

FREERIDING

Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas

January 10 – February 10, 2011

The traditionally passive role of the viewer has been repeatedly challenged by avant-garde artists who have increasingly demanded more and more of their viewers. Happenings and Fluxus performances often relied on the spontaneous participation of their audiences; Earth artists required visitors to trek long distances to experience their work; more recently, artists have begun incorporating cutting-edge technology to create art that literally responds to the viewer's presence in the gallery. In an effort to go beyond mere interaction, *FREERIDING* features works that reflect on or incorporate an act of giving or taking. The nature of these exchanges involves a deeper commitment on the part of the artist and viewer in that each gains something, relinquishes something, or engages in a reciprocal trade.

FREERIDING includes works by the Art Guys, David Bergholz, Christine Bissetto, Richie Budd, Candy Chang, M. Kate Helmes, Kristin Lucas, Temporary Services, and Lawrence Weiner, and a project organized by curator Daniel Baumann. Each work involves various forms of the act of exchange—whether the artist designates his work part of the Public Freehold (Weiner); recreates and manipulates another artist's work (Bissetto); mines from images in the public domain and depends on online workers to contribute to the piece (Lucas); purges intimate objects and memories (Helmes); sells opportunities to engage in conversation with the artist (Budd); or the work centers on charitable, collaborative, and intellectual exchanges (the Art Guys, Bergholz, Chang and Temporary Services). The works included in the exhibition illustrate and underline the social aspects and human exchanges that art can offer, especially when markets or financial trades are not of chief concern.

The passing of an object from one person to another inevitably raises questions about economic systems, particularly notions of bartering or charity that defy the norms of capitalism. Often proliferating during recession eras, such past and present exchange-based projects aim to counter the market, refocusing attention on basic human interactions. Several artists here address this notion by dematerializing the art object in order to emphasize actions and experiences. By actively encouraging the participation of the viewers, artists also relinquish a certain level of control over their work. In 1967, French theorist Roland Barthes wrote the seminal essay "Death of the Author," in which he argues that an author's (or artist's) intentions are less important than the readers' (or viewers') interpretations. In this exhibition, the artists acknowledge and celebrate their diminished authority by creating situations of active and open collaboration with the viewers.

This exhibition operates differently in a university setting than a traditional gallery, as universities provide analogous human and economic trades but with a decidedly critical eye and without such a clear profit motive. *FREERIDING* underscores such exchanges and aims to encourage the interpersonal interactions presented by the works included, especially in an era when isolation and detachment are often easier choices.

--Alison Hearst and Leslie Murrell