



Question

Can a cultural organization impact the life of the community in a meaningful way? And if so, how?

I thought of my thesis project as a study of individual, collective, and ecological consciousness for the ironic generation (of which I am a member in good standing).



It was a performance series, photographs, video, and music—all presented with minimal resources. I focused on the Kings River, part of the California Aqueduct System which diverts water during the winter from the San Joaquin Valley to San Francisco and Los Angeles. Someone pushes a button and turns the river off while the San Joaquin Valley farmers complain about drought. I made a raft out of a closet door and clued recycled water bottles to the bottom, then floated down the river when the water was turned on in the spring. This celebration was absolutely ridiculous, but people looked at the river in a different way, which was the goal.

FREeCOLOGY continues, using humor, satire and irony. One problem I studied recently was the real estate issue surrounding Mount Lee and the Hollywood sign. The Hollywood Sign Conservancy

had to raise \$12.5 million to save the land from being sold to a real estate developer for a hotel. I went around my neighborhood placing 33 little mole hills with miniature Hollywood signs mounted on popsicle sticks.

In a graphic campaign for the rights of hula hoopers in Las Vegas, I went around L.A. with a hula hoop and sign, "Hula Hooping with Las Vegas." Protecting the right to hula hooping seems silly, but when I spoke with passersby, they developed fresh perspectives.

In another project, *Pedestal & the All-Girl Band*, classmates and fellow music enthusiasts Paige Tighe, Hataya Tuptim and I hosted karaoke parties where fifty random people would show up to sing. I built a backpack with a shelf for a boom box, and Paige and Hataya made scrolls with lyrics. At the 18th Street Art Night, attended

by 1,000 people, 20 complete strangers gathered around us to sing Bill Withers' "Lean on Me."

I am a freelance teacher for several non-profits in and around L.A. With Trash for Teaching, I facilitate elementary school student and teacher workshops based on the Three R's, and take donated recycled materials from factories and manufacturers with our Treasure Truck, a retrofitted van. The students and I make art from these materials, saving about 250 tons of waste. I've also worked for the Wildwoods Foundation after-school program that brings environment and ecology to an urban environment. At the Armory Center for the Arts' Children Exploring the Environment Program, we take students hiking in nature around L.A., and create art based on the things we see.

I think of ecology not as environmentalism, but as understanding the connections between things. The limitations really made me get creative.





Fort Hauser questions architecture. What are the possible uses of public land? Who decides? Who has the right to be where, when, how and why?

"Fort Hauser," on a West L.A. traffic island, appears to be surrounded by three rivers or ocean currents. It inserts a material situation into a public space. Viewers are curious about a giant glowing triangle on a traffic island with people painting inside it. They can play, talk, say hi, ask questions, talk about their neighborhood, and make friends. The nature of L.A. is transient. I'm living inside of that idea of mobility and trying to imagine what ephemeral actions and what activities can take place when people are on the move. I'm looking at different rules of living.

The Bermuda Triangle was a large translucent piece. It was pleasant to be inside it, on a dinky cement traffic island in the middle of a huge intersection. It might be a portal to another universe. People were not comfortable with it but they were fascinated by it, in the same way that they are attracted to UFOs and ghosts. They added their work to the space, memorializing or legitimizing it.

Now I am working with Monica Haller on a show for the San Jose Biennial. It's a photography self-history workshop with Iraq vets. Also, I am talking to Red Moon Theater in Chicago about creating ephemeral public spectacles.



The space is a practiced place. It forms a community out of thin air.



Michelle Glass ('10)
The Mobile CROPS Project
(Community Resource for
Organic Produce and
Sustainability)

For my thesis, I developed a partnership with Urban Compass, an after-school enrichment program in Watts, to create a portable garden using recycled green building materials.

The project linked photography, arts education, and arts administration. Access—whether in rural or urban areas, to the arts, to organic produce, or to education—was key. Because much of our farmland is being taken over by housing development, collaborations or artist collectives are working towards sustainability and alternative methods of growing food, and developing innovative ways to bring green spaces to urban areas.

The Urban Compass is concrete, with no space for a garden. One day, a 5th grade student asked what the red thing on the table was, because he had never eaten a tomato. The students and I cre-

ated woolly pockets from a felt-like material made from recycled soda bottles that both absorbs and releases water. Plants thrived in this garden, and the Mobile Structure became a safe haven or a home or play space. Students could lie on the grass and look up at the sky. Ladybugs, butterflies, and birds started to come. It became a habitat. At LACMA's Artwalk, students conducted workshops in the structure, teaching visitors to create sorbet from herbs in their gardens. It was such a joy to see them feel empowered.

I am now Program Director for Side Street Projects' Alternative Roots Program, where we use the Armadillo, a FEMA trailer used for housing during Hurricane Katrina that has been converted into a mobile vertical garden. The Pasadena Armory is our test site, where community members learn about alternative methods of growing food.



Ofunne Obiamiwe ('09)
Oil Change

My thesis project illuminates state-sanctioned killings and the deleterious effect of decades of oil production in the Niger Delta.



Art can be a powerful tool for awareness, activism and catharsis.

The recent BP oil spill has brought oil politics to the forefront of American consciousness. I am currently working with students at Loyola Marymount on a show called "A Purpose of Being." Using video and interviews, documentaries and discussions, we will bring awareness not only to the BP situation but also to oil-producing communities around the world. My goal is to visit Nigeria and work closely with community leaders and politicians to focus attention on the situation.

One of the things I experienced in the MFA program was going into communities respectfully and finding groups that are doing similar things, and bringing them

together to orchestrate a project. In New Orleans and Tijuana, we met people engaged in similar practices and community-based work. I began to understand public practice as dynamic: you can't just write and plan; you have to act. I recently did a project using Facebook called "The Status of Women," part of a show called "Harmony Reverberates Optimism," at Oxnard Community College Gallery. I've also been deejaying, which to me is part of relational aesthetics, in Bourriaud's terms. I also just completed my first short film based on my thesis work.



I explored video and public movement to communicate with audiences both in traditional art venues, in the street and on buses. By dancing on buses across Santa Monica, I questioned social codes.

Can art movements break open oppressive social codes?



I did not expect that I would be riding buses and dancing when I applied to this program. I expected to learn how to work with people, and to make artwork in a community. I did not expect the freedom to delve into the theory and make it my own, which has been very satisfying. I didn't expect to join the experimental dance community, which has been a blessing. There is no way

that I could have known what a perfectly magical transformative fit it would be for me personally.

I am organizing a Community Dance Series at LACE with classmate Jules Rochielle Sievert. I am also the first curatorial fellow at Otis' Ben Maltz Gallery, where I am learning about organizing shows in the hope of communicating new ideas.





I built my first large-scale earthwork, and that did it for me. Earthworks sent me down the road that led to my project.



Tory Tepp ('09)
subVERT

Through Public Practice, I experimented with media and materials I had never used before, and foremost among these was dirt. It was about creating a living and growing space that people used and interacted with.

I lived for four years on the L.A. River in Frogtown before entering Otis. The neighborhood is somewhat neglected, cut off by freeways, and overlooked as gentrification has set in. Bordered by the natural riverbeds of Glendale Narrows, this ecosystem combines an astounding beauty with some horrifying truths.

Gradually many truckloads of dirt made their way back to Elysian Valley to become gardens. Forty yards from a concrete bunker, people harvested and shared produce from these flourishing gardens. A new interactive biosystem emerged that included praying mantises and moths. To make the experience portable or

mobile, I pulled derelict shopping carts out of the River, repurposed them, and planted mobile gardens. I staged a May Day Festival, and released them back into the neighborhood where local gardeners sponsor and tend them.

After graduation I got a residency in New Orleans at A Studio in the Woods, in a restored bottomland hardwood forest on the river. The project goal was to tie the ecological landscape to its cultural landscape. My proposal, "Spirit Ferry," involved a phenomenon called the light gap. During Hurricane Katrina, the tree buffer saved properties from being destroyed. In other

areas, called light gaps, the storm took down trees and allowed new growth. Something older was toppled or something was removed, and new growth sprung forth. The damage that was done became generative. I took this premise for my project. "Spirit Ferry" contained saplings from acorns, pine trees and plants, gardening tools, seeds, and everything needed to fabricate an earthwork or build a garden.





Jules Rochielle Sievert ('09)
Portable City

My thesis project has evolved into Public Interest, a yearlong initiative and residency at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE).

Its mission is to convene different publics to reinvigorate LACE's social space.

I organized "Networks and Hubs," 70 conversations about the variety of different forms of social practice in the local community and Tijuana.

For the project "Cafe Du Monde: Serving Up a Dialogue in Downtown Los Angeles" we had live music, pedestrians, and residents engaged in conversations that linked New Orleans to L.A. in terms of housing, dislocation, racism, and development. Participants chalked responses onto the architecture in a sanctioned activity of free expression in public space. The "waitstaff" hosted over 1,000 people that evening.

Classmate Paige Tighe and I co-programmed *Pie Banquet, a Piece of the Pie Collective*, a platform for community dance and movement. At Cal State Dominguez Hills Student Union, we served free homemade pie to students and others, activating a discussion about who deserves how much of

"the pie" in the U.S. "Bill of reckoning" postcards were then sent to congress members, urging them to support pay equity.

Recently, I participated in a conference at London's Hayward Gallery through a connection that Suzanne Lacy made with Sally Tallant, from the Serpentine Gallery, to the Metabolic Studio, where I work with artist Lauren Bon. Later, I was sent to Australia to the Hothouse Conference, and an international dialogue on social arts practices. Following a lecture we gave at the University of New South Wales, faculty members visited L.A. to investigate Metabolic Studio as a case study for community engaged practices for Sustainable Sydney 2030.



Roberto Del Hoyo ('10) and David Russell (MFA candidate, '11)
Mobile Mural Lab

This art practice develops tools to address the L.A. mural ordinance.

Roberto Del Hoyo

Using mobilized recycled billboard vinyl tarps influenced by advertising, graffiti, and mural-making methodologies, I create alternative wall spaces. These function as a cultural resource to increase social awareness and community empowerment. In one portable mural, I painted an ornate gold frame on a tarp, and installed it to promote interaction. I had seen graffiti in my community but there was little wall space for the young people to express themselves. For the "L.A. to Fresno" Tarp, three art students and I painted half of a tarp with the theme, What is my L.A.? using icons such as a Dodger hat, and the Virgin Mary. We shipped it off to Fresno where young artists created a response.

David Russell

Working with Roberto has given me a jumpstart into the L.A. community, and helped me construct the issues I want to address to develop an approach. At Pico Youth and Family Center in Santa Monica, where I live, I do art workshops with large format painting and murals. Last spring, the young people had an urgent political need to ask the Santa Monica City Council to rethink the new Metro Maintenance Yard. Using the large-format visual space on the truck empowered them and got media attention.

Felicia Montes, one of our colleagues in the Program, approached us about mobilizing the Mobile Mural Lab for a protest at Leimert Park. The truck was loaded with spray paint and acrylic paint, and, like ants on sugar, the youth came over. They painted messages such as "Justice For Oscar Grant" and "Stop Police Brutality."

This summer, I went to Korea for the Anyang Public Art Project, which included projects by Suzanne Lacy, Rick Lowe, and Raumlaborberlin. I participated in an open university/free school project in which we analyzed and critiqued Anyang's public spaces in terms of commercialization, gentrification, and rapid development.

"I wasn't going to Otis to learn how to paint. I did maintain a studio practice, taking sculpture and painting classes, but I was there to learn theoretical approaches to how to engage my public. The Public Practice Program provided me with a more pedagogical approach in how to engage the community in the mural making process."