DEAR READER

What you have in your hands is a collection of thoughts, questions and tools which I hope will move you to consider the complex relationship between art and labor. My own experience has been one of steep learning curves and delicate balancing of idealism and practical realities. Public dialogue is needed in order to improve and find alternatives to the systems in place. Art can not be standardized, but as artists we can each set standards for ourselves. It is through our stand as individuals that we enable the health and survival of all artists. —Helena Keeffe

There seems to be a growing consensus among both artists and curators that the new set of relations [emerging around project work] needs clarification, while curators are increasingly interested in asking artists to produce work in response to specific existing or constructed situations, the labor necessary to respond to those demands is often not recognized or adequately compensated. Conversely many curators committed to project development are frustrated by finding themselves in the role of producers for commercial galleries or a “service department” for artists. (Andrea Fraser, How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction, 1994)

“There are, of course, those within this art world who disagree with the positioning of art as work or as a job; however, because the notion of art as work is so tightly bound up in what being a serious artist means, those who object to professionalization or thinking about art as work are forced to advocate not for hobby or amateur status but for total revolution (e.g. Castle 1969; Lozano 1969).” (Alison Gerber, Payment for Services: From Market to Professional Logics of Valuation in Contemporary Artmaking, 2011)

We increasingly question the fact that, though we have the greatest role among all who work with exhibitions, our work is still not paid. Everyone else — directors, curators, technicians, guards, art handlers — who is a part of the work of an exhibition sees it as obvious that they should be paid for their work. Why is our work not valued in the same way? (Backman 2006)

“Artistic labor supports a multi-billion dollar industry and yet there are no standards, conventions or regulations for artist compensation. We sometimes receive artist fees if we ask for them, or they’re dispensed at the discretion of the institution as compensation for the work that we’re asked to provide: preparation, installation, presentation, consultation, exhibition and reproduction. That sounds a lot like charity to us.” (W.A.G.E. presentation for MMK, Frankfurt, March 1, 2013)

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THE MYTH OF THE STRUGGLING ARTIST

“You don’t have to be struggling and poor to make good art. While destitution and anxiety can generate creativity, so can comfort and tranquility. You’re not going to lose your inspiration because you took a day job and can suddenly afford healthcare. The point isn’t that you should strive to make a lot of money; it’s that whether you do or not is unrelated to the quality of the art you make.” (Bhandari & Melber, ARTWORK, 2009)

PAYMENT FOR ARTISTS’ SERVICES

The fair-exchange principle is one which society already acknowledges for its multitude of dealings, and is simply understood as payment for services. Everyone performing a service in our society is paid in return. The cultural basis for society is created by artists; and we are agreeing with the rest of organized society that services do in fact require payment. (Chambers 1973:38).

“I was invited to sit in a meeting with big funders from the Netherlands, and I was not sure why. Most people there were being funded or asking for funding, so it was kind of an invitation to apply. It made us think maybe an interesting thing to do would be to write a Call For Funders, instead of the other way around. Write the guidelines and the deadlines and say “opportunity of a lifetime”. (Gabi Ngobolo, Creative Director, Center for Historical Reenactments, UC Berkeley Lecture, October 22nd, 2012)

LIBERATION FROM WORK

“The crash in the global economy is not only an effect of the bursting of the financial bubble. It is also and primarily an effect of the bursting of the work bubble. We have been working too much during the last five centuries, this is the simple truth. Working so much has implied an abandonment of vital social functions and a commodification of language, affections, teaching, therapy and self care. Society does not need more work, more jobs, more competition. On the contrary: we need a massive reduction in work-time, a prodigious liberation of life from the social factory, in order to re-weave the fabric of the social relation.” (Bifo, The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy, 2009)
But don't be their slave. Clearly.

YES Focus on partnerships that will offer real support.

NO Are they likely to be able to sell your work?

YES And be ready to change or clarify the agreement you have with them if they don't.

NO This is the most toxic line of bullshit anyone will ever feed you.

YES Funded non-profits should prioritize direct support of artists.

NO Do they promise exposure?

YES Enough to write an angry letter for even considering you'd even work for them?

NO Are there paid employees?

YES Do you vehemently oppose the cause or what they do?

NO Respectfully decline.

YES Plus an angry letter.

NO Are any of the other artists' projects funded?

YES Ask for the support you need and if they can't provide it, respectfully decline.

NO Do you feel there are benefits that out way the lack of financial support?

YES-space to try new things, right? One opportunity leads to the next.

NO Will they give you creative freedom?

YES institutions often ask their employees about friends hungry for opportunities and use the friend connection to take advantage.

NO Space to try new things, right? One opportunity leads to the next.

NO Are they a bunch of a-holes?

YES Fuck that. Who wants to work for free under those conditions? Find a way to do what you want to do without the institution.

NO Are you a prostitute?

YES You're not a prostitute.

NO Are you friends with "benefits?"

YES You mean the institution your friends work for?

NO Are they friends with "benefits?"

YES You're talking, like BFF?

NO Are they promising you a proverbial kidney?

YES-are they likely to flake on you when you need them?

NO Are they promising you a proverbial kidney?

YES Don't be a dick. You owe them.

NO Are they likely to be able to sell your work?

YES Are they likely to be able to sell your work?

NO Are you altruistic?

YES I'm shocked you made it this far in the chart. You could have been done with the project already!

NO Are you sure about that?

YES Are you up broke, but you'll be knee deep in promised organs.

NO Are you masochistic?
“5 FINGERS MNEMONIC”

SHOULD I ACCEPT THIS OPPORTUNITY?
5 KEY QUESTIONS...

Select 5 questions from the list below (or create your own) that will help you establish a conditional relationship to opportunities sought or given. Carry them in your wallet.

STANDARD QUESTIONS FOR ARTISTS

GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY...

Do I believe in what this institution does/stands for? Is this the ideal venue for this project/my work? Does my work feel alive in this context?

Does this project require funding? Am I willing to ask my friends and family to fund it? Is there a version of it I can propose if funding is not available?

Am I comfortable volunteering my time/money/energy? Is exposure compensation enough?

Does this opportunity help me meet or get to know people I may want to work with in the future? Will it enable conversation with people I want to be in conversation with? Is this opportunity helping me reach the audience I want to reach?

What are all of the benefits of working with this institution? Am I providing a service and if so, how do I expect to be compensated?

Do I have time to do this well? Will this opportunity help me sustain myself financially? Do I need it to?

Am I clear what kind of support is being offered? Have I asked for what I need, even if it has not been offered? Who benefits from my labor?

Is there enough freedom in this opportunity? Would saying no to this opportunity be saying yes to something else I care about more? Is this the best artworld for my work? Is it the most effective use of my time/money/energy?

Am I willing to go in to debt for this opportunity? Have I already amassed too much debt?

Am I being instrumentalized? Am I okay with that?

Am I happier making my living separate from making my art?

The resources presented in this publication are the result of a semester of deep inquiry facilitated by Julia Bryan-Wilson’s graduate seminar, Art and Labor, Art as Labor, at UC Berkeley. I am also indebted to the friends and colleagues who share my interest in this topic and who contributed their thoughts and concerns: Heidi de Vreis, Patricia Maloney, Packard Jennings, Amy Trachtenberg, Eleanor Hanson-Wise, Oliver Wise, Lucas Murgida, Cassie Thornton, Stijn Schiffeleers, Valerie Imus, Joseph Del Pesco and Sean Tally.
REQUEST FOR FUNDERS

Funders can find current projects in production at www.________. Priority will be given to funders who demonstrate a commitment to supporting _______. (e.g., performance, socially engaged art, temporary public art)

Finalists will be selected on the following criteria:
1. Successful track record of ____________
2. Demonstrated ability to effectively ____________
3. Proven integrity when it comes to ____________
4. ____________ experience is helpful but not required.

The following materials must be received by ________________:
1. Mission statement including sources of revenue and contact info
2. Letter of interest
   Why does this project or practice interest you?
   Describe your funding priorities.
   Speak specifically to how your contribution could support this project/practice.
3. Up to 15 images of projects you've funded, with project descriptions and budgets.

Up to 3 funders will be shortlisted based on qualifications. Finalists will be asked to give a presentation followed by an interview.

* During a recent talk at U.C. Berkeley, artist and curator Gahi Ngeabo suggested that she might put out a call to institutions to apply to fund her projects, rather than the other way around. Use this template to create your own RFF.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[List of references and sources]

STANDARD

[Add standard format for presentations or publications]

[Include call-out box for symbolic labor acknowledgment]

[Insert footer with website links]

[Add footer note for in-kind donations]

[Include footer note for contact information]