

**Manual** | 'manyə(wə)l|

*noun*

*instructions for learning and understanding a subject*  
*manual of the artist's aphorisms*  
*based on theory and practice, experience and reflection*

By

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**Abstract** |ab ' strakt|

*adjective, noun*

*existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence*

This manual is an investigation and a search for meaning within a gallery space. The essence of my practice as an artist is the research I do within the exhibition space prior to making or installing an artwork. By participating in the creation and the management of 1612 Gallery, I have been studying and reflecting on all aspects of that space as a gallery: researching its history, location and functionality and by observation I have seen how different artists respond to this gallery space. My research has included looking at the history of art galleries through catalogues and fieldwork, as well as studying the writings of art historians, curators and artists as they consider the gallery as a space for exhibiting art. The 1612 Gallery, Emily Carr University Graduate students studios and gallery located at 1612 West 3rd in Vancouver, British Columbia, functions as my case study and is also used as a comparative tool in my understanding of the nature of “the white cube” gallery space.

My research question focuses on how the gallery and exhibition space influences the work on display and how, by placing an artwork within a certain space a specific meaning is created. My method was to place myself in the centre of the investigation, where I took on the roles of the carpenter, cleaner, facilitator, artist, curator and exhibition maker. My purpose was to better understand the role of the artist and the curator, complete with the obligations, and the tasks that comes with these roles, and to better understand how a space; with its white walls, its ideology, and its dialogue becomes an art gallery. My thesis artwork will be a final site-specific sculpture based on these reflections.

## Contents | 'kän , tents|

*noun*

*the things that are held or included in something  
a list of the titles of chapters or sections contained in a manual*

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## List of Figures |'figyørs|

*noun*

*a set of items considered as being in the same category or having a particular order of  
priority  
itemization of photographs or pictures*

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## **Acknowledgments** |ak'nälijmənts|

*noun*

*expressing or displaying gratitude or appreciation for something  
an author's or publisher's statement of indebtedness to others, typically one printed at  
the beginning of a manual*

My gratitude goes to my supervisors, **David MacWilliam** and **Ben Reeves**, I am deeply thankful for their support, patience and healthy dialogues.

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**Charles Lin** for his editorial advice.

I acknowledge that I am offering my hypothesis like an empty gallery in which I tell you there is an artwork. I depend on you to care what an artwork is, its shape always changing, a transparent entity one recognizes best when it is a concept, or by the thoughts it ingests. I depend on you to be curious, even thrilled by the idea of an artwork and if you are living in an enclave of luxury, it is likely you have already learned how to recognize an artwork.<sup>1</sup> (Randolph 69)

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<sup>1</sup> The quote has been altered to serve the means of this manual.

The manual does not aim at being an objective and general analysis of the phenomenon of exhibition spaces, but is rather an instrument for further experience, in regard to art, space and life.

The manual does not aim at establishing what is going to happen in the gallery space, but at what has happened and is happening.

The manual gives documentary evidence of the individual writer, artist, curator, carpenter, cleaner, designer and facilitator.

The manual transforms real life into information.

The manual remains within the limits of the collection of the material; tomorrow there could be another manual by the same writer.

The manual produces a collection of already old material.<sup>2</sup> (Christov-Bakargiev 4)

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<sup>2</sup> I have made a selection and altered the manifesto of the art movement Arte Povera to serve my needs for the manual.

## **Introduction** | , intrə 'dæk sh ən|

*noun*

*the action of bringing a new artwork into space*

*a thing preliminary to something else*

*an explanatory section at the beginning of a manual*

*a person's first experience of a subject or thing<sup>3</sup>*

I entered the studio space that was to be mine for the duration of my studies: my space, a stall, cubical. No natural light, just a little box where I was supposed to think and make artwork in. There was a bigger space in the front of the building that was cluttered, filled with file cabinets, lockers, tables, and office chairs. It took me a while to actually look at that space, to experience it and connect with it. There was a disorderly confusion in the room although it was obvious that it was an exhibition space, a gallery of some sort that had been neglected and uncared for. This space that I'm describing is the Graduate students' studios located at 1612 West 3rd in Vancouver, BC. This location is off main campus, in an area where there are commercial galleries, catering businesses, storage warehouses, condominiums, furniture shops and car dealers. In this neighborhood this studio and gallery space is the odd one out, an awkward warehouse where impecunious art students amble around. As of this fall, 2011, the life of this space as artists' studios and gallery is coming to an end since Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUAD) will be giving up the lease on the building. This writing is likely to be the last recorded evidence of this space that housed graduate students and their artworks.

As time went by in the autumn of 2009, the exhibition space stood empty, no one had used it or taken advantage of it. When my first semester came to its end, in December 2009, I had decided to take over the space, to see if I could find more meaning and usefulness for it. With support from my supervisors, David MacWilliam and Ben Reeves, and the Dean of Graduate Studies, Renee Van Halm, I converted the space into the 1612 Gallery (fig. 1). With the conversion of the space I was also converted, I no longer had the single role as an artist entering the ECUAD Master's program, now I had also taken on

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<sup>3</sup> Apple Dictionary is used for definition, version 2.0.3. Definitions may be altered to serve the artistic discourse.

the role of a curator, facilitator, and even a carpenter and a cleaner. The singular role that I had imagined I would be bettering had become more complicated. I came to realize that 1612 Gallery could be my exhibition space and form a part of my research as a gallery space where I would be exhibiting my work for the next two years, and also a site for my work, and my ideas; it could function as my “own” white cube.

Research and response is my method of working as an artist. If I have the opportunity I will spend as much time in an exhibition space as possible: inhale it, feel it and try to experience it in all possible ways. When I am working on an installation or exhibition, I look at the location; where is the gallery situated, what kind of neighborhood is it located in and who are the public outside of the gallery walls in the street where the work is being installed. The history of the space also becomes a consideration and all these investigations come together and are a part of my research when I am creating an artwork. The exact placement of an artwork is very important because it is part of a negotiation with the space, which defines the artwork just as the artwork defines the space.

In the winter of 2009/10, it became apparent to me to thoroughly investigate this 1612 Gallery space and respond to it with my own artwork as well as my writing. By participating in the creation, the running and the management of 1612 Gallery, I have been studying all aspects of this space: researching its structure, its history, location, and functionality. Through observation, I have also seen how different exhibiting artists have responded to the space when making or installing their artworks.

Before coming to ECUAD my research and practice was focused on making public art. I have always been intrigued by public spaces and the public that move through the streets and fields, and by making work in the public realm, I welcome the possibility to speak to all that are willing to listen and experience my interventions and sculptures. I had always found the gallery to be a limiting space for art to be placed, in that we have to rely on a viewer to first make the effort to enter the gallery space that is surrounding the artworks. However, it is a long and arduous struggle to get permission and grants to make art in public spaces and therefore I do not want to dismiss the gallery space. I have come

to recognize that I need a gallery space as an alternative to my public practice, and to offer an alternative way to think and to react within as an artist. I have come to recognize the gallery space as a shelter from the harsh outside environment, a more private realm that is potentially freer than the public one. In writing this thesis I have come to recognize that I have a love/hate relationship with gallery spaces and on reflection I celebrated the opportunity to be able to investigate it.

Currently my artwork is focused on sculptural sound and video installations. I believe that my works are spatially oriented, poetic and at times minimal. My artworks are based on ideas where nature is often a theme and there is a playful conceptual awareness in my artworks. I want my artworks to be demanding for the spectator even if I am only asking them to look, touch, or listen. While my artwork will not take the leading role in this written thesis, it will serve to represent examples of some of what happened within the 1612 Gallery space, and document my response to the growth and the development that I have been going through as an artist, as I also work towards a better understanding the relationship between artist, gallery and curator.

The 1612 Gallery is the focal point of this research. In that space questions were asked, and in that space answers were sought. The short chapters that follow are structured like a manual, so the reader may approach this written thesis as a tool when starting their own exhibition space. I shall reflect on the meaning of a gallery space; along with its histories and its definitions. I will also be looking at the functionality of light, at whiteness and at the idea of purity in the gallery space. I will consider what constitutes an exhibition, the dialogue that is part of an exhibition space, and discuss the role of the viewer. I will look at what happened in various gallery spaces in the sixties and seventies, since that was a key time when the role of the gallery as a “white cube” space was being questioned. I will try to discover if the institutional critique of questioning the gallery space still has relevance or if artists are content with accepting the givens of the gallery space today. In addition I will be paying attention to the role of the curator or exhibition maker and I will be exploring the relationship between the curator, the artist and the artwork.

1612 Gallery acts as a case study and it is also used as a comparative tool, to better understand how gallery spaces compares and contrasts to each other. My method was to place myself in the centre of the investigation and the pronoun “I” will be used where suitable. I am aware that I am addressing many topics within this paper and given the scope and length of this reflection, that I will not be able take every subject as far as I would like to, but my hope is to create an interest within the reader to take on their own investigation into art exhibitions and gallery space.

## **Gallery** | 'galərē|

*noun*

*a room or building for the display or sale of works of art  
a balcony, esp. a platform or upper floor, a box, providing space for an audience*

I began my investigation by asking myself what were the material conditions of creating a gallery space at 1612 West 3<sup>rd</sup>? What was the nature of this gallery space?

The space was almost a square room 6 x 7 meters, with two and a half meters high white walls, windows onto the street and two doors: one at the entrance and one that opened up into the ten graduate studios, including mine, at the back of the space. Big supportive wooden beams crossed the ceiling in the gallery space and within the space there was a small lavatory and a storage room. The concrete floor was uneven and painted gray, it was beaten up by time and use, with every wash a bit of paint peeled came off. The east wall had a little ledge running across and the west wall only reached 2.2 meters high, above it there was uncovered rippled aluminum. The north wall almost covered the front window of the space but it also created a window space (between wall and window 70 cm narrow) that often was used to promote and hang artworks. The south wall had a door leading to the studio spaces in the back but was with the south wall the “cleanest” and most “neutral” space within the gallery.

1612 Gallery was never white enough or clean enough to be categorized as an ideal white cube gallery. It was artificial but also beaten up by time and use. It is lacking the aesthetics and neutrality that the classic white cube demands. I often wonder if I had the money and time, would I have made this a “proper” gallery space? The space has its limitations, restrictions but that is what constitutes the gallery (fig. 3, 4, 5). An artist cannot enter the gallery with a fixed idea without discussing it with the space first. It is truly difficult to enter 1612 Gallery and not recognize the limitations of the space, it is very present and a big part of everything that is presented within its walls.



The term *white cube* refers to a gallery aesthetic that was introduced in the early twentieth century in response to the increasing abstraction of modern art. With an emphasis on color and light, artists from groups like De Stijl and the Bauhaus preferred to exhibit their works against white walls in order to minimize distraction. The white walls were also thought to act as a frame, rather like the borders of a photograph. A parallel evolution in architecture and design provided the right environment for the art. Its square or oblong shape, white walls and a light source usually from the ceiling characterized the white cube. (Tate Modern)

“The gallery space is devoted to the ‘technology’ of aesthetics: un-shadowed, white, clean, artificial. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study, and seem to be untouched by time. The presence of that odd object, the viewer’s body, seems unneeded, an intrusion. The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, bodies are not. They are only tolerated as a necessity. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floors are polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes float around the space. It has some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with the chic design to produce a unique cube of aesthetics. So powerful are the perceptual fields of force within the cube that, once outside it, art can lapse into a ‘meaningless’ status.” (O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* 15)

I have visited number of galleries and found out that the neutrality within the white cube stays within the exhibition space, but one cannot escape the locality of the place that will start to define the work that is on display, in other words, place and space are inseparable. Without the context of the space, art can leap to a meaningless status,

therefore artists demand specific spaces where art can be seen and apprehended by the spectator. If art can become meaningless outside the context of the exhibition space, then things only become art in a space that allows powerful ideas about art focus on them.

The challenge for the twenty-first century is to continue to acknowledge that gallery spaces and systems of displays are neither natural nor neutral. Perhaps the challenge will be to maintain a sense of where and what the institution is, in terms of its location, history and audiences, while remaining open to new artistic perspectives on the present and the past. I wonder if we can create structures and opportunities that are both robust and transparent. Is it possible to combine the continuity that is necessary to build a relationship with audiences, other institutions and artists, with new flexible models of artistic production and reception? To be relevant in the twenty-first century, the gallery must be at once a permeable web, a black box, a white cube, a temple, a laboratory, and a situation. It must take the form of a creative partnership, between a curator and a producer, object, idea of art. (Marincola 133)

## Historical Context, Conditions and Conventions

['kän,tekst] |kən'di sh ən| |kən'ven ch ən|

### nouns

*circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed*

*circumstances affecting the way in which people live, work and experience art  
a way in which something is usually done, esp. within a particular area, art form or activity*

From the 1920's to the 1970's, the art gallery as a space has a history distinct from the art shown in it. From exhibitions like *Exposition International du Surréalisme* in Paris 1938, where visitors used flashlights to see the works, the *First Papers of Surrealism* in New York in 1942, where Marcel Duchamp wrapped the gallery and the objects within it with string to create an environment, and through a number of other similar exhibitions, the pedestal gradually melted away, leaving the spectator surrounded waist-deep in a wall-to-wall neutral gallery space. Just as artists reflected on the various framing devices that art had historically relied upon to signify a work of art, and eliminated the elaborate frames used to contextualize the value of their paintings, and dropped the pedestal that had been traditionally used to present their sculpture, the scale of sculpture shifted so that the gallery itself, as a homogeneous space became the context for the artwork. As the frames dropped off, and the question of what was and what wasn't art became more difficult to answer, the space became the context and the signifier for the art inside. As all impediments to viewing art were gradually removed increasingly the gallery itself became the subject of a number of artists' artwork.

This new, neutral, white space pushed gently against its confining box, gradually, the gallery was infiltrated with consciousness. The dark burlap walls with wainscoting were gradually eliminated and by the 1960s were replaced with clean, white neutral walls of the white cube. The art gallery became a "degree zero" space, infinitely mutable but never changing.

This was the beginning of a number of exhibitions that use the gallery as a dialectical

space for discussion. These gestures have a history and a provenance; each tells us something about the social and aesthetic agreements and the economies that preserve and maintain the gallery as a site for art. Increasingly the gallery became a site for “installation” where an artist would make a unique, site-specific artwork to draw attention to the gallery’s physical and economic realities, and point to them in a single coherent idea.

An early example, which took place in Paris in 1960, was Arman’s *Le Plein*. The artist completely filled the closed gallery with garbage, detritus and waste. Air and space were evicted until, in a kind of reverse collage, the trash appeared to reach a critical mass pressed against the walls, window and door. The gallery and the artwork were as one: inseparable. The work could only be viewed from the street outside the gallery. Arman himself called this installation a tantrum. (Godfrey 72)

One of the themes of the art of the late sixties and seventies was a move towards how artists could find larger, less elite audiences. This resulted in a large number of site-specific, temporary installations outside the gallery and the museum, and in an international dialogue on perception and value-systems: these exhibitions were liberal, adventurous, sometimes programmatic, sometimes rude, and always anti-establishment and the testing of limits. The intellectual energy was formidable and there was an exhilarating run of insights into the cycle of production and consumption that paralleled the political troubles of the time. It seemed as if the gallery’s walls were metaphorically turning to glass and people were looking in. The gallery could no longer insulate art from the view of the world outside. (O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* 97) “...The artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence,” wrote Susan Sontag in “*The Aesthetics of Silence*.” Art forces the void behind the closed door to speak. Outside, art is saved and refuses to go in

Artists continued to reflect on the political and financial economies of the gallery system and the gallery as a conceptual proposition. In December 1969, in the Art & Project Gallery in Amsterdam, American artist Robert Barry pinned to the front door a

sign that read, “during the exhibition the gallery will be closed.” Barry’s work employed scant means to project the mind beyond the visible. Things may be there, but cannot be seen for there was no work on view, not even access to the gallery where work could be seen. Process is present, but cannot be sensed, attempts are made to transfer ideas without words or objects. All that the artist presented was an assertion that an exhibition was going on. The exhibition was the closed gallery, a temporarily invisible space that could not be viewed and was penetrable only by the mind. As we contemplate this conceptual gesture, we also ruminate about frame and base and collage. (Godfrey 165) In Barry’s empty gallery, the meter ticks, there is someone paying the rent, an enlightened dealer was losing money in the recognition that helps point out the gallery space usually sells things, and also serves to draw attention to the next exhibition in that gallery.

The sixties saw the erosion of the traditional barricades set up between perceiver and what was perceived, between the object or artifact and the viewer. Could the audience become an artifact? The intensified awareness of being a subjective viewer alone in an empty white gallery, looking, with expectation self-reflectively simultaneously becomes an artifact.

In October of 1968, in Rosario, Argentina, the artist Graciela Carnevale invited visitors to what would be the final opening of a ‘Cycle of Experimental Art’

“...a totally empty room, the window wall covered to provide a neutral ambiance, in which are gathered the people who came to the opening, the door is hermetically sealed without the visitors being aware of it. The piece involved closing access and exits, and the unknown reactions of the visitors. After more than an hour, the “prisoners” broke the glass window and escaped.” (Holmes)

The occupants of the empty gallery assumed the condition of art, and then had their expectations frustrated. When they recognized their predicament they rebelled. In an hour

there was a transformation in which the viewers became the subject of the work, and when they recognized this, they broke out of the white cube. While I have only read about this performance, for me it is the perfect artwork for a gallery space, as not only does the viewer undergo a transformation and become the object of scrutiny, but also because of the bridge that the work creates to the outside world. It reminds me that an artwork belongs in the public realm.

During the sixties the neutral white cube, and the hidden conditions of an exhibition revealed some of the agendas of the private gallery space that hadn't been talked about much, and this partial demystification had considerable consequences for the idea of installation. This transformation of the art gallery space became part of the spectator's role. Indeed the artist's role often became providing a gesture for the viewer to experience and acknowledge.

The late 1960s produced at least three different strategies of resistance. First to reform the art institutions and commercial art apparatus that oversaw the circulation, presentation and consumption of artworks. The second and third strategies of resistance were directed at art, artistic practice and artistic products, and not just at institutions and the market. They included conceptual art's dematerializing of the art object in language and action and the temporalization of artworks in specific times and spaces in what can be called post-studio practices. A fourth set of strategies, represented by institutional critique, emerged as a combination of the three. (Fraser 57)

## **Exhibition** |ˈeksəˈbiʃən|

*noun*

*a public display of works of art or other items of interest  
held in an art gallery or museum or at a trade fair*

My first key decision given that I had decided to make a new art gallery at 1612 West 3rd, was what artwork should be exhibited there? Who should be invited and should exhibitions be by invitation, sign up or just drop by and put up artworks? I decided to invite. I began with an exhibition of two painters, my peers, one from Emily Carr University and the other from University of British Columbia. The aim of the first 1612 Gallery exhibition was not only to showcase two painters but also to create a dialogue between two art programs, to establish a relationship with other art students and faculty. I believed that intermingling with another institutions would strengthen and diversify the Emily Carr University MAA program. The exhibition opened January 28, 2010 and from that first exhibition, I then began to construct an exhibition program and over the next eighteen months I installed a series of fourteen exhibitions on a six-week cycle, closing during the summer months. There was a mix of artists that were invited, with artists that signed up for an exhibition, and external curators that selected or put out calls for artists. I was trying to avoid hierarchy. I wanted the gallery to be open and free, but I soon realized that I was a part of a hierarchy, being in an institution that leased the space, and relied on governmental grants I had to consider liability issues.

I did follow a common path in the creation of the 1612 Gallery. Early on I made the decision to follow gallery conventions with invitations and openings. I created a website where shows were announced and documented, the gallery was also put up as a “Group” on Facebook, where announcement and invitations were sent out. With help of people connected in the Vancouver art scene I compiled a mailing list of 125 people. Everything was done digitally as there was little money to be found, so the gallery was restricted to keep things at a minimum cost. Every opening was announced with an e-flyer that was sent to the Facebook Group members and to those on the email list. I did

ask the artists to help with the promotion of their shows, press releases to the local newspapers, Instant Coffee<sup>4</sup>, websites, etc. I asked the exhibiting artists and my MAA colleagues for their assistance since my workload was at times overwhelming, as I was taking on every job in the gallery from painting the walls to the invitations. For openings I struggled to have some kind of refreshments, however lack of money prevented me from being able to offer decent receptions. Since the 1612 Gallery space actually belonged to Emily Carr University, there was a strict alcohol ban that prevented me from being able to sell alcohol and run a bar to pay for itself and simple food. I am curious about the degree to which the lack of alcohol affected the gallery, in that it never became a social gathering place for artists and students in the way that I had hoped. Naturally, occasionally viewers did bring alcohol to openings, but the overlooking security coming in and out of the gallery space made drinking a clandestine activity and it was very awkward to consume anything.

Over the course of the 1612 Gallery's life span as an art gallery, most of the exhibitions have been what might be predictable in a contemporary art gallery: for example paintings and photographs were hung in a classic way, on 54" centres. I took great efforts to be generous and careful to consider the appropriate space that each artwork needs to be seen in the best light with sculptures and installations installed carefully and in an expected way..

Exhibitions form the nexus where artists, their artwork, an art institution and the public intersect. Exhibitions function as primary transmitters through which the continually shifting meaning of art and its relationship to the world is brought into temporary focus and offered to the viewer for contemplation, education and pleasure. The critic and curator Bruce Ferguson has defined exhibitions as "the central-speaking subjects in the stories about art which institutions and curators tell to themselves and to us." (Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nairne 176)

Exhibitions can take on many forms, some more, some less successful in their

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<sup>4</sup> Instant Coffee is a Toronto/Vancouver based group that promotes art shows, talks, and events, with more than 8000 subscribers to their mailing list.



timing, their situation, their audience, and above all their contents. A good group or one person exhibition is never the last word on its subject and no exhibition can exhaust the potential meanings of the art that is presented. Instead, I believe a successful exhibition should be intelligently conceived as a scrupulously realized interpretation of the works selected; one that acknowledges by its organization and installation that the material on view may be seen and considered from a variety of perspectives. This will eventually benefit the idea of other possible understandings of the art in question. (Marincola 14)

I believe an artwork needs to be seen to exist, and the exhibition is the primary means for presenting and “explaining” an artist’s work. Showing is telling. Exhibition installations are at the same time presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation. If we consider galleries like books, then they are filled with exhibitions that are like chapters or paragraphs, the walls and formal subdivisions of the floors are sentences, clusters of works are clauses, and individual works, in varying degree, operate as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and often as more than one depending on their context.

In my experience there is a tendency to overly explain the intentions of the artist and to overly define what artworks mean in galleries and museums through the use of didactic panels, wall texts, labels, and even invitations and Press Releases. This is an interesting discourse within contemporary art: “Do you need an explanatory label on the wall or do you just hang the picture and let the public cope with it?” Sometimes a really thoughtful text of some kind, whether it’s the artist text or whether it is the curator’s text, is really helpful, because even if you disagree with the text, it might give the spectator something to push back against. (Obrist 182)

For the 1612 Gallery I make a decision to refrain from exhibition didactics whenever possible in order not to preempt the viewing process by attempting to explain away the artwork before the spectator has had a chance to see, and engage with the exhibition. I believe that if people read labels first instead of looking at the artwork; the curator has failed the artist. Then the curator has made the labels too prominent, too plentiful, too wordy, too graphically arresting, or in another way too interesting in the general field of

vision. (Winkleman 24) Every exhibition has to be considered by itself and therefore there were exhibitions that did call out for more extensive labeling than others.

People can be afraid of things that they are unfamiliar with and when it comes to art viewers can be embarrassed if they appear not to understand an artwork. “The curator’s task is to arrange the encounter between people and what puzzles them in such fashion that they will derive the maximum benefit and pleasure from it. That is to make something new out of the experience, from the particularities of the work, the viewer’s own uncertainty and, their innate drive to exploit to the fullest extent their own imaginative and intellectual resources.” (Marincola 24)

Over the course of programming the 1612 Gallery for those eighteen months, my initial question about what constitutes an exhibition still remains in many ways unanswered. I recognize that in the most general sense an exhibition is an organized presentation and display of a selection of items. But I find myself asking: when does this presentation gain importance, is it when the artist enters the space, when the invitation is sent out, or is it when the spectator sees the work? “The meaning of art is experienced by the viewer, not the artist. The artist's ideas are not essential to the art as seen by the viewer. The viewer is an artist in the sense that he conceives a given piece in his own way, unique to him. His own imagination determines what it is, what it means. The viewer does not have to be considered during the conception of the art, but should not be told, then, what to think or how to conceive meaning. There is no need for definition.” (Haring)

During my research I found myself reflecting on what constitutes an exhibition of Richard Long’s<sup>5</sup> sculptures. Is it his arrangement of rocks in a straight line out in the countryside is the exhibition, or are the documentary photographs of this arrangement that are then exhibited in an art gallery or museum the exhibition? Or are they both different exhibitions of the same artwork? What is intriguing about an exhibition is the fluid form it can take, a conventional gallery space has the tendency to make an exhibition

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<sup>5</sup> An Englishman born in 1945, sculptor, walker, photographer and painter, one of the best-known British land artists.

seem predictable. The viewer who has been to the gallery space before knows what to expect before they enter. They expect white well-lit walls, relatively high ceilings, a floor that doesn't attract too much attention, and artwork neatly installed within the space. Yet once inside it is that art that is presented that can make each exhibition fresh, surprising and new again.

## **Curator** | 'kʏoər , ātər|

*noun*

*a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection*

*an exhibition maker*

*a seeker of artist*

In creating the 1612 Gallery, I first had to consider if I was willing to take on the role of the curator. The major question for me was how to curate the space. What did I want it to be? Was there a difference between an artist who curates and an artist/curator? More importantly, how would this role affect my relationship with my colleagues who accepted me as an artist, but now I was casting myself into a different power relationship with them, in that I could decide who was chosen to exhibit and who didn't. How would this shift my relationship with them? What qualifies me to select my fellow students, who will have an exhibition? How far should I go in curating when the work was being installed? These questions were uncomfortable and made me feel uneasy.

I soon came to the conclusion that I would be non-curating when it came to installing work, that the artists would take the responsibility to install, that the space was their playground. I stood quietly on the side, looking. Sometimes though I found myself asking questions, and doubting some choices that the artists made. And by questioning the artist and discussing the artwork I breeched my self-imposed non-curatorial policy, and I failed to stand aside. I cared and took my curatorial responsibility personally. I cared about the space, the work on display and I was conscious that *I* was a part of the exhibition through this commitment that I had taken on. The gallery is a learning place both for me as well as for the artists showing their work within its walls. Therefore, I opened up the dialogue between the artist and me, so that we could question each other and question the space.

I found myself asking: who and what is curator and is a curator needed for this gallery? Can a facilitator, carpenter and artist also be a curator? I was selecting and inviting artists, and promoting the exhibition, although sometimes I just called for artists

to sign up for the gallery space. I had become a maker of exhibitions, a maker because I painted the walls, cleaned the floors, redefined the space, invited viewers, designed the website, etc. As a curious artist, I investigate the limits of perception, and challenge established ways of seeing. I hoped to affect and create a dialogue within the space, however I wondered if a work of art could present itself by virtue of its own definition? I celebrated my confusion about the role of the curator and myself as an artist, and observed how and where the roles intermixed. Within 1612 Gallery I had so many different hats that at times I did not know which one to wear, should I be selecting a single hat or could I wear them all at once?

After selecting the two painters for the first show, I asked people to sign up for the gallery space. I decided that the gallery was to be open for Masters students in and around the Vancouver area. I did rely on my fellow students at Emily Carr University to take this opportunity to exhibit their work. I did find myself somehow longing to have a non-curated space, where art students could have a space to display their works, and where I was to be “powerless”. It was a surprise for me to see how little interest my fellow students had for exhibiting in the gallery. I asked myself: was it the space itself, or just a lack in exhibiting? I had to push for people to sign up and found that I was starting to have to curate the vacant time slots that were still available. I started to invite others to curate and tried to keep the gallery doors as open as possible to others. Six of the fourteen shows were group shows that other students or curators curated. I tried to stay as invisible as possible and I was intrigued to see how other people would react and manage the space.

In the beginning of September 2010 I made a decision to create a curatorial committee that was to take over in October and run the gallery till spring 2011. My aim with this committee was to remove myself from the heart of the gallery, and to broaden the way of thinking about the 1612 gallery and create a collaborative, democratic group of people that would make decisions together. I continued to be a part of the committee but now as a single voice among four others. I believed that a committee would have more energy and driving force. I was wrong. The committee became slow and heavy, where

every decision was taken on a slow pace. I wanted to see if committee members would take initiative and be passionate in creating exhibitions and events. To my disappointment the gallery exhibitions and programming almost came to a standstill. This model of an “artist-run” centre was not functioning and the curation of the space was lacking as few sought an opportunity to exhibit work. The committee did not manage to have any impact for the last months of the running of the gallery. Although, if I was to open a gallery again, I would have an interested committee to run the space as it is easier to divide up the tasks and delegate the various responsibilities. Upon reflection, I think that the 1612 committee was never sure enough of its role and felt that they were stepping on my toes, on my gallery project if they were to take on more initiative. My idea of an ideal committee would be that every two years there is a complete rotation of the members so the gallery does not get stuck or pinned on one direction but takes on twist and turns with new people and new ideas.

So I found myself as a curator that was confused about my role and the actual role of curating within a gallery context. I had difficulties placing myself among other gallery and museum curators. The closest similarity to my role at 1612 Gallery was with artist-run centers as I could in no way place myself with curators that were concerned with staging temporary loan exhibitions, arranging displays of the museum’s own collection and recommending acquisitions for that collection.

As I continued my research, I recognized that over the past forty years the role of the curator has evolved: now in addition to in-house curators there are freelance contract and independent curators who are invited or propose ideas for exhibitions in a wide range of spaces, both within and outside established galleries. Curators have become translators and creators who work with the material of others. They translate an artist’s work by providing a context to enable public understanding. “The expanding geography of the art world, the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of artistic proposals, and the demands of various publics create a situation in which mediation plays an ever more crucial role in the exploration and dissemination of art. At the same time, they take into consideration the critical shifts within the exhibition system and the aesthetic precedents that have

defined our history and culture.” (Thea and Micchelli 6)

As I researched the word *curator*, I found it to be synonymous with *exhibition maker*. As I think back on my role in the 1612 Gallery I see myself more as an exhibition maker and have difficulty adopting the title curator to myself, since I now acknowledge the existence of a specific and highly complex discipline that separates the care or preservation of art from its variable display.

While many curators work towards a single objective: that of presenting individual artworks in the most favorable light, leaving the artwork alone, and enabling the viewer to be confronted by the artwork in a supposedly unmediated way, I have come to believe that an artwork is always embedded in a context and it is impossible to perceive the work free from the context in which it is being presented.

The gallery curator’s role is to place, and organize artworks within the exhibition space. This is what differentiates the curator from the artist, the artist makes the artwork. I believe that artifacts gain their status as art precisely through their placing in the exhibition space. This became explicit with Duchamp’s submission of a urinal within the framework of the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1917. It had been proclaimed that the Society would exhibit all work submitted. After much debate by the board members about whether the piece was or was not art, *Fountain* was hidden from view during the show. By being exhibited within this particular exhibition this urinal became a work of art. The curator may choose and design an exhibition, but does not have the magical ability to transform non-art into art through the act of display. That power belongs to the artist alone. As Groys says in his text “The Curator as Iconoclast” in exhibiting a urinal, Duchamp does not devalue a sacred icon, as the museum curators had done; he rather upgrades a mass produced object to an artwork. In this way the exhibition’s role in the symbolic economy changes. Sacred objects were once devalued to produce art; today, profane objects are valorized to become art. For example, Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, 1987, a photograph of a small plastic crucifix submerged in a glass of what appears to be a yellow liquid. The artist described the substance as being his own urine.

As I began to curate the 1612 Gallery and became an artist curator, I had to deal with my suspicions of curators first hand. The artist as curator, or at least as exhibition maker, is not a new idea. Late-19th- and early-20th-century European and North American artists protested the conservative salons and institutions of their day and formed themselves into avant-garde groups to show their work outside the bounds of the establishment. Over the past forty years as the artist-run-centre movement took off around the world, again inspired by artists' co-operatives and artists' desire to bypass existing museums and galleries. Through my research I became aware that since 1975 Canada has been at the forefront of artist-run spaces with A-Space in Toronto and the Western Front in Vancouver. Today in British Columbia alone there are more than 20 active artist-run centres that are part of PAARC (Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres) and presenting innovative and experimental art directly to the public; artwork that would be difficult to present in conventional venues. Each artist-run centre has to struggle with how they define an artist/curator/exhibition maker for their space, and as artists, how they define their relationship to the Board of Directors in administrating that gallery space along with exhibiting or not within that space. If 1612 Gallery were to have continued, we would also have had to make a decision about our artist-run gallery in relation to other similar galleries in Vancouver.

I think the main objective of curating must be to make its practice explicitly visible. The desire to make and present what we've made to others is what drives artists, and curators assist in this process of making artworks visible. Suzanne Pagé, director of the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris has a humble definition for the curator. She defines the curator as a "*commis de l'artiste*" an artist clerk. She says that to a certain degree it is a question for the curator to be vulnerable, of remaining open to the vision of the artist. "It's about forgetting everything you think that you know, and even allowing yourself to get lost." (Obrist 236)

By placing an artwork in a controlled environment, in the context of other carefully chosen objects, and above all involving it in a specific story, in a narrative, the curator is making an iconoclastic gesture. As Boris Groys notes: the curating of an artwork signifies



its return to history, the transformation of the autonomous artwork back into an illustration, an illustration whose value is not contained within but is extrinsic, attached to a historical narrative. (Groys)

The independent curator is increasingly becoming a central player in contemporary art and can be seen as doing everything that the contemporary artist does and it is precisely this, which makes the figure of the independent curator so attractive and so essential to the art of today.

## Space |spās|

*noun*

*a continuous area or expanse that is free, available*

*a blank between artworks, printed, typed, or written words*

*an interval of time*

*the freedom and scope to live, think, and develop in a way that suits one*

*the dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move*

As I began working on the 1612 gallery, I found myself reflecting on what space is. Based on common knowledge, space is the bounded or boundless container of a collection of objects. For the analysis of a work of art, we regard space as bounded by, and susceptible to aesthetic and expressive organization. Architecture provides us with our most common experience of the obvious manipulation of space

A part of experiencing space is the “mass”, the bulk, density and weight of matter within it. The mass needs not to be solid; it can be the exterior shell of an enclosed space. Volume is the space that is organized, divided or enclosed by mass. It may be the spaces of the interior of a building, the intervals between the masses of a building or the volume occupied by three-dimensional objects. Volume and mass describe the exterior as well as the interior forms of a work of art. The space exists immediately around that matter and interact with it. There is an intimate connection between mass and the space that surrounds and penetrates it. (De La Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick 9)

“A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in the relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in

the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a ‘proper.’” (Certeau 118)

Space is shapeless so we continually attempt to box it, delivering quotas of void. “Box” is easier to understand than space, so we ask it questions we used to ask of space. So “box” must be prompted to mumble, parse and speak for itself. Thus we call boxed interventions installations, they display an attitude, and particularly in relation to the architecture that boxes them. Every installation is engaged in reciprocal definition with its box, asking the question “where am I?” The answer being, “you are boxed”. (Altshuler et al. 26)

When I realized that I had made a box out of the gallery space and was boxing myself within it, I made the works **Op.#1** (fig. 2) and **Op.#2** (fig. 3) that attempted to reach outside. For **Op.#1**, I recorded the sound of raindrops falling outside of the 1612 Gallery and created an 8-channel installation where the individual beats of rain were isolated and filled the gallery space. This was my effort to unite location and space together in a single sound installation where eight little speakers filled the gallery with the sounds of rhythmic rain. Space now is not just where things happen but where things make the space happen. (O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* 39)

## **White** |(h)wīt|

*adjective*

*of the color of milk or fresh snow*

*Herman Melville's Moby Dick.*

and

## **Light** |līt|

*noun*

*the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible*

White is purity, cleanliness, and innocence. To the human eye, white is a brilliant color that can cause headaches for some. Too much bright whiteness can be blinding. In most Western countries white is the color for brides. In the East, it's the color for mourning and funerals. In most cases white is seen as a neutral background, a layer suitable for art. "White is a shade, the perception of which is evoked by light that stimulates all three types of color sensitive cone cells in the human eye in nearly equal amounts and with high brightness compared to the surroundings. A white visual stimulation will be void of hue and grayness." (Wyszecki and Stiles 506)

The range of white colors available is remarkable, but white tints with hints of blue or yellow or green may not be as noticeable when the gallery is empty as they can be after putting artwork on the walls or in the space. The shade of white that is chosen will subtly affect the mood in the space, affect how artwork looks in it, and also influence the type of lighting system needed to make the space feel according to how the facilitator wants it to feel. What works in one gallery may not be right for others. A cool sensibility, offered by whites with gray or blue tints, may be perfect for one program, whereas a warmer feel, offered by whites with red or yellow tints, may work for another. (Winkleman 88)

Natural daylight is seen by many as the ultimate way to view art, but others often want more control rather than relying on weather and time of day. The central question in the gallery lighting debate seems to be: is it better to light the art or to light the space?

Using spotlights may seem too theatrical and, invariably, it leaves some parts of the artwork “hotter” than others. It can also create monstrous reflections on works with glazed or shiny surfaces. Theatrical lighting isolates the object on display and can work against the neutrality of the gallery space. The success of art, Michael Fried poses in *Artforum* 1967, depends on its ability to defeat theatre; he argues that art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater. The arts are not converging, but remain individual disciplines with their concepts of quality and value. What is in between is theatre. (Wagner 124)

For most exhibitions an evenly lighted gallery space addresses these concerns and seems to be more “honest” and art-friendly than spotlights. Although some exhibitions are more suited for theatrical lighting; therefore, flexibility in the lighting system should be considered. The aesthetics of the fixtures and the light bulbs are an important factor in the space, such that they don’t attract too much attention.

At 1612 Gallery the walls were white with a tint of yellow, the space had been painted the summer before I entered the program; therefore, I felt that it did not call out for a new coat of paint. There were cans of paint in the space, leftovers that were used to patch up the space after the reconstruction. As the gallery was on low budget, I took what was at hand and used that. Therefore there was no choice of which white or what kind of lights to use. Does a lack of money affect the art that is shown? This was one of my first questions when I started to reconstruct the space. At the beginning the lack of natural light was the main reason for the reconstruction. Although the gallery is fronted with windows, there was no light floating into the space. One extensive wall was drawn up in front the windows, closing off the space and creating a separation from the street public that only could see a white wall behind the glass. I decided to remove a chunk of the wall so that the space might become more inviting, lighter and, of course, brighter. Additionally, I extended one wall and rearranged another one: the space became a box, more of a square container.

The gallery has spotlights and floodlights, but it was a constant struggle to light the artwork without it looking too theatrical. By using most of the lights I managed to light

the gallery so that shadows and reflections were minimized. When placing<sup>6</sup> an artwork in 1612 the lighting always becomes a part of the project and had to be considered since the fixtures and bulbs are very visible on the low ceiling.

I cannot help thinking about a great albino sperm whale that is about to bite my leg off when I am adjusting the gallery lights and creating whiteness: an absolute white, white beyond all whiteness; white of the coming of white. My thoughts are becoming white, insane, screaming with whiteness. Somewhere in the back of my head I long for the end of white.

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<sup>6</sup> By using “placing,” I am referring to all possible art projects that can happen in the gallery space e.g. hanging, performance, artist talk, installing, etc.

**Ceiling** | ' sēli ng |

*noun*

*the upper interior surface of a room or other similar compartment*

**Wall** |wôl|

*noun*

*a continuous vertical surface structure that encloses or divides an area*

**Floor** |flôr|

*noun*

*the lower surface of a room, on which one may walk*

In my visits to galleries I have come to see that the standard is a twelve-foot ceiling or higher. When writing these guidelines for how to build a gallery I talked to gallerists who suggest that it is possible to get away with a ceiling as low as ten feet before the space becomes claustrophobic. Anything lower than ten feet will begin to affect the spectator's comfort and limit the size of the artwork that is to be exhibited. At the 1612 Gallery, the ceiling is 8 feet high with four wooden beams that extend below crossing the ceiling. I would not describe the space as claustrophobic, but it is challenging. Every installation has to consider the features and limitations of the space. The 1612 Gallery walls are in rough shape, battered and barely standing; some of the gallery's history can be read there. The floor of the gallery was discussed regularly; it was painted with grey, peeling paint and many of the gallery's past activities are evidenced there. I have wondered if the floor should have been repainted or not. Again the end decision was that the floor stays as it was, not because of its aesthetic beauty, but because lack of money and time.

The 1612 Gallery walls are made of white drywall panels. When preparing the gallery I removed a part of the north wall to open the space and get a flood of natural light. I moved walls to make the space square and to gain more floor space. Although time and money restricted my renovations, I tried not to hide the space away in white paint. The space had its restrictions because of strange wall configuration but that was

something that artists and curators had to take into consideration. The gallery wasn't neutral; it became a part of the artwork as the walls had presence in the space.

“The white wall is a filter, with degrees of permeability. Like its sister applied spaces, theatre and concert hall, it tends to pre-select its audience, keeping out the un-moneyed, the so-called lower classes, the uninitiated and the indifferent. It issues an invitation to the opposite of these. The white walls are social regulators subscribing to the rhetoric of inclusion. There is nothing inherently evil about this. It isn't much talked about. Highly pedigreed spaces tend to be exclusive and sometimes vice versa.” (Altshuler et al. 28)

Many gallerists would argue that walls and lighting are the most important elements of an exhibition space, but flooring can bring it all together or prove to be a very unfortunate distraction. Conventional wisdom holds that the more open space a gallery has, or the lower the ceilings are, the more important it is for the flooring to be clean, even and inconspicuous. This relates to the type of art that the gallery represents, and the overall image that the space wants to project.



## **Viewer** | 'vyoðər|

*noun*

*a person who looks at or inspects something  
a person watching a video projected on a gallery wall*

As we move around the space, looking at the walls, avoiding things on the floor, we become aware that the space also contains a wandering “phantom” - the spectator. The spectator, viewer, observer has no face since they are mostly facing the wall. Their body occupies space, stopping and peering, a bit clumsy. The spectator may be plunged into darkness, deprived of perceptual cues, blasted by strobes, and frequently we watch our own image chopped up and recycled by a variety of media. Art conjugates an observer as a sluggish verb, eager to carry the weight of meaning but not always up to it. We balance, we test, we are mystified and demystified.

As spectators, we stumble between confusing roles, we are a cluster of motor reflexes, wanderers representing the scene. We may even trigger sound and light in a space land-mined with art. We may be told that we are artists and may be persuaded that our contribution to what we observe or trip over is an authenticating signature. (O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* 41) When the viewer is tripping they are usually trying to project meaning onto the artwork and if so are they then the creator of the artwork? Does the placing in the exhibition space give the artwork its status or is it the viewer that elevates it to the realm of art when looking at it? Can there be artworks without viewers and are we then also the creators of meaning? These are all questions I found myself asking while programming the 1612 Gallery.

In transforming what is present in the gallery, which resists transformation, I believe the spectator becomes the creator. In that process we are ratified, alienated from the work even as we transform it. The confusion between the object and the spectator reverses the Pygmalion myth; the art comes alive and refines the spectator. Consciousness is the agent and the medium. I wonder if in many ways the gallery situation reflect the real world outside.

As an artist I have to come to terms with the fact that once I place an artwork within an exhibition context, I cannot have any more say about how it is perceived. I relinquish my control over the interpretation and meaning of my artwork. While the curator and I could give guidelines for how the viewer should perceive the work, I am against that. I want viewer to experience my artwork without interference. Therefore I will and cannot have any more to say about the work after it has been installed. If I give an artist talk I always prefer it to place that talk closer to the end of the show rather than in the beginning. I believe in letting the viewer have an art experience in solitude.

The viewer that comes into 1612 Gallery is typically a fellow Emily Carr University student or a member of the faculty. It has been a challenge for me to get a broader public into the gallery and to create a larger awareness of the gallery's existence. While we held openings, exhibitions have opened with very few people in attendance.

It is interesting to witness an opening in a gallery space. The artwork becomes a setting for a social event, a backdrop with viewers clustered in groups are seemingly more interested in the social aspects of the event than the objects on display. The viewer is part of a limited, familiar, predictable group of people, friends who go between openings having similar conversations in front of the various artworks. I wonder, how inviting a gallery can be for the general public or someone outside of that milieu?

The spectators in the gallery environment are somehow artificial, aware of being aware, conscious of quoting itself. Though time in the white cube is always changing, the space gives the illusion that time is standing still, as if on a pedestal. (O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube* 5) And if we are back on a pedestal, we have to melt it away again, we have to keep on questioning the space the curator and the artist have created. If we can bridge the separation between the general public and the art public and if we can make these worlds interact, then I believe we would be onto something more interesting.

**Experience** |ɪk 'spi(ə)rēəns|

*noun*

*practical contact with and observation of facts or events  
an event or occurrence that leaves an impression on someone*

and

**Dialogue** | 'dīə , lāg; - , lôg|

*noun*

*conversation between two or more people in a gallery  
directed toward exploration of a particular subject*

A viewer has an experience of an artwork in a gallery space in the context of an exhibition. But what exactly does the viewer experience? I believe that in experiencing an artwork, viewers then create meaning out of the artwork for themselves within the context of the whole gallery or museum exhibition. As viewers, we are also aware that we are having an experience, looking at art, and there is a dialogue that comes along with that.

Artists now use the gallery space, as a place to research and negotiate ideas and new meanings. As museums are where special things are exhibited, and where meanings and values are discovered, made and preserved, then it is an ideal forum for the critical artist. By the mid 1990's the curation of shows in museums by the artists themselves had become almost a genre in its own right. One critic, Lisa Corrin, mocked that "museumism" would be the next category in the chronological survey of art movements. The world of the gallery and museum has changed in a direction foreshadowed by much Conceptual art, the roles of artists and curator have become more interchangeable. The critic Brandon Taylor is right to claim that just as recent art has converted the anti-establishment gesture of 1960s art into a more measured, more philosophical critique, in the process, the art museum has become a space, not of contestation, but of speculation about representation and reality itself.

Have gallery interventions lost their radicality? Daniel Buren notes that it is

impossible for him to work in an interventionist way, for installations or the site specific are now the norm. Both he and Niele Toroni have been asked to do larger and larger installations. Inevitably they have become less surprising, more decorative and the spectator has developed a “taste” for them. Perhaps the “taste” is a result from the over-consuming Western society where everything is getting bigger and the bigness speaks of greatness. (Godfrey 407)

I wanted to create an artwork that showed an escape or an attempt to escape from the gallery, as the greatest breach of the white cube’s walls was the invasion of film and video. The beginnings of videos around 1980 aspired first to broadcast, then the gallery. Monitors were stacked, pyramided; feedback and delay introduced to installations as the observer became ever more objectified. Video did not require a gallery, just an empty space. It turned the gallery into a viewing room where screens defined their viewing audiences. Video prefers a neutral twilight when a film asks for a measure of darkness. Neither of them needs the transforming powers of the cube. They aspire more to the theater's experimental black box. The black box presents different neutrality, its walls dissolve and its darkness has no implicit content beyond the rhetoric of expectation and disclosure. “Video and film define the white box on their own terms. Their unruly energies, time-based demands and theatricalization of the viewer demystify the space and when something is demystified it migrates elsewhere.” (Altshuler et al. 30)

My mind was focused on the idea of the gallery space and therefore my works became reactions to the enclosed box. I filmed a fly struggling for its life on the window ledge in the 1612 Gallery, it was continuously trying to get on its legs to escape the enclosed box. It never managed to do so and eventually died in the window. The video installation is looped and shows the fly always struggling. There is a soundscape with the installation where I play the viola as the fly moves. In an attempt to connect this idea to the free bumblebee that was flying outside the gallery and had the tones of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumblebee* playing in the background. This was yet another inside/outside work that I did, the fly had entered the space but couldn’t get out. I felt I was in a similar position. ***Passing of the Gallery Fly*** (fig. 7) was not only about the

artwork struggling in the space but also about me, defined by, grasping and contemplating the meaning of the gallery.

I wondered if the gallery, as we know it today, is less a place for knowledge than merely for experiences? Is the role of the intellectual as the beating heart of the space doomed? “This depends on how we define the role of intellectual work in galleries. The challenge lies in creating new forms of representation, emphasizing the other side of meaning. This is never the artwork in itself, but rather something that can be recognized in its effect, in its capacity to liberate the viewer.” (Tilore et al. 94) Perhaps we can also present the viewer with an increasing level of autonomy more than the autonomy of the artwork.

I believe that galleries of today are accepted by artists, and they are not questioned in the same way as they were in the 1960s. Perhaps artists have come to terms and accept the white cube because it is one of the few social space where dialogues about art can take place. The place where the artist’s dialogue and the curatorial dialogue merge over the artist’s work. Is the dialogue has the danger of becoming tedious, uninteresting and repetitious because it exists within a small, self-referential crowd of viewers and participants? With these thoughts running through my head I made the work *Suck* (fig. 8). I made a hole in the gallery wall connected to a pipe running through the studio spaces and out into the public alley behind the gallery. The humming vacuum motor, sucks ideas nad dialogue out of the whiteness of the gallery space. Outside these ideas are blown into the public sphere where their relevance and value is fugitive, and dispersed.

I believe it is important for the discourse to return to the notion of the experience; who will experience the artwork, how, why, and where? How is this experience colored by the context in which it takes place? Despite our good intentions, the everyday world and the art world remain separate. Art is and remains a “free” state in which normal laws do not apply. Can art overcome its outsider status? Whatever artists do, it will always remains an outsider comment, as our work never comes completely together with real life. (Tilore et al. 112)

I believe it is our responsibility, both artists and curators, to bridge the gap between

the worlds. The white walls of separation have to come down and I am not talking about the end of the gallery, but about an alternative beginning. If we have accomplished a gallery model that we're satisfied with, so now it's time to steer off-course and scare ourselves again. Instead of repeating the classic gallery model, each exhibition should be continually questioning its very format. Artist and curators should, as they have historically done, break models rather than stagnate within the confines of institutional and conventional protocol. (Townsend 66)

**Color** |'kələɹ|

*noun*

*the property possessed by an object of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the object reflects or emits light*

**of** |əv|

*preposition*

*expressing the relationship between a part and a whole*

**Milk** |milk|

*noun*

*an opaque white fluid*

*secreted by female mammals for the nourishment of their young*

The final exhibition in 1612 Gallery was my thesis artwork: ***Color of Milk***, which represents the summation of my research and formed my conclusion of the 1612 Gallery. The work was a plaster sculpture (fig. 9) in an organic shape that referred to a whale stomach. Within the sculpture there was an industrial fan that sucked in the air of the space and blew it out through the other end of the sculpture. Inside, with the fan, were speakers that played sounds of previous openings of 1612 Gallery, the recordings were mostly of people's voices that had gathered for an opening of an event at 1612. The four channel sounds were played on different speeds, and with the air of the space the sculpture was digesting the history and the presence of the gallery space, contemplating its meaning and reason. A book accompanied the sculpture, book of poems that was written during my stay and investigation of the space. My writings in the book, ***Color of Milk***, address my concerns with the gallery space, my questions about the curator, about art and my own conflicts of being an artist/curator. The poems give a further insight into my search during my tenure and involvement of 1612 Gallery. The sculpture and the poems are my comprehension of the gallery, my search, within my artworks, and the conception of what it is to be a contemporary artist and an exhibition maker. And after two years in a masters program I have a diaphanous understanding of the gallery space, I

have an idea what constitutes to be an artist and I have an impression and awareness of the curator. I haven't found conclusive answers to all my questions and hopefully I will never will since this search is my appetite, response and reaction in the world of art.

The poem *shrinking*, where the title of the book and the exhibition is taken from, was displayed in the window of 1612 Gallery; I used that to encapsulate the exhibition, my peregrination through the ideology of the gallery space to my final work within the Emily Carr University MAA program.

### **shrinking**

color of milk  
of fresh snow  
my children's teeth  
the page  
sweetness in coffee  
fat on meat  
and in my eye  
there is white

absence of color  
full of meaning  
in a wide landscape of snow  
the color of purity  
of death  
we shrink  
in the belly of moby dick

(Kristinsson 17)



Those who are hungry have no need of art to stimulate or excuse discontent and anything of the kind appears to them merely as an amusement of those who are not hungry. So if one has enough to eat he must have other causes of discontent, for example art.<sup>7</sup> (Russell 716)

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<sup>7</sup> In this quote about the aristocratic rebel, I replaced “philosophy” with the word “art” for the purpose of this artistic discourse.

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*noun*

*a list of the books referred to in a scholarly work  
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## Images |'imijs|

*noun*

*visible impressions obtained by a camera*



Fig. 1: 1612 Gallery. Documentation of the first opening at  
Photo: Ahmad Konash. Used by permission of the artist.



Fig. 2: Helgi Kristinsson, *Op.#1*, 2009. 8 channel sound  
installation. 1612 Gallery. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.

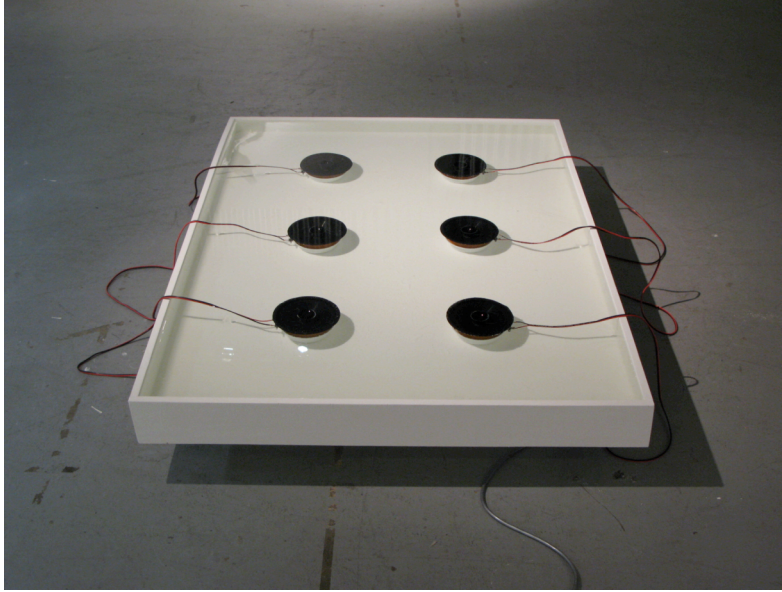


Fig. 3: Helgi Kristinsson, *Op.#2*, 2009. Mixed media, 6 channel sound installation. Dimensions variable. 1612 Gallery. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.



Fig 4: 1612 Gallery. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.





Fig. 5: 1612 Gallery. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.



Fig. 6: 1612 Gallery. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.



Fig. 7: Helgi Kristinsson, *Passing of the Gallery Fly*, 2010. Video installation. Dimensions variable. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.



Fig. 8: Helgi Kristinsson, *Suck*, 2010. Mixed media. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson.





Fig. 9: Helgi Kristinsson, *Color of Milk*, 2011. Plaster, sound equipment and fan. Photo: Helgi Kristinsson

## Appendix |ə'pendiks|

*noun*

*a section or table of additional matter concerning the gallery at the end of a document  
a tube-shaped sac attached to and opening into the lower end of the large intestine in  
humans and some other mammals*

Not every gallery has the same mandate; each may cultivate its own unique audience or market. Here is a list of classic gallery models, but while I am aware that the gallery term can take all kind of shapes, structures, embodiments and formations; fundamentally I would say that any sort of box or a container can be turned into a gallery. A person's living room, an old phone booth, a window, car or the inside of a jacket are also examples of galleries that I have encountered.

**Commercial Gallery:** in the business of selling art. Typically if the gallery doesn't think it can sell the work to its audience it will not represent or exhibit that artist. The decision to exhibit is usually that of the gallery owner. It is common for commercial galleries to take 50% commission on sales.

**Public Gallery:** supported by public funding. Selling is not a part of the galleries mandate. Rather, the focus is to provide the community with an interesting, engaging artwork that might not otherwise be seen. The decision to exhibit work is usually that of a curator. Artist selected for exhibition are usually paid an "exhibition" or "artist's fee" as a professional honorarium: amounts vary.

**Artist-Run Centre:** like a public gallery, public funding often supports these venues. Selling is not part of the Centre's mandate. As the name suggests, an Artist-Run Centre is run by a Board of Directors consisting of a majority of artists. The decision to exhibit artwork is usually that of a selection committee. Like public galleries they also try to pay "artist's fees".

**Co-operatives:** Like Artist-Run Centre, these galleries are run by artists but are not supported by public funding. Rather, as the name suggests, the artist members pool their

financial and other skills to run the gallery. Often the galleries mandate is to exhibit and sell work of the co-operative's members. Members usually have to pay fee to belong.

**Rentals:** Numerous galleries are available for rent. Co-ops, for example, often rent single exhibition slots. In most cases the gallery manager reviews portfolios as to the suitability and quality of work before agreeing for rental. Occasionally, rental galleries take a small commission but in most cases the artist receives 100% of the sale price.(Visual Arts Ontario 37)