

Q: How do
you fix the
art world?

A:

ARTnews a
rough one

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY ALEXANDER DUMBADZE

Back in August my staff and I embarked on an epic project: we wanted to know what inhabitants of the art world think is wrong with it and how they would fix it. In the ensuing months we spoke with more than 50 individuals—artists and curators, critics and historians, art dealers and an art fair director—to gather a range of perspectives. Some wrote longer essayistic responses; some artists responded with visuals. We finished our research and put the Winter 2017 issue of *ARTnews* to bed on the eve of the U.S. presidential election. Subscribers will receive the print edition later this month. Because some of our respondents wanted to speak about what’s right with the art world, we are posting a portion of the many responses in these days before the Thanksgiving holiday. We hope you will read them with the same great interest, and the same open mind, with which we did when we received them. We hope that you will continue the conversation. —Sarah Douglas, Editor-in-Chief, *ARTnews*

CONTENTS

[Jeffrey Deitch](#)

[Hank Willis Thomas](#)

[Martha Wilson](#)

[Klaus Biesenbach](#)

Naima J. Keith

Christy MacLear
& Rachel Harrison

Luis Camnitzer

Coco Fusco

Carrie Mae Weems

Yvette Mutumba
& Julia Grosse

Robert Storr

Daniel Joseph Martinez

W.A.G.E.

Mitchell Algu



Luis Camnitzer, *Two identical Objects*, 1981.

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Jeffrey Deitch
Art Dealer & Curator

There is always something wrong with the art world. There was something wrong [with it] in 1874, when the Impressionists took on the official Salon with their own exhibition. Artists, writers, gallerists, and collectors who are engaged with the art of the present have a continuous mission to “fix” the art world. The next generation will then have to fix the problems that we are creating.

The most challenging problem in the art world today may be the conflict between the enormous new global audience of visually fluent people versus the traditional art-world elites. Can a small group of influential people leading the major museums, galleries, auction houses, and art publications continue to define which artists will become celebrated?

I remember how some of the establishment art critics resented the way artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and other '80s art stars received acclaim from dealers and collectors before there were significant critical reviews. What will happen when artists emerging far from the critical consensus get thousands of Instagram likes and legions of YouTube followers, leapfrogging the entire gallery/museum/magazine system?

With the increasing professionalization of the art enterprise, there is also an increasing tendency for art to focus on the art world itself, rather than the immense societal and environmental challenges that we face. Ultimately, we depend on the emergence of some remarkable individuals—artists, writers, curators, gallerists, and art patrons—who can inspire us by fusing their insights into the contemporary world with a sophisticated artistic vision. ([Back to top.](#))

Hank Willis Thomas

Artist

Artists are almost forced to live between polarities of super success or “not living up to their potential.” There is not a good working model for the “middle-class” artist with a retirement plan.

I think art schools and institutions should do more to help students, artists, and enthusiasts understand the industry of the fine art world even as it continues to be in flux. It's a vast global industry with a multitude of opportunities. There are several ways to make a decent quality living while maintaining self-respect. The trouble is that you have to luck into it. There is also not much support in small business management and life skills. I think there is something to be said for the MBA/MFA in fine arts. There should be an infrastructure for thousands of artists to make an equivalent of \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year off their art. The problem is, as soon as most of us get any money, we pay some of our bills and live a subsistence lifestyle in hope of striking it big. If we learned how to build our careers and savings over time, investing in the market, trading, along with grants, commissions, fellowships, modest sales, and residencies, there could be a nice rotation of income over 10 years. Many would still choose to roll the dice, but at least it would be a choice. ([Back to top.](#))

Martha Wilson

Artist

The MacDowell Colony is one of the things that is right with the art world. It was founded by Edward and Marian MacDowell, but as I understand it, Marian did most of the heavy lifting—fund-raising during the Depression to buy adjoining property and to erect cabins. Now MacDowell is a well-endowed place—though they still have to ask for money.

What's wrong with the American art world is that the arts are not represented on the cabinet level as they are in, say, France. Plus, national governments think the arts are the first place they should cut support; this is happening now in Canada, the United Kingdom, and France.

How to fix this? Arts support could be reframed as a social-justice issue. Children who have different learning styles (read: not logical) can flourish by inventing dances, making movies, drawing graphic novels, for example. In 2011, Franklin Furnace, the space I run, saw English Language Arts scores improve by 13.58 percent at PS 20, an elementary school in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, after the kids participated in our SEQUENTIAL ART for KIDS workshops. Why not improve learning through the arts? I realize this flies in the face of the belief in art for art's sake, but what's the harm in putting the arts at the center of political and educational policy? ([Back to top.](#))

Klaus Biesenbach

Director, MoMA PS1; Chief Curator at Large, MoMA



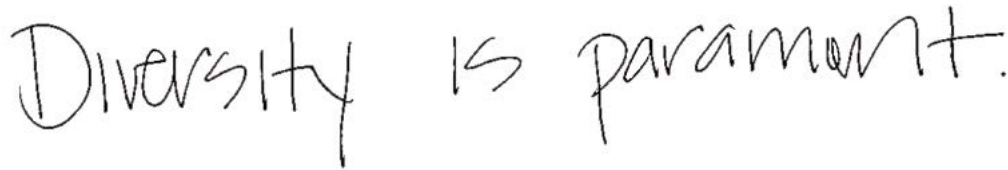
Martha Wilson, *Mona Marcel Marge*, 2015.

In 2016 the biggest dilemma facing the art world is that, seen from the outside, it is often mistaken for the art market, and from within the art world, people conflate the significance of the art and its monetary value. If we weren't so concerned with the art market, but rather with the art, then in a time that is so politically challenging around the globe—with all the conservative and right-wing movements and Brexit—we would react differently and face these challenges more creatively. In the end, the artists anticipate what is to come and offer ways of looking at things differently.

COMPOSITING ARTIST: KATHY GROVE; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND P.P.O.W., NEW YORK

At Documenta in 1972, Joseph Beuys started the Office for Direct Democracy. For three months he was available, and talking to everybody. I was a primary school student at the time, and I remember the discussions, which included the public, not just the art world. There was an awareness that everything one does is political and implies civic responsibility. Things like civil disobedience represented a courageous way of looking at society as a movement and at everything that changes in a society as an opportunity as much as a challenge.

I am looking to the artists I know and the artists I work with to offer different ways of looking at a very challenging national and international political, economic, ecological, and societal situation. ([Back to top.](#))

A photograph of the handwritten text "Diversity is paramount." in black ink on a white background. The handwriting is casual and cursive.

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY NAIMA J. KEITH

Naima J. Keith

Deputy Director, California African American Museum

My first instinct in considering what might be wrong with the art world is to foreground diversity, a pressing issue generally and personally. Recent surveys by the Mellon Foundation reveal that people of color represent only a small fraction of directors, curators, educators, and conservators. I have found that the answer to addressing the imbalance lies not only in diverse hiring practices, but also in purposeful opportunities for mentorship. I've benefited immensely from working with, and under, people who have committed themselves to engaging meaningfully with their employees as mentors, as well as advocating for them in future employment opportunities.

But while diversity is paramount, another subject has more recently presented itself in my work as deputy director at the California African American Museum (CAAM): philanthropy. After almost a year at CAAM, thinking deeply about raising money for this amazing institution's exhibitions and programs, here's what I can tell you: it's complicated. At a moment when one major institution can be flush with record-setting donations while another is forced to undergo unprecedented layoffs, what constitutes a viable middle ground?

For most institutions, there is a shrinking pool of patrons, many of whom look increasingly at how they might benefit from their donation. Many donors prefer a targeted approach, earmarking their money for acquisitions, education, or even endowed positions. Grants and foundations often have these same requirements, and titans such as the Getty and the Met are frequently turning to the same sources as small-to-medium-size institutions to fill budget deficits, so fund-raising for general operational support has become nearly impossible.

CAAM is a state-funded organization, meaning the government provides much of its general support. While this offers a certain degree of stability, the funds—which come with a number of restrictions—are at the discretion of the State of California and thus subject to fluctuation. The museum must therefore look to outside sources to pay for many aspects of its day-to-day operations, including exhibition catalogues.

Yet in the current philanthropic climate, it's nearly impossible for museums like CAAM—places that aren't fund-raising for sexy new buildings or blockbuster exhibitions—to raise enough money. With few alternatives, museums often turn to galleries to support exhibitions, lessening their distinction from the commercial sector. It's my fear that, rather than become inclusive spaces, museums will move away from supporting emerging artists—particularly artists of color, who are woefully underrepresented in the blue-chip galleries that can afford exhibition-related costs.

At this critical time, the new National Museum of African American History and Culture offers a compelling solution. To open its doors, it reached out successfully to remarkably diverse sources, from churches to private donors (Alfred Street Baptist Church offered \$1 million; TV producer Shonda Rhimes pledged \$10 million). African Americans represent 74 percent of the individuals who each gave \$1 million or more, figures almost double the museum's expectations. And African American organizations represent 28 percent of institutional support for the museum, including black sororities, fraternities, and civic groups. So how should an institution go about achieving similar success? I can only assume that the NMAAHC thought outside the box, particularly about how its specific mission could appeal to all communities. Museums need to make their mission not only clear, but also pertinent and accessible to the constituents they are courting. They need to do the hard work of determining how they might expand their mission to truly benefit new segments of society that might, in turn, also become patrons—constituents that institutions may historically have overlooked. Fortunately for institutions like CAAM, this sets a much-needed example not just for the future of museum philanthropy, but for the very future of museums. ([Back to top.](#))

Christy MacLear

CEO, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

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Set them free. Images for scholars, teachers, museums, and stewards. Images to be reused creatively by other artists. Even fair use comes with fear and some still seek a free pass or approval. Stop asking—start using—go forth and flourish. Share smartly and avoid a fear of legal retribution; we all trust you. Use art to teach and share knowledge or inspiration. We love more people loving art.

Deductibility:

Gifts of art to charities propel our culture but inure no direct benefit to the artist. Taxation should be redefined to move from agrarian labor models to addressing contemporary contributed works. An artist's contribution to society must be recognized for more than simply the value of raw materials. Art must be valued as a donation equally for the creator as it is for the collector. Wealth and tax equality for all.

Market:

There is no true art market. A market is a transparent forum of exchange—public and private pricing combined. We must resist the desire to keep this forum sacred—and put the data into the hands of all. Digitize to revolutionize—put your pricing online and level the playing fields—putting more power into the hands of the artists and creating a new currency for them. Create the digital pricing forum to create the true market.

Non-Portable:

Support non-portable art—the non-product. Buy shares in the experience. Be a pilgrim to land art or social practice and leave a check on the table for your transformation. Teach your children that art is not just on the walls but all around them to be experienced. Invest in artists for their risks and grand gestures. Art is life.

Transformation:

In our world an artist needs to be at every table. Creativity is the strongest force in problem-solving. We must join hands with the sciences to solve our world problems. Studio practice now includes social practice and the artist is in the world—a renewed force of nature. Build a bridge between disciplines and watch our world improve in the most unexpected ways. (*Back to top.*)

Luis Camnitzer

Artist

In the late 1960s Uruguayan sculptor Gonzalo Fonseca told me that artists should work under the threat of capital punishment. Having to choose either to stay away from making art or be executed would radically improve quality. This may be true, but I'm against the death penalty (and so was he). His remark reflected his frustration while seeing exhibitions, and didn't address what "quality" might mean. I think the problem is deeper and takes shape in two directions: The art maker (and the market) tends to confuse art with art objects, emphasizing production of things over cultural change. The art activist tends to confuse political action and social service—two duties to be shared by anybody who wants to be a good citizen—with art. Neither considers as its primary mission challenging the limits of our knowledge and helping us enter the territory of the unknown and the unpredictable.

Education presumably trains students to enter the labor market, participate in a meritocracy, and contribute to the good of the country. To achieve these ends, educational institutions have introduced STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), a curriculum that confines creativity within the named disciplines. Creativity is promoted, but only as it pertains to rational and quantitative knowledge (or capital). The other kind of knowledge is disregarded, and art is relegated to the realm of entertainment, market feeder. In this scenario, originality is not a way of contributing to culture but rather a way of creating a



Rachel Harrison, *Heir Fresheners*, digital collage, 2015, from *Rachel Harrison G-L-O-R-I-A*, exhibition catalogue, Cleveland Museum of Art, 2015.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GREENE NAFTALI, NEW YORK

There is no quick fix, but there is an indirect way, which involves radical change in the education system. Art should not be considered a separate discipline designed to identify gallery meat or to manufacture cultural capital. Art should be viewed as a way of knowing that includes both predictability and unpredictability and allows for unbounded imagination, which, after critical evaluation, may yield functional knowledge. To maintain freedom of expression and the possibility of attaining critical distance, art thinking should be integrated into the whole of the educational process. If after an integrated education, outstanding artists emerge as the product of a separate process of rarefied competition, great. These artists may then join the pedagogical enterprise. ([Back to top.](#))

Coco Fusco

Artist

Some artists claim they want to live in an art world without an art market. My response to them is, what planet do you live on? The art world is awash in cash, even when there are down moments, like 2008. I have my criticisms of what I think are the excesses of the art market, but I no longer dream of an art world without a market. I just don't think that's possible. The flow of money may not touch everyone but it undergirds the nonprofit dimension of culture as well as the market.

Sadly, I live in a world in which conservatives love to rail against women and people of color whose art is informed by politics. As a result, it is often expected that I will criticize the art world for being too white. It is undeniable that most of the people in the world who have a lot of money are white. That is the result of a long colonial history. It's also true that since the 1990s, more art works by nonwhite people have been in circulation in the art market. Do those artists represent the majority? No. Do those artists consider it a good thing that their work sells? Yes. Are they less likely to produce work that challenges those in power? Probably.

There are very few political causes that people in the art world invest in in a serious way. The AIDS crisis was one such instance, and I think that this was because the profession was so deeply affected by the epidemic. But the art market is not seriously affected by the fact that there are a few poets in jail, or by the pervasiveness of police brutality against ethnic minorities, or by maximum minimum sentencing.

There are many artists who engage with the political, and I count myself among them. I find ridiculous the attempts to demonize artists who work with the political—many artists deal with relationships of force, and politics is one of those kinds of interactions. Much in the same way that Chris Burden made an installation in which you walk through a turnstile and slowly move the walls of a museum, artists dealing with politics test the limits of established structures and try to foreground those limits. ([Back to top.](#))

Carrie Mae Weems

Artist

The first question is: How is progress to be defined and measured, by what means and against what? It has never been enough for me to measure myself against myself. My sense of achievement is based on the overall forward movement of my people. By progress I mean a decided shift in one's relationship to the means of production, coupled with the way one is perceived and treated by the larger society. Trapped by historical circumstance, our work—like our people—is systematically undervalued. This is made evident in the marketplace, where the work of blacks and women artists sells for substantially less than the work of white men.

Everywhere I look, I see artists of color playing in the field. Their practice is creating new pathways and fields of exploration; we are inventors redefining contemporary art. While listening to Michael Jackson, it occurred to me that a part of our contribution is that we've expanded and extended the field of contemporary art practice. Inventing new ways of making, developing an art practice that would not exist but for us.

Our work is expected to deal with social issues related to the black experience, and when the work ventures into other terrain it is not well received. I'm invited to participate in any number of exhibitions, rarely with white artists. I live in New York City, the most diverse city in America, but often I'm the sole black person in the room. So this is Negro progress now, as I see it. It's difficult for black people to imagine the future, even as we make it. It's hard to create new narratives when you're trapped by what has been. It's a paradox, a conundrum. ([Back to top.](#))



Coco Fusco as Dr. Zira, *Observations of Predation in Humans: A Lecture by Dr. Zira, Animal Psychologist*, 2013.

GENE PITTMAN, WALKER ART CENTER/© 2016 COCO FUSCO/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY/COURTESY ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES, NEW YORK



Carrie Mae Weems, *Lincoln, Lonnie, and Me*, 2012.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

Yvette Mutumba & Julia Grosse

Cofounders, Contemporary And

Inequality in regard to women and the visibility, as well as the featuring, of non-Euro-American artists is still a problem. A challenge that connects all these problems and applies to the in crowd as much as to the out crowd is that it too often feels as if the art world is much more about being connected with the right people and knowing the right names and networks—in a nutshell, about knowing how to play the game—than it is about serious work that has the power to open new perspectives that matter. Networks and exchange are important, but should develop naturally and be based on interest in the same content and in achieving common goals.

The “globality” of an exhibition topic/artist list/collection, for example, often seems to be the sole or critical quality criterion: it seems to be problematic only if it is lacking the “global art” aspect. An understanding of art as global is without a doubt a positive development. But let’s go beyond the tendency of capitalizing on a “global art quota,” which also tends to get fed by the same names.

By doing sustainable work that goes beyond hype, the art world can be fixed. For example, there is clearly a growing hype around contemporary art from African perspectives, which is great; however, we have been working with that topic for many years and will continue to do so even after the hype has moved on to something else. With *Contemporary And* (C&) we want to establish a platform beyond the “game.” This means, among other things, connecting bigger biennial names—seen from the art circus perspective—with “new” names that don’t have any relation with the usual art-world networks but do have a successful standing in their own art scene, from Bahia to Bamako. ([Back to top.](#))

Robert Storr

Artist, Critic, Curator

Yes, it can happen here. And it has, while most of us stood by or—more accurately—sat by our televisions in horrid fascination. This presidential election was indeed a reality show, and much if not most of the electorate treated it as such, giving one candidate high ratings because he understood the genre better than the other or was more entertainingly ruthless in using it. A compulsive liar luxuriating in his attention deficit disorder, he was born for this moment, emerging from a chrysalis of inherited privilege to express sociopathic “empathy” for the common man and deliver motor-mouthed, testosterone-drenched double-talk.

from a chrysalis of inherited privilege to express sociopathic “empathy” for the common man and deliver motor-mouthed, testosterone-drenched double-talk.

Undeniably, Herr Drumpf enthralled a large portion of the disenchanted “masses” as well as many zealous elites, because he personifies a zeitgeist of resentment, envy, and a sense of unlimited entitlement. He is not Hitler; this is not Germany in the 1930s. As dire as much of the writing on the wall about the economy and foreign affairs has been, we have not—yet—had a second worldwide Great Depression. Nor have we suffered any humiliating defeats, though part of the genius of this nemesis is that he was able to convince the aggrieved that they were confronted on all sides by unprecedented existential threats to their way of life. As his opponents have learned, facts don’t matter anymore. Only fantasies and fears count. Big Brother is here at last. Not, however, as the grimly nondescript postwar monster that George Orwell imagined but in the form of an absurdly colorful Grand Guignol grotesque straight out of Stephen King.

So what does all this have to do with contemporary art, other than the devastating effects he is bound to have on the world as a whole, the art world being among the brightest but smallest of its many subcultural moons? The bitter truth is that some of us on that satellite are as complicit as his avid supporters in having prepared the zeitgeist he so effectively exploits, though none are likely to admit as much.

I am speaking of postmodernists who popularized the concepts of critical theory and repackaged them for general consumption, of academics and cultural journalists who disseminated the received ideas and conversation-stopping buzzwords that have become the bane of public discourse. For them, history is a kaleidoscope of abstract teleologies rather than the contested sum of lived experience. For them, the “Enlightenment” is an ever-ready straw man suitable for ritual immolation whenever sustained logical analysis threatens to upend uncritical theoretical speculation.



ILLUSTRATION: ©KATHERINE MCMAHON

In the modern era, most of that speculation has been purely Utopian—we’ll perfect humankind by means of Reason (Classicism/Constructivism/Minimalism) or Unreason (Symbolism/Surrealism/Expressionism). Disillusioned by the dashed hopes of the past, postmodernists tend to be reflex pessimists and dystopians convinced that things have never been worse and will only get more so. Caught in the headlights of total negation while mumbling apocalyptic conceits and deterministic sophistries, they have been blinded by the glare of the catastrophe bearing down on them. Having cried wolf so often, they’ve deafened themselves to the rising din of the mob and have fallen more than half in love with the forces about to overrun them. After having flirted with the rhetoric of anti-parliamentarian tendencies, they are contemptuous of practical politicians and pragmatic organizers trying desperately to shore up, change, and defend flawed democratic institutions against those bent on definitively delegitimizing and dismantling our constitutional government.

Consider this recent ad from one art organization.

“With the election looming, help artist Pedro Reyes & Creative Time hold up a funhouse mirror to democracy with Doomocracy, a political haunted house coming to the Brooklyn Army Terminal. Our Kickstarter was 36% funded in the first week, so it’s looking like the Doomocratic process just might work. To make this madness happen, we’ve launched first Kickstarter campAIN! But we need your help to keep that momentum going and reach our \$80,000 goal in just 20 days.”

We were just weeks away from the polls as I wrote, and with the clock ticking on our society, wouldn’t precious time have been better spent in getting out the vote? What happened to the ad-hoc art world coalitions of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s? Have hipster deconstructivists become too cool for that? Have institutional critiquers become too smart to risk their careers raising a ruckus while making their activism up as they go along?

Well, this was not a fight anyone serious about this country’s future could afford to sit out. Nor was it a struggle where anyone could afford to be too choosy about his or her allies. Moreover, failing to act on this occasion should permanently disqualify those who did so from claiming the moral and intellectual high ground when it comes to intramural art world debates about the politics of culture. This was not a test; it’s the real thing at a moment in history and in a media-saturated context where a great many people have been persuaded or have persuaded themselves that there is no such thing as reality. As phony as the persona of its messenger is, the authoritarianism Herr Drumpf epitomizes is horribly real, and we have only begun to feel its effects. It remains to be seen if he can be stopped. ([Back to top.](#))

PERHAPS WE NEED TO ASK DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY DANIEL JOSEPH MARTINEZ

Daniel Joseph Martinez

Artist

Live from the American Academy in Wannsee, Berlin

October 2, 2016

34 days before the U.S. Presidential Election

WE ARE ALL ZOMBIES

If it is true that art is a mirror of, a reflection of, an echo of, an interpretation of, and a response to human existence, if it is perhaps even the consciousness of the human species, then what is wrong with the world at large is compressed and intensified in the art world. We find ourselves in a state of crisis so extreme that it is beyond our ability to describe or define, much less solve.

Perhaps we need different questions.

What does it mean to be human in the 21st century?

When will we acknowledge that we are all complicit in the behavior and the events of the world?

Is it possible that being an artist doesn't mean anything anymore?

How can other modes of symbolic inscription and other forms of representation be conceived?

Has art lost its value in contemporary society?

How can we represent ourselves in a history that is being written in terms of the global economy, the free market, technologically advanced forms of surveillance, government data collection, the corporate museum, and the absolute commodification of our lives?

Have artists mutated into something new, or nothing at all?

What forms do we use to represent ourselves here and now?

How can we organize an evolving, radical democracy, the equilibrium of which is just and self-sustaining?

Can we embrace the unknown categorically rather than reject it?

Is it possible to conceive of an emergent aesthetic? ([Back to top.](#))

Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)

Activist Organization

What's wrong with the art world is no different from what's wrong with the rest of the world. In fact, it is the art world's perception of itself as having a unique form of wrongness, as being *other than*—as being exceptional—that impedes it from realizing in material terms the political and moral claims it makes for itself

The fact that over many decades little to no progress has been made to correct the systemic racism and institutionalized white supremacy that underpins it, despite ongoing attempts to demonstrate otherwise, makes clear just how unexceptional the art world really is.

Even though it is made up of for-profit and nonprofit sectors, the world of art is an industry just like any other. All of its supporting institutions, including philanthropy, contribute to its perpetuation and growth as such, and all those who contribute to its economy by facilitating the production and distribution of art products, including and especially artists, are wholly unexceptional in their support for and exploitation by it. The role of art and artists within this multibillion-dollar industry is to serve capital—just like everyone else.

But there is an important distinction between the role of artists in the art industry and our status. Unlike our role, our status can be described as exceptional. Even though our participation inevitably serves capital, artists are uniquely enabled to work both for and against it at the same time. Today institutions expect artists to question and attempt to subvert the aesthetic, political, material, social, and economic conditions from which we operate. This makes it sound like we get to have it both ways and it appears to be a privilege. But this privilege comes at a cost: our status is only exceptional as long as we don't get paid.

Here is the problem: we have been led to believe that getting paid to work against the very forces that render our art world an industry just like any other means that our political potential will be rendered meaningless. But think of it this way: *not* getting paid by an industry in which you and your work circulate around a billionaire class is precisely what renders meaningless your political potential as an artist. The demand to be paid is a political one.

Here is what we must do: we must put our exceptionality to work. Putting our exceptionality to work means claiming the privilege of having it both ways. It means dissenting from the industry that we serve by demanding to be paid for the content we provide. And this demand can no longer be made on the basis of being an impoverished, marginalized, and exploited constituency. While there is still steep class stratification between artists, the art field is inarguably an elite one. This means that the demand for compensation must be made on behalf of a broader class struggle that extends well beyond the field's impossibly high barriers to entry.

W.A.G.E. agitates for the wholesale redistribution of resources within this industry and proposes forms of union building based on individual self-organization grounded in collective struggle that must take place laterally across class. Keep your ear to the ground. WAGENCY is coming. ([Back to top.](#))

Mitchell Albus

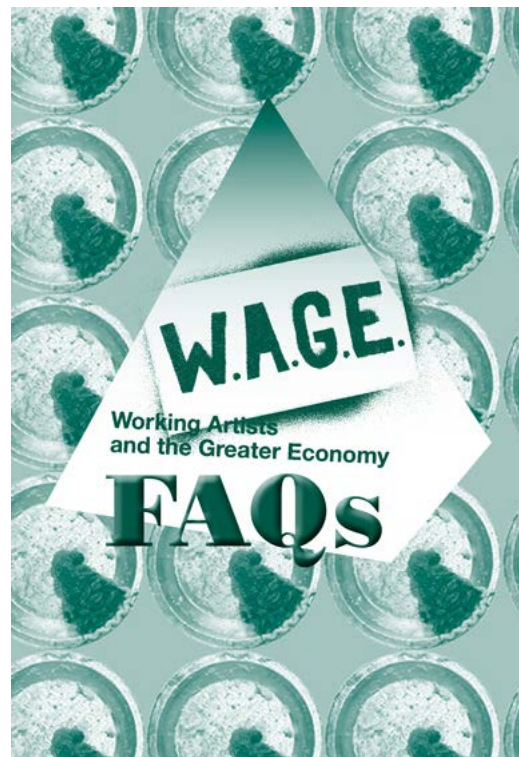
Art Dealer

The art world has been pretty much the same for me since I opened in 1992. But given current trends and problems, some actions might improve how the art world functions and how art as a part of the culture develops.

Go to gallery shows. It's all right to look at shows online, but if you have not visited the gallery you have not seen the show. Gallery shows are art's principal cultural platform. Art fairs are not cultural events; they are commercial forays. Although museums are seeing record attendance figures, the galleries have been sidelined. Without the galleries—and the alternative spaces—the living art culture does not exist.

The art fair model is destructive and unsustainable: Saturn Devouring the Galleries. The fairs co-opt culture at the altar of commerce the same way the auction houses do: conjuring a world detached, serviced by rampant publicity, social inequality, and economic fantasy. Rather, set up viable permanent art fairs in venues similar to the Essex Market or the International Design Center in Long Island City. I love my gallery space: My office is set up for conversation and art, and the exhibition space, for doing the shows that are the gallery's *raison d'être*. But traffic is a big problem and has gotten worse, given the internet, the fairs, and the social rewiring of the art world. Suppose art fairs were perpetual in permanent locations. Some developer could take a large building and, in New York, for example, let Brooklyn and Lower East Side galleries move into it at \$24–35 per square foot. That would do a lot for the community—get more people out to see more shows and promote dialogue among those involved. (Shared experience is the best thing about the art fairs.) Maybe Manhattan Mini Storage could figure out how to make money with this, or the subsidized space that the Warhol Museum was going to occupy at the developing Essex Crossing megaproject could be repurposed for an enterprising art world.

Restore art's now-diminished significance in the culture at large. When standing in front of a Warhol at Castelli, a Judd at the Green Gallery, a Vito Acconci installation at Sonnabend, you were standing at the center of the culture of the day. Same with a Keith Haring at Tony Shafrazi, a Philip Taaffe at Pat Hearn, a Cady Noland at American Fine Arts, even a Julian Schnabel at Mary Boone. But not so much anymore, and not because the art is not there but because the cultural context is gone.



©W.A.G.E.

Money, social geometry, obscurity of content, lack of visual rewards, and an overabundance of artists have all played their part. The culture is somewhere else. The art world was a cultural organism with social structures. It has evolved into a social organism with cultural structures (some vestigial). Even if galleries like Gagosian can provide accessible cultural services for free by doing the shows the museums should be doing—and in a fraction the time—the social context of such venues often overshadows the art. To see “museum-quality” shows at the mega galleries is to marvel at the mind-boggling resources such organizations can bring to bear. Without the imprimatur of money and social capital, museum quality as a concept is meaningless to the wider cultural audience.

REESTABLISH A TRULY CRITICAL CRITICAL APPARATUS

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY MITCHELL ALGUS

Avoid the tyranny of consensus. Art should dismantle consensus, not construct it. Yet value arises from consensus and art is preposterously overvalued (at least monetarily). But in the current market, art needs to be overvalued. Since sales can be few and far between, what sales do occur must be at high enough prices to pay the bills. If art cost less, maybe a larger, smarter, more middle-class market could develop, and cheaper art sold in higher volume could sustain parts of the art world that are now struggling.

Do not buy or sell at auction any art that is less than two decades old. The auction houses will not remove themselves from this game, nor will the art speculators/market manipulators. Collectors need to sit on their paddles and buy from galleries. There is nothing to steal until it has been forgotten by the market, and nothing should be put out to auction until it has been forgotten at least once. Buy from the galleries, steal from the auction houses.

Reestablish a truly critical critical apparatus. With few notable exceptions, criticism is rarely critical and it has been that way for a while. The magazines are generally beside the point (with the exception of *Artforum*, which is, functionally, a glossy social register setting the standard for the display of gallery entitlement against a predictable backdrop of insiderism). The good news here is *ARTnews* and Hyperallergic. They are the best new things going and get lots of information and some criticism out there in real time.

Still, there is lots of room for improvement here, beginning with many more real-time reviews of current exhibitions and a revival of roaming show reviews where momentary context and critical comparison of artworks from multiple galleries are paramount. The *New York Times* has been and remains the print standard; more Jason Farago and less pulp piped in by gallery and auction house public relations firms. (Lifting lines from Wikipedia is less ethically problematic than flipping unedited copy from publicity agents.) Yet even here, as Ian Parker wrote in a recent *New Yorker* article about *Times* restaurant critic, Pete Wells, there are problems: [Wells may have the power to determine the fate of a restaurant, but that power] “has seeped away from reviewers of theatre and painting.”

The internet has not helped. [Certain] sites, . . . with their listicles and paid content, are pernicious. They undermine dialogue and preempt a considered view useful to people new to the art world. Restore the critical weight of the newspapers and magazines. Despite the auction houses’ repeated pronouncements, the market is not the ultimate critic. ([Back to top.](#))

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