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>> OVERVIEW: (An)Other Art World: *(Creating Contemporary Art & Community)*

In this issue we visit artist communities in Philadelphia and Minneapolis, hear dispatches from L.A., Rotterdam, and Turkey, learn about projects in Chang Mai, Madrid and New York, and of course, share some creative love stories from our dear Chicago.

A Collective of Collectives, *By Brett Bloom & Salem Collo-Julin* PAGE 018 / On Otherness and the Arts, *By Renny Pritikin* PAGE 026 / The Death and (After) Life of the American City, *By Michael Carriere & David Schalliol* PAGE 032 / The Politics of Perception, Art and the World Economy, *Brian Holmes & Claire Pentecost* PAGE 036 << WINTER / 2009 / COVER BY SOFTLAB

The Institute for Applied Aesthetics

How We Work:

Elsewhere Artist Collaborative
Greensboro, N.C.

How We Work is a collaborative research column exploring the working models of independent art spaces and groups. In this first installment, the Institute for Applied Aesthetics talks with Stephanie Sherman, the Collaborative Director of Elsewhere Artist Collaborative. Sherman is a writer, artist and organizer exploring the magic of place and presence. As co-founder of Elsewhere, she oversees the transformation of a three-story thrift store into a living museum, an international residency program, and creative laboratory exploring collaboration through things. Elsewhere Artist Collaborative is a 501(c)3 non-profit established in 2003 and is located in Greensboro, North Carolina. www.elsewhereelsewhere.org



INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED AESTHETICS: How does the Elsewhere Collaborative engage the community of Greensboro?

STEPHANIE SHERMAN: Elsewhere is located on "the other side of the tracks" on the southern part of Elm Street, the main drag through all of downtown Greensboro. In 2003, we converted the building we now occupy into a street-level museum. We spent the first two years of our time in Greensboro very inwardly focused, reorganizing the massive amount of materials in the space to make it available to people as a museum, while working to build a basic programming infrastructure for the internal artist community. We launched the residency program in 2005...[and two years later] we really started local community-based programs alongside a facade renovation creating a front window theater that highlights living art to the public.

This year we launched SEA (the South Elm Alliance), formed in response to the gentrification and transformations of our neighborhood. The mission of SEA is to preserve and connect the people of South Elm, residents, business owners and people who use the block. We're also working with a local downtown development organization, Action Greensboro to develop a mural that bridges the North and South Elm districts under those pesky railroad tracks that will be a huge special residency this spring. Then, we're bringing artist Carol Lung, aka "Frau Fiber," from Chicago to do a project around her "Sewing Rebellion" project that teaches communities to make clothing. For that series of programming we'll be bringing together a number of local organizations, Faith Action International, Boys and Girls Clubs and the Center for Creative Aging as well as our textile companies to support a new fabric workshop facility.

IAA: What is Elsewhere's operating budget? Where does the money go and what is it used for?

SHERMAN: It costs about \$30,000 per year to run the building and administrate the programming, and we will spend about double that next year on granted programs and special projects. The reason [our budget] is so low currently is because we are still for the most part an all-volunteer staff.

This year has been tremendous in that we've been able to guide funds to programs like the museum, residency and events largely through a Warhol Foundation grant totaling \$60,000 over two years. Other costs are related to building repair alongside upkeep of facilities to serve artists and museum-goers alike.

We've considered other income streams, but generally it seems that a store with nothing for sale turned museum fits pretty squarely in the non-profit world. Public accountability is part of our mission, and I believe that a burden of proof. In the future, I'd love to have an Elsewhere TV show, an artistic Sesame Street of sorts, which pays for the whole operation.

IAA: How do you think Elsewhere has informed the notion of art and education for the people of Greensboro?

SHERMAN: For Greensboro, I think we've really opened people up to a new understanding of art as an activity, as life, as a medium. When we came here people were always asking us where the paintings were. Greensboro has become much more informed since then, and we have too. Every interaction is certainly an education. We've tried to bring out learning by doing, an education with a progressive approach to history and a demonstrated commitment to realizing an idea.

IAA: There is much discussion about metrics, assessment and outcomes when it comes to community-based art practices...how does Elsewhere cope with these pressures?

SHERMAN: I come to art production from a background in literature and history, so I've always been interested in moving beyond the question of why ask questions about art at work and instead am interested in the ways that art can literally be put to work, or can transform the work of other life activities, including the larger question of what makes a beautiful world.

I'm happy to defend what I do creatively and how that creative production affects the larger operational world. I don't mind making an argument for art, for showing in other people's terms how and why it works and how and why it is important for them. I feel like Elsewhere examines production practice and process, but its production exceeds the capital. We are literally dealing with the surplus of capitalism in terms of our stuff, and in terms of a non-profit structure.

We need to collapse the past, present and future.

We don't want to deny the structure in which we operate, but expose it and make an interstice within it. In my experience funders don't need an exact picture laid out before them of exactly what will happen, but a researched guideline and structure that offers a guide or baseline on how to approach and analyze what actually happens. I understand that foundations want value for their money, especially when those same dollars can go to food on the table and education. In all cases, I think people forget that it's still about personal relationships.

IAA: How do you view "collaboration" at Elsewhere?

SHERMAN: There are so many levels of collaboration operative here. Our work at Elsewhere takes on a very Marxist angle in that to work here you have to assess and consider how your project or work impacts a broader whole, an integrated artwork, a massive collection, a building, the communities within, the means and process of production and how every step affects others around you.

Collaboration on all these levels with our artists, communities, funders, all requires honest communication, shared commitment and being responsible to one another's investment. I'm particularly interested in how we demonstrate caring and learn trust by working through ideas and solving problems. Our practice of collaboration has a strong emphasis on the individual within it as the source of production, as the source for change—we share a resource and work within the parameters of an idea to realize it. The staff helps to support resident work, and residents support staff work. We are

excited to expand the backgrounds of our collaborators to not only artists, but scholars, curators, musicians.

At Elsewhere, we collaborate most intensively when we share the experience of things communally. Things inspire wonder, awe, function, access, sharing, forming a fascinating launch pad for collaborative practices, in that we are all experiencing an environment of things that we collaboratively produce.

IAA: What are the challenges and barriers facing Elsewhere's vision for the future? How can the arts community help address these issues?

SHERMAN: I think the real barrier is the way that our preconceptions about the role of an artist are ingrained into the structures of our institutions. Museums still pretend to be neutral and remain relatively disconnected from their surrounding environs and communities. Galleries still create an idea of sales as the driving force of artist survival and MFA programs fail to teach artists how to launch careers that can realize ideas through frameworks beyond the gallery system.

I think there is a lot of wonderful thinking going on in the academy, thinking about new formats and frameworks for living, but lip service, pages in a book or Internet posts are not enough. I think we're generally out of time for thinking about ways for the future or some abstract community to enact. We need to collapse the past, present, and future. ♦

