



It Can Change  
As We Go Along

Ten Years of the PSU  
Art and Social Practice  
MFA Program

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## Introduction

When I started teaching at Portland State University in 2004 I was assigned to sculpture classes, but I told the department chair that I really wanted to teach something else closer to my own practice. A couple of years later I was able to slowly start changing my undergrad classes to focus more on collaboration and working with the public. Some students got really excited about that; others were irritated and thought what I was doing was not art.

In the summer of 2006, I organized and led an intensive summer program at the Kitchen in New York City that was billed as an Art and Social Engagement workshop. It was a chance to really put into action some of the pedagogical ideas I'd been developing with my own practice, and many of the projects and programs that we tried there were later adapted for the PSU Art and Social Practice MFA Program (including the application requirement for three short videos to be made—a tour of your neighborhood, interviewing a stranger about the significance of his or her clothes, and demonstrating a talent).

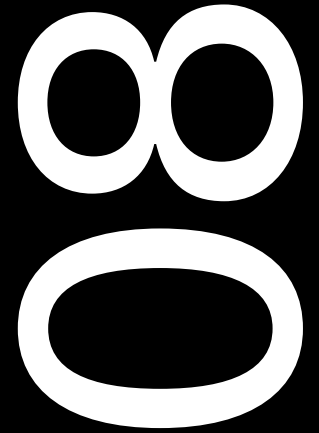
The MFA Program came about out of an administrative imperative. The dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts at PSU said that she wanted there to be more MFA students in the Art Department, but there was a limited number of studios so enrollment could not be increased. She then suggested that some faculty be taken off of the MFA committee, which the faculty did not want to do. So I suggested that I could create a new MFA program in which the students wouldn't need individual studios. Everyone seemed skeptical but said that if I could enroll four students for the fall of 2007 they would let the program run. By September I had eight students lined up for the first cohort. That first year was very experimental and I have

great gratitude for the students who went through that process with me — Amy, Avalon, Cyrus, Eric, Katy, Laurel, Sandy, and Varinthorn.

In that first year of the program we were asked to have a recorded conversation about social practice that was then transcribed and printed in the Winter 2008 issue of *Art Journal*. That conversation is included here along with a 2018 version done with the current students in the program.

We are now in our tenth year of the program and have graduated over fifty students. There have been lots of ups and downs and points when I thought the program might end, but we persevered. We have had amazing faculty and lecturers, and incredible students, and many interesting experiences along the way. This book gives a glimpse (through a somewhat random set of photos that we have collected) into that history. I'm now looking forward to the next ten years.

— Harrell Fletcher



# 20

**Harrell Fletcher** Whether it's intentional or not, whatever you're involved with during this time in graduate school is part of the pedagogy of the program, and it can change as we go along.

**Sandy Sampson** What do you mean, "it can change"?

**HF** Well, the pedagogical structure that we're using this year can change for next year, and continue to change after that. I want it to evolve, and not be fixed and overly structured.

**SS** It seems to me that shaping this program is social practice. For me personally, pedagogy and social practice are like two sides of the same coin.

**HF** I don't think they have to be, but having a teaching component to your work is an option for sure. My sense about social practice is that it can be anything as long as it follows a few basic ideas that need to be there. Other than that, it's wide open. So, you could make projects that are really obnoxious and are not teaching anybody anything, but it happens to be out in the public and working within a post-studio approach, so it would be a subset of social practice. Including educational components in artwork is interesting, but there is no mandate that social-practice work needs to do that.

**SS** That brings up a point of occasional discomfort for me. I feel an expectation when someone asks me "what is social practice?" to speak for some giant monolithic social practice, instead of just saying what I'm doing or what I think. Does anybody else come up against that?

**Eric Steen** Yeah, I do.

**HF** What do you say?

**ES** Well, I basically tell people how I understand the workings of this program. This



The social-practice group meets at the home of Harrell Fletcher in 2008

program is in many respects the opposite of studio practice and the traditional approach to art education. I do end up telling people that art as social practice tends to be geared toward having social interaction as a medium, although I don't always do that in my own work. What I haven't been telling people, but probably should be, is that it has been a pretty experimental educational process. We are trying to keep a type of evolution or flexibility happening within the program and for me that is what I appreciate the most about the experience so far.

**SS** When you say the evolutionary process, you're referring specifically to this program?

**ES** Yes. We are in our first year and are now shaping it while at the same time trying to keep it flexible because we won't always be here. Next year there will be seven more students and they will be shaping it, too, and onward from there.

**Amy Steel** How do you guys describe social practice to people who aren't artists?

**Cyrus Smith** I end up giving examples, and I try to give as varied an array as possible.

**Avalon Kalin** What examples do you end up using?

**CS** I actually end up using all of your work a lot, because I think there are a lot of varied approaches within that. I talk about how Katy is working with a collaborative group, and how working with a group can be considered a part of social practice, because you're

not working in a studio, you're having to socialize to even create. And their group tends to work with event-based projects, which seems to be another thing that fits into social practice in that you're gathering a group of people to have an experience together. I also mention Laurel and Avalon's work in relationship to gathering people, but in maybe more of a spiritual sense, to explain that the act of gathering could serve a lot of different ends. And as business, Eric's approach—publishing—may be more connected to Varinthorn's approach, while education is what Sandy is working with, and play seems to be what Amy works with.

**HF** Laurel and Avalon are spiritual?

**CS** Maybe working with spirituality and community in different ways.

**Laurel Kurtz** But I wouldn't say that overall that's what I do.

**HF** Would you say that, Avalon?

**AK** It's definitely there, gathering as a spiritual thing, for sure. But it's not always oriented that way necessarily.

**HF** I guess there are some things that obviously have a spiritual connection that you are working with. What's the place you are doing a project with called? Interfaith?

**AK** Enter Being. They are an interfaith storytelling group. I'm doing reenactments from the lives of the people there. It's a kind of residency with them. I'm interested in spirituality in general, and being ambiguous about spirituality. The dowser Laurel and I have been working with is a great example of that. We've dowsed public sculptures for auras, trees for energy lines, and the ground around Reed College for musical tones in the environment that we then had a vocalist perform.



Avalon Kain, Laurel Kurtz,  
and Mike Doney, *Dowsing*  
at City Hall, 2008

**LK** The dowsing projects appeal to me because Mike Doney, the dowser that Avalon and I have connected with, is very open with his friendship and knowledge, and he likes to share experiences and information, something I value in communities. I have known Mike since I was twelve. The bird feeders came to be because my dad is very knowledgeable about the birds that visit our yard. He keeps a list, has reference books, and makes feeders and food for them. I wanted to share his knowledge with others as much as I wanted to learn about the birds myself.

**CS** I also use Laurel's work as an example for art and social activism. And Varinthorn does some activist work.

**LK** I did some volunteer work for the Police Accountability Campaign in 2000 because I was upset with police and civilian relationships. The stories and news reports I encountered were fearsome and led to my project in 2005, which involved making rubbings of police officers' badges while they were still wearing them, and then showing the results at a doughnut shop. It was a way for me to have a personal relationship with the police officers and to conquer my fear of them. My current work involves doing volunteer work in a gentrified neighborhood. If the relationships I develop lead to other projects down the line, I am open to that, but in the meantime, I want to have as little impact as possible and do more giving than receiving.

**HF** I noticed that Kate Pocrass, who spoke here as part of the PSU lecture series,

referred to social sculpture in her bio. The term comes from Joseph Beuys, of course, but then it was sort of recycled and used in the 1990s, and then it seemed like other terms eclipsed it, but I guess it still resonates with certain people.

**SS** Who are those people?

**HF** Well, Kate for one. Some other Bay Area people like Lori Gordon use that term.

**ES** I don't think that just because there is a social element the work becomes social sculpture. For Beuys there was movement toward creating some sort of social structure, a system that all contribute to for the greater good.

**HF** You mean like helping to start the Green Party, that sort of thing?

**ES** Well, he certainly did do that, right? But just using participation, I don't exactly see that fitting in with the term *social sculpture*. It seems to have more of an activist feeling to it.

**HF** I think he also used it in reference to lecture events.

**SS** I always understood Beuys's lectures to be examples of social sculpture, but the term more generally embodies an idea of participation, people consciously participating, and understanding even the power of language to shape the world. So, participating and shaping the world could take a million different forms, right? In that sense I agree with you that just because something has a social aspect doesn't make it social sculpture. And participation could have no physical aspect whatsoever and still be social sculpture.

**HF** The term in German is *social plastic*. There are two different terms for sculpture in Germany; one is reductive and the other, "plastic," is additive.



Laurel Kurtz, *Police Badge Rubbing Project*, 2005

**SS** Why don't we be social plastic artists? I love that.

**HF** Is there a term that you all would have preferred the program be called instead of "art and social practice"? It could have been participatory art, relational aesthetics, social sculpture, community-based art, and there are others.

**SS** The thing I like about "social practice" is that you don't have to tack the "art" part onto it, you can just say social practice, and that leaves it much more open. And "practice" is a good word for everyone who's walking and breathing, I think. If you say "relational aesthetics" it starts sounding like a textbook.

**ES** What I love about calling it "social practice" is that it doesn't have to be within the context of what somebody would think of as "art." So if I'm not making something that somebody would see as "art" it still



fits into this category of being some experimental project or practice.

**CS** I don't know if there's any way to incorporate it, but "experimental" seems to keep cropping up in my life.

**HF** It could have been called "experimental practice" but that could include studio work, too. "Experimental Social Practice"? "Experimental Social Participatory Practice"?

**KA** "Social Experiments"?

**AS** Yeah!

**HF** At a faculty meeting we were going through promotion and tenure documents for the department. This gave me an opportunity to make some changes. One of the things that I changed was some terminology. We have the larger Art Department, which includes graphic design, art history, and what had previously been referred to as studio art, but everyone referred to it as "studio." So I said "let's change that to contemporary art practice, because it would cover social practice and anything that is not studio based, but would still makes sense for studio work, too." When I first brought it up, they said "OK, well, we'll just call ourselves art," but art is what the department is called, so that seemed like it would be confusing. Then I pushed for "art practice" and it seems like that's going through; then you could just call it "practice" for short the way it used to be called "studio." That makes a clearer distinction from art history, which is focused on the study of art, while what we do is the practice side of art, the application side of it. But it's been a struggle; it's really hard to get the faculty not to use the word *studio* to refer to everything that I'm calling "practice." There were a lot of other administrative changes along the way. The highest achievement for faculty applying for tenure is to have done a solo exhibition in a gallery or museum;



Eric Steen, *Utopia* —  
A Science Fiction Marathon,  
2008

but if what you're doing is social practice that may not be the best scenario for your work. So I added a lot of other options to the list. So far people are going with it, but there were definitely a few folks who weren't happy with these changes.

**KA** What are some of the things you added to the list of possible achievements?

**HF** Self-initiated public projects of all sorts, work that has an audience and a form of some kind but might not be shown in a gallery or even officially sponsored. There's another category called refereed and non-refereed work, which has to do with whether or not you've been asked to do something or you did it yourself and somehow made it public independent of a museum or journal or whatever. In the administration's world being asked is considered much better than just doing it yourself.

**KA** I got in an argument with our contemporary theory teacher about that, because we have to write papers and we aren't allowed to use anything self-published as reference — nothing written by artists, only words published in a magazine or curated in some way by someone who writes a publication. I said, "So artists can't write about other artists, and have their writings considered valid if they self-publish?" I was thinking about the art group Temporary Services. We weren't allowed to use the Internet for our research. I asked, "If I can get the artist to print out the information they've posted on the Internet and send it to me in the mail, would that count?" She said, "No."

**LK** It's funny, that really stood out to me in class, too. You said, "So basically it just has to be published by someone else?" And she paused and said, "Yes."

**HF** That is the way studio practice has been traditionally taught. Your résumé should only list official galleries and museums, and official public art; if it's public art then it has to be a public art commission. Somebody in authority needs to decide you can show your work to the public. And if you are a good studio artist following the model then that's what you're going to do. You are going to wait your turn and hope that the curator comes and visits your studio and loves your stuff, puts it into the gallery. Somebody else "referees" everything, right? Takes control of everything. And that's the only thing that is considered valid in academia. Most of time success in the art world is about representation. To be part of a commercial gallery means you need to be making something that's a commodifiable object; otherwise for the most part those galleries won't bother with you. It winds up limiting who can be a part of that system. One thing about social practice, in opposition to studio practice, is that it can be refereed but it doesn't have to be. You can self-initiate where the work is shown, you can self-initiate your own writing on it that goes into a zine or onto the Web. The reality in the studio model is that most people never end up showing what they make — it just gets piled up somewhere. In social practice, because part of the idea is that you need to have an audience, showing the work is automatically built into the process. So you're not just making things that pile up; the work always has an audience, it becomes real, the show or project, or action or performance gets realized. And my sense is that those self-initiated projects can be a line on your résumé, without ever having been validated by some larger institution or person. The same sort of thing goes for writing. If you have published something through your zine,

or your blog, that's enough, it's available to an audience, you wrote it, it happened, you don't need someone refereeing it to be valid.

**KA** This makes me think about the blogs, and self-publishing and when we were in our contemporary art history class, the teacher seemed to always be asking, "If this doesn't have to be refereed, how are you supposed to know it's good [laughter]?" "How are we supposed to know if this is even art, if there's not someone defining that for us?"

**HF** That position implies that all refereed work is good.

**KA** You know, it's interesting because you'll hear that from people who aren't as familiar with reading blogs, for instance. You get this idea that some people think they need everything refereed, that there's no way they could be the expert on anything. I don't want to disparage the role of a critic or an art thinker or someone who's interested in taking ideas and putting them together. They're doing a kind of work that can give things a different depth or breadth, or a different sort of meaning. It's just that there's a difference when the people who do that work become the only people who can say what might be meaningful for others.

**Varinthorn Christopher** Katy made me think of the *New York Times* and Daily Kos; if the museum and curator are like the *New York Times*, then the Daily Kos is akin to social practice. At first people didn't really trust the Daily Kos or think it valid, but now it has become a fresh and alternative news source that many people read. It gives a different perspective to journalism. I have a journal there called Siamese Buckaroo.

**HF** The *New York Times* states "all the news that's fit to print," like nothing else really is necessary. But then you have all these upstart bloggers, and after a while

it starts to reverse itself and the *New York Times* is looking to the bloggers to get their news, so they can write about it in the *New York Times*. And the same with something like YouTube where at first it's seen as just a huge mass of nonsense, and then some important things happen as a result of the accessibility of it, like the George Allen Senate race situation with the "macaca" reference. During the campaign Allen made a racist reference that was videotaped and posted on YouTube, and then all the major networks picked it up. That changed the outcome of the race and gave the Democrats a majority in the Senate. And the same situation exists with social practice; it's like YouTube in that it can be all sorts of different things; some people are going to like some of it, some people are going to like other things. There isn't, at least it's my hope, a hard-and-fast set of guidelines. I have my interests, I want to filter some things out, but I don't want to filter out everybody else's interests at the same time.

**SS** Outsider art gets called outsider art once somebody who's in the know decides to claim it and make it public and put it in an art context. But the great thing about artists working outside of the mainstream is that they can referee themselves.

**HF** Self-referees.

**SS** Yeah. I've never heard the term *referee* outside of a sports context before.

**HF** It's a very academic term. The thing that's been interesting for me in putting this program together is that on a very regular basis I keep being able to discover what it should be, rather than having formalized the whole thing in advance. It has occurred as an experiment, and along the way I'm starting to understand what it is in a way that I didn't when the program started. So even realizing this refereed and non-refereed dynamic,

I kind of knew that, but it was more intuitively knowing it, and now I can put it into those terms, and realize that, yes, this is something I feel strongly about, this is partly what we're trying to do with the program, is to break down the concept of the referee.

**LK** I wasn't sure if you meant that it's inherent in social practice that there would be a larger audience, because I was thinking that there aren't aspirations of necessarily reaching a wider audience, it's just that...

**HF** I just meant an audience of some kind more than yourself and a hoped for potential art world audience.

**LK** A different audience, a nonart audience, or a self-chosen audience?

**HF** My sense is that there should be an audience—which could be one person that you send a letter to. That's the very basic level of social practice—sending a letter to someone, as opposed to writing in your journal and never showing it to anyone. That is strictly for yourself and that can be great, I'm not saying there's something wrong with that, I'm saying that this program is about sending letters, not about writing journals, in a metaphoric and real way. For some people the journal is meant to always be private, that's really truly what they want for it. But we want to be published, we want people to care about what we care about, know about what we're thinking, so let's just build it in as part of the program that there needs to be an intended specific audience that can also be made up of participants. To me that's what the social is. It's not that you collaborate with somebody on the work but that there is a specific intended audience. There's got to be an audience with this work or it's not really happening for me. This is interesting, too, how quickly we're accepting this term, *social practice*, that didn't exist four or five years ago. So whenever we comment on a "social practice" project from an earlier time we are

retroactively applying it. I mean, we're one of only two schools using this term for an actual program as far as I know right now, but you can see how quickly it's getting absorbed.

**LK** It's a meme.

**AK** These terms and generalities become problematic. We have to name "social practice" but isn't it just meaningful activity that is relevant to us and we feel is relevant to other people? In the end, value is relative, and these terms are negotiated in values.

**HF** I don't refer to myself as a "social practice" artist. It became useful in the context of a school setting as a way to frame a practice and a study that was going to be different from a traditional one that was studio based. Beyond that, I'm not a fan of categorization. This is just a term that we're throwing on top of things as a way of looking at them. But it's not integral to the work. And so if you feel like it's something else, for instance, whatever it was you just said, Avalon, that seems fine to me, too.

**AK** Meaningful activity that's important to us.

**HF** I still question the term *social practice*. It was expedient, to some extent the lesser of multiple evils.

**AK** It's funny it seems so solid.

**SS** What were some of the rejects?

**HF** All of those other terms, like *relational aesthetics*, *community-based practice*, *social sculpture*. It just seemed the one that felt the least squirmy. There's a squirm factor to these things. If someone were to come up to me and say, "Oh, you're a relational aestheticist [laughter]," I would definitely not feel comfortable with that! And somehow social practice was OK. But I'm still almost ready to change it.



Amy Steel and Sandy Sampson, Portland Greeter, 2008

**ES** Alternative education?

**AS** Creative inquiry was another nice one.

**HF** The thing that was most important to me was getting rid of "studio." Another term that could have been used was *post-studio*. But it felt like that was somehow a little bit dated, and so we went with the newest thing, hoping that it might have some mileage.

**SS** It keeps coming up that we are in opposition to studio, in opposition to something, and the thing I like about "social practice," as opposed to "post-studio" or something, is that it's not inherently oppositional. The words are not oppositional; they're defining something instead of just responding to or reacting against something else.

**HF** I would ultimately really like it if what we're referring to now as the Social Practice program sort of drifted away from the art department entirely and became its own thing.

**CS** But why in the first place would we call ourselves artists? It's a conversation we've had before about having an umbrella organization, like the way nonprofits can gather under an umbrella organization that can help them gain funding. Art can be a term that, as an umbrella, allows you to act in a lot of different ways.

**SS** As opposed to being a dentist.

**CS** As opposed to being a dentist, or a post-dentist.

**HF** And there are some pretty great things about art. One is that it's a super open field to do what you want to do, and most other practices aren't. There were things that were interesting to me about art at the beginning, but as I've taken it further, art in a professional sense is no longer interesting to me. So this is the way that you can do a U-turn and head back, and then go off somewhere else. Like "Oh, that's what it is? I thought it was going to be something different. Let me turn here instead." That's what social practice offers for artists. Ultimately it would be great if there were all sorts of people in the Social Practice program who didn't come from studio backgrounds or an art background at all.

**VC** I wanted to be so many things—veterinarian, biologist, psychologist, farmer, journalist, writer. How can I do that? I became a social-practice artist. I'm excited to see art spread out more to interdisciplinary fields and cross-pollinate with other fields. It does not have to be limited to academic areas but instead can reach out in broader society as well. My husband and I will be presenting our research paper at the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, which is a conference in Bremen, Germany, this summer. I am the first author and I was listed as an artist in the conference abstract. I plan to incorporate art and social-practice elements into the presentation. I want to hear more people say, "Oh, I am an artist, and molecular biology is my hobby."

**AK** The Center for Land Use Interpretation is an example of a "platform," which begs the question of how much is it art, and how much of it's just social advocacy or something like that.

**SS** Kind of pedagogical, really.



The Committee (Katy Asher, Eric Steen, and Chris Hudson), 2007–2008

**HF** Or you could look at it as a group of people that were really into something and decided to get deep into it and make it available to other people because they liked it.

**KA** Where could this type of work exist institutionally? I keep thinking about funding, or people wanting to engage in certain artistic practices that aren't as commodifiable, and thinking that the institution helps in those ways. My first thought is, would social practice move into the social work realm, or sociology, or psychology, or any number of things? Would it move into the business realm? Business is a major aspect of our culture, it's a capitalist thing that also exists in an institutional setting. How would money affect what this practice is about?

**HF** One of the things that I like about art and business and some other things is that you can become a professional at that thing, you could get an MBA in business, or you could not have any degree at all and open your food shack business, or any other business, furniture store or whatever, and nobody's going to stop you, right? Same with being an artist, you can get your terminal degree in it, but you can also be a total amateur who's never taken a class at all and you can achieve the highest levels of success having done that, as opposed to being a lawyer. You can't practice law without having a law degree, or a doctor, you'll get put in jail [laughter] if you try to practice being a doctor.

What do you all think about the fact that you are getting your terminal degrees

in this, and that maybe someone who didn't bother to get a degree at all is doing really great work in the same field that you're studying and spending a lot of money on to get a degree. One response could be to say, well, that's not art then, it's only art if you have your MFA [laughter]! But that doesn't really happen in the gallery context because the gallery is too "wild west," they don't really care about MFAs that much, they just care about what sells and what's in fashion. But in academic institutions they do care, so unless you are really famous you're not going to get a job teaching at a college level without an MFA. Now some schools are offering a PhD in art. Eventually, that might mean to teach you would have to get a PhD. A lot of my teachers didn't have MFAs when I was in school, but now all of your teachers have MFAs. And if we look at the system of the normal studio practice, it's all geared in the direction of commercial art and museums. Only a tiny, tiny percentage of people actually arrives there, and if they do, an even smaller percentage survives after five years of that. Maybe they make some money for a while, and then they get out of it, or they fall out of it. If that existed in any other program, like getting an MBA or a law degree or a medical degree, those programs would empty out instantly; people aren't going to go through all of that to wind up not getting a job. But for some reason artists are willing to do that. So my sense is, OK, that seems out of whack, something's really wrong if that's what's going on here and 95 or 98 percent of the people that get these MFAs then disappear. They just disappear, and that's why you never hear about them again. And then the art schools advertise those 2 percent who did really well who came out of their program, and everyone thinks, "Oh, I'll be the next one of those people." Maybe we could create a program in which 95 percent of students went on to sustain themselves functioning as artists, but if that's going to happen, it's not going to be through the gallery system, because it doesn't have

the capacity to support that many artists. Then, what do you do? Other practices, like small farmers, or small business people, have a pretty high failure rate, too, but a much higher success rate than artists do. You could look at all sorts of different practices and then try and figure out how an artist would operate in those systems. What would happen if art students took farmers and business people and social workers, etc., as role models instead of the gallery artists? I don't exactly know what the conclusions are yet. You all are in some way the test, and we'll see what's happening with you five years from now, ten years from now... [laughter]

**SS** The links you sent us to the *New York Times* article about social entrepreneurs really talk to this.<sup>1</sup> Because when we examine the model of traditional entrepreneurs and businesses, it's not, I think, what any of us want to do. We don't want to set up a booth at Saturday Market, or slot ourselves into the system as it exists right now directly. But we do want to sustain ourselves with our work. I don't know how all the social entrepreneurs mentioned in the article are funding their projects, but the example of Ariel Zylbersztejn in Mexico, who is bringing films for free and bringing in microlenders to the audience, is one really creative approach. It is also very much activism; his project has a very direct purpose. This is certainly something we've talked about among ourselves. We read an interview with Susanne Lacy, and it made us ask, "Are we activists, do we need to be activists?" That's a complicated question...

**VC** The weird thing about art education is that you spend so much money learning things that do very little to help you. I just watched a documentary on John Waters; he dropped out of New York University after one semester because he looked at the classes he had to take and the list of films he needed to watch and he realized that NYU did not offer anything that he was interested

in or that would help him for his filmmaking career. Instead of mowing lawns for money he opened a puppet show in his backyard—which at least fifty neighborhood children always attended. Later he asked his father to fund his film project. His reasoning was that his father did not have to support him during college like his siblings; he got the money and the film changed his career. Personally I am tired of reading about the history of Western art and talking about analyzing the subconscious. What this Social Practice program is going to help me find out is how I can support myself and continue to practice what I am interested in and believe in doing. What skills do I need to build, what should I learn—third language? computer programming?. I want to be happy with what I do for a living and ultimately I want to be useful in the world in some way, and I believe art can be useful.

**HF** One of the things that I think is related to this is the idea of whether or not you have a function as an artist. There is the function of maybe being thought provoking or those other values that are given to art, if you are into contemporary art. My contention is that most of US society doesn't really value it that much; but if they do, then it might be thought provoking. But the general idea is, "I'm an artist, I get to do something that doesn't have a function..."

**KA** Unlike a doctor saving your kidney or something.

**HF** Yeah, a doctor or even a farmer growing some carrots, or someone making some clothes, or whatever—all of these things that have clear functions—or a cook that's making some food, or a person that's making some furniture, or builds a house, millions of things like that. And then there are a lot of other things where the only function is to make money. Within society, that gets highly valued, but those people have problems, too—not unlike the artist, I think—in that

there is a conceptual value for it, but there is also a sense that society doesn't really need you that much and that you are working sort of without a function. For people making money there's a larger sense that, "Well, you're boosting the economy, you are making the economy work." But the artist doesn't even really get that. In some ways what you're most like as an artist is a retired person [*laughter*]. And the thing that happens so often, at least the stereotype of retired people, is that they work their whole life to get to the point where they can retire when they are sixty-five or sixty-seven or whatever, and then they feel useless. Even though whatever their job was might not have been that great for them or for society, they felt like they had a role to play, and then they stopped having that sense, and then they shrivel up and die [*laughter*]. Because they feel like they don't have a social function anymore. And artists are given that from the get-go. They are just told to go off to the studio and do things that have no function. To some degree, that's great, but I think the artists feel like, "Wow, I don't really matter that much, only in terms of fame and money." But then you're no more important than the guy who sells stocks. I think it would be better, actually, if society's sense was that artists have a function in real ways—like the farmer, like the furniture maker, or the clothes maker, the house builder, all of those important people. But I don't exactly know what that function is going to be yet. And that's one of those things I'm trying to figure out.

**VC** We first have to think of art in a different way and teaching art in a different way. When I first tried to collaborate with other departments in the university many people from the other fields thought I was there to contribute something visually. So little by little, I tried to convey to them that I can contribute other things as well and together we can change the way we do research—and hey, there's nothing wrong with visually

pleasing research papers or scientific reports, too.

**AK** Well, that points us back to pedagogy. Harrell, you gravitated back toward schooling and teaching—and you had teaching as part of your earlier artwork when you came up from grad school, like teaching children. I wanted to ask whether you thought that was distinct to you or was part of a broader pattern in contemporary art? This is also something I have been talking with Laurel about, innovations in art and education—we both had really cool experiences taking classes from you. For example, the box-full-of-books lesson where you would bring in a giant box of books, then say, "OK, everybody, you have a minute to read as much about this one artist as possible, and then we're going to go around," and when all the books were done—and we just speed-read and got all this stuff in our heads—you put the books back in the box and you put the box away. It reminds me of inquiry-based learning, where instead of learning by rote and transfer of knowledge to the student who doesn't know the truth, you contact the reality, the fact that some of that truth is already in the student; you engage the experience that they've already had, and you invite them to gain knowledge through their experiences. Do you see this as part of contemporary art, or do you think this is coming from you? And what's your take on inquiry-based learning?

**HF** I'm into it, but I don't think it's any sort of mandate of contemporary art; it's a minority in art, just like it is with everything else in society. If you are asking just personally, I've always had an interest in education. My mom was a teacher and studied alternative education, so it's something that I've always been interested in. All of my research in that area has had to do with children's education, and I've just taken that stuff and applied it to adults. I've never really read much about adult education; I've been



David Dahl and Varinthon Christopher, *Good Seed*, 2008

looking at John Holt, A.S. Neill, and things that they did in childhood education. I'm getting into that space now which is much more about drawing out the knowledge that's within a person and doing experiential education projects. I took a class when I was in college, at Humboldt State, called Experiential Education. We met the first day of class, and we met the last week of class. On the last week, we went on a camping trip together; but the whole rest of that term we were told to figure out some physical activity to do on our own during class time. Completely on our own. I don't know what happened to everybody else—they chose various things, but I don't know if they did them or not—I know that I went down and walked on the train tracks every Monday and Wednesday or whatever it was, during class time, and became really good at walking on these train tracks. It's true, it could have happened outside of school, except that I wouldn't have done it. That was the difference—somehow the school situation and the teacher, Bill Duvall, got me to do this thing that otherwise

I wouldn't have done. And the formalization of the bookends of meeting the first class and doing a few things to get you into it, and the last class in which you went out on this camping trip, somehow worked. So that, and doing the farming program at UC Santa Cruz—it was an apprenticeship model in which you just worked, you did what you were told, and then you thought about it, and then decided whether you liked it or not—those kinds of educational experiences were important to me, and felt like a good way to address some of the problems I saw within art education.

**AS** This program is talking about how we can be really meaningful in society and the different ways we can do that. Most art schools don't talk about the reality of what it's like to be an artist....

**HF** I had a very formative moment in graduate school where I was starting to doubt the whole thing. At first I thought, "All these artists, this is great!" and then "but, what are we doing, why are we doing this?" We were all going off to our studios, and making these weird objects, like we were obsessive-compulsives or something. And I started to realize, "most of this stuff we are working on isn't even going to get shown, and I don't think it would matter if it did." At the same time I had friends who were doing social work, volunteer work with needle exchanges, working with developmentally disabled adults, doing other kinds of things like that, and I was feeling, "Wow, these people are doing something... this is meaningful, what they're doing," and then talking to one of them about it, who was doing some great stuff, and saying, "I'm in graduate school, I'm doing this work, but it feels really meaningless to me, this art stuff, especially in comparison to the work that you do," and she said, "But, no, anybody that makes art, that is really an important, valuable thing for society, just making art is an important thing." And, I thought about



Amy Steel, *Four Square*, 2007

it for a second, and I said, "You are totally wrong, that's just not true, that's a myth [*laughter*]."

**LK** Yeah, but if suddenly you weren't allowed to make art anymore, or if artists weren't allowed to make art, I think society would be a lot different!

**HF** But we're not anywhere close to that, so that's not what we have to worry about. It would be amazing if more of the general population made art, but I think we could do with less "art-world art."

**CS** Where I see it connecting is that art in itself is able to be an emblem for radicalism and different ways of thinking, in that it's always pushing back against the status quo or a given system. It works really powerfully as an emblem. Somebody creating art means that there are people out there who are trying to change our perceptions of things, and that is important.

**KA** I worked at a kids' art camp, Caldera, where at-risk kids were able to express themselves and reflect, and what they made out of that was really transformative to them as individuals. That has meaning. I've witnessed lives being changed, working in that context.

**HF** The problem is that through our socialization and education people are taught that they aren't artists, there're only a few artists and they need to be treated in this special way, either catered to or allowed to find their

"genius" and paid a lot of money or paid nothing and treated as outcasts. I'm not so into professionalization, because of what happens to the work and the motivations for making the work, and then also, you have to rarefy those who do it to be able to sell it, so then everyone can't do it. If everyone was using the non-refereed approach it would be great, in whatever ways they want to. It's this refereed stuff that's bothering me. The Social Practice program also is different in that it's not just about personal expression. I think that personal expression is great, but as far as taking a program in which you're going to be studying, I actually like the approach of the farming program I did, which wasn't about personal expression at all. And yet I felt fulfilled while doing it. It doesn't mean I couldn't also do some drawings or some weird agricultural projects, but I learned how to farm, in a really strict way. I like the idea that this program has a functional element to it, or would eventually. That's probably why I want to plug you guys into the city and to public art projects, so that there would be this potential funding and functional aspect. And then you can express yourselves all you want on the weekends [*laughter*].

**CS** We've been throwing around all these words about being experimental, but you're borrowing a traditional form of education in apprenticeship. That we all might be able to succeed functionally as artists, and have an apprenticeship in functioning as artists, instead of...

**HF** I almost wish that apprenticeship was part of the title of this program. That clarifies things for me...

**CS** Experimental Apprenticeship...

**HF** Right, the Apprenticeship in Social Practice and Something Something.

**ES** Post-Studio Art Production.

**HF** Yeah. That could be good.

**AK** San Keller, when he lectured at PSU in 2005, mentioned that coming out of school he was in a system that paid artists just to do art. He felt that therefore his work should be serving the public that was paying for his career.

**HF** Because he was living in a country that did that; in Switzerland, arts funding isn't a problem.

**AK** But his first works were actually putting advertisements in papers and letting people know that he would do their work for them. And he actually went into people's apartments for some of his first social projects, which were to do people's dishes, to clean their houses, and all sorts of things.

**ES** OK, we've already talked about the program being something that is an attempt to move around, or I guess you can use the word *beyond* [*not transcend*], the traditional, or studio, art model. We have visiting artists—which actually is not different from any other program, but we have them every single week; all the students invite the artists, we host dinners for them on Monday nights, and the artist gives a lecture to the public. We have our own projects that we all work on individually but then we also all pool our efforts to create various public projects. We are working on a project for the Portland City Hall and we're going to have an exhibition prepared for them in July. We're doing something as a group for Reed College in Portland for the Reed Arts Week. The theme for that event is "ghosts" and we are presenting a group of projects for them including pirate radio, a dowsing demonstration, and a ghost-story campfire. We're working with the Bureau of Environmental Services to maybe do a tour of manhole covers in Portland and a canoe tour on the Columbia Slough, and we have various other projects in the works as well. I think

that is a great part of the program, that we are doing so many actual projects out in the world.

**HF** I wanted to bring up the blogs that I have you all keep. And some of you are developing websites. Because social practice has a basic principle that there is some audience, and because oftentimes the work that's made is temporal, or happens in non-formalized sites and situations, the blog is really useful—in the same sort of way that a studio practice person pays rent for a studio to let stuff accumulate in the space, and then when someone does a studio visit they get to see all of the accumulated paintings. But for a social-practice person there isn't a single space in which stuff is accumulating; the idea is that it's happening out in the world, and that some of the projects are totally temporal, so they disappear. In that case the blog becomes a place where you can archive, and formalize what has been going on over a period of time.

**CS** The blogs seem to be appropriate in that our artwork isn't accumulating in a studio, it's out in the world and available for anyone to see—which has been a really interesting kind of shift for me, getting to know that my artwork, when I make it, is out and available in the world.

**VC** It's a very convenient method of communication, especially if you are far away from home, like me. It is comforting to know that my mother in Thailand or my sister in Tokyo can see instantly what I do. Blogging actually opens many opportunities and connections. I just taught my father-in-law, who is seventy-five years old, to blog! It has become the news source for family to read about his wife's chemotherapy and cancer condition, or talking about new friends he meets. A small thing like teaching a retired man to blog led me to meet a doctor from southern India who gives free surgeries for about two hundred people every summer.



Cyrus Smith, *Free Beer for True Democracy*, 2008

I am actually going to build a website for his small nonprofit hospital.

**HF** One of my revelations as the program has progressed is the almost fundamentality of a blog for artists doing social practice. I'm not saying blogs are fundamental to what all programs should be, but it's going to be really useful for this program. They are like public sketchbooks, public notebooks, that also serve as a forum for making documentation that can be used for slide lectures, grant proposals, websites, etc. You can do a project that's totally temporal and it can be documented in this really basic way—a single image and a descriptive text, dates and location—and that form to me has started to seem as fundamental as learning to draw is for a studio program. It's my hope that there is a systemic effect, too; by knowing that you have a blog, it's going to effect what you think you can do as an artist. And ultimately, for me, it's really freeing, because you know there is a public forum for your work and that you don't need to have a gallery letting you show your work when they feel like it is the right time, you can do it anytime.

1 Nicholas Kristof, "The Age of Ambition," *New York Times*, January 27, 2008; <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/opinion/27kristof.html>.

## Photographs



Hiking in Forest Park with Social Practice undergrad class, Portland, OR, 2008





Drinks following Monday Night Lecture Series with Hamza Walker, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2008



Drinks following Monday Night Lecture Series with Larry Sultan, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2009



Physical activity as part of class field trip, Portland, OR, 2009





Physical activity as part of class, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2009



Hannah Jickling taking part in the West Coast Giant Pumpkin Regatta, Tualatin, OR, 2009



Constance Hockaday giving a presentation as part of her graduate project,  
PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2009



Constance Hockaday with a boat she constructed as part of a graduate project,  
Sauvie Island, OR, 2009



Collaborative project and series of presentations organized by members of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Bétonsalon, Paris, 2009



Katherine Ball in collaborative project and series of presentations organized by members of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Bétonsalon, Paris, 2009





Hike with Michael Rakowitz, Portland, OR, 2009



*Portrait of Erskine Wood* by Helen Reed  
as part of *Shine a Light*, Portland Art  
Museum, Portland, OR, 2009



Drinks following Monday Night Lecture Series with Mierle Laderman Ukeles,  
PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2009



Monday Night Lecture Series with  
George Kuchar, PSU School of Art + Design,  
Portland, OR, 2010



*The Incidental Person*, a collaborative project organized by members  
of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, apexart, New York, 2010



*Let Knowledge Serve the City*, a collaborative project organized by members  
of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, NY, 2010



Field trip to visit *The People's Biennial*, curated by Harrell Fletcher as part of TBA Festival with PICA, Portland, OR, 2010



Orientation day, downtown Portland, OR, 2010



Field trip to the Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2010





*Two Boys, Wrestling* by Jason Zimmerman as part of *Shine a Light*,  
Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2010



Monday Night Lecture Series with Amy Franceschini,  
PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2010



Monday Night Lecture Series with Chris Johanson and his band Sun Foot,  
PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2010



Poster listing presenters for PSU MFA Monday Night Lecture Series,  
Portland, OR, 2010-2011



Posters for presenters at PSU MFA Monday Night Lecture Series, Portland, OR, 2010-2011





*We Make the Road By Walking*, a walking project by Travis Souza, somewhere along the proposed high speed rail route between Los Angeles and San Francisco, 2011



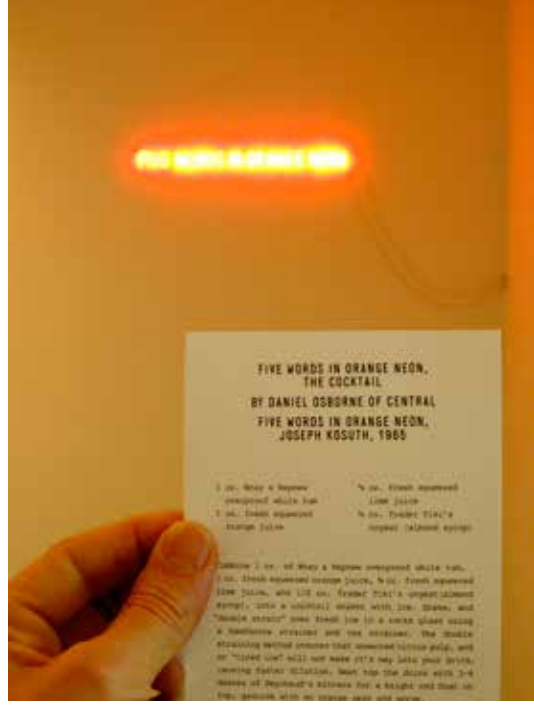
Monday Night Lecture Series (remote) with Lucy R. Lippard, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2011



*Museum Visitor* by Molly Sherman as part of *Shine a Light*,  
Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2011



Lexa Walsh's graduate exhibition, PSU  
School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2011



*Museum Cookbook* by Lexa Walsh with Crystal Baxley as part of *Shine a Light*,  
Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2011



Field trip to visit church organ, Portland, OR, 2011



Carmen Papalia and Adam Moser riding a tandem bike as part of program physical activity time, Portland, OR, 2011



Jen Delos Reyes leading a listening activity at Field Work, Portland, OR, 2011



Poster calling for projects at Field Work, Portland, OR, 2011





Carmen Papalia leading a walking project as part of Open Engagement, Portland, OR, 2011



Pablo Helguera leading a workshop, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2011



Workshop intensive with Fritz Haeg, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2011



Activity with Matthew Coolidge from the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Willamette Stone State Heritage Site, Portland, OR, 2012



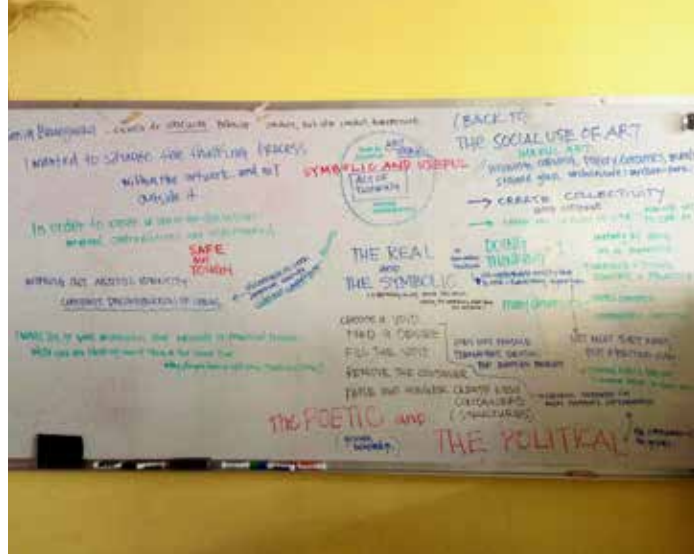
Dinner following Monday Night Lecture Series with Luis Camnitzer, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2012



Adam Moser and Molly Sherman leading a Social Practice class, Metropolitan Learning Center, Portland, OR, 2012



Retreat workshop intensive with Julie Ault, Government Camp, OR, 2012



Notes from workshop intensive with Tania Bruguera, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2012





Panel with Tania Bruguera, Paul Ramirez Jonas, and Art and Social Practice MFA Program students Grace Hwang, Patricia Vázquez Gomez, and Dillon de Give as part of Open Engagement, Yale Union, Portland, OR, 2012



Dinner with Tania Bruguera, Paul Ramirez Jonas, and Art and Social Practice MFA Program students as part of Open Engagement, Yale Union, Portland, OR, 2012



Walking project by Dillon de Give as part of Open Engagement, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2012



*Signs of Change*, a project by Jason Sturgill as part of Open Engagement, Portland, OR, 2012



*Landmarks and Language in Transit* by Carmen Papalia and Jason Sturgill as part of Open Engagement, TriMet Bus, Portland, OR, 2012





*Urban Ecology Tour Series*, a project by Erica Thomas as part of Open Engagement, Portland, OR, 2012



*Picnic Studies*, a project by Farm School (Nolan Calisch and Molly Sherman) as part of Open Engagement, Portland, OR, 2012



*How to Build an Indoor Greywater System*, a collaborative project by Katherine Ball, presented as part of Open Engagement, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2012



*Cut-Off Men*, a project by Adam Moser with Grand Central Art Center, Santa Ana, CA, 2012



John Malpede participating in a workshop led by members of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Creative Time Summit, New York, 2012



*Grocery Stories*, a project by Farm School (Nolan Calisch and Molly Sherman), Portland, OR, 2012





Conversation with Greg Tudor from Friends of Trees, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2012



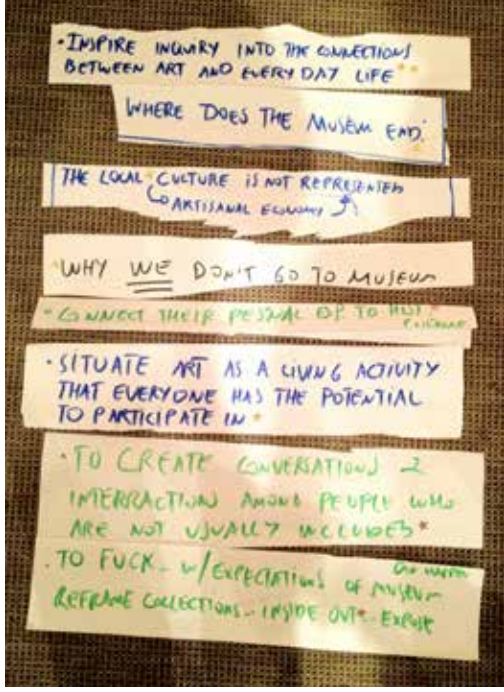
Walk with Greg Tudor from Friends of Trees, Park Blocks, Portland, OR, 2012



Hike with Yoshua Okón as part of a workshop intensive, Washington Park, Portland, OR, 2012



Paul Ramirez Jonas facilitating *Shine a Light*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2012



Notes from Paul Ramirez Jonas facilitating *Shine a Light*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2012



*Materials and Movement Studio*, a project by Grace Hwang and Heather Donahue at Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013





Conversation with Justin Langlois, Field Work,  
Portland, OR, 2013



Window description of Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



*Wayfaring Neighbors: A Downtown Neighborhood Choir*,  
a project by Guestwork (Erin Charpentier and Travis Neel)  
and Zachary Gough, Portland, OR, 2013



*CounterCraft*, a project by members of the PSU Art and Social Practice  
Program, Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR, 2013



Workshop intensive with Claire Doherty, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



Workshop intensive with Pablo Helguera, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



Tom Finkelpearl keynote lecture, Open Engagement, Portland, OR, 2013



Conversation with Astria Suparak, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



*Old Apple Tree*, a project by Farm School (Nolan Calisch and Molly Sherman), Portland, OR, 2013





Conversation with Shari Peters,  
Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



Conversation with Ben Kinnmont,  
Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



Conversation with Wendy Ewald, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



Conversation with Christine Gaspar from the Center  
for Urban Pedagogy, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013





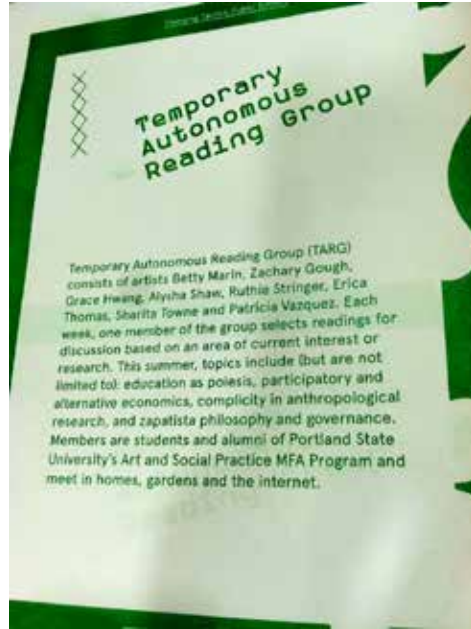
*Old Apple Tree*, a project by Farm School (Nolan Calisch and Molly Sherman) as part of *Shine a Light*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2013



*4-6 Dogs Allowed in the Museum* by Dillon de Giv'e as part of *Shine a Light*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2013



*Reinauguración* by Patricia Vázquez Gomez as part of *Shine a Light*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2013



Poster for *Temporary Autonomous Reading Group*, a project by members of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, throughout Portland, OR, 2013



Fall orientation retreat, Oregon coast, OR, 2013



Physical activity as part of class, Field Work, Portland, OR, 2013



Kimchi-making workshop with Grace Hwang, Harrell Fletcher's house, Portland, OR, 2013



Physical activity as part of class, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2014



Workshop intensive with Steve Lambert and Stephen Duncombe from the Center for Artistic Activism, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2014



*Fighting Words*, a public debate project by Ariana Jacob as part of Assembly, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2014





*Talk to the Gun* book launch and Meme-a-Thon, a project by Pedro Reyes as part of Assembly, PICA, Portland, OR, 2014



Artist lecture by Pedro Reyes as part of Assembly, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2014



*Campout at the Museum as part of Assembly, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2014*



*Book Fair at the Museum, a project by Public Doors and Windows (Nolan Calisch, Harrell Fletcher, and Molly Sherman) as part of Assembly, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2014*



Betty Marin's graduate lecture, VOZ MLK Workers Center, Portland, OR, 2014



Betty Marin's graduate exhibition, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2014



*Mt. Hood Walk*, a five-day walk and summer course co-taught by Harrell Fletcher and Eric Steen, somewhere between Portland and Mt. Hood, OR, 2014





Orientation day, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2014



Fall orientation retreat, Trillium Lake, OR, 2014



Training at KPSU for *Radio School*, a weekly PSU Art and Social Practice Program radio show, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2014



Reference Points book reading, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego, 2014



Visiting Chris Johanson's studio as part of program trip to Southern California, Los Angeles, 2014



Conversation with Mark Allen at Machine Project as part of program trip to Southern California, Echo Park, Los Angeles, 2014





Workshop with Miranda July at her office as part of program trip to Southern California, Echo Park, Los Angeles, 2014



Workshop with Fritz Haeg at his house as part of program trip to Southern California, Los Angeles, 2014





Three-day visit with Andrea Zittel at A-Z West as part of program trip to Southern California, Joshua Tree, CA, 2014



Hike in Joshua Tree National Park, Joshua Tree, CA, 2014



Patricia Vázquez Gomez graduate lecture and performance, Portland, OR, 2014



Erin Charpentier labeling the program's space in the Science and Education Center, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2014



Lecture by Betty Marin, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2015





Artist talk by Ariana Warner as part of the Art & Sports Lecture Series directed by Roz Crews, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2015



Workshop intensive and road trip with Thomas Gokey and Meg Backus, Ashland, OR, 2015



*Dance in the Rec Center* as part of Harrell Fletcher's artist residency at the PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2015





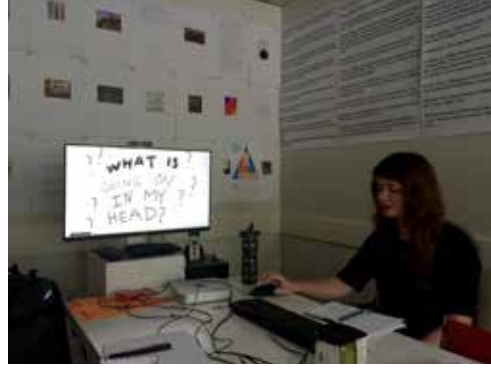
*Open Call*, a project by Amanda Leigh Evans with Roz Crews, Surplus Space, Portland, OR, 2015



Lecture by Phoebe Davies, visiting scholar through British Council Artist Exchange, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2015



*Being Old*, a collaborative project by Emily Fitzgerald and Gemma-Rose Turnbull, with seniors at the Hollywood Senior Center, Portland, OR, 2015



End-of-term presentation by Roz Crews, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2015



*The Clay Will Tell Me What to Do Next*, a project by Amanda Leigh Evans as part of Assembly, composition gallery, Portland, OR, 2015



*Reference Points* book reading as part of Assembly, Publication Studio, Portland, OR, 2015



Re-creation of Uri Tzaig's *Desert* presented by Roz Crews and Harrell Fletcher as part of Assembly, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2015



*Potato Splitting: Championship* by Lee Walton as part of Assembly, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2015



"Considering Social Practice, Craft, and Aesthetics," panel led by Amanda Leigh Evans as part of Assembly, Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR, 2015





*Bodystorm Workshop & Dance Reporting Technique* by Renee Sills, Tere Mathern, and PSU dance students as part of Assembly, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2015



*See You Again*, a caucus-style cocktail hour event to vote the first ever socially engaged artwork into the Portland Art Museum's permanent collection, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2015







*Lifesongs Workshop* with Alysha Shaw as part of Assembly, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2015



*Monster Destruction* by Christopher Michlig, Bijan Berahimi, and David Fletcher as part of Assembly, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2015



*Postcards from America*, an exhibition of photos by a group of Magnum photographers curated by students at MLK Jr. School, presented as part of Assembly, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2015



*Radical Imagination Gymnasium*, a collaborative project by Guestwork (Erin Charpentier and Travis Neel), Patricia Vázquez Gomez, and Zachary Gough, Project Grow, Portland, OR, 2015



Fall orientation retreat, Silver Falls State Park, Sublimity, OR, 2015



Conversation with Judy Bluehorse Skelton as part of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program Weekly Conversation Series, PICA, Portland, OR, 2015



Ethics workshop with Patricia Vázquez Gomez, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2015





Program presentation at SOMA as part of program trip to Mexico City, 2016



Two-day workshop intensive with Pedro Reyes at his home as part of program trip to Mexico City, 2016







Studio visit with Yoshua Okón as part of program trip to Mexico City, 2016



Studio visit with Cráter Invertido as part of program trip to Mexico City, 2016



Students with photo of Julie Ault at Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2016



Tour of National Autonomous University of Mexico with Pedro Reyes as part of program trip to Mexico City, 2016



Students in the program interviewing MFA applicants over Google Hangouts, Likewise, Portland, OR, 2016



notMoMA, a project by Stephanie Syjuco at KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2016



Kimberly Sutherland singing karaoke, a frequent ritual in the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2016



*The Music That Makes Us*, a collaborative exhibition and music festival organized by students in the PSU Art and Social Practice Program with members of the Kenton community, Disjuncta, Portland, OR, 2016



*Portland Museum of Art and Sports*, a collaborative project by Lauren Moran and Anke Schüttler with local and international artists, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2016





Movement activity during Dance & Performance Practices, a graduate course taught by Allie Hankins, FLOCK, Portland, OR, 2016



Artist lecture by Davina Drummond and Yara El-Sherbini, visiting scholars through British Council Artist Exchange, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2016



Neighborhood Research Institute, a collaborative project by Roz Crews, Adam Moser, and Nancy Prior as part of Crews's residency at Likewise, Portland, OR, 2016



"The Useful Art Object: Considering Critical and Socially Engaged Craft Practices," a panel moderated by Amanda Leigh Evans at Yale Union as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2016



Artist talk by Darren O'Donnell at the Independent Publishing Resource Center as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2016



*The Know Parade with the Walking School*, a project by Avalon Kalin as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2016



*Collaborative Learning for Physical Prowess (on the dance floor) or, How to Dance Like a Boss, a project by Renee Sills at Performance Works NW as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2016*



*Backyards, a walking tree tour by Kimberly Sutherland and Paul West as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2016*



*The First Session, a project by Derek Hamm at Likewise as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2016*

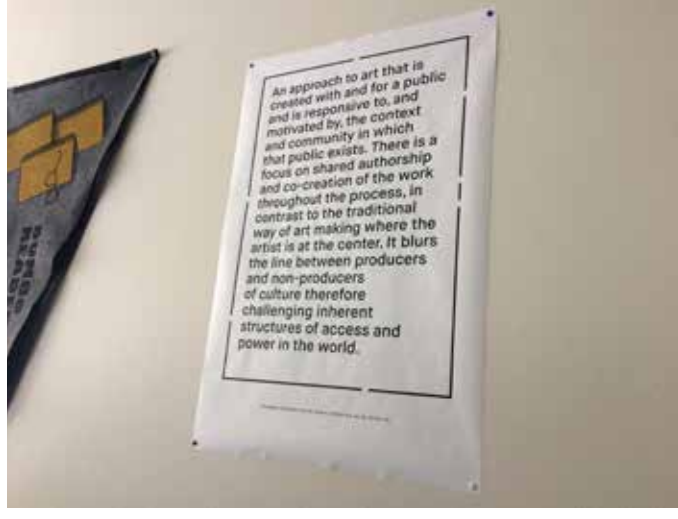




Nolan Calisch giving a tour of his farm project, Wealth Underground Farm, Portland, OR, 2016



Workshop class held at Wealth Underground Farm with remote student Adam Carlin included through FaceTime on Kimberly Sutherland's phone, Portland, OR, 2016



*A Working Description of Art + Social Practice* by Kimberly Sutherland, written during her first year in the Art and Social Practice MFA Program, Portland, OR, 2016



Weeklong workshop intensive with Fritz Haeg as part of program trip to Salmon Creek Farm, Albion, CA, 2016



*Splash Dance* led by Harriet Cuttler for a physical activity as part of workshop class, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2016



*Talk to Everyone and Everything About Race*, a collaborative project by Lauren Moran, Roz Crews, Amanda Leigh Evans, and Lisa Jarrett, presented at Art in Odd Places, New York, 2016



Workshop check-in time in the hot tub, PSU Rec Center, Portland, OR, 2016





*Stepping in the Same River Twice*, a project led by Spencer Byrne-Seres and Roz Crews as part of Sunday Painter's Group and Creek Colleges, Johnson Creek, Portland, OR, 2016



Mall studio photo as part of workshop intensive with Chris Cloud at Lloyd Center mall, Portland, OR, 2016



Workshop intensive with Chris Cloud at KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2016





Lauren Moran leading KSMoCA students in a printmaking workshop, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2016



Amanda Leigh Evans's graduate lecture at the Living School of Art, East Portland, OR, 2016



Emily Fitzgerald's graduate lecture and presentation of *People's Homes*, a collaborative project with Molly Sherman, Portland, OR, 2016



*Hotline Think*, a public call center responding to the presidential immigration ban. Organized by students as a part of the Art as Political Change class, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 2017



Remote student setup for dinner organized by Anupam Singh, Harrell Fletcher's house, Portland, OR, 2017



Program dinner with dishes prepared by Anupam Singh from Indian recipes, Harrell Fletcher's house, Portland, OR, 2017





Students from the PSU Art and Social Practice Program presenting Sara Krajewski with art acquisition paperwork from *See You Again* (2015), Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, 2017



Conversation Series with Joshua Safran, discussing his film *Crime After Crime*, PICA, Portland, OR, 2017



Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI)  
Library Book Drive, PICA, Portland, OR, 2017



Ethics class taught by Patricia Vázquez Gomez,  
KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017





Roz Crews's graduate project *Can Art Inspire Me to Think Critically About...?*, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2017



Mind map mural with participants from CRCI, presented at the Oregon Food Bank as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2017



*Writing Alone and Together in Public*, a project by Roz Crews as part of Creek College at Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), Portland, OR, 2017



"Placemaking, Community and Environment" panel facilitated by Creek College as part of Assembly, Columbia Slough, Portland, OR, 2017



*Canoe the Slough*, a project by Anke Schüttler, Shoshana Gugenheim Kedem, and Jennifer Starkey as part of Assembly, Columbia Slough, Portland, OR, 2017





Students, faculty, and public participants at a Creek College event as part of Assembly, Columbia Slough, Portland, OR, 2017



Roz Crews talking about *Neighborhood Dreams*, her collaborative mural project with Ralph Pugay and middle school students at MLK Jr. School, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



*All the Feelings (Sculpture Garden)*, a project by Anke Schüttler with local artists and students as part of Assembly, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017





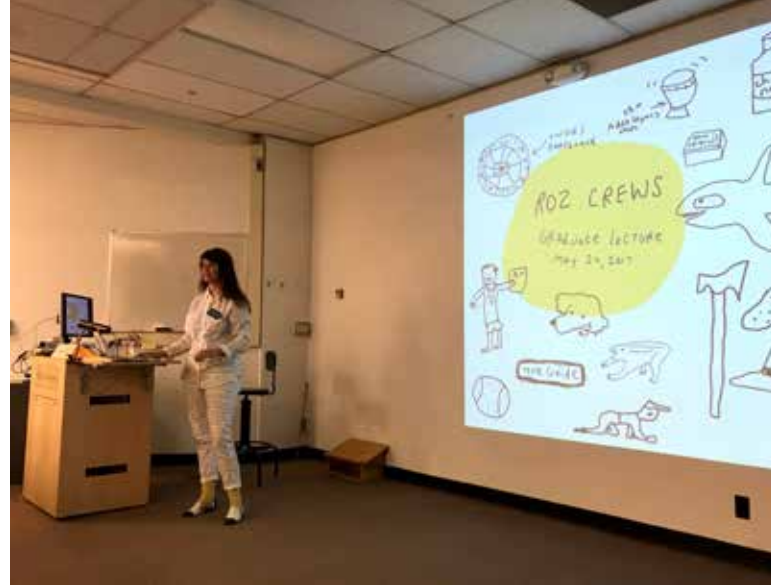
Lauren Moran discussing *Endangered Species, After Warhol (After 1963)*, a printmaking project made in collaboration with Katie Koch and students at MLK Jr. School, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



*Cafeteria Staff Exchange Program*, a collaborative project by Spencer Byrne-Seres and Xi Jie Ng with cafeteria staff from NAYA and MLK Jr. School, presented as part of Assembly, Portland, OR, 2017



Conversation Series with Holcombe Waller, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2017



Roz Crews's graduate lecture, PSU School of Art + Design, Portland, OR, 2017



Graduation ceremony with regalia designed by graduate students for each other, Harrell Fletcher's backyard, Portland, OR, 2017



Xi Jie Ng's collaborative project *Naming Me* 自己取名字 with Mandarin immersion students at MLK Jr. School, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Lecture by visiting scholar Tilda Cobham-Hervey, PSU Art and Social Practice Program, Portland, OR, 2017





Making signage for KSMoCA International Art Fair with summer school students from MLK Jr. School and PSU, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Constructing walls for KSMoCA International Art Fair led by Spencer Byrne-Seres with MLK Jr. School students, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Installing walls for KSMoCA International Art Fair led by Spencer Byrne-Seres with MLK Jr. School students and volunteers, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Panel discussion led by Libby Werbel with MLK Jr. students as part of KSMoCA International Art Fair, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Improvisation acting workshop as part of CRCI artist residency program, Portland, OR, 2017



Bunion panel discussion led by Xi Jie Ng in her exhibition *bunion2bunion* as part of the Arlene Schnitzer Visual Art Prize in the Autzen Gallery at PSU, Portland, OR, 2017



Conversation Series with Shayla Lawson, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



PSU undergraduate students at the exhibition opening of *Excursions* by Ralph Puga, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Conversation Series with Roya Amirsoleymani, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017





Conversation Series with M. Michelle Illuminato, KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2017



Lecture and workshop intensive with Amy Franceschini at KSMoCA, Portland, OR, 2018



CRCI Comedy School with local guest comedians Marcus Coleman and Kate Murphy as part of CRCI artist residency program, Portland, OR, 2018



Workshop intensive with Lenka Clayton, KSMoCA,  
Portland, OR, 2018

# 20

# 10

**Harrell Fletcher** How about if I start off with the original comment, then we can go from there. Did everybody get a chance to read the group conversation from 2008? For those of you who didn't read it, or are not familiar, it was done not only in the first year but probably within the first six months of the first year of the program. So around the same time in the school year as now, and the people who were participating in it, those first eight students, were really in the beginnings of a completely new program that they weren't very familiar with. It was interesting to read and to see the questions that were going on at that time. The way I started it was, "Whether it's intentional or not, whatever you're involved with during this time in graduate school is part of the pedagogy of the program. It can change as we go along." Question, comment?

**Lauren Moran** What have we changed this year?

**Kimberly Sutherland** The program seems to be constantly changing.

**Anupam Singh** It is a kind of social practice.

**HF** What's that?

**AS** Shaping the program while being part of it.

**KS** Changing the way we facilitate classes or respond to each other, the group dynamics.

**AS** The Conversation Series used to be on Mondays and there was a dinner before it.

**HF** That was long ago. Lots of things have changed since that first year of the program.

**LM** What's the most significant change?

**HF** I'm not sure. It's all been so incremental. What I was thinking at the time was that there weren't going to be major shifts from



Kim Sutherland, *One Square Block* featuring Paul West, Portland, OR, 2016

year to year. It was going to be more little shifts, based on what people's interests were. For instance, this year you all decided the intensives should be organized by year as opposed to the whole group making that decision. We haven't started doing that yet, but the plan is that's what will happen next year. Makes sense to me. Sounds like it'll be more efficient. We've never done it that way before. That's an example of student experience with something and a suggestion to alter it and make it more efficient by trying a different approach.

One of the problem versions of this system is that in the past, there's been some pendulum-ness, where one group wants it to be one way and the following group wants it the other way. We swing back and forth on the same thing. There was a point where I'm like, no, we already tried that; we're not going to do that again. I think that starts to happen more and more, too. We begin to have institutional history and knowledge. I'm like, that's an interesting idea, but it didn't work. We tried it already. There are other times I'm like, that makes total sense. Let's give it a try.

**Anke E. Schüttler** For example, the topical conversations we have taken up again. We didn't have them in my first year and you were saying you had them earlier, and somehow there was a moment where people didn't like them anymore.

**HF** That happened, too. There was a period where there was a rebellion against the Conversation Series. Nobody wanted to do it for a year.



**AES** What did that rebellion look like?

**HF** Like we don't want to do this anymore. I said what are you talking about, this makes so much sense. That was one of those ideas I sort of fought off, so we still have it now and everyone seems to appreciate it.

**KS** What did you do instead?

**HF** We still did it. The disgruntled students did it begrudgingly. There had already been a transition from the Monday Night Lecture Series that I started when I first began teaching at PSU in 2004, prior to the onset of the program. It got to the point where every week there was a visiting artist.

Initially, the series was just for the studio MFA program because that was all that existed. Then it was studio and social practice together. Then in its last year we broke apart and had just a Social Practice Monday Night Lecture Series on our own. From there, we switched to Conversation Series and have gone through various incarnations of it being a radio show, being a podcast, happening at Field Work, all these different things that have happened with it over time.

For a while, we were running Open Engagement, which was dominating all of the program time. Work on that was nonstop, so there was very little time for anything else. Once that went away, we decided to continue with something like it. That's how Assembly formed. But we thought, let's make it much lower key and easier to do. That slowly allowed for other things to happen. There was also a period where there was no Student Time [*the program's version of critiques*] at all. People said that they didn't need critiques.

**Spencer Byrne-Seres** One of the thoughts I had in reading the first conversation was that there was a sense that everyone was participating in an experiment and

kept saying that things were experimental, like this was the first time it had happened. I'm wondering if people feel the same way now, or if they feel the program is more institutional. How much of the experimental vibe still carries?

**LM** I feel like from an outside perspective it still seems really experimental. When I tell people what we do, they're like, that's wild.

**AES** Which part do they think is wild?

**LM** That we all take turns facilitating and work on projects together. I think it's still really different from what most people expect from an MFA program.

**AES** Like having more agency than in other MFA programs?

**LM** Yeah, people are always really surprised when I tell them we select all the incoming students.

**AES** I love that.

**Zeph Fishlyn** I was surprised when I found that out. I think I found it out in talking to you, Anke. I was asking you about the program. When I tell people that, they're always surprised that the people in the program select the next cohort.

**LM** Was it hard to get the administration to agree to that?

**HF** They didn't want to do it. Then once the program started, I was on my own. Nobody was checking in anymore, so I just didn't tell anybody, which is how we did most things for a long time. That's what I learned from my early experience of adjuncting—you were given the key, the class time, the class list. That was it. They never knew what you were doing at all. You could try anything you wanted. You could do anything you wanted.

It was actually really fun and liberating in the early days, trying out all kinds of crazy classes.

Also because it hadn't been that long since I had been a student myself, the idea of thinking what would I want to have done was very present. I would only tell the administration when there was something we were going to get out of telling them, and usually that went wrong. It was on a need-to-know basis. When they'd find out something was going on, they tried to institutionalize it or shut it down.

**Shoshana Gugenheim Kedem** Like what?

**HF** Every possible thing. Everything was like that. If I had told them the students were selecting the other students, they wouldn't have liked that. But they have changed over time. It was a much more conservative administration and set of faculty when we started than what exists now. Now, nobody is going to really bother with these kinds of things anymore, unless it's a big program change.

That was one of the things that was interesting in the original conversation. Because we were given a template for a studio-based, traditional MFA program to work off of, we couldn't create a brand-new program. It wasn't possible at that time, and still hasn't been. Instead we looked at each aspect of the original studio program and said does this make sense for a social-practice program or not, or OK this does, this doesn't. In the early days everyone had to do an exhibition at the end of their time in the program. Eventually we started to realize it didn't make sense for this particular program.

We could have continued to follow that convention, but in a way it would be sort of like giving into the bigger system. Instead of saying that for this particular program and these kinds of artists, it may make way more sense for them to do an off-site project or website or performance or whatever.



Zeph Fishlyn, *Those We Glimpse*, Portland, OR, 2018

**AS** When you say the studio practice people had to do an exhibition or had end-of-term critique, what was the structure in the Social Practice program at that time?

**HF** It was the same as the studio program at first because that's the structure we were given. To figure out what our program needed to be, we weren't starting with a blank canvas. We were starting with a completely filled-in one. We had to make adjustments along the way to figure out what made sense.

The thing that was different when it started was that the social-practice students didn't get studios. That was agreed upon. That was how the program got to happen at all. It was both necessary and ideological.

But originally the students still had shows. The problem was that they weren't taking the shows seriously because they didn't really care about them. We ran into this big problem where one of the first-year students did his show in a really half-assed way. The president of the university came to see it, and all these complaints happened as a result. The student's response was that it wasn't really work that he cared about. I understood that, but the president didn't understand that. That's why we needed to just eliminate the shows as a requirement. Now shows are just an option.

Each thing—if you now compare the Studio program to the Social Practice program—deviated in all sorts of ways. We're a three-year program. We have a remote component. We do group projects together. We have a relationship to KSMoCA [King School Museum of Contemporary

Art] and to the prison, CRCI [Columbia River Correctional Institution]. All these different things slowly developed over time.

We're gaining and losing ground all the time. Originally, I cut a deal where all the social-practice students were supposed to get \$500 to use to make a public project. That got eliminated almost immediately when budget cuts came. The other thing was that I said they're not going to get studios but they're going to get me. I'm going to do a bunch of things for this program that the studio programs aren't going to get. They said fine, whatever, as long as you're not using studios. The next thing you know, we were going to Paris and doing stuff like that. They were complaining like crazy that we were getting all these extra benefits. I said you guys get studios, we get to go to Paris. You made the agreement. That's the way it is.

**KS** I have a question. Do you still question social practice, the term?

**HF** The term?

**KS** That came up in the first conversation.

**HF** Right. At that point it was new. Like I said, it was sort of expedient because the opportunity to create the program came up rapidly. I led this monthlong workshop at the Kitchen in New York the summer before the program started. I remember talking to those people and debating whether to call it Social Practice or Social Engagement.

They were like, what's Social Practice? We've never heard of that before. I said it's kind of this new thing. It might be the right term to use. They said no, let's go with Social Engagement. That's what it was called, a workshop on Social Engagement at the Kitchen. Helen Reed, who was in the second year of the program, was at the workshop. Jen Delos Reyes was a student in it, too.

So then when the opportunity to make the program came up, partly the fact that



Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr., Collaborating with Elijah, KSMoCA, 2018

California College for the Arts (CCA) was already calling its program Social Practice made it easier for me to justify the name of ours—if it had been a completely new thing, then it would've been harder to get it to pass. Sometimes there's a benefit to building and not renaming everything every single time. If every single program is called something new, it is harder to unify. It's like a branding decision.

I went with it, but it was so new that I wasn't totally sure what I thought about it. I'd already had ten or fifteen years of people being totally confused about what to call what I did. Mostly I was being reluctant to take on any names in general. So the idea of taking one on for the program was a big deal at that point.

**KS** Was it Ted Purves who first came up with it?

**HF** This is a contested history. He didn't come up with the name *social practice* because he was hired to teach the program at CCA that was being called social practice. I was still in and out of the Bay Area at the time. My recollection—I think different people have different memories of this—was there was a committee formed that included Lydia Matthews, who is an art historian who teaches social-practice classes at Parsons, and Larry Sultan, who was one of my professors, and they came up with the term *social practice*. No one person seems to want to claim it. I thought Lydia was the one, but when I talked to her about it, she said she wasn't. It wasn't Ted, because he was hired to teach that program. I knew

some other people who were also up for that job at that time.

**AS** How do you feel about the name now after ten years of this program?

**HF** I'm happy with it. What I was thinking about at the time was that I liked the word *practice*. I remember talking to Kate Fowle who started the Curatorial Practice program at CCA. And she very specifically called it curatorial practice, whereas Bard's program, which was one of the first big US curatorial programs, was called Curatorial Studies. She told me the reason for calling it practice instead of studies was that she wanted her program to be active and actually be practicing curation, not just studying it. Studying would be part of it, but the main focus would be practicing. I thought it was so genius. Of course, whatever we're doing is practice, not study.

Social seemed like it could be many different things: public, civic, or whatever. It seemed neutral enough at the time. Public was associated with public art, so it had issues. Civil and Civic Engagement seemed more of a social good or something. Social Practice just seemed nicely neutral but specific.

Because CCA is an art school, it's understood that anything happening there is going to be art related. Calling it "social practice" made sense. At a university like PSU where there are social sciences and other things that use social practice as a term, it seemed important to add an art part, so that it would be understood within the university as an art program.

**KS** Referencing the old conversation, you all were talking about this aspect of refereeing, breaking down the concept of the referee and validation of social practice. I still feel we're having those same conversations now. We still are fighting for validation from the art world. Have you seen a shift in terms of that over time?

**HF** At PSU that's changed quite a bit. Partly because graphic design is also interested in things like that, self-published things, Web things, and all the stuff they make. I think they got accelerated at PSU partly because they gave me the documents to edit, and they didn't know I was going to change all this stuff on them. Other universities haven't done that, so a lot of that stuff still exists out there in the status quo academic way. Which is really based more on a historian than a practicing artist of any kind.

**AS** Do you see a shift in the city's perception of social practice since you started the program ten years ago? Do you think it has been incorporated in Portland's art scene?

**HF** I think that you can look at things like how RACC [the Regional Arts and Culture Council] now has a social-practice category. That didn't exist back then. If you look more broadly than Portland, you see there are conferences, publications, shows, and residencies. The Headlands, which is an artist residency in the Bay Area that I spent a lot of time at before I moved up here, didn't have a Social Practice program when I was there. Now it does.

That kind of thing has changed dramatically. The number of artists who identify themselves as social-practice artists, that I don't know—it used to be that I knew every single person using the term *social practice* in regard to art in the world. Ten or twelve years ago, I personally knew every person who was using that term.

**AES** It's like the beginning of the Internet.

**HF** Now, there's people all the time that are using *social practice* and I don't know who they are. They're all over the place. That's changed dramatically. It was under one hundred people using that term ten years ago in relationship to their own practice, probably actually under fifty people.

**AES** I was wondering what you thought about the term *social experiment* that came up in the first conversation quite a bit.

**HF** Experimentation is good, but also what came up in the conversation was for me the precedent of the apprenticeship like the UC Santa Cruz farming apprenticeship I'd done. It was experimental in a certain sense, but in some ways it was also very conventional, almost like old-world conventional. There wasn't a lot of experimenting. It was more like, this is how you make compost. You pile this and this and then this, and you're going to do it all day long. Do whatever you want when you get out of here, but this is how you're doing it here.

I liked that experience for myself, but it didn't feel experimental. It just felt experiential, which I think was more important to me than the experimental. In the end, some projects or some teaching might need to be totally conventional or conservative to be the best in that particular situation. I almost feel like experimental is sometimes too directed, whereas the concept of practice is neutral. It doesn't imply one thing or another.

**AES** I don't know. I'm wondering if social experiment sounds too much like experimenting with people. It seems a little off-putting to me.

**SBS** Yeah. I was thinking that even now there still isn't any consensus on what terms ought to be used. There's still no canonical term. Social practice has a Wikipedia page and stuff, but so do other related terms. It would be interesting to talk a bit more about how people choose to define their practices, whether or not they identify as social-practice artists even. Then maybe what core tenets they feel are part of this field or mode of artmaking.

I think one from the original conversation that's really carried through is the idea of audience specificity and really

thinking about who you're making work for. The idea that it's not about yourself, so much as it is about having an audience and acknowledging the audience. That changes the work as a mirror or relationship between two things. Also defining things oppositionally was an interesting point in the original conversation. But whether or not you define things oppositionally to studio research or studio practice or other conventional art terms, and whether you define social practice or your practice in relationship oppositionally to those.

**HF** Something that I've come up with since then that I will use as a comment on that particular thing is nonfiction. We all accept the term *nonfiction*, and it's totally oppositional. But nobody even thinks about it that way. They just know what it means. I don't think by having something that's oppositional or negative within the title necessarily positions it in a negative way.

**SBS** Non-studio art is actually kind of a nice term.

**HF** It's so dominant. That's the thing. When something is so dominant, sometimes it's necessary to create an opposition to it.

**AES** It would be very explanatory to call it non-studio art.

**HF** Post-studio is a term that's existed and has a history and everything. For me, part of the reason for the oppositionalness is just because we're placed in relationship to conventional studio art. If we were located in some other place, like social work, for example, we wouldn't be thinking of it in those terms. Because of its need to distinguish itself, that's when you look at the differences.

**KS** There was something I wrote down from the original conversation, where Sandy [Sampson] had said the thing she

likes about social practice is that you don't have to tack the art part onto it. But I was thinking about that and was thinking that when I talk about what social practice is, I always talk in contrast to studio art. Then I was wondering how do people define social practice who don't talk about it in relation to art?

**LM** I was just explaining that today to Derrick [Spotts]. I guess I was kind of referencing what was said before about how you can use whatever term is convenient for whomever you're talking to, or whatever context it's in. Sometimes I explain projects and I don't think I necessarily use the word *art*. I've never thought about it in opposition to studio practice, weirdly. I don't know why.

**Tia Kramer** There are times when it is useful to say: "I'm an artist" or "I'm a social-practice artist" and then there are times when we have to consider the specific community member, potential collaborator, or participant we are talking with. I had a conversation with Harrell recently and he said, "If you're working with someone in the community who's not an artist, sometimes it's helpful to not even mention that you're an artist when you're talking about the work that you're trying to do. If you do mention artist, they might automatically think of tropes you might fit within."

There are instances when we are trying to negate certain artist tropes, intentionally directing the project so it doesn't go in a particular direction. During these times, it can actually be to our disadvantage to mention that our work is art. I think this is the beauty of the social-practice framework.

**SBS** The idea of not saying you're an artist feels really sneaky to me in a way that totally misrepresents intentions. For me personally, I'm much more interested in having that conversation of why this is art but not traditional art or those other things, than just trying to pretend it's not art at all.



Tia Kramer and Eric John Olson, *Orbiting Together*, Seattle Art Museum, 2018



Eric John Olson, *Le Petit Nickel*, Seattle, WA, 2015

I feel like in our own world, the program, the world of social practice, that's what's exciting for me about what's happening in art. To not represent that or convey that to other people is sort of misleading.

**HF** Right. I think as a quick clarification, I didn't mean to say to trick the people into thinking you're not an artist. But to use terms that are understandable. For instance, you could say we're making a poster series or I'm making a film, I'm making a newspaper, as opposed to I'm doing an art project. If you lead with art project, it sometimes directs people into thinking, oh, that person is going to do a mural. Sometimes it's better to start with the actual thing you are doing and then work backward.

**SBS** What I'm saying is that I'm interested in that conversation, pushing against the assumption versus people thinking something else.

**Michael Stevenson** It's interesting because I very intentionally identify as an artist in everything. I made that decision because being an artist—unlike being a doctor, a lawyer, or an accountant, you don't get a professional title for what you're doing.



I was going through the process of becoming an artist, and doing it in a strange way, which turns out was socially engaged. It was hard to contend with the world of art in the way that it was, traditional. Wearing the mantle of “Artist” ultra-intentionally was the way for me to own it and claim it.

I’ve definitely recognized there’s an interesting quality that happens when I’m doing it, because it definitely has people imagining that I’m a painter or sculptor. It really opens the door to be like, actually, here’s this other universe that I am operating in. It’s a segue into the kind of work I’m doing that can exist under the lens of art, as opposed to just saying something like, I do work with kids and we do these kinds of things. We’re not skirting art as much as we just sometimes operate under the terms of social practice exclusively.

**LM** It’s funny. I’ve never tricked anyone. I feel like I don’t intentionally not use the word *artist*, but when I came into the program, I was really uncomfortable calling myself an artist. I don’t know if you all remember that.

**KS** Adam was the only one in our cohort who clearly identified as an artist!

**LM** Yeah, I was doing all these weird things and I didn’t know if I felt like an artist. Through the process of the program, now I do really identify as an artist. I feel like in different situations I’ll be having a conversation with someone and don’t necessarily call it art. But I think that shifted for me because of what you all are talking about. I do want to claim it—like oh, I’m organizing a community print shop, that can be an art project. I guess it’s about claiming and then feeling comfortable with claiming. Now I’m all about it.

**ZF** Tia, I’ve been wanting to ask, on what occasions do you claim that?



Adam Carlin, Greensboro Project Space, Greensboro, NC, ongoing

**TK** Earlier, I was referring to my initial conversations with community members and potential collaborators here in Walla Walla. To push back against Spencer’s comment, not claiming art at the onset of a conversation is not an attempt to be sneaky. At some point it will come up that I am an artist. And I am enthusiastic to call my work art. Rather, it seems important early in the process to thoughtfully consider where these potential collaborators are coming from and then carefully determine how I can help them understand my interests or curiosity as quickly as possible.

**ZF** Your question made me think about it myself, about when I claim it and when I don’t. It occurred to me that when I’m talking to people outside of art circles, I claim artist when I want them to take me less seriously. Don’t mind me, officer, I’m just an artist doing a thing.

I often don’t use the word when I want people to take me more seriously. Or sort of like what Harrell was saying; rather than saying I’m an artist doing art, I’ll talk more about the thing I’m doing. I do feel there’s a cultural thing around being an artist that you’re kind of flaky and your thing is nonthreatening and abstract. Which is really useful because people aren’t threatened by it most of the time. Other times, it feels like people will write you off because they think, oh, that person is not serious.

**Eric John Olson** For me it is less about whether or not I identify myself as an artist, and more about how I claim the work I’m doing as an art project or not. Sometimes

when I begin a new project I think it’s more important to make sure the work feels useful to the participants than to start formalizing it as art. That’s not to say I find any value in the conversation of whether something is art or not. It’s more that the rigor I put into conceptualization of a project can distract from the actual work being done. I feel that when collaborating with nonartists on a new project it can be more meaningful to do the interviews or plant the garden first. If the collaboration and group work proves meaningful to everyone involved, it is easy at any time to work together on how to frame it as an art project, and to iterate on the process to make sure that the next version is conceptually strong. No matter what, I am still an artist working, but sometimes it has more value in its informality, in doing the work without an artistic goal.

**AES** I’m waiting for Adam to jump in. It feels like this whole conversation about being an artist or not is so related to what we were experiencing in our first year, and we were explaining how everybody was feeling like, oh, am I an artist? What? And really questioning it all of a sudden. Adam was really the only one who was like, I’m definitely an artist. Throughout the program there have been a lot of questions from him, like what’s my role and what am I?

He has all these different functions and roles, and so for some reason doesn’t claim it as one thing. He’s just an artist doing all these things. But always questioning, am I actually a curator or an educator or what? He has interesting points about how when you call yourself an artist, especially in relationship to Greensboro Project Space, the project space that he’s directing, it’s creating this duality.

This whole conversation we have about making art more accessible sort of is related to that. He’s saying if I don’t claim myself as an artist, or claim everybody as an artist, or nobody as the audience, or everybody as the audience, I am breaking with this

duality that would come out of saying that I’m an artist, you’re not an artist.

**SBS** I was thinking about that claim. It’s interesting in observing Adam, that he’s gone the opposite way. I feel for me, personally, the claim of being an artist figures potentially into creating a practice at all versus coming from some other realm where I’m, like, maybe I could call this art. I put myself as an artist and then want to take from all these other disciplines or things and borrow to have something different.

I think how you identify yourself is part of the relationship to how you’re situated with power, privilege, and all those things. And when you’re confronting or interacting with an institution larger than yourself, I feel like it’s freer to be switching around how you present a project and what the intentions of it are versus if you’re working for someone who might have less power and privilege than you would in that situation.

**SGK** This question came up in a slightly different way in the original piece. There was a question about how you describe what you do. I don’t remember exactly the way it was worded.

One of the students said “usually what I do is I just tell people about the projects that my peers are doing.” I thought, yes, that’s exactly what I do. Then I thought, are we making progress or not because I’m still doing this ten years later—I’m still using that same model. I don’t necessarily have the language to describe it in a way where I feel heard or understood.

It’s true that I do change my response depending on whom I’m talking to. I choose different projects to talk about depending on whom I’m talking to. Maybe that is OK, but in a way, I feel slightly resentful about that. I want to be able to say this is what social practice is and have people understand it, without necessarily having to describe it in the way that one might say I’m a painter or sculptor. I want there

to be a context. It doesn't mean they understand one's work or anything, but to have a context.

I feel both sides of it. OK, of course, I like talking about other people's work. Sometimes I'll use my own work or whatever, but there's a part of me that doesn't want to have to go into that place.

**AES** I agree, Shoshana. I've often used other people's projects or specifically *The Music That Makes Us* is oftentimes this project that I always take out of the pocket and reference. It's a project that we were invited to do in this art space, Disjecta in Kenton in North Portland. The whole curatorial year the topic was sound matter. And so we were thinking about doing something that was related to that topic. We also really wanted to find ways of connecting to the neighborhood more and finding ways of connecting the community and the art space more.

So we started investigating music in this neighborhood and collaborated with all different kinds of community partners who were musically inclined. We created this show with them, sort of about music in the neighborhood. We collected all this ephemera and exhibited it. We did interviews with the partners about their musical practice and created posters of that. Then each group performed during the opening and closing event.

Anyway, I recently had this situation where a sixth grader was asking me for an interview and asking me about my photography practice, but also asking me if I had any other art practices. I was immediately going into this social-practice conversation. And then realized it's really hard. How do I explain this to a kid? I was thinking, I really want to check back in with people about that and be like how would you explain what we're doing to a kid. In a way, I was just telling her that I realized at some point that I really didn't like the idea of being by myself in a studio, and that I was much more interested in interacting with people.

The type of art we're doing is much more socially interactive, and working with groups of people, and creating art together. That's where I went with that, but it was a very interesting experience to be confronted with the fact that there was another level of complication on how to explain my work. Throwing around terms like *conceptual art* or whatever felt really ridiculous in that moment.

**LM** I guess my direct response to Shoshana and Anke is that I kind of like the non-definition part. I like the fact that you can't quite figure it out. There is a theory that once you define something, then people or systems or capitalism know how to co-opt it, copy it, and replicate it in coercive ways. I personally really like the fact that there isn't a definition, or a specific one sentence you can say to describe what we do.

I don't really want it to get to that point. Maybe not everyone feels that way in social practice, but I feel there's a sense that it does want to stay mobile and not particularly captured. That's a kind of phenomenon that I'm very much interested in. I like staying flexible and mobile and changing. Then capitalism doesn't know how to keep up.

**Emma Colburn** I want to respond to what Lauren was saying, and Shoshana also, when you were talking about wanting to define. I was thinking of jazz music. You can't really use words to talk about a Herbie Hancock solo. There's something about once you experience it, then you understand it. For example, Tia Factor's painting class came to PLAT for an artist lecture. She was like, oh, wow, I think people saw a studio in a different way through that experience. Also, my mom came to my performance walk last weekend. I feel like throughout the last three years, at each event that my parents have been able to come to, you can tell they're starting to see and understand more about socially engaged work.

I was reading this interview with Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, and they were talking about art and the role of artists to continually innovate and improvise, which is part of how it evolves. I think that's what we're doing.

**HF** It's interesting that you used jazz as the example. Jazz is the discipline that has been put into academia. There's classical and jazz. We don't have rock and roll and hip-hop.

There may be a class, but if you look at music departments across the country in the United States, it's classical or jazz. Jazz does get totally analyzed. Of course there's an experiential component to it, but it's also been completely studied and talked about and dissected and a million things like that.

**EC** The jazz departments in institutions feel so far removed from their original context. There's something about the academic study of the art form that removes it from something like the Harlem Renaissance.

**HF** That doesn't stop it from being experiential. I think sometimes people say that you just need to experience something and that we shouldn't talk about it or analyze it or put it into an academic situation. I think jazz is a great example of something that has been analyzed and it didn't negate the experiential elements you can have with it also.

**EC** It's interesting because I feel like the program and your presence in the city over the last ten years has really shaped the art landscape in Portland in some ways. Because of its size. I don't know what it looked like ten years ago, but I think the program has shaped arts ecology here.

**SGK** I want to add to the jazz metaphor. It's mostly what I'm getting at. When you say jazz to somebody they know what you're talking about. That's what I want to be able to achieve with social practice. I couldn't



Emma Colburn, *March Four the Love: Lyric on Lombard*, Portland, OR, 2018

define exactly what jazz music is, but I have a sense of what it is.

Reaching for that language, defining social practice in association to something that's known or understood is a starting point. It's not an expectation that it fits neatly into something, but that there's an immediate association, which I don't feel like I get in response from 90 percent of the people that I talk to.

**HF** I think if you compare where we were at ten years ago it's dramatically different.

**SGK** Yeah, that's my curiosity. That's what I'm getting at. What I'm saying is I'm still using the same tactic.

**HF** We'll always use that tactic because it's such a good one.

**SGK** It is a good one, but it's that immediate association that I want to achieve. Maybe because it's non-studio. Like fiction/nonfiction, I really like that parallel. It actually condenses it all. For me, I don't usually use non-studio but I like it as a very direct definition.

**MS** The old defining of social practice is an interesting thing that Anupam has locked into print in some way from everyone, from an e-mail he sent out recently asking us to define the term *Art and Social Practice*, which I Googled. This program dominated 100 percent of that framework. I answered from that framework.

Something that Emma and then Shoshana said made me think about how

we are defining social practice. Giving a detailed explanation every time you talk about work is not ideal. Every single time you talk to someone you're having to suss out this larger, deeper meaning of the thing that we're still digging into.

However, in many ways, that's the value of the non-locking it down that Lauren was talking about. When I'm talking to people about my work in general, which only sometimes I am emphasizing the social practice-ness of it, and sometimes I'm just trying to explain what's happening; I'm often describing different work because I'm essentially curating the ideas I'm sending to the person who's trying to get it. It has more to do with what they are thinking about already as happening that's interesting.

Recently, I was talking to an herbalist who is an artist, who was at the Land Foundation project founded by Rirkrit Tiravanija in Thailand. And I was like, yeah, right now, we're doing a thing that's called Portland Tropical Gardens. It doesn't have a medicinal aspect to it. That was immediately a segue to understanding, whereas, if I were talking about our work at CRCl, as much as it's also social practice, they could be like, hmm, I don't really know how that interacts with my interests.

The sussing out is the thing that allows for the more in-depth understanding, depending on whom you're talking to. You can curate the examples. I find that I continue to use more and more contemporary examples because they continue to push the envelope and they're continually spanning in a different way.

**HF** That is a site-specific approach, as in I'm going to deal with the situation I have here and respond accordingly, as opposed to using a generic response every single time. In a way, that's very consistent with the broader practice, to curate that, as you're saying, to the people you're talking to. Figuring out what's going to make sense to them, what's going

to be interesting to them. In the same way, if I'm making a project for a place, I need to consider what's going to be interesting to there and what makes sense.

**Adam Carlin** On a practical level, if you want other people to relate to your project or fully engage with it, sometimes it doesn't help to come at it as an artist. If you want to describe your work to someone who doesn't understand it, you could talk about it in different ways. We're forced to be really practical in this field, very logical, maybe more so than other artistic fields. I think that's interesting. It seems like I always experience a kind of elephant in the room when I have this type of conversation. What about artists engaging in social-practice-like activities like the 1970s? It was different, but it still feels right. It's like it doesn't exist if you don't call it something. That doesn't sit right with me.

**HF** What doesn't sit right?

**AC** Earlier, you were talking about how ten years ago you knew all the social-practice artists.

**HF** All the people that were using the term *social practice* is what I said. It's very different. There's a difference between people using the term *social practice* and people who did things that were like social practice. It's a historical difference, even if the work was similar.

**AC** And so we're also social-practice artists looking at artists from throughout contemporary art history as models and as people who are part of our field that we're learning from, growing from. They may not be social-practice artists, but we should think of them in that way. I feel like it's helpful.

**HF** Sure, that's why we have the History of Social Practice class that definitely doesn't limit itself to people who used the term *social*

*practice*. It's looking at a much broader history and set of precedents, and it doesn't have to be restricted to just artists.

I'm curious that you're bothered by it because it's something that I think we've really been strenuously trying to say. We're not claiming that this is a new kind of work. We're saying it's a new academic term that's applied to a type of work. That then starts to change things because of that framework that's been put around it. But in no way are we saying it's a brand-new thing. We're always looking at all kinds of precedents that existed before that term was around, and outside of the art discipline. I don't see a problem.

**AC** I think the program has helped me understand that for the reasons you just mentioned and more. It has helped me get to that point. There are many different areas and ideas that I can think of as part of my sphere, but I think it still exists out there in the world of social-practice education where that may not be the case. It happens quite often, I think.

**KS** That work from before is not being acknowledged as social practice?

**AC** Yeah. There have been artists working like this for a long time, but now there's opportunities specifically for that sphere and canon. I'm also curious how artists felt back then, or if they felt they still had opportunities and these support structures that we're developing now, or that they snuck into other ones and were very comfortable—for example, the sculpture field or the performance field.

**HF** I can tell you because I functioned as an artist for fifteen years prior to the term showing up, doing that kind of work. I have direct experience with it.

**AC** I would like to follow up to see what that was like. Was it more of a struggle



Spencer Byrne-Seres, *Doing Time (Prison Board Game)*, CRCl, Portland, OR, 2018



Anke Schüttler, *Answers Without Words*, CRCl, Portland, OR, 2018

or just different, a different field with different opportunities where you felt you had to change your practice or alter it, or did it feel very normal? Were you longing for this time where there are more opportunities?

**HF** It's hard to long for something you don't know might exist. There was definitely a sense of feeling very marginalized. You looked for your precedents, but they were all over the place. You were patching them together. It was just that much harder to feel like you had a community. You felt you were sort of alone in doing these kinds of things. Even if you knew Group Material did something a decade ago in New York, that was really nice to know, but you didn't have a group like you all have. In fact, the people I went to school with in my MFA program were constantly challenging the validity of my work and were oppositional to it. To be past that point and to be able to talk about the work and not having to justify it all the time would've been a huge relief twenty-five years ago.

**AS** To respond to Adam, people might have worked in the '70s in ways similar to social practice, but it depends if they claimed themselves to be social-practice artists



or not, or if somebody defined their practice as social practice. The artist I look at as social practice existed in the 1900s in India. It depends on how one claims it. Like artist Navjot Altaf's work in India, whose work I really admire and I am highly inspired by. She has been working in collaboration with indigenous artists and communities of the Kondagaon district in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh from '96 onward. At that time it was called community-based art, but it can fit well within the parameters of today's social practice.

**EC** Earlier, I was thinking back on defining social practice and how Joseph Beuys comes up in the original conversation. We don't often trace social practice back to objects that served a social function, that tell the story of people's history, like cave paintings, or bowls or whatever. But there's something that feels relevant to me to think about the origin point, whether it's the twentieth century in Europe or 4,000 years ago in wherever.

I was just curious what other people think about social practice or socially engaged work or social sculpture or whatever term we're using, and how those terms originated from a Western European/American art context. Is the designation of creating work in a socially engaged way necessary because of the role the artist has played in Western culture for the past four hundred years?

**LM** I don't know, but I feel like a lot of stuff we're doing keeps reminding me of post-colonial feminist theory, and I keep being like, oh, social practice. I feel like it's maybe emerging from that. I've been working a lot with Ried Gustafson who is studying indigenous studies—it's all about experientialness and reminds me a lot of what we're doing in the program, too, or maybe social practice steals from that. I don't know.

**MS** I think Emma's comment is interesting. Just this past weekend I was talking to



Anupam Singh, *Ghar*, Navi Mumbai, India, 2011–2012

someone who was at Rirkrit Tiravanija's land-art project in Thailand, and I learned a lot about it that I didn't know. It was really fascinating because the project is essentially exploring what it would be to have a Thai-centric art universe, as opposed to a Western/colonial art universe.

A lot of my initial exposure to art history in general was through a very early Native American art class, and the art historian was going through that and talking about how art collectors were claiming artifacts as art, although it was created in some other context entirely. But I do believe that cultures were doing things that are totally analogous to the outcomes of social practice.

It's not necessary for me to claim those things as social practice or to honor them as the origin, but just to acknowledge that things that took place many centuries ago have a totally common thread and ideals that can be borrowed from or attributed to.

**AS** To address what Emma just mentioned, it's interesting because capitalism constantly provokes you to define yourself. Otherwise, it doesn't recognize your existence. The origin of social practice can be linked depending on what kind of parameters you imply. In art history, we can link to Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculpture. He pulled inspiration from Oriental cultures or practices, shamanism and other things.

At one point I claimed the famous Indian artist Rabindranath Tagore's work as social sculpture, or his experimental institute Santiniketan that he initiated in 1901. I found a conceptual link between both Beuys's idea of social sculpture and Tagore's Santiniketan experiment. That's how I started my research into social practice.

It really depends what kind of parameters you're applying to a certain practice, and then you can link it to a different time and different locations that might have existed in multiple contexts previously.

**SBS** What's the point of retroactively saying something was social practice versus acknowledging it as an antecedent to what is currently the term or the field? I don't personally see the point of claiming that as social practice, even though it was forty years ago. I don't understand, that kind of denies the context in which it was happening in a way, versus saying that all these things were happening that were really similar to what's happening now, and set a precedent for what's happening now.

**SGK** Saying it had the qualities of social practice, because there are very well-known artists that we wouldn't have called that.

**MS** I agree with Spencer that the retroactive claiming of a thing denies the reality in which it was generated or what it was trying to be in that time. There's an opportunity to just say that there's precedence for what I'm doing now because an earlier thing happened and all of the historical context in which it was involved.

That's what Emma was saying. There are things that have a totally congruent nature with what we're doing now that can be referenced—you're just drawing a specific historical context. You're outlining why that happened, and what happened then, and how it is related to what you're doing now.

I guess I'm saying that the retroactive classification of a thing as social practice



Lauren Moran, *Field of View: An Artist Residency with artist Sonya Hamilton*, KSMoCA, 2017

is a fruitless conversation in some ways. Because it is actually more respectful, regardless of whether it makes sense for your argument, to acknowledge the precedence for the thing in its own context. It is that context in which you're even trying to draw from. So to simplify it shorthand and say that's social practice, what purpose does it have? People are having trouble understanding what social practice is anyway.

**HF** Or it's misleading also.

**AS** I'm not sure I totally get your point. For me, it is very important. It also helps me define the pattern, because that's important for my own practice.

If it is just about branding, then of course social practice is new. But if you're talking about the precedents, the early examples that define social practice and if those precedents were present in people's practices before social practice was termed, then I think it totally makes sense for me to call their practices Social Practice or Socially Engaged Art, Community-Based Art or Social Sculpture. If these precedents were there in someone's work, then for me there's no harm in putting their works in the same category or term.

**MS** No, it's totally harmful. It's actually colonized.

**Roshani Thakore** Yes, I was thinking something similar, or just that the act is similar. And it may not be as valuable

to claim the works in the same manner. You're claiming—

**LM** Categorizing, defining.

**RT** Yes, using the same systems as colonizers.

**AS** When you talk about is as colonizing, don't you think branding itself is a form of colonization?

**RT** I'm not a fan of it either. I think whatever the artist is intending with the work in its context is what it should be called. If it's helping your practice, that is one way to articulate it. But the systems are the same and I'm not sure of the benefit of that in the historical context.

**HF** I think the distinction is in just saying there's a precedent for what you're doing, as opposed to saying it is this. The language and history and all those things are actually meaningful. It's not fluid. It depends on when these things actually happened. In some ways it's just confusing to apply a term as if it existed before it actually was put into use. It's factually incorrect.

**AS** So if I say social practice has its root in something that happened in the 1900s, won't that be colonizing?

**MS** Not if you say this act occurred in a certain era, and these were the people involved; it was totally amazing and revolutionary, and it's similar to this thing I'm doing right now called social practice.

**SBS** I guess I wanted to say why this conversation matters is that we're in an academic program. That's maybe why we're so obsessed with talking about the terms and history of it, because the act of participating and helping to create and maintain is maybe part of that process of turning social practice into a thing that's canonical or whatever.

It's exciting in a way because we're kind of watching it happen and are able to shape and guide it a bit more.

**SGK** I wanted to bring up a totally different topic, if that's OK. Lauren, your response about capitalism made me think about the question of capitalism, which came up in the first conversation. I can't find the exact reference, but that language we so often use to say what we're doing is stepping out of the traditional capitalist or the capitalist framework. Stepping outside of the object/gallery/sales model.

On the other hand, there's the obvious concern that we all want to support ourselves. I want to sell my work. We live in a capitalist society, and I want people to invest in my work. I want people to buy my work and spend money on my work.

The woman that I'm partnering with now is getting paid \$100,000 to write a Torah scroll. That's a coup. There are men who are in her position who are doing that—it's not just because they're men—but the way the whole opportunity unfolded is because of the way we set it up and made our work valuable in a system that has capital value. I'm not necessarily interested in moving away from that and I think that's part of this whole conversation.

**LM** I am interested in moving away from that, I guess.

**SGK** I'm happy to have grants and all that, but I feel when I'm doing social-practice work and people are buying it or investing in it, to me that feels like such a huge success in a way that to other people it isn't. It feels to me like some people get social practice and they want to spend money on it. They want to invest in it. It's like investing in a social venture. It feels very successful to me as a concept.

**HF** Isn't there a difference between the example you're giving and the woman

that's going to do the Torah scribing? She's getting paid by a synagogue, a whole group of people who've come together to pool their money to buy something they think is culturally important, that's then going to be shared. As opposed to a very wealthy person buying an individual object to put into his or her house by himself or herself. There's money involved in both, but one is capitalist and one is more socialist.

**SGK** Yes, but they're not completely separate.

**HF** You can sell things, but in general the social-practice approach is of getting commissioned by museums, schools, public art programs, synagogues, and is about a collective economy and a shared experience. The studio version where ideally—though not so often in reality for most people pursuing that route—individuals buy super-elevated-priced objects means only really rich people can participate.

**SGK** I guess what's interesting to me, and maybe it is what you're saying is that they had the option to spend \$40,000 and buy a scroll from somebody else—a man—but for the added meaning behind it they're going to spend an extra \$60,000 for it to be done on ethical parchment by a female scribe. Maybe that is what you're saying; it's an investment in an idea. But it still is in a system where they're saying we're willing to spend this much money. At the end of the day, it's an object. That's what's interesting to me maneuvering within a capitalist framework, nonetheless. Even for sacred, religious objects.

**SBS** That's definitely an interesting question. I'm really curious about all these Artsy articles that are being written about social practice right now, lining it up. Artsy is a website for art collecting and is driven by that world. Their picking up on social practice is pretty interesting/scary.



Shoshana Gugenheim  
Kedem, ורמ נח | Or  
Hadas, 2017–current

It will be interesting to watch how that unfolds more. The impression people have of the do-gooding nature of social practice is kind of misleading about what the transaction is between artists and people they're working with, and what the output might be and the motivations behind it. I think it is pretty interesting.

Whereas, if people understood you're an artist trying to get by and not a social worker doing this for the greater good, I wonder how that might change people's understanding of their participation in a project. Or how it gets distributed afterward, whether it's a book you can sell or something like that.

**MS** Shoshana, would you describe the case study of the woman scribe writing for \$100,000 as a social-practice event?

**SGK** I see it that way. I don't think any other woman in the scribing world would see it that way, but that's because I've been so deeply inside. I see it like that and I've formulated the language to talk about it and the framework to place it in. But I don't think anyone else in that scribing world would, for better or worse. I think for worse. I really want them to get it on that level.

**MS** It's interesting because I think you've been an integral part in getting it there. The way you're framing it contributes to that. Do you feel like men getting hired to write a Torah scroll is social practice or is a precedent for the way you're doing it now?

**SGK** No, because the way that it transitioned for me into social practice is that women

stepped in where we have been forbidden because I created a collective practice for writing and sewing the scroll.

**LM** I feel like in the earlier situation you were describing, the people that decided to buy the scroll are not functioning in a capitalist way. What is everybody else's opinion? I think it's hard to avoid functioning in a capitalist world, but I do appreciate projects that show other examples of how we could do things. I think social practice—my understanding of it—is working against capitalism because it's about collectiveness and working together. Especially now, thinking more and more about job stuff, it's competition. Everyone is forced to compete with each other all the time instead of working together.

**AES** One thing that has come up, which is for me a clear difference between more traditional art forms and social practice is this realm of maybe going against capitalism, maybe not, that the central goal might not be creating an object but having an interaction happen between people. So it's really something nonmaterialistic we're aiming for in the first place. Creating objects then only becomes the pretext to come together. And even if there's this question of how do you earn money, it's still different. It's less about selling an object and more about finding money, like grants or something that finances what you're doing with a group of people. I feel like it's very important to me at least that there's more this focus on interaction between people and less this focus on objects. And also less selling an object and more selling that you're working with people.

**SGK** And paying people.

**AES** Yeah, and paying people.

**SGK** I'm not suggesting that it's about moving back to objects, but in a way



Roshani Thakore with artists from the Living School of Art, *Living Artists' Thoughts on Living in Portland*, 2017

I feel if the same people who are investing in the traditional object-oriented art are investing and spending their money on social practice—I don't even know what it would look like. I don't know whether it's salary or collecting ephemera. I don't know what that is. But there's something to me that feels really satisfying about directing money toward things that are being initiated from social engagement and the values that we share. That's a place that's interesting to me.

**SBS** I guess for me there's two questions in this conversation. One is, how do you want to sustain your practice? I don't think any of those answers exist outside of the capitalist framework we live in. But then there is, what does our practice contain?

I think that this other question of what your practice contains and whether or not that's anti-capitalist or in contradiction to capitalist models is something else to think about, as far as actually getting by in the world.

**RT** Thinking about sustaining the practice, I feel like if anything in this program—compared to other programs or even just being a studio artist—the experiential aspect of being able to plug into so many different nonart sites opens up possibilities to think about how art is viewed, integrated, and can shift culture and structures, and, yes, within this capitalist system.

**KS** It somewhat flattens the hierarchy in some way of who's getting all that money.

**RT** Right.

**KS** You're spreading it out more to people that maybe wouldn't normally get it. I want to go back to how Spencer was talking about the do-gooderness—that's a word I just made up—of social-practice work, and it reminded me of what Avalon [Kalin] said in the original conversation. He said, "We have to name Social Practice, but isn't it just meaningful activity that is relevant to us and that we feel is relevant to other people?"

I wanted to ask, does everyone in here feel like they're making work that is meaningful to themselves? I would assume yes. Does anyone disagree with that?

**LM** Do you think studio artists would?

**KS** That was my second question. Therefore, if we all do, which I assume we do but maybe not, do studio artists also make work that they feel is meaningful, which we can't answer because they're not here?

**SGK** I hope so.

**LM** I've heard people question it a lot.

**AES** I questioned that my entire existence of being a sort of studio artist, and I always had these weird moments where it's like wait; all this work is going into putting this picture on the wall in the end? What am I doing? I really had strong feelings about that. When



Xi Jie Ng, *World's First Bunion Panel Discussion at bunion2bunion*, Autzen Gallery, PSU, 2017

I started being in more collective projects and working in groups of people, having more of this interactive aspect, it made so much more sense to me and it was at least more fun for me.

And it was such a relief that this program exists. I can actually study something that feels so much more meaningful to me than putting a painting or photograph on the wall. In a sense, it feels almost like there is another level to what we're doing. Maybe in the end we also hang a picture on the wall, but how we got there feels so much more important to me. There's this learning process with other people, and all this attraction that has happened to get there.

**HF** Maybe it's not just meaningful to you but to a broader set of people, where the value is not just in you. It isn't just a case of, "look at my thing, isn't it great?" It's "look at our thing," or "look at this other person's thing, isn't it great?"

**AES** Right, it's much more like celebrating together something that you created than just being like, oh, now I have to advertise this thing I've been doing in the dark. And now I'm showing it off and everybody has to like it.

**LM** Might have to convince someone to buy it, yeah.

**HF** I made it. It's totally weird and interesting. Don't you love it? Buy it, validate me.

**LM** Where does our validation come from?



**AES** From grants.

**SGK** From people coming up to you saying that was amazing, wow.

**Xi Jie Ng** I like what Anke said about “all this attraction that has happened to get there,” and “there” for me can mean any point in the process, not necessarily an end product. I like the idea that we are curious about different fields in the world and that people in those fields may be curious about how collaborating within the frame of social practice or art could birth a new experience. I think together what we advertise to the world at large is the possibility of thinking differently about something in the everyday, be it bread-and-butter or seemingly banal. Possibility as meaning rings especially true for me because in working with others there is always the potential for surprise. The unknown magic, or attraction, that can happen in the space together is meaningful to me. I am probably reading my own desires into it, but when Avalon said “meaningful activity,” it feels like a collective search for meaning in life. That it is collective is at least interesting, if not beautiful. I imagine a bunch of people bumbling around, doing something kind of out of what is perceived as ordinary reality. That kind of semi-fictional paradigm we get to temporarily exist together in because of the meeting of different worlds holds great meaning and wonder for me.

**AC** For me personally, I feel like it’s a relationship with the work. It’s little moments. It changes. It feels meaningful and then later on I don’t feel it with the same work. It’s a constant roller coaster. But I’m pretty sure the moment I decide to pursue an idea, it is the meaningfulness of it that makes it happen.

Then I could lose it. Things that were meaningful for me, a year later aren’t anymore. So I think it’s not as easy as it is meaningful, the work you’re doing, because inevitably that changes.

**KS** Do you feel you’re creating work that’s meaningful for other people?

**AC** For other people, I think more and more, yeah. I have been trying to make little sacrifices of my own talents and what I like to do in order to find out what other people like to do. It happens at Greensboro Project Space a lot. I don’t always go to the programs we have because frankly sometimes it is uninteresting to me, emphasis on the me. But I know it’s happening and people are enjoying it. For me, that is meaningful. But there’s definitely a selfishness to that engrained in it. I’m also serving myself, and my institution or project. All in all, it’s a better feeling than making something that’s for myself that I pass off as something for other people.

## People

### Faculty who have taught or will teach at least three years in the program

Roya Amirsoleymani  
Julie Ault  
Amanda Leigh Evans  
Harrell Fletcher  
M. Michelle Illuminato  
Ariana Jacob  
Lisa Jarrett  
Jen Delos Reyes  
Patricia Vázquez Gomez

### Alumni and Current Students

Katy Asher  
Katherine Ball  
Dana Bishop-Root  
Spencer Byrne-Seres  
Nolan Calisch  
Adam Carlin  
Erin Charpentier  
Varinthorn Christopher  
Emma Colburn  
Roz Crews  
Dillon de Give  
Amanda Leigh Evans  
Zeph Fishlyn  
Emily Fitzgerald  
Zachary Gough  
Eliza Gregory  
Shoshana Gugenheim  
Kedem  
Derek Hamm  
Constance Hockaday  
Grace Hwang  
Ariana Jacob  
Hannah Jickling  
Avalon Kalin  
Tia Kramer  
Laurel Kurtz  
Betty Marin  
Mark Menjivar  
Josh Mong  
Lauren Moran  
Adam Moser  
Travis Neel  
Xi Jie Ng  
Eric Olson  
Carmen Papalia  
Helen Reed  
Sandy Sampson  
Anke Schüttler  
Renee Sills  
Anupam Singh

Alysha Shaw  
Molly Sherman  
Cyrus Smith  
Travis Souza  
Zach Springer  
Amy Steel  
Eric Steen  
Michael Stevenson  
Ruthie Stringer  
Jason Sturgill  
Kim Sutherland  
Michelle Swinehart  
Roshani Thakore  
Erica Thomas  
Sharita Towne  
Patricia Vázquez Gomez  
Lexa Walsh  
Arianna Warner  
Jason Zimmerman

### Visiting Instructors and Lecturers

Laylah Ali  
Mark Allen  
Yaelle Amir  
Edgar Arceneaux  
Meg Backus  
Mark Beasley  
Robert Bellows  
Pollyanne Birge  
Doug Blandy  
Borderland Collective  
Daniel Bozhkov  
Tanya Bruguera  
Rex Burkholder  
Luis Camnitzer  
Center for Land Use  
Interpretation  
Center for Tactical Magic  
Mel Chin  
Lenka Clayton  
Chris Cloud  
Kris Cohen  
Design 99  
Modou Dieng  
Mark Dion  
Claire Doherty  
Lucky Dragons  
Janet Owen Driggs  
Stephen Duncombe  
Sam Durant  
Daniel Eatock  
Hasan Elaahi  
Carson Ellis  
Wendy Ewald

John Feodorov  
Courtney Fink  
Tom Finkelpearl  
Amy Franceschini  
LaToya Ruby Frazier  
Fallen Fruit  
Jim Goldberg  
Kenneth Goldsmith  
Thomas Gokey  
MK Guth  
Fritz Haeg  
Allie Hankins  
Pablo Helguera  
Matthew Higgs  
Shannon Jackson  
Natalie Jeremijenko  
Hannah Jickling  
Chris Johanson  
Linda K. Johnson  
Miranda July  
Nina Katchadourian  
Kristan Kennedy  
George Kuchar  
Mierle Laderman Ukeles  
Steve Lambert  
Justin Langlois  
Shayla Lawson  
Lucy R. Lippard  
Rick Lowe  
John Malpede  
Tom Marioni  
Allan McCollum  
Matt McCormick  
Mack McFarland  
Sarah Mirk  
Akihiko Miyoshi  
Lee Montgomery  
Carmen Montoya  
Mike Murawski  
Atsu Nagayama  
Laurel Nakadate  
Nils Norman  
Darren O'Donnell  
Yoshua Okón  
Tina Olsen  
Sue Palmer  
Roger Peet  
Francesca Piantadosi  
Pie Ranch  
Ryan Pierce  
J. Morgan Puett  
Michael Rakowitz  
Paul Ramirez Jonas  
Jonathan Raymond  
Kirk Rea

Helen Reed  
Sara Reisman  
Pedro Reyes  
Duke Riley  
Clare E. Rojas  
Sherrill Roland  
Jon Rubin  
Joshua Safran  
Barry Sanders  
Alexandro Segade  
Buster Simpson  
Judy Bluehorse Skelton  
Molly Sherman  
Slanguage  
Stephanie Smith  
Kelsey Snook  
Frances Stark  
Eric Steen  
Deborah Stratman  
Larry Sultan  
Stephanie Syjuco  
Swoon  
Althea Thauberger  
Sojourn Theatre  
Cassie Thornton  
Tonisha Toler  
Transformazium  
Hamza Walker  
Lee Walton  
Libby Werbel  
Natasha Wheat  
Wendy Willis  
Hank Willis Thomas  
Wochenklausur  
Caroline Woolard  
Mel Ziegler  
Andrea Zittel

### Visiting Scholars

Lenine Bourke  
Phoebe Davies  
Davina Drummond  
Anna Nora Fischer  
Tilda Cobham-Hervey  
Yara El-Sherbini  
Gemma-Rose Turnbull  
Ingrid Voorendt

# Glossary

## Assembly

Annual PSU Art and Social Practice Program coauthored conference with project presentations, events, lectures, and activities. The equivalent to an end of year MFA exhibition in a more conventional program. Assembly began in May 2014.

## British Council Artist Exchange

Two-year award between the British Council and the PSU Art and Social Practice Program. Each year an alumni from the program was sent to the UK to do research and a UK artist was sent to Portland to do work with the Art and Social Practice Program (2015–2016).

## Conversation Series

A weekly visiting guest lecture program directed by students in the PSU Art and Social Practice Program. Visitors range from artists to scientists to historians, etc., and are invited based on a direct or indirect relationship their practice has to art and social practice.

## CRCI

Columbia River Correctional Institution, a minimum security prison that the PSU Art and Social Practice Program works with on two projects, an artist-in-residence program for prisoners and a comedy school for prisoners. The partnership began in 2016.

## Field Work

An off-site classroom in a vacant copy shop in downtown Portland, used by the program for about five years, but recently demolished and turned into a loft condo building (2009–2014).

## KSMoCA

King School Museum of Contemporary Art, an ongoing artwork in the form of a contemporary art museum inside Martin Luther King Jr. public school in Northeast Portland, OR. Founded by Harrell Fletcher and Lisa Jarrett in 2014. Many PSU Art and Social Practice Program projects have taken place with and at KSMoCA.

## Likewise

A conceptual art bar operated by Adam Moser, alumni of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program, for several years (2015–2017). It was often used by the program for classes and events.

## Monday Night Lecture Series

A weekly lecture series organized by the PSU MFA Program (both Social Practice and Studio Practice) for seven years.

## Open Engagement

A social practice conference founded by Jen Delos Reyes that for several years was organized with the PSU Art and Social Practice Program and held at PSU (2010–2013).

## PICA

Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, an art institution in Portland that the PSU Art and Social Practice Program has collaborated with many times and in many ways.

## Program Trips

Annual trips that the program takes together. Generally in the fall the program takes a local camping trip orientation retreat, and in the spring the program goes on trips to other cities to learn about social-practice-related activities in those specific places. In the past program trips have gone to Los Angeles, Mexico City, Paris, Berlin, and Vancouver.

## Radio School

A one-year radio program (2014–2015) on KPSU that was used as the form for the Art and Social Practice Conversation Series.

## Shine a Light

An annual event at the Portland Art Museum in which students in the PSU Art and Social Practice Program took over the museum, creating socially engaged events and activities (2010–2014).

## Workshop

Weekly class taught by Harrell Fletcher in which all of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program students meet to check in, review each other's work, discuss topics related to social practice, and go over logistics for program projects, trips, intensives, etc. A physical activity always happens at some point during the class.

## Workshop Intensive

Multiday workshop for the PSU Art and Social Practice Program with a visiting artist or scholar.



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