

THE ARTIST AS CURATOR



AN ANTHOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION (WHEN EXHIBITIONS BECOME FORM: ON THE HISTORY OF THE ARTIST AS CURATOR)

We know some of the fabulous stories, like the one about Gustave Courbet setting up shop across the way from the 1855 Salon in Paris. His rogue pavilion aimed to present his work differently and better, he claimed, than the French state would have in its crammed annual exhibition, where paintings were stacked to the ceiling with apparent disregard for the integrity of the works on show. The Salon officials had rejected the artist's major works from the period, including *The Artist's Studio* (1854–55) and *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50), so his entrepreneurial one-person show (something unheard of in its day) would, he imagined, be not only a fitting riposte, but also a revenge on the exhibition conventions favored by the Salon. One can picture him, realist painting's master craftsman, peddling photographic reproductions of his paintings and charging for admission as well as for the checking of canes and umbrellas in order to pay for the affair.¹ In a time long before the advent of the fully professionalized species known as the "curator," an artist was endeavoring, on his own, to choose the location, organize the scenography, make the selection of artworks to be featured, and even devise the financing scheme—all so that he might better determine the conditions of his work's reception. With the twentieth century even more such seeming anomalies arrived: artists who not only quietly made discrete objects in their studios but took into their own hands the very apparatus of presentation and dissemination of the work they had produced—and often that of other artists as well.

The annals of art history are full of such anecdotes, although they sit almost without exception on the periphery of official narratives. The reasons for this are perhaps no mystery: despite its fundamental importance as a primary context through which art is first made public, circulated, seen, and discussed, the exhibition has long been considered an ambiguous object of study at best, partly due to the tenuousness of

the exhibition's—*any* exhibition's—ontological ground, no matter who curated it. Neither a stable, immutable, collectible thing (the usual stuff of art history), nor a clear product of any single hand (being, as they are, determined as much by the artist-made objects they comprise as by the curator who organizes said objects); decidedly not autonomous; often deemed "merely" a frame; and irrevocably tied to the mundane pragmatics of administration (thus supposedly less "pure" and "creative" than an artwork): these are some of the reasons that might explain why exhibition history, in general, took so long to gain traction as a bona fide object of study.² Yet why the peculiar and specific genus that is the artist-curated exhibition has taken even longer to be theorized requires another explanation.

Any explanation would surely be related to the ontological impurity of exhibitions in the wider sense, but artist-curated examples arguably further exacerbate the exhibition's precarious nature, sitting uncomfortably close to artistic work, and yet still evidently not quite qualifying as artworks. Even if they are the product of an artist or artist collective, artist-curated exhibitions cannot be thought through the romantic idea of the artist as individual producer of immutable objects that follow a progressive, evolutive development of forms classifiable according to artistic movement, style, or "turn." Neither is it clear how to consider them in relation to an artistic oeuvre (is an artist-curated exhibition, for instance, entered into an artist's catalogue raisonné? Does it get listed in the artist's curriculum vitae along with other group exhibitions? Or rather with the solo shows?). Nor is it apparent whether they can be usefully compared (as artworks are) in discussions regarding the development of parallel artistic oeuvres or movements.

Speaking of exhibition history in general, the writer and curator Simon Sheikh raised the following question: "What does it mean to shift

attention from objects to exhibitions? . . . We have to ask ourselves not only what a history of exhibitions can tell us about art but also what a history of exhibitions will tell us about history, how it is written and read, rewritten and reread.”³ In response, he advanced the following proposition: if a history of exhibitions were to be written, it should perhaps be based on the historian Reinhart Koselleck’s notion of “conceptual history”—in other words, a history examined not through stylistic or chronological devices, but instead through the (materially embodied) concepts and ideas that presumably underpin the exhibitions in question.⁴ Sheikh suggests, for example, “democracy,” “the state,” “freedom,” and “progress” as such possible categories. Although provocative, it is not clear what such a conceptual history of exhibitions would look like, particularly given the profoundly ambiguous nature of the concepts he suggests, nor whether such a methodology could adequately address the history of that complex and labile object that is the exhibition. Yet to Shiekh’s compelling set of questions one could add: Once we have written that history, how do we attend to the specific genus that is the artist-curated exhibition? What can it tell us about history, art history, and exhibition history—about how these are written and read, rewritten and reread?

How to contextualize artist-curated exhibitions? Should their narration follow (like most art history courses being taught even today) a linear, chronological, even progressive direction (think of Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s famous flow chart), going from, say, Courbet to Mark Leckey? Or, instead, might one think in terms of typologies rather than chronology (or style or movement)?⁵ Such typologies could include solo projects as exhibitions (Claes Oldenburg’s *The Store*, 1961; Marcel Broodthaers’s *Département des Aigles*, 1968–72); political-activist exhibitions (Group Material’s *AIDS Timeline*, 1989; Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer’s *The Potosí Principle*, 2010); the rearranging of museum or other collections in, and as, exhibitions (Andy Warhol’s *Raid the Icebox I, with Andy Warhol*, 1969; Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum*, 1992); exhibitions as sensorial experiences (Yves Klein’s *Le Vide*, 1958; David Hammons’s *Concerto in Black and Blue*, 2002); and so on. You will read extended meditations on several of these, and others, in this volume. Still, maybe

the overarching problem with any of these possible organizational principles is that they fail to address the shared condition of so many of these artist-curated exhibitions—namely, that their aims, methods, structures, and modes of address undermine, or even denature, established ideas of the exhibition.

Peruse Bruce Altshuler’s formidable two-volume work *From Salon to Biennial and Biennials and Beyond*, both subtitled *Exhibitions that Made Art History*.⁶ Some of the exhibitions he features include the first Blaue Reiter exhibition, Moderne Galerie Tannhäuser, Munich, 1911; the Armory Show, New York, 1913; *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1936; *The New American Painting*, Tate, London, 1959; *Primary Structures*, the Jewish Museum, New York, 1966; *Magiciens de la Terre*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989; and documenta 11, Kassel, 2002. There is no doubt that any and all of these merit inclusion in the history of exhibitions if for no other reason than because they introduced new art to a public. *Cubism and Abstract Art*, for example, brought together works by those eponymous movements for the first time in 1936; *Primary Structures* gathered in an institutional setting the kinds of objects that would later be grouped under Minimalism for the first time in 1966; *Magiciens de la Terre* challenged Western hegemonies by showing the first truly “global” panorama of art in 1989, and so on. Whatever can be said about these indeed important exhibitions that, as Altshuler suggests, “made art history,” they were classical in many senses of the word. In most cases, they simply brought the “new” into a space that remained unaltered by the confrontation; few of them fundamentally or radically troubled the conventions, structures, and protocols of the exhibition as *form*.⁷

If it is easy to see that artist-curated exhibitions can trouble our very understanding of such notions as “artistic autonomy,” “authorship,” “artwork,” and “artistic oeuvre,” what might be less evident is that they also complicate what counts as an “exhibition.” Many artist-curated exhibitions—perhaps the most striking and influential of the genre—are the result of artists treating the exhibition as an artistic medium in its own right, an *articulation of form*. In the process, they often disown or dismantle the very idea of the “exhibition” as it is conventionally thought, putting its

genre, category, format, or protocols at stake and thus entirely shifting the terms of what an exhibition could be. Courbet's example suggests that the impulse among artists to take the organization of exhibitions into their own hands already existed in the late nineteenth century, yet it was for the avant-gardes of the early twentieth to further develop the potentials of the exhibition as medium. And, following them, a postwar generation of artists finally so radically tackled the form that they fundamentally transformed the shape of exhibitions thereafter—not only those curated by artists, but also those generated by professional curators.

In order to better understand how artists approached the genre throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, an examination of the case of Marcel Duchamp provides an interesting, pioneering example. While he is most lauded for the provocation of claiming a store-bought object as art, his lifelong role as curator was arguably no less radical or influential a gesture. Dorothea von Hantelmann credits Duchamp with inaugurating what she calls "the curatorial paradigm," arguing that "in the field of art it was Marcel Duchamp who anticipated, paradigmatically performed, and articulated" a new archetype of creativity. In her view, it was his *choice* (which is what she considers *curatorial*) that allowed the readymade to mark "the transition of a production-oriented society to a selection-oriented society."⁸ Von Hantelmann goes on to state: "Duchamp turned the act of choosing into a new paradigm of creativity. Or, rather, he sharpened a practice that has always existed into something like a paradigm." That Duchamp inaugurated a curatorial paradigm is quite right, although I would argue that it is *not* at all because of his "choice" or "selection" with regard to the readymade (nor do I imagine the curator primarily a "selector" of things). Rather, Duchamp inaugurated a curatorial paradigm through his understanding of the exhibition as a means of interrogation, a tool by which to critically question the limits of both the (art) object and its institutions, all of which importantly determined the fate of his readymade even more than his mere selection did.⁹

Although the profession of the "curator" was hardly very defined or prevalent when Duchamp first began to adopt curatorial operations as part

of his artistic practice, and he would never explicitly use the term to describe himself, the notion progressively became concretized in the half century during which he worked, solidifying into its present-day sense, describing an art professional attending to the manifold tasks connected to the caretaking of art and its public exhibition.¹⁰ Still, the "curator," no matter how one defined that role, had aims and responsibilities quite distinct from that of the artist, and vice versa, making it all the more unusual that Duchamp so frequently and insistently engaged in the tasks associated with curatorial work. More than occasional occupations or undertakings ancillary to the "actual" work of the artist and the artwork, Duchamp arguably made "curatorial" tasks a veritable lifework and the pivotal catalyst through which to understand and expose the artwork as such.¹¹ Indeed, through Duchamp's deep preoccupation with the institutional sites, mechanisms, and conventions that accompany and ostensibly lie outside of the artwork, he radically shifted both the exhibition's and the artwork's terms (and not solely, as has been so long thought, through an act of artistic fiat—either "invention," "declaration," or "selection"—that transformed a urinal into *Fountain*).

One could cite his early relationship to exhibitions as a prelude to his later, actual curating. For instance, in 1916, in response to an eager gallerist's request to feature one of his paintings in a group show, he insisted on including two of his readymades as well—making it their first public appearance in an exhibition. He placed the everyday objects without fanfare or indication in the coat check area of the gallery (with no label, no pedestal, no special lighting, and no discussion about them) and they—perhaps unsurprisingly—went totally unnoticed.¹² Duchamp was not in any way the curator here, but his orchestration of the exercise seems to treat the exhibition not only as a locale for the presentation of things but also as a site of inquiry, a testing ground from which the artist might have learned that an object perhaps only appears as a work of art under certain conditions, one of which is to be explicitly on *exhibit*, with all the protocol this entails. After this incident, Duchamp would repeatedly and insistently be involved in curating exhibitions, recognizing that the discursive and institutional apparatuses around the artwork could be used, experimented with, rethought.

Ultimately, as his exhibitions from the 1930s until the end of his life reveal, he rendered the exhibition utterly unlike the showplaces of artifacts hung more or less high on the wall that the museum at the time treated them as.

Only one year later, in 1917, Duchamp took on the role of president of the “hanging committee” for the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York.¹³ In that capacity, he devised a curious system for the arrangement of the show, proposing to hang the artworks not according to school, style, or chronology, but alphabetically and according to chance, beginning the exhibition with the first letter selected from a hat—thereby ensuring absolutely no favoritism while defying every known system according to which shows were typically organized. Arguably, it was precisely because he was president of the hanging committee that he made sure that another gesture he performed would be anonymous: he pseudonymously submitted a store-bought piece of porcelain plumbing entitled *Fountain* to the exhibition. The urinal, signed “R. Mutt 1917,” was, as the now-famous story goes, rejected before being lost or destroyed (no one quite knows which).¹⁴ Few had any idea that a certain Marcel Duchamp was behind *Fountain*; not even some of his closest friends and patrons knew, and the artist didn’t publicly mention his connection to the object for decades.¹⁵ As far as von Hantelmann’s idea of curatorial paradigms go, the urinal may have been an artwork selected, but in 1917 it had not been shown or noticed, and it had decidedly not entered into history. It might as well have never existed at all, in fact.¹⁶

When Duchamp did finally reveal his connection to *Fountain*—which is to say, when he began several decades later to construct a public history for an object that by that point no longer existed and one that had, moreover, made no impact while it did exist—his revelation was entirely bound up with his thinking about exhibitions, art institutions, and their administration of what counts as “Art.” The “invention” of the readymade needed to be curated; in other words, it required a public exhibition, which it finally got in Duchamp’s creation of an exhibition in a suitcase, *La Boîte-en-valise* (The Box in a Valise, 1938–42). The artist constructed the miniature portable exhibition for his *Fountain* (along with

reproductions of sixty-eight other artworks) at the exact moment that he was preparing the first of what would be a series of elaborate exhibitions with the Surrealists for which he was the curator (or the “generator arbitrator,” in the Surrealists’ and his idiosyncratic terminology). He would act in that role again and again over his lifetime: first in 1938, then in 1942, 1947, 1959, and 1960. In other words, Duchamp’s investigations into the enunciative capacity and authoritative functioning of the full-size exhibition is inseparable from his creation of a miniature version of a retrospective exhibition that allowed him to play, literally, the museum’s game on his own terms. On the other hand, with flashlights as exhibition lighting, suspended coal bags as a ceiling, and department-store revolving doors as supports for paintings (as in the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* [International Surrealist Exhibition] in 1938), or with artworks strung amid a web of miles of ordinary string that obstructed passage and vision (as for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in 1942), to name just two examples, his exhibitions were, in each case, radical reimaginings of the conventions of display that proved immensely influential to the generations of artists that came after him.

Indeed, there are numerous examples of artists who, each in their own way, subsequently took up the practice of exhibition making as a critical medium. In the postwar period, Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore’s programmatically titled *an Exhibit* of 1957 is of emblematic dimensions. Comprised of variously colored acrylic sheets differing in their degree of transparency, strung from the ceiling and placed at right angles to each other, the exhibition appeared as a maze-like spatial structure within which spectators could move about. It was an exhibition with “no images,” which in the artists’ minds meant no artworks as such, and, in Hamilton’s words, “no subject, no theme other than itself,” which is to say, nearly none of the primary elements that would make an exhibition an exhibition. Instead, as Hamilton added, “it was self-referential,”¹⁷ and, explaining his intentions further, “I wanted to . . . make the exhibition into an art form in its own right—an exhibition about an exhibition.”¹⁸ In the process, the artists made a *display of display*. As both the content and driving methodology of the exhibition, “display” became a material surface and catalyst

for visual and spatial experience. Hamilton and Pasmore's was a gesture of withdrawal—"un-exhibiting" as a mode of exhibiting. Along with similarly radical methodologies advanced in a number of other artist-curated exhibitions that would follow in *an Exhibit's* wake, it pursued the radical reversal of the art exhibition's usual mandate: questioning, probing, reimagining what the content and the terms of display for exhibitions could be.

Less than a year later, for his exhibition *Le Vide* (The Void), Yves Klein painted the whole interior of a Parisian art gallery exhibition space white, removing all of the usual, recognizable "content" from the space. It was not just a gallery emptied or simply repainted: the very whiteness that was the signature of the modern white cube was rendered an extreme of itself. Whiter than white, Klein's careful paint job combined several coats of pure white lithopone pigment blended with his own special varnish of alcohol, acetone, and vinyl resin.¹⁹ As he later recounted:

*The object of this endeavor: to create, establish, and present to the public a palpable pictorial state in the limits of a picture gallery. In other words, the creation of an ambience, a genuine pictorial climate, and, therefore, an invisible one. This invisible pictorial state within the gallery space should be so present and endowed with autonomous life that it should literally be what has hitherto been regarded as the best overall definition of painting: radiance.*²⁰

The exhibition opening was a willfully provocative, decidedly staged affair. Many of the conventions of the art exhibition were used, but also exaggerated: specially printed invitation cards (3,500—a considerable number for a gallery show at the time), a commissioned text by a critic, an entrance fee (unheard of in commercial galleries but common in museums), an opening speech, drinks for the occasion (special blue cocktails), and hired guards out front (two mounted Republican guards, no less). And when Klein discovered a young man playfully drawing on his freshly painted gallery wall, he promptly called security and had him thrown out. In other words, the space operated according to many of the rules and institutional policies that would typically characterize an exhibition, except for the radical evacuation of the exhibition's

conventional *raison d'être*: anything that might be mistaken for an artwork on exhibit was absent.

A few years later, in December 1966, Mel Bochner, then a young instructor at the School of Visual Arts in New York, placed four identical ring binders—each with one hundred copies of studio notes, working drawings, and diagrams collected and Xeroxed by the artist—on pedestals in the school's gallery for its winter show. He entitled it *Working Drawings And Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art*. Each binder contains photocopies of preparatory drawings for artists' projects: Dan Flavin's proposals for his light installations, Sol LeWitt's sketches of white lattices, Eva Hesse's numerical progressions, Carl Andre's studies for poetry, and Donald Judd's work plans (including even a bill for fabrication costs), as well as the technical drawing of the Xerox machine used to make the copies included in the binders. As an exhibition, *Working Drawings* deployed some of the most recognizable conventions of the exhibition at the time—a white cube space, pristine display conditions, pedestals—but used them in order to undermine some of the very pillars of the exhibition by operating according to minimal and conceptual paradigms instead of presenting anything that would have looked like bona fide art at the time. *Working Drawings* "dematerialized" the auratic, visual artwork into a reproducible idea, a notion that became a hallmark of late-1960s Conceptualism.

By displaying a reproducible document with all the markers of an artwork on exhibition, Bochner not only prioritized what Siegelau would later call "secondary" over "primary" information, but he actually made a show of it. It is said that when the Museum of Modern Art rejected Bochner's offer to donate the binders to its collection as artworks (they were the product, after all, of artists' generative processes) and instead only agreed to accept them as a potential donation to its library, Bochner refused. Although the story is perhaps apocryphal, the fact that it still circulates is telling. It is about a museum (as museums are wont to do) attempting to defend the idea of the singular work of art against the perceived threat of "the reproduction." For Bochner, however, *Working Drawings* purposefully destabilized hierarchies between

originality and reproduction as much as it did between exhibition and artwork.

On the other side of the globe, in 1968, a series of events and exhibitions by a group of young Argentine artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario called the Experimental Art Cycle took place. Their activities would lead to the conception of a large activist research, information, and exhibition campaign, *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán Burns), held later that year.²¹ As part of the cycle of events that led to *Tucumán Arde*, the artist Graciela Carnevale opened her *Acción del Encierro* (Confinement Action) in an empty Rosario storefront gallery whose windows she had papered over. The event consisted of her locking up attendees to the opening for more than an hour. Guests (or “prisoners,” as the artist later referred to them) only afterward realized that their sequestration in the empty exhibition space (and the resultant confusion, fear, paranoia, and eventual escape) was the exhibition itself. The confinement made them, as the artist recounts, “obliged, violently, to participate”—an effect partially thwarted by a passerby who saw the desperate incarcerated crowd (who by this point had peeled off the posters covering the window) and broke the glass to let them out.²² Once outside of the exhibition context, and just before the police brought the exhibition-action to an abrupt end, the audience was given a photocopied statement that drew a parallel between their experience and the abuses perpetrated by the Argentine military dictatorship on a daily basis. Although *Confinement Action* was as much an activist performance as an exhibition, it is relevant that Carnevale specifically chose the medium and format of the exhibition as a means of staging her own version of aesthetic withdrawal, countering the expectations of the artwork and its normative, spectacular display.

An altogether different sort of refusal to deliver an exhibition of artworks (or, in this case, the solo show that the original invitation to the artist specified) was Martha Rosler’s 1989 *If You Lived Here . . .* held at the Dia Art Foundation, New York. Part artist research project, part curated group exhibition (itself made up of three exhibition cycles, four public meetings, and numerous accompanying events), it offered a makeshift, disorderly mix of art and non-art items (charts, graphs, maps, newspaper clippings) by

known and less-known artists and non-artists alike about homelessness, housing injustices in New York, and the conditions that made such things possible. Delivering an implicit critique of the host institution located in the then-flourishing art market district in SoHo, the project connected its immediate exhibition surroundings to broader systems that made homelessness and human precarity thrive (gentrification, corruption, complicity, rampant capitalism). Practically speaking, this was an exhibition space transformed into a town hall for meetings, providing a place for discussion, research, and information spreading, but also cooking and sleeping (with seating and makeshift shelter included). It was a place to instill activism, communal participation, and engagement. It looked and operated little like a typical art exhibition, and its reception, both by its host institution and by the local press, revealed the difficulty with which it was recognized as an exhibition at all (rather than, say, social activism). Nevertheless, through it, Rosler inspired a whole generation of artists—from Liam Gillick to Rirkrit Tiravanija—and participatory practices in art, and she also significantly influenced what went on to become called the “discursive exhibition,” a pedagogic, activist turn in art that used the exhibition as a privileged public forum.

Still other examples offering altogether different responses to the question of what might constitute an exhibition could be cited, like David Hammons’s unannounced 1994 exhibition at Knobkerry, an operating New York shop for Asian and African objects, where his works slyly infiltrated the emporium’s usual artifacts with no indication through presentation or signage as to the differing status of each. Hiding in plain sight, as so much of his work and person does, Hammons’s project was as much an investigation of the relationship of the artwork to the commodity as it was a reflection on the form of an “art” exhibition. Or there is Lucy McKenzie and Paulina Ołowska’s *Nova Popularna* (2003), an exhibition that took the form of a temporary illegal speakeasy in Warsaw. Taking over a space loaded with historical resonance as the site of avant-garde happenings in previous decades, the duo of artists designed their own brand of vernacular or “new popular” scenography (from the bar and curtains to their own uniforms as the locale’s barmaids) as the backdrop against which they presented a rotating

array of artworks, performances, concerts, and other events. One could name many more—indeed, the list of remarkable artist-curated exhibitions is long, and takes us from Yves Klein's *Le Vide* (1958) to Mike Kelley's *The Uncanny* (1993); from Barbara Kruger's *Pictures and Promises: A Display of Advertisings, Slogans and Interventions* (1981) to Willem de Rooij's *Intolerance* (2011); from Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992) to Thomas Hirschhorn's *Musée Precaire* (2004), and still other fantastically rich examples that couldn't be investigated in this volume, but all of which prove that artists have, from the postwar period to the present, found the exhibition an incredibly potent site of intervention.

Of course not every exhibition organized by an artist explicitly seeks to shift the terms of the exhibition as such. Some have been more than anything else about expressing an artist's particular and unusual grounds for selection while the classical format for presentation remained stalwartly in place. And there are, conversely, a number of exhibitions made by "professional" curators (or, at least, non-artists), who for their part have managed to accomplish that task of reimagining the form of the exhibition (think of Lippard's various "Numbers" shows, 1969–74; Siegelau's *Xerox Book*, 1968; Gerry Schum's *Television Exhibitions I and II*, 1969–70; and Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput's *Les Immateriaux*, 1985). These cases can be attributed to the curator endeavoring to find an exhibition form that would respond to the nature of the work being shown, or to the fact that the curator allowed the artists, while not taking over the role of the curator per se, to have a hand in determining the exhibition. Professional curators have at times been inspired by artist-curated exhibitions and have felt challenged to rethink the exhibition's form as a result. In other words, there are no hard-and-fast rules that distinguish the categories I deploy in order to facilitate a discussion of the subject. Things *are* slippery. Nevertheless, this larger project of looking at the artist as curator aims to address what has been the signal of many artist-curated shows: a gauntlet thrown down to the idea of the exhibition as a neutral arrangement of artworks in a given space and time for didactic or spectacular display.

However much this project might seem to unify the specific genre that is the artist-curated

exhibition, it does not suggest a sameness or uniformity to artists' approaches. The examples, which the following collection of essays examines in detail, suggest that the premises that quietly support and perpetuate the most conventional notions of the "exhibition" have long been undermined by artistic practice. And while artist-curated initiatives have for too long remained under-studied, they raise the thorny issues mentioned earlier, among them questions regarding the limits of the artwork (Where does an artwork end and its context begin?), the status of the exhibition (Should an exhibition curated by an artist be considered an artwork? How is it to be evaluated in relation to an artist's oeuvre?), and so on. Thus, this serially generated anthology of essays surveys both recent and not-so-recent examples to better reflect on how theoretical and historical notions of the exhibition have been transformed under the influence of artists. As such, this project is less about constructing a canon of "landmark" exhibitions (although this is *also* an attempt to understand what the terms and perils of that could be). It is instead more about beginning to imagine possible languages, tools, and methodologies for looking at, and talking about, how a certain kind of exhibition making advanced by artists can be studied today—alongside, but also perhaps differently from, the vast expanse of exhibitions writ large.

The Artist as Curator's ambition is manifold, but it is decidedly not meant to be a rehearsal of the mythos of the curator, whether artist or not. Rather, it is an attempt to acknowledge the critical agency of operations and activities that are taken up by artists but which might not seem "artistic" in the most traditional sense. These activities reveal an acute understanding on the part of artists regarding the exhibition's latent potential as a form to be pressed, challenged, and even undone. For the crucial task of a history of artist-curated exhibitions is to attend to the particularities not only of what was shown, but also to the form the exhibitions assumed. That form may or may not be considered an artwork, or even an exhibition, but the cases explored in this project will ask us to fundamentally reconsider what an artwork or an exhibition are—or could be.

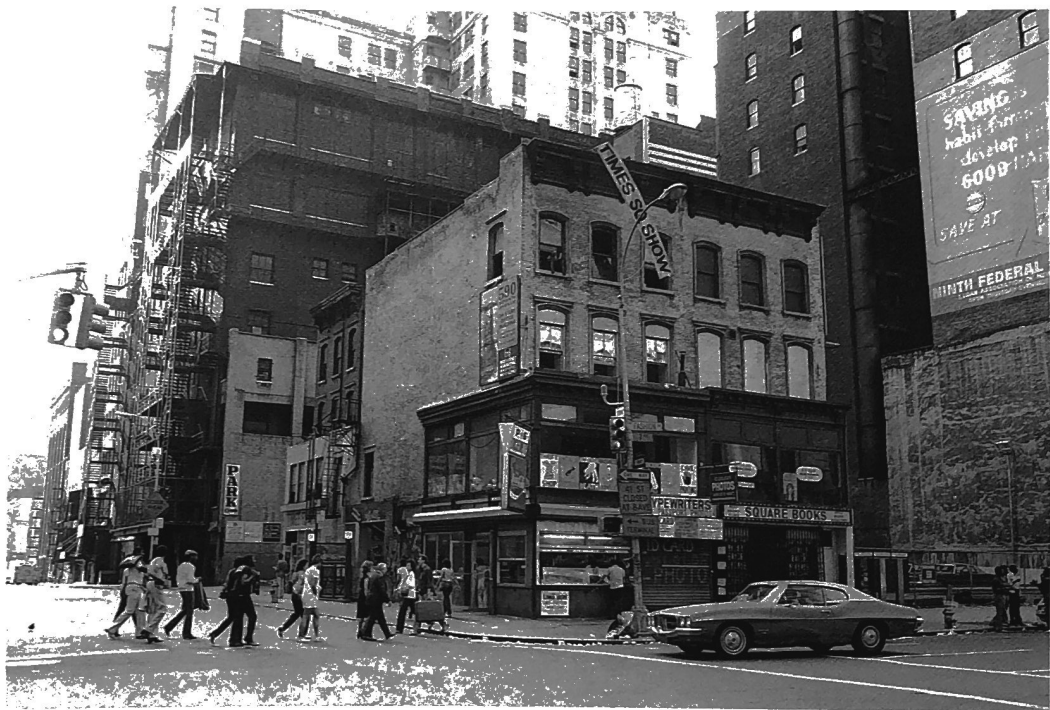
—Elena Filipovic

1. See Patricia Mainardi, "Courbet's Exhibitionism," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 118 (December 1991): 253–65. Occasional references to artist-curated exhibitions appear in broader exhibition histories (Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* and Bruce Altshuler's *The Avant Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth Century* offer rare, early exceptions that give significant attention to the artist-curated exhibition, and there are a handful of essays, each devoted to a single artist-curated exhibition, and even a few articles on the phenomenon of the artist as curator (on all accounts, see the "Selected Bibliography" in this volume). But, surprisingly, there exists no comprehensive study surveying artist-curated exhibitions, nor any serious attempt to theorize the specificity of these exhibitions. Moreover, artist-curated exhibitions often get left out of larger art histories that still frequently favor discussions of autonomous objects.
2. The reconstruction of historic exhibitions is not new, but the Prada Foundation's impressive recent efforts toward meticulously researching and reconstructing *When Attitudes Become Form* is both unparalleled and indicative of how woefully limited such reconstructions inevitably are. See the remarkable publication edited by Germano Celant and Chiara Costa, *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina, 2013).
3. Simon Sheikh, "A Conceptual History of Exhibition-Making," paper presented at Former West Conference, BAK, Utrecht, November 7, 2009.
4. Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
5. See Pablo Lafuente's suggestion of typologies as a way to historicize post-1989 exhibitions as articulated in his "Exhibition Typologies Post-1989," paper presented at Former West Conference, BAK, Utrecht, November 7, 2009.
6. See Bruce Altshuler, *From Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History, Volume 1: 1863–1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008) and *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013).
7. The ambiguity of the phrase "exhibitions that made art history" seems willful: it suggests either "shows that made it into art history" or "shows that made art history what it is today"—or both.
8. Dorothea von Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," *Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 11–12.
9. This discussion of Duchamp's role as curator draws from my book *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
10. In the 1920s, and parallel with the development of museums and public collections devoted to modern art, several important examples of museum director-curators emerged, including Alexander Dornier in Europe and Alfred H. Barr Jr. in the United States, each of whom helped forge a model for what the modern curator could be. For more on the development of the notions of curator, exhibition, and museum in the modern period, see the "Selected Bibliography" in this volume.
11. It was arguably Duchamp's pioneering stance that set the foundations for subsequent generations to develop what came to be called conceptual art's "aesthetics of administration" (to use Benjamin Buchloh's formulation) and institutional critique, for which curatorial and administrative tasks were a central part of artistic labor. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (winter 1990): 105–43.
12. See Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 102; and Bernard Marcadé, "Concept of Nothing," in *Voids* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier; Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2009), 236.
13. For this presentation there was specifically not supposed to be a "selection"; it was open to all comers. Yet the president of the hanging committee was pretty much as close as one can get to the "curator" in our contemporary sense.
14. No matter that the exhibition claimed to have "no jury and no prizes," and anyone who paid the six-dollar submission fee, as R. Mutt had, was supposed to be allowed to exhibit. A urinal revealed the exhibition's pretense of undogmatic inclusiveness to be, quite simply, a lie. Censored from the catalogue and the show, it was apparently hidden behind a wall partition where the public would not see it. And it was, so at least one story goes, lost almost as quickly as it had been chosen from among the lavatory supplies at the J. L. Mott ironwork and appliance showroom. For a collection of the most extensive research on the different accounts of *Fountain*, see William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp/Fountain* (Houston: Menil Collection, Houston Fine Arts Press, 1989).
15. "For a period of thirty years nobody talked about them [the readymades], and neither did I," Duchamp later admitted in "Marcel Duchamp Talking about Readymades," interview by Philippe Collin, June 21, 1967, reprinted in Harald Szeemann, ed., *Marcel Duchamp* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 40.
16. This fact cannot be overemphasized, since so many of the art historical references to the urinal as the seminal example of Duchampian iconoclasm fail to take adequate note of its lack of publicness at the time. They treat *Fountain* as if it were, already in 1917, the art historical icon that it is today and as if one can properly speak of it without considering the fundamental role that its documentation, administration, and (delayed) representation in an exhibition (which is to say, its curation) has had on its contemporary interpretation.
17. "Pop Daddy: An Interview with Richard Hamilton by Hans Ulrich Obrist," *Tate Magazine*, March–April 2003, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/pop-daddy-richard-hamilton-early-exhibition>.
18. Richard Hamilton, quoted in *Fifty Years of the Future: A Chronicle of the Institute of Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1998), my emphasis. See also Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words, 1953–82* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).
19. See Sidra Stich's descriptions of Klein's process in *Yves Klein* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995), 135.
20. Yves Klein, "Le Vide Performance (The Void)," lecture, Sorbonne, Paris, 1959, translated and reprinted in *Yves Klein 1928–1962: A Retrospective* (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1982). Read it online at <http://web.tiscali.it/nouveaurealisme/ENG/klein5.htm>.
21. In addition to Ana Longoni's essay on *Tucumán Arde* in this volume, see also Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a "Tucumán Arde": Vanguardia artística y política en el '68 argentino* (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000).
22. Graciela Carnevale's artist's statement reads: "The work consists of first preparing a totally empty room, with totally empty walls. One of the walls, which was made of glass, had to be covered in order to achieve a suitably neutral space for the work to take place. In this room the participating audience, which has come together by chance for the opening, has been locked in. The door has been hermetically closed without the audience being aware of it. I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving. Here the work comes into being and these people are the actors. There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate. Their positive or negative reaction is always a form of participation." Graciela Carnevale, "El encierro—Project for the Experimental Art Series," *React Feminism*, <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=27&e=a>.

Collaborative Projects Inc. (Colab), *Times Square Show*, 1980

It's not like people got together before the month of June and they made this Times Square Show and then they open the door and everyone came in and went, "Wow! Look at that!" No. It was not anything like that. It was more like something that was constantly changing.

—Charlie Ahearn¹



Exterior of *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980

On June 1, 1980, what the *Village Voice* called “the first radical art show of the '80s” opened in a former massage parlor at 201 West Fortieth Street and Seventh Avenue in New York.² It was organized by the artist members of Collaborative Projects Inc., also known as Colab, and was inaugurated with a party that went late into the summer night. For the entirety of the month of June, *Times Square Show* (frequently abbreviated TSS) was open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, echoing the all-hours rhythm of nearby Forty-Second Street.³ Though it was economically downtrodden, New York was on the verge of massive cultural change and, with it, the art world too was on the brink of a new era. Within this cityscape Times Square was an especially liminal site, the social context of which became material for Colab’s event-based exhibition where spontaneous interventions created a stream of unanticipated alterations—much like the unpredictable reality of the streets outside.

Times Square Show was comprised of artworks by 100 to 150 artists and included an extensive lineup of “Exotic Events,” performances, and screenings.⁴

1. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/charlie-ahearn.html>.

2. Richard Goldstein, “Three Chord Art Anyone Can Play,” *Village Voice*, June 16, 1980.

3. In some of the posters and fliers, *Times Square Show* was promoted as being open “everyday in June” or from June 1 to 30. However, William Zimmer’s review of the show in the *SoHo News* listed the final date as July 4, 1980 (“Underground in the Underground World,” June 18, 1980). It thus seems likely that the show was extended through July 4.

4. Posters and fliers for *Times Square Show* include lists of “Exotic Events.”



Becky Howland, *Oil Rig Fountain* (1980), as installed in the men's room at *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980; also visible at the upper right are Mitch Corber, *Atomic Graffiti*, and Joe Fyfe, *Fruit* (both 1980)

More than a constellation of artworks or events, however, it was the artists' protocol that was remarkable for the way it activated the exhibition as social space. The artists of Colab made, conceived, organized, and displayed the "show" themselves, taking all aspects of production into their own hands and following the "open-wall" or "open-invitation" policy of their previous exhibitions staged in downtown lofts and studios.⁵ This strategy had built them a reputation for inclusivity, prompting other artists to show up unannounced with their artworks, or to create pieces in situ even after the exhibition had opened.⁶ The organizing artists did not adhere to conventions of modern art display (white walls, even lighting), and they welcomed a sweeping range of media as well as non-art objects. At times, viewers might have

5. In January 1979, Colab members, including Diego Cortez, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, and Robin Winters, began to sponsor a series of open-invitation, thematic group shows in their apartments, lofts, and studios. The shows sponsored in 1979 included *Batman Show*; *Income and Wealth Show*; *Doctors and Dentists Show*; *The Dog Show*; *The Manifesto Show*; *Just Another Asshole Show*; and *Exhibit A*.

6. In a conversation with the author (November 2015), Callard reaffirmed that information about the exhibition spread by word of mouth. There is no record of a submission deadline or a request for proposals.

been hard pressed to distinguish between one artwork and the next. There were artworks in every nook and cranny of the four-story building—on ceilings and in toilet stalls, closets, staircases, and dimly lit halls—the result looking “aggressively unkempt” according to Jeffrey Deitch in his review of the show, or “tarted up,” as the critic Lucy Lippard described it in her pseudonymously penned review.⁷

As a group, Colab relied on the hard work and enthusiasm of its participants, whose spirited approach echoed throughout *Times Square Show*. Atypical among post-1960s artist collectives, the artists incorporated themselves as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, but did not rent a permanent exhibition space, hire salaried administrators, or otherwise formalize along institutional lines.⁸ Instead, to meet the requirements of funding bodies and solicit nationwide public grants, which is to say, to use the means and legal status of incorporation (and the “Inc.” in their name flaunted it) to radical ends, members took on temporary administrative responsibilities. By keeping bureaucracy and financial overhead to a minimum, they maintained artistic autonomy and maximized flexibility. The funds Colab raised were distributed via democratic forum at group meetings, where members could vote their dollar share toward projects of their choice. As well as shouldering many of the administrative responsibilities, the women of Colab were active feminists who spearheaded numerous projects and challenged patriarchal hierarchies. It is significant that women made up 50 percent of the membership, a high level for a heterogeneous group at the time. With a constituency of thirty to fifty members at any given moment, Colab artists maintained their unique mandate for more than seven years.

Ideologically, Colab endeavored to create affordable art, reach audiences beyond the art world, and challenge systemic relationships between culture, money, and information. In speaking about *Times Square Show*, Colab member John Ahearn told the *East Village Eye*, “There has always been a misdirected consciousness that art belongs to a certain class or intelligence. This show proves there are no classes in art, no differentiation.”⁹ These ideas are reflected in Colab’s affiliation with Fashion Moda, an arts organization founded in 1978 in the South Bronx that collaborated on *Times Square Show*.¹⁰ Fashion Moda raised critical questions about the function of art, especially in terms of race and class: Who makes art? Who decides what art is? Who decides which art gets shown?¹¹

Six months prior to the exhibition, a handful of Colab members participated in the Committee for the Real Estate Show, which organized a rebelliously themed exhibition about landlord speculation in low-income neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side (LES). *Real Estate Show* opened on January 1, 1980, in an illegal LES squat. When the artists returned the following morning, they found themselves locked out of the building. They later returned to the site to protest outside, and were joined by art dealer Ronald Feldman and the German artist Joseph Beuys. This high-profile lockout, captured by photographers from the *New York Times*, led to negotiations with city agencies, and the artists were eventually granted use of another empty building at 156 Rivington Street, where they founded the collectively run center for art and activism ABC No Rio. In many ways, *Real Estate Show* was a threshold exhibition, bringing together social critique, political activism, and art to highlight pervasive housing issues in New York.

In Times Square, the relationship between private capital and public space evolved at a different pace. Successive generations of elected representatives had tried and failed to eradicate crime there through commercial development, and in

7. Jeffrey Deitch, “Report from Times Square,” *Art in America* 68 (September 1980): 58–63; and Anne Ominous [Lucy Lippard], “Sex and Death and Shock and Schlock: A Long Review of the Times Square Show,” *Artforum* 19, no. 2 (October 1980): 52.

8. Colab held its first meeting in 1977 and was incorporated in 1979. A number of alternative art spaces and collectives flourished in New York around this time, and in the previous decade, including: 112 Workshop / 112 Greene Street / White Columns, A.I.R. Gallery, Artists Space, Clocktower Gallery, Creative Time, the Drawing Center, Electronic Arts Intermix, Fashion Moda, Franklin Furnace, Institute for Art and Urban Resources (later P.S.1 / MoMA PS1), Just Above Midtown, Kenkeleba House, the Kitchen, Printed Matter, and Public Art Fund.

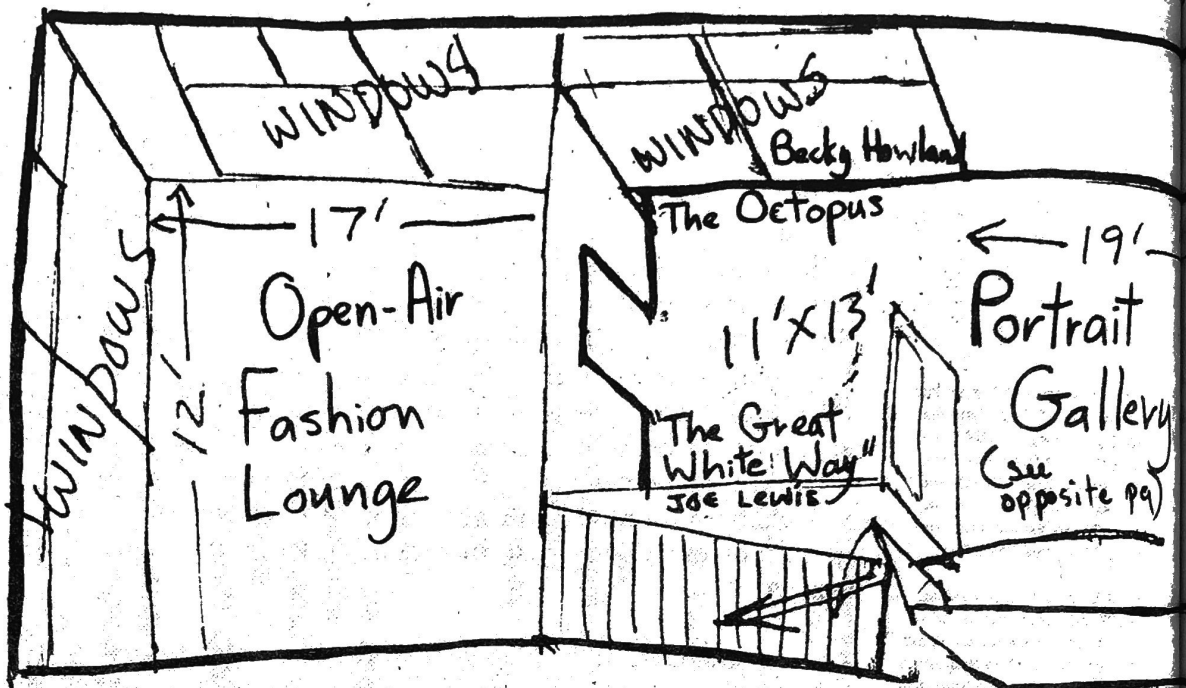
9. Quoted in John Reed, “Crossroads of the (Art) World,” *Paris Review*, October 10, 2012, <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/10/10/crossroads-of-the-art-world/>.

10. Fashion Moda was founded by Stefan Eins, who was soon thereafter joined by the artist Joe Lewis and William Scott as codirectors. Presenting influential exhibitions including *GAS (Graffiti Art Success for America)*, curated by John “Crash” Matos, in October 1980, Fashion Moda was critical in bringing graffiti artists into contact with Colab members and other downtown artists. Shortly after, graffiti was featured in P.S.1’s *New York / New Wave* exhibition in 1981.

11. The photographer Lisa Kahane enumerated these questions during a conversation with the author about Fashion Moda in March 2016.

41ST

(Fashion ave.)
7th AVE



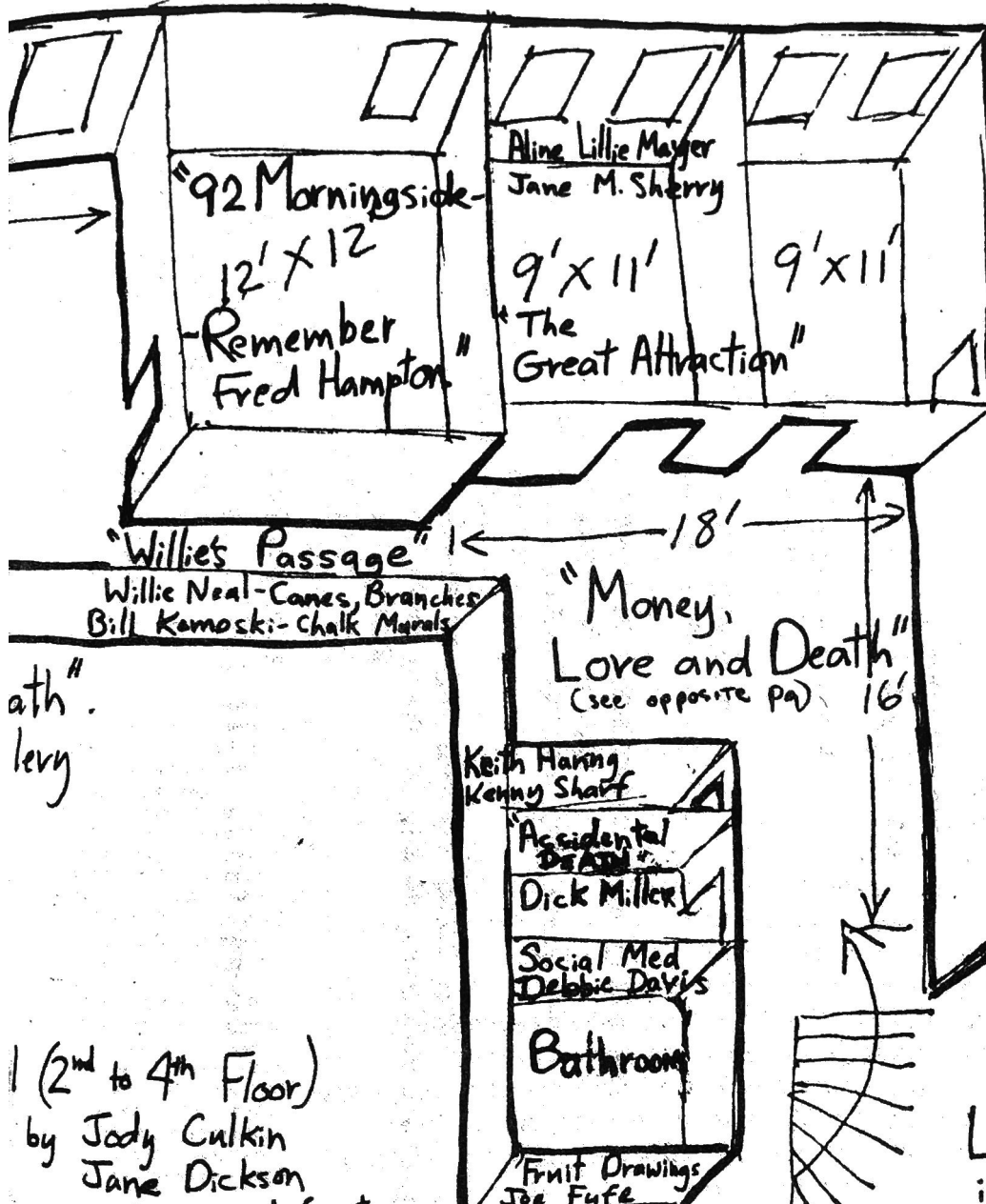
Fashion Lounge
 designed by: Mary Lemley
 Sophie VDT
 Paula Grief
 Karen Luner
 Esther Balint
 Jean-Michel Basquiat
 Vicki Pederson

↑ SOUTH w/ black painting - Olivier Masset

Listing for "Money, Love
 and Portrait" all
 on reverse side

TIMES SQUARE SHOW
 201-205 W 41ST ST
 2ND FLOOR 9' CEILING

92 Morningside
 Candace Hill Montgomery - Bill Stephans
 w/ Portrait Painting - Kathleen Gilia
 Large Pig - Angela Fremont
 Lifecasts - John Ahearn
 Broken Glass - David Hammons



Wall Paper -
 Bills - Chris Kolhofen
 Plates - Colen Fitzgibbon
 Robin Winters
 Rats - Christy Rupp

Teeth over Doorway -
 Margaret Lippard

Endangered -
 Paulette Venner

Large Painting Series
 in Stairwell -
 Cara Pearlman
 Green Bottles in Stairwell -
 Bobby G.
 Rats running down stairs -
 Christy Rupp

1 (2nd to 4th Floor)
 by Jody Culklin
 Jane Dickson
 w/ Orange Lifecast -
 John Ahearn
 Wilbur Mills Painting - Scott Miller
 "Couples" drawing Series - Jane Dickson

ath"
 levy

6

1980, such projects were just beginning to take hold, as evidenced by the increasing number of buildings slated for demolition. *Times Square Show's* dilapidated massage parlor (likely a brothel) was one such site. To arrange their use of the building, John Ahearn, Tom Otterness, and Coleen Fitzgibbon negotiated with the landlord, who donated it for two months in exchange for a \$500 deposit that was never returned.¹² This agreement is an early example of artists being engaged in processes of "urban renewal," even as they acted out against gentrification.¹³

By all accounts, Colab's vote to do a project in Times Square was unanimous. Some of the group's members held a preliminary meeting on the purple carpet in the lobby of the World Trade Center to begin preparations.¹⁴ In May, when the artists took over the derelict building in Times Square, the floors were littered with dirty mattresses, glass from broken windows, and other debris. They made repairs, painted the walls and floors, and fixed the deteriorating staircase. Given the number of participants, visitors, and passersby, and that the building had unregulated twenty-four-hour access, it is unlikely that a conclusive account of the project or even a final list of every one of the (invited and uninvited) participants exists. In Andrea Callard's archive there are budget drafts and sparsely jotted meeting notes.¹⁵ Elsewhere, the artists' own photographs provide vital—though incomplete—documentation of the exhibition, and a handful of other photographers captured portions of it.¹⁶ As John Ahearn has pointed out, "the photographs are just one moment in a month, and things were not so static."¹⁷ Otterness's evocative, hand-drawn floor-by-floor maps are much more valuable for those of us looking back on the show than they were for visitors because everything was in such flux that by the time John Ahearn filled in the details, it was already mid-June.¹⁸ After the show closed, many installations and artworks were destroyed with the building. For all of these reasons, *Times Square Show* is remembered primarily through firsthand accounts, stories, recollections, and anecdotes.¹⁹

Divergent as these narratives are, shared among them is a palpable sense of exuberance. It is clear that the show was a group effort, a matter of "showing up," and that there was no one "in charge" per se. The accounts describe a process born from heated discussion. Colab meetings had a notorious reputation for being argumentative, and this combative mode was transferred into the making of *Times Square Show*. Jane Dickson recalled, "At the TSS there was an immense amount of attitude, you know, everybody was yelling and just full of opinions."²⁰ So much so that Aline Mayer hung a picture of a boxer in the lobby and Mitch Corber created there a text painting: *VORTEXVELOCITY*.²¹ Becky Howland reflected, "Artists didn't know too much about resolving the inevitable conflicts. There was a lot more talking than listening. There were a lot of tears. One of Colab's main principles was no curators. But people would get a great idea and start rearranging the show—and then artists would come in and find their piece moved or gone. It was a free-for-all. Hmm. Maybe that is why I started camping out there."²²

From the various stories, one also gets a sense of the viewing experience—of wandering through the installation to discover artworks colliding up against each other.²³ Though a great effort was made to clean up the building, its run-down state became part of the show. As did the layered installation of unlabeled artworks, which, as John Reed wrote, underscored the artists' "disregard for convention, and conventional categorization."²⁴ Reed's observation is critical, as it draws out an important distinction: while the exhibition may have seemed haphazard, the mode of installation was an explicit decision by the artists, who were interested in undoing art-world hierarchies of power and display.

12. For *Times Square Show*, Colab used funding they received from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Bears Foundation. O-P cinema, Fashion Moda, and ABC No Rio contributed funds as well. According to a budget draft in Andrea Callard's papers, the total project cost was \$32,000, with at least \$11,850 in donated in goods and services.

13. In his essay "Polarity Rules," David Deitcher notes that Colab members brought Mark Finkelstein, the landlord of the building, a letter of support from Joseph Morningstar of the 42nd Street Development Corporation. The letter, dated May 1, 1980, explicated Morningstar's plan to engage artists in the project of "urban renewal." Morningstar wrote, "Any support which you could offer would not only insure the success of the show, but also aid in the revitalization of Times Square." The 42nd Street Development Corporation is a nonprofit organization founded in 1976 to advocate for the redevelopment of Times Square. David Deitcher, "Polarity Rules," in *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press in collaboration with the Drawing Center, 2002), 220.

14. Relayed by Andrea Callard in a conversation with the author, 2016. There were many artists involved in Colab at the time. Those who were especially engaged in the exhibition projects and might have attended the meeting include John Ahearn, Liza Béar, Diego Cortez, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Tom Otterness, Cara Periman, Ulli Rimkus, Christy Rupp, and Robin Winters.

15. Andrea Callard served as Colab secretary in 1980. Her archive, which is housed at the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University, includes meeting notes, budget drafts, posters, floor maps, and event listings from *Times Square Show*.

16. Callard shot color slides of each floor of the exhibition. Lisa Kahane, Francine Keery, Terise Slotkin, and Wolfgang Staehle took black-and-white photographs of the building's exterior, selected installations, and some of the events.

17. Relayed by Andrea Callard in a conversation with the author, 2016.

18. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/john-ahearn.html>.

If there was selective logic at work at *Times Square Show*, it was murky at best and it is unclear on what grounds artists might have been welcomed or barred from the event. We do know that some were turned away; others argued to be included. In some cases, artists claim to have been in the exhibition, but there is no



Colab meeting at Peter Fend's Broadway loft, 1983

19. The author wishes to acknowledge Shawna Cooper and Karli Wurzelbacher, who curated *Times Square Show Revisited* at the Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College, New York (September 14–December 8, 2012). The exhibition featured artist interviews and recollections gathered by the curators as part of their research. *Times Square Show Revisited's* extensive website includes transcriptions of these recollections, recorded during studio visits, phone conversations, and email exchanges.

20. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/jane-dickson.html>.

21. Relayed by Andrea Callard in a conversation with the author, 2016.

22. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/becky-howland.html>.

23. Nayland Blake described his visit to *Times Square Show* as a formative experience, especially for the way it upset traditional standards of exhibition display, during an artist talk at Bard College in February 2016 organized by Alex Kitnick.

24. John Reed, "Crossroads of the (Art) World."

25. Conversely, in a phone conversation with the author on March 23, 2016, Lisa Kahane said she was not in the exhibition but is often mentioned as having participated.

26. Alan Moore's sculpture was called *The No*. Moore recalls that it was a "reflection on the decision processes at work in an 'open show.'" <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/alan-w-moore.html>.

27. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/jane-dickson.html>.

28. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/charlie-ahearn.html>.

way to substantiate their participation.²⁵ The tension around inclusion was prominent enough that Alan Moore recalls hiding a sculpture behind a wall in solidarity with all of the artists who were rejected from the show.²⁶ Numerous stories circulated: a young David Hammons heard from Joe Lewis that there was a "free-for-all" going on in Times Square. Hammons arrived one day in May and, after introducing himself to Jody Culkin and Jane Dickson, went back out into the neighboring blocks and returned with a bag of empty Night Train wine bottles he'd collected. Hammons crushed the bottles and sprinkled the glass down the side of the staircase where Culkin and Dickson were installing, an intervention that might have gone unnoticed in the bombastic array of works, if not for the fact that anyone using the stairs had to contend with it. "When Jody and I protested the glass carpet he'd laid," Dickson recalls, "David gave us a little shrugging smile as if to say: deal with it, kids. And then left."²⁷

With "no curators" as a motto, the artists themselves took up the curatorial roles of organizers, exhibition designers, administrators, and promoters. While Colab distributed its funds according to a democratic structure, it had an anarchistic mechanism at its heart. Once a project was in motion, many ideas would play out simultaneously. About making a sign out front, Charlie Ahearn recalls, "I remember I walked out there and I just did it. I didn't ask anyone. That's the weird thing about it. There was no one in charge that I remember. I remember just taking a ladder, paint, and I taped it out with masking tape." At the time, he said, you could spray paint a building at midday in midtown and "no one would blink an eye."²⁸ Dickson created, in collaboration with Charlie Ahearn, a poster that featured a reference to the gambling game three-card monte, which was ubiquitous on streets near Times Square. Ahearn then turned the third floor into a temporary silkscreen workshop.



David Hammons smashing bottles for his installation at *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980

Additionally, artists made fliers of photomontaged images culled from magazines with hand-scribbled notes, which they plastered on buildings and in clubs downtown. Someone printed up VIP invitation cards and sent them to New York art critics. Colab frequently employed alternative strategies to disseminate information. They produced numerous ephemeral materials, including posters, fliers, multiples, and magazines. As an integral part of their social practice, these were more than project collateral; they were a core element of Colab's creative output and activities.²⁹

29. Curated by Max Schumann at Printed Matter in 2011, *A Show About Colab (and Related Activities)* brought together an extensive collection of Colab ephemera, documents, publications, and artworks, as did the subsequent publication, *A Book About Colab (and Related Activities)* (Printed Matter, 2015). Francesco Spampinato discusses the importance of Colab's ephemeral materials in "Colab Again: The Real Estate Show and the Times Square Show Revisited," *Stedelijk Studies*, no. 2 (July 2015): <http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/colab-again/>.

In light of this, the advertisements created for *Times Square Show* were central to the exhibition. Created by Colab artists, they expanded the borders of the event to include even the airways and sightlines of New York. And they foretold Times Square's imminent future as an advertising mecca and symbolic locus of capitalist entertainment. In many ways, the advertisements for *Times Square Show* mobilized Colab's two primary interests, which David Little describes as media and space.³⁰ Dickson, who worked as a programmer for the Spectacolor—an enormous block of computer-programmed lights that hung over Times Square—created an animation directed at the crowds of commuters and tourists. Her thirty-second piece ran once an hour, every hour, for the entire month of June. In it, two hands swept away playing cards to reveal the words “Times Square Show.”³¹

30. David Little, “Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces” *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 60–74.

31. Jane Dickson worked as a programmer for the Spectacolor unit. She recalls that her boss had grown tired of trying to teach computer programmers how to be creative, so instead the company hired artists and taught them how to use the software. Dickson's boss allowed her to produce and run the ad for *Times Square Show*. After the show, Dickson asked if she could do an artists' series, which she would go on to curate until 1982. Control of the series was then passed over to Public Art Fund, who continued to run it until 1990. Dickson organized Jenny Holzer's first work in LED lights, and commissioned projects by Keith Haring, David Hammons, Matthew Geller, and Nancy Spero, among others.

32. In his essay “Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back,” David Little writes that Colab was inspired by pioneers of guerrilla video from 1960s and 1970s activist collectives such as Union, Video Freez, Top Value Television (TVTV), Raintance, and the Paper Tiger Collective. As with many of these groups, Colab members participated in one another's film and video work, taking on various production roles and sharing equipment costs. Colab member and filmmaker Michael McClard was especially involved in these media-based projects, the extensive output of which included numerous cable TV programs.

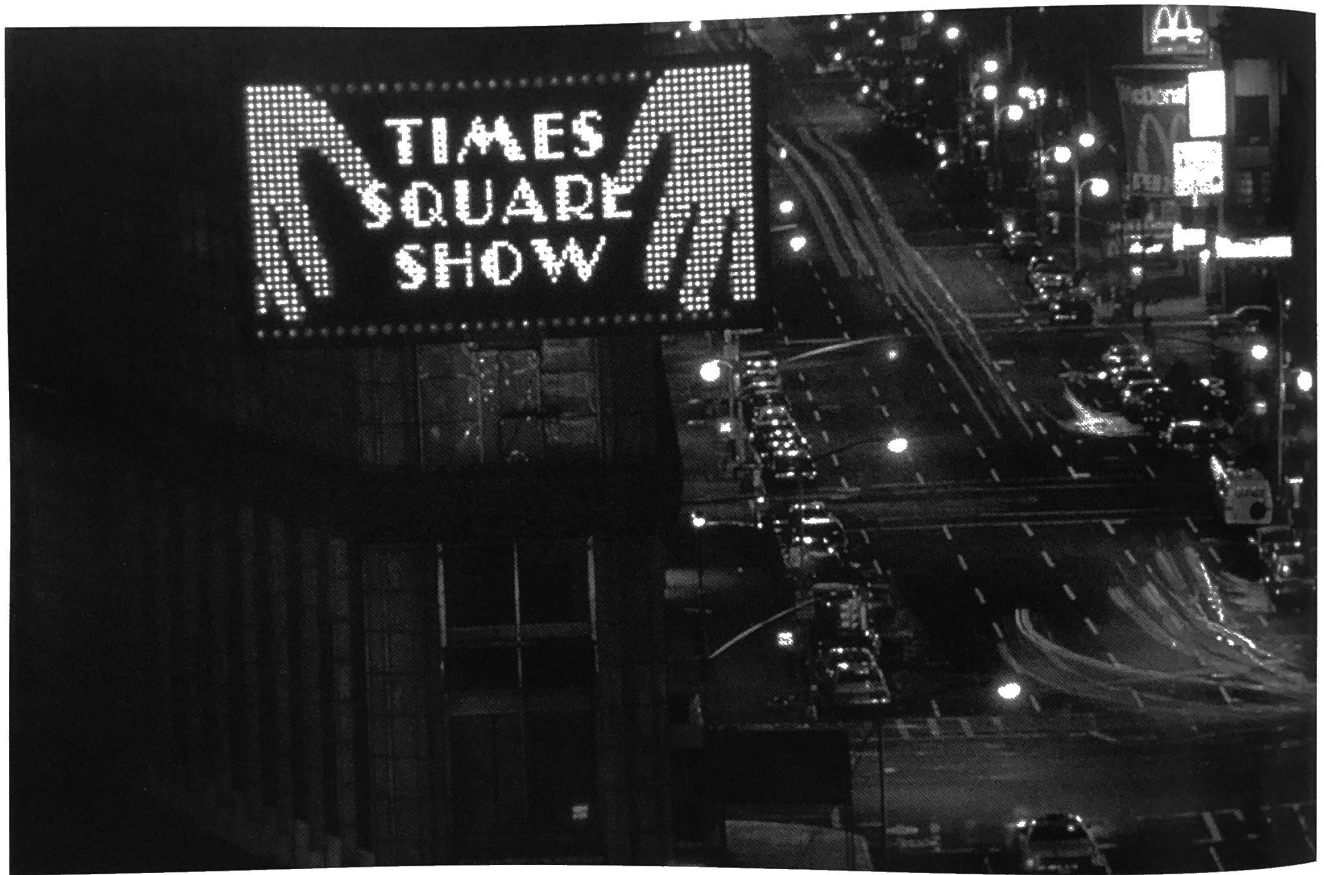
33. All three PSAs can be viewed at <https://archive.org/details/xfrstn>.



Gregory Lehman among drying posters designed by Jane Dickson and Charlie Ahearn in the temporary silkscreen workshop on the third floor of *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980

From its inception, Colab was interested in video as a democratic medium; they embraced it as a non-salable art form.³² Significantly, a handful of Colab members created three public service announcements (PSAs) to promote *Times Square Show*, which aired on New York cable television throughout the month of June.³³ Colab members collaboratively acted, shot, directed, and provided audio for the PSAs, which were filmed on a soundstage, while walking through Times Square, and in a park, respectively; each PSA promoted the show as one would the circus or a Broadway musical. These do-it-yourself videos were integral to the scope and concept of the exhibition, and in creating them, Colab explored sociopolitical relationships between time-based media and space. They harnessed video as a medium, and TV as a mode of distribution, to reach an “everyday audience.”

Continuing in the mode of their previous exhibitions, the artists formed ad hoc committees to oversee the thematic design of each space in the four-story building. In small groups, they managed the construction and installation of the Souvenir Shop and lobby, which came endowed with a stage replete with mirrored panels. They oversaw the Fashion Room, the Portrait Room, the TV Lounge/Leopard Room, and the Money, Love, and Death Room, that last covered in Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winters's black and white *Gun, Dollar, Plate* wallpaper. Artists from the Harlem Workshop and White Columns managed spaces on the fourth



Jane Dickson's Spectacolor billboard announcement overlooking Times Square, New York, 1980

BIGGEST MACHINE ON EARTH



opening
 June 1
 1980

through
 June 30

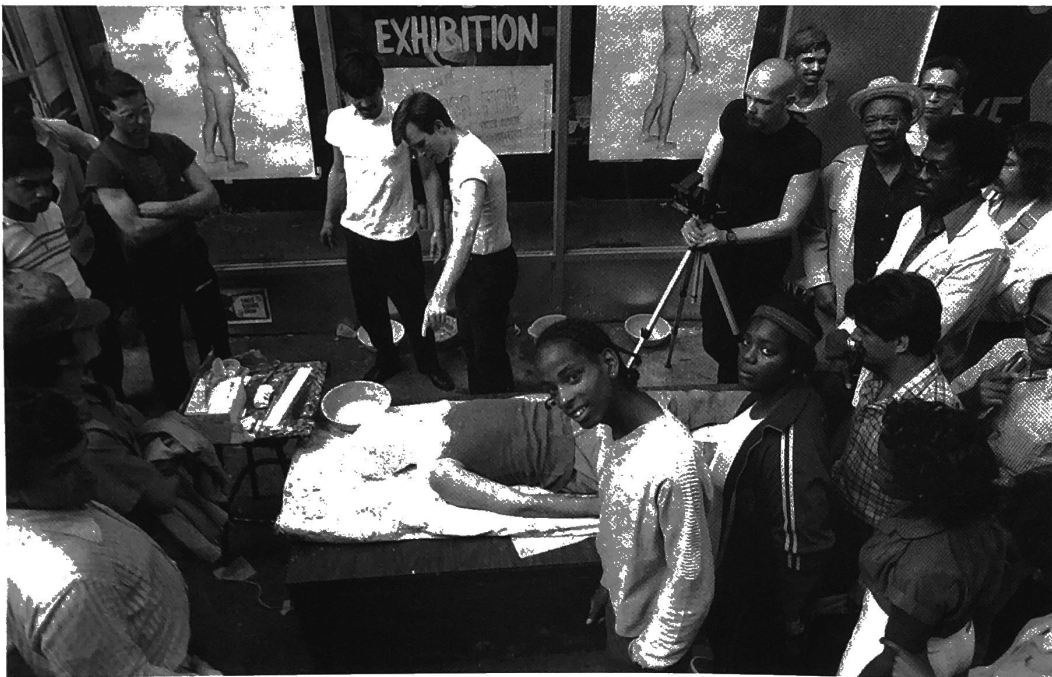
ART POLITICS
 PERFORMANCE
 +
 FILM

7th Ave
 +
 41st

TIMES SQUARE SHOW

floor. Installations found their way into the damp, dark, rat-infested basement and into the stairways, where brightly colored Christmas lights illuminated faux Roman columns. Christy Rupp's yearlong project *Rat Patrol*, created in response to New York's garbage emergency, went indoors for the first time; her offset prints depicting rats climbed up the stairs from the lobby and along the baseboards. Peter Fend installed the first iteration of *NEWS ROOM*, which included news reports from agencies that kept head offices within two miles of Times Square, including the *New York Times*, Time-Life, NBC, CBS, and the BBC. Fred Brathwaite (aka Fab 5 Freddy) and Lee Quiñones made graffiti on an exterior wall and hung canvases upstairs. Brathwaite's fortuitous meeting with Charlie Ahearn at the show later led to the seminal film *Wild Style* (1983).

With their emphasis on interactivity, the artists' experiments further dissipated the usual distinctions between exhibition, artwork, and audience. In addition to the number of hand-painted plaster works they hung in the Portrait Room, John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres organized life casting sessions on the sidewalks of Times Square. Bobby G, Matthew Geller, and Julie Harrison videotaped unscheduled interviews with spectators, inside and outside of the space. Mary Lemley, Paula Greif, Karen Luner, Eszter Balint, Vicki Pederson, and Sophie Vieille designed the Fashion Lounge, which they filled with painted clothes that visitors took away over the course of the show. They also dislodged the tall windows on the second floor, creating a balcony effect, so that the auditory chaos of Seventh Avenue, aka Fashion Avenue, filled the room. They invited Jean-Michel Basquiat to make his first painting on board, which they hung behind the catwalk as a backdrop for a fashion show



John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres doing a life cast on the sidewalk in front of *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980

titled *Wraps and Raps*.³⁴ One of the twenty models roller-skated down the runway; another paraded down in white foam held together with silver tape. Upon visiting her womblike installation, Eva DeCarlo would find strangers trying on wigs and panties that she'd woven into her "nest" made of cloth, tinsel, and satin.³⁵ Walter Robinson remembers once walking in on someone masturbating in there.³⁶ Of her installation DeCarlo has said, "I wasn't as interested in recording the interaction as I was in providing the environment for it. . . . It was also an ongoing live performance;

34. Kim Levin, "The Times Square Show," *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 2 (September 1980): 87-99.

35. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/eva-decarlo.html>.

36. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/walter-robinson.html>.

anyone could happen upon people in there and join or watch, which was a great tribute to the location.”³⁷

In the preceding decades cultural shifts had taken place, generating new artistic strategies with an emphasis on participation, indeterminacy, and chance, in which the presence of a spectator activated or completed a work of art. This emphasis on participation and reception within the field of performance art (from the 1960s onward) began to shape aspects of public art and institutional critique, the latter of which attempted to, as Miwon Kwon has noted, “expose the cultural confinement within which artists function.”³⁸ In a manner of thinking, *Times Square Show* epitomizes strategies, on an exhibitionary scale, that were “aggressively anti-visual,” “immaterial,” and “bracketed by temporal boundaries,” anticipating artistic practices that would come to be known under the rubric of relational aesthetics or socially engaged art.³⁹ At *Times Square Show*, social interactions and their ensuing conversations were critical to the overall experience, perhaps even defined it, and were activated by an extensive list of events. Jim Jarmusch screened early films, as did



The Souvenir Shop at *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980

Michael Auder, Scott B and Beth B, and Betsy Sussler. Dara Birnbaum showed her video *Wonder Woman* (1978), and Nan Goldin presented one of her first slide shows. Jack Smith held a typically long and uneventful performance, which cast the entire evening within a performative frame. At one point, he accidentally lit his turban on fire while lighting incense. Smith didn't realize his headgear was burning, but one of the other two performers, a hooker he had picked up in Times Square, did, and patted it out.⁴⁰

Becky Howland recalls waking up one morning to the sound of a commotion. Colab artists were painting over the words “Free Sex” that Basquiat had spray painted above the entry door. Fitzgibbon reasonably points out: “Who would want to be working there minding the store when people came in for the free sex?”⁴¹ Modeled after the tourist stores and seedier sex shops selling tchotchkes nearby, the Souvenir Shop on the exhibition's ground floor, which Fitzgibbon is referring

37. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/eva-decarlo.html>.

38. Miwon Kwon, “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” *October 80* (Spring 1997): 89.

39. To invoke a few of Kwon's terms. *Ibid.*, 91.

40. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/justen-ladda.html>.

41. <http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/becky-howland.html>.

to, continued blurring the boundary between art and life. The shop featured artist multiples, some costing about five dollars, some as cheap as twenty-five cents; these included winged penis figurines, pill capsules bearing messages, and fans with a prayer on one side and a picture of people having sex on the other. Kiki Smith chopped up two-by-fours, painting them to resemble cigarette packs for sale. Colab artists saw multiples as a way to make art affordable and accessible to working-class people, and a way to earn some income as well.⁴² Playing off of Times Square as a site of consumption, the Souvenir Shop critically highlighted relationships between art, commodity, and tourism—modes of cultural transaction—that would become more entrenched and pronounced throughout the decade.

The early 1980s in New York was a time marked by bankruptcies, violence, and class struggle. Blackouts and fires plagued the outer boroughs during the post-Vietnam years, prompting many artists to reflect on their role within the political system at large. In this cityscape, Times Square was a region unto itself: a cacophony of stimulants, light, and sound. The sidewalks were busy with the foot traffic of tourists, businesspeople, con men, pimps, prostitutes, pickpockets, clubbers, and roaming gangs of kids, who partook in underground illegal transactions of all kinds. The streets were lined with porn shops, tourist traps, fake-antique stores, film labs, kung fu cinemas, fast food joints, and strip clubs. There were queer outposts and artist outposts, including Maggie Smith's basement bar on Forty-Ninth Street, Tin Pan Alley.⁴³ Adjacent to Broadway's many theaters and the bus depot at the Port Authority was a red light district filled with peep shows, hustlers, drug dealers, and their customers. Describing the exhibition with words like "sleazy," "gritty," and "smutty," reviews of *Times Square Show* tended to revel in its proximity to New York's "criminal underbelly" and the spectacle of Times Square.⁴⁴ The artists may have felt liberated in this illicit space where the rules of regular society (not to mention the rules of bona fide art spaces) were temporarily lifted. In some ways, one can understand the former massage parlor as a zone of permissibility as much as a zone of experimentation.

As evidenced by their previous projects, including *Real Estate Show*, Colab artists were actively engaged in the issue of space and affordable housing in New York. In Times Square they literally inhabited the exhibition locale, sleeping and living there for weeks alongside homeless people who were taking temporary shelter from the street. The openness of the exhibition site meant that meetings, conversations, and frictions between the artists and the wide variety of visitors played out in unregulated and unexpected ways. Otterness said, "TSS as public art is really that question about reaching an audience that doesn't walk into a museum. I think one of the big successes of the show was that people would walk in because they just didn't know what it was—and they weren't looking for art."⁴⁵ Post-1980, homelessness would escalate across New York. In her groundbreaking 1989 exhibition *If You Lived Here . . .* at Dia Art Foundation in New York, Martha Rosler organized a rigorous conversation about homelessness and housing in relation to economics, culture, and art. Rosler's appropriation of the promotional condo slogan framed a series of events intended to subvert the institution from within.⁴⁶ In some ways, Rosler's proposition built off of Colab's looser experiment in which the artists actually did "live there."

Located as it is above Fourteenth Street, Times Square was outside the "downtown scene" and the network of galleries and artists' projects that thrived there at the close of the 1970s. By that point, alternative spaces and sites had already played a significant role in shaping the cultural paradigm in New York for more

42. Colab member Stefan Eins sold multiples out of his previous street-level space at 3 Mercer Street. Colab went on to organize *A More Store*, an annual series of stores of artists' multiples that appeared at Broome Street (1980), White Columns (1981), Barbara Gladstone Gallery (1982-83), and Jack Tilton Gallery (1983-84). Additionally, Eins organized a store at Documenta 7 (1982). Colab also worked with Printed Matter to create Art Direct, a mail-order catalog for their multiples.

43. Artists in *Times Square Show* who worked at Tin Pan Alley include Nan Goldin, Cara Perlman, Ulli Rinkus, and Kiki Smith. Rinkus organized events there and would go on to open the Lower East Side bar Max Fish. Colab members were generally involved in the music and nightclub scene centered around CBGBs, Club 57, Max's Kansas City, and Mudd Club.

44. Reviews of *Times Square Show* not previously mentioned include Susana Sedgwick, "Times Square Show," *East Village Eye* (Summer 1980): 21; and Guy Trebay, "Art in the Privates Sector," *Village Voice*, June 9, 1980, 57.

45. <http://www.timesquareareshowrevisited.com/accounts/tom-otterness.html>.

46. See Nina Möntmann's essay on *If You Lived Here . . .* in the present volume.

than two decades. Artists' projects thrived in disused warehouses, abandoned lots, churches, storefronts, and nightclubs throughout the city.⁴⁷ Various forms of underground culture had developed beyond the normalizing sphere of the museum world, which had yet to adapt or modify its own conservative standards, and art activism had begun to directly address the institutions' discriminatory policies, in particular the racism and sexism embedded within them. By the time 1980 came around, artists were galvanized by the activity and polemics of independent organizational strategies. As David Deitcher writes in his essay "Polarity Rules," "They were also united in their disaffection with the parochial concerns and elitist rituals of the commercial gallery and museum scene and in their impatience with alternative spaces that paid lip service to diversity but remained unresponsive to young, punk-inspired artists like themselves."⁴⁸ It was in this moment, before the museums began to change their policies, that *Times Square Show* took place.

Times Square Show was the first major exhibition for many artists, including several not yet mentioned in this essay—Jenny Holzer, Keith Haring, Olivier Mosset, Kenny Scharf, and Wolfgang Staehle—as well as artists who already had some significant exhibitions under their belts, for instance Mimi Gross and Alex Katz. While this helps to account for its legendary status, more than any one artistic practice, *Times Square Show* is most notable for the way in which the artists' methods and ideological values shaped the exhibition's form. *Times Square Show* leveled attention priorities from the outset, indicating a shift away from static structures in which singular combinations of artworks are displayed, and toward event-based installations, especially where large-scale collaborations are concerned. It complicated—and began to dissolve—notions of authorship, and did so at the beginning of an era in which artistic interventions in the social sphere attained equal, if not more, cultural significance than art objects. To borrow Simon Sheikh's description of biennials, *Times Square Show* was "not only a container of artworks" but a social space, "a place where meanings, narratives, histories, conversations and encounters are actively produced and set in motion."⁴⁹ Biennials and other large-scale exhibitions, which burgeoned in the late 1980s, may have gleaned some of these attributes precisely from exhibitions like *Times Square Show*, whose prescient signaling of the importance of social engagement announced a shift to the larger art world.

If the *Village Voice* immediately understood it as "first radical art show of the '80s," the comment suggests that the exhibition's radical form and its inauguration of a brave new era in art were already recognizable at the time. Speaking of the show in hindsight, John Reed recently asked, "At what date on the calendar, at what precise location, did counterculture become pop culture? And who do we mark down in the history books as the hero, or the villain, who masterminded the switch? There is an answer: 'The Times Square Show.'"⁵⁰ As it happens, in 1980 the culture of appropriation within the visual arts began to mix with DJ and graffiti culture. Colab artists were particularly open to such hybridity between high and low art, something that *Times Square Show* epitomized. Appropriated images that addressed issues such as money and sexism were heavily featured in the non-juried, thematic exhibitions organized by Colab. Punk and pop aesthetics influenced these artists more than questions of framing and representation, although other artists and scholars were taking up those latter points of inquiry in parallel conversations about appropriation. Douglas Crimp's salient observations about quotation and meaning construction as tenets of postmodern art practice are a concurrent example of the increasing use of appropriation across the visual arts, though employed according to different artistic strategies. Crimp curated the group exhibition *Pictures* at Artists Space in 1977—the same year that Colab's first meeting took place—and published

47. Colab projects could not help but inscribe themselves in a history of participatory events and scenes, including the Fluxus loft scene, Yoko Ono's loft at 112 Chambers Street, Judson Dance Theater, Andy Warhol's The Factory (which occupied different locations in Manhattan from 1962 to 1984), Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961), Gordon Matta-Clark's interventions in abandoned buildings along the West Side Highway in the 1970s, and FOOD, the restaurant Matta-Clark cofounded with the artists Carol Goodden and Tina Girouard in SoHo in 1971.

48. David Deitcher, "Polarity Rules," 217.

49. Simon Sheikh, "Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility," in "The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon," a special issue of *Open*, no. 16 (2009): 75.

50. John Reed, "Crossroads of the (Art) World."



TIMES

FOUR FLOORS
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Outside Times

WOMEN
MEMOIR

SHOW

MOVIES



his follow-up essay in the art journal *October* two years later, shortly before the planning for *Times Square Show* was under way. While *Pictures*, and its “Pictures Generation” artists, have maintained prominence in art history ever since, the opposite could be said of *Times Square Show*, where the artists traded conceptual frameworks for a sloppier, handmade attitude toward appropriation.



Sidewalk view of *Times Square Show*, New York, 1980

Many artists in *Times Square Show* expressed their social anxieties by creating topical images of objects like guns and dolls, but the political position of their artworks was perhaps diluted amid the mix of references and visual noise. In a discussion about representation and reception in her review of the show, Lucy Lippard raised the issue of “code sharing” and how shifts in context may change the meaning of an image: “TTSS’ [sic] images of hard and soft porn may have seemed quite daring and ‘real life’ to an art audience. To the street audience they were probably downright opaque.”⁵¹ Still other images that might have read as social critique according to the cultural codes of the downtown art world took on new meanings alongside the sex shops and brothels in Times Square. Lippard also noted what she recognized as instances of racialized coding in the show, such as the dancing puppet of James Brown hanging in the lobby, invoking minstrel stereotypes. Lippard’s observations articulate one of the primary concerns of site-specific art, which Kwon has referred to as “the epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context.”⁵² The collision of subjectivities, languages, and signs at *Times Square Show* produced critical questions about context and meaning that continue to occupy artists and curators today. Lippard noted:

What makes TTSS noteworthy, no matter what one thinks of the art in it, is the levels it offers. TTSS is an organizational feat—an object lesson in object-organizing by artists. It is a weird kind of cultural colonization that worked because colonizers and colonized had something in common; an exhibition of “unsalable” works accompanied by a gifte shoppe that managed to sell just such works—cheap; a constantly changing panorama of esthetic neuroses; a performance and film festival; a throwback to the early ‘60s happenings-and-store-front syndrome; a sunny apotheosis of shady sexism; a cry of rage

51. Anne Ominous [Lucy Lippard], “Sex and Death and Shock and Schlock,” 54–55.

52. Miwon Kwon, “One Place after Another,” 86.

*against current artworldliness and a ghastly glance into the future of art. It's also a lot of knives and guns and money and dirt and cocks and cunts and blood and gore housed in four wrecked floors (plus basement) donated to the organizers by the landlord.*⁵³

The artists in *Times Square Show* gravitated toward the seductive and taboo industries around sex. Half of the exhibitors were women, and many works in the show posited disparaging assumptions regarding the sex industry. Lippard describes how on opening night, Diane Torr and Ruth Peyser presented a series of five-minute interactions with a life-size, inflatable porno doll. These feminist performers waged an attack on the doll's orifices, using sex toys and strap-on dildos while yelling things like, "She likes it!" Some male bystanders were deeply offended by the artists' aggressions, while others noted that some pimps came in, watched for a while, and later walked off giggling.⁵⁴

Julie Ault of Group Material, an important artist collective active at the time, and a historian of alternative art spaces in New York, has described Colab projects as "often messy, pluralistic and democratic."⁵⁵ This was especially true at *Times Square Show* and noted in the show's enthusiastic exhibition reviews, which frequently mentioned the popular use of "downtown" aesthetics: New Wave's retro style, irony, and appropriation. Invoking the Lower East Side's punk schlock attitudes, Richard Goldstein called *Times Square Show* "three chord art that anyone can play."⁵⁶ Reviews noted the lack of distinction between artworks and other objects. One anecdote mentioned sawdust on the floor as evidence of the artists' punk-inflected, laissez-faire attitude. In fact, the artists used sawdust to sop up spilled beer before sweeping it away.⁵⁷ At the show, a visitor might have easily confused it for random debris or part of an installation. This potential slippage in meaning is indicative of the perspectival shifts that were activated by the show's environment.

Times Square Show embodied the chaos and social dynamism of Times Square, serving dual duty as site and theme. By abolishing distinctions between inside and outside, shop and exhibition, artwork and trinket, original and copy, artist and audience, corporate (incorporation) and radical, famous and unknown, elite and downtrodden, this "object lesson in object-organizing by artists" (to recall Lippard's characterization of it) reminds us that the place, policy, protocol, and even opening hours of an exhibition contribute to its overall "form." And in the case of *Times Square Show*, this form shaped not only the "first radical art show of the '80s," but perhaps also the one that best encapsulates the questions about context, site, and sociality that artists and curators would grapple with in the decades to follow.

The following *Times Square Show* artist list has been compiled from the floor maps and the Exotic Events listings, but cannot be considered definitive, since for example some artists whose artworks were photographed in the exhibition are not listed on the floor maps, and many artists added work to the show after it opened. Spellings have been corrected whenever possible:

L. Abrahms; Charlie Ahearn; John Ahearn; Jules Allen; Amsterdam Theater; Ehry Anderson; Anonymous; Eszter Balint; Doug Ball; Jean-Michel Basquiat / SAMO; Nan Becker; Michael Bidlo; Marc Blane; Jeff Blechman; Richard Bosman; Marc Brasz; Fred Brathwaite / Fab 5 Freddy; Bread and Roses, Leni Brown; Edward Brzezinski; Andrea Callard; Jim Casebere; Georgette Comerford; Mitch

53. *Ibid.*, 51.

54. <http://www.timesquashowrevisited.com/accounts/coleen-fitzgibbon.html>.

55. Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York*, 49.

56. Richard Goldstein, "Three Chord Art Anyone Can Play."

57. Relayed by Andrea Callard in a conversation with the author, November 2015.

Corber; Diego Cortez; Jody Culkin; Debbie Davis; Annie Deon; Jimmy DeSana; Eva DeCarlo; Jane Dickson; Leah Douglas; Wally Edwards; Babs Egan; Stefan Eins; Bill Evertson; Peter Fend; Arnold Fern; Coleen Fitzgibbon; Mary Ann Fowler; Angela Fremont; Funk City Graffiti (Bill and Mark); Joe Fyfe; Bobby G; Robert Gaines; Matthew Geller; Kathleen Gilia; Mike Glier; Paula Greif; Mimi Gross; Alan Guttman; Julie Hair; David Hammons; Duncan Hannah; Keith Haring; Julie Harrison; Willy Heeks; Candace Hill Montgomery; Jenny Holzer; Becky Howland; Peter Jameson; Alex Katz; Christof Kohlhofer; Bill Komoski; Kim Komoski; Justen Ladda; Gregory Lehman; Mary Lemley; Joe Lewis; Margret Lippard; Karen Luner; Jai Mal; Aline Mayer; Rosemary Mayer; Meryle; Dick Miller; Scott Miller; Richard Mock; Howie Montaug; John Morton; Alan Moore; Olivier Mosset; James Nares; Willie Neel; Paulette Nenner; Ann Newmarch; Normal (Jan Knap, Milan Kunic, and Peter Angarmang); Michael Norton; Jackie Ochs; Tom Otterness; Lan Payne; Vicki Pederson; Cara Perlman; Anne Petrone; Scott Pfaffman; Susan Pitt; Caz Porter; Lee Quiñones; Judy Rifka; Ulli Rimkus; Mike Robinson; Mike Roddy; Anne-Marie Rousseau; Christy Rupp; Kenny Scharf; Sandy Seymour; Jane Sherry; Teri Slotkin; Ann Smith; Kiki Smith; Harry Spitz; Wolfgang Staehle; Janet Stein; Bill Stephans; Mindy Stevenson; Jamie Summers; Kathleen Thomas; Rigoberto Torres; Robert Torres; Sophie VDT / Vieille; Tom Warner; David Wells; Reese Williams; Robin Winters; and Janet Ziff.

Artists known to have participated in the "Exotic Events" include Kenneth Ager; Charlie Ahearn with Michael Smith; Michael Auder with Ondine and Viva; Scott B and Beth B; Dara Birnbaum; Jane Brettschneider; Steve Brown; Tim Burns; the Dynells; Bill Garner; Jean Genet; Nan Goldin; Ilona Granet; Rick Greenwald; Gary Indiana; Nathan Ingram; Jim Jarmusch; Becky Johnson; Mark Kehoe; Christof Kohlhofer; Linton Kwesi Johnson; George Landau; Bing Lee; Willie Lenski; Aline Mayer; Larry Meltzer; Ellie Nager; James Nares; Michael Oblowitz; Mark Pauline; Ruth Peyser; Caz Porter; RAYBEATS; Walter Robinson; Kenny Scharf; Terrance Sellers; Stuart Sherman; Jane Sherry and Cara Perlman; Barry Shills; Jack Smith with Sinbad Glick and the Brasiere Girls of Bagdad; Michael Smith; Bill Stephens; Gordon Stevenson with Mirielle Cervenka; Mindy Stevenson; Suicide; Betsy Sussler; Third World Newsreel; Diane Torr; Erika Van Damn; video X; and Peter von Ziegesar.

* The author thanks Andrea Callard and John Ahearn. Thanks go as well to Ann Butler for her conversations, and Dean Daderko, Sara Marcus, Benny Merris, Max Schumann, and David Senior.

David Hammons, *Untitled (Knobkerry)*, 1994

As an artist I'm not aligned with the collectors or the dealers or the museums; I see them all as frauds.

—David Hammons¹

An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains. . . . Never was a space, designed to accommodate the prejudices and enhance the self-image of the upper middle classes, so efficiently codified.

—Brian O'Doherty²



*Knobkerry/sara Penn
Tulicia #11 W. B'way*

Installation view of untitled exhibition at Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing *Flight Fantasy* (1978)

1. Maurice Berger, "Interview with David Hammons," *Art in America*, September 1990, 80.

2. From Brian O'Doherty's trilogy of essays about the ideology of exhibition spaces, which appeared serially in *Artforum* in 1976, and are now collected under the title *Inside the White Cube: Ideology of the Exhibition Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 14, 76.

3. Parts of this essay are extracted from my book *David Hammons: Blitz-aard Ball Sale* (London: Afterall, 2017), and the nearly fifty interviews conducted in an oral history that forms its basis. As with that project, the importance of admitting the role of uncertainty and doubt—even as one attempts to contribute to the writing of history—lies at the center of this essay.

David Hammons has made an art of making himself difficult to find.³ He rejects many requests for interviews, largely dodges the inquiries of scholars, refuses to send out press releases or make artist statements. He doesn't have a website, and isn't officially

represented by a gallery. He snubs most invitations to exhibit, and has eschewed retrospective surveys at any number of the venerable institutions interested in showing his work. Once he even went so far as to get a lawyer involved to make sure one prestigious museum *wouldn't* organize a retrospective devoted to him.⁴ He declines, quite simply, to cooperate in the dissemination and promotion—the making widely visible—of an artistic “oeuvre” of the type that artists are typically preoccupied with.⁵

Rather than trivial anecdotes of one artist's cagey behavior, all of these accounts describe gestures that occupy the very core of Hammons's larger practice. Arguably, these gestures *are* his practice. Turning on its head the haunting line from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me,”⁶ Hammons's practice is based not on the habitual art world hope (and hype) for ultimate visibility and omnipresence, but the opposite: willful obfuscation at the risk of obscurity. As a result, some of his most significant works have been unabashedly ephemeral, evanescent, unannounced, witnessed by only a few, uncollected (and uncollectable), recorded only occasionally, barely written about at the time (if at all), and evidenced only by a few photographs (if that). The artist's own crisp elucidation of his logic is as follows: “To be invisible is more powerful than being visible.”⁷ Because Hammons knows that to be black in an art world as white as the walls of its museums, and in an America where privilege and presence and whiteness go hand in hand, is to realize that visibility is something to mess with, to disavow.⁸ Evasion, then, has become his operational strategy—an ethics, even—asserting “fugitivity” (to use Fred Moten's term) as a form of resistance.⁹

This hasn't stopped him from forging an undeniably influential body of work. From the late 1960s to the present, Hammons has powdered his drawings with Harlem dirt; attached deep-fried chicken wings by fishhooks to a friend's discarded Persian rug or to cheap costume jewelry; covered stones with “nappy” hair and given them razor-cut hairstyles; lined telephone poles holding up impossibly high basketball hoops with thousands of bottle caps; hung barbecued ribs from wall sculptures made from greasy paper bags; and left upturned empty wine bottles on the branches of trees in vacant Harlem lots. He has also made “drawings” from dust, organized exhibitions with little more than blue light, made and sold snowballs, and even spread rumors as art. His oeuvre, a mix of handcrafted and found elements, often from the street, has been so brazenly audacious as to sometimes barely be “there” at all. And yet the resultant artworks are strangely charged, even witchy: at once modest, wonky, witty, and utterly commanding (that is their paradox).

Hammons's lexicon of ephemeral actions, funky materials, and self-consciously “black” readymades goes hand in hand with his self-construction as an elusive maverick. If his actions mine the street as both inspiration and stage, they also make a point of eschewing the whole art world machine: official announcements, bona fide institutional spaces, insider audiences. Instead, he has controlled the means of his distribution and taken his visibility into his own hands. Thus, to speak of Hammons's practice you might look not only at the artworks he has made, but also at the ways in which he has elected to present them, the operations he has organized around them, and even the actions he has orchestrated to conceal them—to make his work itself as evasive as he himself has been. Because, for Hammons, the artwork's power lies as much in what makes it visible (or invisible) as within the thing as such. He has said, “It's not the art object itself. It's the daringness of the act, of presenting it, and the art object is the result . . . of empowering the object, as opposed to the object being powerful.”¹⁰

4. Hammons has never been afraid of being noncompliant. Recently, after learning that a New York museum was planning a retrospective of his work, he took measures to ensure that the project would not happen while simultaneously allowing for two other exhibitions of his work (each billed as a “retrospective,” no less) to be organized: one at the opulent Upper East Side townhouse of Mnuchin Gallery, specializing in the secondary market and run by a former equity trader, and another at the undistinguished corporate collection headquarters in Athens of Greek shipping magnate Georges Economou, whose name bears etymological relation to “economy.” None of the implications of each context would have been lost on Hammons, lover of wordplay that he is. Hammons might even have found these two venues appealing precisely because they defied expectation and made a spectacle of his interest in the functioning of the art market.

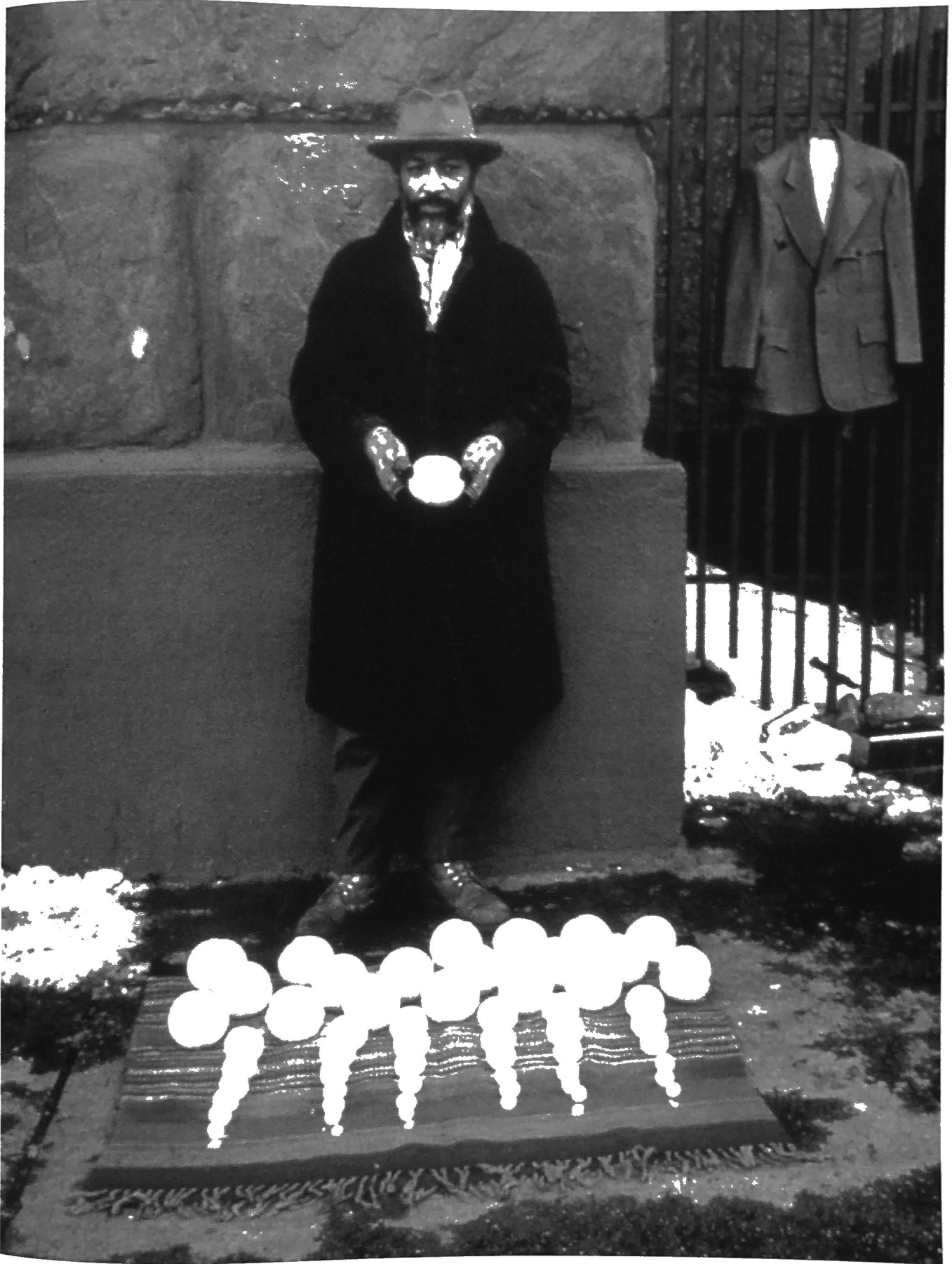
5. And this was the case from the very start. The curator of Hammons's first institutional solo show, in 1974 at California State University, Los Angeles, recounts: “The first thing David Hammons did, the day after I invited him to have a solo show, was to turn off his phone.” Josine Ianco-Starrels, “Some Thoughts,” in *L.A. Object and David Hammons Body Prints*, ed. Connie Rogers Tilton and Lindsay Charwood (New York: Tilton Gallery, 2011), 136–37.

6. These are among the opening lines of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), a novel whose exploration of racism and perception in America offers a potent lens through which to read Hammons's construction of a fugitive stance.

7. Hammons in conversation with the author, New York, September 7, 2009.

8. The gaping discrepancy between the attention, monetary value, and reputation attributed to white versus minority artists and the institutions that supported each of them can't be emphasized enough. Well into the 1990s, when both Los Angeles and New York were racially and socially integrated, they were still astoundingly segregated professionally and institutionally—a reality that lingers today.

9. Fred Moten has brilliantly articulated the potency of fugitivity across various texts, including “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 177–218.



David Hammons, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* (1983)

Hammons started off exhibiting his art in church basements or on pegboards in Jewish recreation centers, since “they were the only places in Los Angeles that gave shows to black artists.” He was also “showing around swimming pools, . . . putting art on trees,” and finding still other unconventional sites: “I’ve been in bars, showing in barbershops and cafés. I’ve done all that.”¹¹ In other words, he *made* his own exhibition context when more official options were not yet open to him. And this remained the case even once the art world began to take notice.



Installation view (from above) of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994

It is perhaps unsurprising that Hammons has never been fond of the so-called white cube—that white-walled, supposedly neutral blank slate of a space imposing a radical separateness between art and the outside world. One thing you can say about his most iconic and furtive work of art, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*—a sale of snowballs on a wintry New York street corner in 1983—is that it showed to what lengths he would go in order to avoid the white cube. Like Gustave Courbet’s 1855 creation of a rogue pavilion just across the way from the official salon exposition in Paris, Hammons’s carefully organized display of snowballs nearby the pristine white cubes of the burgeoning gallery scene was somewhere between a huckster’s outdoor sales showroom and his own *salon des refusés*. However, if a kind of *salon des refusés* it was, then Hammons arranged it without having tried and failed to penetrate any official exhibition. He had, from the start, refused to accept not only the art world’s conventional procedures and tidying sensibilities (its rules and paths to career building), but also the character of its spaces and the logics of its displays, once declaring:

Most of my things I can’t exhibit because the situation isn’t right. The reason for that is that no one is taking the shit seriously anymore. And the rooms are almost always wrong, too much plasterboard, too overlit, too shiny and too neat. Painting these rooms doesn’t really help, that takes the sheen off but there’s no spirit, they’re still gallery spaces.¹²

Like so many of Hammons’s interventions (think of *Pissed Off* and *Shoe Tree*, his ephemeral actions taken upon a Richard Serra sculpture in 1981, or his *Bottle Trees*

10. Interview no. 1 with Papo Colo and Jeanette Ingberman in an unpublished typescript for a (never-published) catalogue by Exit Art, Fales Library and Special Collections, Exit Art Archives, p. 12.

11. Interview with Robert Storr, in *Yardbird Suite: Hammons 93* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1995), 56.

12. Kellie Jones, “Interview with David Hammons,” *Real Life Magazine* 16 (Fall 1986), reprinted in Kellie Jones, “Interview with David Hammons,” in *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 251.

and *Higher Goals*, equally precarious “artworks” that occupied vacant Harlem lots between 1983 and 1986, not to mention *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* itself), the force of his projects often lies not only in how cunningly they engage their contexts, but also in how diametrically opposed that context is to the conditions of the white cube with its in-built audience. That audience was just too busy “looking at each other and each other’s clothes and each other’s haircuts,” as Hammons famously observed.¹³ Refusing to cater to such a public, and refusing as well to conceive of an exhibition as a neatly fixed and well-behaved display of auratic, authored things cut off from the world from which they were born, Hammons persistently pursued unconventional means and sites to show art. A perfect but little-known example is his 1994 self-initiated, untitled, unannounced exhibition at Knobkerry, a shop for African and Asian artifacts in the New York neighborhood of Tribeca run by his friend Sara Penn.¹⁴

You could go to Penn’s shop for Masai warrior necklaces or Japanese figurines, Moroccan kilim rugs or West African tribal masks. Hammons had known it for twenty years, regularly shopped there to find materials for his works, and admitted that for as long as he’d known the place, he had wanted to do an exhibition that would “play off” its compendium of cultures.¹⁵ His resultant orchestration—curation, really—of an exhibition of his artworks infiltrated the site’s inventory with no indication, through presentation or signage, as to the differing status of each. As an outpost for precisely the kinds of ethnic folk objects the artist had often used as the basis for his own art, Knobkerry was a place where Hammons’s art could effectively hide in plain sight.

13. *Ibid.*, 255.

14. I gleaned many of the details about the Knobkerry exhibition from Sara Penn as well as Erma Estwick, whose photographs of the exhibition are among the few remaining traces of that ephemeral event.

15. Amei Wallach, “David Hammons’ Secret Magic Show,” *New York Newsday*, December 23, 1994, B38.

16. *Ibid.* Wallach mentions the start date as Halloween, putting the opening at October 31, 1994; it ran at least through February 15, 1995, according to a Knobkerry flyer with the handwritten addition: “David Hammons show extended.”

17. See Amei Wallach, “David Hammons’ Secret Magic Show”; Roberta Smith, “The New, Irreverent Approach to Mounting Exhibitions,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1995, <http://nytimes.com/1995/01/06/arts/art-review-the-new-irreverent-approach-to-mounting-exhibitions.html>; Coco Fusco and Christian Hale, “Wreaking Havoc on the Signified,” *frize* 22 (May 1995): 34–41.

18. See Coco Fusco and Christian Hale, “Wreaking Havoc on the Signified”; Amei Wallach, “David Hammons’ Secret Magic Show,” B3.

19. On Hammons’s ambiguous relationship to photography and documentation, see my *David Hammons: Bliz-aard Ball Sale*.

Fittingly, the exhibition opened (according to one report) on that celebration day for trickster camouflage, Halloween (October 31, 1994), and ran, with at least one date extension, for more than two months (through February 15, 1995). If it continued on after that is not certain.¹⁶ There was no invitation, advertisement, press release, or opening event; and then, as now, rumor (and perhaps misinformation) about it is inseparable from the exhibition itself.

From what photographic documents do exist of the show, it seems that some of the forms or constellations of objects may have changed; perhaps objects were even added along the way. At some point during its run, a small handwritten sign appeared discreetly on the floor telling visitors (if they noticed or cared): “Works by David Hammons Now on Exhibit.” It was the only explicit mention in the shop that something out of the ordinary was going on. And for the duration of the artist-curated exhibition, few noticed in the art world. News of it passed mainly by word of mouth, and scattered mentions of it appeared in the press.¹⁷ The show drew some insiders—a few eager collectors, a smattering of informed critics, a host of friends. But mostly it was visited by the small emporium’s usual shoppers, who were there looking for the exotic objects and ornaments that were Knobkerry’s specialty.

“More than a dozen” works by Hammons (“more than fifteen” in another’s estimation—it’s interesting that no one could say for certain) were spread across the shop without calling attention to themselves, even to those looking for them.¹⁸ They often combined Knobkerry’s usual artifacts with the artist’s material and semantic mainstays—from basketballs to tongue-in-cheek puns. All were for sale and none were behind glass or on pedestals or protected by stanchions; visitors could simply sift through the art while looking for something else. And although Hammons called upon a photographer friend, Erma Estwick, to document it and a handful of photographs remain, recorded facts are few and far between, including whether or not some of the unsold juxtapositions of items (temporarily considered artworks by Hammons during the show) resumed their previous status as mere merchandise afterward.¹⁹



Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing detail of a

WORKS by
DAVID HAMMONS
1962
D.A.J. EXHIBIT

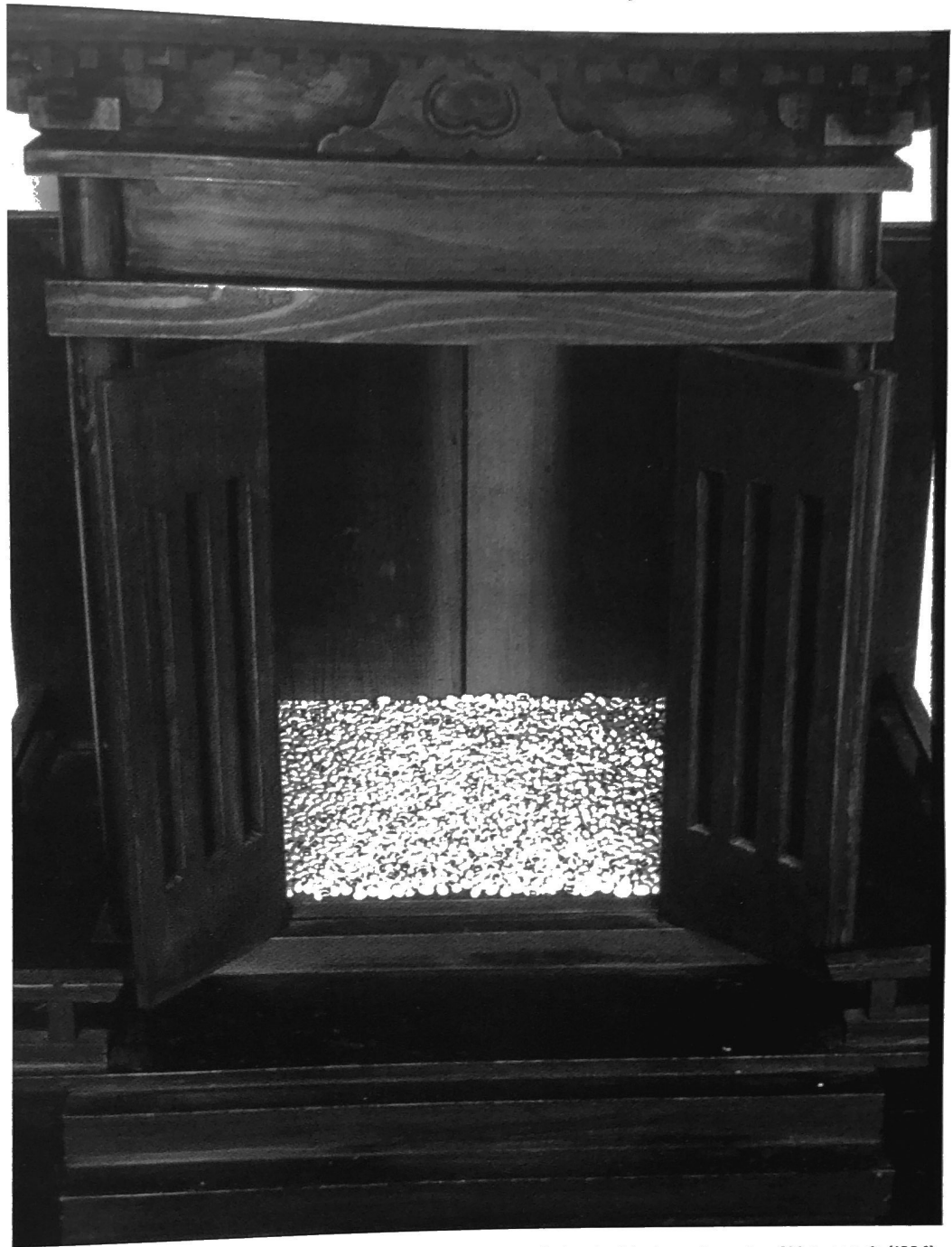
SALE
PRICE





Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing *Cigarette Chandelier* and *Asia Africa* (both 1994)

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Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing black-eyed peas in a Shinto temple (1994)

An art of ferociously casual acts abounded, as did evidence of Hammons's truculent wit: black-eyed peas were strewn across the floor of a miniature Shinto temple (if the work had a title, no one seems to have taken note of it); a tangle of wire and cigarette butts was attached to the gold brocade of a seventeenth-century Buddhist monk's robe that had long been hanging on the shop's wall to become *Cigarette Chandelier* (unless otherwise noted, all works are from 1994); a deflated basketball served as a rice bowl positioned between ceremonial silver bracelets, Yoruba combs, and other exotic paraphernalia in a vitrine near the cash register to become *Basketball Rice Bowl*; and on a wall hung *Marimba Ribs*, punning on the resemblance of the slab of meat and bones to the marimba, a xylophone-like percussion instrument developed in Central America by African slaves, and reminding viewers of the artist's early use of greasy food in his art (and, as Penn tells it, remaining just as unsellable).²⁰

20. Sara Penn in conversation with the author, New York, March 11, 2014.



Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing the entrance vitrine with *Basketball Rice Bowl* (1994)



The juxtapositions were often sardonic but also poignant, “crossing,” as noted by Roberta Smith (one of the few critics who wrote about the show at the time), “racial, cultural and geographic boundaries, mixing old and new, high and low, East and West.”²¹

From a ceiling corner the artist suspended one of the only previously existing pieces in the show, *Flight Fantasy* from 1978, consisting of vinyl record fragments, hair, clay, plaster, feathers, bamboo, and colored string, its bits of balled-up black hair and shards of 45 rpm records swaying slightly with any movement of air in the shop; in an opening of an Asian armoire, positioned near Japanese dolls, the artist sat a decoy duck bandaged in surgical tape like a modern mummy, drolly called *Tape Duck*; and along one wall hung *Carpet Beater*, a kilim rug adorned with a grid of attached drumsticks (the kinds used on drums), creating a material and linguistic riff on Hammons’s 1990 *Flying Carpet*, in which a grid of fried chicken wings had given that earlier carpet metaphoric flight. Hammons created two fountain works for the show, including a small wooden African mask with water pouring from its mouth into a bowl set below it, and a larger fountain in the entrance window comprised of a makeshift stand with a Chinese bronze bowl collecting water that spewed from the eyes and nose of an African mask plumed with white feathers and branches of cotton pods, appropriately called *Spitting Image*. But to describe the works as I have, or even to show the photographs taken of them, is to see them zeroed in on, almost out of their context, and thus to betray how furtively they actually occupied the space. Rather than there being art inside a shop, one must imagine a fully operational shop that slyly camouflaged an exhibition.²²

It would not be the first or the last time Hammons “curated.” Already in 1980, he conceived *Art across the Park*, an outdoor exhibition of ephemeral works shown in Central Park that continued for two iterations, after which the artist decided that its success and official offers to fund it made the project’s continuance uninteresting, “too institutionalized.”²³ And he has repeatedly curated exhibitions of his friends’ works or inserted the works of other artists into his own or other exhibitions—whether an Agnes Martin drawing that he included without explanation in his 2010 solo exhibition at a London gallery, or, before that, in 2006, his orchestration of the inclusion of a work by Miles Davis in the Whitney Biennial.²⁴ But what he did at Knobkerry was considerably different. Here, his project was as much a reflection on the form of an “art” exhibition as it was about the relationship of the artwork to the commodity, a questioning that has been central to a number of his other projects, from the 1983 *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* more than a decade before the Knobkerry show, to his 2004 *Sheep Raffle*, a full decade after it, to still other projects beyond.

Every Hammons artwork at Knobkerry was without a label and priced the same, no matter its size or seeming importance, as had been his snowballs when he peddled them on a street corner. But make no mistake, here the \$25,000 (no discounts given) price was not that of a street seller: it was not a matter of democratizing art but of rerouting its aesthetic sublimation.²⁵ And if some of the pieces may have more readily looked like art (or, let’s say, like an artwork by Hammons), others—like a wad of gum stuck to the underside of a doll-size, flower-patterned lounge chair, a basketball improbably stuffed into a terra-cotta vase, or even toilet paper stacked into a pyramid—seemed even more slight or tenuous as “works of art.” No one seems to have noted titles for these three, or whether the gum was simply removed after the show, the basketball extracted from its vessel, and the toilet paper returned to its regular place of use in the bathroom.

21. Roberta Smith, “The New, Irreverent Approach to Mounting Exhibitions,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1995, <http://nytimes.com/1995/01/06/arts/art-review-the-new-irreverent-approach-to-mounting-exhibitions.html>.

22. Although the two projects are very different, Fred Wilson’s 1992 exhibition *Mining the Museum* might usefully be discussed in relation to Hammons’s Knobkerry exhibition. Wilson studied the items in the collection of the Maryland Historical Society and, by way of infiltration, exacted his own version of an existing display space and system when he presented repoussé-style silver vessels alongside slave shackles from the same period in a vitrine under the heading “Metalwork 1793–1880,” or ornate armchairs alongside a whipping post under the heading “Cabinetmaking 1820–1960.” If Wilson’s project was primarily about how race is lodged in the museological, Hammons’s was primarily about how it is lodged in the fiduciary. On *Mining the Museum*, see Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Blackness, and the Site of Slavery in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 25–62.

23. Horace Brockington and Gilbert Coker acted as organizers of the project, although both attest that Hammons was its initiator and true curator. Brockington and Coker in conversation with the author, with the assistance of Alhena Katsof, New York, August 4, 2014, and May 26, 2014, respectively.

24. See Philippe Vergne, “Miles Away,” in *David Hammons Yves Klein / Yves Klein David Hammons*, ed. Michelle Piranio (Aspen, CO: Aspen Art Museum, 2014), 105.

25. Sara Penn did not record the sales price and visitors’ recollections vary, but one common refrain was that whatever the price, it was the same for every item. The Walker Art Center’s records attest that they purchased *Flight Fantasy* (1978) in 1994 from Knobkerry for the sale price of \$25,000, which suggests that it was the most probable sales price. For his part, A. C. Hudgins describes refusing, on Hammons’s behalf, a discount to any potential buyer who asked. When one prominent collector insisted, it was suggested that he buy the work for \$5,000 more than the sales price and apply a discount to that, effectively buying at the regular asking price. The collector declined. Email from A. C. Hudgins, April 10, 2017.

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Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing a toilet-paper pyramid (1994)

Hammons's gestures reversed the Duchampian act of bringing a store-bought thing into an exhibition space and proclaiming it to be art; here, he made the store into the exhibition, and made some of its usual stuff into his art. Objects might be deemed art by their maker, but—when unannounced, unpublicized, unlabeled, and merely infiltrated into an operating shop of artifacts or on the street among sellers of other commodities—they are decidedly untethered from the sorts of institutional, critical, and commercial collusions that otherwise aid in determining whether a spade is a spade, or an artwork an artwork. For an artist like Hammons, who has long observed those collusions, it was a way to integrate his art into a site of mercantilism—"the real world," as he called it—and in so doing comment on the way people "consume art."²⁶

26. Quoted in Amei Wallach, "David Hammons' Secret Magic Show," B3.



Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing a terra-cotta vase stuffed with a basketball (1994)

The phenomenon of the artist as sales agent was not entirely new. But unlike Martha Rosler, for instance, who in 1973 had set up a monumental “garage” sale and sold off her personal belongings in the museal confines of the University Art Gallery at the University of California, San Diego, Hammons did not take his sale into a gallery or museum. Instead he ensconced it in an operating shop, confusing his wares/works with regular commodities. In that way, his was an even more insidious approach, perhaps, than that of Claes Oldenburg, who in 1961 created *The Store* in an empty Lower East Side storefront. Oldenburg’s display and sale of quasi-formless representations of cupcakes, ribeye steaks, and girdles was rooted in the premise that all art, no matter how recalcitrant, no matter how avant-gardist or daring, is recuperable



Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing *Spitting Image* (1994)



Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing *Carpet Beater* (1994)

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by middle-class culture.²⁷ His intent—and this could just as well apply to Hammons's hawking of snowballs in 1983, or his infiltration of Knobkerry in 1994—was to skip over the illusory stage in which art pretends to escape commodification. Hammons, for his part, decided that rather than simulating a site of commerce, he would infiltrate one. His Knobkerry exhibition is thus perhaps closer in affiliation to Duchamp's 1935 insertion of himself at the *Concours Lépine*, an inventors' fair in Paris, where, positioned among vendors peddling vegetable slicers and garbage compressors, the French artist (unsuccessfully) attempted to sell his *Rotoreliefs*. In both scenarios, the line was blurred not only between art and merchandise, but also between an exhibition and a site of retail commerce.



Installation view of untitled exhibition, Knobkerry, New York, 1994, showing a doll-size chair with gum (1994)

For Hammons, the act was not innocent. In an art world that is predominantly white, the money that circulates within it is inextricably bound to issues of class and race. And although Hammons has had shifting views on the commodification of his art over the years, his interest by that point to “take home as much money as possible” was a loaded one, a defiant statement of sorts.²⁸ As he explained: “It’s possible to sell pieces for \$100,000 that are the size of my palm. ’Cause this is a cultural statement that they have to address. Buying a small piece for \$100,000 from a black artist, who just took two, um, pipe cleaners and put them together, you know, ’cause I’m interested in making that cultural statement towards the art world.”²⁹ His embrace of commerce was thus as programmatic as his rejection of the white cube and general evasiveness in relation to a (normative, white) art world.

The Knobkerry show opened just a few weeks after *Time* magazine’s triumphant cover declaration of a “Black Renaissance.”³⁰ Blackness was suddenly a subject of American middle-class dinner-table discussion and Hammons, mentioned in the issue, was part of that discussion: maybe that’s why he insisted all the more on going in the opposite direction, toward an infiltration that rendered him nearly invisible. If you had asked him, though, he would tell you that his Knobkerry show was a guerilla response to Thelma Golden’s *Black Male*, a timely, controversial, and now landmark exhibition on identity politics shown concurrently at the Whitney Museum of

27. Yve-Alain Bois, “Ray Guns,” in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 173–76.

28. Kellie Jones, “Interview with David Hammons,” 253.

29. Interview no. 1 with Papo Colo and Jeanette Ingberman, p. 11.

30. The issue was subtitled, without irony, “African-American Artists Are Truly Free at Last,” with articles including Jack E. White, “The Beauty of Black Art,” and Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Black Creativity: On the Cutting Edge,” *Time*, October 10, 1994, 66–73 and 74–75.

American Art, New York.³¹ A few of Hammons's pieces were included Golden's show, incorporated into its biting inquiry regarding contemporary representations of race and masculinity, which is how Hammons knew about its concept and preparations before it opened to the public.

He felt the Whitney show was, as he declared to a journalist without hiding his disapproval, "a child's exhibition." As a result, he conceived his near-simultaneous show of art tucked almost out of sight because he "thought something should be in town that was much more subtle, the opposite of that."³² However deliberately provocative, and even perhaps ultimately unfair, his statements are revelatory. If Hammons staged his Knobkerry show specifically as a riposte to *Black Male*, it suggests that he believed that an inquiry into "blackness" could be more powerfully addressed through tongue-in-cheek juxtapositions of high and low, linguistic punning, and subterfuge that, first and foremost, began with a rejection of the white cube.³³

This thinking was differently but no less powerfully articulated a decade later, in 2004, when Hammons conceived *Sheep Raffle* as a response to an invitation to take part in the United States' contribution to Dak'Art, the Biennial of Contemporary African Art in Dakar, Senegal. Refusing to display art in any of the exhibition venues, and indeed bypassing the jet-set biennial audience altogether, Hammons used his allocated budget to stage a free daily lottery of sheep for local residents. He organized the giveaway of a total of twelve sheep, two per day for six days. The event was staged at 4 p.m. each day at the busy intersection of two main avenues, where sheep are typically purchased or slaughtered to celebrate the local Festival of the Sacrifice (the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha).



David Hammons, *Sheep Raffle* (2004), Dak'Art, Dakar, Senegal

There, on a stage and accompanied by music and dancing, a master of ceremonies announced the rules and declared the daily winners. The event was promoted via billboards and radio jingles in French and Wolof, with raffle tickets distributed daily to locals eager for a chance to win a sheep. Recalling both *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*

31. See Amei Wallach, "David Hammons' Secret Magic Show," B3 and B38. *Black Male* ran at the Whitney Museum of American Art from November 10, 1994, to March 5, 1995. Hammons's exhibition at Knobkerry ran from October 31, 1994, to at least February 15, 1995.

32. *Ibid.*, B3.

33. Hammons likely thought that not much truly critical could come of an exhibition that didn't begin by refuting the site's white walls, corporate policies, or institutional history of exclusion, least of all at the Whitney, since, as he declared in another context, "Their relationship with black artists has been negative since Day 1." Quoted in Amei Wallach, "David Hammons' Secret Magic Show," B3.

and the exhibition at Knobkerry, *Sheep Raffle* not only referenced the social rituals of the context, but was staged at a site where these types of events typically took place. Hammons modeled *Sheep Raffle* on other lotteries of products common for the area, and even accepted Maggi, the industrial soup bouillon and instant noodle giant, as a sponsor, just like other local raffles did.

According to Hammons, he conceived *Sheep Raffle* because “people in Dakar do not go to exhibitions. They think that the Dak’Art is for white people. . . . At least with the sheep raffle, I’ll give them something they can relate to.”³⁴ At an international contemporary art biennial, he effectively replaced the logic of aesthetic display with a display of a kind of transaction (the exchange of winning lottery tickets for animals that served as near-currency to locals). Exactly a decade after the exhibition at Knobkerry and more than two decades after *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, he was trading in sheep as he had previously traded in African trinkets or snowballs. Raffle tickets circulated in place of money, and the corner of Avenue Bourguiba and Voie du Nord took the place of a Tribeca shop or the corner of Copper Square and Astor Place. His artwork was once again an event that left white cube exhibition spaces aside as it foregrounded the (economic) transactions and logic around which much of the art world revolves, indeed making a spectacular display of it: *Sheep Raffle* had, as one critic at the time astutely noted, “few winners, many losers,” and a “questionable . . . multinational sponsor,” Nestlé subsidiary Maggi, legitimizing itself through it all.³⁵

From his late 1960s and early 1970s grease and “nappy” hair works to *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* to *Sheep Raffle*, with the Knobkerry exhibition as a remarkable example in between, Hammons’s lifework has entailed, on the one hand, evading the institutions of art and their coolly antiseptic spaces and, on the other, revealing the power, race, class, and fiduciary dynamics that inflect them. Brian O’Doherty, in his 1976 trilogy of essays in *Artforum*, made abundantly clear that the white cube was not a neutral site, calling it nothing less than “a social, financial, and intellectual snobbery which models (and at its worst parodies) our system of limited production, our modes of assigning value, our social habits at large.”³⁶ O’Doherty articulated this just as Hammons, in his own way, was showing up the white cube as an implicitly racialized space—its walls as white as the culture it tacitly upholds. As Hammons himself would later say:

*White walls are so difficult because everything is out of context. They don’t give me any information. It’s not the way my culture perceives the world. We would never build a shape like that or rooms that way. To us that’s for mad people, you get put in them in the hospital. There is no other place I’d seen that kind of room until I came into the art world.*³⁷

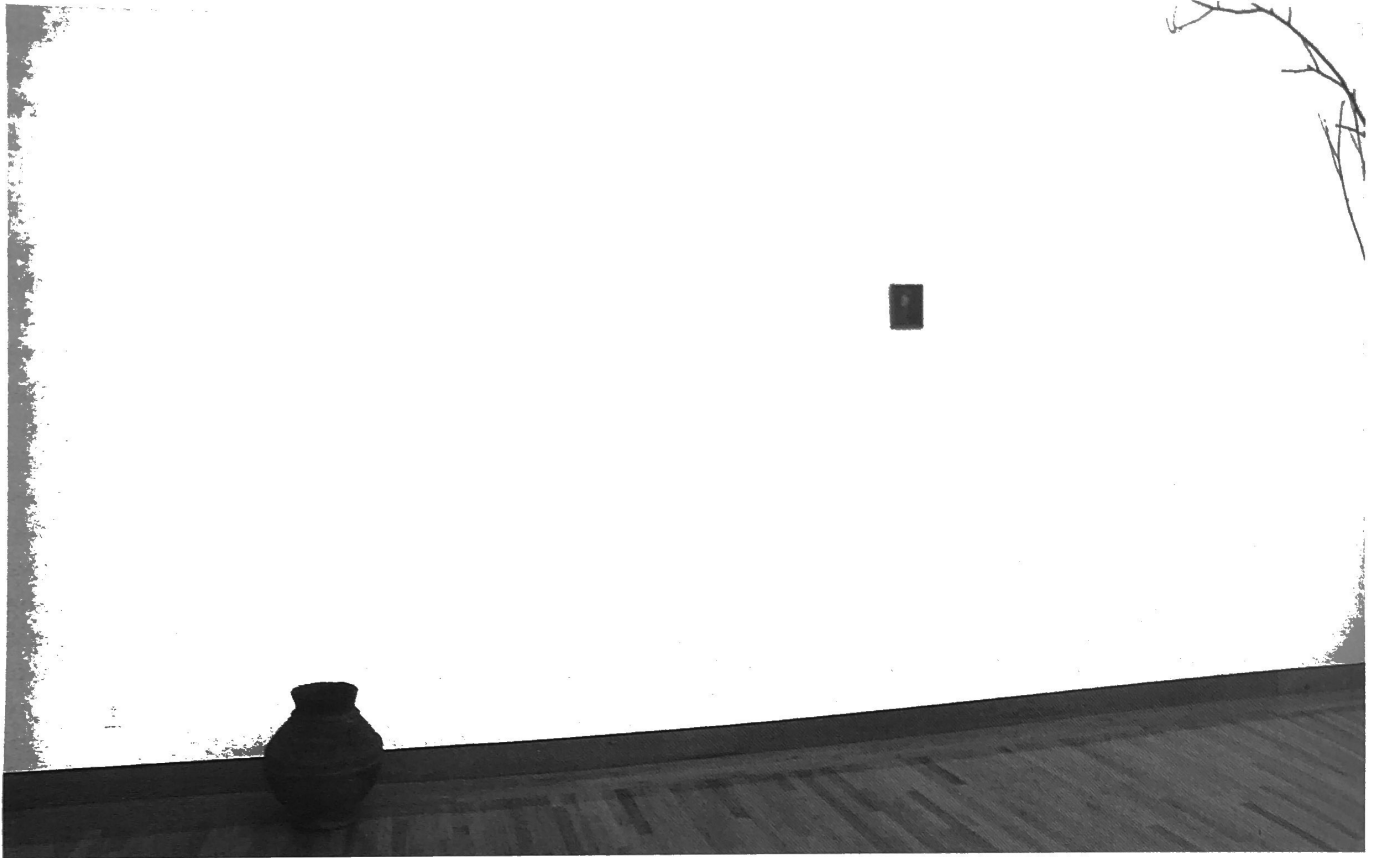
As a response to these spaces, he has often created disruptions literally aimed at their walls. Whether he defiles them with fried food or lice-strewn hair protruding from their floorboards or ceilings; whether he covers the museum’s walls with the cheap stenciled wall patterns of Harlem tenement hallways or imprints them with dirt from a bounced basketball; whether he has guests at his first retrospective’s opening play a pickup game of basketball in the middle of the exhibition; whether he empties a gallery of all signs of art and makes the white cube black and blue; or whether he leaves institutionalized spaces altogether to present his art on the street or in a shop or at a busy crossroads, the result is a practice that inserts dirt or grease or confusion or invisibility in order to clog “the system.” It interferes with the machinery of the institution of art, all the better to make apparent how its cogs move and its gears

34. Quoted in Manthia Diawara, “Dak’Art 2004 Sheep Raffle,” in *Diaspora, Memory, Place: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z*, ed. Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley (Munich and London: Prestel, 2008), 138.

35. Iolanda Pensa, “Art and Artists at Dak’Art 2004,” *nafas*, <http://u-in-u.com/nafas/articles/2004/dakart-2004/>.

36. Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 80.

37. Interview with Robert Storr, *Yardbird Suite*, 30.



Installation view of *David Hammons: Yardbird Suite*, showing *Hail Mary* (1993), Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1993



David Hammons bounces a basketball off the museum's walls during the installation of *David Hammons: In the Hood*, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, 1993

engage. Because that machine, including its collectors, museums, curators, histories, and procedures of validation and value formation, was—and still is—a white machine. He shows that resistance to the institution of art need not be explosive; it can be light as dust and comprised of the particles of everyday existence that simply mar it from within. In so doing, he refuses to let reign unchecked the white cube and the “prejudices and . . . self-image” (to repeat O’Doherty’s words) of the society it is “designed to accommodate.”³⁸

Hammons once said: “I always had to see their [white] reflections when I looked at Western Art. There is no information in there concerning my reference points. So my art had to be as Black as their art is white.”³⁹ Perhaps the same could be said of his relationship to exhibition spaces. Maybe like writer Zora Neale Hurston, who declared that she felt “most colored” when “thrown up against a sharp white background,” Hammons has treated the white cube and the conventional models of exhibition that typically feature within it as that “sharp white background” against which he would make a lifework of responding.⁴⁰

38. *Ibid.*

39. Quoted in Charlie Ahearn, “‘Tragic Magic’ Sparks Hammons Retrospective at P.S.1,” *City Sun*, January 16–22, 1991. Clipping archived in the MoMA PS1 archives Series I.A. 1583 *David Hammons: Rousing the Rubble, 1969–1990* (December 16, 1990–February 10, 1991) news clippings.

40. Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” *The World Tomorrow*, May 1928, 215–16, anthologized in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: 1914–1945*, ed. Julia Reidhead (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), 541.

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