



THE PRICE OF EVERYTHING...
PERSPECTIVES ON THE ART MARKET



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May 17 - June 24, 2007

WHITNEY

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The City University of New York

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WHITNEY

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INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic worth and economic value have been intertwined for centuries. But as the international art market witnesses an unprecedented expansion, these different forms of value have become increasingly conflated, to the point that the head of contemporary art at Sotheby's, Tobias Meyer, could recently assert, "The best art is the most expensive because the market is so smart."¹

The Price of Everything... Perspectives on the Art Market attempts to question this glib invocation of economic motive by evaluating the different, overlapping micro-economies that comprise today's expanded art market, structures which are often invisible to the casual observer. Taking its title from Oscar Wilde's definition of the cynic as "a man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing," the exhibition explores how artists have responded to the distinction between price and value, or to the erasure of that distinction.² In particular, it focuses on works that engage the concept of speculative value, investigate the commercial aspects of exhibition and display, explore alternative and non-profit-based economies, and/or shed light on the role of the collector. Whether engaging in critique, intervention, or a degree of knowing complicity with market forces, each work in *The Price of Everything...* deals directly with the economic conditions of art's production, reception, and circulation.

We felt that it was important to feature a range of older works alongside contemporary ones, and have included work made between the late 1960s and the present. We hope that this breadth will engender a set of unexpected dialogues, bringing out a playful side to works that seem grounded in explicit critique as well as locating critical subtexts in recent work that might not appear on first glance to directly address market mechanisms. In many ways, it was the oldest work in the show, Robert Morris's *Money* (1969–73), which provided our starting point. When Morris proposed that the Whitney Museum invest \$50,000 as a work of art—and that he should receive half of any profits—it was appropriately for a show at the Whitney called *Anti-Illusion* (1969). Morris presciently recognized the thin line between being undecieved and disillusioned. Many of the works in the show echo his ambivalence, marking their distance from the centers of economic power at the same time as they acknowledge a certain implication. This ambivalence, however, is often characterized by humor rather than cynical resignation. And we should remember, of course, that being implicated does not necessarily mean profiting: as Morris has pointed out on the few occasions that *Money* has been exhibited since 1969, he has yet to be paid his \$164.38.³

The essays that follow seek to uncover some of the less visible economic processes that frame our experience of contemporary art. In "The Commercial Signification

of the Exhibition Space,” Martin Braathen explores the analogies between displays in the museum, the commercial gallery, and the department store—a history with added resonance here, as the CUNY Graduate Center is a former department store. The essay examines work by Fareed Armaly and Christian Philipp Müller, Conrad Bakker, Fia Backström, Elmgreen & Dragset, Marianne Heier, and Christian Jankowski within the context of these intertwined histories. In John Schott and E. J. Vaughn’s documentary *America’s Pop Collector: Robert C. Scull—Contemporary Art at Auction* (1974), which is being screened as part of the exhibition, collector Robert Scull remarks, “Acquisition is involvement, and in art it’s probably the most exciting kind of involvement.” In “Collecting Ourselves,” Minnie Scott explores this acquisitive urge by addressing artistic responses to the phenomenon of private art ownership and the social aspects of collecting. She traces how the role of the art collector is foregrounded in the work of Danica Phelps and by the Fine Art Adoption Network, and considers how questions of socio-economic context are taken up by Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, and Karl Haendel. Mike Sperlinger interviews art advisor Diego Cortez about his business in “Future Into Futures.” Cortez, a former artist and curator and a pioneer in the field of art advising since the 1980s, offers a unique perspective on both the evolution of the current art market and the business of mediating between collectors and dealers. Finally, in “Reciprocating the Philanthropist’s Gift: The American Art Awards,” Stéphanie Fabre examines the institution of the American Art Awards, works of art that are given to corporate patrons under the auspices of the Whitney Museum. Analyzing the complex transaction that takes place between the artist, the museum, and the corporation, she explores the various forms of taking that are implicit in corporate giving.

Art requires many forms of investment—intellectual and emotional as well as financial. Within the context of the current market fever, *The Price of Everything...* attempts to correlate these different kinds of investment, ultimately posing a series of questions about the kinds of returns that we expect from contemporary art.

Notes

- 1 Quoted by Sarah Thornton in “Love and Money,” *Artforum*, “Scene & Herd,” May 11, 2006, <http://artforum.com/diary/id=10968>.
- 2 Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 134.
- 3 Morris is still owed half of the \$328.77 profit generated by the six-week-long investment.

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Morgan Guaranty Trust Company OF NEW YORK No 0001284 ¹⁻²³/₂₁₀

New York May 20, 1969 \$ 50,000.00

This Certifies that Whitney Museum of American Art
has deposited with the MORGAN GUARANTY TRUST COMPANY OF NEW YORK, the sum of
50,000 AND 00 CTS Dollars in current funds
payable with interest at the rate of 5 1/2 percent per annum, upon the 7th day of July 1969
to the said Whitney Museum of American Art or its assigns
upon surrender of this certificate which is assignable only on the books of the Company.

C. Brown
C. R. BROWN, ASSISTANT TREASURER

⑆0210⑉0023⑆

New York, July 7 1969
Received of Miss Berta Walker
\$ 50,000. C D due 7/7/69 issued to Whitney Museum
of American Art for delivery to Mr. Richard Meyer at
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James M. Raftery
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FORM 48-312

Robert Morris
Money, 1969-73 (detail)



Conrad Bakker
Untitled Project: DONATIONS, 2000

The Commercial Signification of the Exhibition Space

Martin Braathen

The moral question of art and commerce is, as far as the architect is concerned, a dead duck The best thing he can do in this embarrassing situation (to put it mildly) is to say to himself that after all, he is helping out, not only the dealer to sell, and the artist to earn a living, but even the promotion of art.—Frederick Kiesler

In 1930, the Ukrainian-American architect Frederick Kiesler claimed that the connection between art and commerce in the United States began when “modern art reached the American masses through the department store.” In his book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, Kiesler wrote polemically that modern art was introduced to America “first, as a new style in textile design for women’s fashions, second, as a means of shop window decoration, [and third] in store decoration and expositions.”¹ Walter Benjamin also commented on the relationship between art and commercial spaces in his discussion of the arcades in Paris in the 1820s, writing that they were “centers of commerce in luxury items” in which “art enters the service of the merchant.”² For Kiesler and Benjamin alike, art has a shared past with retail, one rooted in mass culture. Or, as Andy Warhol later remarked, “department stores are kind of like museums.”³

Both the museum and the department store display precious objects, and more importantly, both institutions engage two prominent features of bourgeois public culture: the refined leisure of connoisseurship and the entertaining consumption of shopping.⁴ While historically—and in very general terms—museums may cater to connoisseurs and department stores to consumers, one special kind of institution has always blurred these roles. The commercial gallery emerged in the late nineteenth century in the gap between museum and department store: it is at once a store for art and a space of display. In some ways, commercial galleries operate in parallel to museums, sharing artists and artworks, staff and organizational structures (i.e., directors, curators, art handlers, etc.). Both function as sites for connoisseurship and discourse: reviews of gallery shows and museum shows are presented in the same media and are often indistinguishable, and many gallery visitors, like museum visitors, cannot actually purchase the art on view. And like museums, commercial galleries occasionally display works that are not for sale, be they works borrowed from private collections or site-specific commissions. Even in terms of spatial design, the two kinds of institutions have evolved similarly: both matured from the salon model, in which works were hung densely, often in ornamental spaces, and developed toward the “neutral” white cube.⁵

Of course, museums and commercial galleries differ in significant ways, namely in how each is financially structured, and, in turn, in how their economic underpinnings

are manifest spatially. Donations in the form of memberships, gifts, sponsorships, grants, and public support are crucial for not-for-profit art spaces. Signifiers of these modes of support are often discreetly visible in exhibition spaces, in forms as various as plaques with contributors' names and donation boxes. These markers signify the institution's dependence on external support as well as its anti-commercial position. Conrad Bakker's *Untitled Projects: DONATIONS* (2000) is a replica of an institutional donation box, carved in wood and painted. While its presence in the gallery of The Graduate Center may seem to offer a reminder that the space is a not-for-profit one, the work was first displayed in a commercial gallery show. But the box is impossible to open, and the money within—accumulated in several showings of the work since 2000—is thus a pure investment in the work's own value and inaccessible to any other use. Another work by Bakker, the site-specific *Untitled Project: FINAL SALE* (\$59, \$79, \$99) (2007), plays on the absence (or only very subtle presence) of price labels in art institutions. Precisely mimicking price signs in adjacent stores, Bakker's carved and painted signs are placed in the gallery windows that face Fifth Avenue, thus visually connecting the gallery to its commercial environment. Bakker's signs contain only nonspecific text and numbers ("Sale," "\$59," "\$79," "\$99"), and rather than referring to specific objects serve as ambiguous signifiers of the function of the artworks that passersby see in the background. The work also plays on the gallery space's former function as a department store, humorously commenting on the similarities between spaces for sales of luxury goods and spaces for display of art.⁶

The hidden economic infrastructure of the commercial art gallery is often rejected by many artist-run art spaces. While such spaces are similar to museums in that the art on view is not normally for sale, and support comes from private or public donations, they are dramatically different in other ways. The artist-run space is often established in opposition to the bourgeois tradition of museums, on the one hand, and the commercialism of for-profit galleries on the other. These breaks with tradition and the market are frequently signified in explicit spatial terms. By applying an anti-white-cube aesthetic for a rougher, unfinished look, the space of the artist-run gallery lays bare its disconnection to the commercial art market through almost Brechtian means. The *Verfremdungseffekt* advocated by Bertolt Brecht was intended to "prevent the [theater] audience from losing itself passively and completely" and to turn the audience into "a consciously critical observer."⁷ In a similar manner, if the typical white cube gallery attempts to conceal its financial underpinnings behind what often seems to be a platonic idealizing of art in an isolated space, the deliberate trash aesthetics of non-painted walls and badly maintained interiors function in an opposite way. The artist-run space may alert the audience to the seduction of the white cube by appearing so different from it, and, in the best of cases, remove the illusion of the artwork's detachment from the political and economic contexts within which it is produced.



Christian Jankowski
Point of Sale, 2002 (video still)



Marianne Heier
Permanent Installation (5,783 Euros), 2005 (detail)



Fia Backström
A New Order for a New Economy—To Form and Content,
Proposal to Re-Arrange Artforum, 2006–07 (detail)



Fia Backström
A New Order for a New Economy—To Form and Content,
Proposal to Re-Arrange Artforum, 2006–07 (detail)

In several works, Marianne Heier has considered the spatial strategies of nonprofit art institutions. Her *Permanent Installation (5,783 Euros)* was performed in 2005 in one of Berlin's most prominent artist-run spaces, Sparwasser HQ. Known for its strongly anti-commercial stance, Sparwasser HQ was physically decaying when Heier was invited by two guest curators to contribute an artwork to a group show. In the work, which consisted of an inaugural speech and the donation of a check, Heier considers the relationship between art's critical potential and the spatial context in which it is encountered. While the white cube has been blamed for emphasizing an artwork's formal qualities at the expense of its critical ones, Heier remarks in her speech that art with a critical agenda risks marginalization when presented in a dilapidated environment. Instead of primarily emphasizing the art on view, down-at-heel spaces run the risk of conjuring the romantic, and conservative, idea of the studio of the suffering artist genius. The speech ends with the declaration that "good and serious art needs and deserves to be seen in good and serious surroundings," and Heier giving Sparwasser HQ a check for 5,783 Euros (approximately \$7000). Earmarked for architectural improvements to the space, the donation took literal form as a new spatial framework for the display of work in the future. Heier had earned this money selling her art and working as an art critic, museum guide, and gallery warden. *Permanent Installation* thus connects the economies of commercial and noncommercial art institutions. In the process, Heier reveals how the financial independence claimed by noncommercial galleries is relative, and often based on substantial personal investments. *Permanent Installation* was at once a critique and a generous gift, one that Sparwasser HQ hardly could reject—though they accepted it rather reluctantly.

What the commercial gallery shares with the museum in spatial and organizational respects, it shares with the store in its reason for being: museums are almost always nonprofit institutions kept alive by public or private donations, while galleries are profit-making enterprises financed by sales. Most intellectual discourse on art, both in academia and in reviews, omits this crucial distinction; seldom is an artwork evaluated in terms of its status as marketable asset. But the balance between an artwork's cultural credibility and its potential sales value is significant and upheld by both gallerists and art buyers. This connection is explored in Fia Backström's *A New Order for a New Economy* (2006–07). The work considers the economic basis of *Artforum* by drawing attention to its large volume of full-page advertisements for commercial galleries. Interspersed with the magazine's scholarly articles and reviews, these ads function as a second layer of discourse, connecting editorial content directly or indirectly to the art market.

A New Order presents the ads from the April 2007 issue of *Artforum*, prized from their original context and installed as a frieze running around the gallery. From a distance, they are not necessarily recognizable as ads, and sorted formally, they turn into colorful decoration. But a closer look reveals how Backström draws out the visual

similarities between the ads, grouping them by content, color, and/or compositional layout to highlight the branding strategies of different galleries. By making visual puns between the ads (several ads with a vegetation theme are grouped together, fading into a set of green abstractions, which abut ads with human formations, etc.), she reverses the process by which works from the advertised exhibitions are edited and cropped to make them stand out among the hundreds of other advertisements. Furthermore, by turning a two-dimensional form into a striking spatial feature, Backström creates a highly charged framework for the other works on view, reminding viewers of the exchanges that can take place between noncommercial projects (such as the ISP curatorial exhibition) and the commercial art market. The exhibition of art in not-for-profit exhibition spaces, for example, can still heighten its market value as well as enhance the visibility of the artist.

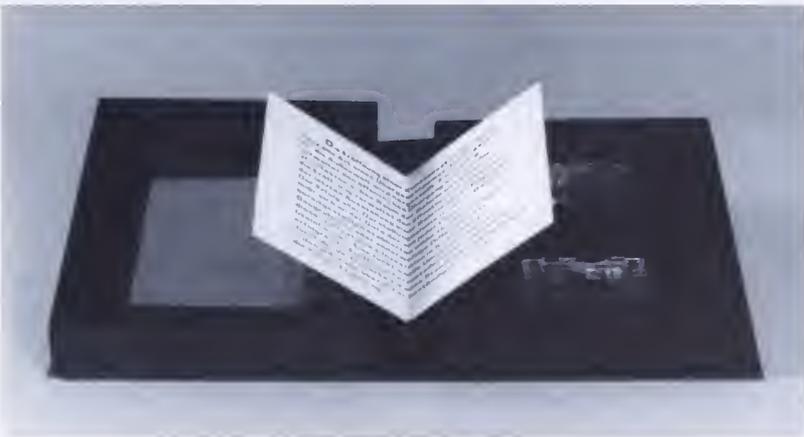
This ambiguous relationship is also considered in Christian Jankowski's *Point of Sale*, 2002, which explores the economic strategies of the art gallery vis-à-vis its cultural credibility and expectations about its appearance. By allowing a business consultant to interview his gallerist, Michelle Maccarone, and her downstairs neighbor, a low-voltage electronics merchant named George Kunstlinger, Jankowski compares the two small-scale, commercial, niche enterprises in terms of location, marketing strategies, relationship to clients, and pricing structures. The video reveals how galleries often rely heavily on private money, networking with other galleries, establishing intimate relationships with collectors, and creating hype about their artists. This differs greatly from the merchant's intent to provide, first and foremost, a large assortment of products to a wide array of customers. At the end of the video, the consultant's advice to the gallery is a reminder of the difficulty of selling art using a conventional business model, without knowledge of the art world's coded means of ensuring cultural credibility. His advice is to secure a steadier income for the gallery by extending its "product catalogue" to include serial editions and prints.

As a three-channel video, *Point of Sale* takes the form of a dialogue between the participants. In a confusing move, Jankowski has Kunstlinger and Maccarone swap lines; Kunstlinger, who is older and wearing a yarmulke, comments on the complexities of selling art from a basement crammed with cardboard boxes and electronics, while Maccarone, a young woman dressed in black, talks about 220-volt equipment in an art gallery with white walls. Hence our expectations about the appearance of both art dealers and art galleries are challenged, and the disjunction of hearing and seeing Kunstlinger awkwardly discuss the business of art is both funny and revelatory.

The establishment of a trustworthy gallery atmosphere is a theme also humorously considered by Fared Armaly and Christian Philipp Müller's *Auftakt* (1990). The work was originally conceived within the context of the *Köln Show*, an extensive event arranged by several of the most prominent galleries in Cologne at a time when the city played an important role in the international art market. All of the galleries were



Elmgreen & Dragset
Prada Marfa, 2005



Fareed Armaly & Christian Philipp Müller
Auftakt, 1990

located in the same building, and the staircase connecting them became a main arena for socializing. To contrast the silence of the white gallery spaces, the artists piped a piece of muzak, or what they called “functional music,” through the stairwell. They had commissioned this music with the brief that it enhance art sales. Armaly and Müller then rerecorded the muzak, this time overlaying the sounds of socializing in the transitional space of the stairwell.

For a subsequent touring exhibition, the artists then brought the ambience of the *Köln Show* to a series of galleries in Stuttgart, Graz, and Zurich, exporting the sound of the region’s commercial art center to its relative periphery. While the recording was played in transitional spaces outside of the galleries (*Auftakt* means “prelude”), the work also consisted of a series of five silk-screened, framed texts exhibited in the gallery spaces. The texts were excerpts from sales brochures for muzak about constructing environments for stimulating human behavior. Armaly and Müller added texts of their own, similar in style and tone, extending their construction of the perfect gallery opening atmosphere: an environment for socializing, networking, spectatorship—and economic transaction.

In Elmgreen & Dragset’s *Prada Marfa* (2005), the artists examine commercial architecture as a frame of consumption. Built as a white, minimalist store featuring a display of the fall 2005 collection of Prada shoes and handbags, the work is located in the desert outside of Marfa, a small Texas town known as a center for land art and Minimalism through the presence of Donald Judd’s Chinati Foundation. But the store is sealed, and the items on view purely for display rather than sale. On one level, the work functions as a comment on those strategies of physical dislocation from the commercial gallery that are often associated with site-specific work. *Prada Marfa* suggests that these dislocated artworks can just as easily become sites of fashionable consumption, namely for the quickly growing field of “art tourism” and its seemingly endless itinerary of art fairs. Echoing a recent claim by the architect Rem Koolhaas that, principally as a result of capitalist development, “shopping is arguably the last remaining form of public activity,” *Prada Marfa* can be pessimistically interpreted as making the point that commercialism has outpaced any activity that does not have a market value.⁸ Former “disinterested” bourgeois public activities, such as art connoisseurship, are gone, leaving only shopping—in its many guises—in their wake. Yet the work also occasions another reading of the situation. As a mock store with a sealed entrance, *Prada Marfa* dislocates not only the artwork but also the actual marketplace, the store, to an abandoned site. Rendering its commercial function totally useless, the only thing left is a desolate ruin of yesterday’s fashion. As the commodities are gradually covered by layers of dust and the minimalist architecture eroded by sandstorms, the work may become a cultural relic, leaving viewers only its criticism of a consumption-oriented art market to ponder. In *The Price of Everything...*, *Prada Marfa* is represented by a road

sign indicating the distance from New York to the nonfunctional store. In this way, The Art Gallery of The Graduate Center, as a repurposed department store, is linked to another space in which the permeable borders between art and commerce are revealed through architecture.

The gallery space is, and has always been, an inevitable site for commercial exchange, where art works are changing hands and displayed as merchandise for potential customers. But it has also always been—simultaneously—a site of critical struggle. As several works in this exhibition demonstrate, commercial circulation does not always negate critical potential. When Frederick Kiesler stated that “the moral question of art and commerce is, as far as the architect is concerned, a dead duck,” he acknowledged that architectural influence on this relationship is limited. But he also believed that spatial design can still prompt the spectator to “recognize his act of seeing, as participation in the creative process,” bring out the critical potential of the work on display, and “convey its message without loss of its specific meaning.”⁹

Notes

Epigraph. Frederick Kiesler, “Art, Money and Architecture,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Siegfried Gohr and Gunda Luyken (Ostfildern: Gerd Hatje Verlag, 1996), 71.

- 1 Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (New York: Brentano's, 1930), 66.
- 2 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (New York: Belknap Press, 1999), 15.
- 3 Andy Warhol quoted in Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 77.
- 4 In Paris this connection between shopping, art enjoyment, and bourgeois life is emblemized by the fact that the Louvre, the first French public museum, opened in 1793, right after the revolution had appropriated all royal treasures as public property.
- 5 This parallel lasted until many museums, beginning in the 1960s, discarded the white cube for more spectacular and sculptural architecture, while it has continued as the dominant architectural mode for commercial gallery spaces. Regarding the white cube's neutrality, see Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 6 The Graduate Center is located in the former B. Altman & Company Department Store Building, on Fifth Avenue, built in 1905–1913 and operated as department store until 1989. See <http://www.gc.cuny.edu> for a thorough account of the building's history.
- 7 Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 99.
- 8 Rem Koolhaas, Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Sze Tsung Leong et al., *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* (Cologne: Taschen, 2001), n.p.
- 9 Kiesler quoted in *Frederick Kiesler*, ed. Lisa Phillips (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 62–63.



Louise Lawler
Foreground, 1994

Collecting Ourselves

Minnie Scott

For a collector—and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be—ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.—Walter Benjamin

I have at times come across my work at parties in the homes of wealthy people; misplaced and mute as a stuffed bird or bear, it seems to function there as a trophy acquired in a foreign land, as if it had been bagged during an art safari.—Fred Wilson

When an artwork leaves the artist's studio, it is immediately subject to cultural assessment and economic evaluation. Perhaps there is never a time in a work's existence when it is totally free from these interconnected modes of appraisal. The artists whose work is exhibited in *The Price of Everything...* traverse such networks reflectively, and often critically. But what happens in the event of the artwork's eventual withdrawal from the visibility of the marketplace through purchase and collection? At this point, whether in an institution or a private home, it becomes prey (to adopt Fred Wilson's analogy) to a potentially violent recontextualization. Especially in the case of the private collector, concepts such as value and investment become equivocally imbued with affective as well as economic significance, and these tensions are explored by several of the works in *The Price of Everything...* Louise Lawler probes the psychological and cultural implications of owning art by examining the place of artwork within the domestic setting. Interrogating the activity of investing in and collecting art, Hans Haacke offers an object transformed and damaged by its collectable status, while Karl Haendel, Danica Phelps, and the Fine Art Adoption Network present three distinct alternatives to conventional means of acquiring and valuing art, thus provoking broader questions about how economic relations impinge on what one contemporary critic has called "the ideal of [art's] unpolluted cultural freedom" (and, conversely, about how this pervasive quantifying impulse can be resisted).¹

Louise Lawler's approach to her subjects has been described in terms of its "neutrality" and "laconic lack of commentary," and indeed the composition of *Foreground* (1994) appears to be exquisitely unpartisan.² In this tiny black-and-white photograph, we see an interior, presumably of the home of a wealthy collector, which is equally divided in Lawler's image between a sleek kitchen and a living space in which art objects are displayed. A wall splits the photograph down the center in a way that is reminiscent of a diagrammatic cross-section, revealing the proximity of quotidian domestic space to the setting of the art collection, which is characterized by an ambivalent mixture of intimacy and display. The objects that represent these

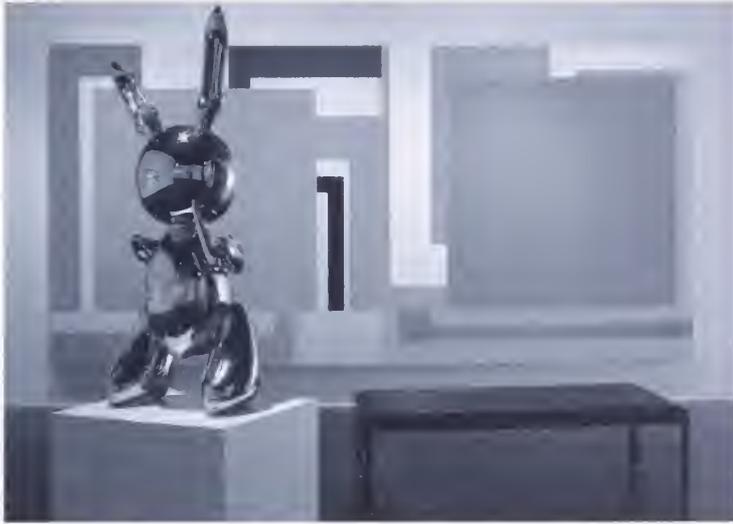
separate spheres of experience are a large, stark refrigerator and a reflective stainless steel sculpture by Jeff Koons of an anthropomorphic bunny (*Rabbit*, 1986).

The presence of these apparently contrasting items conjures post-structuralist philosopher Jean Baudrillard's pseudo-Marxist classification of collectable and non-collectable objects. In his analysis (and indictment) of the psychology of the collector, he distinguishes between those objects that can be possessed and those that can merely be utilized. The latter, a "strictly utilitarian object," lacks some of the pure objecthood of the collectable item because it serves a social use, pointing its owner "back into the world."³ By contrast, the collectable object is severed from any practical function, since "its meaning is entirely up to the subject" who owns it.⁴ *Foreground* appears, at first glance, to manifest an almost uncanny connection to Baudrillard's schema, even down to the examples he invokes. He describes the refrigerator as the archetypal utilitarian item: it can be used, but not truly possessed, because it is "defined in terms of a practical transaction: it is not an object so much as a freezing mechanism."⁵ In absolute contrast to this is the collected object, which Baudrillard, borrowing from Maurice Rheim, compares to "a docile dog, which receives caresses and returns them in its own way; or rather, reflects them like a mirror."⁶ This pet-mirror fusion, which reflects an ideal, un-contradicted and un-contradictory image of the collector, corresponds coincidentally but strikingly to Koons's *Rabbit*.

Yet the mapping of Baudrillard's conception of contrasting object-roles onto Lawler's composition is not completely seamless, and in fact raises additional questions. While Koons's shiny bunny seems to embody the collected object in an ideal state, reflecting the collecting subject on his own terms, its three-dimensionality is problematic. The work faces outward, into the space of display; like a ship's looking glass, it has the potential to reflect a microcosmic view of the collection to which it belongs and to reinforce its own place as an object within that collection. Yet Lawler pictures the sculpture in profile, so that it reflects not only its official context but also the blank wall behind it, which we recognize as a fragile partition between the aesthetic and the functional.

Foreground thus problematizes Baudrillard's distinction between collectable and functional entities. From the vantage point that Lawler establishes, the formal similarities between the refrigerator and the plinth on which the sculpture stands are striking. This visual echo gestures toward an aspect of collecting that Baudrillard's analysis does not consider: while collected objects reflect the collector's subjectivity back on himself, they also extend the notion of subjecthood-through-possession into a wider social context. Along with other commodities, an art object can be instrumentalized as a marker of cultural identity or status, and thus can be *used* culturally—just as the refrigerator is used practically.

The collected object's betrayal of the domestic, unaestheticized space becomes more pointed when *Foreground* is juxtaposed with Lawler's (*Bunny*) *Sculpture and Painting*



Louise Lawler
(Bunny) Sculpture and Painting, 1999



Danica Phelps
Artist, Collector, Curator, Spy, 2002 (installation view)



Karl Haendel
\$56,055, 2005, 2005

(1999). Koons's reflective sculpture reappears in this photograph, within what appears to be a gallery setting, but here no other area impinges on the perfect display conditions. The public setting brings to the surface those questions about the socio-cultural use value of art that are an implicit presence in *Foreground*, and the contrasting size of these photographs underscores the fundamental transformation of the art object as it moves from the context of public display to private ownership. Less than four inches high, *Foreground* evokes associations of physical ownership, of the visceral element of possession that applies to objects one can carry and hold. The work's tiny scale also makes access to it difficult—one must peer closely, and several people cannot view the photograph at once. This personal, precious effect contrasts with the imposing—and thus implicitly public—scale of *(Bunny) Sculpture and Painting*.

The connection between object acquisition and the formation and maintenance of capitalist social relations is a latent presence, not unlike the unseen collector, in much of Lawler's practice. By overtly staging the activity of collecting in *Artist, Collector, Curator, Spy* (2002), Danica Phelps engages the social relations, responsibilities, and forms of agency of various art world roles. Here the distinguishing function of the purchased collection is questioned and inverted through an investigation of the labor expended by the art collector, a role consciously taken on by Phelps for this project.⁷ Her mode of collecting is at once conventional and iconoclastic: over a year-long period she visited approximately eight hundred New York galleries and selected works that she would like to "own." The number and frequency of her gallery visits, and the fact that she selected approximately one hundred works for her "collection" in one year, seems excessive, a hyperbolic manifestation of the acquisitive impulse (although these activities do square with both historical and more recent descriptions of art collectors as "voracious").⁸

The element of collecting that Phelps utterly transforms in her project is the means of acquiring artworks: the desired work is covertly photographed in the gallery, and this photograph becomes the model for an intricate graphite drawing. Phelps posits the products of her draftsmanship as a kind of currency. The hand-written captions beneath her drawings often contain two prices: that of the original work and that of the drawing itself. The medium thus becomes for her a system of collecting, one which comprehends and classifies all of the elements it contains. It is also proposed as an alternative form of investment: by replacing monetary investment with an expenditure of time and artistic labor, the abstraction of economic exchange is dramatized. Phelps not only works (draws) rather than pays for her acquisitions, she makes her artistic labor evident in precise graphite marks that register the time and attention involved in her process.

By curating the works within her "collection" as multiple themed clusters, or "micro-exhibitions," the artist maintains control over conditions of display of works that belong at once to other artists and to her, thus emphasizing the representational

privileges of ownership. When Phelps first exhibited her collection, she invited artists whose work she had collected to exchange work with her. Relations of trading are integral to much of Phelps's practice; in this case they create uncertainty as to whether her drawings function as placeholders—mere representations of the original works—or whether they constitute collected (and collectable) art objects in their own right. Inhabiting the roles of artist, collector, and curator simultaneously, Phelps reflects on the art world's own taxonomies and divisions, as well as on the different forms of agency and control generally allocated to each cultural position (creation, ownership, public presentation, etc.). The “spy” in the project's title can be interpreted as a reference to the artist's covert photographing of desired art objects. In addition, the position of the spy is one from which Phelps, and perhaps her viewers, can reflect on the very network of roles and relationships that are, in a sense, collected and displayed within the project.

Like Phelps, Karl Haendel juxtaposes representations of the labor of drawing with overt references to economic value. *\$56,055, 2005 (2005)* is a photorealistic, almost life-size, graphite drawing of a Cadillac SUV. The terms of the initial transaction between Haendel and the purchaser of the work specified a price that was equal to the current *Kelley Blue Book* value of the subject of the drawing (hence the inclusion of both date and price in the title). The work thus operates by pitting the depreciating value of the car (as commodity) against the speculation associated with art as an appreciating (commodified) asset, with the title commemorating the point at which these systems of value intersect. The question of the artist's control over the circulation of his work is emphatically mooted, as it is unknown whether this pricing policy—the conceptual aspect of the work—will be enforced when it changes hands in the future. While one might doubt whether any collector would welcome or perpetuate such a structure of diminishing returns, the precarious terms of Haendel's conditions of sale certainly add to the complexity of the work. *\$56,055, 2005* makes the explicit point that once an artist is no longer a participant in a transaction involving his work, the conceptual underpinnings—and not merely the physical context—of that work are subject to change. The title of Haendel's project thus functions as a deliberate trace of the artist's direct control over the conditions of exchange.⁹

Hans Haacke's *Broken R.M...* (1988) engages comparable tensions between artistic self-determination and economic exigency. Haacke hangs the handle of a snow shovel which has been snapped into two pieces from the ceiling; the gilded shovel itself lies on the floor below, in front of a wall plaque reading *art et argent à tous les étages* (art and money on every floor). The sculpture invokes and puns on several works by Marcel Duchamp, in particular the snow shovel readymade *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915), his famous urinal sculpture *Fountain* (1917), and his later mass-produced readymade of a Paris apartment plaque that reads *Eau et Gaz à tous les étages* (water and gas on every floor) (1958). Simultaneously aestheticized and impotent, the object



Hans Haacke
Broken R.M., 1988 (installation view)



Fine Art Adoption Network, 2006
FAAN works in collectors homes. Artists' work pictured
(clockwise from upper left): Carol Radsprecher,
Michelle Handelman, Matt Freedman, M. Ringland, Perry Bard

encourages reflection on how the art market has evolved to absorb anti-art gestures. The initials in the work's title imply that some form of violence has been done to both R. Mutt (the name under which Duchamp signed *Fountain*) and the category of the readymade in general. Haacke's work can be seen as a direct response to the inflation of prices for readymades in 1980s New York; *Broken R.M...* implies that the intellectual operations of Duchamp's works risk becoming deformed by their status as economically attractive investments. Artist Andrea Fraser has observed that the acceptance of Duchamp's readymades into the museum institution and the art market "opened the way for the artistic conceptualization—and commodification—of everything."¹⁰

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Haacke's pointed interrogation of the art market, the Fine Art Adoption Network (FAAN), a project initiated by artist Adam Simon in 2006, refuses economic transactions altogether. A web-based forum for artists and potential collectors, the FAAN site displays works that participating artists are prepared to give away. Would-be collectors—or "adopters"—then contact the artist via the website and explain why they would like to own the work. The elimination of monetary exchange thus realigns the subject- and object-roles of the art selection process as it is conventionally undertaken by a collector: here the artist has the opportunity to assess, compare, and choose between potential owners. When a suitable home is found, the work of art is given—not sold or traded—to the adopter. Adoption stories on the site chronicle the various interactions the project has engendered: negotiations as to how to transport a collage from Chicago to Uruguay; discussions about placing a billboard work in front of a rural diner; an ongoing correspondence between an artist and her nine-year-old collector; and the creation of narrative works that take the adopter's request as their source material. This project is thus instantiated in multiple physical sites and diffused among the collectors who are chosen, but as a virtual archive that documents the diffusion of artworks, it functions paradoxically as a collection in itself.

Simon describes the gift-transaction as "empowering" to the artists involved; the reversal of usual structures of dependency and selection obviously plays a part in this sense of empowerment. However, upon reading the documentation of mutually-appreciative relations between artist-givers and collector-receivers, it does not appear that the artists enjoy their agency at the expense of their collectors. While the pervasive privileging of exchange value may be undermined, other forms of transaction—especially in the form of intellectual, and even emotional, reciprocity—are facilitated through the network. FAAN's generosity is a gesture of defiance against the multiple forms of social and economic exclusivity that structure the art market.

The diverse treatment of themes of art collection and ownership in the works of Lawler, Phelps, Haendel, and Haacke, and by the Fine Art Adoption Network, disclose some of the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the activity of investing in art. The emotional investment in works of art that is apparent in many

of FAAN's adoption stories suggests an enraptured identification of the owner with each element in a collection. At the same time, and as Baudrillard postulates, the organization of the collection can reflect the personality of its assembler at the expense of individual objects. Both systems of personal investment can in turn be contrasted with a more public conception of art collecting, in which the potential for economic exchangeability seems to define value. Yet, as the works within *The Price of Everything...* reveal, the personal, social, and economic aspects of collecting are always ambivalently intertwined. Very few of these works lambaste the collector, or present him or her as an unequivocally oppressive figure; the ideal for the majority of artists is, after all, to earn a living through their art. Taken together, the works in this exhibition testify to the acute difficulty of reconciling the pleasures of private art ownership with the more pernicious pressures exerted on works of art by the economic conditions of their circulation.

Notes

Epigraph. Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 67.

Epigraph. Fred Wilson, "Mining the Museum in Me," in *Pictures, Patents, Monkeys and More... On Collecting* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2001), 54.

- 1 Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.
- 2 Johannes Meinhart, "The Sites of Art: Photographing the In-Between," in *Louise Lawler: An Arrangement of Pictures* (New York: Assouline, 2000), n.p.
- 3 Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 7, 8.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 6 The collected object-as-mirror is, according to Rheim, "constructed in such a way as to throw back images, not of the real but of the desirable." Rheim in *ibid.*, 10.
- 7 In an observation cited by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, Karl Marx reflects on the interconnection between the private identity-forming and public/social aspects of ownership: "Man is initially posited as a private property owner, i.e., an exclusive owner whose exclusive ownership permits him both to preserve his personality and to distinguish himself from other men, as well as relate to them ... private property is man's personal, distinguishing and hence essential existence." Karl Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy," in *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1974), 266; quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 280.
- 8 See Leo Castelli's description of Robert Scull in *America's Pop Collector: Robert C. Scull—Contemporary Art at Auction* (1974), dir. John Schott and E. J. Vaughn, 16mm. See also Stuart Jeffries's description of Charles Saatchi as "the most voracious collector of contemporary art," *Guardian*, September 6, 2006, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1865768,00.html>.
- 9 It is also potentially a historical trace of The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement drafted by Seth Siegelaub in 1971. The contract attempted to secure economic and representational rights for artists in the event of their work being resold between collectors or institutions. For a full reproduction of the contract, see *Leonardo* 6, no. 4 (Autumn 1973): 347–350.
- 10 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44, no. 1 (September 2005): 282.

Fine Art Adoption Network beta

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Welcome to the Fine Art Adoption Network (FAAN).

FAAN is an online network, which uses a gift economy to connect artists and potential collectors. All of the artworks on view are available for adoption. This means acquiring an artwork without purchasing it, through an arrangement between the artist and collector. Our goal is to help increase and diversify the population of art owners and to offer artists new means for engaging their audience.



What is an art adoption? An art adoption is to take an artwork into one's space, and to care for it as its collector.

Is the Artwork loaned? No, an artwork which is adopted is the property of the adopter. However, the artist may put conditions on resale of the artwork.

How much does it cost? There are no costs except possible fees associated with transporting the artwork.

Can anyone adopt? Any individual or institution may attempt to adopt an artwork. It is the artist who determines who can adopt the artwork.

How long does an adoption take? This is up to the artist. The artist may wish to wait for several inquiries before taking any action.

How do I care for an artwork? Proper care for an artwork is important. Take in mind that artists may want to give their artwork to someone that is experienced or that is committed to learning about the responsibilities of being a collector or simply caring for art. We have a list of educational links on art [here](#).

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Artists

At this stage, FAAN is open to artists by invitation from participating artists or collaborating organizations only. In the future it may be open to any artist interested in participating.

If you already have an invitation Token, [join now](#).

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Fine Art Adoption Network, 2006
www.fineartadoption.net



Diego Cortez (right) with architect Bernard Tschumi
Venice, 2006

Future into Futures: An Interview with Diego Cortez

Mike Sperlinger

One of the most noticeable effects of the rapid expansion of the art market in recent years is the increased visibility of its various participants. In addition to profiles of artists, press coverage of the art world now regularly includes collectors, gallerists, curators, auctioneers, and other previously overlooked figures in the art world's economic circuits.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these players is the art advisor. These consultants work in various capacities, but generally mediate between dealers and gallerists, on the one hand, and collectors on the other. Art advisors can be tastemakers, guiding collectors in their purchases, and often provide access to the work of oversubscribed artists—a valuable commodity in what is currently a seller's market.

Diego Cortez started his career as an artist, having studied film, video, and photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago before moving to New York in 1973. He continued to make both short and feature-length experimental films, but also moved into curating and other areas of the art world as a kind of cultural entrepreneur; he was particularly active in the city's punk and new wave music scenes, and cofounded the Mudd Club, a music venue and nightclub, in 1978. The curator of numerous shows, including the important New York/New Wave show (1981) at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources in New York (now P.S.1), Cortez has also been a publisher, editor, gallerist, patron, fundraiser, and writer.

In 1981 he founded Diego Cortez Arte Ltd. (DCA), which began by representing Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, both then on the cusp of international recognition. The agency quickly evolved into an innovative art advisory for private collectors, and their first major client was Peter S. Brams, a Manhattan jewelry designer. Cortez is widely recognized as a pioneer in the art advising business and currently works with several preeminent American and European collectors from his base in New York.

Mike Sperlinger: From the outside, art advising seems almost like an occult field. Whereas much of the art world is increasingly professionalized and bureaucratized, art advising seems to be much harder to codify, much more about individual characters and personal connections. What do you think art advising is?

Diego Cortez: In a way it's being a middleman. In a sense—I'm speaking about the way that I see it, not the way that I see everyone else behaving—an art advisor is a neutral agent who can be in the middle of all of these sharks and get things done on behalf of the person who's putting up the money to buy pieces. I include the collector as being one of the sharks, too. You're always in the middle of a pressured situation, because you're dealing with large amounts of money and tenuous questions—how to define “taste,” for example, or what makes an artwork good.

An art advisor is also a kind of connoisseur. Some collectors, of course, are also connoisseurs, but most are not. There are many different types of collections in the world today. Some of them really reflect the idea of connoisseurship, and others are anthological collections, either of our time or from different periods. I see the art advisor as someone who can navigate the art market well, getting good things for people who often don't have the time to do so.

A lot of collectors do have the time, but I happen to think that I can build a better collection than most collectors. There are many collectors in the world who can build a collection as well as I can, but most of them probably have advisors. I'm very hands-on. In the two major collections I've built, I've pitched almost every work to the collector, building the collections from scratch so that each became an artwork in itself.

People ask me why collectors need an art advisor. Why can't they just do it themselves—are they ignorant or something? Well yes, some wealthy people are ignorant about art. They might not be ignorant about real estate or stock trading, in which they made their fortunes, but they probably didn't go to art school, they don't know most artists in the art world of importance and most art dealers around the globe, and they haven't seen thousands of shows. They're paying for my expertise because I've done those things.

MS: How do you go about building a collection?

DC: It's easier to start with somebody who's never collected before. But I've also worked with some people who have already started collecting—it just means you have to fit things into what they already have, or eventually tell them to get rid of certain works.

I didn't have to do that with my first big collectors—we just started from scratch. I did bring them a lot of things to look at, then they made some choices, and I could start to see their taste in art. I accommodated their taste to a certain degree, because there were always enough good things that fit their tastes. For example, if they liked color or figure, I might get them an important Ron Kitai painting. Kitai is not on the tip of most people's tongues, but he's a great artist. Then, gradually, I would try to get them interested in artists who are more to my taste, like Andy Warhol or Yves Klein or Joseph Beuys. I could not get one of my two main collectors interested in Beuys for twenty years. Finally, he bought one of Beuys's blackboards—persistence is very important!

I remember one bad incident, which was kind of funny and kind of tragic. After three years of working with a client, I presented to him a late 1960s Arturo Schwarz re-edition of a 1913–14 Marcel Duchamp work called *Three Standard Stoppages*. It was offered to me for \$35,000, and the collector wouldn't buy it. Even when I got the price down to \$32,000, he still refused, and the deal collapsed. It sold for about \$750,000 a year or two later—so I've had my share of missed opportunities. Later, I sent this collector a letter that said, "We've worked together for three years. Here is a

list of the pieces you have in your collection and another list of the pieces that you've turned down. Unfortunately, the collection you could have had, of pieces that you refused, is a much better collection than the one you have." Luckily, he was familiar with my wit, and we continued working together. He always joked about this later.

MS: How did you move into art advising?

DC: From curating. I was an artist first, having studied art and art history in college and art school. In 1975, when I decided to no longer be an artist, I opted to be more entrepreneurial and remain in a support position to the visual arts. I started curating at the very end of the 1970s and through that met some young collectors who would ask me to help them buy some works, and it developed from there. It has never become a huge business in terms of the number of clients. Most art advisors in New York have many more clients than I do. I enjoy having only a handful of clients at a time, but the ones I do have need to be at a certain level of purchasing.

To have twenty clients, as many advisors do, seems to automatically create conflicts of interest. How can I give the best piece to one person over another person? With two or three clients, and especially if they're friends—my clients have mostly been friends—they're going to see each other's work. I must therefore always have a reason for giving a certain work to one collector and another work to another collector. In twenty-five years, I haven't had many problems with conflicts of interest.

MS: Were there ever any other kinds of conflict for you? In the seventies your own work was quite radical—critic Diedrich Diedrichsen described you as having been a “semiotic terrorist.” Was it easy to move from being a practicing artist and curator to working with collectors?

DC: Yes, because I don't have any prejudices about people with money—only about how they got it and what they do with it. When I look at rich people, I don't simplistically categorize them and say that they're just the bourgeoisie or something. They have a choice to make: What to do with their expendable income? Some spend it on horses and jets and clothes and all kinds of ludicrous stuff, while others use it to support the arts or for other intellectual pursuits. Old-fashioned collectors end up donating their art to museums; they have a guardian role. New-fashioned collectors, unfortunately, speculate in the art market and resell their purchases somewhat instantly. That disgusts me about the state of the art market today: there are fewer and fewer real collectors. The term “collector” has almost become archaic.

MS: Speculation has always been quite taboo, hasn't it? Galleries don't want to sell works to speculators . . .

DC: In the past they didn't really have to worry about it, because the art market wasn't that big. The art market has boomed only in the last twenty or thirty years. In the

1960s and 1970s, Leo Castelli had trouble selling work to major collectors, except to a few such as Burton Tremaine. Castelli was once asked in an interview how he had such a great personal collection, and he replied that these were just the last artworks that his collectors had refused or passed over.

In the 1980s the art market caught fire and more people got involved, and in the 1990s it was stronger still. In this decade, it's out of control.

MS: How have the types of people investing in art changed?

DC: The speculation game has grown enormously. It's fuelled by the auction houses, by galleries, and even by artists—they're all happy to take the money, but many will not admit it. They complain that speculation is suffocating the art world, which is true. But many collectors are obviously speculating—that's the reason prices have risen so enormously. It doesn't mean that everything is for sale, just that certain holdings are more valuable. My collectors have sold almost nothing since they started collecting, but the value of their collections has grown enormously in twenty years.

MS: Can you say more about this out-of-control market, and its effects?

DC: It's out of control for different reasons. One is that there is too much opportunity and too much product, which makes finding something good a harder job. Second, the art world is at a stage, like many commercial markets, where democracy has turned into glut. Third, it's created a whole generation of young artists who cannot make, and do not care about making, good art—they just want to be successful.

I've defended the art market for twenty years now, but have finally started to cave in and agree with its critics. The fatal effect of today's booming art market has been to mute any possibility of new talent. Almost everything I see now by young artists is totally predictable, derivative, and boring.

MS: At the same time, you've also said that in terms of collecting, the future is contemporary art, because historical works have been so comprehensively collected.

DC: Yes, I said that only two years ago. Now, I have to revise that and say that contemporary art is at a kind of orange alert level. It's almost impossible to navigate, to find works that have meaning for the present and also for the future. Once that was the game of collecting: to support something that you believed had a future. But market speculation has turned future into futures. The market has become overly pernicious. Now, I have to agree with its detractors and criticize it for its self-destructive behavior. I've gone through several boom-and-bust cycles in the art market. It's not fun working in a boom environment—everyone is really nasty and greedy, and it's awful. Then, as soon as there's a loss in value and people suffer a little, everyone is suddenly warm and friendly, and it becomes easier to negotiate for good works of art.

One of the recent turning points, I would say, in the current demise of the art scene was Charles Saatchi's practice of buying new art in bulk in the 1980s. He catalogued it, exhibited it, and publicized his own collection—as he really is a publicist, at the end of the day. Then, just before the art market crash of 1989, he unloaded his entire collection. He cashed in just in time, but he triggered a rush to sell and perhaps even a crash in the contemporary art market at that moment. Later, in the 1990s, his second surge, to buy and promote bad English art, brought the integrity, style, and relevance of art collecting even lower.

Today there are collectors who are just buying to sell, which was formerly the practice of dealers. There was a recent article in the *New York Times* about buying works after only having seen digital images—not looking at the real thing! I would never buy a work unless I'd actually seen it. The one time I did this was with a Gerhard Richter color-chart painting from a Cologne art dealer, who had promised me that the work was in “mint” condition. It arrived with a six-inch vertical slash running down its center, badly “restored” with duct tape on the verso of the work.

Now, collectors don't seem to care so much about real art objects, because they're not really buying them to look at, live with, and enjoy. They buy them to hoard in storage, to unload later onto other people who likewise don't seem to care to look at the real works.

MS: So it becomes about inventory. It's no longer something that they want to live with...

DC: It's more like trading stocks. It has nothing to do anymore with quality or the artist's intention, or it has much less to do with that.

MS: What role have art advisors played in this context?

DC: Art advising, per se, is not really the issue in today's crisis. Art advisors actually go back a long way. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's collection in Boston was built by Bernard Berenson, Gardner's advisor. A lot of the Frick Collection was put together by Joseph Duveen, who was an art dealer, a connoisseur, and a crook—he treated his best collectors really well and screwed a lot of other people with fakes.

Now it seems that everyone has become an art advisor. A few years after I began advisory work, I noticed that many collectors' wives were starting to become art advisors. That was the first wave. Later, it was young people who might have otherwise become artists. There was perhaps an attraction to our perceived lifestyle—it seemed like we made a lot of money, traveled a lot to see shows, and were intimate with artists and dealers. The art world is full of advisors now. Some have developed big businesses with large staffs, and work with twenty collectors, or fifty collectors.

MS: Is that sustainable?

DC: It's sustainable as a business, for them. But I've seen some of the collections these types of advisors have put together, and you wouldn't believe how badly some collectors are being screwed. They have many of the right names, but bad examples of those artists' work.

MS: Do you have a sense of where the market is going? Does there have to be a crash, or will the art world diversify as the music industry has, becoming many different art worlds?

DC: There will be some kind of crash; there always is. Capitalism can't work without crashes. They can call it a "correction," or whatever they want. As I said, I've lived through a number of these cycles, so I know what they feel like. I strangely find that I'm happiest in the times when I'm not making as much money. Of course, I don't have to pay as much in taxes, but also it's easier to do business and my relationships with people in the art world feel less stressed.

MS: What about your own collection?

DC: I don't buy things for myself for the same reasons I buy for my collectors. When I buy for my collectors, I have to think of important pieces that will end up in museums. When I buy for myself, I buy based on my own taste, which is often not museum taste or market taste—it's more radical or eccentric. I buy things that I personally need to look at, or works by certain artists whom I want to support, who may not be trendy. The works that really interest me the most are those not yet digested by the public. The thrill to me of contemporary art is appreciating something before it's digested by the mainstream.

Perhaps my goal now is to only buy art that other collectors are not interested in buying. Even with this extreme position, I'm sure I could create a better collection in the long run than those who clamor over the things everyone else wants.

MS: Do you think a show like ours has any bearing on the market?

DC: How could it? Probably not. I'm being cynical. When a market is out of control, it means that well-intentioned criticism, such as that which might be found in your show, will probably not have any effect—which sounds vaguely similar to the political situation in which we find ourselves today.

PERMANENT INSTALLATION



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Sparvasser HQ

Underskrift

Marianne Heier

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10 131426

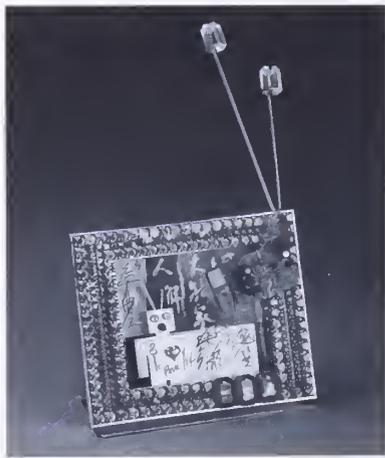
Marianne Heier
Permanent Installation (5,783 Euros), 2005 (detail)



Richard Artschwager, *See by Looking/Hear by Listening*, 1992
Presented to Michael Miles, Philip Morris Companies, 1992



Jenny Holzer, *Truisms*, 1979
Presented to Edgar M. Bronfman,
Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, 1993



Nam June Paik, *Untitled*, 1994
Presented to Michael P. Shulhof,
The Sony Corporation, 1994

Reciprocating the Philanthropist's Gift: The American Art Awards

Stéphanie Fabre

In a 1987 lecture on the origins and values of philanthropy, Robert Payton, then president of the Exxon Education Foundation,¹ declared, “What you find is that (and I think this tends to be true of corporations and of people with substantial amounts of money) people give because they *want* to give.”² In spite of the assumption inherent in Payton’s emphasis on the word “want” that philanthropy is simply a matter of pure altruism, the reasons corporations engage in cultural gift-giving are, of course, far more interested. Corporations that sponsor the arts—and particularly the fine arts—expect that giving will improve their image with their customers and employees. Cultural philanthropy may also be a way to exert some influence on the functioning and programming of the institution that is on the receiving end of a donation, and perhaps even on public policy in general. One work (not included in *The Price of Everything...*) that draws attention to corporate involvement in the arts is Hans Haacke’s *On Social Grease* (1975), for which the artist compiled a series of quotations by several corporate philanthropists. The words of David Rockefeller, then president of Chase Manhattan and founder of the Business Committee for the Arts (BCA),³ offer a relevant, concise summary of corporate expectations:

From an economic standpoint, such involvement in the arts can mean direct and tangible benefits. It can provide a company with extensive publicity and advertising, a brighter public reputation, and an improved corporate image. It can build better customer relations, a readier acceptance of company products, and a superior appraisal of their quality.⁴

In short, the philanthropic gesture is perceived as an investment.

Rockefeller’s understanding of the motivations behind corporate giving recalls the gestures analyzed by Marcel Mauss in his seminal *Essai sur le don (The Gift)*, published in 1924. Mauss compares gift-giving gestures in various societies, mostly in what were then called “primitive” cultures, and argues for what seem to be two essential characteristics of the act of giving a gift: it is not disinterested and not voluntary. It is not disinterested because the offering, predicated on an expected reciprocal gift in the future, makes the recipient of the gift indebted to the donor. And giving is involuntary in the sense that both giver and receiver participate in a social and moral structure that adheres to a rule-based system of material circulation. Donations can be strategic, competitive, and antagonistic, placing the receiver in a subservient position whereby he or she must reciprocate so as not to lose status or honor.

Mauss asks if “the rich man’s expenditure on luxury, art, servants, and extravagances recall[s] the expenditure of the nobleman of former times or the savage chiefs whose

customs we have been describing?"⁵ His inquiry might be directly applied to corporate philanthropic donations, like the ones that museums such as the Whitney both give and receive. Corporations—consider the industries of banking, tobacco, or telecommunications, for instance—operate in a competitive economy. The gifts they give to cultural institutions are often just another strategic move in an endless attempt to get the best return on their investment, in this case in the field of public relations. In other words, philanthropy is a way to gain, in the critical eyes of the public, some moral authority in what is generally viewed as a morally bankrupt playing field. Philanthropy also asserts the status of the donor or the corporate group. As Mauss writes, "The potlatch—the distribution of goods—is the fundamental act of public recognition in all spheres, military, legal, economic, and religious."⁶ The philanthropic gesture signals success in the realm of the donor's activity, and in a contemporary context, it emblemizes capitalist success.

Since 1992, the Whitney Museum of American Art has reciprocated some of the gifts it has received by commissioning an artist whose work is in its collection to create a unique work of art.⁷ The American Art Award honors a "sustained commitment to the artistic and cultural heritage of the arts in America,"⁸ and is given annually to an individual representative of a corporation. The director of the museum, considering the recommendations of a Whitney Museum curator, selects the artist to receive the honor of making the award. According to Lawrence Rinder, a former curator at the



Glenn Ligon, *Community Pages*, 1995
Presented to Frederic V. Salerno, NYMEX, 1995

museum, “the aim was to give the award to a mid-career artist who was on the verge of achieving more significant renown.”⁹ Multiple editions of the work are produced: one is kept by the artist, one goes to the museum, one goes to the corporate philanthropist who is the recipient of the award, and another goes to the underwriter of the work, when there is one.¹⁰ The awards are the centerpiece of a glamorous event—a black-tie reception for which individual tickets are priced at \$2,500 and tables at \$25,000 and \$50,000—which raises over a million dollars for the museum.

In reciprocating gifts from corporate donors, the museum honors their generosity. But the gesture of giving unique art objects as awards is also reminiscent of the gift economy, analyzed by Mauss in his study of the potlatch. The “potlatch” here might be understood as a series of powerful and aggressive acts in which the participants—the museum and the corporate entity—compete to maintain their status through their generosity. The moral and social ramifications of this gift economy, rather than the individual art objects, warrant further attention, in particular because aspects of this system have been considered by many contemporary artists, including some whose work is featured in *The Price of Everything...*

The commissioned artwork is given as a prize, to honor the generosity of a rich individual or company, yet the exchange also highlights the commodity aspect of the work. The work of a mid-career artist has a decided worth, and the transaction between the corporation and the museum acknowledges this. But in the process the



Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*, 1996
Presented to Leonard A. Lauder,
The Estée Lauder Companies, Inc., 1996



Tony Oursler, *Underwater Head*, 1997
Presented to Douglas A. Warner III, J. P.
Morgan & Co., Incorporated, 1997

work also acquires a fetishistic value. Although the monetary value of the artwork given by the museum to its donor may be lower than the value of the gift given by the corporation to the museum, the work possesses a superior symbolic value, in part as a result of its affiliation with the Whitney. In addition—and as corporations know when they invest in art—art is often seen as elevated, noble, and permanent, and these associations add to the museum's clout in the gift exchange.

Many of the commissioned artists seem to have known to which corporation his or her work was going to be offered, especially in the early years of the awards. In fact, some artists related their commissions to the business of the donor or the very idea of an award, creating small, precious, trophy-like objects. These artists reflected the commission in material and theme, foregrounding the economic nature of the exchange. Richard Artschwager (1992) and Jenny Holzer (1993) created delicate wooden boxes reminiscent of a wrapped present, which open to reveal shiny contents. Holzer's box contains battery-operated L.E.D signs that display a selection of her *Truisms*. Artschwager's contains chrome-plated, brass ear bones and a magnifying glass. As an explanation for the work, David Ross, then director of the museum, stated in an interview that "to be a significant supporter of the arts, you must not only have money, but you must listen carefully and look hard."¹¹ Ross's interpretation of Artschwager's work points to the fact that philanthropy is a form of investment and, like investment, requires a discerning perspective.



Tom Otterness, *Moneybag Man with Cellphone*, 1998
Presented to Charles R. Lee, GTE Corporation, 1998



Kiki Smith, *Squirreling*, 2000
Presented to Walter V. Shipley, The Chase Manhattan Corporation, 2000

For telecommunications giant GTE, Tom Otterness (1998) created a variation of a precious Fabergé egg. While Artschwager's work responds to the nature of the commission, Otterness's commentary is on the economic stature of the recipient of the award: contained in the transparent glass egg is a figurine the artist calls "Moneybag Man with cellphone"—an anthropomorphic sack of the sort used to transport cash, with a phone to its ear—which points to the lucrative nature of the business of the award's recipient.

Some artists also seem to have entered into a playful relationship with the motive behind the awards through the means and materials of their work. Jim Hodges (2004) used gold leaf for his award to the Altria Group (of which Phillip Morris is a branch), which seems to point to the force of the tobacco industry in American economic history. Kiki Smith's 2000 award for The Chase Manhattan Corporation consisted of a hand-knit wool stocking. Perhaps she is alluding to how human presence—signified here by manual labor—is becoming increasingly invisible as a result of the machinations of global capital. (Her title, *Squirreling*, evokes the stockpiling of capital.)

The Whitney's gesture of giving a work of art to honor a significant monetary philanthropic contribution may be read in light of one of Mauss's questions: "What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?"¹² For Mauss, the recipient of a gift is compelled to offer a reciprocal gift because the first object given is not an "inert thing." The philanthropist's money is not



Jim Hodges, *Untitled II*, 2004
Presented to Louis C. Camilleri,
Altria Group, Inc., 2004



Bryan Hunt, *Islet #1*, 1999
Presented to Gilbert C. Maurer,
The Hearst Corporation, 1999

inert because it supports the museum. Similarly, the gift offered by the Whitney Museum has its own connotations (related to art's symbolic values), and thus, with its awards, the Whitney enters into a relationship of exchange with the philanthropist that does not follow a rational economic system. Instead, it is a moral transaction that establishes an interpersonal relationship, encouraging, or practically obliging, further donations.

The philanthropist, in giving, elevates his or her image, and, we may suppose, acquires a form of power over the recipient of the gift, who remains subservient until the gift is returned. In other words, inequality in this relationship is not permanent. As Mauss wrote, "To give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is *magister*. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient, to become *minister*."¹³ But the Whitney does not accept without "repaying more." In giving a work that is unique, and that gains value from its singularity, the museum asserts its perceived equality, independence, and autonomy in its relationship to the donor, refusing to be *minister*.

That the award is a work of art augments its significance, evoking Mauss's idea that "to give something is to give a part of oneself."¹⁴ In giving an artwork, the museum's very *raison d'être*, the museum creates a sort of alliance with the philanthropist. This alliance, for Mauss, is also a kind of division of labor, an exchange of what each side has to offer as its product and from which both may benefit, "as for instance partnership between fishing tribes and tribes of hunters and potters."¹⁵ In this division of labor, the philanthropist exchanges some surplus funds with the museum for public validation—awareness of its altruism, prestige,



Louise Bourgeois, *Untitled*, 2006
Presented to Terry J. Lundgren,
Federated Department Stores, Inc., 2006

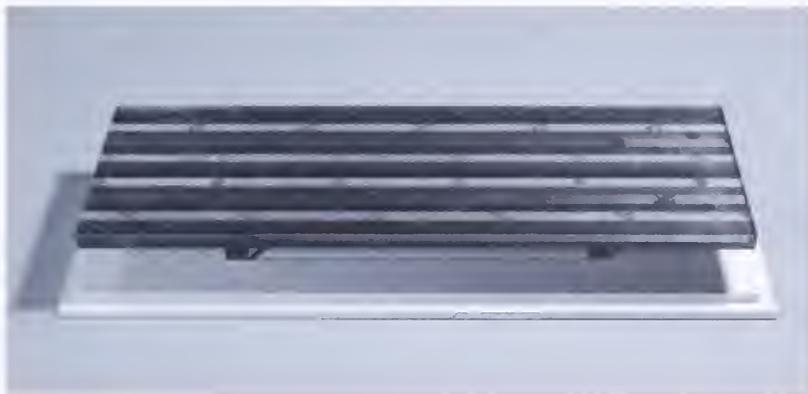


Jeremy Blake, *1906, 2003* (detail)
Presented to Stanislas de Quercize,
Cartier, Inc., 2003

and power—with a certain socio-economic audience. Although a corporate philanthropist's interest in certain cultural institutions is often tied to the specific image of that institution—in this case modern and contemporary American art—the Whitney, in reciprocating the gift, establishes a relationship of exchange with the donor in which the donor's alliance is with the entity of the museum, rather than only with its image or reputation.

In other words, the transaction of giving a work of art in exchange for a philanthropic donation is a way to legitimize the idea that these philanthropic contributions are motivated only by love and “commitment to artistic and cultural heritage.”¹⁶ While using art as the symbol of gratitude for sustained donations may convey the impression that art is the sole reason for the ritual meal and award ceremony, it is important to recognize that this gift of art masks the interested relationships that are always present in philanthropy.

Placing art at the center of this gift exchange is beneficial to all three participants in the transaction. Artists selected to create the awards, although already mid-career and likely on the verge of more substantial recognition, may see the value of their work increased by the recognition the museum offers them; this increase is also beneficial to the museum, which owns their works. At the same time, the museum bolsters its own reputation by demonstrating that it supports its artists. It also profits from the American Art Award gala, and its public honoring of philanthropic “generosity” may encourage new alliances with other philanthropists. For corporate philanthropists the award is an opportunity for publicity, as well as an announcement of appreciation for their furtherance of the public good—with many returns on their investment.



Sooja Kim, *Deductive Object 2002*, 2002
Presented to Dr. Henry A. McKinnell, Pfizer, Inc., 2002

Notes

- 1 Created in the 1950s, the Exxon Education Foundation is a significant donor to institutions of higher education, particularly colleges and universities.
- 2 Robert Payton, "American Values and Private Philanthropy," in *Philanthropy: Private Means, Public Ends*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson, vol. 4, Exxon Education Foundation Series on Rhetoric and Political Discourse (New York: University Press of America, 1987), 18.
- 3 As stated on its website, the Business Committee for the Arts "provides businesses of all sizes with the services and resources necessary to develop and advance partnerships with the arts that benefit business, the arts, and the community." Its mission "is to ensure that the arts flourish in America by encouraging, inspiring and stimulating businesses to support the arts in the workplace, in education and in the community," <http://www.bcainc.org>. According to Chin-Tao Wu, it was founded as a response to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1967. See "Embracing the Enterprise Culture: Art Institutions Since the 1980s," *New Left Review* 230 (1998): 30.
- 4 Hans Haacke, "On Social Grease," *Art Journal* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 141.
- 5 Marcel Mauss, trans. Ian Cunnison, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 74.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 7 With the exception of the 2003 American Art Award, Jeremy Blake's *1906*, which was bought by the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee of the Whitney. It was then awarded to Cartier, Inc.
- 8 Press release of the Whitney Museum of American Art, "2006 American Art Award to be presented to Terry J. Lundgren at Whitney Museum, Tuesday, May 16, 2006."
- 9 Larry Rinder, e-mail communication with the author, March 2, 2007.
- 10 Until 2001, Cartier, Inc. underwrote all the awards. From 2002 to 2005, the Whitney Museum alone commissioned the works, and the recent 2006 award created by Louise Bourgeois was underwritten by Coach.
- 11 Nadine Brozan, "Chronicle," *New York Times*, May 14, 1992, B10.
- 12 Mauss, 1.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 16 Press release, "2006 American Art Award to be presented to Terry J. Lundgren at Whitney Museum, Tuesday, May 16, 2006."



Lorna Simpson, *Easy to Remember*, 2001
Presented to Philip H. Geier, Jr.,
The Interpublic Group of
Companies, Inc., 2001



Julie Mehretu, *Untitled*, 2005
Presented to Martin J. G. Glynn,
HSBC Bank USA, N.A., 2005

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Fareed Armaly &
Christian Philipp Müller
Auftakt, 1990
Sound installation and framed prints
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artists

Fia Backström
*A New Order for a New Economy—
To Form and Content, Proposal to
Re-Arrange* Artforum, 2006–07
Magazine pages, glass, and
wooden shelf
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

Conrad Bakker
Untitled Project: DONATIONS, 2000
Oil on carved wood
11 x 13 x 7 in.
Collection of the artist

Conrad Bakker
Untitled Project: FINAL SALE
[\$59, \$79, \$99], 2007
Oil on carved wood
11 x 14 in. each
(48 x 14 in. overall)
Collection of the artist

Conrad Bakker
Untitled Project: CLEARANCE
[\$49.99], 2007
Oil on carved wood
11½ x 35 in.
Collection of the artist

Elmgreen & Dragset
Prada Marfa Sign Sculpture Edition, 2005
Steel and aluminum sign, sculpture
edition, and photograph
10 x 6 feet
Collection of Art Production Fund

Fine Art Adoption Network
2006–ongoing, web-based project
Initiated by artist Adam Simon
Dimensions variable
Commissioned by Art in General,
New York

Hans Haacke
Broken R.M..., 1988
Gilded snow shovel and enamel
wall panel
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

Karl Haendel
\$56,055, 2005, 2005
Graphite on paper
93 x 130 in.
Collection of Alberto Mugarib

Marianne Heier
Permanent Installation
(5,783 Euros), 2005
Two inkjet prints
41 x 81 in. each
Collection of the artist

Christian Jankowski
Point of Sale, 2002
3-channel video
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist, Maccarone, Inc.,
New York, and Klosterfelde, Berlin

Works in the Exhibition

Louise Lawler

Foreground, 1994

Black-and-white photograph
with mat

3 x 2¼ in. (image)

21 x 18½ in. (overall)

Collection of Donald Hanson

Louise Lawler

(Bunny) Sculpture and Painting, 1999

Cibachrome (museum mounted)

47½ x 66 in.

Collection of Diane L. Ackerman
and Kelly L. Ackerman

Robert Morris

Money, 1969–73

Ink on paper mounted on board

23¾ x 68 x 1½ in.

Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York; purchase with funds from
the Postwar Committee 2003.198

Danica Phelps

Artist, Collector, Curator, Spy, 2002

Graphite on paper, digital prints
mounted on wood, and selected works
from the collection of the artist

Dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

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