TODAY, MODES OF PRESENTATION have become increasingly part of the discursive components of contemporary artistic practices. The exhibition system inherently uses various ways of presenting art in a gallery, museum, Kunsthalle, project, alternative, or laboratory space. It is the primary way of offering an experience of art. But that experience is influenced or diffused, however minor, merely by inserting art into this system—institutionalizing it—which affects how information about art is communicated. Embedded within this system of exhibiting contemporary art at sites established for doing so is quite naturally a number of variables, including artistic subjects, curatorial tastes, funding directives, boards of trustees, donors, lenders, sponsors, architecture, and geographical location. The artist, curator, visitor, arts administrator, development officer, marketing department, and city of the exhibiting site are conduits that intermingle with these and other factors in a kind of operatic course of actions that bring together, present, and influence the viewer's experience of art.

The quality of that experience is partially gauged by how the institution of art mediates between artistic subject and the viewer. For instance, the layout of an exhibition installation, narratives drawn between artworks through proximities or oppositions, the order in which the visitor sees the artworks, and juxtapositions created within hangings and groupings are all means used by the curator vis-à-vis the institution to nudge along the visitor in an experience of an exhibition. Other instruments that come into play in this arena and affect a response to art are labels, audio guides, press releases, catalogues, advertising, sponsorship, lighting, announcements, gift shops, bookstores, cafés, websites, opening receptions, academia, art history, criticism, journals, and reproductions—all of which fall under scrutiny in some form or another in the practice of institutional critique. In fact, *Exact Imagination* includes artists Andrea Fraser and Louise Lawler, whose practices include conceptual and site-specific forms of art that examine the institution of art and how artistic subject and the art object are affected by the mechanisms of it. This very exhibition, this catalogue, this essay, and some of the components mentioned above are part of that institution and fall directly within the purview of institutional critique.

The visitor's role is vital in the exhibition system since an exhibition is, after all, made for their contemplation and reflection, communicating some kind of artistic message or inserting some kind of vehicle to relay that message. With regard to visitors and group exhibitions, Ralph Rugoff believes that

> an exhibition is not, in the end, a *fait accompli*, whose work is done once it is installed in a gallery; on the contrary, that is precisely when its work begins. Rather than presenting a predigested cultural experience, a stimulating group show conveys a sense that it is reinventing the way we think about art, on however small a scale, in a negotiation in which each visitor participates. In short, group exhibitions can aim to remind us, as Marcel Duchamp insisted, that the viewer is responsible for half the work in creating art's meaning.[1]

The societal, cultural, economic, political, and academic instruments used by the field of art to shape knowledge and form that negotiation with art are the bases from which *Exact Imagination* operates. Particular attention to the viewer is threaded throughout the collection of artworks and social exchanges gathered together for this exhibition, considering not only how the art institution solicits response from viewers but how the viewer experiences and engages with art and an exhibition. In its consideration of these topics, *Exact Imagination* relies significantly on the insightful and witty criticisms of institutional critique and Dadaism in as much as those art forms counter the art establishment, question its authority, and abdicate traditional modes of artistic production and exhibition display.

An increasingly used model of curatorial practice involves what has been called new institutionalism.[2] New institutionalism reduces emphasis on the traditional exhibition model of display as we know it and places greater focus on the production of art and social exchange. This model incorporates

residencies for artists and organizes platforms of social engagements, such as lectures, seminars, and conversations, that do not usually conform to typical exhibition formats and calendars. Compared with the tidy, nicely packaged exhibition of the white cube with definite dates, checklist of artworks, and rote set of accoutrements like catalogue, labels, and opening reception, the exhibition organized by the new institution can be open-ended, sometimes off-site, and does not always strive toward a finished product or provide an immediate conclusion.

Social engagement is an important component of the new institution exhibition model. On one hand, it can be organized by the institution and take the form of dialogues among artists, curators, and visitors in a public forum that offers equal footing for each participant. On the other hand, dialogical exchange is representative of an artistic discipline that can at times abandon altogether the art object and adopt community interventions, conversations, gatherings, workshops, seminars, dinners, and events in non-art settings as primary means of artistic interaction with the world.[3] These exhibitions are sometimes advocacy-based and give artists as much leeway as possible to complete their work, which seeks often to leave a positive trace in the community. Hosted by the Dia Art Foundation in New York City, Martha Rosler's *If You Lived Here...* (1989) is a notable forerunner of this type of exhibition model in which creative license for exhibition planning and programming was left to the artist. Made up of three group exhibitions, four public forums, and a publication, Rosler's project examined issues of homelessness, urbanism, housing, and urban planning.

Today, new institutionalism embraces the complexities of contemporary artistic practices like Rosler's that address a wide range of social, cultural, political, and environmental issues in a number of different ways and mediums, which include objects as well as social theory practices. As such, the conventional mode of exhibition is destabilized here, and the visitor becomes a full-on agent in the making of an exhibition. In the new institutionalism mode, visitors are asked to literally participate, not necessarily by viewing only objects in a gallery but by becoming an accountable part of the art in artistically conceived social arenas. This direct interaction with the viewer began with Dadaism and was expanded with art produced during the 1960s and '70s in gallery-based performances and installations. It can be beneficial to remove as much as possible the art institution from this milieu as these models of engagement are ideally organized off-site, outside the sphere of the traditional exhibition space.

Even so, it is impossible for artistic practice to completely emancipate itself from the institution of art. This precise quandary has occupied much debate on institutional critique, as Andrea Fraser contends:

> Art is art when it exists for discourses and practices that recognize it as art, value and evaluate it as art, and consume it as art, whether as object, gesture, representation, or only idea. The institution of art is not something external to any work of art but the irreducible condition of its existence as art. No matter how public in placement, immaterial, transitory, relational, everyday, or even invisible, what is announced and perceived as art is always already institutionalized, simply because it exists within the perception of participants in the field of art as art, a perception not necessarily aesthetic but fundamentally social in its determination.[4]

Indeed, Fraser operates not in opposition to the institution but within it, openly recognizing her complicit role in the system.

New institutionalism responds to this predicament. In light of the awkward canonization of institutional critique—a form of art that originated in opposition to the institution—the term could eventually be left behind altogether in exchange for new institutionalism.[5] The integrative approach to organizing exhibitions under the model of new institutionalism encourages production of an art free from the influence of the institution while still, no doubt, working within it. In this manner, new

institutionalism becomes another way to continue the critical discourse of institutional critique in a form that reflects the changing sociocultural, political, economic, and artistic influences today while keeping that discourse relevant and vital in the field of art.[6] The double agent in the new institution is the curator in the rise of a curatorial practice that simultaneously acknowledges the effect of the art institution and recognizes the inextricable ties to it, but works from within it to nurture a pure, undiluted encounter with art.[7] *Exact Imagination* includes two artist collectives, N55 and Red76, whose practices ask for physical participation from the viewer and represent the forms of art generally adopted by curators operating in the new institution.

EXACT IMAGINATION is about the experience of art, however one may have it, via gallery exhibitions, social engagements, books, reproductions, academics, or simply by being alive. Taking its inspiration and title from the Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno and his analysis of aesthetic experience in which he argues that subjective and objective forces collide to determine a viewer's perceptual reception of art—how it makes them feel, what they take away from it, what they draw up inside of them to relate to it—this exhibition includes art that encourages both concrete and immaterial aesthetic explorations. With this in mind, *Exact Imagination* investigates the authority of the institution and its effect on the viewer. It provides conditions for experiencing the way institutional devices leverage reactions to art in divergent forms of encounters, either by inspiring an internal aesthetic response to art objects (as does any exhibition or work of art) or by requiring from viewers literal participation in social exchanges. The artists in this exhibition examine with criticism and humor the institutionalization of art, exhibition-making, academic production, artistic resistance, and a wide range of other influences that affect how people get access to, read about, study, view, reflect upon, and bring forth an imaginative response to art.

GAYLEN GERBER'S *BACKDROPS* ask visitors to participate in the fulfillment of his works of art, whether they realize it or not. *Backdrops* are large-scale paintings on canvas, monochromatic, and situation-specific. These discreet works of art replicate exact dimensions and sometimes the color of an existing wall in an exhibition space. While the theoretical basis of a *Backdrop* investigates the structural and material conditions of a gallery space—the spatial container—and how these affect the presentation and reception of art, the planning and making of the work invariably pulls Gerber into the art institution and its various exhibition-making mechanisms. Due to the obvious reliance on a physical wall in a gallery for exhibiting art, a *Backdrop* visually dominates an installation while paradoxically deflecting specific authorship or attention in the very nature of its adoption of the ubiquitous service role. Dialectic relationships between Gerber's painting and other works of art are made by way of appropriation and cooperation. Indeed, Gerber cooperates with other artists in the execution of his painting by exhibiting their art on or in front of his. The artwork selected by the exhibition curator is installed in conjunction with a *Backdrop*, or Gerber may introduce an entirely new artist into the mix whose work encourages a specific dialogue.

In realizing a *Backdrop*, Gerber transcends freely the roles of artist, curator, and a network of other positions in the exhibition-making system. He negotiates with structural aspects of a wall in an exhibition site, as well as with other artworks. He also engages with facets of the institution of art, such as artists, curators, collectors, dealers, budget, art handlers, and so forth, in a dance that delicately balances artistic vision and ego with renunciation of authorial intentionality. His titling of these paintings as "Backdrops" implies a passive role, while their absolutely integral place in the exhibition is nonnegotiable. One could even argue that Gerber plays with and challenges the field of contemporary art in its complicity to undertake construction of large canvases to cover gallery walls of the same dimensions

and sometimes the same color. One might ask, doesn't the existing gallery wall suffice as a ready-made framing device of the institution? This is just one of the numerous questions Gerber raises with a *Backdrop*. When plans for the installation are settled, he turns over a meticulous set of guidelines for building the work, relieving himself of the construction process and exiting from the various exhibition-making roles inhabited temporarily.

Backdrop/Exact Imagination is a 16-x-50-foot, gray painting, visible throughout the exhibition site. While Gerber cooperated with each exhibition participant to realize this painting, the collective Red76's artistic resistance fliers from the series *Free Art History* are scattered on the floor, free for the taking, in direct proximity to *Backdrop/Exact Imagination*. This particular collaboration brings together artistic practices that elicit visitor participation in two divergent ways, Gerber with devices that encourage internal aesthetic explorations and Red76 with social exchange (discussed below). An actual gallery wall built perpendicular to *Backdrop/Exact Imagination* divides it into two sections. That wall embeds, visually and psychologically, Gerber's work into the exhibition site, obscuring it even further from visitors' attention, thus strengthening its clandestine role in their aesthetic experience.

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI'S VIDEO *FLOCK* (2002) accompanies *Backdrop/Exact Imagination* on the opposite side of the perpendicular gallery wall. In *Flock* Jankowski considers the relationship between the artist, the gallery, and the visitor. In the video twelve viewers of an exhibition preview experience a very unique form of participation: a magician systematically turns each and every one of them into sheep before they enter the gallery—en masse. Once inside, the sheep wander past works of art, taking cursory looks here and there. They congregate in parts of the exhibition space and, within this setting, appear to chitchat as if it is just another opening reception. They give attention only to each other, ignoring the art. *Flock* is a humorous and insightful observation of the social dynamics of the contemporary art world in which constituents sometimes place greater onus on the entertainment than the works of art.

Jankowski's videos and installations eschew boundaries between art and reality. In *Flock* he uses the power of the moving image to break conceptually a fissure into which we—the viewers watching the viewers—have a momentary peek at that space between reality and illusion. The illusion of magic is amplified by the use of video, a medium that Jankowski frequently turns on the social sphere of the field of art and the media. Concerned more with process over finished product, his practice exploits the unpredictable outcomes of working with nonactors or amateurs to produce artworks typically unscripted or, at least, with minimal direction. Jankowski uncovers the spontaneity and randomness of life and leaves viewers with a renewed sense of perspective. In *Flock* the gallery-going visitors return eventually to their human forms, and the adventure becomes a circuitous experience. We are privy to that illusion, witnesses to a temporary collapse—a jolt or an aggravation—of social order in an otherwise austere, refined gallery system. The common scene of an opening reception is suddenly coated with refreshing new meaning.

THE BRITISH COLLECTIVE BANK produced more widespread, intense, and real-life forms of aggravation for the established contemporary art scene. Active in London throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, BANK included revolving members Simon Bedwell, Dave Burrows, Dino Demosthenous, John Russell, Milly Thompson, and Andrew Williamson. Bedwell and Russell fell into collaboration following graduation from art school when they were thrust into the period of trepidation that young artists face, simultaneously repelled and allured by the world of contemporary art. Making fun of the art world and playing tricks with illusion and reality, the artists' first antic included mailing invites for completely fictional exhibitions taking place at very real exhibition sites—to the annoyance of the commercial establishment.

The collective's name originates from its first exhibition called *BANK* held in 1991 in a disused bank building. From that point the name stuck, and the bulk of their activity focused on organizing almost thirty exhibitions—with and without BANK artists—during their existence. In many cases, these projects blatantly deployed the exhibition format as a part of BANK's artistic modus operandi, periodically making satirical commentary on the "curation-ego and all its trappings."[8] Operating counter to the commercial exhibition system, the collective organized shows like *COCAINE ORGASM* (1995), *FUCK OFF* (1996), *DOG-U-MENTAL VIII!!!* (1996) and *STOP SHORT-CHANGING US. POPULAR CULTURE IS FOR IDIOTS. WE BELIEVE IN ART!* (1998). Dadaist, ironic, sometimes vitriolic, but always filled with energy, vitality, and originality, BANK's exhibitions and tabloid publications—with headlines like *Crap!*, *London is Over*, *Exactly How Much Do You Want?*, *Turner Prize Beauty Pageant*, and *Galleries 'All Owned by Rich People' Shock*—challenged exclusionary conditions of the field of contemporary art. The exhibitions appeared at a range of locations, some of which remained nameless and others that were called BANKSPACE, DOG, and Gallerie Poo Poo, over the course of BANK's existence.

The collective's last exhibition at Gallerie Poo Poo, *PRESS RELEASE* (1999), gathered together work from the project *The BANK Fax-Bak Service*. For it the members of BANK graded gallery press releases that included editing, correcting grammar, commenting on layout and design, offering opinionating reviews of the documents, and faxing the marked-up versions back to galleries of origin. This free advice service, complete with branding logo and tagline, "Helping You Help Yourselves!," operated for over a year. It left few galleries in London and New York unscathed from criticism of the art-speak and lofty, bourgeois pretension used sometimes to publicize exhibitions. A vague notion of self-parody combined with dead-on critique of alienating culture-speak make the *Fax-Bak* works hilariously successful, certainly dumbfounding and aggravating galleries on the receiving end. In fact, a fax-back by Feigen Contemporary in response to a *Fax-Bak* can attest to it. No doubt frustrated, the gallery responded: "PLEASE STOP WASTING OUR TIME WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT INANE COMMENTARY. GO AWAY!! DO NOT CONTACT US AGAIN."

DADAIST SATIRE, IRONY, UNPREDICTABLE TACTICS, and unconventional materials serve to characterize the art of David Ireland. Using architecture, installations, actions, drawings, and objects to challenge distinctions between art, non-art, and everyday life, Ireland charges exhibition sites with quizzical references and situations for visitors to ponder and decipher. His interest in process, chance, and art history—drawing on influences from artists like Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Smithson, and Yves Klein—alter and confuse the viewer's perception and knowledge of art history. Indeed, Gerber introduced Ireland's art to *Exact Imagination* for the unexpected, unclassifiable presence, aggravation, and confusion that it adds to an exhibition narrative. In Rugoff's consideration of this kind of experience in group exhibitions, he writes: "…it is precisely when we are unsure of something that our curiosity is aroused, and that we then tend to regard it more closely, consider it more carefully, and in the end, experience it more intensely."[9] The art of Ireland provides that experience.

Y.K.'s object (2001) is a small blue blob of Fixall about six inches long by three inches wide. It is installed in a corner of the gallery. Ireland appropriates the ultramarine blue commonly associated with Yves Klein. The visitor's expectations are disrupted by Ireland's use of the color linked intricately to a prominent figure in art history but here mixing it into a completely indecipherable, even questionable work of art. What is that thing in the corner? This collision of intellectual experience, historical knowledge, and bewilderment forms an aesthetic response that asks viewers to construct their own narratives, draw their own conclusions, and think critically about the work, its context in the exhibition, and in art history.

Ireland's use of the Klein blue pokes at an art world that readily legitimizes and idolizes artists through agents of recognition like color, material, and signature. Challenges to claims of uniqueness are threaded throughout Ireland's practice, which itself defies classification with specific material or style. Subjects like ego, validation, and originality are incorporated into a series of installations and sculptures in which Ireland reflexively stakes claim to authorship by using his initials "D.I." as logotype—in fact branding, figuratively and literally, the letters onto the ends of wood logs as seen in *Duchamp's Tree* (1995). While value is asserted in this declaration of artist-creator, it is called up only to be negated by the everyday quality and extraordinary quantity of logs. The uneasy relationship of commerce and art amplifies the denial of originality in the act of stamping a signature onto something so common as a raw piece of wood, thus undermining the deification of artist as cult figure and the way commercial and cultural status is assigned. Mimicry of the Klein blue makes this case. But, more obvious, Ireland's "D.I." calls to mind a familiar critique in the urinal to which Duchamp in 1917 gave artistic cachet by selecting it, flipping it upside down, scribbling the fictional signature "R. Mutt," and titling it *Fountain*.

Untitled (capillary work) (1988), made of a white enameled basin filled with a golden-yellow liquid, white napkin, and wire, is a sculpture constructed of ready-made elements—objects recycled, combined, and arranged to bring on new life and meaning. The napkin that dangles from the wire and partially into the basin slowly absorbs the liquid. It engages with the visitor's familiarity with these common objects by re-presenting them in an arrangement in relation to other works of art in the exhibition. The continually changing quality of the capillary work—liquid rising, evaporating, basin drying—inserts a disturbance in the exhibition site similar to *Y.K.'s object*. But, in this case, the capillary work causes a heightened perceptual awareness of the ever-shifting environmental conditions of a gallery, such as air temperature, humidity, light level, visitors chatting, phones ringing, outdoor noises, and café aromas.

DAVID ORDING'S PAINTINGS are polyvalent, inviting a number of questions to unravel. On one hand, he challenges the canon of art history and the academic producers who laud, define, and interpret it. On the other, he interweaves issues of visual and intellectual derivatives; rules of engagement with art in museums; and issues of appropriation and representation. His painting *After* (2005–07) is 7 x 10 feet, divided into a grid of twenty-eight equal parts. For each section Ording selected and copied with uncanny technical skill a range of recognizable full-views and details of Old Master paintings from the Renaissance to Realism. Forgoing the formidable task of tracking down the originals in museum collections around the world, he purposely copied reproductions like the kind found in art history texts, exhibition catalogues, and postcards.

But something is not quite right in these reproductions, several degrees removed from the original paintings, including Ingres's *Odalisque*, Géricault's *Raft of the* Medusa, Delacroix's *Lion Devouring a Hare*, Rubens's *The Three Graces*, Courbet's *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*, and Caravaggio's *Bacchus*. Is it the flatness, color, tone, texture, or white areas that bracket the full-view images? Ording has intentionally replicated with precision those deficiencies and nuances inherent in print, postcard, and online media reproductions that viewers use often to experience art. While this approach reinforces the obvious notion that reproductions are no substitute for the real thing, Ording draws attention to the subjugated histories of art devised, written, and disseminated by scholars and critics—analyzing what is included as much as what is omitted. Such histories are represented in Janson's *History of Art* and Gardner's *Art Through the Ages*, ubiquitous tomes of art history that have been used by generations of students and continue to be used in academics today.

Ording's selection and arrangement of images in the grid paintings is a kind of formalist

approach to Dadaist montage. In *After* (2005–07) and *After (40 plates from Degas)* (2004), a work divided into forty different views and details of paintings by the French Impressionist Edgar Degas, Ording usurps the role of narrative-maker, appropriating the images, arranging them in a way to give new meaning, and leaving it to the viewer to piece together, make conclusions, and figure it out. Here they can contemplate the French master's attitude toward relationships between men and women of the nineteenth century. Ording's witty and wildly poignant juxtapositions formulate his history of the very history of art presented by Janson et al. The final compositions serve as reminders that a judgment of history, in any field at any time, is always the version of the privileged who record it and the era in which that is done.

You Can't Touch That (after Courbet) (2005) is a painting of a digital photograph of the artist's hand surreptitiously touching a self-portrait painting by Courbet in the collection of the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Obviously alluding to conditions of museum security—guards, stanchions, glass, motion alarms—under which visitors experience works of art, the painting also evokes Courbet's rebellious spirit against the art-world establishment. In 1855 in Paris after two of his paintings were rejected by the selection committee of the Exposition Universelle, in part because of their realistic relations to social conditions, Courbet set up his own pavilion. In that space he showed forty works of art in an exhibition he called *Du Réalisme*. Accompanied by a manifesto outlining his thoughts on Realism, this solo exhibition is one of the earliest in the history of art to take a stance against conventional mandates of the official exhibition system, foreshadowing those Dadaist, anti-establishment exhibitions and publications of BANK. While derivation and appropriation are again prominent here in this painting by Ording, he formulates an uneasy mixture of elements to decipher. The meticulous replication of Courbet's brushwork, photographic overexposure of Ording's own hand, and haphazard tilt of the frame all coalesce to form an illusion that Courbet himself is recoiling from the approaching touch and, perhaps, the very canon into which history has placed him.

IN *EXACT IMAGINATION* ANDREA FRASER'S *A Visit to the Sistine Chapel* (2005) extends Ording's criticism of the institution of art from the texts of academia to the interpretative devices of art museums. The video chronicles Fraser's visit to the Vatican Museum in Rome. The soundtrack is the museum's audio guide with Baroque music playing in the background and a voice guiding her through the museum's galleries to the anticlimactic finale: the Sistine Chapel. The voice on the audio guide instructs Fraser to be pious and contemplative, encouraging an emotionally moving response to art, religion, and architecture on a level quite impossible to achieve amidst the surrounding throngs of mass tourism and culture marketing. Her seemingly basic task of following instructions is challenged constantly by dodging crazed, camera-clicking, video-taping tourists and by detours through museum gift shops and bookstores. Fraser's dramatic gestures and acquiescent responses—trying to be obedient—intensify the Disneyfication of the whole museum experience.

While informative and entertaining, institutional didactic materials like audio guides and wall texts can homogenize a cultural experience by drawing attention to the same ideas and images deemed most valuable by curators and scholars. Supplying information on authorship and ownership (artist, collector), institutional didactics influence ways of appreciation by determining culture value and by discouraging individual feeling or response. As a result, visitors are not always encouraged to use their own eyes, thoughts, mood, knowledge, personal history, and imagination to conjure objective or subjective aesthetic experiences by themselves. This is evident in Fraser's video, for example, in the images of other museum visitors using the audio guide, turning their attention, almost in unison, right, then left, then up.

A Visit to the Sistine Chapel could be interpreted as a critique by Fraser of "…the spectacularization of museums and their transformation from public educational institutions into corporate entertainment

complexes…"[10] It characterizes her practice dedicated to meaningfully considering economic, social, political, and cultural forces in the institution of art. Generally speaking, early practitioners of institutional critique from the 1960s and '70s, such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Robert Smithson, investigated physical qualities and limitations of the art institution as a physical embodiment of power and commerce. Fraser's interventions, performances, videos, writings, and objects extend that critique to a wider sociocultural set of circumstances of resistance. She is not only influenced by those early practitioners but also by other practices that originated in the late 1960s, '70s, and '80s with a generation of vanguard artists, such as Martha Rosler, Dara Birnbaum, Gran Fury, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Yvonne Rainer, Sherrie Levine, Group Material, and Louise Lawler, to mention only a few, who evaluate critically representations of gender roles, sexuality, and systems of hierarchy in the way culture and society present them.

LOUISE LAWLER'S ART addresses issues of cultural representation and social relations in the world of art. She looks at the relationships not only between viewer and art object but among collectors, dealers, institutions, artists, and gallery staff that ultimately form power structures in a complex matrix of art-world assemblages. Her artistic production then is a collective process, purposely made difficult to identify, eschewing the role of artist-creator or as Fraser writes:

> By abdicating this privileged place of artistic identity, Lawler manages to escape institutional definitions of artistic activity as an autonomous aesthetic exploration. Her objective is not so much to uncover hidden ideological agendas, but to disrupt the institutional boundaries that determine and separate the discrete identities of artist and artwork from an apparatus that supposedly merely supplements them.[11]

Dissolving those identities to a state of anonymity, Lawler photographs, curates, writes, edits, designs, arranges, records, prints, and installs work in a strategy that draws on others for its content. She complicates detection of specific identity by simultaneously appropriating images and texts of other artists as well as other art-world roles and scenes, not unlike Gerber whose *Backdrop/Exact Imagination* is made of an aggregate of collaborators.

In the photographs *Board of Directors* (1988/1989) and *Conditions of Sale* (1988/1990) a constellation of collaborators are at work. Both photographs were taken during a preview at Christie's auction house in an era when contemporary art was booming. The sale is "Contemporary Art from The Tremaine Collection," a collection with which Lawler was intimately involved in the early 1980s when she began investigating art as decoration in domestic settings. *Board of Directors* includes a detail of Jasper Johns's *White Flag* from that collection. The label with identifying information of collector, artist, title, date, and confirmation of signature assures potential buyers that it is the real thing. The cropped detail of the painting—thick with impasto, canvas surface exposed partially, and thin wood frame—has no particular value or recognition if not for the label to legitimize and assess its cultural and commercial significance. These kinds of descriptive labels inform potential buyers of an authenticity that supports the prices the art is expected to garner. Text and titles are also important to Lawler. While her titles of these works insert them directly into a sphere of the commercial art market and, perhaps in the case of *Board of Directors*, even act as playful puns relaying a boredom with those power elite, the brief accompanying texts here are appropriated from sale catalogues. The found text draws attention to forces and conditions under which art is sold as goods, the text acting as a readymade in its own right.

In *Conditions of Sale* (1988/1990) an arrangement of artworks for sale is cropped in Lawler's matter-of-fact style. Here works by Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein commingle in Christie's less-than-thoughtful, hurried arrangement on a temporary wall with wires dangling and poking

out from beneath the frames. According to Helen Molesworth, what makes Lawler's photographs of works of art at auction poignant is that "The emotional intensity comes from the realization that however fancy the trappings of the auction house, and however delirious the bidding, an art auction is nothing more than an extremely fancy garage sale, a collection of cast-off pictures, a grouping of art that is no longer wanted or needed by its owners."[12] That garage-sale setting comes across in the presentation of these works, coated ever so slyly by Lichtenstein's teary-eyed woman who looks down on the other castaways. In the accompanying text, Lawler culls an auction house disclaimer that reminds potential buyers that the work is sold "AS IS," an elaborate 'buyer beware' warning like those found at used car lots. The labels for this arrangement are pushed to the far edge of the wall, which emphasizes the physical quality of the support on which the works hang but also directs attention beyond it, toward a glimpse out the window, across a city street, and into a corporate setting. The sterile, fluorescent-lighted environment into which viewers peek mirrors that in which these artworks have been caught, turning that voyeurism on itself, bringing to mind the kind of corporate and business acumen that fuels the auction house world.

In the context of *Exact Imagination* it could be argued that Lawler's *Big* (2002/2003) has it all. She has captured a brief moment during an installation of works in an art fair booth at Art Basel Miami Beach. Maurizio Cattelan's oversized sculpture of Picasso, just unpacked, not yet assembled, lies horizontal, decapitated. Behind this Dadaist-looking crime scene is a photograph by Thomas Struth of museum visitors viewing classical works of art, other kinds of headless sculptures from other points in art history. Lawler sets up a multilayered visual experience into which the viewer looks onto other viewers of other artworks in another kind of art-viewing setting: the museum, a very different environment from the glitzy, commercially driven art fairs in which the Cattelan and Struth works reside temporarily. As in the Christie's pictures taken at previews prior to auctions, Lawler photographs a quiet moment before the storm of commerce ensues. Art fairs have come to dominate contemporary art world sales, accommodating buying frenzies and parties as all things "big" seem to take precedence in contemporary art. In a critique of the size of the Guggenheim Bilbao, Fraser sums up this circuitous trap of scale:

> Big art demands big spaces. Big spaces demand big art. Big, spectacular art and architecture draw big audiences. Big, general audiences, with less specific taste for the specific traditions of modern and contemporary art and architecture, are drawn by big, spectacular art and architecture. Museums need big spaces to accommodate big art and big shows and the big audiences they draw. They need big shows and big art to draw big audiences to raise big money to build big spaces and organize big shows with big art to draw big audiences…[13]

BASED IN COPENHAGEN AND LAND˚, the Danish collective N55 produces art and situations for everyday life. Their writings, designs, public events, collaborations, services, and objects merge art and life in utopist, democratic, and utilitarian models that seek to raise questions about contemporary living conditions, geography, and revised considerations of place. In simply titled and concisely written MANUALS, such as MICRODWELLINGS, SHOP, FACTORY, LAND, ROOMS, and CLEAN AIR MACHINE, N55 empower individuals with the means to change their own quality of life. In these projects, N55 has built, organized, instigated, or proposed mobile housing modules, alternative systems of economic exchange, production facilities, new models of publicly held property, public access to shared spaces, alternative forms of political movement, and devices for improving indoor air. More than merely viewers of art, the persons who participate in N55 projects become concrete users, producers, disseminators, and benefactors of the projects and, by extension, insert art into the public sphere. The primary role of these persons is described in N55's statement "Art and Reality."

Part artist statement, part sweeping philosophy on art and life, "Art and Reality" draws attention to authorship, signifying the artist or collective as the primary origin of artistic subject. *Exact Imagination* reproduces "Art and Reality" in this catalogue and installed in vinyl lettering on a 16-x-28-foot wall in the exhibition site. It is an exaggerated and alternative kind of introductory wall text that traditionally confronts visitors at exhibition entrances. Forgoing the typical model of that exhibition-making component, *Exact Imagination* pushes aside the institution's voice in text and gives import of place to the artist in lieu of it.

N55 operates largely on the margins of the art institution, outside traditional commercial frameworks, supported, in some cases, by curatorial practices of new institutionalism. The collective produces art with the viewer-cum-user as a requisite of the fulfillment of their work. This essay is bookended by descriptions of artistic practices that encourage engagement with art through divergent means but with equal emphasis on the viewer. Gaylen Gerber's *Backdrop/Exact Imagination*, on one hand, brings in viewers to explore aesthetic relationships, internally and independently, responding to art that makes their participation crucial to a final realization of his work. Artists like N55 and the Portland, Oregon-based collective Red76 literally ask for physical exchange from visitors where they become agents that help to forge the art to fruition.

RED76 USES SOCIAL EXCHANGE, community-based projects, fliers, posters, publications, the Internet, e-mail and blogs that bring participants into workshops, events, conversations, and actions to fuel an artistic practice that stimulates political and cultural change. Spearheaded by Sam Gould, the collective draws on models of resistance in art and political histories to influence a dialogical practice that is very much rooted in the present.

Red76's contribution to *Exact Imagination* is two-fold. In the exhibition site are fliers and a video from the project *Free Art History*. The premise of this project is simple but effective. Seeking to make information about art and history more readily accessible to the public, the collective photocopied handmade fliers about key figures and movements with a particular focus on artistic resistance. Some of the subjects in the fliers include the exhibition *China/Avant-garde* which opened in February 1989 at the National Gallery in Beijing; Ed Sanders and his journal *FUCK YOU/a magazine of the arts*; the peace campaign of Yoko Ono and John Lennon; the British punk band CRASS and its instigation of Thatchergate; and Renée Jeanne Falconetti and the story of her powerful performance in the 1928 silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. The video documents Red76 disseminating copies of these fliers and others throughout Columbus, Ohio, at laundromats, grocery stores, cafés, security offices, retail chains, coffee shops, and on street posts. *Free Art History* is a form of artistic anarchy, which the fliers themselves embody, spreading information about art and its legacy of reaction against cultural and societal upheavals. In addition to putting this information into the public realm, incorporated within these fliers and actions is a critique on today's limited access to art history in the high costs of illustrated texts and rising entrance fees to museums that prohibit widespread knowledge about and experience of art.

Another history in the *Free Art History* series is the copy policy of the offices of the Vietnam Day Committee in Berkeley, California, in the mid 1960s. The VDC held an open copy policy, meaning that along with posters and internal memoranda the group needed to make, the public was encouraged to come and use the VDC's mimeograph machine to make fliers—for protests, used bikes for sale, roommates wanted, whatever. Free beer was available at the office too. The only catch: before leaving, each flier was stamped with a VDC logo. The copy center evolved into a center for community in which people gathered to discuss a range of political and social issues of the day.

Red76's *Franklin's VDC Copy Center* revisits the radical activities of Berkeley's VDC as a means

to raise awareness and generate visibility of political, social, and cultural organizations working today in Columbus and beyond. Groups like Columbus Food Not Bombs, FreeGeek Columbus, Iraq Veterans Against the War, MAP Furniture Bank, Third Hand Bicycle Co-op, Spore-Print Infoshop, and Van Gallery are some of the organizations represented on a rotating basis in the copy center, which is located temporarily in a formerly unused storefront space on a busy downtown street. Each organization may use the copier for their purposes. During the run of the exhibition, the public may also use the copy center free of charge, but all photocopies produced are given a stamp promoting the group that occupies the space at that given time. The high visibility of this urban space provides significant public exposure for these organizations. The copy center is a site for conversations, gatherings, workshops, lectures, and film screenings pertaining to each organization during the course of *Exact Imagination*, giving Red76 creative freedom and removal from the institution of art as much as possible to produce a new physical terrain and social space. As a means of opening up debate around contemporary cultural issues, Red76 created this temporary place for public research outside of academic and institutional frameworks, drawing on America's radical social past and reinvigorating it for current public discourse. Anybody with anything to say or share is invited to participate—"Open for Anything, Good, for Nothing."

Franklin's VDC Copy Center and Red76 are the projects and artistic practices that flourish in the exhibition model of the new institution in which social exchange is the art and the art is the social exchange, where all viewers are inherently participants, exercising their imagination in response to the transformative effect of art.

ENDNOTES

1 Ralph Rugoff, "You Talking To Me? On Curating Group Shows that Give You a Chance to Join the Group," in *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, ed. Paula Marincola (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 46.

2 Maria Lind and Alex Farquharson, "Integrative Institutionalism: a Reconsideration," in *The New Administration of Aesthetics*, eds. Tone Hansen and Trude Iversen (Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2007), 110. New institutionalism is discussed in a conversation between Lind and Farquharson and integral to ideas developed in this essay.

3 Physical engagement between artists and participants has been a part of artistic practices for decades; consider Dadaism, Fluxus, and Happenings as starting points. Lind and Farquharson's discussion of new institutionalism describes a curatorial practice that increasingly integrates social exchange into exhibition models.

4 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: jrp/Ringier; Southern California Consortium of Art Schools, 2007), 130.

5 In his essay "Fleeing the Art of Governing. How to 'leave the established,' or how to escape the 'new administration of aesthetic,'" Gerald Raunig addresses the need for institutional critique to continue to evolve and develop in response to changes in society and culture. See *The New Administration of Aesthetics*, eds. Tone Hansen and Trude Iversen (Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2007), 16–27. On the changing role of the artist as curator and curator as artist in exhibition strategies, see Jens Hoffmann, "The Curatorialization of Institutional Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: jrp/Ringier; Southern California Consortium of Art Schools, 2007), 322–335.

6 This question occupies discourse in journals and symposia on institutional critique. In 2005 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art organized a conference, which resulted in the publication *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: jrp/Ringier; Southern California Consortium of Art Schools, 2007). In 2006 in Oslo the conference "The New Administration of Aesthetics" assessed institutional critique and broader structural changes in the cultural field. That conference produced the publication *The New Administration of Aesthetics*, eds. Tone Hansen and Trude Iversen (Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2007) that continues discussions initiated in it.

7 In addition to the artists participating in *Exact Imagination*, I am indebted to brilliant and innovative writers, curators, and thinkers like Alexander Alberro, Magali Arriola, Claire Bishop, Alex Farquharson, Hal Foster, Andrea Fraser, Isabelle Graw, Tone Hansen, Jens Hoffmann, Grant Kester, Trude Iversen, Maria Lind, Stephen Melville, Helen Molesworth, Gerald Raunig, Ralph Rugoff, Gregory Sholette, Blake Stimson, Robert Storr, and Krzysztof Wodiczko in the formation of thinking about curatorial practice and ways of display and development of the ideas incorporated into this essay and exhibition.

8 BANK, *BANK* (London: Black Dog, 2000).

9 Rugoff, "You Talking To Me? On Curating Group Shows that Give You a Chance to Join the Group," 48–49.

10 Fraser makes this statement about museums in her analysis of the Guggenheim Bilbao. It is applicable here to a consideration of her Vatican Museum experience. See Fraser, "Isn't This a Wonderful Place? (A Tour of a Tour of the Guggenheim Bilbao)," in *Museum Highlights. The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 239.

11 Fraser, "In and Out of Place," in *Museum Highlights*, 18.

12 Helen Molesworth, "Louise Lawler: Just the Facts," in *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (looking back)*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2006), 146.

13 Fraser, "Isn't This a Wonderful Place? (A Tour of a Tour of the Guggenheim Bilbao)," in *Museum Highlights*, 255.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

BANK
The Bank Fax-Bak Service series, 1998–99

AC Project Room, NY, 1999
Alexander & Bonin, NY, 1999
Paula Cooper, NY, 1999
CRG, NY, 1999
Feigen Contemporary, NY, 1999
Gagosian, NY, 1999
Greene Naftali, NY, 1999
Casey Kaplan, NY, 1999
Friedrich Petzel, NY, 1999
Metro Pictures, NY, 1999
Duncan Cargill, UK, 1998
Sadie Coles, UK, 1998
Stephen Friedman, UK, 1998
Laurent Delaye, UK 1998
The Showroom, UK, 1998
ink on paper

Fax-Backs to *Fax-Baks*
Paula Cooper, NY, 1999
Feigen Contemporary, NY, June 1999
Feigen Contemporary, NY, April 1999
The approach, UK, 1998
facsimile on paper

Voicemail messages to *Fax-Baks*
Cristenrose Gallery, NY, 1998

Feigen Contemporary, NY, 1998
answerphone message transferred to CD
1:29 minutes
Courtesy of BANK archive, London

Andrea Fraser
A Visit to the Sistine Chapel, 2005
DVD
12 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York

Gaylen Gerber with BANK, Andrea Fraser, David Ireland,
Christian Jankowski, Louise Lawler, N55, David Ording and Red76
Backdrop/Exact Imagination, 2008*
latex on canvas, various media
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

David Ireland
Untitled (capillary work), 1988
capillary action work with bassinet, wire and fabric dye
40 x 27 x 22 inches

Y.K.'s object, 2001
Fixall with pigment
6 ½ x 2 ¾ x 2 inches
Courtesy of Christopher Grimes Gallery, Los Angeles

Christian Jankowski
Flock, 2002
DVD
10 minutes
Courtesy of the artist, Maccarone, Inc., New York, and Klosterfelde, Berlin

Louise Lawler
Big, 2002/2003
cibachrome mounted on museum box
52 ¾ x 46 ½ inches
Courtesy of Dominique Lévy and Dorothy Berwin

Board of Directors, 1988/1989
black and white photograph with printed mat
16 x 22 ¼ inches
28 x 32 ¼ inches (mat)
Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

Conditions of Sale, 1988/1990
black and white photograph with printed mat
16 x 22 ¼ inches (image)
28 x 32 ¼ inches (mat)
Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

N55
Art and Reality, 1996
site-specific installation
cut vinyl text
15 x 28 feet
Courtesy of the artists

David Ording
After, 2005–07
oil on canvas
7 x 10 feet

You Can't Touch That (after Courbet), 2005
oil on canvas
30 x 24 inches
After (40 Plates from Degas), 2004
oil on canvas
34 x 38 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston

Red76
video and fliers from the series *Free Art History*, 2008
ink on paper
community-wide distribution

Franklin's VDC Copy Center, 2008
1124 North High, Columbus, Ohio
Courtesy of the artists

* Gerber's *Backdrops* are not dates themselves but carry the date of the artwork installed in relation to it.

CREDITS

David Ireland
Duchamp's Tree, 1995
branded wood on steel bottle rack
46 x 35 x 35 inches
Private collection
Image courtesy of Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Los Angeles
photography Michael Tropea

Louise Lawler
Big, 2002/2003
cibachrome mounted on museum box
52 ¾ x 46 ½ inches
Collection of Dominique Lévy and Dorothy Berwin
Image courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

Installation photography courtesy of Anthony Castronovo (pages 16, 50, 52, 53).

Installation photography courtesy of Gaylen Gerber (pages 13, 14).

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Exact Imagination* curated by James Voorhies. Organized by Columbus College of Art & Design, the exhibition is on view from February 13 to April 5, 2008 at Canzani Center Gallery on the CCAD campus.

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