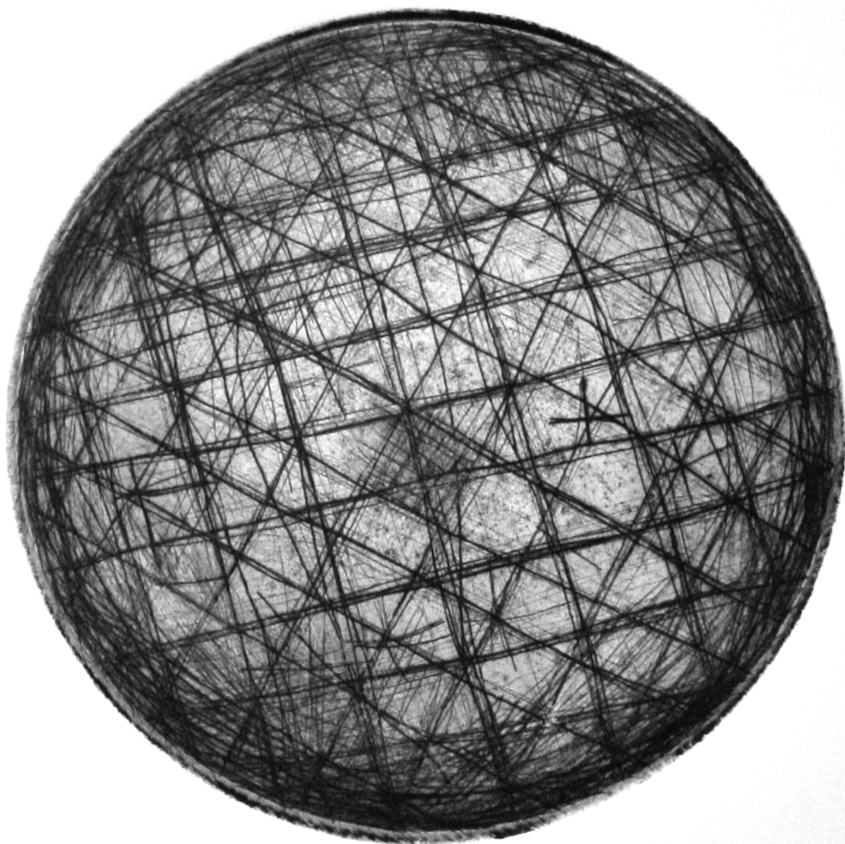


Articulating Value in the Arts



1/3

confluência II

E/K 96

A project by Culture Mill

About this Project

Articulating Value in the Arts has been a year-long series of conversations among artists - an evolving platform which culminates in a public Symposium in September, 2017, and an accompanying book. The Symposium and book are neither comprehensive nor authoritative. They are meant to represent a crystallization of insights, questions and possibilities articulated by artists, towards future actions and initiatives.

This project is made possible in part by a grant from the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation. The foundation's support of this project has provided the initial and sustaining funding necessary to see this project through to its end. However, it would not have been possible without the generosity of other spaces and the individuals that hosted our gatherings: Laura Ritchie at The Carrack Modern Art, Shelly Smith at Anchorlight, Ginger Wagg at The Nightlight as well as Daniel Stark at The Shed. Tom and Heather LaGarde of the Haw River Ballroom have graciously provided some technical equipment to make our final symposium run, and Aubrey Griffith-Zill along with the staff of Living Arts Collective have been generous hosts. A number of other individuals also took time to question our methods or provide valuable insight or interviews such as Monet Marshall, Michael Tara Garver, Gabi Revlock, Dean Poyner, Clint Lutes, George Sheer, Carl Faber and Ely Urbanski. And of course, thank you to all the artists who took part.

This project is meant as a spark, hopefully setting alight a greater engagement and interest on the part of artists, towards a clearer, more inclusive and empowered articulation for the Arts in central North Carolina.

- Murielle Elizéon, Chris Vitiello, Ginger Wagg & Tommy Noonan
September, 2017

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An Index

Compiled from the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2017

147,900,000: The number of US dollars devoted to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

.004: The percentage of the US National budget devoted to the NEA

19,500,000: The amount of US dollars cut from the NEA since 2010

9: The number of private dollars leveraged for every 1 dollar granted by the NEA

100: The percentage of congressional districts receiving NEA funding

704,200,000,000: The estimated amount of US dollars Arts and Cultural Production contributes to the US economy according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

4.23: The percent of GDP the above figure represents (more than Construction or Transportation)

6,474,763: Total amount of US dollars awarded in Grants by the NC Arts Council

122: Total number of NC communities funded by the NC Arts Council

268: Total number of NC grantees funded by the NC Arts Council

356: The total number of grants awarded by the North Carolina Arts Council

4,700,000: The number of wage and salary workers in arts jobs in the U.S.

35.1: The percent by which the arts sector contribution to GDP grew between 1998 and 2014

115,000,000: Number of Americans who attended a live visual or performing Arts Activity in 2012

50: The percent of American adults represented by the above figure

49,610: Number of Artists in the NC labor force according to the US Census Bureau

54: Percent of artists in the U.S. employed by the private for-profit sector

97: Percent of U.S. Employers who say creativity is increasingly important to them

162: The number of non-arts jobs created as a result of every 100 arts jobs created in 2012

These numbers represent a compilation of statistics given by various reports from The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in 2017: nasaa-arts.org

Questions and Answers

by 30 Artists living and working in North Carolina

The following texts were collected by means of questions posed on rolls of paper hanging on the walls of The Carrack Modern Art in Durham, NC at the first Articulating Value artist gathering in Jaunary, 2017. Answers were written anonymously.

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST? HOW DO YOU DEFINE PROFESSIONAL?

Respecting oneself and others. Showing that respect through actions.

I view professionalism in art as an ongoing sense of curiosity and a priority where engaging with your artistic community is concerned. In my mind, it's about wanting your entire community to find ways to grow/stretch/evolve in the interest of benefiting one another and your audiences.

To confidently and consistently identify yourself as one. To consistently make work, not "output" necessarily, but keeping that process present. Prioritizing it. Living it. Also valuing yourself and your practice enough to expect to receive compensation for it.

To show up (on time) and do your absolute best. To be prepared and consistent. To get better at your craft as you spend your life practicing. To give yourself to your values and always try to understand them more deeply. Basically, to show up.

It's a purely functional description within a capitalist framework. It means you earn the majority of your income through your art. By this definition, very few are. That's not a knock on them. It's a knock on the system.

Being professional is a commitment to respecting your own time and sense of value, and trying, always, in your choices and actions to engage your art with the world and to create your livelihood from that art.

Gah. A certain level of seriousness? Is this a label that comes from the art world

or one that is imposed on us? I get it as “serious.” Pays attention to the art conversations and participants. But there are problems with that too. Segregation of communities etc.

When the art cannot be separated from the life making it. Not a hobby but a need, a compulsion—the art gets made without asking why. It’s just done.

To hoodwink someone to pay you to do something that you would do for free.

Giving the greatest effort to produce the best possible result. Attempting to create a living off of the work.

When it becomes your vocation instead of your avocation.

To take my work and practice as seriously (or more seriously) as I take the job I work for income in the hopes that one day the practice will be the job.

Not a hobby. Not for fun. There will be blood.

Make, organize, exhibit, perform. Participate in economies, structures, systems of your discipline(s). Make new economies, structures, systems.

To be committed to a craft as a daily practice that transforms into a way of living/being.

I am way baffled by this question. I know that a lot of people would say it’s when you make a living income from your art practice, but nobody I know has one discrete practice anymore; it’s not even a duality of commercial and noncommercial praxes. It’s all blurry. Maybe there are no professional artists. Who am I?

Mostly—how you see yourself! To be committed to your studio practice. Also—not to “give” away your work and time always.

It means you’re spending time with art as practice making, sharing, etc. You have expectations of moving through life in this way. It’s a major part of your life and what you do/believe in.

Developing a current conversation between community, audience, collaborators, artists and using this to make and perform work. An exchange.

Professional is such a loaded word. A professional artist is someone who consistently engages in creating and sharing their art. I prefer to leave capitalism out of the definition.

Being professional is to be committed to a certain practice; of dedication to time and space doing the work of facilitating it. Committed to asking over and over the question of what it means to be professional fluidly in relationship to places, contexts, infrastructure, systems. Being involved in developing the relationship between my work and the communities where it emerges.

2. WHEN INVITING OTHER ARTISTS TO WORK ON YOUR INITIATIVES, DO YOU HAVE ANY RESPONSIBILITIES? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY?

Make it a true collaboration.

Absolutely. You're responsible for laying out expectations/desires/hopes. Agreeing to a set of goals or a process, and showing up consistently in that agreement.

I like to start with kindness and fun. Then discover what is the true passion of the collaborator. What is the thing they would do if they could do anything? My responsibility is to listen to and see them. Good attention allows an unfolding, I believe. Generosity, playfulness, straightforwardness, clarity, and respect.

Respect their time.

Encouraging cooperation and autonomy (at the same time)

Care for their authority and interests. Good listening. \$ if it's there (but it's not)—working on it!

Show your gratitude as much as humanly possible. Pay as much as possible. Take care of all logistics related to the project, or delegate in an organized manner. Be

upfront and transparent about all aspects of the project, and be open to letting the participants affect the creative outcome.

Pay if you can. If you can't, you make sure they know and are reminded that they and their work are invaluable and important. Sustained support.

Discover the unique contributions your collaborators can make. Allow others ideas to disrupt your well-laid plans. Learn to ask questions of your collaborators and to allow their questions to help you ask better questions.

Create a diverse cohort!

Of course. Allowing them to feel a part of what's happening; creating a sense of authorship; and respecting their time. Paying artists for their time is also a bonus for their involvement. Will they take something away from having them a part of the process? Will the process be enjoyable/engaging enough for them to want to be involved/supportive in the future. It's ultimately a work in progress, all of it.

Mutual integrity. Listening to each other. Willingness to change direction. Productive argument. Not being a controlling jerk. Always staying connected to why we specifically are collaborating in the first place.

Pay people for their time and expertise but be honest about what is possible ahead of time.

I should provide a safe, supportive space to work; feelings of value; adventure; gratitude; \$ whenever possible.

Communicate clearly—about expectations of both parties. How would I expect to be treated if the roles were reversed? Give credit to your collaborators.

Bury your own bullshit. Cry in the dark and cowboy up when you lead (and follow).

Yep, upfront and clear expectations. Transparency about goals and funds. Open dialogue about the politics of the bodies in the room. LISTENING. Take care

of them.

Pay what's possible. Collaborate openly. Learn from each other.

To be clear in my expectations and as generous in my compensation as possible. When making the choice to involve others it is usually knowing that I will be working for free or taking a loss in order to pay them for their time and contribution.

Honesty. About process, payment, expectations. I try to create an environment where they feel respected, nourished, listened to. This includes talking and making decisions about payment, time devoted, performance expectations, rehearsal expectations and knowing this can all change depending on each individual's current circumstance. IDEAL. Does it always play out this way? Not as much as I'd like.

3. WHAT DO YOU NEED TO THRIVE IN YOUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE?

Space, time, community, support, energy, willingness to be involved, others willing to push your thinking

Space! Time! A shift in understanding around Black art & culture

Space + time, yes. Stability + something to work against.

Community. Resources: Space to create & exhibit. \$ to live, create, exhibit.

Information

Research related to practice

Knowledge of what is happening in community & the world

Time. Other stuff going on. My work has become reactive, I take some prompt from a performance I see, or something I read, or something someone says in

a cafe. So I need the time to be “in play.” And to be curious, to deploy curiosity into something else.

I need space, time, love, support. Sometimes I need to be alone, sometimes I need to be with others, mostly I need to be in community with people who recognize and trust my work & needs.

Shared commitment to experimentation. Obstacles. Free stuff.

Space to work alone. Space to work with others. Expensive equipment. Collaborators. Time. Sound proofing. A place to share with the public. Imagination.

Space. (Money'd be great too, yet that art gets made regardless)

Criticism. Friends (who know I things I don't). Collaborators. Audiences. A setup/studio. Monetary resources. Psychic stability. Force of will. Humility.

Self care.

Community support.

Attendance to shows.

Financial.

Moral/emotionally.

Challenging my process/critical response.

Space, most importantly.

Mental space to focus

Space in my schedule to dedicate to rehearsal/planning/organizing

Space to use for rehearsal

A mentor

Always space/time/money, but also community of people who are meeting, talking, playing and bumping up against one another with relative frequency.

Space, time, ongoing training, audience, community

“Integrating” time - EMPTY SPACE

Sharing space (gathering - collaborators, learning situations regularly)

Boldness

Money to do everything

Space & time.

Also support, people believing in you/your work. Willing to believe in dollar amounts. I need inspiration so...inspire me! Please. I need a deadline. Easy. I need spreaders of the word & internet wizards to make my work known right across the globe. Healthy snacks help.

Capacity for more - ideas, works, collaborations

In schedule

Emotional

Mental

Being ready for what's handed to me. Being ready to take what I need (perceive to need)

Support - financial, audience base

Exchange - between audiences, artists/collaborators, infrastructure

Critical response

Space

Community

Place

Creative cohort

Safety of being able to fail - to fail faster

Space, boredom, play - then making

Creative cohort - - I usually talk about it then make what I talk about

Willing collaborators. Sounding boards. Work space.

4. DO YOU HAVE THE MEANS TO MAKE YOUR WORK? WHAT ABOUT THE RESOURCES? WHAT ARE THOSE MEANS AND RESOURCES?

Yes! Apparently, this is all possible! I have no idea how, but, it happened. Sheer force of will & non-stop work and stick-to-it-tive-ness. Studio we have by luck & generosity. Resources are mainly people who believe in what we do. But money happens by constant movement & determination. No one ever told me I couldn't do it this way. I don't know I would have listened if they had.

I work with a partner. We presently have the time and money to rent rehearsal space once a week. We work with the time and space we have at any moment.

yes/no - the materials exist and await your engagement

Yes. I have the resources in the form of people and their resources. Monetarily, sometimes. I make the work regardless of the dollars.

I have the means because I the mind to do it. I don't have the financial resources TBH. I have a supportive family that offers sweat equity. I have a community that show up. But I've yet to have the money or consistent formal support is space or \$\$\$.

Psychic means are more important than time or money. I find when I have time I don't have money, and when I have money I don't have time. But neither of those things are true if I can outsmart myself and get to work.

My practice shapes itself to the means & resources available to me. I work digitally & physically so when I don't have the \$ to make the physical object I make images on the computer. Both mediums serve me, one informs the other.

Yes mostly, not entirely. This is because I make choices and out my practice and works based upon the resources available to me -- I also try to think of creative ways to get resources, to make arguments for why I need resources. But still I can always use more time, space, \$, also I need a community of people interacting a lot.

Writing - just about. No \$ is really necessary, or not much. Just could use a little more time. But it gets done. No real complaints.

Organizing - DIDA could use an intern! We need time & expertise - we can use \$ too, but in a way work time (like organizing the email list) is more crucial.

Yes and no. I have time but not space. I also do not have financial resources to pay collaborators what they are worth. This turns art making into a consolidated solo practice at most. Mostly unfulfilled desire to work...

Yes. I have access to space, health, wealth, privilege. I have access to collaborators and community. I'd like more time.

Not yet. Space is one the things for sure. Somewhere to make loud noise. Ideally, a space, like a studio, to leave props/instruments/notes/things. I currently have spaces that will accommodate all these but nowhere that includes all the things.

I work in textiles & print. A good printer is invaluable. A good textile print service is rare & expensive. Digital tools: software & hardware. \$ to live so I can focus on the work. Job-job & art job is a tough balance.

I have the things. I don't have the time.

I do, means & resources. I work w/what I have access to, and that is usually it. Studio space, performance space, internet, notebooks, other artists & arts people.

It's all out there you just need the juice. Stop crying about \$

I do have the means, thank God. Being a write means relatively low overhead. As for visual art, I invested in markers awhile ago. I'm good.

I can't afford to consistently rent rehearsal space. Fortunately, I am collaborating with an artist who teaches & gets access to space for free. I feel lucky to have access to a lot of local artists to whom I can look for support & guidance. Those things are of utmost value & importance!

Yes + no. As a dancer I can make work w/o much, but space is a necessity + time + childcare. I increasingly feel like I also need to devote more time to the practice of moving w/o the expectation of product.

I'm a writer to the means and materiality of my work is kind of minimal. The physical stuff of it, and the physical space necessary, come into play but are also more or less just paper, laptop, lamp, table. But TIME is the hard thing, specifically framed and shaped time. TIME fucks me HARD.

I'm in constant battle with the internal "means" to make/create. Resources are abundant - space is donated, props 'n things can be low cost.

5. IN YOUR FIELD, WHAT ARE ARTISTS PAID? WHAT SHOULD THEY BE PAID?

Jackshit. Everything.

I am a studio artist & most of us are paid what we say we should be paid. However, there is a limit to what the market will bear.

Dance artists are seldom paid. \$ is a unicorn, even in academia.

As a Poetry Fox, I shoot for \$150/hr - because there are no other PFOXes on Earth. But I have a bunch of different scales for different clients and situations. As a straight-up poet, I get book copies and an annual royalty check that's 3 figures, so...

Writers? Ahaha. They are paid very little across the board - journalism, science fiction, playwriting, literary fiction. Of course they should all be paid a living wage (after a threshold of competence I've never been able to account for - how to get there, paid - I don't know that it's possible. You always have to grind a lot, first).

\$100/performance minimum if I hire people

As a dancer it varies from project to project...\$15/hour, 700/per show, sometimes nothing. It is never consistent. Performance fees are often subsidized by teaching work.

\$200/day is fairly standard, though sometimes I make more and most times I make less than that. Ideally a living wage should be made, but I'm willing to work for less if it means getting the work completed.

I have many fields, in some artists are paid sporadically. In some they are not paid at all. I believe in shoulds. I believe in economic power.

Depending on contexts, places, country: \$300 - \$500/show.

\$2500/month

It's rare to get paid for what you love to do. It's okay to give it away.

Artists should be valued \$100,000 per year! Artists will be paid what they demand

to be paid, what they ask for. If you don't ask you won't be paid.

Dancers: (minimum) \$500/week full week full time rehearsals (12.50/hour)

\$100-\$300 per show. There should of course be a range and understanding of different conditions but this rate should be a common goal/marker.

A living wage.

A living wage! Artwork is work!

Embarrassing wages most times.

Living wages for sure.

As a dancer I have NEVER expected to make a living dancing. However, I am willing to lose \$ / go into debt paying dancers. The expectation is to do the best you can, but it is increasingly hard to GIVE energetically to THE DANCE when it is not life sustaining on a basic \$ level. The why has always been beyond \$.

Depends on the gig - never enough. Often it is a story to tell or experience collected. Barbers work occasionally. Meals are always appreciated.

Different fields, different realities & expectations. Design can pay ok. Music rarely pays. Art can fund more art

I wish dance artists didn't lose \$ on shows - I wish it weren't so hard - -

I get \$1000 per bk - once every 4 years. Ha ha ha ha. But it's great because lots don't get that.

I have no idea really. It varies wildly from going into debt to millions. I make a living wage for a family of 3. For the past 12 years I have had no other jobs but my art. I feel I'm being paid what I should be. Though, I'm open to increase. Most puppeteers do not but, I feel more should be based on what I've seen &

heard about the effect of the work on people.

I perform in mostly small venues/clubs. If I'm not touring I can expect \$0-100 per band/group.

It depends on what you are doing with it. Not enough.

Often I get paid somewhere between \$80-300 per project depending on length & contribution. \$300 can be an 8 month rehearsal process. Conversely, commercial work can pay \$100-200/day but is more rare.

6. WHAT CAN YOU AFFORD TO GIVE AWAY? WHAT CAN YOU NOT AFFORD TO GIVE AWAY?

I often give away a lot of time/labor/brain space. I'm not sure what I can afford.

Afford is a hard word. I feel like I can't afford to give certain things away to certain communities. But I fear setting precedent of free that continues a legacy of expectation of free or reduced labor by black bodies.

It's weird, I give tons of my work away and I'm more or less cool with that, and even have a practice that specifically is that. But my time is another matter. I'm not irresponsibly egocentric, but I value my time and expect dollars for it.

More than I have.

My integrity / My work

Apparently I can afford to give away writing, affirmations, etc. on social media because I do all the damn time. Can't afford to give away the conviction that I deserve payment for my work. And therefore... very little of my work.

Currently I give away most of my work/resources—that sets precedent. I then have to consider what “afford” means. I love to connect, assist, support others, and build platforms to showcase talents. I can afford this. I can't afford to give away my time to practice.

Some of the shit piling up in my studio. Come on by and get something. I can give my energy to the greater good. Sometimes. I can be generous with many things: tickets, invitations, my praise, hugs, even my ideas. I cannot afford to give away too much of my time. In order to make living as an artist work as a full-time career, I have to charge for my time. Because it is what makes what I do possible. Therefore, I ask others to value it too.

Afford: my stuff. I can't give away this new sense of finally being who I am.

I can afford to give away things and time. I can't afford to give away control.

I can afford to give away time, ideas, and past experiences where community organizing is concerned. I can't afford to give away my choreography—not yet anyway. Last year was the first year I broke even where making art and paying to train for my art are concerned.

Ideas. Deferring to others. Being a boss.

These things change as I change. Today: My experience. Lessons I've learned. Space. A listening ear. Skills. Stuff (fabric!). (Some) time.

Things, objects, possessions for sure. Also, time in the sense of building community space—and food! I cannot afford to give away time/space for... not sure... this feels like a place of protection that is to be considered on a case by case, mutually beneficial basis. A protection of valuable time/space for creative practice.

Guidance to young artists.

I can give away my experience, a certain amount of time, a certain amount of space to which I have access, but I cannot give away much \$\$ and after a point, I cannot give away time.

It depends on the project. Often I give my time and performance. I can't afford to spend money without return on other people's projects unless I'm a member of the audience.

I can give away some of my resources in time, money, stuff as part of a necessary exchange. I can't give away all of it. I need to keep asking over and over the questions: What is needed? And what do I need?

I can provide space. I can give money. Time is harder. I can share experience. I can yield power.

I can afford to share the technical information related to my craft (education). Time/energy, etc in reasonable amounts.

Time is something I donate often—can I afford to give this away? No, not usually. But I have to—to survive and grow with collaborators and other artists and events it is necessary, it's just how it seems to happen...

I can afford to give away about 2-5 hours a week of hard work, during work hours. Hard to give away evenings, weekends (I have a family).

I can afford to give away comfort. Giving away time to be creative is out of the question. Seeing and being is pretty essential.

7. WHAT ROLE DOES TIME PLAY IN YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS?

Never enough time. But too much can be detrimental as well.

Resist the speed-up of the industrial assembly line and accelerate until machines break.

Not enough time in a day. Limited. Time is often found when I'm absolutely exhausted and have very little to give to my work/process. But it is found. Sometimes it allows me to make/engage in really amazing work/artmaking, and sometimes it results in really shitty art-making.

It takes so long to make something working just 3 hours a week even if you're thinking about it 20 hours a week.

Time, that bitch. I am always thinking about/wishing for time. Creativity and

making occurs in a mental space for me, that can't just be turned on or off. So it's hard to cobble together bits of studio time.

Time is the context and subtext. And the ur-text.

Time is essential. It is necessary for building concepts and for finding choreographic content that endures beyond any one given day.

Tend to compress creation time. Creates a radical and important pressure needed to create without censorship, self-judgement. It focuses the decision-making. Raises the bar for artist.

Need to work every day. Long-term projects as in ten years. They play out over time and some are here and gone in a few minutes.

I stay up all night about once a week in order to keep everything moving. I'm actually really slow at doing things like reading and writing, so I need to block off kinda tons of time and the way to do that is overnight. So the parameters of that time— isolation, darkness, silence— impact my creative process quite a bit.

It's a medium to manipulate and exploit. Sometime you can ignore it but it has strong properties that impact things regardless.

There is never enough.

I never take enough time. Whenever I take more time, or 'too much time,' I get to a really great place in my work. I need time to be liberated from my own habits or constraints, to let ideas and materials develop deeply through simple tinkering.

Excited by pressure.

Writing—it just takes time. 4 years a book. All kinds of time—working time, empty time. Organizing—there's only so much time. I can see more to do but I can't see how I can do it.

Time reveals what is and is not essential. Considering ways to condense process time for sake of enlivening work and reducing expense. Also considering ways of bringing creative process into ALL OF THE TIME.

Time is very carefully marked and ritualized to me. It gives form to ,and gives me control over, that which would otherwise slip through my fingers totally unused.

Time has a major role. Need time to see what different times of the process have to “say.” Time is intrinsically tight to money.

Time plays too big a role. Deadlines to force the work help—but time, and “not enough of it”—often defeat me before I begin.

I need a deadline or nothing gets done. Give me a date and the work will be done to the best of my ability. I need more of it also.

Someone once said that being black in America is a non-linear experience. Time is interesting because I vacillate between past and present, slavery and liberation. So does my art.

8. WHAT DOES YOUR GEOGRAPHIC PLACE GIVE TO YOUR WORK? WHAT DOES YOUR WORK GIVE TO YOUR PLACE?

Durham is home base. My “crate” where everything is safe and familiar. I may not need it someday.

I live in Raleigh and found that the community I need is there, but sometimes I have to search for it. I have to remember that magical art community isn’t going to just appear or even exist. You work with what you got.

Place gives context, energy, flavor. I holds the work and the work is good if it gives back to the place. Place plus work are collaborators.

I have learned to make art anywhere. I just need a flat surface and a little peace. However my location always flavors the image from my subconscious.

9. WHAT VALUES ARE YOU STANDING FOR IN YOUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE?

Joy.

Equity. Blackness. Questioning. Challenging the white imagination.

My own practice: radical expression (backed up with curiosity empathy research practice etc). My own organizing: risk quality representation (trying)

Doing the impossible, failing. And adding intention to that act of failure. Confusion is a gift, risk illegibility. Questions > statements. Unknown > known. Viva bad ideas.

The opportunity for all question/challenge/critique and make our own choices accordingly.

Awakening human potential. Interconnectedness. Love. Generosity. Inspiration. Transformation. The value of shifting the status quo from fundamentally shitty to absolutely awesome!

Honest and relevant work. Thought provoking. Engaging. Creating regardless of ability. Not depending on others, money, time or space.

Truth. Equal access to all. Creating work that will get people to engage with an issue I care about. To push open or provide space for audience to have a larger dialogue and ask more complicated questions. To push for systemic and structural change.

Wake the fuck up. Curiosity. Clarity. Ruthless generosity. Provocation. Endurance. Attention.

Truth and honesty. Generosity. Openness. Equity.

Honesty.

Breaking expectations. Challenging normalities. Giving new expectations.

Formal values natural to the making process. Conceptual values of truth, honesty, reflection, connecting to others, starting conversations, making or asking people to think.

Craft. Rigorous structure.

Freedom, weirdness, transformation, beauty, truth, falsehood.

Place-making, empowerment, possibility, resistance.

Objectivity in looking at my own work. Not being precious about what the choreography must look like.

Learning how to work and live together. The act of making conscious choices.

Honesty and awareness.

Not “knowing” so much.

Radical curiosity.

It-ness. Cosmic perspective. Getting lost. Joy. Community.

Integrity of practice.

Creating a space of common experience. Creating/fostering more complex understandings of each other and our world. Feeling more.

10. HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE VALUE OF YOUR WORK? HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR VALUE AS AN ARTIST?

Does my work make my audience reflect/question/connect? If yes, it bears value. Am I finding ways to reflect/question/connect? Am I being honest about the work and not being concerned with any personal sense of ego attached to it?

I can speak more to the incredible value being an artist has to me as a person in the “regular” world. For the work: when everyone involved has a meaningful experience and can contribute equally. When it’s honest and relevant. Engaging for those involved and the community. As an artist: if I’m able to make work that goes beyond my own expectations. When others believe in my work and want to support it on some level.

I recognize that as a queer black woman telling and sharing my truth is still novel and dangerous. My value is based in that history. My work is valuable because it creates opportunities to retell old stories and create new ones.

I make it up as I go. Really, who doesn’t? But what I ask for my services reflects both my own evolution and the brand new work has established. The sense of the work is collective and gets its value in a mysterious mass hysteria or mass belief system. There is also comparison, thoughtfulness, and healthy informed guessing! It takes not getting the job sometimes. It increases with my experience.

Have I made honest work? If yes, then that’s enough for the work to feel valuable.

My work is intrinsically valuable to me for its ability to give me some agency (sometimes) and to be a thing that produces new outcomes and experiences that I might not otherwise find in the course of my day-to-day. Can I share these with others? Maybe that’s my value as an artist.

So often is value quantified in a monetary sum. In the case of art for me, my currency is time and attentiveness. In most cases I treat my art as a gift. I never expect or assume a particular reaction. Therefore the value of my work and of myself as an artist is mostly measured in what I get out of my own contribution.

If it reaches someone and speaks to them. $\$=0$. I think it’s valuable when people ask question and I try to do that as an artist. I’m not going to make claims for my value.

Radical truth-telling. If I’ve done that, then it’s valuable.

Honestly, work is so hard to make that if it comes into existence then it is intrinsically valuable. Same with being an artist—the value is in the ability/commitment to keep working.

If there is a conversation or question that is sparked there is value to the “we.” If there isn’t communication that’s sparked that means more value to the process itself—what didn’t work, where do I go from here. Both are value, both are needed.

I avoid this and just keep working. I’m not sure if that serves me well. Maybe when I figure this out I’ll stop feeling so shitty about both.

Value = paying complete attention to something (“Simone Weil”). Complete attention to something is the purest form of generosity. So maybe the complete attention I give to my working process is the value I give it. But if you are talking about \$, it’s all based on “MARKETS” in our hyper-neoliberal world.

There is the value that is measured in size of the audience, monetary gain, etc. All temporary and difficult to control. A slippery slope! The greatest measure of the value of my work is usually found in one-to-one conversations with the folks who experienced it, or contributed to it in some way.

My work feels valuable when I see it—or some remnant of it or other iteration of it—show up later in the work of artists/practitioners/leaders whom I admire—when it pushes something forward.

Too often it is covered by what all audiences will “like.” I want to define value based on the integrity of the work and to create dissonant sounds.

\$-wise, I charge by the square foot and how many techniques/materials were used. Personally, the work must feel honest to be valuable. Did I make it for me or the “buyer?” Did I listen to my process and materials or resist them?

Monetarily Minimum \$15/hour. In the larger scheme of things? What we make is literally what people live for. I place artists among the most valuable professions in society, alongside farmers and teachers.

REFLECTIONS

Assumptions

By Tommy Noonan

This essay is a reflection on the relationship between art and value, through the prism of the discussion series: *Articulating Value in the Arts*, and through my position as one facilitator of those discussions. There are not, nor have there ever been, any objective answers or truths uncovered in this journey — only an accumulation of experiences, knowledge, revelations, misunderstandings, missteps and attempts to grapple with a fundamentally slippery and multi-faceted set of topics in the realm of Value and Art. So, rather than defining my terms before proceeding with some methodological analysis, I will provide an account of the evolution of several key assumptions I held as an independent performing artist, a co-director of a small independent non-profit, and a white, 34 year-old male who lives in central North Carolina in 2017.

Among my initial assumptions were that professional artists are defined as those who earn a living wage from their art, that the primary barrier to a fully monetized culture of independent art in this country is a simple lack of public funding, and that my own personal and professional network was sufficiently diverse to appropriately address the themes of our topic. I now believe none of these things to be true.

A SELF-SEGREGATING NETWORK

To begin with the last, and perhaps most problematic assumption about my own network's diversity and perspective, this project has revealed to me just how homogenous my own network is, and how segregated the arts community in central North Carolina remains in 2017. This is not news to many people, particularly artists who are also People of Color. However, the full extent of it has been news to a number of white artists, myself included. I am keenly aware of how embarrassingly late this revelation comes to some of us white artists, and how frustrating that lateness may be for others to witness. Nonetheless, it bears repeating, as other (particularly white) friends in the arts community are still not aware of the degree to which our artistic networks remain segregated.

Our leading team made an early decision that the initial conversations on Value and Art would not be an advertized public event, but would rather spread within the networks of existing relationships among artists in the triangle area. The reason for this was to create impactful and relevant conversations based on community bonds, as opposed to setting up contrived “communities” and a set of discussion terms that did not resonate with existing artist networks. We started with 10 questions for artists, and wanted those 10 questions to evolve along the path of questions already percolating between friends and collaborators. So we reached out to artists we knew personally and/or professionally — those whom we felt might be interested in grappling with our same questions, much as one would reach out to a friend for a coffee or beer to discuss some pressing issue with personal significance.

This idea felt organic. We wanted the size of the initial gathering to preserve the possibility for a single group discussion, so we limited our invitations to 30 people. Our leading team is balanced in gender, three of us are white and one is a Person of Color as well as an immigrant. Those invited did include People of Color, and we discussed the importance of gathering a diverse room. However, when the day arrived, the 30 faces in the room were almost entirely white. Further gatherings, which continued to spread along existing networks of artists, remained predominantly white. This unfortunate and deeply problematic reality spurred a number of conversations, and of course, the impulse to remedy the situation — an impulse which can lead down the equally problematic path of tokenism, or ‘mining for brown people’, as one of my colleagues once put it.

Rather than remedy this situation, I now feel it important to let the nature of our method be revealed as indicative of an insidious truth: from the first conversation through the final symposium, the unexamined (white) impulse to have a simple conversation within existing social networks only reinforces the deeply segregated nature of those networks within our artistic communities, excluding many, and cementing the terms of discussion and the nature of imagination along those already segregated lines. Existing social networks, left unconsidered by white artists, reflect a deeply racist and systemic history still at work in North Carolina.

And so we were left with what to do. Certainly, the answer is not simple and has more to do with work on a generational scale that dwarfs even the category

of the Arts, and is already under way in many spaces in central North Carolina. What to do is less about token diversity, and more about the process of building of real relationships beyond the easy, existing social networks frequented by artists — networks that are often the products of a racist society. Perhaps it has to do with cultivating the curiosity to show up in other spaces, and not so much to construct new relationships, as to foster the conditions for new relationships to blossom across segregated social networks. I am speaking specifically to white people, as People of Color already are doing enormous work around this issue. I and we, white artists, need to consider what it means ourselves to show up, if we want our own spaces and networks to be anything more than mere reflections of an oppressive system.

So perhaps the problematic nature of our initial decision has value in providing an opportunity to reconsider the terms of conversations held about art, who shows up to those conversations, and how they are or are not invited in the first place. Perhaps one value of Art is that its networks can be a scaffold which takes shape around greater structural problems within society, and therefore a frame through which those problems might be revealed and even addressed.

LABOR AND EXPLOITATION AMONG FRIENDS

One example in which broad social injustices have been addressed through the lens of the art world, was with the Art Worker's Coalition (AWC) in the late 1960s. As a loosely assembled network of multi-disciplinary artists, the AWC protested a homogenized, exclusive art world, and specifically the exploitative relationship between art institutions and artists. The AWC lobbied for greater access to art spaces for women and minorities in museums in New York City, particularly the Museum of Modern Art. Their activism was deeply tied to the anti-Viet Nam War movement and the struggle for Civil Rights. However the AWC was often criticized as so broadly intertwining with multiple facets of the struggle for social justice (women's rights, minority rights, gay rights, pacifism and labor struggles) that its vision lacked focus, and it failed to affect any meaningful structural change beyond securing a day of the week in which museums are free of admission charges.

Yet the legacy of the AWC's work can be felt in several movements today. One

in particular is the New York-based non-profit organization: Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E)¹. Articulating Value in the Arts has come into contact with W.A.G.E. through a very particular set of questions we began asking to our friends and colleagues at the beginning of our discussions: *What are Artists Paid in your field? What Should they be Paid?*

These questions relate to a second naive assumption of mine: that the primary barrier to a robust and monetized independent arts culture in America is largely a lack of public funding. Once again, the problem now proves more complex to me than before, and involves not only public funding structures, but also non-profit arts institutions, and especially the way we as individual artists relate to them and to one another. It was striking to our team that, in response to the question about artist payment, few offered a considered numerical answer. More often than not, the answers were either equivocal paragraphs on the nature of money, art and capitalism, or cynical one-liner responses (“...jack shit & everything...”). What we detected beneath these answers was that either few wanted to answer our question, or few knew how. Most importantly, these responses betrayed a lack of meaningful reference points about how much artists should be paid — or in other words, any frame of reference as to the value of artist labor in monetary terms.

Of course quantifying labor value in the arts is a Sisyphean task. Everything differs according to location, community, artistic medium and level of experience. Visual artists often grapple with a mystifying process of commodification in a marketplace full of agents, dealers, speculators and collectors. Theatre artists or writers in film and television often regard free labor as a career investment, with unionization providing reference points in a basic labor value. Independent musicians’ payment depends largely upon ticket-sales by a for-profit venue, while concert musicians might be under contract to a large non-profit institution with very clear definitions about their time and value of their labor. Of all the fields, dancers perhaps have the least amount of common reference points as to how their labor or their ephemeral artworks should be valued in monetary terms.

It is no wonder that such a heterogenous landscape creates the conditions for

1. My analysis and contextualization of W.A.G.E draws heavily on the extensive work and research done by W.A.G.E over the years, much of which can be found at www.wageforwork.com

confusion at best and exploitation at worst. Such conditions have given birth to W.A.G.E. and its specific mission to address artist fees — an almost myopic focus borne out of the desire to wage a deeper, more focused campaign, as opposed to the broader social justice activism of the AWC. The primary focus of W.A.G.E. is the non-profit sector of arts institutions within the United States, and its primary instruments are a fee schedule by which non-profits pay artists according to the artistic services rendered, and an accompanying certification program. It is an approach modelled somewhat on Canadian Artists' Representation (CARFAC), the national voice of Canada's professional visual artists, defending artists' economic and legal rights. W.A.G.E.'s approach is tailored to the United States through extensive research and consulting from artists, academics, labor historians and other arts professionals. Non-profits obtain W.A.G.E. certification by committing to paying artist fees at least at a minimum level according to their total annual budget; each certified non-profit works with W.A.G.E. to meet standards that fit both the size of the non-profit and the nature of the artist labor, turning their annual budget over to W.A.G.E. staff for assessment and approval. In such a system, the labor of artists is treated like any other type of labor which produces value within capitalist society; if one party profits off of labor which is not adequately compensated, then the situation has a name: exploitation.

In my opinion, we artists walk around with a myth about our labor, which has two components: one is that we are special unicorns who live outside the normal rules and conditions of capitalism, and the second is that our love of our work precludes our right to be compensated for it. This myth is not only untrue, but it is harmful, because it enables the continuation of an exploitative system -- because we carry it around in our heads and it conditions our behavior such that we enter into dubious, quasi-exploitative relationships with one another as artists and collaborators, once again, with the best of intentions. This is not entirely our fault, but it is, to some extent, our responsibility to address.

In the United States, non-profits form a tax-subsidized class of institutions, which theoretically do the socially important charitable work taken on by federal and state agencies in other wealthy industrialized nations. But here we like our freedom, so instead of forming a social contract in which we all pay taxes to a robust cultural ministry which directly funds, and more importantly regulates,

artist labor relations, we have thousands of non-profits which gather both public and private funds and may or may not engage in the direct payment to artists for their services. This total lack of any regulatory mechanism encourages a tendency to utilize an abundance of free artist labor is almost too much for many non-profits to resist (who doesn't love free labor!). If this weren't enough of a problem, it creates a pervasive culture among artists in which we fail to grasp any common references about how our labor should be monetarily valued. We either don't want to talk about it or we don't know how to figure out what we should be paid. We also start reproducing these exploitative relationships by asking one another to contribute labor without any discussion of its value or of compensation.

My point here is not that all artists can always be paid. That would be unrealistic in our resource-scarce fields. It is that artists should be paid, but until that fact is internalized and regularly acknowledged by artists willing to ask up front about whether artist fees are part of a project, and both artists and employers can have a frank discussion about how compensation for labor is adequate and not exploitative, the systemic problem will persist. W.A.G.E. not only provides an opportunity for the ethical self-regulation of the non-profit sector, it also raises awareness among individual artists, providing a platform which enables them to grasp their responsibility in asserting the value of their own labor.

I am happy that, as of the end of Articulating Value in the Arts, Culture Mill, the independent non-profit which I co-direct with Murielle Elizeon, has become the first non-profit organization in the southeast to gain W.A.G.E. certification. This means that for all our artistic programs and projects going forward, we will pay artist fees according to W.A.G.E.'s fee scale. Practically, this means our projects are limited by realistic costs, and projects cannot operate on whatever scale we want — a benefit of using free artist labor. It means we have to make choices and to plan according to what labor actually costs, but we consider it a worthwhile and an ethical trade to make. It is our hope that by becoming W.A.G.E. certified, we are not only putting our money where our mouth is, but we are encouraging other non-profits in our region to follow a similar course and to self-regulate, recognizing the ethical practice of compensating artists for their labor.

PROFESSIONALISM AND COMMITMENT

At the beginning of *Articulating Value in the Arts*, one of our questions was: *How do you define Professional?* I admit that I quite simply assumed a professional artist to be one who earns a living by making art. I now find this definition to be woefully inadequate. Some artists consistently create work of great quality and impact without ever earning a living from it, while others have found a method of subsisting from their craft in such a way that has more to do with entrepreneurship than it does with pursuing a creative practice. Some artists move freely in and out of art-making in their lives, while others make art constantly but rarely share it with anyone outside close friends and family. It suffices to say that trying to define “Professionalism” in art is not an easy task. Some industrialized nations, such as France, have a clear administrative category for professional artists. Once the hours of work are logged and the paperwork is approved, the artist is adopted into the *Intermittent du Spectacle* system, and that professional enjoys all sorts of rights and regulations concerning their labor, unemployment benefits and other official mechanisms of professional recognition. In the US however (as in many countries), no such administrative class exists for professional artists. Once again, artists themselves bear the responsibility to articulate that definition.

Over the course of our conversations, I have come to define a professional artist in the following terms: 1: one who is committed to an art-practice for which they have already invested considerable time, energy and resources; 2: one who is committed to their art-practice being engaged with the world, and can clearly demonstrate ways in which the world has in turn participated in, viewed, heard or otherwise engaged with their art-practice; 3: a professional artist is committed in their daily life to the concrete work of connecting the labor of their artistic practice with the basic means and costs of living their lives.

Let me focus on that word: commitment. Throughout the course of this series, I have come to two basic conclusions: first, there are no easy answers to any of our questions or topics of discussion, and second, the operative characteristic in being a professional artist, of addressing questions of labor value, or of confronting the reality of a segregated arts community, is commitment. In *Articulating Value in the Arts*, each conclusion has revealed an exception to the rule, each definition has revealed new ambiguities, and each notion of commitment varies

for different artists, administrators, thinkers, consumers and producers. Yet at the end of the day, one is either committed to these questions or they are not; one either advocates for ethical practices or they do not; one either shows up in Other spaces, or they don't.

In the course of one of our numerous interviews with artists on this topic, the immersive theater director and activist Mikhael Tara Garver said the following: "If you are asking what makes me a professional artist, it's that I am having this conversation...I'm dealing with the balance of real life with the balance of my values and priorities. It's that I woke up this morning and I'm figuring out how I balance family with the goals and ideas and ways I want to make work in the world." Perhaps one value of art then, is that whether we are producing, consuming, thinking or facilitating, art is a dynamic, unsolvable and important puzzle -- one whose many facets provide the opportunity for us to commit to an ongoing discussion of how to be in the world as artists, as citizens and as humans.

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS

UP TO CODE BUT CAUGHT ON THE FRINGE:

Holding alternative space in emerging cultural economies

by George Scheer

I want to reflect for a moment on the tragic fire in Oakland, which among its victims were musicians and visual artists, trans and queer. We have a task today to explore the conditions and resources for creative experimentation in our home state of North Carolina, and also nationally with intricacies of our locales. Among its many lessons, the tragedy of Oakland points to unrelenting drive of artists to create, to make space for their work and their audiences, despite the conditions, despite the resources, and despite their own safety. We are also confronted with how the value we place in artists, or don't, directly relates to the resources we place in our community infrastructures, housing, businesses, and development. I see this in what my grandmother left behind, a remainder of 60-years of commerce and consumption, an exhausted small, independent business in a divested and deteriorating historic downtown. After her passing, her store remained filled to the brink with an inventory and treasure trove of things. This three story fire trap, contained an incredible and seemingly infinite archive of 20th C. cultural surplus—an incredible artist resource.

When we took over the store in 2003, we decided nothing would be for sale or leave the building. We wanted to keep the collection intact, to immerse ourselves inside it, and explore an alternative way of making and imagining in context and among things. We saw a future for this place as a connector for artists around the globe and within our own community. Over the past 15 years Elsewhere persisted and grew. It grew in a place where arts funding was conservative and scarce, in a place where artist residencies aren't common, where you're asked if you make paintings, where experimentation isn't a practice or a goal, and where fine arts or crafts determine what art is—made by skillful hands, and available for sale. Most of our community isn't concerned with contemporary art and its turn toward social engagement, community investment, and activism. But at the same time, the city, its leaders, foundations, and organizations are all invested in

art, adept at gathering resources, and effective in the production of not-for-profit and social justice work. For our part, we were savvy as we articulated our values in art, cultural vitality and placemaking. We tried to be incredibly welcoming at the front door. We were privileged by our whiteness. For over 10 years we hid in plain sight, obscured the illegality of what we were doing, and played among the complexities of ‘a store where nothing’s for sale that became a living museum.’ In the gray area of a grandfathered old store we were protected by alliances and by getting grants. We celebrated progress, not sustainability. We ended each season with a different end game and strategy for the next year. We built systems and partnerships, internships and a staff, workshops for the residents, a kitchen, a library. We folded fabric and arranged toys, made manuals and g-docs. Putting everything in order was both the Art and the only way we’d survive. Amidst this uncertainty we built a home for artists around the globe, a connective hub, a resource for people with ideas. If people asked where the artists’ lived we’d say, we are a 24 hour studio, a term also used by the residents of GhostShip. In 2011, the Warhol Foundation, which cares for spaces like ours, asked two questions, ‘Do you want to go on? and What do you need to be sustainable?’ Answer: Yes. Fix our leaky roof, production resources for artists, and seed funding to restore the building. We gathered a team of board members and local volunteers serving as consultants to build a campaign. We wrote and received support from local and national foundations. We ran a kickstarter that brought in over 300 individuals. We were championed by a handful of local donors who believed Elsewhere was important for Greensboro and a future for collaborative art. In total we raised \$850,000 to restore the building, install life safety, residential coding, heat and air for year round operations. After 14 seasons of precarious operation, proof of concept, and cat and mouse games, we are, as of August, secure in our home. It is pretty incredible that there are people in Greensboro willing to turn out for their alternative art space, as they did for the historic Carolina Theater and the Woolworths that became the International Civil Rights Center and Museum. Some developers and civic leaders are doing the same for dilapidated buildings throughout downtown—an independent bookstore, a maker space, new ventures by local restaurateurs. Typical of an emerging cultural economy of our scale, the gradual evolution and varied support of new and old ventures are championed for the momentum they bring. But momentum leaves people and things behind, evacuates spaces, folds services, and creates blind spots among the “game changers” and “catalysts.” In Greensboro we are building a Performing Arts Center

and raised an unprecedented \$70 Million of public and private funds in under 6 months, alongside a new \$12 million public park, and \$36 million Greenway under construction. While these accomplishments are tremendous, they are the effect of years of cultural advocacy from organizations that persisted in a less than rich arts ecology. 40+ years of active divestment in downtown makes capital investment expedient, and the rapid flush of infrastructure threatens to cannibalize existing organizations inside and out. The mantra, 'all boats rise,' obscures disparities and jeopardizes the organic qualities and sustainability of long standing community organizations. Increasing property values, renovation costs, and entrepreneurial models inevitably displace people and businesses while increasing tax bases rarely return resources to the cultural sector (let alone the people displaced). Instead, reliance is built on private philanthropy to accomplish public good, resilience is expected from artist seeking exposure, and private investors are encouraged to leverage public dollars to build new markets and public services that align with a pro forma. Foundations become policy makers, fund holders become committee leaders, and private philanthropy is tied up for multiple years in capital. Dollars for organizational operation and capacity building become increasingly competitive and scarce. Some criticality and planning could address these issues, but no one wants another plan on the shelf! We could use a little pattern language in our cultural economy. Consider that Elsewhere's three year effort to raise just under a million dollars is dwarfed by \$200 million invested into our block by private and foundation developers in the last two years. The International Civil Rights Center and Museum, set in the former Woolworths, took 17 years to open after its building was saved from demolition. Over the last 15 years, 4 or 5 underground music venues appeared and disappeared, closed down by city enforcement. Recently, Bennett College, one of two women's HBCU in the nation, closed its visual art department. Coffee shops are the only spaces local artists can perform or show work with limited barriers for access. 17 'grassroots' organizations receiving project support from Greensboro's arts council pull from a tiny pot of just \$125,000. Community artist projects like The Artist Bloc, Casa Azul, Greensboro Mural Project, Poetry Basketball, and Cackalac Thunder, remain underfunded because they don't fit a neat downtown narrative, aren't savvy non-profits, and present challenging work in their own vernacular. I suspect similar ecologies could be mapped for other cities at their scales.

Despite their relegation to an order of scarcity, alternative spaces thrive in

emerging cultural economies. Their experimentation breaks down rigid thinking in the cultural sector by assembling new audiences, partnerships, and by mobilizing ideas into the public sphere. Elissa Blount Moorhead, Executive Director of Station North Arts and Entertainment District in Baltimore said in response to Oakland and the closing of Baltimore's Bell Foundry, "You can't call yourself an arts district or a city that cares about the arts if you only have spaces that people are trying to cobble together. There have to be spaces where people can live in community." As mid-size cities regenerate themselves around the renewal of their downtowns we should consider the opportunity for new social formations. Art's oft discussed fascination with accelerated capitalism luridly pictures artists clinging to the fringes of major metropolises. But places outside artworld bubbles where broad cultural shifts are absolutely necessary to protect lives, and are in fact most vulnerable to a critical art-activist incursions, are often invisible to the liberal art "centers." In a state like North Carolina, where congressional districts were redrawn to remove civil liberties, the municipalities are actually responsive enough to their constituencies and liberal enough in their values, to distribute cultural capital and invest in communities as part of culture—with the right pressure. We've all experienced council leaders, economic development agencies, developers, planning departments, and corporate board members struggling with clunky ideas like Placemaking. Place is something felt, not a strategy. Yet we keep espousing these ideas to inch forward a sliver of understanding about our culture's potential. We turn critically important values of art and community into poor economic arguments. For example, American's for the Arts tells us that in Guilford County every dollar spent on the arts leverages \$14 dollars in the surrounding economy. But doesn't that mean for every dollar admission we accept at our door, \$14 is spent buying pizza across the street. Why don't we stop selling their pie and start expanding the pie for our communities and artists? Cultural capital in the arts is just decoration if it doesn't hold investors and civic leaders responsible to existing communities, doesn't embrace community design, and leaves artist outside the planning process. We need to stop advocating for more funds and start advocating for communities and artists.

Following the talks, panels, and viewing of the Nasher Southern Accent exhibition, we will build an asset map of our state. Together we will ask: what are artists doing in our towns? Under what conditions are they operating? Why are their values sometimes so different from our arts institutions, patrons, and civic

leaders? We will list the resources in place—formal structures like grants, studio and living spaces, program models, schools, peer networks, and leadership trainings. But lets also try to imagine what resources should be in place sustain those more informal creative spaces, spaces where communities are serving themselves, where they work to remain less visible to ensure their own self empowerment. Considering the history of our state in the Culture War and the current political coup in North Carolina's state legislature, I challenge us all to ask: in this new Culture War, whose side are we actually on—that of our own institutions or the artists and communities they serve? Are we prepared to use our exhibitions, hiring policies, board structures, and capital investments to divest in traditional leadership and decolonize the white power structures that systematically segregate our culture? Are we prepared to lead our organizations and constituents toward a more honest and holistic conception of community building? When we support artistic experimentation are we prepared to enact the vision of freedom being described to us by our Trans and POC neighbors? Do we know what their vision looks like, what it feels like? Are we ready to build our organizations with a different image of love and growth? Today, and perhaps over the next 100 days and next four years, I hope we will all be quick to express what we don't know and to lean into any discomfort. Let's try not to defend and promote our great work. Instead, let's think critically, work differently, act collectively, and make more equitably.

This essay is an edited statement delivered at the opening of Elsewhere's Southern Constellation Convergence, a discussion and mapping of experimental artist resources in North Carolina. Held at the Nasher Museum, December 17th, Durham, NC in correspondence with their Southern Accent exhibition. It appears here courtesy of Temporary Art Review, and was originally published on January 13, 2017 at www.temporaryartreview.com

REFLECTIONS

2010 W.A.G.E Survey

by W.A.G.E.

The following excerpt is reproduced here courtesy of W.A.G.E. More on W.A.G.E's original 2010 survey at wageforwork.com/resources/2010-w-a-g-e-survey

Introduction

The purpose of the W.A.G.E. Survey was to gather information about the economic experiences of visual and performing artists exhibiting in non-profit exhibition spaces and museums in New York City between 2005 and 2010. The survey was distributed in two parts: one that gathered information about small to medium sized non-profit arts organizations and another that gathered information about large non-profit arts organizations and museums; the questions and structure of each were identical and only differed by their lists of institutions. The survey was launched on September 22, 2010 and remained open until May 1, 2011. It collected responses anonymously, and was distributed via Web and Email outreach using W.A.G.E.'s mailing list, Facebook, various LISTSERVS, and an e-flux announcement. The combined reach of these mailings was to approximately 50,000 people. A total of 731 respondents provided data about Small to Medium Non-profit Institutions, while 246 respondents provided data about Large Non-profit Institutions and Museums. This report was commissioned by W.A.G.E. and compiled by Sherry X. Xian of the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. Her analysis combines the data of both surveys unless otherwise indicated and provides analysis only where significant differentiation within the data was noted.

Demographic information is representative of the 977 respondents who began the survey but not necessarily of those who provided specific information about their payment experiences, since only 577 of those who answered demographic questions also exhibited in a non-profit arts institution between 2005-2010. 43% were between 31 to 40 years old. 60% were male and about 2% were transgender. 46% did not rent a studio outside of their residence. 26% spent less than \$5,000 in annual studio rent.

The following 2010 W.A.G.E. Survey graphics are taken from a poster designed by Common Space Studio: www.commonspacestudio.com

ANY PAYMENT

Did you receive any form of payment, compensation or reimbursement for your participation in the exhibition, including the coverage of any expenses?

ANY FORM OF PAYMENT
577 RESPONDENTS



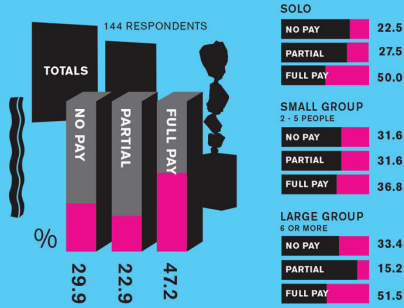
58.4%

41.6%

EXHIBITION EXPENSES

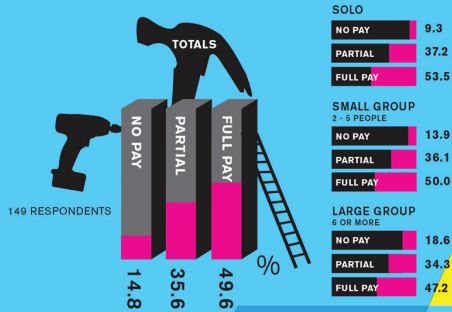
SHIPPING

How much of the cost of shipping/transporting the work was paid for by the organization?



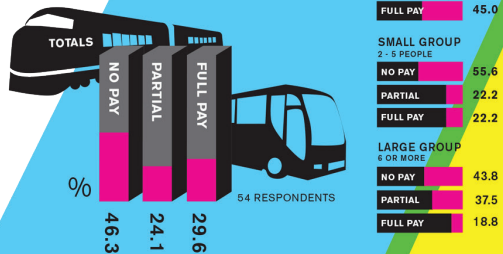
INSTALLATION

How much of your installation expenses were covered by the organization?



TRAVEL

If you traveled to New York City from out of town, how much of your travel expenses were covered?



ANY FORM OF PAYMENT BY NUMBER OF ARTISTS IN EXHIBITION
577 RESPONDENTS

SOLO EXHIBITION



SMALL GROUP
2-5 PEOPLE

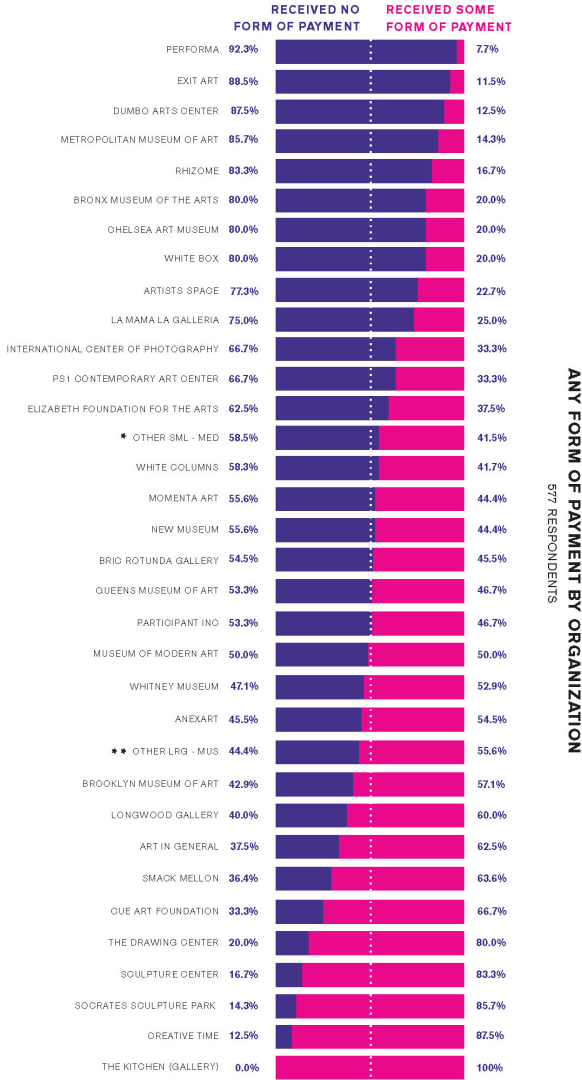


LARGE GROUP
6 OR MORE



ANY PAYMENT

Did you receive any form of payment, compensation or reimbursement for your participation in the exhibition, including the coverage of any expenses?



Artist Resource Sharing in the Triangle

By Jessica Jones

There were so many meetings and discussions that made up the Articulating Value in the Arts project this year. Each one seemed to have a different personality and tone, but each was passionate, insightful, and productive. These conversations led to friendships, to projects, and to a better understanding of my fellow artists. However, for all the specific outputs, what truly struck me was the value of the meetings themselves. The most powerful element, to my eyes, was the feeling of sharing this experience with other artists in an open and compassionate environment.

A sense of isolation is a common barrier to everyone who works independently towards a goal. Whether their field is painting, dance, writing, or whether it is web design, baking, or mathematics. The experience is not limited to the fine arts, but the arts community in particular seems to have limited coping strategies established for the challenges of isolation. To be present, in a sustained way, with other individuals who share your interests, your struggles, perhaps a shared educational background, or common art historical context... this is a powerful emotional need, and one which was met by the repeated gatherings of Articulating Value in the Arts.

However, this project was not intended to be an end, in and of itself, it was intended (at least in part) to identify problems and launch solutions. One such solution is an idea that has existed amorphously in my dreams for several years, and has recently seen a chance to be realized. That dream is the establishment of an artist resource center for working arts professionals. The cathartic experience of these Articulating Value meetings reminded me of the emotional value of such an organizing presence, and the flurry of networking that occurred at each event clarified for me the practical value of simply giving artists the opportunity to help each other. This networking also formed the relationships that promise to make this dream a reality.

I should note, though, that of course this need was not something I alone noticed. It was a prominent point of discussion throughout our conversations,

frequently coming to the foreground as a problem that many acknowledged, but that had no simple solution. To facilitate this kind of communication and collaboration remotely through a website or listserv is, not completely ineffective, but certainly challenging. The kind of organic communication that is really productive often comes from chance physical encounters.

This phenomenon has been studied in the corporate world, and has resulted in tech companies organizing office layouts to force employees to walk by one another's offices, and to congregate in casual shared areas, such as break rooms and outdoor spaces. I've experienced it myself in open office situations, where it is easy for younger individuals to ask casually for help from others with more advanced skills. Or where one person laughing inadvertently at something on their computer leads to the whole office joining in and having a shared break. You cannot artificially create these things, but by giving them the chance to occur, the group is strengthened and each member is able to achieve more.

Proximity breeds efficiency, for sure, but how do we achieve this in the arts? Well, as I mentioned, one of these Articulating Value meetings, with its invaluable casual networking, led to just such an opportunity. An individual, one Jaybird O'Berski, happened to mention toward the end of a meeting that he was going to look at a building owned by the city that might be available for use by artists. He invited anyone interested to come have a look with him, and of course I asked for the address.

What we found was precisely the kind of rough stone the arts community could polish into a jewel. A sturdy, spacious, industrial-type property that will be vacated in the next year, it offered endless fodder for the imagination. This could be the artist resource center I had been imagining. A classroom here, a break-room there, a space for dance, and one for theater... Not fancy, not sexy, no vaulted roofs or floor-to-ceiling windows, but a functional building where artists could run free, creating in whichever way they were inspired. Most importantly, though, they could do it together. The screen-printer can have a coffee while dropping in on a play rehearsal (and maybe suggest an idea for a poster?). The sculptor can come inside and take a break in the air conditioning with the dancers who are warming up for a class. In the office space, an advocacy group might borrow a stapler from a nonprofit gallery (a partnership is born?). The framework

is unfinished, and the building not yet leased, but the possibilities seem endless.

There are many wonderful resources in the city of Durham, and the Triangle at large. There are co-working spaces run by amazing administrators and full of many creative businesses. There are performance spaces and offices, galleries and studios, all making great strides towards strengthening and growing the arts community. This space, though, this unpolished building full of opportunity, promises to be a truly unique asset. Like a garage, where one doesn't have to be quiet and behave, or a playroom, where you can finally jump on the furniture, this space has the potential to be a truly multi-disciplinary playground for artists, while also offering the structured programming to support this creative output. Great programming is what could take a project like this from useful to transformative.

The fundamental idea underlying a professional artist resource center is that it is not just a rehearsal space (although it is that). It is not just a meeting place (although it is that as well). The space needs to have a knowledgeable core staff who set a tone of empowerment and support by providing artists with the information they need to make their projects, not just artistically ambitious, but successful and sustainable in their execution.

My experience teaching financial literacy to artists has shown me what an enormous difference a small amount of planning can make. For an artist, having a place where they can go to find information, templates, or advice means that they don't have to feel like they have all the answers up front. They don't have to act like they have it all together, and they don't have to be afraid when they realize they don't. Just as one individual isn't going to have all the physical supplies they need, they also will not have every scrap of experience and information they need right at the start. Any project worth doing requires learning along the way, and artists deserve to have a space where they can go to find that information in a way that is tailored for their industry. With my own experience, and the tremendous skills of the other individuals involved in this project, I have no doubt that the services we could provide through this space would be invaluable.

Equipment-sharing, professional development seminars, city resource databases; these are all part of the dream, but we cannot yet get ahead of ourselves. Con-

vincing a city to take a chance on a project like this is no small feat. The city has a responsibility to use its assets efficiently and has many different departments with many different, extremely important goals. Our job, now, is to show them all the value of the arts, and remind them what a strong arts community can do for its city. We must be advocates and ambassadors to remind everyone that we are a strong and vital part of the economy. The arts are not a charity, they are an industry, with employees, institutions, and invaluable contributions to their cities.

If we want to be a strong community, we cannot be isolated. It is easy to get lost in one's own work, but we have to reach out. We have to stay in touch with each other, and also with other industries and with our local government. We must be active, aware citizens, in order to build the kind of infrastructure we need to accomplish our work, and also build sustainable lives for ourselves and our community.

Articulating Value in the Arts

by *Chris Vitiello*

Early this month, *The New York Times* ran a profile of Hal Willner, who would be called an “arts entrepreneur” or “cultural producer” today but in his day was just called whatever he was doing at the moment, which ranged from producing albums to organizing performances to bringing wildly disparate artists together to collaborate to whatever the hell else he thought was interesting to do. Name all that and you kind of kill it.

That’s not important. What’s important is how Willner describes mainstream American culture in the 60s and 70s as much more generally weird than it is now. Soupy Sales had his own kids show. William S. Burroughs read “Naked Lunch” on “Saturday Night Live.” Today, kids shows are made to brand merchandise and SNL shoots for click counts to air web ads on the fronts of sound bytes. It’s pretty watered down and all the same, because it’s pretty much what’s proven to sell.

While that’s one expression of the value of arts and culture, it’s sure a narrow one—about as narrow as a dollar bill. How did we get here in just a few decades? What happened, Willner asks, and not without a bit of “these kids today” crankiness.

The answer isn’t simple because the answer must be based upon the answerer’s ideas about what art is for, as well as what kinds and qualities of art fulfill those purposes. Art’s value is entirely social, so any calculation of that value contains variables that have to do with one’s relationship to society at all levels and scales, which varies from day to day as people and things change.

That’s not as narrow a notion of value as what a roomful of advertisers might express. But, with so many unknowable variables, can you express anything at all useful about value and the arts? Maybe not. And things are still getting less weird.

HOW THIS STARTED

Articulating Value hopes to seed new opportunities for a diverse arts community through a sustained consideration of the relationship between art and value. The project has consisted of a series of community conversations, heading toward this more traditionally structured conference and publication in September 2017. And then continuing in forms to be determined by necessity.

To be true, Articulating Value has seemed always on the verge of arriving at its starting point. That's because its root questions are unanswerable, inasmuch as there are many answers to them and the set of answers is constantly changing as time passes.

How do artists measure the value of their work? What are the units of measurement? the amounts? How do artists describe their own value to their communities, to the larger society, and to humanity generally? And what do communities and humanity get out of art anyway? How can artists make a living from their work, and do they even deserve to? These are big questions, and the answers change fast.

We started last year with small conversations among a core group of four. Murielle Elizéon and Tommy Noonan at Culture Mill created the project and brought Ginger Wagg and me together to mull these questions. We started small and slow. We had open-ended discussions with no agenda other than to talk about our successes and failures. We kicked around what-ifs, shared solutions that we'd read about or witnessed, and imagined adapting those models to our own communities. If this sounds just like shoptalk and shooting the breeze, it was, and quite intentionally so.

That's because, when it came to discussions of value in the arts, the worst ones we had ever been to were the snoozers of panel discussions by consultants and administrators who charted already outdated Chamber of Commerce metrics and clicked through the bulletpoints they'd screened at seven conferences already.

The best discussions of value and the arts we'd been in usually started with a bunch of artists during a rehearsal break or at the bar after an event. Someone

complains about how hard it is to get paid or how lame a street festival was and someone else says “we should do X” or “we should start Y” and everyone nods and then has a second whiskey or gets back into work mode and sets X and Y aside.

Articulating Value aspires to replicate and provoke those productive conversations as much as possible in an open and inclusive forum. And to pick up that X and Y and run with them.

Why this might be useful

Hal Willner’s complaint offers some context in the form of a timestamp. What’s happened since the 70s to make American arts and culture less weird? And where are we right now?

In the 80s, Reagan’s conservatives led cultural purges put forth as policy. Remember the “NEA Four” and Andres Serrano’s “Piss Christ?” Attacking anything they didn’t like as deviant, conservatives lowered the boom on public art funding by taking the legs out from under the National Endowment for the Arts for funding organizations that showed that suddenly controversial work. Even if arts funding amounts have stabilized or recovered (according to which economic model you’re using), arts organizations retain that trauma and play it absurdly safe in terms of what they’ll fund.

Arts councils, which redistribute NEA funds, still enforce the Reagan-era neocon agenda to a large extent, using the taking of public dollars and the fear of a witch hunt as justifications for blandness. And, whether they know it or not, neoliberals hold the councils’ hands. It’s a devil’s bargain: in order to open up the arts for all, all art must be safe for all, and any art that’s not represents a risk that plenty of arts administrators and granting agencies have forgotten how to take. And so we have “good” notions of value operating as a normalizing system, and art becomes a leisure activity that people can bring their kids to on a sunny Saturday afternoon before buying a thousand rolls of toilet paper at Costco.

One way artists and arts organizations have gotten around this is to become credentialed by an academic institution. It’s okay that there’s a nipple in the

photograph; the artist got

an MFA at Yale. But the academy is another normalizing system because debt comes with that MFA. You had better graduate with a portfolio that granting bodies can safely put dollars behind and that art spaces can show and sell tickets to, because loans are coming due.

Today, we're seeing another conservative surge and more threats to public arts funding. It's scary to look at the ground we've not taken back since Reagan, and imagine giving even more over to Trump. It's time to ask the deepest possible questions and to build new models and organizations. And maybe there's an opportunity there to close ranks between the arts administrators and the renegade practitioners.

WHERE THIS MIGHT BE GOING

Remember that X and Y that someone thought of while patching the gallery wall? Some of us have been following through with those ideas. Today we have a wealth of smaller, more agile artist-run spaces, collectives, and organizational models that didn't exist a decade ago. We're finding ways to reclaim weird ground by operating outside of the normalized system through crowdfunding and more distributed group structures. We tend to be smaller and local, and we're not getting paid well—or at all—but we're making more relevant work and we're building community through that work.

The initial small conversations among our core four Articulating Value folks produced a set of 10 big questions about value and the arts. We brought these 10 questions to a large gathering of around 40 people at The Carrack in Durham. Then we did more gatherings in the three points of the Triangle—in Durham at the Shed, at Anchorlight in Raleigh, and at the Nightlight in Chapel Hill. Another conversation sprang up pretty spontaneously in Saxapahaw, too.

Those questions produced discussion that seemed to head into two broad categories: 1. conceptual considerations of the aspirations and purposes of artists in general; and 2. practical considerations of both the existing and missing organizational resources for artists in our specific communities and cities.

All of this wide-ranging discussion has prompted real activity in the areas of arts advocacy and resource sharing and development. People are making new relationships with local governments and businesses to create opportunities for artistic projects or new access to spaces. People are designing advocacy initiatives for changes to traditional arts funding structures. People are sketching out new, more agile arts organizations and un- organizations that could better address needs that aren't being addressed or go chronically under-addressed.

Which brings us to this more traditionally structured conference today. People will present on some of this new activity. People will listen and nod and jot notes and introduce themselves to each other. Some of it will be like a Powerpoint in a Sheraton. And some of it, hopefully, will be like it's 11:43 p.m. and you just hung the last collage on the gallery wall and you're going to die if the taco truck is closed already.

Be real and be vital and never—never ever ever—get tired. You're needed.

REFLECTIONS