

CREATIVETIME

WHAT: *Who Cares* dialogue: "Anywhere In the World"

WHEN: Monday, November 14, 2005
6:30pm arrival, 7:00pm dinner

WHERE: Home of Dillon Cohen
5 East 16th Street, Apt. #2
New York, NY 10003
(Between Union Square West & 5th Avenue)

Nearest Subway:
N, R, Q, W, 4, 5, 6, L: 14th Street Union Square
F, V: 14th Street & 6th Avenue

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PARTICIPANTS:

Tania Bruguera
Dean Daderko
Chitra Ganesh
Hans Haacke (pending)
Jens Haaning (pending)
Ronak Kapadia
Lucy Lippard
Patricia Phillips
Martha Rosler
Joe Scanlan
David Levi Strauss
The Yes Men: Mike & Andy

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Dear Andy,

I am writing to help set an agenda for our roundtable discussion of Nov 14th, as part of *Who Cares*, Creative Time's new initiative designed to address the possibility for timely critical public practices. Enclosed are various documents to help orient you, including background on Creative Time and the grant that made *Who Cares* possible; details of the initiative components and timeline; and specifics for the upcoming dialogue in which you have agreed to participate.

Before I describe the parameters for that conversation, I would like to go over the history and a few of the overall parameters for *Who Cares*. Last summer, Anne Pasternak, the Director of Creative Time, approached me to help her organize a discursive foundation for what she hoped would be a new grant basis to fund urgent, socially responsive public practice. Creative Time had received a grant to make these hopes a reality: the grant would cover a series of dialogues to be followed up by a series of three public projects in New York. With the help of Peter Eley and Heather Duggan, we considered the question of how to generate critical contemplation of new artistic public forms and methods. Collectively, we decided to organize the dialogues as thematically related dinners that would examine how art functions as public practice today: from the globalization of creative economies to the dominance of restrictive notions of beauty to the war culture we live in today.

With each meeting we hope to render a set of different points of view visible and coherent. In helping to organize these meetings I have tried to consistently respond to two general understandings:

- 1.) We live in a particularly alarming social moment in which the emancipatory effect of the cultural is increasingly suppressed.
- 2.) Recent art practice suggests a resurgence of critical artistic models and methods: a growing desire among visual artists to see their work as part of a counter-culture.

Fundamentally, my reasons for participating in this project are countercultural. I have always wanted to see how the ideas of artists can affect everyday life in this city and how they can ignite dialogue and participation. If counter cultural practices suggest different futures, they also remind us of a past that may already be forgotten – of the sense that we have been through all this before and no one remembered to write it all down. The lack of institutional interest in agitational art often means that our historical record of tactics, strategy, and experience is often incomplete. It often seems we have to re-invent the wheel every time we walk out of the gallery to make a space of our own. These conversations serve as a way to make a document of viewpoints and processes for future practitioners. Accordingly, each evening will be partially transcribed for publication, but only with the active editorial presence of each participant.

It seems obvious to point out that the act of conversation has always been a key component to the beginning of production. Yet I believe that what we do individually as artists, writers, and teachers is often linked in ways that remain undescribed or isolated in relation to many conversations about the role of art in today's social fabric. *Who Cares*

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represents a possible collective moment in which our conditions and methods can be compared and contrasted. I have supported the idea that these meetings remain small and private – a context in which we can speak openly about the doubts we carry, the experiences we have had of failure and inactivity. By comparing tactics and strategies without the pressure of public presentation, our conversation may affect the direction of the artistic practices we invest into our lives.

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The meeting you have been asked to attend is titled “Anywhere in the World” and is the first conversation of *Who Cares*. Primarily I am there to help us get the conversation started and to keep it moving. Where we land with our concerns and hopes for culture is up to all of us and I am open to all subjects.

Among other things, participants in the “Anywhere in the World” conversation will be asked to critically address shifts in art institutions’ understanding of place and productions that radically shift the working context for artists interested in site and social specificity. Expected to be everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, our work is often denied a productive relationship with audiences. Coherent communities of concern form themselves in political cultural practice everyday, in the street and in schools, but are diminished as models for public practice. The globalization of artistic display in festivalism and art fairs only adds to the problem, citing artworks as internationalist programs without local importance or extended discursive effect. If we would say that this is the stage of a globalized market coming home to roost in the art industry, we might not be far off. Artists traverse the globe as legal immaterial laborers, producing knowledge and legitimating urban renewal – while armies of unemployed migrants follow to maintain the profits of a international ownership class. In a way the problems of narrowing public function for art are pre-written in the market plans and strategies of a global economy.

I am hopeful that this conversation, in comparing the experiences of cultural producers from a wide range of contexts and generations, will generate a set of ideas or proposals – concrete descriptions of the hopes we have for culture and its institutional setting. If not, we will all have fun talking through the possibilities.

Please feel free to call me anytime prior to our dinner conversation on November 14, 2005.

Best,

Doug Ashford
October, 2005

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STATEMENT OF NEED

EXCERPTED FROM SUCCESSFUL GRANT PROPOSAL TO ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND RESULTING IN FUNDING FOR *WHO CARES* INITIATIVE

Creative dialogue and action on timely, public issues is impoverished in New York City. The impact of the creative community's voice in public dialogue is similarly in decline. While "political" or "activist art" has taken many forms—from the "happenings" in the 50s to performance art in the 70s to guerrilla art in the 90s—, art projects that respond to public issues barely exist in New York City today. Though Creative Time has historically presented projects that address timely, public issues, the number of proposals we receive for these kinds of projects has dropped severely over the past decade. Nevertheless, artists need to be addressing timely public issues. Artists offer the public unusual vantage points from which to understand contemporary culture and society. Artists also help move dialogue on public issues beyond sound-bite rhetoric and into richer territory.

To understand artists' disengagement with timely issues more deeply, Creative Time organized a series of forums in 2003 to hear directly from them. First of all, artists articulated their difficulties in finding strong financial support systems that foster work of this kind. They expressed frustration at the limitations imposed by project-specific grant programs. Long grant application processes and reward cycles make it nearly impossible for artists to present time-sensitive projects, which usually go unrealized due to lack of support. In particular, due to the privatization of arts funding, the decline of government grants in the wake of the Culture Wars, and the increasing role of corporate sponsorships, timely art projects are simply harder to fundraise for. Artists also find little traditional support from foundations for risk-taking and potentially controversial artworks and projects whose relevance is time-sensitive.

In addition, artists expressed a lack of community dialogue that fosters innovative strategies for addressing public issues. For example, many young artists are encouraged by the field to focus on building commercially successful careers with work that typically doesn't engage public dialogue. At the same time, experienced artists who still pursue public issues haven't evolved their creative practices in decades. Though they have long histories of critically addressing timely issues, they often aren't engaged with today's alternative modes of communication, such as the Internet, for reaching mass audiences. Unfortunately, most "political art" appears outmoded to both young artists and public audiences. Therefore, while younger artists are discouraged from engaging public issues, experienced artists who still take on issues lack the tools they need to contend with contemporary media.

Who Cares will address these needs in three ways. First, by making grants, resources, and professional support available for projects that address public issues, Creative Time will fill a critical gap in funding for time-sensitive artist projects. In doing so, we hope to broaden the roster of artists who are able to bring their creative vision to bear on public issues. Secondly, *Who Cares* will provide the infrastructure needed to create relationships between Creative Time and artists who are interested pursuing projects of this nature. *Who Cares* will therefore enable Creative Time to fulfill its desire to further its historical commitment to promoting discourse on timely issues through our programming. Lastly, by supporting both young and experienced artists who are actively pursuing new

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strategies for engaging public issues, we will foster cross-generational dialogue as well as innovation in the field.

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WHO CARES INITIATIVE COMPONENTS

DIALOGUES: 3 cross-generational, multi-disciplinary and thematic talks, organized as intimate dinner parties. The backbone of the initiative, these talks are seen as working meetings, with a hope that new ideas will emerge for strategies or methodologies for making impactful, responsive, and timely work.

PROJECTS: *Who Cares* has been conceived as a working initiative; as such, we hope that our private dialogues may spark ideas for public projects among the participating artists; create a network through which new artists with timely public work are introduced to Creative Time; and/or collaborations are formed.

Creative Time will support the presentation of three low-resource, high-impact projects in 2006. If projects do not grow out of the dialogues organically, we will put out a call to the field and review proposals for projects of timely public work.

PUBLICATION

(Web and Print): *Who Cares* brings together three groups of exceptional artists, teachers, thinkers, and writers to come to the table and share their thoughts and experiences around important issues facing the art world, and a larger cultural community. While it is important that the dialogue be held privately, with no audience, we believe that the work done in these meetings has the potential to be a resource. It is important to the conception of this initiative that both the urgency of the “in-process” content and the thoughtfulness of a “digested” version be shared. As such, we plan to publish the content in two ways, and through two methods.

TRANSCRIPTION

To capture the real perspective and voice of everyone involved, we will tape record the dialogues, as well as having a dedicated note-taker. Once the tapes have been transcribed and cleaned up, selections will be chosen and circulated to participants for their input.

ESSAYS

To put the dialogues in a wider perspective, and with the benefit of hindsight, Doug Ashford will write an essay on each of the topics.

DISTRIBUTION

Together, these works will form the core content of two publications, a dedicated *Who Cares* website on www.creativetime.org, and a small, bound publication for distribution. The two mediums each offer something unique: while the publication, like the essays, will serve as a thoughtful archive of the talks, the website will be the living document, with the opportunity for links, audio files, blogs, and chat rooms.

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CREATIVE TIME'S *WHO CARES* INITIATIVE TARGET TIMELINE

SUMMER/FALL	Artist invitations for participation
NOVEMBER 14	DIALOGUE 1: Anywhere in the World
DECEMBER 5	DIALOGUE 2: Beauty and its discontents
DECEMBER 14	DIALOGUE 3: War Culture
JANUARY 2006	Transcription complete; selections in circulation for input
FEBRUARY 2006	Website live; content added on-going
MARCH 2006	If needed, call for proposals
APRIL 2006	Panels convene on proposals; projects selected
JULY 2006	3 Projects launch
SEPTEMBER 2006	Printed publication complete

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ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Our Mission:

Creative Time presents the most innovative art in the public realm. From our base in New York, we work with artists who ignite the imagination and engage the ideas that shape our society. We initiate dynamic conversations among artists, sites, and audiences that keep our public spaces alive with free and powerful expression.

Creative Time was founded in 1973. Our history of commissioning, producing, and presenting temporary, innovative public artworks emerged in the midst of a moment of both crisis and possibility. Artists were experimenting with new forms and media and taking their practices outside of institutional walls and into the spaces of everyday life. At the same time, our City was physically in crisis, having deteriorated as the fiscal troubles spun out of control. New Yorkers responded with the City Beautification movement. At the same moment, the federal government established the National Endowment for the Arts to herald the role of artists and introduce uninitiated audiences to contemporary art. Creative Time came out of this powerful moment and derives its values from this historic impetus to foster artistic experimentation, enrich public space and the everyday experience, and forefront artists as key contributors to democratic society.

Since then, Creative Time has pioneered diverse models for presenting art in the public realm. In the 1970s, we explored the new practice of taking art into public space; in the early 1980s, *Art in the Anchorage* and *Art on the Beach* brought people to neglected and unusual spaces in the City, encouraging a rethinking of the urban landscape. From the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s, social action projects drew attention to current issues like AIDS and censorship. Large-scale projects in landmark locations like Grand Central Station mark our late 1990s programming and a thriving New York City.

Keeping our finger on the pulse of New York City and the artistic field is at the core of Creative Time's identity. Today, our projects continue to reflect and respond to social currents. We strive to empower artists to impact the ever-changing physical, cultural, and social landscape of New York City—and to encourage the public to see their world anew.

Throughout our history, we have seen that often the most powerful experiences occur when artists enter into a site's narrative at a crucial turning point, in a moment of impending change. Creative Time's *Art on the Beach* and *The 42nd Street Art Project*, both embraced by the public long after their time, illustrate the profound potential of public art projects that ask artists to respond to a site at a moment of transition. We have always offered artists challenging and extraordinary opportunities to create work in the public realm. Public projects have an amazingly wide influence on the artist's career, the art world, the City, and the public—especially for emerging artists.

Creative Time will continue to work with artists to develop a diversity of projects that could not be realized otherwise or elsewhere and that insert the artistic voice into everyday life. But, today, our work carries a deeper significance for all of us. New York City holds a unique position in the post-9/11 world. The City embodies so many of the challenges, divisions, and emotions of our changed world. Issues of freedom and liberty have never been more debated, nor have the debates had such an international impact.

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By inserting artistic voices loud and clear into public space, Creative Time fosters democratic dialogue and free expression, sustaining New York City as a place where creative practices spark insight and reflection on the world. Just as importantly, by working with artists in the public realm, we look to make creative and free expression a part of daily life. With a belief in art's ability to create powerful, life-altering moments, we stand behind our historic commitment to the experimental over the conventional; artful provocation over the mundane; intellectual probing over willful ignorance; and creative freedom over the safe and familiar. Your support makes it possible for Creative Time to translate these values into opportunities for artists and meaningful, transformative experiences for the public.