



The Chicago Effect: Redefining the Middle

August 24 - November 23, 2014
Gallery 1, Gallery 2 & Cleve E. Carney Gallery

On the whole, exhibitions tend to represent culmination—they are the final presentation punctuating the end of a process, the period at the end of a sentence. *The Chicago Effect: Redefining the Middle* takes a different position. More like an ellipsis, it presents a visual capture of progress taking place somewhere in the middle of a thought. It is a moment in an ongoing research project that is equal parts an exhibition and a series of experiments transforming the Art Center into a laboratory.

This year Hyde Park Art Center turns 75 and for the anniversary occasion, presenting a retrospective exhibition seemed to eulogize an institution still very active, while mounting a show dreaming up an imaginary future felt disconnected from the organizational work happening on the ground. Instead, it seemed best to remain in the present, backed by a rich history and looking toward an exciting, yet unknown future. It meant being comfortable in the middle—being a mid-sized institution, supporting artists at the emerging and mid-career levels and everywhere in between, straddling the line between contemporary art gallery and community center. The Art Center has a lot of growing to do and decided to let this exhibition assist in that process.

Since its founding in 1939 as an artist-run initiative of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Hyde Park Art Center has served as an experimental venue for contemporary art production, presentation and pedagogy. Over the years, the organization formalized, establishing a traditional staffing structure and growing its governing board of directors. In 2006, the Art Center expanded from a series of storefronts and a ballroom to a facility of its own. Today, the organization is no longer run exclusively by artists—though artists remain deeply involved in the Art Center's work. These transformations beg the questions: Is Hyde Park Art Center still the experimental, nimble, non-institution-institution it claims to be? How can it continue operating in this spirit in the years to come?

Of course, the Art Center couldn't approach these questions alone. Partnering with teams of experts from diverse fields, it embarked on a series of experimental interventions to question assumptions about the purpose and operations of a contemporary art center. Objects and explanatory panels in grey embedded throughout the exhibition present the seven Experiments-in-Process that consider the questions mentioned.

Representatives from DePaul University, IDEO, Illinois Institute of Technology, Rhode Island School of Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and University of Chicago's Science of Philanthropy Initiative propose physical and conceptual adaptations to the Art Center's administration, design, and programming leading up to and during the exhibition. In turn, the Art Center performs, presents, and enacts the results of these experiments, archiving them and documenting the exhibition in a 2015 publication designed by Cranbrook Academy of Art students. [More on individual Experiments on back panel.]

As an exhibition, *The Chicago Effect* offers an analysis of how a mid-sized arts institution can function today by examining how artists pragmatically comply with or circumvent the establishment—art schools, commercial markets and museums—carving out space for experimentation that exposes new possibilities for structures and systems more fluid than these. The ten artists included in the exhibition occupy, investigate, and complicate the middle in various ways; some operate from within established systems, while others construct their own, each exploring visual and formal manifestations of compromise, commitment, hard work, and suspension within an artistic practice.

Artwork on view presents permeable boundaries, liminal spaces, and in-betweens, identifying and asserting the necessity of the middle as a fertile improvisational space that becomes a creative engine. By aligning one's practice with the middle and embracing relatively ordinary characteristics of middle management and middle age, of sustaining a process of observation rather than of drawing conclusions, the artists have discovered that the middle is a surprisingly generative place for uncommon ideas.

Marissa Lee Benedict is more interested in the process of creating tools to record or measure data than the data itself. For her, applied knowledge is a pathway to invention. Her handmade rowboat, *Solo Mesoporos* (roughly translating to "only halfway through the journey"), is balanced by a barrel containing Lake Michigan water growing algae samples over the course of the exhibition—an exercise in the counterbalance between ecology and technology. *Augur II* is a DIY seismometer commonly used in Benedict's native California that monitors the dynamic equilibrium of Earth's lithosphere and sits poised in anticipation of the tectonic or man-made shifts to come in the Midwest. Suspension is essential to Benedict's process and creates the conditions for her to examine natural phenomena, perhaps undetectable, but nonetheless integral to global environmental activity.

Like a scientist approaches research, **Robert Burnier** tests different systems and processes—whether a virtual CAD rendering or a physical form built from aluminum, spray paint or wood—to understand how materials behave and how their operations might be expanded. *Revokon*, one of two wood sculptures on display, is constructed from a crate the Chicago-based artist built for a series of landscape paintings he made many years ago. Instead of performing their administrative function of transporting the art, Burnier fused the crate with the paintings by coating them together with enamel, simultaneously obliterating the work and redirecting its structure into a painting-



The Chicago Effect: Redefining the Middle, 2014, installation views of interior, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago



Left: artwork by Lan Tuazon, *Isolated Fictions* show on the grey wall, & artwork by Jamie Hayes. **Right:** *Office Riddim* (2013) by Essex Olivares

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sculpture hybrid. The form is a timestamp of Burnier's previous practice and carries with it the evolution into a new incarnation.

Brooklyn-based collaborative **Essex Olivares** are researchers and toolmakers who do not find their materials in the studio or in nature but inside the office environment. Preoccupied by the activity (and inactivity) that takes place in administrative spaces, their work contrarily attempts to restore the human element to a highly quantified, cubicle-d, routinized work culture. The *Office Riddim* installation recreates an office space within the gallery through its composition: a classic two-drawer filing cabinet (booming with a bass-heavy soundtrack), a tower of copier paper, a desk plant, and a sign reminding employees that surveillance cameras are present. A video depicts previous performances, choreographed by the artist/musician duo, of office workers participating in team-building exercises to increase physical and mental activity during the mundane workday. Accompanying the installation is their free downloadable app, *Incorporate*, which facilitates users' reconnection with their own emotions, encouraging stronger social connection to others.

Patrick Meagher is an artist, organizer, and co-founder of Silvershed, a collectively operated artist-run project space based in New York. Committed to building a more connected, self-actualized world, Meagher developed a unique, five-way Venn diagram or "information-collage," which posits that *The Fifth Dimension* may very well be the key to expanding consciousness. The symbol, emblazoned as a banner on display, represents a conceptual thread from philosophy to science via religious thought, human potential, technology, and semiotics and strives for holistic understandings of mind, body, and spirit. The topic is further expanded upon in a booklet of additional five-way diagrams Meagher made with multiple collaborators, which enumerate five levels of understanding around a given subject. In an age characterized by an excess of virtual information, Meagher emphasizes social connection and collectivity as potent ways of participating in the world.

Lan Tuazon takes as her subject the possibilities of the parking lot, reading her own collective potency into those seemingly benign,

empty spaces. Highly transitional plots of real estate dotting the urban landscape, parking lots are hybrid public/private properties that facilitate informal social interactions—both wanted and unwanted—and offer easy, accessible sites for bringing people together. In her prints and sculpture, *Parking Lot Landscapes* and *Parking Lot Island*, the recent Chicago transplant fits together all the parking lots on the island of Manhattan sourced from Google Earth and proposes a new landmass for discovery. For Tuazon, this new form has the potential to counteract the divisions and disruptions to communal living created through urban planning efforts. Void of architecture, Tuazon's islands provide an open footprint for thinking about an alternative landscape that allows for civil obedience and disobedience necessary to generate a progressive society.

A concrete and brick slab photographed from five different perspectives make up **Assaf Evron's** *Untitled (series R)*, which at once combines monumentality with notions of failure and potential. The brick form is a lone monolith boldly asserting itself skyward from a dusty landscape in Evron's native Israel. Neither remnant nor relic, the structure has been digitally redesigned by the Chicago-based artist using a palette of naturally occurring hues. The structure is a prototype for an architectural form yet to come, though possibly forgotten. Its presence marks the future construction of a longer, comprehensive, federally instated wall intended to delineate a boundary, to separate and protect. In its complete formation, hundreds of connected fragments will mark the flat landscape, serving both political and bureaucratic functions.

Although several of the artists adopt administrative techniques to generate artwork that counteracts isolation resulting from managerial or governmental processes, artists like **Devon Dikeou** embrace institutional operations into their artwork, transforming critique into function. *Pay what you wish but you must pay something*, located at both entrances to the exhibition, consists of replicas of other art institutions' donations boxes. Money donated is documented and then administered to the institutions that received support throughout the exhibition. The Denver-based artist, curator, collector, and publisher of *Zing Magazine* approaches art holistically as the product of an interwoven system of identities and roles reliant on each other.

The Jackman Goldwasser Catwalk Facade Gallery at the Art Center provides the structure and visual content for the site-specific digital mural *Installation no. 21* by Chicago-based artist **Jan Tichy**. The formal black and white projection animates the architecture of the facade and calls attention to it as a permeable portal shared by the public and the institution. Traditionally, murals are erected to galvanize community using figurative illustrations to depict shared values and a proud history. Tichy's abstract light patterns, integrated with the building's features, propose a new approach to mural-making, yet retain the original goal of strengthening community through incremental actions. Slow movement among geometric shapes suggests an administrative monotony within the architecture, which is in sync with the pedestrian urban rhythm of the side streets. The tension and suspension crescendo into fleeting moments of realization and surprise, symbolizing those institutional and human epiphanies that may occur through perseverance.

Longtime artist and educator, Austin, Texas-based **Michael Smith** presents school portraits spanning nearly 28 years of his teaching career. At the end of each semester, Smith invites his student to sit for a class picture. The installation, titled *The Sears Portraits*, shows the irony of a man aging toward the middle of his life, surrounded by the perpetual youth of his art students. As the duration and depth of Smith's actual practice expands, so do the portraits' portrayal of values associated with and essential to being a teacher: supportiveness, collaboration, hard work, and self-sacrifice, a contrast to the popular image of the singular artist-genius. The work could not have been realized without a generational passage of time coupled with Smith's patience, persistence, and dedication to his dual roles as artist and teacher.

Like Smith, a notion of *working together* provides the foundation for **Jamie Hayes'** approach to fashion design. In this selection of unique, customized garments, Hayes worked directly with friends and colleagues to create a new "uniform" for each, to assist them in their work or to conjure a new archetype that would support their being-in-the-world. Emerging from an interest in the multifarious nature of the uniform—as both a functional and aesthetic garment, which can reinforce hierarchies while also dissolving differences among people wearing them—these garments are not uniform at all. Created collaboratively, the designs are a reflection of the individuals who wear (and now own) them. Extending the project, Hayes also developed a new design for the Art Center's front desk staff, which highlights and supports their dual roles as administrators and institutional gatekeepers.

Rather than articulate a geographically bounded tendency, the title *The Chicago Effect* refers to an approach to developing a practice or way of working. This approach is based on sustained commitment over time, resilient labor, and a collaborative energy often found among artists and creative individuals working in the City of Big Shoulders. Yet this method can also be found elsewhere, across the country and the globe. More a work ethic than a location, *The Chicago Effect* refers to a belief that audacious new ideas do not necessarily stem from a virtuosic burst, but often result from the steady accumulation of small, ordinary change.

Curatorial Team: Christopher K. Ho, Allison Peters Quinn & Megha Ralapati

Experiments-in-Process

IDEO

Representatives from this leading design and innovation firm apply their design process to imagine a "reinvention" of the Art Center's programming and space.

Science of Philanthropy Initiative

The Art Center works with scholars from this University of Chicago initiative to bridge their academic research with on-the-ground findings to strengthen best practices in fundraising and broaden participation in philanthropy.

School of the Art Institute (Management Studio)

An interactive project initiated by MA students and on view at the Art Center gathers feedback from the public in and beyond Chicago about the value of art and culture and how public arts institutions can support them.

Rhode Island School of Design

MFA students instructed by co-curator Christopher K. Ho invited The Green Lantern to reproduce a past show, *Isolated Fictions: A Reenactment*, in response to *The Chicago Effect* and have also made two new collaborative art works on view at the Art Center. *Isolated Fictions: A Reenactment* is curated by Caroline Picard and features artwork by **Amanda Browder, Nick Butcher, Maria Dumlao, Jason Dunda, Rebecca Mir Grady, Nadine Nakanishi, Carmen Price, Steve Ruiz** and **Hui-min Tsen**.

Illinois Institute of Technology

Architect and IIT professor Andrew Schachman initiates a series of seminar-style discussions exploring how the arts institution is transforming to support current trends in art making.

DePaul University/Stockyard Institute

Artist and DePaul Professor of Visual Arts and Secondary Education Jim Duignan conducts surveys and hosts conversations from a temporary office at the Art Center to develop research on community arts practices and to propose a new style of curriculum based on the findings.

School of the Art Institute (Curatorial Practices)

Curators program a night of creative response to *The Chicago Effect* using archives, social practice, performance, and interventions based on their ongoing research of curating in an expanded field of alternative and artist-run spaces.

Program of Events:

The Chicago Effect reception

Saturday, September 13, 5 – 8pm

The Chicago Effect Gallery Tour

September 15, 6pm

Experience the exhibition with a tour led by curators Allison Peters Quinn and Megha Ralapati.

Institution as Agent

October 14, 6pm

Art practice today regularly appropriates administrative and managerial forms. Within this expanded field of organizational art production, what role can the community art center play in presenting and supporting it? Led by architect and Illinois Institute of Technology Professor Andrew Schachman, this discussion explores how such trends in art impact the operations of the institution.

Institution as Signifier: Education as Art Practice

October 28, 6pm

When artists appropriate education as art form, what is the impact on the spaces and platforms for arts education more broadly? Are there opportunities for artists and institutions to participate in public education? Along with practitioners in the field, Andrew Schachman leads a conversation about the dynamics of education as art practice.

Creative Response to The Chicago Effect

November 10, 6pm

Students from the Curatorial Practices course at SAIC, led by Abigail Satinsky, research curating in the expanded field of alternative and artist-run spaces. Based on ongoing research, they will program a night of creative response using archives, social practice, performance, and interventions.

Visit hydeparkart.org for more info and the most up-to-date programming calendar.

For 75 years, Hyde Park Art Center has been a unique resource that advances contemporary visual art in Chicago by connecting artists and communities in unexpected ways. As an open forum for exploring the artistic process, the Art Center fosters creativity through making, learning about, seeing, and discussing art—all under one roof.

The Art Center is funded in part by: Alphawood Foundation; Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Field Foundation of Illinois; Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; Harper Court Arts Council; Harpo Foundation; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; Illinois Humanities Council; Irving Harris Foundation; Joyce Foundation; Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; National Endowment for the Arts; National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Illinois General Assembly; Polk Bros. Foundation; David C and Sarajeon Ruttenberg Arts Foundation; Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust; and the generosity of its members and people like you.

Installation photography by Tom van Eynde
Design by the JNL graphic design

Cover:

Marissa Lee Benedict, *Solo Mesoporos*, 2013-2014, Maine peapod rowboat (hand-built), water samples (Lake Michigan, Chicago River), ratchet straps, pulleys, climbing harness, clamp lights, scaffolding. On the left: Jamie Hayes and Terrence Swafford, F.L.U. (Future Life Uniform), 2013, vinyl and spray paint, 28 x 23 inches (jacket); 41 x 20 inches (pants)

Hyde Park **ART**CENTER

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