

Collectives and being • Guerilla  
Girls don't have to be naked to  
get into the Met • if you can  
get someone you disagree  
with to laugh then you've got  
common ground • funding  
criteria geared to fulfilling  
the wrong outcomes • the  
'professionalising' of artist-  
led practice • putting the street  
above the gallery in terms of  
hierarchy • Duchamp: 'I  
don't believe in art, I  
just believe in artists'  
• identification of art  
with works of art is  
the founding heresy  
of the artworld •  
artists and scientists  
in zero gravity •  
art as a way of  
experiencing a  
fusion of pleasure  
and insight • Luna  
Gaia closed loop  
life-support systems  
and travel to the  
Moon • museums  
are buying only  
a few of the great  
number of women  
artists • some of  
my favourite art is  
the most offensive.  
• voice of the artist  
rendered mute by  
the machinations of  
the bureaucracy  
artists placing politics and  
activism at the core of  
their practice • Occupy  
Movement is the greatest  
social art experiments  
the world has seen • my  
performance of running  
for Mayor is about  
connecting people so  
that they form beautiful  
communities • the artist-  
run space of the future is  
like a mushroom, delicate  
yet deadly, and able to eat  
oil spills. • possibility  
of creating an empathy  
virus. • collectives and  
being • Guerilla girls don't



# Artlink

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ARTISTS ON THE MOON

GUERRILLA GIRLS ARE BACK

ARTIST AS MAYOR

INFINITY BURIAL PROJECT

HANGING IN THE STREET

INTERCONNECTIVITY

# EXPERIMENT

# ARTIST-RUN SPACES of the future

■ Christopher Kennedy

In a depression, space is created and new opportunities emerge while deficit accumulates. Under these conditions, the artworld retracts, budgets are slashed, and programs cut. Yet on the fringe, artist-run culture adapts and reimagines the use and meaning of spaces for people and cultural experimentation. In these liminal voids, artist-run spaces crop up in many forms: as ephemeral and temporary project spaces, site-specific apartment galleries, and as long-term centres with ties to a particular neighborhood among others. Over the past several years I've worked to investigate the resurgence and legacy of this artist-run culture in the United States and around the world, asking a central question: "what is the artist-run space of the future?" These investigations have led to research on the rhizomatic nature of these newly reimagined spaces, and their tendency to reinvent conventional market-driven cycles of displaying and selling art objects.

The initial research conducted is a mere glimpse, but has unearthed the discovery of unique partnerships, cooperative operating models, and playful experiments in how art should be shown, through varied means and for different purposes. In the end, I found the only way to properly describe these new models is through ecological metaphor: the artist-run space of the future is like a mushroom, delicate yet deadly, and able to eat oil spills. At its core is a formidable network, sometimes unseen and other times visible, encompassing neither a beginning nor an end, but always a middle from which it grows and overflows. The artist-run space of the future is thus perhaps the starting point of a vast cycle that serves as the catalyst for whole cultural ecosystems.

Yet the struggle of the artist-run space is a well-known story. Historically marginalised and oftentimes ephemeral, the artist-run space is dependent on discernibly difficult to measure and fluctuating variables such as time, commitment and collective participation. These models have also been coopted, making the artist-run space of the future something quite elusive and dependent on a delicate balance of sheer determination and John Cageian chance and luck. Nonetheless, the occurrence and multiplicity of these spaces gestures toward something utopic, signalling a collective move toward imagining a more fluid boundary between artwork, art process, and art experience.

Still, the road ahead is full of barriers both economic and social, and the conversations on how to navigate these

in-between spaces are rarely singular. To provide even further discussion, the following is a collaborative conversation exploring some of the issues central to making artwork independent of entrenched cultural and social institutions. The conversation was facilitated at Elsewhere, a living museum set inside a former thrift store in Greensboro, North Carolina that brings together more than 50 creatives each year to make site specific projects and imagine new living systems that actively critique what an art institution should and could be. Seven of these visiting artists, and some of Elsewhere's staff, share their diverse understanding of artist-run culture, its potential future, and emergent geography.

Erica Curry – Winnfield, Louisiana (Minicine, <http://www.swampland.org/>)

Paula Damasceno – Salvador, Brazil

Aislinn Pentecost-Farrin – Raleigh, North Carolina

Wythe Marschall – Brooklyn, New York (<http://hollowearthsociety.com/>)

Ethan Gould – Brooklyn, New York (<http://observatoryroom.org/>)

Capp Larsen – Halifax, California (<http://www.robertsstreet.org/>)

Christopher Kennedy – Greensboro, North Carolina (<http://applied-aesthetics.org>)

## What kinds of artist-run spaces have you been a part of?

**Erica:** There was a place called Minicine that started off as a place to show documentaries in Shreveport, Louisiana. The guy who ran it couldn't get any local grants because the property he owns stands in the way of a development that would rip down these 100 year old buildings to build a modern artist community, without communicating with the artists already occupying these buildings. So there was this huge disconnect between politics and actual art.

**Paula:** I was a part of a theatre and environmental group in Brazil when Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) was for the first time elected as the cultural minister of Brazil. He created an entire net of traditional groups. He called it 'cultural doing' to activate contemporary and traditional groups together. But when Dumas was elected, everything changed – the money used to create this net and the forums created for discussion





Creative Retreat, Elsewhere: A Living Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina, USA.

stopped. You could not use money to rent the spaces, and it was like a trap. Yet, now today, a number of Latin American countries are importing this idea despite it not working in Brazil. It's a kind of mix between propaganda and real empowerment.

**Capp:** I work with a group called the Robert Street Social Center and it's a collection of projects, there's the Inkstorm Screenprinting collective, a zine library called the Anchor archive and then a multipurpose event space and residency program called the Crows Nest. Its been going for seven years and it's a completely member volunteer-based group. There is no paid staff, funding all comes from a mixture of grants and fundraisers and donations. It's interesting right now because Robert Street is wrestling with questions of being a closed artist community versus drawing in the general public and locating where those things overlap. What's public, what's private?

**Wythe:** My experience has been with Proteus Gowanus, and a gallery we run called the Observatory. But we're not a nonprofit or an LLC, instead we exist within the nonprofit of Proteus Gowanus, and we basically do events and art shows. Among the nine that started the Observatory, there's like three that are intimately involved. It's interesting because it's a collective, it's not hierarchical, but none of us have really jumped in to do it full-time. None of us want to run a nonprofit, we all kind of agree that its nice to have a support

structure that we can all agree upon, but the art making is individual so we don't step on each other's toes.

**So what is the responsibility of an artist-run space, to the people that run it? Is the existence of artist-run spaces in response to something in particular?**

**Wythe:** There's different levels of plasticity. So a really small organisation can just decide to buy something we need, so we just raise the money to buy it. That kind of ad hoc mentality has worked really well. But I think bigger institutions can't do that, they're so beholden to grants and there are some institutions doing sketchy stuff but there's all kinds of levels in-between.

**Erica:** We don't have to rely on white boxes made generations before us. They created this culture that we're supposed to fit into, but we can produce it ourselves. The shed in my backyard for instance could be the leading institution of social research if I promote it well, and make sure the right people know about it. So really we don't need some kind of corporate building on the corner that deems us as cultural creators to make it so.

**Wythe:** It's in flux though because those spaces are looking to smaller spaces and snatching people up. Not in a selling out kind of way, but they're asking for the same people that come to Brooklyn Brainery or Observatory to come and speak at American Museum of Natural History so it's just like a cycle





Roberts Street Social Center, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

now, instead of it only originating from the top and from a big grant, it can originate from like two bros and a shit. But it can ladder up in both directions, and be in your backyard.

**Capp:** We just did a survey of members at Robert Street and we found that they really appreciate the space because it didn't have any loopholes, red tape or rules. People can kind of easily feel a sense of ownership over the space even if they aren't part of the immediate collective or didn't start it or anything like that. There is just a lot of room for people to create and change it. And there's nobody to go to ask if that's ok, which is I think a little disorienting for people once you kind of get it. Everyone and no one runs the space at the same time. That's really empowering and something museums and institutions don't have. As you become more established there is more policy, which is usually a reaction and a tendency to over-structure.

**CK:** Right, and it seems like in the last five years there is literally a cavern or a hole in cities or places – there are so many vacant storefronts, so many vacant potentialities. I wonder if artist-run spaces could be a platform for activation. I'm thinking for instance about an organisation in Windsor, Canada called the Broken City Lab. They invited artists to populate vacant storefront spaces over the course of one month. And so I wonder: is this translatable to other spaces? Is it okay for an artist-run space to only exist for one year on purpose and then go away?

**Paula:** The only way to survive in a community, is to be a community. To live and be with this community...

**Ethan:** Yes! But how much of a barrier is having and running a physical space? I've had dreams of running an artist-run space or a temporary gallery, but the price of renting something is crazy. What alternatives have people come across to lease or own a space used by artists?

**Wythe:** Hans Eisler Nail Salon just opened in Brooklyn. They do all this crazy arts and education alternative DIY stuff, but they're also a nail salon. I think people wanted to open a nail salon and these crazy artists were some of those people but not all of them. So there's like two groups who got along and they opened a thing together so the nail salon can make money, but the artists could have a space to show art and do classes.

**Chris:** I think this idea of squatting is interesting. There's just so much space in America, so many buildings. We need to use them. It's one of those things where zoning and regulations, and basically addressing the bureaucracy on its own terms, need to be confronted.

**Erica:** Right now in New Orleans, because of all the property damage from Katrina, the city is throwing tax liens on properties and I think it's \$20,000 or \$15,000 something obscene that people can't cover. So people won't do anything with the property they own, they just get rid of it, and the city will take it and auction it off.





Elsewhere: A Living Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina, USA.

**Wythe:** Another alternative might be Chashama in New York. They take spaces that are between leases, that are vacant – and they lease them out stupid cheap, and they have art stuff in them. It's not going to be permanent – it's going to be six months in what used to be an Abercrombie and Fitch and now it's going to be a theatre for six months instead.

**Aislinn:** The Durham storefront project is a much smaller version of that and I think other cities have a program where someone organises all the empty storefronts and the owners let the windows be used for projects.

**Capp:** Similarly in Halifax, there's an economic boom happening with real estate and so there's a complete glut of spaces and everything's turning over really quickly. Our space is having to move and we cannot find anything on the peninsula. It's being sold to a developer, so the future is completely unknown. We can just ride the wave and move into a new space, get evicted, move into a new space, get evicted... So when you ask the question – what is your ideal space – it's one that doesn't have to compete in that world. Something without financial worries.

**Ethan:** It's a paradox of being an artist because it's the large urban centres where increasingly hubs of artist activity and business and general culture are building up, and at the same time the places that are left available in a raw state are rural. I think that networking, digital networks allowing different artists in different regions to link up with each other is good,

but that's still not enough to necessarily create an arts culture completely from the ground up.

**CK:** It becomes a question of value. Are artist-run spaces something that we should value just as much as something that creates 'jobs' or creates a product? To folks in Australia – I wonder do they have the same DIY impetus; is there a trans-continental pattern?

**Capp:** Seems like what were talking about has a lot to do with the economy and trends of cities and whether or not there is vacant space. That really affects the nature of the centres. Are they permanent or temporary, roving, do they have a business model or are they all free? The specific place affects how the artist-run centre reacts to the specific place it's in. So I'm sure that Australia has multiple ecosystems that are a reaction to the local experience. ■

Christopher Lee Kennedy is working through 'Education', and the rise of academic capitalism by playing inside a living museum called Elsewhere, and pursuing a PhD at the University of North Carolina.