"Collective" is a term that has been bandied about a lot in art circles recently. Numerous exhibitions, international biennials, books, and articles over the past few years have focused on group work, but the term is often haphazardly applied without sufficient attention paid to the subtleties and difficulties of working collaboratively. There are many other terms that are used by practitioners that reflect group work's complexity.

It's not surprising that group work is so poorly understood. When you're working in a group, you're working in a way the system has not defined. The modern institutional art system and marketplace have been set up to promote and sell the work of individual artists, not groups of them. Artists who work in groups, duos, couples, or other configurations, face a host of structural constraints and institutional biases. For example, most university graduate programs focus on developing the talent of individual artists instead of encouraging collaborative practice; museums are structured to market exhibitions that feature the work of a single artist and often won't pay for groups to travel, receive honoraria, or other basic amenities individual artists enjoy; curators, writers, and critics openly admit they will not talk to artist groups because it takes more time and work; magazine editors are often unwilling to run texts by multiple authors; and prestigious cultural production awards, such as the MacArthur Foundation's "genius grant," are only given to individuals. To further complicate matters, the term is often misapplied to "false collectives," or individual artists who assemble teams of artists and laborers to produce their work yet seldom give these others authorial credit, still creating their work within a strict, hierarchical structure. This lack of transparency creates a climate of false recognition and expectations—artwork that lies about its own production.

The introduction of "collectives" into the contemporary art market has simplified the complexities of this work, banished multiple conflicting voices, and repackaged group work in a way that makes it easier to sell and promote as a fashionable trend. The term itself calls forth many associations—speaking with one voice, living together, sharing resources—that conjure utopian notions of revolutionary society. "Group art practice has a long history in most cultures," remarks artist and activist Greg Sholette, "Collectivism is something associated with the emergence of modernism and is connected to mass politics of the late-19th and early-20th centuries." Yet most groups who call themselves collectives don't live together, share an economy, or do any of the things implied by the term. There are many working collaboratively who specifically choose not to call themselves collectives. Those who work in couples, teams, groups, or collectives outside of the market do so for many reasons. Some are concerned with creating transformative experiences rather than environments for buying and selling art. Park Fiction has fought for over nine years to preserve the last open space in the St. Pauli neighborhood of Hamburg as a park designed by area residents. Some groups hope to reach far beyond the market-based production and distribution of a stagnant and conservative marketplace with a pronounced lack of diversity and social and economic structure. Groups like Critical Art风湿 illnesses and books, challenge the corporate and governmental power, and our food, bodies and lives. Because a hopelessly small number of people are living from participating in the commercial art market, collaborating about opening up possibilities and addressing destructive attitudes of the art world and the culture at large. Sometimes, working collectively is a good time, working on cool things, and doing something that only one person can accomplish.

Working collaboratively has its problems, too: inter-group squabbles and occasional struggles for power. It also doesn't guarantee that work—sometimes consensus can diminish aesthetic coherence. Groups often go unchecked and unchallenged and sexism is often unchallenged and addressed directly.

There are numerous challenges that face artists who want to collaborate and working in groups becomes more common, it is all the more reason for practitioners take an active role in shaping their own history, promoting exhibitions, and gaining access to monetary support. This current status-quo art world, which has constantly diminished the market ends.

There are a number of things collaborative groups, in whatever guise, bring about change in the art world. Groups need to self-organize and participate in events that celebrate independence from more traditional, market-based systems. They must hold museums, galleries, cultural centers, and other venues accountable for making the needed changes to support group work. People who give out awards to consider groups, couples, and individuals instead of only individual artists. Groups and students can agitate for curricula at art schools and universities and ask the schools to hire art faculty in groups to teach. Instead of letting uninformed writers and critics focus on the goals and accomplishments of group practice, groups can, and should, produce and distribute their own writings both online and in print. Perhaps most importantly, however, that collaboration can happen anywhere and work to build a network of people working in other cities and countries, thereby expanding the possibilities for collaboration and creativity.

Many thanks go to Ava Bromberg, Marc Fischer, Rikke Luther, and S. Wang for their valuable criticism and input on this article.

**Making Art in Groups, Couples, and Other Configurations**

*By Brett Bloom*

*Photos courtesy of Park Fiction*
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books, challenge the corporate and governmental power structures that control
and lives. Because a hopelessly small number of artists actually make
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their valuable criticism and input on this article.

INTERESTING GROUP BEHAVIOR

RELAY

Based in Europe, a database for adding
information about self-organized groups.

php/Relay

COPENHAGEN FREE UNIVERSITY

An open-access website that encourages
participation to build “an ongoing resource,
archive, and tool of collective investigation
into the issues of self-institution.”

http://www.ourorganisation.org/

16 BEAVER GROUP

A New York-based group, their links page is
astounding—tons of art groups and collabor-
atively run spaces. This is a really good
resource and they’re a good group of folks, too.

www.16beavergroup.org/links.htm

OTHER CONFIGURATIONS

BY BRETT BLOOM
PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARK FICTION

FREE COOPERATION STATE UNIVERSITY

Although the Art, and Collab,
there is still gleamed from

http://molodie2

AN ARCHITEKT!

Camp for Opposes,
three-day pow-
anarchist, arch

http://anarchitect

rePUBLICart

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www.republicart
GROUP BEHAVIOR

FREE COOPERATION CONFERENCE AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT BUFFALO

Although the actual conference, "Networks, Art, and Collaboration," was held in April, there is still some good information to be gleaned from this site.

http://molodiez.org/ocs/index.php

AN ARCHITEKTUR

Camp for Oppositional Architecture is a three-day pow-wow in Berlin on alternate, anarchist, architectural strategies.

http://anarchitektur.com/

rePUBLICart

A transnational project developed to expand the practice of public art.

www.republicart.net/

BASEKAMP

Established in 1998 in Philadelphia, basekamp is a non-commercial studio and exhibition space focused on the creation, facilitation, and promotion of large-scale collaborative projects by contemporary artists.

http://www.basekamp.com/

NETWORK OF CASUAL ART

Chicago artist Mike Wolf's initiative, part of which is devoted to lending out AV equipment to a wide range of spaces and practitioners—a very interesting way to collaborate.

http://www.stopgostop.com/

FLASH MOBS

Information on the now-you-see-them-now-you-don't phantom organized assemblies.

www.flashmob.com