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*Chelsea  
Ya' Later!*

Drawing Room

ARTISTS SPACE



## **ART CLUB2000**

selected works 1992-1999

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## introduction



*Untitled (Statements Relating to the  
Death of the Author), 1998, LED sign,  
dimensions variable*



Formed in 1992, the fabled collective **ART CLUB2000 (AC2K)** provocatively articulated eminent crises in youth and artistic identities within the neoliberal post-recession economy that epitomized 1990s New York. Under the guidance of the mercurial art dealer Colin de Land, who hosted the group's debut exhibition in 1993 at American Fine Arts, Co., the members, all Cooper Union students, conceived of their collaboration as an opportunity to parody and critique the dispassionate Generation X attitudes that were celebrated in commercial culture and advertising of the time. Overtly employing their own youth, they began at a time when the New York art world was eager for the voices and images of emerging-artist-personae. After receiving press coverage for their first exhibition, **ART CLUB2000** became the group's official name and simultaneously set the terms of its own demise with the promise to disband at the turn of the millennium. The group would produce an exhibition for each of the next seven summers at American Fine Arts, Co., as well as participating in solo and group exhibitions at institutions across the US and abroad.

**AC2K** stated its intention to create "something that was interesting or visually compelling, something that might confuse or dismay; something not retrograde; something that would examine the condition of its own production; to make visible or obvious that which is latent in culture." The group's collaborative working principles frustrated any single approach to making art, and its exhibitions became restive adaptations that employed a multiplicity of wildly mutable aesthetic and critical tactics—both in their range of mediums (photography, video, performance, sculpture, journalism, wall painting) and in their diverse artistic genres (documentary, installation art, appropriation, media and architectural intervention, and others). **AC2K's** impulse to experiment in response to its immediate conditions compelled the group to engage topics that today register as among the most urgent for artists: the intersection of emerging identity positions and radical political movements, the desire for bohemia and artistic freedom amidst precarious dependency on low-wage jobs, the corrosive and inescapable effects of gentrification, and its accompanying marketization of culture, institutions, and their publics. Questioning the orthodoxy of even its most significant artistic influences—such as Group Material, Andrea Fraser, and the group's former teacher Hans Haacke—**AC2K** sought to reclaim a sense of self-determination at every turn, interrogating the subjects, methodologies, and exhibition strategies that had come to define, and perhaps even stall, the potential of critical artistic practice.

While **AC2K's** prominent and adversarial position was central to the landscape of American art in the 1990s, its work has remained largely unavailable to contemporary audiences. Now, twenty years since disbanding, we can much more clearly see **AC2K** as visionary in its inventive unlayering of the received conventions of art production, challenging the exhibition form in new ways with each project. Bringing the full arc of **AC2K** together for the first time, *Selected Works 1992-1999* reveals a combative practice that swerved between comical, sincere, and caustic—through probing insolence, intense research, and a prismatic approach to its chosen topics of concern.

group formation, group identity





*Untitled (Conran's 2), 1992–93, color photograph, 8 × 10 inches*



*Untitled (Times Square/Gap Grunge 2), 1992–93, color photograph, 8 × 10 inches*





*Commingle*. Installation views,  
American Fine Arts, Co., 1993





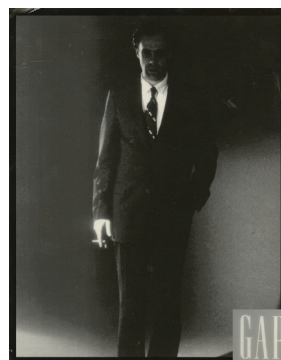
A cadre of students engaged in real-time group formation, **ART CLUB2000**'s debut as an "artist" trafficked in embodied critique from the outset. In its first exhibition, *Commingle* (1993), the group focused on the Gap corporation's pointedly contemporary marketing of youth lifestyle and celebrity endorsement as the initial place from which to generate its earliest creative investigations. The Gap's East Village arrival on St. Mark's Place in 1988 was a decisive step in a gentrification process that targeted communities in the heart of New York City's fading counterculture nexus. As the vestiges of older downtown New York 'realness' were being remorselessly co-opted, the Gap's unthreatening and ubiquitous normalcy was aggressively marketed vis-à-vis creative lifestyle—its infamous "Individuals of Style" ad campaign featuring stark black and white portraits (by Annie Leibovitz, Steven Meisel, and others) of a who's who of arts world luminaries including Spike Lee, Joan Didion, William Burroughs, Madonna, Anthony Kiedis, Jim Dine, and even gallerist Leo Castelli. Pitched to the same demographic of consumers as the **AC2K** members themselves, this incursion became "the gap" from which much of the work in *Commingle* emerged.

Photographing themselves wearing signature Gap apparel in sites around New York City, **AC2K** examined the Gap's idealized, market driven depiction of artistic style and youthful leisure as a canned notion of individuality and unstated conformity. Aesthetic approaches familiar from the Pictures Generation and the mise-en-scène modalities of installation art were strategically deployed as the group pantomimed and picked over all aspects of the Gap to manifest an abhorrent, deconstructed simulacrum. In researching its subject, they scavenged corporate trash from Gap store dumpsters to recover employee loss prevention and sales manuals, customer service protocols and reports, and any other directives of both the public and unseen aspects of the corporation's activities. Physical installations and sculptures made of slatwall, Gap shoe boxes, and other materials collected from the stores' refuse were constructed into a restless exhumation of research, reportage photography, garbology, and didactic wall texts. **AC2K** formulated a reflective take on Institutional Critique, painstakingly enacting and decoding the messages of a corporation intent on claiming relevance and turning a profit through its disingenuous affiliation with the cultural sphere. *Commingle* would become a model for subsequent projects, whereby sociological investigation was undertaken with a studied and piquant interest that could be effectively reported in the guise of 'constructed reality' photography, conceptual art, documentary, or more chaotic happenings.

In group photographs—a format the group would revisit throughout its career—**AC2K** staged themselves within carefully selected Manhattan settings: posing in Times Square, in bed at Ian Schrager and Philippe Starck's Paramount Hotel, lounging in the Conran's furniture store, throwing a pajama party at Angelika Film Center, perusing the *Art in America* office library, posing for a portrait session at Sears.

In the lead-up to the exhibition, the group produced a pastiche of a Gap advertisement featuring a dapper portrait of Colin de Land as an "Individual of Style." Foregrounding de Land as its iconic promotional representative, **AC2K** acknowledged his fundamental role, one that at times invoked the tradition of manufactured pop groups such as The Monkees, the Sex Pistols, and the New Kids on the Block, with de Land as producer and industry impresario. Following the ad's publication in *Artforum*, the Gap faxed a cease and desist letter to American Fine Arts, Co. threatening to sue, and effectively providing **AC2K** with its first bit of critical attention.

The group's second exhibition, *Clear* (1994), further explored the generic dislocations of fashion, identity, and brand, using the notion of 'clear' transparent fabrics and soft drinks, then on-trend, in an effort to relate such stylistic fads to invisible authority structures obscured from public view. After noticing several commercial fashion shoots staged at Cooper Union, **AC2K** focused on the school as a location, photographing themselves posing inside its austere John Hejduk-designed interiors. In the new era of the 'supermodel,' both the runway and the pages of fashion magazines were filled with alternative, punk, and grunge styles, a calculated industry effort to harness the D.I.Y. energy of young people. The gallery walls were painted chroma key green and blue to underscore the non-space of post-production and dropped-in backgrounds. In another gesture of formlessness and uncontainability, the members crashed down a gallery wall and branded it with their name "Art Club 2000." Finally, inside a small, egg-crated soundproof room, a tiny drum kit, also emblazoned with "Art Club 2000," served as a toy memento to co-opted indie-rock culture.



*Untitled (Individuals of Style / Colin de Land)*, 1993, black and white photograph, 14 x 16 inches



*Clear*, Installation view, American Fine Arts, Co., 1994



*Untitled (Cooper Union / Dead on the Stairs), 1994, color photograph, 16 x 20 inches*



*Untitled (Drumkit), 1994, miniature drumkit, eggcrate foam, black paint, and spotlight, dimensions variable*



## muckraking journalism and institutional critique



*Untitled (Coffee Cup)*, 1995, black and white photograph, 11 × 14 inches

Chronicling nighttime in SoHo and the East Village—sidewalk trash outside Starbucks, skateboarders at the Astor Place Cube, the Scharf Schack, the Cyber Cafe, a line of people at a screening of Larry Clark and Harmony Korine's *Kids*, an "I [heart] New York" paper coffee cup—**ART CLUB2000** produced a series of black and white photographs that revisited the legacy of New York street photography, documenting the various scenes, settings, and cultural minutiae that the group frequented. The images convey the specificity of New York City in the mid-1990s while casting a skeptical and alienated lens upon "downtown New York" as an elaborate metaphor, one which was radically changing under the influence of dominant commercial and real estate interests. *Night in the City* (1995) was installed in an overtly museological style (with beige painted walls and protective hardware on the framed photographs), imitating the austere timelessness of iconic New York images by the likes of Alfred Stieglitz, Berenice Abbott, Weegee, and Roy DeCarava. At once droll and fleeting, **AC2K**'s barren and often unpopulated scenes contend with their own latent nostalgia in subjectively indexing New York. A demolished room was presented in the exhibition, while nearby, a push button interface prompted the song "Institutionalized" by the thrash metal band Suicidal Tendencies to play in the gallery. With *Night in the City*, **AC2K** began to cite and borrow from its own short history as an artist and exhibition-maker, a self-scrutinizing and emboldening strategy the group would further invoke in later exhibitions.

The following year, **AC2K** extended its documentary survey of New York City with *SoHo So Long* (1996), a critical reflection on gentrification and the material conditions that led to the migration of galleries from the increasingly commercial SoHo to the vast and vacant garages of the purportedly 'untapped' Chelsea. The core project was a series of extensive interviews with notable New York gallerists, critics, and collectors who were contemplating this relocation of the art world's then-current center to a new gallery district in a remote neighborhood. A large lightbox photograph of prominent art dealers posing together, including Matthew Marks, Pat Hearn, and Carol Greene, offered a portrait of the movers and shakers who would define the New York art world's coordinates for the coming decades. Suspended on a seamless curved wall, the lightbox illuminated an ad-hoc waiting room of vending machines and Ikea furniture where visitors could sit and read the interviews. Nearby, vestiges of SoHo in its various guises made scenographic cameos—an ersatz recreation of Kenny Scharf's art-retail kiosk, the "Sharf Shack" [sic], soaped up storefront windows announcing the imminent arrival of a fictitious Old Navy store, and branded outdoor planter boxes replicating the signage of SoHo stalwart institution The Drawing Center. A sandwich board declaring, "STOP (On In While Staying At) THE MEGA HOTEL," conveyed the give-and-take impulses that continue to define New York City's suspicious and predictable upticks.

*1970* (1997) further elaborated on a waning New York City that still traded on myths from the recent past, in particular, that the survival of artists did not require



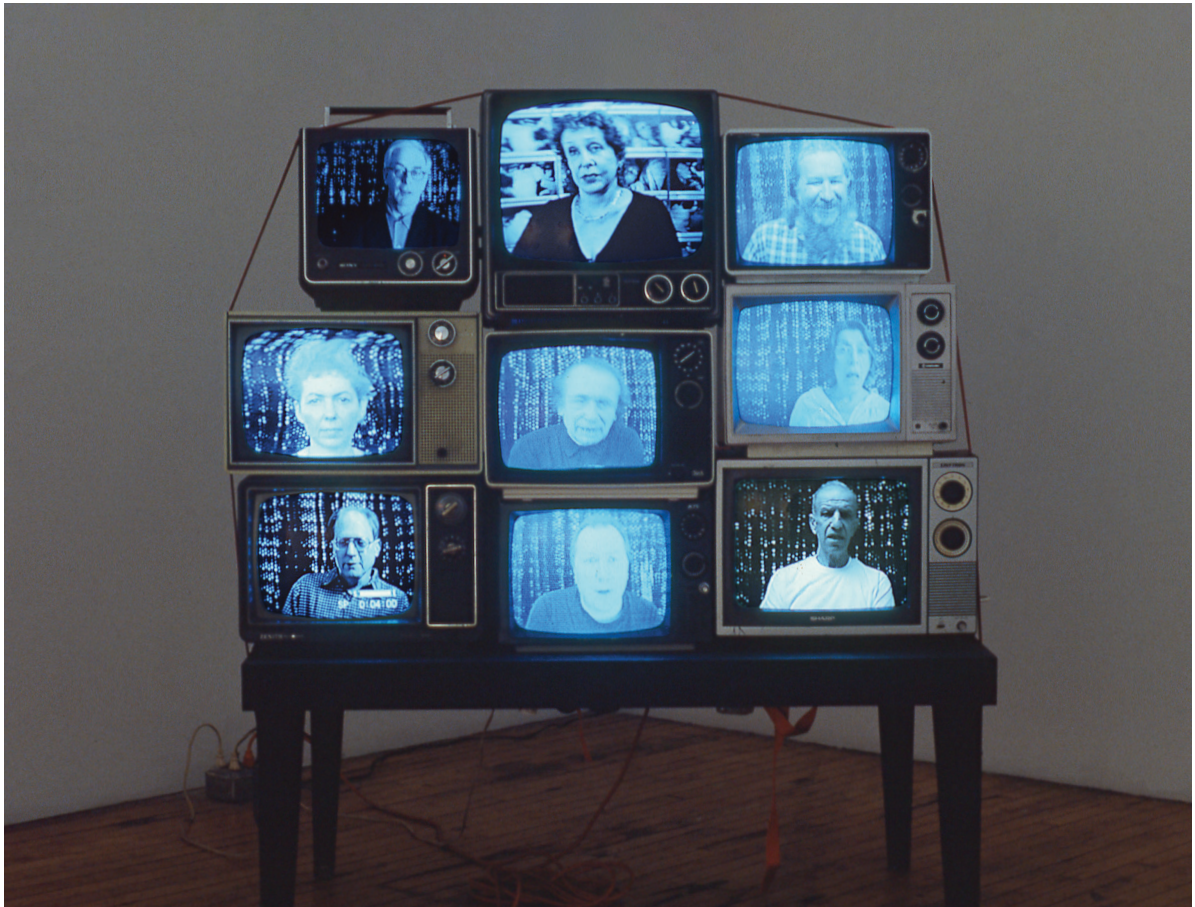


*Night in the City*. Installation view, American Fine Arts, Co., 1995



*Untitled (Starbucks Trash)*, 1995, black and white photograph, 11 x 14 inches

professionalism or contending with the fundamental and ongoing difficulties of finding housing, employment, and studio space. **AC2K** mined New York artistic life in its legendary living forms, conducting video interviews with a constellation of artists who were active and accessible to the group: Alex Katz, Isa Genzken, Henry Flynt, Vito Acconci, Carolee Schneemann, Les Levine, Simon Cerigo, Niki Logis, and Olivier Mosset. Each was recorded opining on the topic of "1970," and presented simultaneously as a cacophony of voices on a nine-square grid of vintage televisions—invoking both Ant Farm's *Media Burn* and Nam June Paik's loft-era video walls. A separate viewing station, with a single television, allowed visitors to watch the interviews in a more coherent and isolated manner.



*Untitled (Video Interviews with Artists on the Year 1970)*, 1997, black and white TVs, VCRs, and wooden table, approx. 4 × 5 × 3 feet





*SoHo So Long. Installation views,  
American Fine Arts, Co., 1996*







In 1994, **ART CLUB2000** was invited to exhibit internationally following significant press attention from its New York gallery shows. Dislocated from its local context and with reduced participation from de Land, the group embarked on a critical period of experimentation and self-definition, testing its ability to collectively apply its working methods abroad. For the group exhibition *Esprit d'Amusement* at Grazer Kunstverein, **AC2K** produced *Kaputtmachen im Graz* (1994), a mural-sized photograph of themselves in a trashed hotel room. The scene depicts the members of **AC2K** as if on tour as a '90s grunge band—the group's outfits and poses directly referencing contemporaneous tabloid photos of Johnny Depp in handcuffs after being arrested for trashing a room he shared with Kate Moss at New York City's The Mark Hotel. Nearby, a boombox played Austrian popular music on endless repeat. Caricaturing themselves as brash American enfants terribles, **AC2K** glibly performed the identity cliché that its European hosts might have imagined when inviting the *Artforum*-hyped group to travel.

**AC2K**'s play on artistic identity intensified at Glasgow's Transmission Gallery in 1995, as the group wholly embodied another working artist. The exhibition, *Jackie McAllister*, was a perverse portrait of the art, life, and family history of the New York-based Scottish-American artist (and a close interlocutor of American Fine Arts, Co.). Arriving with suitcases full of McAllister's original art, slides and documentation of his work, and books from his collection, the exhibition included a McAllister painting of the Saint Andrew's Cross in the style of Jackson Pollock, the McAllister family tartan painted both directly on the wall and rendered in LEGO, a Martin Kippenberger artwork made from a box of Scottish cookies from McAllister's personal collection, two super-8 films: McAllister speaking about his work and his youth in Glasgow, and an interview with fellow Glaswegian artist Douglas Gordon, and McAllister's handwritten signature rendered in large black script as wall signage. The endeavor, initially misunderstood by some viewers as **AC2K** inventing a fictional artist, exemplifies the group's campy and flatfooted inversion of import/export expectations toward exhibiting abroad.

Surfacing the typically unseen labor that both props up and enables artistic pursuits, the exhibition *Working!* (1995) at Forde in Geneva, Switzerland, became an office environment with a table, rolling chairs, and a coffee machine surrounding a central video monitor topped by a taxidermied seagull. Addressing the numerous forms of labor implicitly at play in the room, **AC2K** produced a video featuring members of the gallery's cooperative committee recounting every job they had held prior to working at Forde, while feeding stale bread to the local swans. A series of photographs depicting the New York work environments of jobs performed by **AC2K**'s members and their peers (including Dia Art Foundation, the offices of *Flash Art*, and Bowery Bar) lined the walls. Within this coolly ambivalent setting, **AC2K** critiqued the prosaic and repetitious nature of contemporary work and the professionalization of artistic life.





Jackie McAllister. Installation view,  
Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland, 1995

Untitled (Production Manager, Interview  
Magazine), 1995, black and white photograph,  
11 x 14 inches



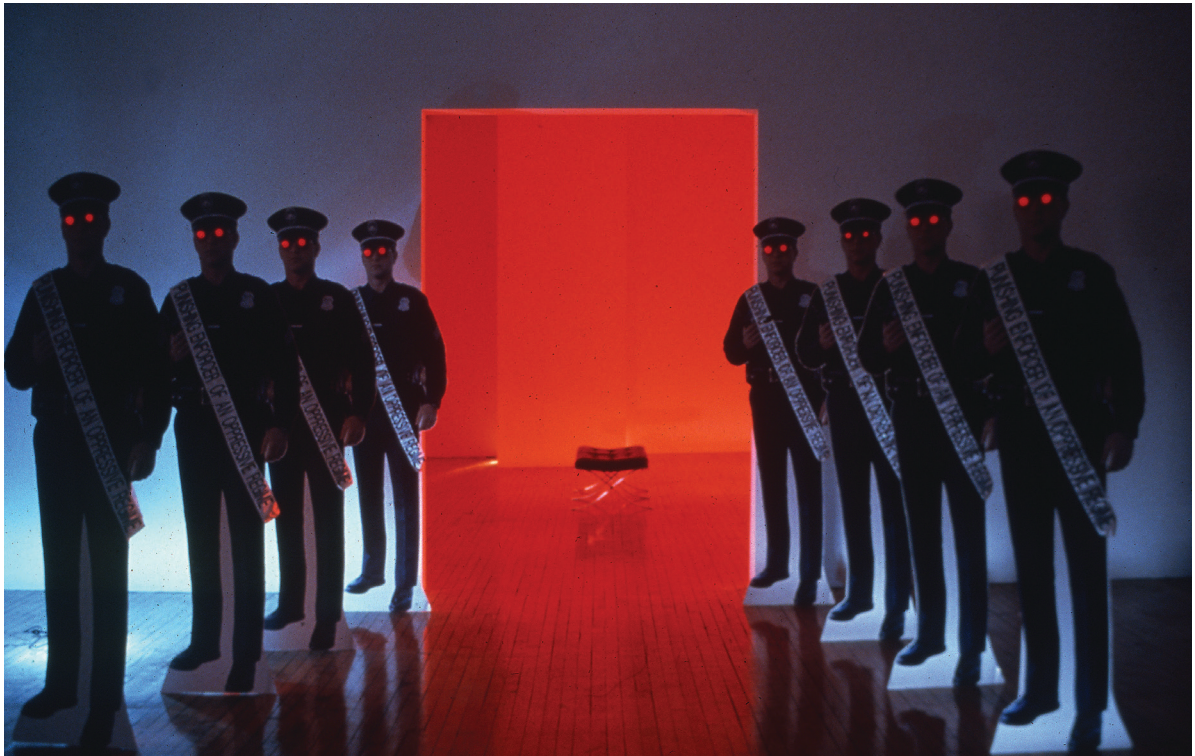
## political theater



*Night of the Living Dead* Author. Installation view, American Fine Arts, Co., 1998



Collaborating with its mentor de Land as a fellow artist, **ART CLUB2000**'s last exhibition of new work, *Night of the Living Dead Author* (1998), overtly investigated power and authority, specifically its legitimation across repeated, reproducible forms. By the late '90s, Mayor Giuliani's "quality of life" campaign had intensified, his effort to sanitize the city through broken windows theory policing—raids on nightclubs, the removal of homeless people from public spaces, and the criminalization of petty offenses like turnstile hopping, drinking in public, and the enforcement of cabaret laws—manifested an oppressive program of social control on the lives of New Yorkers. Following a series of conversations in which the members asked, "what is a cop?" the group produced an imposing multitude of identical life-sized cardboard police, their eyes glowing red, bearing sashes with the text: "PUNISHING ENFORCER OF AN OPPRESSIVE REGIME." Beyond this formation of cardboard officers, a scrolling LED sign pulsated an amalgamated critique of contemporary artists including Mariko Mori, Vanessa Beecroft, Matthew Barney, Mark Dion, and **ART CLUB2000** with statements like: "*The Death of the Author* (R. Barthes 1968) ...famously declares the author as no longer the unique source of meaning and/or value of a work of art... For art to merit a degree of critical integrity today, as over the past thirty years... it must



*Untitled (Punishing Enforcers of an Oppressive Regime)*, 1998, printed cardboard standees, satin sashes, and LED lights, dimensions variable

seem to acknowledge this most 'postmodern' declaration.....Today's artists too often only posture to address to this declaration... by using appropriative and quotational techniques" endlessly repeating across the screen. A Mies van der Rohe-designed Barcelona ottoman, borrowed directly from Leo Castelli's gallery, emphasized the imposing authority of the viewing context itself, while a pervading mood of horror was further instilled by a soundtrack of gnashing and moaning zombies and hastily barricaded gallery windows shuttered by scrap wood.

For the exhibition *Milanarian* at Galleria Facsimile in Milan, **AC2K** produced *Gli Avvoltoi (The Vultures)* (1995), a work in-situ in response to media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi's recent appointment as Italy's Prime Minister. His victory followed a massive advertising campaign wherein he utilized his own media empire—including three national TV networks, the daily newspaper *Il Giornale*, the highest selling weekly magazine *Panorama*, and multiple radio stations—which he continued to operate while Prime Minister. **AC2K** painted a dense tangle of repeating rooftop TV antennae (an image appropriated from a United Colors of Benetton ad campaign pervasive in Italy at the time) on the wall as an elaborate panoramic mural. Looming cartoon vultures from Disney's *The Jungle Book* populated the scene, scavengers defecating in Benetton-trademark green. A series of numbered speech bubbles emerging from the birds' beaks corresponded to an index of statements by Guy Debord, Lucy Lippard, and others. Within this network of appropriated images, messages, and motivations, **AC2K** explored 'the spectacle' as it manifests within marketing, activism, critical theory, and artmaking itself.



*Night of the Living Dead* Author.  
Installation detail, American Fine Arts,  
Co., 1998





*Gli Avvoltoi (The Vultures)*, 1995, wall painting and printed handout, dimensions variable



bugged  
millennium

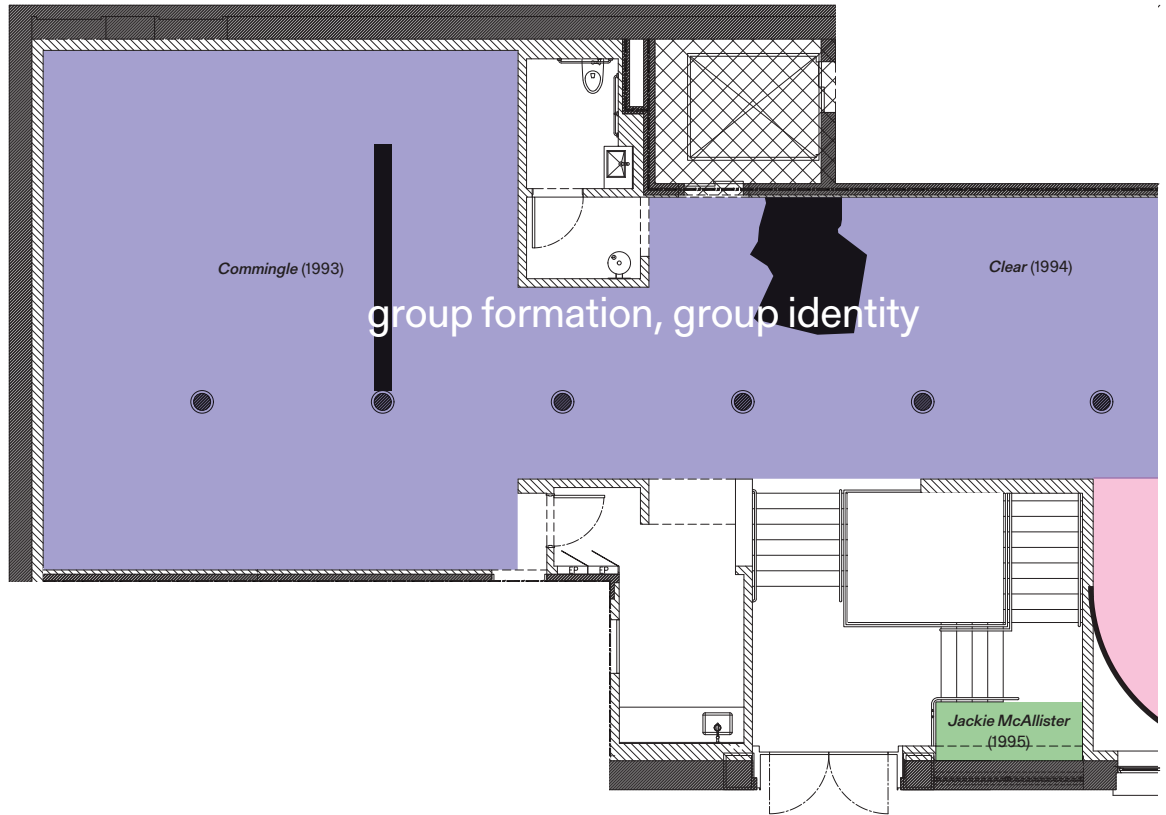


1999. *(A Retrodisrespective)*. Installation view, American Fine Arts, Co., 1999

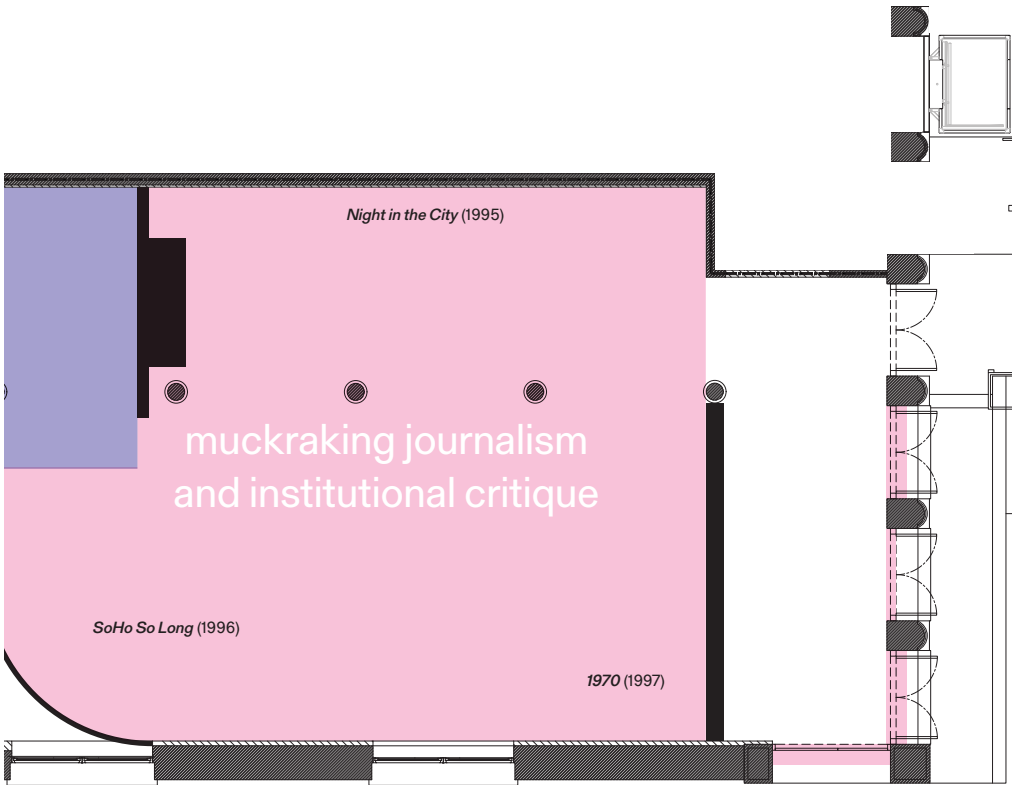
While not represented in this exhibition, **ART CLUB2000** took a final step toward actively undermining its own authorship by staging *1999. (A Retrodisrepective)*. The final act was a carefully arranged dumping ground of the group's efforts from the past seven years, exhibited as a dense array of decontextualized relics, the group now ready to cease activity as planned and submit to the 21st century. At the entrance to this exhibition, a draped theatrical curtain was held open by a life-sized Grim Reaper—the scene recalling Charles Wilson Peale's famous 1822 self-portrait *The Artist in His Museum*, which depicts Peale, an artist-curator, revealing his amassed collection.

Where *1999. (A Retrodisrepective)* conveyed a disconnected nihilism toward afterlife, *Selected Works 1992–1999* endeavors to recontextualize these elements and their exhibitions in their original forms. Presented here for the first time is an extensive portion of the **AC2K** archive, including ephemera, props, correspondence, photographs, documentation, and research materials elucidating the interiority of **AC2K**'s methodologies, group authorship, and exhibition-making practices. **AC2K**'s prescient impulse to self-historicize its emerging identity and the tenets of its work in real-time lead to a particularly rich archive comprised of source materials, traces of its collective procedures, and artifacts which further underscore its legacy as a highly reactive sociological think-tank in the guise of a critically-savvy "in-the-know" artist. The entrance to this archive, held open by the same Grim Reaper, reveals the working mechanisms of the group's studied, coactive, and politically pointed practice, and exposes never-before-seen materials endemic to its evolution.

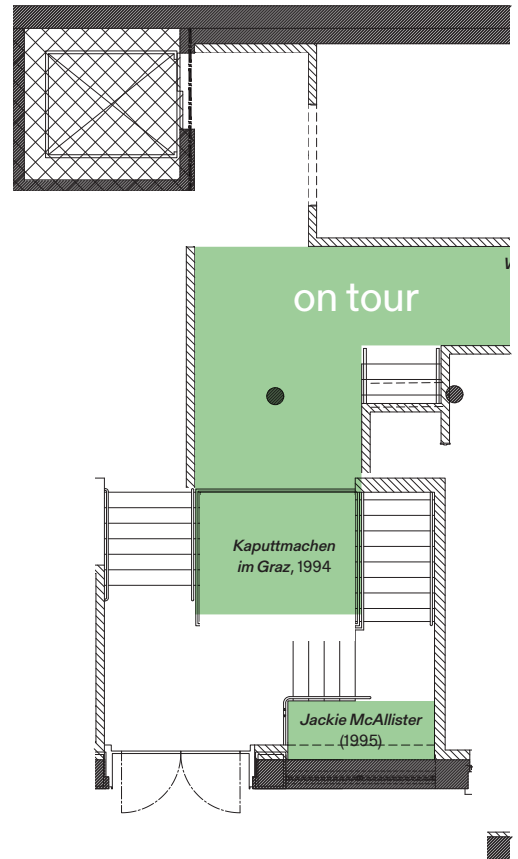
## first floor

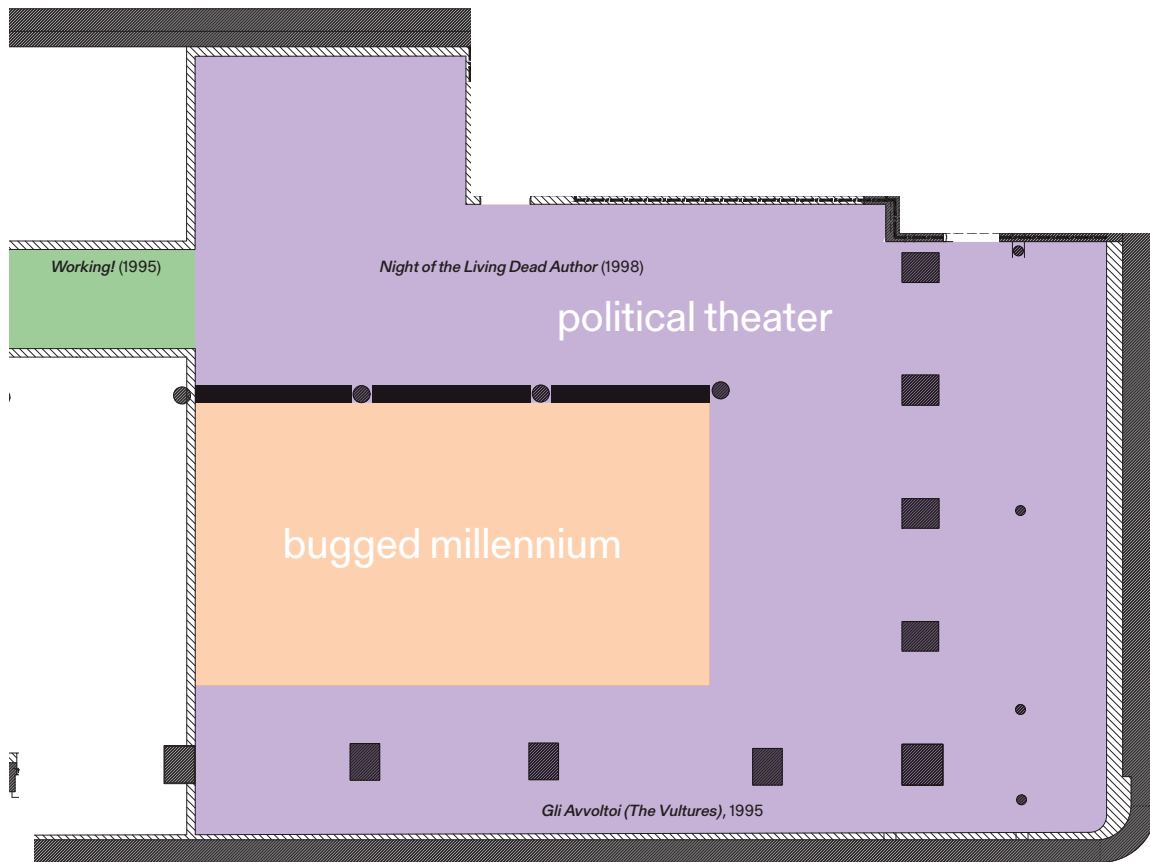






## lower floor







**ART CLUB2000:** *Selected Works 1992–1999* is on view at Artists Space from October 21, 2020 – January 9, 2021. Following its New York premiere, the exhibition will travel to Kunsthalle Zürich from September 4 – November 7, 2021.

Support for **ART CLUB2000:** *Selected Works 1992–1999* is provided by Barbara and Howard Morse, Anonymous, and The Friends of Artists Space.

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Cover image: *Night of the Living Dead Author*. Installation view, American Fine Arts, Co., 1998

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 Toby Webster  
 Begum Yasar

