

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

Gregory Sholette, Assistant Professor of Studio Art
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As an interdisciplinary artist and writer my work and teaching draw from diverse fields, media and genres of visual art, and my professional research interests focus on issues of social justice, artistic collaboration, and the largely overlooked archive of socially engaged art, or what I call the “dark matter” of the art world. I think of what I do as an “expanded” social art practice in which the material production of art interacts with cultural organizing, scholarship, and pedagogy. My admittedly ambitious aim is to generate new forms of knowledge and aesthetic experience. Sometimes this takes place through collaborations with others, and sometimes by publishing art criticism, but it also takes the form of public art as well as more traditional, gallery-based art exhibitions. This drawing together of art with criticism and community activism is closely linked to certain well-known conceptual artists such as Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler, both of whom I studied with in the 1980s. That said, perhaps Professor William W. Clark described my activity most succinctly when he wrote “you are a successfully published author and editor of articles and books focusing on critical theory, one of the more significant aspects of current intellectual activity in relation to art production.”⁺

Imaginary Archive (IA) is a good example of this “expanded” social art practice in so far as it draws together production, research, writing, and organizing. IA is a traveling, participatory art installation that explores the unrealized utopian possibilities of history. It began the summer after I was hired at QC during a residency in Wellington New Zealand (2008). My role involves not only conceptualizing and organizing the project, but also creating works for the growing archive that now consists of over fifty “documents” describing a past whose future never arrived: printed materials, small art objects, books, pamphlets and self-published narratives. And because each artist focuses on issues related to his or her own nation’s past, these fictional explorations shed a surprisingly strong light on concrete realities. Since 2008 IA has traveled to Galway, Ireland in 2010, Graz, Austria in 2011, and most recently Kyiv, Ukraine in April 2014 adding local artists along the way.

Not all of my work is as participatory as this, however. Sometimes I begin with an element of social collaboration and then use this as a basis to produce sculptural objects. Two years ago the Queens Museum asked me to create a temporary work to be installed directly on their monumental panorama of New York City in miniature that was built at the behest of Robert Moses for the 1964-65 World’s Fair. As a former model-maker myself the offer was exhilarating and made me think of the hundreds of skilled individuals who contributed to its fabrication, noting that they are today by and large forgotten. I decided to ask fifteen art world associates to describe a new island of their own imagining for New York’s waterways. I then “translated” these ideas into sculpted miniature islands and placed them on the panorama. “Fifteen Islands for Robert Moses” remained on view for several months and became a hit with museum visitors and school groups. The Daily News accurately described it as “ranging from political to abstract, [and the] staunchly serious to eccentrically playful.” By contrast I opened a traditional, one-person art exhibition just this past summer at my gallery, Station Independent Projects, in downtown Manhattan, and will have another show there in October of 2014.

Nevertheless, social interaction and collaboration remains central to my practice, and stretches back decades to a couple of artists’ collectives I co-organized in the 1980s and 1990s. Political Art Documentation/Distribution, or simply PAD/D (1980-1988) or PAD/D produced an archive of socially engaged art that is now housed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Meanwhile REPOhistory (1980-2000) is known for its “repossessing of lost histories” using temporary metal street signs installed around New York City in 1992, 1994, and 1998 to mark the little-known or forgotten stories of New York’s laborers, radicals, abolitionists, Native Americans, Latino activists, feminists, children workers, the handicapped and LGBT residents. REPOhistory even got permission to mark the famed visit of Nelson Mandela to the city in 1990 and the site of the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan. On June 27, 1992 Mayor David Dinkins office even declared it “REPOhistory Day.” The groups own historical documents are now archived at New York University in the Fales Library Special Collections.

Noting the absence of well-researched, theoretically substantial writings about such artists’ collectives I begin to write a series of essays in which I examined these understudied practices. In 2004 I co-edited a catalog about recent social practices with Nato Thompson entitled *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (MASS MOCA/MIT Press). Very popular with art teachers the book was reprinted several times and has been cited by other writers some 123 times (according to Google Scholar Search).

⁺ William W. Clark, Professor and Art Department Chair, June 25, 2007.

In 2006 I co-edited a more scholarly volume of writings with the art historian Blake Stimson in which we focused on artistic collaboration itself. *Collectivism after modernism: the Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (University of Minnesota Press) is also well-cited (some 168 times) and well-reviewed in prominent journals. In 2010 I drew upon many years of research to publish my own, thesis driven, peer-reviewed book entitled, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* with Pluto Press in the United Kingdom. All copies sold out in its first year and it has since been reprinted twice. *Dark Matter* has also received a dozen strong reviews, been translated into Turkish (with a Spanish translation in progress), is cited by some 110 scholars and the book's overarching thesis has formed the basis of several art exhibitions, research projects and conferences. And in David Cottington's "The Avant-Garde: A Very Short Introduction" (Oxford University Press) he describes my book as "a ground-breaking analysis of the potential of the marginal, oppositional collectivities whose emergence he charts."

I continue to write and publish. Last year I brought out a fourth book entitled *It's The Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory*. Consisting of theoretical essays and exhibition documents by myself and other scholars the book compliments a curatorial project I initiated under the same title with Austrian Artist Oliver Ressler. Among the exhibition's two-dozen artists include my colleague, Professor Maureen Conner, and four Queens College MFA graduates. Since 2012 the show has traveled from New York City to venues in Pori, Finland; Thessaloniki, Greece, Belgrade, Slovenia, Chicago, Illinois, and Zagreb, Croatia. In part because of this specialized research my expertise is sometimes sought out as a lecturer, commentator, mentor or reader. Since arriving at QC I have delivered some seventy papers and presentations including at such noted institutions as the Palais De Tokyo and the Sorbonne University Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris, Courtauld Art History Department in London, Harvard University in Cambridge, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, Spain. I have also served as a peer-reviewer for some seven publications including scholarly grants, papers, books, and book proposals at the behest of venues such as Art History Journal, Routledge Press, Duke University Press, and the Humanities Research Council in Canada. And because pedagogy is key to my "expanded" art practice I maintain three websites where digitized documents, classroom syllabi, resources and reading lists are made available free to other artists, scholars, and educators. This "open source" ethic runs throughout my work as does service to the communities that I interact with including Queens College CUNY.

Last year I revamped the Art Department's decades-old Master of Fine Arts curriculum, and in conjunction with my colleague Professor Maureen Connor co-developed a new MFA concentration in Social Practice Art in 2011. The later project began with an invitation by the Queens Museum to coauthor a Rockefeller New York City Cultural Innovations Grant. In 2011 we were awarded 250,000 dollars to begin to establish a unique urban artist residency program in Corona, Queens and investigate a partnership to initiate a Social Practice MFA at Queens College. But just what is "social practice art"? Today this question is at the heart of a lively debate within the contemporary art world, but for our purposes Social Practice combines studio work with social, tactical, interventionist and cooperative forms with the goal of initiating interdisciplinary projects with real world outcomes within CUNY, in Queens, and beyond. Since initiating the project about two years ago we have not only begun to put SPQ in a broader national and even international spotlight (as of now it is one of two social practice initiatives at the graduate level East of California), but we have successfully graduated three students with several other MFA participants focused on this unique concentration. We are now in the process of proposing a 24 credit Certificate in Social Practice, and it is my elected responsibility to see this new initiative through. In addition to these activities my service was fundamental to establishing the annual MFA Art Exhibition.

Soon after arriving at QC my colleague Glenn Goldberg and I petitioned the President's Office to help fund an annual MFA exhibition in Manhattan. We succeeded and now Queens College MFA has taken its place along side of other leading graduate programs in the city. Along with Professor Tyrone Mitchell I also played a key role in resurrecting the Klapper Hall bronze foundry. In 2008 Professor Connor and I took five of our exceptional MFA students to Iasi, Romania where we installed an exhibition as the "Institute for Wishful Thinking." Six years later IWT continues to exhibit together. Along with serving as a member of the Queens College Strategic Planning Committee, acting as a juror for PSC-CUNY research awards, performing Deputy Chair and twice chairing the MFA studio art program, I also collect and manage all content updating for the Art Department's website. And since service to community extends beyond Queens College CUNY I will briefly mention that I am honored to be a member of the five-person Curriculum Committee for the Home WorkSpace contemporary art program in Beirut, Lebanon where I assist with selecting students and designing curriculum, as well as an Associate of the Art, Design and the Public Domain program in the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.

In conclusion I can say that my years at Queens College have been a time of personal growth as a teacher and a professional. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with my colleagues, students, and the administration of the school. I look forward to continuing this work into the future.