



Politics, Participation, and the Portable Print

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Introduction

“Politics, Participation, and the Portable Print” is an effort to trace the outlines and lineage of an uncharted genre - a genre of activity rooted in the political, reliant on sympathetic membership, and evidenced by the print/multiple object. Presented here are a few projects that bracket the genre and situate the activity within the larger climate of collaborative, participatory, and interventionist work that is prevalent in contemporary art today. These projects rely on volunteer participation, creating a sense of shared responsibility and authorship. In each case, the print/multiple acts as messenger or artifact and serves as a proxy for the symbolic action; it is an observable, visible, and sometimes aestheticised outcome of the political idea. In recent contemporary art work of this kind, the Internet and electronic connectivity play a vital role. Virtual space doubles as a social space for connection, solicitation, and interaction, as well as a site for exchange and documentation.

Part I: The Genre



Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Death by Gun, 1990
stack of offset lithographs

Felix Gonzalez-Torres created open-ended, participatory artworks that are activated by the engagement of the viewer, simultaneously completed and extended by their participation. The activities of giving (by the artist) and taking (by the viewer) create a sense of shared responsibility for the ideas as well as their distribution. Gonzalez-Torres entrusted his viewers to engage with and ultimately activate the meaning of his works.



Robbie Conal
Climate Change
postering campaign, 2008

Robbie Conal is an American painter and guerilla poster artist noted for his gnarled, grotesque depictions of U.S. political figures accompanied by masterful one-liner captions. He is renowned for distributing his offset printed posters throughout a city overnight using his “volunteer guerrilla postering army.” His work and methods of distribution empower others to take direct cooperative action.



Xavier Cortada
Reclamation Project, Native Flags
Key Biscayne, Florida, USA, 2008

Xavier Cortada develops participatory eco-art projects aimed at restoring native habitats for plants and animals in coastal communities. In 2006, he implemented the *Reclamation Project* to engage residents in coastal and urban reforestation. Volunteers agree to plant a native tree and alongside that tree, a screenprinted flag that reads, “I hereby reclaim this land for nature.” After planting, participants upload pictures of their flag and tree to reclamationproject.net.



John Hitchcock
Objetivos Moviles/Moving Targets
Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2008

John Hitchcock initiated the project, *Moving Targets*, a participatory print exhibition executed in various geographical locations that moved across borders via public transportation. The work of 100 artists was solicited and submitted electfor banners that were carried by volunteer participants, in this case, through the streets and on the public trains of Buenos Aires. The social concerns addressed by the project tie it to the rich tradition of printmaking as a vehicle for expression and critique.



Adrian Kondratowicz
Trash: anycoloryoulike
New York, New York, USA, 2008

TRASH: anycoloryoulike is an art intervention for urban beautification and environmental awareness. Adrian Kondratowicz gives away colorful bags which transform standard piles of trash into vivid sculptures of color through the participation of local business owners and residents. Each TRASH bag is 100% biodegradable and naturally scented to repel insects and vermin. Kondratowicz hopes that the visibility of the bags will draw attention to the excess trash that we produce.



Packard Jennings
Newspaper Headlines
San Francisco, CA, USA, 2008

Packard Jennings is a California artist, activist, and provocateur who was first known for his anarchist action figures that he “shopdropped” at Walmart stores. His Newspaper Headlines project, another kind of intervention, is an activity of “interactive subvertising.” Participants download pdf versions of newspaper stories from Jennings’ website and then replace the real newspaper page on stands and in stores with the altered stories and pictures.



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Part 2: A Project

RADIATE/CULTIVATE

Radiate/Cultivate is an ongoing public intervention project initiated by Lisa Bulawsky under the pseudonym of Vertigo Press and implemented with the help of volunteers all over the world. The project capitalizes on the democratic quality of the print/multiple to disseminate its political and environmental message. Participation is solicited and aided by electronic communication; the internet provides a site for both distribution and documentation.

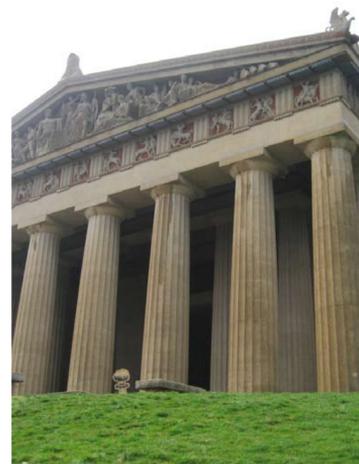
In the broadest sense, *Radiate-Cultivate* is a warning and a comment on humanity's capacity for destruction, indeed for self destruction. It involves the planting of wood cutouts of screenprinted mushroom clouds that are the shape and size of a small bush or oversized flower. Attached to the wood is a garden stake so that it can be easily pushed into the ground.

On the back of the wooden mushroom cloud, a quote is printed in English and in Utopian (Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, 1516, invented the Utopian alphabet and included it in the original edition of the book). The quote, from Theodor Adorno reads:

“Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.”

The aim of the project is to call attention to the idea that we are ultimately cultivating our own destruction. In an effort to point toward hope, volunteers are encouraged to plant poppy seeds next to their mushroom cloud. The red poppy is a symbol of remembrance as well as rebirth.

Documentation of this project as well as the opportunity to participate can be found online at: www.lisabulawsky.com under the heading “Projects.”



planted by Laelle Busch
at the Parthenon replica
Nashville, Tennessee, USA
March 2009



planted by Erik Peterson
at Lake Michigan
Chicago, Illinois, USA
March 2008



planted by Tony Garbarini
American Pavilion, Venice Biennale,
Venice, Italy
July 2009



planted by Richard Noyce
Wales, UK
June 2008



planted by Joey Korein
Vermont, USA
December 2008



planted by Amanda Knowles
Seattle, Washington, USA
June 2008



planted by Stephan Koperl and
Sylvia Winkler
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
May 2008



planted by Chang-Soo Kim
near the Han River
Seoul, South Korea
July 2008