Ethics and Exclusions in the Museum:  
The Art Workers Coalition and Case Studies of Institutional Critique

Emily Reynolds  
Art and Art History Departmental Honors Thesis  
University of Colorado, Boulder

Committee Members:
Alison Jaggar | Philosophy, Women and Gender Studies  
Robert Nauman | Art and Art History  
Amber Travis Teng | Art and Art History, Thesis Advisor

March 27, 2012
Table of Contents

Abstract [i]
List of Figures [ii]
Introduction [1]
Section 1: Hans Haacke and Site Specific Critique [12]
Section 2: Feminism, Labor and Strategies of Institutional Critique [26]
Section 3: Institutional Racism, the Art Workers Coalition and Fred Wilson [39]
Conclusion [56]
Bibliography [65]
Abstract

_Institutional Critique_ is a term often applied to conceptual art of the late twentieth century, and a practice that grew in popularity among artists along with an organization of art workers called the Art Workers Coalition (AWC). The AWC was critical of the institution of art in the United States, and influenced conceptual artists to apply the same criticisms in their work. Hans Haacke utilized site specific critique of museums to expose systems within the museum, Mierle Laderman Ukeles used performance art to explore women's labor and maintenance within the museum, and Fred Wilson used techniques of museology to present a new narrative within his work _Mining The Museum_ (1991). Through analysis of these artists, their work, and their relationship to the Art Workers Coalition and the artworld, the important role of the museum and its critique becomes clear. Critiques of the institution both in artworks and through political action are vital to the future of museums, as they are the holders of common culture and history.
List of Figures

Figure 1. Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube* 1963-65

Figure 2. Hans Haacke, *MoMA Poll* 1970

Figure 3. Hans Haacke, *Gallery Goers’ Birthplace and Residence Profile* 1969

Figure 4. Hans Haacke, *John Weber Gallery Visitors’ Profile 2*, 1973; punch card.

Figure 5. Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* 1971; facts, data sheets, charts.

Figure 6. Hans Haacke, *Manet-PROJEKT ’74*, 1974

Figure 7. Hans Haacke, *On Social Grease* 1974 (one panel of 6)

Figure 8. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object* 1973 (performance photo)

Figure 9. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, maintenance outside* 1973 (performance photo)

Figure 10. *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, maintenance inside* 1973 (performance photo)

Figure 11. Burt Glinn, *USA. New York City. Upper Bohemians. USA. New York City. 1957. Painter Helen Frankenthaler uses slippered feet to create an Abstract Expressionist painting* 1957

Figure 12. Womanhouse Catalog Cover, 1972

Figure 13. Judy Chicago, *Menstruation Bathroom* 1972

Figure 14. Installation detail, Truth Trophy. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum* 1992

Figure 15. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: Portrait busts on pedestals* 1992
Figure 16. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: Empty pedestals* 1992

Figure 17. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: Installation of cigar store indians with photographic portraits* 1992

Figure 18. Justus Englehardt Kühn, *Henry Darnell III* ca. 1710

Figure 19. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: 19th century portrait with face cut-out* 1992

Figure 20. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: Baby Carriage and Klu Klux Klan hood* 1992

Figure 21. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: Photograph: Mount Vernon Place* 1992

Figure 22. Art Workers Coalition, *Q: And Babies? A: And Babies.* 1970
Introduction

The practice of institutional critique is generally defined by its apparent object, "the institution," which is, in turn, taken to refer primarily to established, organized sites for the presentation of art...“Critique” appears even less specific than “institution,” vacillating between a rather timid “exposing,” “reflecting,” or “revealing,” on the one hand, and visions of the revolutionary overthrow of the existing museological order on the other, with the institutional critic as a guerrilla fighter engaging in acts of subversion and sabotage, breaking through walls and floors and doors, provoking censorship, bringing down the powers that be.¹

-Andrea Fraser

Institutional critique is a term that gets mentioned repeatedly in conjunction with new media artists in the late twentieth century, though its meaning is not always made clear. Institutional critique is an artistic strategy, popular among conceptual artists in the 1960’s and onwards. The practice is political in nature, and is aimed at the heart of the institution, the museum. The art institution is a system made up of galleries, museums, schools of art practice and art history, art publications, and artists, and all who fund or work within each component. Within the institution, schools teach artists, artists create objects, galleries show art, art critics write, museums acquire, preserve, display, and educate, and eventually art historians place what becomes understood as the most important work of its time in contexts. Each component attempts to define what art is, and what its values are.

This system is not without problems, and spurred by philosophers such as Michel Foucault, these systems were criticized systematically in the late 20th century. This criticism of the art institution led to a mass questioning that materialized in the 1960’s and seventies among artists, and especially in the art, writings, and protests of the Art Workers Coalition, or AWC. This group encouraged art workers, especially artists, to question the status-quo of the institutional system, and spurred artists through the rest of the twentieth century to use the developing concepts of institutional critique as an artistic strategy, questioning the art institution in the works that they created.

Art museums play a complicated role in modern society. Museums were founded to be holders of collections and places for scholarly study. Twentieth century philosopher Michel Foucault saw that museums function as part of the “modern desire to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes.” He went on to argue that the objects inside the museum are placed there to be outside of time and “inaccessible to its ravages.” Those items placed in the museum are outside of time, preserved in an unnatural context forever. Artist Hans Haacke has called museums “managers of consciousness”, they determine the understanding of people in their culture. Art historian Carol Duncan defines museums as “holders of secular truth”


describing the museum as furthering one truth and ignoring others like a religion might.⁴ Though the idea of a museum is not inherently sinister, each of these definitions explore the more sinister aspects of the museum. The museum of art has a complex relationship with the culture or community which it is intended to represent, and holds more power over cultural understanding than is often realized.

The earliest museum-like collections represented the interests of one individual. Princes invested money and time into collecting art and artifacts that interested them but that also would show their status. Other wealthy men began to collect art and objects as well, in what were called *wunderkammer* (cabinet of wonder), *kunstkammer* (cabinet of art), or cabinets of curiosities. Each kind of collection was open only to their owner and those he invited. These collections were exclusionary in every way, reflecting just one person’s interests, and existing for them while simultaneously earning them status among their peers.

During the enlightenment, *wunderkammer* and princely collections underwent a transformation. Philosophers and revolutionaries began to argue that these collections should be open to all people, they were vestiges of the peoples history. The first instance of the modern museum occurred when the revolutionaries of the late eighteenth century opened the Louvre to the public after the fall of Louis XVI in 1793.⁵ The Louvre was born out of revolution and enlightenment ideals to allow the people of

---


France to feel ownership over their country and government. Even the opening of this museum was not without its critics. Quatremere de Qincy, the president of the Academie des Beaux Arts at the time, recounted in letters that the self-appointed government took to requisitioning all historic artifacts in the entire country. He often found the juxtaposition of objects without context upsetting and manipulative. When he saw the Apollo Belvedere at Les Invalides he called it a barbaric placement, and also argued that the government was using the collections of art to show a selected bourgeoisie revolutionary history that turned on all others.⁶

Despite the criticism of Quatremere de Qincy, museums appeared in other European capitols and then other collections in much the same way. Museums of art became among the foremost institutions of culture in the Western world. Even the most modern museums of art operate on the same basic ideals of the Louvre at its inception. Collections are generally started by an individual, and then added to by curators. Large national collections strive to tell the story of their nation through works of art, they are understood to contain everything of cultural importance. The narrative of a museum also usually includes a moral message. Museums like the Victoria and Albert and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston were founded in part to teach lower classes the proper way to live and to show them the kinds of lives to strive for.⁷ Museums play an important part in dictating what is included in the history of art and what is forgotten.

---


⁷ While traditional art museums were still for those who were studying the fine arts, or those whose standing allowed them to appreciate fine arts, the V&A (originally the South Kensington Museum) and MFA in Boston housed objects of industry and arts and crafts, objects that would be familiar to middle class visitors, but still be aspirational. Visits to the museum would also keep them from other, less moral activities. McClellan, 11
The power that the museum has over historical understanding of a culture has been questioned often and harshly since the middle of the twentieth century. Art historian Donald Preziosi called art a specifically European invention of ideology and continued to say that, “the institution is an ideological apparatus, a discipline for the production of social realities and subjectivities of the modern world.”

He argues that art is a construct created by the Western world. Other societies don’t have art the way that the West has art, instead they have objects of function, ceremony, and other aesthetic programs, but the West projects artistic value upon objects, dictating what is art and what is not. When art starts as a cultural construct, the museum occupies an even more complex space in culture, and it is always used to justify an ideology. In a similar argument Carol Duncan said that, “to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.”

This begs the philosophical question that gets at the heart of institutional critique, should a museum impose or even prescribe truths and values for an entire community?

The Artist Workers Coalition was a movement that began in 1968 when artists and art critics sought to debate institutional issues openly in the artworld. Throughout the United States, 1968 was a tumultuous year. Martin Luther King Junior and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated, Black Panthers sought civil rights through militant actions, and the atrocities of the Vietnam war caused mass protests, especially among students. The AWC’s formation was sparked by the artist Vassilakis Takis and an

---


9 Duncan, 425.
disagreement he had with New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Although the museum held several of Takis’ telekinetic sculptures in their collection, they chose to show *Tele-Sculpture* (1960) in their show, “Machine.” Takis believed that *Tele-Sculpture* was an inferior example of his work, and asked MoMA to either replace the sculpture with one of his other works or remove it from the show entirely.\(^\text{10}\) The museum chose not to, so in retaliation, Takis marched into the museum and abducted his work. This action sparked the interest of the artist community, many of whom also wanted more rights regarding how their work was presented in the museum. The artists and art critics who joined the AWC wanted to return to enlightenment ideals in the museum.\(^\text{11}\) Revolutionary ideas dominated the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, and it seemed that this revolution, as the French Revolution had before, should redefine the role of the museum.\(^\text{12}\)

The original members of the AWC were Wen-Ying Tsai, Tom Lloyd, Len Lye, Farman, Hans Haacke, Vassilakis Takis, Carl Andre, John Perrault, Irving Petlin, Rosemarie Castoro, Lucy Lippard, Max Kozloff and Willoughby Sharp.\(^\text{13}\) These artists and art critics met regularly to discuss, plan and protest against museums and for artists rights. There were often joined by many more, usually between sixty and one hundred

---


\(^{12}\) The French Revolution and the revolution of 1968, while the French Revolution was a bourgeoisie revolution, the revolution of 1968 was primarily Marxist in ideology. Despite this, both revolutions called for a revolution that was to take place inside museums.

art workers were in attendance in meetings and hearings they planned in New York City.\textsuperscript{14} After the abduction of the Takis sculpture, the group began to discuss the shortcomings of the museum as an institution. Many of them were working in new media. The minimalists were creating works with some degree of site specificity that were somewhere between painting and sculpture. Installations were also in their nascent form along with performance and video art. The museum seemed likely to simply ignore these media because they posed new challenges to exhibit. The movement was also heavily impacted by political and social issues of the time: the Vietnam war, the Black Panthers and other black power movements, Chicano rights, and Women’s Liberation. As these movements flourished, the AWC incorporated their ideas into their own goals. They believed that, “to fight against the museum is to fight against the war,” and so they were opposed to the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{15} They also called for all people to be represented and served by the institutions, including blacks, Puerto Ricans, and women. This all began with their demand to be called art workers instead of artists. Art workers was a term that included artists, critics, and even curators and museum employees. They wanted to be treated like workers, and also wanted to receive governmental support in the same way that workers could.

This change marked a change in the relationship between artists and politics. In the 1950’s the abstract expressionists worked within the institution to change the notion of what art was and could be, however they were against being overtly political in their

\textsuperscript{14} Lippard, 12.

\textsuperscript{15} Bryan-Wilson, 18.
work. In the 1960’s, the climate had changed, and artists wanted to become part of the political discourse. The art workers coalition was a political organization, and it encouraged its members to address political issues in their work.

Artists broke from the the abstract expressionists and the modernist artists in New York of the 1950’s by wanting to be known as workers instead of artists. The concept of the art worker surpassed that of the individual genius artist. A collective mentality was favored and some artists began to rent large studios where many artists would work together. They began to curate independent shows, and they actively sought to create an art industry instead of an art market. This development of art as an industry can be seen in its most extreme form in Andy Warhol’s factory. Warehouses and production lines, the cornerstones of industry, replaced artist studios that had been romanticized as intimate dens where genius artists spent hours in solitude. And the museum was a cog in the industrial machine, establishing objects as valuable and representative of their time.

In their first year of existence, the AWC collectively wrote their “Statement of Demands” which functioned as a manifesto for the group. The demands were printed on pamphlets and distributed among the arts community, to arts publications, and to the museums. They demanded that the board of trustees of each museum be made up of one third museum staff, one third patrons, and one third artists instead of being chosen

16 Though abstract expressionism is not overtly political, Clement Greenberg argued that their work was in response to the art of fascism.

17 Lucy Lippard argued in “The Art Workers Coalition: Not a History” that the AWC was not about the politicization of art, and that there was no mandate that AWC artists create political work.

upon a financial basis. To qualify to be on the board of trustees at most museums, large donations are required. The bigger and more important the institution, the larger the donation required. The AWC believed that by removing the mandatory donations, they would diversify the interests of the museums, and protect and promote cultural heritage for the people. They also called for free admission to museums at all times, and for evening hours to accommodate those who worked during the day. They called for decentralization, where museums would open branch institutions in Puerto Rican and black communities, and also called for more inclusion of Black and Puerto Rican artists in the museum. They wanted museums to encourage female artists through equal representation in exhibitions and collections. They demanded that one museum in each city must maintain a registry of all artists in the area, and they must make that information public. They asked that museums politicize themselves in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as issues of rent control for housing and legislation for artists rights. They wanted special exhibitions for artist who were not represented by a commercial gallery, and finally they wanted to retain control over their work even after it was acquired by the museum or sold. They further demanded that artists be paid a ‘rental fee’ whenever a work is shown and an entrance fee is charged, that a percentage of each sale of work go to the artist or their estate, and that a trust fund be set up on the death of an artist, and fed by posthumous sales, to support dependents of the dead artist.

The demands were sent to all the major museums in New York City, and they were not completely ignored. Soon after this letter was sent, the Metropolitan Museum
of Art, as well as most other museums, instituted the ‘free day’.\(^{19}\) For a while there were major plans to open a new wing of the Met called the Martin Luther King Jr. Wing, which would feature the art of African Americans. Additionally curators began to incorporate a higher percentage of women artists into their exhibitions through the 1970’s.\(^{20}\) There were other demands, however, that were out of the realm of possibility. Museums in the United States are not governmental institutions as they are in most European countries, and while they are still entrusted with cultural heritage, it’s because they bought it or it was donated.\(^{21}\) American museums are largely financially dependent on donors, grants and tax-exemptions, and so cannot be held as easily to democratic enlightenment ideals. If the museum was forced to pay a rental fee every time a work was shown, it could cripple the entire economic structure of the museum, or worse, it could eliminate the exhibition of all contemporary art. The goals of the AWC were lofty, but perhaps sometimes out of touch with the reality of the museums financial and operational structure.

The museum was the primary subject in the work of three artists, Hans Haacke, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Fred Wilson. All three artists are known for practicing institutional critique in their conceptual art, but also work within greater themes of political activism regarding financial corruption, civil rights, and women's liberation respectively, which locate their work both as works of institutional critique but also reflect


\(^{21}\) Some museums do receive some funding through taxes, but usually only a small percentage. Funding from governmental agencies varies widely from state to state and city to city.
the values of the Art Workers Coalition. The writings and ideas of the Artist Workers
Coalition frame some of their work and the messages of these artists, and the AWC
played a major role in exposing the role of the museum and encouraging artists to
criticize the art institution.

What arose from the criticism of the art workers, and the criticized museum was
a relationship that allowed museum leadership to reflect on what the museum could do
to better serve the community in which it was located. Artist’s critiques like those of
Haacke, Ukeles, and Wilson invited the artworld to reflect on the history of the museum,
the narrative they presented and new narratives they were inspired to include.
While the Art Workers Coalition protested and created protest centered art, Hans Haacke incorporated the AWC’s goals into his own personal work. Haacke is a German born artist who has lived and worked in the United States since the 1960’s. He was closely associated with the AWC from the beginning of the movement, and his affiliation with the group coincided with a major change in the kind of work he produced. His work during the time the AWC was active and through most of the 1970’s helped establish institutional critique as a site specific artistic practice through exposing viewers to Haacke’s well researched sociological understanding of the ‘artworld’ and the systems within it.¹

Haacke was born in Cologne, Germany and moved to Kassel, Germany at the age of 20 to attend the Art Academy. Kassel had just hosted the first Documenta, and was drawing influential international artists. Though Haacke started his artistic career painting and drawing, he quickly moved away from two dimensional work and towards conceptual work in three dimensional space. He referred to his works as “real time systems.”² In these works Haacke explored systems of science and technology. In one

¹ The ‘artworld’ is a term originally used by Arthur Danto in “The Art World,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 1964. He believed that what is considered to be art is defined by art schools, museums, and artists, and so the artworld is defined by an “atmosphere of art theory” which is made up of institutional components. Danto, Arthur. "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 16.19 (1964): 571-84. Web.

Haacke created a clear acrylic cube, reminiscent of the work of the minimalist sculptors, but filled it with a small amount of water. Inside the cube water cycled between states of vapor and liquid, and the state of the water varied as the environment of the gallery did. Increased visitors created a different reaction than the empty gallery at night, as did overall temperature of the gallery. As Haacke explored the systems of science, he moved from working with environmental materials like water wind and earth, to living creatures like chickens and birds. Finally, in the late 1960’s Haacke continued his exploration of systems in to systems of people.³

Several events between 1969 and 1971 influenced the continuation of Haacke’s artistic process. First, Haacke helped found the Art Workers Coalition. Haacke was one of the original authors of the AWC statement of demands for artist rights, with Carl Andre, Tom Lloyd and Lucy Lippard. He was fully committed to all the demands, and even hired a lawyer to create a contract for himself that ensured anyone who bought his work would have to follow the demands that require artists to be paid when their art is bought or sold after the initial purchase. Second, he created his first work of institutional critique at a major museum⁴, *MoMA Poll* (1970) (fig. 2) at a Museum of Modern Art show

---

³ Grasskamp, 42.

⁴ He had created several systems works that led up to MoMA Poll for the Wise Gallery in New York in the prior years.
called “Information.” Finally, in 1971 Haacke’s first solo show at the Guggenheim was cancelled when he was asked to censor himself. These three events solidified Haacke’s desire to use his artwork to criticize the museum and the system of the artworld and censorship of the artist be it obvious or subtle.

Haacke’s work in the 1970’s was entirely focused on institutional critique. The way he explores the ‘artworld’ system evolved progressively. At the beginning of the decade his work was dependent on viewer participation, and provided an understanding of the museum public. After gaining an understanding of the audience in the artworld, Haacke moved towards criticism of the governance of the museum, and after that Haacke began to focus on the funding sources that museums depend on. His work was difficult for museums to exhibit, and so many of his works were shown in private galleries, but nonetheless they had a major impact on the institution.

In his earliest pieces of institutional critique, Haacke created polls and questionnaires that identified the museum audience. The first work of this kind was carried out at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York and was called *Gallery Goers’*

---

5 Some have theorized that “Information” was conceived to act as an olive branch to the AWC. Many AWC artists were included in the show. Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Hans Haacke’s Paperwork." *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era.* Berkeley: University of California, 2009. 189.
Birthplace and Residence Profile (fig. 3).

The show was mounted in 1969 and asked gallery visitors to take a poll. Posted to the wall was a map of Manhattan and the other New York City boroughs, the United States, and then the world. Visitors were asked to put a red pin in the location of their birth, and then put a blue pin in their current residence. The work relied on the participation and contribution of the viewers, it gave them a vested interest in the work. The result established that the visitors to the gallery were mostly from middle class and upper middle class white neighborhoods. It presented the homogenous reality of the art audience.

Haacke expanded his polling research at the John Weber Gallery in New York. The work here was called John Weber Gallery Visitors’ Profile 2 (1973) (fig. 4). Haacke created a questionnaire that asked twenty questions. It began by asking about the visitors background in the arts, wether they were interested in the gallery as an artist, art or art history student, other art professional, or had no professional interest in the gallery. Haacke again asked questions about where visitors lived, but then asked more political questions such as, “Do you think, as a matter of principle, that all group shows

---

6 Haacke had wanted to use a very similar questionnaire in his solo show at the Guggenheim, Guggenheim Museum Visitors’ Profile in 1971. The director of the museum, Thomas Messer, objected to the poll as well as two other works in the proposed show.
should include women artists.” In this poll Haacke found that 70% of the visitors to the gallery were artists, art students, or art professionals, and most of them came, again, from middle and upper middle class backgrounds. The research here was formally similar to the sociological research of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel put forth in their 1991 book, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public*. Bourdieu, who came to be a good friend of Haacke, found that the appreciation of art is determined by social factors, specifically income and education. In the book Bourdieu said that, “the museum is reserved for those who, equipped with the ability to appropriate the works of art, have the privilege of making use of this freedom.”

To Haacke, these works showed that museums and the artworld was indeed based on exclusion and privilege.

Haacke also polled viewers in *MoMA Poll (fig. 2)* with the intention of revealing museum goer’s stance on the Vietnam war. In this work Haacke fabricated two clear ballot boxes with an automatic counter. Above the ballot boxes was a sign asking, “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s

---


Visitors were given color coded ballots that corresponded to their ticket level. They were marked as full-fare visitors, members, guest-pass holders, and free day visitors. The visitors were then asked to drop their ballots into either the YES or NO box. The boxes were counted automatically and the totals were electronically displayed, however by the end of the exhibition it was clear by sheer volume that the YES box was more full than the NO box. Over 37,000 people voted, and 69% of those visitors said that they would not vote for Governor Rockefeller. While MoMA Poll again established the audience of the museum, in this work Haacke began to delve deeper into the reputation of the institution. It was somewhat common knowledge that Governor Rockefeller was on the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art. Before installing the work, Haacke had not told the curators what the poll would ask, but by asking about Governor Rockefeller and associating him with President Nixon and the Vietnam War, Haacke was subtly implicating the museum in the highly unpopular war. Though this information could be gathered, Haacke was against providing any interpretive statements about his work along with them, leaving any conclusions to be drawn by the viewers. In this way he became closer to objective ‘truth.’

The desire to criticize the governance of the museum became Haacke’s next focus within his next few works. The two works that initiated the cancellation of his solo show at the Guggenheim were called Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971 (1971)(fig. 5) and Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo, Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System as of May 1, 1971.  

---

Haacke hung photographs, data sheets and charts that represented research Haacke had done into the real estate market. Haacke had requested the ownership records and property values of properties in the New York County Clerks Office, mostly in the slum areas of the Lower East Side and Harlem, from the City Records. Haacke explained that,

Corporations are mentioned in the work if their officers included a member of the Shaplosky family and if they bought or sold, or held mortgages from or mortgaged properties to the Shaplosky clan. In turn, Shaplosky family members and persons who had real estate dealings with these corporations are named.\(^\text{10}\)

This system exposed the parties buying, selling, and mortgaging slum properties in a way that helped evade taxes and obscured the ownership of the slum properties. At the heart of the operation was Harry Shaplosky, a man convicted of rent gouging and bribing building inspectors. The data and pictures showed that the Shapolsky real estate group and the Goldman real estate group were part of a real estate social system, the slums were bought, sold, bought and sold, all the while taking advantage of low income families. Formally, the works became interesting as the photographic records of each slum property was included, as well as complicated charts that formally mimicked the line drawings of Sol Lewitt and elements of minimalism. The curator of the show,

\(^{10}\) Haacke, *Unfinished Business*, 92.
Edward F. Fry, stood by Haacke as his work came under attack by the museum director Thomas Messer. Messer claimed that the work was “inappropriate” which left many to speculate that museum trustees were somehow involved in one of the real estate groups. Either way, the intention was to draw attention to unsavory behavior and the system that perpetuated the behavior. When Messer asked Haacke to remove the work, Haacke refused, and six weeks before the expected opening, the show was cancelled. Fry was eventually fired, and never worked in an American museum again, while Haacke was forced to rely on his teaching position at Cooper-Union. He wasn’t offered another retrospective for fifteen years.

The AWC was outraged by this decision, and held a major protest of the Guggenheim following the cancelation. Protesters passed out a pamphlet that read like a chronology.

April 1, 1971: Hans Haacke’s one man show cancelled for alleged social and political content... April 26, 1971: Curator Ed Fry fired (with four days notice) for supporting Haacke and artists rights of free expression...May 1, 1971: Artists demonstrate at the Guggenheim in support of Haacke and against art censorship: Petition circulated internationally to censure Guggenheim and director Thomas Messer...Next?

The pamphlet presented information in the same way that was characteristic of both the AWC’s collective artwork as well as Haacke’s. Information was presented in a factual and clear method with very little interpretation. This strategy suggested that Haacke wanted to leave interpretation up to the viewer.

11 Grasskamp, 50.
In *Shaplosky et al.* no trustees were ever directly implicated, but the censorship he underwent prompted him to probe further into the issues of museum governance at the Guggenheim. His 1974 work *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* was a simple work where Haacke researched the economic ties of each of the members of the Guggenheim’s board of trustees. Without comment or interpretation, Haacke exhibited seven panels at the Stefanotty Gallery that laid out the corporate affiliations of the trustees of the museum. The work exposed viewers to the things they were not seeing. Corporations that were related in any way to board members would not be exhibited in a negative light, and further, it was clear there were beneficial relationships between board members and museum interests.

Next he took this strategy to Europe, and began to use his strategy of research, or what Benjamin Buchloh called “aesthetic administration”\(^\text{13}\) to explore a specific work’s provenance. Haacke was invited to show a piece in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, Germany as part of the museum’s 150th birthday celebration, PROJEKT ’74. For his piece, *Manet-PROJEKT ’74 (1974)(fig. 6)* Haacke submitted this proposal,

> Manet’s *Bunch of Asparagus* of 1880 *(see fig. 6)*, collection Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, is on a studio easel in an approx. 6 by 8 meter room of PROJEKT ’74. Panels on the walls present that social and economic position of the persons who have owned the painting over the years and the prices paid for it.\(^\text{14}\)

On ten framed panels Haacke displayed the provenance of the painting accompanied by biographical information about the owners. The provenance of the painting was quite simple to find, but Haacke wanted to dig further and provide some biographical detail

\(^{13}\) Bryan-Wilson, 182.

\(^{14}\) Haacke, *Unfinished Business*, 118.
about each owner, mainly what their profession and income level was, and how much they paid for the painting.

The painting changed hands many times, however it was frequently under Jewish ownership until the second world war, when it was acquired by a ‘friends of the museum’ acquisition committee. The committee was led by German banker Hermann J. Abs. Haacke found that Abs had began his career before World War II, and in the late 1930’s helped configure and stabilize the economy of Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{15} After World War II Abs, like many former Nazi officials, concealed his past and helped to reconstruct the German economy and maintained a position of power over both the economy and the arts in Germany as the chairman of the board of Deutsche Bank and a long standing member of the board of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum. When the director of the museum saw the work, he censored Haacke for attacking and exposing Abs, whose nineteen positions on the board were listed on the final panel, and implicated the museum in shady dealings in the pre-war environment while simultaneously alienating one of the museums biggest and most generous donors.\textsuperscript{16} In solidarity Daniel Buren, who was also in the show and a practitioner of institutional

\textsuperscript{15} Grasskamp, 54.

\textsuperscript{16} Haacke, \textit{Unfinished Business} 118.
critique, posted reproductions of Haacke’s work in his space. In turn, he was also removed from the show.

Haacke had now been kicked out of shows both in America and Europe, prompting him to deeply distrust the governance of any kind of art institution. This also established that an attack on those who govern the museum was too far over the line. It put directors and curators in an uncomfortable position, and to work with Haacke became a nightmare for people in those positions. Haacke had to seek a new approach, and this time he chose to look at corporate sponsorship of major museums.

Haacke’s new approach started with a piece he called *On Social Grease* (1974) (fig. 7). The work was mounted at the John Weber Gallery in New York. In *On Social Grease*, Haacke collected quotations from corporate executives and museum pamphlets. The quotations were all about the benefits of corporate sponsorship in the arts. One of the quotations featured was from C. Douglas Dillon, who was an investment banker, the chairman of the US & Foreign Securities Corporation, and the trustee president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1970-1978. He was quoted as saying,

> Perhaps the most important single reason for this increased interest of international corporations in the arts is the almost limitless diversity of projects which are possible. These projects can be tailored to a company’s
specific business goals and can return dividends far out of proportion to the actual investment required.17

Through quotes like these, Haacke exposed the roles that corporations already played in art production through corporate sponsorship. It would be naive to believe that corporate funding didn’t dictate what kind of art is institutionalized. The quotes were printed on photo-engraved magnesium plates and mounted on aluminum. The material played a special role here, it is a mimicry of the newspaper.18 Newspapers used magnesium plates to print the news, and here Haacke uses the material to mimic journalistic “truth.” The plates are also reminiscent of plaques, the kind of esteemed phrases one might see attached to the entrance of a building. This move towards the criticism of corporations and the museum led him to produce more works where he researched the influence of corporations in systems besides the museum.

Haacke had always been interested in cultural theories and sociological research, especially those relating to the arts and museums. In Haacke’s 1974 essay “The Art that is Fit to Show” Haacke asserted that the museum is a “carrier of socio-political connotations” that cannot avoid being politically charged no matter where funding comes from, public institutions are just as guilty as private.19 In this essay Haacke turns to Bertold Brecht and his theories of truth. Haacke sums up Brecht’s 1934 essay “Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties.”

The need for courage to write the truth when the truth is everywhere opposed; the keenness to recognize it although it is everywhere concealed; the skill to


18 Bryan-Wilson, 187.

manipulate it as a weapon; the *judgement* to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the *cunning* to spread truth among such persons.

Haacke challenges the museum visitor to know how to discern what is truth, and the museum to exhibit the truth. At the same time Haacke sought to incorporate all five difficulties into his own work, by exposing the truth, recognizing it where it is concealed, and manipulating it to help others see it. In many of his works of institutional critique facts are presented as though Haacke seeks to be seen as the impossible ‘objective’ journalist. He admired Brecht for his desire to expose the system of theater to objective viewers, and sought to do the same in art.

In “*The Constituency*” from 1977 Haacke began to write about the ‘consciousness industry,’ a term coined by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. He implicates all artists as part of the industry and explains that for the industry to remain profitable there must be workers, who are artists in this case, and there must be a clientele. The clientele is the museum, the curators, the galleries and the viewers, and all of these people are constantly seeking new and fresh forms. To Haacke, the artists that create the new and fresh forms are the ‘deviants.’ Haacke is a deviant himself, and as art historian Walter Grasskamp points out, he was a deviant before it was an aesthetic strategy. While today, and since the 1980’s controversy and censorship have often helped an artist become more famous and more profitable, the 1970’s still showed vestiges of formalism and serious academia in art. While artists like Chris Ofili and Andres Serrano’s controversial works made them more famous, Haacke’s stunts at

---

20 This is a very simplified summation of Brecht’s essay. Haacke, *The ‘Art’ That’s Fit to Show*, 105.

21 Bryan-Wilson, 187.

MoMA and the Guggenheim almost killed his career in the US. He did not show at any US museum or gallery or have any work bought for 12 years. Haacke theorized that if there were not deviant artists, art would become stagnant and bureaucratic.

Haacke’s most important piece of theoretical museum criticism was titled “Museums: Managers of Consciousness” and written in 1984. In this essay Haacke used the of the idea of the ‘consciousness industry’ again and argued that museums, along with a few other institutions were the controllers of consciousness. He demonstrated that changes in the 20th century had established artistic production as an industry, and that both artists and museums had become businesses. The industry has the reputation of presenting indisputable truth when it is actually “the result of a collective historical endeavor, embedded in and reflecting particular value systems, aspirations, and goals.”

The institutions, and the city they represented became the system of study for Haacke. His work was dependent on thorough research, that was then presented in a deadpan manner, but was intended to draw attention to complications and issues that are often overlooked. His art was moving towards the same goals of the AWC, to draw attention to the imperfections in the museum and art systems.

23 Grasskamp, 47.

24 Grasskamp, 51.

25 By the 1980’s, critics affiliated with the journal October considered Haacke’s history of censorship his credentials.

Feminism, Labor and Strategies of Institutional Critique

The Artist Workers Coalition was sometimes criticized by women artists for not being concerned enough with the feminist cause, despite the fact that one of the authors of the “Statement of Demands” was Lucy Lippard, a renowned feminist critic.¹ The AWC argued that women should be represented equally in museums in every regard.

Museums should encourage female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions, museum purchases and on selection committees.²

The museums of the past were largely responsible for not collecting the work of women and instead continuing the perpetual ideal of the male master artist. Women were not only left out, but the work that they did was considered lower than fine art. The division between art and craft put men’s work into the museum and left women’s in the home. By acknowledging the damage done to the female artist by the institution, the AWC “Statement of Demands” sought to incorporate the ideals of the second wave feminist movement, especially equality of legal rights and pay.³ Labor and the institution

¹ Women, besides Lucy Lippard, held few positions of leadership in the AWC and felt that the male leadership was contributing to the systematic exclusion of women from the artworld. Lippard didn’t identify as a feminist until 1970. Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Lucy Lippard's Feminist Labor." Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era. Berkeley: University of California, 2009. 153. Print.


infiltrated much of feminist art history in the 1970’s, and women used strategies of labor and practiced institutional critique to establish a feminist art practice. This is evidenced in Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ performance art, Lucy Lippard’s critical art writing, and in Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro’s *Womanhouse* (1972).

The Art Workers Coalition’s formation coincided with the beginnings of the women’s liberation movement. The larger women’s movement, and how the movement manifested in the art world was perhaps what prompted the AWC to demand that women’s artwork be incorporated into the museum. The first major essay to explore feminist theory in art history was Linda Nochlin’s “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” published in 1971 in *ArtNews.* This essay is heavily critical of the historical narrative presented by art institutions, and posits that there have not been any great women artists because the greater societal structure and the institutions of art have not been open to women. Nochlin argued that,

“The question of women’s equality--in art as in any other realm--devolves not upon the relative benevolence or ill-will of individual men, nor the self-confidence or abjectness of individual women, but rather on the very nature of our institutional structures themselves and the view of reality which they impose on the human beings who are a part of them.”

The institutions of art didn’t recognize women as makers of art, and so women could not be great makers of art. The second wave feminist response to this charge was to dig up as many examples of women artists in history, and incorporate them into the institutional canon through exhibition and critical writing. One such group who took this task to hand was The Women Artists in Revolution or WAR. WAR was a spin off of the AWC, formed

---


5 Nochlin, 25.
after the women in the AWC decided they were not getting enough representation. Through WAR women artists began to establish artistic practices that were critical of the institutions that had been denied to them in the past.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles was one of the first women to incorporate feminism and institutional critique into her work. Through performance she used a new medium of artistic practice that was in nature critical of traditional artistic practices. In 1969 she penned the “Manifesto for Maintenance Art.” In the manifesto, Ukeles describes the two basic systems of human labor: development and maintenance. She describes development as, “pure individual creation; the new change; progress, advance excitement, flight or fleeing.”\(^6\) Development is progress, while she defines maintenance as, “keeping the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.”\(^7\) She calls maintenance a “drag”, and argues that, “the culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs.”\(^8\) Those who perform maintenance are people who work for minimum wages or housewives. Despite all this, development is dependent on maintenance, and she asserts that all she does is art, and therefore maintenance is art. This manifesto was spurred by her life as a mother. When she was in the early stages of her first pregnancy, Ukeles was enrolled in a sculpture class at the Pratt Institute. In front of the entire class the male professor said, “Well, Mierle, I guess you know you

---


\(^7\) Ukeles, 24.

\(^8\) Ukeles, 24.
can’t be an artist now.”

This comment created an anxiety inside of her about her future as an artist, and her future as a mother. She wrote:

Through free choice and love, I became pregnant. I had a child by choice. I was in an all-out crisis. People only saw me as a mother. The culture had no place for me. There were no words for my life. I was split into two people; artist and mother. I had fallen out of the picture.

Instead of deciding to be one or the other, Ukeles carved out her maintenance art, which included the maintenance of motherhood.

Her first public maintenance work was a set of four performances at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut. The performances were called the Maintenance Art Performances and took place in 1973, in conjunction with a show of women artists curated by Lucy Lippard, “C. 7,500.” The ‘actions’ took place over two days, Friday, July 20th and Sunday, July 22nd.

The Friday actions were titled Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object (see fig. 9) and The Keeping of the Keys: Maintenance as Security. In Transfer, Ukeles focused on the maintenance of the

---


10 Liss, 51.
exhibitions inside the museum. She chose one specific object, the Egyptian Mummy. The object chosen was symbolic; the mummy was female, her breasts are discernible atop her body, and the function of the process of mummification is to preserve and maintain the body for the afterlife. Of course, the mummy is preserved today by a conservator, but the glass case the mummy rests in is cleaned by a janitor. In *Transfer*, Ukeles explored the division of labor inside the museum. By being an artist herself and cleaning the mummy case she elevated the status of the mummy’s case to *art*, the same way Duchamp elevated the status of the urinal in *Fountain* (1917). This elevation transferred the maintenance duties of the case from the janitor to the conservator, as Ukeles’ action defined it as a piece of art.¹¹ *The Keeping of the Keys* explored the roles of both security staff and patrons. In this action Ukeles was given the keys to each room in the museum by the security guards. She locked and unlocked each gallery at a designated time. Patrons were notified about room closures and openings, and chose to either be incorporated by being locked in, or to avoid those sections of the museum. This action brought attention to the unused power of security workers, while also giving the artist the ultimate control over the museum.

On Sunday, Ukeles undertook the more

---

grueling maintenance processes of the museum. First, in *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, maintenance outside* (fig. 9) Ukeles cleaned the exterior steps and plaza of the Athenaeum. She spent the next four hours inside, performing *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, maintenance inside* (fig. 10). It consisted of Ukeles scrubbing and mopping the museum floors for four hours, while the museum was open, without fanfare. Her materials consisted of water, stone, and diapers. Diapers were the material that conservators used for cleaning and maintaining objects, but when Ukeles used them they become a symbol of motherhood and maintenance.\(^{12}\) She called her motions ‘floor paintings’ and one of the photographs of the event shows Ukeles pouring a bucket of water down the steps.\(^{13}\) The image, along with the title ‘floor paintings’ bring to mind the iconic photographs by Hans Namuth of Jackson Pollock painting in his Long Island studio, as well as a photo of Helen Frankenthaler painting with her hands and slippers in 1957 by Burt Glinn (fig. 11). While these artists developed new strategies of painting by incorporating actions that could be easily confused with maintenance, Ukeles maintained the exterior of the building that housed such works of art.


\(^{13}\) Molesworth, 115.
Ukeles discussed the role of the museum, and the meaning of the performances at the Hartford Atheneum in “25 Years Later”, an essay written about the impact of her work after twenty-five years.

The museum could be the institutional site in society that could be as progressive and as open as the art it showed. The proposal for the four performance works also carried a notion of the necessity to critique every institution as well. These were the days of the Vietnam War, when institutions by their very own nature were understood to be inherently corruptible. During these days many artists (myself among them) chose to do most of their work in the streets. We were very wary of “going inside”. We dematerialized our art as much as we could. We needed to be unfettered, unowned. It seemed a way to be more pure. So one could say [I] both revered the museum--some of the most important experiences of [my] life had happened in museums--and [I] was deeply nervous about the extent to which the museum could be the site of freedom growing in front of your eyes.14

Ukeles’ discomfort with the museum can also be felt in the writings of Lucy Lippard. In 1970 Lippard wrote, “One thing museum administrators can’t seem to realize is that most of the art workers lead triple (for women, often quadruple) lives: making art, earning a living, political or social action, and maybe domestic work too.”15 Both women depended on the museum and the institution, but both were wary of exclusivity and being denied access to its inner workings.

It is no surprise that Lucy Lippard sought out Ukeles to participate in the “C.7,500” exhibition. Lippard had similar qualms about being a mother, while also being an art worker. In Julia Bryan-Wilson’s chapter on Lippard in Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era entitled Lucy Lippard’s Feminist Labor, Bryan-Wilson asserts that Lippard, too, was deeply affected by her pregnancy. In 1964 Lippard wrote


a letter to her editor at *Art International* that said, “Herewith the twenty-two reviews. Hope they make whatever the deadline is. Slight delay as I had a baby last week.”¹⁶

One week after giving birth, Lippard had written twenty-two reviews, and to that date she had concealed her entire pregnancy to her editor. It is clear that she felt an anxiety similar the one that prompted Ukeles to pen her “*Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*” Lippard was also interested in the concept of labor and how it related to feminism and art making. The word labor has a double meaning for women, noting both work and giving birth. Women’s art, historically was considered close to labor while fine art was only starting to be considered labor. While to Ukeles, labor was physical and achieved through maintenance, for Lippard the labor was writing.

Lippard was not an art maker, but saw herself as an art worker all the same. As an art worker, she sympathized with artists more than her fellow academics, and saw that her part in the Art Workers Coalition revolution was to change the institution through her criticism, curation and activism. Lippard began her time at the AWC establishing herself as part of the boy’s club, with her then husband Robert Ryman and friends Sol

---

¹⁶ Quoted from Lippard to Jim Fitzsimmons, December 11, 1964, Lucy Lippard Papers, AAA. Bryan-Wilson, 127.
Lewitt and Robert Mangold. Her inclusion was an exception, at the time few curators and critics were allowed to attend meetings as they were seen as part of the problem. Lippard removed herself from the academic setting and spent her time among the artists. She abandoned formalist criticism, alienating herself from the world of academic critics. Instead Lippard championed what she called ‘dematerialized‘ art. This included minimalism and conceptual art. She saw her writing as labor, she wrote art criticism to support herself and her child.

Lippard was hesitant to align herself or her labor with feminism. She wanted to be seen as a person, not specifically a woman. Her hesitations were heightened by motherhood. Radical second wave feminists sometimes bemoaned motherhood and all traditional roles of women, while Lippard was proud of her position as a mother.

Despite that belief, Lippard did begin to identify as a feminist by 1970. She identified as a cultural feminist, interested in equal representation, equal pay. Labor was on the forefront of this movement, women sought to be paid equally for their labor whether it be art making, or art writing. Lippard was a proponent of labor, and began to incorporate women’s labor into her writings and curation. As the AWC began to fall apart, Lippard became more involved in curation and feminism.

---


18 Bryan-Wilson, 153.

“C.7,500” was what Lippard called her only unconventional show of women’s art. She found that there were so many women seeking to be shown in galleries and museums in the typical way, to establish themselves in the institution, that she couldn’t often get real feminist shows funded or picked up.20 “C.7,500”—named for the population of Valencia, California, where CalArts was located—opened at CalArts in 1973 and was spurred by comments Lippard had heard about how “women didn’t do conceptual art.”21 The show featured only women and each piece of artwork had to fit into a manilla envelope. This was an example of Lippard’s suitcase shows, shows of conceptual art that could be easily transported, and so showed at many venues. “C.7,500” did indeed travel, besides CalArts it showed at the Walker, in London, at Smith College and at the Wadsworth Atheneum, where Ukeles performed Maintenance Art Performances. The show did help establish the existence of women in conceptual art and featured works by women who came to be the forerunners in feminist art.

While women artists began to proliferate through the 1970’s and the 1980’s, feminist curatorial strategies became confusing. As Lippard said, she curated many conventional women’s shows, it was natural to put together a show of women artists and call it feminist, but as Katy Deepwell argues in “Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practice Since the 1970’s” there is a difference between a show of women artists and a show that is based on feminist ideology.22 While in the 1970’s the number of shows that featured women increased, the curation left much to be desired. After writing “Why Have

21 Obrist, 216.
There Been No Great Women Artists” Linda Nochlin curated an exhibition with Ann Sutherland Harris called “Women Artists, 1550-1950” which opened in 1976 at the Los Angeles County Museum. This exhibition inserted unknown women artists into the art historical narrative, but it failed to explain why and how women had been marginalized throughout history. Several other shows used similar strategies and were criticized for it.

If the institution was the enemy, as Nochlin argued in “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”, then why were all of the curators curating shows that didn’t challenge the very basis of the institution?

Womanhouse (fig. 12) was an exhibition that did just that. Womanhouse was a project by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro that opened in 1972. Both women were professors in the newly founded Feminist Art Program at CalArt. The program, and the Womanhouse project were founded on four principles, “to be witness to women's common experience through consciousness-raising, to build a female environment, to present positive female role models and to grant permission to student/artists to be themselves and make art out of their experience as women.”

Chicago and Shapiro, along with their 25 students used a deserted mansion as their site, and collectively

---

refurbished it, and retrofitted it to be an expression of feminism. Each room reflected a woman's role in the domestic setting. Performance also became a part of the project. The project was dependent on women’s labor. The women performed the reconstruction of the house first, and then installed inside of it their collectively created artwork. Perhaps the most famous room is Chicago’s *Menstruation Bathroom (fig. 13)*, a white and sterile bathroom that was filled with used menstruation products.

The house then became the museum or gallery, but it was the construction of the women, it functioned outside the institution. Much of what was inside the house is considered essentialist today, but the concept of *Womanhouse* is what made it so influential to feminist art history. The house was open to visitors for a little under a month and was heavily attended. It garnered national attention. The house became an alternative to the institution for women to present their work beyond the traditional patriarchal canon.

Labor and institutional critique have become commonplace in feminist art, and the strategies that feminists used have had an impact on the institutions. Feminist artists have continued to be highly critical of the institution. Artists like the Guerrilla Girls, Adrienne Piper and Andrea Fraser have continued the tradition of institutional critique,
also often utilizing new media and labor to present their points. Progress has been made inside the institution as well. At the Whitney Museum of American Art 5-10% of artist on display were women before 1970, since 1970 they have upped that to 22%.\textsuperscript{24} Louise Bourgiouse had only 6 solo exhibitions between 1950 and 1978, but between 1978 and 1982 she had seven and a major retrospective at MoMA. In the 1990’s two major exhibitions about feminist art of the 1970’s were mounted, and more and more women are added to the canon of art history each year, while others still seek to destroy the canon all together.

The black community in New York was well organized in the 1960’s and seventies. The civil rights and black power movements were defined by political activity and protest, and many of the black artistic community were members of the movement. As the black art community began to organize themselves, they vocally protested the art institution for not showing the work of black artists and other minorities. Many were active members of the Art Workers Coalition. Because black artists were rarely exhibited in museums, the artists relied mainly on community institutions where they showed political art focused broadly on civil rights, not specifically institutional critique. Fred Wilson’s 1992 work entitled *Mining the Museum* has come to be one of the most important works of institutional critique because it unearthed an African-American narrative in a traditional museum and exposed the while male frame that the museum relied on.

As a reaction to exclusion, independent community museums began to pop up in New York communities that were heavily populated by blacks and Puerto Ricans in the 1960’s. The Studio Museum in Harlem took an especially activist stance in 1968, as many of the artists in the black community started to protest the major museums of New York for their exclusionary curatorial practices. In 1968 Whitney curator William Agee opened a show entitled “*Painting and Sculpture in America: The 1930’s*” which was
comprised of only white artists. When questioned about this upsetting representation of America, the director of the museum asserted that no black artists work was up to the standards of the exhibition.\(^1\) Of course, the standards that the curator had used to choose the works in the exhibition were not disclosed. As a reaction, the Studio Museum staged an exhibition called “Invisible Americans: Black Artists of the ‘30s.” As the name implies, this exhibition featured only black artists and highlighted the contributions that black artists had made to art in the 1930’s.

Things got worse the next year. The new curator at the Metropolitan Museum, Thomas Hoving, and Allon Schoener of the New York State Council saw the events at the Whitney and Studio Museum unfold and wanted to establish the Met as a more progressive museum, willing to incorporate black culture. In 1969 they staged an exhibition about Harlem called “Harlem on my Mind.” The exhibition went through the history of Harlem by decade, and was supposed to highlight the achievements of blacks in Harlem. The Harlem community was very excited until it became clear that Hoving was not as progressive as he thought he was. Activist and artist Cliff James explained why the Harlem community objected to the exhibition.

We had several protests about the way the show was set up. One of the things we were in protest against was the fact that Mr. Schoener chose not to use the talents and expertise of any of the members of the black community - artists, art experts, leaders - to help in setting up the show.\(^2\)

What Hoving and Schoener actually created was an exhibition about black people for white people. It only advanced a comfortable and familiar image of the Harlem

\(^1\) Lennon, 107.

community. The Harlem artists that were featured were mostly musicians and writers from the Harlem Renaissance, and the only visual art featured in the show were photographs, taken by the African-American photographer James Van Der Zee, of the more famous musicians and writers honored in the exhibition. Despite what were probably Hoving’s best intentions, artists in Harlem and the greater black community were offended and boycotted the exhibition.³

“Harlem On My Mind” inspired the founding of the black activist artist group, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, or BECC. The BECC formed to protest the Met and the way they handled “Harlem On My Mind” and did so by picketing in front of the museum, holding signs that called the Met a, “Museum of Photography.”⁴ The action of the BECC encouraged some of the younger artists to also join the Art Workers Coalition. As members of the AWC, these black artists fought for an overhaul of the institutional system and the entire artworld that went further than racial issues.

In New York, the black members of the AWC were not interested in merely being incorporated into the existing museums, instead they wanted branch institutions or wings to tell their own stories. The Art Worker Coalition “Statement of Demands” incorporated two demands for minority art communities.

All museums should decentralize to the extent that their activities and services enter Black, Puerto Rican and all other communities. They should support events with which these communities can identify and control. They should convert existing structures all over the city into relatively cheap, flexible branch-museums or cultural centers that could not carry the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society.

³ Lennon, 108.

A section of all museums under the direction of Black or Puerto Rican artists should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of black and Puerto Rican artists, particularly in those cities where these (or other) minorities are well represented.\(^5\)

While a few of the major New York museums considered creating wings or funding branch museums, none of the efforts ever took off.\(^6\) Instead, community museums like the Studio Museum in Harlem took off on their own. The community museums provided progressive spaces for highly political artists to show work, work that was more concerned with basic issues of freedom and race instead of institutional critique in particular.

Artist Fred Wilson grew up on the outskirts of this community. He was born in the Bronx in 1954 to an African-American father and a mother from the West Indies, and so identified as African-American and Native American. When he was still quite young his family moved to Westchester New York, an entirely white suburb, where they stayed until he was in junior high. In high school his family moved back to a more urban environment, where he attended the famous High School of Music and Art. Next he joined the new undergraduate studio arts program at SUNY Purchase in the early 1970’s. After graduating, Wilson moved back to New York and started working in the education department of the Met, the Natural History Museum and the American Craft Museum.

While working at these museums, Wilson continued to practice art. He sat in on a course at Hunter taught by Robert Morris, a pioneer minimalist artist, where he was


\(^{6}\) Lennon, 108.
introduced to strategies of institutional critique. He also began to think more critically about his experiences in the education departments of the museums he had worked in and the role of the museum in society.

The museum is like American society at large. I grew up in an environment where I was alienated, and yet everybody kept smiling...There I was feeling bad about myself because of how I was being treated, and meanwhile everybody’s acting like there’s no problem. In the museum, you’re in this environment you’re supposed to understand and you’re supposed to feel good about. All of these “supposed to’s” --and the artwork’s all there, but there’s all this stuff that’s not being talked about as it relates to the real world.7

Wilson recognized that although he was employed by the museum, it was still not representative of his reality. While working in the museums, Wilson felt disconnected from the black art community. In 1981 he was hired at the Just Above Midtown gallery, run by Linda Goode-Bryant, who concentrated on showing the work of black artists. The gallery also provided salons, lectures and other events, that Wilson was hired to help plan. This job became his way into the community of black artists working in New York in the early 1980’s. He met and was inspired by Richard Hunt, Florence Hardy, Romare Bearden and many of the most notable artists at the time.

Wilson occupied a strange role of artist, black artist and museum and gallery worker. He added curator to that list in 1985 when he became the director of the Longwood Arts Project in South Bronx. This space was another experimental arts gallery designed to give studio space and exhibition opportunities to minority artists. As a curator at Longwood, Wilson decided to mount a show that dealt with the role of the institutional frame. It was called “Rooms with a View” and in it Wilson staged three

galleries to appear as three different types of stereotypical museum galleries. One
gallery was a white cube for contemporary art, one gallery was made to look like an
ethnographic museum, and the third was to look like an 18th century salon. Wilson
chose 30 contemporary black artists to be in the show. All 30 had work in the white
cube, but then Wilson selected about half of the work to be shown in either the
ethnographic space or the salon style gallery, depending on where he felt their work
would fit in. He explained,

Many of the artists at that time were making work that seemed to fit in an
ethnographic museum, because they were working on Third World cultural
idioms. There were other artists who were working more with the history of
Western art in their work. When I placed their work in the ethnographic
space, I would have visiting curators say with surprise, “Oh, you have a
collection of primitive art?” I had to tell one curator, “No, Valerie, that work
you’re staring at was in your gallery a month ago.” The environment really
changed the work. This mode of curation he called trompe l’oeil curation. He purposely tried to
manipulate the understanding of the viewer by relying on traditional museum display
strategies. To further the trick of the eye, he left out the names of many of the artists in
the ethnographic room, instead including titles like “Found, Williamsburg Brooklyn, Late
20th Century.” In this exhibition, Wilson hit upon what he wanted to do as an artist, he
wanted to play with the notion of the museum, but he realized that he couldn’t do it as a
curator anymore. He didn’t want to continue manipulating his fellow artists’ works, and
so he needed to do it as an artist himself.

9 Wilson, Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums 332.
11 Wilson, Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums, 332.
“Mining The Museum” (1992) was Wilson’s big breakthrough, conceptually. He was asked by the Contemporary in Baltimore to organize an exhibition. The Contemporary was one of the more experimental kinds of art institutions, and had limited exhibition space that was always changing, so for Wilson they said that they would organize his exhibition to be at any institution in Baltimore. For Wilson, the choice of institution was obvious. The Maryland Historical society was an old and conservative institution. It had started out as a Men’s Club, originating right after the American Revolution, and reflects “a gentleman’s interests in the antebellum era, focusing first on honoring the memory of Maryland’s revolutionary statesmen, since the museums’ founding members were the descendants of the state’s patriots and military heroes.” The museum was incorporated as a state historical society in 1844, but the collection continued to represent historical bias. In the collection women were still represented by crafts, and traces of African-Americans were hard to find.

The Contemporary worked out a plan with the Maryland Historical Society, which was looking to update their image anyway. Fred Wilson would have a year long residency sponsored by both institutions. Wilson would set up a studio in the office of the president of the Board of Trustees. He would be allowed to look freely upon the collection and use anything and everything he saw fit for his exhibition. He would be given the entire third floor for the exhibition and it would be open from April 4, 1992 to February 28, 1993. Wilson spent the year meticulously exploring the collection, researching objects that interested him, and engaging the community. He worked with  

---

researchers and historians in the area, as well as the entire museum staff, from the security guards to the director.

What resulted was an exhibition that drew 55,000 visitors in its 7 month run. Visitors arrived at the museum and were first greeted by a video featuring Fred Wilson that prepared them for what they would see. They were then ushered into the elevators, to be left on the 3rd floor. The first three weeks of the exhibition featured limited interpretive material. That time was for the experts—guards, guides, receptionists, docents—to identify the most commonly asked questions, so that those could be addressed in didactic literature. The first piece of the exhibition that they would encounter was a golden globe with the word “TRUTH” inscribed (fig. 14). There was a plaque on the base that recounted which advertising agencies won the “Truth in Advertising” trophy each year from 1913-1920. It was accompanied in its case by various acrylic mounts, credited as “maker unknown” in the 1960’s. On either side of the globe were three marble pedestals. The pedestals on the right had nothing on them, but the pedestals on the left featured classical busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte and Andrew Jackson (fig. 15). The empty pedestals on the right were labeled Harriet Tubman, Fredrick Douglass, and Benjamin Banneker (fig. 16). A person familiar with the history of Maryland may recognize that all three of the names who have no sculpture commemorating
their existence were African-American residents of Maryland, while all of the busts that were found in the collection have little to no connection to Maryland. The entrance of the exhibition sets the visitors up for what Wilson will be doing through the rest of the exhibition. He will be playing with the idea of TRUTH in the institution, and how the selection and exhibition of objects can create ideological truths.

The next gallery dealt with issues of Native American heritage. In the collection of the historical society he found statues of Native Americans that were placed in front of cigar stores. They depict the stereotypical Indian chief. Wilson placed them with their backs facing the viewers, looking at images that Wilson brought in, images of contemporary Native Americans in Maryland that came from the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs (fig. 17). Wilson had positioned the
statues faces towards the wall “so you couldn’t look into their faces and accept the stereotype,” instead you were confronted with the images of modern native Americans in somewhat mundane and ordinary circumstances. It was also important that these images were some of the few objects Wilson brought in to the exhibit from outside the Historical Societies collection. He found them himself because when he asked about finding them inside the collection he was told, “There are no Indians in Maryland.” From that quote, Wilson also decided to include a map of the Chesapeake Bay Waterfowling Region that outlined names of the Native American tribes that had once lived all over the region. The rest of the exhibition features mostly unearthed black history, but this room uncovers the untold and misunderstood past of the region’s very first inhabitants.

---

13 Wilson, *Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums* 335.

14 Wilson, *Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums* 336.
The next part of the exhibition featured paintings and portraits. There were several portraits from the 18th century where black children were included with the masters children. One of these was the well-known portrait of Henry Darnell III \textit{(fig. 18)} painted by Justus Englehardt Kühn in 1710. Wilson arranged the lighting so that the face of the boy next to little Darnell became the focal point of the painting. The figure is of a slave child with a collar and leash around his neck, holding a pheasant. The portrait sickeningly implies that the boy serves the same function as a dog, who fetches the bird once the white child has shot it.

Along with the light that brought the focus to the slave child, Wilson also included recorded voices that ask “Am I your brother?, Am I your friend? Am I your pet?”\textsuperscript{15}

Another similar portrait of children originally attributed to Robert Street entitled \textit{Children of Commodore John Daniel Danels} is treated in a similar manner. Slave children are almost hiding in the painting, in the back behind walls and on the floor. Wilson went through and found out the names of the slave children, and then included more questions, “Where did I come from? Where did I go? Where do I sleep? What are my dreams? Who washes my back? Who combs my hair? Who calms me when I’m

afraid?” The questions humanize the literally marginalized slave figures and establish them as real subjects of the portraits. Wilson also brought out other disgraces of the museum. He displayed a portrait of an anonymous man with gaping holes in it painted by Henry Bebie in 1860 (fig. 19). The hole is the nightmare of a conservator, a huge triangle was simply cut out of the face. The portrait should have been deaccessioned or dealt with in some way, as it is beyond repair, but Wilson chose to display it, quite literally exposing the shame of the museum. A collecting museum like the Maryland Historical Society is obligated to care for their collection first and foremost. The vandalized portrait exposes negligence on the part of the museum. Subjacent to the cut portrait was the face of a black man, aligned perfectly with the remaining facial structure of the original subject.

In a collection of paintings, mostly by artist Benjamin Latrobe, Wilson assigned new titles to each piece. These were paintings that included black figures but were titled by curators, as artists rarely named their paintings until the 20th century. The new titles gave names to the black figures in the paintings. A work traditionally titled Market Folks was titled Easter’s Mother by Wilson. One called Preparations for the Enjoyment of a Fine Sunday

---

16 Wilson, *Mining the Museum: An Installation*
Among the Blacks, Norfolk was now called Richard, Ned, and Their Brothers.17 By finding these paintings and giving them names Wilson again changes the way we interpret the paintings. Instead of looking at the subjects as stereotypes, figures whose actions and appearance were indicative of an entire group of people, they are now individuals.

The next room featured three headings, “Metalwork 1793-1880”, “Cabinet Making” and “Modes of Transport.” Under the “Metalwork” heading Wilson exhibited several of the many pieces of repoussé silver from the museum’s collection in a vitrine. Amongst the pieces of silver, was another piece of metal work, slave shackles, that had laid forgotten deep in the collection. “Cabinet Making” featured several baroque chairs that faced a whipping post, donated to the museum from a prison. The prison had documented its use up to 1950, and certainly many of those who were whipped over the years were black. The baroque chairs indicate that the whipping is a spectacle, something to be watched.

“Modes of Transport” featured the sedan chair of the last royal governor. The sedan chair is also depicted in a painting, where it is being carried by black slaves. Wilson also included a model of the ship “The Baltimore Clipper,” a ship that carried slaves. The model was accompanied by the inventory of “livestock” on one of the ship’s voyages. The “livestock” included the names of people. The final “mode of transport” was an infant pram that carried a single Klu Klux Klan hood in place of traditional white baby linens (see fig. 14). Near the pram hung photos of black nannies pushing baby carriages in the town center (see fig. 15). In Modes of Transport, Wilson relies heavily

17 Wilson, Constructing the Spectacle of Culture 336.
on juxtaposition, and the meanings derived from them. The juxtaposition of the baby carriage and the photograph of black nannies implies that babies who grew up to be racists, were raised and nurtured by black nannies. The black nannies, who were once enslaved, and later paid for their work, are also the actual mode of transportation, it is their push that makes the carriage move. The sedan chair had been exhibited in the museum before, however who did the carrying of the chair was not addressed. By including a painting of the exact same sedan chair, those who made the carriage move are recognized.

Dispersed around the exhibition were documents. There were many signs about lost slaves where Wilson would use spotlights to call attention to especially offensive or inhumane passages. There were photos where Wilson would highlight the African-Americans in a crowd of white people. There were diaries and accounts of slaves and white people. In one such manuscript a white woman mentioned her fear and nightmares about slave uprisings. To illustrate the woman’s fear, Wilson created a
doll-house where black figurines wreaked havoc, an illustration of a slave revolt. The
dolls were out of scale with the rest of the house and looked like monstrous dream
creatures. Throughout these segments of the work, from the absent busts to the
dollhouse and whipping post, Wilson unearthed much of the gruesome and racist past
of the museum, and exposed a new historical narrative.

For the end of the exhibition, Wilson wanted to depart from the tales of slavery
and abuse, and move towards uncovering great African-Americans in Maryland’s history
whose stories were not as well known.

The final section was about dreams and aspirations; in the crevices of the
museum, totally unnoticed, I found things made by Africans and African-
Americans, including American made pottery and basketry and personal
adornments that came from Liberia, circa 1867. A book by Benjamin
Bannecker, a mathematician and freeman who surveyed Washington D.C.
for Jefferson, and also was an amateur astronomer.18

After disassembling a previously comfortable view of history, Wilson begins the process
of building a new history in the state of Maryland, similar to the way many women
approached feminist art history. There is something important about unearthing the art
of these forgotten figures, to prove that this has been a part of African-American culture
for far longer than it has been recorded. Here, Wilson starts again with another
narrative, this time a celebratory one, showing that history is more complex than any
one narrative.

The final important aspect of the exhibition was the visitor feedback. Wilson was
intent on getting feedback from all who saw the exhibition as well as the staff of the
museum. After the three week trial period, Wilson decided to install very limited didactic
material. In the elevators he posted signs that said:

18 Wilson, Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums 337.
What is it? Where is it? Why? What is it saying? How is it used? For whom was it created? For whom does it exist? Who is represented? How are they represented? Who is doing the telling? The hearing? What do you see? What do you hear? What can you touch? What do you feel? What do you think? Where are you?\textsuperscript{19}

The didactic material that simply posed questions forced the viewer to think critically. At the end of the exhibition, Wilson asked visitors to fill out comment cards where they were asked to give critical feedback on the exhibition. The responses he got ranged widely. Some found the exhibition racist and argued that it perpetuated hatred in the black community, but others thought of it as groundbreaking and life-changing. Many of the visitors were minorities, who responded positively to the experience.

As a work of institutional critique, “Mining the Museum” was a pioneer. It was not the first work to use museology and curation as an artistic strategy, but it was the first on such a large scale, and it was the first to have such a clearly communicated political message at its core. By staging an exhibition, Wilson turned the strategy of the museum against the museum. He used the tools of the institution, and the societal role of the museum to manipulate the audience in the same way that the museum does each day, but since he deviated from the accepted historical narrative he exposed the manipulative role of the institutional frame. As Lucy Lippard explains, “Wilson began an artist revolution by using the actual collection as a raw material and a social mirror.”\textsuperscript{20}

When writing a critique of the exhibition Ivan Karp wrote that, “the conventions by which we understand objects and otherness are conventions produced at least in part by

\textsuperscript{19} Wilson, \textit{Mining The Museum: an Installation} 16.

\textsuperscript{20} Lippard, 109.
museums.” Wilson attempted to call attention to the conventions, and expose the exclusive and racist nature of the institution.

---

21 Wilson, *Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums* 338.
Conclusion

The Art Workers Coalition and the demands it made upon museums in the early 1970’s led conceptual artists to criticize the museum in the United States throughout the latter half of the twentieth century in America. Artists chose different aspects to criticize, but by calling attention to the museum, they questioned the role of the institution in establishing the history of art and the value of objects. Institutional critique remains relevant in the twenty first century, however, in an essay called “From the Critique of the Institution to an Institution of Critique,” artist Andrea Fraser argued, “institutional critique is dead, a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the institution it stood against.”

Andrea Fraser is known for performance works where she uses the museum as her subject. One such work, called “Museum Highlights,” was staged at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989. Fraser acted as a museum docent and took an unsuspecting group of museum visitors on a trip around the museum, highlighting and analyzing mundane objects like water fountains and the museum cafeteria, and spending more time discussing the museum as an operation than the objects within. She has also written extensively about the museum and institutional critique, which is a term she may

---

have even been the first to use. In 2005 Fraser wrote that the institutional critique has been institutionalized by the museums.

One increasingly finds institutional critique accorded the unquestioning respect often granted artistic phenomena that have achieved a certain historical status. That recognition, however, quickly becomes an occasion to dismiss the critical claims associated with it, as resentment of its perceived exclusivity and high-handedness rushes to the surface.

Fraser asserts institutional critique has become an accepted part of the art historical narrative, and is now invited into the institution, and through that has lost its vitality. She cites the Los Angeles County Museum’s conference entitled, “Institutional Critique and After”, Daniel Buren’s major installation at the Guggenheim in 2005, a replica of his work of institutional critique that was removed from a show at the Guggenheim in 1971. She said that discussions of institutional critique have become “nostalgic” for an “era before the corporate mega-museum and the 24/7 global art market, a time when artists could conceivably take a position against or outside the museum.” She argues that this change isn’t something that just happened, but that in fact artists who worked with strategies of institutional critique within the museum, were always part of the institution. Even Haacke, in “The ‘Art’ That’s Fit to Show” written in 1974 admitted that artists are not outsiders to the institution.

Artists as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter of what ideological coloration, are unwitting partners...They participate jointly in

2 Fraser first used the term in her 1985 essay on Louise Lawler, “In and Out of Place.” Fraser, 101.

3 Fraser, 100.

4 Michael Kimmelman, who reviewed the Buren show for the New York Times argued that Christo and Jeanne-Claude should be lauded for operation mostly outside of the institution, however it seems to me that even they depend upon museum notoriety, magazine write ups, and the sales of their sketches to financially support their projects, therein still operating within the institution. Fraser, 100.
the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work with that frame, set the frame, and are being framed.\(^5\)

What Haacke, and Fraser intend to impart is that artists are part of the institution, and that critique of the art institution is self-critique. Many of the artists who practiced institutional critique were seen as outsiders, but in fact they were working within the institution.

In the 1970's the AWC was founded for art workers who were against the institution, they saw themselves as outsiders, although many of the member artists were being shown in the most significant museums in the United States. The group disbanded in 1971, three years after their first action. Besides publishing the Statement of Demands and the institutional concessions that followed, like free entrance days, the art workers organized a moratorium day on October 15th, 1969. On this day they convinced the Modern, the Whitney, the Jewish Museum and many New York City galleries to close in recognition of the Vietnam War. One of the most successful protests they planned was the May 1970 Art Strike, where hundreds of artists entered museums and galleries and removed their work from the walls. These protests involved museums, but were more concerned with political peace. The most

---

significant work associated with the AWC, *Q: And Babies? A: And Babies.* (1969) (fig. 22), appropriated a photograph taken by Ronald Haeberle for Life Magazine of the Mai Lai Massacre. Superimposed over the image was a quotation taken from a CBS television interview between anchor Mike Wallace and U.S. Soldier Paul Meadlo, a participant in the massacre. In the interview, Wallace asks Meadlo about who was the focus of the attack, first asking if they fired upon women and children, and then asking if they opened fire on babies. The work was supposed to be sponsored by MoMA and reproduced as a poster, but their sponsorship pulled out at the last second.6 This caused further protests, where, standing in front of Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), AWC members handed out the poster.

While at meetings, and in theory the Art Workers Coalition was concerned primarily with the well being of artists versus the intentions of the museum, their actions became increasingly political, which discouraged some prominent artists from joining, especially artists who didn’t see themselves as outsiders.7 Hilton Kramer, a conservative critic for the New York Times wrote in January of 1970 to all people “who believe in the very idea of art museums—to make our commitments known, to say loud and clear that we will not stand for the politicization of art that is now looming as a real possibility.”8 The coalition began to fall apart for this very same reason, some artists, Donald Judd


for instance, were mostly interested in the formation of an artists union. Black, Puerto Rican and women artists were still mainly outside the institution, but had formed their own groups focused on their own needs. The group factionalized and fell apart.

Between the 1970’s and present day 2012, museums have instituted some positive changes. There have been major exhibitions of women, Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican’s throughout America, and statistics of representation in collections and exhibitions have improved. Educational and outreach departments at museums such as the Denver Art Museum work to encourage minority communities to visit the museum. There have been attempts to create spaces of inclusion rather than exclusion. Other things haven’t changed, and are perhaps even more discouraging than they were in the 1970’s. Governance of most major museums is still in the hands of the ultra-wealthy, who have the final say in all exhibitions, programs, personnel and acquisitions of a museum. More exhibitions are sponsored by corporations than ever. The concern over museum governance that the Art Workers Coalition outlined in their first demand in 1968 has even made a reappearance in the art world through a group called Occupy Museums.

Occupy Wall Street began last September to protest the corruption of the banking industry and to voice frustration about the current financial crisis. The group in New York is organized into a general assembly, with smaller committees reporting to the general assembly. One such committee is called ‘Arts and Labor.’ Arts and Labor organizes a branch of occupy protests which is called “Occupy Museums.”

Art and culture are part of the commons. Art is not a luxury item.

9 Lippard, 13.
However, many art and cultural museums are currently run by and for the 1%. Economic interests dictate what art is accessible, successful, and desirable. Institutions often have board members who are part of the 1%. Galleries and museums increasingly operate as profit-driven business. In this system, money and power define what is art, and what is not. This system is cutting into the livelihoods of artists and art workers, and has emaciated the breadth of art available to the public.

Occupy Museums seeks to occupy our art galleries, museums and cultural institutions with the ideas, values, histories and art of the 99%. Like our government, which no longer represents the people, museums have sold out to the highest bidder. We are a direct action group within the Occupy Wall Street movement. We bring attention to the most glaring problems within the current system and imagine alternatives. At Occupy Wall Street, we are taking the steps toward a future where our cultural commons are truly shared not hoarded by the few.

Occupy Museums!

Occupy Museums is seeking democratic museum reforms using much of the same language that the Art Workers Coalition did. They refer to “artists and art workers” which was the trademark of the AWC. There is some variance, the one message of Occupy Museums seems to be about power and wealth, they have focused less the AWC’s demands for equal representation, and concentrate on museum governance and “unethical” financial models, which provide tax breaks for the rich. In another piece on their website, entitled “Why to Occupy Museums,” they argue that museums should be occupied for allowing conflicts of interests on their boards, giving the example of the Museum of Modern Arts board, which shares two board members with Sotheby’s. While MoMA is a non-profit museum, Sotheby’s is a for profit auction house, and there could


11 Under ‘resources’ the Occupy Museums website lists Lucy Lippard’s “Art Workers Coalition: Not a History.” Occupy Museums.

be a great deal of collaboration and speculation between the two. They additionally criticize museums for being a tax haven for the rich 1%, as gifts of artworks are entirely tax deductible. They argue that museums mistreat many of their own laborers, including guards and unpaid interns. Museum workers are seldom part of a union, and unions in the art world have become a sore subject as the Sotheby’s art handlers union continues to strike. Occupy Museums blames museums for perpetuating cults of celebrity artists while ignoring others, creating a limited art market.\[13\]

Like the AWC, Occupy Museums has taken their message straight to the museums. There have been four occupations of MoMA since last October, most have been joined by the striking teamsters from Sotheby’s. Protests have taken place both inside and outside of the museums. A free day, sponsored by Target, provided an opportunity for the Occupiers to create a scene inside the museum. They call for an end to the lock out of the art handlers while using their “Mic Check” method of communication and shout that “art is not a luxury item” but that MoMA’s twenty-five dollar admission fee makes it one.\[14\] The January 13th protest took place while significantly, a Diego Rivera exhibition was on display. The Art Workers Coalition famously protested in front of a Rivera mural. This modern incarnation of the spirit of the Art Workers Coalition seems as though it may have more focused goals, though they have yet to achieve any positive institutional reactions. Additionally, on the 24th of February, 2012, the Arts & Labor group called for the end of the Whitney Biennial.

\[13\] One can’t help but assume they are talking about Damien Hirst. In another article, the Occupy Museums website calls Hirst the “house artist to the 1%.” "Resources for Occupying Museums." RESOURCES. Occupy Museums. Web. 26 Mar. 2012.

\[14\] Video footage of this action. #J13 #OccupyMuseums #OccupyWallStreet - MoMA Banner Drop @ Diego Rivera. Occupy Museums. Web.
We object to the biennial in its current form because it upholds a system that benefits collectors, trustees, and corporations at the expense of art workers. The biennial perpetuates the myth that art functions like other professional careers and that selection and participation in the exhibition, for which artists themselves are not compensated, will secure a sustainable vocation. This fallacy encourages many young artists to incur debt from which they will never be free and supports a culture industry and financial and cultural institutions that profit from their labors and financial servitude.\(^{15}\)

They call for an end of the biennial in 2014, arguing that it no longer serves the purpose of exposing new American artists. Along with this action came an anonymous internet protest/hack, where a false web address, whiteney2012.org, was posted to mimic the real Whitney Biennial website, but featured a press release stating that the Whitney had dropped two of its major corporate sponsors, Deutsche Bank and Sotheby's. This was not the case, however it brought attention to the fact that the Whitney has retained these sponsors who have been under constant criticism by the media in the recent past for the economic crisis and the lockout of union art handlers.

These recent actions by the occupy movement make it clear that although works of institutional critique do not operate outside the institution, they are still culturally relevant, and important to study. The questions that Haacke raised about museum governance, the institutional framework that Wilson exposed, and the attention that Ukeles brought to maintenance inside museums are all still valid critiques of the art institution, but the very same critiques could be made today at most institutions. Museums, however, are not static inventions, and have the ability to evolve without revolution. By inviting practitioners of institutional critique to work within their galleries

and collections, and making donor interests public knowledge, museums could earn the trust of the artworld which has so long just been accepted without question.


Fraser, Andrea. "From the Critique of the Institution to an Institution of Critique." *ArtForum* September (2005): 100-06. Web. 102


