

Accessing Community: Artists Relationship to the Public

Artists have a variety of relationships with communities, activating the creative process with audiences to communicate messages for an expanding conversation on the role of art in varied networks. What methods can an artist use to engage a community in sharing an experience or story beyond the surface aesthetic? How do we determine what memories a neighborhood has from the hands of the people living in that environment? I will connect some ideas on pragmatism with community artists, public art projects, and conversations the audience has with the artwork on site. I will relate theories of philosopher Richard Rorty with community, artists' methods, the public conversation through the art project, and the escalating conversation of the artist's purpose or role in the community.

I begin by introducing three ideas from Richard Rorty on pragmatism. I found examining Rorty's ideas of engaging others to participate in conversation accessible to the experience of community based art. The ideas collected by the philosopher were; "to pay attention to communities and social networks" (Grenz 1996). "To abandon the quest for absolute knowledge, and to engage in constructive conversation that would be of use in varied networks or practices allowing for further conversations to open." (Grenz 1996) Rorty found practicality to be a key in his methods on community by identifying the self and relationship to the community, to not think of "who am I" but "what should I do?" (Grenz 1996)

To further detail Rorty's view on pragmatism, the following are terms of identification linked to this form of pragmatism; *non-essentialists*, *non-realists*, and *non-representationalists*.

The **non-essentialists** think of objects as what we find useful to speak about in order to cope with situations that present themselves to us. Linguistic signs and thoughts are context sensitive. The signs and thoughts are not “things” with essential properties but nodes on a web of relations. Non essentialists also point out the significance of a sentence derives from its place in a web of other sentences. It is for all these reasons that I gather the heightened significance of context as a key thought. (Grenz 1996)

The **Non-Realists** believe access to the world is mediated by language. Truth is not primarily a metaphysical concept but a matter of human convention. (Grenz 1996)

Language is used to reinforce or justify our interests, understanding, interactions, and our desires.

Non-Representationalists deny that language has the capability to represent the world. The act or referring or saying the word representation cannot mean actual “representation” because language cannot bring what is absent into our presence. The spoken or written word cannot manifest a physical presence (Grenz 1996).

The non representationalists/pragmatists like Rorty do not view knowledge as a matter of defining reality, instead seek action for coping with reality. For all these traits of non essentialists, non realists, and non representationalists; the pragmatist view of truth elevates coherence rather than correspondence. Rorty refers to correspondence theory as the “spectator theory of knowledge” and dismisses it as unworkable. Rorty instead credits John Dewey for pointing us in a helpful direction (Grenz 1996). In place of assuming that beliefs represent reality, Dewey substitutes the idea that beliefs are tools for dealing with

reality, they are proclamations that dictate the behavior of the one that holds them. Rorty advocates “coherence theory”, he declares that statements are true as long as they cohere with the entire system of beliefs (Grenz 1996).

Pragmatists understand truth as what works rather than what is theoretically correct. According to Rorty pragmatism is a vocabulary of practice rather than of theory. It focuses on action rather than contemplation. Pragmatists frame questions about what is correct in terms of what is useful. They ask “what difference will this make to our conduct?” (Huang 2009). Rorty sees language as a tool we use to obtain a variety of wants. Rorty characterizes the “self” as a center less and ever changing web of beliefs and desires that produce actions (Huang 2009). He believes that the way we think and act is ingrained in our cultural context (Huang 2009). Rorty proclaims us to have an ethnocentric view, as he states one cannot go beyond one's own society's procedures of justification. Everything one can say about truth or rationality relies on understanding and concepts unique to the society in which one lives (Huang 2009). Therefore he believes that we measure the rationality and actions of others based on our own culture or community. Our identification with community is elevated when we see community as ours rather than nature, shaped rather than found, one among many which has been man made. (Huang 2009) What matters is our loyalty to other human beings throughout varied obstacles, hardships, and situations, not our hope of getting things right (Grenz 1996).

The goal of philosophy is not to uncover objective truth but to maintain the discussion among these differing beliefs. Rorty believes that instead of arguing over philosophical outlooks, concepts of human nature, or the meaning of life, *liberals* who wish to recommend *liberalism* to others should “point out the practical advantages of liberal institutions in allowing individuals and culture to get along without intruding on

each other's privacy, without meddling with each other's conceptions of the good” (Huang 2009). In encountering another culture, all we should try to do is to get inside the inhabitants of that culture long enough to get some idea of how we look to them, and whether they have any ideas we can use. This is also all that can be expected in return from encountering us (Huang 2009).

This dialogue regarding ethnocentric views and learning from other cultures will lead me into the first artist I will be examining. This artist creates artwork to address the reactions to her work as the focus of discussion. Adrian Piper is an artist and philosopher who has been working with limitations of dialogue and its boundaries (Kester 2004). Her projects expose the refusal to acknowledge others as individuals and the tendency to revert to generalizing stereotypes (Kester 2004). Artist Adrian Piper states: “I've been doing pieces the significance and experience of which is defined as completely as possible by the viewer's reaction and interpretation. Ideally the work has no meaning or independent existence outside of its function as a medium of change; it exists only as a catalytic agent between myself and the viewer.”

My interpretation is that she defines her own work by the reaction and interpretation of the audience, outside of this act or context the art has no function (Kester 2004). Piper's work emerged out of conceptualism and minimalism. She initially was focused on drawing but found difficulty challenging the belief that drawing was entirely aesthetically pleasing, she sought to reveal a more complex thought underlying the visual experience (Kester 2004). Piper does not create work collaboratively, and most of her work does remain within art galleries, museums, and relating institutions speaking to her respective peers in the “art world.” Piper has a focus with site specific situations of the viewer and audience within her work.

Piper has created street based performances mostly in the '70s and '80s involving dressing in male attire including a wig, a mustache, and glasses she would transcribe her phone conversations and recite them to public passing by on the street (Berger 1999). She would also play loud belches, unrecognizable noises, and conversations, all from a concealed recorder. She has performed this act out in public streets and also within a library interior. Her goal was to observe various reactions of bystanders to the behavior that was not conventional of social interaction or public acceptance. Piper's public performances were interactive, gathering responses that ranged from ignorance, disgust, to self-reflection. As I mentioned before Piper has stated that her art had no independent existence outside of the interaction with the viewer (Berger 1999).

As Piper's body of work grew she was more concerned with the personal politics of the artworld. This concern grew by her encounters with racism and sexism within the galleries, museums, and related institutions. Piper is a light skinned colored woman as she prefers to describe herself. She had found herself often having a front seat to racist slurs and jokes by white or Caucasian people as she described them in the art world who assumed she was one of them. In response to these uncomfortable interactions Piper created a calling card which read

Dear friend,

I am black,

I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me (Kester 2004).

Piper's interest in the presence of racism in offhand remarks or dinner party jokes reflects her belief that the foundations of broader forms of cultural discrimination are located at an interpersonal level of communication. "It is in these exchanges that blacks learn from whites that they are unwelcome in mainstream society" (Kester 2004).

Piper uses interaction between the viewer and the artwork to raise questions about social interactions and especially about attaching stereotypes when confronted with people whom we perceive as different from ourselves (Berger 1999). It is through her work that Piper addresses her community of artists working in formal institutions while addressing her community in her ethnicity about the thoughts and shared stories of racism that is still very present. The strength of her work brings further conversation to what an artist's responsibility is to their community and how to address issues of concern (Berger 1999).

Moving onto another artist who addresses the relationship of the arts to a community I will begin by giving a description of a location. South Chicago is known for reports of shootings and deaths related to gun violence. The neighborhood has little in art engagement and is often known for gang activity and gun related violence.

Sarah Ward runs South Chicago Art Center a nonprofit art center for youth. The art center in turn also functions as a safe haven for youth after school or in between commuting from school to home. Sarah has had experience as an art teacher and a former juvenile probation officer. In 2012 she reached out to neighborhood youth and artists to create hand painted, carvings, drawings, and sculptures. All of these works of art were formatted to the shape of a nine millimeter semi-automatic pistol (Konkoi 2012).

Ward collected three hundred forty three of the art related guns, one for each Chicago public school child shot in 2011, she displayed these works at a Chicago art gallery in the community of Pilsen (Konkoi 2012) (Hope 2012). Her project did not aim to

glorify guns but to engage viewers about the realities of the youth's lives without being didactic. Ward visited a few schools with her gun project to have students create on some of the guns artists had constructed. In the schools, students mostly boys gravitated towards the guns and wanted to hold them with pride. Other students paid no attention and just played with their phones. The rest of the students that did want to participate were aware of the common place shootings in the neighborhoods and were well aware of the availability of inexpensive nine mm pistols that went for a street price of twenty five dollars. Ward went on to display these guns at a silent auction, some went for more than one hundred twenty dollars, and the show raised a total of thirteen thousand dollars (Konkol 2012).

All of the proceeds from the artwork went to fund programs throughout the city that engage youth and help them stay occupied, creative, and off of the street (Konkol 2012). Through her exhibit and auction Ward wanted people from privileged neighborhoods or suburbs to contribute by purchasing work and in return funding outside of school programming in the city (Hope 2012). She created this project to raise awareness to the people who will never visit south Chicago for the negative depictions it receives from media and press. Her goal was also to have funding available for workshops, projects, and youth oriented programming to service her community and allowing for more youth to have more accessible and free positive experiences within the neighborhood (Konkol 2012). The art fundraiser that Sarah assembled was her response to her neighborhood's problem with violence affecting the youth and she sought to engage conversation on a local level. Her language and content in the arts allowed her to mediate an exhibit that displayed imagery regarding death of youth. In return she obtained the funding to make practical use of art centers and program providers to continue the theme or conversation with the youth and the public.

The next artist I would like to discuss is an artist who created artwork in her immediate neighborhood but further expanded her message in an accessible coherent manner. Candy Chang combines public art, civic engagement, and self reflection. She explores the impact of public spaces to help understand our communities and ourselves. She challenges the limitations residents have in communication with their entire community and responds by experimenting in public space. She has created interactive public art projects to share resources, memories, housing costs, and hopes for abandoned buildings (Chang 2013).

In recent years Candy was confronted by death in loss of someone personal in her life, she found difficulty in coping with death. She found herself struggling to maintain positive perspective, and began to see aggravation in the chores of day to day tasks. Candy had a strong desire to express her thoughts about life and why it is worth experiencing (Chang 2013). With help from friends, Chang painted the side of an abandoned house in her neighborhood in New Orleans with chalkboard paint and stenciled it with a grid of the sentence “Before I die I want to...” allowing anyone walking by to use chalk to write a desire and participate with the art (Chang 2013).

The Project initially was an experiment, by the next day the wall was completely full. People wrote various statements from sentiments of happiness to more somber tones. This project was an unconventional method Candy created to give the public a forum to exchange thoughts with their surroundings. This project allowed Candy to create a conversation with her immediate community but that lead to expanding discussion on a global level (Chang 2013).

After the project gained attention she then created a toolkit and a project site to help people make a wall with their community. Over three hundred fifty “*before I die*” walls

have been created in twenty five languages in over sixty countries. As of recently she has released a book “Before I Die” on November 5, 2013 (Chang 2013).

The community art projects and discussions gathered through observing the work of Adrian Piper, Sarah Ward, and Candy Chang all lead me to reflect on the community artist's role. As I gathered some ideas of Richard Rorty, I have applied some of his accessible concepts to the arts. From the perspective of a creator I view that an artist working in the community does have a responsibility to share the practice and make it accessible to the public. Creating artwork to open conversation amongst other artists but also those who do not practice art making. Communities need to listen and view the many stories of the people within it to reinforce what is valuable in that community. In addressing concerns of the community, people can hope this will allow further conversations to manifest. It is also in this gathering of communication that we must be active, create, engage, practice, and focus more on being useful rather than being stationary and concerned if we are being “correct” (Huang 2009). This further leads me to ideas on muralists and creating artwork on public walls while addressing the ideas of a community. Chicano public artists often provided muralists with a clear-cut directive for their creative activities. The muralists’ political agenda gave many artists a meaningful purpose to their pursuits as cultural producers; they were not just doing art for art's sake, but they were responding to a call to serve their community (Latorre 2008). Taking much inspiration from artists of Latin America I have used my tools to reclaim an urban culture in which people are often displaced, relocated, or gentrified. The ability to record a concrete message affordably and quickly allows various groups from different social spheres to have a tool at hand with which to go out to the streets and to voice what many are thinking but don't express (Ruiz 2011).

I now examine some of my own work as an artist, I have created many street art pieces over the past few years. I display street art in the form of wheatpaste paintings on paper, murals, piñatas of papier-mâché, and outdoor ephemeral wood altars. In my practice of creating art for the streets I take into consideration my surrounding and the audience of those neighborhoods. I create imagery with words in Spanish with hand painted art. Using dialogue that exists in the neighborhood, I include the public and allow them to read, discuss, and interact with my artwork. In incorporating imagery, choosing to use symbols or icons that are embedded in popular culture to capture the viewer's attention but allowing them to recognize the image isn't a commercial or corporate advertisement. In creating artwork for the public, I express my ideas for things to be desired in the community and addressing the need for unity in the hope for growth and challenging generalized labels that are attached to the people living in these neighborhoods. I often create work in communities with low income, low art engagement, and with youth often labeled as “at risk”. I choose to give optimism in my work to uplift what can become an environment that feels neglected by more privileged funding in surrounding cities. I aim to express to the public that they can make choices and strive for more challenging but empowering life choices that people in all neighborhoods make. It is often in addressing hope, beauty, pride, intellect, and nurturing that I find people are very proud of a surrounding. Even when they might be under privileged or segregated they are still proud of those who stand for them, with them, but not above them.

“The signifying authority of community artists derives from two sources. First, it derives from the collaborative process itself. This is an exchange in which the artist, by surrendering some degree of his or her creative autonomy negotiations with a given group over the production of a project, is granted authority to speak on its behalf. The second

source of authority is a moment of transference (usually some event in the artist's past) that establishes a moral equivalence between his or her experience and that of the community” (Kester 2004).

In these respects, I have received commendations and thanks from the public for acknowledging them and choosing to speak in a language native to them and not gentrifying my artwork in what is a growing trend amongst the urban environment. In respect to the culture and ethnicity depicted in my artwork and in respective neighborhoods, I have integrated my informally learned and practiced street art into art centers for the youth, after school programs, and various other workshops. In taking the methods practiced on the streets, I have learned to translate the craft to further engage youth and to continue a conversation that reinforces relevance as the people participating advance the subject matter and discussion on public art. Though not all our projects have been of the highest success or commendation of elite institutions or museums, our successes have been measured by what has been meaningful to our communities and what has engaged our youth and working artists to create a public forum and interaction while acknowledging the surrounding residents in each respective art site.

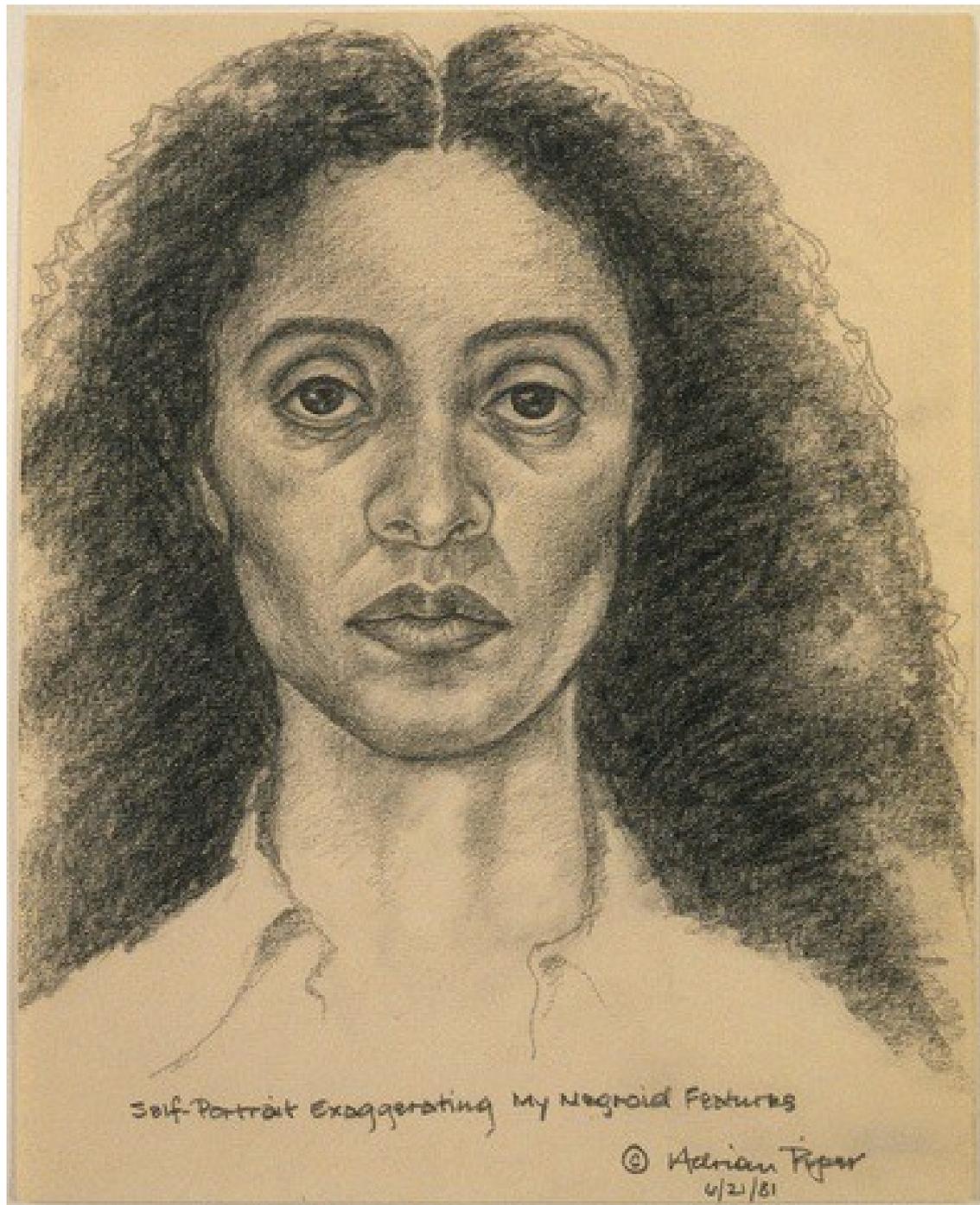
“Projects created in collaboration with politically coherent communities tend to be characterized by a more reciprocal process of dialogue and mutual education, with the artist learning from the community and having his or her preconception (about the community or specific social, cultural, and political issues) challenged and transformed in turn” (Kester 2004).

Artists have a bond in collaborating with people in surroundings, the people involved learn to communicate with each other through the teamwork involved. In these exchanges people learn that the end result can be visually pleasing and rich with content to

discuss. It is also through collaboration that one gains the ephemeral experience of working as a team and creating, it is more of a performance that is often overlooked as an art form in it of itself. This is an experience of creating a dialogue, writing or drawing a vision or draft and in time executing the idea with a team while fostering positive and accessible communication. To orchestrate a functioning and collaborative team that will over time become an example of how to intersect disciplines and how to allow each member to have ownership of the project. In the broad scope of community based art, I desire for artists to document and record the process. I hope for artists to share practices and methods for teaching, learning, and working in these various communities. It is when these processes are not recorded that younger generations find they are reinventing the wheel by starting from the ground up (Kester 2004). Ephemeral art by nature is site specific and not always documented but artists need to find ways to share these stories for future generations to be involved in the practice, in the conversation, and in the community.

Bibliography

- Allayincite. "Adrian Piper... makes you uncomfortable."
http://comfortzonesart.wordpress.com/2013/03/27/adrian_piper_makes_you_uncomfortable/ (accessed November 2, 2013)
- Berger, Maurice. *Adrian Piper: a Retrospective*. D.A.P., Distributed Art Publishers, 1999.
- Chang, Candy. "Before I die... The Story." <http://beforeidie.cc/site/about/> (accessed November 2, 2013)
- Grenz, Stanley. *A primer on postmodernism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2nd printing edition, 1996.
- Hope, Leah. "Kids impacted by violence create 343 guns art project at south chicago art center." <http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=news/local&id=8851141> (accessed November 2, 2013)
- Huang, Yong. *Rorty, Pragmatism, and Confucianism* [electronic resource]. NY : State University of New York Press, 2009.
- Kester, Grant H. *Conversation pieces: community and communication in modern art*. University of California Press, 2004.
- Konkol, Mark. "Art teacher fights teen shootings with guns as art."
http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/2012/11/26/south-chicago/art_teacher_fights_teen_shootings_with_guns_as_art (accessed November 2, 2013)
- Latorre, Guisela. *Walls of Empowerment*. University of Texas Press, 2008.
- Ruiz, Maximiliano. *Nuevo Mundo: Latin American Street Art*. Gestalten Verlag, 2011.
- Ward, Sarah. "Sarah talks about the art center and the future of our youth."
http://www.happyartcenter.org/blog/2013/8/sarah_talks_about_the_art_center_and_the_future_of_our_youth (accessed November 2, 2013)



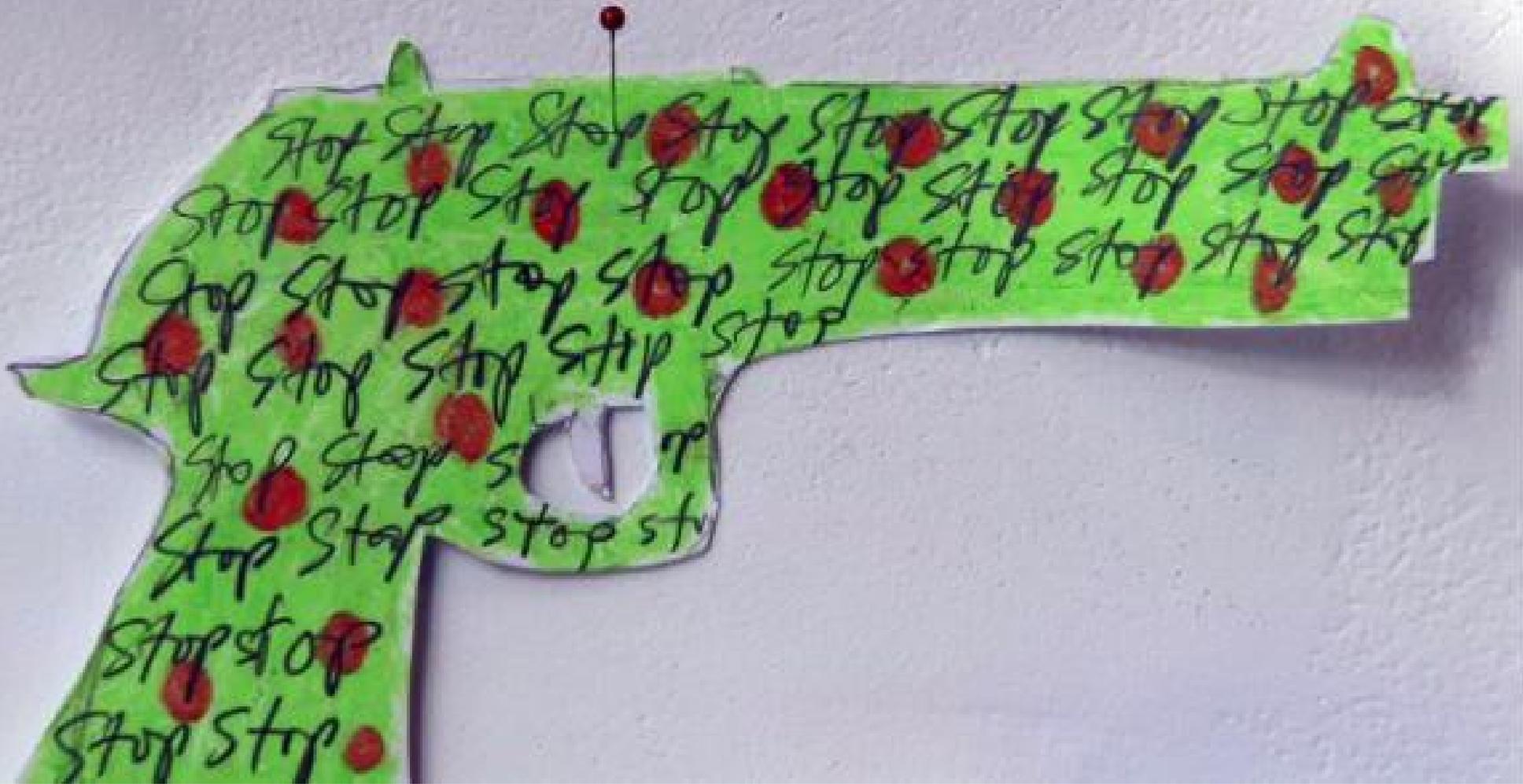


Dear Friend,
I am black.

I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.









SOUTH CHICAGO ART CENTER

3217 E. 91st St., Chicago, IL 60617 ♦ 773-731-9287 ♦ info@happyartcenter.org

Calling all Artists!

343 Chicago Public School students were shot during the school year ending in June of 2012. This is unacceptable. The South Chicago Art Center is committed to improving the lives of every young person who walks through its door. Our mission is to provide youth with an accessible safe place to participate in quality visual arts programs.

During the month of October, Chicago Artist Month, the Art Center will be in a gallery space in the Pilsen neighborhood. Join us in creating a window piece that speaks out against gun violence and, in-turn, helps us keep more youth safe.

Create a gun for our anti-gun violence artistic project

1. Use this template as a guide for size
2. Use any material you want, really any
3. Mail or drop off the "gun" to the Art Center before **Friday, September 21, 2012**
3217 E. 91st St. Chicago, IL 60617

We will use the "guns" in a fundraiser for the Art Center on October 17, 2012. During that fundraiser, we will ask our guests to purchase the guns to symbolically take them off the street. Over 40,000 people view art during Chicago Artist month. Let your voice be heard and support our important program.

Visit our Facebook page at
[facebook.com/happyartcenter](https://www.facebook.com/happyartcenter)

or our website at
happyartcenter.org

to download a copy
of this flyer!







Before I die...

LOVE MY FAMILY

LOVE TO BASK

Before I die I want to own a monkey

Before I die I want to Learn French

Before I die I want to Feed an Elephant

Before I die I want to Go to the World Series

Before I die I want to TRULY LIVE 

Before I die I want to Go to an LSU Game

Before I die I want to See the leaves change many times

Before I die I want to DANCE FAST

Before I die I wa

Before I die

Go to Israel

not be too old.
HAVE FUN!

Before I die I want to

LIVE IN NEW YORK
FINISH

Before I die I want to

go 200 mph.

Before I die I want to

TRIED FOR TRACEY
GO TO ROME

Before I die I want to

be president of the European Union
TO SEE ALL MY GOURMES

Before I die I want to

keep living in NOLA
SEES THE END OF GUNS!

Before I die I want to

love, wreckless living
love & be loved

Before I die I want to

FORGIVE, BE FREE

SOUL SAVED
UPGRADE
SAVE MY SOUL

Before I die I want to

BE REMEMBERED

Before I die I want to

see a hot chick

Before I die I want to

see a hot chick

Before I die I want to

IN MOUNT TOHONG
GROW OLD

Before I die I want to

DANCE

Before I die I want to

be a pornstar

Before I die I want to

be famous

Before I die I want to

I want to visit every country

CHANGE A LIFE FOR THE BETTER

voted #1
Best wish

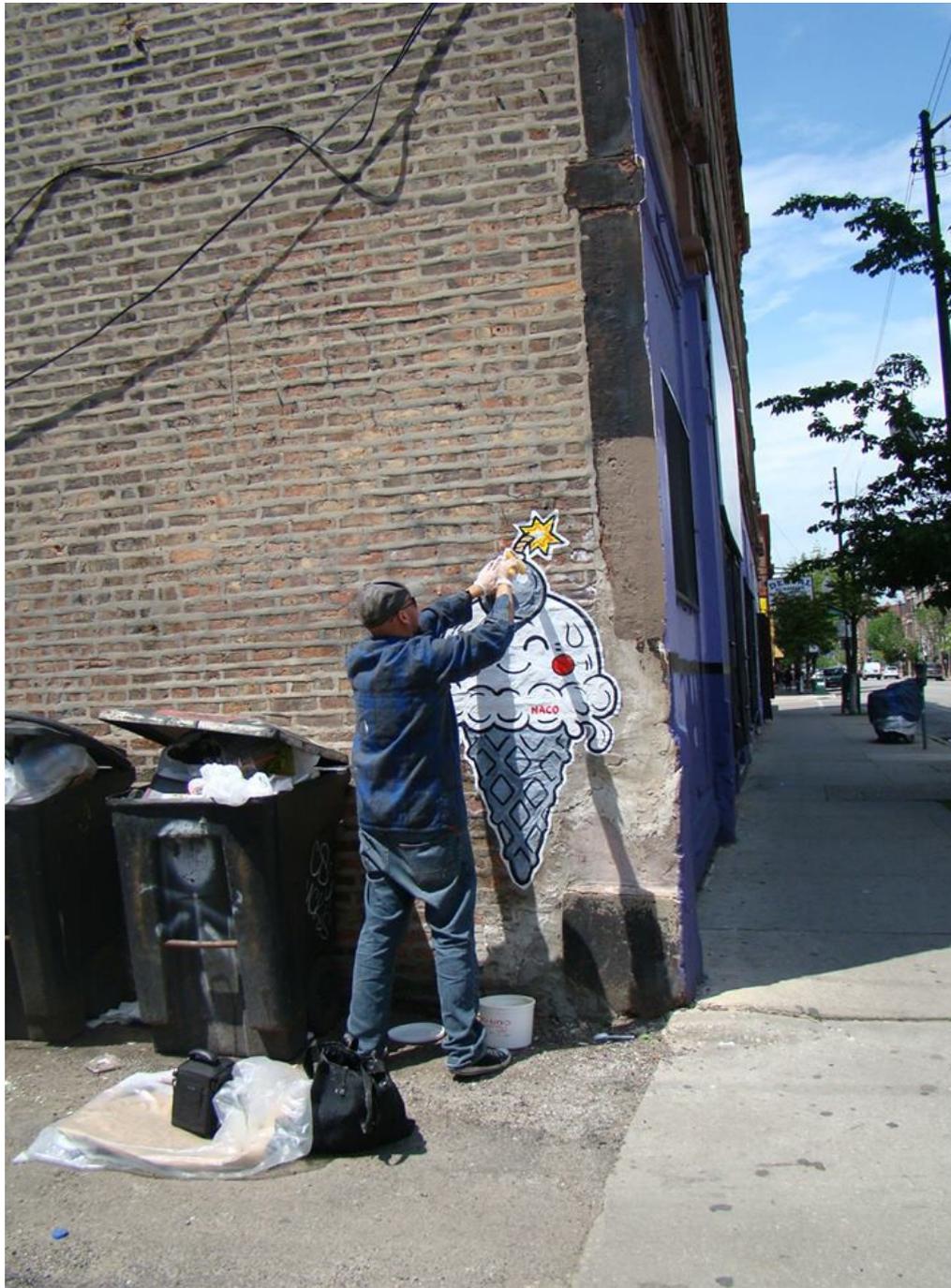
Summer
Chills
to END IT
ALL



CUIDADO

MACO

MEALUD





BOMB







Medical Center
(312) 733-3331

1418

CUIDADO

NACO

ST. JUDE
MEDICAL CENTER
(312) 733-3331
MON. TO FRI. 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
SATURDAY 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
SUN. CLOSED
NO HABLE ESPAÑOL

PARKING

Jazmin
Flowers & Balloons
1414 W. 107th St.
Chicago, IL 60648
Tel: 312-378-0172

We Deliver
OPEN
MON. - FRI. 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM

MEXICAN ART
25 YEARS













Algebra
Chapter 1: Real-World Applications
Section 1.1: Linear Equations in Two Variables
Section 1.2: Systems of Linear Equations in Two Variables
Section 1.3: Systems of Linear Inequalities in Two Variables
Section 1.4: Linear Functions
Section 1.5: Linear Functions and Linear Equations
Section 1.6: Linear Functions and Linear Inequalities
Section 1.7: Linear Functions and Linear Equations and Inequalities
Section 1.8: Linear Functions and Linear Equations and Inequalities

loki











SPORTS

LiTeRacy

Recycling Club

Student Council

BEST BUDDIES

asm

Music

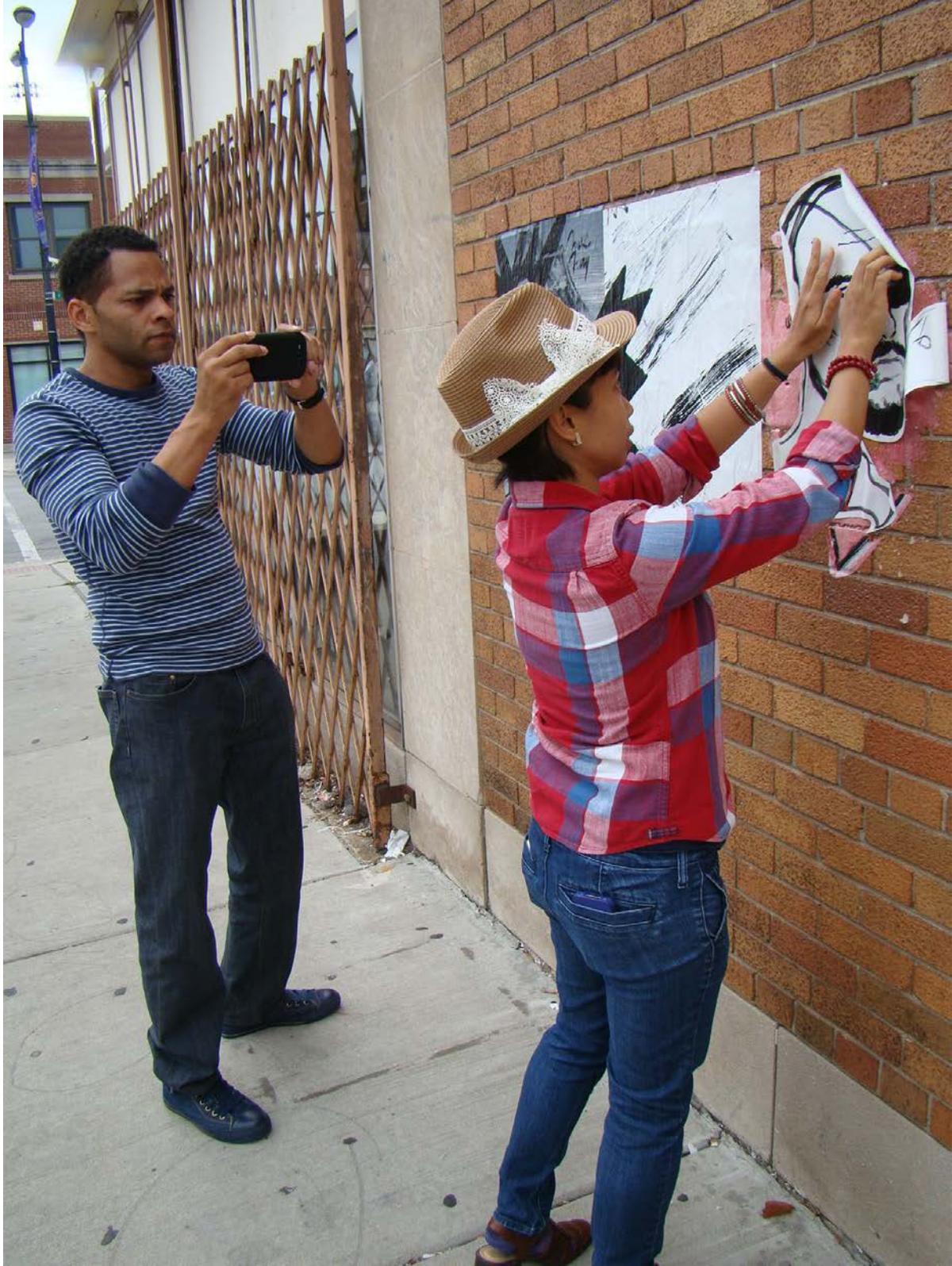
ASBIE















is
ERS



PAY FOR PARKING AT PAY BOX
P
LOW ZONE





