Printed in conjunction with the exhibition:

YOU COMPLETE ME
Mediating Relationships in Contemporary Art

October 1 – November 11, 2012

Contributing Artists
Adrian Piper  
David Parker  
Jason Lazarus  
Jill Frank  
Jon Rafman  
Nikki S. Lee  

John Preus with New Materialists  
Leroy Bach  
Mikel Patrick-Avery  
Tadd Cowen  

InCUBATE:  
Matthey Joynt  
Bryce Dwyer  
Abigail Satinsky

The DeVos Art Museum  
School of Art & Design  
Northern Michigan University

Director and Curator  Melissa Matuscak  
nmu.edu/devos

Catalogue Design  Edwin Carter  
edwinrobertcarter.com
Mediating Relationships in Contemporary Art

DeVos Art Museum

YOU COMPLETE ME

INTRODUCTION

Mediate is defined as an intervention to bring about resolution. While we often think about mediation involving a dispute or argument, this exhibition looks at the idea more broadly. The artists and pieces represented intervene by directly and indirectly engaging with other people in the creation of the work. It is only with the involvement of others, either in the making of or the display of the work, that the work can be fully completed. The artists, or the artwork, then become mediators, asking the participant/viewer to negotiate their perspective by becoming part of the work.

Participatory art has been explored by numerous artists and exhibitions in recent history and has been fully embraced as part of contemporary artistic practice. The motivation for artists to reach out to the viewer/audience is as varied as the practice itself. For some, participation allows the viewer to develop a sense of ownership to the work. Shared production can also break down actual and perceived bourgeois walls between the object/artist and viewer/audience. It can be a political statement about the way art is valued, both socially and economically. The artists in You Complete Me consider these ideas through sub-categories of identity, culture, physical space and labor.
IDENTITY. Photographers Jason Lazarus and Jill Frank create projects that ask participants to reflect on personal experiences. Jason Lazarus circulates open calls for photographic contributions to archives based on particular memories. In his Nirvana series (2007-present), Lazarus continues to build a collection of snapshots of the first person that introduced the participant to the iconic 90’s rock band, taken during the time the band first became well known. The archive creates a nostalgic shared identity for Generation X as images are contributed and published (where were you the first time you heard the song Smells Like Teen Spirit?). Jill Frank’s Psychodrama series also builds a collective identity, however the artist’s hand is much more apparent in the work. Using open forums such as Craigslist, Frank seeks out people willing to share troubling memories to be restaged and photographed. The resulting images also consider the limits of truth and photographic representation. Multi-media artist Jon Rafman also collects images for archives, but his methods are more solitary. Utilizing screen captures from Google Street View, Rafman has been building a Tumblr archive of images from all over the world. The images allude to the long history of street photography as Rafman captures everything from chaotic urban streets to extraordinary rural landscapes. Participation by the subjects in these images is unintentional and dependent on a chance interaction with the Google Street View cameras and Rafman’s selections. Once selected, Rafman reinterprets these images as visual and cultural objects—creating a layered voyeuristic relationship between participant and viewer.

Jill Frank
CULTURE. Adrian Piper and Nikki S. Lee consider cultural stereotypes through social interactions. Both artists incorporate typical routines and activities—gathering with friends, shopping, dancing—to ask poignant questions about race and social class. Piper’s video Funk Lessons (1983) documents a participatory performance where the artist teaches the audience how to listen and dance to funk music. The result is an endearing and humorous interaction that also addresses how African-American music contributes to American culture, and how it affects racial perceptions. Nikki S. Lee pushes these themes in her photographic series Projects (1997-2001), snapshots of the artist posing with various ethnic and socially constructed groups. Unbeknownst to the participants, Lee alters her outward appearance to assimilate into groups of skateboarders, young urban professionals and punks to name a few. The resulting group snapshots investigate cultural stereotypes—both in the way they are imposed on our identities and how we embrace them to fit in.

PHYSICAL SPACE. David Parker, John Preus and the Chicago-based collective InCUBATE incorporate participation in more direct, physical ways. David Parker’s Heartbeat Carrillon (2005) requires audience interaction with his sculptural installation of heartbeat monitors connected to glass bells. The more viewers participate by sitting at the monitor stations, the more the piece activates as sound fills the gallery space. Without the viewer’s participation, the sculpture will not function.
John Preus and InCUBATE present work that involves participation that touches on labor and value in artistic practice by asking viewers to contribute while inside the gallery space. Preus’ “sculptures” are incomplete until the participant modifies them. The pieces begin as unwanted, once functional objects sourced from second hand stores and dumpsters. Viewers are asked to select a piece to remove and alter outside of the gallery. They are also asked to return the pieces to the gallery to display during the final weeks of the exhibition. Because of the involvement of the artist and contributors, waste is elevated to the status of artwork. Regardless of the final results being functional or purely sculptural, Preus challenges ideas of how we place value on objects.

Chicago-based research group InCUBATE questions traditional models for arts funding by pooling collective resources and hosting temporary programs. Their ground-breaking work includes events such as Sunday Soup, a group meal that raises funds for individual artist grants. Sunday Soup is now an international network of creative practitioners, awarding over $60,000 in grants to artists. The seemingly simple act of sharing a meal of soup becomes a platform for discussing the value of artistic production and the nature of arts funding. For You Complete Me, InCUBATE asks gallery viewers to record an audio tour of the exhibition. Participants use analog tapes to document their thoughts on the exhibition and leave the tapes in the gallery for others to listen to. As with Sunday Soup, InCUBATE provides the structure for participation, allowing anyone to contribute to the dialogue.

I would like to thank the artists in the exhibition for their willingness to collaborate and share their work. I would particularly like to thank InCUBATE for contributing additional thoughts in the catalogue and Edwin Carter, for designing the exhibition catalogue and materials to aesthetically please and conceptually complement the curatorial premise.
YOU COMPLETE ME

EXHIBITION

October 1 — November 11
ADRIAN PIPER

Fig. 1  Shiva Dances with the Art Institute of Chicago, 2004. Group Performance: Art Institute of Chicago; film still #20007; Collection and © APRA Foundation Berlin.

Fig. 2  Shiva Dances with the Art Institute of Chicago, 2004. Group Performance: Art Institute of Chicago; film still #50005; Collection and © APRA Foundation Berlin.
DAVID PARKER

Fig. 3  Heartbeat Carillon,
interative sound installation,
glass, steel, electronics,
15 x 12 x 6 ft (dimensions variable),
first realized 2005
Courtesy of the artist.
DAVID PARKER

Heartbeat Carillon,
interactive sound installation,
glass, steel, electronics,
15 x 12 x 6 ft (dimensions variable),
first realized 2005
Courtesy of the artist.
InCUBATE

"thinking is pre-eminently an art; knowledge and propositions which are the products of thinking, are works of art, as much so as statuary and symphonies."

Experience and Nature
John Dewey

PERSPECTIVE LIBRARY is an attempt to make public the reactions, experiences and responses of visitors to "You Complete Me" through visitor-generated audio tours of the exhibition. Considering all forms of response to the work to be knowledge—contemporary pop mixtapes to in-depth verbal analysis of the work—the library is an opportunity for visitors to participate in the real-time archiving of the show. By creating and listening to tours made by other visitors, new knowledge and ways of perceiving will emerge and enrich both the dialog around the work and the experience of the exhibition audience. Simultaneously, the archive will historically represent a more capacious understanding of the exhibitions meaning in its contingent public context.

Each response is an act of creation. The body of knowledge that forms from these individual acts is a work of art.
I dated Dave (left), bassist of Oklahoma City’s “Captain Eyeball.” He introduced me to a number of my favorite bands and labels, mostly 4AD and Sub Pop, The Pixies, Tones on Tail, Sonic Youth...it was from him that I first heard Bleach and liked it right away.
My step-dad Mike pretty much introduced me to all music. I remember finding Nevermind in his private CD collection.
Jill Frank


Fig. 8
Prosthesis. A synthetic restorative replacement or elaboration upon a missing part of something else. Most commonly referring to the loss of a body part.

It occurred to me to consider prosthetics in relation to furniture partially because I happened to be thinking about furniture on my commute home from work, at the same time that I saw 3 panhandlers with prosthetic legs on a 6 mile stretch of Western Avenue in Chicago. In the same week, one of my co-workers was shot in the leg. The state funded the operation to get a rod installed in his leg to rebuild the femur. Prosthetics (on humans) are becoming much more common than they once were, at the same time that it becomes increasingly rare to see furniture, a much simpler affair, or objects of any kind, that have been repaired or restored. And somehow we have it in our national or state budget to supply prosthetics to the homeless and uninsured, but not food or shelter, or insurance for that matter.

The logic of IKEA is certainly relevant here. Josephine Rydberg-Dumont, managing director of IKEA Sweden encapsulates their philosophy.

“We’re ready for modernism now. When it first came,” Rydberg-Dumont explains, “it was for the few. Now it is for the many. You value things that don’t bog you down... That old, traditional stuff...[the idea] that things can’t change, that taking responsibility for your things is more important than taking responsibility for your life. It’s O.K. to replace them, to get rid of them. We don’t think we’re going to live one way always. Our feeling is: It’s just furniture. Change it.”

(quote provided by Lane Relyea)
Ryder-Dumont’s cheery faux-populist endorsement of disposability exhibits what I want to call anti-materialism. The implied dichotomy between caring for things versus caring for life is less a Modernist position, than a revamped transcendentalist one with none of the self-actualization commitments. The feigned humility, “it’s just furniture,” ignores the material, labor and energy that goes into making a sheet of pressboard, from the growth of trees, to the factory, to transportation and storage, to the father and son kneeling on the living room floor scratching their heads over incomprehensible directions...

And from the U.S. Army website:

“A sophisticated prosthetic knee [the Genium X2 produced by Orange Coast Prosthetics, Inc.] with a newly designed microprocessor is giving many wounded warriors with above-the-knee amputations the chance to return to active duty...”

“For every 30 service members returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, one is an amputee. Just since Jan. 1, [2012] 1,421 amputees have returned.”

“Twenty-two percent of amputees return to duty and experience less emotional distress than limb salvage patients. Thanks to a revolution in prosthetics, patients have better outcomes with amputation as opposed to reconstruction.”
JON RAFMAN

Fig. 12
Lungomare 9 Maggio,
Bari Puglia, Italia,
2009.
From the series
Nine Eyes of Google Street View,
archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper.
Courtesy of the artist.
EXHIBITION

YOU COMPLETE ME

DeVos Art Museum

JON RAFMAN

Fig. 13 2081 Valmont Road, Boulder, Colorado, US, 2012. From the series Nine Eyes of Google Street View. Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 14 6 West Pomerania Vovodeship, Poland, 2011. From the series Nine Eyes of Google Street View. Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper. Courtesy of the artist.
EXHIBITION

NIKKI S. LEE

The Skateboarders Project #7
2000
Chromogenic development print
Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago

Fig. 15
YOU COMPLETE ME

DeVos Art Museum

NIKKI S. LEE

EXHIBITION

Fig. 16
The Yuppie Project #4
1998
Chromogenic development print
Courtesy of the
Museum of Contemporary Photography
at Columbia College Chicago
An interview with InCUBATE (Bryce Dwyer, Abigail Satinsky, and Matthew Joynt). Conducted by Anthony Stepter on the occasion of a workshop facilitated by Artway of Thinking, organized by Mary Jane Jacob and many others at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in July 2012.
How did you first become interested in working in the field of art?

BRYCE DWYER: I have always been fascinated by history. As a kid, I used to read the encyclopedia for fun. The history books I had in school were never enough. Because I didn’t have access to conventional art spaces growing up, most of my access to art came second-hand through historical study—learning about it in high school art classes, or checking out books about art history from the library. I think this soldered history and art together in my mind. I was fascinated by both the stories and histories embodied in actual art objects, and also the histories that made those works possible. When I was trying to decide what to study in college, the options for straight-up history seemed murky to me. Art seemed to have a living quality, something to be wrestled with. Studying art history was a way for me to have the best of both fascinations. I’ve been involved with art most of my life, from going to classical music camp to all my extracurricular activities as a teenager to then getting my BFA at Carnegie Mellon. My trajectory was rather random, I started out being interested in making history paintings and then became a video artist and then after school, I worked as an art teacher and at a film archive. I couldn’t figure out where I fit, so I started volunteering at museums and non-profits to see what the other side of things looked like and that led me to graduate school. In my family working seriously on whatever your passion is with a sense of practicality and measurable goals was very important so I signed up for Art Administration and Policy without having sense of what I was getting into. So all that is to say, I floated around a lot until I could find a place where I found myself useful.

ABIGAIL SATINSKY: I’ve been involved with art most of my life, from going to classical music camp to all my extracurricular activities as a teenager to then getting my BFA at Carnegie Mellon. My trajectory was rather random, I started out being interested in making history paintings and then became a video artist and then after school, I worked as an art teacher and at a film archive. I couldn’t figure out where I fit, so I started volunteering at museums and non-profits to see what the other side of things looked like and that led me to graduate school. In my family working seriously on whatever your passion is with a sense of practicality and measurable goals was very important so I signed up for Art Administration and Policy without having sense of what I was getting into. So all that is to say, I floated around a lot until I could find a place where I found myself useful.

ABIGAIL SATINSKY: My mom is an artist and educator and growing up my sister and I were always making things with her. My best early memories of spending time with other people involve doing projects, building elaborate environments out of raw materials, dreaming up weird worlds, and lip-syncing to Queen and Janet Jackson’s Rhythm Nation while head-banging in neon wigs. From an early age, art and performance were a big part of the way that I communicated with other people. They served as primary axes of important conversation in our family. At the same time, they were indecipherable from (because they were so embedded in) everyday life. I acted in a lot of shows as a kid, started punk and hardcore bands in high school, entered a BFA program but dropped out to tour in a band. I was kind of all over the place. Maybe it was an experience that was similar to Abby’s in that I wasn’t quite sure where I fit.

BRYCE DWYER: Not really! I don’t think I have an artistic practice. Maybe something closer to an administrative practice, or an organizational practice.

ABIGAIL SATINSKY: Yes. As I mentioned before, my life identifying as an artist ended around the time I entered graduate school. When I talk about what I do as an organizer or “creative administrator,” I don’t think of that as synonymous with making art, however with a back-
How do you decide the lifespan of a project? If you are uncomfortable making a generalization here, you can speak anecdotally.

MATTHEW JOYNT: Before becoming involved in Incubate, I focused most of my adult-life energy on making music. Oddly, I came to find that the questions that arose from our Incubate’s projects often shared strong parallels to the personal, political and public dynamics that arise in a collaborative band.

BRYCE DWYER: It’s definitely not something I’ve ever decided on right from the project’s start. A decision on the lifespan comes after evaluating where it’s been so far and how me and my collaborators feel about it once we make time to catch up and talk over how we’re feeling about it. In one case, that of Sunday Soup, we let the project lie dormant for two years not necessarily expecting to reanimate it. The burn-out we experienced wore off and all of a sudden it was something we missed, not something we were exhausted by. We recently started it back up again, making deliberate changes in our organizational structure to give it a longer life this time around.

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ABIGAIL SATINSKY: Well, you work on a project until it’s not interesting or you’re going through the motions or no one seems to be paying attention to it anymore. Certainly with Incubate, when we had the storefront space, we debated a lot about when to close because we felt somehow accountable to the community of people that were showing up there and liked what we were doing. And the space itself held a history that was very important to us. But we also felt that our personal energy had waned to the point that we couldn’t do it. When you don’t have much boundary between your creative projects and your personal life, as we did at that time and still do to a certain extent, you make these decisions when you feel it’s right. And in a general sense, most socially-engaged projects seem to blur into an artist’s life a lot of the time and so when to feel the beginning and end of something becomes a very mushy territory.

In addition to what Bryce and Abby have said above, it seems like most of our projects need to be given space to live in order for us to know when and how they should end. This is particularly true because they usually involve models that are either useful to others or not and it’s apparent pretty quickly. Lifespan (in our projects so far) has been necessarily contingent upon what actually occurs (conditions that can’t be known until they are present).
Does “integration” always require that a community take over a project?

**Bryce Dwyer:** I’d hesitate to use the word “always” when it comes to a project based in a community. Since Sunday Soup began, communities around the world have adopted its basic premise to suit their needs. We never felt it necessary to claim ownership over other people’s use of this model, so “taking over” wouldn’t describe what other communities have done either. They’ve just taken the recipe and modified it to suit them. Being open to other communities adapting the project and taking responsibility for it on their own has allowed Sunday Soup to live on in many forms and under many names. From my perspective, it’s also a big reason why we were excited to start it up again here in Chicago.

**Abigail Satinsky:** Well if integration is your goal, as it was with Sunday Soup, we knew that it was successful when other people took it on and have no idea where it started from. That happens a lot, most people don’t know where it comes from and feel total ownership of it, which is actually totally sweet. But I don’t know if socially engaged projects need to have integration, sometimes it actually is dependent on the originator’s facilitation and perhaps when its done, the “community” has different ideas about new projects for the future and that wouldn’t have been possible before. A community may just enjoy the experience and feel that the project is irrelevant to their ongoing lives. Sometimes our projects don’t have traction or are just straight-up bad and so no one takes them up. They are experiments and we don’t presume they will have any use at all.

What do you think artists need to know if they choose to do socially engaged art practice?

**Bryce Dwyer:** They need to know (or be open to learning) how to research. I don’t mean formatting footnotes. I mean knowing how to navigate information, where to seek it out, and how to corral it in meaningful ways.

**Abigail Satinsky:** I think artists need to do some self-reflection before they start out making socially-engaged work, at least just personal clarification on what they want to get out of that kind of work. There is a lot of privilege that is associated with wanting to go out and work with “communities” and working for some so-called greater good. It seems important to have a sense of humility but also a way to check yourself so that you know you’re interacting with other people on a human level who perhaps know way more about the social/political/economic issues you’re interested in whatever particular project. And then figure out what exactly you’re bringing to the table.

**Matthew Joynt:** I think it’s important to always consider why a project is being framed within an art context (and not assume that it should because you’re an artist). Maybe it would be more useful to present the project elsewhere or with different language. The common retort is something like, “... but it can’t find a context anywhere else that made sense.” I think that’s kind of lazy and trepid. Maybe it would be more meaningful not to think of it as a project or practice at all. My main fear is that something is lost in the professionalization of the everyday. When lived experience is subject to a very specific mode of questioning, what was once a pretty expansive and radical field of inquiry quickly submits to a new form of specialization. Sometimes the art context produces really cool dialogue, but often I wonder if projects could find a more fruitful and useful conversation elsewhere. Or in both, being articulated in two ways.
In many socially-engaged practices, artists are working on issues that non-artists are already engaged in. Examples include immigration policy reform, urban development, arts funding, healing, etc… How is the act of addressing such issues substantively different when an artist is doing the work rather than a professional from a particular field?

**BRYCE DWYER:** I think the best way in is for an artist to offer specific skills, competencies, or knowledge and not just their nominal status as an artist. What artists bring to these issues is as varied and numerous as the artists themselves. The experience of being an artist (if one calls oneself that) can be just as complex as the experience of being an immigration lawyer or an urban planner. So I would not want to over simplify these non-artists’ jobs by saying artists have access to something that they don’t by virtue of their profession. I do think that artists often have the license to explore facets of these issues that a non-artist’s profession might necessarily de-emphasize. Maybe the presence of an artist offers something as simple as material skills. The artist might also offer an opportunity to enter into a certain profession’s standardized decision-making process from a different angle. Whatever the artist might offer, I imagine that it could often very well be offered by a non-artist too.

**ABIGAIL SATINSKY:** I agree with what Bryce said. I think its also important that artists don’t have to just stick to arty things, like they’re not allowed to venture out of that territory. Always staying in the “art world” can be boring. In order to not make contemporary art even more alien to people not schooled in this practice, artists have to figure out what they have to say to people who don’t use the same language they do, be responsible about learning about the world and figure out their role in it.

**MATTHEW JOYNT:** I agree too.

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**INTERVIEW**

**BRYCE DWYER:** Does antagonism play a role in your practice?

**ABIGAIL SATINSKY:** I’m butchering Chantal Mouffe, but I think “antagonism” is a term that a lot of people use to say that things shouldn’t be nice all the time. And that when other people’s existence or ideas or work are incommensurable with your own and that this is somehow productive because it teaches you about your own limits. These things I agree with to a degree. However, while I think this is a useful way to think about things, sometimes it feels like it has become a value for its own sake. Like if your work isn’t antagonistic, then its not critical enough. And being critical is the best way to be important in the field of art. Our work has the tone of the willfully naive, which I think we cultivate in order to get a better sense of all we don’t know. In the process, things happen, often what we don’t expect. But I don’t think we start from a point of antagonism, it’s not our framework.

**MATTHEW JOYNT:** Antagonism seems like a secondary affect of proposing other options to already available models and ways of operating. It’s not my primary objective, but I could see how it might be considered an intrinsic part of our projects.
When working on a project, through which discourses of criticism do you self-critique?

Is this how we evaluate whether something we did was interesting or not? Or that we did a good job? Or how we place ourselves in whatever history? As far as discourses of criticism are concerned, we've done a lot of reading on the American philosophical tradition of Pragmatism. And this was because it helped us come up with a working framework in which we could understand ourselves as working within institutions and enacting functional change that also had some imaginative, even utopic, component. That kind of history gave us allowance to go forward with our small projects that we felt like, if tested in public and then discovered as relevant or not to other people, then some kind of change happens. It also gave us some alternative readings than what typically happened in art school, especially opening us up to local histories such as models outside the art world, for example, Jane Addams Hull House, which was an inspirational radical social center. That’s just the most ready example of the larger world of community organizing integrated with culture that opened up a whole line of thought that we continue to explore. But I would also put a plug in for a lot of recent writing that takes up performance’s relationship to social practice, articulated best in Shannon Jackson’s book “Social Works.” Incidentally, she also wrote a book on the cultural life at the Hull House museum where she talks about “reformance” which is a clunky term but also an interesting concept, especially for artists that are interested in social change through building alternative spaces. There’s a lot there about looking at everyday experience as a place to enact radical social transformation. So there’s some interesting ideas bubbling up there about shared histories between performance and social practice art which I’m really excited about lately. Also because I’m interested in this work having a certain poetics, not always just working towards social goals in one particular way. And to understand what makes a poetic moment, we have to look at a bunch of different things.

Why do you continue making art?

Like I mentioned earlier, I’m not sure I’ve ever made art in the first place. But I stick around art because the questions it provokes keep getting better.

Because the poetic, affective moments that happen in the best moments of art are what make you imagine the world you want to live in. They don’t happen very often, but when they do, it affirms all the other stuff.

Because it is able to hold so much.
REFERENCES

JILL FRANK
Atlanta, Georgia
jillfrank.org

INCBUATE
Bryce Dwyer
Matthew Joynt
Abigail Satinsky
Chicago, Illinois
incubate-chicago.org

JASON LAZARUS
Chicago, Illinois
jasonlazarus.com

NIKKI S. LEE
Location
website

DAVID PARKER
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
davidparker.name

ADRIAN PIPER
Berlin, Germany
adrianniper.com

NEW MATERIALISTS
Tadd Cowen
Matthew Joynt
Mikwi Patrick
John Preus
Chicago, Illinois
johnpreus.com

JON RAFMAN
Montreal, Quebec
jonrafman.com
EVENTS

FRIDAY, 10/10

2:00 PM
Artist’s talk by photographer Jill Frank

THURSDAY, 10/18

8:00–9:30 PM
Listening party with Chicago-based InCUBATE and Eric May. Followed by a dance party DJ’d by InCUBATE and Eric May at the UpFront & Co.

SATURDAY, 10/20

2:00 PM
Film screening of twohundredfiftycolors, a 16mm film composed of animated gifs, curated by Jason Lazarus and Eric Fleischauer. Discussion with the curators will follow the screening.

FRIDAY, 10/26

7:00 PM
An unveiling of reconfigured furniture pieces by NMU students and local community participants, from a project led by John Preus. Chicago based band the New Materialists (John Preus, Tadd Cowen, and Mikel Patrick Avery) will perform using musical instruments and technology based upon defunct furniture parts.

THURSDAY, 11/08

7:00–8:00 PM
Poetry reading and open mic hosted by Andrea Scarpino.
Andrea Scarpino will be reading selections inspired by visual art which will be followed by a poetry open mic (note: 3-5 minute limit on open mic).