

# TEMPORARY SERVICES

## Free For All Portable Exhibit Guide

Free For All was a one day only event presented by Temporary Services on Saturday February 5, 2000 from 1:00 - 5:00 PM. It was held in an empty storefront on the south-west corner of Augusta and Washtenaw. On this date, we gave away over 10,000 items donated by the following individuals and organizations:

American Civil Liberties Union, Tony Alamo, Matti Allison, Anonymous, María José Barandiarán & Michael Bulka, Baur Au Lac Zürich, Bible Helps, Shawn Calvert, Charm School Industries, Coalition for Positive Sexuality, Credit Suisse, Wilfrid Désir, Jim Duignan, Anthony Elms & Joel Score, Ending the Begin Tract League, Evangelical Tract Distributors, Fellowship Tract League, F.T.L., Nicolas Floc'h, Elisabeth Goldschmidt, Grace & Truth, Highwater Books, Emily Jacir, Jews For Jesus, Kevin Kaempf, Kim and Mike, Nance Klehm, Liberation Rock, Lora Lode, Josh MacPhee, Ryan McGinness, Adam Mikos, Mr. Nash, Ralph Nielsen, Leah Oates, Old Paths Tract Society Inc., Krista Peel, Michael Piazza, Pilgrim Tract Society, Inc., The Renaissance Society & The Art Institute of Chicago, Ben Rubin, Bob Shaw, David Shrigley, Shy Girl, Owen Smith, Dana Sperry, Jocelyn Superstar 2000, Temporary Services, Threadculture, Vladlen Voronin, & Oli Watt.

Free For All began at 1:00 PM on a Saturday. At the entry of the borrowed storefront, 100 silkscreened "Free For All Portable Exhibit" boxes were neatly stacked for people to use. These free boxes were provided so that people could collect any work from the show that they wanted to take with them. No restrictions were placed on what or how much work people could take, nor was anything held over for late-comers. There were nine tables of free items. Two tables of individually wrapped food items were provided as well. At 1:00 PM visitors began to arrive, take boxes, and collect objects from the various tables. To their credit, most people did not hoard the work, but rather seemed to take only what looked interesting, promising, or obviously desirable. There was little need for close scrutiny however - you could inspect the work when you got home. By 2:00 the show resembled a bit of a feeding frenzy. The FFA collection boxes soon ran out and a few people were seen using empty boxes from the snack foods to hold work. Extra Free For All Exhibition Guides were gone by around 3:30. While people continued to arrive up until the end, only scattered works that were provided in the greatest quantities remained when the show was over. At least 200 people attended Free For All, and while some Portable Exhibit boxes are undoubtedly more complete than others, many miniature collections of work from this show exist and continue to be exhibited both publicly and privately by those who took things with them. This free booklet does not inventory the many works that were included in the show. It does duplicate certain writings from the Exhibition Guide that are critical to FFA. They offer ways to extend the ideas behind the project without necessarily having the objects that were given away.

# Free For All

Marc Fischer

The seeds of "Free For All" can be traced back as far as two years ago, before there even was a Temporary Services, when Brett Bloom talked to me about a show he wanted to do using card tables as a system for displaying work. There would be painting stations and food stations; coffee on one table, sculptures or video on the next. Brett accumulated over a dozen cheap used card tables for this project but for some forgotten reason, it never materialized. Another abandoned project that we had planned to work on together involved a carefully curated event involving many artists operating under the guise of a one day long garage sale. One aspect of this project would be a table of free literature combining printed projects by artists mixed in with other materials from various organizations and the community. Gradually as that idea began to dissolve, the free literature table split apart and became it's own entity which is this show. "Free For All" became a project that I had a particular personal attachment to and wanted to curate alone, but many of its key ideas can be traced back to discussions over the past two years. We found a use for those card tables.

The most important criteria for the inclusion of works in this show, was that the objects should be portable, self-contained vehicles for ideas, expression, thought, images, or sound and that they should be available or provided in significant quantity. Quantities were determined based on what was affordable or possible for the artists to donate, what I could obtain for free, or what I could copy or reproduce on my own. Artists were compensated for their donations of work through an exchange of free work by most of the other participants. As the number of artists increased, I asked participants to try to donate more, in order to provide for both the public and each other.

The many religious tracts that are included in this show were obtained by writing letters to their publishers. This aspect of the show was curated by reviewing hundreds of different titles and then carefully selecting certain ones for inclusion. In my letters to these organizations I stated that I could not provide money, but would freely distribute the materials that I requested. At times they sent numerous alternate tracts that I did not request. I have included only the titles I asked for and this show will fulfill my promise of free distribution. The abundance of this type of material reflects the generosity of the publishers, and my enthusiasm for the tract form. Tracts remain an excellent means of communication and expression that should be studied for their potential as a highly affordable artists' medium. I do not care about their religious preaching at all, but I respect and admire their often ingenious use of language, graphics, and design.

Certain individuals (known, and unknown) are represented by work that I duplicated for inclusion without their knowledge. My criteria for including this often highly provocative work was in part, that it was meant for the eyes of others - that it was sent out, copied, distributed, taped to a pole, or posted on a wall in order to reach a larger audience. Nothing that I felt would invade the privacy of any individual in a way that was undesired, or that would make public something harmful to a specific person that was meant to stay private has been included.

It is only fitting that a project that exists to give things away for free, would not have been possible without the charity of many people. Some artists that normally sell their work, donated a great number of similar or identical objects to be given away through this show. It is common for artists who produce multiples to trade these works with

each other, but I have asked for something more, and everyone has been exceedingly generous.

The following people donated labor of some sort, suggested artists, provided contact assistance for people I wanted to invite but did not know personally, made suggestions, donated found materials that were either reproduced, or procured in larger quantities from their original source, or otherwise volunteered their knowledge and services to help to make this possible:

Brett Bloom, Serena Lander, Nance Klehm, Oli Watt and Associated Colleges Midwest, Jim Duignan, Doro Boehme, Roland C. Hansen, Sally Alatalo, Dana Sperry, Lora Lode, Kevin Kaempf, Lillian Yvonne, Basia Mosinski, R House Press, John Gustafson, Salem Collo-Julin, Matti Allison, Mason McCormick, Jefferson Root, Julia Friedman, Craig Smith, Anthony Elms, Laurie Palmer, Lis Goldschmidt, Nicole Repack, Tom Choat, Virginia Montgomery, Walter Andersons, Mia Brownell, and Julian Rothenstein.

# All For Free

Brett Bloom

Giving things away for free has the potential of being a very radical gesture in a culture that tries to sell every square inch of existence for whatever it can. Giving things away in a culture with an all too often base preoccupation with money is usually a means of luring *someone* into buying *something*. This gesture is an advertisement. Advertisements always want something from us. They want us to buy this item or use that service. They are never generous. They never give us anything for the sake of giving. Ad firms never have to worry about being accused of altruistic behavior - making a sacrifice with no gain for oneself. No one trusts ads. No one trusts someone trying to swindle him or her. No one trusts things that are free... until they are about actually giving. When people realize that you are giving them something - and just giving them something - they respond in ways that cut through their expected mistrust and cynicism. The response is all the more amplified if you are giving them something good.

With Free For All, Temporary Services is giving away over 10,000 items! These items cover an immense range of practices from art making to religious pamphleteering. David Shrigley has contributed hilarious, photocopied booklets originally made for a friend's wedding. Shy Girl has donated hundreds of stickers made by hand that have check-boxes on them next to which appear several choices (normally used graffiti-style, they are like abstract, public opinion polls). Jews for Jesus has sent multiple copies of a tract they put out co-opting the characters from South Park to push their own agenda (a frightening example of how once radical strategies of resisting conservative agendas have been taken over by groups like this)! Krista Peel made watercolors that fit into tiny medicine capsules allowing you to easily ingest her artwork.

Some of the material in FFA was found and reproduced specifically for this exhibition. This includes fliers by an unknown person we like to call the Ancient Order Guy. The fliers are on folded, 8 1/2 x 11, photocopied paper. They warn of vast conspiracies orchestrated by a group identified as the Ancient Order. Complex numerical calculations become proofs of the devious activities this group is responsible for. The originals were found distributed anonymously in free newspaper dispensers throughout the city over a period of many months.

There is one religious tract from the Fellowship Tract League that should be mentioned. Part of its cover is used for the cover of this booklet. On the tract's cover in large, bold letters are the words "Absolutely Free". Underneath them is the following text:

In this day and time, it's not often that someone offers an absolutely free gift.

Yet here is the most wonderful and precious gift especially for you!!

It has already been paid for by someone else.  
Please read on to find out more.

This tract isn't honestly giving you something for free. It is pushing its own religious agenda. Its goal is to trick you into accepting its belief system. The tract functions in a

manner that is the direct opposite of how we want FFA to work.

The items mentioned in the previous paragraphs are a very small sample of what is included in FFA. They may not be the items that everyone sees or picks up, but there are many items that will function in a very similar manner to those mentioned.

Nothing is asked in return for receiving all of the material in FFA. It is hoped however that the exhibition will be shared and continued in various manners once people take things away with them. Special boxes were designed and are provided to keep the items together. The boxes allow for the easy transport of the material home. An accompanying text of re-exhibition strategies suggests ways someone can extend the project. But, ultimately, how this is done is up to each person.

FFA establishes a context for distributing art that the work of many of the artists involved rarely enjoys. It is simply not enough to make multiple copies of artwork and think that this is participating in broader, contemporary culture - the bulk of multiples made by artists today just ape the aesthetics of mass production in an attempt to cash in on the afterglow of a once radical gesture. Most artists' multiples fail to live up to their promise of being relatively cheap to produce in quantity because little to no effort is made to distribute them outside the usual art circles. The work is allowed no opportunity to compete visually or conceptually with other objects in the world. Free For All acknowledges and emphasizes the expanded context that this material exists in. This is part of the service that we provide; we seek to ever expand the contexts in which art is understood.

The way that things are given out for free plays an important role in how people respond to what they receive. The items in FFA aren't being handed out on the street from one person to another. This method of distribution is often seen, by the person receiving the material, as intrusive. It shuts people off from something that they might actually want. Or put another way, it doesn't allow someone to comfortably make a choice if they want the item or not. This clearly happens on a daily basis in conjunction with those handing out religious tracts or distributing advertising supplements. If these actions are particularly aggressive, then the person who encounters them is all the more likely to avoid them in the future.

We are interested in finding ways to present work in a manner that is open to larger numbers of people. We felt that FFA wouldn't make sense in our office space so it has been done in a place where the items are accessible to passersby. Every step has been taken to make people feel included. Getting those who normally don't seek out art to engage our work is an ever-pressing concern. It has been difficult in the past to get large numbers of people from the neighborhood to come into our space. For FFA, Temporary Services was lent an old storefront that we could, appropriately enough, use for free. We are presenting FFA on a Saturday afternoon in order to avoid the exclusive, party atmosphere typical of evening gallery openings in this neighborhood. We are using make-shift methods of distribution and display that are commonly found in flea markets, garage sales and craft shows. These forms are familiar and people feel comfortable approaching them on their own. An atmosphere encouraging peoples' voluntary participation is what we seek to provide. This service is open to anyone. No one is being forced to pay to get in or to have the things we are giving away.

Along with seeking to make art more relevant to larger groups of people, Temporary

Services is committed to non-commercial methods of art production, distribution and constructive and outreach work must be done. There are more ways of structuring relationships with others than through making and spending money. FFA begins to move art out of its hiding place into a position where it becomes relevant to the lives of increasingly more people. Giving the work away in large quantities is a way of allowing people to live with art and further integrate it into their lives without having to drop hundreds or thousands of dollars for this privilege. Ideally, we would like to do this project on a massive scale drawing thousands of people. Efforts of this magnitude are something we are developing strategies for and working toward.

Presenting FFA as a self-replicating exhibit will extend it well beyond the scope of normal exhibitions. Over a hundred mini-versions of FFA will get taken to different destinations and will be shared in many different capacities. Artists that participated in the show will get collections of each others work that they can share with yet more artists and viewers. Nearly all of the artists and organizations in FFA have provided contact information allowing viewers to respond to the people whose work they have taken home. While we have no direct way of tracking or gauging how FFA actually gets extended, if each person that takes material shares it with at least one other person, then the impact of the exhibition gets doubled. We know that this will happen given the strange and engaging qualities of a lot of the work presented. A partial collection of work from this show has already been presented at Indiana University in Bloomington. The full range of materials will be on display at Flaxman Library at the School of the Art Institute in March. At the end of the show the portable exhibit will become a permanent part of the Joan Flasch Artist Book Collection within the library.

Free For All asks questions about mass production that get avoided by antique notions of art production and reception. What does it mean to actually operate on a larger scale? What happens when art is put into play with other items made for mass reception? What happens to art when its reception is out of the control of a rarefied space? What does it mean to actually take responsibility for your work and use it as a means of communication? Why can't art be incredibly intelligent, articulate and also highly accessible? Do people who talk about not wanting to "dumb down art for the masses" really have anything interesting to say in the first place or are they protecting a privileged and weak position?

# Free For All Re-Exhibition Strategies

Marc Fischer

If you obtained a variety of free materials from this show, you probably have enough things to mount a small exhibit of this work on your own. You are a collector now so you should feel socially obligated to let people see your collection. It will be a lot of fun and you don't need to have your own gallery space. The following suggestions are to help you mount your own portable "Free For All" exhibit. These are just a few of the many ways that you could share this work with a larger audience.

Public Library: Visit your local public library. Neatly arrange the contents of your "Free For All" box on a large available study table. This will probably attract some attention from other library patrons. Encourage them to pull up chairs and look at the work. Answer their questions to the best of your ability. Share your own observations about the materials if they solicit your opinion. The library may have a small conference room that you can use to hold a larger discussion.

Work: Bring your "Free For All" collection to work and leave it in the break room or by the vending machines or coffee maker. This will allow people to see a little bit of contemporary art or give them something to read during the work day.

Airplane: The next time you fly take your "Free For All" box on the plane with you in your carry on luggage (it will fit underneath the seat in front of you during take off). Once you are in the air, attempt to share the contents of your collection with the passenger sitting next to you or the flight attendants. If traveling internationally, freely allow the customs agents at the airport to have a look.

Apartment or House: When friends or family invite you over for lunch, dinner, a party, or just to visit, bring your "Free For All" collection and share it with them. It can be viewed while food is cooking, when all the guests arrive, or after dessert.

Nursing Home: Elderly people that live in nursing homes don't get out very often and if they do have the opportunity to see an exhibit, it will most likely be at some type of museum rather than a gallery. Call a nursing home in your neighborhood and explain that you are an art collector and would like to bring a portable exhibit to the home to show to the residents. Allow the nurses to find out which residents are interested in viewing your collection and then set a date where space and time can be allocated to view and discuss the materials from "Free For All."

Train: Bring your "Free For All" collection on a long distance train ride. Occupy a table in the cafe car and turn it into an impromptu exhibition space for the length of the trip. Buy food and drinks and have an opening.

High School: Send a student to school with your "Free For All" collection. Let them share it with other students during lunch, study hall, or detention. Emphasize that many of the forms in the collection such as flyers, stickers, booklets, and tracts, would be good mediums for them to use to express their own ideas. Encourage them to design, create, and distribute their own multiples.

## Free For All Re-Exhibition Strategies Continued:

Government Offices: Government offices such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and Immigration Services are known for their long lines where one must wait for hours on end with little or nothing interesting to look at. Bring your "Free For All" collection and present the whole box to someone who will be waiting at least another fifteen minutes. Ask them to take a look and then pass the box to the next person behind them. Then you can go to the end of the line and begin waiting. Eventually your collection will reach you and you can step out of line and go home (unless you have some Government business to take care of). This will simulate the experience of loaning works to a museum and having to wait for them to return.

Prison: Attempt to mail the entire "Free For All" box to someone in prison as a care package (be sure to get a package slip and instructions in advance to ensure that all of the items are acceptable and will not be confiscated or returned as contraband). Right before the recipient receives parole and returns to society, ask them to pass the collection on to another inmate, who will in turn give it up at the end of their sentence. This way the collection will always remain in prison for future generations of incarcerated people to enjoy.

## About This Booklet

This booklet was created to accompany a documentary exhibition of a complete set of work from Free For All at Flaxman Library in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. At the close of this show, this complete Free For All Portable Exhibit will be available for viewing in the Joan Flasch Artist Book Collection within the library. This booklet may be reproduced without permission and distributed for free at any other portable exhibitions of Free For All (no matter how incomplete), or for any occasions where it is felt that the ideas embodied in this project should be extended. Additional information and images from Free For All can be viewed at the Temporary Services website listed below.

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