

MOUSSE

REVIEWS

Coop Fund, Amalle Dublon & Constantina Zavitsanos, Devin Kenny, John Neff, Artists Space, New York

Alexander Iadarola and Charlie Markbreiter



Amalle Dublon & Constantina Zavitsanos, a composition of waters (adjusted to fit), 2018, Artists Space, New York, 2018.
Photo: Daniel Pérez. Artists Space, New York,

The codification of “institutional critique” today has been so over-determined and ossified that it partially functions as a meme. We know all about the recapitulative logic of capital, about how institutions absorb critique to make themselves look good, and yet the art world is still fundamentally market-driven; what has really changed?

Instead of inviting artists to skewer its practices at a safe distance, Artists Space collaborated with artists to candidly illustrate that the process of ethical deliberation is constantly in progress. The resulting exhibit, Coop Fund, Amalle Dublon & Constantina Zavitsanos, Devin Kenny, John Neff, runs from February 11 – March 31, 2018, and continues a negotiation that began in Fall 2016. At that time, Artists Space was forced to begin looking for a new executive director after Stefan Kalmár announced that he would leave his post to join the ICA in London. In the wake of his departure, the staff of Artists Space invited the same group of artists presenting work in the current show to “mediate and lead” a series of conversations and workshops entitled Authorization Sessions; these sessions were designed to facilitate a process of institutional self-examination and reevaluation during Artists Space’s transition period.

After its extended period experimenting with alternative modes of internal organization, Artists Space announced its new director and chief curator, Jay Sanders, who started in April 2017. As a result, the period of transition and negotiation that serves as one of this show’s central themes came to an end. Yet the question regarding what constitutes an “ethical” non-profit remains open, despite the change in leadership. These circumstances give the show an overriding sense of uncertainty, present both in the ongoing process of ethical deliberation it entails and in the artworks themselves.

Meanwhile, Houston-Based artist Devin Kenny hacks the “life hack”: Instead of clickbait listicles on increasing productivity, Kenny’s problem-solving tips amplify human flourishing, both materially (by redirecting institutional resources) and aesthetically, eschewing the conceptualist urge to “strip down” an artwork to its “barest elements” (time, space) in favor of the jam-packed. Working with The New Inquiry’s Bail Bloc software, Kenny has set up a blockchain rig in Artists Space to mine currency for bail funds for the duration of the exhibition. His intervention within the non-profit’s usual mode of capital circulation explores the ways in which blockchain technology could offer new models of decentralized, semi-autonomous community-building, while its real-world effects are still in the process of being determined. Drawing attention to overlaps between the non-profit and prison industrial complexes, the accompanying exhibition text notes that the cryptocurrency miner will likely generate much less than the cost of the exhibition as a whole.

On a similar note, Kenny’s work, *Do You Even Talk To Your Neighbors?* (2018), utilizes an oil-drum-turned-barbeque into a Faraday cage, insulating it from electrostatic and electromagnetic signals. By enacting something like site-specific encryption, this work evokes the typology of a “temporary autonomous zone,” but one that is always-already compromised by virtue of systemic anti-blackness and the predictive, all-encompassing technologies of networked surveillance infrastructures. It is notable that the barbeque is produced by Brooklyn chef Alabama Joe, who regularly hosts free cookouts; the work gestures toward fleeting moments of fugitivity at the same time that it indexes structural conditions of violent enclosure. One of Amelle Dublon and Constantina Zavitsanos’s several pieces meanwhile scientifically demonstrates quantum entanglement by using a Mach-Zender interferometer to enact what is known as the “quantum eraser experiment.” Nearby, their video, *April 4, 1980* (2018), ponders the mysteries of love and space-time; vocoded narration states that “matter isn’t mass,” asking “what it is to fall in love when we can’t even fall through space-time?”



Devin Kenny, “What would Upski think?”, 2018, Artists Space, New York, 2018. Photo: Daniel Pérez. Artists Space, New York, 2018.

John Neff's video, *Manhattan Project* (2016-2018), documents the process whereby Artists Space sought his guidance. The viewer sees Neff and the Artists Space staff dining and getting drinks together—events we all know occur “behind the scenes” but which are rarely documented for public consumption. Neff's project is to some extent an adaptation or “cover” of conceptual artist Tom Marioni's ongoing work, *The Act of Drinking Beer With Friends is the Highest Form of Art* (1973–), in which Marioni hosts nights of drinking in a gallery setting. In one punny, sweet moment of social practice, Neff takes Artists Space staff members out for Manhattan cocktails, foregrounding the gallery's mythologized location. They discuss a typically fraught work/life balance in urban post-Fordism, which in turn highlights the official/unofficial networking labor that allows art institutions to survive. Within this context, it becomes clear that prevailing economic conditions make it even harder for “scenes” to be sites of community-building and solidarity, if they ever were.

Coop Fund, Amalle Dublon & Constantina Zavitsanos, Devin Kenny, John Neff is generatively out of sync with itself: Pieces don't always line up with one another in obvious ways. The imbalanced nature of the relationship between Artists Space and the artists themselves is illuminated quite clearly, while the mutual aid projects are self-consciously piecemeal. Instead of saying something definitive or novel for the sake of theory production, the exhibit refuses to affirm or discard the institution as such, reflecting the ambivalent, materially-bound relationship that many artists have with art institutions. Foregrounding its own uncertainty, the show does a commendable job of putting its cards on the table.