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ARTIST-RUN SPACES:

A Brief History Since 1984

by: DAN GUNN

"I have come home and I'm looking through the window. Outside it's snowing, no waves at all. The beach is white, the fence posts are gray. I'm looking back at a world now gone forever. Thinking of a time that will never return. A book of photographs is looking at me. Twenty-five years of looking for the right road. Postcards from everywhere. If there are any answers I have lost them."

--Robert Frank, FROM "LINES ON MY HAND"

Twenty-five years ago, in 1984, Lynne Warren and Mary Jane Jacobs chronicled the previous decade's monumental alternative spaces in *Alternative Spaces in Chicago*, an exhibition and catalog for the Museum of Contemporary Art. Many spaces have come and gone since then and, with a few exceptions, the names of those places live on only in the CVs of artists who exhibited in them. Like ghosts they travel through the subconscious professionalism of so many prospective careers. There is a touch of sadness in people's voices when they talk about the end of these spaces because the artist-gallery relationship is never completely devoid of feeling. But the lack of an adequate record of these temporary exhibition

spaces obscures the dynamic and forceful activities performed in them and in the future by artists because of them. They were and are the result of a specific cultural, political, and economic climate that informs the present condition of artist-run spaces and determines their lifespan and collective reception.

Generally, artists would rather make art than assume the administrative duties of operating a gallery. When compelled by external factors, like a perceived lack of exhibition opportunities or the immediate needs of a community, artists fill in the gaps between social groups, commercial galleries, and cultural institutions. Therefore the work of an artist-run

space is related to the possibility inherent in those artists' communities. As diverse in motive as in form, each artist-run space addresses a particular set of concerns. Some spaces link up with larger artistic communities and/or the international art market; some celebrate particular genres, mediums or generations of art and artists; some challenge the accepted frame of exhibition practice; some create new forms of artistic/ curatorial hybrids; and some form the physical site of community activism and cultural change.

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ARTIST-RUN SPACES: *A Brief History Since 1984*

Continued from cover

1984

Alternative Spaces in Chicago detailed the rise in the 1970s of large alternative spaces and collectives that grew out of a desire to show anti-commercial, ephemeral, or Feminist work. Pioneered by groups of ten to fifteen people they were organized as not-for-profit art centers and worked tirelessly to procure large amounts of federal, state, and private aid. This emphasis on grant monies originally allowed them to function as an alternative to the commercial gallery and as a home for the multitudinous art practices that emerged post-Minimalism, namely performance, video, and installation.

Randolph Street Gallery was the most influential of the large alternatives. It offered exhibition opportunities to local emerging and established artists, as well as important national and international artwork. Randolph Street took special pleasure in facilitating difficult or politically sensitive works of art, like Antonio Muntada's "File Room" project, a real time online library documenting cases of censorship around the world. Randolph Street held a vibrant performance series in its designated black box theatre and printed the performance art journal *P-Form*, which was, in many cases, the only document of time-based works and performance criticism of the period. Randolph Street supported ephemeral and site specific works like seasonal outdoor projects and installations located throughout the city. By the mid 1980s, both Randolph Street and another influential not-for-profit, N.A.M.E. Gallery, were moving in the direction of becoming indistinguishable from museums in terms of their programming. N.A.M.E., for instance, supported local, national, and international visual artists and, in partnership with Randolph Street, helped export many local artists to commercial galleries and museum shows. N.A.M.E. also had a vigorous performance series, classes, lectures, and a screening program called *Filmgroup*, which split off to become Chicago Filmmakers, a separate entity still in operation today.

Side by side in stature with Randolph Street and N.A.M.E. were two large feminist collectives, ARC and Artemesia. These two spaces adopted a collective structure that functioned to give women within the membership the valuable exhibition opportunities that they were frequently denied. The membership also created a strong institutional identity and provided the galleries with another source of revenue. Through the years, ARC and Artemesia also invited noted female artists and theorists like Judy Chicago, Lucy Lippard, Alice Ayccock, Alice Neel, and Ann Truitt to exhibit and lecture, mixing them with local artists like Mary Min, Hollis Sigler, and Vera Clement. The collective was an invaluable place for discourse and exhibition for women who where (and still are) underrepresented in the arts. Unfortunately, over time the galleries' influence diminished in scope because of the acceptance of feminism in the art sphere and an unfortunate association with "vanity" galleries, due to their practice of showing members.

Another long-lived artist-run space was Lynn and John Kearney's Contemporary Art Workshop (CAW). Founded in 1950, the CAW gave young artists solo shows and rented studios. The studio fees helped keep this center afloat during some tough economic periods. Though at times marginalized, the Workshop found renewed relevance in recent years and will be missed after its closing this year. Other alternative spaces like the Beacon Street Gallery and Performance Company; an outgrowth of the Uptown Hull House, Moming Dance and Arts Center, Links Hall and the Lill Street Art Center serve more specialized communities. With the exception of Moming, which closed in 1989, these spaces continue to support their communities and act as an inspiration to younger artists around the city through their educational activities. Other regional art centers like the Beverly Art Center, South Side Community Art Center, Hyde Park Art Center, and Evanston Art Center, also support greater Chicago through integrated arts exhibition and education.

In the late 1980s, the Chicago International Art Exhibition (CIAE) anchored Chicago's place in the international art market. As the premier US art fair of the time, CIAE gave the international art world a reason to descend upon Navy Pier each spring, and the surging art market afforded Chicago a prominent gallery district in the River North. Galleries like Feigen, Feature, and Robin Lockett were dominated by a generation of young Chicago neo-conceptualists like Tony Tasset, Jeanne Dunning, Mitchell Kane and Hirsch Perlman and received a great deal of national press, likely the most bestowed on a group of Chicago artists since the Imagists. The galleries of the time mined younger artists in response to the increased sales on the buoyant market. The permissive commercial atmosphere eliminated some of the necessity for alternative spaces to show "excluded" art. Consequently N.A.M.E. and Randolph Street frequently ended up showing work similar to the predominant commercial style of the time period. "Thus they functioned in part as an extension of the commercial gallery system rather than as an alternative to it."ⁱⁱ

1989-1996

The Chicago conceptualist's homogeneity inside the commercial galleries coupled with the perceived "establishment" status of the remaining alternative spaces, led a younger generation to create a new model for alternative exhibitions, called the Uncomfortable Spaces. Beginning around 1990, the Uncomfortable Spaces were an affiliation of four artist-initiated galleries, Chris Murray's MWMWM Gallery, Ned Schwartz's Beret International, Joel Lieb's Ten in One and Richard Kelley's Tough Gallery. Artist Michelle Grabner, who runs the Oak Park exhibition space *The Suburban*, remembers the Uncomfortable Spaces as symbolizing a generational change:

The spaces that represented the previous generation of artists were slicker, clean conceptual venues flush with Chicago's version of Neo Geo and critique-based practices. The Uncomfortable Spaces were sloppy by comparison, much more scrappy, even though they were also commercial. But back then, the aesthetic landscape had shifted, and 80s neo-conceptual practices gave way to the muddled diversity of the 90s and the spaces [like the Uncomfortables] reflected that.ⁱⁱⁱ

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Three Walls - 119 N Peoria St.

Sensing the strain upon the grant-funded model and not wanting to report to a board, the Uncomfortable Spaces operated as commercial galleries. The four of them eventually settled in the still cheap and unseemly neighborhood of Wicker Park, where they occupied spaces far smaller than the massive lofts of Randolph Street and N.A.M.E.^{iv} Chris Murray of MWMWM recounts the events surrounding their creation:

MWMWM ran on a shoestring. ... We agreed to work together to promote ourselves. I came up with the name "Uncomfortable Spaces" only to stop Ned [of Beret] from trying to name the collective "Bad Hygiene." ... The Uncomfortable Spaces hosted events together - we had the same [open] times - we did art fairs together - we were a support network, our artists and us were all one large extended family.

The effort to diminish the cost of a gallery by sharing expenditures would prove to be a judicious choice. The first few years of the 1990s were turbulent for the art world. In response to a sharp downturn in the global art market, the Chicago International Art Exposition faltered and failed around 1993. The poor financial climate caused many of Chicago's best galleries to close or move, resulting in a significantly diminished scene in River North.

Flying under the reach of much of this financial adversity each Uncomfortable Space had its own style. Beret International loved to poke fun at the art market with shows like "The Free Show," "... where all the pieces were given away;" and the "I paid \$25 to exhibit my art in this show" show, where visitors were also charged an entrance fee from \$3-10, "depending on how they were dressed." Beret also exhibited a more serious cultural fare like "The Queer Art Show," curated by Nathan Mason (who later opens his own space, Margin), and supported

artists like Jno Cook, Dzine, Mike Lash, Karen Reimer, Alison Ruttan, and Michael Piazza. Ten in One, which began as an artist cooperative, ultimately turned into an elegantly commercial white cube under Joel Lieb's leadership. Ten in One, located for years in a storefront adjacent to the Damen Blue Line stop, represented younger artists like Michelle Grabner, Rebecca Morris, Stephanie Brooks, and Tom Denlinger. Tough, whose director Richard Kelly owned the building where the gallery was located, occupied an inadequately heated basement with an undulating concrete floor. Despite the difficult conditions Kelly managed to show a wide range of art though most of it was sculpture or installation. Tough received a lot of press for their shows with artists like Jo Hormuth, Frances Whitehead, and Adelleid Mers. MWMWM was informed by Chris Murray's experience with another space in the South Loop, the Edge of the Lookingglass, which had theater, performance art, spoken word events, and live music, in addition to visual art.

NEA Crisis

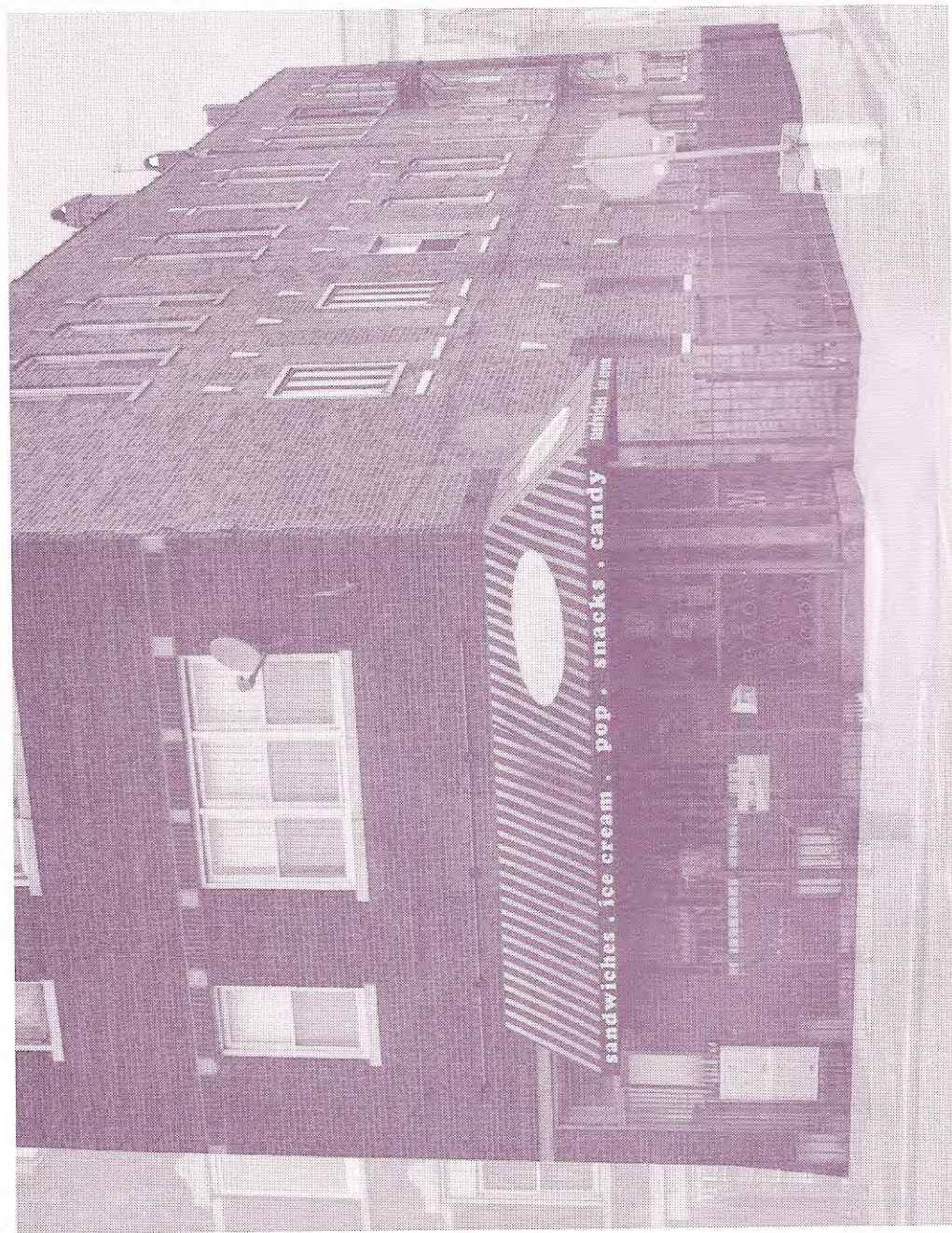
Unfortunately the distrust of public funding by the artists who ran the Uncomfortable Spaces was born out by the Culture War's assault on federal money for the arts. While the National Endowment for the Arts' total funding was largely consistent until 1996, the bureaucracy surrounding grant applications grew into a difficult obstacle. Furthermore, in lieu of public funding, private funding favors demonstrably "profitable" forms of culture. But the worst blow came during the budget battles between the incumbent Clinton administration and the newly elected Republican majority in Congress. In 1996, the NEA and NEH had their budgets cut by 40%, a move that was championed by some Republicans as the "the death knell" for the two agencies.^v This budget cut struck directly at the larger alternative

galleries that depended upon it to cover operating costs as well as to encourage donations from private foundations. N.A.M.E. failed that same year and Randolph Street failed two years later in 1998^{iv}. ARC and Artemesia last considerably longer, due in part to the revenue from membership dues.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the 70s alternative spaces to the Chicago arts community. They provided ample exhibition opportunities for challenging artwork at the same time as they taught artists not-for-profit gallery operations and exhibition practice. Artists were involved at all levels of these institutions, including planning, fundraising, and installation. The absence of that training ground has never truly been filled. Nor will the era of the large alternative space return with current funding levels. The NEA funding cuts permanently changed the perceived possibilities available in Chicago and cemented the Uncomfortable Spaces model precisely because it still appeared to be feasible. The Uncomfortables were largely successful in presenting a generation of artists in a way that was visible to critics and curators but with minimized costs and some bravado.

Other organizations like the non-profit Gallery 312 attempted to weather the new funding climate. Begun in 1994, Gallery 312 was the vision of real-estate developers Anne Neri and Lewis Kostner. The gallery held regular exhibitions of local, national, and international artists of varying reputation housed in a large industrial building along with the PEACH Club, a high school arts education program. 312 attempted to recapture the feeling of those old spaces, and for a while it was able to do just that. In the long run, even with rent graciously covered by the Kostners, Gallery 312 was unable to pay for its operating costs in the long term and closed in 2005.

>> CONTINUED INSIDE



No Coast - 1500 West 17th St.

1996-2000

Eventually each Uncomfortable Space either closes due to the financial burden or moves elsewhere. Ten in One exists for several years in Chelsea, and MWMM re-opens briefly in Brooklyn. But the art schools of Chicago have always been a wealth of new blood for Chicago's arts. One particular change within the art schools has had some surprisingly direct results. Around 1992, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) began the Student Union Galleries (SUGS), student run exhibition spaces facilitated in part by artist and educator Michael Ryan. In addition to this, SAIC created classes in exhibition practice and began a curatorial studies program. The students who participated in programs like SUGS gained the technical knowledge and wherewithal to start spaces. In 1996, the first generation of these BFA students graduated and kickstarted the next

efforts as dealers. In 2002 when one of their artists, Conor McGrady, was selected to the Whitney Biennial, Muirhead and Panya faced a difficult choice: go to the Whitney Biennial as dealers and be identified as such, or wait for the day that they could go as artists. Forcefully choosing the latter, NFA closed its doors following Conor McGrady's show. The example of NFA illustrates one unforeseen peril of the quasi-commercial artist-run space i.e. the Uncomfortable Space model; that success might come at the price of an artistic identity.

The example of NFA illustrates one unforeseen peril of the

activism and the collective re-imagining of everyday life. Some historical examples of this tendency are Logan Square's Axe Street Arena, run in part by Jim Duignan (future founder of the Stockyard Institute) and the late influential artist Michael Piazza, as well as projects from artist's like Inigo Mangano-Ovalle and the HaHa Collective⁸. Two such contemporary ventures are the Stockyard Institute and Experimental Station. The Stockyard Institute is a continuation of Jim Duignan's work with high-school students in the Back of the Yards and Austin, begun in 1995. An ongoing collaboration in self-determined pedagogy between Duignan and his students, the Stockyard Institute is an effort to cooperatively realign the curriculum to allow students agency in their own education.

Similarly, artist Dan Peterman's interest is in preserving the ongoing social ecology of his communal studio building at 6100 Blackstone, which housed the offices of *The Baffler* journal, Blackstone Bicycle Works, and more recently, urban farming projects. By using his art world contacts, Peterman's exhibition space, Monk Parakeet (1995-2000), drew in like-minded international artists like (SAIC alum) Rirkrit Tiravanija, Paint the Town Red, Superflex, N55, and Christophe Bitchel into dialogue with Chicago artists, critics, and theorists. Peterman created a site pregnant with conversation and possibilities. A fire in 2001 reduced the building to a skeleton, and after various battles with the city over zoning issues, 6100 Blackstone reopened as the Experimental Station.

2000-2005

Peterman's influence especially encouraged another generation of "multi-use centers" like Mess Hall begun in 2003.⁹ Occupying a storefront in Rogers Park, Mess Hall is organized by a network of "keyholders," allowing it to function as an umbrella institution facilitating other people's projects instead of being the product of any one particular vision. Mess Hall attempts to be a free space to host projects from exercises in urban mapping and activism to performance and social art practices.

While spaces like the Stockyard Institute, Experimental Station, and Mess Hall are working to integrate the surrounding communities and ecology into their activities, others are working to create a separate community. Similarly galvanized by anarchist theories of autonomous zones, temporary spaces where the prevailing political and economic power relationships can be suspended, another generation of spaces like Camp Gay and Buddy mixed music, art, performance, activism, and dance parties together in what was described as a scene of "sweat, noise and danger"¹⁰. Innumerable events were spawned during this time, including Version Festival, an annual festival of site-specific, participatory new media and social art projects coordinated in temporary sites around the city. Ed Marszewski, one of the original Buddy founders, explains the collective's state of mind:

So [alongside visual art] there'd be theater or fashion shows; we just allowed it to be open to whatever people really wanted to do.

Like Buddy, Camp Gay was another highly volatile venue where people like Paul B. Davis, Cory Arcangel, and Todd Bailey lived, threw art and music

generation of spaces, including the Chicago Project Room, Dogmatic, The Butcher Shop, NEA Space, and Bodybuilder and Sportsman. Michael Hall (formerly of R&S Gallery) and Daniel Hagg, creators of the Chicago Project Room, cite the Uncomfortables as an influence in a 1999 interview with the *New Art Examiner*:

One of the positive things the Uncomfortable Spaces did was make it acceptable to operate outside of the traditional art districts and therefore, worry less about the bottom line...⁴¹ I think galleries today have to function on that level; blurring the line between commercial and institutional practices is something I am very interested in. Our programming does sometimes look more like a *kunsthalle*.⁴²

The inspiration for many spaces at this time, the *kunsthalle* is a German term for a museum holds temporary exhibitions without a permanent collection. The Chicago Project Room located in Wicker Park held highly polished exhibitions during its five year stint by artists like Helen Mirra and Candice Breitz.

In Pilsen, Michael Thomas, Paul Chan, Aviv Kruglanski and Andrew Natale created Dogmatic Gallery. Dogmatic held shows in their house and its dirt-floored basement, "the earth room." Eventually solely run by Michael Thomas, Dogmatic in its nearly ten years of operation was extremely influential and collaborated with many other artist-run spaces. In 2003, Dogmatic moved into another space that began at this time, The Butcher Shop. The Butcher Shop, which existed concurrently in the West Loop, was run by a large group of people who lived in a self-rehabbed warehouse space. The building had the Crosshair screen-printing studio upstairs and an exhibition space downstairs. Through its years, the Butcher Shop was known for great Christmas parties, concerts, hosting groups like the Emily, Forman, Josh MacPhee, and Naito Thompson's Department of Space and Land Reclamation⁴³ and large exhibitions with artists like Siehren Versteeg, Amanda Ross-Ho, Christian Holstad and Cat Chow.

Artist-run spaces often have to redefine themselves during their lives as they change and grow. In some cases, the changes can be surprising. In 1996, Iain Muirhead and Amarong Panja (both SUGS alumni) opened NEA Space in Uptown. In Uptown, NEA operated two side-by-side storefronts showing contemporary painting, sculpture, and installation. The exhibitions were successful, but the owners felt that it was difficult drawing people to Uptown. In 2001 NEA emigrated to the West Loop building at 119 N. Peoria St. looking to expand its foot traffic and at the encouragement of Kavi Gupta, who was championing the area at the time. NEA functioned in the model of the Uncomfortable Spaces, as a quasi-alternative program with a commercial structure and supported in part by their art handling business. Now in the West Loop they stepped up their

quasi-commercial artist-run space i.e. the Uncomfortable Space model; that success might come at the price of an artistic identity.

Beginning in the same way but taking a different path was Tim Brower and Tony Wright's Bodybuilder and Sportsman. A live/work storefront on Division St. that also opened in 1996, B&S had a proper gallery and great parties. At a certain point after several years working, Wright "started to think about it as more of a potential career."⁴⁴ Then in 2001, Wright moved Bodybuilder into the 119 N. Peoria building, about 6 months after NEA. Whereas NEA's proprietors had shied away from morphing into galleries, Wright embraced that transition. "It was a long organic process, really, it just grew into what it was... I spent more and more time [in the gallery] getting things to happen."⁴⁵ Several other Chicago galleries like Western Exhibitions and Bucket Rider have begun in similar fashion as this generation's apartment spaces became commercial galleries.

The commercial art market aside, another strain of art practice winds its way through Chicago's history where art is mobilized for community-based

parties, and temporarily housed other nomadic youngsters of similar ilk. Chicago housed and houses a number of other experimental spaces in this general vein, like High School, Open End, the Texas Ballroom, Diamonds, Mr. City, and Hey Cadets! Another hybrid art and music space was Rob Ray's Deadtech. Until 2007, Deadtech consistently showed experimental, noise, and electronic music in-between exhibitions of "electromechanical" and sound art. Deadtech was one of the only venues where kinetic and new media artworks could regularly be viewed.

Back on Milwaukee Avenue at that time were the artist/instigators of LAW OFFICE. The collective machination of four friends, Robert Davis (a SUGS Alum), Michael Langlois (a SUGS Alum), Rebekah Levine, and Vince Demody, LAW OFFICE created art events throughout the city. The group organized some of the decade's more memorable spectacles, including the "the Sex Show," an exhibition/party of porn sets; "Beer Tastings," a conceptual beer tasting and sociological investigation of alcohol advertising; the fake retrospective of recent graduate Joe Baldwin's paintings; and a paid streaker for Art Chicago. LAW OFFICE designed events around social conventions to elicit certain behaviors from the audience. Essentially an experiment in social spaces and the limits of decorum, LAW OFFICE paralleled the development of many relational aesthetic practices but with a sharpened wit.



Roots & Culture - 1034 N Milwaukee

One event in particular gave further attention to these spaces and proved to be very influential to the artists involved. After the art fair's collapse in the early 90s, Thomas Blackman Associates reinvigorated Art Chicago through the second half of the decade. Looking to extend the fair's influence in the Chicago community and to keep up with other competing fairs, T.B.A., Heather Hubbs and Melissa Schubeck of Joymore organized an impromptu art fair called the Stray Show. The first Stray Show in 2001 featured mainly Chicago artist run spaces like Joymore, Dogmatic, LAW OFFICE, Bodybuilder & Sportsman, Monique Meloche, Seven Three Split, NEA Space, deluxe projects, Suitable, STANDARD, mn gallery, FGA and Deadtech. The excitement surrounding the first show is palpable in accounts of the time. The energy generated by the convergence of so many similar people engaged in similar activities led to a cathartic release of enthusiasm. Michael Thomas of Dogmatic set the scene:

The Post-Stray show generation is marked by a number of newer phenomena, including the return of the not-for-profit model and the increased proximity of the galleries to living space.

It was two unadulterated days of young motivated artist/curator types talking about work and spaces and shows, with Tom Blackman rolling a red wagon around the space and delivering beers to us. It was one of occasions when you felt like everything was worth it. All the money spent buying toilet paper and paint. ... Suddenly it all worked. It seemed like what these spaces were doing was unique and the work they showed was about to get its due.

Visitors wandered through the sparkling white fair booths, and a new if small audience was exposed to these spaces. The most enduring feature of the Stray Show was the spontaneous community that those spaces formed and the encouragement that it provided.⁵⁶

scope of a gallery from overpowering their art practices, as well as prepared the gallery's public for its closure. Alogon Gallery (started in 2007) "curates curators," thus allowing the space to be re-imagined by a rotating cast of people. By separating the gallery's mission from the direct vision of the founders, Alogon maintains an "institutional" identity and has been able to transition between sets of live-in organizers.

The Post-Stray show generation is marked by a number of newer phenomena, including the return of the not-for-profit model and the increased proximity of the galleries to living space. One of the newer developments of these last few years is the reemergence of the Not for Profit gallery, albeit at a much smaller scale than those of the 1970s. Threewalls, begun in part by Shannon Stratton in 2003, is a non-profit residency program, exhibition space and independent publisher, based loosely on the "Canadian model of the Artist Center." This renewed interest in non-commercial funding is a probable result of fatigue with the continuing non-commercial and monetary cost of operating a space pro-bono, as well as disinterest in the rigors of the commercial art market and has been adopted by newer galleries like Green Lantern, and Roots & Culture.

Two recent examples of the "multi-use" center are the Co-Prosperity Sphere which grew out of Buddy in 2006 and the Institute for Community Understanding Between Art and The Everyday (inCUBATE). Founded by Roman Petruniak, Abby Sainsky, and the late Ben Schaafsma, as well as Bryce Dwyer, inCUBATE pursues a model of integrated economic, political, social, and aesthetic projects and has developed a reputation for its innovative funding efforts, such as its Sunday Soup grants. One Sunday a month, a guest donates time to prepare a meal for the public and attendees donate an optional amount of money along with their email address. Guests subsequently vote to fund an artist's proposal with the donated money. In this way, places like inCUBATE are re-envisioning the model of an arts institution from the ground up.

The economic push of gentrification pushes artist run spaces out of storefronts and lofts on the main boulevards and into smaller residential spaces placing artwork in direct confrontation with the "everyday." Several "apartment galleries" like OLD GOLD and He Said She Said deal directly with the domestic context. OLD GOLD, organized by Caleb Lyons and

One solution is to designate a space separate from the living space for exhibitions. In 1999, Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam, veterans of the Uncomfortable Spaces generation, began the Suburban. Grabner and Killam invite other artists to work in maintenance shed adjacent to their Oak Park home. In its ten years, the Suburban has morphed into a type of small-scale residency program for national and international artists. Grabner's art world influence, combined with Oak Park's virtual invisibility, allows these high profile artists the opportunity to experiment without commercial pressures. Coincidentally, the Suburban also links these artists to artists, students, and patrons who might otherwise not have access to and at the same time, creates a larger network for Killam, Grabner, and their visitors. The Suburban is an example of a limited space that, when used adeptly, reaches out internationally.

The generational change of artist-run spaces is extremely difficult to track, due to the brief lifespan of the spaces. The recent flurry includes names of current spaces like Alogon Gallery, Livebox, Lloyd Dobler, antenna, He Said She Said, Second Bedroom, the Plaines Project, Hungryman, The Family Room, Normal Projects, minidutch, Scott Projects, Knock Knock Gallery, Julius Caesar, Swimming Pool Project Space, No Coast, and Vega Estates. These spaces are as varied and as rich as at any time in the past 25 years. Some are following the example of spaces like NEA or Tony Wight by making a professional atmosphere and patiently advocating particular artist's careers, as with 65GRAND and Dan Devening Projects + Editions.

As a descriptive term, the artist-run space has lost many of the connotations that it had in the 1970s. No longer purely the symbol of anti-establishment virtue, it has instead grown to encompass a multiplicity of intentions and formats. By constantly meddling with their own exhibition opportunities, artists in Chicago have knowledge of every facet of art production, display, marketing, funding, and event planning. These skills make them uniquely capable to re-imagine the terms of art's creation, display, reception, and historicism in a holistic manner. In the current deleterious economic climate, the model of the artists-run space having, sharpened its teeth on a lack of funding, could prove more resilient than some more prestigious spaces. It could even serve as a model for other communities dealing with a similar lack of financial opportunity. But if Chicago's artists wish to do that, they need to reconsider what a truly sustainable gallery might look like and might mean culturally. While similar motivations bind together artists in each generation, the artist-run space is no single one thing. Artists still search for the perfect extension of the studio, whether that's the financially sustainable, accessible, ethical, discursive, and respected exhibition venue, or the type of art practice that blends seamlessly into all areas of life and surrounding communities of people. Artists are still searching for that answer. ♦

Special thanks to Jason Gillette and Fang-Tze Hsu for research support.





Swimming Pool Project Space - 2858 W. Montrose

2005-2009

A generation of people in the crowds at these events responded with DIY projects of their own.

This second generation after the Uncomfortable Spaces had programming that was as individual as the small groups of people who ran them, usually from two to five in number. Largely the duration of these spaces is exceedingly brief: The first part of these last four years were populated by former spaces like VONZWECK, *ard edge*, Polvo, Fraction Workspace, duchess, COMA and Teri. Located in live/work storefronts, basements, lofts, and garages, these artist-run projects showed their peers alongside other local, national, and international artists. In order for these projects to be financially sustainable, they were often located in marginal or extraneous spaces like roofs (The Roof), guest rooms (Guestroom Project Space), strange architectural nooks (*ard edge*) or cheap shelving (Modest Contemporary Art Projects).

However, the strength of the artist-run space was also its chief weakness. By having a small group in charge, the programming of the artist-run space or apartment gallery is incredibly nimble and adventurous, but it also binds the space tightly to the circumstances of the people involved. Frequently there is no one to hand the space over to and no external institutional identity to refer to. This is the key difference that determines the extreme volatility of apartment galleries since 1995. Two spaces, The Pond and the later Alagon Gallery, have provided approaches to this issue. The Pond (2001-2003), organized by Pete Fagundo, David Coyle, Jeff Ward, and Howard Fonda, decided from the outset that the space would only last as long as their two-year lease. The clearly delineated endpoint prevented the

Kathryn Scanlan, exhibited painting, photography, and installation inside of a 70s style wood-paneled basement and had its last show in that space this spring. He Said She Said is the embodied disagreement between Pamela Frasier and Randall Scott over the values of art and everyday life, argued through exhibitions in their Oak Park home.

The economic push of gentrification pushes artist run spaces out of storefronts and lofts on the main boulevards and into smaller residential spaces placing artwork in direct confrontation with the "everyday."

These exhibition spaces are far from neutral for visitors and artists alike. For the owners, it strains the normally private living space making it public. For the visitors, it can be an awkward experience to enter an unfamiliar apartment (private space) for an opening (public event). In addition, the configuration of art and the domestic sphere challenges art's relevance to lived experience but also threatens to subsume it within everyday objects. These issues are also opportunities for marginal exhibition practices like Chris Smith's *Medicine Cabinet*, a miniature exhibition in the bathroom cabinet of curiosities that illustrates the tension between art and the context of an apartment.

B I T S

- ¹ Eleanor Hearlney, "Second to What?", *New Art Examiner*, 22-26, My 87
- ² Lyne Warren, "N.A.M.E. at Six: Re-defining the Role of Alternative Spaces", *New Art Examiner* 6 No.9 Jun 79.
- ³ From an interview with Michelle Grabner.
- ⁴ Jeff Hubner, "Schwartz's Folly", *the Chicago Reader*, July 26, 1996
- ⁵ Timothy Lin, "Chicago's Uncomfortable Spaces", *Art Papers*, March/April, 1998
- ⁶ Peter Robert, "With New Budget, Domestic Spending is cut 24 Billion", *New York Times*, April 27th 1996
- ⁷ RSG's closing was also due in part to the inability to hire a new director.

¹⁰⁰ "CPR Takes off: A conversation with Michael Hall and Dan Hug", *New Art Examiner* 26 No.8 28-31, My 99.

¹⁰¹ Alice Kim, "Chicago: The World is Ours", *New Art Examiner* 29 no 1, S/O 2001

¹⁰² From an interview of Tony Wright.

¹⁰³ Eleanor Hearlney, "Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago - book reviews", *Art in America*, June 1995.

¹⁰⁴ Nola Thompson, "Until it's gone: Taking stock of Chicago's multi-use centers", *New Art Examiner* 29 no.4 Mr/Ap 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Liz Armstrong, "Hot Fun in the Et?", *Chicago Reader*, July 8th 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Greg Purrell, "Chicago Boosterism at its Best", *New Art Examiner* 29 no.4 Mr/Ap 2002