

STUDENT SERIES: CCA Fall 2005

project art, some definitions, ethical considerations, and descriptions

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Introduction I. 3

Towards a definition of project art I. 4

Ethical considerations in project art II. 5-6

Project Descriptions:

Bridget Barnhart I. 7

Randolph Carter I. 8

Julia DeGuzman I. 9

Anne Devine I. 10

Jennifer Durban I. 11

Joyce Grimm I. 12

Amanda Herman I. 13

David Maisel I. 14

Jessica Martin I. 15

Matthew Paulson I. 16

Boyd Richard I. 17

Mark Rodriguez I. 18

Colophon I. 19

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## An introductory note

The following texts come out of a class entitled "A Project Art Practicum" from the Fall, 2005, semester at the California College of Arts. The sections entitled "Towards a definition of project art" and "Ethical considerations in project art" were based upon individual student writings that were then re-written by the class as a group, summarized into the lists below, edited by myself, and then approved by the class. They represent a culmination of a semester of class discussions around ethics and project art. During the semester students conducted their own project work and presented that work to the class. They also made group presentations on project work by others, including Christo, Creative Growth (an arts community center for developmentally disabled adults in Oakland, California), the Guerrilla Art Action Group, Santiago Sierra, and Tim Rollins and KOS. Following the two lists are the students' project descriptions of their own work.

I consider the two lists on project art (definition and ethics) to be a work in progress and, therefore, welcome all comments and criticism (bkinmont@aol.com). Although project art is often defined by its involvement with others, its practitioners are usually very independent. This independence has often come out of a need to figure things out on one's own and to do so without institutional support. As a result, for every definition of that practice there are ten exceptions, and for every suggestion as to what constitutes something ethical, there are 100 disagreements. Still, however, I do believe it important to at least try to get something down on paper, if only to aid in the discourse about the nature of this practice which some call "project art."

Ben Kinmont  
Sebastopol, CA  
12 December 2005

## **Towards a definition of project art**

Project art considers value structures outside of the art historical discourse.

Project art involves the public and the artist in a dialogue that usually occurs outside of the art world.

Project art often involves artist and non-artist collaborations and public research.

In project art the community influences the content and structure of the project as the project takes place in the community.

Project art changes in response to particular environments and situations.

Project art is not necessarily contained by normative art exhibition spaces but rather may take place on the street, on the move, or in your home.

Project art is often defined by its duration and interaction with others and is not limited by physical dimensions.

Project art is often ephemeral or transitory.

Project art often encompasses activities that are normally considered tangential to or in the service of the art-making process (e.g. the phone call, the letter, the research, the conversation, & the failed attempt).

Project art does not set out to create an art object to be sold and resold.

Project Art uses social structures to achieve relationships that are often unattainable in other art mediums.

## **Ethical considerations in project art**

Project art should carefully consider the context in which the project is occurring.

When participants are involved in a project the participants' needs should also be considered.

Projects should not harm participants physically or mentally.

Projects should minimize personal risks and hazards to collaborators, the public, and the environment.

The artist's intent and actions in a project should not contradict the known will of the participants.

Information given to participants should be accurate.

Participants should be treated with dignity and artists should try to express appreciation for the participation and contribution of the participants.

Projects should respect confidentiality and privacy where applicable.

When funds are changing hands in the project, establish a bookkeeping strategy ahead of time, open or closed, with clearly defined guidelines for allocation of funds and profits generated.

Be clear with participants as to what can and cannot be provided as part of a project.

Explain to participants how their material and contributions might be used afterwards (e.g. in a publication, archive, exhibition, or website) and obtain consent where necessary.

When the abovementioned material is being used, make an effort to help the participant understand how their contribution will be viewed, understood, and used.

When projects involve production and authorship, be clear with yourself and the participants about where the authorship lies.

Honor commitments made through a project and don't make commitments that can't be fulfilled.

When conducting a project that is engaged with a participant, whether long or short term, think ahead to how to end the project.

Try to be aware of the long-term consequences of the project, if any.

In cases of dispute, attempt to resolve the problem through dialogue before resorting to legal action.

Do not abuse your authority as artist of the project.

## **Project descriptions**

### **Bridget Barnhart & Ali Naschke-Messing**

#### *The Hammock Project*

*The Hammock Project* works directly with the community to involve them in the circular act of learning, making, and giving. The Hammock Project involves a series of workshops in which participants create hammocks for public use. The social exchange occurs through the act of donating materials; learning and teaching a functional skill; and collaborating with members of the community. The end product will be a series of hammocks that will be hung in the city for free use. The projected budget is \$1,100 towards advertising, materials, placards and miscellaneous expenses. Grants from the Center for Public Art and Life will fund the project.

There are three stages to the project: material collection; teaching hammock making; and installing the hammocks. Ads will be placed in local weekly papers and in posters around the city calling for hammock making materials. Workshops will be held on the street, the first will be in the Tenderloin district where the initial teacher lives. Hammocks are made in the location that they will hang. They are knotted using the tree for tension and participants will see their work manifested and utilized. As we teach we will enlist others in teaching along side us, so the project has an enduring life force branching out into the community.

## **Randolph Carter**

### *Big Box Stories*

*Big Box Stories* is part of a series of audio portraits commissioned by The Museum of Viral Memory (MVM) over the last decade. The first audio portraits were a series of audio autobiographies by musician Duke Lee. These were followed by a year-long self-portrait commissioned from artist Lee Pembleton. Pembleton's *Une Fleuve Maudit* was begun in 2000 and required Pembleton to record one third of his 35th year of life. These recordings were manipulated into 35 compositions to be released in an edition of one as part of his installation at the MVM next year.

Following the personal portraits, the MVM commissioned a series of environmental portraits from artist Randolph Carter. These included portraits of glaciers, islands, deserts and cities, and were released individually on CD in three editions over the past two years.

*Big Box Stories* continues this commission, stretching the idea of portraiture and field recording to encompass the understanding of the big box store as a public community. Carter's installation portraits are built around long-term audio recordings he makes in big box stores. Wearing hidden mics, Carter begins recording when a big box opens and records the inner environment until closing, documenting a day in the life of stores such as Wal-Mart, Costco, Target and Home Depot. The megaphonic recordings are manipulated into unique compositions reflecting the nature, environment and personality of the iconic monoliths of modern life, these post-Christ churches of the American Catholicism.

Installed, the portraits will transport visitors from their mundane museum-going day-trip to a dreamland of vibrant visual seizures and cacophonous concertos. Utilizing The Museum of Viral Memory's unique Environmeant format, Carter will project each portrait's calliope of visual documentation upon the screens of our Wunderland Chambers with accompanying compositions playing on the Museum's Viral Audio Tours. The compositions themselves are designed to reflect the bio-rhythms of what may be the first megafauna to emerge since the Cretaceous period.



**Julia DeGuzman**

*This is an excerpt from "A Guide for the American or 'Un-American' To Be More American: The Auto-mobile Issue" (a work in progress).*

**Project Description:**

Julia DeGuzman will achieve her first-ever Driver's License from The State of California when she completes the following:

Pass the CA DMV Written Test

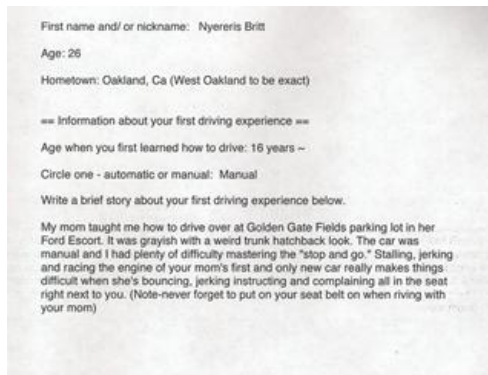
Pass the CA DMV Driving Test

Get Automobile Insurance

and

Fulfill her personal goal to drive from her home in Oakland, Ca to her school campus in San Francisco, Ca

During this process she will maintain a weekly journal/driving log that will document the subject's thoughts about the process, record video documentation of her first experiences behind the wheel, and compose a supplementary publication of short stories collected from the public that will be distributed to selected high school driver's education programs including her alma matter Oakland High School of Oakland California.



Project initiated Fall 2005  
To be completed Spring 2006

**Anne Devine**

*CROSSWALK: a project for lower Potrero Hill*

In *CROSSWALK* I explore personal geography and bureaucratic process while proposing crosswalk(s) to bridge the communities of California College of the Arts (CCA) and Lower Potrero Hill. Desired result is in San Francisco Department of Public Works' (DPW) / Department of Parking & Transportation's (DPT) installation of a crosswalk spanning Sixteenth Street at or near the termination of Eighth Street and elsewhere.

Participants include myself, pedestrians who frequent the area, businesses of the area, SF DPW & DPT, and various other departments, businesses, organizations, and individuals involved in the bureaucratic and political decisions of crosswalk implementation.

The intended audience is anyone walking in the area.

Actions planned or underway include: map and survey the area; tracking and nurturing of progress of crosswalk request logged 09 Nov 05 with DPW; advocacy of an enhanced *CROSSWALK* pattern using the material DuraTherm; video record certain areas for (neutral) documentation of pedestrian flow; survey pedestrians with a pre-printed map; comparison of data collected; if needed, initiate petitioning or letter writing/postcards to encourage community support & requests, photo/video documentation of any *CROSSWALK* installation.

Documentation may consist of: maps, paperwork, correspondence, post cards or petitions if used, copies of letters, completed surveys, participants' hand-marked personal maps, digital video, digital still photography.

Current budget for *CROSSWALK* is minimal, with a maximum expenditure of \$200 if funded solely by myself.

This project continues into 2006.



**Jennifer Durban**

*Back Roads, Front Porches*



My current project is the development of a roadside museum in the town of Bird's Landing, CA. Bird's Landing is a rural community in the California Delta comprised of approximately seventeen residents. It was known for having the smallest post office in the United States until 2001, when the area's zip code was suspended for serving too few people. Many residents defiantly continue to use the former zip code, 94512, even though the post office has been abandoned. My desire is to transform the old post office into an exhibition space that functions as a revolving portrait of the community. It will exhibit works created primarily by me with participation and input from the community. Photographic documentation of the project's progress and final outcome will result in an exhibition catalogue to be distributed in the surrounding area. A copy will also be placed in the town archive.

The first installment of this project (July 2005 – December 2005) will consist of the restoration and conversion of the post office. This includes:

- Deconstructing and modifying the building for better functionality.
- Landscaping created from plant cuttings donated by members of the community.
- Outdoor lighting constructed from plastic shotgun hulls covering Christmas lights.
- Creation of a Bird's Landing flag based on input from the residents.

<http://www.birdslanding.org/>

**Joyce Grimm**

*24th STREET PROMENADE*

A new gallery opens in the Mission District of San Francisco and is spearheaded by curatorial collective No.4. The new curatorial collective is brought together by a shared interest in site-specific and multi-disciplinary contemporary art practice. They have invited artists to create art installations, socially engaged projects, and performances in various neighborhood storefronts and on 24th Street in the Mission District of San Francisco, California. Exciting collaborations unfold when the artists' vision must coincide with the practical needs of the shop owners and the daily life of the community.

24th STREET PROMANADE Artists: Becca Albee, Charles Beronio, Nate Boyce, Matt Boyko, Joshua G. Churchill, Gibson Cuyler, Jennifer Durban, Patricia Esquivias, Amanda Herman, Kottie Paloma, Katina A. Papson, Brion Nuda Rosch and Mark Rodriguez. This project hopes to generate a mutually beneficial relationship and general feeling of goodwill between the new audience that the gallery will bring to the neighborhood and the people who have a long history in the community.



**Amanda Herman**

*Family Album – Relocated.*

In August 2005 Hurricane Katrina raged its way across the gulf coast. In New Orleans, a city built below sea level, levees were breached and the bowl in which the city sat was filled with water. The resulting diaspora spread people out into the United States, some traveling as far as Alaska & Hawaii for refuge. Over 700 families, some with as many as 15 members arrived in the Bay Area.

In response, Alameda County established a one-stop relief center for the evacuated families at the Eastmont Town Center Mall in Oakland, CA. For two months, twice weekly, I set up a free family portrait service there to replace photos families lost in the hurricane (and hopefully improve their experience at the center). Participants received an instant digital print to take home. Over 200 photographs were taken and given away. I wanted to ask each family questions about their experience and possibly create an exhibition from the photos & stories, but on the first day of the project I realized that I didn't feel comfortable using the photographs in a different context without their consent.

One month into this project I set-up my free 'photo-booth' at Fruitvale Elementary School during their one-day relief event. There, I asked participants if they were interested in meeting with me so I could interview them about their experience. Because of the positive response, I began to ask participants at the Alameda County relief center if I could contact them also. Since then, I have met with these families and interviewed them about the hurricane, how it changed their lives, and what they envision for their future. I have continued to provide each family with photographs. I explain my project to each participant and all interviewees have signed a release form allowing me to use the material as I wish.

The project has continued to expand due to a grant opportunity from the California Council for Humanities. I submitted an exhibition proposal with the urban history non-profit, Western Neighborhoods Project, and the Museum of the African Diaspora (MOAD). 2006 will mark the centennial of San Francisco's Great Earthquake and the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the Gulf Coast. Using MOAD's themes of Origins, Movement, Adaptation and Transformation we plan to compare the experiences of the Katrina evacuees with the refugees from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. The project would include a sound installation inside a restored 1906 earthquake refugee cottage (placed on Market Street), a photo exhibit at MOAD, recorded stories & photographs on both organizations' web sites and a series of live public programs.

**David Maisel***5118 Seedlings*

The notion with this project was originally to give away one tree seedling for each canister of cremated remains from the Oregon State Hospital in Salem, Oregon. Beginning in 1883 (the year the hospital was opened, when it was known as the Oregon State Insane Asylum) and through the 1970's, the hospital cremated the remains of mental patients who died and whose bodies remained unclaimed by their families. Numbers are stamped into the lid of each canister; the lowest number is 01, and the highest is 5,118.

The seedling is meant to represent or correspond symbolically to the person whose life has ended with their body incinerated and abandoned. It is a symbolic rebirth, or a chance at some sort of transfiguration. Rather than being hidden in a dusty outbuilding of a dilapidated hospital, the tree seedling will have the potential to exist in the open air, to literally put down roots, to flourish. One of the desired effects of giving away seedlings is to extend the boundaries of the memorial, and of any exhibition of the photographs of the canisters, beyond the structures housing these functions, and to morph or transmute the project from something static (a building, and exhibit) into something boundless.

I have been seeking to work on the Seedling Project with the Portland Mental Health Association, to have one seedling given to each person donating funds for a patient memorial. The site of the project is both the site of the asylum, and the site of wherever each of the 5118 seedlings are planted. The site is distributive over the entirety of places that will be both specific and known, though unseen and alien (i.e. the asylum), and the generalized, unspecific, though somehow imaginable site of each seedling's planting.

The project's duration will be the time needed in the effort to raise funds to build a memorial for these canisters. (Should each seedling also be numbered, as each canister is numbered?) The project's duration may also be seen as the life-span of longest-lived tree that is planted as part of this endeavor. (It would be helpful to be able to give away a type of species of tree that is particularly long-lived.)

Simultaneously, I have donated a set of prints to the hospital, with the proviso that they be used in whatever way they see fit- in order to either help get a memorial built, or also to assist in the efforts to modernize the hospital's facilities, etc. (for example, by showing the images to the Oregon State Legislature in order to request additional funding for the hospital). The director of the hospital has requested that I allow some of them to be auctioned at a fundraiser for the hospital, and I have agreed. Additionally, I have permitted my photographs of the canisters to be utilized in fundraising efforts by the Portland Mental Health Association.

**Jessica Martin**

*The Unexpected in Public Place*

The ongoing research project, *The Unexpected in Public Place*, is based on the premise that innovative public art practice lies in the domain of the unexpected. With this in mind, The Unexpected project has set out to locate and define objects, places and events that intervene in one's everyday environment. This information has been gathered through a survey, which is conducted through the project's website as well as through personal interviews. The participants in the survey are asked the same question: "What have you encountered that was out of the ordinary?" The resulting answers are placed in a growing online database of stories about the unexpected.

The project's ultimate goal is to commission artists to create works in the public domain that are inspired by our research. We hope that the project will assist artists in challenging preconceived notions of public art.

*The Unexpected in Public Space* was initiated in April of 2005 by curators Jessica Martin, Roopesh Sitharan, and Alex Burke.  
[www.theunexpected.org](http://www.theunexpected.org)

**Matthew Paulson**

*Smooth Weather Station*

I have been inspired by the smooth jazz music they play on The Weather Channel. Because I believe this music to have no relation to the weather that's being forecasted on "the local on the 8s," I would like to replace this smooth jazz/weather broadcast of information with a physical location in time. As a means to make temperature readings available, a temporary reorganizing of elements within a site is performed. Several different site temperature readings are executed through various techniques that are engineered to erode quickly and affect a localized area. This system is then employed to many specific locations throughout the city.



**Boyd Richard**  
*The Shark Report*

Among thousands of media representations that perpetuate the mythological role of sharks as man eaters, I have chosen to examine one, a News Channel 5 WTVF Nashville, TN article posted on their website entitled, "NewsChannel 5 Special Report: The Facts About Sharks," written by Nick Beres. In an effort to investigate the impact of the article on internet users in the Tennessee area, I have contacted them, asked them to read the article and answer a few yes or no questions such as: "Do you find sharks frightening?" and "Did the article portray sharks as frightening?" Overwhelmingly, people have answered yes to both questions. In concert with my survey, I am developing a report entitled, *The Shark Report*. It argues that the fear inducing value of sharks is a dramatic commercial tool that ignores science and clouds our understanding of the species. Nick Beres will be the first recipient of *The Shark Report*.



**Mark Rodriguez***In Search of an Art Philanthropist*

The initial plan for this project was to knock on doors, talk with interested parties, and distribute information in Berkeley, in order to find art philanthropists to help me to fund my art practice. The participants were to consist of those who opened their doors to me when I knocked, or rang on their guest-notifying devices. The purpose of this project was to inform un-art types about art practices, to talk to people (shoot the shit), and most importantly, to find philanthropists to support me.

I was planning on supplying an informational brochure containing my intent and a brief history of art in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This would have been handed out to interested parties so that I did not have to stumble over my words as I usually do. Instead of creating a pamphlet, I reasoned that it would be easier to memorize the following:

Hello, my name is Mark Rodriguez. I am an artist looking for financial support to help fund future art projects. Do you want to be an art philanthropist?

I performed the protocol on Sunday, December 11, 2005 on a block long section of Woolsey St., between Claremont Ave. and College Ave. in Berkeley, California. Six people answered their doors, mostly for a brief time. A middle-aged woman was cooking dinner and was too busy to talk. She expressed some interest by trying to negotiate a future time to meet and discuss my work, however, a time could not be agreed upon. An elderly woman offered me luck, and explained that her house was her only asset. After going through the protocol, a bald man answered, "I would certainly not." The other participants explained that they did not have time, were not interested, or simply said that they could not help. Next time I am going to wear a suit.



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