

# ARTNEWS

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WINTER 2017 ([HTTP://WWW.ARTNEWS.COM/ISSUE/WINTER-2017/](http://www.artnews.com/issue/winter-2017/))

HOW TO FIX THE ART WORLD, PART 4

BY *The Editors of ARTnews* ([http://www.artnews.com/author/the\\_editors\\_of\\_artnews/](http://www.artnews.com/author/the_editors_of_artnews/)) POSTED 11/30/16 10:00 AM

Q: How do  
you fix the  
art world?

A:

That's a  
rough one

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY ALEXANDER DUMBADZE

Welcome to Part 4 of 'How to Fix the Art World.' If you are just now tuning in, here are the links to [Parts 1](http://www.artnews.com/2016/11/18/how-to-fix-the-art-world-part-1/) (<http://www.artnews.com/2016/11/18/how-to-fix-the-art-world-part-1/>), [2](http://www.artnews.com/2016/11/21/how-to-fix-the-art-world-part-2/) (<http://www.artnews.com/2016/11/21/how-to-fix-the-art-world-part-2/>), and [3](http://www.artnews.com/2016/11/28/how-to-fix-the-art-world-part-3/) (<http://www.artnews.com/2016/11/28/how-to-fix-the-art-world-part-3/>), and here's a little background:

Back in August my staff and I embarked on an epic project: we wanted to know what inhabitants of the art world think is wrong with it and how they would fix it. In the ensuing months we spoke with more than 50 individuals—artists and curators, critics and historians, art dealers and an art fair director—to gather a range of perspectives. Some wrote longer essayistic responses; some artists responded with visuals. We finished our research and put the Winter 2017 issue of *ARTnews* to bed on the eve of the U.S. presidential election. Subscribers will receive the print edition later this month. <sup>coverage since 1902.</sup> Because some of our respondents wanted to speak about what's right with the art world, we are posting a portion of the many responses in these days before the Thanksgiving holiday. We hope you will read them with the same great interest, and the same open mind, with which we did when we received them. We hope that you will continue the conversation. —Sarah Douglas, Editor-in-Chief, *ARTnews*

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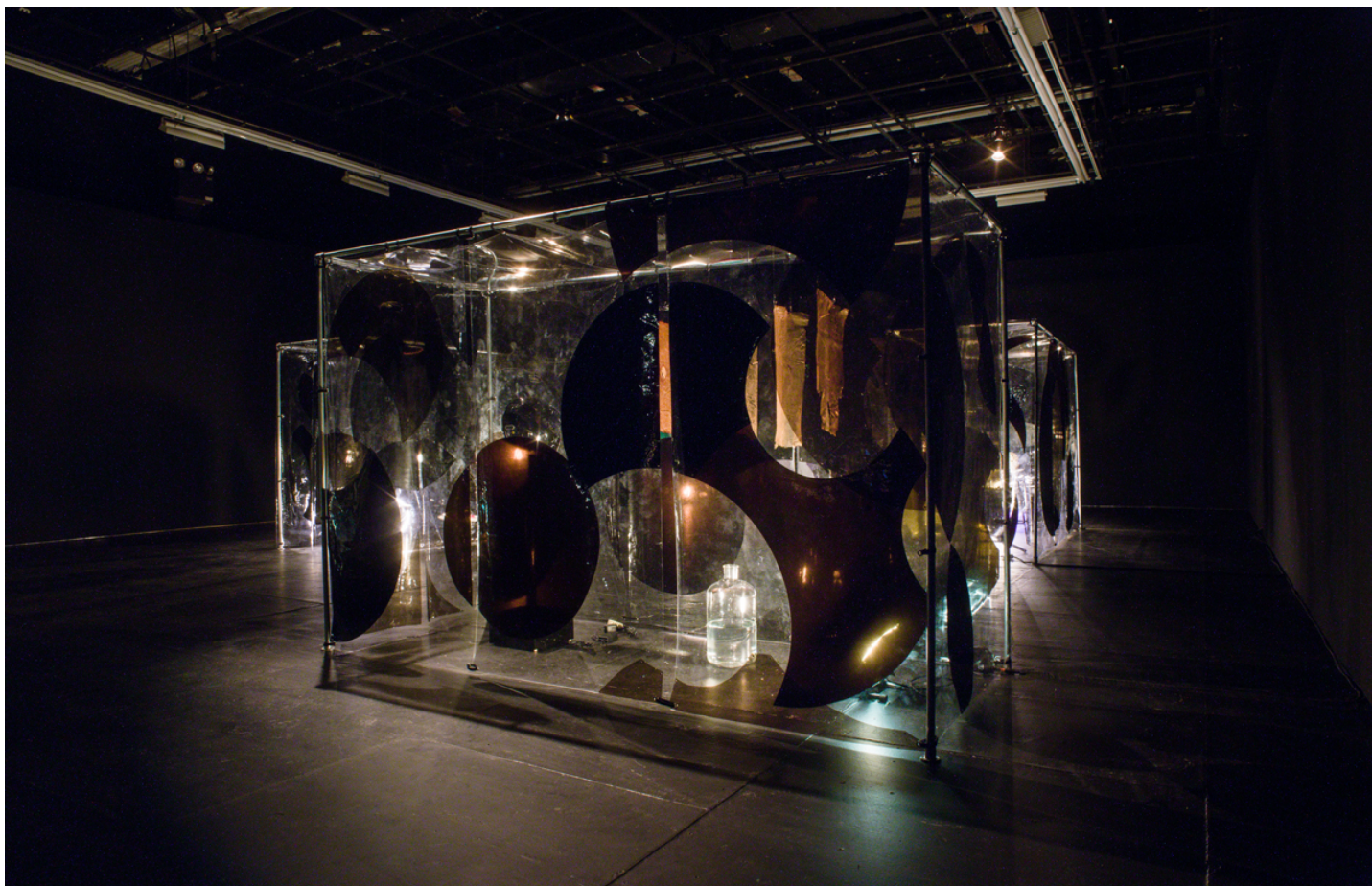
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Anicka Yi, *Fontenelle*, 2015.

JASON MANDELLA/COURTESY THE ARTIST, 47 CANAL, NEW YORK AND THE KITCHEN, NEW YORK

## Anicka Yi

### Artist

We need to have more diversity. The art world needs to be far more inclusive of people of color. One thing I feel very much is lacking is the opportunity to interact with different kinds of people, in terms of gender, ethnicity, age. You can only have a richer experience when you have more diversity. Affirmative action policies would a good way of changing this. Museum boards need more women and people of color. Why can't we implement this? For this generation, it's shot, but a few generations down the road it will make a difference. It's been effective for education in this country.

I would also rethink this notion of a winner-takes-all type of structure. We need to strive more for a bell-curve distribution of acknowledgment, rewards, and opportunity. That can only strengthen the art community. When you have just a few breakout stars, that compromises the system itself. You make the middle ground vulnerable and everything is in threat of collapsing. When you have a stronger structure like a bell-curve distribution and more people benefit from it, then you have a stronger system. It's like economics, with the middle class. Where is the middle class in the art world?

It's also important to remember that the attention economy should not determine your value, or the value of your work or practice. No one gets to determine your value. No one gets to tell you that you are good, bad, approved, or disapproved. I think it takes a tremendous ability to be able to step away from the consensus and try to forge ahead. You may not see results for decades, but if we had more of a bell-curve distribution of success, then maybe more of us could be encouraged and hang in there.

I wish more fortitude for everybody. I know how hard it is to work so hard and be ignored and not be encouraged. It kind of breaks your heart and you wonder, how do people survive? Just because an artist gets 10,000 likes does not mean it makes them a more important valuable contributor. This like/dislike economy is really fraught. (*Back to top.*)

## **Jamillah James**

### **Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles**

The art world is really insulated, oftentimes, from what is understood as the “real world,” onto which we are actually a mirror. I say this with questions of audience in mind and also big-picture societal concerns that artists are good at addressing through their work.


Sexism and racism in the art world are open secrets, and there is a deep need at the institutional, organizational level to address them and to work together against the systemic problems that can make working in the arts alienating—and that can alienate audiences, too. Museums have been doing a better job lately of opening their walls to the public through community-engagement programming and enhanced social media exchange.

Still, there is much work to be done in making exhibitions and programs that are not just about art, but that also confront more of the issues that directly impact their constituencies. We have to keep doing that and not get bogged down or cynical about the way our world is right now. We have a real responsibility to think critically about things that people may not ordinarily consider. We have the tools, we have the ability, and we have the people to initiate important conversations, especially when the stakes are so high. We must try as cultural producers to sustain engagement with our communities—to be patient, to be open, to listen.

There's still nervousness about the “other” in the art world, and there's always the conversation about who's “in” the art world. Some people are supposedly “outside” it, which I don't believe: I think that the border between inside and out must always be porous to maintain the flow of information. We have to stop thinking of the art world as something separate from the real world. It's just the world we live in. (*Back to top.*)

## Walter Robinson

### Artist & Writer

A handwritten note in black ink on a white background. The text reads "For some people IT'S NOT BROKEN." The word "IT'S" is written in all caps and is significantly larger and bolder than the other words. The rest of the text is in a cursive, lowercase script.

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY WALTER ROBINSON

How do you fix the art world? For some people, it's not broken. Some people have shows of their artwork on view right now at important New York galleries. Some people get favorable notices for their exhibitions from top art critics in newspapers and magazines. Some people experience a notable boost in their social status simply because of their newfound success. Some people just plain can't complain.

Have you noticed those courses and books that advise artists about ways to be business savvy and promote themselves to get ahead? Not everybody needs that kind of how-to advice. Not everybody has use for a guide to gallery etiquette and studio-visit strategy and cultivating museum curators. Not every artist cares to be taught how to sell.

Imagine you're a painter. What do you want? This: You're sitting at your easel in your studio, working, and a friend drops by, looks at what you're doing and says, "Oh that's good, I like it." Then a little while later, another friend, one who has just started her own art gallery, calls you on the phone. "We're having a group show," she says. "Do you have anything you can let us see?" When you bring over to the gallery a few things you've done on paper, she likes them, and puts you in the exhibition. Simple.

Later still, you're hanging out, and other friends and acquaintances ask you to do things. Have a show. Write something. Curate something. Be in a video, a benefit, a performance. And more shows. You do what you want. You have fun. You sell some paintings, though not for a lot, and the money passes through your fingers like water.

When the art world wants you, it comes and gets you. You are not so much an autonomous agent as a crossroads of historical and social forces. All you have to do is be ready. ([Back to top.](#))

## **Alex Gartenfeld**

**Deputy Director & Chief Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art Miami**

Miami bears witness to a problem that is more a universal reflection on the nature of objects and culture today: explosive interest in art's economic might and glorification of its attendant values at the expense of its relationship to critical and progressive vocabularies. The popularity of art and its increasing similarity to other areas of cultural spectatorship is its affirmation of the power it enshrines. To be “artistic” is good; to be “curatorial” is to be a savvy consumer—not to be critical, political, social, egalitarian, or progressive.

This role for culture is one of extreme financial and economic exclusion, which mirrors society. Given the nature of this order, it also renders moot the commons of middle-class community, and those who would inhabit it—writers and critics, educators, and professionals, but also educated viewers and interlocutors. Literacy in contemporary art is not a technology but a civic mode.

In spite of being the site for one of the Western Hemisphere's preeminent art fairs and having some of the most important collections of American postwar and 20th-century Latin American art, as well as a rapidly expanding museum field, Miami is still working to generate discourse to reflect the cultural import of the material that has lent it economic prestige.

In response, this past fall at ICA Miami, my colleague Gean Moreno initiated the Art + Research Center (A+RC), the city's first graduate-level seminar program dedicated to art and ideas. A unique collaboration with Florida International University (FIU)—which hosts the only regional curatorial master's program, and an ambitious visual arts program—A+RC entails a series of workshops and seminars geared toward politicizing the field of inquiry into images among our city's leading analytical minds. Each summer, in a state where the governor has prohibited use of the words “climate change” among members of high-level government, yet where every official champions the importance of art tourism, this program will host an intensive examination dedicated to the relationship between aesthetics and the epochal shift of environmental transformation caused by human activity. (*[Back to top.](#)*)

## **Susana Torruella Leval**

**Director Emerita, El Museo del Barrio**

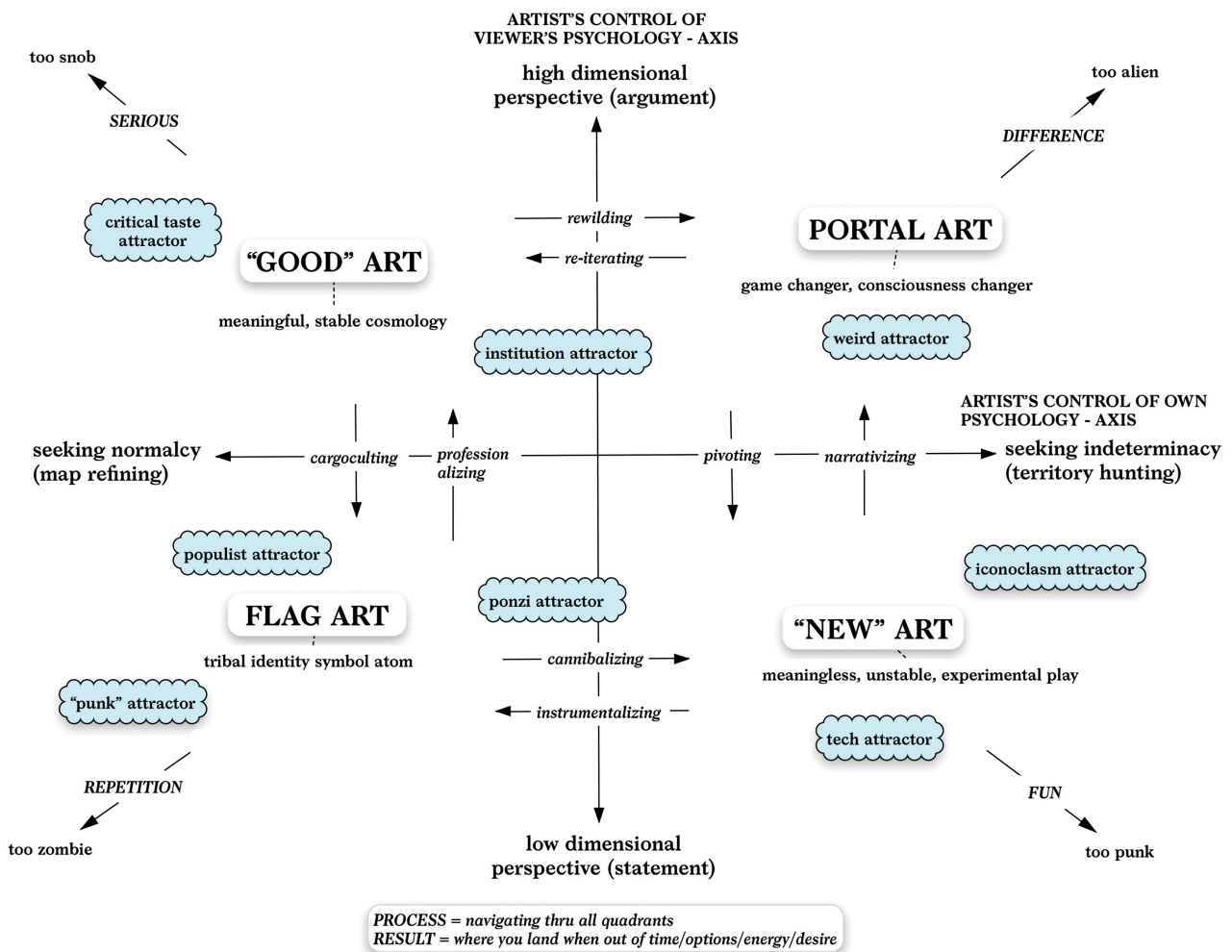
Speed defines today's art world—speed of travel, of electronic communications, of human contacts and professional transactions, of transfers of massive amounts of information and wealth, of proliferating art fairs and biennials as must-see art marketplaces. The greater the speed, the less time for careful thought, meaningful exchanges, slow research, pleasure in work.

Speed shrinks the world and contributes to a culture of celebrity, as jet-setting curators gobble up the world, trolling the same venues for the next global art star.

Solutions? Slow down? Forget about money? Go back to leisurely studio visits and handwritten letters? Not bloody likely. (*Back to top.*)

# Ian Cheng Artist

## ART STATES OF MIND



([http://1vze7o2h8a2b2tyahl3i0t68.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/iancheng\\_final.jpg](http://1vze7o2h8a2b2tyahl3i0t68.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/iancheng_final.jpg)). (*Click to enlarge and explore.*)



What state of mind are we looking at when we look at an artist's artwork? And what game is that artwork persuading us to play? Here is a new map to get oriented. An artwork, and its artist, often journey through all quadrants in the process, but arrive at one psychological orientation in the end: as a retreat into tribalism (flag art); as an attempt at coherent meaningfulness ("good" art); as meaningless experimental play ("new" art); as an interface to feel the weird unknown (portal art). Every era implicitly asks of art to rebalance the cultural debts of previous eras, to cope with the times, to fertilize the institutions of tomorrow. In our time, when untamed reality leaks into our comforting certainties at rates that exceed our ability to emotionally resolve, we should invest in a culture of portals. Portals can be the prosthetic interfaces to build up our tolerance for indeterminacy, to live with its incoherence, navigate it, crash within it, gain perspective on it, perhaps even learn to love it. Against the childish protests of our ancient limbic wiring, and against our adult addiction to normalize reality into eternal, stable meaning, portals, portals, portals. (*Back to top.*)

## **Adam Lindemann**

### **Art Dealer & Collector**

Who invented this question? This sounds like Donald Trump—Make America Great Again. Make the Art World Great Again.

It seems to me that the art world works far too well. It's far too efficient. I mean, it's slightly off its all-time high—it would benefit from slowing down—it's just accelerated, the quantity has increased, therefore the quality has decreased. The vast quantities of art being vomited onto the market, daily. That's why we have all those artists who come up with a trick—I'm gonna run my paintings through a printer, I'm gonna make it with a fire extinguisher—the gimmick thing.

It can't be fixed unless it slows. [The market] cooled? Man, hello? People are still buying, still living a fantasy. It would make sense that they would live a fantasy, because art is a fantasy, and now it's a dream of investment. Everyone who buys art thinks they're buying something of value, but they're not. It's very hard to dissuade people or steer them away from optimistic and somewhat hedonistic beliefs. Everyone's having a great time so why bother them. No one likes a party pooper.

But I don't think we're going to have any kind of collapse, ever again. We can have slowdowns, but we can't have collapses. There's always going to be someone who wants a great work of art. (*Back to top.*)

## **RoseLee Goldberg**

### **Director & Curator, Performa**

# Redress the balance

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY ROSELEE GOLDBERG

What's right with the art world? It's finally a place of racial and ethnic diversity, a complex world where the expectation is that artists investigate the unexpected, the painful, the difficult, the underserved in society, and find visual language to describe the always-evolving world in which we live. What's ideal about the art world is that we speak many languages, traverse multiple disciplines, from visual art to photography, dance, music, film, poetry, design, architecture, philosophy, and more, and that artists ponder the many divisions in class and society, media and history.

What's wrong with the art world is the same as what's wrong with the economic systems that dominate our globe; all the money is at the top, being traded by the few, with little that trickles down to the source, to the artists who produce the work, and the writers and curators and nonprofit organizations who help produce, contextualize, display, disseminate, and conserve their work and ideas. It would be great if the members of this group at the top understood their role as patrons of the arts, and took responsibility as producers rather than behaving as mere consumers. For every dollar spent to put art on the wall, a dollar should be put back into the art community, nurturing the next generation of artists.

Everyone needs to play an active role in redressing the balance. Cities need to revise their budgets to recognize the essential work of the nonprofit organizations that provide community and critical support for the early careers of emerging artists and offer professional opportunities for young curators and administrators as well as compelling cultural and educational magnets for their cities; collectors need to get involved to sustain the fragile ecosystem of the nonprofit side of the art world with philanthropic gifts to endowments and programming funds; and cultural nonprofits must reassert their voices and engagement with the public they serve so that they remain vital and valued and are not overshadowed by the commercial sector. (*[Back to top.](#)*)

**David Levi Strauss**

***Chair of MFA Art Writing Department, School of Visual Arts***

The main thing that's wrong with the art world today is that too many people involved now think that art is like everything else, and the truth is that it's not.

The shift started a long time ago, with the corporatization of the museums and the accompanying imperative for growth at any cost, causing museums to treat art as entertainment or therapy. Then people from the financial sector figured out how to monetize art and turn the art market into a real trading market, wherein art holdings could be leveraged for greater profit. This brought in a different kind of player, who thought of art as a commodity only. The art market became increasingly separated from the actual making of art, to the point where artists and consumers of art are now living in two entirely different realms. One needs a validated visa to travel from one realm to the other, and the border is patrolled by hordes of middle managers, speaking and writing a kind of ecclesiastical sales argot.

This process rendered art criticism, and critical thinking about art, irrelevant, since the only measure that matters in the new formulation is economic valuation. The kind of art writing I value is alive and well in the realm of art and artists, but has little purchase in relation to the market. This shift has also had disastrous consequences in art education, causing all manner of confusion about what young artists need and want today.

Does this mean the end of art? No. Art continues to thrive in the interstices and in the shadows of the corporate art world. But the idea that art is like everything else is more and more prevalent, and needs to be actively disputed.

How do you fix it? Education. Bring artists and writers together. Stop pretending that art is like everything else. It's not. (*[Back to top.](#)*)

**Jacob Ciocci**

**Artist**



Jacob Ciocci, *What's Next*, 2015.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

I'm 38 years old but can't stop thinking I'm 40. So as a 40-year-old I feel like life is about half over, if I'm lucky. It's making me reflect a lot, and in particular I keep thinking about the people I met in my early 20s all the way through my mid 30s—people I barely see anymore. These are friends or acquaintances I met through touring, organizing shows, or self-releasing music, zines, comics, etc. I have been teaching art at colleges/universities off and on for about 8 years. I hold this framework for weird culture that I learned when I was in my 20s, built by and for kids, outside of but in relation to the history of fine art, as my spiritual center when I teach. It's really hard and I bet my students don't even notice I'm trying to teach from this perspective. I'm going to now try and describe some of these things that I learned in my 20s that are still important:

1. Art should be lived as much as it should be made. Art is a daily lifestyle—don't quarantine art into only studio time or conscious thought—art is every moment.
2. Art is people and connections between people—not objects, products, money, or anything else. This may seem weird to say in today's highly professionalized art world, but it's still true. All that matters is that art/music is a place where people figure out how to temporarily give each other more space, more freedom, more hope—it's a place where people learn how to treat each other better than people are

normally treated in society. I think this is true even if you are a painter. Painting can be this space for people. But this space is not contained in the painting, it's contained in the minds of the people that look at the painting.

3. Art is a balance of doing things for no reason and doing things to nurture friends and doing things because it feels good and doing things to be a trickster, to push people, to push the world, and doing things so that you can keep doing things.

4. Making art is all about giving it away—everything is a gift—your time, your money, your art/music/whatever—no expectations, no rewards. That last part is super important: doing things without expectation for reward. In my 20s sometimes shows were shitty and everyone was mean (often in fact), but the act was the same: giving with no expectation for reward, embracing the situation for what it was and making the most of it.

In summary: there is something important about making things from a perspective where you simultaneously expect both no one and everyone to care, and it's an attitude I try to teach my students. (*[Back to top.](#)*)

## **Xu Zhen**

### **Artist**

The issues within the art world are similar to those within society. If your working area is wide enough and if you have been in this field long enough, you will realize that there are numerous problems within the art world. People's weaknesses and inertia manifest in such ways as a conservative attitude when facing radical things or various prejudices when questions relate to geographical regions (racism, Western-centered opinions). There are also irrational reactions toward things coming from the outside and a lack of idealism. These are common "problems," and my work is to fight against these tendencies.

I think you should first understand that the problems that you are exposed to within the small area of the art world are in fact those of everyone's reality. These issues have always been there, and it isn't because you became aware of them that they will change. Therefore, the meaning of one's work should be directly pointed toward this reality and toward the society of the future, and shouldn't remain only within the realm of art. Once this is understood, everything [else] can be left aside and these problems can be seen with humor. Then a true contribution can be made. (*[Back to top.](#)*)

## Jay Gorney

### Art Dealer

We do seem to be burdened with a schedule of one art fair after another. I don't dislike fairs—they present a lot of material to a lot of people—but the schedule is filled with so many fairs that it becomes overwhelming for collectors, galleries, and artists. It is increasingly difficult for dealers to get material—both primary and secondary dealers. Now, how do you fix that? I think perhaps gallerists could start to get more selective about the fairs they participate in. More specialized fairs—like the New York Art Book Fair, the Outsider Fair, or Frieze Masters—might present a solution, and might be more interesting for collectors. In an art world that seems enormous and sort of daunting, greater specialization might not be the worst thing.

Another “problem” seems to be that of the mega galleries presenting a monolithic presence in the art world. I don't know how you un-ring a bell; this seems to reflect what's going on in the world at large. This is not a fix, but one now looks to galleries that are more specialized to provide a more specific kind of service to collectors by bringing a greater level of connoisseurship into the discussion—like Craig Starr on the Upper East Side, or Alexander Gray in Chelsea. There needs to be more connoisseurship on the part of gallerists and on the part of collectors. Specialization and greater knowledge might alleviate that feeling of sameness one can get when going from gallery to gallery.

Also, even within these very large galleries, some of the most brilliant shows are the ones that display enormous amounts of knowledge and connoisseurship, like the Monet show and the Picasso shows at Gagosian, shows of minimalist work at Paula Cooper, the Bas Jan Ader exhibition at Metro Pictures, 1960s drawings at Dominique Lévy, or the show of black Reinhardt paintings at David Zwirner. When you have more interesting programming, you might have more energized collectors.

I think everybody benefits when people know what they're doing and their focus gets a little more refined. (*Back to top.*)

## Krzysztof Wodiczko

### Artist

MORE \$ FOR PROJECTS  
THAT ARE BRIDGING  
THE ART WORLD AND  
THE LARGER WORLD.

HANDWRITTEN TEXT BY KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO

First of all, let me say that there are many different art worlds. But often artists like myself, who work in the socio-aesthetic field, often in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations, social support centers, city officials, agencies, or universities—institutions and groups that don't consider themselves part of the art world, and about whom the art world does not necessarily care—feel that they are only partially members of the art world as it is usually defined.

I could list organizations—the Los Angeles Poverty Department, for example—that have created their own socio-aesthetic programs and are, like myself, part of an art world. I am part of the art world, too, or you wouldn't be calling me. And that means that because my work is developed in collaboration with non-art-world organizations, a lot of other peoples' work is discussed or evaluated as part of the art-world discourse that would not otherwise necessarily be discussed or evaluated in this way.

Even so, the art world still seems not to be informed enough about socio-aesthetic work that originates outside it. Why is the art world reluctant to evaluate and discuss the people who have initiated such projects as the Los Angeles Poverty Department and the people who have contributed to and taken advantage of such projects?

In my ideal world, the art theory, criticism, and history, as much as art practice, would be more focused on socio-aesthetic work. Artists are still not prepared to operate well outside the art world; art education still locks artists inside their studios, and doesn't present them with the opportunity to work outside art-world institutions. Maybe I'm not being entirely fair, because I see some university programs and some recently published books that do encourage this. But there are still not many field critics writing about, observing, or working with non-art-world organizations, and most grants to artists are given on the basis of the object as a work of art.

When the work of art is complex and involves people and other institutions and groups, its artistic value cannot easily be recognized and explained. And there are many aesthetic projects that have originated outside the art world. For example, Antanas Mockus, the mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, initiated and developed a series of art projects involving city residents, encouraging them to become pantomime artists, to act as traffic police, and to become artist-painters in order to visually transform their urban dwellings. These kinds of projects are still not generally known or discussed in the art world.

There is a very big difference between the United States and countries like France, or Germany, or Canada even, where a lot more support comes from government, from ministries of culture, and so forth. In France, for example, there's a decentralized procedural structure for socio-aesthetic projects; they must be developed in collaboration with state and regional art authorities, and relevant social and cultural organizations. It's a step-by-step process. I'm not advocating this model as such, because of course there are lots of problems with having projects supervised by governmental and non-governmental authorities. In fact, there's something dubious about this. But I wish we had this kind of problem here in the United States. From what I can see, there is less and less government funding for art, so that means it is very difficult for artists to pursue long-term projects involving people and organizations outside the art world, to do it systematically, systematically developing methods of critical analysis and evaluation of this kind of work.

What I'm saying is that within the existing system there should be more critical support and money for projects that are bridging the art world and the larger world, and for initiatives coming from outside the art world that have aesthetic as well as social, ethical, and political dimensions. ([\*Back to top.\*](#))

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