

Art21

Guest Blog: Kemi Ilesanmi, Creative Capital

FLASH POINTS: What is the value of art?

Free & Clear: Exhibition and the Free Store

May 12th, 2009 by [Kemi Ilesanmi](#)

Is free sometimes the best value for art? Well, it certainly can be when artists and curators turn an inquisitive and critically-engaged eye towards the nature of exchange, regeneration, and artistic creation. Two recent projects in New York City demonstrate the value of free art, free imagination, free form, and free rewards.

I happened upon the fabulous [Exhibition](#) in Nolita when I met one of the 5 organizers of this temporary art space for lunch just last week. This six-month long continuous art experiment is being programmed by Elena Bajo, Eric Anglès, Jakob Schillinger, Nathalie Anglès, and Warren Neidich.

One accounting of the simple premise is:

1. The site is a storefront lent by a luxury condominium development at 211 Elizabeth Street.
2. The site is open from March to August 2009, Wednesday to Sunday, 12 to 6.
3. The site hosts a single unfolding exhibition.

1. The work is not for sale and belongs to no one.
2. The work is an intervention upon interventions.
3. The work can be modified, parasitized and destroyed.

1. The artist is drawn from a hat.
2. The artist works in areas determined by a roll of dice.
3. The artist discusses these conditions in conversation and on-site.

Fantastic! At least every three days, there is a new artist intervention, and while they can make whatever manner of changes inside the space, artists may not remove their own art works afterwards. When it comes in, it stays.

Last week, I took in an exuberant gridded landscape of colorful confetti on the floor by Liz Linden along with Filip Gilissen's mostly deflated "Vamos" ballons, as well as sometimes cryptic pencil drawings and tracings on the walls...and that's just what I noticed in a quick visual sweep.

In 2 months, [Exhibition](#) (which can also be followed by [blog](#)) has already invited over 26 artists to intervene and freely create in the space and they hope to work with up to a total of 100 by the end of August. In the meantime, I look forward to visiting the space as often as I can.

Perhaps, a more direct form of free exchange was the late winter art and commerce treat in lower Manhattan called the [Free Store](#), which was organized by the artists Athena Robles and Anna Stein (aka [Double A Projects](#)). From February 18-March 22, 2009 they ran a store that “sold” items for free and also accepted free donations of everything from pencils, pez dispensers, shoes, DVDS, and tchotchkes to t-shirts, canned food, garden seeds, vintage bags, and art work such as photographs and hand-painted posters.



Double A Projects, Free Store goods, 2009. Courtesy Double A Projects.

Framed by this moment of global economic crisis and inspired by alternative gift and barter economies long familiar to artists, Athena & Anna wanted to see what it would be like to “broaden this circle of trust and exchange by including the general public.” How would people act when everything is free and yet predicated on collective giving as well as receiving?

The act of exchange was not limited to objects, but also extended to ideas, information, and even food. The [Free Store](#) featured several wonderful

curatorial interventions including a call and response lecture, a night of interactive performance art, and one afternoon of 15-minute professional feedback sessions provided by Edwin Ramoran of Aljira Center for Contemporary Art.



Andres Serrano t-shirts, Free Store, 2009. Courtesy Double A Projects.

Probably my favorite Free Store event was the dinner party for 18, organized by freelance curator Julie Sengle. It featured donated food, recipes, and labor. Seats were given away by a mix of raffle and invitation to Free Store supporters and participants. A delicious and free communal dinner surrounded by art and ideas—does it get any better than that?

Anna, Athena, and the gang of five at Exhibition hope their experiments in free exchange and free creation will inspire other free experiments around the globe. So do I.