bread making, the piece offers participants an opportunity to learn and reshape their social and physical environments." - Artist Michael O'Malley

An exhibition of socially engaged artworks that combine learning and ritual with the sensory experience of taste in the creative and curatorial process, CUR(EAT) invited visitors to observe and participate in Michael O'Malley's social sculpture. In addition to building a wood fired oven in the gallery and allowing visitors to observe and share in his construction process as part of the DCCA's educational programming around CUR(EAT), O'Malley offered dough-making workshops and the opportunity for visitors to learn about ovens and to bake their own bread.

O'Malley's artistic emphasis on basic materials such as bricks and mortar recalls the significance that Minimalist artists of the 1960s and 70s placed on the reduction of art to its necessary elements. O'Malley also highlights the idea that sculptural objects can be generative models for meaningful work and collective cultural involvement. In 1960, the American artist Mierle Ukeles declared, "My working will be the work." Her focus on the act of cleaning and interacting

with the sanitation service workers of New York City underscored issues of class and gender in the United States. While Ukeles focused on the value of traditional women's and blue-collar work, O'Malley combines a whole systems approach to his social and labor-intensive sculptural process—from growing and harvesting wheat to building ovens and baking bread—demonstrating the way many contemporary artists seek to reconcile disparities between art and life and nature and culture in their work. O'Malley's comprehensive creative process is an aesthetic form that confronts urgent environmental, social, economic demands.

Michael O'Malley was born in South Bend, Indiana, grew up in Northern California, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles and the Catskills of New York. He studied ceramics as an undergraduate at Alfred University in New York and, while earning a Masters of Fine Arts from Stanford University, focused on large-scale installations that altered perceptual and social situations of the body. O'Malley has since engaged the aesthetics and conventions that shape the built environment, and his latest work explores ideas of community, social, and sustainable artistic practice. He is Associate Professor of Art at Pomona College, in Claremont, California.

Maiza Hixson





CUR(EAT): Tom Marioni

The Act Of Drinking Beer With Friends Is The Highest Form Of Art, 1970-2013

September 6, 2013—November 17, 2013
Constance S. and Robert J. Hennessy Project Space

As part of CUREAT, Tom Marioni installed a free beer bar in the Hennessy Project Space Gallery. Marioni is a California-based conceptual artist who re-defines the gallery space, reframing the act of drinking beer with friends as social sculpture.

Born in Cincinnati in 1937, Tom Marioni studied drawing, sculpture, and printmaking at the Cincinnati Art Academy, and in 1959 moved to San Francisco where he began to experiment with performance, sound, the sense of taste, and other non-traditional media.

A pioneer of the West Coast Conceptual Art movement, Marioni drew inspiration from artists such as Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), John Cage (1912-1992), and Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), all of whom challenged the conventions of art. Emphasizing ideas rather than objects as the basis for art, these artists exercised a profound influence on Marioni and other conceptual artists of the 1960's. In 1968, Marioni became a curator at the Bay Area's Richmond Art Center, where he mounted a series of ambitious Conceptual Art shows. In 1970, he founded the

Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco, where he continued to experiment, viewing the concept of the museum as an extension of his work, until he closed it in 1984.

Following in the tradition of the "readymade"—Duchamp's name for common or found objects, which he recontextualized as art—Marioni employed mundane substances such as beer, elevating its significance from a common means of socialization to a catalyst for creative expression and social interaction. This meant that drinking beer with friends could be as profound an experience as gazing at the Mona Lisa. Thus, in Marioni's view, the act of communication itself takes on aesthetic significance. Like Cage, whose work highlighted chance and ordinary sounds as music, Marioni attempts to make art that is as close to everyday life as possible without becoming life itself. Similar to Beuys, who privileged creative action over the precious and static art object, Marioni's conversations and gatherings expand the conventions of painting and sculpture.

Maiza Hixson





LITTLE WHITE CUBES is a series of exhibitions that present the concept of the gallery as a work of art or creative medium. Many artists have subverted the presumed neutrality of the “white cube” exhibition space by parodying or critiquing the authority behind a museum’s institutional framework.

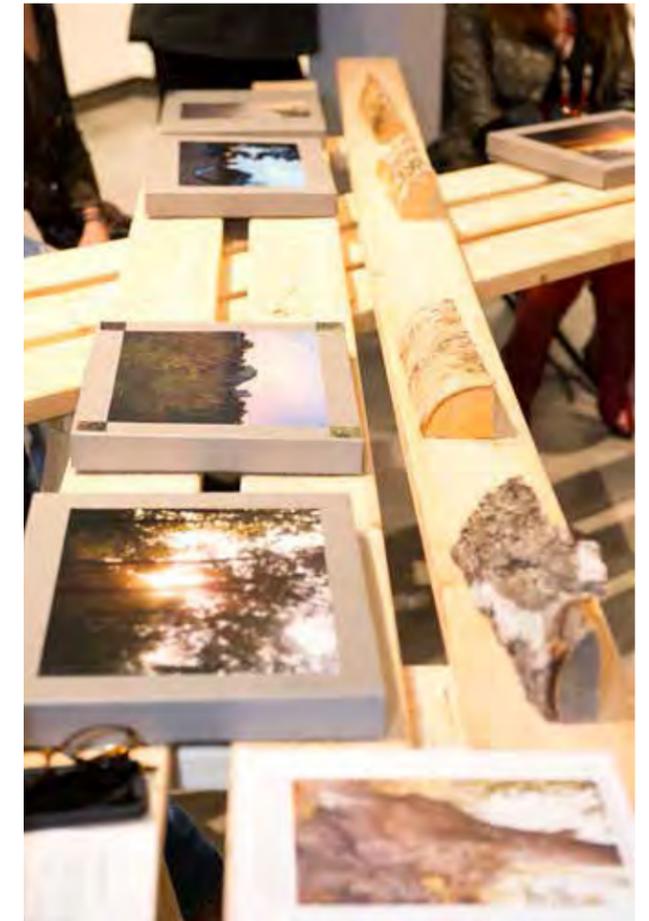
In 1970, Tom Marioni invented the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco and began his social sculpture, *Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*. Erickson and Ziegler’s MoMA Whites (1990) featured a gallery painted with different colors of white preferred by various curators of the Museum of Modern Art. Adopting paraprofessional identities and working in the genre of Institutional Critique, in the 1990s artists such as Andrea Frasier and Fred Wilson respectively assumed the identities of docent and curator, deconstructing museological education and displays and calling the traditional role of the artist into question. Other contemporary artists of the 2000s, such as the Yes Men duo, appropriate corporate identity in order to camouflage themselves as business CEOs in various settings. In current socially engaged artistic practice, many artists increasingly eschew the title of Artist altogether, announcing themselves as politicians, farmers, or urban planners, for example, who treat the gallery as civic center, community garden, or public design studio.

LITTLE WHITE CUBES: ARTISTS’ MAKESHIFT SPACES

Matthew Jensen: The Wilmington Center for the Study of Local Landscape

Matthew Jensen, the first artist in this series of exhibitions, turns the white cube into an ad hoc parks commission, entitled The Wilmington Center for the Study of Local Landscape (WCSLL). As an artist-in-residence at the DCCA for 12 weeks, Jensen began his residency by exploring Delaware on foot, walking 100 miles of byways and back roads from Wilmington to Rehoboth. Collecting found objects along his way, Jensen studied the landscape and immersed himself in the small towns, new subdivisions, strip malls, farm fields, forests, and estuaries that make up the First State. He then compiled a selection of photographs taken along the walk into a magazine called *Delawareness/ Delawalking*, on view in the WCSLL waiting room along with the artifacts discovered on his walks. The artist’s photographs are also on display in the gallery, including Brandywine Boulder, which is a 14-foot tall photograph depicting a stone of equal size found in Brandywine Creek State Park. Jensen’s *Tree Love* is an expansive photographic series installed on two full walls and is an in-depth study of tree graffiti in area parks. The photographs expose generations of love-inspired scrawls that date back to the 1920s. A subjective, artistic response to Wilmington’s natural environment, Jensen’s Center for the Study of Local Landscape underscores the idea that in order to protect our parks, we must first develop a personal relationship to them. Through the artist’s playful use of the gallery as a bureaucratic space, we discover new ways to enjoy, protect, and participate in nature. Presenting a combination of experiences and artworks derived from Wilmington-area landscapes, Jensen’s Center serves, in some ways, like a tourist bureau for visitors new to Wilmington or for locals interested in seeing the parks anew.

As part of his residency partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, Jensen developed additional content on view in the Center through organized, creative activities for 12 local citizens who studied the Wilmington park system. Each person investigated landscapes through individual projects centered on a park of their choice. Collectively, they took over 1000 photographs, a selection of which are on view in archival boxes on the Wilmington Center conference table. Each box represents a single park and the contents encapsulate the individual’s memories, texture studies, letters, and lists of suggestions for park improvement. DCCA visitors are invited to look through each box and reflect on these unique perspectives of local landscapes. At the WCSLL’s opening reception, Jensen and his founding members will meet around the conference table to discuss and ratify their suggestions for area parks and landscapes.





Funded partly through a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, DCCA Artist in Residence Matthew Jensen (Brooklyn, NY) engaged in a 12-week residency during the fall of 2013. A conceptual landscape artist, Jensen began his DCCA Art & Community Visual Arts Residency program by spending a week walking the length of Delaware on foot from Wilmington to Rehoboth, exploring parks and overlooked spaces along the way. The artist's photographs and the artifacts discovered along his walks were displayed in the DCCA galleries in an ad hoc parks commission entitled *The Wilmington Center for the Study of Local Landscapes (WCSLL)*.

As a core component of his residency, and as a focal point of the *WCSLL* exhibition, Jensen collaborated with a diverse group of 12 local photographers (both novice and experienced) to generate a series of intimate explorations of surrounding parks. Jensen created exploratory assignments that challenged participants to look at new ways of observing and experiencing the natural environment. The assignments were intended to be transformative and empowering to participants and inspiring to viewers, as they experienced the beauty that thrives in landscapes that are often undervalued and overlooked. *WCSLL* participant Jen Polillo remarked, "For me, working with Matt was the opportunity I was

very much in need of, the opportunity to slow down, focus, and take time to create. Matt brought together artists from all walks and inspired us to reach beyond our studios to explore, look closer, and take time to enjoy our green spaces. The time I spent working on my assignments for Matt not only yielded some beautiful works, but also was a very insightful and soul soothing experience."

During weekly workshops, participants met with Jensen at the DCCA to discuss a range of topics about landscape and photography in today's image-saturated society. Embracing everything from professional cameras to iPhones, Jensen eased participants into his unique artistic practice by sharing his personal work, stories, technical know-how, and knowledge of other artists who create work in similar urban/suburban settings. Each of his students explored a specific park through various approaches such as observing surfaces and textures, collecting and preserving plant specimens, experiential walks, and turning observations into poetry. Even simple assignments, such as photographing a sunrise, were elevated with Jensen reflecting, "The act of them committing to this assignment was memorable and transformative. It embodied a new experience of a familiar place."

Ultimately, the work of the 12 participants was displayed in mixed-media archival boxes during the *WCSLL* exhibition at the DCCA. As the final assignment was to reflect upon changes they would make to their parks, the exhibition opening featured a town hall-style meeting open to the public. Jensen stated, "Having our final meeting in the gallery and in

public was really exciting and something I had never imagined working so well. The fact that everyone was present showed me that the whole thing worked and that everyone was engaged until the end."

Following the close of the exhibition at the DCCA, select pieces from the *WCSLL* traveled to Blue Ball Barn Gallery at Alapocas Run State Park in North Wilmington. DCCA's Gretchen Hupfel Curator Maiza Hixson described the project at a well-received lecture at the Blue Ball Barn Gallery.

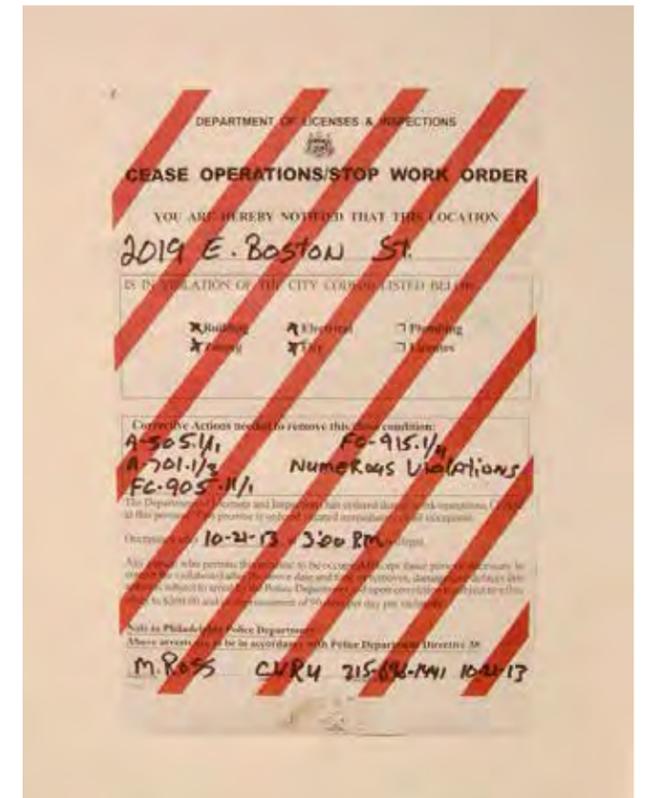


LITTLE WHITE CUBES: ARTISTS' MAKESHIFT SPACES

Little Berlin: An Undefined Artist Space

The Philadelphia-based artistic collaborative Little Berlin repurposes the Hennessy Project Space as an improvised art space for Little White Cubes, a curatorial project that contextualizes the gallery as work of art or creative medium. Founded in 2007 by two artists, Little Berlin identifies itself as an "undefined exhibition space" run by approximately ten members who approach curating from a creative, collaborative perspective. Current Little Berlin members treat the DCCA gallery as a makeshift satellite of the actual gallery located in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood. Installing a TV stack for screening documentation of prior events, a "zine" library with armchair seating, a live video feed, and performance area in the gallery, Little Berlin's treatment of the museum space exemplifies new media experimentation coupled with a do-it-yourself ethos.

Many artists have subverted the presumed neutrality of the "white cube" exhibition space by parodying or critiquing the authority behind a museum's institutional framework. In 1970, Tom Marioni invented the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco and began his social sculpture, *Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*. Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler's *MoMA Whites* (1990) featured a gallery painted with different colors of white preferred by various curators of the Museum of Modern Art. Adopting a paraprofessional identity and working in the genre of Institutional Critique, in the 1990s artist Andrea Frasier delivered a tour as a museum docent, deconstructing museological education and calling the traditional role of the artist into question. Other contemporary artists of the 2000s, such as the Yes Men duo, appropriate corporate identity in order to camouflage themselves as business CEOs in various settings. In current socially engaged artistic practice, many artists increasingly eschew the title of Artist altogether, announcing themselves as politicians, farmers, or urban planners, for example, who treat the gallery as civic center, community garden, or public design studio.



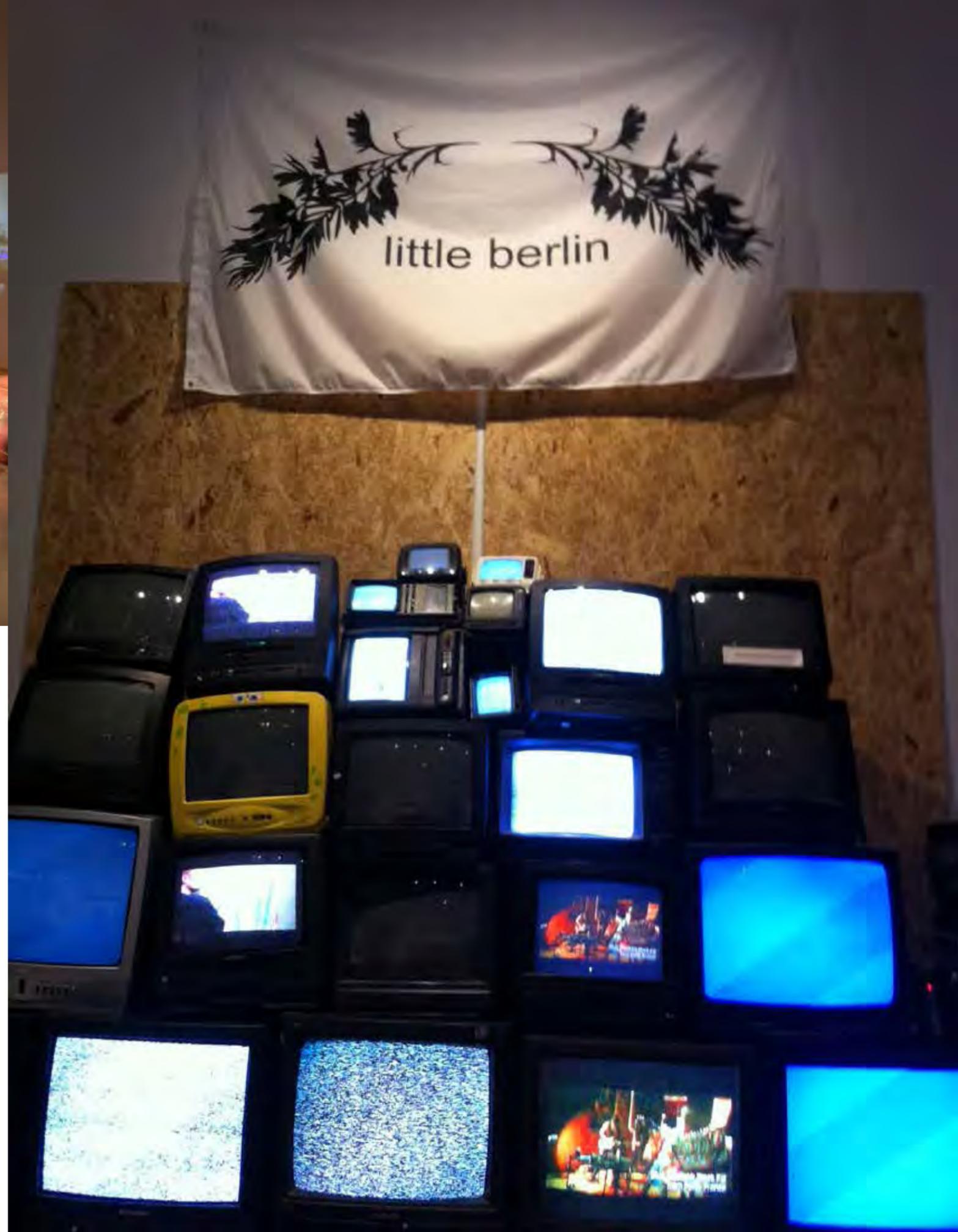


Little Berlin was founded in 2007 by Kristen Neville-Taylor and Martha Savery. Pushing aside what was originally their studio space and removing walls to put up new ones, they opened the gallery doors in October at the Berks Warehouse (1801 N. Howard Street) to a warm reception. Someone told Neville-Taylor and Savery that with artists rehabbing buildings and starting up projects in a forgotten neighborhood, Philadelphia's Kensington felt like postwar Berlin. Neville and Savery liked the notion, so they named their new space Little Berlin.

In 2009, the gallery, which up to this point had organized monthly exhibitions and dozens of events under the curation of only two individuals, became a collective of curatorial members. To help with funding and running the gallery, which operates with a DIY ethic and no outside financial support, Neville-Taylor and Savery put out an open call for membership for an "undefined exhibition space." The new team included Robert "Tim" Panella, Tyler Kline, Masha Badinter, Beth Heinly, Alex Gartlemann, and Sam Belkowitz. When asked about Little Berlin's goals Savery responded, "We don't want to be a traditional collective. The members aren't expected to do the usual show-and-tell artwork, but will have a say in what we do as an organization." Members came from various

After several conflicts arose at the original location, Little Berlin members decided it had outgrown its location within the Berks warehouse and moved to a new location at the Viking Mill building (2430 Coral Street) in 2010. At the time, Viking Mill was five floors of hallway with a scattering of artist studios, practice spaces for bands, and a few machine shops. The new space designated for Little Berlin was otherwise a hole in the wall, in an unused part of the warehouse, but offered 1200 sq. feet of potential and an attached courtyard for outdoor events. The renovations of the space prompted the creation of the zine "How To Turn A Cave Into A White Box" which documented the six-months process by which members of Little Berlin changed a dilapidated warehouse space into a polished white wall gallery space.

With the renovations completed, Little Berlin reopened its doors in May 2011. Many of the exhibitions at the new location began to boast a convergence of internet-based artwork with more traditional artworks found typically inside an art gallery. This motif is one that set Little Berlin apart from other galleries in the city of Philadelphia, keeping openings on the cutting edge of new media. Additionally, Little Berlin's members, often referred to as curatorial members, began practicing within the boundaries of "curating" as art practice, exhibiting databases (Flashflood, March 2012; >get>put,



November 2012), displaying anonymously-made memes and products (PRRRSONA, September 2012; Repeat, April 2013), showing the work of faux artists (Limits and Demonstrations, October 2013), and even hosting a giant Dionysian party complete with its own rock-based currency (Plato's Porno Cave, January 2012; March 2013).

In 2012, member Angela McQuillan learned the Viking Mill landlord also owned the large vacant lot adjacent to the building and negotiated a multiple year rent-free lease in exchange for developing the plot of land. Through a successful Knight Arts Challenge Grant received in 2012-2013, Little Berlin built the Fairgrounds, a large outdoor community park and sculpture garden, which has hosted barbecues, movie screenings, block parties, lots of gardening, and the elusive mobile EverNever Night Market as well as commissioned several sculptors to create the various artworks scattered around the grounds.

By 2013, many of the original members of Little Berlin had parted ways with the gallery; some becoming too tied up in their own art making schedules and others moving on to other projects. Beth Heinly and Maria Dumlao (a member addition in 2011) moved on to join Vox Populi. Kelani Nichole (a member addition in 2011) opened her own gallery in Williamsburg, called Transfer, focusing specifically on Internet-based art. The only remaining member of the original flagship collective is Tyler Kline. The other members



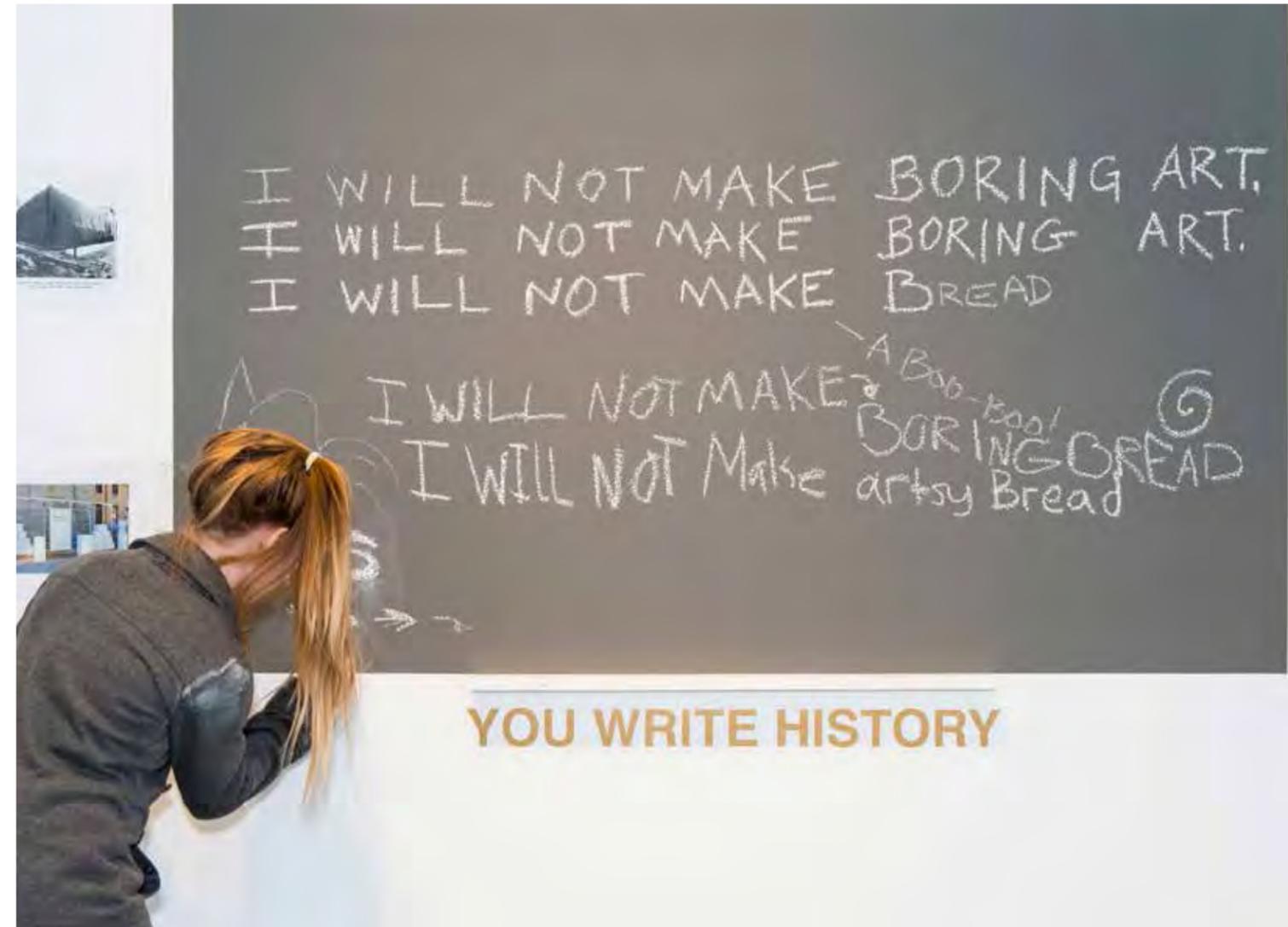
include Lee Tusman, Marshall James Kavanaugh, Erin Bernard, Patrick Quinn, Patrick Koziol, and Peter Erickson with three new recent members Eric Danger Clark, Madeline Hewitt, and Veronica A. Perez. With this new cast of creative laborers picking up where those who preceded them left off, Little Berlin has grown into an epicenter of culture for its current East Kensington home, and the city of Philadelphia as a whole. Each month it hosts events like the ongoing Dream Oven concerts, film screenings, poetry readings, lectures, wrestling matches, and other one-off events in addition to the exhibitions curated by its members.



LITTLE WHITE CUBES: ARTISTS' MAKESHIFT SPACES

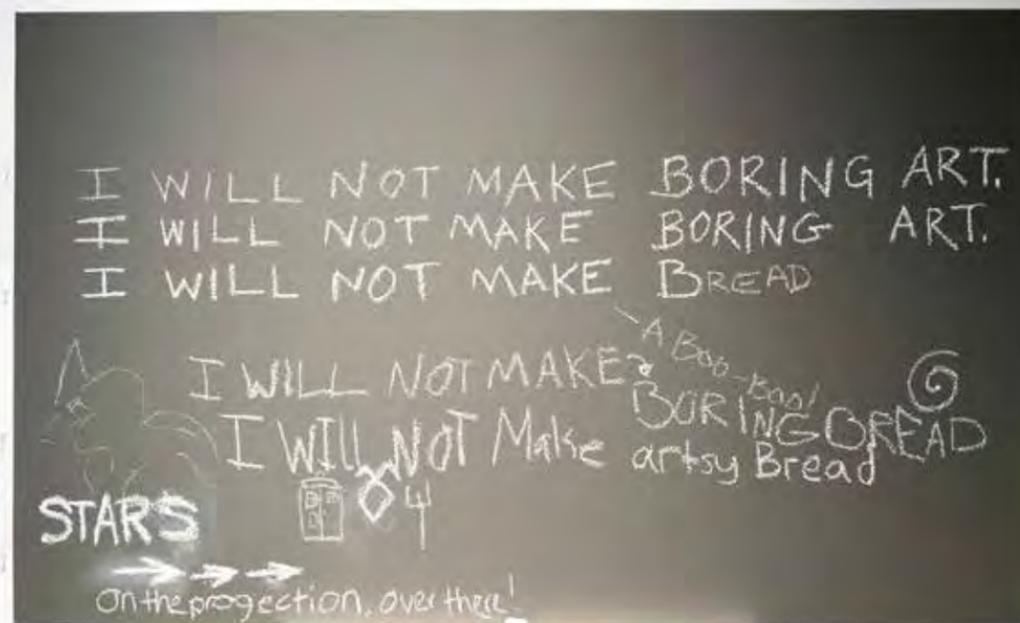
DCCA University: Gallery as School

In keeping with the Little White Cubes theme of makeshift artists' gallery spaces, this third iteration functions as an alternative school for critical dialogue surrounding the institutional framework of the gallery and exhibitions as cultural objects. The title of DCCA University is meant to reference the ancient Greek origins of museums, which were primarily devoted to scholarship. Hence, the DCCA University visitor is invited to peruse the University's modest library with relevant texts, write down ideas on the adjacent chalkboard, and view the Powerpoint presentation on the history and development of contemporary artistic and curatorial practice. Creating a rhetorical dialogue with the theme of Little White Cubes, a littler white cube has been constructed within the larger gallery and features dynamic programming throughout the month of March. Lastly, visitors are invited to conceptualize their own exhibitions by filling out complimentary exhibition proposal forms and pinning them to the homosote board. DCCA University overturns the conventional curatorial practice of displaying art objects and redefines curating as an alternative form of education and collective knowledge production.





CLASSROOM



YOU WRITE HISTORY



A General Theory of Tonight:

Script by Pablo Helguera and Collaborators adapted by Maiza Hixson

1st Half of Script (Pages 1 - 13) will be read as follows:

Maiza will be played by Jerry

Jerry will be played by Maiza

John will be played by John

2nd Half of Script (Pages 14 - 26) will be read as follows:

John will be played by Delona

Maiza will be played by Kathrine

Jerry will be played by Amy

JERRY HODGE

Good evening, and welcome to A General Theory of Tonight. My name is Jerry Hodge.

MAIZA HIXSON

I am Maiza Hixson,

JOHN FARNUM

And I am John Farnum,

JERRY

and we all are actors.

JOHN

We are being asked by the script I am reading to say that we are professional and renowned actors, which we are not.

JOHN

Now, to clarify a few things first:

JERRY

It is not our intention, nor our interest, to impersonate artists and curators, to parody art, nor to reiterate what half a century of institutional critique has so effectively done;

JOHN

not that we did not enjoy our little task at hand,

MAIZA

Or that we didn't operate under full awareness that it may be impossible for us to convince you that we tried to avoid irony.

JERRY

Our aim is perhaps more difficult, more ambitious, more idealistic, and less connected to any particular exhibition.

JOHN

This is not a simulation. It is not meant to "pretend to be" anything. Instead it is what it intends to be: a playful intervention on the dynamics of art history, particularly as they operate in an environment like this;

JERRY

Environments where, either by whether desire or need, we subject ourselves to many viewpoints but mainly many expositions, mostly microscopic in scale, a wide range of expertise that covers the entirety of art history from prehistory to, in this case, tonight.

MAIZA

In this second decade of the XXIst century, when single-angled narratives have given place to multiple perspectives and where our brains have been rewired to divide our attention to multiple channels of information, some of the most pressing problems that art history needs to address today is how to balance the natural demands of the profession toward specialized knowledge with the enormous need to gain a general understanding of what is happening in the recent and immediate past;

JOHN

how to synthesize effectively and in a way that actually bears some relevance to the world we live in today.

JERRY

If we agree that the most consequential art that is made at any given time is so because of how it grasps and defines the time in which it was made, then it should naturally follow that the art historical profession should operate in the same way.

MAIZA

As we know, the contemporary art speak focuses so much on the minute, and too little on the long view,

JERRY

That is, on the long view of the immediate.

JOHN

In other words, in places like this museum, we find ourselves with great thirst for understanding what the heck is going on with contemporary art,

JERRY

Hopes to understand whether any of this so called “art” at the DCCA will last and to distill what are the most important questions of the moment,

MAIZA

And yet we usually are left with excessively detailed information, with little time or energy or help to make sense for all of it.

JOHN

The second lingering question tends to be: when does art history start?

MAIZA

Indeed: when does the immediate past turn into the past, which turns into the landscape that is distant enough from us to start giving us meaning? Will we become part of contemporary art history tonight? If so, who will write it down? (DOES ANYBODY HAVE A PEN?)

JERRY

When do we start historicizing, and when and under what conditions can we overhistoricize?

MAIZA

And isn't it the case that in the age of the 24 hour news cycle this relationship has changed?

JERRY

Indeed, isn't it true that the day after, say, an exhibition like this one opens it's already history?

MAIZA

And isn't it also the case that we always appear to be utterly unprepared to understand that fact?

JERRY

Could we join the depth of art history with the mass appeal of journalism?

JOHN

For that reason, we believe we need to re-imagine the process by which we understand and relate to the immediate.

JERRY

Not with the objective to quickly discard it, but on the contrary: to think of it intelligently and sensibly, and prevent this seemingly inevitable tendency of immediate detachment to take hold.

JOHN

This is the premise of creating a General Theory of Tonight.

MAIZA

It is less an attempt to fix the transient in a little white box, and more an impulse to make sense of that which has immediately transpired with our own logic and our own articulation, before others come and do it for us in the future.

JERRY

And to contest, at the very least, that need for synthesis that we need on a daily basis to move forward.

JOHN

Welcome.

JERRY

And now, precisely because we are talking about the idea of immediate historization, and because this is in essence a contemporary art exhibition, the writers of this script have proposed that one of the subjects we put to a debate today is on whether there are definitive views of art history. In museums, for instance, we often see examples where a particular history is told in what may appear “definitive” ways, where a period is given a final, “definitive” reading. For many of you this is an old and perhaps annoying problem, known as the center-periphery problem.

MAIZA

We first need to say that this obsession with the definitive history is not particularly exclusive to Art history. The Creationist Church and The Hagley Museum, for instance, have the same tendency to want to write definitive histories, histories that consistently leave out the periphery—like atheists and poor people.

JOHN

I want to start by saying, in broad strokes, that the ubiquity for the last thirty years of the center-periphery conundrum has become more of a career opportunity for academic papers than a real debate. The reality is that the producers of art history have already recognized for many years that alternative

histories, that is, for instance, alternative modernisms, need to be recognized, but they just can't be incorporated cleanly into a single narrative.

MAIZA

Ok, let's see... going back to the Hagley Museum for example: they represent a capitalist legacy of DuPont's Wilmington where people go to explore local history, without seriously questioning whether they were part of it or not.

JOHN

I don't think there is such lack of awareness, nor is the comparison very useful right now, really, come on.

MAIZA

The issue, and you are proving my point, is that the most important thing is that the center never has to respond to the questions of those outside of the canon.

JERRY

What kind of questions?

JOHN

I don't even know what we are debating.

JERRY

But I said...

MAIZA

Ok, let's bring up a recently reviled case in point; Ken Jonson's New York Times review of the Now Dig This! exhibition at PS1, where he theorizes that black artists are just imitating the art of previous white artists.

JOHN

First of all, Ken Johnson is not even worth dignifying with a discussion. He is the most extreme and substandard intellectual example you could come up with.

MAIZA

Ok, let me try something else. As a Delawarean don't you think you are in the periphery?

JOHN

That's a complicated question

JERRY

Why?

JOHN

Do I feel out of touch? No, because Delawareans are some of the most well traveled people in the world.

MAIZA

But do you like it when people are indifferent about what may be happening, for instance, in the art scene in Wilmington?

JOHN

It is a great art scene here.

MAIZA

But nobody knows it. I mean, no one outside Wilmington I guess. So why should I care about the art scene in Wilmington if I don't have to travel outside of New York to see great art?

JOHN

The point you are trying to make, if I understand correctly, is moot if you are talking about contemporary art. Today great art is hard to hide; it is on the web, it can become viral in seconds; curators travel all over the world to put art in hundreds of biennials, the strangest and more exotic the better.

MAIZA

The real issue is whether there should be a canon at all--that there simply needs to be multiple stories.

JOHN

But I don't think anyone is questioning that.

JERRY

What does it mean to be left out of the canonical history?

But actually, let's go back to the question: Can we have the hubris to definitively state the history of a particular artistic movement?

JOHN

I wouldn't define it as hubris but there is something to be said about the importance of the clear narrative.

MAIZA

It is the clear narrative versus the messy truth.

JERRY

What is a clear narrative and what is a messy truth?

MAIZA

Well the Brandywine River Museum's canonical story down the street is a clear narrative. It was a visual argument that led the Museum to choose the Brandywine School of Illustration in a neatly packaged genealogy of artists.

JOHN

I guess I agree that the canonical narrative may be too neat and that the world is too messy, but where do you find accuracy, I mean, truthful stories, in that mess?

MAIZA

You know what? The more I think about clean narratives, I realize that I am not attached to truth anymore...

JERRY

So you are into telling dirty lies?

MAIZA

No! Gosh. It is not about telling lies instead but that there is a fundamental fallacy in "telling a true narrative".

JOHN

That is only if you are a bad curator.

MAIZA

I don't think that when a curator is curating he or she is supposed to tell the truth. He or she could be an unreliable narrator who creates new ways for people to reflect on culture. So if the way you are presenting art and culture feels boring, it's because it is.

JOHN

But — I am sorry— the canonical modernist model has not ceased to function. Why do so many thousands of people go every day to see Picassos and Cezannes and all that?

MAIZA

Well, those have become familiar narratives, stories we recognize and believe we understand and maybe even embellish and we feel rewarded when we can tell them to others.

JERRY

Ok, you talk about canonical narratives as how they are dominant, but...

...but here is a question: if I am not part of them, if they don't concern me, if I live in another part of the world, why should I worry why they are important?

MAIZA

Because they have the most exposure and what gets the most exposure dominates what gets discussed and thought about.

JERRY

I am a bit lost on how the dots connect. Excuse me if I digress.

One thing that I found fascinating last time I went to the Delaware Art Museum was that I was looking at a Norman Rockwell and then exited to the sculpture garden where there's a giant bronze cartoon, and you would just stand there and stare at this huge caricature with his head in his hands...

JOHN

But that is a very mainstream artist...

JERRY

But I went from a Rockwell to a crying cartoon! How the heck is that a narrative in any way?

JOHN

Because it is a really cerebral work...

JERRY

It's like, it's like that artist who paints pregnant women with animal heads...

MAIZA

Hunter Clarke?

JERRY

She's got the entire animal kingdom breast-feeding those babies....

And there's that MFA show, with the neon sign, is the neon sign still here?

MAIZA

It's almost gone...show ends March 9.

JERRY

Darn—I was hoping I missed it! But anyway, ok, the point is: how do the animal mothers and the neon sign interrelate? How do they all fit into one neat narrative?

JOHN

Jerry, that's Contemporary Art. We were really talking about Modern narratives. It really is like apples and oranges.

JERRY

I'm sorry.

MAIZA

No, it's ok. Point taken that narratives can be arbitrary, and an institution that commands attention has a responsibility to recognize their power and whatever they represent as good.

JOHN

But what if people ONLY want to see the Pre-Raphaelites and Howard Pyle? What if the demand is for the more conventional art? And I am not talking only about the center here.

MAIZA

Well, institutions could admit their own reality, which is that that's what they are doing, that they are supporting that they have to command some power, to open their process, to detract from this idea, because that is what power does.

JOHN

You seem to be saying that now it matters what institutions do. Before you were saying, "why does it matter to me what a big institutions do if it doesn't concern me?"

JERRY

No, I was the one who said that why should, say, people in Wilmington care about what the big museums in Philadelphia or New York do. My point is that they are always asking about themselves and sometimes it is not about you or Wilmington.

MAIZA

They try to spread the word about their "important" art shows but that is another act of imperialism. As if we don't hear enough about the New York art world. So they have to feed it to us like it was McDonalds. While there are other invisible artists here that are completely ignored, the story of New York artists is being written. Anyone outside of that canon is exceptional...

JOHN

But where are these mystery artists? Where are they hiding?

MAIZA

In the local art scenes. For example, Andrew Wyeth was not the only Modern painter living in the area. It takes a scholar with a lot of patience to go and dig out that stuff.

What I was talking about is the process of knowledge production. But however this circulation works, it works in how these artists position themselves in relation to centers of power, either an artist gets plucked out of his own context...

SWITCH ROLES: JERRY

Like Andrew Wyeth?

MAIZA

...Or however power gets exported to other sites, but that artist's work has to be packaged into something that can work in relationship to the existing discourse of the processing of new and different information.

JOHN

Sorry, I didn't understand a word of what you said.

MAIZA

I mean that a Wilmington artist's work for example has to represent all of Delaware while the established New York art world looks for Delaware art that is also in harmony with New York. My point is that Art history is either a REAL MESS or just a BIG FAT LIE.

JERRY

Very well. And now, I would like that we make a brief switch and turn into another old-time, related subject. What does it mean to make art today? How can museums like the DCCA and the DELAWARE ART MUSEUM support independent artistic thought, even while they compromise it?

MAIZA

To me the most important question is: If an artist exhibits radical art in a museum, does this affiliation compromise the artist's radical agenda?

JOHN

What does affiliation mean?

MAIZA

MONEY. Usually the dirty kind or the ethically compromised.

JOHN

What about artist affiliations? The world doesn't care if you don't have a job as an artist.

MAIZA

In the case of artists it may be a commercial gallery.

JOHN

In Canada, for example, affiliation means artists' collectives... all are funded by the state; none of them

question that. Do you think you can be outside of a system? What is artistic freedom?

MAIZA

I feel free when I get to do whatever I want 2/3rds of my time.

JOHN

But the fact that you feel independent doesn't mean that you are— you are still tied to a system.

MAIZA

I feel independent because I am, because within the system where I live, whatever I do in the form of art or other things, is valued by people. I wouldn't regard, for instance, curating in an art museum as an independent art practice. The museum censors you.

JOHN

Wait a minute.

JERRY

John?

JOHN

Sorry, but that is a bunch of crap! The museum can give you more freedom to curate than a commercial gallery. How could you say that you can't be free because you have a curating job?

JERRY

I didn't say that.

JOHN

I don't mean you, but Maiza.

MAIZA

I didn't say that either.

JERRY

Yes Maiza you did say it.

MAIZA

No I didn't.

JOHN

Yes, you did!

MAIZA

No I didn't!

JERRY

Look, it's here, clearly written, in the script.

MAIZA

Oh. Did I? Oh well then. But I did not mean that I am free because I just exhibit artwork. It is not about putting objects on display for entertainment. Let me put it this way. How do you critique racism, sexism, and hierarchy within the institution? You have an agenda to fight injustice, but how do you do it without getting fired or compromising your own ethics? I am for creating my own ship. I don't believe in working outside or parasitically inside an institution.

JOHN

BUT an institution is not just a museum or commercial gallery. An institution is the art market, the art world.... Take for example this Little White Cubes exhibition in the DCCA.

JERRY

Pardon the pun, but this Little White Cubes show is really OFF THE WALL, right? GET IT?

JOHN

THIS EXHIBITION IS PROBABLY MISUNDERSTOOD BY EVERY ONE, inside and outside the DCCA!

JERRY

Which brings us back to the question we started with: What is artistic freedom? What compromises your mission as an individual, what compromises one's ethics?

MAIZA

Well as an artist or curator, you feel a pressure to entertain people with traditionally beautiful pictures and objects even when you want to show new and different things and ways of curating. Maybe people WANT what they don't NEED in terms of conventional art. Little White Cubes literally attempts to exhibit the dilemma of a museum trying to talk about the difficulty of dictating what is art and whose art history is ultimately to be written. It is this exactly why I'm reading this script about how to decide on a general theory of tonight! Who decides what is contemporary art history? What about the artists who aren't here tonight? Who would rather stay home and paint than work for a museum or go to gallery openings?

JOHN

But how long can that last? How long until you need actual money, when you need to pay the bills?

JERRY

Good point.

MAIZA

I've never been anti-money. My grandpa always said, "You must earn your living and THEN practice virtue."

JOHN

And how do you find funds?

MAIZA

If you work within a collective, generate power within the collective, and redistribute your privilege within the group. It takes a lot of trust, commitment to the group—and in the end you might still end up broke.

JOHN

But the reality is that the idea of being fully autonomous or outside of the market is ridiculous. But perhaps there ARE benefits to being a parasite of the museum.

JERRY

That is an ugly word. Doesn't sound so beneficial.

JOHN

Call it however you want it. Many successful art projects are attached to the museum. Does that disqualify them? No.

JERRY

I suppose that if you are happy working for the museum man, that's great. If you think you can make a run of the gallery market, then try. If you lack the chops or have different politics, or make work that's not going to sell, then it's important you find a way to pay your rent whereby they have the time to continue making your work. There's a lot of different ways to do that.

JOHN

But no matter how you go about it, you will have to work shit jobs to subsidize your creative practice.

JERRY

I think that we agree, that in some cases artists can successfully and subversively bite the hand that feeds them.

MAIZA

You guys... you guys change the subject all the time. This is the thing: you will always find an institutional framework if your mind is institutionalized. So naturally you can't see outside of the institution. It is a scary place. It is difficult as well to see and practice outside of the art market, out of traditional art history and object production.

JERRY

I am glad that you brought us back to the beginning.

MAIZA

I actually object to this format of the scripted discussion.

JOHN

And why is that?

MAIZA

It's too constraining, and you can't come up with meaningful stuff on the spot, and it symbolizes all that is wrong with what we talked about in terms of narratives and autonomy.

JOHN

We aren't always free to say what we want.

JERRY

Tonight is a case in point.

LITTLE WHITE CUBES: RELATED PROGRAMMING

2014 Gretchen Hupfel Symposium Pablo Helguera: *The Iconoclast Arguments: A Byzantine Discussion*



Pablo Helguera

ASK LEO

Characters

John Muse, as himself

Joseph Gonzalez, as himself

Maiza Hixson, as herself

Audience Member 1 [Pablo Helguera, in disguise]

Audience Member 2

Maiza Hixson

Welcome to the DCCA and to the 2014 Gretchen Hupfel Symposium titled ART: A Creative Debate. My name is Maiza Hixson and I am delighted to bring a group of exceptional scholars to discuss some of the most pressing issues in contemporary art today. The subject that we decided to approach this year has to do with what we believe has become a central point of contention around new kinds of art making that cannot be supported by the existing infrastructures of the art world. Art that cannot be commodified, sold, collected or owned in any way is nothing new. But these days, the art world faces a particular period of clash of practices. As we know, the production of

art is excessive and appears to be in overdrive with the creation of millions of new art works a year and a multi-billion dollar industry of objects that museums and collectors all over the world fight to obtain. After several decades of this growth, and despite the large crowds at art fairs, biennials and museums, there is a belief amongst many that the art world is increasingly out of touch with the outside world. As part of this sentiment, a growing group of artists over the years have taken strong positions against the massive global process of commodification of art and the current economy of art as it is — a reaction that has included the emergence of socially engaged art and other types of political art practices.

The question we want to ask tonight is: are we in the presence of a new revolution in art?

And, is there a fundamental change taking place in how we look at the work of art today, or how we give it meaning in our society today? We have kindly asked John Muse and Joseph Gonzalez to join us in this discussion, which we have asked them to sustain as a debate around this question. Thank you and please join me in welcoming them.

Muse

Thank you Maiza. I am very pleased to be here with you tonight. The question for the debate tonight, as Maiza mentioned is: are we amidst a new revolution in art making? And, is there a fundamental change taking place or not?

My position here is that we are indeed living a revolutionary moment that will change the way, not only the way we exhibit art, but the way we think about art, period. We all are familiar with the arch of modernism, whose end we have simply try to extend in a long and prolonged death for many decades. Probably there will be many decades more where artists will continue making art that refers to that history, in the same way that there are many artists who continue making academic painting today. But the fact is that we are seeing another mode of art making, one that doesn't depend on museums, or in the gallery scene. Young artist make blogs, ephemeral videos and objects that transform over time, that are not permanent, material or stable. Others have merged their life and their work so intricately that they don't bother making a distinction between what they consider living and art making. Socially engaged art has grown exponentially over the last five years and we have seen with it, a remarkable community of artists that are taking a political stance that directly challenges the status quo. So, in many ways, yes, I do think that this is a unique phenomenon that had not been seen before, and what it is bringing to us is both unexpected and exciting.

Gonzalez

Thank you so much for having me here. My position in this discussion is that this so-called revolution or shift in art making, while I concede it's interesting, I would not rush to declare it a seismic movement that may change things in a fundamental sense. For that you first need to consider that, every few years, revolutions in art are routinely declared; we just don't have the perspective sometimes to see the dimension of changes from the present, which is usually pretty small. In this sense, there has always been political art, or art with a social content. So a shift of social and political consciousness is not unusual, but rather the reaffirmation of the rule. Secondly, there is a very established cycle of countercultural movements that eventually get absorbed into mainstream culture. This means that talented new artists, usually from younger generations, often enter into the scene presenting ideas that may rebel against the status quo, and at first are ignored. At some point they do become accepted and absorbed by the mainstream, and at that point they themselves become mainstream. Look at performance art. It emerged as a radical practice that rebelled against the institution, and now it has been entirely domesticated. You can sell and collect and preserve performance in the same way that you can sell and collect and preserve a painting. So I think that what we are looking at now is nothing other than another wave of what has been a pretty slow but still continuum of ideas that came from modernism.

Muse

I would like to question your comparison between culture and counterculture and what is happening in art right now.

Gonzalez

Great! Go ahead.

Muse

Basically, when you look at the vast majority of postwar art and art up to and including the 90s, most of it is dependent of the gallery space and the museum to exist. That is no longer the case.

Gonzalez

What do you mean? We are dependent of this institution to have this conversation, aren't we?

Muse

But we don't necessarily have to be here to have this conversation. We could have it at the bar next door. The frame of art is no longer institutional, but the institution is now simply discursive. It's what you and I decide what art is and then discuss it.

Gonzalez

But I would say...

Muse

Hold on, let me finish the thought. Because the new frame of art is just discursive, and actually barely, like museum is increasingly useless to host that kind of art. It's fulfilling its original mission of being a mausoleum.

Gonzalez

But have you been inside a large museum recently? Places like the Tate, MoMA, the MET, the Pompidou. Hundreds of thousands, millions of people visit. People are in awe at what they see. These don't feel like mausoleums to me. I think we too quickly keep thinking of the art of the past as dead art. It is never dead to me. Its like what Faulkner said, the past is not dead, it's not even past.

Muse

Don't get me wrong; I recognize the role that museums play today. But the large museum, even if it tries to fulfill an important mission in serving the larger public, that makes it very clumsy when it tries to explore the cutting edge of art. It is not surprising that people associate museums with churches where you come to pay your respects to your favorite saint. Or like libraries where you just go see past references. Or tourist destinations, where people mainly go to take pictures of themselves and the art just to say they were there. But these places increasingly are out of touch with our present debates and problems. You can say it is present only because it is here in front of you right now and whatever you are feeling about that art work you are feeling it in the present, but then everything should be present. If I look at

a million year old fossil then that should also be considered contemporary just because its here?

Gonzalez

I think you are drawing the wrong conclusions from simply looking at cultural tourism, which of course exists, but museums play a much more important role: they are the natural necessity of visual culture.

Muse

But the problem is that most art is not visual anymore.



Gonzalez

Most art is not visual? Maybe that art that you are referring to is not visual art after all. Maybe it's something else, like activism, or social work.

Muse

No, I am serious. I mean, don't you think it is ridiculous when you try to treat reproductions of say, a happening as if it was the reproduction of a painting? Museums do that ALL the time, only confusing the audience.

Gonzalez

That may be more of a problem with the work, not with the museum. There's a saying: you can dress the monkey in silk, but the monkey remains. If the work is not visually compelling I don't see how that can be a strength.

Muse

Are you kidding? But that goes back all the way to Duchamp! He is the one who said he was against "retinal" art.

Gonzalez

Duchamp is different. He conceived his artworks always to be inside galleries. What I don't understand is why we need to forcibly put art works that don't belong to the narrative of the history of art into a museum if they don't really have anything to do with it.

Muse

Well, I think you are really wrong there, Joseph. The mismatch is not that these new art works don't care or can't fit into a museum, its that we have a whole industry of exhibition venues modeled after XXth century ideas, when the art that is being made right now is XXIst century. It is that museums haven't evolved.

Gonzalez

But then what you are proposing is, essentially, the eradication of art.

Muse

Am I? Wow. How's that?

Gonzalez

You are arguing for museums to stop being places for visual culture.

Muse

I don't know what that even means. What the hell is visual culture?

Gonzalez

The history of art is the history of visual arts. If you are making activism as art, that doesn't belong in a museum, maybe in the museum of activism. Which by the way, I doubt many people would be interested in visiting.

Muse

On the contrary, the modern museum doesn't belong to our day. You can keep the XXth century museums, but those should be left alone to hold the art of the past and we need to build spaces for the present and future.

Gonzalez

Ok, John, that's enough. I just find that this whole anti- museum talk just is hollow and unproductive. The problem with art may not be that there are no places to support it or show it— it's that it is poorly conceived.

Muse

That is the same argument that the French academy used when the Impressionists came around.



Maiza

Ok— I feel I should intervene briefly here. It seems to me that the debate that we are having right now has to do with the visual dimension of art, and how we should think about framing art that does not rely too much or primarily on the visual. Let me follow up with a question then. At what point does visual art stop being visual art, and does it matter?

Gonzalez

Frankly I don't think this is such a difficult question. Visual art stops being visual as soon as it doesn't rely on visuality to make a statement. Then it becomes something else. I think this is what confuses a lot of people.

Muse

I couldn't disagree more. This is like saying that performance art is like bad theater, which is a total misunderstanding about what performance is.

Maiza

I am not sure I follow... how does performance come into the conversation?

Muse

Performance art came from visual arts- it did not come from theater. In the same way artists who do social practice they came from the visual arts, so their gestures, their acts are in dialogue with that history. They need to be understood in terms of that history. So, yes, it absolutely matters how you call it.

Gonzalez

But John — I grant you that this stuff may come from that history, but just because something has emerged from a certain tradition it doesn't mean that it should remain forever an extension of that tradition or abide by the rules of that tradition...for example....

Muse

What do you mean?



Gonzalez

I mean, many artists today who make work outside of museums, outside of the visual tradition of art, outside of object making, have renounced practically every single aspect of what we understand as art making. Some of them don't seem to even care if what they do is called art. So why should a museum for example try to support or present to the public that kind of work that has clearly detached from every premise connected to the visual arts?

Muse

Joseph, that is exactly the point — that this rebellion in art is happening with the objective to rethink the role of art in our lives and to reform the institutions of art. Over decades now artists have tried to erase the boundaries between art and life because they want art to be relevant to life, not to be an isolated thing that is not part of the world we live in.

[an audience member raises the hand]

Maiza

It appears we already have a question. We were going to take questions at the end, but is it ok for either of you that we take a question now?

[all nod]

Audience member 1

Thanks for the discussion--it's interesting, but I wish you all would get to the main point. I guess I am just curious about what either of you understands as the concept itself of art.

Muse

[laughing]

Well... I think we more or less explained...

Audience member 1

I mean, do either of you think that art is a religion?

Muse

What? No. You mean art as religion? No.

Gonzalez

Well, I wouldn't say no exactly. It's more complicated than that.

Muse

You seriously think art is a religion?

Gonzalez

No, I didn't say that.

Maiza

Maybe can we discuss art in terms of spirituality?

Audience Member 1

I didn't say that!

Muse

Art is not a religion—it is art.

Gonzalez

Wait.

Maiza

Ok Joseph, you go.

Gonzalez

Art may not be religion in the sense of it being like Catholicism or whatever, but we can't forget how art and religion have been so closely linked historically. For centuries art was mainly religious and medieval icons in churches that now we call art were not considered art at the time. Malevich...

Muse

But Joseph, hold on before you bring up Malevich.



Gonzalez
Just let me...

Muse
You just were saying that the fact that socially engaged art comes from art history is irrelevant. Why would now the history of religion be relevant for contemporary art?

Gonzalez
But you were the one comparing museums to churches a minute ago! One just can't understand how and why we value artists if we don't understand how religion has determined how we give spiritual power to objects.

Maiza
That's right John, I think you did bring up churches...

Muse
But I was bringing it up to say how that is wrong! Museums should not be churches and art should not be a religion. I don't have anything against religion...

Gonzalez
John, I think you are just against art.

Muse
Me? If you think art and religion are the same thing, you are against both art and religion.

Audience member 1
So both of you are against religion?

Maiza
No, they didn't say that.

Audience member 2
[to audience member 1]
maybe they are both against art.

Gonzalez
I am against stuff that calls itself something and it is not what it says it is.

Muse
Maybe that's where the problem lies.

Gonzalez
What do you mean "that's where the problem lies"?

Muse
You can't go around policing the world with your own definitions. If someone says something is art, it is art, period.

Gonzalez
So if I say that this discussion is art, it is art?

Muse
Absolutely.

Audience Member 1
What if you say that it is religion?

Muse
Well, that is the real difference, right? Nobody goes around pointing at stuff and deciding this pen here is God, or that chair is God. Unless you are mentally deranged. And yet that is what artists have been doing now for a century. It's called "found object". We go back to Duchamp...

Gonzalez
Some people think that there is something deranged about being an artist...

Audience member 2
[interrupting Gonzalez]

Muse
Excuse me... excuse me. I feel we are going in circles in this discussion. And I am disappointed that we have been all sitting here, listening to your arguments that don't seem to lead anywhere. Is this a symposium?



Audience member 1
I agree that we need to focus more on this discussion. Like, this whole discussion about who gets to call something art...isn't it now irrelevant? I mean anything can be art and anyone can be an artist. The point is, is any given art work relevant and what makes it relevant?

Muse
Thank you. That is what I was trying to say.

Gonzalez
But why didn't you say it?

Muse
I was trying but everyone else was talking!

Maiza
I feel we are off track again.

Audience member 1
Can I ask another question?

Muse
Ok, but let's just move please from the religious discussion.

Audience member 1

But that's part of my question. I guess it's not a question but a statement.

Gonzalez

No more statements. Lets just stick to questions.

Maiza

I think it's ok--let's hear.

Audience member 1

Thank you. Let me see--I took some notes [looking at some notes].

This discussion was billed originally as a discussion on the iconoclast arguments, which is why I came. I am interested in that subject, as I studied it very closely in college.

Audience member 2

Me too. That's also why I came. I would never come otherwise. I hate art discussions because they don't lead anywhere.

Audience member 1

So let me provide some context for the audience.

Maiza

Sure.

Audience member 1

So, in the 8th century Emperor Leo III forbid the depiction of Christ in churches and temples and ordered all the images removed. This caused a huge pushback that lasted for a whole century. There were the iconoclasts, who were in favor of destroying all depictions of Christ, which is a prohibition by the way that comes from the Old Testament.

Audience member 2

This reminds me a bit of Occupy Museums.

Audience member 1

Were they proposing to destroy art inside museums?

Audience member 2

Well, not exactly, but their rhetoric...

Audience member 1

The point is that this was a very divisive debate that created a huge crisis in the church.

Muse

Can I ask a question?

Audience member 2

No. I want to hear more about what he has to say. [pointing at Audience member 1]

Audience member 1

It's ok. Go ahead.

Muse

Why did Emperor Leo suddenly become so invested in this idea of destroying images?

Audience member 1

Nobody knows. I mean, nobody knows for sure. There is the idea of going back to the fundamentals of the Old Testament as I said, but there may have been a political reason too. I mean, just think about it: the tensions at the time between Christians, Jews and Muslims, who forbid images as well. So to forbid images could have been a way to create harmony between religions.



Audience member 2

But maybe also take power away from the churches, which had accumulated so much power at the time as sites of adoration.

Gonzalez

So what's the larger point?... I mean, how does this connect...?

Audience member 1

You tell me. You are the lecturer.

Gonzalez

You are the one who brought up the question.

Audience member 1

You said no statements. I asked a question, you answer it.

Audience member 2

I don't know the answer, but I do think there is a point here.

Audience member 1

I agree. Do you agree?

Audience member 2

Yes.

Muse

Can I say something?

Audience Member 1

See, this why I asked about art and religion.

Audience member 2

That's right.

Gonzalez

Why?

Audience Member 1

When you really think about it, in the XXIst version of that in art, we are playing the inverse version of the iconoclast debate: if museums are churches, ...

Audience member 2

and if images are art,...

Muse

instead of forbidding depictions we are forbidding non-depictions.

Gonzalez

Who is forbidding?

Muse

Well, you have been pretty forbidding in this conversation...

Gonzalez

I try to be the voice of reason- I am not the one trying to destroy museums.

Muse

Nobody suggested destroying museums.

Gonzalez

Maybe only getting rid of the art inside then. Making museums non-visual?

Audience member 2

We forbid art that is not image-based.

Audience member 1

Well, not exactly. Forbid is a strong word. You could say though that those who are most attached to the traditional values of XXth century art forbid letting art ascend to the hierarchy of divinity that image-based art has had, that those sacred paintings on the wall have. What's at stake today is the replacement of that hierarchy by other forms of art that don't rely on the worshipping of the object nor on the status that it acquires by entering into the sacred realm of the site that bestows that sacred value. So in a way one can argue that Leo's prohibition of icons mirrors, in an inverse way, museum's disregard for art that does not result in collectible, material and visual products.

Gonzalez

I don't agree. That's such a gross generalization. That's like passé Marxist theory.

Muse

He has a point.

Gonzalez

[to John] Thank you. Finally.

Muse

I didn't mean you. I meant he. [referring to Audience member 1]

Gonzalez

Ok, whatever. But let's think about this then. If history is a guide, Leo III lost in the end. People continued worshipping icons in spite of his empire and his army. What does that tell us?

Muse

That we shouldn't follow history, as you suggested earlier?

Audience member 2

That we are just wired to worship things?

Mayza

Or that we can't stop the course of history.

Audience member 1

Or that both history and religion are poor means to understand art.

Gonzalez

Or that nothing ever changes.

Muse

or that everything changes.

Audience member 2

or both things.

Audience member 1

Both things?

Audience member 2

Yes both things.

Gonzalez

Which things?

Maiza

Permanence and change?

Audience member 1

Religion and art?

Gonzalez

Past and present?

Muse

Desecration leads to worshipping and vice versa.

Audience member

maybe that forbidding non-visual art will lead to its worshipping.

Audience member 2

maybe what all this means is that this is a never ending debate.

Audience member 1

it only has taken several centuries.

Audience member 2

and religious wars.

Muse

One shouldn't expect less of art.

Gonzalez

maybe we should stop here.

Audience member 1

but we won't.

Audience member 2

True, we won't.

Gonzalez

If history is any guide.

Muse

When in fact there aren't any guides.

Audience member 2

Aren't there?

Gonzalez

Yes, there are

Muse

No, there aren't.

Gonzalez

Yes, there are.

Muse

No, there aren't.

Audience member 2

who would know?

Audience Member 1

Ask Leo.

[the speakers stand up and leave]

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