

Social Construction

**Curated by Scott Snibbe and Abner Nolan
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Catalog Essay by Scott Snibbe

All works of art are created within a network that includes the artist, medium and society. *Social Construction* is comprised of works that are conceived in this matrix of interdependency and then executed by other organisms in a framework established by the artist. The final pieces, completed by other plants, animals, or humans, have a creative energy that stems directly from relinquishing control of the results. The exhibition offers alternative models for artistic production, wherein human creation has its roots in an unconscious connection to our environment, beyond the boundaries of our history, our culture, and our senses of originality and self.



Barbara Bartos collaborates with bees in her sculptural installation, *Philosopher's Stone* (2001-2005). The work comprises two hollow plastic brains, each connected by a tube to the outdoors. Bees enter through a hole in the gallery wall and gradually build their hives within the two lobes over the course of several months. By beginning as empty brain-shells, the work suggests that our minds themselves are substantially constructed from our environment and experiences – elements intrinsically outside the brain itself. Like twins, the two brain-hives grow into

recognizably different objects as small initial differences in hive construction are magnified over time.



Lee Walton is an Experientialist whose projects and performances are full of humor, detailed planning, and interaction with the outside world. *Red Ball: Manhattan* is an on-line project in which participants democratically decide "where" in Manhattan (down to the square inch) to place a little red ball. Utilizing the internet to connect thousands of participants from around the world, Walton will facilitate this interactive real-time project and place the red ball at its final destination. The artist expands his exploration of urban potential with the *City System*, a step-by-step manual created for navigational purposes. In accordance with simple observations and occurrences, the *City System* determines each step of a journey that will define an experience through a city. Walton's *systems*, like conceptual maps, construct highly personal explorations of shared city landscapes that are completed when viewers become participants.



John Knuth relies on an army of flies to produce his series of large-scale watercolor paintings. Knuth creates built environments for thousands of flies that digest watercolor paint and deposit small spots of color on the white canvases. While the works' formal conventions reference strategies of action painting, their mode of production undermines any idealized notions of the individual author. The act of "painting" becomes a dance between the controls established by the artist and

the survival instincts of his fly collaborators. The resulting compositions, while strikingly beautiful, reflect an attempt to control a biological entity.

Vitaly Komar (former Komar & Melamid Art Studio) has famously produced abstract expressionist elephant paintings and marketing research validated *Most Wanted* paintings. His work expands to sculpture with *Ecollaborations* made in partnership with beavers. Viewers recognize exquisite vertical sculptures with carefully detailed surfaces as the product of beavers' engineering efforts when close examination reveals teeth-marks. The accompanying collages present pensive, thoughtful portraits of the beaver as architect. These works on paper suggest a postmodern future in which human and animal architectures are combined in jarring juxtaposition.

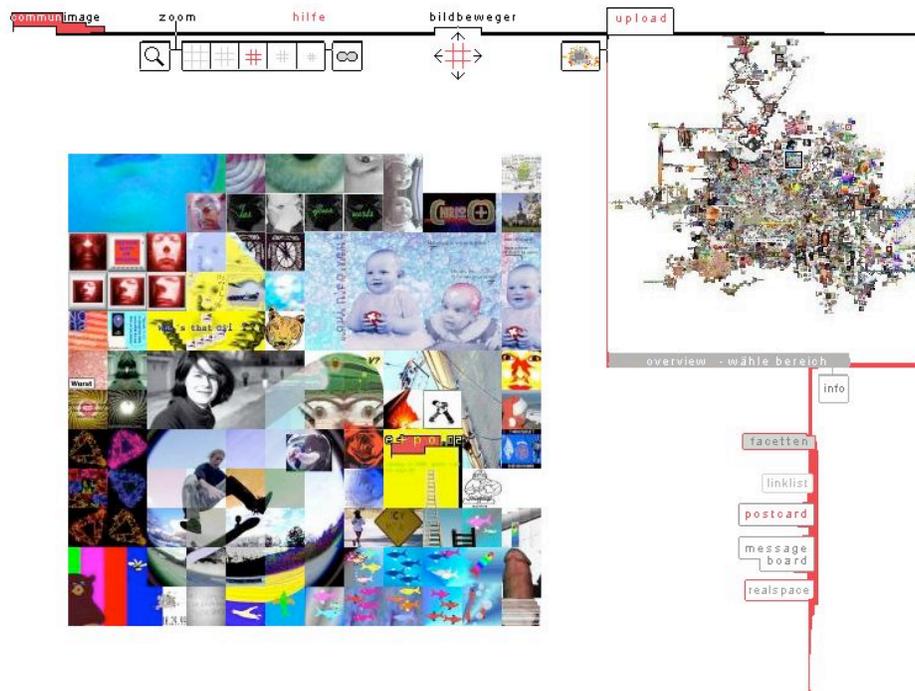


Leah Modigliani's project, *Acquisition* (2003-ongoing) extends traditional notions of the art market to create an enclosed global economy of art production and sale. After photographing the homes of affluent Bay Area art collectors, the artist sends the snapshots to Chinese landscape painters to be reproduced as large-scale oil paintings. These outsourced works are then sold on the open market with the resulting proceeds intended (eventually) to finance a down payment for Modigliani's first home. The artists' "emerging" status in the marketplace and the quotidian quality of the resulting images conspire to highlight the inherent fallacies of this scheme. *Acquisition* draws attention to the discrepancies of an art

marketplace that is primarily driven by traditional commodities – objects of art – while championing the ideas and talents of the individual artist.

Phil Ross explores time from a plant's point of view in three new pieces. *Junior Return* (2004) is a small plant-support device that hydroponically raises a broccoli sprout. The clinical appearance of the work makes us consider whether digitally delivered nutrient drops are as unnatural a manipulation of nature as a human being on life-support. *Triple Now Power* (2005) is an intricate splicing of three redwood slices so that growth rings meet and continue across slices. Ross' work evokes the 8-foot diameter redwood slice in New York's Natural History Museum that is marked with significant events in human history. The unlabeled and spliced cross-sections suggest that we have ignored the tree's view of time in which the center doesn't represent a Gregorian calendar birth date, but rather year zero in "tree time". By splicing three sections of the same tree, Ross shows that each year is experienced uniquely at different points within the tree's volume, making us remember Einstein's revelation that space and time cannot be separated – our experience of one is affected by the other. *Deep Phase* (2005) embeds a human clock inside a gnarled root ball, wittily parodying baroque clock designs that embed the rational clock's circle into an elaborate illusionist recreation of nature.





c a l c (tOmi Scheiderbauer, Teresa Alonso Novo, Luks Brunner and Malex Spiegel) in close collaboration with **Johannes Gees** created the online *Communimage* (1999 - ongoing) as an endless virtual 2D landscape. Visitors can claim a square within this landscape to fill in any way they choose and then upload to the site. For some visitors this is a parlor activity, carefully filling in the square with detailed drawing. For others it is a land grab with wholesale tracts of space taken up by swaths of pornography or family photos. Many visitors choose to appropriate nearby images, transforming, amplifying or distorting them. An original small image of a duck is enlarged ten-fold and its head removed with the German phrase “Kopf ab” (head off) written below. Other tracts include hundreds of sequential screen shots from a videogame, Catholic iconography, nature photography and high school yearbook photos. The work transcends taste and genre as a portrait of the collective conscious.