

# Cuando no hay fronteras entre el arte y la enseñanza

Patricia Vázquez  
Gómez con  
José Miguel  
González Casanova  
y Harrell Fletcher

PSU Art and Social Practice  
Reference Points

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To Julie Ault, José Miguel González Casanova, Harrell Fletcher, Molly Sherman, Elisa Hernández, and all my compañeros y compañeras at the MFA in social practice... and to my familias on both sides of the border, the one into which I was born and the others that continue to adopt me.

—PVG

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## Preface

**Patricia  
Vázquez Gómez**

When I entered the Art and Social Practice MFA Program at Portland State University I didn't have a clear idea what social practice was. The three years in the program gave me the opportunity to develop, even if slowly and with significant challenges, the intellectual and practical resources to transform my previously object-based practice into a process-based one. As a student of this form of art making I experienced the challenges of teaching and learning an art practice that is not bound to a specific skill, a practice and approach that can draw from any other discipline and is relatively new in the academic field. I share with many other social-practice students a passion for teaching that I consider vital to my practice as an artist. But even after teaching as an assistant and attending the required pedagogy classes, I still face the larger question of how to effectively teach socially engaged art. In the US, where I live, there are only a handful of programs at the higher-education level dedicated to social practice. In Mexico, where I come from, I know of only one three-year seminar dedicated to this expanded practice in a major public university. As socially engaged art becomes established in the academic field, the main resource on the subject seems to be the people who have been teaching this form of art making in recent years.

A couple of years ago I met a group of young artists in Mexico whose work I was profoundly impressed with. In tracing the origins of their practices, I learned they were all students of José Miguel González Casanova, an artist and professor who has led the Multiple Media Seminar at the National School of Visual Arts since 2003. I left my first conversation with José Miguel feeling deeply stimulated by the clarity and sharpness of his ideas regarding the role of art in society, the need to create alternatives for art students to have greater

independence from the art market, and how that relates to the particularities of Mexican society and culture. I found many connections between his values and ideas and those of Harrell Fletcher, the director of the MFA program I recently graduated from. But I also noticed significant differences between the educational institutions in which they operate: José Miguel teaches at a free public university in a “developing” country, while Harrell teaches at a public university in a “developed” country that charges thousands of dollars to its students. Their larger political, social, economic, and cultural environments are likewise radically different. Some questions started to emerge from those observations: How do contexts shape the values and methods guiding socially engaged art education? How does the history of socially engaged art and of alternative pedagogies in a specific country inform the way contextual art practices are taught? How is the political significance of teaching social practice informed by the larger environment in which it is being taught? As a binational artist, these themes are of particular importance because I want my practice to reflect the places that have formed me. At graduate school I constantly experienced a feeling of incompleteness from the intense Euro- and US-centric character of our conversations. I have searched, with certain desperation, for information and names that would lead me to an understanding of what it means to do socially engaged art in the third world, particularly in Latin America; what the regional influences and priorities are and how those art practices respond to the particularities of the specific societies in which they operate. Many of the key figures I encountered, including Luis Camnitzer, Pablo Helguera, and Ernesto Pujol, are artists and educators of Latin American origin working in the US. The conversations I had with José Miguel provided

me with valuable insight into the relevance of socially engaged art and education as it is practiced and reflected upon in Mexico.

At the same time, my experience as a student of Harrell Fletcher has left an imprint in the artwork I create and in my ideas about what is relevant for a social practice student to learn. Despite differences in our backgrounds and perspectives, I align with most of the values that guide Harrell’s artistic and teaching practice. The conversation I had with Harrell for this book facilitated a more intentional exploration of his influence over my newly acquired identity as a socially engaged artist and a deepened understanding of the differences between teaching art in the US and teaching art in Mexico.

In that first conversation I had with José Miguel I asked him how he perceived his students responding to the Mexican reality. His response resonated as an aspiration for what I want my work and that of my future students to be: “Their work has an urgency that comes from being part of a reality that is falling apart by the minute.”

## Conversation with José Miguel González Casanova

*The Multiple Media Seminar was created in 2003 by the Mexico City-based artist and educator José Miguel González Casanova. This seminar is an optional course for students of the Faculty of Arts and Design (formerly the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas [ENAP]) at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the largest public university in Mexico City. The seminar is an educational project that proposes that art learning happens when common experiences that integrate artists and discrete publics are created, and that art functions as a tool for producing knowledge when it operates effectively in a specific reality. In shared aesthetic experiences that are created collectively by the participants in an art project, the fields of art and education intersect and expand. In the seminar students are considered artists, students, and teachers, and they conceive projects that are serious and congruent with the context in which they happen and with the publics they have dialogue with. Most projects are focused on the search for amplifying the spaces in which art circulates, and on the participation of the public in the making of the artwork.*

*Students participate in the seminar for three years, during which they hold weekly meetings that alternate between reading discussions, group and individual exercises, and collective analysis of projects. The interdisciplinary theses developed by the seminar's students have been published in the books Medios Múltiples volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4. Students at the seminar have created collective public artworks with visiting artists Martin Dufrasne, Shirley Paes Leme, Gean Moreno, Ruslán Torres and Rosângela Rennó. The seminar's language of instruction is Spanish.*

*José Miguel González Casanova is a teacher and artist who has participated in more than 100 collective and individual exhibitions on four continents. He is widely published and recognized with awards in Mexico and Spain.*

PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GÓMEZ: You were trained as a painter and you later turned to a kind of art practice that is less dependent in the creation of objects and more oriented toward

public action and participation. How did this change come about? What led you to develop this kind of work, so different from a more conventional art practice?

JOSÉ MIGUEL GONZÁLEZ CASANOVA: The work itself took me there. I was first trained as a printmaker, then started painting. I had a couple of shows, then I became very interested in installation, and finally I started doing work that was more related to the public.

In my last show I made some paintings with anamorphosis, in which you would see different things depending on where you were in relationship to the painting. I was exploring the simultaneity of different readings and interpretations, calling for the viewer to move around the painting. Back then I was already paying attention to the viewer, to her movements around the painting and her interpretation from different points of view.

The next thing was Temístocles,<sup>1</sup> because I was interested in doing more conceptual work with former students of mine, looking also to compensate for some of the great deficits of a very traditional curriculum at the school.<sup>2</sup> We formed a study group that led to the creation of this space. In my first installation I worked with the same ideas about representation and reality that I was working with while painting, and this took me two months to complete, while the last painting show took me two years, and in those two months I felt that I had accomplished something more effective, because people were getting a clearer understanding of what I was reflecting on in the work. I realized that working eight hours every day on a painting implied a very closed relationship, for myself, but also for the viewer, who had to have all these cult references about the history of painting to understand the work.

Working on installation took me to a reflection on the specific site, and on the context in which the piece is taking place, not only from a formal point of view of the space, but also from what that place means, its history and its public. That was in '93; by '94 I had a show at the Nina Menocal gallery in which I installed my living room in the gallery and lived there for fifteen days, and I did a different project every day with friends from different disciplines, and that was a very ephemeral, quick, and spontaneous thing, geared toward a specific and intimate audience of friends and people close to me. The piece I did with Nina, the gallery owner, was a dancing class. She invited her rich friends and I invited my poor artist friends, and we had a dancing class all together. At that time I was still doing installation, but I quickly incorporated the public's presence and it became something about intersubjectivity, about the action of the audience building the piece—there were no objects. At the same time came the crisis with Temístocles, and as part of my critique of the art system that project was moving toward, I started working with my students in Santiago Tepalcatlalpan,<sup>3</sup> a town in Xochimilco very close to ENAP, and we started working on a project for the community there.

The first critique of painting and the need to leave it for good came because I felt that it was code for specialists, and that painting in itself limits its possible audiences—particularly if you are doing such a specialized thing as I was doing, a reflection about painting itself. And that crisis with painting ended up being a crisis with the art world, with its structures and competition, circulation and commerce systems. That reflection led me to think that I needed to create relationships with other publics to expand the meanings of the artwork. And by '98, I was looking for ways to leave the art



context, with things like theater, the town in Xochimilco, and I was less and less interested in working in a gallery. And from there, I started going on a different path.

PVG: And how did the creation of educational spaces finally lead to the formation of the Multiple Media Seminar?

JMG: Everything that I have talked about was happening at the same time I was teaching at ENAP. In 1999 the student strike<sup>4</sup> happened and they took away our space in Tepalcatlalpan, because the government didn't want to make spaces available to the university, because they didn't want us to hold classes outside the university facilities. A crisis in the community was also happening, some sort of power struggle between different local political factions. I started thinking then: How can I influence the school structure while critiquing the projects the students are doing as groups, or collectives? Because I observed they were hiding behind the group to not pursue their own independent investigations. These projects worked very well as collective street interventions, but the students were not getting an education, in either practice or theory. And then I put together a thesis seminar, I organized theoretical and practical research, and at the same time I encouraged what I knew how to do, which was the collective work, while at the same time I asked from each student to sustain her own artistic development. There was an incredible enthusiasm when the strike ended, and since then the seminar has been happening; we are at four graduating classes and it continues to refine itself. We added the idea of making a publication, and we continue that research that I proposed from the beginning, of integrating the production, distribution, and consumption of the

work in the creative process, as well as the reflection about who you are talking to, and of the social contexts and spaces.

PVG: You have been teaching for many years, about twenty-four if I am correct. And you have been creating innovative education experiences in a school that has not been receptive to them and has provided no financial support, or any other kind of support. Why are you so committed to teaching?

JMG: For me it's the context of my artistic production. I don't separate teaching from art. I find they have a lot of things in common. Both are experiences that create knowledge, particularly if you think of teaching as a learning experience where there is no objective knowledge to pour into an empty container, but something that is actively built, assimilated at the affective level, experienced in a collective process of teaching and learning. And that is basically what art is too, unless you consider that art requires a passive viewer of a work produced by a genius, who is showing a universal mode of sensibility, and to which the viewer can only respond "I like it" or "I don't like it." It all depends on what your conception of art and education is, but in mine they can be the same thing. On the other side, I am interested in the way these experiences about aesthetics and sensibility can be shared and communicated at other levels, and how they can be contextualized in a broader manner. And in my opinion, there are two options: you are in the market, circulating around fairs and biennials, selling your aesthetic products, or you are more aligned with the idea of breaking the division between production and consumption and are functioning from

the notion of creating knowledge rather than selling objects. If you choose this last option, you are in the field of education. For example, this same interview is happening because you are in a university and you are doing research about knowledge and education, and that allows us to build a link between my projects and my students' with those happening where you are; that creates a web of knowledge through education and education-based projects; our investigations are not isolated, because that could be a danger too. They are communicable, but the medium we are using to communicate is not the market.

PVG: But teaching also has purposes, responsibilities, and premises that are different from those of art. For example, a teacher doesn't place as much emphasis on originality and experimentation as an artist does, because in the end she is expecting to get certain results and those results carry a social responsibility. Where do you draw the line between artistic and pedagogical practice?

JMG: My perspective is that of an art teacher, which is a particular one. It's evident that a medicine professor would have a responsibility to have students not kill a patient in an operation, but that's a more technical thing. In essence, I believe that knowledge is not an object you pass on to the student and that she receives. It's a process in which you learn by generating the knowledge, through experience and experimentation, unless you take on somebody else's experience in a more technical manner, in the form of technical rules as happens in medicine or other disciplines. Yet, I think that a good doctor should have a more integral, humanistic, and creative education, in order to have the capacity of

creative visioning within its discipline. On the other hand, because of the influence of the market there is the issue of artists wanting to stand out as the original authors of some sort of registered trademark that is going to compete with others. I don't believe that is art, but it happens in the art world, and what I like about education is that it doesn't matter who the ideas belong to—the knowledge flows. It's valid to repeat exercises that helped you learn, and nobody is expecting you to be the one who invented them. It's something that grows organically and takes from many experiences. I believe that education is an art, because it is an experience that generates knowledge.

PVG: So for you there are no boundaries, things that you would do as an artist that you wouldn't do as an educator.

JMG: No, I don't see why there should be. I believe it's a win-win situation, to approach education from the place of art, and vice versa. They don't contradict each other, but rather the opposite: they help each other grow.

PVG: Why Multiple Media? What led you to choose that name for the seminar?

JMG: It has several meanings. It has to do with the multiplicity of readings, of messages, of social media, of contexts, and of disciplines. Painting is not a multiple media; it's not reproducible, it can't be multiplied. Interdiscipline is multiple, because a project can develop through different mediums, both in terms of discipline and of reading and contextualization. Theoretically, the idea of the multiple comes from Deleuze and the rhizome. I like that in the context of ENAP, the most

immediate reference is SUMA,<sup>5</sup> and there is this reference to “after SUMA comes multiplication.”<sup>6</sup>

PVG: Where I live, in the US, many people who are practicing or teaching alternative art practices are inspired by educators or theorists of education, one of the main influences being Paulo Freire. What is the relationship that your practice as professor has with experimental education outside the art field? What figures or ideas from the educational field have influenced you?

JMG: There have been a lot of influences, because there are many artists who have found a middle ground between their artistic and educational practice. One of them is Joseph Beuys. I find the work he did in education and the concept of building social sculpture using educational means very interesting. Gilberto Aceves Navarro<sup>7</sup> is another influence, a more personal one, because he was one of my professors at ENAP. His methodology for teaching drawing used experience as a starting point, and was in opposition to the academic methodology that teaches you that a man measures eight heads, and which in general transmits a series of formulas that stereotype the work. Gilberto didn't tell you how to solve the drawing, but proposed a series of experiences about looking and drawing from which you could take whatever was useful for you.

Paulo Freire has been an influence, but a later one. I would say that I work rather from the belief that art, and everything else, should be taught from the assimilation of knowledge through the experience of building it, embodying it, and making it yours. I also use as a foundation the problem of how you teach art without teaching formulas, because

as Giordano Bruno said in the Renaissance, art creates the rules, therefore teaching art is not about teaching how to follow rules, but how to create them. And from this belief I come into the educational field, and as years go by and research moves ahead I realize that in the arena of education there is also a critical stance toward school as a factory of objectivized subjects; there is a position about education that takes liberating values as its foundation. In Paulo Freire I find and affirm things that I was practicing because of the needs of my art-teaching practice.

PVG: How would you describe the culture of the seminar?

JMG: In general what we are looking for is collective and team work, for teaching and learning. There is always intense discussion and collaboration between everybody; we are involved in everyone's process. We have invited teachers, who always assume the role of coordinators, of instigators of certain exercises and situations, but little by little we look for the group to assume the organization of the seminar.

I intend to create a more horizontal work structure, in the sense of generating teaching and learning processes that start from the idea that the best student is the one who teaches and the best teachers are those who learn, questioning the traditional teacher-student roles and looking to foster collectivity and a commitment to your own educational process.

PVG: And how do you foster collectivity?

JMG: You need a common goal (or a number of them) to foster collectivity. At the seminar, one of those goals

is to educate each other, to support everyone. The revision of personal projects always happens in a brainstorm format; it's about providing a critique that is constructive and that works, with the purpose of providing solutions for all the personal and collective work. Each graduating class has the goal of completing a book, which is a very concrete thing that implies a very specific process of editorial work, of graphic design, of writing the texts and of management of resources, because all the resources are self-managed and we all look for funding. To make a book is a very complex process and a very specific one that prevents us from getting lost and allows for every person to write their own research, but also to work in collaboration. To finish the book we have to come up with highly organized systems, and the responsibilities have to be balanced. What has been happening is that every year the responsibility over the coordination of each part of the process is passed on to the next generation, because it is clear that one person can't do everything, and we all can't be doing all of it either.

PVG: It sounds like a very organic process that arises collectively, but I personally believe that for an organic process to work, a structure is necessary, because things don't work in a vacuum; somebody or something has to manage that structure so things follow a certain route and every person knows what they are working toward.

JMG: Of course. I have a role as a director of the seminar. To question the hierarchy of roles doesn't mean that they stop existing. In the organizing ideal for social activism by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*, he puts forward the idea that groups have to take turns leading for

everybody to have that experience, but it is necessary to have somebody coordinating. The most concrete coordinating experience students get at the seminar happens with the specific tasks necessary to publish the book. At the beginning there are ten or twenty students and each one comes with very different expectations, and what we try to do is to create unity, which happens from the experience of working together, of seeing each other every week, of being involved in each other's work. It also happens through the shared readings and discussions, in coming up with a common language. As time goes on we read what students propose, but at the beginning I organize that part. The seminar starts with a more vertical structure, but with the intention of dismantling that verticality. It starts as a very directed and controlled thing; at the beginning I am much more of an authority and there are things like "if you miss three classes you are out," because it is very necessary to institute a level of rigor in the context of ENAP and of public education in Mexico. Students are very used to not reading, to not writing, to not doing homework; there is a simulation of learning in which the teacher pretends he is teaching and the student pretends he is learning. It is necessary to start with much discipline, much rigor, and to affirm, clearly, that we are going to read, and if you don't bring your reading report you won't be allowed in class. Later on I relax, because I know they are reading and there is a dynamic already instituted, but if I don't start that way, they won't ever read because they are used to skimming the text and coming to talk nonsense in class, which is very bad education. It is also about establishing parameters for discussion, which is about solidarity but also criticality. Here we can say everything, we can tear a project apart, but always with the intention of building it up, because

we are learning together and your own education depends on your fellow students' education. And an affective process happens too, because they end up being friends, because we spend so much time together and we know each other's process intimately; we work, create art and street interventions together.

PVG: And have you ever run into any criticism from the students?

JMG: Part of the intention of this project is to encourage a critical culture; if there is an exercise or reading they are not OK with, it can be shared, but as everything is organized collectively, that criticism is not necessary against me. It is evident that there is a common project that I am proposing and that they are coming into. There are basic premises, but the way they get solved or the path they follow is each student's choice, and responds to their own development. Of course there are students who do not do well in the seminar, because they don't want to enter the collective dynamic, or because they are responding to their own idea of what a teacher is, or what a school dynamic should be. They come with that baggage and face the teacher as the authority. This is a voluntary project; students don't receive grades, or a diploma, they don't have to pay to be here—nothing. They are here because they want to be, and for many years I wasn't even paid a salary to do this. Nobody is obligated to be here. It is because we share certain interests that we are here. The environment at the seminar is in general quite positive, we critique dynamics and even our fellow members, but always with a positive intention. If criticism happens, it is not necessarily against me, but about the way we are doing things, particularly when

some students feel they are doing more than the others, that not everybody is pulling their own weight. But those are circumstantial problems.

Outside the seminar I have faced criticisms, which are more about the criticism this kind of art and projects receive, and that reflect the prejudices toward socially engaged art, that it is feel-good art, or that we are coming from some sort of Christian virtue to face sin. Now it's trendy and that criticism doesn't exist as much, but it was there at the beginning. One time I had a confrontation with a friend who is a curator, who criticized me heavily saying that I was leading my students to a ravine, that what I was doing didn't make any sense because it was outside the art system. He concluded by saying, "Your students will never be in the art books." And curiously, I had with me, just out of the print shop, the first books that the seminar made, and I gave him one and said, "My students *make* the books." But that was more than a decade ago.

PVG: What are the theoretical influences at the seminar? What are the key texts that have created the common language you were talking about?

JMG: The first text I ask them to read is Deleuze and Guattari's "Rhizome,"<sup>8</sup> because I am very interested in questioning the conventional structure of a thesis, because that is another goal of the seminar, to write the thesis they need to graduate. Academic theses are usually built using a tree form, with roots, trunk, and branches. While they are writing a conventional index for their thesis they are also reading "Rhizome," which talks about multiplicity, hypertextuality, and nonlinear structures. After, they do a series of exercises in which they have to translate those indexes to rhizomatic drawings: What

happens if you transfer this index to the skins of an onion, or a map? What would be bigger, what would border what? It is about understanding an organizational form of knowledge that can be modifiable; it is relative, simultaneous, and hypertextual. “Rhizome” is supporting a series of experiences that have the purpose of understanding what kind of structures knowledge can have. Another text that I always ask them to read is *The Society of Spectacle*, because I find it useful to understand the division between free time and work time, and the exploitation through free time. Another one that I find very beautiful, because it is optimistic, enthusiastic, and opens doors, is Raoul Vaneigem’s *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. We read Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, to revise the relationship between art and play. We read Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*. I also try to get to an understanding of what art is, because I also find a problem there. Any professional knows what her activity is about—a biologist knows what biology is, a mathematician knows what mathematics are—but in general an art student doesn’t know what art is, so at the seminar there are also dynamics of study about what art is, to be able to define our field of action. I have a dynamic in which each student chooses a philosopher or art theorist, they study his or her position, and then we get together and each student embodies the person they choose, defending their ideas in front of the others to find similarities and stimulate a debate. This leads us to distinguish between the different discourses that have existed, what associations there are and where the differences are. For each class group I have proposed different texts, and shared research is generated in a more casual way, meaning that I am not promoting any line of inquiry, but each group finds its common interests. The first seminar explored space, from the body to the internet. For the second, time was more

important. For the third seminar identity came to the forefront, and because the third and the fourth generations of students worked closely together they also concentrated on identity, but there was also a lot of work created about education and therapy. These themes that the group defines by itself determine certain shared bibliographical references. As the group develops, the topics of study get defined. Another book almost all of us have read is Gaston Bachelard’s *Intuition of the Instant*, to foster a reflection about time and the way we experience it. In the third graduating class it was decided that there was a lot of interest in the pedagogical experience, so we started reading Freire, and Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. The readings change somehow from generation to generation, yet I surprise myself realizing that I tend to assign readings from the ’60s and ’70s.

PVG: It’s interesting to notice the predominance of European and North American authors in your list of theoretical influences. Have you found influences with a more local perspective, either Mexican, Latin American, or even from the third world?

JMG: I talked about Paulo Freire as an important influence. Or Aceves Navarro as a more direct influence, or The Groups<sup>9</sup> and in particular SUMA, but those traditions are mostly about practice and the context itself, rather than a theoretical reflection, because there is not much of this in Mexico—we have to recognize that.

PVG: I would like to come back to what you mentioned about students taking on research in both theory and practice. Why is it so important that they do both at the same time?

JMG: Because the division between theory and practice (and particularly the way it is structured in the school I work at and in education in Mexico) is part of a system of colonization and subjugation. Historically, the role of the artist in Mexico has been more that of an artisan, who has no theoretical education, but one that is almost exclusively practical and craft-based. There is no discursive practice. For me it is very clear that one example of the colonizing origin of this can be found in the seventeenth-century ordinances,<sup>10</sup> in which indigenous people were forbidden to paint religious work and were limited to painting ornaments. The discourse was property and expression only of the Spanish and criollo<sup>11</sup> artists, who were the only ones who could paint the discourse, while the indigenous people were only allowed to paint little flowers. If we think of art as a way to generate knowledge and hold the political belief that all kinds of social groups have the right to self-representation and their own modes of sensibility, it is essential to have a critical and theoretical notion accompanying the practice. The division between theory and practice is a trap, like all divisions, because all of them have an ideological subtext that in general leads to control and limitation of experience.

PVG: But there are also risks in having too much of a focus on theory, don't you think?

JMG: Of course, we are artists and what we are working on is an artistic education. The artistic methodology is not scientific. It is a methodology and it does carry out research, yet in education, in the whole world, the scientific model prevails, which I find to be a problem. Art works through trial and error, experience, and the discovery that errors can

actually hit the target, and that accidents are full of meaning and lead to accurate conclusions. It is based in intuition and the direct and concrete experience of executing the work. The methodology is artistic, organic, intuitive, and experiential; it's not based in theory. Precisely, theory and practice have to go hand in hand, although it is true that in contemporary art there is a tendency, and particularly since conceptual art became trendy, of doing an illustration of concepts. Art is not illustration or representation of theories, it's rather experience embodied in practice, in a sensible model. We artists don't have the rigor of, let's say, philosophers—my philosopher friends can't say anything without using an enormous number of previous references. My position about theory is that it must occur from the creative act; that's one of art's greatest virtues, that it is inclusive, that it brings things together, that it is an additive action; and that is what the creative act is, the association of things that were separated before and when they become integrated they create a new reality, a new model, new knowledge. From the place of art we can integrate diverse theories and use them to spark a critical reflection on reality and the contexts in which we are operating to take advantage of them, but this should emerge from the development of an investigation that is part of an artistic methodology. In art there is nothing preconfigured; to be creation it has to have something that's new or original, an expanding of the experience of knowledge. We need to have a theoretical conscience about our practices—we have to have it, but theory can't be a hierarchical imposition above the artistic experience.

PVG: I think I agree with that. And I was also curious about the hypothesis that students at the seminar are asked to propose

in order to conduct their research. It would be useful to hear examples of proposed hypotheses, of how the process works, and also about the benefits of using this strategy, which looks so much like the way research is conducted in other disciplines.

JMG: The hypothesis is necessary because otherwise they would get lost. I insist very much that the hypothesis be solidly defined and that they start from it, because when they get to the library they can become lost when facing all the information available and can end up drifting about, staying on the surface and never finding focus in a structured idea and a coherent practice with that idea. But the hypothesis can be modified; the one they start with is not the one that they finish with; it refines itself, but there is always that concrete goal and clarity about the information they are selecting.

The use of the hypothesis is very different for a scientist than for an artist; it's only a presupposition, and it's very practical for the investigation to follow a route, but the research methodology is entirely different. A scientist can't be changing her hypothesis throughout her research, and here we can; it evolves and clarifies itself.

How does it work? Well, the hypothesis forces you to realize that both the theory- and practice-based research of your work are ideas that can operate in various fields of knowledge, not only in a few artistic disciplines but also theoretical ones, and they all can come together in developing a project that is not wandering around, but can actually become something concrete.

PVG: It would be very useful to hear concrete examples of the kind of hypotheses that students have formulated.

JMG: One of the more visible projects is Antonio Vega Macotella's.<sup>12</sup> He started from the presupposition that the jail is a small-scale model of society, and that in jail all the social structures are reflected. This somehow implies that we live in a jail-like structure. He then got into the jail and started his project, slowly making the structures visible, as well as the relationships existing in its interior. He did an ethnographic study of what happens there. And now that I mention his project, I remember that I ask students to not speak of art as they develop the discourse around their projects, to not speak about their pieces, but to build a parallel discourse to their practice, drawing from other disciplines. Antonio then devoted himself to studying Foucault, the problem of judging and punishing, and all that relates to the jail structure. The investigation happens in practice and theory at the same time—otherwise it would fall into that tendency that art has to legitimize itself through art, somehow saying “My work is valid because it looks like that other person's work that has already been validated.” This self-referentiality is what prevents the opening of art to other areas of knowledge and makes it into a specialized language. And what happens is that it becomes subordinated to a power structure that I use to legitimate myself through the validation of other people's work. “If my work looks like that other famous person's, that makes it good.” The intention for the work is to be art for the way it functions as art, not because you are contextualizing it within an art-history discourse. I think this is very important.

I insist a lot on the clarity of the hypothesis, on what they are investigating. For example, Idaid Rodríguez,<sup>13</sup> with his factory project, I don't remember exactly the language of it, but his hypothesis was that art could be an intermediary in the reconstruction of historic memory. His research was



about oral history, the construction of memory, and of identity based on historic memory.

PVG: What kind of students does the seminar attract?

JMG: The seminar has been projecting a public identity: that of work that is social, political, interdisciplinary, and contextualized. It hasn't been like that from the beginning, but that's the image that has been generated because the majority of students have been doing that kind of work. I haven't established any limitations; if somebody who wants to do more traditional work, about art as an object that is circulating in an artistic circuit, I wouldn't say no, but what we would need to work on intensely is the issue of how that work is operating in that specific context and with what public it's having a dialogue with. You don't only have to be in dialogue with marginalized communities or the incarcerated, you can also do a project designed for art collectors, doing an intervention in that market. The seminar's premise is that production, distribution, and consumption are all essential aspects of the same creative process and that the artist has a responsibility throughout that process to create channels of circulation as well as dialogues with the public. Curiously, almost all projects end up taking place in the contexts that are the closest to the students, whether it's their own neighborhood, or their health problems, maybe because that's what feels natural to them, that's what they care about; it hasn't been an imposition, but a tradition has been built in that aspect.

The first generations came in because it was an educational option given the lack of resources at school. For example, when I got that great funding from the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development,

I was able to hire teachers and we offered a lot of classes, precisely to compensate for the educational shortcomings. As I said, on the one hand we tried to compensate for the absence of critical reflection, but we also offered video and performance classes, things that the rest of the school doesn't offer. I think that students coming to the seminar are looking for that, a more contemporary education, because the school is way behind. The curriculum that was used up to this year was implemented in 1973.

PVG: Do you consider yourself a mentor for your students? What would it mean to be a mentor for you?

JMG: I am not sure what a mentor is. We should look up the definition in the dictionary, it's not clear to me.

PVG: I understand it as a more traditional concept in education, in which there is a recognition that the teacher is there because she knows more than the student and has more life experience, which is very valuable in the learning process from my point of view, because many come into educational institutions looking exactly for that, to learn from those who have more experience doing what we want to do.

JMG: Yes, I don't think you can negate your role as an authority. I absolutely assume that I direct the seminar, and I have even had to expel people from it. At the beginning I accept everyone who satisfies the requirement of structuring a research project. For the level of rigor in the work a natural selection process also happens, in which many decide to leave. But I have to live up to that authority role, keep expectations high, because the work is serious. At the beginning in particular

I have to be some sort of general and implement a hierarchic structure, to set the rules of the game.

I don't believe that I should subordinate my authority to what students want, because what they want, in many instances, is determined by a lousy previous education that gets things confused. What this is about is to put in crisis what each student thinks she wants, to discover what they really want, and I have to help in that process. I have to maintain my difference, to make clear I am not the same as the students. I actually don't present my research until the end, once everybody's research is clear, then they learn what I am doing, because by then I can have a dialogue with them in which there is no risk that my work would become a model to follow. Equity has to be earned and built; it's not the beginning of the process. It's the same with the interdiscipline; it's a process of construction of community, of collectivity. I start with a structure that is somehow authoritarian but that has the purpose of getting into crisis. The goal is to do away with it, but you can't start from the end. And of course I end up having a role as a moral authority, but that's a different thing—it comes from certain consideration of the fact that I have more experience and my comments are never taken as absolute truths; there is always a possibility of questioning them. And at the end I become their student; I learn from them because they know more about their project and their research. There are a lot of research projects, and I have a general notion about them, but [the students] are the ones who read fifty books about a certain topic.

And even when the group is solidly formed and there is consciousness and participation, there is always the need of a referee, because there are critical moments in which somebody has to intervene and make sure that things are happening.

PVG: The concept of authority can have negative connotations, particularly in Mexican society, where there is a tradition of authoritarianism that has functioned in highly repressive forms.

JMG: Well, authority is somehow related to authorship. In the particular Mexican context it's very clear that projects are actually sustained by personal wills, and what gives continuity to things is the will of the person who is maintaining them. This emerges as a personal project of mine, as an artist, and in the educational context in which I work and to which I am trying to contribute something. It's very clear to me that if I stopped doing the seminar, it would disappear. It was my idea, my intention and will, and it has survived for thirteen years because I have been sustaining it. It's not a project generated by the interest of the school administration, but by my investigation as an artist and teacher. In that sense I am indeed the author and the authority. An ideal goal would be for the students themselves, many of whom are artists doing serious work, to commit so the seminar could continue. But it would be necessary for some of them to fully own it. That would be ideal, if the seminar could function by itself, led by the students themselves.

PVG: What are the antecedents in Mexico in teaching this kind of artistic practice? Or are there similar projects in existence right now?

JMG: As I said before, I consider SUMA the precedent of the Multiple Media Seminar; it was created at the end of the '70s, at the same school. There is also Ricardo Rocha,<sup>14</sup> who took advantage of the mural painting class to form a group that

studied the Mexican school of muralism, but that also did many street interventions, with stencils, taking over walls and in general doing work that was more contextualized in the public space. What the seminar has provoked is the formation of study and work groups. Almost all graduating classes have resulted in groups that are working in a very solid way. The second seminar is still meeting around a project called “The Council of Lived Wisdom,” which works with the elderly, gathering their knowledge and experience. The third and fourth seminars formed a project called “Free Traffic of Knowledge” and they are still working without my constant advice. I support them as an equal and as a friend, but they are not projects of the seminar anymore. I also understand that there are more recent groups that share the logic of the seminar, like *Cráter Invertido*, which comes from students at La Esmeralda,<sup>15</sup> but that departs from the school, operating in an independent manner and maintaining its own space. They make publications and interesting social-practice work. I believe that the seminar has had an influence on many young artists as an educational model of artistic practice, and that we also have a tradition of collectivity from the groups of the '70s, which is something very important for all of us.

PVG: And do you think that the kind of art that you teach, and the fact that you are promoting it from a public education institution has political implications?

JMG: It's neither arbitrary, nor incidental, that I have contextualized my work in UNAM. It is a personal position—where do you want to put your energy, time in life and action? I have been invited to teach classes in other places, in private spaces, and at a personal level I am not interested

in operating in those spaces, but rather in working for public education, for what it means to have good public education that is accessible to students who come from a variety of social backgrounds, as happens in public universities. To decide to work in this context is a political position. It is through education that we can find emancipation and ways to build tools of representation and self representation, to enter the politically charged field of symbolic negotiation, because the sensibility that operates in the art world is defined by a certain social class, a certain profile of student that has access to contemporary art-world information, who speaks several languages, and who comes from upper-class contexts. It all stops in the representation of certain modes of sensibility that are particular to those groups and which are imposed, and that's a political issue, the sensibility that is forced onto others. I consider a political action to contribute to the ability of people from diverse social contexts to have the tools to build the sensibility models that represent their lifestyles. It is the equivalent to the way Hollywood imposes a model of cinematographic sensibility, and in the whole world people watch the same movies that show a certain lifestyle, which is not bad in itself—the problem is that it becomes the only one. There are many different possible models of life experience, and the issue is to find ways for them to have an influence so that I can understand the fast-paced, superficial, and spectacular experience of time that Hollywood offers as much as the introspective, reflexive, and poetic of Tarkovsky. To encourage different experiences of time, life, and culture in the movies enriches us all, but the tendency of the market is to centralize and impose one single model, which is the same thing that happens in politics; you can choose between three different political parties<sup>16</sup> and there

are no other options. Those structures limit diversity. It is a political act to oppose this homogenization and the control of culture, representation, and history, so other narratives are built, and other histories that question the official one. And that also cultivates the construction of citizenship.

PVG: What does it mean to construct citizenship through art?

JMG: What these kind of projects (projects that are conceptualized as a way to build something with the public and from the public) are doing in the end is building identities gathered around common goals. We come together in a shared artwork that represents us and functions as a collective entity, which allows us to negotiate politically in the world. It's like saying, "Our neighborhood identifies around this artwork that was made with this artist; we, this collective, this group of people, are gathered because of this aesthetic experience." That exceeds what is purely aesthetic, because it is generating identities and communities who are asserting themselves as active citizens in a plural context in which there are more citizens and more representations at play, and all this is given visibility.

PVG: But these collectivities created through art, as you define them, tend to be short-lived, and from a social-justice perspective the formation of active citizens happens rather through a process that requires the establishment of long-term relationships, and more importantly, of the leadership of the citizens themselves. Don't you think that the expectation of creating citizenship might be too large for art, and for the artist?

JMG: It depends, because if the artist and the art are putting themselves to the service of those organized collectivities I do think it is a realistic expectation. Art is not the only generator of this—art only contributes to it. If the artist works with a given neighborhood or community a social dynamic already exists there. Art contributes to social integration, but that has to exist already. The artist is not going to invent society, but rather put herself to its service. The artist does generate collectivities but within collectivities that are already established. The work is that of reinforcing, and also of questioning, because as an artist you can work in a community situation questioning things, operating in a more complex manner.

And there is also the perspective that a work of art creates its own public. A work of art also invites diverse sensibilities to gather around an experience, and that is a way of generating community too.

PVG: Precisely in the text *Approximations to Art and Life*, in the book *Seminario de Medios Múltiples 2*, you affirm that one of the functions of art is that of expanding the quality of life of its consumers. How do you think that art does that?

JMG: That is what I was trying to say with the example of the experience of temporality in cinema: if you are limited to think about time as it is represented in Hollywood, your experience is limited. But if you understand that time can also elapse in another way, then there is an expansion of your modes of experience, of your references. To explain the function of art I like to imagine the nonexistence of art, imagine there is no literature, no cinema, no works of art, no music—how would experience be? It would be absolutely subjugated

to hierarchical social structures, those of production, work, and consumption, those of the capitalist economy, or the verticality within family; our expectations about life would be very limited because we wouldn't be able to imagine other life possibilities, and everything would be limited to an experience controlled by immediate and practical reality. Art allows you to think of yourself as another as well as to understand others; it allows you to imagine other realities, and through this imagining, to identify them inside you and to experience them. It would be incredibly depressing if art didn't exist and we couldn't imagine a different reality. Art allows you to imagine other lifestyles, for yourself and for others, and it draws you out from an egotistical space, whether social or subjective.

1. Temístocles appeared within the context of the emergence of alternative spaces for artistic production and distribution in Mexico in the '80s. It was a space that intended to promote a dialogue between researchers and artists while questioning the limits of art. This space was conceived as a center for the exhibition of art prioritizing experimentation, research, and documentation, with the purpose of creating spaces to exhibit work not generally welcomed by galleries and museums. Temístocles's seminars, classes, and publications validated their educational aspect, directed toward the artists in the collective as well as anybody interested in art. They produced a biweekly newsletter called *Alegría*.

2. The school González Casanova is referring to is the National School of Visual Arts (ENAP; Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas). ENAP is part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), the biggest and oldest public university in the country.

3. Santiago Tepalcatlalpan is a town in Xochimilco, one of Mexico City's sixteen boroughs. The Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas is located in the same borough.

4. In February of 1999, UNAM's president, Francisco Barnés de Castro, tried to modify the rules regarding fees and tuition, with the purpose of increasing costs for students. As a response, on April 20, 1999, thousands of students formed the General Strike Council and decided to cancel the university's activities indefinitely through the seizure of its facilities. This was the beginning of the longest student strike in UNAM's history, lasting almost nine months.

5. The group SUMA (in Spanish SUMA means "addition") was formed in 1976.

It originated in the Mural Painting Workshop led by Ricardo Rocha in the Academia de San Carlos—a historic building in downtown Mexico City where ENAP offers art classes too. It was part of the artistic movement known as Los Grupos. It is recognized as the group with the most presence in the public spaces of Mexico City. They severely questioned and critiqued the notion of public art, because of its estrangement from what they considered its essence: the communication with the public. On that basis, they adopted a methodology that consisted in exploring the streets and studying their complexity as visual spaces. Their intention was to contribute artistic and playful values to counteract the proliferation of visual messages and visual pollution. SUMA disappeared in 1982.

6. "After addition comes multiplication," referring to SUMA, which means "addition" in Spanish.

7. Gilberto Aceves Navarro is a Mexican visual artist who has been a teacher since 1971 at ENAP and since 1998 at his own private studio.

8. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3–25.

9. The '70s in Mexico were profoundly influenced by the student movement of 1968, which opened new topics of reflection about the relationship between art and society and the critical interrogation of institutions, among other issues. By the mid '70s the artists' movement Los Grupos had appeared. It was characterized by an artistic practice that was collective and interdisciplinary, with conceptual proposals and the use of the street as a space of creation,

critique, dissemination, and reunion. The Taller de Arte e Ideología (Art and Ideology Workshop), Proceso Pentágono (Pentagon Process), and SUMA are some of the most representative groups of that tendency.

10. When the Conquest started, churches were built rapidly in large numbers, a response to the need to implement Catholicism. Natives were used to build those churches, and at the beginning they were working in the production of images. A clear example is from Tonantzintla, where the indigenous artists created a mural in which they mixed elements of their religious tradition, like Tlaloc—god of the water—using the Catholic images to represent their own. That was in the sixteenth century; by the seventeenth century there was no urgency in building churches, and the Spaniards realized that what the indigenous artists were painting wasn't strictly their European religious beliefs, and that the native beliefs were sneaking in. An ordinance prohibiting indigenous people to paint was established, which also had the function of guaranteeing work for the Spanish painters, who were after that in charge of painting religious discourse, while the indigenous people only painted the ornamentation, or the elements that didn't create an ideological problem.

11. In colonial times, a criollo was an inhabitant born in the American Continent from European parents.

12. Antonio Vega Macotela is a graduate of the Multiple Media Seminar. For his project "Time Exchange" he organized exchanges with 365 inmates of the Santa Martha Acatitla Jail in Mexico City, in which the artist would use an agreed-upon amount of his time to perform tasks for the inmates outside the jail at a specific day and hour. At the same time the inmates

would do whatever Vega Macotela asked them to do as an artist.

13. Idaíd Rodríguez is another graduate of the Multiple Media Seminar. His project "La Fama Perdida" intends to restore and revise the history of a Mexico City neighborhood that lost its identity when the local textiles factory (La Fama Montañesa) closed down. In collaboration with the residents of the area, he has created an archive of the local history, both pictorially and through text and image, which resulted in an exhibition that has been shown in Mexico and internationally.

14. Ricardo Rocha was an artist and professor of mural painting at ENAP. He is one of the founders of SUMA.

15. The National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking La Esmeralda is a school of the Fine Arts National Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes), founded in 1923. When it began it offered free workshops to the public, mostly to workers and farmers. It later became an institution of higher education.

16. In Mexico, the political arena is dominated by three political parties, the right-center parties PRI and PAN and the left-center party PRD.

## Conversation with Harrell Fletcher

*The Art and Social Practice MFA Program at Portland State University was founded in 2007 by the artist and educator Harrell Fletcher. The program combines individual research, group work, and experiential learning for art students to make meaningful work and to collaborate effectively with people, organizations, and institutions.*

*The ninety-credit, three-year course challenges students to work outside the studio to produce socially engaged art. By forming an experience in a place rather than producing a final object, the program asks student-artists—and their audiences—to consider themselves, their communities, and the larger environment as part of the art. “Instead of starting with an idea, I encourage students to start with a place,” Fletcher has said. Part of the process is discovering that place and its social and historical context. This exploration spurs community participation and exposes the artist to a variety of new perspectives. As a consequence, students have produced work in and for unconventional spaces such as community-based organizations, stores, walking routes, apartment complexes, and schools.*

*The program places a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity, collaboration, participation, and public engagement. Students have worked collectively on projects such as an annual intervention event at the Portland Art Museum called Shine a Light; the Open Engagement Conference; and the annual Assembly gathering. Each student also produces a book for the Social Practice Reference Points series with a relevant practitioner or on a prevalent social-practice theme. The program’s language of instruction is English.*

*Harrell Fletcher is an internationally recognized artist who has produced a variety of socially engaged collaborative and interdisciplinary projects since the early 1990s. His work explores themes ranging from global conflict to local food systems and has been shown in galleries, museums, and other spaces in the US, Europe, and Asia.*

PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GÓMEZ: You developed a very early interest in education; if I remember correctly you trace

that interest all the way back to kindergarten, when you started thinking about what you would change in your educational experience if you could. What about your interest in art? How did that come to be? And when did you start making the connections between art and education that characterize your work?

HARRELL FLETCHER: One of my older sisters was in art school when I was born, at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. She was an influence since I was very young, because she was always doing all kinds of art projects: ceramics, weaving, photography, drawing. She married a guy who was also a student from CCAC, Michael Bravo. And he was always around too. My dad also had an interest in art; he did photography and had a darkroom when he was younger. So I was exposed to art, even if I was brought up in a small agricultural town that didn't have an art museum, or a university, a place you wouldn't think of as an art place at all, nothing like San Francisco or Los Angeles.

PVG: But the art you describe having around was mostly object based: ceramics, drawing, as you have described. And your art degree is in photography. How did the move to social practice happen?

HF: It's true that the focus was on objects, but this was the late '60s and '70s. The '70s on the West Coast was a time in which there wasn't much of an art market, there wasn't a lot of commercial activity; and instead there was a lot of collective, collaborative, grassroots, and experimental stuff, like Allan Kaprow's Happenings. It was the zeitgeist of that time period. And my sister and her husband were

bringing those ideas to me on a regular basis too. I saw their lifestyle, not only their objects, as something that was an option. They did very unconventional things, and a lot of process-based activities that from a very early age I identified with being an artist. My mom also had a friend, Mary Ellen Schultz, who was a nature photographer who took a strong interest in me from very early on, and encouraged my interest in photography, so I got my first camera when I was ten and I took one of her seminars when I was twelve. So I had a variety of influences that created my sense of what an artist could be in a very expanded way.

PVG: So, in your childhood environment you had many folks doing art?

HF: Yes, I was exposed to art on an everyday basis. It was normal. To me, the option of being an artist was always there, and I was identified as an artist by friends and family starting when I was a small child. Everyone acknowledged me as an artist. My dad commissioned me to make drawings that he would put up in his office and people would see them and talk to me about them; I would do portraits of family members, and people would hang them. Friends and family treated me as a serious artist. It was always part of my identity. A lot of the people I met in grad school didn't have that experience, they decided they wanted to be artists as teenagers, or in their twenties, or later. On the one hand that is great and empowering, but on the other hand I noticed that they were put in the position of having to fight to be an artist, to be accepted and validated. And in that process they would also become protective of certain ideas about what art was. In my opinion, it is never a good idea to defend



a limited idea about art; if you try to define art you are going to run into trouble. By graduate school I already felt comfortable with the idea of being an artist and didn't feel like I had to fight for it at all. I could let go all the way to a thread the idea of what art needed to be and still feel secure.

PVG: That is a big privilege you had, because in thinking about those classmates of yours who decided to be artists in their teens or later, I identify myself with those in the "later" category. I studied graphic design in a public university in Mexico and I have friends who studied with me who later left their careers as graphic designers to do art, like I did. We had realized that what we always wanted was to be artists, but since none of us had any artists or art around we couldn't believe we could be artists, so we chose graphic design as the closest alternative. When I was little I thought of artists as people from another planet, because I didn't know anybody who was an artist; nobody in my family or in the working-class neighborhood on the outskirts of Mexico City where I grew up was an artist, or was thought of as one. So, when my friends and I had to choose a career we couldn't even consider the idea that we could be artists, let alone make a living, so we went for graphic design. So for us there was a long process of trying all kinds of things before we could even think of ourselves as artists. It's mostly a class thing. That's why I consider it a huge privilege to be able to identify as an artist from an early age.

HF: I know it was a privileged position, but it didn't come from wealth or access to the art world; it came from having connections to supportive, interesting people like my sister and her husband, Michael. If they hadn't been there I couldn't

have experienced that. But yes, I lucked out having that. It wasn't calculated on my parents' part, though. It was very different from growing up in NYC, attending art galleries. That is a very different situation.

PVG: And do you think that because you got that support and encouragement to identify as an artist coming from a place that wasn't class privilege, you developed a certain sensibility that facilitated your development into a social-practice artist?

HF: In a way, but my two other sisters had done social-service related careers, and my mom was a teacher and was working with kids with disabilities. All week long she was off serving meals at homeless shelters, having kids coming over that she was tutoring for free, helping out on nonprofit boards. So I was just exposed to that kind of social consciousness constantly too. My dad was also very community-service oriented. And as I said, there wasn't an art market at that time and in the places where I lived. I never considered the idea that I was going to show and sell in galleries. The career path I thought of was to teach, because that is what my brother-in-law did. I struggled when I was in the Bay Area in grad school and ran into the concept that people had to make a living selling art. I had non-art-related friends when I was in grad school who were involved in social services, like needle-exchange projects, or working with adults with disabilities, and for me that seemed more meaningful, of more value than what I was seeing in the studios of the art school, those objects that were created with the hope that they were going to be sold in a commercial gallery. I was struggling around with that idea, and it didn't feel right to me. As an undergrad I tried different things—video, performance—but I was also

interested in environmental, peace, and antiwar issues so I was thinking about those issues and trying to figure out if my art practice should be separate, or if it was connected and how. At the San Francisco Art Institute, where I finished my BFA degree after three years at Humboldt State, I ran across people like Jim Goldberg, who was doing documentary photography about poverty and street kids, and I saw that you could do work related to social issues and still be an artist. I was also struggling with my form; I liked the idea of making books more than having exhibitions, because I could distribute them. I took two years off after getting my undergraduate degree and one of those years I worked at a grade school with kids, and that really informed what I was doing. The other year I just traveled around and looked at a lot of documentary films, photography, and fiction writers and tried to absorb that and apply it to my work as an artist.

PVG: You mentioned that you started teaching right after undergrad, at a grade school, and later you became a professor at a university. What seems productive about having a double career as an artist and a teacher now?

HF: There are a couple of practical things. In the US we don't have universal health care, and I didn't have it for ten years after I finished grad school. You can get away with that when you are young, but at some point you realize you have to figure that out. Teaching at the university provides me with a salary so I can pay my living costs, and it comes with health care, which is especially important to me now that I have a daughter.

At the art-practice level, being among students is invigorating because of the challenges of being confronted

with questions, having to explain and understand various topics; it's mentally engaging to do that. The social interactions are also important. My own tendency could have been to become a hermit (I'm naturally antisocial), and performing the role of teacher and instructor has helped me develop my ability to function socially. It is an interesting role to be in, because you are in charge but you are also trying to diminish your power in order to create a more equal environment. These challenges are similar to those I face in my projects. I personally don't see a difference; I view everything—exhibitions, public art projects, lectures, workshops, teaching, running a program—as part of my artistic practice. Similar things are occurring in all of them. The main difference is the institutional framework, the expectations and assumptions that I have to negotiate. If participants or collaborators are students it is challenging because of the fact that they are getting a degree, paying tuition, grades, all those kinds of things that are not really very interesting to me. I would rather have an educational system without those things. In a project I can work with participants who don't have those issues at stake. There are other concerns, like exploitation; doing something that is perceived as good or bad; or what does it mean to collaborate with non-artists; funding. Each situation is different, but as far as I am concerned, conceptually, I like to treat them all as the same, they are all parts of a larger complicated practice. My work almost always has an educational or participatory component, and looks at a site and its resources. I am doing that at the university too, so both teaching and art help my skills and concepts. They are always informing each other; something will come up in a class that helps me understand or work through an art project, and vice versa.

PVG: So do you see the Art and Social Practice Program as an art project too?

HF: That is tricky, because if I say “Yes, this is an art project,” most people would misunderstand the meaning of that. I have been accused of objectifying or exploiting people I work with in art projects. But that’s not the relationship I have with people or how I see them. I can imagine students getting up in arms saying, “What? I am a student paying tuition to be in your art project?” But that’s not how I view it. Even when I am commissioned to do an art project I am already conceiving of those projects in very unorthodox ways. There are examples of works that involve lots of people, like music, theater or film, in which there is a system for people to get credit. There might be problems within that system, but at least it is interesting that everyone is credited. It is understood that there were a lot people involved whose work was vital, and yet there is a director, which is similar to the role I play in an art project. In theater or film or dance it’s not seen as exploitation but as a form of collaboration that is formalized. We don’t have any of that for art projects, so once you do something that has people involved in it, people have knee-jerk reactions that you are exploiting people or that you are making a claim you shouldn’t, even if you are the one directing it. In art projects I use a hybrid model that is influenced by film, theater, farmers’ markets, etc. If I think of the graduate program as an art project I am thinking about it also as an unorthodox and hybridized one in which participants can have agency and get credit.

PVG: As a recent student, I think that the idea of being in a program that is thought of as an art project is partly exciting

and partly stressful. Because as you mentioned, there are real things that get in the way and create pressures, and the main one is tuition. It is a reality that we are paying a lot of money for these degrees and it’s hard to relax when you are accumulating debt. In the back of your head there is always the thought that you might as well make this worthwhile because when you finish you have to make a living and on top of that, pay that debt.

HF: I totally hear you and understand that dynamic. But I think it is necessary to look at the fact that the program is operating in the context of regular MFA programs, in which students are paying the same amount of tuition, if not more, and most of them aren’t developing any kind of real skills that they are going to apply to making money because the art-market system is so limited. So my thinking is that it is worthwhile to try to make the experience more real and have students work on projects that will actually have an audience and context, and will allow them to develop a way of working and a methodology they can then take and apply to other situations. My hope is that this will give them greater possibilities for a sustained practice after leaving the program than a traditional MFA program does. Yes, what you have identified are problems, for sure, but what I am trying to do is mitigate them to the extent that I can. I am not the one who controls the tuition costs. I chose to be employed by the institution and I do that somewhat selfishly because I need to get paid, and I need to get health insurance and all of those kinds of things. So I am taking part, I am complicit, but I am also trying to address the problems I encounter.

PVG: It is true that the Social Practice program feels like a reaction against traditional studio education. Other than

within the mandated art-related classes, like history, a lot of times it doesn't feel like we are studying art; our conversations are hardly art-focused, yet our references are. In which areas do you think it is beneficial for social-practice art education to overlap with a more traditional art education?

HF: That's an interesting question. Because the program is experimental, we try things, see the results and then adapt and move on. I remember talking to Mark Dion about this topic twelve years ago or so, before the program was created. He didn't have an MFA and in his case disciplines like natural history and biology were fundamental to his development as an artist. If he hadn't been allowed to study those subjects it would have been detrimental, rather than beneficial. We thought it would be interesting if students could choose what disciplines they wanted to weave into their graduate program, rather than demanding that everybody take a specific set of classes. An art student could study conflict resolution, black studies, women's studies, biology; and initially that's what I wanted to happen at PSU. And again, because I was coming from a traditional MFA program, working with people who identified as artists, it didn't seem like such a big deal to decrease the art-specific classes. But one of the things I wasn't counting on was that, eventually, the students applying for the program had not studied art at the undergrad level, which I liked conceptually, but the reality was that they didn't have any art education and we were not giving them any art education. They were operating in a different way and were missing that piece that I had, an understanding of contemporary art, which my work is a reaction against in some ways. At the same time, something that people outside the program have remarked on consistently is that it is different from any other program;

the students aren't looking through *Artforums*, they are not fixated on Chelsea galleries or talking about how they are intending to sell their work, things that almost all other MFA students seem to be obsessed with.

As an art student I learned a lot about different aesthetics, exhibition strategies, and to some degree public projects. It's hard for me to separate [those things] because I studied art my entire life. One of the good things about art in its ideal form is that it is about being unconventional and breaking rules and finding your own way of doing things. I don't think that is what happens all the time, but if you get to do that it can be very liberating. The mythology of art is very different from that of other disciplines that are very specific and formalized in a tradition that is not about breaking rules. That is one of the contradictions about having an art department in a university, that so much of the practice of art and artists has been about breaking rules and not going with the status quo, so it's strange to stick it into a status quo institution. And you see things, like our current School of Art and Design director, who comes from urban planning, getting very upset about graffiti on the walls of the art building, while everybody who has gone through art programs sees the graffiti as nothing to be concerned about, and even more, as a form that is validated, taught, understood, and valued within an art context. It is an indication of the problem with art in a university, that art is about breaking rules, while the university wants you to fit into academic structures and not really to experiment, to set things in stone and hold them like that. It's an oil and water relationship to begin with.

PVG: If you are running into so many issues at the university, it sounds like an art school might be a better fit, and maybe

that was one of the motivations behind the creation of art schools. But they also have their own set of issues. I actually chose this program because I liked the idea of being in a public institution in which I could interact with a greater diversity of students and disciplines. It felt like a better fit for both my values and the work I wanted to do.

HF: Right. I understand the impulse behind separating the art school, and the problem with it. I am not in favor of art schools at this point, after having experience with both the art school and the university. The art school might be appealing because of the comfort of homogeneity; there is less conflict because everyone is in some ways the same. For me, at first it felt great to be among people who were all weird and creative, but after a while I got sick of that. It's a dilemma, but one that the university should be able to handle if the structure was made more flexible and it was understood that not only art but also other disciplines need to operate in a more fluid and experimental way.

PVG: There are major advantages to studying art and social practice at a public university, but in my opinion, there are also serious challenges. The program at PSU is seriously underfunded, and Portland State does not have the prestige of other institutions offering art and social-practice programs. What are other benefits of studying in this specific art and social-practice program? And why study art in a place that is not considered an art-center?

HF: It depends on what you want to do. Philosophically I don't want to buy into the idea of prestige, but I realize it's at play and I am personally affected by it. When I left the

Bay Area, which is already a secondary art-world center, my move to Portland was seen as crazy. I was valuing other things, like a lower cost of living; it seemed more possible for me to survive here. But I think that one of the advantages for me, as a person involved in the art world, as well as for students, is that Portland is not an art-world center. When I am in New York or LA people are very fixated on the art world, art magazines, art fairs, art shows, openings, and all those kinds of things. Here, we have little of that, so it doesn't distract us. I personally try to stay away from all that stuff, kind of in the way that if you want to lose weight you stay away from junk food. By being here in Portland you can focus on other things, and if your interest is in working on immigrant rights or with day laborers you can focus on that and not worry about how that plays in commercial galleries, for example. My point of view is that it's a big benefit. And one thing I have seen in this MFA program is that there is little competition, and I think it's partly because we are away from the centers and from the art world. Another benefit that should come with being at Portland State is that it should be cheaper, but it's not a lot cheaper. It's something we continue to work on and there is finally movement in a way that has never happened before, partly because the economy is doing better, and partly because the administration is starting to value us differently. So, there is finally improvement in the financial front for both tuition costs and potentially how much funding the program might get. And even if it's not a top-tier prestigious university there are still plenty of very interesting people, research, and work and all kinds of projects, more than can be exhausted by any one student. If anybody had the impression that there wasn't much going on at PSU they haven't done any research, because that's not the case.

PVG: You mentioned that there is not much competition in the program and I agree with you. There is a strong sense of community and students support each other. What else do you think characterizes the culture of the program?

HF: The interdisciplinary approach, that people have a wide variety of interests. There are almost no limitations in this program, there is no pressure to stay within any particular medium or subject, any particular outcome, other than a public one, and there is support, encouragement, and precedents to offer. There is lots of space for individual initiative while there are structures in place: Reference Points, Shine a Light, the Assembly conference, the radio show, these things that give people a chance to fit into a structure and try it out. And all the connections we have. There is an overwhelming and amazing list of people connected to the program through lectures, classes, or projects over the eight years the program has existed. We have world-class access while being at a somewhat obscure institution.

PVG: What about the culture of the program in terms of relationships, between yourself and students, among students themselves and with the larger community?

HF: It has always been a tight-knit community where there is a lot of encouragement, support, and personal relationships that form, which is something I wanted. For me it's modeled after my experience at the farming program at UC Santa Cruz. There was a structure and a set of experiences happening for all the students in the apprenticeship, but there was also a built-in community connection, and long-lasting relationships that people formed. I see that as a very important part: who

is in your cohort and what your connection is to them and to alumni is crucial. It's something I encourage to some extent through campouts and retreats, but it's also something that I assume and expect will happen more organically. I consider myself very available. I had very close relationships to professors I had in grad school and those relationships were very important to me. I always felt that was the approach I should take, to be more available and not limit my interactions with students to class and office times. That includes understanding who they are, what their lives are like, outside school, so I can better help guide them. And then of course I encourage people to have relationships outside the program. Obviously students have their friends and family, but [they should] also think about relationships that can be collaborative or instructive with other people on the campus, locally, and nationally. And because there are no limitations people can collaborate with other students and nonstudents. We value that, we think it's important. If that is something you are going to do out in the world, of course do that in the program, too.

PVG: The program has a very flexible character, and from the interior it feels that things are always in flux. Some people praise that, because they consider that one of the strengths of the program is that it is constantly reinventing itself. After eight years of trying different ways of running the program, what is the relationship between structure and flexibility you are looking for?

HF: One of the mistakes I made early on was that I was basing things on my own experience in grad school. I am now heading in the direction of multiple framework platforms that are consistent over time but that are still flexible. For instance,

Reference Points, our book series. Students have three years to come up with their content, do their interviews or whatever the content [consists in], and then arrive at a finished publication. I really want the radio show to be like that too—a built-in resource structure [for which] students can use their own agency and interests to fill in the content. Another example is the end-of-term presentations; students have resisted them but I have also noticed that they have gotten better at presenting as a result of doing presentations at the end of each term. Assembly is turning into one of those structures too; it's a platform to organize an event of the student's choosing. Those are the things that we do on a regular basis. From my point of view these are useful experiences for students to have, so when they finish the program they have those experiences and skills. The program was a theory that maybe hasn't been realized to the extent I thought it was going to, but things have definitely happened. Despite the perceived chaos in the program, a high percentage of the thirty-six current graduates are doing very interesting things out there, and I think it's a higher percentage than normal MFA programs. They are finding ways to make a living too, with elements of or a combination of their practice. And none of them are doing things through the commercial gallery system. It is very interesting to see that happening.

PVG: And since you are mentioning the possibilities students have of making a living as artists, I want to ask you about an article the *Washington Post* published last year whose headline was "If you're lucky enough to earn a living from your art, you're probably white," and that spoke about the racial disparity among working artists in the US, and particularly among art school graduates. The article stated that "the lack of diversity is, for instance, even more pronounced for those with art

school degrees—more than 80 percent of people with undergraduate art school degrees are white, according to the analysis. And it's most severe among art school graduates who go on to make it (or, at the very least, make a living) in the art world—more than 83 percent of working artists with an art school degree are white." What are your thoughts regarding that disparity and how do you see this reflected in the Art and Social Practice Program?

HF: It's obvious, and those of us participating in the art world are aware of that disparity. It reflects the whiteness within art programs in general. An interesting thing is that most successful artists are men, but that is not reflected in art school, where most students are women. The first reaction might be "We need greater diversity within MFA or art programs," but in regard to gender, that hasn't done the trick. That needs to be worked on, and I think it is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed throughout the whole school system in a way that is different and new, not only by having grade-school students take a weekly art class—that's not going to do it. We are trying to address some of that problem with the project I am working on right now, which is about creating a contemporary art museum within a K–8 public school here in Portland that has a primarily African American population. I think that by having students go to school within the context of a museum, where they are constantly exposed to contemporary art, they can consider being artists or having a relationship to art in a more meaningful way than with a once-a-year field trip to an art museum. But that is only one school; things like that would need to be reproduced all over the place. In my experience it is an uphill battle. For instance, for seven years we ran

the lecture series here at PSU, and each year we selected twenty artists to come do a lecture, and I did the selection of the lecturers with the students. I always warned them to pay attention to diversity, and every single time we would end up with a majority of white males on the students' lists of who they wanted to invite. We worked that out to create a diverse balance, and still, white males would accept our invitations more than females or people of color. And I don't know why that is. It was hard to keep it really balanced with that dynamic at play. It is an indication of the deep systemic issues going on that prevent diversity.

PVG: I see that as a responsibility educators have, because biases are very strong and rooted; we grow up in a society that is dominated by beliefs about which groups are worthier than others. And educators are in a great position to point to that and correct it according to their field of impact. And it is important because it creates a culture within programs or educational spaces.

HF: Yes. I have also experienced it within faculty. In PSU's art department, most professors are white. It's dramatic: out of twenty professors eighteen are white. And there is a specific fellowship created to bring more diversity to the faculty, which is great, but the problem is that it only gives them the opportunity to teach for four years and after that we lose that person. I have proposed to give people in that fellowship a permanent position after the four years, and then bring another person, to create more permanent change. But it's not set up to work that way. And it's not exclusive to the art world. We can look at writing, engineering, business—it's a broader societal thing. It's good to take responsibility as an individual

and in the area you occupy, but it's obviously misleading if it is talked about as something that only happens in the art world.

PVG: I understand that, but I appreciated the connection between studying art and making a living as artists that the article made. Because it suggests there are structural obstacles after school that prevent people of color from achieving success as artists, or even just making a decent living from art. One of the beauties of social practice is that it allows you to be an artist in other spaces, rather than being confined to the art world. If I am more comfortable or interested in working with community-based organizations, or schools, or my family, I can try to make my work happen there, rather than trying to fit somewhere else. But that also implies a remarginalization, because the idea of success for artists is still heavily defined by the art world and the art created in and for alternative spaces doesn't get the same financial and social recognition as the art created for museums and galleries.

HF: But there are a lot of different art worlds that you can be successful in while avoiding the commercial system. All that people should really be concerned about is: Can you create a successful practice that sustains you? And if your practice intersects with the art world, great, but it doesn't need to. Most of our references are within the art world because those are the people we know about, but there are many folks with interesting practices that nobody knows about in the art world. There are some benefits in having connections to art, because you have freedoms that you don't in other disciplines or other ways of working, and I like that kind of freedom, and yet it's not for everyone.



PVG: On a related topic, at the SP program we had an anti-oppression workshop, which was part of an effort from students to bring more intentional education about issues of racism, sexism, and other dynamics of social oppression into the program. Do you think it is important for SP students to have that kind of education? What are your thoughts about the most appropriate way to do that?

HF: I am somehow resistant to making that education a mandate, because it makes some assumptions about the nature of the work that we produce. It doesn't hurt for people to get the information, but we have to be careful when we make something an absolute. If your work is about bringing dogs into a museum or holding hands on the beach it would be useful, but it's not as necessary. For other people's practices it could be very relevant. I am also leery because if we look at social-science programs, they have all kinds of requirements that we don't have: board certifications and working with human-subject reviews, for example. I have looked into that and although it's interesting, it's not what I would like to see in the program, or in my own work, because it's very restrictive. And in talking with people who work with those models, I have found that they find them of some value, but would prefer not to always have to work with them. They create a logistical nightmare many times. And one of the reasons I like being an artist is that I don't have to deal with that, I like the freedoms we have. If there was a consistent set of students going to work with communities they had no connection to and doing disruptive and insensitive work, I would do something about it. But I haven't seen that happening, and what I have seen is the opposite, mostly an incredible carefulness about working with people who are different

from the artists. I am also concerned about sending the message that you might automatically cause a problem through your engagement as an artist. One of the ways in which it can start affecting people negatively is by making them think "I am not going to do anything because I am going to start oppressing people with my presence and interactions so I am going to stick to people who are like me." That's why it would be good to come up with a class that is very specific to the program, a class that would focus on the idea of being sensitive, thoughtful, inquisitive, doing your research when you work with people from other generations or cultures. I like the idea of that, and of looking at models in use in social work and other disciplines and seeing what parts we would want to bring into our own version of it. I personally like the challenges of being put into situations with people who are different from me, not only in terms of socioeconomic or culture, but for example, to have the opportunity to work with scientists and find ways to interact with them in an intelligent way and learn from them. I want to encourage students to feel like they can have positive interactions with lots of different people, not by using standardized codes, but by using thoughtful situational ethics and common sense.

PVG: On the one hand it is important to consider that in working in the context of a university, or any educational institution, you are not only forming artists, but also citizens. But on the other hand, one of the things that art can do is to provoke and confront; we are allowed to push boundaries and break rules in ways that are not allowed in other disciplines. I personally appreciate work that is challenging and I actually came to art partly looking for a place in which I could come up with my own code

of ethics in how to work with people, instead of implementing one that came from somewhere else.

HF: That is why I was so impressed by the work of John Malpede with the Los Angeles Poverty Department. What he was doing (and continues to do) could have been perceived as disrespectful, but I realized that he was being more respectful because he was being real. He wasn't coddling or patronizing, and his group was doing very interesting theater artworks together that were as hard-core as any contemporary art; he wasn't watering it down because of wanting to be overly sensitive to the people he worked with from Skid Row. And in the end it wasn't disrespectful because you knew he had a very close relationship that was built over many years with his collaborators. It was an amazing thing that wouldn't have been allowed if there had been a rigid code of ethics. And when Wendy Ewald worked with kids in Appalachia, she probably crossed many lines from the point of view of the social sciences; she would have been seen as too personally involved to be objective or something like that. There are situations with this kind of work in which codes would actually be disruptive.

PVG: It sounds like you think there might be some value in having a class that addresses social-oppression issues?

HF: Yes, it is high on the list of the classes I would consider as topical subjects in the program. I would have different people teach it from different perspectives. I could also see it included as part of a theory class. And as you said, it could be something inserted in general as a topic in many classes, as a point of conversation.

PVG: Maybe a class about ethics could be good, because ethics is a term that is tossed around a lot among students, and it could be productive to examine the concept without trying to apply it to anything, or to come to any resolutions. We could look at how it is used in different disciplines and its different meanings to build general knowledge about it. Maybe that would be a good approach, to look at concepts like these from a more abstract level.

HF: Sure. I am definitely interested and happy to discuss those topics, but I also think that there are other places where it might be more needed than in our program, like in studio art programs. But I am not trying to dismiss the idea that introducing more of these discussions and opportunities to learn about these topics within the social-practice program at PSU would be a good idea.

PVG: I would like to change the subject now. In an online interview you did with Nic Paget-Clarke, in talking about an artwork you were creating for the American Festival Project in Whitesburg, Kentucky, you said, "In all the situations I go into, I go in with the idea that I'm going to be learning... like a roving classroom." How does that apply to your role as professor in Art and Social Practice? What have you learned, as an artist and human being, from your students?

HF: That's a good question. That interview took place in 2000, four years before I started teaching at PSU and seven years before I started the Social Practice program. There are some things that I have learned that are very informal, and some that have had a more formal impact. Carmen Papalia's<sup>1</sup> presence in the program as a student, for example, was major

because it made me realize how reliant we are on visualness, and how strong the biases toward the visual are in art education. Since then I have been constantly trying to get the school to create more inclusive language, because it felt like we were discriminating against Carmen by calling everything visual. And there were other practical things, like wanting to go on a bike ride with students and learning to accommodate so he could participate too. That was a very instructive experience for me. The projects students propose and realize have opened my eyes to possibilities or knowledge about what's out there, the demographics, contexts, and ideas people work with. The process of meeting with somebody individually or in a group brainstorming around a project has always been fruitful for me, because besides helping students on their projects, it also sparks ideas about things I would like to do. That process has always been a great incubator of ideas for me.

PVG: In an essay he wrote for the book *Art School: Propositions for the Twenty-First Century*, Ernesto Pujol proposes the idea of artist as citizen, and what that means for him is an artist who is also a public intellectual, a visual scholar, and an active cultural worker who participates in global society. I have found that idea incredibly stimulating and I am wondering what relationship you expect the graduates of your program to have not only with the particular contexts their projects happen in, but to society in general?

HF: This question makes me think of the way people always assume, within my work but also in relationship to the program, that there's a mandate for people to do good. And I have always argued that's not true, it is just an option but not a mandate.

I am always suspicious of artists who believe they are "doing good," because in art there are too many variables, and you don't often end up with tangible things like improved dental care for lower-income people, or something like that. That could happen, but you might need to team up with somebody to make sure that is the case. I just don't feel that artists have those kinds of skills usually. What I feel more comfortable with is evaluating things situationally and determining what is the most interesting thing to do within the given context and set of resources. Sometimes that ends up being interesting only in a metaphorical kind of way; at other times there might be real-world applications. But I don't make the claim that I am going to change somebody's life. I suppose my work might do that in the way we think of art enriching people, like when you read a very good novel, or you listen to some very good music, and you feel stimulated, excited or happy, those emotional experiences can facilitate the expansion of possibility. I feel more comfortable working on that realm than I do in the idea of having real-world change applications. Even if that happens there is no guarantee that is going to happen all the time, and I feel uncomfortable creating that expectation for students or myself. There is also a problem with scale; in defining whether something you do is better because it helped more people than somebody else's work that only helped one person. I try to think in terms of a broader practice that has lots of components, some of which could fall under the heading of activism, some under education, some under less identifiable topics. Having said that, I do think that all people, in whatever role they have, have an opportunity to have a positive impact if they want to do that.

I like the idea of people functioning as public intellectuals, because it breaks free of the idea that only MIT professors

can be public intellectuals, and that is appealing to me. If you can think of becoming your neighborhood public intellectual, that is not only doable, but also very interesting. If you decide to be the person in your neighborhood who is posing interesting questions, setting up opportunities for people to engage in participatory educational, aesthetic, or physical activities, and think about how to make a location a more intellectually stimulating place, that sounds great. And that might help with the idea that what you have to do as a social-practice artist is to fix things, instead of setting up opportunities for intellectual engagement, or adding to the set of interesting things people are encountering in their lives. Some of those things might connect to political, social, and economic issues, but others might be more focused on humor, or strangeness.

PVG: We have talked about the issue of making a living as an artist, and you are critical of the kind of art education in which students are taught to create objects for the art market and its derived institutions, because only a very small percentage of those students will actually be successful in that system. But from what I observed, opportunities to make a living as a social-practice artist depend on the same institutions that support studio artists, creating a similar situation in which only a small percentage of social-practice graduates are achieving “success.” And success for social-practice artists seems to continue to be defined by the recognition one gets from the art establishment. What does this mean as more social-practice programs emerge and more social-practice artists are competing for limited resources?

HF: I think that is an interesting question, but I don’t agree 100 percent with it. On one hand, none of the people in the

program or who graduated from it are pursuing commercial gallery careers. And the fact that they are going around that is a major difference from a conventional program. I think it’s a liberating thing. You may have success within the art world but if you are not doing it through a commercial gallery, you haven’t been influenced or affected by it in the same way as someone who is pursuing those things is, and your work is operating at another level of that world: museums, art centers, public art, et cetera. The social-practice students oftentimes enter these institutions through the education department, which is completely different from what a studio artist would want or expect. A studio artist might get some extra money from leading a museum family program, but that’s not what they want to do or what they consider to be part of their practice. In the case of the Social Practice program at PSU, people are leaving the program and working with major institutions through their education departments, doing major projects that are part of their practice and that continue to sustain them. It happens in the same institution, it gets validation, but it’s hitting at a different spot, it’s functioning in a different way, and the social-practice artist has freedoms that the traditional artist doesn’t have. You have to sift through it in a finer way to see the differences. It’s easy to say, “Social-practice artists are showing in art museums too, so it’s the same,” but it’s not, it’s a different process, outcome, position, agency, all those things. And it’s a much more open field. The potential of doing work as an artist through education programs at museums, for example, is almost unlimited, while your chances of being in an exhibition at a museum are very, very small. You don’t see studio MFA students doing things at the Portland Art Museum as part of their practice, it’s not happening, and it’s not likely

to happen. But because of the nature of Social Practice we have not only done work there, we were asked to do it, and it has been going on for five years. And there are other non-art contexts or institutions through which people are doing work and getting paid for it—grocery stores and nonprofits, which might be of no interest to a studio artist but which for a social-practice artist are exciting opportunities. It is true that you get more art-world attention from what you do at art institutions, because we are still working in an art context and that has weight, but I hope that eventually having a residency at the grocery store will be seen as just as valid and as important as having a residency at an art museum. I also feel that I am in the first wave of what is being formally called social practice, and within that wave most of what we have done was connected to art institutions. My hope is that the second and third waves, which are students of these new social-practice programs among other people, are going to find ways to connect to non-art institutions and get support and validation through those institutions.

1. Carmen Papalia is a graduate from the PSU Art and Social Practice MFA Program and is legally blind. He uses his own experience with access, dictated by his visual disability, as the foundation for participatory projects that investigate individual access in relationship to public space, art institutions, and visual culture.

## Notes

### 74–79

Assembly is a five-day set of presentations, discussions, interventions, and activities addressing and exploring topics related to art and social practice. It happens in Portland, Oregon and it is organized and curated by Art and Social Practice MFA faculty, students, alumni, and partners.

### 80–83

Students from the Social Practice MFA in a cabin retreat and a forest walk with the artist Julie Ault.

### 84–87

Shine a Light was a collaboration between the Portland Art Museum and the Art and Social Practice MFA Program. This yearly event happened for five consecutive years and featured a mix of student/artist-driven installations, performances, and interventions throughout the museum's campus, offering an opportunity for visitors to reconsider their relationship to art, to engage with the museum in unexpected ways, and to think about the role of museums in people's lives in the 21st century.

## Pies de fotos

### 74–79

Assembly es una serie de presentaciones, discusiones, intervenciones y actividades que duran cinco días y exploran temas relacionados con el arte y la práctica social. Estas presentaciones se llevan a cabo en Portland, Oregón y es un evento organizado y curado por los estudiantes, maestros, egresados y colaboradores de la maestría en arte y práctica social de la Universidad Estatal de Portland.

### 80–83

Retiro de estudiantes de la maestría en práctica social en una cabaña y en un paseo por el bosque con la artista Julie Ault.

### 84–87

Shine a Light fue una colaboración entre el Museo de Arte de Portland y la maestría en arte y práctica social. Este evento anual se llevó a cabo por cinco años consecutivos e incluyó una mezcla de instalaciones, *performances* e intervenciones en todo el museo, creadas por los estudiantes/artistas. Estos acontecimientos invitaban a los visitantes a reconsiderar su relación con el arte, a involucrarse con el museo de maneras inesperadas, y a pensar sobre el papel de los museos en el siglo xxi.















