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Title: Manifesto for art: the public sphere and the work of the Free art collective

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Example citation: Hewitt, A., Beech, D. and Jordan, M. (2016) Manifesto for art: the public sphere and the work of the Free art collective. Seminar Presentation presented to: *Beyond Art Activism: Rewriting Art's Neoliberal Value System Seminar, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 26th October 2016.*

Note: Free Art Collective Manifesto for Art

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/9037/>



Manifesto for Art

The Free Art Collective

Written in dialogue with the *Radical Change In Culture Manifesto*
originally signed by the members of the committee for a radical change in culture: Roman Dziadkiewicz, Grzegorz Jankowicz, Zbigniew Libera, Ewa Majewska, Lidia Makowska, Natalia Romik, Janek Simon, Jan Sowa, Kuba Szreder, Bogna Swiatkowska, Joanna Warsza.
Published on the 15th of October 2009



Instructions:

Free invites you to participate in a spoken choir.

In order to participate you need to:

- 1. Print off the pdf (hard copies are also being distributed)*
- 2. Underline every sentence that you agree with.*
- 3. Bring the pamphlet to the event and read out those sections that you have under-lined.*



WHAT WE ARE FOR

- ***We are for art!***

Art is an emancipatory practice.

Today art is under threat and is in need of an emancipatory practice to prevent it from turning into business as usual, to stop it from being completely utilized for regeneration and gentrification, and to halt the colonisation of judgements of artistic quality by the culture of the audit.

WHAT WE ARE AGAINST

- ***We are against bureaucrats, economists and auditors!***

Economists cannot fathom the distinctive character of art as the common domain of social value, cultural critique and subjective freedom. When economists extend their vocabulary and methodology to incorporate art they mistakenly treat the production of art as motivated in the same way as growing potatoes for the market or manufacturing vacuum cleaners to meet consumer demand.

Culture is not driven by the motivations of capital investment and the maximisation of profits. Nor is art circulated through an irrational system of gift giving, potlatch, carnival, excess, or driven by taboo and the sacred. We object to the saturation of art in the anthropological rhetoric of magical exchange as much as we object to the false characterisation of art as a commodity like anything else.

- ***We are against the commercialization of art***

While artistic production has not been converted into the capitalist mode of production and the artist is neither a wage labourer nor a capitalist (one sells labour-power to a capitalist and the other merely advances capital), art is constantly under threat of commercial forces. Art

must be protected from blockbuster exhibitions, super-brand galleries and museums, art fairs and hedge funds.

The free market hates the poor and hates anything that has value rather than a price. The free market restricts non-economic forms of activity and privileges goods produced for profit. We are against the free market as the mechanism for deciding what kind of art is made available to the public and which artists are rewarded for their work. We will not hand over our power of collective cultural decision making to spending power.

We reject the rhetorical replacement of the viewer, the public, the citizen and the visitor with the consumer, the customer, the tax-payer and market demand.

We reject the mechanisms by which super wealthy art collectors, through their purchasing power, decide what art the rest of us see in galleries and museums.

We reject the economic dogma that there is an oversupply of art and an oversupply of artists. We reject all corporate sponsorship of art which succeeds only in giving decision making powers to those who can afford it rather than those who are capable of it.

We reject all advertising in art magazines which succeeds only in allocating space in the public sphere on the grounds of payment rather than the value of the opinion and values expressed.

- ***We are against the instrumentalisation of art***

The promotion of a region or city and the management of national identity through art always leads to cultural impoverishment. Art is emancipatory only if it is critical. We are against the instrumentalisation of art because we are against both instrumenatalisation and affirmative art. If art can be deployed in the process of placemaking it is not critical enough.

We are opposed to art as the official political opposition, as a form of political satire. Art is political but politics is not political enough for art.

We demand art to be free from the duties and obligations of professional politics, whether in the form of imposed topical social issues tied to public funding objectives or as the promotion of official ideologies. We renounce the opposition between autonomous art and political art. Autonomous art is political or it is nothing. Political art is autonomous or it is not political enough.

Our hatred of the instrumentalisation of art is not based on the writings of Theodor Adorno, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière. We despise art's instrumentalisation because we have seen what business, bureaucracy and auditing does to art.

Guy Debord was not entirely serious when he said "The point is not to put poetry at the service of revolution, but to put revolution at the service of poetry". Artists must participate in the social revolution but art must have its own revolution because every aspect of life must be revolutionised. There is no one revolution that in a single moment changes everything. Art cannot serve this abstract revolution nor should art live in hope that this puntural revolution will emancipate art. We reject the instrumentalisation of revolution as much as we reject the instrumentalisation of art.

- ***We are against the privatisation of art's funding and art's institutions***

Public art is a public good. This means, first, that the enjoyment of public art by one person does not reduce what is there for others to enjoy. And second, it is not possible to stop people gaining access to public art through market mechanisms. In short, everybody benefits equally

from the provision of public art.

Art is not a public good. Art is a merit good. As a merit good, art ought to be supplied to all for free by the public purse regardless of ability to pay and regardless of consumer demand.

All art's public institutions must guarantee public access to art and the ability to produce it. Art's public institutions are vital to art's critical, emancipatory and aesthetic force.

WHAT WE PROPOSE

- ***We propose the universal expansion of artistic activity in all its forms.***

Everyone is not an artist just by saying so. Everyone will be an artist when everyone obtains the material and immaterial prerequisites of artistic production.

We propose that every house contain its own studio and its own gallery.

There are not too many exhibitions, too many biennales, too many galleries and too many museums. We need more art, more artists, more art institutions, more art theory, more art schools and more art funding.

Art is a basic human right.

Art for all should not be restricted to making art's institutions and art's public collections accessible to a universal public. Art for all must mean that all the activities of art - artist, critic, curator – which are currently professions become the common property of all.

- ***We demand the end of all intellectual property rights
Copyright, patents and trademarks are techniques
for preserving capitalist property relations under
the technological conditions of their obsolescence.***

When art required high levels of skill to produce

them, ownership of the rights of reproduction were unnecessary. Anything that can be reproduced effortlessly through mechanical or digital means must be released into the commons.

Ideas, inventions and concepts should circulate freely – be used, modified and cross-connected in order to create new cultural value, not harnessed to the market for the private accumulation of profit. Film, music and digital images are already technologically in excess of capitalist property relations which is why they are subject to increasing levels of legal restraint. Intellectual property rights now act as a limit on creative activity (eg appropriation, sampling, found footage, mash-up and so on).

We reject the utopia of „open license” strategies which uses property law against property law. We demand the full democratisation of art and culture and the free distribution and reuse of all art and culture.

We demand the elimination of the wage system as the condition for the elimination of the need to protect the property rights of artists
Defending artists as precarious producers is a trap based on the acceptance of the wage system. Only by disaggregating all human activity from income can the emancipation of art be for the benefit of all producers not just artists.

We reject the special dispensations given to artists because we reject the social division of labour that prevents everyone else from producing art. Artists and their advocates who call for artists to be paid for whatever they do are nothing but the preservers of privilege. Artists are no more entitled to be paid for making art than anyone else. The sense of entitlement on behalf of artists and other intellectual workers must be confronted, rejected and eliminated.

We demand the unconditional guaranteed salary for all as the condition for the promotion of cultural production rather than the promotion of the artist as a special cultural producer.

Art needs the abolition of capitalism.

Published on the 7th of September 2016 at CARDIFF
WITH CULTURE: VISIONING THE CITY, G39