

Art is Not a Commodity: Examining Economic Exceptionalism in Art

11am – 5pm, 18 February 2017

Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1Y 5AH

This symposium examines the idea that art is not a standard commodity. Through presentations and panel discussions, participants will test this notion through theories and practices of economic exceptionalism discussed in Dave Beech's book *Art and Value*.

We aim to unpack urgent issues around the economic context of art, including unpaid internships, payment of artists, public funding of arts, 'value engineering' practices in arts institutions, the economics of art education, and the facts of the art market.

Schedule

11.15 - 11.20 Welcome by Professor Malcolm Quinn

11.20 – 11.40 Introduction by Professor Dave Beech

11.40 – 12.40 **SESSION 1: ART & VALUES**

Mel Evans, *Artwash - how oil companies instrumentalise art*

Rosalie Schweiker, *£180 : 3 = £60*

Panel discussion chaired by Ben Fitton

12.40 – 13.20 **Lunch**

13.20 – 14.20 **SESSION 2: MANAGING CHANGE**

Andrea Phillips, *Devaluation and institutional management*

Mick Wilson, *Some changes in the discourse on art and value: From the 'bargain sale of values' to 'deferred value'*

Panel discussion chaired by Jason Bowman

14.20 – 15.20 **SESSION 3: PAYING FOR ART**

Kim Charnley, *Affluence and Degradation: Ian Burn's economics of art under Neoliberalism?*

Julie McCalден, *Can we afford NOT to pay artists?*

Panel discussion chaired by Marsha Bradfield

15.20 – 15.50 **Refreshment Break**

15.50 – 16.50 **SESSION 4: ART & WORK**

Josefine Wikström, *The mediation of abstract labour in art*

Marina Vishmidt, *Erase Errata: On Being Interested in the Economy and the Anomaly*

Panel discussion chaired by Gail Day

16.50 – 17.00 Closing thoughts, Dave Beech

Convened by Dave Beech, Malcolm Quinn and Lisa le Feuvre. This event is co-organised with Valand Academy and presented by Camberwell, Chelsea, Wimbledon Graduate School Public Programme. Held in association with the Institute of Contemporary Arts London.

Programme Notes

SESSION 1: ART & VALUES

Speakers: Mel Evans and Rosalie Schweiker

Chair: Ben Fitton

Mel Evans

Artwash - how oil companies instrumentalise art

Art and money go together in some circles – but not for everyone. The arts for most people are not merely objects that could be appreciated in financial value, but always have and always will be temporally bound moments to explore and experience life, history and our own minds.

Art is not something the rest of us hang on our walls – it's something we practice in community centres, it's what we look forward to visit on that weekend trip into town to, it's what we cherish in books on the shelf or in the local library.

Yet art for some corporates is instrumentalised in the service of public relations and what Evans calls – ‘artwashing’ an oil company’s sullied public image. The likes of BP and Shell hide behind a pretence of philanthropy but within the sector, company spokespeople are much more vocal about the brand value of buying an association with art.

The corporate PR strategy looks to art for its ‘inherent authenticity’ (Pine & Gilmore, 2009), latching on to a value of art beyond the immediately financial. In relation to Beech’s ‘economic exceptionalism’ the two concepts can be brought together to reveal the finer nuances of the attempted corporate takeover of the arts, which is necessary to inform strategies to maintain public spaces of critical thinking within the arts sector, free from the artwashing of oil companies’ harmful operations.

Rosalie Schweiker

£180 : 3 = £60

£60 is worth roughly an hour's worth of our time. Rosalie will spend 30 minutes writing a speech and 30 minutes on making an outfit in which to deliver the speech. Sophie and Kerri will spend an hour with Rosalie to improve and rehearse the speech. This means that Rosalie will actually work more than 60 minutes on this, but then she's the name on the speaker's list, so it's probably ok. Also we won't charge for our communication (emails, fb chat, writing this blurb etc) and the actual delivery. Maybe we'll have to sell some merch at the end of the presentation to cover our costs. Let's see.

SESSION 2: MANAGING CHANGE

Speakers: Andrea Phillips and Mick Wilson

Chaired by Jason Bowman

Andrea Phillips

Devaluation and institutional management

Contra arguments that cultural institutions - be they state-run or commercial (or both) - must recognise chains of value in the production and reproduction of art, I will argue that in fact cultural institutions must engage in processes of devaluation in order to destabilise the basis of economic

arguments for art's valuation practices. This will inevitably entail a restructuring of what is considered to be any value point in artistic labour.

Mick Wilson

Some changes in the discourse on art and value: From the 'bargain sale of values' to 'deferred value'

This presentation will look at the changing ways in which the question of art and value has been constructed in recent decades, with particular attention to the development of a discourse on 'deferred value' and its contestation. Starting from the construction of the question of art's value in the mass-culture debates of the 1940s, the presentation will schematically outline the emergence of a discourse on the management of 'deferred value' in publicly funded arts organisations. In looking at the contestation of this latter development, it will point to continuities in the ambivalent utilisation of 'value' discourse in respect to contemporary art.

SESSION 3: PAYING FOR ART

Speakers: Kim Charnley and Julie McCalden

Chaired by Marsha Bradfield

Kim Charnley

Affluence and Degradation: Ian Burn's economics of art under Neoliberalism

This paper will use Dave Beech's clarification of the stakes involved in economic analysis of art to explore theoretical debates of the mid-1970s, during the crisis-ridden inception of neoliberal capitalism. Focusing on texts written by conceptual artist Ian Burn for *Artforum* and *The Fox* in 1975, Kim Charnley will explore Marxist positions on art's economics that were debated as the implications of conceptual art were being processed. At that time, a now familiar art theoretical lexicon was in the process of being formed, including the shibboleth that art is 'a commodity'. The conflicted and inchoate debates of the period provide, therefore, an interesting vantage point from which to reflect on the crisis-ridden present and the theoretical and political investments of art within it.

Charnley's argument being that Beech's critique in *Art and Value* opens up useful historical perspectives on contemporary art and allows scrutiny of fundamental problems of art's political effectiveness under capitalism.

Julie McCalden

Can we afford NOT to pay artists?

In 2013, following up on a widespread belief that artists were not being paid by galleries, a-n The Artists Information Company commissioned research into artists' income. The findings led to the launch of the Paying Artists campaign to secure payment for artists exhibiting in publicly funded spaces. Two years of research, consultation and activism have changed the conversation from one of skepticism to one of pragmatism – but the conversation about how to make it happen was far from cut and dried. Artist and Paying Artists Project Manager Julie McCalden will discuss the precarious nature of artists' livelihoods, some of the complexities around pay, as well as the impact that the implementation of the recently launched Exhibition Payment Guide will have for artists and the wider sector.

SESSION 4: ART & WORK

Speakers: Marina Vishmidt and Josefina Wikström
Chaired by Gail Day

Marina Vishmidt

Erase Errata: On Being Interested in the Economy and the Anomaly

This presentation will be about tracing back categories such as the economy and value as conjunctural terms in geopolitics (Mitchell) and governmentality (Foucault), while looking to the ‘economies’ of the rule and the exception to foreground the debates over value in Marxist feminist theories of reproductive labour – all in the attempt to drive some apposite conclusions about the status of the anomalous as a ground for a politics of artistic work and artistic labour in the current moment.

Josefina Wikström

The mediation of abstract labour in art

If, as was already pointed out by Adorno in the 1960s, art is not a commodity in the way a pair of Nike shoes are, how does art mediate this economic exceptional status and why is it crucial that it does so? It is simply not enough, as much critical art theory does, to merely point to art's commodity status. To understand the way in which art becomes art, consideration must also be taken into the way in which art mediates its economic exceptionality formally, both at the level of the art institution and at the level of the artwork. How does art negate or mediate its relative commodity status? Why must art mediate itself critically in relation to the abstract labour relations it is reproduced within? And what might such mediation look like?

Speaker Biographies

Jason E. Bowman is an artist with a curatorial practice and MFA: Fine Art Programme Leader at the Valand Academy at the University of Gothenburg. The Swedish Research Council supports his current research project, *Stretched*, conducted with Dr Mick Wilson and Dr Julie Crawshaw. This interrogates the potential for artists-initiatives to be considered through a broader scope than of the artist-led as an assertion of secessionism, alterativity or independence. Via an expanded genealogy, it argues towards exhibitionary formations predicated on considering examples of artist-organisation through an exhibitionary lens of inter- and intra-organisational relations. His curation of a career-survey of the disbanded UK inter-disciplinary collective, *The Theatre of Mistakes* (1974-81) opens at Raven Row in June 2017.

Dave Beech is Professor of Art at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Arts. He is an artist in the collective Freee (with Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan), who are currently collaborating with Vito Acconci Studio on a commission for MK Gallery. He is a founding co-editor of the journal *Art and the Public Sphere* and author of *Art and Value* (Brill 2015). He is currently writing two books *The Dictionarium of Art and the Social Turn* and *Art and Labour*.

Marsha Bradfield rides the hyphen as an archivist-artist-curator-educator-researcher-writer. This multi-barrelled practice is fired by the lived experience of authorship. Bradfield co-authors research-based experiments in collaborative cultural production with groups including Critical Practice Research Cluster, the Incidental Unit (formerly the Artist Placement Group) and Precarious Workers Brigade. These experiments often result in understanding that she later re-presents as publications, performative lectures and other dialogic artworks. Bradfield is based at Chelsea College of Arts, where she works as an associate researcher and lecturer and PhD supervisor. Her practice has been presented in Canada, England, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Kim Charnley is an art theorist and historian whose research explores the political legacies of conceptual art in institutional critique and art activism. His PhD, completed at the University of Essex in 2015, compared the praxis of two art collectives, Art & Language, New York and Group Material. He has published in *Art Journal*, *Historical Materialism* and *Art and the Public Sphere* and edited a collection of Gregory Sholette's essays, to be published in May 2017 as *Delirium and Resistance: activist art and the crisis of capitalism*, by Pluto Press.

Gail Day's Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory (Columbia University Press) was shortlisted for the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize. She is Senior Lecturer in History of Art in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds, where she is co-founder of the centre for Critical Materialist Studies. Gail is part of the research collective Marxism in Culture (at the Institute of Historical Research, London) and initiated the project 'Aesthetic Form & Uneven Modernities' with colleagues from Universidade de São Paulo and Birkbeck.

Mel Evans is an artist and campaigner with Platform and Liberate Tate. Her book *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* was published by Pluto Press in April 2015. Her play *Oil City* was produced by Platform and presented as part of the Two Degrees Festival in 2013. With Liberate Tate Mel has co-created numerous live art performance interventions to challenge BP sponsorship of Tate. Her writing has been published by Performance Research Journal, The Guardian, the Independent and Dissent! magazine.

Ben Fitton is an artist and Senior Lecturer at Chelsea College of Arts. His work uses language and its support structures to investigate the politics of public address, and has been shown extensively in the UK and internationally. His projects include solo exhibitions at Site Gallery, Sheffield; Floating I.P., Manchester; The Economist Plaza, Redux, IBID.Projects and Balfron Tower, London; and a series of temporary public structures in collaboration with Dylan Shipton: most recently *Monument to the Excluded Middle* (2013), Brighton; and *GUNSGOFTHEMSELVES* (2014), Chatham. He was guest editor of the latest issue (5.1) of *Art & the Public Sphere*.

Julie McCalden is an artist and Paying Artists campaign Project Manager for a-n The Artists Information Company. In addition to her individual practice she works collaboratively with Back in 5 Minutes Squad (Bi5MS), HO-ST and Girl Gang both within, and outside of, traditional gallery contexts. Recent projects include *Working from Home*, Museum of Bath at Work (2015), *Even after the complete collapse of civilization there will be product placement and power ballads* (2015), Bi5MS, Plymouth Arts Centre and *Higher Scores, Brighter Futures. Together we are individuals. Data makes us free* (2016), Bi5MS, Inland Art Festival and Baltic 39.

Malcolm Quinn is Professor of Cultural and Political History, Associate Dean of Research and Director of Camberwell, Chelsea, Wimbledon Graduate School, University of the Arts London. His current research focuses on the issue of prejudice in taste in the thought of Jeremy Bentham and David Hume. He has written about the politics of taste in the development of state funded art education for the journals *History of European Ideas*, *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* and *Revue d'études Benthamiennes*. His book *Utilitarianism and the Art School in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Pickering and Chatto) was published in 2012.

Andrea Phillips is a writer and organiser, and works at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg.

Rosalie Schweiker is an artist. Sophie Chapman and Kerri Jefferis have prepared this presentation with her. The three artists will split the speakers fee of £180.

Marina Vishmidt is Lecturer and Course Convenor in Culture Industry at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she teaches on theories and practices of creativity, labour and precariousness. She also runs a theory seminar at the Dutch Art Institute. Her work has appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Ephemera*, *Afterall*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, and *Radical Philosophy*, among others, as well as a number of edited volumes. She is the co-author of *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art* (with Kerstin Stakemeier) (Mute, 2016), and is currently completing a book-length project entitled *Speculation as a Mode of Production* (Brill, 2017).

Josefine Wikström is a writer and lecturer whose research revolves around questions of labour, value, mediation and the object in contemporary art, performance and dance, and the intersection between cultural and critical theory through post-Kantian philosophy. She is a member of staff at Stockholm University of the Arts and a visiting lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is currently completing her PhD thesis at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University. She has been published in journals and magazines like *MUTE*, *Texte Zur Kunst* and *Kunstkritikk*. She is an associate editor of *Philosophy of Photography* journal.

Mick Wilson is an artist, educator and researcher based in Sweden. He is Head of the Valand Academy of Art, University of Gothenburg and co-editor-in-chief of PARSE journal. Wilson's edited volumes include: *The Curatorial Conundrum*, MIT (2016) with P. O'Neill and L. Steeds; *Curating Research*, Open Editions /deAppel (2014); *Curating the Educational Turn*, Open Editions /de Appel (2010) both with P. O'Neill; *SHARE Handbook of Artist Research Education*, ELIA (2013) with S. V.

Ruiten; and *Public Enquiries: PARK LEK and the Scandinavian Social Turn* (BDP 2017, forthcoming). Projects and exhibitions include: “Seminar” BAK (2017); “Aesthetics Jam in Taipei Biennial (2014); “Joyful Wisdom” Rezan Has Museum, Istanbul (2013); and the “The Judgement is the Mirror” Living Art Museum Reykjavík (2013).