

THE FOLLOWING ARE 3 CONSECUTIVE SPEECHES GIVEN BY FOUNDING MEMBERS OF W.A.G.E. ON SEPTEMBER 27TH, 2008 AT CREATIVE TIMES, DEMOCRACY NOW:

It seems apt that W.A.G.E. is here tonight, to bring to light ongoing unjust fiscal practices in the art world, as we witness the unfolding saga of wall street and what results from unregulated economic greed.

We see it does no one any good, not even those who initially benefited from exploitative endeavors.

For the artists here tonight I imagine few or none of you make a living solely by selling your art? Even most 'successful' artist teach, or supplement their income in some fashion.

And How many of you have exhibited work with institutions or museums in the US, in which all costs incurred were covered by the institution?

I'm talking about, travel expenses (if any) AND all exhibition/ installation costs covered, AND received an artists fee, (for the hours you spent consulting with the institution, preparing works for exhibition,) AND a lecture fee (if you lectured) AND a reproduction fee for the use of your image in advertising materials.

Does this list sound absurd?

What is absurd is to exclude artist from the payment of their labor, the reproduction and exhibition of their work, with in an economic climate where it is socially acknowledged that payment is granted for services rendered.

It's NOT absurd, because there are many examples of artists fees being covered in their ENTIRETY, in many other countries.

Possibly your thinking, "well they must be socialist, and they have more government funding than our private institutions do."

Those things may be true, and it may explain why they have adopted a more humane relationship towards artists, than what we experience here. But it's not an excuse for NOT CHANGING things here.

If capitalism is your bag, and priority, I can't think of anything more capitalist than getting paid for your labor, for your copyrights... for institutions to aid our ongoing contribution to the economy, with all the money we spend to maintain an art practice.

let there be TRANSPARENCY! do not be deceived by the ever present "we don't have money" excuse. The United States is home to many of the wealthiest institutions in the world.

US institutions simply, flat out, REFUSE to put artists fees in their annual budgets.

And WHY do they refuse?

Because they can.

as artists, we are, apparently a masochistic bunch! We let them get away with it. Apparently, we MUST suffer for our art. I think there are plenty of other things in the world to suffer over besides a legitimate desire to be paid for your labors. As artists, we have made an unspoken collective agreement to work in exchange for the ever elusive sugar daddy known as 'EXPOSURE'.

TODAY WE MAKE A PUBLIC and COLLECTIVE STATEMENT, that we can not and will not live off EXPOSURE in exchange for our labors.

For those of us involved at what ever level with the art world, we have watched massive economic expansion over the past decade. The art market is no longer an exclusive and intimate number of uber wealthy collectors. It's international. It's an expansive web of artist, curators, writers, critics, collectors, art schools, galleries, biennials, art fairs, non-profit art spaces, museums and institutions.

But I'd like to speak locally for a moment. given that NYC is one of, if not THE cultural capital of the world. I feel that making a change here will inevitably effect the larger picture. In NY the production of art is essential to the economy as a whole, but also to the heart and soul of this city.

What is NYC without the cultural history that artists have brought to it? Why is it that all of us live here, where drawn to move here? and why do we love it so, EVEN as it become an increasingly frustrating place to try and survive. It is because of the massive proliferation of culture that occurs here. NYC without artists begins to look allot like a grim overpriced shopping mall.

And we will argue here tonight that the well being and ability of artist to survive in this great city is in CRISIS.

I'd like to quote an article I read recently, that was an interview with Susan and Micheal HORT, whom many of you 'in the know', know they are avid and respected collectors of contemporary art here in NY claim:

Their comments on why they currently collect very little art from NY and prefer to look elsewhere, like LA and Europe. And they go on to discuss the complexity of the COST of being an artist. And that even for those whom selling in a gallery is viable option, it doesn't always mean it's the best choice one can make.

“we don't find the art, the artists in New York; they are in Europe right now... it's very difficult for a young artist to make a living in New York and do a good job. If you graduate from art school, have a studio and an apartment in NY, you have to have a full time job, in which case you can't do your ART. Or you HAVE to sell in a gallery – in which case you're selling your soul. And your art will never change, because you know if you make your black paintings that you dream of making, and they don't sell, you're dead. Art is... if you make money, okay. But it really should be about creating something that's important to civilization, that moves people.“
end quote..

it's one thing when artists complain, but you know there is a SERIOUS problem when even the collectors are bitching about economically debilitating circumstances.

And Why do you think people are flocking to get MFA's? Because it's one of the few options to get a loan to give you TIME to develop your work. Artists NOW, don't need an MFA any more than artist did 20 years ago. what artists NEED now, that is harder and harder to come by, is time, VALUABLE TIME.

Unfortunately, it seems that many of those with power, those who operate the larger cultural institutions seem to be ignoring to this fact.. the fact is that artists do not GET PAID to go to there studios. That selling art is a possibility but NOT a promise. And that we should not feel required to sell, for mere survival. especially when we are laboring in so many other ways. Our labor is more than just the sum of our 'collectable product'. We ALSO should not feel our career is dependant on the act of giving and donating, our TIME our MONEY our WORK. AND in particular for institutions who ask the PUBLIC to PAY to see our work!

WE ARE NOT FIGHTING TO BE RICH, WE ARE FIGHTING TO SURVIVE.

So, there is this ART Market, that is seemingly thriving, and expanding quicker than you can say “art fair”. But where is the money? In the secondary market? In enormously endowed institutions?

It's in many places that thrive off our 'product' but give NOTHING in return.

What we ask for is really quite simple, it's very reasonable. we may not be able to quit our jobs and joyfully produce art 24/7 as we all dream of, but we'll feel less ABUSED by the system that profits from and celebrates our production and existence.

Lets look at an inspiring example, that exist only hours from here, via our Canadian neighbors. In 1968, CARFAC was created, and has successfully represented the rights of artists and established a universal fee system, based on the size of an institution and the various aspects of exhibition labor that an artist contributes.

To quote CARFAC's statement of purpose:

"We believe that artists, like professionals in other fields, should be paid for their work and share equitably in profits from their work."

the first CARFAC fee schedule was met with great disbelief and hostility. some galleries supported artists' rights and began paying fees but there were many who refused. As we all know, change never comes easy. OBAMA!

As a result CARFAC announced that its members would boycott all non-fee paying institution. And guess what happened... more began paying fees.

People we exist in and play willing into an exploitive system, that other people recognized and began changing 40 years ago. we can all just sit and bitch about it, but I say, I can't SURVIVE any longer, YOU can't survive any longer, by being complaisant. We are here today to begin to gather momentum, to gather you, to create collective agency, to provide us with what we NEED and DESERVE.

W.A.G.E. ON!

Thank you.

by A.K. BURNS, 2008

WHAT KIND OF WILLPOWER must you have to remain an artist in this city?

What kind of crazy determination and resolve?

The willpower to live month to month, if not hand to mouth, every week, every day for years on end and feel privileged because you are working as an artist in this city.. Feel privileged because you are surviving...

The willpower to survive without a real job, or any sense of stability or regular income.

The willpower to go on without health insurance for more years than you can count.

The strength and resolve to be an artist and expect NO compensation for our labor.

I get up everyday and go to work in my studio. I work over 40 hours a week, more if I can. I work my ass off. But my studio is not an office. My art practice is not a business. We should not be pressured to feel that as artists we are some sort of venture capitalists. We don't get a studio because we expect to make a profit. We are not setting up a store. The business model must STOP being compared to an artist's studio practice. It's ridiculous. I am not a venture capitalist. I am an artist.

Since moving here, I've lived off of less than average starting salaries for college grads. I've barely made enough money to get by. That's no surprise to most artists. That includes times of exhibiting my work in major institutions. And I don't come from money. I don't have family money. But what have I been paid? Cultural capital, exposure, ISN'T THAT GLAMOROUS.

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE GLAMOR OF BEING AN ARTIST IN THIS CITY.

the glamour of not being able to eat well. the glamour of not being able to go to the museums. the glamour of not even being able to make the work you want to make because you can't afford it. the glamour of

not being able to go to the dr. the glamour of not being able to get your teeth cleaned. the glamour of moving every year or two further and further away from the city. the glamour of not having a home. the glamour of being made to feel idiotic when you ask to be paid. the glamour of not being able to get a well paid part time job. the glamour of needing surgery you can't afford. the glamour of having a landlord who won't turn on the heat in the winter. the glamour of sleeping in your coat and hat. the glamour of spending your last dollar every month.

I FEEL LIKE A PROSTITUE WORKING IN THIS CITY, I REALLY DO. and a clown.

Yes, I have a price. I need to get by. I'd like to buy some new socks and underwear.

Does anyone out here know what I am talking about?

The economy of the art world is upside down.

The collectors and galleries fetishize our "outsideness" and "otherness"

They like us poor. They enjoy it. It makes them feel cool to be around all that edgy crazy gay out there art. They want a picture of it to hang on their wall. They want to keep us on the edge because they stupidly think it makes the work more interesting. It's only more interesting to them because they have no idea what the fuck it means to be an artist. To get up and do your own work, your own way, and have the drive to express yourself.

THEY WANT US TO DIE POOR. That would make their collection more interesting, wouldn't it? Maybe it would shoot up the value! They romanticize our poverty and outsider status from some misinformed opinion that it makes an artist better to suffer.

We're not asking the world, we are asking simply to be paid for our labor. Museums want performance art for free? What do they think? That we dream it up while we are watching TV during the commercials? That's work. That's days, weeks or months of work and research and if you are

LUCKY, if you are LUCKY you MIGHT GET 100,200,300. Then you are pushy, the curator is annoyed with you because they have had to bristle some fur up in their modernist tower about something that costs less than their budget for toilet paper. And hey- since you weren't easy to work with and you were a pain in the ass for all that back and for the about the money- they don't want to work with you again! And sometimes you are caught turning around wondering why people are paying to get in somewhere to see your work, but you are not getting paid. Not even a cut. Your needs to survive, to make a living, are totally invisible and it makes you feel crazy. CRAZY! and only crazy artists ask for money!!!! Do they think artists are magic? I'm seriously wondering? It's all part of that j'ne se quos isn't it? Cultural capital and exposure. The touch of one million eyeballs produces not a penny. NOT A PENNY FOLKS. I need to do laundry and those eyeballs don't help. In fact, they like seeing me in dirty clothes. They like crazy artists.

AND what of if folks, if you don't make objects? Then you don't even have that tiny percentage of a gamble to sell your work.

THIS CITY AND ITS ART INSTITUTIONS ARE KILLING ITS ARTISTS. WE CAN'T EVEN SURVIVE. THE SITUATION IS DIRE. THIS IS A CRISIS. WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS CITY WOULD BE LIKE WITHOUT ARTISTS? WE MADE NEW YORK CITY NEW YORK FUCKING CITY!

CORPORATE CULTURE WILL STAGNATE YOUR LIFE. BUSINESSES THINK THEY CAN CREATE CULTURE NOW BUT THEY ARE WRONG WRONG WRONG.. we are the ones who make this city vital, interesting, active, engaging, and fun. Yes we are the ones. It's not wall street. Kick the bankers out! I've been making honest work my whole life! Kick the fucking bankers out of this city!! Artists don't need a bail out plan. We don't need a bail out plan. We need a life plan. We need a plan for living. We need our city's institutions, public and private, to take Artist labor into consideration when using it. We need to let them know that what is making their culture institution "rich" is the product of months or years of labor. or days. it doesn't matter. What's your day worth? What's your hour worth? What's your time worth? What kind of shitty things do you have to do to make money and still be an artist. How many ways do we have to degrade ourselves?

The degradation and exploitation continues right into the institutions where you are supposed to want to have an exhibition. You need an exhibition. The only way right now to exist as an artist in this city is to be a slut and let everyone fuck you over.

by K8 HARDY, 2008

Some of you may be artists.

If I am not a speculator in the art market, but rather

I am an artist,

how do I survive in the inspiring boroughs of New York- one of the most expensive cities in the world to live?

Surprisingly, I am forced to pay for

RENT
FOOD
CLOTHING
MATERIALS

In the U.S.- according the U.S. art institutions- I must make the money to pay for these things elsewhere, perhaps at a separate job or maybe hit the jackpot in the art market. **BECAUSE** they WILL NOT pay artists fees, and only sometimes will they cover expenses. This is because they are providing an allegedly liveable, eatable, drinkable product they like to call

EXPOSURE

And I am dying out here of **exposure**, folks. I am talking about

The Whitney
Aspen Museum of Art
The New Museum
The Brooklyn Museum of Art
The Guggenheim
MoMA
P.S.1.

and thousands of other museums and art institutions who have attained non-profit status as “educational institutions” but refuse to allocate **ANY** of the funds that they raise for **ARTIST FEES**.

Elsewhere in the world, institutions also survive on public and private money. But they have standards, whether legal or within their institution, that revolve around the basic premise of capitalism:

If an artist- otherwise sometimes known as an ART WORKER or a CULTURAL WORKER – is invited to present work in their institution, they are obliged to pay them a fee and their expenses. Because they recognize a simple fact- artists must make WAGES TO LIVE ON.

As Jack Smith prophetically noted in his work, the United States hates artists. And I cannot come to any other conclusion at this point in my experience with U.S. institutions:

- who have billion-dollar endowments;
- who have Boards of Directors who stuff their pockets with the money made off the artists in their collections whom are coincidentally featured in the museums they “advise”;
- where gobs of money collectors spend selling works to each other- then “donate” TO MUSEUMS- is FULLY TAX-DEDUCTABLE, whilst artists may only legally deduct the COST OF THE MATERIALS FOR THEIR WORK when donating;
- who buy multi-million dollar properties or make multi-million dollar renovations but have no artist fees, or audio-visual equipment (“borrowing” it from non-profit spaces) or asking artists to pay for their own expenses or the administrative & staff costs of the museum if invited to exhibit or commissioned by the institution

Where everyone is squeezed except for the directors, collectors and real-estate developers. Folks, I am NOT MAKING THIS UP.

It is a TRAVESTY.

It is an UNREGUALTED MARKET, where ARTISTS, PERFORMERS AND INDEPENDEENT CURATORS ARE **FLAT-OUT REFUSED FEES FOR THEIR WORK**

IN THE 80’S, WHEN JESSE HELMS & CO used sexism, misogyny, racism and homophobia to target American artists and relegate us to a “pariah” status, respectable and admirable U.S. art institutions willfully and, have since, enthusiastically, gone along with the game, due to American arts administrators inability to defend the QUEERNESS- both LITERALLY & FIGURATIVELY- of all arts practice. They are, in fact, ACTIVELY ADVOCATING AGAINST just & fair fees for artists, rather than *FOR* them, It is explicitly stated in museum board and staff meetings that ARTISTS WILL NOT & SHOULD NOT receive fees, that we are paid in **EXPOSURE** and perhaps, at some point, MIGHT profit greatly from this exposure.

WE ARE, THEREFORE, FORCED TO BECOME MARKET SPECULATORS RATHER THAN CULTURAL WORKERS.

And agree, under duress, that all the corporate, private and public MONEY will be ALLOCATED to the museum, it’s endowment, staff and special events, **AND NONE TO ARTIST FEES.**

But what about our day-to-day living? Those artists, performers and independent curators making valuable cultural work but not yet, or ever collected. Forever “**EMERGING**”, as most women artists are?

NO LONGER must U.S. art institutions be able to do this!

ARTISTS MUST REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE, TOGETHER, OF REFUSING TO WORK WITHOUT A FEE SCHEDULE

An artist can choose to donate their work or services to an institution, **BUT THERE SHOULD NOT BE ONE INSTANCE OF AN ARTIST, PEFORMER OR INDEPENDENT CURATOR WHO IS COERCED TO WORK, PERFORM, EXHIBIT OR SCREEN THEIR WORK FOR FREE A U.S. ART INSTITUTION.**

To all the museum directors, curators, administrators and board members out there:

WE SHALL NOT be put in a position where we are FORCED to work solely for exposure's sake. It is unethical and, worse, ILLEGAL to refuse to compensate us for our CULTURAL WORK that we make and are asked to present at your institutions. MY 12-YEAR INTERNSHIP IS OVER. The money within the art world and its market system is being distributed UNETHICALLY, INCORRECTLY, UNEVENLY AND UNFAIRLY, like the rest of our economy, and it MUST END NOW.

These circumstances are forced upon us by our own peers, in many cases out of ignorance, or an unquestioning of the ethics prevalent in the art world. People who appreciate art & culture but are blinded to the very simple realities of our existence because of the greedy and unthinking leadership they're under. Because profits trump wages. Because of "investors" or "advisors". Or because no one is considering these issues. The art market presents the ultimate capitalist fantasy – let the "dreamers", WE THE ARTISTS, make work and never offer us wages. Let us survive solely in the marketplace, not in the labor force.

NO ONE can or will establish the ground rules or come to our defense - not corporations, art institutions, government leaders, nor collectors - except for **US**, And potentially commercial art galleries as our business advocates.

As we must live, eat and breathe in a capitalist system, tell me what other workers in our system are asked to abide by the system's rules, yet work for FREE. Why is art-making a career choice with no living wage? If we do other work- perhaps teach, have second-jobs- we are paid for that work. Museum directors, curators or board members may think it ABSURD to offer a \$75 screening fee for a video program, but with that \$75 I can buy 2 week's worth of groceries. The divide between the rich and poor is as real as the food on my table. If Target can sponsor a museum's "FREE" entry hours (a benefit, I might add, won by the Art Worker's Coalition), why aren't these institutions raising funds for the artists they feature- i.e. the community they are meant to support, the people they are using to "educate" the public?

WHEREAS this is our predicament, look at Canada's fee schedule on W.A.G.E.'s website, where it's government-regulated that artists be paid fees for their work, a benefit won by Canadian artists who rallied around a man named Jack Chambers. Chambers advocated that it was

“absurd to exclude artists from payment for their work and the reproduction of it within an economic climate where it is socially acknowledged that payment is granted for services rendered”.

He pointed out that the galleries asking him to work and reproduce his works for free, would make a profit from the reproduction of his work, even as an educational product, and thus asked to be compensated for his work. **W.A.G.E. is not living in a dream world**, we are living under capitalism, which requires us to pay full-market rent and costs of living with **NO COMPENSATORY WAGES**.

In the U.S., artists:

- work without fees;
- become secretive, splintered and disconnected from each other;
- compete in this late-capitalism endgame with each other so that we can maybe get a scrap of exposure, and perhaps 2% of us will hit the JACKPOT

ARTISTS, AT THIS MOMENT, ASK NOTHING OF FAIRNESS from these institutions, so that:

- we do not insult them while they coerce us to work, exhibit, perform and/or screen for free, or perhaps beg for money in the dark, blindly;

- they can de-value our most valuable work as they request that it be featured in their institutions;
- THEY CAN GAIN NOTERIETY, EXPOSURE & MORE CASH DONATIONS FOR THEIR ACCOUNTS *OFF OUR BACKS*

We know we are being manipulated, in a competitive system, to do this work for free, so we must become unified and informed about the ILLEGAL, UNEHTICAL AND IMMORAL PRACTICES of this scam known as THE ART MARKET. So we can CHANGE THINGS.

I want to continue to live here, and I want to continue to work here. And I should not be squeezed out of here by the very institutions that survive off of the fruits of my labor.

ART-MAKING IS LABOR. ART-MAKING IS MY JOB.

AND the art market is currently A SYSTEM OF ORGANIZED IRRESPONSIBILITY.

It is way past time that this must come to an end. The directors and administrators of U.S. art institutions must allocate artist fees in their annual budgets. And artists must become transparent and informative with each other within the scope of these transactions- whether you are selling well in the art market or not is IRRELEVANT.

ALL WORKERS, INCLUDING ARTISTS, PERFORMERS AND INDEPENDENT CURATORS MUST BE PAID FEES FOR THEIR WORK.

AND MONEY FOR OUR EXPENSES IS NOT AN ARTIST FEE

All we have to do is demand what is rightfully ours. I hope this cause ends soon, for it is easily adjustable.

Museum directors, curators, advisors and board members: you must rectify this situation and return to an accountable, fair and structured economic playing field with the artists you work with. **YOU MUST ALLOCATE ARTIST FEES - FOR ALL ARTISTS WITH WHOM YOU WORK - IN YOUR ANNUAL INSTITUTIONAL BUDGETS.**

Artists- you must be brave advocates for our trade and opt out of the illegal, unethical SCHEME being forced upon us

JOIN W.A.G.E. NOW!

IF IT'S FREE, IT'S NOT FOR ME!

Thank you.

By A.L. STEINER, 2008