
Culture in Action A Public Symposium

This event is organized by threewalls and co-sponsored by Never the Same, Afterall, Open Practice Committee, Smart Museum of Art, Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago, and SAIC's Department of Exhibitions and Exhibition Studies.

Front cover images: Top (Chicago Torture Justice Memorials); Bottom (Daniel J Martinez at Culture in Action, 1993)

About NTS

The goal of this project is to document Chicago's rich art history and develop a language for discussing the impact of socially and politically engaged art practices that integrates consideration of external with internal transformation and effects.

Contact:
neverthesamechicago@gmail.com

Co-Directors: Daniel Tucker and Rebecca Zorach

Archivist: Skyla Hearn

Layout: Eric Triantafyllou and Daniel Tucker

Transcription: Haley Martin

Intern: Emma Saperstein

The project was launched in the Fall of 2010 with a roundtable discussion about archiving Chicago art held at the Experimental Station. Throughout 2013 NTS will be expanded in terms of our ongoing efforts at archiving and interviewing, as well as through the development of public programs.

Funding

This work is supported by a Mellon Residential Fellowship for Arts Practice & Scholarship at the Richard and Mary L. Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry at the University of Chicago.

graycenter
FOR ARTS AND INQUIRY

**Never
the Same:**
Conversations
About Art
Transforming
Politics
& Community
in Chicago
& Beyond

never-the-same.org

**Never
the Same:**

Conversations About Art
Transforming Politics & Community
in Chicago & Beyond

Program notes for

Culture in Action

Public Art in Chicago
Twenty Years Later
A Public Symposium
Saturday,
October 5
2013



Interviews:
Mary Jane
Jacob &
Laurie
Palmer

02

Program notes for

Culture in Action

Public Art in Chicago

Twenty Years Later

A Public Symposium

Saturday,

October 5

2013

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Culture in Action, the seminal public art exhibition curated by Mary Jane Jacob as part of Sculpture Chicago in 1993, this symposium brings together past participants and artists working today to discuss its impact on the current field of community-based public art, particularly in Chicago. Culture in Action facilitated challenging frameworks for artists working within communities to create public art and today's artists face similar issues in a radically changed artistic, political, and economic climate. Together participants and attendees will discuss what we have learned and what we have yet to learn.

Schedule:

1 - 2:30 PM: A conversation on "Twenty years later" between artist Daniel Joseph Martinez and arts writer Michael Brenson

3 - 4:30 PM: "Where to Now?" with Chicago artists and organizers Sarah Ross, Nicole Marroquin, Andres Hernandez, and Carla Mayer moderated by Abigail Satinsky, Associate Director, threewalls.

The event will close with thoughts by artist A. Laurie Palmer, followed by a reception at the Never the Same exhibition in The Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry at Midway Studios 929 E. 60th St. More information on the exhibition below.

Participant Bios

For over thirty years **Daniel Joseph Martinez** has engaged in an investigation of social, political, and cultural mores through artworks that have been characterized as “nonlinear multidimensional propositions.” He has exhibited in the United States and internationally since 1978, most recently, *The Fully Enlightened Earth Radiates Disaster Triumphant: Daniel Joseph Martinez: United States Pavilion*, 10th International Cairo Biennale 2006, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2006); the 2008 Whitney Biennial Exhibition, New York; and *the west bank is missing, I am not dead yet, am I?*, Amie and Tony James Gallery at City University of New York (2009). Recent publications include *Daniel Joseph Martinez: A Life of Disobedience* (Stuttgart, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009), including essays by Arthur C. Danto, David Levi Strauss, Michael Brenson, and Hakim Bey. Martinez has been teaching since 1990 at the University of California, Irvine, and is currently professor of theory, practice, and mediation of contemporary art in the graduate studies program and new genres department. Martinez is currently represented by Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, California, and Simon Preston Gallery, New York, New York and contributed to *Culture in Action* with two large-scale projects.

Michael Brenson is a critic, scholar and teacher. He received an MA in Creative Writing and a Ph.D in art history from Johns Hopkins University, and was an art critic for *The New York Times* from 1982 to 1991. His publications include *Visionaries and Outcasts: The NEA, Congress, and the Place of the Visual Artist in America* (2001); *Sol LeWitt: Concrete Block Structures* (2002); *Acts of Engagement: Writings on Art, Criticism, and Institutions, 1993–2002* (2004); edited (with Mary Jane Jacob) *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art* (1996), edited (with Rhea Anastas) *Witness to Her Art: Art and Writings by Adrian Piper, Mona Hatoum, Cady Noland, Jenny Holzer, Kara Walker, Daniela Rossell and Eau de Cologne* (2006). He is a Getty scholar and Guggenheim Fellow, a Visiting Senior Critic in the University of Pennsylvania School of Design's Department of Fine Arts, and a member of the sculpture faculty in Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts. He is working on a biography of David Smith.

Andres L. Hernandez is an artist-designer-educator who works both independently and collaboratively to interpret, critique, and re-imagine the physical, social, and cultural environments we inhabit. Since 1997, Andres has worked within a variety of institutions to develop and implement

innovative, standards-based art and design curricula; train school teachers and youth program staff in arts-integrated curricula and project-based learning; assist with research, planning, installation, and educational activities for museum exhibitions; and organize collaborative, community-based art projects throughout the city of Chicago. Andres has held a number of professional positions, most notably, Youth Development Director at Umoja Student Development Corporation; Co-Director/Drop-In Director at Street-Level Youth Media; and Curatorial Assistant for African and Oceanic Art at the Seattle Art Museum. Andres received his Bachelor of Architecture degree from Cornell University, and his Master of Arts in Art Education degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he has been an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art Education since 2006. He is concurrently employed as Lead Artist with the Teens Re-Imagining Art, Community & Environment (TRACE) program of the Chicago Park District, and maintains an active studio and writing practice.

Nicole Marroquin is an interdisciplinary artist whose creative practice includes collaboration, research, teaching, and strategic intervention. As a classroom art teacher in Chicago and Detroit, Marroquin taught and collaborated with youth on art-based action research projects. In addition to activism in education, Marroquin has exhibited her sculpture internationally, and most recently at the Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares in Mexico City. Marroquin received her MFA from the University of Michigan in 2008 and is now living in Pilsen, Chicago. She makes art, exhibits and writes about participatory cultural production with youth and in communities. She is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Carla Mayer, Arts and Culture Manager at the Chicago Park District, provides vision and direction for the Arts and Culture Unit, the locus of arts learning at the District. With her crack staff, she manages initiatives such as the Cultural Center Initiative, Arts Partners in Residence, Inferno Mobile Recording Studio, and youth arts programs including Arts XIII and TRACE (Teens Re-Imagining Art, Community & Environment). She assists artists and arts organization with accessing public spaces, and leverages resources for parks and communities. She believes strongly that community arts practices are a way to connect, build and heal. She also consults on curriculum and programming in the areas of process-based art education, and workforce and youth leadership development. She is a certified teacher, and has taught art and run internship programs in Chicago Public Schools. Her background is in literature and visual art; she has a BA from Brown University and an MA in Interdisciplinary Arts from Columbia College. In and out of work, she is a committed youth developer and creative activist, and a trained circle-keeper. As an installation artist and sculptor, her work focuses on silenced voices, familiar materiality and including non-artists in the process of art-making. She is part of the organizing collective behind Chicago Torture Justice Memorials.

A. Laurie Palmer's work takes various forms as sculpture, public projects, writing, and interdisciplinary collaborations. She has shown, lectured, and published nationally and internationally since 1988, both independently and with the artist collaborative Haha, and has received generous foundation and institutional support, including from the Louis Tiffany Foundation, the Illinois Arts Council, the Richard M. Driehaus Foundation, the ArtCouncil (now Artadia) and the Radcliffe Institute. Around the year 2000, she began to focus her individual practice on local projects relating to land-use. The book *3 Acres on the Lake: DuSable Park Proposal Project*, published by WhiteWalls Press in 2004, documents a public art project and exhibition related to these concerns. In 2008, WhiteWalls published *With Love from Haha* documenting twenty years of Haha's site-based work, and also marking the end of that long-term collaboration. In February 2014 she will publish a book documenting many years of research into industrial mineral extraction sites in the U.S. and movements of substances between land and bodies (*In the Aura of a Hole, Black Dog, London*). She has returned to the studio to work on sculptural projects related to this ongoing research, and to other considerations of matter's active nature and explorations of our collective capacities for change. A. Laurie Palmer studied English literature and studio art at Williams College as an undergraduate, and completed her MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1988 in printmaking and sculpture. She has taught full time at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and at Carnegie Mellon University, and part-time at the University of Chicago, UIC, and Vermont College. For the last sixteen years she has taught sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She also was an art writer for ten years.

Sarah Ross is an artist who works in sculpture, video and photo. Her projects use narrative and the body to address spatial concerns as they relate to access, class, anxiety and activism. Sarah also works collaboratively with other artists on projects such as *Compass* (of the MRCC), *Regional Relationships*, *Chicago Justice Torture Memorials*, and *Prison and Neighborhood Arts Project*. She has co-curated exhibitions at SPACES Gallery, Cleveland, *Sea and Space Explorations*, Los Angeles, and PS122, New York. She teaches at The School of the Art Institute Chicago and is a co-organizer of the *Prison and Neighborhood Arts Project*, an arts and humanities initiative at Stateville Prison. Sarah is the recipient of grants from the Propeller Fund, Graham Foundation, University of California Institute for Research in the Arts and the Illinois Art Council. Some of her work has been exhibited in venues such as the Armory, Pasadena, CA; Gallery 727, Los Angeles; PS122, New York; Roots and Culture Gallery, Chicago; Pinkard Gallery, Baltimore; META Cultural Foundation, Romania and the Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal.

Abigail Satinsky is the Associate Director at *threewalls* in Chicago and a member of *InCUBATE*, a research collaborative dedicated to art economies and founders of *Sunday Soup*, an international micro-granting initiative. She co-edited the most recent *PHONEBOOK*, a directory of artist-run

spaces and projects across the United States, published by threewalls, and co-founded the Hand in Glove conference, a national convergence on grassroots arts organizing and administration. She regularly writes on socially engaged art practices for publications and exhibition catalogues, including most recently *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art* at the Smart Museum of Art, and contributes to *Bad at Sports* podcast as a social practice correspondent and to ACRE Residency & Exhibitions by co-organizing their visiting artist program.

Never the Same: Founded in late 2010 after receiving support from the Propeller Fund (administered by threewalls and Gallery 400), Tucker and Zorach conceived of *Never The Same* after collaborating together for five years on the publication and event series AREA Chicago (areachicago.org). Throughout 2011 and 2012 they focused primarily on conducting oral history interviews with a wide range of artists, curators and collectives ranging from founders of AfriCOBRA and Homocore Chicago to the Iraq Veterans Against the War and the Institute for Puerto Rican Arts and Culture. Upon receiving the Mellon Fellowship from the Gray Center, the collaborators decided to expand the activities of *Never The Same* into an educational, curatorial and archiving project. never-the-same.org

The symposium reception from 5-7 PM will be held at:

Unfurling: Five Explorations in Art, Activism, and Archiving, A *Never The Same* Exhibition is five artists and scholars commissioned to produce work that activates archival materials related to Chicago's rich history of politically- and socially-engaged art.

Exhibition Dates: September 23-October 20, 2013

Opening Reception: September 27, 2013 6-8pm

Location: Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, The University of Chicago, 929 E. 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637

Invited Artists/Groups:

Extinct Entities (Erin Nixon, Anthony Romero and Anthony D. Stepter), Liliana Angulo Cortés, Faheem Majeed, Jayne Hileman, and Dan S. Wang.

Interview: Mary Jane Jacob

Curator Mary Jane Jacob was interviewed by NTS at the Sullivan Galleries in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (July, 2011) where Jacob is the Executive Director of Exhibitions. The interview focuses on the work leading up to and during the ambitious “Culture in Action” project organized for Sculpture Chicago, which took place over a two-year period (1991-93). For the project artists worked in direct partnership with community members to explore the changing nature of public art, its relationship to social issues, and an expanded role of audience from spectator to participant and offered a new model for art in the urban context.

A publication by Bay Press, Seattle, traced these multi-layered projects that took the form of monuments, parades, candy bars and billboards, hydroponic gardens, and a permanent youth media program. Herbert Muschamp, architecture critic for The New York Times, wrote that these “conceptually oriented public artworks update the City Beautiful tradition of integrating fine art into the urban fabric... using art and urbanism to reinforce each other” as part of a movement to “think globally, act locally.” The project featured works by Suzanne Lacy and A Coalition of Chicago Women; Inigo Manglano-Ovalle and Street-Level Video; Haha and Flood: A Volunteer Network for Active Participation in Healthcare; Robert Peters; Mark Dion and The Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group; Simon Grennan, Christopher Sperandio and The Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers’ International Union of America Local No. 552114; Kate Ericson, Mel Ziegler, and A Resident Group of Ogden Courts Apartments; and Daniel J. Martinez and The West Side Three-Point Marchers.

Daniel Tucker (DT): As a starting point could you talk a little bit about what research or projects you were involved in or that you were observing elsewhere that provided inspiration for “Culture in Action”.

Mary Jane Jacob (MJJ): It came from a few fronts happening in art of the 80s. One is straight-forward: NEA and other government public art panels defined how stuff got made in cities at that point, through a panel of expert and local representatives or sometimes just art professionals picking the artists. The process of selection was the short-term (one day) and jury-style that did not value community



Daniel J Martinez, Consequences of a Gesture

as relevant. It was one established to ensure “art quality.” Furthermore, the result of that process was that often times the art work never got made or when it did—I suppose this was the greatest impetus to me—it became highly compromised as it made its way through a logistical process that succumbed to the power of site architects or politics. Or because the artist’s distance from the process, it might not be the right work for the context. So that was one motivation from the public art field.

Another contributing experience came even earlier. As a graduate student at the University of Michigan, I did an internship as curator of the Michigan Artrain, working on a show from the Upper Midwest. As I met artists in local terrains, I heard about the regional prejudices they faced and how their place—outside the mainstream—labeled them in negative ways and restricted their access to showing. Thankfully, that has changed a lot in the last three decades in large part due to champions like Marcia Tucker. I thought it wrong that they felt compelled to leave the place where they lived and from which they drew their inspiration in order to have a career. It also made me think about place and its relationship to making: What does an artist can bring to the perception of a place.

I had also begun working with other artists “outside the mainstream”: women artists, those who employed material associated with crafts for their art, or new genre like performance and installation. Combined with that, I took an interest in art with a political and social agenda. So all of this led to cultivating a kind of curatorial position and with that came relooking at the state of public art. At that time early in my career I also found a dialogue around this discourse with Suzanne Lacy who has certainly been a leader in rethinking the field public art.

So all those experiences served as some professional background for a critique of public art and set the scene for engaging a conversation with Sculpture Chicago around doing an exploratory program, which eventually became “Culture in Action”.

In 1990 I was a board member of Sculpture Chicago. I was also doing a site-specific show in Charleston, South Carolina—“Places with a Past”—where the invited artists were grappling with erased histories of slavery. At Sculpture Chicago I was impressed with the real enthusiasm among that committed board for the work they’d most recently accomplished with Vito Acconci and others. However, their programmatic separation of local and national artists seemed to smack of regionalism to me. Additionally, their “curatorial” process of having jurors select artists based on maquettes of work they wanted to make outdoors seemed reactionary. It didn’t allow for the way artmaking was going. And by focusing art on the plaza, what the public was exposed to was restricted. I thought the process needed to be opened up to another way.

But in spite of this critique, at the heart of what they were doing—and what seemed to touch most deeply the heart of the board—was bringing the wider Chicago community into the process by enabling the public to see artists at work. Moreover, the board was moved by stories of other professionals (crane operators, welders...) who had helped the artists in the process and then returned to see the work with their families full of pride and a sense of ownership. The board was excited that non-museum go-ers had an experience with art through what they provided and could even participate in the process with the artist.

This was ultimately where the whole process started: with the public. I thought: What would happen if we opened up the process fully to allow artists to do what they do? And what would happen if we really opened up the process to allow the public to be part of that process? How can that be best realized? Not through marketing. To bring people who aren’t usually the art audience into art, I thought, could best be achieved through something personally meaningful to them. (I saw how this was working on the subject of history with my exhibition in Charleston.) So that became the inspirational moment thing that brought all the other art discourses to bear in “Culture in Action”.

The critiques embodied in this program caught the attention of the National Endowment for the Arts; there was a feeling a test case was needed to think about public art in another way. It was a moment. But how it was going to happen and what the art was going to look like was hard to explain to funders. It wasn’t acceptable for a curator to work organically, developing a project for which outcomes were not defined. So it became challenging for me to hold the space open for artists to work, for things to emerge, and the public process to unfold—but that was the only way to truly include the public in the process. Furthermore, this is how the creative process goes and as a curator I wanted enable that process.

So the fact that we couldn't describe at the outset where the work was going to be, what collaboration would look like, which artists would eventually become end up being part of the program, who the audience-participants would be, what would be produced was the right process. This meant that all those involved needed to work from a certain level of trust. And for this Sculpture Chicago was the right board; I have never worked with a board that was so involved throughout that whole undertaking.

DT: And so most of the funding was from the NEA?

MJJ: NEA and also the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund were the primary funders, but there were other significant ones, too, such as Rockefeller and Nathan Cummings Foundation on the national level, and Polk Foundation and MacArthur in Chicago. Funders were entering in at various points, but it was a good moment for fundraising because people didn't have examples; they couldn't quite nail down what we were doing; they hadn't set up categories of funding yet for such projects. I was willing to go out there and talk about what we aimed to do and why. So if they were curious and maybe inspired, too, they got into the discussion as we tried to figure it out.

Rebecca Zorach (RZ): I have a follow-up question, partly about the way you talk to funders and partly just about the way you thought about the project yourself. Because when Daniel asked the initial question, the first sort of way that you framed it was as a critique of the NEA process and what was going out in public art. But I'm curious about this when you talk to funders, did you balance critique with an affirmative argument about—

MJJ: Yes, "Culture in Action" was presented along the lines of potential: potential of what the audience can bring to the art experience, potential of the passion and vision of artists to work in new ways and in public, and the potential for art to be a way of thinking about and dealing with the problems we face. It was also presented as a program that needed to be comprised of several projects coming from different directions, dealing with different ideas and issues. Then what resulted might offer some examples of working relationships and ways to imagine the potential for public art, for art and the public.

I was critiquing sculpture in urban spaces, but as time went on notions of collaboration came to the forefront

Funders think about how to design programs that can and serve needs. It's all well intentioned. Sculpture Chicago board members had the desire to create meaningful, embedded, personally

life-transforming experience through art for the public. That wasn't their mission statement, but it was what they believed in. I approached board members and funders on this level, seeking their best possible selves, and we became engaged in a critical conversation about what could happen: What is

art for? To talk in that way rather than do a sales pitch is all I could do as a curator. For some people that worked, and for others, I can tell you, it didn't because the story I was delivering is too complicated, risky, and murky. With "Culture in Action" I was really up front that we might deliver anything. We were not claiming there would be sculptures or change society, but we wanted to try to see what art can mean in people's lives.

DT: How were the artists in "Culture in Action" identified and what was sort of the process like of connecting them with communities that they end up working with?

MJJ: In the beginning I was critiquing sculpture in urban spaces, but as time went on notions of collaboration came to the forefront, along with co-authorship among a segment of the population that, before or for this occasion, could be thought of as a community. Some artists came and went in that evolutionary process. My way of working on a group show always involves starting the conversation with a few artists, bringing them onboard to think with me, and not waiting till I have settled on a final list before beginning on the ground.

Mark Dion was one of the first artists to begin, and he was certainly the first one to clearly define that he was working collaboratively, having us solicit a group of high school students. Of those who lived outside Chicago, Mark also spent the most time here. He came nearly every week during the school year to lead a class and stayed all summer. He knew what he wanted to do. Ronald Jones had recommended him—listening to artists is one way I select other artists. [I had done a work with Ron just prior for Sculpture Chicago, which also helped launch "Culture in Action."] It was a temporary park in sited on open land left over from building the Harold Washington Library building. His project, Pritzker Park, could have been a permanent, but ultimately was not. It was largely enabled by collaborating with the head of City Planning at that time, Chuck Thurow, who went on to lead the Hyde Park Art Center and carry out their new building.

As to selecting other artists, well, I always loved the work of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler and had just worked with them in Charleston where they made a very successful project with a resident, painting his house [Camouflaged History]. I knew they were interested in issues around housing and thought they would find Chicago a good place to work.

Daniel Martinez was an artist that I would have liked to have worked with when I was Chief Curator at LA MoCA, but that museum was not open to that. So I invited him here to Chicago. I had worked with Bob Peters in Chicago as Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, so chose to do so again here.

Haha was a Chicago four young artists already working collaboratively who proved interested in creating a wider collective. Christopher Sperandio and Simon Grennan were just graduating from UIC; their first projects in Chicago parks intrigued me because of their irreverence and critical

insight. So I met with them and talked about what they might do.

Suzanne Lacy, as I mentioned, was a leader in thinking about public practice and an artist I knew well; we had shared many discussions. I felt that the program overall could benefit from her experience and intellect, and that with her we could build a deeper discourse.

DT: “Culture in Action” gets referenced frequently, but a lot of the time it is the idea of the exhibition, and there’s not as much reference to specific projects. I’m just kind of curious if you have any anecdotes or project stories that you think are really meaningful or transformative kind of experiences that happened in “Culture in Action” that are not widely known?



Suzanne Lacy

MJJ: Full Circle, Suzanne Lacy's project about women, was centered on the inspirational historic figure of Jane Addams. In the magical, spectacular way Suzanne works best, overnight where there had no Chicgo monuments to women, appeared a hundred monuments in the Loop. These temporary works are often pictured, but the second part was of her project, Dinner at Jane's, was a dinner among women world leaders, staged and filmed at Hull-House. This part is less known but is what made this work truly come full circle.

Grennan and Sperandio's project ran into some interesting challenges. At one point it looked like it might be stopped when the Nestle headquarters would not allow the workers at their local plant that we had been negotiating with to participate in the art project for one week. It represented 40 hours for 15 people, so to them it was a lot of money, but also maybe they were fearful in other ways. At that time the union was suspicious of the corporation's new program of "employee empowerment." It was the head of that suburban Chicago plant that actually gave those workers the week off. He said, "Just don't meet in the factory." So we held collaborative design workshops in the offices of Sidley & Austin made available by Sculpture Chicago board member Jack Guthman. We also had to have the candy bar made out of state by a sympathetic union. In the end the local union leader, Jethro Head, brought the project back to the factory, handing out the candy bars that represented the workers' ideas and literature about the union's goals. But I always remember the head of the plant who put his job on the line because he believed in an art project. That was a big deal.

Daniel Martinez's project had two aspects: a parade and an outdoor installation. For the latter, we got all this granite from UIC that was dismantling the raised pavement that was part of Walter Netsch's building scheme. A fortune in granite was diverted for a time on its way to the salvage yard. The people's plaza that Daniel imagined was going to be constructed on a City-owned block of the former Maxwell Street Market, and we had received City approval for this. But some board members got worried that the mayor might not be pleased with us doing this. At the proverbial 11th hour (at 11:00 p.m. the evening before we were to meet the salvage truck and start placing the granite slabs), a call came in saying we shouldn't do this. So I "gave a grant" to Daniel to pay the salvage company, and went down to the site early that morning with our installation crew to cut the lock off one of the UIC-owned lots. We didn't ask permission. There wasn't time. Anyway, guerilla art has a long tradition in the public sphere. A head UIC administrator came about a half an hour later and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "We're making art." I think they thought it was easier to let us proceed than risk causing a fuss, because it could have become another flashpoint in the ongoing controversy over closing the Maxwell Street Market. The piece got done and stayed up all summer. It was interesting that Sculpture Chicago didn't stop us either. Ultimately, this work became the cover of the book.

With Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's project, Tele-Vecindario, the process was intensive. He exposed himself daily to the issues of the community in which he lived, all your time

consumed with the youth's problems and the weight of responsibly of what it meant to work there with them. It did not become Inigo's regular mode of practice, but I think it came at a good moment in his career and, I would say, it affected where he went in his own work. Inigo brought a lot of critical intelligence to the program, understanding questions of audiences and diverse publics. Of course, the process he did set out, not controlling the conversation but responding and shaping it, gave others a role, a buy-in, while building an infrastructure for what was to come—even though there was never a grand plan that forecast what that would be. That's why the Community Television Network staff members who worked as part of this and the social worker, Nilda Pauley, at Wells High School could join forces at the conclusion of the exhibition and create something else. They created Street Level Video, now called Street Level Youth Media.

DT: Along those lines, can you talk about projects that have legacies like that?

MJJ: Street Level Youth Media is the most obvious example of legacy. They are coming up on their 20th anniversary. It is an institution that serves 1000 youth each year, teaching them skills in media technologies and using art strategies. They aim to cultivate a consciousness of self in society, with a goal of helping less advantaged students be competitive in college. There are individual stories here, too, like Paul Teruel who was there at the beginning, became a founding director of Street Level, and went on to develop community partnerships at Columbia College Chicago.

But Street Level brings up an issue which public art practitioners need to be cautious about. If our goal had been to create such an organization from the outset, I believe the exploration would have been lost, the process would have been narrowed to focus on implementing the founding of an organization. But we could not have defined this outcome at the start. It had to find its natural, necessary way as a shared agenda among a broader set of stakeholders—and first they had to find what stake they had in common. Undertaking temporary artworks enabled them to see that and feel it.

Funders would have liked us to have expressed clear outcomes, tangible goals; today they are often mandated in grant making process. Instead what happened came about in a real, organic way. But "organic" was taboo then, as was intuition, because these were not valid business-like words. Yet good creative processes define intent and then listen to the process and let it go. That is exactly what Tele-Vecindario did as an art project, and this allowed it to fluidly lead to Street-Level Youth Media.

There were also so many beautiful acts of generosity on the part of all the artists. For instance, we were offered a small gallery on the first floor gallery of the MCA (this was the former building on Ontario Street), because they had a gap in their schedule. I think they thought we install documentation to orient visitors to the "Culture in Action" projects around the city. But I felt the gallery was too significant a space for that; it should be a work of art. So I asked Inigo to do something. None of the other artists complained that this

opportunity went to him. Acts of generosity.

Inigo made a piece called Cul-de-sac, which dealt with the new anti-gang law and the City putting in cul-de-sacs to segregate communities and contain gangs. He showed videos behind cyclone fencing, as would later happen with actual fencing on Erie Street in West Town. So this work also became a model, a maquette in a way, for how the first block party, which was a major art installation, ended up looking. It also became a lesson for the youth involved to find their way into the museum for the first time and enter without fear. This was one of the things that Inigo did: bridge the hierarchy between the mainstream institutions and the non-art world neighborhood for these students who thought the museum was not for them, who were intimidated to actually “pay what you wish,” and who found guards intimidating. This show also proved to be a way for many museum patrons to see the students’ work because, conversely, they were fearful at that time to go to the block party on Erie Street west of Ashland.

...We were in the same stew together. We had questions about public art; we had questions about what art could be; how communities could be involved....

RZ: You were mentioning a concern about how outcomes are talked about now. And I wonder, is it possible to find ways to celebrate outcomes without imposing expectations that there will be a certain outcome?

MJJ: Oh, definitely we can celebrate outcomes after they happen and celebrate the potential for outcomes. Not pre-determining outcomes does not mean there is not a desire to have an outcome. The concern is in determining the outcome before you have done the research, worked with others, and tried some things together. A temporary artwork is not an outcome—it is a product of a process, a gesture, and it can be a meaningful gesture. An outcome can be an organization like Street Level or a new mindset; it can be a change in the art field. In all these ways outcome implies something more. I don’t want to use the word sustainable here, because some things can be wonderful for a short time or for, you know, a longish time, like ten years. Not everything has to be sustainable forever. I speculate on outcomes all the time with artists, but I work with those who do not become fixed on what they want others to do. The outcome has to come from another place, another space.

In “Culture in Action” we were in the same stew together. We had questions about public art; we had questions about what art could be; how communities could be involved and we had a stake in how could artists actually make change. Those things were either in the back of the mind or the front of the mind of everyone, but it was in some part of the mind for everybody. So maybe that had some effect, left some legacy, too.

DT: Were there any other legacies you want to discuss?

Haha's Flood might have inspired green developments in art, which certainly John Ploof and Laurie Palmer, artists in the project, have continued. From Mark's project, MCA curator Naomi Beckwith, then a student, emerged in the field. These may be outcomes. This may indicate validate that in order to actually analyze these projects, you have to analyze them like medical research—over a lifetime—not just in the time of the artwork because the art keeps working.

DT: At the time how did you try to show the project to people in the art world so they could understand its complexity?

MJJ: Well, there was New York Times critic Michael Kimmelman who I meet at the Venice Biennale and who said, "there's nothing interesting here." I said, "Well there's something interesting in Chicago," and he came the next week. Of course, since these projects existed over time as well as in different places in the city, it was challenging to show him what was going on and for him to grasp the whole. Still there were things to see and people to meet in order to get a sense of that moment. So he did a great job keeping pace with the energy up of the day as he different realities were thrown at him.

DT: This was during "Culture in Action"?

MJJ: This was during the summer of 1993. But we also offered something like this to anyone who signed up for a tour; it was a demanding bus tour—five hours—led by Rebecca Keller, who is an artist now doing site and community projects. Every tour was a little different because time wasn't static for these projects; each time we unpacked together what was being experienced. It ended with a box lunch and discussion at the Haha garden project.

But controversy arose in the art community around public art around: who's the author; ethically, how long does an artist need to work with a community; what does the artwork look like?

DT: I am curious if you have anything else to say about the differences between that moment when you were initiating it and now, because I feel like you really defined the moment well in your essay in the "Culture in Action" catalog.

RZ: In some ways this kind of practice has become more institutionalized.

MJJ: Well, that's not necessarily negative. Things that were questions before aren't now. So, I don't think co-authorship is such a problem for the art establishment. Questions around curator as artist have settled down, so that curating is seen as a wider practice that includes not only commissioning but also being part of the creative dialogue. I think that there is greater consciousness of process and what it means to follow a process. Some of the questions around the evaluation have led to an appreciation of qualitative over quantitative means, and the need to invent new ways of carrying out evaluation. Certainly at this point the big

questions, or the big issues, of society that were touched on in programs like “Culture in Action” are accepted as part of the terrain of artists’ work. So while I think questions about what art can and cannot do are always there, we see a continuum of answers and artists’ practices.

I don’t want to make it sound like everything is great, but today there are a lot more artists working outside the museum and undertaking a wide range of practices. So the same artist can do a public artwork and work for a museum. I think having those options or the chance to have a multiplicity of practices is one of the things I try to instill here at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I encourage students to try their hand at public practice or be part of a team, and to know that this doesn’t mean they can’t do their own thing—make work, show it, and sell it. But knowing something about public practice can make students more open to this kind of work by others and not accusatory that it isn’t art, which was what we experienced so often with “Culture in Action”. Even more so, they can be more sensitive to the presence of the audience—and that is important for any artwork. When I began here at the School about ten years ago, talking about community in the classroom was rare; now it is different and it is an expanded and more nuanced, richer conversation. So this institutionalization, if you will, seems to me a good thing.

To see this interview online, visit:

<http://never-the-same.org/interviews/mary-jane-jacob/>



Haha’s *Flood*, at Culture in Action

Interview: Laurie Palmer

A. Laurie Palmer is an artist, writer, and teacher. Her work is “concerned, most immediately, with resistance to privatization, and more generally, with theoretical and material explorations of matter’s active nature as it asserts itself on different scales and in different speeds”. Most recently, she has pursued an extended exploration of mineral extraction sites in the U.S. In this interview she discusses a number of her early solo projects as well as large-scale and long-term collaborations including 3 Acres On The Lake, Chicago Torture justice Memorials and Haha. In 2008, WhiteWalls Press published With Love from Haha documenting twenty years of Haha’s site-based work including Flood (1992-95) which was initiated as part of Sculpture Chicago’s Culture In Action series. Laurie was interviewed in her office in the Sculpture Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she works as a professor on February 1st, 2013.

Daniel Tucker: Something I wanted to dive into is about the open-call form. Something that I’ve been really interested in in being an observer of the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials effort currently underway are some of the similarities to your 3 Acres On The Lake: DuSable Park Proposal Project (2000-2003). I wondered if you could talk a little about any sort of prehistories or influences on that form or way of engaging people? Where does this come from?

Laurie Palmer: I didn’t think about prehistories of that form in particular when I started the 3 Acres project. I was working with the Friends of the Parks around the DuSable project and the Haitian Association of Chicago and the DuSable League to try to revive public interest in the park. For me, it began with a question “what is going on with this park and why is it here” and then I asked, “Why don’t you guys do a call for proposals?” And they said, “We’ve done stuff in the past for other sites and they are all in the closet still and nothing ever went anywhere, it was a waste of energy.”

The form is such a tried and true form for public art and for architecture. But when they were talking about the specific problems that they were having with it that’s when it oc-



3 Acres design charrette

curred to me that it was perfect as an art project because of my interest in participatory publics and in there not being a final outcome... Which is what they were saying, "We could never get the final outcome, it was problematic."

I was so not interested in a final outcome. I was interested in a lot of people potentially getting really inside the questions that the publicness of the park raised and feeling like it was their city and their park and like that. So, it was always, it seemed to have the potential for, distributed structure, distributed form more than to reach a final conclusion...and it developed that way.

And then I did another version for a call of proposals that was less encompassing for the Notions of Expenditure project (2004-2005)...It was more of an art project and a little bit contrived, I guess contrived is the word. I am still really glad that we did it and there were maybe thirty or forty submissions and we ended up reproducing ten in multiples and putting them on the CTA. But that was a kind of... It was more contained as a project and I didn't think I'd be doing that form again. It just seemed like the DuSable project was perfect for it, but maybe that was it. And then Joey Mogul (lawyer with People's Law Office) approached me and said,

I was interested in a lot of people potentially getting really inside the questions that the publicness of the park raised.

"What do you think about trying to use that structure that you used for DuSable Park with the Torture cases." And then she and Amy Partridge and I had a conversation... So, I think that the proposal form is just a form, and it works well or less well for different kinds of things.

DT: Now, is it something that you had ever been on the other side of things with, where you were a submitter to a public art call for proposals?

LP: Yes, in fact I have done a couple of submissions like that. And right before DuSable Park, I finished a large, permanent public art project in Austria and that was so compromised by the end that I remember saying, "I'm really not interested in this version of public art where you only get to have one."

It is the typical public art problem, and by the end it has to satisfy so many constituents and other conditions. In some ways that is the beauty of it if it leads to a lot of conversation. It is the Rosalyn Deutsche argument that the conflictual conversations themselves create a form of participatory democracy in the process of discussing what gets made but the Austrian project wasn't sited that way, it was more of a process that happened between the Austrian officials and the curator and me ... I'm very glad I did it but anyway, it was a different kind of thing.

I did submit to a couple of other [calls].... Because of that project I got my name on the Chicago Public Art list and I would get solicitations for submissions and many of them were to commemorate something I would have no interest in commemorating. And others were going to be so fraught. I respect people who responded to the Haymarket memorial call and at the time that that came through I really tried to figure out how to do that and I just knew I would feel so disappointed with whatever it was that was possible for me to do, if for some reason I was chosen. Which is not to say anything about what did get made, it's great that it got made. I just felt its not a form I want to be putting my energies into.



CTJM exhibition, Sullivan Galleries, Fall 2012

DT: If you could describe a little bit about the story of 3 Acres. And something that I am particularly interested is about the relationship between the Shaping Time project (1992-1996) and the 3 Acres, both deal with ongoing encounters with a site or a vantage point. And you found these forms to deal with the ongoing curiosity and that it really came from a long term engagement with being curious about it, led to a material resolution or a social resolution. I'm curious about that.

LP: That connection makes sense to me. One of the things I notice when I look at some of my earlier writing compared with more current writing, there are certain verbal tropes that reveal a similar relationship to site that you are talking about. And sometimes I think, "Oh god Laurie, you just write the same way over and over again. Like you have a glitch." But I think what you are saying is a more generous approach, which is that there's a habit of engagement...I definitely feel on-goingness and a kind of open relationship to not only

a place but to the making process. I have a real allergy to closure so I think that leads to wanting to do very inclusive projects and also to [the work] not being closed in time either.

It is interesting though to put the Shaping Time piece, which is a really bad title, I have to say, but anyway, that one next to 3 Acres because they come from [important moments]... one before and one after, when I distinctly remember feeling "Oh, I live in Chicago." I moved into an apartment with my lover in 1996 in Uptown, and I think it took us a couple of years to get used to that and get used to Uptown and find out what was happening, but that's when I had that realization. You know? And to think that I had been here all these years before and all the time with Haha and even during the Flood years (1992-1995) and I always thought I was going somewhere else, I just never really seriously felt that I lived here. Even though a lot of Haha's stuff was site-specific, and community-engaged also, I just...I didn't take it in. Well, what happened in Uptown is that it became where we lived and who we spent time with, like a lot of our time, working on activist anti-gentrification projects. It was so fused and I was so happy to feel located.

In Shaping Time I was still looking elsewhere, looking across the ocean of the lake to, for, something. And then the DuSable Park project was right here. It is interesting. It provokes a lot of emotion to be saying that because it was so surprising to feel, that there's so much here. And then this tiny little piece of land, you just scratch the surface and you find out there is so much going on. And instead of it feeling like a lot of closed doors or that all these people have been trying to do stuff with it and never had been able to and its limbo state seeming like an impossible situation, instead it seemed like a really rich and really fertile bunch of questions that were appropriate to, that could be by analogy relevant to, a lot of other sites. But all the same questions were right here too.

So, in terms of you asking about how that started, I noticed this place and just started asking around, so what's the story, why is there this meadow, I wanted to go there to pick Goldenrod to make dye, I wanted to get access to it, and I don't know what I was going to do with a goldenrod dye. I had a very romantic projection onto the land, and then I started to find out the history of Harold Washington having dedicated it to DuSable and then of Martin Puryear having developed a sculpture for it, plans for one. And all these plans that had never been followed through with. And then also all the excuses why, various things like there's some radioactive thorium embedded in the land that was dumped from a former, I think it was a watch factory in Streeterville, and they just scooped up the land there and dumped it on DuSable Park and it had leftover Thorium in it. And also [I was finding out about the] public private nature [of the site]..I had to file FOIA documents which is always such a really interesting thing to do and....

DT: Was that the first time you had done that?

LP: Yes. So that actually came back with a lot more questions. And at that point also, Brett Bloom and others were

doing Temporary Services, Brett and Salem and Marc and I think Lora was in on it then too, and I can't remember, maybe Kevin, and so I had been talking to them about doing something about the park, like presenting the questions in a show in their gallery on State Street, State and Monroe or Madison, it was upstairs in a funny office-like space, and then Brett heard something, there was some decision, nobody had been talking about the park or even thinking about it, it wasn't in the news, and suddenly he got in touch with me and said, "Oh, they are going to make it into a parking lot."

That started the wheels moving really quickly and put me in touch with Friends of the Parks and then it became an issue of finding all the other stakeholders who were interested in not having their planned memorial flattened into asphalt. And so that is when the alliance formed to create this project with the DuSable League women, there were only five or six women, left in the DuSable League that started in the 1920s. Once I learned about them and started meeting them, I found out that my friend Esther Parada had done a piece about and with the DuSable League maybe ten years earlier. I probably even had seen that piece but I hadn't put it together with these women. So, Esther got involved too with the DuSable Park project as well. And then, I'm trying to remember now the names of the women: Virginia Julian, Bessie Neal, Mary Tynes, Dulsie Cargill, Joan Pilot, and Linda Wheeler. They are really fabulous women.

DT: There are many different ways to look at that project and something that I'm interested in about your own position within it is how you feel like your role shifted as various layers were revealed, either that you revealed or they were revealed to you? Because there are aspects of the project that have a "concerned citizen" kind of curiosity, and then there are aspects where you are functioning more of a maker and framer of things, and then there are other parts where you were more of a facilitator between different constituencies, which is more a community organizer role, and then there is another layer where you are in some ways a curator or a commissioning body that is doing a Call For Proposals. I'm curious if you could describe some of that for yourself but also thinking back to what of those experiences might be related to other positions you've occupied.

LP: Yes, one of the roles that you didn't mention was teacher, which I think was there for me too... Because I have been steadily teaching and I think it has in many ways permeated many aspects of my art practice. In fact, someone told me recently, "your works are so pedagogical." And they didn't mean it as didactic, or critically, I don't think, I think they meant it as if there was hope. It was nice... I think they meant it as a desire to engage people in their own processes of learning. And I think that there is a way that the structure of the DuSable Park project was also about that and there is something about that that gives me pleasure because one of the things that happens as a teacher is that you get to see all of these fires light up. And there is just no way that you could ever have imagined all of these fires coming out of initial assignments. So in a way it was kind of an assignment and all the participants make it a world, many worlds. So that was really wonderful and I was not apologetic about its pedagogical

cal nature at all.

I also felt my artist role very strongly. In framing the project I invested that land with so much of my own projected “stuff” and I feel like it was okay to do that because then the invitation gets extended to others to invest it with whatever projected stuff they have. I think that a role that I sometimes find myself taking or wanting to take and then wondering why I want to take it — because it is a way of trying to encompass something wholly—, is a theoretical one. I felt, this is a version of the virtual because all these possible parks get to exist at the same time. And to me that felt like art, basically an imaginary reality that exists simultaneously with the actual, in more or less the same space. You know, in the sense that everybody could have their way, their own public art, and at the same time. That is not literally true, but in some sense...

What happened to the park since is a whole other story, but the fact that it is still in limbo kind of allows those sixty four proposals to still be what the park is, for me anyway... I don't know. So, yes, to the degree that art is often permissive, allowing the eye to fuse with the world, in a way that is not the same as necessarily imposing the world on it, but having a fusion with it. I feel like that's what happened with this little piece of land. And not in an exclusive way, hopefully, I think the fact there was so much work involved to make it happen, and I was psyched for all of that, that also has to mean there was a deep personal investment in it, the kind that artmaking comes from.

I know that activism can do that too, but because I have less of a steady history of activism, I think the fusion with artmaking is what liberated a lot of energy. And even more was liberated because it also felt activist.... In somewhat constrained ways but the activist part that is particularly exciting for me, which is also true with the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials project, is working with people I wouldn't normally be working with otherwise. And that's this potential for finding relationships that cross class and race and neighborhood. That was a huge part of the energy involved with the DuSable Park project.

DT: In a lot of ways these projects are very different, but there are some sort of formal and organizational qualities that make them overlap. How do you think the framework of something like the “open call” style project, how you think this framework functions differently or similarly to other kind of forms of getting together around a question or a challenge? I see the open call in both projects as a sort of a device that enables all sorts of relationships and questions. There are other devices for getting people together, whether they are like policy issues or conflicts or friendship networks, there are various other ways that people intersect with one another, and I guess what I'm curious about is what are the lessons of how this device works uniquely? Knowing it also that both issues, whether urban planning or police torture, have had more conventional forms of activism and organizing oriented towards them or directed at them, why would people be so into using these experimental open calls?

LP: Going back to DuSable Park, Friends of the Parks couldn't make sense of why I would do the call independent from the city at first and then they were happy because they could see that that form [did a lot], without it having to be realistic, that's the key I think in both cases, the proposals didn't have to show a kind of do-ability. The proposals were expressive, for lack of a better word, or they could be expressive. The Friends of the Park people were totally excited about a Lesbian Bathtub Retirement Home as one of the proposals, for example. And so were the DuSable League women. It didn't matter what the proposal was, because the larger project was what mattered. And it was the fact that so many people put time into it, got engaged with that larger project.

And I think there is something about, I guess going back to teaching, how you frame an assignment that draws something out of people that they feel empowered to make confident [proposals]. People like to be challenged with something, whether they are artists or not. And in both cases, we framed it so that you didn't have to be an artist to make a proposal but most of the participants were involved with art in some form, although they weren't by any means of a specific art world. You know, they came from all different art worlds.

Actually the DuSable project—because we held some charrettes that were at the library—there were people that got involved who had never made anything, and we, some of our students, were working with them to realize a proposal. So, that was also going on, “Oh, someone is going to help me make an artwork.”

Part of me, again, on the theoretical realm, which is an abstraction but still meaningful to me, I think about singularity and multiplicity in relation to activist projects where people, feel that they are projecting themselves —“singular” — at the same time as being part of a collective “many” ...I don't even think of art as projecting your self, necessarily, but making a collective successfully means having lots of room for the singular in it... And without interrupting anybody else's singularity... I think that is the structure that really interests me with these open call formats.

And then I think part of what happens is that people, through the open-endedness, start exploring the questions that are questions that they didn't think they'd get into otherwise, like public or private ownership, and who gets to go where...It is sort of a hook. And I'm not saying it was strategic. The thing that I like about the DuSable project and I think it works differently with the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials but with DuSable Park I felt like, and I said this before, it could be art, it could be a playful wild profusion of ideas and all of that could be leveraged towards pushing the City to do something. They could both be effective and neither one compromised. And I think with CTJM it is more strategic in that from the inception of the project, the idea was that the justice system is not working to find justice for the people tortured and so how can we bring cultural work to bear on this issue that will be able to be used strategically to gain justice and recognition. Part of that recognition comes through the

proposals themselves and the exhibition as a whole because so many more people know about it and there's an honoring going on, but now after the initial exhibition and events, the thrust of that project is more political, So the exhibition is a little bit more instrumental, and I'm really excited about that possibility too. And I think that, again, that's been there from the beginning.

DT: Considering the kind of struggle that is associated around police brutality in Chicago and everywhere, and the policy and reparations stuff that you are navigating with CTJM in relationship to idea you brought up about a more instrumentalized/strategic kind of art, is that something that you have engaged before or is this a new type of direct engagement? I'm curious if there has been a shift for you or you are channeling something from another part of your life that has always been separate from art...

LP: Am I understanding your question to be more of the straightforward politics?

DT: Yes. I guess another way of asking is, this project deals with more straightforward politics than most of your other work. Your past work deals with more of a social question, or environmental questions, or even with the DuSable project is like...there are people that care about DuSable Park and there is a political history to it, but it is not like a site of conflict in the same way that something like police brutality is... So I'm curious if this is a new territory to be engaging? Is it something new?

LP: It is exciting to me to be working in collaboration with people who do have long histories with that kind of political work and I feel like it is a true collaboration. No, I don't have other invisible strands that have been going on steadily and now they are becoming manifest, I feel like my interests and concern have been present, but my mode of thinking things through and working, even with the Flood project, has been much more mediated through materiality, and like you said sociality... And so what is happening with Chicago Torture Justice Memorials is a function of the diversity of participants who bring some really long-term, deeply knowledgeable activist experience to this. And so I get the opportunity to work in tandem with that and bring whatever I bring, but I would likely not have been able to feel this sense of connection to Darrell Cannon or Anthony Holmes, for example, without working with people who have been in relationship to Darrell and Anthony for decades. And so, I am excited about this CTJM project in part because of the people it allows me to work with and get to know. This is the thing about working collaboratively, you can't do it all, you get to be a part.

DT: The way that we are framing this comes out of the concern about the rhetoric that is used to understand and talk about socially and politically engaged art. And our interest is that it is not often adequate because it doesn't actually get at all the things that happen. And so part of the experiment with this is by calling the project Never the Same is that we would sort of foreground something about transformative events and experiences. Both ones that sort of catalyzed a community or a group of people to like do something differ-

ently than they had before but also something on the level of an individual or group practice that shifted something. So that is an aside. But something I wanted to ask you is about other projects you feel like have been these kind of transformative or catalytic events for you that changed how you thought about art or Chicago?

Making a collective successfully means having lots of room for the singular in it.

LP: Flood and the DuSable park project and CTJM are all still exciting projects for me and they all keep go-

ing. They stand out that way for me because there are so many pieces to them. The idea of there not being adequate language to talk about work that is socially engaged, is real because how do you corral all the things that it feels like happens in a project for you, for one person, not to mention when there are many other people involved who are all experiencing it differently?

DT: I'm curious about the relationship between your individual practice and group stuff? I want to provide some way to talk about the projects that are somehow much smaller but are still really meaningful and in a way can be overshadowed when you do really complicated organizational stuff.

LP: As I understand your project more I feel more permission to talk about some of the ways in which some projects, that haven't been collaborative necessarily in any explicitly formal way, that they have been about following my curiosity. And I guess there's so much to say about art as research and trying to formalize what that means, but I think so many people that go into it just really want to know about the world they are living in. If they can turn it into some form that twists it into something else, another way of understanding it, there's something exciting to live for.

Projects like City Deposits (2005), which was about wanting to investigate the materiality of land, and specifically wanting to learn about the holes that had been dug inside the grid of Chicago and being amazed that Union Park had been a giant hole and when we go there to do parades or marches we are just marching on garbage.... There's a series of works that came out of anti-gentrification work when I was thinking about space in the city, and linked to the Department of Space and Land Reclamation (2001) discussions that were going on then. But these also came from just being interested in land as matter and my basic inability to understand land as private property. It is a sort of fundamental resistance, or refusal, not necessarily even on a political level, but more like, I don't get why someone should have to, or could, own this. That dumb refusal to understand the abstractions of private property led to City Deposits, which was basically a research project that took form as a little book and a gallery installation—less explicitly political but connected to other interests that had to do with acting politically in other realms.

The Oxygen Bar (2005) project, initially sited in Pittsburgh, was developed in relation to a piece of land there.... It was sort of linked to ideas related to the DuSable Park project,

in terms of public participation in land use. The Oxygen Bars were objects that I pushed around on the street in Pittsburgh. It twisted away from whatever kind of relationship it had initially to trying to save the land and it became an excuse to have public conversations with people about anything they wanted to talk about. It became a way to break the anonymity of street culture. ...I think that for me was the main thing about that project. It was just so much fun. But those oxygen bars came back to Chicago and got reused by Debbie Gould and me to take greens from our backyard garden and distribute them in the neighborhood we lived in and that became also a way to get to know people.

DT: Well, maybe another way to talk about some different projects relates to something that I'm really interested in your work: the interplay between work that has more of a material resolution and work that has more of a social activation or engagement. As far as I can tell, you've done projects that are much more material, projects that are much more socially engaged, and then you've done a number of things that actually bridge the two, that take an object



Anthony Holmes at CTJM exhibit, Sullival Galleries, Fall 2012

that you've made and they sort of become interactive devices. You can talk about anything specifically, but I'm interested in how that interplay works for you over a longer term, like across a bunch of different projects over time?

LP: Well, I do think that object relations matter in the sense that it is good to have something to touch and something to see and something to get you outside of yourself that can triangulate a relationship with somebody else. That is fundamental to art making,

whether it is more or less of an actual object. There is a lot of complexity in having a conversation with someone, and there is more and different complexity that comes in when you are working with materials that don't actually speak. I studied art and I love art. I love when I'm amazed and excited about something that I'm looking at but that I don't understand, and then I try to make my own kind of sense of it. And I love when I'm working on something and it turns that corner and becomes something I don't understand. On some level I live for that. And it could probably be generalized to something that happens that is not only material and not only art. Something that happens with an idea or a conversation.... Sometimes you are talking to someone and together you turn a corner. It is like evolution, a little bit of evolution. That is exciting, and sometimes the way to try to do that for me is making stuff.

Making is hard to do collectively and I am aware of it being sort of lonely but sometimes I love being alone. It is not about solo reflective, it is more that idea of auto-poiesis — when

the thing makes itself — or when you have some kind of dialogue with “stuff” and then the thing starts to talk back to you or it starts to become something on its own and then you have to follow after it. It can happen in lots of different ways.

DT: Something that I've had more of an appreciation for, as I focused time reading a bunch of your stuff and looking back at different projects, is your recurring reference or questioning around social relations, but specifically the “I and the we”, the individual and the collective. I think I was just struck by the actual recurring articulation of it as a question, and so I'm curious about that for you, if you could describe a little bit your trajectory around thinking about the I and the we.

On some level there are certain things that we continue to try to work out all our lives. And I just have to accept that's okay, I'm still doing that.

LP: It is funny because I just put on my website a talk I gave in 1996...that was quoting Ogden Nash, “If I were you I'd call me us.” I gave another talk this fall about a new project that I'm trying to bring into some form about lichen and I found myself talking about the symbiosis of fungi and algae. I had an

exchange with Donna Haraway and some other people at UCSC this fall, in a really generative think tank situation there about all this and I thought, oh, they get it. They are in on these ideas of multiple selves..of course.

And then I went back and I thought, “This sounds really familiar.” I realized that I had written a talk twenty years ago that I could still get behind. And so I would love to say there is a trajectory but then I could also say I haven't moved... I've been feeling this a lot Daniel. This summer I had a little bit of time, and I went through a bunch of old stuff stored in my studio and looking at old projects I was thinking, “Oh my god, I did this back then and I'm doing it again now.” I had to come to terms with that. On some level there are certain things that we continue to try to work out all our lives. And I just have to accept that's okay, I'm still doing that.

One of biggest things that you are picking up on is that relation between self and other or maybe I and we is a better way to phrase it, as you did. I think the long-term collaboration with Haha was all about that. We always made a point of saying that we have this collaboration and it is one entity, and we also all have our own separate artistic entities as well. You know, that was something we always stressed. And it was important for all of us to do both and it was exhausting to do both. I have so much respect for people who never felt, or they decided, that they didn't have to do both but I've always had to do both.

I guess it is just one of those things. At the same time I think of myself as so multiple. I don't feel there is a single Laurie that working solo is all about articulating. I feel like the solo work is as much about working out my sense of multiplicity — only it is not necessarily with other humans. It is about a multiplicity of relations with materiality or over time that is

not fixable. I think the oscillation between the I and the we is one version of the non-fixed identity or non-fixed in time sense of being. And that's an instability and indeterminacy that has defined my experience of being alive for as long as I can remember.

To see this interview online, visit:

<http://never-the-same.org/interviews/laurie-palmer/>