



**AN ORAL HISTORY  
OF ART CLUB2000,  
THE COLLECTIVE  
THAT PREDICTED  
(OR MAYBE  
INVENTED) THIS  
MILLENNIUM'S  
CULTURAL  
WASTELAND**





ART CLUB2000 formed as a collective of seven Cooper Union students who started making art in 1992. Inspired by their teacher, the German artist Hans Haacke, and guided by influential art dealer Colin de Land, they pushed institutional critique to the max with their fresh, post-Generation X perspective. Simultaneously parodying and trading off their photogenic looks, ART CLUB2000 wanted viewers to stare long enough to feel ashamed of a shallow, yuppie culture that had grown fanatically obsessed with youth.

Over the seven years the collective was together — having decided from the onset to disband in the year 2000 — they pulled together a new exhibition each summer at De Land's SoHo gallery American Fine Arts. Their first and maybe best-known exhibition was "Commingle," which *Art in America* reviewed in 1993, referring to it as "a parody of Gap's mass-marketing campaigns [that] used the Gap logo and included photographs of the group dressed in Gap fashions. It drew an angry cease and desist letter from a company lawyer." When ART CLUB2000 was founded in the mid-1990s, luxury boutiques forced many of the galleries in New York's SoHo neighborhood out of their homes. The group made an exhibition on the subject titled "SoHo So Long." For Colin de Land, the affair between art and fashion was, like many trends, one of "exploitation, consumption, and burnout." The collective therefore predicted the direction culture would soon take, with artists as influencers long before we even knew the meaning of the word. By the late-2000s, collectives like DIS, K-HOLE, and ãyr emerged to fill the void left in their wake, furthering the gag by working as artists in the contexts of brand consulting, fashion photography, media, and design. In

the 2010s that relationship was practically institutionalized as fashion brands sought out contemporary artists for collaborations and every luxury conglomerate from LVMH to Prada broke ground on museums. Today for an artist to be featured on the Balenciaga Instagram is deemed as significant as participating in a major gallery group show. Creating a runway set rivals the prestige of a Kunsthalle Basel solo.

The difficulty with institutional critique is that it often ends up validating the institutions it sets out to interrogate. It's doubtful the collective set out to make the Gap hip, but that was clearly one consequence of their attention to the chain. Their work credits the Gap with this art world marketing ploy that proliferated beyond what even the most astute astrologists could have read in the stars.

Similar to ART CLUB2000's exploration of the '70s by interviewing artists like Isa Genzken, Vito Acconci, and Alex Katz about that mythic decade, the beginning of the 2020s is the perfect time to excavate the remnants of this cult art collective. Unfortunately, the artist whom the group cites as its main influence, Hans Haacke, "does not have a strong recollection of ART CLUB2000, or their connection to Cooper," per an email from his artist liaison.

With guidance from the collective and curators of "ART CLUB2000: Selected Works 1992–1999," recently on exhibit at Artists Space in New York and set to reopen at the Kunsthalle Zurich in September this year, we assembled an oral history of early memories, impressions, gossip, and reflections on their moment and its legacy.

By JORDAN RICHMAN

Untitled (Sears Portrait Center) (1992)





Untitled (Times Square/Gap Grunge 1) (1992-93)



## ON INITIAL ENCOUNTERS

RACHEL HARRISON (artist): “My friend was teaching at Cooper Union and invited me to his students’ exhibition. In a grand but not so grand entrance, [future ART CLUB2000 members] Patterson Beckwith and Alex Bag appeared in identical oversized T-shirts and matching blue — or was it green — dyed hair. They looked like twins. Mini beer kegs hung from the ceiling in nets, with other things I can’t recall. It was pretty packed with people, and in the hazy air I thought to not separate the artists from the work. This wasn’t ART CLUB2000, but Patterson and Alex performing as artists who might be downtown celebrities for doing nothing more than being themselves. I knew [ART CLUB2000’s] Danny McDonald just from being around American Fine Arts and saw he made very lovely fake rocks. Ideas were circulating around what was both real and not real in art, maybe not taking it too seriously while being very serious about it. Artists were thinking about how to frame themselves, something that has gone on for a long time but was getting stirred up again.”

DOUGLAS COUPLAND (writer and artist): “I think they were called Gap Club 2000 first, and I’m pretty sure I read about them in *Artforum* with a great image of fresh, young kids working in some place that looked like the Library of Congress. I thought they were witty and gave the impression that current modes of thinking — Be young! Be fresh! — were all it took to run the world. The message I got from them is that as a culture we were living in a fool’s paradise of khaki freshness. In our quest for perkiness we were leaving ourselves open to abuse by other systems who make no attempt to hide their darkness. Russia? China? You’d never have found Gap Club 2000 anywhere else on the planet except for the US.”

LEO FITZPATRICK (actor and gallerist): “Even though I don’t believe in god, I believe in ART CLUB2000 as salvation.”

COLLIER SCHORR (artist and photographer): “When ART CLUB came up it was like a complete departure from idolizing stodgy conceptualism — or at least that’s how it felt. Like any youth group, they seemed attractive and annoying. And somehow they swallowed the culture and rebuilt bodies out of the pulp. I think they wanted to underscore their youth to look even younger. To make chicken hawks of their audience. I think they wanted to address the ways in which they were a targeted generation. I think they wanted to look like they wanted it, but I also think they probably stole stuff wherever they went. At least I hope they did. Did they create a place for K-pop? I think so. Gen Z seemed more resigned to the end of the world, while ART CLUB wanted to set the world on fire.”

AA BRONSON (artist and a founding member of art group General Idea): “To tell the absolute truth, they seemed like a young spinoff on General Idea at the time. We took as our model the consensus-based philosophy of the commune movement and the free-school movement of the ’60s, but our interest was in mass media, consumer culture, and the concept of marketing — that word was invented in the ’70s. It seemed to us that ‘low culture,’ as opposed to high culture, was the obvious window through which to understand North American culture at the time, and like some sort of alien anthropologists, we were fascinated by what we saw.”

DOUGLAS COUPLAND: “I bought one of their prints and I love it. It was *Bleedout (Cooper Union)*. I’ll double-check that when I get home. Date, too. I phoned — I think it was — Ronald Feldman Galleries to buy it, and the guy who answered the phone was part of Gap, or ART CLUB2000. He said I was the first person to ever buy one of their pieces. It was magic. That photo reminds me of images from the opening credits of *The Stand*. There’s a part of me that loves disaster.”

## ON COLIN DE LAND

JAMES FUENTES (gallerist): “When I was 21 years old and right out of college, Colin de Land was one of the few gallerists who gave me the time of day. I loitered at his gallery American Fine Arts to witness Colin, who was one of the most enigmatic and charming creatures in the art world, first hand. I vividly remember Colin would invite me to lunch at his favorite spot on West Broadway called Novecento. He would sit there while we were having lunch cutting up magazines and making collages and would perk up when the conversation took an interesting turn. He was like the Wizard of Oz. He was an active collaborator for many of the artists that he worked with.”

RACHEL HARRISON: “I think since initially they were Cooper Union students people might not have known what to make of it, but Colin de Land’s involvement was known. It was an imperfect, perfect storm. Colin was also teaching classes for art collectors, so him having this group of art students around, shaping not only their work but their identity as an art collective, was also an extension of how he ran the gallery. A gallerist as producer who wasn’t sure he wanted to be a gallerist — this really took it to the next level. What’s striking is how they nailed their parts, without the certainty they could actually fulfill the roles they were performing — something these days a lot of people call precarity.”

## ON ART AND COMMERCE

RACHEL HARRISON: “It might be hard to grasp today, but the fact you could buy clothing, wear it, and return it was very new and pretty unheard of at the time, especially as part of a brand’s marketing. ART CLUB saw Gap seeing the future: retail as activity, artists as influencers.”

SEAN MONAHAN (writer and co-founder of collective K-HOLE): “The ’90s were a boom for branding — both its proponents and its critics. Brand gurus had sold corporations on the idea that a brand was this quasi-holy thing — that it transubstantiated a cultural ethos into commercially viable intellectual property. But the ’90s were also the era of grunge, anti-globalization, Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (1999), the magazine *Adbusters*. The Gap, with its reputation as ‘the place corporate types buy chinos for casual Fridays,’ became a symbol for people’s fears that corporations were homogenizing culture and promoting an inauthentic idea of cool. Ironically, ART CLUB2000’s Gap photo shoots in retrospect make the brand look cool. I’m not so sure this was their intention.”

COLLIER SCHORR: “We had very little in New York to compare with Young British Artists. We had scatter art, we had Karen Kilimnik, and we had Candy Ass, and then somehow these twisted misogynistic John Currin paintings at Andrea Rosen. We could not have known painting would turn the art world into a market.”

## ON WORKING AS A COLLECTIVE

JAY SANDERS (executive director of Artists Space): “Their medium was the ‘exhibition’ itself, and their area of study was both the immediate conditions they inhabited and the ‘artist’ as a subject and object to be skeptically embodied. Elsewhere, Bernadette Corporation was more readily performing, at least initially, within distributed media systems (fashion, magazines, films, novels, etc.) under the cloak of corporate facelessness.”

AA BRONSON: “General Idea clung to our position of only carrying out decisions that were made by consensus, which eliminated 99 percent of our ideas, because there were always differences. The idea was to come to a position that was bigger than any one of us, that none of us could have achieved individually. In a way we were trying to turn the idea of the genius-artist inside out, as we did not believe in that cliché.”

SEAN MONAHAN: “People rarely talk about it, but the biggest challenge for art collectives is financial. Pieces from art collectives are priced lower than pieces from peer individual artists at similar points in their careers.



The thinking is that art collectives are inherently more unstable because they are likely to break up and thus not create an oeuvre spanning decades. Where should everyone live? How should everyone work? How much claim do you have to each other’s time? These are questions that become more, not less, complicated if a collective achieves any success. The additional issue is most collectives start out thinking decision-making can just be made by consensus. This starts to create problems fast. Ironically, the longest-lasting collective human endeavors are corporations. Most collectives set out to critique corporate hierarchy. But inevitably a decision where members — or groups of members — disagree will come along. Suddenly, hierarchy and delegated decision-making don’t seem so bad. Oftentimes, it’s the only way through an impasse.”

## ON THEIR LEGACY

LAUREN BOYLE (artist and member of collective DIS): “The Gap series spoke to us deeply. The reverse appropriation screamed that there was no alternative. ART CLUB2000 visualized corporate culture’s nimble appropriation of leftist, oppositional, and utopian ideas in an era of market supremacy and apathy. It was a critique, but one that seemed to poke at everyone. DIS Magazine had that same energy, a 21st century end game of coun-

terculture. That is, it didn’t counter culture. It totally embraced the mainstream. The message was that there is no alternative music, alternative culture, or epoch — and in fact there isn’t — which made DIS in the end a kind of cultural critique. It was an aesthetic that was already there but made obscene. We’re all consumers, but as producers we found an interesting space disrupting this feedback loop through image making. It was probably a reaction to our hyper-commercialized world and also a reflection of our experiences, having all worked intermittently in advertising and fashion. We used to say, its aesthetic is default: mass-market apparel and stock photography models bask under a soft-box with a certain uneasiness, but not a drop of irony.”

SEAN MONAHAN: “It’s not only the influence of ART CLUB2000, but also the influence of the time period they represent: the late ’90s. Consumerism was (and is) popular culture. I think streetwear and post-Internet art both approached consumerism with the mindset of making it more complex, interesting, sophisticated. If some consumers have boring, generic taste, could we cultivate other advanced consumers who operated with a more rarefied palate? This used to happen with more frequency in the ’90s and into the 2000s. The best

example is the Slavoj Žižek text for Abercrombie and Fitch’s raunchy magazine. The idea that one of the world’s pre-eminent philosophers would write for one of the world’s pre-eminent teen brands was inspirational. It’s probably one of the first instances that proves a high-low collaborative synthesis can produce a consumer culture that’s more than the sum of its parts. You don’t get the Vetements x DHL viral T-shirt without the Slavoj Žižek x Abercrombie and Fitch scandal mag. ART CLUB2000 x the Gap was the first experimentation in this direction. The fact we’re still talking about it proves the template was irresistibly sticky.”

STELLA CILMAN (co-curator of “ART CLUB2000: Selected Works 1992–1999”): “In exposing oppressive systems of power — corporate branding, the surveillance apparatuses of the state, and artistic ambition itself — their exhaustive experiment in collective identity always stretched the limits of self-representation. For me, the essence of their project is laid bare in the archive, which remains a depository of negotiations, disagreements, and false starts. Looking beyond, I hope the world, and the art world within it, takes up ART CLUB2000’s self-critical methodology so that we can better interpret the evils and the absurdities of the present.”





1. *Untitled (Cooper Union/Weasel) (1994)*
2. *Untitled (Paramount Nude) (1992-93)*
3. *Untitled (Industria Superstudios 3) (1992-93)*
4. *Untitled (Zombies) (1998)*
5. *Untitled (Industria Superstudios 2/Makeup Room) (1992-93)*
6. *Untitled (Cooper Union/Snake) (1994)*
7. *Untitled (Donut Shop 1) (1992-93)*
8. *Untitled (Wooster Street/Gap Vampires) (1992-93)*
9. *Untitled (Cyber Cafe) (1995)*

All Images courtesy Artists Space, NY



**"EVEN THOUGH I  
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IN ART CLUB2000  
AS SALVATION."**

