

TO BEGIN, AGAIN

A PREHISTORY OF THE WEX, 1968–89

Large Print Gallery Guide

wexner center for the arts

Before the Wex: An Introduction

Daniel Marcus

When the Wexner Center opened to the public on November 16, 1989, its galleries were unveiled without a single artwork on the walls, permitting visitors to survey Peter Eisenman's architectural design (coauthored with Richard Trott) free of distraction.¹ A calculated gesture on the part of founding director Robert Stearns, the banishment of art from the center's walls marked a break, not only with the demands of functionalism (a hallmark of modern architecture), but also with the Wex's status as a campus art museum—a role inherited from its precursor, the University Gallery of Fine Art, which had previously overseen the exhibition and collection of contemporary art at The Ohio State University. With the Wexner Center's inauguration, the University Gallery had formally ceased operations, transferring its holdings, a group of approximately 3,000 objects, into state-of-the-art storage facilities at the new institution. Placed out of sight in the moment of the center's founding, this collection would feature only intermittently during the first two years of exhibitions programming, becoming dormant thereafter.² As Stearns advised in an essay heralding the Wex's opening, "the traditional museum context for art as a passive object in a hermetic setting is not here."³

While the creation of the Wexner Center has been copiously documented, the history of the University Gallery still remains to be fully explored. This essay seeks, modestly, to begin that exploration, illuminating a pivotal era in the cultural life of the university—one

that set the mold from which the Wex was eventually cast. Founded within the School of Art in 1966 with the encouragement of its director Jerome J. Hausman, the gallery initially oversaw a small exhibition space on the ground floor of Hopkins Hall, which served as a venue for faculty, students, and visiting artists to stage small-scale projects and exhibitions.⁴ By the decade's end, it had acquired a small collection of modernist artworks with the support of Ohio State alumni; but there was no permanent staff or budget to speak of, and the gallery's activities waxed and waned with the commitments of individual art faculty. An unremarkable institution, it bore the distinction, however, of being the only art museum at the university—which, unusually, lacked any other art collection or campus museum. This absence became an embarrassment in 1968, when Hausman left Ohio State to take a position at New York University, complaining on his exit that the “administration has not shown interest, nor provided adequate support,” to the arts on campus.⁵

The gallery's fortunes changed dramatically in the early 1970s with the appointment of Betty Collings as director—a decision that marked a shift, not only in the institution's leadership, but also in its administrative status, precipitating its independence from the art faculty. Flying under the radar during her first year in the position, Collings's program at the gallery began to attract serious attention in October 1975 with the opening of a second, larger exhibition space in Sullivant Hall, featuring a solo show by former Ohio State alumnus Roy Lichtenstein. This success was soon followed by the announcement of a \$20,000 award from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)—the first of several such cash infusions, each matched by the Ohio State

Development Fund—under its Museum Purchase Plan, a grant program to support the purchase of art by living American artists. Aided by a faculty advisory committee, and with New York–based critic Robert Pincus-Witten as a paid consultant, Collings began to assemble a formidable collection of contemporary art, including large-scale, object-based works by Frank Stella, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre alongside early video art by Lynda Benglis, Peter Campus (who had earned his MFA at Ohio State), and Woody and Steina Vasulka, among others. In tandem with these acquisitions, she launched an ambitious program of special exhibitions, the first season of which featured site-specific projects by Chris Burden, Mel Bochner, and Richard Tuttle, none of whom would have accepted the description of their work as “passive object[s] in a hermetic setting.”

Far from irrelevant to the Wexner Center, it was on account of Collings’s program that the university first contemplated what was later to become the Center for the Visual Arts competition (the call for proposals that resulted in Eisenman/Trott’s winning design)—a project that aimed, first and foremost, to provide the University Gallery collection with a permanent home. On the administration’s side, College of the Arts Dean Andrew Broekema bore responsibility for the broad-strokes vision of a multidisciplinary arts center; in the autumn of 1979, he authorized Collings to begin planning the gallery’s expansion into a centralized university art museum, offering an array of potential sites and existing facilities (none of which proved adequate). As articulated in Broekema and Collings’s plans, the enlarged institution was to gather art collections and exhibitions under a single roof, while also consolidating the Department of

Photography and Cinema, previously housed in the College of Engineering. As the plan gathered steam, however, the university moved to restructure the University Gallery, effectively demoting Collings; when she protested, her letter of complaint was interpreted as an ultimatum, resulting in her de facto dismissal in early 1980.

Collings's legacy was shaped not just by the beneficence of the NEA, but also by the academic culture at Ohio State, where hard and applied sciences overshadowed the humanities. While this orientation toward STEM fields placed a question mark over the role of artists on campus, it also articulated a link between aesthetic experimentation and scientific research that would prove generative for the University Gallery program. In the late 1960s, vanguard activity at Ohio State began to coalesce at the meeting place of art and technology, yielding, among other projects, the Computer Graphics Research Group, a consortium founded in 1969 by art professor and digital art innovator Charles Csurí. (Later renamed the Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design, the group's operation continues today.) While Csurí and his collaborators envisioned the technologization of art (and vice versa), others at the university advocated for art to be treated as a domain of research parallel to the experimental sciences—one that stood to benefit, they argued, from professional cross-pollination.

In 1973, art professor Bertram Katz succeeded in organizing a "Symposium on the Visual and Performing Arts in Higher Education" at Ohio State, bringing to campus an impressive array of notable figures from across creative disciplines. Invitees included visual artists Robert Smithson, Peter Blake, Philip Pearlstein, and Otto Muehl;

critics Annette Michelson, Harold Rosenberg, Max Kozloff, and Lucy Lippard; Chicano farmworker theater collective El Teatro Campesino; filmmaker George Stevens; photography historian Peter Bunnell; theater director Robert Wilson; and dancer/choreographer Viola Farber. An unprecedented event in the life of the university, Katz's symposium staged a first encounter between the university and the underground, a world alien to the academy ("no higher [educational] institution has any vocabulary or method for dealing with these avant garde people," he declared prior to the event) but, as it would prove, one that was essential to its growth and vitality.⁶

In recollecting her path to the University Gallery directorship, Collings cites Katz's symposium as a catalytic experience, opening her eyes to an expanded field of artistic engagement. A third-year MFA student in Ohio State's Division of Art at the time, she had already developed an interdisciplinary practice of her own, drawing nourishment from the study of biology, mathematics, and theoretical physics. Interacting with Smithson following his presentation at Ohio State, Collings felt a kinship with his artistic project, which drew from disciplines far beyond art's traditional ambit. This influence shaped Collings's own artistic projects, informing her exploration of mathematical patterns and topologies through large-scale inflatable sculpture; it also oriented her program at the gallery, informing several key acquisitions—among them Agnes Denes's *Pascal's Triangle, Drawing No. 3* (1973–75), Dorothea Rockburne's *Leveling* (1970), and Bill Ramage's *Empirical Study II* (1979)—and prompting her to propose a major interdisciplinary conference on the role of language in art and art criticism. (After several unsuccessful attempts at securing outside grant

funding, this project was sadly abandoned.) Embracing experimental practice in all artistic fields, including such traditional media as painting and sculpture, but also performance and process-based art, Collings aimed, as she put it in a letter to art historian Rosalind Krauss, to “force the art [at the gallery] to be looked at in relation to other modes of thinking....I’m very curious—maybe the art won’t stand up.”⁷

If the centrality of the hard sciences at Ohio State furnished a springboard for Collings’s program, it also set the stage for conflict. As noted by art historian Howard Singerman, artists in the 1960s and 70s often found themselves on unsteady footing in the academy, within which “the artist was a stranger, even a trespasser....Marked by their excesses, and perhaps by the lack of a certain kind of language, artists pose[d] a threat to the university, but [were] also its potential victims.”⁸ This dynamic of defense and offense played out in various ways during the gallery’s first decade. In some cases, it sufficed for a visiting artist to cultivate an attitude of discursive silence or blankness; for example, in 1976, during her first major season of exhibitions, Collings’s notes record a conversation with Richard Tuttle in advance of his solo project at the gallery, which was to take the form of simple white paper shapes, each cut from a template and pasted directly onto white gallery walls:

I mentioned what I think is the positive role of schools [and] he expounded on his dislike of academic situations. When I quoted [the] scientific experimental apparatus and the unassuming nature of its presence he replied that “although he likes to cut down [i.e. to minimize the visual presence of his work] it is only to elevate the experience of art.”⁹

Other artists erected more painstaking defenses against the “scientific experimental apparatus”—and none more intricately than Chris Burden, who devised the multiday performance *Shadow* for the University Gallery in April 1976, inverting the terms and conditions of the visiting artist gig. Donning a beatnik costume of fatigues, a black sailor’s cap, and sunglasses during the entirety of his trip to Columbus from Los Angeles, Burden self-consciously restricted his interactions with students and faculty to terse, aloof utterances, enacting his contractual obligations with self-ironizing rigidity. Instead of a slide lecture, he placed a visual barrier—a translucent screen—between himself and his audience, reading published descriptions of his earlier performances. In subsequent conversations with students and faculty, he pointedly “reveal[ed] little or no information about [himself] that was not already publicly available.”¹⁰

As Singerman has argued, Burden’s performance in *Shadow* addressed the structural condition of the avant-garde artist within the post-60s academy, forcing the audience to confront, simultaneously, “the physical presence of the artist and the redoubling, representational absence carved within it by language”—an absence calculated to subvert the institutional requirement that the visiting artist speak. This subversion of the artist-academic’s professional entrapment echoed, in turn, an earlier project at Ohio State, Barry Le Va’s performance *Velocity Piece (Impact Run – Energy Drain)*, staged at Hopkins Hall Gallery in October 1969. As detailed in Ohio State’s student newspaper, Le Va left the gallery

completely bare except for two strips of surgical tape about one foot apart, running the entire length of the room. At each end of the

strips is a loudspeaker. One of the walls is slightly tinged with blood. The unmistakable sound of a man running, sliding, and crashing into something comes from the speakers every 30 seconds.¹¹

That noise, it turned out, was the sound of the artist's body thudding repeatedly against the gallery walls. Long since canonized as a pathbreaking work of performance art, *Velocity Piece* marked a violent encounter between the post-Minimalist avant-garde and the university, foreshadowing Burden's later—and tamer—variation on the theme. The sound installation in Hopkins Hall played a recording of a private performance Le Va had undertaken in the same space a few evenings earlier, when, after the hubbub of foot traffic had quieted, he recorded himself running from one side of the gallery to the other, slamming his body hard into each wall until he was too pulverized to continue. This trial lasted precisely one hour and 43 minutes, leaving the artist bruised and the gallery walls marked with a mixture of blood and sweater lint—a gesture *The Lantern* framed in terms of willed self-harm (“masochism...is alive and bleeding at the Ohio State University Art Gallery”), but which Le Va himself considered as a formal experiment, testing the limits of his musculature against the physics of entropy.¹²

In its gruesome enactment of self-directed violence, Le Va's performance intimated a sinister dimension of the encounter with academe—one that positioned the artist as literal victim. *Velocity Piece* also opened a thematic channel to another scene of domination and resistance at Ohio State, which emerged from the 1960s as a major flashpoint of student revolt. A year before Le Va's appearance at the university, in the spring term of 1968, student

militancy at Ohio State had reached a point of combustion, prompted by a combination of anti-Black racism, bureaucratic immiseration, and rising antiwar sentiment. In early April '68, an anonymous group of activists entwined these grievances in a telegraphic pamphlet, calling on students to take matters into their own hands:

RALLY — OSU — WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10 — OVAL — IT'S TIME
STUDENTS ARISE — CONFRONT THE SICK SOCIETY — WAR
— RACISM — EDUCATIONAL DEHUMANIZATION.¹³

By the month's end, this promise would be at least partly realized, when, on April 26, 1968, the mistreatment of four Black passengers by a white campus bus driver prompted an outpouring of anger by the newly formed Black Student Union, which organized a sit-in—quickly escalating to become a lock-in—at the Administration Building (now Bricker Hall). After tense negotiations, the occupation terminated with a voluntary retreat by the students; but the university, egged on by the state legislature and local media, recommended the prosecution of 34 Black demonstrators under felony charges.

Although a full-scale revolt failed to materialize in the spring of '68, leaving the OSU 34—as the Black arrestees of the April 26 lock-in became known—to fend for themselves, two years later, smoldering discontent flared into a major conflagration. In March 1970, another pattern of campus racism prompted a recently formed Black student organization, Afro-Am, to stage a performative demonstration in front of the Admin Building. Stacking a row of bricks along the sidewalk, the activists claimed to be building a “bridge of understanding,” inviting discussion of a list of 13 demands, but the administration,

fearing bricks in the hands of protesters, interpreted the gesture as a prelude to violence, preventatively locking down the building. By the time negotiations could be arranged, a large crowd had gathered outside; as the Afro-Am activists exited, another cohort rushed in, vandalizing offices and harassing the remaining staff.

The failure of Afro-Am's "bridge of understanding" opened a breach at Ohio State, and in the weeks that followed, student dissent erupted in a mass uprising that brought together white and Black student activists in an unprecedented coalition. From late April to mid-May 1970, the campus became a site of pitched battles between students and forces of order, resulting in numerous casualties (including wounds from shotgun rounds fired by vigilantes) and the university's unprecedented decision on May 7 to shutter the campus and send students home early—a decision resisted by numerous demonstrators. Eclipsed in the public memory by the fatal shooting of four students by guardsmen at Kent State University on May 4, the uprising at Ohio State was in fact far larger and more protracted, carrying on over a period of weeks that saw the entire University District placed under military cordon.

In the end, the university succeeded in quelling the uprising, but not without acceding to the terms of its critique. Convening an emergency session during the height of the violence, members of Ohio State's Faculty Council lamented that "disregard for the concerns of the young has long seemed to many of our students to be characteristic of this university," which stood publicly accused by the demonstrations.¹⁴ Vindicated in their expression of grievances, students set the coordinates for future reforms, chief among them the creation of Black

Studies and Women's Studies departments (now the Department of African American and African Studies and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, respectively) and an Office of Minority Affairs (now the Office of Diversity and Inclusion). Beyond these essential demands, however, there remained myriad questions of policy and governance, including the larger question of "educational dehumanization." If alienation was the malady, what was the cure?

That question lingered, unanswered, long after the 1970 uprising. In the view of Ohio State President Novice Fawcett, the trauma of the school's closure required a transition "to the ideal of a person-centered society," replacing the "numbers-game" of ever-increasing enrollments and grant revenue with "non-materialistic, more spiritual, intuitive, transcendental" values.¹⁵ For progressive activists, however, the practice of political solidarity offered a more compelling solution, linking the campus community with liberationist struggles at home and abroad. In the late 1970s, student movements to combat sexual violence proliferated under the slogan "Take Back the Night," joining a national network of feminist and abortion rights activists, and during the first years of the Reagan Administration, a broad coalition of organizations—uniting students, faculty, and community advocates—rallied in defense of popular forces in Central America, with a particular focus on El Salvador. Among the most ardent supporters of this latter cause were a group of faculty in the Department of Photography and Cinema, including photographer/essayist Allan Sekula and filmmakers/critics Noël Burch and Thom Andersen, which became such a thorn in the university's side that the department was effectively dismantled in the mid-1980s. As active members of the Latin

American Solidarity Committee, the Columbus chapter of CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), Sekula, Burch, and Andersen bridged a gap between the worlds of art and activism, staking a position critical of Reagan's foreign policy that put them starkly at odds with Ohio State's administration. In Sekula's case, he crossed this line at his peril: tarred for his public appearance at a rally on the Oval in 1981, where he had donned a rubber Ronald Reagan mask and theatrically consumed a one-dollar bill in protest of US foreign policy, he was denied tenure at the university and ultimately decamped for the California Institute of the Arts in 1984.

Collings's successor at the University Gallery, Jonathan Green, hailed from this dissenting corner of the university—an origin that marked his career at the school and which ultimately informed his tenure at the gallery, where he proved to be a stalwart champion of progressive causes. Under Green's leadership, the gallery shifted its energies toward preparing for the Center for the Visual Arts competition, but it also took an outwardly political stance in both acquisitions and exhibitions, adding works of "political conscience" by Nancy Spero, Adrian Piper, and Rudolf Baranik, among others. In a departure from Collings's program, Green advocated a more populist approach to exhibitions, taking aim at long-running hierarchies and prejudices in the art world. On one hand, this commitment entailed a reevaluation of the museum's gatekeeping role, devoting focus to so-called "outsiders," nonartists, and other grassroots avatars. In 1982, for example, Green devised a project called *Kitsch*, soliciting tchotchkes from the gallery audience to be exhibited in place of the expected high-art fare. In 1984, he followed up with a three-person show

featuring New York graffiti artists ERO, Futura2000, and Zephyr, who created large-scale pieces on massive canvas panels—not quite the dimensions of a subway car, but nearly so—painted before a live audience. (In a callback to Burden’s *Shadow*, attendees at the exhibition opening were separated from the artists by a plastic tarp, here minimizing exposure to noxious fumes.)

On the other hand, Green’s democratic instinct sanctioned an open-ended experiment in distributed authority, offering the institutional apparatus to artists, curators, and cultural workers on the front lines of social struggle. In 1983, the gallery launched what became a sequence of exhibitions channeling the politics of 1980s feminism, anti-imperialism, and queer activism, starting with *All’s Fair: Love and War in New Feminist Art*. That exhibition was guest-curated by Lucy Lippard during the 1983 National Women’s Studies Association Conference at Ohio State—a project that marked the intersection of women’s liberationist, anti-imperialist, and Third-Worldist politics.

Inspired by this presentation, the gallery’s Assistant Director Stephanie K. Blackwood developed an exhibition project that would highlight artists’ engagement with the politics of sexual violence, making common cause with an array of campus groups and activists, from Ohio State’s Office of Women’s Services, Center for Women Studies, and Rape Education and Prevention Program to the advocacy group Women Against Rape (WAR). Simply titled *RAPE*, the show presented a selection of artworks juried by Susan Brownmiller, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer alongside community-led workshops, with councilors at the ready to provide on-site emotional support when needed. Internationalist in outlook, *RAPE* directed its focus at the

intersection of domestic and political violence, featuring indictments of the mediatization of rape—such as Lynette Molnar’s *Meditations on Pornography* series—alongside indictments of US foreign policy, as in Paulette Nenner’s incendiary *Central American Rape* installation. As the first national touring exhibition launched by the university and a successful experiment in community-led programming, it vindicated Green’s vision of institutional democratization, pointing the way toward the gallery’s culminating project.

The final exhibition at University Gallery, *AIDS: The Artists’ Response*, opened on February 24, 1989, during the last months of construction on the new Wexner Center for the Visual Arts (the name was later amended in recognition of the institution’s multidisciplinary). Guest-curated by Jan Zita Grover, a writer and activist based in San Francisco, with assistance from Molnar and Mark Allen Svede, the exhibition represented a sprawling, community-driven protest against the erasure, misrepresentation, harm, neglect, and demonization of people with AIDS. The largest institutional exhibition to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic during the era, it had been organized through an open call (augmented by solicitations from Grover) and attracted such a deluge of submissions that an auxiliary slide presentation had to be arranged. The show also occasioned the installation of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt inside Ohio State’s Woody Hayes Athletic Center, its first presentation on a college campus and a watershed in the public recognition of queer lives in Central Ohio. The sheer scope of curatorial ambition was remarkable—*AIDS: The Artists’ Response* garnered over 1,000 submissions from over 200 artists

and collectives, accompanied by mutual aid workshops, a film/video screening series, and a national symposium on “AIDS, Art, and Activism”—and a testament to the mutual engagement of gallery programmers and the local community of HIV/AIDS activists and allies.¹⁶

Green’s tenure culminated with the creation of the Wexner Center, a project he not only shepherded from committee through groundbreaking and construction, but to which he also lent a personal stamp. The departing director devised a sequence of heraldic projects, including a pyrotechnic display by artist Dennis Oppenheim and a collaborative installation by sculptor Richard Serra and composer Philip Glass, to announce the center’s arrival and lead to a major inaugural exhibition—to be staged at the Wex, not at University Gallery—on the subject of flight. Although Stearns’s appointment as the center’s first director cut short Green’s plans for the show, precipitating his eventual departure shortly after the Wex’s opening, the *Flight* exhibition was to have offered a democratic apotheosis, concentrating attention around the work of a Black self-taught sculptor named Leslie Payne and his full-size “imitations” of World War I-era aircraft (the sculptures were already trucked from rural Virginia to Columbus for the occasion).¹⁷

Despite Green’s high hopes for the project, *Flight* never launched, and a few months before the center opened to the public, the University Gallery disbanded, scattering its staff (only a handful were retained by the new institution) and preparing its files for transmission to University Archives. Latent within the Wex, the gallery’s legacy remains an open question more than three decades later. Mercy

might dictate a final verdict, delivered all in one stroke on the past, but justice would have us take irresolution as a point of departure, and to start from there, come what may.

Notes

1. Although there were no traditional or conventional exhibitions on view during the first weeks of the Wex's operations, visitors were met with an array of technological interventions throughout the building. Julia Scher's video installation *Occupational Placement* placed security cameras and monitors along the axial ramp corridor, tracking visitors as they traversed the galleries; but this project—the only artwork on view in the building on opening day—only intensified the experience of the building's charged vacancy. In addition to Scher's *Occupational Placement*, two audio projects premiered at the Wex on opening day: John Cage's *Essay*, an installation in the Performance Space that excerpted from Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*; and Antenna Theater's interpretive tour, *The Grid*.

2. Two exhibitions were organized from the permanent collection during the first years of the Wex's operations, both titled *Selections from the Permanent Collection*; they ran January 26–February 24, 1991, and January 23–April 11, 1993, and were curated by Sarah Rogers-Lafferty and Ann Bremner, respectively.

3. Robert Stearns, "Building as Catalyst," *Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, The Ohio State University* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1989), 24–27.

4. Hopkins Hall was a recent addition to the campus, having been completed in 1959. The initial plan for the building included a separate wing for a university art museum; however, this feature was ultimately pared back, with gallery space reduced to the current footprint of Hopkins Hall Gallery.

5. "Administration Fails to Aid Art, Says Departing Proof" [sic], *Lantern*, May 31, 1968.

6. "Symposium Will Feature Avant-Garde Artists," *Lantern*, March 5, 1973.

7. Betty Collings, letter to Rosalind Krauss, October 13, 1976, 2, Wexner Center for the Arts archive.

8. Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999), 163–64.

9. Betty Collings, undated note, Wexner Center for the Arts archive.

10. Quoted in Singerman, 160.

11. "Crashing for Fun—And Profit," *Lantern*, October 29, 1969.

12. Ibid.

13. James E. Pollard, "Dissent and Unrest on the Campus, 1931–1970" (unpublished manuscript, September 1970), 10, Ohio State University Archives, box UA.RG.40.52.0003, folder 12.

14. Quoted in William J. Shkruti, *The Ohio State University in the Sixties: The Unraveling of the Old Order* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio

State University Press, 2016), 329.

15. Novice Fawcett, "A Lid for Pandora's Box" (address given at the American Association of School Administrators, Atlantic City, NJ, February 21, 1971), reprinted in *The Journal of School Health* 41, no. 6 (June 1971): 294.

16. *AIDS: The Artists' Response* (Columbus, Ohio: University Gallery of Fine Art, exh. cat., 1989), 56.

17. Green's dream of a Payne exhibition at the Wex ultimately came to pass a few years later with the 1991 exhibition *Leslie Payne: Visions of Flight*.

Reflection

Stephanie K. Blackwood

Curator, *RAPE*

Assistant Director, University Gallery of Fine Art, 1983–86

Transgressive. Transformational.

Were these words ever used to describe the visual arts at Ohio State before the Wexner Center? Not that I recall. But as I reconsider that “time before the Wex,” I see clearly that many of our exhibitions transgressed against prevailing ideas, and often, they transformed.

This transgressive/transformational positioning was the fault of University Gallery Director Jonathan Green, who simply saw art EVERYWHERE and in EVERYTHING! He valued art for its power to present ideas, provoke discussion, and stir feelings. Jonathan believed that our mandate was to incite discourse about art, starting in Central Ohio and, if possible, reaching as far as the art centers of the coasts.

Jonathan knew that the very idea of Central Ohioans talking about art was a joke on him. Forty years ago, mid-Ohio fervor was singularly focused on Ohio State football and basketball. To dare to imagine that the university could be known for anything else was ludicrous...the most transgressive idea.

Nothing stopped us. Our public programs in film/video and performance art were eclectic. Our exhibition schedule was aggressive, comprising more than 30 shows per year—guest- and staff-curated, art faculty– and student-organized. Subject matter ranged from graffiti art to HIV/AIDS, outsider art to feminist art,

illuminated manuscripts to mail art, Giorgio Morandi to Pat Steir.

The show I most vividly recall is *RAPE*, a subject previously considered inappropriate for exhibition—certainly confrontational, possibly prurient, and dangerously intimate.

Prior to the University Gallery's presentation of *RAPE*, sexual violence had never been used as an organizing principle for an art show. But our unapologetically feminist artist selection committee claimed the opportunity to be bold: Susan Brownmiller, author of the critically acclaimed book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1993); Barbara Kruger, the conceptual collagist whose work addresses "cultural constructions of power, identity, consumerism, and sexuality"; and Jenny Holzer, a neoconceptual feminist artist known for her word works.¹ The committee selected 20 artists, half of whom had survived the horrors of rape. The show was a sobering examination of sexual assault, gender violence, cultural violence against marginalized people, and war's horrific impact.

On view November 13–December 13, 1985, *RAPE* was dedicated to artist Ana Mendieta, whose death under suspicious circumstances only weeks before the opening underscored the show's violent subtext (a pair of photographs documenting her 1973 project *Rape/Murder* were included in the exhibition). Jerri Allyn's confrontational, opening-night performance *Raw Meet* immersed the audience in a painfully personal recollection of being the prey. Silenced by the intensity of Allyn's performance, the capacity crowd silently moved into the exhibition. The art was strategically placed on the blank white walls of a house, constructed in the gallery but without a roof, reminding us

that even home was not a safe place.

In her powerful catalogue essay, feminist art scholar Arlene Raven set the stage: “*RAPE* was inaugurated by empathy, the many and long labors of preparing this exhibition ignited by righteous rage. Twenty artists created works of burning eloquence...Furies move me to this writing. Perhaps your own disgust kindles your interest in coming to see *RAPE*, until finally we are all on fire as we enter the gallery.”

Anticipating that “fire” might be a response, we prepared for both violent and emotional reactions among viewers. Representatives of the university’s Rape Victim Support Services and community-based Women Against Rape were on hand during gallery hours, providing peer counseling and monitoring closely for individuals who either might reexperience trauma or may have been motivated by voyeuristic interest in sexual violence. One memory stands out: I approached a young man in camo who was growing visibly more agitated as he walked among the works. His face grew red, his breathing was irregular. I carefully approached him and asked if he wanted support. He hesitated, eyes filling with tears, and then blurted, “I didn’t know it was like this! I just didn’t know!”

The show ignored social propriety. It made public the private hell. It gave voice to a community of victims, across identities—generations, race, gender. It allowed safe space where repressed memories surfaced, new consciousness developed, conversations of support and healing occurred. It was a #MeToo experience, transformative for many—women and men alike—who saw it during a four-year national tour to other college and university art centers.

Raven's eloquent and provocative catalogue essay closed with a simple statement that captured our accomplishment: "I know that there is now no ultimate solution to the problem of rape. Yet I take comfort in affirming that we have done what we can do now."

Through *RAPE* and many other shows that challenged popularly held ideas, we at the University Gallery found a transformative beginning.

Among those transformed, I include myself. Sexually molested as a preschooler and date raped in college, I buried my shame and humiliation for decades. *RAPE* initiated a process to own and integrate my history, engaging with the community to create support and policy change and healing the wounded child and young woman I was, so that now I too am able to simply say #MeToo.

Notes

1. "Barbara Kruger," LIZWORKS, accessed November 1, 2021, <http://www.lizworks.net/barbara-kruger>.

Reflection

Arielle Irizarry

Curatorial Intern, Wexner Center for the Arts

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To consider the political and cultural landscape at Ohio State in 1970 is also to consider that of most other college campuses at the time. Across the nation, the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., burgeoning women's movements, rampant class inequities, and the ongoing Vietnam War weighed heavily on public consciousness. Students were not exempt from these concerns; in fact, they represented some of the loudest voices in protests surrounding these issues. On the West Coast, the University of California, Berkeley, was the site of a huge series of student-led protests in the early 60s. In New York, students at Columbia University organized a massive protest in 1968 in response to segregationist policies on campus and the university's institutional link to the Vietnam War.

In Ohio, in 1970, students at Kent State protested the US's encroachment into Cambodia as part of the Vietnam War as well as the presence of the National Guard on their own campus. Details surrounding the events of the Kent State protest are numerous and often conflicting, but what remains clear is that the National Guard killed four students and wounded nine others. Just two hours away, almost concurrently, Ohio State was also witnessing a historic protest. On April 30, led by the Ad Hoc Committee—a student-formed coalition comprised of members of Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Student Union,

Veterans Against Vietnam, and others—around 2,000 students showed up at Ohio State's Columbus campus to protest, in part, the war, but also what they felt was a harmful administration content to operate without care for student demands. The protest marked a historic event at the university as its organization brought together an unprecedented number of students who worked from different standpoints to amplify their voices collectively.

Protests at Ohio State in the late 1960s marked a change in the relationship between the university and students. In the 60s, for instance, Ohio State started calling in police officers to corral and control students instead of leaving protests to peter out on their own. Still, it must have been something else entirely for students to arrive on campus to air their grievances and be met with members of the National Guard. However, despite the presence of armed guardsmen, the April 30 protest continued. Students remained on campus for approximately eight days until May 7, when the university finally elected to close its doors and remain shuttered for a total of 12 days—a decision many student activists regarded as a vindication of their struggle.

Yet this victory proved bittersweet in many respects. Students involved in the protest would go on to experience a series of punitive university trials, a denial of their degrees, and in some cases, extended legal battles. Further, the changes that those students wanted for the university were made incrementally if at all. The university heard, it seemed, the requests for basic changes surrounding student housing, but what about the harm the institution inflicted on the student body through its actions and policies? If we

inherit anything from 1970 today, it is perhaps an awareness of and deep skepticism toward this ambivalent relationship between institutions and those they claim to serve.

Still, there remains a gap in the history of student protest at Ohio State. Namely, what was the role of women's liberation groups in the events of 1970? As indicated by the launching of a sequence of feminist-inspired exhibitions at Ohio State in the 1980s, including *All's Fair: Love and War in New Feminist Art* and *RAPE*, women's voices and struggles gained newfound prominence in campus activism following the 1970 uprising. Women in these shows (and outside of them) were envisioning the possibilities feminist praxis could open while making people witness the gender-based violence women are subjected to. In the flurry of reportage that surrounded the uprising in 1970, limited information can be gleaned to help us grasp the role women played during the protests. This isn't to say that there weren't women at work within these organizations, but that women's organizing has been subsumed within the larger narrative of student protest at Ohio State. One way to continue this transformative struggle, then—to begin, again, as it were—might be to inquire about these women in the woodwork and the efforts they put in then, and now, to see their visions realized.

Reflection

Mark Svede

Cocurator, *AIDS: The Artists' Response*

Guest Curator and Curatorial Associate,
University Gallery of Fine Art, 1987–89

Implicit in the exhibition title *AIDS: The Artists' Response* was the outrageous fact that, six years into the epidemic, a national response was still forthcoming. President Reagan hadn't uttered a single word acknowledging the crisis and it would take almost another year for the federal government to organize a coordinated national health care policy and system for people living with HIV. Meanwhile, LGBTQ communities on the coasts and particularly members working in creative professions had been reeling from and responding to AIDS in profound ways, something we on the curatorial team hoped to honor and amplify locally with the first topical exhibition of this scale organized anywhere. San Francisco–based lead curator Jan Zita Grover was witnessing the devastation firsthand in one of the epicenters, while curatorial associates Lynette Molnar and myself were actively reckoning with the recent deaths and illnesses of people close to us. Granted, in the early stages of our project, Columbus was relatively unscathed by AIDS, but the epidemiological writing was on the wall. For instance, from early 1981 People Express Airlines offered Columbus-Newark round-trip airfare for under \$100, enabling even the most-starving-of-artist friends among us monthly exposure to everything NYC had to offer, including a new, unknown virus.

From the exhibition's inception, the curatorial process sought

to reconcile artistic criteria with activist impulse. I was sent by University Gallery to Washington DC for the first full display of the NAMES Project Quilt—this in anticipation of Ohio State hosting the largest indoor display of the memorial two years later at the gallery’s initiative. But the visit also enabled me to attend ACT UP NY teach-ins in preparation for the civil disobedience that shut down the FDA the following week in protest of antiquated drug protocols. For that protest, activist art collective Gran Fury generated iconic posters that later featured prominently on our gallery walls alongside paintings and assemblages that articulated more personal, private responses to the epidemic.

Because the entirety of the former University Gallery space could be inscribed within just one of the Wexner Center’s galleries, our ability to showcase the breadth of AIDS-related creative expression as it had evolved by the late 1980s was severely curtailed. Limitation became opportunity: within the gallery, images of all works submitted to the curatorial selection process were projected next to the works that physically inhabited the space. Other works were installed beyond gallery confines where their didactic force would more effectively address and directly confront public ignorance about HIV transmissibility. Seventy-two years after Duchamp installed his urinal in a gallery, in-your-face art—Sten Rudstrom’s *You Already Have the Dis • Ease AIDS. You Got It From Dis • Information* (1988)—was installed above campus urinals. Local cultural publications *Columbus Alive* and *Columbus Art* devoted special issues to activist graphic art commissions with public health content, while the Columbus AIDS Task Force collected first-person testimonials of clients and caregivers

for University Gallery to inscribe as wall text. And the gallery recruited 700+ volunteers to staff Ohio State's NAMES Project Quilt display, a collective endeavor by the university's administration, athletic department, hospital system, and broader community.

What Is a Laboratory?

Julian Myers-Szupinska

1.

Everything is a laboratory. Nature is the laboratory of heaven; the body is the laboratory of the soul. The states are a laboratory of American democracy. Switzerland is the political laboratory of Europe, and Kerala is the political laboratory of India. A kitchen is a laboratory. A record store is a laboratory, and the studios that produce the music they sell? Also, laboratories. Cities, or social media, or university campuses are laboratories of social behavior, or administration, or policing. The Wexner Center for the Arts, too, is a laboratory—one of many such contemporary art institutions that wear that self-definition. One needs to look no farther than its mission statement: “The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University’s multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art.”¹

What is a laboratory? It is a space of confined focus and experimentation, isolated from life. Follow the word’s etymology—Latin, *laboratorium*—and discover it as a place where work happens. Attend to its English origin and find it means a place set apart for alchemical concoctions and the mixing of medicines. Only later, in the 19th century, does it come to signal a building equipped for scientific research; indeed, science in its modern sense can be said to emerge from the spatial apparatus of the laboratory, and not vice versa. But these definitions carry us only so far in understanding the way the Wexner Center deploys the term. For that we need the word’s rich

figurative usage. Consider, then, a paragraph from a draft version of the center's original statement of purpose. Written in the mid-1980s, it is the first time the laboratory appears in the sense we are trying to reason out.² The Wexner Center, it argues,

is dedicated to experimentation and vanguard artistic activity through exploration of contemporary art pathways, the expansion of traditional visual art boundaries, and the creation of communication between the artist and the art-viewing public. The Center is dedicated to the belief that the visual arts are an absolutely essential, enriching ingredient in the life of every student and citizen. Similarly, it is dedicated to the idea that the active creation of art is as important as the collection of art itself.³

The prose is emphatic, carried along by underscored words—experimentation, expansion, creation—and by a conspicuous adverb: “absolutely.” The intensifier calls to mind the modernist credo of the poet Arthur Rimbaud, who wrote in his diaristic prose poem *A Season in Hell* that “one must be *absolutely* modern.”⁴ And there is the curious usage of “vanguard,” a word that links contemporary art and institutions to the militant forward-thinking of the avant-gardes of the early 20th century. Deployed in the grip of a postmodernist moment that regarded those avant-gardes with suspicion, it has a pointed, if not combative, edge.⁵ This is a sensibility—call it modernism—that sees science and the laboratory as driving forces behind those rapid changes, the forceful engines that generate the thrilling sensation of hurtling forward motion.

These rumblings set the scene for more gestures of neomodernist

self-definition. “[A]rt centers are in the process of shifting from storehouses of historical objects to research and experimental facilities,” the draft statement declares, now echoing Kazimir Malevich.⁶ Under this new identity, the Wexner Center would operate as “a hybrid of gallery, movie house, theater, and music hall.”⁷ The conclusion finds this new status in full flower, now explicitly under the sign of the laboratory: “The ultimate result will be a living arts center and laboratory dedicated to creating and showcasing the best of local, national, and international contemporary visual art.”⁸

How should we read this statement in retrospect? How do we make sense of its force and ambition? What accounts for its piling-up of avant-gardist pasts in a new context? And what explains the two-part “ultimate result”—living arts center and laboratory—the writers imagined? Suggestions elsewhere in the statement evince an institution that was as much a work zone and training center as a venue devoted to performance and display—one that, by including computer labs and studios alongside galleries, would naturally link the university campus to “the rapidly emerging corporate world of art technology.”⁹ In these proposals, some realized and some not, one hears competing images of the art-center-as-laboratory: the utopian or countercultural “living art center” battling with a premonition of something like a Silicon Valley tech campus. The overall impression is of a cyborg combination of the two.

The flexibility of the laboratory metaphor allows for the stakeholders of this institution-to-be—the center’s organizers, Ohio State students, university administrators, and outside advisors—to grasp its meaning differently. One can understand it to signal a hard-nosed commitment

to contemporary culture, and to the institution's autonomy and risk-taking. Or one can read it in a different direction, as validating the arts within the terms of a research university that sees science and industry as the measure of other, "softer" disciplines. The magic of the metaphor, its value as a rhetorical tool, is that it may, indeed, do both. But, too, it speaks of a dialectical friction within the figure of the laboratory as the writers received it—one that accounts for, though it does not resolve, the statement's puzzles and contradictions.

2.

Reasoning out this friction requires us to move on from the draft statement, to dig deeper into a modernist history in which the laboratory was both fixed idea and fatal attraction. Indeed, invocations of the laboratory are so frequent and central to the narrative of early 20th century avant-gardes that it would be impossible to grasp their story without accounting for these artists' investment in the laboratory as a guiding metaphor and key means of self-understanding.

Let a few examples stand in for the broader movement. Pablo Picasso famously referred to his time of close shared studio production with Georges Braque—the period from 1909 to 1912 sometimes described as Analytic Cubism—as "a kind of laboratory research from which every pretension or individual vanity was excluded."¹⁰ Paul Haviland described the foundational modernist galleries run by the photographer Alfred Stieglitz at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York as "a laboratory, where human beings as well as their productions may be mere subjects for experiment and analysis."¹¹

And in the wake of the October Revolution, the artists of the Soviet avant-garde, too, espoused “laboratory work...undertaken not as an end in itself, nor for any immediately utilitarian purpose, but with the idea that such experimentation would eventually contribute to the solution of some utilitarian task.”¹²

Laboratory work, on these terms, was rigorously analytical, and potentially applicable to society at large. Nevertheless, it was conducted in the close quarters of the studio, artist-run gallery, or classroom; its operative form was the small group. These laboratories had participants, not onlookers, and they were driven by purposes that were internally derived, and not “immediately utilitarian.” In Haviland’s weird image of his friend’s gallery, these modernists seem to experiment on themselves. It should be mentioned that Jonathan W. Green, the second director of Ohio State’s University Gallery of Fine Art and a driving force behind the Wexner Center’s statement of purpose, had published an anthology of Stieglitz’s journal, *Camera Work*, in 1973; he was intimately aware of 291’s laboratory model and was likely recalling it deliberately in the statement.¹³

Yet articulated in this way, we may begin to grasp further striations within the general term, as modernists used it. Take as another case, then, how the figure was used in 1939 by Alfred H. Barr Jr., then the director of The Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Introducing the exhibition *Art in Our Time* on the tenth anniversary of the museum’s founding, Barr wrote, “The Museum of Modern Art is a laboratory: in its experiments the public is invited to participate.”¹⁴

The question is how, exactly, Barr’s metaphor should be understood.

Scholars of museum history have typically grasped it as a way of describing the museum's appetite, during Barr's directorship, for open-ended, exploratory risk-taking; like the artists the museum collected and historicized, the museum too had its "laboratory period" before retreating to a more conservative institutional stance after Barr's ouster in 1943.¹⁵ The phrase has also been taken to signal the interpenetration of the museum's worldview with those of the plutocrats on the museum's board—men like John D. Rockefeller and A. Conger Goodyear, for whom the figure of the laboratory was woven into an industrialist's idea of modernization.

Barr, to his credit, seems to have had a different image of the laboratory in mind. Reading his brief statement, it is clear he was thinking less about progress than engagement: "In [these] experiments the public is invited to participate." This resonance, then, was rooted less in the ideations of his board than in Barr's history as an art historian and educator. In an educational setting, a "laboratory" is a course meeting that allows for direct and practical contact with matters otherwise addressed only in theory. Barr's syllabi from the late 1920s toggled between lectures and "laboratory work" in exactly this sense. These sessions asked his students to "sketch, paint, or sculpt copies after photographs or plaster casts of the artworks they were learning about in lecture" with the goal of infusing "the historical study of art with a sense of material immediacy through hands-on engagement."¹⁶ And if this pedagogical method was modeled on science classes, it spoke equally to Barr's belief in the transformative value of direct, even tactile, contact with artworks; his museum was staked on this above all.

3.

The matter of participation then opens onto a counter-history of the laboratory figure, one specific to the art center as an institutional form. The roots of the art center in America extend to the early years of the 20th century, when progressives advocated, in the context of urban reform, for the creation of community centers—a new idea—in city neighborhoods. These centers were designed to respond to growing urban alienation in a moment when expanded immigration had diversified those cities ethnically and linguistically, and when the amelioration of poverty was a central preoccupation. The community center promised, through direct contact among disparate populations around matters of shared local concern, to strengthen social and political participation at the ground level. This experience of direct democracy would then emanate, as advocate Mary Parker Follett argued, up the scale toward national politics, giving rise to what Follett described as a “new state.”¹⁷ The idea proved popular, and a wave of community centers were established in American cities in the late 1910s and 20s.¹⁸

This movement drew many of its coordinates from the new science of sociology, where the laboratory metaphor had already taken root. In these sociologists’ eyes, the city itself should be imagined as a sort of “social laboratory” of competing urban problems and behaviors; meanwhile the concept of “social experiments” informed progressive efforts at fixing those problems.¹⁹ The New Deal took up efforts like these as federal policy, and it was here that the modern art center took shape. Under the direction of the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Art Project sponsored the establishment of more than 100

art centers across the United States after 1936, in cities like Pensacola, Raleigh, and Sioux City, among others.²⁰

Unlike museums, art centers were not, by and large, oriented by their collection; unlike art galleries, they were not focused strictly on the display of art. In some cases, however, existing art galleries, such as the Walker Art Galleries in Minneapolis, were reorganized to participate in the program, renaming itself the Walker Art Center in January 1940.²¹ Fundamental to art centers was a catholic approach to artistic medium—combining fine arts with theater, dance, and more—and a strong sense of municipal responsibility. These art centers had the aims of improving the lot of impoverished artists, and through participation, instating fellow feeling and comradeship in their communities—goals overseen by city and federal agencies. And if such institutions pursued impulses in line with Barr’s ideal of the art institution as a social and pedagogical laboratory, they were—in general—at cross purposes with the hermeticism and future shock of earlier modes of avant-gardist research and development.

The two distinct genealogies of the laboratory, however, began to blur together in the 1960s, when artists began to mine the achievements of those earlier avant-gardes, recovering Marcel Duchamp and Soviet Constructivists among others. They did so not primarily in museums or art centers, but in commercial art galleries and perennial temporary exhibitions—and, increasingly, in self-organized art spaces. The latter form adopted the novel identity of “alternative spaces,” and pursued a new and hybrid model: a commitment to ground-level participation modeled on the art center, and a commitment to experimentation rooted in the avant-garde.²²

Alternative spaces then embraced laboratory metaphors with renewed enthusiasm.

This was true across the United States, as in the signal example of Alanna Heiss, founder of PSI and the nonprofit Clocktower Productions, “a laboratory for experimentation,” in 1972.²³ A comparable case, though, can be found in the Arts Labs movement in the United Kingdom, which embodied similar clashes between radical artists and relatively conservative municipal arts funding agencies.²⁴ The London Arts Laboratory was founded in 1967 by a group centered on the American bohemian and impresario Jim Haynes, who arrived in London after establishing a controversial bookshop in Edinburgh, Scotland, as well as cofounding the Traverse Theatre, which was committed to contemporary and experimental productions. In London, he had first organized the short-lived UFO Club, which presented multimedia performances by Jimi Hendrix and Yoko Ono, and by Pink Floyd and Soft Machine, the venue’s house bands.²⁵ Situated in London’s late 1960s counterculture, the Arts Lab was, as Haynes described it, a “fluid commune environment” that combined all aspects of his prior efforts—hosting happenings, newly written plays, experimental films, an art gallery curated by artists Biddy Peppin and Pamela Zoline, and a small bookshop and restaurant.²⁶ As such it combined aspects of the art center model—a focus on community participation, a cross-genre stew—with an appetite for experimental art, and an optimistic attitude toward art’s integration with new media like video, and new technology—computers.²⁷

4.

While the London Arts Lab was short lived, spanning just two years before budgetary shortfalls and internal disagreements led to the institution's closure, the model it presented was deeply influential.²⁸ As with the American community center movement in the 1910s, it gave rise to a sudden wave of arts labs; an article published in the *International Times*—a countercultural newspaper coedited by Haynes—lists more than fifty new arts labs across the United Kingdom, in London suburbs, Northern cities, Wales, and beyond.²⁹ Among their founders was David Bowie, who initiated an arts lab in Beckenham after performing at the London Arts Lab; “Memory of a Free Festival,” the closing song on his self-titled 1969 album, records his disillusionment after co-organizing an arts lab concert in a local park.³⁰

As with the alternative space movement in the United States, efforts like these exerted a strong influence on more traditional institutions, which in turn absorbed some of their dispositions to advanced art and new technology, as well as their cathexis on the laboratory figure.³¹ And when the laboratory reemerged as a mainstream institutional model in the 1970s and 80s, it did so along the lines established by these more informal and fugitive countercultural spaces—now linking the participatory and ameliorative attitude of the community art center to an avant-gardist commitment to “the new” in the form of innovative or experimental art.

This genealogy, then, finally returns us to the moment in which the Wexner Center's founding statement of purpose was written, and accounts for some of its uneven dreams: of innovation

and participation, vanguardist alienation and populist public engagement. Uneven, because there is little sense that this reconciliation is possible—especially in the US, where the two impulses are often understood to be in direct contradiction. It is worth recalling, though, that the historical avant-gardes invoked by the statement imagined things differently. For them, social and political transformations began, as did Follett's "new state," at the ground level of an individual encounter with radical art. A direct experience of such art was seen as itself social and participatory, and as "useful" in an altered world.³²

There is hardly space here, at the essay's conclusion, fully to explore the complicated status of these histories for an art center linked to a university. Suffice it to say that university art centers place a special weight on matters of pedagogy and participation. But in relation to which constituency? Ostensibly, the university and its students. But they also face outward, toward the proximate communities of their urban surroundings, and into a virtual, global art discourse, as a sort of emblem or advertisement of the university as such. Yet these differing publics, each heterogenous in themselves, are often at cross purposes with each other, with differing desires, tastes, and forms of knowledge. The contradictions within the laboratory figure represent this problem, while also offering an imaginary solution to it—that the university art center is, like the laboratory, for no one in particular, aside from itself; it has "no immediate purpose."

Like the university art center's multiple publics, its dueling laboratories, at some level, cannot be fully reconciled. But reconciliation is anyway the wrong goal, a false resolution of tensions and possibilities that

we benefit from sustaining. The figure's internal frictions allow us, in an ongoing and politicized way, to pose the question: What does the laboratory mean now? What do we want it to mean? Do the antipodes of the laboratory figure navigated above—avant-gardist experimentation and insularity, communitarian openness and free festival—have a role to play in a moment of widespread institutional crisis, in struggles for equal representation, in challenges to a poisoned hierarchy of money and power, and during a pandemic? If we are, each of us, living in one figurative laboratory or another, we can still ask: what kind? Bound up in our answers will be the sort of futures—and futurisms—we decide to live with.

Notes

1. See <https://wexarts.org/mission>.
2. Aspects of this process, including a full list of participants, are described in the document "History of the Center of Visual Arts—The Ohio State University," an internal document dated to October 1983.
3. "Wexner Center for the Visual Arts—Statement of Purpose (Draft)," single page, undated. The inclusion of American clothing and bath goods magnate Les Wexner's surname into the title signals it was composed after he arrived as a primary donor. Certain phrasings, however, date back to at least 1982, and the leadership of founding director Jonathan W. Green. See "Basic Premises for an OSU Art Center," July 7, 1982, and "University Art Center—Definition of the Visual Arts," July 13, 1982. Under Wexner's name, the institution opened to the public on November 16, 1989.

4. "Il faut être absolument moderne." Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell & Illuminations*, trans., ed., and introduction Wyatt Mason (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 86. See also Paul Wood's discussion of the phrase as definitive for artistic modernism in *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde (Art and Its Histories)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 116.

5. An emblematic version of this—of postmodernism as a skepticism toward narratives of technological progress, utopia, and the artistic avant-garde—appears in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See also the critical reading provided by Ann Gibson, "Avant-Garde," in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 202–16.

6. "Wexner Center for the Visual Arts—Statement of Purpose (Draft)." Malevich writes, "Any hoarding of old things brings harm...Our job is to always move toward what is new, not to live in museums... Instead of collecting all sorts of old stuff we must form laboratories of a worldwide creative building apparatus." See "On the Museum" in Arseny Zhilyaev, ed., *Avant-Garde Museology* (Brooklyn, NY: e-flux classics, 2015), 272.

7. "Wexner Center for the Visual Arts—Statement of Purpose (Draft)."

8. "Wexner Center for the Visual Arts—Statement of Purpose (Draft)."

9. "Basic Premises for an OSU Art Center," 1.

10. Pablo Picasso as quoted in Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (1964; repr., NYRB Classics, 2019), 69.
11. Paul B. Haviland, "What 291 Means to Me," in "What Is 291?", special issue, *Camera Work* no. 47 (June 1914): 32. The first sentences of Stieglitz's introduction set the stage: "Another year of experimenting done. Nine years of public experimenting. Experimenting in the little garret—variously termed Photo-Secession, Little Gallery, '291'—at 291 Fifth Avenue, New York." *Camera Work* no. 47: 3.
12. Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 7. See also Malevich, note 6.
13. Jonathan W. Green, ed., *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1973).
14. Alfred Barr Jr., "Art in Our Time: The Plan of the Exhibition," in *Art in Our Time: 10th Anniversary Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1939): 15.
15. Drawing on Barr's 1939 statement, the art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski coined the phrase "laboratory period" to describe MoMA's early history of exhibitions in her landmark study *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998). Following Staniszewski, the laboratory became a key, if undertheorized, metaphor in contemporary curatorial discourse. See, for example, Iwona Blazwick, "Temple/White Cube/Laboratory," in Paula Marincola, ed., *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006). Barr stayed on at MoMA in various

capacities until 1968.

16. Richard Meyer describes Barr's teaching in *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 42.

17. See Mary Parker Follett, *The New State: Group Organization and the Solution of Popular Government* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), especially the section on "the neighborhood group," 189–257.

18. "By 1918–19 there were community centers in 107 cities....By 1923–24 there were centers in 240 cities and by 1930 New York City alone had nearly 500 centers with a regular attendance of more than four million." See Mark K. Smith, "Community centres (centers) and associations," in *The Encyclopedia of Pedagogy and Informal Education*, updated 2002, www.infed.org/mobi/community-centers-and-associations. Smith draws his figures from Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 16.

19. See Matthias Gross, "Collaborative Experiments: Jane Addams, Hull House and Experimental Social Work," *Social Science Information* 48, no. 1 (March 2009): 81–95.

20. See Susan Quinn, *Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and a Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008) and Thaddeus Clapp, "'Art Within Reach': Federal Art Project Community Art Centers." *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, n.d., accessed November 2021, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5100/>.

21. See Walker Art Center, "Mission & History," <https://walkerart.org/about/mission-history>. The Walker was a direct model for early thinking about the Wexner Center, and the conceptualization process for the latter institution included site visits and discussions with the Walker's administration.

22. Julie Ault offers a comprehensive account of the history of alternative institutions in New York City in *Alternative Art New York* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

23. Heiss founded the Institute for Art and Urban Resources in New York City in 1971. That organization opened a permanent location in Queens in 1976 under the name P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center. Heiss delivered a lecture at Ohio State's University Gallery of Fine Art on February 27, 1978, which marks her efforts as another proximate model for the Wexner Center's reorganization in the 1980s.

24. The definitive historical resource on the London Arts Lab is David Curtis, *London's Arts Labs and the 60s Avant-Garde* (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2020).

25. As recounted in Jim Haynes's memoir, *Thanks for Coming! An Autobiography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984).

26. The phrase "fluid commune environment" comes from Jim Haynes's brief manifesto for the arts lab movement in "An Alternative to Marriage?" *International Times*, no. 66, October 10–23, 1969,

16. The full run of the newspaper is available at <http://www.internationaltimes.it/archive>.

27. As recounted in Curtis, their interest in new technology was more

dream than reality. More effective integrations were on the horizon. See Howard Fine, "Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc.: at the leading edge of art" (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 1973). See also Hannah Higgins and Douglas Kahn, eds., *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of the Digital Arts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012) and Zabet Patterson, *Peripheral Vision: Bell Labs, the S-C 4020, and the Origins of Computer Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

28. A splinter group would establish the Institute for Research in Art and Technology, also known as the New Arts Lab, in London in 1969.

29. Haynes, "An Alternative to Marriage?", 16.

30. As narrated in Mary Finnigan's memoir *Psychedelic Suburbia: David Bowie and the Beckenham Arts Lab* (Portland, OR: Jorvik Press, 2016), 144–53.

31. Alongside PSI and Clocktower Productions, mentioned in note 21, consider the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, established in 1979, which aimed to absorb the experimental energies of the alternative art scene. See Jordan Karney Chaim, "Do It Yourself: Artists, Alternative Spaces and the Rise of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, 1970–1990" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2020).

32. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (1974; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).