



What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation

By Tom Finkelpearl

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In *What We Made*, Tom Finkelpearl examines the activist, participatory, coauthored aesthetic experiences being created in contemporary art. He suggests social cooperation as a meaningful way to think about this work and provides a framework for understanding its emergence and acceptance. In a series of fifteen conversations, artists comment on their experiences working cooperatively, joined at times by colleagues from related fields, including social policy, architecture, art history, urban planning, and new media. Issues discussed include the experiences of working in public and of working with museums and libraries, opportunities for social change, the lines between education and art, spirituality, collaborative opportunities made available by new media, and the elusive criteria for evaluating cooperative art. Finkelpearl engages the art historians Grant Kester and Claire Bishop in conversation on the challenges of writing critically about this work and the aesthetic status of the dialogical encounter. He also interviews the often overlooked co-creators of cooperative art, "expert participants" who have worked with artists. In his conclusion, Finkelpearl argues that pragmatism offers a useful critical platform for understanding the experiential nature of social cooperation, and he brings pragmatism to bear in a discussion of Houston's *Project Row Houses*.

Interviewees. Naomi Beckwith, Claire Bishop, Tania Bruguera, Brett Cook, Teddy Cruz, Jay Dykeman, Wendy Ewald, Sondra Farganis, Harrell Fletcher, David Henry, Gregg Horowitz, Grant Kester, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Pedro Lasch, Rick Lowe, Daniel Martinez, Lee Mingwei, Jonah Peretti, Ernesto Pujol, Evan Roth, Ethan Seltzer, and Mark Stern

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Editorial Review

Review

"*What We Made* is a dialogical thick description of cooperative art practices from the point of view of practitioners and many insightful interlocutors. It will be an extremely valuable resource for artists, art historians, and museum professionals."

(Rebecca Zorach, author of *The Passionate Triangle*)

"In between histories, current art practices, and theories lies the conundrum: how to describe relational and public art and the many intentions of those involved. Tom Finkelpearl gives us perspectives from artists' on-the-ground experiences and a welcome revisiting of Dewey, contextualized by a sweeping introduction that alone is worth the price of the book."

(Suzanne Lacy, author of *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974–2007*)

"These conversations by key practitioners and thinkers are a snapshot of thinking around the emergence of social and collaborative art, which seeks to improve society and address social issues. Finkelpearl ably situates collaborative and participatory art within the chronology of American art history."

(Toro Castaño *Library Journal*)

"What *What We Made* does, perhaps better than anything I've read so far about this particular kind of art, is utterly refrain from arriving at singular summaries or judgments. Instead, the conversations foreground the nuanced and complex social relations tied up in any artwork, but particularly collaborative artwork that draws on communities operating largely outside of the arts marketplace. And the projects Finkelpearl has chosen to discuss and feature by and large demonstrate real possibilities for genuine exchange across networks and communities."

(Alexis Clements *Hyperallergic* 2014-04-29)

"*What We Made* is a good sourcebook of art that tackles politics through participation and collaboration. The author's introduction provides a useful overview of the situation in contemporary America. . . ."

(Sally O'Reilly *Art Monthly*)

"*What We Made* brings together the stars of the social practice world Rick Lowe, Tania Bruguera, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Harrell Fletcher, and more in conversations with urban planners, educators, and each other, to create a fluid and interdisciplinary dialogue about social practice and its complicated, beautiful and necessary implications in the world."

(Katie Bachler *The Art Book Review*)

"Finkelpearl has provided his readers with a rich description of a particular, influential movement in the art museum world. This book illustrates his own commitment to social collaboration. By presenting the conversations that make up the core of this volume, he brings this aspect of the art museum world to a larger public."

(George E. Hein *Curator*)

About the Author

Tom Finkelppearl is Executive Director of the Queens Museum of Art. He is the author of *Dialogues in Public Art*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Andrea Toliver:

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Elijah McWhorter:

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