

Community

Community is a term that gets thrown around a lot, many times without definition. On the surface the word seems benign. Yet community presents highly problematic implications. So what defines a community? Foremost, community entails a group of people, but what group? Among its numerous uses, community refers to people connected by a shared geographical location, a common ethnicity, religion or profession, and/or a similar set of social values. It can be self-defined or externally imposed. Regardless, defining people based on established criteria always divides as much as it connects. Inclusion unfailingly involves exclusion. Therefore, this “complex form(s) of identification” has dual capabilities.¹ Community possesses the ability to break down barriers between people and create a space for understanding and conversation while at the same time this construction retains the capacity to standardize difference and diversity under an umbrella term.²

Art is one means to build a temporary community based on interest and engagement. The NOW exhibition strives to build such a provisional community where people are able to come together through art to contemplate, converse and participate in relevant social and cultural issues affecting daily life in Toronto.

¹Kester, Grant. 2004. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 15.
²Ibid.

Tied to a physical location, museums and galleries, like the Art Gallery of Ontario, are naturally situated within a geographical community. Yet to define people who visit galleries by geography, ethnicity, education, profession or income bracket ignores the complex and personal reasons that influence audience attendance. Within the art world community continues to be a heavily debated concept.

Historically, museums of the 18th and 19th century sought out patrons with appropriate moral and social behaviors of the upper middle class in order to influence diverse individuals to form a civic-whole comprised of ideal citizens.³ Defiantly, community arts in the 1980's and 1990 offered a more open, democratic definition. Simply defined, community arts deals with the collaborative creative process between a practicing artist and a community. Here community refers to a self-defined group of individuals, electively joined together as much by diversity as by sameness rather than made uniform by externally established similarities. This project's community comprises complex, multiple audiences with multiple identities, but it is the individual responses to the art and ideas addressed in the gallery that completes the NOW exhibition.⁴

³Duncan, Carol. 1991. “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship.” *Exhibiting Cultures: the Poetics and Politics of Museums*. Ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 89



Photograph Cindy Blazevic

⁴Lacy, Suzanne. 1995. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle: Bay Press. 38

All Together Now

Collaboration in art is nothing new. The process of working together with other artists, curators and audiences is a long established strategy. From apprenticeships in the 19th century, to studio assistants in the 21st, from community arts practice to relational aesthetics, joint projects have an extensive history both inside and outside the art gallery. Yet every time new people come together on a new project unexpected results are sure to ensue. While applying ideas of collaboration and community to graffiti writing and street art may initially seem odd, this exhibition does just that. It goes beyond the misrepresentation of these art practices and embraces the notions of respect, honesty and friendship; common elements in these public art forms.

Teamwork is at the foundation of the NOW project. For the past five months the artists, Sean and Pascal, and curator Katherine, worked closely. In this context, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Inspired by collaboration that uses continuous dialogue to arrive at agreement, each individual played his or her own role without sacrificing personal expertise and experiences. Through thoughtful discussion ideas were presented, and together issues and concerns were navigated and negotiated. This approach promotes respect but also accepts differences of opinion, integral to learning from others.

Not only have the artists and curator formed a close working relationship, the Art Gallery of Ontario is the other partner in this project. Group meetings with various individuals and departments have taken NOW from a small-scale installation to a multi-part project, integrating the artists' work within other areas of the museum. The next step in this collaboration invites audience participation in the exhibition and its programming. Visitors are encouraged to post wall notes with personal responses in the gallery, to initiate conversation with other visitors and the artists, to spend time in this free public space and to participate in the community walks taking place in the neighborhood.



Sean Martindale, *NATURE*, Public Intervention, Toronto, 2009

Mindfulness

Stress, over-stimulation, rising work and academic pressure, low employment levels and a highly consumable culture gives rise to a surge of physical and social disorders. Increasingly employed by western psychology, mindfulness combats the every growing malaise of contemporary capitalist society. What is mindfulness? A historically Buddhist philosophy, contemporary mindfulness asks its followers to slow down, breath and be in the moment.

With daily life getting faster and faster, with access to information more immediate than ever, the quest for mindfulness is all the more challenging. At odds with contemporary culture, mindfulness offers a sustainable way of living through attentive awareness of the present.