

SOFA

FEATURING INTERVIEWS & ESSAYS BY

Carmen Montoya

Jennelyn Tumulad

Deborah Erickson, PHD

Allison Rowe

Sara Krajewski

Laura Burney Nissen, PHD

Matoska

Kuek Hue Boey and

Ng Say Cheong

Elissa Favero

and

The Cat Houses
of Morgan Ritter

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Letter from the editors

The second issue of the Social Forms of Art Journal takes the idea of perception as its guiding principal. During a visit to a fish hatchery outside of Portland, I was talking to another artist about perception: how fish or other animals might see the world in ways that are totally different from that of humans. I started to think about how true this is even of two different people, and in the context of Social Practice, two different collaborators. What are the lenses of perception through which we look at art?

Picture in your mind a group of people standing around a painting: the mother of the artist, an ethnographer, a curator, an educator, and a dog. They are all standing there looking at this work of art. They can all agree it exists. They can say with some consensus what colors it is, what it might depict, and its size. But as to what the work means, who it is for, or why it was made, there would be much discussion, and even disagreement. Now if we replace that painting with, for instance, an ephemeral collaborative project, all of the sudden there is nothing to look at. We are standing in an empty room. The colors of the painting have become relationships, the content becomes a conversation, the scale takes on that of a room, or a community, or a country. So we're left to ask, what are we looking at when we look at social practice art? What is each of us actually able to see?

The second issue of SoFA spans a variety of disciplines and mediums, from social work to sculpture to parapsychology. We will learn how Carmen Montoya is inverting the first world gaze through her work in Ghana Think Tank. Hue Boey Kuek and Say Cheong Ng, parents of artist Xi Jie Ng, share their views on their daughter's films and socially engaged projects. Elissa Favero writes as a participant in a large scale participatory project, Orbiting Together, where strangers reacted to prompts and scores sent from satellites orbiting overhead. Morgan Ritter forgets about the art world and humans in general, through the creation of cat houses. And we interview Matoska, a dog whose guardian is a student in the Art and Social Practice Program, with the aid of animal communicator Deborah Erickson.

Beyond these individuals, we look at institutional and disciplinary perspectives: Jenne-lynn Tumulad offers an educator's view of social practice in the museum, challenging the assumptions and expectations that museums make through outreach and education departments. Allison Rowe offers an attempt at an ethnographic study of socially engaged art practices, and the many dogs that punctuate these projects. Sara Krajewski asks important questions about how socially engaged work fits into the museum, through the collection and exhibition of Not MoMA by Stephanie Syjuco. Finally, Laura Burney Nissen speaks to the potential for artists to complement and enrich the field of social work.

The goal here is not to essentialize how any one person or system sees art and makes meaning. Rather, each contribution offers a lens, or filter, through which we can look at the world. It is not the end of one's vision, nor the totality of it, but a starting point. The artists and projects contained here challenge our assumptions about who is seeing and who is being seen. They consider audience, make new audiences, and reject old ones. Ultimately they force us to see the limitations of any one position in understanding the world, instead advocating for complexity, nuance, and depth.

Spencer Byrne-Seres
Eric J. Olson
Brianna Ortega

CREATE MORE SPACE THAN YOU TAKE UP

An interview with Maria del Carmen Montoya by Tia Kramer.



Mobile mosque, Houston, TX April, 2016

Maria del Carmen Montoya is an exuberant, warm and concise artist whose desire to create meaningful connections with people is contagious. I was lucky enough to talk with her about her creative passions and to learn what motivates her work as a collaborator in Ghana Think Tank and educator at George Washington University Corcoran School of Art and Design.

Within the world of Social Practice, Ghana Think Tank is a renowned international collective that flips the script on traditional international development by setting up think tanks in “third world” countries and asking them to solve the problems of people living in the “first world.” Carmen joined Ghana Think Tank founders Christopher Robbins and John Ewing in 2009 and since then they have founded think tanks all over the globe and at home in the US, always challenging the common assumptions of who is in need and inverting the typical hierarchy of expertise. For example, in the Mexican Border Project, Ghana Think Tank collected problems on the theme of immigration from civilian “Minutemen” and “Patriot” groups and brought them to be solved by undocumented workers in San Diego and recently deported immigrants in Tijuana. When Ghana Think Tank looks

to undocumented workers, deported immigrants, Moroccans or Iranians for solutions, they elevate their knowledge, a wisdom often dismissed by systems of power in the name of “progress”. Ghana Think Tank’s act of listening is radical, deeply affecting both the interviewee and those who are seeking solutions to their problems.

At the start of our interview Carmen told me about a very important aspect of her identity: where she is “from.” Having grown up on the northern outskirts of Houston, TX in a neighborhood she called the *barrio*, gave her rich and complicated experiences of both belonging and exclusion, often being seen as the indigent other. She draws upon these experiences when doing her work. She has returned to Houston, a number of times creating work there with Ghana Think Tank.

Currently, Carmen loves living in Washington, DC, a city that is “ostensibly, the seat of political power in United States.” Here she holds a post as Assistant Professor in Sculpture and Spatial Practices at George Washington University’s Corcoran School of Art and Design. Carmen is married to a supportive artist and has two young children who can often be seen helping with her art projects.

Tia Kramer: I would love for you to begin by talking a little bit about what you mean when you say that you are “interested in the communal process of meaning making?”

Carmen Montoya: Yeah. It’s kinda meta right? As far back as I can remember in my life, my experiences have felt most real when they have been shared with other people. For me, participation is critical to understanding the world I live in. I learn by doing. But I’m not naive about this idea of participation, especially in the context of socially engaged art. We’re all at different places in our lives. Sometimes we can’t come to the same place, emotionally, physically, conceptually for so many reasons like our access to resources, our age, our daily routines. I believe artists must work to create opportunities for people to be present and to bear witness even when participation is not an option. Sharing an experience makes it possible to refer to it with other people. If you did it alone, then you have yourself. But if you did it together, there are all these other eyes and minds on this thing that happened. When we share a moment, whether as participants or as witnesses, we can try to understand it together. For me it is the most honest and effective way to know things. This shared knowing sets the stage for collective action.

TK: Yes. That resonates deeply with me. And given this experience it makes sense that your work is based in conversation with individuals and groups. Can you share with me a particular conversation in your life that was catalytic for you?

CM: Oh yes. So we [Ghana Think Tank] were working in Corona, Queens as part of the Open Door Commission at the Queens Museum. John [Ewing] and I had gone to a community teach-in for young men about how to act when approached by police on the street. Police harassment of young Black and Latino males in Corona continues to be a huge problem. We were still in the research phase of the project and we wanted to learn about how community members were coming together to help each other address this issue. The room was full, interestingly enough, of grandmothers. John and I didn’t look like anybody else in that room. We were definitely the outsiders, a position we often find ourselves in when implementing the Ghana ThinkTank process.

After the presentation one of the women, came up to me and she introduced herself. She was very proper and well spoken



and she said, “Good evening, my name is Violet. I’m an octogenarian. Do you know what that is?” I thought to myself (Thank god I know what that is!) I said, “Yes, Are you 80? Or 81? Or 84?” She smiled and she said, “What are you doing here?” It was such an open, honest, but pretty aggressive question. And she was looking at me; usually people look at John but she was interested in what I was doing there. I responded, “Well, I’m an artist and I’m here to listen and to learn about the concerns of your community.”

And she said, “Oh, an artist! So are you a painter?” And I said, “No”. And then she said, “Oh then you draw really well?” And I said, “Well, not really, I mean I draw ok but not great.” That seemed to peak her interest. “So what kind of an artist are you?”, “she asked. It was such an intense, existential question to have in that very moment. I don’t know where it came from - but I said, “Well, think about what a painter is doing when they render a landscape, it’s never exactly like the thing that’s out there in the world. The artist is asking you to look at the fields, the sky, the horizon in another way. And, that’s what I’m asking you to do, only we’re talking about people and relationships.”

She took a moment to think and she said, “Oh! Well, then I see you are an artist.” I felt so entirely validated in that moment. This brilliant, engaged woman understood the value of work like this and that it is art. I am so grateful to Violet for asking her questions in an such an exacting way. She wasn’t trying to make me feel good or give me an opportunity, she wanted to know for herself what on Earth I was doing there. That exchange gave me the

understanding and language to express what I’m doing in a way that nobody had ever done before.

TK: You mentioned your work in Queens, but you also have spent a lot of time in conversations with your think tank teams in so called “developing” or “third world” countries. Can you share an example from a specific team that you have worked with closely?

CM: Sure, in 2013 the US State Department and the Bronx Museum selected Ghana Think Tank to do work as cultural ambassadors in Morocco. The idea was to activate a full range of diplomatic tools, in this case the visual arts. American artists were sent abroad to collaborate with local artists on a variety of community based projects in hopes of fostering greater intercultural understanding.

We arrived in a small Moroccan village, just about 45 minutes outside of Marrakech. And there we were working with the really lovely folks, at Dar al-Ma’mûn, an international residency that focuses on artists and literary translators. They have one of the most active translation centers in all of that region focusing on French, English, Arabic, and Spanish. And they connected us with a group of artists and teachers that were working in the area. This group melded magically.

As part of the project we transformed a donkey cart into a solar powered mobile tea lounge. We used to travel around the more rural areas asking Moroccans for help. One of the problems that we brought with us to Morocco was that even in cities people find ways to isolate them-

As we sat among the trees, the participants slowly passed the problems around the circle, really pondering the issues. After some time one young man stood up and said, “I see! For Sartre, the other is hell but for Ghana ThinkTank, the other is the solution!”

selves from each other, the doors of home are hidden by shrubbery, they tend to face away from the street if possible. The Moroccans were really interested in this issue of social isolation. They said, your culture is totally obsessed with single family homes and maybe it's really your architecture that's your problem. You should have architecture that's more like ours. In the Moroccan riad doors all face a shared central courtyard and you can't help but see each other when coming and going.

This suggestion became one of our most ambitious and far reaching projects ever, The American Riad. We've teamed up with Oakland Avenue Artist Coalition, the North End Woodward Community Organization, Central Detroit Christian CDC, and Affirming Love Ministries Church, to build a Moroccan style riad in the North end of Detroit. This art and architecture collaboration will transform abandoned buildings and empty lots into affordable housing around a shared courtyard filled with edible gardens. The site will be deeded as a land trust and an equity coop to ensure that the homes remain affordable in perpetuity. One of our main goals is to create an art based model for introducing art into a community while simultaneously resisting gentrification. As you can imagine taking on this complex solution really intensified our relationship with the Moroccan Think Tank.

TK: How does this team and other people you know in that region of the world perceive and understand Ghana Think Tank's work?

CM: The Moroccan Think Tank was really interested in why outsiders were there, in their rural communities, asking for assistance. Some found the process novel and an opportunity to take a stab at American culture, most were truly interested in trying to help. They also found it very interesting to consider the heterogeneity of the United States.

For example, during another session in the mobile tea lounge, we found ourselves once again analysing this problem of social isolation. One woman brought forward a beautiful quote that said that a neighbor is your responsibility and that includes anyone living up to 40 doors in any direction. Many people that day suggested we look to the Qur'an and the Hadiths to find our answers. This project was the first time that we had been able to discuss the solutions with a think tank face to face in real time and ask immediate follow up questions, “How can we bring the Qur'an as a recommendation to people living in

America?” I asked. “People follow so many faiths and belief systems it will be difficult for them to accept.” To which she replied aggressively, “You, in America, don't even know our book. Americans don't read the Qur'an, they burn it!” The conversation suddenly became very intense with people yelling angrily in many languages. I remember Sarah, my translator, putting her arm across me and yelling, “Don't blame her, she's not even really American, she's Mexican.” Some people seemed confused. “No, no, I am American, well, sort of, Mexican-American. It's complicated.” I interjected. Abid, the donkey cart driver, whistled loudly and we all quieted down. Then the woman asked me if I had ever read the Qur'an. “No,” I admitted. This was a real wake up moment for me because I had studied philosophy and theology as an undergraduate and had read many cultures' holy books. “Well, why don't you start there,” said the woman. What a beautiful, gentle and potentially enlightening intervention. This solution resulted in a series of Qur'an readings all over the country in libraries, schools, and homes (starting with my own) and on one windy roof-top at Portland State University as part of Open Engagement 2013.

Another exchange that might help answer this question took place in a rural olive grove on a warm afternoon. The project was being funded in part by the US State Department and there was significant oversight by that office. Several of the problems that we proposed taking to Morocco were considered “inappropriate,” problems like childhood obesity, lack of political freedom in the US and PowerPoint as a brain-numbing presentation tool. The reasons varied with the most common being that “The Moroccans just won't understand. They don't have the context for this.” This type of paternalism is a big part of what Ghana ThinkTank is responding to and we were determined to bring the problems that Americans had submitted— all of them.

We often try to work with groups that already have a relationship with each other because it tends to create a comfortable scene and fuels conversation. That afternoon we had been invited to meet with a philosophy study group. What a moment! This was the most succinct and accurate statement ever made about our project.

TK: Your Mexican Border Project differed from many other Ghana Think Tank projects because many of the people you were working with were in precarious legal situations and much of the work had to remain anonymous. One aspect of this project in-

cluded collaborating with Torolab, and award-winning Mexican art and design group to “create a border cart designed to help people cross the US/Mexican border. Outfitted with interactive screens, the cart allowed people to present problems and give solutions pertaining to immigration and the border, creating a public think tank about the border, at the border.” What surprised you most about working on the Mexican Border Project?

CM: It was so surprising. It was really, really surprising what happened when we went to the border. We were on the Mexican side of the border and we wanted to cross with the cart into the US, so we were traveling against the power dynamic. We had worked on the border cart for months and not just us, all the wonderful people at La Granja, Torolab’s community base. Through all this work, the object had become quite precious. All the times I’ve crossed into Mexico, it’s no big deal. The lines are short and move fast. But getting in to the US is a lot harder. We were concerned that the cart would get confiscated and we wouldn’t be able to complete the think tank session. Add to that that every single time I cross into the US from Mexico, I am “randomly selected for additional screening,” every single time. What if they confiscate the cart? What if one of us, probably me because I’m the Chicana, gets arrested? We made copies of passports, had important numbers set in our phones. We had this idea in our minds that the border patrol were going to make things really hard for us.

So there we are with the cart and we’re pushing it along the pedestrian lane. It’s brightly colored and we’re talking to people, inviting them to sit and chat, to have a drink— creating quite a ruckus. Of course the Border Patrol stop us and ask us what

we are doing. They are armed, in riot gear, because I guess that is what they wear all the time now and not smiling. I took the most honest route I could and I just said, “Well, we’re here on the border, we’re artists, we’re trying to open a critical dialogic space about immigration. And we want it to be in conversation with the people who are living their daily lives on either side of these issues. And so we thought the best place to do that would be here on the border itself.”

It was amazing. The Border Patrol guys looked at each other and they were like, “Wow, yeah. We really need that. We REALLY need that. Nobody is asking us about that.” One guy got on his walkie-talkie and called up ahead to ask for help. “Where do you want the cart?” he asked me. “Uhhh.. up there?” I said. Just then two other border patrol showed up and the four of them hoisted the cart up and over the barrier and we were on our way. It was AWESOME. I was completely set to be detained, to have my passport confiscated, to have the cart impounded and to have to call my husband from a border town jail. None of that happened. All we did was talk to real people in real language. For me, it was one of the most enlightening moments of this project and there have been many.

TK: Did, that cause any shift in the project? Was there any action that changed because of that experience?

CM: I don’t think it shifted the project at all because we were set to do this one way or another. Our plan was the same as always— be respectful, try really hard and deal with the consequences of whatever happens. What I do think it did in that moment, when people saw the border patrol agents carrying the cart, is that it lifted some of the fear of interacting with us.

“I think one of the ways that we create space is when we pass the mic.”

I think on some level it might have even given us a little bit of legitimacy. A lot of people were really suspicious. It’s a scary topic, immigration and one’s status.

TK: Based on your diverse experiences, what advice would give to young social practice artists?

CM: Pose your own questions. There is something very different at stake for participants, for community liaisons, for institutions, and for the artist. And I think it’s really important to do as much as you can to bring those concerns into conversation with each other. I always try to be honest about what is at stake for me personally in any project. So when we worked on the issue of climate change, when we worked with the immigration conundrum on the border, when we addressed police abuse of power in NYC, I look for my own story in that. And I am prepared to be the first to share. What is at stake for a participant is real. What is at stake for you is real. What’s at stake for the institution is real. It is essential that everyone is bringing what’s at stake for them to the table in an open, honest way.

The other thing is that I think it is important to create more space than you take up. As socially engaged practitioners, working in communities, we are taking up space. People have things to do and they are taking time out of their lives to speak to us, to participate, to contribute to our projects, they help us build them, to implement them. And so it is important to not be in denial about that, about the space that we’re taking up in people’s lives. I think one of the ways that we create space is when we pass the mic. By that I mean when we create a context for people to talk about what’s really important to them. This is what allows the work to become their work too.



Art Education & Public Programming within Art Institutions

Conversational Interview with Jennelyn Tumulad,
current Project Coordinator of Education at the
Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles, CA.
By Brianna Ortega.

BO: You focused your Master's thesis at Pratt Institute on "Socially Engaged Art and Educators in the Museum" and have worked within many institutions, specifically within the educational programming and public programs departments. How have museums and institutions perceived your "socially engaged art practices", specifically related to your different projects like "College Night" at the Getty and others?

JT: Socially engaged practices to me, are practices in which programmers/educators/artists are responsive to the needs of a community and work with them to create resources, programs, experiences, and opportunities they feel they most need. This is not unlike museum programming, especially for education departments. Museums identify as public educational institutions that serve their community. I started creating parallels between the two practices—museum education and socially engaged art—while I was working as an educator in museums in NYC and studying art history, focusing on contemporary art movements such as activist art, art and social practice, and socially engaged art. I chose this due to seeing a lot of parallels with the work that I was doing as a freelance educator.

As far as how museums have perceived my socially engaged art practices... I think it's important to acknowledge the difference between supporting change and radical ideas, and actually committing to the time, energy, persistence, and self-work that actually goes into making long-term systemic change.

I think the most directly related project I've developed in hopes to really trying to incorporate socially engaged practices into museum programming is one that I'm about to implement this January. When I say "socially engaged practices," I'm referring to ways in which socially engaged artists involve the communities they work

with. My program structure uses "YPAR" Youth-led participatory action research. In the original curriculum that I developed, the participating youth in this program are active agents in identifying problems within their community and coming to answers they felt would help "solve" these issues. I pitched this program and had incredibly positive feedback about it being "youth-led" and that students would feel empowered and become active agents in this program, but ultimately the core of this program ended up changing a lot from original inception of the idea to actual implementation.

BO: How do you see socially engaged art functioning within an institution?

JT: It's hard, you know, because museums exist within the art world, which in and of itself likes to exist outside of the real world, but ultimately the art world is within the real world, which has its own systemic injustices. I think what is really dark about the art world is that it likes to portray that it's different. And it's not. And I think that's one thing it needs to own up to and stop performing. Many art spaces profit on being viewed as an activist and progressive space, but the reality is that many institutions are ultimately funded by the 1%. That's something that I've had to come to terms with when working within museum spaces.

The goals that museum educators have are a lot of the same goals that socially engaged artists have. Pablo Helguera's piece, *Librería Donceles*, was a travelling Spanish language bookstore and community space that hosted programming that was responsive to the Spanish speaking community of each city it occupied; a project like this is exactly what museum education and public programming seeks to accomplish. It creates and strengthens the local community, it connects people closer to art and ideas, it develops empathy and crit-

ical thinking about the world around you. It is not surprising that Pablo Helguera is both a socially engaged artist and the Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art.

Another example of the blurry line between artist and educator is a teacher's resource guide from the Guggenheim's education department for their exhibition, "Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today" that helps teachers and visitors with different ways of navigating the gallery space. It was entirely comprised of conceptual art and felt like an instructional fluxus piece. I said to myself, "this is literally art. What is the difference here?"

While attending the NAEA conference a few years ago, I attended a presentation from an art education PhD candidate on the topic of how K-12 art educators can lose their identity of being an artist once they start teaching. It made me realize that many art educators have such a traditional view of what art is. And it's really not in line with where art history is in the moment at all. It's very confusing. It made me think, "So we expect everyone who teaches foundational k-12 art education to have a really traditional viewpoint of what art is, such as drawing a still life, one point perspective, or essentially that art is how accurately you can draw something, or even that art can only be an object. And drawing it accurately..."

BO: What you are saying makes total sense.

JT: And yet everyone who teaches at the college level are all practicing artists. They all know art history in its entire scope. This guy was talking about his research to a bunch of very traditional K-12 art educators. He said that art educators normally define artists as those producing artwork and showing at a gallery. They see art as

only making a product. He asserts that art educators would continue to identify as artists if they start to expand their viewpoint of what art is, which has been something that's been happening, since the 60s or earlier (remember anti-art and Dada?). And everyone's mind was blown: "wait what, art and social practice?"

Ultimately, socially engaged artists and educators within institutions can learn a lot from each other. Educators can become inspired to think more about their practice in a creative way and allow themselves to see that the work that they do is artistic in itself when approached with purpose and creativity. But, socially engaged artists can strongly benefit from some of the very practical methods educators implement in their discipline: things like measuring impact, applying standards to their work, and developing pedagogical strategy.

BO: Continuing with the perception of institutions on socially engaged art... How have any of your socially engaged art practices within institutions changed their perception in a new way?

JT: I think it's important to think about who is making up an institution's perception. If it's the people funding the museum or the higher powers of the institution, I wish I knew! I'm still quite young in my career, and have only been able to "sit at the table" with directors and decision makers a handful of times. I think it goes back to being patient for change and back to the ideas I mentioned before that long-term systemic change takes time. So it's important to see small wins and remember that those small shifts can build up to create the change you want to see.

For example, the longest I've worked on administrative staff at a museum was at the J. Paul Getty Museum for 2 years in

varying capacities (moving from Graduate Intern to a Program Coordinator in those two years, always focusing on college audiences and public artist programs). I worked tirelessly to incorporate a College Advisory Board to help plan their annual college night. In this board, I involved as diverse a range of students that my one man operation could recruit. I built out a program where we met weekly to discuss and think critically about what College Night meant to them and their community and how we could make it a program that truly represented the diversity of interests, needs, and work happening in college audiences in LA County. This involvement and collaboration caused the attendance to skyrocket compared to the previous year: the number of participants rose from 1,600 to 2,600 in attendance. It was as simple as involving the community, valuing their perspective, and nurturing the relationship so that they all felt a stake and desire to see this event be successful. From that experience, the College Advisory Board's involvement continued, it allowed for the museum to provide travel stipends for future College Advisory Board members, and increased the event's program budget for the next fiscal year.

Again, museums are really quick to say, "Yes! Let's do it," when they hear about programs and initiatives that mention social justice, equity, or incorporate any of the strategies that are informed by socially engaged art. They want to quickly flip a switch to say, "Yeah, we are equitable, we serve the local community, and we are diverse." To get to this point, it takes real patience and systemic change, and having every single stakeholder that's a part of the program actually being committed to the work of making that change.

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what is

By Sara Krajewski

Stephanie Syjuco's notMoMA (2010) is a work of conceptual art and social engagement, and the first work of social practice art to enter the Portland Art Museum's collection.



As a gesture of institutional critique, notMoMA questions the value and authority given to museum collections, who establishes and upholds that value, and how access to collections is

granted. The Museum acquired the work in 2016 as a donation from the Portland State University's Art & Social Practice program. It is unlike anything the Museum has collected, so far.



To exhibit notMoMA, Syjuco asks the presenting institution to identify and engage a group of artists. The makeup of the group is completely open and in its three iterations to date it has focused on students from middle school to college. The presenter also designates a curator (again, who takes

that role is open for interpretation) and the curator's job is to select works from the Museum of Modern Art's online collection. The group of artists are then tasked with recreating the selected works, using only the digital reproduction available on MoMA's website as their source material. The intention is to refabricate the works to near actual size, employing readily accessible and affordable art supplies or scavenged things. When finished, the



re-fabrications are displayed in a gallery deemed "notMoMA" and presented with interpretative labels identifying the original art works and original artists,



alongside the names of the re-fabricators.

The work came to the attention of folks at PSU's Art & Social Practice program when it was produced at Washington State University, Pullman. notMoMA was soon wrapped into an upcoming event "See You Again" that a group of PSU students were creating for the Portland Art Museum's Shine A Light series of socially engaged programs. The "See You Again" collaborators Roz Crews, Amanda Leigh Evans, Erin Charpentier, Emily Fitzgerald, Zachary Gough, Harrell Fletcher, Derek Hamm, Renee Sills, and Arianna Warner decided to take their programming honorarium of \$2000 and use it to purchase a work of social practice art that they would donate to the Museum.



They selected pieces by Ariana Jacob, Paul Ramirez Jonas, Ben Kinmont, Carmen Papalia, Pedro Reyes, and notMoMA by Syjuco. On Sunday, May 31st, 2015, a large group of guests attended a cocktail hour and heard impassioned advocates make political style speeches to sway the audience toward selecting one work. A caucus style vote commenced until, at evening's end, notMoMA emerged the winner.

OK, notMoMA was selected. Then what? Stephanie Parrish, Associate Director of Programs at PAM and coordinator of the Shine A Light series, advised the PSU students to sit tight: to guide the work through the acquisition process, it was going to need a strong advocate in the curatorial department. That was me. In September 2015, I came on board at PAM, with a goal to reinvent the contemporary art program and I set about establishing a vision to welcome a much broader array of artistic practices and expression. I have always embraced an artist-centered approach to creating

exhibitions and have had the opportunity to provide artists with platforms for experimental works. But to this point, I had not yet been in a position to bring a performative, socially-engaged work into an institutional collection.

The Museum, like all public, non-profit collecting institutions in the U.S., has a collection committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. This committee's role is to provide oversight and approval of all purchases and donations that enter the Museum's collection. Each PAM curator presents works of art to this group in meetings that take place every other month. I knew that notMoMA would be a challenge because we don't have a history of collecting this type of work and it would be an educational moment for our committee members. I decided to do some advance prep with the committee co-chairmen to discuss the work and use that discussion to be prepared for questions that undoubtedly would arise: What exactly are we collecting? Will this create concern for MoMA that we are supporting this work? Questions came up about appropriation, copyright infringement, and how to ascertain the long-term value and relevancy of the work when it is not a fixed object or experience. We discussed the professional standards for collecting conceptual art and performance through certificates of authenticity; I gave a primer in social practice art forms and outlined our ongoing relationship with



PSU's Art & Social Practice program. A rigorous debate ensued. Even with lingering concerns, the committee voted to accept the piece.

With the official stamp of approval, the accessioning process began. In conversation





Image courtesy of Roz Crews.

with the PSU students, they expressed a desire to have a material form for the work that they could deliver. We settled on a set of instructions with attendant appendices that illustrate past iterations of the work. The instructions serve as our certificate of authenticity. An institutional concern came up around the artwork's transfer of ownership. When a work of art enters the Museum collection, the Museum retains rights to it as a special class of property. We did not have any precedents for a process-oriented, idea-driven piece that takes changeable physical forms. Does the Museum solely own the idea and the right to recreate the idea? What are the artist's rights to the non-objective, to the piece as intellectual property? If an organization wanted to present the work with the artist, would they have to acknowledge "collection of the Portland Art Museum"? Is this work "unique," e.g. are their editions or multiples that the artist might show or sell in the future?

notMoMA has given me reason to reflect more deeply on the categories and designations that museum collections place on works that exist in the social sphere. Specific to notMoMA, the piece concerns access to art; by virtue of the institution's internal control systems a layer of restriction has now been added to mounting the work outside of the Museum. It raises a relevant question: is this work really collectible? What does it mean for students of social practice art to create a situation where a socially-engaged work goes out of circulation, frozen in an institutional

vault? Wouldn't the work and its ideas be equally, or even better, served by multiple well-documented presentations that would be more readily available to larger audiences? The "See You Again" requests certainly asked the institution to stretch its definitions and its categories, and that is indisputably good and necessary. But did the act of collecting notMoMA stop it from reaching a heightened potential in the real world where real questions get addressed?

After all, Syjuco intends that notMoMA bridge a gap in students' understandings of "high art" and invites them to come to a greater comprehension via their own do-it-yourself collective vision. Whether considered copies, translations, or even mis-translations, all resulting works are unique expressions in their own right. They exist outside the institutional framework, even in healthy opposition to it. As an exhibition illicitly "borrowed" from MOMA's collection, notMoMA creates a dialogue between a localized audience and a powerful cultural institution that may be inaccessible to the participants and public alike due to geographical, economic and socio-cultural barriers. Syjuco also reflects on the aura of original works of art, challenges the consolidation of cultural wealth in major institutions, and reasserts the physical experience of art in the digital age. Now that it is in another institutions collection, does this affiliation further complicate the work? Or could it be seen to neutralize its criticism some?

After acquiring the piece, I felt an ur-

gency to activate the work and justify its "value". We presented notMoMA in the context of our year-long We.Construct. Marvels.Between.Monuments. series led by guest artistic director Libby Werbel. Werbel responded enthusiastically to including the work in chapter 3, MARVELS. She invited curators Shir Ly Grisanti (c3:initiative), Mercedes Orozco (UNA Gallery) and Melanie Flood (Melanie Flood Projects) to select MoMA works and area high school students from Jefferson High School, Gresham High School, and Reynolds High School to be the artists/re-fabricators. We also engaged a side project with c3:initiative, creating a space for documenting the process and giving more recognition to the student artists. We even got a best of 2018 mention in Artforum, courtesy of artist John Riepenhoff, probably the first critical attention the Museum has had in the print edition of the journal.

I am pleased and proud that the Museum has engaged with an important work of art, and of course I am pleased and proud that we can count it in our collection. Stephanie Syjuco continues to challenge me with the depth and complexity of her artistic inquiry. I'm grateful to the PSU Art & Social Practice program for making this engagement possible and allowing for this reflection of a wonderfully complex work. The number of questions notMoMA and the event/intention of See You Again continue to have for me attests to the importance of the work and adds dimension to the continuing relationship between the Museum and the PSU program.

Where Social Work Meets Art & Social Practice

Conversational Interview with Dr. Laura Burney Nissen, Dean of the School of Social Work at Portland State University and Professor.

By Brianna Ortega.

Brianna Ortega: Can you tell me a little bit about your background and how this plays into your current perception?

Laura Burney Nissen: I studied art as an undergrad and was raised by artist parents, and then later “switched” to social work out of a deep desire to make the world a better place. I never stopped having my own art practice though...it has been a cornerstone of my life. Somewhere along the line, we bought into this false choice that we had to choose “you have to be an artist” or “you’re a social worker” and that’s an unacceptable choice. I reject that choice. But, now I’m 56. I wish I would’ve rejected it sooner. The last couple years, I’ve been exploring the intersection of the arts and social change, and community wellbeing and individual well being.

Last year, the Social Practice Program started to attract me for lots of reasons. The future of social work and the future of most professions is interdisciplinary work. No one group has the answer and the answer to many of the challenges we are facing are the spaces in between our profession lenses, the ways of thinking, and our community partners.

BO: I’ve heard that the School of Social Work has collaborated a few times with the Social Practice Program.

So, last year, I invited the Art & Social Practice students over to the School of Social Work just to have dinner with some Social Work students who were also very intrigued by this. And we just talked and nothing really came of it per se beyond a

deep desire to “do more” and get to know each other better. But we are going to do another one this year. One thing the students said last year was, “Let’s do it again, and next year, let’s talk about how would we both tackle a social problem, like, let’s say... homelessness.” So how would social workers approach that? But how would artists approach that? And is there more that we can learn from each other about how to be more creative and effective through learning from each other.

BO: To get two different disciplines to think about the same idea or project...

Right. And I have loved being a social worker. I’ve had incredible experiences and it has been deeply professionally rewarding. I don’t have any regrets. And all of the things I am grateful for, I am grateful for my art background as I’ve been a social worker. I actually think my art background did more to prepare me for the kind of problem solving I do in social work.

BO: That’s inspiring to hear as creativity is something often undervalued. But, to me, the most intelligent people are often the most creative.

Yes, I totally agree. And I valued the social work education, but I’m glad it came after my training as an artist. Because I approach everything with an unlimited amount of problem solving energy. Too many people look at a problem and think “there’s 3 ways to solve this.” No there’s really not. There’s really an unlimited number ways to solve an issue, but we’re just not always using them.

Definition of Social Work (from Google): Social work is an academic discipline and profession that concerns itself with individuals, families, groups and communities in an effort to enhance social functioning and overall well-being.

BO: So with your experience in the School of Social Work... What is your and the school’s perception of the Art & Social Practice program?

Last year I was able to get an article published about art and social work together. I was waiting to write that academic article for 20 years and I finally did it. When we started our 2018-2019 academic year, we had a big event to welcome the MSW students. I mentioned that this is a big passion of mine (art and social change) and I’m doing a lot of thinking work about bridge-building between these two areas. I really am a bridge between two areas because I understand both languages. I developed a shortlist of several students that were also interested in this, who were also artists... musicians or visual artists or actors. There’s always intensely creative souls that become social workers. So I didn’t have to do much convincing with these people.

The bigger challenge is, and what I have to figure out now is this something that every social worker can benefit from? And yeah, I think there is. I think people who don’t see the connection is my next big challenge. Because I think a lot of people look at it and think, aw, that’s cute. They don’t take it very seriously.

I can tell you that I don’t know a joint degree program anywhere in the country that you can get an MFA and an MSW together. But, you can get an MSW and a law degree. You can get an MSW and a Public Health degree... and several others. (Art and Social Work) is not a combination that is well

understood or well recognized. But, maybe someday we'll find a way to do that here at PSU.

I'd be very interested to see what someone would do with both a social work degree and an art degree. To me, those are two very powerful people and a powerful combo.

BO: What do you think are the parallels between the two?

Social work definitely is a profession, but it's also a passion. Nobody is in social work because they go into it for purely intellectual reasons. Social Work is a passion. People are passionate about wellbeing. They're passionate about injustice. They're passionate about healing and advocacy and problem solving. Artists are similar. Art is a profession; you have professional artists. Art is not just a profession, it is also a passion. People who are artists are also interested in a different lens. I don't want to say all artists are interested in social justice and wellbeing, but I think all artists are interested in problem solving and communication, and many artists are interested in a lot of the same things as Social workers: they're interested in the meaning of life, what creativity contributes to the human experience. Both disciplines seek for their work to mean something and both professions are very creative.

Because so much of social work is done within bureaucracies and within rigid canons of theory about theory, sometimes social work can be uncreative. It can suffer from a lot of bureaucracy and I have some deep disappointments about that - that is how social workers burn out. I don't know much about how artists can get burned out - but I know they do too. Through my own process making art, I know that you can have ups and downs. You're not highly successful all the time. But I don't think both groups get burned out in the same way - maybe there is something we can learn from each other about burnout and renewal as well.

I don't have all the answers. Right? Where exactly is the bridge? One thing in my heart that I feel deeply about is that creativity is really good for people and really healthy. Where art is thriving in communities--those are little pockets of wellbeing. And social workers really care about how to help individuals, families, and communities to be well. As I'm looking over a person's life, a community's life, as much as I'm checking on poverty, illness, and men-

tal health, I should also be checking on the presence of art or creativity in these spaces and asking if it is possible that those things can help. I deeply believe they could and there's increasingly sound research supporting that these are really powerful sources of healing energy.

BO: We need more bridges.

More bridges and less walls.

BO: Any last thoughts on the Art & Social practice program?

I have a deep respect for the arts and a deep respect for artists. I think the people that are doing the Art & Social Practice program are amazing and committed. I think this is one of the cutting edge areas. This is very much about the future. This program is visionary and exciting and has so much to offer the world. I'm really excited about it and I celebrate it, but most of all I respect it. I don't think it's fluffy. I don't think it's easy. I think it's hard work. Hard intellectual work. Hard community work. I just have a deep respect for it. I'm glad it's there.

My specialty is addiction, so I know how mental health and addictive health works. I am committed to finding new kinds of solutions and building more opportunities for systems to reflect what works. I'd love to see art become more a part of that. In many of the spaces I occupy, I don't think the arts get adequate respect for the kind of problem solving that we engage in on that front. All of this work I want to do I do because I respect it, and I respect the people who are doing it.

I have a friend who is working through the questions "Is all social work art? And are all social workers, artists?" Well, I don't think they are. I don't actually. I think artists are artists and social workers are social workers. Like, I happen to be both. And you are both. But, if you are both, you have to really dedicate yourself to both. Art is not easy. It takes courage and dedication.

Laura is going to be spending her upcoming sabbatical exploring and studying the intersection of art and social change in New York, Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, and Portland.

An Interview With a Dog About Art

Towards the end of December, 2018, we set up a unconventional sort of interview to further expand the lines of inquiry towards the perception of art. We contacted Dr. Deborah Erickson, a parapsychologist and animal communicator, to conduct an interview with Matoska, the companion of Artist Michael Bernard Steven-son Jr., a member of the PSU Art and Social Practice Program. We asked a series of questions to Matoska, through the facilitation of Deborah, to try and learn what are Matoska's perceptions of art, whether she considers herself an artist, and where she draws inspiration in the world.

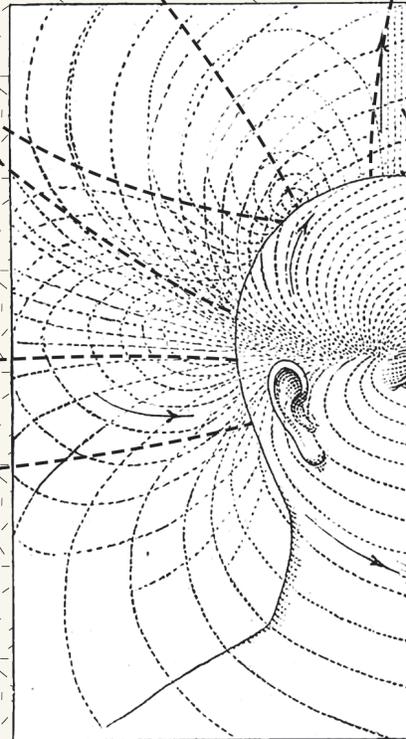
- Deborah: Just to frame this session for you, I'm sitting in my meditation room with a blackout mask over my eyes. I've spent about the last 20 minutes or so in conscious breathing, yoga breathing, visualizations, getting myself cleared of negative energy, negative entities, and asking for help from the perfect powerful Source, the Diva of animal communication, and from Matoska's angels and archangels, to help me get clear messages from her.
- Michael: Excellent.
- Deborah: Okay. Can you see her? Sometimes you'll see a physical reaction when I connect to animals in their heads. Not always, but sometimes. I've talked to a friend's cats who said her cats were stomping around the house trying to figure out where I was. So, who's asking questions? I'd like to take 'em just one or two at a time.
- Michael: Sure. I'll go one at a time, 'cause that makes sense.
- Deborah: Okay. Let's get started. What's your first question for her?
- Michael: The first question is, "What kind of art do you like?"
- Deborah: Okay. Hold on just a sec. She's been waiting for me, by the way. Hold on... So, in one of the photographs sent, Michael, her front feet were crossed. Was it posed or did Matoska do that?
- Michael: That was Matoska in her finest.
- Deborah: Exactly, 'cause that's the picture I just got when I connected with her. Very regal. Very smart. And so I introduce myself and I say, "Michael asked me to talk with you. Is that okay with you?" And she says, "Of course. I've been waiting for you." For the question, "What kind of art do you like." She kind of looked around and thought, she finally said, "Well, nature is art." To her, the outside is art to her. And I said, "Well, okay. Do you like sculpture?" Has she ever seen sculpture? I don't think she really understood what I meant by that. So, I think if anything, her "favorite art" would be natural things portrayed on canvas or a picture or something like that. I mean, she kind of didn't know how to answer that question, I don't think. And from her perspective, nature is art.
- Deborah: So, the question is, "Do you like social practice art?" How has she been exposed to this? Would she know what that means?
- Michael: Well, I guess you can convey, which more questions will come up about it. She attends class with me, so for all intents and purposes, my understanding is Matoska's also pursuing her Master of Fine Art in art and social practice. She's never missed a class. Then often when I'm practicing, the photo of her in front of that cart, is activated by young people serving food out of it and she has been present for both iterations of that, among other interviews or meetings or engagements that are part of my practice, or others' practices.
- Deborah: Good. That helps. Hold on... Well, she wants to be one of the participants, one of the collaborators. She goes to class with you, but she says she just sits on the side and watches. So, she feels like she's been sort of shuttled to the side of participating in these exchanges and she doesn't get to play. Is she normally included or excluded from these collaborative efforts?

A

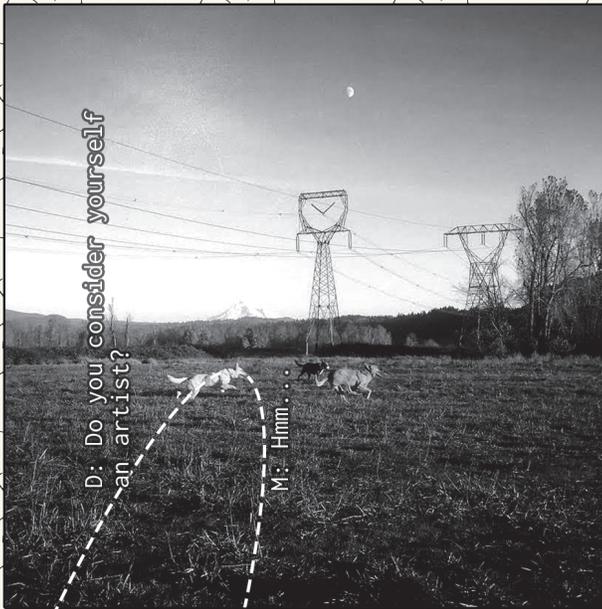


With

Parapsychologist's



Interview



D: Do you consider yourself an artist?

M: Hmm...

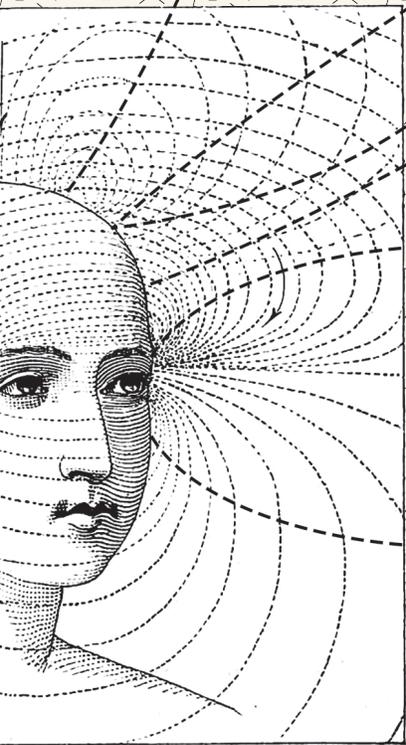
Artist



D: What sort of work do you want to make?

M: I want to get my feet wet.

Matoska



cho-Magnetic Curves.



D: What are your major influences as an artist?

M: Michael...

Michael: That's a really great question. She, in class, definitely is kind of more just present. Sometimes she's kind of bouncing around doing her own thing, but mostly is just relaxed. I have brought her to some of my projects, and again, she's more present. It's more of like a social experience for her but non-collaborative creative. Although this article, originally, the thought was maybe interviewing the dogs who belong or are in partnership with the director of our program. But they just stay at home. Matoska's much more present in the culture and within that, I have been thinking about collaborating with Matoska, to kind of help develop her practice in her own right. That is kind of oncoming or has slowly begun, and this interview and article is kind of part of that, kind of validating her interests as an individual. So, it's good to know that she enjoys nature. So far we've done some feather collecting together. But I'm looking forward to more, for sure.

Deborah: Good. So, yeah, she wants to be engaged in these events as well. Okay, next question.

Michael: Do you consider yourself an artist, and if so, what sort of work do you want to make?

Deborah: Yeah. Hold on... Well, when I asked her that, I didn't really get an answer for a while. She's thinking about it too, and the image I got was like her splashing through a puddle. And then I got image of her walking through wet sand. Things that would imprint her footprints, that kind of thing. I sent her a picture of ... You know, these elephants or animals that hold a paintbrush in their mouth? And put color on a canvas, and she seemed intrigued but not that interested. It was like the kind of answer, you know, it was sort of a reaction of, "Really?" That was kind of farther than she could think, I think.

Michael: Yeah. The next question is, "What are your major influences as an artist?"

Deborah: Okay. Hold on... Well, she said, "Michael ... " You, of course, as a guardian, she said, "I learn something every class," that she has with you. Then just engaging with your friends.

Michael: Right. Well, that's excellent. She's got a lot of good mentors. The final of the easier questions is, "Are you interested in collaboration in your artwork?" Which you kind of mentioned, but I don't know whether Matoska has more to say.

Deborah: Okay. Hold on... Well, dogs never want to do anything alone. They always want to be engaged with us, with people. And if it's not with us, then with other dogs. I mean, does she have a "practice" now? And if so, what does she do?

Michael: That's a good question. I think there's two pulls. Me trying to deduce what existing parts of her lifestyle is part of her practice. And then also what are ways that I can participate with them that feel collaborative and generative for us both? Well, I mean, again, kind of drawing from nature and pre-existing forms. Sometimes Matoska will find feathers and I've begun to collect them for some other purpose in the future. I also was thinking about when she was younger, she would always run to puddles, now then tend to avoid them. But we did ... I would think not out of disinterest, but out of respect for my desire to not always have a wet dog. But now, we went to this place at Thousand Acres. I've been trying to find it again, but it was kind of like a water dirt bike park for dogs and that may be one of the happiest play sessions I've ever seen. So, it would be interesting to work with something there.

“So, maybe getting her feet wet would enable her to create something.”

Ethnography, socially engaged art and a preponderance of dogs:

A researcher's attempt to get a new perspective

By Allison Rowe

Dog is one of the most used words in field notes I recorded during the two months I spent studying a collaborative, socially engaged art project in the winter of 2018. The project that the artists worked on was not about dogs but rather about technology, somatics, and fostering embodied connections between people. It was a beautiful, complex work that helped me learn new and unexpected things about museum-supported socially engaged art, community, and generosity. The dogs who pepper my notes largely just walked by me through the space where the artwork was taking place. As an artist turned art education “ethnographer”, I diligently took note of these dogs, what they wore, how they moved, and the people who walked them. Though my mentions of dogs are brief and lack the depth of my writings about the collaborative processes of the artists and the institution I was trying to learn about, the dogs are still interwoven throughout my notes, like pine cones amongst the dense dark green branches of a fir tree. While I did not realize it then, my accidental fixation on dogs illustrates just how much one’s own life can color individual percep-

tions of socially engaged art, even if, like me, you are attempting to look at things in a new way.

At the time of my canine preoccupation, I was a doctoral student studying gallery and museum supported socially engaged art. I began my research project because a decade of making, talking, and reading about socially engaged art had attuned me to a gap between my lived experiences within the field and ways that others (particularly academics and museums) seemed to describe projects. I observed that much writing on socially engaged art articulated or analyzed the final outcomes of a project, never getting to what most interested me as an artist—the slow, sometimes uncomfortable, mundane ways that a collaborative, institutionally-supported work unfolds. Bishop (2012) identified how the logistics of art critical and academic research don’t always align with the structure of socially engaged art which she explained is, “an art dependent on first-hand experience, preferably over a long duration (days, months or even years). Few observers are in a position to take such an overview of long-term participa-

tory projects” (p. 6). As a socially engaged artist I agreed with Bishop and decided to structure my research so that I could gain a long-term and social perspective of the ways artists and museums work together.

In late 2017 I developed an ethnographic case study research design with the guidance of my dissertation advisors. Unlike art critical methodologies, ethnography prioritizes the in-situ grasp of a culture or community over time, largely through observational and discursive methods. As Marcus and Myers (1995) assert, unlike most artistic discourse, ethnography is not concerned with defining or critiquing what art is, because it is focused on “understanding how these practices are put to work in producing culture” (p. 10). I postulated that ethnography would allow me to follow the full lifecycle of socially engaged art projects from preliminary discussions, through to post-project debriefing, thereby offering the potential for new insights into gallery and artist collaborative processes. I was drawn to the ethnographic emphasis on remaining open as possible during research so that unexpected themes, unspoken participant beliefs, and/or non-obvious factors influencing a particular social situation might become visible.¹ For example, at my first research site I realized that the backdoor to the gallery (which led into the staff offices) was commonly used by the public because the organization was open to their community stopping in any time to make use of the institution’s resources—something I may not have realized unless I jotted down how everyone entered the space. Part of what I hoped this type of ethnographic observation might offer me was a more objective perspective on socially engaged art. Like many people who work in participatory art, I get deeply invested in my projects and the people I work with, making it hard for me to separate my emotional, critical, and personal perspectives when describing my artworks to others. I theorized that taking on the role of an ethnographer might create some productive distance between me and the socially engaged art projects I was learning about so that I could get a fresh perspective on institutional and artist collaborations.

My ethnographic research design required me to temporarily relocate to the cities where the projects I was studying took place.² When I arrived at my second site in January 2018, I brought with me my nine-month old rescue dog Sprout who my partner and I had acquired three months prior. Though adorable, Sprout was a high energy puppy who had learned a multitude of bad dog behaviors in the few months

she lived in an overcrowded Ohio animal shelter.

Each day, before I arrived at the museum to work with the artists on their project, I took Sprout out for at least a one hour walk, during which I tried to teach her how to not pull on a leash, chase squirrels, bark at people, or eat garbage. I could then leave her for a maximum of five hours before I needed to return home and take her out for another hour or hour and a half, often in the pouring winter rains of the Pacific Northwest. Sprout frolicked around me licking my feet and trying to jump onto forbidden surfaces as I typed up my field notes each day. She sat beside me on the couch as I used one hand to edit images for the project, the other to pet her head. Sprout ripped up toys and fancy treats in the bathroom while I conducted Skype interviews. Occasionally, she would sleep beside me while I read over my notes. Other than my research, the only thing I accomplished in that two-month period was to teach Sprout how to play fetch in order to more effectively tire her out. To say dogs were on my mind during my research is an understatement; my puppy training brain was liking a weather vane, oscillating towards any canine who crossed my path, likely with the subconscious hope that I might discover how to better control my dog.

For all intents and purposes, Sprout, like the dogs in my field notes, has nothing to do with my research. She will not be mentioned in my dissertation, nor are any other canines discussed analytically in my work.³ And yet, their presence in my notes offers perhaps the best window into the limitations of both ethnography as a method for studying socially engaged art and of socially engaged art storytelling. Ethnographic case study, like socially engaged art, is something which unfolds over time via the mutual participation of people in a specific context. Both are fields made up of lots of participants who come to a project for different reasons, with different intentions, aims, and feelings. Any or all of someone’s life situation may be expressed or not, in action or words, at any point during a project. The challenge to articulate a socially engaged art work, be it by artists, the institutions who support them, or a researcher, will always reflect the plentitude of perspectives that the author inhabits.

Though I entered this project with the belief that ethnographic case study might provide me a more judicial viewpoint of socially engaged art, instead it reminded me of the impossibility of crafting a singular ‘accurate’ story of any socially engaged art project by highlighting how my dog/life

balance was shaping my research. While ethnography offered me an innovative toolkit for approaching socially engaged art, it was not a magical periscope that stopped my life or feelings from shaping my encounter with the project. Rather than viewing the impacts that social, emotional, political, and personal experiences have on socially engaged art as a potential limitation to how we tell the stories of projects, I believe artists, galleries, and researchers simply need to be more transparent about these factors, both during the execution of a work and in its dissemination. This honesty and vulnerability, whether it is about a poorly conceived timeline, a longstanding friendship between a curator and artist, or a fixation on dogs, will help foster more inclusive dialogues about socially engaged art and will support our field in continuing to grow in new and exciting directions.

¹ Delamont’s (2008) *For lust of knowing: Observation in educational ethnography* and Emerson, Fretz and Shaw’s (2011) *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* are excellent resources on how to be open and responsive when doing ethnographic research.

² Spending months away from home to conduct research is an incredible luxury, which, as Bishop correctly pointed out, is not possible for most people writing about socially engaged art. Though not discussed in detail here, the financial, personal, and emotional costs of ethnography are important factors that should be included in any analysis of the potential of this methodology as a tool for socially engaged art.

³ Sprout will, of course, be thanked in my dissertation acknowledgements because my research would not have been possible without her love and affection.



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Our daughter, the artist

To get the long view of an artists career and work, we asked the parents of Xi Jie Ng to offer us some insights.

By Hue Boey Kuek with Say Cheong Ng.
Introduction by Xi Jie Ng.

I once shouted at my father through sobs on our porch, “Trying to live your dreams is the most practical thing you can do in life!” and told him to read his Dalai Lama book on happiness. Two years before that, my father demanded to know my “plan b and c” when I quit my arts administration job to be an artist. Today, external institutional validation and experiencing my and my peers’ work have helped my parents better understand their eccentric firstborn and what it means to have a creative practice. I think they choose to see a certain side of my work in a somewhat do-gooding light; that is grand progress for us. Say Cheong is known to be an enthusiastic, task-oriented eager-beaver; he once went up to my high school theatre studies teacher and told him, “I’m worried about her. She’s coming up with weird names for herself.” Hue Boey is a hardworking, empathetic worrier-type; she encouraged my childhood love for crafts, drama and reading. Both grew up poor in developing Singapore, are now financially worry-free and have never changed their civil service jobs. Putting myself in their shoes with a lot of grace (as is often needed in familial interactions), I see how it is terrifying that my work may challenge state control and that my life might manifest in patchwork ways wildly different from the

safe, hammered-into-the-cultural-psyche Singaporean standard. But which child doesn’t yearn for profound understanding, acceptance and support (in that order) from their parents? I think a lot about karma and why we are born to our parents. Recently, my mother told me I am resourceful and suited to this crumbling world, that as a result of me, she and my father experience things they usually do not. This can mean putting on a new lens - as she wrote, to my infinite delight, “Many of the things we do, even in everyday live, is art, for example, cooking a dish, arranging furniture or decorating our house, gardening, sewing, writing, etc.” I am deeply grateful for their support through confusion, and that my artistic practice is now, for us together, a portal into my cosmos and many more worlds that may rightly excite, shock and abhor them as they age.

-Xi Jie Ng

When did you know your daughter was going to be an artist? What were the signs? How did you feel, knowing this was her chosen path?

Xi Jie had shown a lot of creativity since young. She also enjoyed activities like drawing, art & craft and speech and drama classes. Birthday presents for some family members were always very interesting creations of hers. When she started pursuing theatre studies in junior college, that was the start of more serious pursuit of her interest in cre-





ative work. She surprised us by her projects which were out of the ordinary. After graduation, she took on a job in the National Arts Council where she organized the first silver arts festivals (for seniors) in Singapore. Her ideas of getting seniors to appreciate and participate in creative activities were very novel. She also embarked on projects like filming which showed her other talents. She went on to do other projects. We saw that there was no limit to what she is capable of and there was no doubt she would continue to pursue her interest in the arts.

We were at first a bit concerned that she was not taking the conventional path like other kids. We felt that it was a waste of her talents – she was good in both the arts and sciences subjects, including mathematics. She is intelligent and we were sure she could excel in the more conventional route. Like many parents who would like their children to have a secured future, we were concerned if she could make a living being an artist. Despite our reservations, we continue to support her.

How are artists viewed in Singapore in general?

Our sense is that there is greater understanding and appreciation of artists and their work in Singapore especially by the younger population and post-baby boomers given they are mostly educated and also more exposed to art through today's very borderless world and greater appreciation of things beyond the science of things and materialistic pursuits.

How would you describe Xi Jie's work? What type of artist is she? How is her work different or unique from other artists?

As amateurs in the field of art, we think that Xi Jie's works is very varied. This reflects her multi-talents and versatility. Her work covers drawing, illustrations, writing, producing films, acting, photography, installations, etc.

What stands out about some of Xi Jie's work is that they seem to originate from her interest in people and things of the past. For instance, capturing the daily lives of her

grandmothers in film, telling the story behind Singapore's pioneer busker in film, an exhibition on bunions which is a body defect affecting many people, getting seniors to go beyond their limits to come up with creative art and craft, working with prisoners on art projects, etc.

Some of her work is abstract and we could not immediately grasp the message behind them. Examples include her work at a few residency programmes. One of these is a picture of her against the moon that she took at a residency in Finland. Another is a project she did in Elsewhere (North Carolina) where she created a space like a Japanese capsule hotel.

How does watching Xi Jie's work make you feel?

Xi Jie's works have opened our eyes and at times make us feel that she lives in a different world from what we are used to. Our background is in engineering and science and our thinking is very black-and-white. We have been prepared to enter her world and experience it. Our visit to Portland in 2017 had given us the opportunity to experience her projects which we were amazed with.

What have you learned from Xi Jie's work? Has Xi Jie's work challenged you, or changed your views on anything?

Needless to say, it has challenged us to be very open to artistic work and to appreciate that the work has meaning to the artist behind it that we should never discount or even laugh at. The more abstract the work

is, the more we have to challenge ourselves.

We learnt from Xi Jie's work about limitless imagination, of making connections with things, people and between them and seeing meaning beyond what our eyes and our mind typically tell us. We also learnt that there is innate potential of artistic work in everyone. Many of the things we do, even in everyday life, is art, for example, cooking a dish, arranging furniture or decorating our house, gardening, sewing, writing, etc.

What is your favorite project that Xi Jie has created? Describe the project and how you engaged with it - were you a participant, saw it at an event, saw documentation (photos and videos taken of the project)? What is one project or artwork you wish Xi Jie would do, that she hasn't done?

Our favourite project is the short film about the daily lives of her grandmothers. We are delighted that she takes an interest in how her grandmothers are spending their silver years and wants to document it in a film. The film also gives audience a glimpse into the lives of the ordinary grandmother in Singapore.

We were not involved in the filming but got updates from her. The grandmothers were as expected, accommodating. We are sure that Xi Jie learnt something more about her grandmothers through the project, for example, her maternal grandmother attended dancing class.

Her father hopes that she can do a project to get the community's support for creative art for seniors. The Silver Art Festival was a good start and it is now an annual event. With an aging population, there are opportunities to engage more seniors in art activities that they can enjoy.



Tethers

Elissa Favero

On the second day of the year, I learn that my sister has been diagnosed with thyroid cancer. She's over 1,700 miles away, in Chicago. She announces the news to our family over text. And though she and I will speak on the phone occasionally in the next months, most of the updates ahead will come via Short Message Service (SMS). Some reflect her lawyerly training—informative, succinct, definitive in the face of uncertainty. Others—many others—are silly. As she plans for the isolation her radiation treatment requires, she writes of her Laura Ingalls Wilder preparations, of the supplies she had gathered for her time of hunkering down, her “nuclear winter,” as she's calling it. Her partner, fortunately, is able to stay in their condo but has to relocate his bed to the couch. She can't be within three feet of him or anyone else for eleven days. She's played The Police's “Don't Stand So Close to Me” for him the day before she begins treatment, she tells us. On the fifth day of the isolation, she writes, “At least the treatment seems to be working.” In the picture she attaches, her face glows green from the reflected light of the computer monitor beneath her face. In response to these messages, my Mom writes from Maryland with dogged optimism and over-the-top, animated emojis. She's 600 miles from my older sister, some 2,300 miles from me in Seattle. My younger sister, in Baltimore, is quick, wry, just as she is in person. My Dad is earnest, self-deprecating, obviously deeply concerned. “That is good news,” he replies to my older sister after an early report with some bit of encouraging information, some mitigating detail. “You are in my heart as I travel,” he tells her, and us, on his way to visit my grandmother in Montana.

Later that month, I subscribe to a series of SMS notifications. These come daily, sometimes twice a day. Each is an invitation to participate, from afar, in a winter program at the Seattle Art Museum's Olympic Sculpture Park. Orbiting Together begins with a low-stakes prompt on January 26: “Recall which pair of socks you chose to wear today. Observe how they feel on your feet. How long have you had them? (NAVASTAR 71: USA 256)” I try hard to remember before lifting my pants leg to reveal rose-patterned knee-highs. They were a Christmas present from my older sister the year before. I think of how many others are receiving the message, trying to recall their wardrobe choices of a few hours before, wiggling their toes, stealing glances down at their feet.

Tia Kramer, Eric J. Olson, and Tamin Totzke composed the daily notifications for Orbiting Together in response to the paths of satellites traveling above the sculpture park. Some three thousand pass over the park each day. These satellites, part of the United States Air Force's Global Positioning System (GPS) that launched in the early 1970's to track and transmit data about time and location, make it possible now for us to pull out smartphones, swipe and tap, and find exactly where we are. They make of geography something exact and objective. The cell phone messages the artists use, meanwhile, are conveyed to us by way of towers communicating at different radio frequencies. Like the satellites, the towers transmit at a distance. Even nearby, these satellites and towers often go unnoticed, the visible/invisible infrastructures that allow for our digital lives to play out via screens sensitive to touch.

The messages ask me to pause and engage. The artists meant to co-opt the contemporary technology of digital capitalism and subvert it. They want to draw us back into the reality of what's passing overhead or nearby, to our own bodies and feelings. The information they convey is the action of a passing satellite. The rest is suggestion—the prescribed action up to me.

More often than not, I admit, I imagined instead of enacted. My favorite prompts—the ones I was especially likely to follow—ask not for physical engagement but for more basic awareness and perception. “Listen for a rhythm in your environment. Consider your heartbeat.” came the prompt late afternoon on January 31. I listen to the hum and horns of I-5 traffic outside my window. I can't hear my heart, so I put my hand to my chest and find its rhythm. Where, I wonder, does touch become sound? This particular message corresponds to the BEESAT-2, the Berlin Experimental Satellite that allows for amateur radio communication.

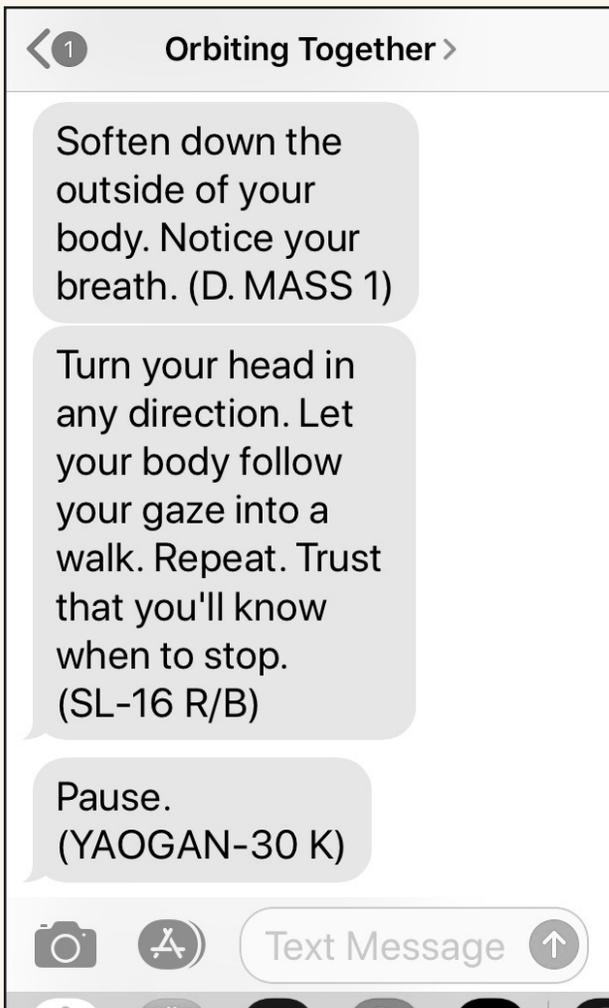
Ten days later, I hear my phone buzz and reach out for it, reading “Look to the satellite flying overhead. Cup your hands around your mouth and whisper a message to someone who is very far away.” The corresponding IRIDIUM satellite, I learn later from the artists, provides satellite phone coverage for people in remote locations.

I think of the main character in the 2001 Hong Kong film *In the Mood for Love*. At the end of the movie, Chow Mo-wan comes from Hong Kong to the ruins of Angkor Wat. He has earlier told his friend about an ancient practice of making a hollow in a tree, whispering a secret inside, and covering the opening with mud. In Cambodia, Mr. Chow touches his hand to a space in the temple wall before bringing his mouth to it. After he leaves, we see that he has stuffed straw into the void, pushing back his words as far as he can reach. The words themselves we never hear. As he stands, leans, and whispers, the film's music swells and the camera circles, a satellite around him.



In-person, participatory performances bookend Orbiting Together's month of daily texts. At the first, I feel my introversion as I arrive and survey the scene from the edge of the room. I'm relieved when we're called together, coordinated into movement. Weeks later, at the start of the second performance, a woman asks for my arm as she adjusts her shoe. At once I feel helpful, more at ease. About halfway through the performance, a prompt directs us to "Sink into the floor and allow yourself to be held by those around you. Notice how you are holding up others. (SL-14 R/B)" I laugh with the three people I happen to have been near and fallen with. We are preposterously, precariously arranged, backs on the ground with limbs extended, overlapping, supporting or being supported. I'm being stretched past the polite disregard I cultivate on the bus and in other public spaces.

At this second performance, there are professional dancers among us. They perform with us and then coalesce to extend the directives with the grace of bodies professionalized for movement, becoming fonts of trust and mutuality in a sea of strangers who've been asked over the course of these weeks leading up and now this evening to come closer and closer. "Feel the presence of others. (WISE)," we are directed. "Fall with someone. (D. MASS 2)...Notice your hesitation. Notice your surrender. (ALOS: DAICHI)" And later, "Orbit around somebody you don't know. (SAUDISAT 1C: SO-50)...Observe your heartbeat. (FENGYUN 3C)."



All told, 422 people subscribed to Orbiting Together's notifications during January and February. Many also posted to an Instagram account, documenting their responses to the daily prompts through photographs and short videos. I'm struck as I scroll through these that the participants aren't touting the beauty or good taste we're often meant to see in selfies or vacation photos. Instead of assertions of individual identity, the responses feel more like a chorus of gentle echoes. So this is what it looks like when you spin in place, noticing your dizziness, imagining satellites travelling faster as they get closer to earth.

The artists behind Orbiting Together conceived of their project as a rhizome—in botany, a system of roots that extends laterally, without a clear center. "This project," they write, "uses a network of satellites flying over the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park as triggers for messages encouraging participants to engage their somatic awareness. Individuals opted into the system create a rhizomatic positioning system composed of people in the place of technology." The Olympic Sculpture Park is the nexus of activity, with satellites passing overhead, triggering the messages. But the recipients and enactors themselves define the network, its reach and shape morphing and mutating over the weeks. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari similarly use the metaphor of the rhizome to put different disciplines in conversation and send out reverberating lines of communication. "All we talk about," they write in their introduction to the book, "are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types...It has to do with surveying, mapping even realms that are yet to come."

We orient ourselves relative to people, to a constellation of relationships both casual and serious, immediate and distant. These comprise single exchanges, rapports formed by routine, brief periods of intense intimacy, and bonds that will last a lifetime. These relationships help tell us, in big ways and small, who we are and how we belong together.

This last year and a half, I've experienced the remote sickness and recovery of first my father-in-law and then my sister. In the last month, I learned from a friend across the country about the sudden, devastating death of her husband. Perhaps the reverse side of Deleuze and Guattari's underground, extending roots—always expanding and coalescing, spontaneously forming—are the ways history and shared experience have tethered us to each other. "Tether" comes from Old Norse, meaning "a rope for fastening an animal" and, by two centuries later, the "measure of one's limitations." We are, in a sense, beasts of burden to one other, figures of responsibility and obligation. But instead of selves bounded and begrudgingly beholden to each other, I think of Deleuze and Guattari's multiplicities and intensities moved above ground, those communications via satellite and text, those tracks and tethers that allow me to feel the pull of my sister, my father-in-law, my friend, the tug I perceive at my end, the connection that reaches between them and me and measures the length of the distance and also forms its link.

The rhizome: a ribbon of highway ceaselessly carrying drivers and passengers near and then past my win-

dow; an arm extended to a stranger when she needs it; and a happenstance, precarious pile of laughing bodies on the floor of a museum. And the tether: the teasing and self-deprecation and, at the best of times, vulnerability and fierce love that took years to bloom between us, that I want to tend across miles and years.

My sister and I will likely never live in the same place again. There are good reasons for that—differences in professions, interests, temperaments, values. Sometimes these can feel like vast chasms. It can be hard to say the right words to each other. I know I've said the wrong ones, said what felt like betrayal, heard what sounded like indictment. Or said nothing at all. I feel the tug, though, of her typed texts or animated gifs on my end and I tug back. We orbit together in a perpetual dance of distance and immediacy, uncertainty and intimacy.

Connections, though, can be cultivated, can extend into territory as yet unmapped. Toes and heartbeats and whispers to ourselves, observations from a window or a proffered arm or bodies right close to each other, calls and texts with those we love already: these are the realms of self-awareness and friendship—however temporary or lasting, however unexpected or made of what we think we already know so well—that pulse with the present, that are, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, the realms ever yet to come.

I look up. I reach for my phone.



The Cat Houses of Morgan Ritter

By Spencer Byrne-Seres

“Incidental” was one of the first words that leapt out at me in my conversations with Morgan Ritter about *The Cat House Settlement*. Incidental, a sort of by-product. An incident, a response, a result. Not necessarily an accident. Maybe an attitude, a mood, a situation. That the cat houses appear abstract, that they can be understood as art, is incidental. So clear are their primary function, that when Morgan was walking down the street carrying the ladder (see fig. 1), a couple ran out of their house to confirm and exclaim that it was, in fact, a cat house. These objects are everyday objects, human structures, renovated for cats. Incidentally, they are covered in carpet.

I first came across *The Cat House Settlement* through a series of Instagram posts that Morgan made about their existence. The caption on one post read: “LOCAL OPPORTUNITY TO SQUEEZE MY CAT HOUSES: 3 of my “cat houses” (patchwork carpeted sculptures for cats aka human’s perception of cats via human language and material) are FOR SALE in PORTLAND...”

Human’s perception of cats via human language and material.

Morgan’s cat houses are questions, a material research project into perception by an artist who desires to move beyond simple human audiences. They began in response to the artist’s disappointment and trauma with human politics and the human art world. The cat houses offered a respite from a caustic environment though dissociation: a fantasy project, a post-human query into interspecies communication. It felt like the missing piece to SoFA Journal’s chosen theme, so I contacted Morgan immediately and we began talking about the work.

Morgan has been making these houses for years. All of the objects are found objects, as is most of the carpet. They are remnants that she finds on craigslist or in free piles to which she adds innumerable hours of time and attention. There is a lad-



Fig. 1

der, a pallet, an ironing board, a block of wood, a box, and a stick, all covered in carpet. Morgan states that “the scrapping is a technique of survival that I have cultivated in my creative practice. Working with what I have to achieve something paradoxical and almost unimaginable.” To this end she painstakingly collages together carpet, cut into shapes then assembled together in an instinctive way, through what is described as a snowballing process. Their composition starts with one shape or patch of carpet, then slowly envelopes the object. The colors are mostly muted tones of purple, blue, and beige; tones of carpet you would already find covering other cat houses. Interspersed in some are text: world, elevator. Poems for the humans, jokes for the cats, or vice versa.

When we talk about the cat houses, we always talk first in terms of cats. How do they climb them? Do they like them?



Fig. 2

What cat considerations are you making? Are they for particular cats, or a general cat audience? On a certain level the cat houses don’t need cats to function. Morgan is making assumptions about what cats might be interested in, the process is dialogic, or even speculative. They are projections, imaginations by a human of what cats might need or value. There does not need to be consensus among cats just as there does not need to be consensus among humans. And it is in the reception of this work where we learn about how others perceive the world. When I arrived at the studio, there was a cat, perched in the upper basket of the largest house, staring at me at eye level (fig 2). This almost came as a surprise. I wasn’t sure if the cats really engaged with the houses, but in that moment there was no doubt who the work was for.



Installation view

Each of these objects points to an obvious fact of life: cats and humans cohabit the world together. We share bathrooms and bedrooms and kitchens. And we fill these spaces with stuff. Stuff mostly designed for humans, save the dog bed in the corner or the kitty litter box in the garage. We expect cats to live in our houses, walk on our slippery floors, scramble over our appliances and underneath our beds. Morgan is pushing back, by wrapping our stuff in carpet. “No,” she is saying to the chair, “you are not just for humans.” The cat houses are puzzles, both for cats and for humans. For instance, there is a hunk of wood that is covered in carpet on one side, that rests on two sharpened pencils, titled “INTERSPECIES WORK TABLE” (fig. 3). The function of this object is no more apparent to the human than to the cat. But to both it poses a challenge, and perhaps an invitation to collaborate in what Morgan sees as a launchpad for post-human thinking.

The work has been presented in a number of ongoing formats: normally the cat houses live in Morgan’s garage studio, their natural environment. Cats and humans may come and go, seeking or discovering the cat houses as I did when I arrived for a studio visit. The work was also presented in a garage in Seattle. And online, the work is shown through Morgan’s website in a mock Craigslist page that lists all of the pieces and their prices. This last presentation is like insurance, lest the art world try to re-re-appropriate the work as sculpture. “This is not an exhibition,” she writes in reference to the works living in Seattle. The Craigslist page builds a certain logic of transaction into the work that is otherwise the product of “dissociation

and fantasy.” The logic of transaction underlines the function of the work: she is creating supportive structures that are in turn able to support her.

As Morgan makes clear, the cat houses are not for the gallery; they have no function there. But where does art serve a function? Why does it have to live in ascetic white boxes and cold warehouses? We grapple with these questions much like a cat on a wooden floor, sliding around, trying to find our grip. Function is at the heart of Morgan’s inquiry, challenging the status quo, retreating from the standard functions and spaces in which art is produced and consumed. She has been making a list, attempting to catalogue the functions of art:

Art as a compromised result of accommodating an institution’s requirements
 Art as no vacancy, or vacancy
 Art as all you can eat

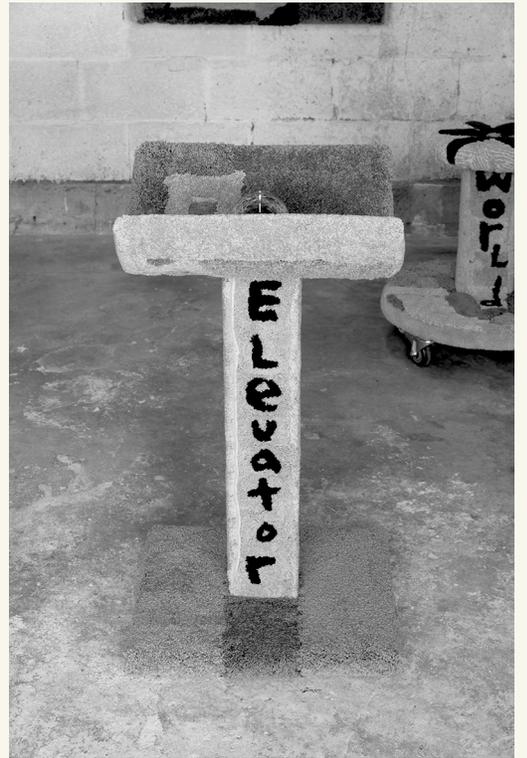
The list goes on and on, a detailed account of the artist’s perception and a reminder that through art we can actually learn about the world. The list reads not quite as a manifesto, but as a series of observations, or hypotheses. The cat houses are one of these hypotheses, erased from the list because they now exist in reality. Their existence proves their function, they are *art as a cat house*. As I sit here writing about them, I imagine a cat climbing on one in Morgan’s garage.

Morgan has started taking on commissions for new houses, for specific cats and specific people. Through the use of a questionnaire, she incorporates the cat’s preferences into the patterns and shapes of each unique cat house. Each will live out

its life in a home, covered in fur or dust, slowly deteriorating through use and consideration. It is a never ending, ongoing project, and as the artist states, “Morgan will continue working on both projects for the remaining duration of her life.”



Fig. 3



BIOS

Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. received their BFA from Alfred University School of Art and Design and is currently studying to receive their MFA from Portland State University. After receiving their BFA at Alfred, Stevenson remained in the community receiving an unofficial education from restaurant owners, shopkeepers, and organic farmers which impacted their work as an artist. Stevenson has produced a variety of socially engaged collaborative and interdisciplinary projects since 2009. After moving to Portland Stevenson has exhibited work at KSMoCA, the Tiny Gallery, in Show Motel Florida, with Public Annex, at Columbia River Correctional Institution, and at PICA.

Spencer Byrne-Seres is an artist, preparator and culture-worker based in Portland, Oregon. His activities range from woodworking and custom fabrication to administrative and curatorial project management for museums, non-profits, commercial galleries, colleges, small alternative spaces and for himself.

Deborah Erickson completed her BS in Business Administration with University of Phoenix Online, and an MBA from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA. She holds a Doctorate of Philosophy in Psychology with a concentration in Consciousness and Spirituality from Saybrook University, in San Francisco, CA. Her doctoral research explored telepathic interspecies communication between humans and animals. Animal communication may be possible using meditative techniques to quiet the mind, to consciously shift your brain into a slower theta brainwave state, and to turn off this three-dimensional world our left brain and physical senses perceive as reality.

Elissa Favero has worked in education and public programs at the National Museum of Women in the Arts and at the Seattle Art Museum. She currently teaches critical and contextual studies at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. Her art criticism and essays have appeared in *Art Nerd* Seattle, *ARCADE* Magazine, *Temporary Art Review*, *Critical Read*, *The Timberline Review*, and *River Teeth Journal's* "Beautiful Things" series, and her writing has been generously supported by residencies at Ragdale (Lake Forest, IL) and the Anderson Center (Red Wing, MN) and with an Art Writing Workshop Award from the International Art Critics Association/USA Section (AICA/USA) and the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program.

Sara Krajewski is the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Portland Art Museum, Oregon. Krajewski holds degrees in Art History from the University of Wisconsin (BA)

and Williams College (MA) and has been a contemporary art curator for twenty years, holding prior positions at the Harvard Art Museum, the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, the Henry Art Gallery, and INOVA/Institute of Visual Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A specialist in transdisciplinary artistic practices, Krajewski was awarded a curatorial research fellowship from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and is a 2019 fellow at the Center for Curatorial Leadership.

Tia Kramer is socially engaged artist creating experiences that prioritize human connection and collective meaning making. Her collaborative work in site specific performance, social choreography and creative pedagogy work toward equity, social justice and mindfulness in the world. Kramer's work has been supported by Seattle Art Museum Artist Residency, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 4Culture, Artist Trust, Eichholz Foundation, MadArt Studios, and Duwamish Revealed. Kramer studied at Macalester College and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago; she now lives in Walla Walla, WA is an MFA candidate in Portland State University's Art and Social Practice Program.

Hue Boey Kuek has worked in Human Resources (HR) information systems (as a bridge between business and IT) and data analytics and to some extent, HR transformation projects. Enjoyable activities include baking and reading. She is the mother of artist Xi Jie Ng.

Artist Matoska was born in Cannon Ball North Dakota which is on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. They have 3 siblings who each have black and brown markings like a doberman husky mix which lean towards Matoska having a different father. At Oceti Sakowin, the prayerful camp resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline, Matoska, their mother "Mama," and 3 siblings all acted as emotional support for Water Protectors suffering from trauma and PTSD. Matoska has traveled across the North Eastern Americas, Southward through the Appalachians, Westward through Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, and Northward up the Western coast and currently resides in Portland Oregon. Their artist practice is interdisciplinary with themes of interspecies relations, care ethics, play, and feathers. Matoska enjoys long runs on the beach with wet sand squishing between their paw toes.

Maria del Carmen Montoya operates in the contested ground between art and social activism. Her primary medium is the communal process of making meaning. She has lived and worked throughout Latin America where she served as the sole inter-

preter for an assembly of rural farms in San Salvador, an advocate for battered women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and an English teacher for a craft cooperative in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Her work has been shown at SIGGRAPH, PERFORMA, New Museum Festival of Ideas, ZKM | Museum of Contemporary Art, Venice Biennial of Architecture and Centro Mexicano para la Música y las Artes Sonoras, in Morelia, Mexico, where she co-founded an artist residency for multimedia performance art. She is a core member of Ghana ThinkTank.

Dr. Laura Burney Nissen is a nationally known author, researcher, speaker and leader. Currently Dean of Portland State University's renowned School of Social Work, she is also the founder and former national director of Reclaiming Futures, an initiative funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to improve the assessment and treatment of teens with substance abuse problems.

Say Cheong Ng is a trained civil and structural engineer, he works in engineering-related roles. He enjoys playing golf and travels overseas to experience and challenge himself playing in different golf courses. He also likes walking to keep fit. His is the father of artist Xi Jie Ng.

Xi Jie Ng (Salty) is an artist, filmmaker and performance maker from the tropical metropolis of Singapore. She is currently in the MFA in art & social practice program at Portland State University. She has been supported by the Singapore National Arts Council postgraduate scholarship, the Singapore Film Commission, the Arlene Schnitzer Visual Arts Prize and the Regional Arts and Culture Council (Oregon).

Eric John Olson is an artist based in Seattle, WA. He collaborates with artists and community members to conduct research and to co-create participatory projects. His work examines the themes of housing, displacement, embodiment, death, and aging. In the summer of 2018, he worked with a community center summer youth program to interview elders in their community and re-enact games from the stories in a neighboring park. Earlier that year, Eric and Tia Kramer created a project where participants who opted-in simultaneously received a text once a day when specific satellites flew over the Olympic Sculpture Park. Texts contained directions that investigated participants' connections to each other, their intuition, and to their surroundings.

Brianna Ortega is an artist interested in exploring the boundaries and power structures of identity and place. Her work often involves experiential

education, performance, video, and facilitating experiences related to her project, *Sea Together Magazine*. She has shown work or been involved in spaces like San Diego Art Institute, Laguna Art Museum, San Diego Surf Ladies, Lux Art Institute, and currently lives on the Oregon Coast while attending the MFA in Art and Social Practice Program at Portland State University.

Morgan Ritter has a BA in Intermedia from the Pacific Northwest College of Art (2011). Her visual and written work has been exhibited through institutions such as the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), the Henry Art Museum (Seattle), LUMA Foundation (Zurich) and Centre Pompidou (Paris). She has been awarded residencies in New Mexico, New York, Washington and Colorado. Ritter has published three books and is working on a new book of poetry to be published by Ambient Press (NY) and a multi-media release with Musical Archive (LA).

Allison Rowe is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and researcher. Her artistic work attempts to re-personalize political discourses, exploring the possibilities that exist in this transitional process. Allison's artwork has been exhibited at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto, Ontario, Outhaus in Champaign, Illinois, La Centrale in Montreal, Quebec and in public spaces across North America. Her pedagogical and community-centered projects have been manifested in numerous spaces including; the Dovercourt Boys and Girls Club, the Yukon Riverside Arts Festival and at Toronto Public Library Culture Days. Allison holds an MFA in Social Practice from California College of the Arts and a BFA in Photography from Ryerson University. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Art Education at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where she is researching institutionally-supported socially engaged art.

Jennelyn Tumulad is a Los Angeles based arts program producer, educator, and curator interested in the intersection of educational programming and socially engaged art practices. Her philosophy for teaching and program production is centered around using art as a tool for creative experimentation, developing empathy, and social change. She received her BA in Art History and Interdisciplinary Visual Art at the University of Washington and completed her MS in the History of Art and Design at Pratt Institute. She has worked in various education departments within world renowned art museums including the J. Paul Getty Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

The Social Forms of Art (SoFA) Journal is a bi-annual publication dedicated to supporting, documenting, and contextualizing socially engaged art and its related fields and disciplines. Each issue of the Journal focuses on a different theme in order to take a deep look at the ways in which artists are engaging with communities, institutions, and the public. The Journal seeks to support writing and web based projects that offer documentation, critique, commentary, and context for a field that is active and expanding.

The SoFA Journal is published in print and PDF form twice a year, a summer and winter issue, by the PSU Art & Social Practice Program. In addition to the print publication, the Journal hosts an online platform for ongoing projects.

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