

EDITED BY SHARON LOUDEN

# *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life*

ESSAYS BY 40 WORKING ARTISTS



## PREFACE

IN 1991, I graduated with an MFA from Yale University, School of Art, and was struggling to live with a mountain of debt from school loans and credit card bills. I had taken a job as an administrative assistant that did not pay enough to make ends meet, and I was having difficulty striking a balance between making my work and paying the bills. Then living in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, I remember calling one of my former professors and asking him what to do. His response was, "Just do your work and it will carry you." While I knew my work was the priority in my life, the conversation left me at a loss. How was I going to sustain a creative practice while trying to survive?

Leaving graduate school, I also faced your typical expectations, desires and question marks. And I harbored certain illusions. For instance, I thought that a gallery was going to support me financially and emotionally, and that I didn't have to work for very long at other jobs before such a relationship was established. I expected that the feeling of Utopia which flowed from the fluid exchange and sharing of ideas among my fellow students at graduate school would continue once I graduated. I also hoped to create dialogue with the local art community as I explored alternative ways to get my work seen. Over the years, I've had to find my own path, and I only wish that I had had artists to lean on and consult such as the contributors to this book.

The premise of this collection of essays is to show the reality of how artists – from the unknown to the established – juggle their creative lives with the everyday needs of making a living. I believe that this subject has been neglected and pushed to the margins of art discourse throughout history, almost as if it were a source of embarrassment. Making art and participating in the art world over a lifetime is a challenge enough, and those who have navigated it can certainly learn from one another.

The details in the following essays seem to me invaluable for many reasons, but among the more important are: (1) they show how artists turn obstacles into inspiration, both inside and outside of their studios; (2) they explain to people who may not be fully aware why money is not the only measure of artistic success; (3) they attack the old myth of the “poor, struggling artist” for whom great pain is a requisite for great art; and (4) they address the delicate questions of educational debt and community support in a culture that normalizes and encourages competition.

Through these artists’ words, we hear both general approaches to the conundrum of sustaining the creative life, and also specific solutions to navigating individual circumstances. Each essay is a particular story. For instance, we hear from Michelle Grabner about her efforts to sustain her creative life while juggling three full-time jobs: Chair of the Painting and Drawing Department of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; mother of three children; and co-founder, along with her husband, of two artist-run exhibition spaces – The Suburban and The Poor Farm. Brian Novatny inspires with his continued commitment to his work in Bushwick, Brooklyn, holding down various odd jobs while making work for two to three shows a year, both in the US and in Germany. Having broken his “cycle of repetition” brought on by years of having to satisfy the demand of gallery exhibitions, he now embraces the liberating paycheck that comes from working as an art handler. Tim Nolan, from Los Angeles, traces his everyday life under various headings and categories: Relationships, Research, Seeking Out, Public Relations, Keeping Current, Professional Commitments, Side Job, and Studio Work. It’s a fascinating map of an inspiring, long career that has now also begun to move into the public art realm. Will Cotton, an artist able to support himself from sales of his work, reminds us

once again that money has little to do with sustaining a creative life, and can even get in the way. He recalls his early days in New York, when, out of necessity, he taught himself contractor skills to make ends meet. Beth Lipman, the mother of two young children, married to her studio and business manager, describes in her concise essay what life is like for an artist living on a farm in Wisconsin. She reveals the feeling of “leaping off a cliff” when she quit her full-time, salaried position (with benefits) into the unknown world of the full-time studio artist.

It’s the truth of the day-to-day living that I am after in this book, since these details help rectify the many misperceptions that still exist in the art community, the most common of which is addressed by the gallerist Ed Winkleman in our conversation at the end of the book:

I think whether or not you have a gallery is a question a lot of people who identify as an artist are asked almost immediately. And within the population at large of people who kind of understand how the art world works, it is seen as a milestone. Seen as a potential career goal. But I also find that there *are* younger artists using the model of building an art career completely independent of a commercial art gallery system, and it is equally viable. I think it doesn’t get as much attention because there aren’t consistent advertising or promotional pushes for those artists. As opposed to a gallery artist who gets more exposure through the promotion of a gallery.

The idea that one needs a gallery to justify one’s existence as an artist is, I believe, outdated: the gallery is just one venue through which to share a visual vocabulary with others. What’s most important is that an artist is an artist no matter if he or she holds down another job, chooses to follow an untraditional path, remains relatively obscure throughout life, or is represented by a gallery. The power of creativity does not just lie in an artist’s work, but also in how he or she continues to create regardless of the obstacles life places in the way. The process of simply making work over time should be celebrated, since our society so often judges artists externally by false milestones.

I began developing the idea of this book by coming up with a list of 40 artists who I knew could speak candidly about their lives

in a very personal way. I chose them because I felt comfortable going back and forth with them, asking questions and drawing out intimate features of their lives. Several generations are represented in these pages, and also various geographies. About half of the contributors reside in New York City, and the other half in different parts of the United States. Two live and work in Europe. The common thread is the great respect I have for all – the work they make and how they live. All of these artists thrive in their practice. They are serious and dedicated, deeply engaged and committed. These stories of how they sustain creative lives, often with struggle, are immeasurably inspiring.

The book begins with a quote from Carter Foster, Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which sets the tone for the essays that follow. When I first met Foster, one of the many things that impressed me about him was his belief that external validation was never a prerequisite for the success of an artist, and I am honored by his contribution to this project.

Two interviews appear along with the 40 essays. It was important for me to include Thomas Kilpper and Will Cotton, but each was unable to write essays. The interview with Kilpper was via e-mail, and the one with Cotton was recorded in person at his studio in New York.

I feel sure that the essays collected here will provide many useful ideas, lots of different pathways and a tremendous amount of inspiration, not only for art students and those wishing to make a living as an artist, but also for others curious to learn how an artist in the twenty-first century navigates it all.

Sharon Loudon

## INTRODUCTION

FOR ME, ARTISTS are driven to do what they do no matter what. It's a very powerful ambition and they pursue it in whatever way works best for them. Artists have a practice and pursuing and developing it is always the motivating factor, not whether or not they will sell something or even find a venue in which it can be seen. In my experience, artists are among the most self-motivated, organized, the most disciplined, and the hardest working people I know. Sure, some artists are lucky enough that they can make a living doing it while other artists work day jobs or supplement their practice by teaching or other means. But I don't think the distinction is important. It's the seriousness of purpose that I admire the most.

Carter E. Foster  
Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art



of hard-edge geometry derived in part from West Coast architecture. I've worked with various galleries in New York, Boston and Los Angeles, as well as in Europe, and recently had a solo exhibition in Louisville, Kentucky, at Land of Tomorrow, as well as a group show this summer at Kate Werble Gallery. At the moment, I am not affiliated with any New York gallery, and so have less to say about the relationship between artist and dealer, although my goal is, and always has been, to find a gallery that takes care of all business-related matters professionally, honestly and adeptly.

Because we as artists are so driven and committed to making our work, I believe that we will always find creative ways to overcome obstacles and support ourselves toward that end. That's what I see all around me, anyway, and I am proud to belong to such a dedicated, hard-working lot. ●

## AMY PLEASANT



EACH DAY I wake, put my clothes on, drink my coffee, wake my kids, make breakfast, pack lunches, take them to school and then drive to the studio. When I walk through the door I am comforted by the smell of oil and turpentine, and scan the room to take note of how I left it the day before. I stand in the midst of paintings that are propped up on paint cans and leaning against the wall, reminding me of the successes and failures of the day before.

Every day I create a problem for myself to solve, a battle that within my four walls is the only battle in the world. How the image presses itself against the edge of the canvas, how the colored ground seeps through, how the characters interact or don't interact with one another, how it reveals to me the delicate balance between my insecurity and my confidence. And then in the end, the satisfaction of knowing that it couldn't be any other way.

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to be an artist. It was the only thing that interested me and I was always making something. Despite my parents' concern that I might live a life of poverty, they supported my every decision.

I received my BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1994, during which time I studied twice abroad in Italy, and afterwards decided to take a few years off before going to graduate school. I moved back to my home town of Birmingham, Alabama, to find that I couldn't find a studio that I

Amy Pleasant  
*Untitled, On the Ground Below*  
 45"x72"  
 Ink on paper  
 2011  
 Courtesy of the artist and Jeff  
 Bailey Gallery  
 Photography by Jason Wallis

could afford. One of my best friends was the stage manager of the historic downtown Alabama Theater, and as I sat complaining about my studio situation, he suggested I come to the theater and look at some raw spaces in their building. The manager of the non-profit organization that oversaw the Alabama was interested in what I did, and wanted to support me somehow. He offered me a studio in the building for \$35 a month, enough to cover my light usage. I became a part of the Alabama Theater family, and in this space I spent three years developing the work that I applied to graduate programs with. During this time I taught four days a week at an art studio for high-risk youth, taught private lessons, and after leaving the studio, I assisted a painter during these three years creating murals and decorative finishes in private homes. I painted on Fridays and any other time I could get on the weekends.

After finishing my MFA at Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, in 1999, I moved back to Birmingham and resumed my work with the decorative painter until I found out I was pregnant and couldn't use the chemicals we were using on the job. I knew that I wanted to have kids and was concerned about how it would affect my career, but I'm a bit stubborn and determined and refused to believe that I should pick one over the other. I was going to do both; however, this decision played a large role in where I lived. My family was in Birmingham so it made sense to be there as they wanted to be an active part of my children's lives.

Where I live has been a large factor in how I survive as an artist. Living in an affordable city meant a less expensive house and studio, therefore leaving funds available to travel to see exhibitions, to visit with other artists, or for project opportunities. The amazing people at the Alabama Theater allowed me to keep my studio while I was away at Tyler, and I moved right back in after finishing my graduate degree. They raised my rent to \$50 a month as I now had air-conditioning.

Living in a small town is made easier by having New York gallery representation at Jeff Bailey Gallery, with whom I have worked since 2004. Having this relationship relieves some of the feelings of isolation. I can participate in the larger art community while living outside of a major art city. We have a relationship that is both professional and personal, as he is

my dealer but he is also my friend. We talk a couple of times a month to catch up on progress of new work, opportunities that have come up, consignments or life in general. Despite the distance, we have studio visits at least twice a year. Other than that, we exchange by sending digital images.

Another gem about where I live is the incredibly supportive community of collectors that live in Birmingham. I am so fortunate to be a part of a tight and passionate group of people who have embraced my work.

I work a lot on creating relationships outside of Birmingham, in Atlanta, and in other surrounding cities, as there are so many great artists, curators and dealers in places close by. I need to engage with others in my field, invite them for studio visits and have ongoing dialog that feeds my studio practice when living in a smallish town.

Outside of sales of work, I currently teach two days a week and supplement my income by jurying shows, grants, project stipends, visiting artist opportunities and residencies (these are few and far between, as time away from home is difficult). So much of my growth is strictly about visibility, so I am continually looking for opportunities to keep my work out in the world, whether it is through my website or exhibitions.

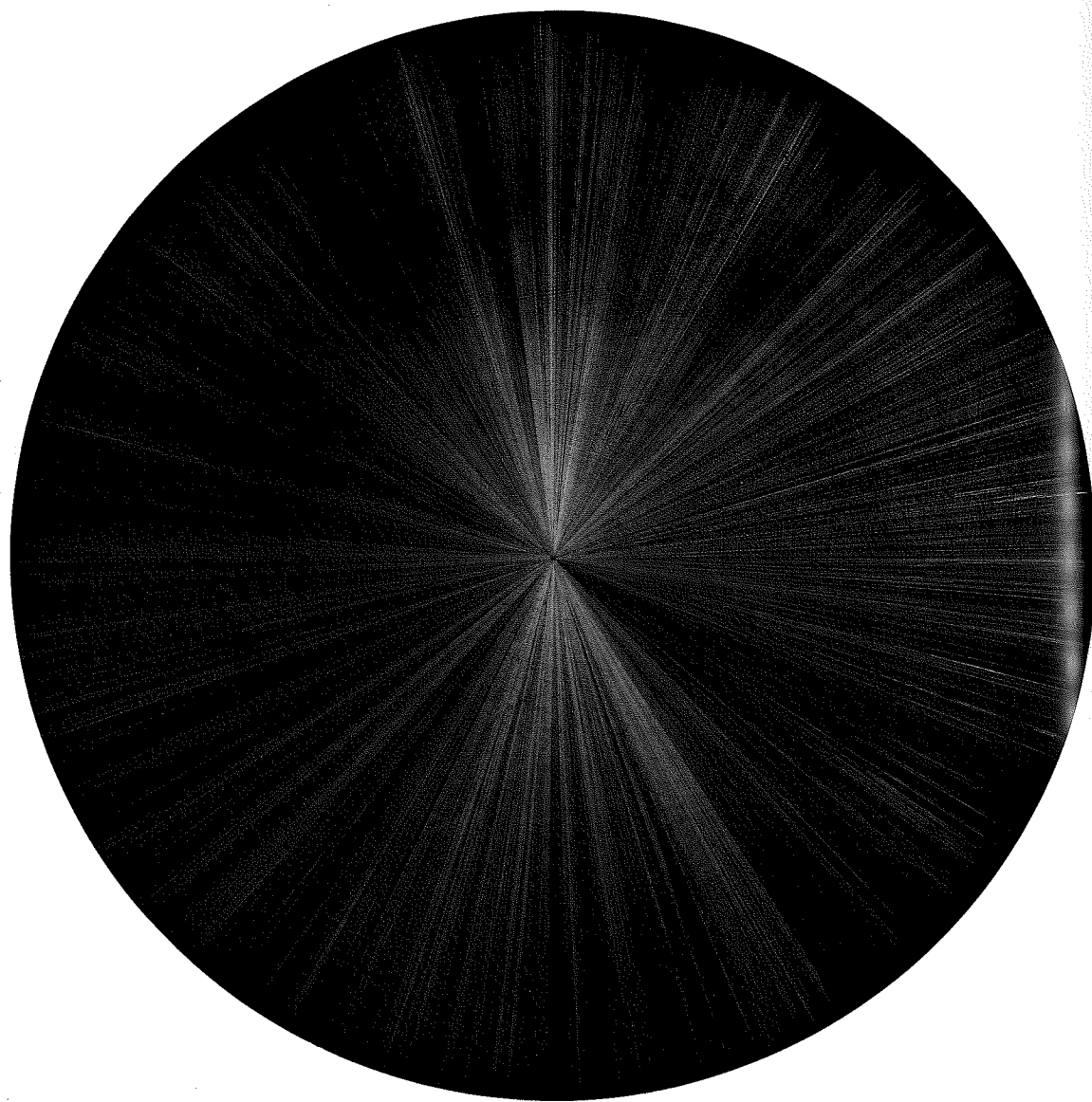
I have found at this stage in my career that I spend more time on the business side than ever before. I spend hours researching artists, galleries, grants, project spaces, residencies, and e-mailing and reading about exhibitions as a way to stay informed in general. I try to schedule my days in the studio as a normal nine-to-five job would be, then family time in the evening, and then business work at night after my kids have gone to bed. I find that setting goals (monthly and yearly), and creating strategies to achieve them in very practical ways, is empowering.

Nothing is more critical to my process than time, and I found out quickly how to structure the studio in a new way after kids, as time was more sacred than ever. When I am there I have clearer objectives for what I want to accomplish each day. There is no room for waste. I try to not schedule meetings/appointments during studio time, and to keep clear lines around work and play, which requires a great deal of discipline.

I am confronted with obstacles on a daily basis, and my job is to find a way to persevere regardless. As I have gotten older, I have come to realize the sacrifices I have to make on a daily basis. Sometimes those sacrifices come in the form of things, sometimes it is a social life, and sometimes it is people.

During a critique in graduate school the topic of "life as an artist" ensued, and my painting professor, Stanley Whitney, said, "Even if you had every day for the rest of your life to paint, it still wouldn't be enough."

And it wakes me up each day. And I follow it. And at the risk of sounding melodramatic, it is the greatest thing I know. •



Michelle Grabner

*Untitled*

36"x36"

Silverpoint and black gesso on  
panel

2012

Courtesy of the artist and  
Shane Campbell Gallery

THE QUESTION, "how do I do all those things?" always makes me uneasy. Yet it is a perennial and predictable inquiry, and one that I never can never fully decipher. This is because at its core the question is both ideological and emotional. Simply put, I did not escape the middle-class, middle America imprinting of growing up in a small manufacturing river town in Wisconsin. So anything short of an analysis of Max Weber's Protestant work ethic, the sociopolitical underpinnings in eastern Wisconsin during the Cold War, and an ever thorny and interwoven psychological profile would fail at getting to the heart of my deep-seated and profound drive to work.

So my shorthand answer to "how do I do all those things?" is always credited to my husband, Brad Killam, who is also an artist and art professor. As teachers, we are both designated atypical work structures that for the most part also correspond to our kid's school schedule. This flexibility provides for bursts of creative output throughout the year. The downside is that daily work has to be negotiated, and the result is inconsistency. We are in a regular state of building a graceless schedule that is driven by projects, exhibitions and writing deadlines. The fact that we have different art world careers and art world trajectories is cause for ongoing dialog on differing art world positions: worth and merit, public and private, regional and global. These dialectics, and the practical exchanges we are



forced to embrace, also establish priorities and realities to build our schedule around.

With our teaching posts, studio practice and host of art-related projects endlessly orbiting through our lives, we have learned to fold parenting and pedagogy into the rotation of obligations and opportunities. With three kids – two of whom are now welcomingly in college – most everything we do, either out of plan, necessity or misadventure, becomes a teaching moment. There is no doubt that we perpetuate the unconventional “art parent” cliché as we drag our kids out of school for projects in New Haven or Cologne. Or as we expose them to other artists, who like pilgrims, stay with us in our yellow stucco house in Oak Park as they make projects at the artist space we have run for 12 years. Unequivocally, we have and continue to offer our kids an alternative way of thinking and being in the world. Yet sacrificing some of that customary parenting script can also be difficult, and at the very least challenging, for kids at different developmental stages. For example, our 7-year-old daughter is only now starting to identify that her family behaves atypically. But for the moment she is still game. We know from our experience with our two older sons, her curious compliance will not last for long.

Finding great pleasure and satisfaction in pragmatically negotiating my given resources and profound limitations is an obvious underpinning to my production habits. But I am careful not to confuse my continuous impulse to learn and deliberate with that of personal ambition. It takes too much work to arbitrate the meaningful work of making art. To braid it into all aspects of life is the only way to make it worthwhile.

And while the previous commentary opts to address the unasked “why” in the question “how do I do all those things?” the following is an attempt at sketching out the “how” in some of the work I do.

#### THE STUDIO

My studio work bends and folds into and around everything else – with the exception of an early 4:30 a.m. routine that gives my studio practice its own resolute rhythm. This three-hour window before I head into the house to make breakfast and

help get the kids to school is the only uniform time I dedicate to the studio. Then, depending on the day, I may head back to the studio and work until the evening. If I am teaching or if I am in the office that day, I may not return to the studio until the next morning. Or I may head back out in the evening after dinner and homework. Outside of those day-breaking hours, the rest of the time in the studio is a daily deliberation with other activities. It is also important to note that my studio is above The Suburban galleries, just steps from the back door of the house, so hideous sweatpants and flip-flops with wool socks provide no obstacle to work. In the summer when I am in Wisconsin, my studio time is brokered with the Poor Farm, mowing, and gardening. And for those times when I am traveling, I have devised a series of work adaptable to planes and hotels.

#### THE SUBURBAN AND THE POOR FARM

The Suburban is an artist project space that I run with my husband, Brad. Since January 1999, we have hosted over 150 artists in two small galleries that are located on our property in the West Chicago suburb of Oak Park. We host shows every six to eight weeks. I head up the administration aspects of The Suburban, which means I am in contact with artists at different stages of their project: from scheduling dates to lining up visiting artist gigs, picking artists up at the airport to sending them gallery floor plans. Brad, on the other hand, shores up the physical ends of the program. Where I send out the e-mail blasts and update the website, he builds crates and arranges for the return shipping of work, builds pedestals, wires new light fixtures and puts beer on ice for the openings. In other words, I carry The Suburban's long vision and historic arc while Brad steps in and takes care of immediate exhibition needs. Once artists are here and on-site (most often staying with us in our home), we take turns negotiating the artists' needs and expectations with that of the family. This includes making pancakes for the artists and our daughter, to running to the village hardware store.

Where the Suburban is comprised of two very small galleries and located in an urban setting, the Poor Farm (built in 1876) is a sprawling exhibition space with a dormitory building located in the farm fields of northeastern Wisconsin. Unlike The Suburban, The Poor Farm is a not-for-profit project, but my

tasks are similar to The Suburban. The Poor Farm hosts year-long exhibitions and comes to life in summers, when we concentrate our time there with a rotation of other artists-in-residence. Embarking on our fourth year of programming, we manage the Poor Farm with administrated attention spread lightly over the course of the academic year, and then ramp up the physical care and direction over the summers. Between November and March, the Poor Farm sits in a state of hibernation. Because the Poor Farm is evolving slowly as an institution, and changes with the seasons of the upper Midwest, this ambitious project can work because, for now, we have its impact nestled into in the high production of summer, and not actively competing with our other work and obligations.

### BUSINESS REALITIES

And like the integration of art and the domestic sphere, the commercial realities of the art world are also shaped by a regimen of cyclical compromises. As it is with most aspects of my social negotiation – business, parenting, curating and teaching – three factors come into play. A combination of style, belief, and pragmatics – with a heavy emphasis on the last two perspectives – govern my relationships with my commercial dealers (and most art world dealings for that matter). Because the value in my studio art practice is located in the process of conceptualizing and making, I can play it “loose” with my dealers, and with critics and curators with whom I occasionally interact. And because their mandates are grounded in a very different value system, I can only trust that they work in my best interest; and sometimes they do and sometimes they don’t. But as long as I have the privilege and discipline of studio practice, coupled with the opportunity to explore exhibition context and display schemes in my work, I fully entrust dealers with the business aspect of distribution and consumption, curators with zeitgeist, and critics with judgment. Strategically, this is not an ideal position for artists who are driven by the drama and celebrity of art world success. I am perfectly aware that dealers and collectors engage in repugnant, self-realizing relationships that result in heaps of fictional value-building. Opting for an unconfined relationship with the business of art may provide

for a greater scope of artistic freedom, but it can also mean less visibility on the “scene” driven by cultural capital.

### TEACHING

I am gratefully indebted to The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an art institution that has been able to vividly discern and support the connection between outstanding teaching and engaged practices. I work in an institution that expects me to be in the studio and professionally active when I am not in the classroom. This should seem an obvious value in higher education, but those who teach know that it is becoming a rare attribute. Teaching gives predictable structure to my week, requiring me to be in the classroom on certain days. Now that I am chair of the Painting and Drawing Department, my time in the office and attending meetings is less predictable, changing as the arc of the semester changes. Flexibility is the pay-off for the relentless and attentive schedule-building required of department administration. And after two years in this position, I realized that I am not effective at slipping between teaching and management. The language, vocabulary and analytical reasoning required of administration is drastically different, even opposed to teaching. It is also true that my brain is not facile enough to move between the two types of discourse. Regardless, I have learned not to intertwine teaching and administration, but instead relegate separate days for each activity.

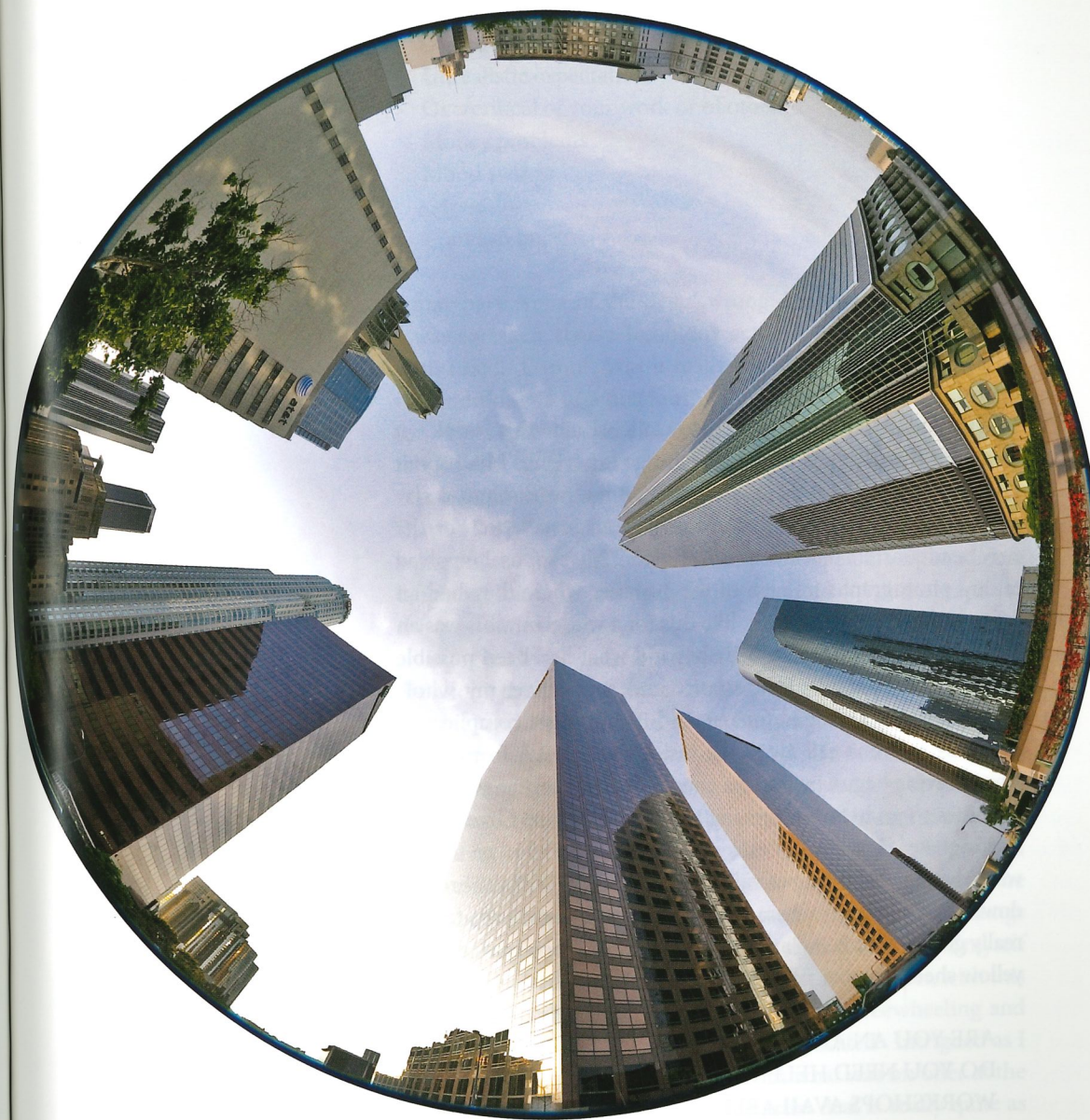
### WRITING

Writing is dreadful. As much as I enjoy deliberating on theories of art and practice, the act of writing is difficult. Profound dyslexia is to blame. Writing and reading is painfully slow, so I indulge myself and write in bed under a big down quilt, with books stacked in piles next to me. I earmark whole unadulterated days to writing. However, the dread of the process is always mitigated by what is learned, and the synthesis of pulling together research. And to be most transparent, procrastination should not be underestimated, as I can accomplish impressive amounts of guilt-induced housecleaning and studio work when dodging deadlines. I have learned to harness this energy. And it is my guess that most editors know they are entangled in these psychological head games with writers, and I am always indebted to their expertise. •



middle-class families in New York. Your rent went up or down depending on your finances. For an artist, having an apartment that wasn't going to drag you under if you had a bad year was incredible. I could not have lived and worked in New York City without this apartment. There are virtually none of these buildings left in NYC.

I have had great relationships and a couple of horrible relationships with the dealers in my life. In most cases, I try to be a team player and advance the cause of the gallery in any way that I can. Sometimes I have curated shows that bring more attention to the gallery or introduced artists, writers or collectors to the dealer. The relationship of the artist to the dealer has obviously changed over time. The idea of a primary dealer who is in control of your entire professional life is almost extinct. Most galleries do not have the staff to engage in real career development, and so that has fallen more to the artist to accomplish than the dealer. I do believe that the healthiest professional relationships that I have had over the years were and still are collaborative. I expect and get honest criticism from the dealers that I work with, but not any form of direction. This is pretty hard to pull off as you could argue that honest criticism is direction, but the best dealers instinctively know where to draw the line. I'm fairly low maintenance as far as contact is concerned. I can go for months without speaking directly with some of the dealers that I work with, and others I'll try to speak with once a week. The dealers that I have enjoyed the most in my life have been enthusiastic, visual sensualists. Their joy about art and artists is visceral. One of my favorite dealers is someone who just calls me when I'm in the studio and we'll talk for an hour about nothing. It's just a chance to connect to someone who is sharing your life. The one deal-breaker for me is non-payment without negotiation. I know that everyone gets behind from time to time, and as long as a payment schedule is negotiated I'm pretty willing to be flexible. One of my favorite dealers pays the artist before anyone else just to make sure that she's not tempted to think of the artist's share as a loan. In the long run, the best professional relationships that I have had have been open and honest. The art world is an extremely anxious and subjective world; the last thing that you need is to be second-guessing your work or your relationship to your dealer.



WHEN SHARON CALLED to talk about this book, it immediately made me think of a strange experience I had about four years ago. I was in Los Angeles, a few weeks into a six-month project – a commission to make an installation for the new headquarters of a law firm in Boston. My proposal involved taking photographs in each of the 14 cities where they had an office. I'd been making work like this for a while, but this was an opportunity to work on a scale beyond what had been possible before. My client was enthusiastic and supportive; my whole travel itinerary arranged for me, and if things got complicated, help was a phone call away. I'd just arrived in LA from Hong Kong, having begun in Tokyo a couple of weeks earlier, with nine US cities to go before returning to London, where I live. I was making work I wanted to make, in places I wanted to go to, and was creating something of value for my clients. Walking around downtown with my camera in the sunshine, I think I was feeling really good about being an artist that day. And then I saw a faded yellow sheet of paper pasted to a lamppost, which read:

ARE YOU AN ARTIST?  
DO YOU NEED HELP??  
WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

It then listed a long series of issues an artist might have:

Peter Newman  
*Los Angeles, Downtown*  
39" diameter  
Diasc-mounted C-Type  
photograph  
2008  
Courtesy of the artist

Perfectionism  
Creative block  
Overproduction  
Difficulty talking about your work  
Unrealistic expectations  
Overcritical of your work or of others  
Money problems  
Mood swings

...and so on.

I may have some of the detail wrong, but you get the picture. I was so taken aback, I couldn't actually take one, although I wish I had. Damn! Was it really that difficult? Is it some kind of condition? Is it contagious? The sign read like recruitment for *Artists Anonymous: 12 steps to creative satisfaction*. I actually felt kind of angry and a little defensive that artists were being represented this way. But I guess what threw me the most was that I'd be lying if I said I hadn't felt all these things myself at some point. The fact that perfectionism topped the list made me laugh out loud. I'd just been taking hundreds of photographs of the very same thing.

I got back to work, but thought about that piece of paper for a long time. It was a reality check when I was high on good fortune, and I was grateful for it. But what was it doing posted there anyway, in the business heart of LA? In fact, somehow the whole thing seemed a little uncanny as it was just so perfectly pitched. So considered, with all points on a spectrum covered. Yet honest and thought-provoking, I began wondering if it was an artwork itself, and maybe a joke was slowly dawning on me. Here I was in the center of a city, surrounded by impressive buildings that conferred status on the artwork in their foyers, and I myself happily involved in such a project. Yet out on the street, with this thin piece of paper, an aspirational idea of a freewheeling and successful artist had been brilliantly complicated. Intrigued as I was, sadly I didn't have time to find out what was on offer at the workshop. I'm not quite sure if the artist deal is really quite as tough as the sign made it sound, but complex it certainly can be.



I've been working independently for some years now. By independent, I mean I don't have a main gallery representing me and through which I'm usually reached. I often work directly with clients and institutions. I do work with an agency that specializes in public commissions, but I have to make a lot of connections myself and also make sales, neither of which come particularly naturally for me. I remember finding private views very intense and quite a lot of work. Now I'm much more at ease with the necessity of putting yourself forward, even if you are with a gallery. I don't find the process of selling the work to be so different to selling an idea, but I do find pricing difficult. I think it's just really hard for an artist to put a value on their own work. I've got too much invested in it already, so it's useful to get an opinion from someone else. Left to my own devices, I tend to either overvalue my work or practically give it away, depending on my mood and some other fairly random factors.

Perhaps part of my independent approach came from being at Goldsmiths College in London at the time of the now infamous "Freeze" exhibition. To see the older students put on an exhibition of their work outside of college was very influential. The idea of taking the initiative with regard to your own success has been a given for me since then. In fact, it was a model I followed a few years later by putting on a show in an empty building myself. I didn't sell a thing, having put all the money I had into it, but it was reviewed by *Time Out* magazine. This led to other things, including a few years with a gallery, and effectively started my career.

Something that definitely helps me sustain myself independently are the relationships I have with art consultants. This has been essential, and I'm truly grateful for their support. Many are also working freelance, and even the large consultancies seem more than happy to work directly with an artist. I think the dialog between artist and client can be more immediate and engaging that way. I've certainly enjoyed this, and the dialog seems to be an important part of any commission. Not that it will change the nature of the work, but the exchange is often about more than simply the installation at the end. I find it very rewarding to learn about the world of a client and their motivation and hope that's reciprocated.

One of the most important experiences I had when I first started showing my work was with a private collector in London. He invited me to meet him at his offices, and after talking for a while he asked:

"So what's the work you've always wanted to make, but haven't been able to?"

Good question! As good as it gets. I told him I wanted to make a video of someone trying to do yoga in freefall. Right there, he committed to buy it, so I was able to go out and make the work. It was a leap in every sense for everyone involved. I asked if I could make it as an edition of three, with the first one going to him. That way I could spend everything on the production and hope to make something back later on. We had a deal. What really impressed me was not just his ability to have confidence in an idea, but also how much he clearly enjoyed being involved in a creative process. One of the editions ended up being bought by a museum in Japan, and was projected onto the outside when it opened in 2005, seven years after the work was made. The piece has also been shown in other locations and countries. I realized never to underestimate the possibilities of a commission or the support of a good collector.

As glad as I am that I've been able to make it work as an independent artist, I am now involved in talking about representation for the future. Maybe I hit a glass ceiling or perhaps it's just getting older, but I now feel that to take things to the next level will require working with the right gallery. I think I've enjoyed feeling like an outsider, but when I've been represented in the past, I've usually felt more secure. I'm also aware I've lost out on some projects as I couldn't offer the reassurance of a gallery. Ironically, or perhaps because of the unlimited possibilities of the medium, the art world can be surprisingly conventional when it comes to career development. One of the hardest things I found is finding the right balance between the social aspect of the art world, through which you meet the people who can make things happen, and the practical side of just getting on with making your work. I've certainly over-involved myself in each of those aspects at times, but more so when independent. I think you always have to be involved in your own promotion, but my priority now is to free up time to focus on making the work, and to be able to think a little more about the bigger picture. •





Thomas Kilpper  
From the on-site project, *State of Control*  
ca. 205cm x 275cm  
Unique lino-print on paper;  
*State of Control* was a floor cut in the former ministry for state security of the GDR (Stasi HQ), Berlin. The section shown here: migrants on their dangerous way over the Mediterranean to Europe via Lampedusa, Italy 2009  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler

SHARON LOUDEN (SL): Can you share with me what your practice is like on any given day, balancing your creative practice with the practical aspects of your life?

THOMAS KILPPER (TK): Somehow this is not strictly separated as I am quite chaotic and badly organized. In my "normal" daily life I am very lazy and not disciplined – my art projects mostly are not carried out in my studio but on-site, wherever. I must concentrate all my energy and focus on the process of these weeks and months. As my work deals to a great part with the notion of physical intervention and overspending/exhaustion, it is quite frazzling, but I like this intense process to go to the limits.

SL: What kind of things do you do to sustain your creative practice?

TK: My creative practice is full of interruptions and breaks, and stays somehow in opposition to a sustainable process. First, sparks of possibilities often come during awakening, in the small time slot when I am between unconsciousness and consciousness and still a bit numb... it's my starting point to develop ideas.

SL: Do you have occasions to talk with curators, gallery directors, and others to have exhibitions and the like?

TK: Yes of course; before you have a show you talk about it with curators or the like.

SL: What is that like? Do you enjoy the dialog with them, and is your practice a more collaborative one with curators?

TK: Of course, this depends on the curator and our relationship. Generally speaking, it is a very sensitive relation between the artist and the curator – not always easy, as they have their aims, their agendas and you have yours, and if it does not match to a certain degree, you cannot show together.

SL: Do you have assistants that help you with your work? If so, what kinds of things do they do for you?

TK: I work with assistants on my large-scale projects. They might help build an installation or help with printing, or whatever is needed. It depends on the assistants – what they can or want to do – and it depends on my budget for the project.

SL: Some artists like to work in complete solitude. Do you work in your studio while others are present? Is the nature of your practice collaborative?

TK: Sometimes I work in solitude, sometimes I work with assistants, and sometimes I work collaboratively. The latter to me means a collective process and the result is “ours”, not just “mine” – when two or more artists work equally together, and not as assistants but partners.

SL: Can you talk about what kind of hours you keep, or when you work on your own work? Does it involve “business hours” of others who are related to the business aspect of your life as an artist?

TK: As an artist you need to work 25 hours, eight days a week – 25/8 not 24/7.

SL: You have an exhibition space called *After the Butcher* that is open to the public, as well as your own studio in the same “complex.” Can you talk about how you manage this space while getting your work done?

TK: I consider my project space as a part of my art practice. It is not meant to develop a commercial gallery business. I believe both practices correlate and interact with each other. But to develop my own art projects clearly is my main emphasis. *After the Butcher* (the project space) comes secondary, although it is not of marginal importance. Mostly, the openings at *After the Butcher* are the highlight of the shows. For Franziska, my wife, and me, inviting the public into my house is very special and a great opportunity. After that, visitors need to contact us prior to visiting the exhibition – though we have two large shop windows.

SL: What do your galleries do for you that you don't do for yourself, and vice versa? What type of things do you have to bring to the galleries that you work with and what sort of things do you have to do on your own?

TK: In the first place, a commercial gallery is important to try to sell your work and to organize some income. The gallery should also mediate contacts to curators or museums for shows in another space. Showing at commercial galleries is a special task for me – it asks for a different balancing between experimental needs and commercial approach.

SL: Directing where you want your work to be seen and specific audiences for your work, how do you determine where your work is shown? What are the choices you make? Are they based on the type of work you're doing in the studio or the venue that you're choosing?

TK: First of all, normally you get invited to a show. Only projects in non-institutional frames – in empty buildings or so – I organize without an invitation. I belong to the type of artists that can hardly say “no” to any invitation. I had to learn to say “no,” but when I do not participate I always have a guilty conscience about it.

SL: You haven’t been able to enter in the United States for many years. Has that limited your opportunities and income as an artist?

TK: Sure, I would have been a billionaire if I could have come to the States. No, seriously, so far I missed two opportunities: I had an invitation to a printing project within Philagrafika in Philadelphia, and to meet a curator of the printing department of MoMA in New York. Of course it was sad not to get the permission from the US embassy to enter the States. You might see this as a destructive attitude of the “land of the free,” but such regulatory behavior won’t stop any artist ever; it is outdated and part of symptoms that indicate the States is past its best.

SL: How do you find opportunities to exhibit your work?

TK: Somehow, to me, this is not so much the question. I believe the exhibitors, and even the exhibitions, find you. The exceptions in my development and work are projects at places that have not been art-related sites before my intervention. These projects I have started from scratch on my own – and maybe I’ll continue with this very practice even it is very labor-intensive and time-consuming.

Generally speaking it applies more to me to ask: How do we find our way to develop interesting and good art? Or even: What makes art “good art?” Where is the place to discuss and exchange reflections on these questions?

SL: Is it important for you to exhibit your work? Some artists just like making the work and release it to the world in different ways.

TK: For my understanding, art is a social process – the exchange of new aesthetics, new ideas, new questions on cultural, social issues. This process is dependent on public reception. Public reception needs public exhibitions. As long as someone is doing creative work just in his or her studio, it’s not part of this process and exchange within the society. Once the public gets in touch with it, this process can start. I am very much interested in this very social process and exchange. To separate oneself from the world and withdraw in your studio... to me, and for the kind of work I do is not an option. But, of course, it can happen that an artist works without getting any attention but is able to realize important work for generations after his or her death. But this “Van Gogh-phenomenon” is quite rare. Most artists need the above-mentioned process of exchange, critique, reflections from outsiders...

SL: What is the best venue for your work (i.e. museums, non-profits, self-starter/DIY exhibitions, etc.)?

TK: I am mostly interested in site-related interventions with links to the sociopolitical sphere and its historical layers. I am interested to find out to what extent art is a medium to trigger political and social changes towards emancipation, and social equality and individual diversity at the same time. Almost all venues are interesting with always different options and challenges. If you can develop your work within the frame of a museum, you might have a better budget, a more professional assistance and generally better conditions. To me, the only important things are: what are the ideas behind an exhibition, do these ideas apply to me? And do the working conditions for me as an artist match with the general ones. It does not make sense to get invited to show in an institution where everybody enjoys professional working conditions but the artist. That means, for example, an artist fee is obligatory within a professionally working field and institution.

SL: Does your family have a role in helping the productivity of your work? How do they support what you’re doing and/or assist in any aspects of your work in or out of the studio?



TK: Sometimes I ask my partner – so she comments on what I plan and often this is helpful, almost a corrective.

SL: As a follow-up to an earlier question about your exhibition space being an extension of your art practice: did you start *After the Butcher* to create community?

TK: No, it is not to create community but to develop the opportunity of a non-commercial space – more like a laboratory or so. What direction of contemporary art production do we want to see flourish? This is the good thing about Berlin: there is no such thing as the “*Butcher-community*” because Berlin is so big that every exhibition brings new and different visitors. No opening is like any other. This also has to do with the fact that we are interested in very different artists.

SL: Finally, how has your practice of balancing the practical side of living and sustaining your creativity with the making of your art changed over the years? How have you been able to find a balance between making your work and all of the other responsibilities of sustaining your practice?

TK: It is hard to find an answer to that. Maybe my practice has changed very little, maybe too little – and I certainly wish to radically change it and break with some routine habits. ●

## TIMOTHY NOLAN



WC: I would. I think to say just that, though, is to undervalue the alone time in the studio, which is also huge. Maybe it's stating the obvious, but I feel like it needs to be said – my relationship with my own work and my engagement with my work is most important. If I think back to the first impulse I had to make art, it was when I was young – I'd see a Tiepolo painting and I'd want to go and make one, end of story. What I've learned over the years is when I get excited by something like that, the trick for me is to find myself within it. •

## CONCLUSION

Ed Winkleman and Bill Carroll

SHARON LOUDEN (SL): I'm here with Ed Winkleman and Bill Carroll in Ed's gallery in Chelsea on July 17th, 2012, to record a conclusion to this book, *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life: essays by 40 working artists*. One of the reasons why I asked them to sit and talk with me today is because they both have had many years of experience working with artists and seeing how artists have evolved. Bill Carroll is a "senior" gallerist, if you will, even though he's not in that role at the moment. In addition to being a fantastic artist in his own right, he serves as the Director of the studio program at the Elizabeth Foundation (EFA); is that correct, Bill?

BILL CARROLL (BC): Yes.

SL: And then we have Ed Winkleman, gallerist, as well as activist through his blog. He has also written an extremely informative book detailing how to build a gallery, entitled, *How to Start and Run a Commercial Gallery*. One of the reasons I asked both of them to contribute to the book is to hear about their experiences in the art world over the years. I wanted to get their views on whether it really matters if an artist is represented by a gallery, or whether one's "pedigree" is important to achieving respect as an artist living and sustaining a creative life. Can you talk about that, Ed?



ED WINKLEMAN (EW): I suppose that's, like, maybe a couple of questions, so maybe we could break it down...

SL: How about if I say this: a lot of artists I have met, especially young artists, feel that when they get out of school they have to have a gallery in order to be considered "worthy" as a professional artist. I'm more interested in asking the question: What defines an artist publicly? Many of the artists contributing to this book talk about the simple sustaining power of just making their work every day in their studio, and that's enough to call themselves artists. It's not a public process. And yet they must sustain outside of their studio, as well. Could you talk about that dynamic, perhaps?

EW: I think whether or not you have a gallery is a question a lot of people who identify as an artist are asked almost immediately. And within the population of people who kind of understand how the art world works, it is seen as a milestone. Seen as a potential career goal. But I also find that there *are* younger artists using the model of building an art career completely independent of a commercial art gallery system, and it is equally viable. I think it doesn't get as much attention because there aren't consistent advertising or promotional pushes for those artists. As opposed to a gallery artist who gets more exposure through the promotion of a gallery. So you might get a sense that Artist X, who shows with this gallery in New York, this one in London, and this one in Los Angeles, is having a good career. But truth of the matter is Artist X might not be making anywhere near as much money as Artist Y, who doesn't have any galleries. But Artist Y isn't having the ads bought for individual shows, or isn't necessarily having their work shown at art fairs or these other sort of more public places. So it's a more under-the-radar sort of career to have if you don't have a commercial art gallery. I think that confuses a lot of younger artists into thinking that they must have a commercial art gallery to meet their goals. Because how else would they measure it?

Now when I talk a little bit about how to get a gallery in some of my lectures, I start off with the idea that there's a spectrum

of places that you can exhibit your work: everywhere from a restaurant to a museum, non-profit places in between, etc. The commercial galleries have been one choice in that spectrum. What I ask artists who are interested in getting a gallery to really think about is whether getting a gallery helps them meet their goals. Oddly enough, that usually triggers them to say they're not sure what their goals are. So then I say, okay, that's really where you have to start. What are your goals? Is it that you want to have, you know, a museum retrospective by the time you're 50? Is it that you want to be able to live off of your art? I mean, what are very concrete goals you have? And believe it or not a lot of times a commercial gallery can be completely irrelevant to those goals. Figuring out whether or not your goals require you to have a commercial gallery is extremely important and something we talk about.

That said, it's a little difficult for me, being a commercial gallerist, to really delve deeply into what all of the options outside the commercial gallery system are. I mean, I'm really focused on what we're doing here. But I know a number of artists have very, very successful careers outside the commercial gallery system. Some of the artists that we work with, for example, we sell some of their work, but nowhere near as much as they show in museums or biennials or other things, and you know, a commercial gallery for them is a nice little extra off the side. It doesn't even come close to making them the sort of money they get from these other opportunities to exhibit their work.

SL: Bill, what do you think?

BC: I think, when I talk to one of my students at Pratt in professional practice, what we really talk about, first of all, is entering the dialog. The first thing most artists want is to be in their studio making their work, and that's what they're dedicated to. And if you just want to do that and then hope it's discovered after you're dead, that's one route. But, with the artists that I'm meeting, first of all, they've come to New York to really enter into the dialog. For me, the question is: Do you need to have a commercial gallery to enter into that dialog? And in fact,

no, you don't. There are people, as you were talking about, Ed, those couple of artists that you represent, whose bigger part of their career is actually in museums. I remember one artist in particular, when I was at Elizabeth Harris, that we worked with. At one point we were doing a lot of site-specific installations in our smaller space. This was a big focus of mine with this artist. But very much on a one-shot deal because they were unsalable. At another point, we took on one artist who did these big site-specific installations, which were really not very saleable. But the fact of the matter is she was at that point already a mid-career artist. She had had other galleries at different points, but the main part of her career was in museums, especially university museums. There were a lot of places out there that couldn't wait to have her come and do a big installation; places that did not care whether they were going to be sold. That wasn't their primary goal. Because one way or another, no matter how you slice it, galleries are a business, and at some point it becomes about salability.

There are a number of artists who do these site-specific kinds of installations or performances, and can also figure out a saleable part of it. I always think Ann Hamilton's a great example, who did these amazing things. All the little video things she did were equally good – and were saleable. There are not a lot of people doing the installation stuff who can manage that. That said, I've met a number of artists who have their careers either doing the museum thing, where there's a big audience for that, or are doing other sorts of projects – especially some of these younger artists who are doing all kinds of guerilla-type art situations, where they're bringing their own friends, that sort of scene.

There are lots of ways to be in the dialog without being in the commercial gallery system. But I think, ultimately, that's the first decision: is this art-making thing something you're going to do just for yourself, and you're not worried about showing at all? I don't think that is the case with anyone who's going to read this book. Finally, in terms of making money, I've also met a lot of artists who have plugged into art consultants around the country, and who are selling work on a regular basis. Sometimes they are making a lot of money and don't have a commercial

gallery, although they do have some other kind of commercial outlet.

SL: So would it be fair to say that you consider somebody who's a professional artist just somebody who's simply creating? Or, is the importance to engage in the dialog paramount?

EW: Well, those are two different things. Somebody who's simply creating can sort of participate in the dialog, but you obviously can't engage in the dialog without creating. For instance, we're just starting to work with an artist who has a 30-page resume of exhibitions and had her very first gallery show at age 60, and did not need a commercial gallery whatsoever to have the success she's achieved. She's in MoMA, she's in the Whitney, she's in the Biennial, she's in all the history books. She's major. She defines a big section of the dialog. She didn't need a gallery; it was just nice to have after she met a lot of other goals for herself. So, yeah, it's completely possible outside the gallery. Sometimes it's probably even easier.

SL: Well, it's interesting to hear that. I think part of this book is that a lot of these artists do talk about the different road maps that they take to be able to sustain their creativity and living in order to keep going as artists. So, based on what you just mentioned about this artist and her 30 years, can you talk about some of the other artists that you've worked with that they have sustained their creativity and livings as artists?

EW: Well, I can elaborate on the one I just mentioned. In addition to teaching, she got virtually every grant known to man. And, again, got it through the strength of her work. To be really honest though, at a certain point the decision to work with a commercial gallery came because she realized that there were no grants that she hadn't gotten, and it was very unlikely she would continue to get as many as she had because she'd already gotten them all. So that can be one of the factors that can drive somebody into a commercial gallery.

BC: I always say to my students that, in the same way that you're in your studio coming up with a very individual body of work, that's really your voice and not like anybody else's – your career should be the same way. It's important to compare and contrast paths, of course, but that no two careers look exactly the same. For instance, certainly teaching's a big part of it. Also, some of the artists at the EFA are graphic designers, and they do it freelance and they get paid a lot of money by the hour.

Two more things artists need to remember: (1) keep your expenses low right from the beginning. I've watched a lot of artists, for instance, in the late 1980s, when there was a boom and they really overextended themselves, and then when the crash came they were really not in a good situation. It's important that even when things are good, you must keep your expenses low... it's a really good thing. (2) If you're going to have a day job, try to keep it somehow connected to the art community. I think that for you to spend hours of a day doing something that's so completely disconnected... even if you're working part-time like up at the EFA, you're meeting other artists; there's a kind of networking that goes on that I think is really important.

I was going to say, I was also thinking of artists who have found other ways to make a living. One artist that I worked with back when I was at Charlie Cowles was an artist who made big sculptures. And in the early 1990s when the crash – that crash, it was two crashes ago now – when that happened – boom. The gallery part of it; we stopped selling completely. He ended up going into public art. So he started applying for all these public art commissions and ended up getting them. Once he had one really big success – he did something in Boston that was a huge success – that really became his career. He now basically does public art. And as far as I know, I don't even think he has a gallery or has had one for years. But that's like almost another world he got plugged into, where he's highly respected; he does these amazing commissions, he knows how to do them, he does them on time, everybody loves them. There are so many different ways you can find as an outlet for your art.

SL: What do you think the expectations are now for an artist, versus, let's say, 20 years ago? Are they the same after leaving school? Do all newly-minted art school grads expect to get a

gallery immediately? Is being part of a community important? That sort of thing?

EW: I think you have to go back more than 20 years. When I go back 20 years, I think it's very similar. It was sort of after the Neo-Expressionists and everybody was just making tons and tons of money. I think the expectation, to get really historical about it, started at more or less the same time that Warhol started to take off. You could be both a rock star and an artist at the same time, and whether or not it was really realistic, that started to become the dream anyway. I think once that became the dream, that trickled down into art schools. Everybody coming out assumed... I mean, not everybody – I guess there was still a generation of students being taught, "these galleries are your enemy; you will never make any money." Some of them bought into it, but the smarter ones were looking at the other people making money and thinking, "well, you're saying that but look at them over there." So 20 years ago I think we were well into the era when artists assumed that they could have a successful career living off their art. And I would say at least that segment of the artist population dominated who was approaching the galleries. At that point, artists approaching the galleries were assuming that they were going to be able to live off of selling their art. So it really hasn't changed that much.

SL: Do you think, though, that there's an expectation now versus before? The expectation being that it will automatically happen?

EW: Well, I think there are more galleries than ever before; the market's a lot larger, that's for sure. So yeah, the expectation is in place because of that. But, honestly, I go back to the artists that lost their galleries in the early 1990s, and those are folks who were out of school 20 years ago now. All of the East Village crowd – they all assumed they were going to be the next big rock star. This is why they moved to New York; this is why they were going to the East Village. What Bill said is really important, though: a lot of them thought the money was never going to end. And the market *did* crash, and they were completely unprepared. I think in terms of preparing artists to have a lengthy career and make

money, somebody has to show them that this will always go up and down. There will never be a constant rise in the market. I mean, really great artists, who should have known better, got wiped out at this last downturn.

SL: In 2008.

EW: Which is ridiculous. I mean, they were so unprepared for it to come back down again. It's just shocking to me that they didn't see that that was a very strong possibility. So I think that's a big deal to emphasize.

SL: Bill?

BC: Well, as you said, to go back historically, which is a really long way, but when I was in art school the model was [Willem] de Kooning, who had his first one-person show at 40. You didn't think about showing the first ten years out of school. And it took a long time to actually have work that was mature enough that you would dare put it out there in that dialog. And obviously that changed, and I do think the big change was the boom in the late 1980s, which to me was pretty much the exact same as this last boom. There was this boom, and everybody took it for granted. Everybody was making tons of money, every show we had was selling out, and people took it for granted. And then, boom, it's over. And yes, it's really important for artists to realize that. And that's something I really emphasize when I'm talking to young artists: you need to be able to get through the tough times. Just because you're selling a bunch of stuff right now.... It's a very fragile world! It's the first thing people cut out when there's a recession [buying art]. You need to be ready when that happens. I have a number of artists at the Elizabeth Foundation; I can think of one artist in particular, who had a gallery and part of her income besides teaching was at least \$50,000 a year from her art. And it just stopped completely. Suddenly she doesn't have \$50,000 that she had before, because when this crash happened, people stopped selling. It was a done deal.

So you have to be in it for the long haul. I do think that during the moments of boom, whichever one you talk about, the young

artists expected immediate gallery representation when they graduated. I talked to someone up in Columbia University recently who told me that it was a real problem; that it had gotten to the point where everybody who left Columbia immediately walked into some big gallery career. One of the problems with that is that the few who didn't get immediate representation thought that they were failures, a year out of graduate school. They thought that their career was already over. I thought those were *really* unrealistic expectations.

I think in that way the downturns are a good thing. This last one was like a light switched off from one year to the next. When Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy, the lights went off. It was like overnight it was a completely different story. And in ways, I think that's a good thing; the kids who came out in the middle of this difficulty and, in a way right now, are getting a much more realistic sense of what it's like to be an artist, where it's hard to sell. You know, it's not guaranteed. I'm sure right now the kids coming out of graduate school are dealing with very different mindsets.

SL: And yet, what you were talking about earlier about perception is important – how some people on the outside (collectors or curators, for instance) see an artist with a lot of gallery shows and think that he or she is doing just fine. What about this possible misperception that seems to never go away?

EW: That you seem to be more viable if you have a network....

SL: Right. One reason why I've edited this book is that I want to show that an artist can have that validity without that perception. I think that's harder for the artist in a lot of ways, though. Would you say that that perception is the same, if not more, than years ago? Or less so? And also, who are the people contributing to this? Is it just the collectors?

EW: I would say that an important factor in this is that purchasing has sped up incredibly. People are making buying decisions so much faster than ever before, and I think that goes

hand in hand with the collectors we know wanting the security of the gallery behind this artist or that artist. The idea is if a year from now they realize, oh shit, that was a mistake (buying that artist's work), the gallery will take that work back. Because, you know, they're afraid... especially if there's a hot artist; they're afraid if they don't buy it right away it won't be there at that price point, and blah blah blah. But they definitely want to know they're not going to be stuck with this work if, in a year from now, they realize they were wrong. So I hear this time and again: that collectors feel more comfortable buying work from an artist who has a gallery because there's that institution behind that work. And I think that really contributes to how quickly it's selling. They're not really necessarily buying with their eyes; they're buying with their ears. And the more you buy with your ears, the more you want those other people (i.e. the gallery) behind the work for you.

BC: It's true – the idea that that gallery is showing some artist does immediately give them some kind of validity. There's definitely a perception that, oh my god, they're showing at that gallery, they must be making lots of money! That might not be the case though. For instance, Leo Castelli showed Cy Twombly for years, and he didn't sell anything. He was selling the Warhols and he was selling the Jasper Johns, but Twombly did not sell. It's like nobody got Cy Twombly at first except Castelli, and he gave him all these shows. So the fact that, oh my god, he's selling with Leo Castelli, he must be selling a lot of work – he was definitely not selling a lot of work. But just to be showing with Leo Castelli was certainly *the* stamp of approval as far as a gallery goes.

If you get your work in MoMA – wow, that's a big thing. Collectors are going to love that, for sure. But then you're suddenly showing with Winkelman Gallery; that is a stamp of approval by Ed, who obviously has a really great eye. It doesn't have to be the only validity, but you can't discount it either, especially since the galleries are putting money into promoting your show, they're doing ads. So, that again really brings you right into the dialog; that the gallery's doing all this extra work.

Even if you have a gallery, though, you really need to be taking care of your own career and keeping your mailing list up. You know, you can't totally count on the galleries, especially if it's a smaller gallery. On the other hand, if you don't have a gallery, you have to be doing all that work yourself, so that if you want a career, in whatever way, you know, guerrilla exhibitions or exhibitions in museums, you do need to be keeping your mailing list up, making sure people know about it. If you really want people to know what you're doing, and you don't have a gallery doing it for you, then you need to be doing it on your own.

SL: Well, it's interesting because in virtually all of the essays in the book, you'll see that these artists do a tremendous amount on their own, with or without a dealer. Nowadays, it seems that it is more of a partnership versus perhaps 30 years ago when artists were more dependent. It was a different system, I think.

EW: There was more of an expectation that the dealer/artist relationship would be for the long run. And you're right, that has changed from both sides. Dealers are grumbling that artists are disloyal; artists are grumbling that dealers are disloyal. I see artists reminiscing about the days of Castelli Gallery. I recently saw somebody put up a photo of Castelli and his stable and all the artists were like, "Oh wow, remember the days, they were like his children..." And to be honest, I think that that is a very dangerous myth as well: that somehow a gallery is an artist's parent. I don't know of any contemporary dealer who feels that they're the parent of their artists, and I don't think an artist should want that. I think an artist should want to be an equal player in their career, making adult decisions with the gallery. There should not be this infantilization of the artist. I think that the expectation, "All I have to do is get a gallery and that horrible stuff is going to be taking care of for me," is (1) a myth, and (2) it sets up disappointment when an artist gets a gallery and the gallery reminds the artist, "I have 15 other artists. I can't take your phone call at three o'clock in the morning."



SL: That goes back to what I was saying earlier, before we started this conversation. I think that this book shows that artists are self-sustaining. And that has been consistent over many centuries, long before this market ever happened. In some ways, it's still the same. And yet, I definitely believe that expectations are different, based on external things like the market, like the pressure for someone to enter in the art world. On one hand, you guys are saying it's not necessary to have a gallery, but on the other hand you say, well, collectors might want the gallery because then they have that stamp of approval. So it's this delicate balance.

It's also clear from reading the amazing essays in the book that the concept of balance is pre-eminent in the lives of these artists. Balance in the sense of being able to continue to create while paying the bills. How do you balance that time, if someone has a regular day job of one sort or another, or another artist has gallery representation and his/her "day job" consists of working with the gallery? Or spending many hours teaching or dealing with paperwork for public art projects, or whatever it is, and *then* making their work. Would you agree that there are many options for an artist to sustain their living while simultaneously developing their creative life?

EW: I would say much more so than ever, and the Internet is a big part of why. A huge part of the marketing can now be done by the artist very easily, from a computer in their studio.

SL: That's great.

EW: And one of the models that we haven't highlighted, but I think you're going to see more and more, are artists like Banksy or whoever, who make a splash, get their own press, their prices go through the roof, and maybe galleries come after the fact. Jason Munson is another really good example. You know, huge galleries are chasing after him after he made his own name via YouTube. So you're going to see a lot more artists doing their own promotion and building their own careers. And then, yeah, they can have their pick of the galleries.

SL: Do you want to add anything, Bill?

BC: Actually, those are good examples of people who found a different way to enter this dialog and make a big splash. In the late 1980s, before the crash, there were 150 galleries in SoHo. In Chelsea, before the crash, there were 300 galleries. So right there, from one main area to the next, it had *doubled* in size. Not mentioning all the other areas where there were galleries, because at one point there were the Williamsburg galleries, now there's the Lower East Side. And there were so many more. When you talk about the days of Leo Castelli with anyone you know from that time, they will tell you that the art world was tiny. An artist would get with Leo Castelli and stay with him for life.

It's just a whole different system now. Things are much more fluid than before, and I do think it's healthier. Because sometimes the artists change, and the galleries change, and the idea that you're going to be with a gallery forever... things are moving too fast now. You know, it's just a different world. But the opportunities are stupendous with the Internet as a tool, and there are so many galleries worldwide. The markets in Asia now... there are so many people getting involved. That is huge. There are just a lot of opportunities worldwide if young artists can figure out how to take advantage of them.

SL: So, we're going to close out this conversation. I know it's a difficult question, but what do you think is the key, or keys, for an artist today to sustain a creative life? To sustain their living? You both spoke about various ways to achieve this, such as self-promotion, working in partnership with galleries, creating diverse exhibition opportunities by thinking outside of the box, developing a public art career. From your experience working with artists over the years, are there any key points that have stuck out and contributed to success in sustaining a creative life for the long haul? Bill?

BC: I think a sense of humor really helps. [Laughter]

SL: A sense of humor!

BC: And by that I mean a sense of perspective. I think that artists who come into this with a very specific idea of what's supposed to happen, that "I'm just going to be miserable if this, this and this doesn't happen," are setting themselves up for disappointment. And these are the people I meet who are middle-aged and bitter. The artists who sustain... first of all, obviously, the first thing is that you're in your studio, you're really connecting to your work, you're making good work, and that is the first and most important thing. From there I do think you need to have a good attitude as you move through the art world. And you've got to be flexible, you know; you put the energy out there but you're kind of flexible to the things that happen. You never know what's going to happen. For instance, suddenly all the older artists around you are having the biggest part of their careers now, in their sixties. In our building, we have Suzan Frecon, who's just doing incredibly. She had a very respectable career, but now she's having this huge career. Judith Bernstein, who's come to speak to my class, who was a tough feminist artist, the first show at A.I.R. Gallery involved in all of that feminist work that really worked against her for many years. She didn't have a one-person show for 24 years. Now Haunch of Venison is buying up all of her early work; the Whitney's buying up her work. And the thing about Judith – I met her before all of this stuff was hot – she really has a great sense of humor. Even though she had been locked out of the system because her work is so feminist, she wasn't bitter about it. Judith really had a sense of perspective. She always taught; she found ways to sustain her practice. She just really had a great attitude, and it's really gratifying to see some of these people rewarded. You know, now they're selling all this work. Even all her early work is being bought up.

SL: What do you think, Ed?

EW: I think Judith is a good example of what I think is just somebody who, despite ups and downs, was more interested in being in her studio and making her work than anything else. I would turn this around a little bit actually, just because it's an easy example – I'll use myself. Nobody knows this, but a long time ago I was an enthusiastic painter. After coming to New York

and spending a lot of time in other artists' studios, I realized I actually enjoyed talking to other artists about their work more than I enjoyed making my own. That was an indication to me that being a painter wasn't what I should be doing.

If there's any part of all of this process that you're not into, or that you're more excited about, like, the parties or whatever, rather than being in your studio, you might want to figure out a different career within the art world. Because being in your studio should be its own reward. And if it's not, then you might want to reconsider what your goals are. If it is, you're going to be happy no matter what happens to you.

SL: So it sounds like anything that would sustain that creative practice is of utmost importance. Always stay within yourself as an artist. Continue to develop your visual vocabulary.

EW: Well, an artist is defined as somebody who's making art, so that's first and foremost what you have to be doing your entire career: making art. And it's really interesting, because you're going to constantly re-evaluate your goals completely as your career progresses. It can start off with huge dreams of being the next Damien Hirst, but alongside of that should always be a much more intimate goal of making that next piece that you're really excited about. That being its own reward.

SL: I love that you said that! Thank you very much!