

Title: How can artists effectively collaborate with social change activists to share and leverage our strengths in successful ventures?

Convener:

Pat Allen

Participants:

- Analia is a Photographer (works as a community organizer) and is viewed as an artist and activist. Masters in Columbia College Art Education and Youth program looking to bring the activist and artist together.
- Mary Fran is self-employed and tries to find ways to bring art to groups in need, looks to ways to bring people together through art. Pat Allen teaches at SAIC in the Art Therapy department. Has worked in homeless shelters and on creating community studios. She wonders how activists can use the art process and imagination as a tool. How can the art process be used to organize people? She feels that artists often find it difficult to connect to the ideas of activists. There is a need to connect these two types and empower possibilities of change.
- Brandi Rose is a Columbia College graduate student who has a background in music and art. She considers herself an artist and not an activist, but hopes to in the future use art to provoke change.
- Mun-Jung is from SAIC feels that we are artists who create, but that sometimes our schools and backgrounds are not a good mix. We should work towards answering questions that make us better. Artists are often limited and need to venture into different areas.
- Matea is a graduate student at SAIC in Art Education. She considers herself an artist and activist. This combination is very effective.
- Carmen is from Spain and is interested in Art Therapy.
- Diana works for Shanti and is a visual artist. She is interested in social activism and how the arts can strengthen this goal. She feels like she transforms herself from artist to activist.
- Mars Coulton- artist and activist.

Discussion Notes:

Diana has been working in the Latino Community and when working in Pilsen was exposed to a lot of activism and art. As a teenager she was first an activist and then saw how artists in her community were using their talents to make things happen. This was inspiring to her and she is now a painter and photographer. Artist and Activist roles have influenced each other.

Art and activism seem to work well when someone is truly connected to the community in which they are working.

Diana agrees that starting by sharing art skills with a community and its people using small steps is a way of empowering community members. This was a learning space that went both ways- she learned from members and they learned from her. There was a trust built between the participants.

Question posed-

When artist become activists, how do we institutionalize activism?

Diana feels that she is an activist, but when she goes out and talks to people and community, she is perceived as being an outsider.

Matea, if the organization is approached in a way that lets them know that you are on the same page as them and understand their end goal, prove to them that art is a great tool to motivate their cause. Articulate your mutual cause.

But, the question is, how do you gain their trust and create dialogue? They often won't commit to programs due to funding. Points of views are often not shared. Much dialogue and many meetings are necessary. Cultivating relationships takes time and is necessary.

Artists often underestimate the time it takes to accomplish this. Creating art together is often a way of building this bond, but time gets in the way. You must have an initiative and go after a project with passion.

Do you belong to that community? How can you build a relationship?

Contacting different groups and explaining about who you are. Offer giving a talk about a topic you are well versed on .. Battered women, violence...other topics, or explain free programs. This is a way to get your foot in the door. Make your presence known.

Many people have a certain idea about artists and don't know if they are accessible, will the artist need to be paid? Artists have the idea that "we are so special," perhaps too special to pass out flyers or get on a "lower" level. How should artists interact with other people? Who is an artist? Working at a rally and in high schools makes it clear that you are at the same level as others. Artists need to have a sense of humility and not portray an "I am better than you" attitude.

You can't assume that this community needs the artist. The idea of building a well for women in a rural community demonstrates this. The well was built, but the community was not included, and the well was build to far away and was not well used.

Creating a memorial park by elders. Shanti organization may be helping with this situation. The importance of listening is so important, before artists jump out with their ideas.

One person works for a non-profit and recalls looking for artists to come and help, but forget to educate the artist about their goals. The idea of artists being used for their talents, without being properly respected. Artists are asked to donate work for auctions and frequently are not willing to.

How do we get these conversations to happen? Could a conference take place such as this?

Artists must feel confident about stating and questioning what is respectful.

Communities get educated about what the artist does, and artists are educated about the community. We must think about the commonalities of issues. How are we doing public service in the country? It should be free.

Relational issues are key to success.

Activating the art in every person. The idea that there is an artist in all of us. If we were able to create these kinds of situations, maybe the next conference should be artists and activists. A space that teaches activists how to use the arts, like teaching educators how to use the arts. A mutual education process, everyone learns from everyone. How can we speak in one voice? Building a community of people to lean on for help. The networks of relationships need to be formed.

The art of movement making at Columbia College talked about the role of art in the struggle. Large connections of social justice issues were made. What nightmares occur in this process and successes? People need to take the responsibility to define their roles and goals.

Poets wrote on topics that were so hot that it made their poetry sound better. Why are they involved in these topics? One must ask them selves this question. Be clear on your purpose when working with people. People don't understand what artists do...they research and study; don't drink two bottles of wine and paint. Allow the movement to broaden the subject of the artist.

Another way of doing it could be to have artists open the pain of activist issues to toughen them. Many people have a power struggle, seeking power through art and activism, rather than a desire to work with others on the same level. Art is a means to process pain.

One does not make art for a particular movement, but now makes art for the benefit of community and personal self. Art activist and art educator in one. Why do people create their work?

I think we can affect change by inspiring people, with out thinking to much about it.

What a positive role art plays in society. Many times people who are not artists feel that all artists who care about this issue or that problem want to be of assistance, and that's not always the case. People have a personal reason for making art. Expressive emotions (rage, frustration) help them achieve change. For the art to affect change the art should not be about self, but should be about the change. Art works for the artist and people who come across the art.

This is where activists and artists are very similar, whether to be selfish, or for community. If people need art therapy, they often get lost, and need to keep focus on their end goal.

As a young artist when one person is recruited as an activist, they should be encouraged to invite artists, this is a way for more artists to be activists.

A common frustration amongst participants was money, all of these things require funding, as a result money complicates things.

We cannot assume that all movements are funded. Some are not, they are volunteer and grass roots programs. People get comfortable working for non-profit with a pay. Some organizations want to hire artists to work for them and then only pay 20 dollars an hour, which is not enough to make ends meet for artists.

There should be a value on art. Should you not get paid because you like what you do? There are many short-term options for artists that are not well paid.

Bridges out of poverty, when the funding was done the program was over. Non-profits go where the money is. Big grants run out. What's going to happen three years down the line?

Everyone should look into the history of the WPA. Artists were commissioned to do murals and community studios. Artists were hired to teach at the studios. Business community and the war had the biggest influence on this.

Many artists had political concerns and people got nervous about this. Art was privatized.

We are paying money to be activists and as a result one needs to work a second job to fund their lives.

Next Steps:

The Shanti Foundation should sponsor a conference for both artists and activists to help foster solidarity and touch on topics we discussed today.

Could mentorship be formed between experienced people with fresh meat? There is so much to learn.

Networking would be a great way to keep this issue alive. The importance of communicating our concerns and working out problems is huge.

Gather oral histories of artists and activist to get some of the stories published.

Mars initiated a website idea for networking, where questions can be posted and responded to. Where Art Meets Social Change.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.