

NOW

A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette

by

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Abstract

This thesis consists of a contemporary art exhibition and accompanying curatorial essay featuring Toronto-based artists Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette. Martindale and Paquette collaborated for the first time to create a site-specific installation for the *Toronto Now* series at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Combining graffiti writing, street art and activist interventions with contemporary painting and design Martindale and Paquette created new work for the exhibition. To develop the installation the artists and curator worked closely with the AGO including the FRANK restaurant, the gift shop, the Weston Family Learning Centre and curatorial department to construct an integrated project that playfully works with and responds to established museum systems.

Acknowledgments

Sean and Pascal, you are inspired artists and genuine friends. Thank you for making this experience unforgettable.

This project could not have taken place without the support and participation of many people. To all my partners I admire your work and dedication to contemporary art. Thank you to all who said yes when saying no is so much easier and to all who opened their office and studio doors to collaborate without reservation.

Thank you to Michelle Jacques for giving my project a home. Your confidence and generosity leaves me speechless. To Kelly McKinley, your innovation and willingness to take risks is inspiring.

It has been a sincere pleasure learning from and working with my advisor Andrea Fatona. Your thoughtful words continually guided me down an ever exciting but always well-considered path.

To both the OCAD University and Art Gallery Ontario communities, your support has brought this exciting project to fruition. And for those many moments of agony and of celebration, Mary and Zach I would not have survived without you both!

Dedication

To my parents for their unwavering support and encouragement

Table of Contents

List of Images	viii
PART I: The Project	1
The Thesis	1
The Context	2
The Exhibition	3
The Curatorial Essay	5
PART II: Frameworks	7
My Curatorial Approach	7
A Site-Specific Installation	11
The NOW Service Bureau	16
Gift Shop Gift Shop	19
PART III: Methodology	21
PART IV: Process and Reflection	24
Pre-Installation	24
Collaboration and Conflict	26
Subject Position	29
Institutional Relations	30
PART V: Analysis	32
PART VI: Closing Discussion	35
Reference List	37
Appendix A: NOW Newspaper – Curatorial Essay	39
Appendix B: Exhibition Hand-Held Panel Copy	44
Appendix C: Exhibition Programming Schedule	46
Accompanying Material	48

List of Images

1. NOW Service Bureau – installation view, 2012.	4
2. <i>Infinite NOW</i> – installation view, 2012.	5
3. NOW Newspaper – installation view, 2012.	6
4. <i>OPEN OPINE</i> – installation view, 2012.	16
5. Post NOW comment wall – detail. 2012.	17
6. Post NOW comment wall – detail. 2012.	18
7. Gift Shop Gift Shop – installation view, shopAGO, 2012.	20
8. Gift Shop Gift Shop – installation view, shopAGO, 2012.	20
9. Young Gallery – installation view, 2012.	23
10. Gift Shop Gift Shop – installation view, shopAGO, 2012.	28
11. shopAGO window display, 2012.	34
12. <i>NOW up</i> , 2012.	34
13. Young Gallery window – installation view, 2012.	36

All Photographs Courtesy of Cindy Blazevic

PART I: The Project

The Thesis

Now: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette and the accompanying curatorial essay explores the impact of a collaborative curatorial approach in developing an exhibition of contemporary art. Working together with the artists and the institution as partners, this thesis project investigates three primary research questions:

1. What curatorial strategies can be used, prior to and post installation, to invite artistic collaboration and an in depth response to the specific gallery identity?
2. Does bringing graffiti writing and street art into an institutional gallery necessarily imply co-optation?
3. What impact does shifting the context from street to gallery have on the artists and their artwork?

This paper discusses the curatorial methodology used in undertaking this project and outlines the theoretical frameworks that inform my research. A personal response to the process of curating the exhibition from inception to completion addresses the first research question and focuses on issues and learning opportunities. Finally, I revisit the final two research questions in light of new knowledge and practices developed in the process of executing this exhibition project.

The Context

The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) houses many intriguing treasures. Some of these treasures live on display inside carefully curated galleries, others are hidden away in vaults awaiting exhibition. Yet another treasure hides in plain sight. Numerous visitors and non-visitors alike walk by daily yet it often goes unnoticed. The Young Gallery, host to the *Toronto Now* series, sits on the northeastern corner of the AGO connected to the FRANK restaurant. Positioned behind double-paned UV protected glass this street-front gallery generally remains invisible.

Toronto Now is a rotating program of contemporary art projects by local artists. The series promotes Toronto's arts community, in addition to providing the general public free access to contemporary art. Although part of the museum framework and thus subject to institutional practices, *Toronto Now* is uniquely positioned to negotiate and challenge traditional museological practices. At its inception *Toronto Now* was described by the AGO as a meeting place between the street and museum. Framed as a grassroots, DIY space, this series allows for participation and the possibility of openness for artistic exploration within the traditionally closed system of the art institution.

The artists I selected for my thesis exhibition excel at illuminating the invisible. Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette take often-overlooked sites, such as back alleyways, temporary hoardings, parking lots and liminal city spaces transforming them into forums for artistic exploration of contemporary concerns. When transplanted into the museum their act of illumination opens up the Young Gallery as a place where socially relevant and contentious ideas are addressed head on through art and where audiences are invited in to experience a previously overlooked space devoted to contemporary creativity.

The Exhibition

NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette is the eleventh installment of the AGO's *Toronto Now* series. The exhibition is comprised of site-specific artworks that create the appearance of a functional service bureau. Integrated into the installation, the art allows visitors to pause and question what or where is the art. The NOW Service Bureau evolved from the artists' appropriation of the AGO logo and the Now name to create their own branded office space. This playful exhibition encourages visitors to get involved through a comment wall and workspace. Here questions are posed about current issues in the city at large. Rather than posing answers to these questions themselves, the artists ask audience members to consider their own ideas and the ideas of others who share the space.

In *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette*, the gallery is transformed into a forum for discussion with art as the catalyst for conversation. Converging street art, graffiti writing and activist interventions with contemporary painting, sculpture and design, Martindale and Paquette blur traditional art classifications and work to expand the understanding of what artistic creativity can be within the established art world. Collaborating for the first time, Martindale and Paquette produced new work for the exhibition, including *Infinite NOW* (2012), a large-scale mirrored sculpture, *NOW up* (2012) and *Whitewash* (2012), two videos of graffiti writing taking place outside the gallery, a vinyl graffiti piece installed on the outside window of the gallery and two installations: the NOW Service Bureau and Gift Shop Gift Shop. The project reflects the artists' interest in the tension between the rush and impatience of mainstream society's quintessential lifestyle and the benefit of slowing down, being mindful and aware of environmental, political and cultural issues.

Taking inspiration from their daily environment, the gallery, as well as the current socio-political and cultural climate of Toronto, the exhibition invites audiences to reconsider Toronto now.



Figure 1. NOW Service Bureau – installation view, 2012.



Figure 2. *Infinite NOW* – installation view, 2012.

The Curatorial Essay¹

To compliment the exhibition the accompanying curatorial essay takes the form of a newspaper. This four page take-away, available in the exhibition, was carefully constructed to reach a broad readership while maintaining cohesion with the installation itself and supporting the ideas addressed by the art. The essay is divided into eleven segments, each written to function as a whole but also work individually to compliment the other segments. The format is intended to allow the public a choice of reading that would benefit their experience in the exhibition. The visitor can read the entirety of the newspaper all at once or read sections over time as a supplement to the project. Segments include information on the project highlighting the NOW Service Bureau, the artists' biographies and Gift Shop Gift Shop; ideas addressed by the larger

¹ Appendix A: NOW Newspaper, curatorial essay

project through concepts of positive complicity, mindfulness and community; and two interview segments from conversations with each artist that introduces their voices into the curatorial writing.

In addition to the curatorial essay, a hand-held panel helps provide information and context to the exhibition.² Available to read in the gallery, this text includes the voices of both artists and the curator. Frustrated and unsatisfied by third person writing of exhibition text that implies an all knowing and removed author imposing the right interpretation onto the art, this panel was written to provide personal perspectives on the project where the author takes ownership of their ideas and recognizes that these statements are just a few of many possible interpretations.

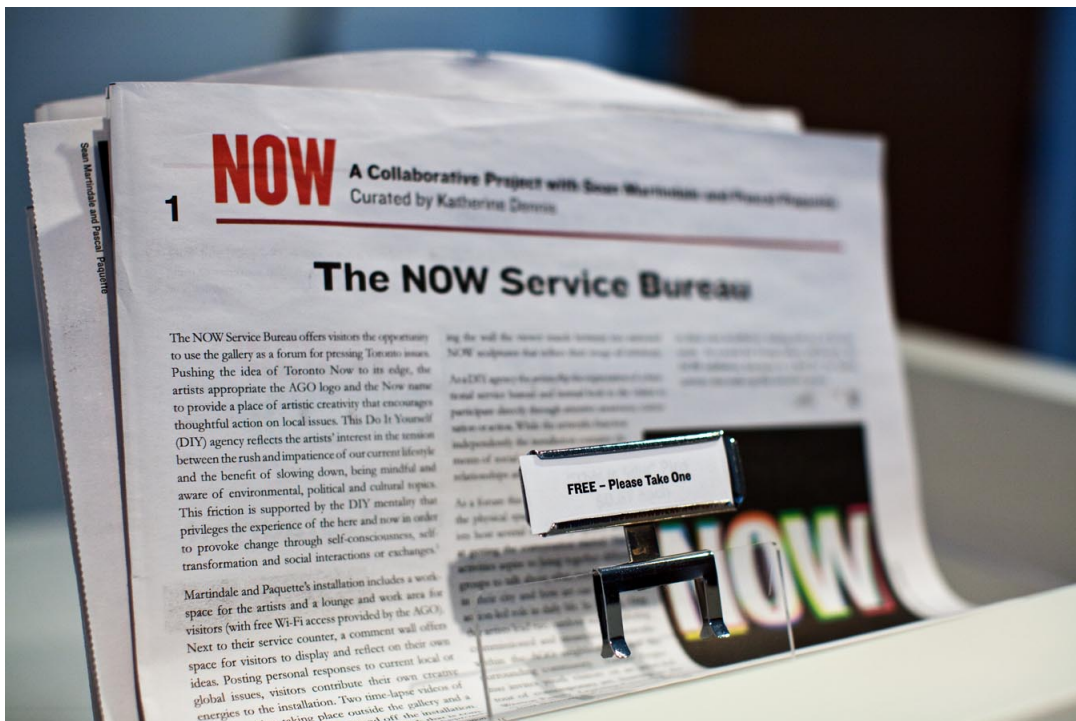


Figure 3. NOW Newspaper – installation view, 2012.

² Appendix B: Exhibition hand-held panel copy

PART II: Frameworks

Like the project itself, the theoretical framework behind *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette* is complex and multi-faceted. Theories from a broad range of authors and disciplines merge together to inform the diverse activities involved in creating this exhibition. Two frameworks ground this project, theories drawn from the curatorial practice of collaborating with artists and the theories that examine artist selection and the creation of artwork to address the demands of the exhibition space. This dual foundation is distinct yet interconnected. A collaborative curatorial practice supported the development of a site-specific response to the Young Gallery but was not a requisite for the type of art created for the exhibition.

The Curatorial Approach

My curatorial approach is derived from community arts practice and theory focused on dialogical and collaborative nature of knowledge production (Gablik 1995; Kester 2004; Lacy 1995; Lind 2009). I also draw from the tenants of relational aesthetics from the perspective of Claire Bishop and her critique of an idealized, conflict free community (Bishop 2010). These perspectives provide the platform upon which I explore and apply various relevant theories within the fields of curatorial and museum practices, community arts, and critical and cultural theory. My interest in the exhibition as a form of conversation originates from the writing of curator Bruce Ferguson (1996) in his exploration of the rhetoric of exhibitions, while cultural studies professor Tony Bennett's (1995) Foucauldian analysis of the museum provides the starting point for exploring the impact of historical museological traditions on how art is determined, selected, collected, presented and talked about today.

Community arts in North America presented an alternative to prevalent modernist practices that stressed the artist as genius, who in turn produced autonomous, transcendent works of art. Gaining popularity in the late fifties and early sixties, happenings and gallery gestures herald the path for the development of community-based practice that took art outside the traditional gallery environment (Lacy 1995, 25). The community arts movement aimed to return creative production and performance to the community and liberate the arts and artists from elitist gallery spaces (23). Dissatisfied with the myth of the artist as an asocial, isolated individual exempt from social responsibility, the term community arts depicts artists with a shared interest in social responsibility, who crave community relevancy and enjoy working collaboratively (25).

Historically, community arts have been linked to social and political movements such as feminism, Marxism, civil rights and other activist practices (Lacy 1995, 25). Popular culture and public space became the medium for vanguard artists who challenged the conventional high/low art divide (Clements 2010, 10). Questioning the idea of universals, community arts practice undermines the museum's authority as "truth" (Duncan 1991, 90). It rejects the autonomous art object for private contemplation and focuses on social creativity over self-expression (Gablik 1995, 76). Transformation, rather than transcendence, defines community art's ultimate goal.

In contrast to the absolution of social responsibility, community arts practice gives voice to socio-political and cultural issues through a collaborative process. However community arts practice itself is not unproblematic. Even the notion of giving voice to others suggests an unequal power dynamic and the ability of one, special person to give authority to someone in a lesser position. Yet, the critical discussions on community arts envisions an issue-based participatory arts practice that grants equal value to the process of creation as to the final product (Fernandez and Lee 1998, 7; Lacy 1995, 38; Jacob 1995, 52). Emphasis on process stems from the

relationship between artist and a community that results in a co-creative, collaborative creation of art (Fernandez and Lee 1998, 7). “All art posits a space between the artist and the perceiver of the work, traditionally filled with the art object,” explains community arts practitioner Suzanne Lacy (1995, 35). Rather than the art object occupying the space between artist and audience, the relationship itself, framed as art, inhabits this position (35). Thus community practice possesses the ability to “displace and replace” twentieth-century modernist ideals (Tuer 1995, 3). It discredits the gaze, a practice of looking that typically objectifies either the subject or spectator. Instead this complex relationship is based not on the act of looking and being looked at but on interaction and integration of the subject/spectator relationship. This communication offers a dialogical structure based on collaboration and engagement (Gablik 1995, 76).

My curatorial thesis cannot be characterized as community arts practice in a traditional sense but rather employs the perspectives and elements of community arts to inform the project. Many of these ideas were applied to the curatorial process, which allowed the art to be made in response to the demands of the space. In particular the navigation and challenging of standard power dynamics helped develop a hybrid method of curating that borrows from a number of critical art practices. Adapting and applying the ideas supported by community arts practice to the creation of the exhibition, shifts the focus from the installation of finished artworks into a gallery space, to the development of art in response to the relationships and interactions amongst the artists, curators and various partners within the museum as well as the anticipated relationship between an audience and the exhibition.

However, translating these ideas into an exhibition hosted by a major public institution puts forth many challenges to negotiate, even more so, when the exhibition itself stems from yet another institution, that of the university. Ferguson (1996) argues in his essay “Exhibition

Rhetorics: material speech and utter sense,” that the driving idea behind an exhibition expresses the results of both the curator’s and the artists’ research, employing the exhibition as the medium for communication (176). The exhibition functions as a vehicle for delivery for these sometimes similar, sometimes different lines of inquiry. However, it is not only the research of the curator and artist that is on display. The museum also represents a voice within the exhibition. The limitations of the exhibition discussed by Ferguson as a “strategic system of representation,” uphold institutional ideologies, which underpin every exhibition held in a gallery or museum (180). The exhibition forms “a complex representation of institutional, social and, paradoxically, often personal values, simultaneously” (180).

Awareness of these multiple interests when constructing an exhibition hosted by a major public museum provides an entry point into challenging and deconstructing the powerful hold of long-established roles, practices and expectations that accompany conventional museum exhibitions. Rather than rejecting the voice of the museum, this project works within the institution’s framework and needs, aiming to achieve ‘positive complicity’, an acknowledged, knowing compromise where diverse opinions are shared, respected but also critiqued.³

Scholar Tony Bennett (1995) explores the history of museums and their practices in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Bennett examines the development of the museum and its role in the production and reproduction of the ‘cultured’ citizen through the lens of critical theory. In his Foucauldian analysis of the museum, Bennett argues that the museum functions as a resource of the state to civilize the mass public by establishing acceptable social conventions and behavioral norms. Museums, as heterotopias, operate as physical sites that mimic through representation, contestation and inversion the cultural norms in which it is located (1). Ordering

³ See Accompanying Material, page 2 for a discussion of ‘positive complicity’

people as much as the objects on display the museum establishes standards of behavior acceptable for its visitors. Order and subjective truth are valued above mess, chaos and error, traits typical of interactions amongst people. Places of “showing and telling”, the museum asserts superiority and control over the ‘Other’ by placing difference on display as subject (3). These historical practices of categorizing, standardizing or exoticizing and looking remain embedded within the behaviors supported by the conventional museum system.

Art historian Andrew McClellan (2008) similarly outlines the historical genesis of the modern museum. The origin of today’s museum has its roots in the *Wunderkammer* or cabinets of curiosities that were extremely popular with the European bourgeoisie in the 17th and 18th century. During the 18th century, these personal collections transformed into public displays and as a result, public museums were born. While personal collections were considered an extension of the individual, the museum’s public collections can be seen as extensions of the nation. The way objects are collected and then classified demonstrates the ideologies of the dominant power, which are unconsciously imposed on the visitor as logical, enlightened methods of display.

A Site-specific Installation

Site is essential to the development of *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette*. Falling outside the traditional, paid-programming structure of the museum, the Young Gallery occupies a unique physical location. The Young Gallery is frequently criticized both internally by staff and externally by the arts community for relegating local artists to a peripheral space with little visibility. This criticism highlights the importance of placement within museum architecture as a signifier of value by the institution, an idea addressed by both Bennett and McClellan. Yet, this site is unique in its material and intangible properties. Relative to the larger museum, the Young Gallery presents the possibility for experimentation with alternative

exhibition models. This allows for greater freedom for selecting artists, displaying artworks and applying unconventional working models but the gallery still remains constrained by conventional museum practices. Breaking, adapting or shifting these conventions, even temporarily, positions the artists and curator radically against a long history of museology.

Knowing that the location, both physical and metaphorical is a permanent fixture of the gallery, site-specificity is one method to overcome and incorporate these elements into the artwork. Acknowledging that no one definition can adequately encapsulate all installation art, art historian Claire Bishop (2005) defines installation as a form of art in which the viewer physically enters, often described as theatrical, immersive or experiential (6). *Installation Art: A Critical History* (Bishop 2005) outlines the origins of installation art beginning with the proto-installations of El Lissitzky, Mondrian, Landinsky and Schwitters. Bishop defines the period between 1965 and 1975 as the rise of the age of installation art and connects installations to the theory of poststructuralism and the fragmented subject taken up in the theoretical writing of Barthes, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida.

Breaking down the complex art form of installation, curator Mark Rosenthal (2003) creates distinctive categories within this medium. Rosenthal divides installation into two groups, “filled-space,” which can be separated from the location and maintains a coherence between the parts that fill the space and “site-specific,” which is inextricably linked to the locale, where parts relate to each other and the larger space, creating a dialogue (28). Relevant to *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette* site-specific interventions investigate the physical, functional, intellectual, cultural or institutional character of the site (61). For example, the museum can function as the site and subject for the art. Filmmaker and writer Erika Suderburg (2000) provides a compelling definition of site-specific practices that address the

demands installation art places on space, “*Site specific* derives from the delineation and examination of the site of the gallery in relation to space unconfined by the gallery and in relation to the spectator” (4).

Addressing and challenging the institutional expectations and practices explored by Bennett and McClellan requires knowledge of the site of the exhibition, in this case the Young Gallery at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The writing of Miwon Kwon (2002) and James Meyer’s (2000) provides an exploration of space, place and site-specificity that underlies this exhibition. Cultural theories, which help understand and respond to the site, include Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, and de Certeau’s premise of walking in the city.

Kwon’s *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002) discusses the evolution of site specific work, which she argues, transitioned from a physical space, to a phenomenological model of site that looks at the physical, spatial and cultural framework, to site-oriented practices that engage with the outside world and everyday life. Exploring three paradigms of site specificity, the author outlines the transition from site as a physical location in the late 1960’s to early 70’s to site as cultural framework, often known as institutional critique, which expanded into a discursively determined site. Contemporary site-oriented practices frequently operate within multiple definitions of site. Relational, discursive sites include cultural debates, theoretical concepts, social issues, politics, institutional frameworks and historical conditions (45). The author distinguishes clearly between sites of action or interventions, a physical site, and the site of affects or reception, a discursive site. These categorically distinct sites link to James Meyer’s concept of literal and functional sites.

In “The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity,” Meyer (2000) establishes an important separation between two categories of site: literal and functional. A literal

site is an actual, in situ location. It is a singular place that has been distinguished as unique (24). In contrast, a functional site may or may not incorporate a physical place and instead emphasizes the process or operation that takes place between sites (25). The functional site is an allegorical site, mobile and ephemeral. Practices of institutional critique and conceptual art belong to the functional site (27).

NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette examines both the literal and functional site of the Young Gallery. While this gallery occupies a physical space within the AGO and the surrounding community it also comprises complex relationships and processes that are distinct from those of the larger museum. Since the series' inception in 2010 several unique challenges have presented themselves: firstly, while the Young Gallery provides local artists with a chance to present new work at the AGO, the gallery occupies a peripheral location with little visibility. The concern of minimal visibility is initially surprising as the gallery has a street-front location with large floor to ceiling windows and enjoys free public access. However, visitors cannot see through the UV protected glass and walkers-by often miss the gallery altogether. Signage for the space is minimal, almost invisible next to the advertising campaigns for the gallery's paid programming and commercial marketing. Similarly, those who enter through the museum's main entrance may never be aware that through the commercial labyrinth of gift-shop and restaurant lays an art oasis waiting to be discovered.

In addition, to gain access to the Young Gallery, the visitor must pass through the *FRANK* restaurant, a fine dining hot spot that targets a specific clientele. Passing through the restaurant creates contention among the restaurant staff, diners, artists and audiences that share this space. This disunity among users brings to light issues of class and taste making illuminated by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's 'habitus', at work within this tension, creates an unconscious sense of class,

marking these adjoining spaces as different. Habitus is the complex interaction amongst an individual, group or institution's past, including family, education and upbringing that shapes both present and future behaviors therefore creating perceptions, appreciations and practices (Bourdieu 1977, 78). Simply, habitus is the disposition of a social entity operating in the social arena, in this case the Art Gallery of Ontario (Maton 2008, 51). When positioned next to another's individual habitus, tensions may arise from complex and imbedded, unconscious differences in past, present and future character, behaviors and upbringings. Therefore, Bourdieu (1977) states, "the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction" (81). Thus the unintended tension apparent between the gallery and restaurant demonstrate how the physical location reveals the much more complex identity of the functional site. However, positioned on the edge of the mainstream museum model, the artists in the *Toronto Now* series are able to push against historical boundaries inherent in the rest of the museum. Reacting to the literal and functional site of the Young Gallery, *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette* takes up Meyer's connection between functional site and conceptual art with the NOW Service Bureau and contemporary institutional critique with Gift Shop Gift Shop.



Figure 4. *OPEN OPINE* – installation view, 2012.

The NOW Service Bureau

The NOW Service Bureau is a DIY agency that subverts traditional expectations of a functional service bureau and instead invites the visitor to participate directly through attentive awareness, conversation or action. While the artworks function independently, the installation contains elements of social practice that strive to foster relationships and promote discussion. In the spirit of theorist de Certeau (1984), the exhibition is not a static, passive experience to be viewed from a distance. Instead, visitors are encouraged to take on an active role making not only the gallery space but also the larger museum and surrounding neighbourhood their own. Looking at the ways individuals and communities act within their society, de Certeau puts forth the practice of walking as a method of activating agency in the urban environment. The author proposes walking as an alternative to the voyeur who views the city from a disimpassioned distance. The act of walking

in the city creates “pedestrian speech acts” where rhetoric develops, creating an individualized city where personal meaning is assigned to spaces that supersedes the original, primary function of the site (97).



Figure 5. Post NOW comment wall – detail, 2012.

As a forum, the exhibition extends beyond the physical space of the gallery. The artists and curator host outreach programs aimed at stimulating conversation. Exhibition programming for *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette* aspires to bring together different audiences, including youth, local artists and arts supporters, restaurant diners, gift shop shoppers and AGO staff.⁴ *Tagging Along* takes the conversation out of the gallery and into the street, through two outdoor walks that looks at public art, graffiti writing and street art in the AGO neighborhood and surrounding community. *Youthful Perspectives* invites youth visitors

⁴ Appendix C: Exhibition Programming Schedule

to explore all the free spaces the AGO has to offer by leading an artist-led tour of contemporary art, which starts in the Weston Family Learning Centre's education commons, explores the AGO's collection of contemporary art and finishes in the Young Gallery. Making full use of the museum this tour helps claim ownership of these spaces for an often-underrepresented audience: youth. Unable and unwilling to ignore the connection to the FRANK restaurant, a dinner hosted in the restaurant's private dining room brings FRANK's slogan, ART. FOOD. TALK. to life. Joining all the elements available to the *Toronto Now* series through the Young Gallery, this dinner integrates gallery and restaurant space, accepting and working within the parameters of the site to bridge tensions and separation.



Figure 6. Post NOW comment wall – detail, 2012.

Gift Shop Gift Shop

The exhibition's second installation, Gift Shop Gift Shop, developed from this exploration and recognition of the Young Gallery's position within the institutions pre-gate programming and its location next to the museum's commercial interests. Through many meetings with the museum's gift shop and FRANK Restaurant the project extends into the AGO's commercial arena. Gift Shop Gift Shop, located within the AGO's gift shop, runs as a parallel project during the course of the exhibition. This store within a store features souvenirs of the AGO gift shop itself, rather than the expected gallery mementos, as well as other related open-edition art multiples.

Gift Shop Gift Shop works by Martindale and Paquette are available alongside both collaborative and independent multiples by other local Toronto-based artists, designers and illustrators. The products for sale fit within three categories, self-reflective art-making that questions how value is attributed to objects, works that transform raw street and everyday materials and images into privileged, purchasable objects and souvenirs about the gift shop itself as a destination equal to the gallery.



Figure 7. Gift Shop Gift Shop – installation view, shopAGO, 2012.



Figure 8. Gift Shop Gift Shop – installation view, shopAGO, 2012.

PART III: Methodology

The exhibition is both the object and outcome of my curatorial research. In “The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research,” Henk Borgdorff (2011) contends that, the practice of collaboration used to create the exhibition produces non-conceptual knowledge and experience typical of artistic research (48). The production of knowledge in the form of new ideas, methods and practices arise from continual dialogue between various partners within the project (Lacy 1995, 36). Drawing on ideas discussed by art historian and writer Grant Kester, with support from fields as varied as feminist sociology, artistic and design research; collaboration defines my process-based methodology (Borgdorff 2011; Kester 2004; Lacy 1995; Plowman 2003; Wolf 1996). Translating Kester’s framework of collaborative, dialogical artistic practice into a curatorial method results in a working process built on consultation that involves a synthesis of diverse perspectives through the tools of listening, discussion and empathy.

In his book, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Kester (2004) evaluates dialogical art, which he situates within the context of other avant-garde art practices and is defined by their radical social and cultural innovations (13). Dialogical art describes a durational collaborative practice that encompasses cultural activism, creative dialogue and empathetic insight. Based on a common language, open conversation and asking questions, this form of artistic practice requires process-based, performative and interactive relationships, where the viewer is considered a collaborator rather than a mere spectator (11). Dialogical practice engages art in a relationship with the broader social and political world (9). In Kester’s dialogical art practice, collaboration operates as an artistic methodology that strives to reclaim a positive relationship with the audience or collaborators while still maintaining a high level of

critical insights typified by avant-garde practices. Kester argues that this type of exchange is based on reciprocal openness and calls for empathy, listening, dependency and vulnerability (110). Kester distinguishes dialogical from a conventional model of aesthetic experience because the latter is based on a universal foundation, be it God, reason or enlightenment, while dialogical practice is formed from local consensual knowledge.

Adapting Kester's dialogical art methodology to curatorial practice involves developing a collaborative-based process that employs common, agreed upon knowledge and language that is used among contributors to support the development of discovery-led research. Borgdorff (2011) argues for artistic research as a form of knowledge production. The author explores this form of inquiry by comparing and contrasting it to other forms of research in the humanities, social sciences and aesthetics. Rather than acting as the subject typical of hypothesis-led research, artworks, installations, performances and other products are the outcome of discovery-led research. Here, knowledge production emerges through practices, actions and interactions. Working with Borgdorff's theory of artistic research in mind, the curatorial process of this exhibition results in the outcome of a site-specific installation created by the interactions and collaboration amongst the artists, the curator and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Collaboration has a long history within the field of arts. Community arts practice in particular involves many forms of working together amongst artists, audiences and curators. Collaboration opens up unlimited possibilities throughout the process and in the final product. In this type of practice, championed by arts practitioner Suzanne Lacy, art functions as means of communication that ideally results in self-transformation of both artist and audience and I would add, the curator. This type of relationship necessitates compassion, openness to understanding others and the ability to recognize oneself in someone else (Lacy 1995). A collaborative approach

has allowed me to work closely with Martindale and Paquette as well as various partners in the AGO from the conception to completion of this project. In this context, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The exhibition grew from many people's ideas, inputs and expertise, transforming a small-scale installation into a multi-part project integrated into various locations within the museum.

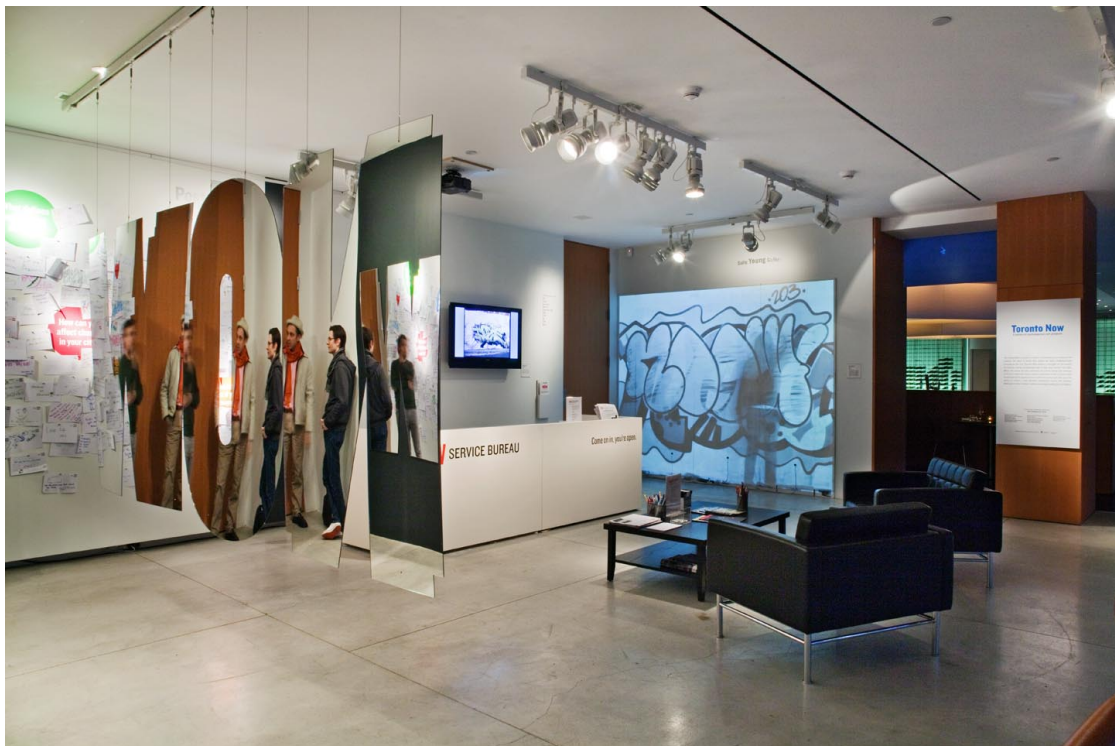


Figure 9. Young Gallery – installation view, 2012.

PART IV: Process and Reflection

Pre-Installation

Through the process of organizing this exhibition learning took place experientially. With each part of the project, experiences resulted in new knowledge to be analyzed through both theory and personal reflection. During one of our tours of the exhibition I was asked a very important question that sets the stage for evaluating the process of putting together this exhibition. I paraphrase here: Why did you seek out street artists for this project? The truth is, I did not seek them out but rather discovered them during my search for an artist to exhibit in the Young Gallery. Most of what I now know and understand about graffiti writing and street art I learnt through my interactions with Martindale and Paquette and the people I have met through them. Subsequent research provided me with a fuller grasp of this artistic community. Through this process, I uncovered street art as vibrant art form and a possible solution to the problems posed by the Young Gallery.

Having lived in Toronto for less than a year at the time this project began, I was at a disadvantage searching for local artists, as I knew almost no one. Who would take on this project with me? Who might share my views about audience participation, the potential of museums to play a vital role in the arts community and the city at large while also open to my skepticism of historical roles and hierarchies embedded in the art world?

Through studio visits I met with many artists. These visits came out of hours of Internet research and talking with people who had an in depth knowledge of the Toronto art scene. I had a sense of what I was looking for but I never would have found it without help. Meeting Martindale and Paquette independently, the chemistry between us was a natural fit. Most

importantly the ideas each were discussing could equally have come straight from my own mouth. These studio visits reinforce Lacy's belief that successful collaboration comes from being able to see yourself in someone else. The studio visits also revealed a conceptual connection between the artists' practices. In very different visual ways, each was addressing a particular set of ideas that while they typically took place on the street, translated into the challenges I was facing with the Young Gallery.

With both artists on board with the project, I had only a framework for the form the exhibition would take. In fact, it was months before I had a clear vision of the art that would fill the space. The physical art objects emerged from the ideas generated by the artists' practices, conversation and working strategies in place to address the *Toronto Now* series and the Young Gallery. Collaboration was the core of what I asked from Martindale and Paquette, in how they worked together and with me. We also extended our collaborative model to include different departments within the Art Gallery of Ontario that were or should be involved in the gallery's programming. The artists, staff at AGO and myself embraced this approach, taking the idea of collaboration to its fullest potential.

With the gallery secured, I set forth the premise of collaboration and 'positive complicity' as well as a general framework of site-specificity to address the Young Gallery as a location where public and private interests converge (Drucker 2005, xiv). I then offered the artists the opportunity to include me as much or as little as they felt necessary to create the work for the exhibition. This was a pivotal moment in the project. At this point the exhibition could have been organized in a more conventional way. Instead they invited me to be directly involved in their creative process.

Together we had brainstorming meetings, attended lectures, site visits and related exhibitions. I was included in how the works unfolded and the artists were closely involved in my decisions. Working together we transformed a small-scale installation into a multi-faceted project that is, at once, exhibition, relational practice, educational program, a marketing/public relations extravaganza, a commercial venture, a fifty artist collaboration and an interdepartmental infiltration of the museum. By providing the environment for others to explore their own ideas, together the involved participants were able to produce a more dynamic and expansive project than any one person could do alone. A multitude of people, circumstances, situations and decisions came together in a complex network to arrive at *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette*.

Collaboration and Conflict

With so many involved participants, this project can be viewed from the perspective of relational practices. Coined by curator Nicolas Bourriaud 'relational aesthetics' defines art as the relationships that develop between the artist and the audience while engaging together in a particular situation. Although Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics is problematic – standardizing audiences to serve as artistic tropes - his broader reflection on active participation in art is valuable to consider when undertaking a collaboration where relationships are central to the outcome of the project. However, art historian Claire Bishop (2010) criticizes Bourriaud's relational aesthetics for glossing over the less picture perfect elements of collaboration. Bishop dismisses Bourriaud's understanding of democracy by arguing that relational aesthetics bases its perception of participants on an idealized whole where community always means togetherness (265). Instead, Bishop grounds her argument in the theory of Rosalyn Deutsche, who believes the democratic public sphere is based on open contestation, and on Chantal Mouffe, who argues that

subjectivity is split and decentered and thus, conflict is necessary to sustain a democratic society. Understanding these theories and then experiencing the ideas in practice, I realized that the complex collaborative process is not without complications and challenges.

Thus no collaborative project proceeds and develops without conflict. Conflict is an inherent element when working closely with creative and independent people but need not be viewed solely as a negative component. By accepting and embracing inevitable contradictions and disparities, the rewards are as great as the risks. Collaboration is messy. Inevitably people butt heads, disagree and are occasionally – with lack of sleep, over stimulation, excitement and mounting real world pressures – not the best version of themselves. It takes great trust and empathy to see a project of this scale through to the end. There were moments when I was amazed at the joy and ease of the project. At times, I was worn down and felt overworked and underappreciated. I owe these experiences as much to my own neurosis as to other people's words and actions. It is however, important to recognize the emotional side of working closely with other people. In many ways, this affective element of the project opposes the traditional education experience where, like the autonomous artist, the lone researcher mulls away in libraries over books and studies others from an objective distance, safely removed from conflict and clashes.

With three distinct individuals collaborating on this project, all with individual ideas, points of views and goals, this type of work can easily grow and expand beyond any established frameworks. Initially part of the exhibition's programming, with the goal of integrating visually and through collaboration into the commercial venues in the museum, Gift Shop Gift Shop, became a second large-scale project. Conceptually a shop within the existing AGO gift store is smart, well received and built on collaboration with local artists, designers and illustrators. However, the organization of a project of this magnitude in addition to the primary exhibit was

taxing and at times strained relationships. Roles for Martindale, Paquette and myself became unclear as the project proved bigger than the existing resources, both human and financial. Artistic, curatorial, administrative and managerial distinctions disintegrated under the pressure of accommodating and accomplishing all the demands of this project. While Gift Shop Gift Shop led to unique opportunities to integrate with the gift shop proper, something we set out to do, in the end it became a project on equal scale to the installation itself.



Figure 10. Gift Shop Gift Shop – installation view, shopAGO, 2012.

Subject Position

In the context of this thesis project, a tension exists between curator as position of authority and curator as facilitator and mediator. One of the goals I set for myself when beginning this project was to minimize the authorial space I would occupy and open up that area for collaboration. However, I soon realized, it is equally important to recognize and own my individual position within the project and to accept and embrace the necessity to voice opinions, make decisions and move forward with the project. Therefore, through praxis, enacting theory through practice combined with self-reflexivity, I was able to achieve balance between the myriad of roles I assumed during this project.

As anyone in a graduate curatorial program would likely attest, there exists a tension surrounding the role of the curator, particularly in relation to the role and rights of the artist. The blurring of these traditional boundaries elicits strong responses on both ends of the spectrum. The role of the curator could be discussed at length. Writing since the 1990s abounds on the changing role of the curator. In practice, the word, in its traditional definition – a caretaker of objects – is completely inadequate to capture the nuanced and multi-faceted role this position requires. This definition also ignores the artistic, creative acts of curating that helps bring the artists' ideas and artworks to life in an inhabitable way for the audience. In light of these experiences, I propose the history of the curator be recognized, analyzed but inevitably overcome and rewritten in relation to the demands of the individual project at hand. It is always important to understand the history you are working within but not be limited by past expectations.

Institutional Relations

The relationship between the Young Gallery and the paid museum programming is a unique aspect to acknowledge and address. The *Toronto Now* series operates incongruently from the rest of the museum. While the majority of the AGO's programming is established much farther in advance, the *Toronto Now* series is not a prime concern for most departments until something is an immediate issue. There are competing timelines at play with vastly different priorities within the institution. Therefore, response times and deadlines often do not match up. Frequently the flexibility of the *Toronto Now* programming bumps up against the rigidity of the museum structure only allowing for so much movement. Working with a large organization, miscommunication frequently presents challenges in the organization and implementation of ideas.

The AGO is built on a traditional pyramid governance structure, a complex hierarchy of roles and responsibilities. However my presence as guest curator for the *Toronto Now* series demonstrates the willingness of certain individuals within the AGO to take risks and experiment with new models of working. Fissures within the established operating systems open up because certain principles that are embodied in an individual are not necessarily supported within the whole institution and vice versa. Change occurs because of the will of an individual or a small group of people that are willing to support institutional transformation and evolution. When these fissures open it is important to seize the opportunity to make change regardless if the end result is provisional or permanent.

Working as a student, guest curator placed me in a position outside the established hierarchy. This allowed for a lot of freedom to implement ideas that otherwise might not make it through the necessary levels of approval. However on several occasions acting outside the

establishment tied my hands when other departments took over parts of the project, such as marketing, and were unable, with all their other responsibilities to live up to the standards of the project. As an outsider and a student it also meant repeatedly having to demonstrate and reestablish my capabilities as a curator. However this outsider position allowed me to approach people within the AGO from a new perspective and listen without ingrained expectations of their roles and responsibilities. As a result, the artists and myself received a very supportive response. Individuals and departments were glad to be included in the development process and willing to get involved with the project as much or as little as need be. No one forced their own agenda but offered helpful suggestions, their own expertise and left the conversation open for continual dialogue.

It is important to recognize that in this project the AGO was more than the frame that holds the exhibition, the AGO was an active partner. I choose the word partner carefully. Collaboration underscores not only the relationship between artist and curator but between curator and museum, between museum and artist and amongst the three. From the very beginning of the project, the artists and I worked with the FRANK restaurant, the AGO gift shop, the education and curatorial departments. Many individuals within each of these areas got involved and supported the project. The AGO is filled with assets. These assets, in human, material and financial form, are too often overlooked. Drawing upon the expertise and experiences that already exist within the museum opened many doors. Although this type of interaction and integration is not possible with every project, the mindset of working collaboratively, interdepartmentally and recognizing existing assets could facilitate new approaches to existing and upcoming museum projects.

PART V: Analysis

Revisiting the research questions, does bringing graffiti writing and street art into an institutional gallery necessarily imply co-optation and what impact does shifting the context from street to gallery have on the artists and their artwork, returns the discussion to the exhibition itself and the opportunities and challenges of bringing art from the outside inside. There is no direct one-to-one translation with this type of project. What is made on the street cannot necessarily be shown in the gallery; nor was that the intent of this project. There is no question that the institutional setting impacts the way certain ideas would otherwise be interpreted if encountered on the street. With the presence of their art, Martindale and Paquette began restructuring the space. Yet at the same time the space restructures their practice. This reciprocal negotiation involves compromise to encourage change. The work of Martindale and Paquette does not lose meaning or impact in a gallery but the context does inform how the art is interpreted. A fine balance exists between transgressing boundaries and becoming complacent when working in such an established public art gallery. Actions that might seem rebellious and innovative on the street have a different, but still important, power in the gallery.

Context is vital to both artists' practice and this provides commonality between the street and the gallery. Like work created on the street, the process for addressing the space is familiar. The Young Gallery, similar to the parking lot between Grange Park and Butterfield Park (the site of Martindale's FREE installation) or the no longer standing brownstone wall at 360 Richmond Street West (the past site of one of Paquette's pieces), has a distinct identity to which the artists responded. Like other sites used by these artists, the gallery functions as a microcosm, a sample environment paralleling larger city wide and national institutional practices. Neither public nor

private, the Young Gallery is a free space in an institution named for the province it is intended to serve. The artists produced artworks that addressed the demands of the space, similar to their process on the streets. The art ultimately took on a different form than the expected cardboard sculptures or plant interventions from Martindale or the large-scale paintings and graffiti pieces by Paquette. Imposing these expectations would have unnecessarily categorized and limited the artists' response to the site.

When working with others who see and define art in a variety of ways, and work and respond to the museum with equal variance, it is much harder to bring people together over conversation and mutual interests than to maintain a strictly oppositional stance that further divides individuals with differing opinions. Positive, open working relationships help move conversations forward rather than closing channels of communication down. Of course there is tension between seeking acceptance from an established art world and wanting to help re-define what that art world accepts. Although graffiti is recognized all over the world as an art form, posited as art within the mainstream museum system remains contentious for many audiences, patrons and gallery workers alike. Bennett's writing on museological politics and practices disturbs the otherwise common sense acceptance of institutional decisions of what art is or can be and opens up space to think about how these decisions are made and what impact these practices have. Bennett's challenge to accepting conventional approaches to art asks readers to question what constitutes art and how these decisions are made. This conversation captures the complex relationship between graffiti and the museum. Bringing this ongoing conversation directly into the gallery highlights the importance of constantly questioning and rethinking standard definitions of art practices. Rather than co-opting street art and graffiti, the gallery acts as a forum where these issues and dialogues can be continually interrogated.

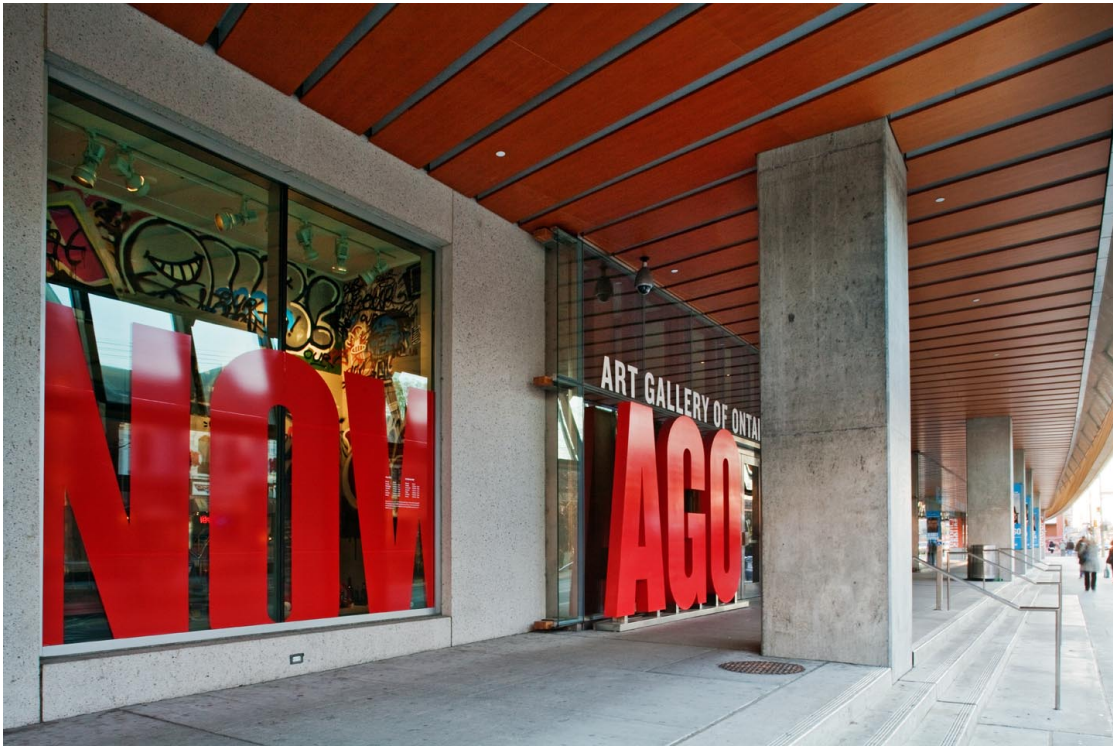


Figure 11. shopAGO window display, 2012.



Figure 12. *NOW up*, 2012.

PART VI: Closing Discussion

Piloting a collaborative curatorial approach in the Young Gallery at the Art Gallery of Ontario has allowed for many learning opportunities and new experiences to take place. This strategy has opened the door to future projects looking to work with the unique possibilities inherent in this space. Creating new connections and sharing ownership of the project has demonstrated just a few of the many ways this gallery can be used in the future that offers alternative practices to traditional curating in an institutional gallery. With a framework in place and a precedence established for new partnerships and working models in the Young Gallery, *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette* sets the stage for others wishing to build on this experience.

Working within the history of the *Toronto Now* series, this thesis set out to address the AGO's original objectives for the space, to allow artists to engage in a non-bureaucratic manner with the AGO, to provide an alternative, flexible exhibition space and to expand audience understanding of the many ways contemporary art can take shape. With these objectives in mind the outcomes of the project demonstrate that these goals can be achieved when approached with direct intent.

The project succeeded in bringing in a large and diverse community of artists and audiences into the AGO, many of who would not necessarily spend time in this gallery. Hopefully this re-introduction to an established art institution will impact future experiences for the collaborators and visitors on both an individual level and as part of the arts community in Toronto. Thus far, the gallery has acted as a hub of activity rather than a space to house art objects. It functions as a gathering place for people and the objects support the actions of these

inhabitants. One of the most frequent questions from visitors asks, where is the art? While this might sound like a negative response taken out of context, this question highlights the success of the goals laid out by the project. Without the art being immediately apparent as objects to look at, the gallery opens up to new forms of inhabiting and new ways of acting in the space.

As I conclude the report of *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette* the one-sided perspective presented in this document strikes me as only part of a much larger picture. With all of the project's stages filtered through many contributors I miss their input into this element of the process. I finish on this note because while this document serves an important learning function I also recognize that this too is only one possible interpretation and response to the project.



Figure 13. Young Gallery window – installation view, 2012.

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Appendix A: NOW Newspaper – Curatorial Essay

1 **NOW** A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette Curated by Katherine Dennis

The NOW Service Bureau

The NOW Service Bureau offers visitors the opportunity to use the gallery as a forum for pressing Toronto issues. Pushing the idea of Toronto Now to its edge, the artists appropriate the AGO logo and the Now name to provide a place of artistic creativity that encourages thoughtful action on local issues. This Do It Yourself (DIY) agency reflects the artists' interest in the tension between the rush and impatience of our current lifestyle and the benefit of slowing down, being mindful and aware of environmental, political and cultural topics. This friction is supported by the DIY mentality that privileges the experience of the here and now in order to provoke change through self-consciousness, self-transformation and social interactions or exchanges.¹

Martindale and Paquette's installation includes a workspace for the artists and a lounge and work area for visitors (with free Wi-Fi access provided by the AGO). Next to their service counter, a comment wall offers space for visitors to display and reflect on their own ideas. Posting personal responses to current local or global issues, visitors contribute their own creative energies to the installation. Two time-lapse videos of graffiti writing taking place outside the gallery and a large-scale NOW sculpture round off the installation. *Infinite NOW* (2012) is a dynamic artwork that is completed, not by the artists, but by the visitors. Approach-

¹Deuze, Anna, ed. 2010. The 'do-it-yourself' artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 15.

ing the wall the viewer stands between two mirrored NOW sculptures that reflect their image ad infinitum.

As a DIY agency the artists flip the expectation of a functional service bureau and instead look to the visitor to participate directly through attentive awareness, conversation or action. While the artworks function independently the installation contains elements of social practice that strive to foster relationships and promote discussion.

As a forum this exhibition extends beyond the physical space of the gallery. The artists host several outreach programs aimed at getting the conversation started. These activities aspire to bring together different groups to talk about what matters to them in their city and how art can play a vital, action-led role in daily life. In *Tagging Along* the artists lead two outdoor walks exploring commissioned and unsanctioned artworks within the AGO neighborhood and the surrounding community. *Youthful Perspectives* invites youth visitors on an artist-led tour of contemporary art. Starting in the Weston Family Learning Centre's Educations Commons the artists lead this free tour through the AGO collection and end

in their own installation, making full use of the museum. As a result the Young Gallery, which hosts the NOW exhibition, functions as a hub for the various activities that make up this extensive project.



Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette

The Artists

Sean Martindale combines his fine art and design background with street art to communicate complicated ideas with visual simplicity. His process involves ongoing interventions that use reclaimed, recyclable and plant materials. Determined to start a conversation, Martindale's work focuses on exploring the visual language of signs while making sculptural DIY creations that are often reproducible and open-sourced.

A recognizable figure in two distinctive art worlds, **Pascal Paquette** has spent the last decade traversing the contemporary art scene, while learning and expanding on his graffiti writing practice under the pseudonym Mon Petit Chou. Paquette's thematic interests interrogate the transformation of culture that occurs when two or more economic, social or cultural realities collide. He works primarily through painting but also employs street art, graffiti and photography in projects that are often site-specific or geographically dependent.

Martindale and Paquette's artistic practices place them literally and metaphorically outside and inside the mainstream art world. Their works navigate and negotiate the divide between public and private space connecting through a visual language of signs and images that incorporate the world around it, allowing multiple points of entry. The artists' works share thematic explorations of the politics of public space,

mainstream and alternative visual and text-based languages and intervention practices. Both artists often work in a collaborative manner, either through intended joint projects with other artists or by allowing their artwork into the public domain and

opening up each piece for unexpected authorship from often-unknown sources. The emphasis on collaboration stems from a desire for dialogue that is critically engaged but without strict parameters for participation.



Photograph Cindy Blazewic

“Contemporary art has the potential to play an integral role in society by opening up spaces in which individuals may reexamine their own lives and their relationship to the world”

— Morin et al.¹

¹ Morin, France, et al. 2000. “Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Contemporary Art Exhibitions.” *Art Journal* 59.1: 4-21.

Exit Through the Gift Shop Gift Shop

Developed from an exploration and recognition of the Young Gallery's position within the larger institution and through meetings with the museum's gift shop and FRANK Restaurant - the artists extend their project beyond the gallery into other areas of the museum.

The artists run Gift Shop Gift Shop with the AGO's gift shop as a parallel project during the course of the exhibition. This store within a store features souvenirs of the AGO gift shop itself, rather than the expected gallery mementos, as well as other related open-edition art multiples. Gift Shop Gift Shop works by the Martindale and Paquette are available alongside both collaborative and independent multiples by other local Toronto-based artists, designers and illustrators. The produces for sale develop out of self-reflective art making and many of the works transform raw street and everyday materials and images into privileged, valuable objects. This

project builds off the artists' affinity for collaboration and the practice of using reclaimed materials. Taking inspiration from existing gift shop souvenirs or using gift shop overstock, these items are examined and reworked to deconstruct how consumable objects are given value.



Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette

Complicity

To be complicit in an act spontaneously brings to mind a wrong doing of some kind – something to cover up or gloss over. However, this highly charged idea has both positive and negative associations. In popular usage, complicity is put forward as a negative undertaking, with connotations drawn from conspiracy theories and criminal acts. Instead, a positive application of complicity can be grounded in the constructive yet complex processes involved in collaboration. In collaborative art production, this form of complicity rejects radical negativity of the avant-garde; calling us in the art field to use imagination, enthusiasm and innovative practices to engage a wider audience. Accepting and making use of visual culture, mass media and fine art traditions, 'positive complicity' in contemporary art involves compromise and an awareness of what is given up and what is gained.¹ The notion of 'positive complicity', underlying our exhibition, necessitates an acknowledged but qualified involvement that reflects the value of multiple and diverse interests. This has allowed us to bring a controversial art form into the mainstream art world where the negotiation of diverging interests ultimately results in a temporary middle ground, not of concession but of consent.

¹ Drucker, Joan. 2005. *Sweet Dreams: contemporary art and complicity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press xv

Enter Through the Restaurant

FROM STREET TO GALLERY

One of the most compelling but precarious aspects of this project is bringing art from the street into the confines of the gallery. Questions that arise from this move to the inside are: Does bringing graffiti writing and street art into an institutional gallery imply co-optation? What impact does shifting the context from street to gallery have on the artists and their artwork?

Context is vital to the artistic practices of both Martindale and Paquette. The institutional setting of the AGO alters the way ideas might otherwise be addressed on the street. The Young Gallery, host to the *Toronto Now* series, has a distinct identity. This context is unique in its material and intangible properties. The unintended tension between the Young Gallery and the adjoining FRANK restaurant demonstrate how the physical location influence the complex identity of the functional site. In contrast to an in situ physical location, the functional site may or may not be a concrete place. Instead, the functional site emphasizes the processes and relationships that take place within a space.¹ This type of site is mobile and most often temporary.

The Young Gallery is an alternative exhibition space that allows for greater freedom relative to the larger museum but it remains limited by conventional museum practices, such as how art is defined, selected, talked about and presented. Of course, even an unconventional space suffers from its own set of restrictions. The gallery is frequently criticized both

internally and externally for relegating local artists to a peripheral space with little visibility. Outdoor signage for the space is minimal, almost invisible next to the advertising campaigns for the gallery's paid programming and commercial marketing. Breaking, adapting or shifting these traditions, even temporarily, radically positions the artists in relation to museum history and practice.

Simply by placing their art in the Young Gallery, Martindale and Paquette restructure the space while at the same time the space restructures their practice. For example, some considers graffiti vulgar and crass vandalism, yet when placed within the gallery it transforms into an accepted and valued art object. The presence of this type of art in the gallery is controversial to many, both within the mainstream art world and the street art community. There is a visible and reciprocal push-pull in this negotiation. It is a slow process, one that at times might not feel critical enough or immediate enough but one that is extremely important in order to maintain the integrity of all those involved. At the same time, the gallery, like other, often outdoor, sites used by the artists, functions as a microcosm that makes visible larger institutional and societal practices. Regardless of their location inside the gallery or out on the street both artists continue to question and probe how space is constructed and used within contemporary society.

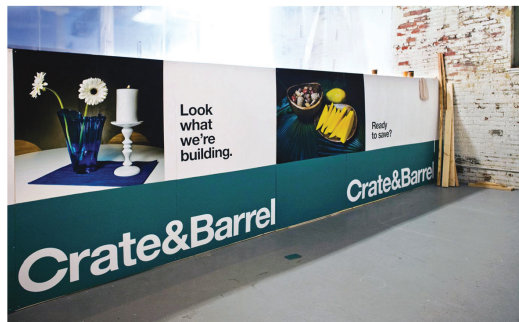
¹ Meyer, James. 2000. "The Functional Site; or, 'The Transformation of Site Specificity'" *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*. Ed. Erika Suderburg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 25

In Perspective: Toronto 2011 – 2012

In 2011 the global population reached 7 billion. This past year has seen volcano eruptions in Iceland and Chile, massive floods around the world, the oil spill in the Pacific ocean, the Tsunami in Japan, the declaration of famine in Somalia, the Arab Spring, Occupy protests across the United States and Canada, the Stanley Cup riots, the Slave Lake fires, and the housing crisis in Attawapiskat. In Canada, after five years of minority rule, Stephen Harper won a majority Conservative government in the May 2011 federal election. These are but a few monumental events that shape our current world and merit attentive consideration.

On a local level the administration of Rob Ford has changed the foreseeable future of arts and culture in Toronto. The passing of NDP party leader Jack Layton, 40 days of protest in St. James Park questioning the ever-expanding disparity between the 1 and 99% and the ban on shark fin soup show a small slice of life in Toronto 2011.

With the new year upon us, what happens in 2012 remains unknown. Now is the opportunity to get involved in shaping the coming year.



Pascal Paquette, *Crate&Barrel, Commodity Over Culture* Installation view, Labo, Toronto, 2009

In Conversation with Sean

Interview by Katherine Dennis

When Sean and I got together to talk about his artistic practice it was inevitable that our conversation would take up politics. This segment sheds light on how Sean views the relationship between art and politics.

K: I'd like to hear your thoughts on the idea of a healthy democracy. Certainly there is a political tone to your work. Yet in the art world there is a lot of debate about whether or not art is inherently political or if art should be political. I'm wondering how you feel about the connection between politics and art and whether you see art as an avenue for social change?

S: Yes I do, definitely, but I don't see it as the only avenue for social change. It's important to have many different approaches. I do see art as inherently political. If you look at politics in the broadest sense then I think almost everything we do can be considered political. This is especially true for the kind of art that I'm most involved in - stuff that's out in public. The public realm is where politics happens, that's where the political exists. If you are doing something so visible to other people and using this shared space I think it's particularly political. That's not to say that everyone's practices are consciously political, that people know or even think about the politics behind what they are doing. But it's something I don't think we can avoid or escape.

There is a politics to aesthetics and aesthetics to politics. I don't think there is an inherently political style. In my mind, meaning changes over time, and it's all malleable and open for contestation. Therefore I don't think one particular style can be considered



Sean Martindale
Love the Future / Free Ai Weiwei, Toronto, 2011

universally of a certain politics or universally rebellious. It can change over time and through different interpretation, but in any given moment, in any given context, it can be political and interpreted that way. Language is not something that is fixed. It's something that is socially constructed. We all play a big

role. Art is language, visual language. It's constructed by all of us, so the art we create - and how we speak about it - can be seen to either support or challenge the paradigm and structures in which it exists and of which it is a part.

“Never overestimate the information your readers have, but never underestimate their intelligence”

– Virgil Thomson, newspaper critic!

I. Storr, Robert. 2006. “Show and Tell.” *What Makes A Great Exhibition: Questions of Practice*, ed. Paula Martincola. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibition Initiative, The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. 14-31.

A Slice of Life with Pascal

Interview by Katherine Dennis

On October 25th, 2011 I joined Pascal in his studio for a conversation about his career as both a contemporary painter and graffiti writer. The conversation turned to Pascal's role as an advocate for graffiti being a valid art form and how this practice fits into the context of Toronto. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

K: Let's talk about identity in the graffiti scene. You work under both your given name and a graffiti alias. Either way, you're quite honest about your identity. In some ways it makes you more vulnerable to being caught and charged but in other ways it allow you to do more and say more with your art:

P: I got into this to make sure in a way that the scene was healthier. It was important to me to give something that is regarded as a good contribution, not just by the graffiti scene but by everyone. That is still my goal today. To say, yeah I did do some throw ups on that wall that was half destroyed anyway and that I know is slated to be a new development. I have no problem putting my name to that. If someone really wants to take me to court, go for it. I have a great lawyer and I stand for what I do. I don't see myself doing anything wrong. I'm just adding a piece of art.

K: The dialogue happening around graffiti in Toronto right now is a very topical issue. What conversations are you trying to have with your art?

P: For me the biggest thing about living here in Toronto is that we keep saying yes to street art and then we say no to street art. Rob Ford shows up not knowing anything about it, claims that it's all vandalism and motions to shut the whole thing down. I'm trying

to bring the conversations happening on the street into an intellectual realm, and to the people who are interested in discussing these issues from every angle.

I think that the gallery can function as a forum. Let me take this slice of life I saw and put it on display. Lets talk about this idea today. I hope that fuels more people to talk about these issues. As a result we can further understand each other.



Pascal Paquette, *What I've Learned in the Last Five Years (Empire Penguins)*, 2010

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.

Appendix B: Exhibition Hand-Held Panel Copy

FRONT

NOW

Relocated from the street to the gallery, local interdisciplinary street artist Sean Martindale and contemporary painter and graffiti writer Pascal Paquette come together for the first time in this collaborative installation:

All together NOW – Reassess assumed roles, established views and expectations. Such examination can reveal hidden tensions, but also opportunity.

These interwoven projects act as ongoing experiments in collaboration and cross-pollination. We explore the position of the Young Gallery within the Art Gallery of Ontario and surrounding communities, as well as our own positions in relation to it and the wider world in which we all live and play a part.

The current culture is one of speed and consumerism, of novelty and disposability. While we try to avoid this rush and impatience, we still recognize pressing issues and the urgency for change.

NOW is a starting point.

These projects will continue to evolve beyond the opening and outside the gallery itself.

Sean Martindale

There have only been a handful of times where gigantic leaps occur in the way art is made and how that influences the way we perceive the world. The street art and graffiti movement is one of those leaps, neither imitating nor drawing a point of reference from the movements and the processes that precede it.

Though this culture is widely — albeit, controversially — recognized as an international art movement, Toronto is still an emerging scene even though we have, and continue to contribute, a strong voice to the overall conversation. Both the public and the artists share plenty of room to play, to experiment and shape our movement to come.

Pascal Paquette

Complex and multifaceted, contemporary art, in all its forms has tremendous transformative possibilities. As a site of communication, an exhibition offers a place where people can reflect, learn and engage with others in critical conversation by taking art as the starting point for exploring the world in which we live. Employing a collaborative approach to this project, we (the artists, many individuals at the Art Gallery of Ontario and OCAD University and myself) have worked and learned together to bring this experience to life.

Katherine Dennis, curator

BACK

About the artists:

Sean Martindale combines his fine art and design background art with street art to communicate complicated ideas with visual simplicity. His process involves ongoing interventions in the urban environment that use reclaimed, recycled and plant materials. Determined to start a conversation, Martindale's work focuses on exploring the visual language of signs while making sculptural DIY creations that are often reproducible and open-sourced.

A recognizable figure in two distinctive art worlds, **Pascal Paquette** spent the last decade traversing the contemporary art scene, while learning and expanding on his graffiti writing practice under the pseudonym Mon Petit Chou. Paquette's thematic interests interrogate the transformation of culture that occurs when two or more economic, social or cultural realities collide. He works primarily through painting but also employs street art, graffiti and photography in projects that are often site-specific or geographically dependent.

About the Project:

Martindale and Paquette join forces to create a collaborative installation for the *Toronto Now Series*. Brought together by Katherine Dennis, an emerging curator, this exhibition is the focus of her thesis. Katherine is a Masters candidate in OCAD University's Criticism and Curatorial Practices program. Her research focuses on the interaction between art, artists and audiences, employing a collaborative curatorial strategy that is based in curating, education and artistic practices.

Located in the Young Gallery, the *Toronto Now Series* promotes Toronto's local arts community, in addition to providing visitors free access to contemporary art. As a forum, this exhibition extends beyond the physical space of the gallery. The artists host several outreach programs aimed at getting the conversation started, including events with the FRANK restaurant, the AGO gift shop and the Weston Family Learning Centre. These activities aspire to bring together different groups to talk about what matters to them in their city and how art can play a vital, action-led role in daily life.

Appendix C: Exhibition Programming Schedule

Month	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<u>Jan</u> 2012	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20 Opening Reception	21
	22	23 Tour: shopAGO retail staff	24 Tour: FRANK restaurant staff (day) Tour: OCAD art students	25	26 Talk and tour: OCAD curatorial students Tour: FRANK restaurant staff (night)	27 Tour: OCAD art students	28 Tour: Contemporary Circle, AGO donors
	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
<u>Feb</u> 2012	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	12	13	14	15 Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22 <i>Youthful Perspectives</i> , youth tour Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	23	24	25
	26	27	28	29 Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	1	2 ART. FOOD. TALK. dinner	3
<u>Mar</u> 2012	4	5	6 <i>Exit Through The Gift Shop</i> film screening and Q&A with artists	7 Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14 Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	15	16	17 <i>Tagging Along</i> community walk

Month	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	18	19	20	21 Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	22	23	24 <i>Tagging Along</i> community walk
	25	26	27	28 Artists' Service Bureau office hours 6 to 8pm	29	30	31
<u>Apr</u> 2012	1 Final day of exhibition	2	3	4	5	6	7

Accompanying Material

The following accompanying material is available upon request from the OCAD University Library: NOW Newspaper (curatorial essay).

Anyone requesting the material may view it in the OCADU Library or pay to have it copied for personal use.