

ARTSEEN

WEBEXCLUSIVE

## Coop Fund: Amalle Dublon & Constantina Zavitsanos, Devin Kenny, John Neff

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Coop Fund is the result of a series of workshops and conversations between Artists Space's staff and participating artists from early 2017 to March 2018, when the gallery was without a director or a permanent exhibition space. The exhibition sets a tone, rather than an explicit agenda, in a moment of institutional self-reckoning before the gallery's relocation to Tribeca later this year. Building on Artists Space's history as an institution whose program has increasingly emphasized community participation and political organization (see last year's *Decolonize This Place*, which turned the gallery into a weekly activist meeting hub), Coop Fund foregoes traditional media like painting or sculpture in favor of video, art-science hybrids, updated junk sculpture, and institutional critique, making an implicit statement about these media that, for their associations with high-modernist seriousness, are appropriate to a politically engaged exhibition.

The show is bookended by two *cinéma vérité* videos by John Neff. *Manhattan Project* (2016–18) loosely weaves together scenes of Neff's meetings with the gallery's staff and episodes from less decorous social ventures, with the Manhattan cocktail—and drinking in general—appearing as a leitmotif. Work, pleasure, and obsession intermingle in Neff's narrative, which dramatizes both Artists Space's director-less flux and the art world's pervasive blurring of distinctions between professional and emotional forms of labor. At one point, we hear an Artists Space staffer in a downtown dive bar explain the gallery's horizontal organizational structure while assistant curator Harry Burke stabilizes a precarious pyramid of cocktail glasses. *Tony Greene Movie* (2014–16) similarly explores the blurry work-play balance of artistic labor via a visit to New York by Neff's boyfriend that coincides with the planning and execution of Neff's curatorial project focused on the painter Tony Greene at a Chicago gallery. The tone shifts subtly from diaristic to documentary to expository, with Neff seeming to, on more than one occasion, test the patience of his subjects (including Artists Space curator Jamie Stevens). Artists Space originally commissioned Neff to undertake research on inquiry-based learning, an education model based on exploratory and observational techniques; the fact that this is the artist's response suggests that his ambivalent manipulations are meant in part to comment on the art world as a social system absent traditional hierarchies and organization. Neff has also tested several wall paint colors and window-cleaning liquids throughout the gallery space, a hands-on, though nearly invisible, engagement with the unglamorous maintenance of the gallery's ongoing operations.

The works on view throughout the exhibition extend late-modernist concerns regarding art's production and circulation to institutional conditions beyond the art system. Devin Kenny's "What Would Upski Think?" (2018) is a readymade S7 computer that the artist has manipulated to noisily mine cryptocurrency from the internet, procuring money that will be donated to the nonprofit Bronx Freedom bail fund. Both *More or Less* (2017)—a performance video in which Kenny tries and fails to elude an automatic light switch's motion sensor—and Amalle Dublon and Constantina Zavitsanos's *Interferometer (Quantum Eraser)* (2018)—a tabletop experiment-cum-light sculpture that uses photons to demonstrate properties of quantum particles—give form to themes of (in)visibility, measurement, and entanglement. As three different types of demonstration, these works propose the art exhibition as a format for investigating the intersection of socioeconomic, cultural, and epistemological intangibilities, while positioning the (nonprofit) gallery as uniquely qualified to present these investigations.

The exhibition's titular centerpiece, Dublon and Zavitsanos's *Coop Fund* (2018), is a simple crowdsourced funding platform designed to allocate contributions to specific artists' projects through a democratic process. The fledgling organization is represented by a printed handbook, an infographic poster, and a table and chairs, around which interested parties can sit, read, and discuss proposals. A simple tin bucket serves as a kind of logo, appearing in pixelated clip-art form on *Coop Fund's* printed materials and website. On one hand, the organization is presented as low-budget, pragmatic, and utilitarian; on the other, it updates the administrative aesthetics of paperwork pervasive in postwar conceptual art. The cool affect and implied neutrality inherent to this stripped-bare aesthetic remains as seductive today as it was in the '60s. However, *Coop Fund* mobilizes conceptualism's detached anti-aesthetic to signal the organization's aloofness from style in favor of a dedication to institutional transparency and democratic participation.



John Neff, *Authorization Sessions Set*, 2018, Manhattan Project, 2016–2018. Courtesy Artists Space, New York.

All of this contrasts sharply in tone and substance with a new wave of Expressionist painting and sculpture found elsewhere on the gallery circuit in Lower Manhattan, which tends to emphasize eccentric pictorial modes and the idiosyncrasies of individual creativity at the expense of critical examination of art and its social function. In comparison, Coop Fund equates progressive formal experimentation in a modernist mode with ethical probing and the possibilities of a socially engaged program. The show's aims are sometimes lofty, but its vision of an updated modernism that might engage with pressing issues that concern institutions both within and beyond the art world feels timely and sincere. It signals good things to come when the gallery settles into its new home.