

# **B**UILDING **L**EVERAGE **O**VER **C**REATIVE **C**APITALISM

**BLOCC** seeks to alter the relationship between Contemporary Art and gentrification. While not exceptional in its relationship to gentrification, the Contemporary Art field is but one arm of an extensive global drive for urban renewal and social cleansing. A phenomenon that is now running rampant across urban centres and peripheries globally. Whether intentionally or inadvertently, the artistic field (galleries, project spaces, artist studios, beautification projects, biennials, and cultural capital) has become, at best, a useful pawn in this process and, at worse, an eager profiteer.

With its educational curriculum and online platform, **BLOCC** will unpack ways in which the artistic field—with its reliance on deregulation, mobility and precarity—feeds neatly into the capitalist wheels of gentrification. Tools which might train a new generation of artists to reallocate the resources of Contemporary Art in the fight against displacement and the financialization of living space.

As the first step in this multi-pronged approach, our group has developed a series of educational modules, aimed at equipping art students with the tools to address the ever-changing relationship between the artistic field and contemporary capitalism. These modules amount to a series of lectures, discussions and exercises, all working to counter Contemporary Art's role in the production of cities where the majority of inhabitants cannot afford to live.

**BLOCC** was designed by the fellows of Sommerakademie Paul Klee 2017-2019 as a response to Tirdad Zolghadr's REALTY framework.

# ARTISTIC FOOTPRINT: EXAMINING ART'S RELATIONSHIP TO GENTRIFICATION - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Workshop Conducted by: Alexis Mitchell

Since the 1980s, in cities across North America, artists have often been thought of the 'footsoldiers of gentrification', but how did this perception come to be, and is this a perspective shared globally? This module will approach the topic at hand by first outlining some of the political and economic issues globalizing cities are faced with. By learning about the forces that shape our cities, we will come to understand the ways the artistic field has been caught in the fast moving wheels of urban change. After addressing the North American context as one important example among many, we will then move through a number of case studies from the last few decades, in cities such as New York, Rio de Janeiro and Berlin, to understand where the artistic field has intersected with the larger forces of urban displacement, and will outline places for intervention within this dangerous dynamic.



Crosby Street & Spring Street, SoHo New York, 1978. Image credit: Thomas Struth.

Alexis Mitchell (b. 1983, Toronto) is an award-winning artist and scholar whose works have shown at festivals and in galleries internationally, including the Glasgow Short Film Festival, the Images Festival, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and is included in a number of publications such as C Magazine, the Los Angeles Review of Books, and the forthcoming book *Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture*. Her videos and installations use space and place to reconfigure the political spectres of belonging. She often works collaboratively, most consistently with artist Sharlene Bamboat under the name Bambitchell. Mitchell is a PhD Candidate in Human Geography and Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto where she holds a SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship and a Joseph A. May Scholarship, exploring the history and politics of the Jewish summer camp.

# BLOG

## BEYOND POINTING

Workshop Conducted by: Heather M. O'Brien and Jonathan Takahashi

"The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?" - Fred Moten

As artists, we are part of the problem. Our presence and cultural privilege assists in the process of active displacement of low income and working class communities. Oftentimes, we too must move out. This described guilt can become an opportunity to begin unpacking our own personal misplaced ideas of erasure in a hyper capitalized cityscape. How do we survive complicity? Our precarity, realized and scrutinized, can be a resource instead of the typical well of infinite despair. It takes time to learn how to point at a problem, yet too often we feel the work ends there. When it comes to Contemporary Art, there's a certain cultural capital gained by criticizing capitalism, but it doesn't necessarily mean we are putting anything on the line to dismantle it. Armed with the understanding of the historical and political relationships gentrification has played within major metropolitan cities, this module will move towards a place where artists can resist becoming instrumentalized for commercialized financial tidal waves. We will reconsider where we live and work, how to build bonds of co-struggle with our neighbors, and how to pursue research that is genuinely on-the-ground. Before looking at the planetary, we must learn from and center the local voices of those most affected by displacement. How might we encourage popular education and empowerment without permitting ourselves to ride the waves of gentrification, as if absolved from questions of property speculation and skyrocketing rents? What if we see our role as artists as being deeply tied to the health of our neighborhoods?



Image Credit: Heather M. O'Brien

Heather M. O'Brien and Jonathan Takahashi are artists and educators based in Beirut, Lebanon. They began collaborating in Los Angeles, CA, in a group called School of Echoes, which operates as an open listening process of community-based research, popular education, and organizing to generate experiments in political action. In 2015, School of Echoes joined with others to form the LA Tenants Union / Sindicato de Inquilinos de LA, a membership-based tenant-centered movement fighting for the human right to housing for all.

# BLOCC

## DRAWING BLUEPRINTS FOR POTENTIAL ART SPACES

Workshop Conducted by: Luiza Crosman

This is a practical seminar, in which participants draw possible blueprints for art spaces and art institutions, focusing on their relationships, operations and impact within the city and the local art context. After all, critiquing institutional models implicitly or explicitly implies, a counter model. In order for us to understand the place of art institutions and art spaces within urban infrastructure, and to develop such counter-models, a coherent account of the impact of these existing spaces in urban neighborhoods must be produced. Departing from a local case study - depicting its successes and problems - and through the exploration of various diagramming and drawing practices, the participants will work on altering the initial depictions, moving towards a new model of operation. The seminar will also explore the changing role of institutional critique, from a passive critical position, to a speculative and pro-active tool, by dislocating its common association with discursive language in favor of a new association with visual language and its own semantics.

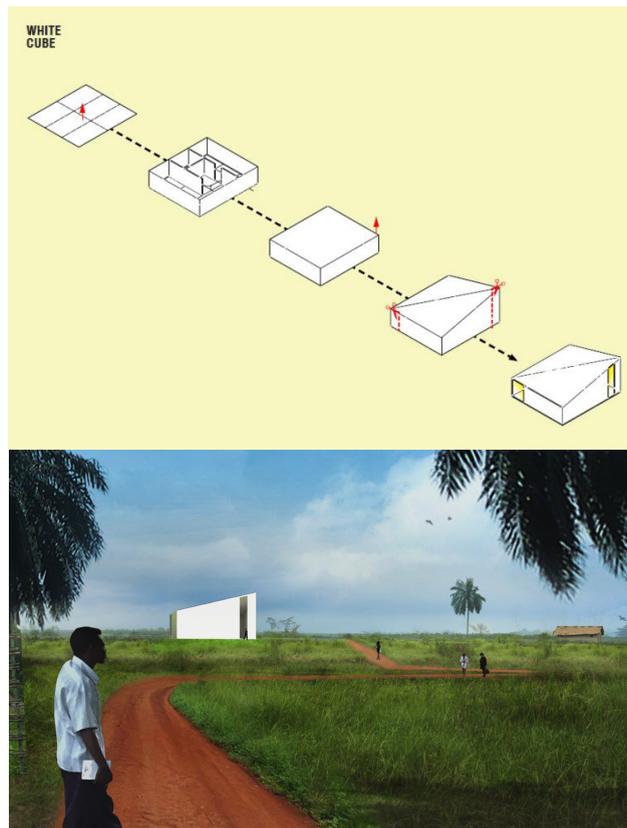


Diagram and render of the White Cube in Lusanga. Image Credit: OMA.

Luiza Crosman (Rio de Janeiro, 1987) is an artist, writer and researcher on institutional dynamics, context production, circulation patterns and subjective agency. Her work often involves positive feedback loops, using recursive systems referring back to a given original event. This manifested across drawings, text, installation and workshops and in the interest of visualizing how things are in movement, and thereby creating possibilities of a future. She was part of the directorial team of the exhibition space casamata between 2014-2017 in Rio de Janeiro and is currently a member of the working group *Negozi Automatico*.

# BLOCC

## ART AND THE BUILDING

Workshop Conducted by: Johanna Bruckner and Alexandros Kyriakatos

The starting point of the discussion will be the Kunst am Bau legislation, in Switzerland and other countries, interrogating the loopholes, both within the law and the policy it spawns. Following a description of Kunst am Bau, the principal focus of this course will examine how one arm of existing policies could be transformed into public policy. One which enables social infrastructures beyond the artistic production currently emerging from the 1% share of new building construction budgets. In this context, Art and the Building is researching the means to challenge two hegemonic neoliberal models: the artist as a creative worker, and the artist as an urban planner. Students will adopt a critical approach to the Contemporary Art field as part of the finance-driven political economy related to housing – and also to labour issues. Through theoretical analysis and discussion, group projects and urban walks, the students will be able to critically position themselves to Kunst am Bau, which often leads to gentrifying processes, and hopefully to develop a more proactive position towards it .



Image credit: Johanna Bruckner, 2017

Johanna Bruckner was born in Vienna in 1984 and is based between Hamburg and Zurich. She has studied Fine Arts, Cultural Studies and Social Anthropology in Vienna, Berlin, New York, Stockholm and Hamburg. Bruckner is interested in the conditions of labour that have been emerging in response to the technologies of communicative capitalism. Her work has been included in exhibitions internationally, most recently, at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, and the 17th WRO Biennale, Poland. She has lectured at institutions and universities, and received numerous grants, most recently, the Hamburg Stipendium for Fine Arts. She teaches at the Zurich University of the Arts.

The relationship between art and urbanism is at the center of Alexandros Kyriakatos' practice, particularly the transition of industrial to postindustrial space. He frequently uses site specific interventions to activate the memory of space, but also artist walks, performance, archival materials and ephemeral constructions. Kyriakatos is a member of the err collective ([errcollective.com](http://errcollective.com)), which recently participated in AB5to6 - Omonoia Athens Biennale 2016. He's currently collaborating with Werkbund SWB-Romandie, in the context of the project COSMOS. Kyriakatos' professional background is psychology and neurosciences; he has worked as a post doctoral scientist in the Faculty of Life Sciences at the Federal Polytechnic School in Lausanne (EPFL).

# BLOCC

## DEVELOPING ART

Workshop Conducted by: Crystal Z Campbell

Does Contemporary Art have the capacity to catalyze, counter, exploit, negate, amplify, or capitalize on the phenomenon of gentrification? Within other BLOCC modules, we have explored the correlation between an unregulated art market and the implied protocol of being an artist who is both untethered, yet bound to a series of unspoken codes and economic conditions which feed back into a compounding system of gentrification. In this module, we will discuss the creative strategies artists employ to generate artwork centering on the theme of gentrification and displacement. We will address the problematics of representing gentrification, the aesthetics of organizing as art, the efficacy of art as political tool, artist as developer, and the limits of creative production as proposition. Central to this module is the artwork and artist's positionality, which we will examine beyond the artist's good intentions.



Image Credit: Project Row Houses: Round 46 (Black Women for Black Lives Matter), Houston, TX, 2017

Crystal Z Campbell is a visual artist and writer of African-American, Filipino & Chinese descents. Campbell uses art as a tool and history as material to rupture collective memory, imagine social transformations and question the politics of witnessing. With visual art, writing, and community projects, Campbell proposes alternate perceptions of archival material and unsettled historical and contemporary narratives: Henrietta Lacks' immortal cell line, gentrification and the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre amongst others. Campbell has exhibited internationally: SculptureCenter, ICA Philadelphia, Artissima (IT), Studio Museum of Harlem, Project Row Houses in Texas, Art Rotterdam (NL) and De Appel Arts Centre (NL). Selected honors include Skowhegan, Rijksakademie, Van Lier Fellowship at Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program, Mondriaan Fonds, Smithsonian Research Fellowship, Yaddo and MacDowell Colony. Campbell is a second-year Tulsa Artist Fellow.

# BLOCC

## NAMING THE CONDITIONS THAT PRODUCE A SITUATION THAT DEMANDS AN ART LIKE THIS<sup>1</sup>

Workshop Conducted by: Bahar Noorizadeh

By way of continuous erasure and dissolution of its boundaries into life, the field we know today as Contemporary Art holds a strong enmity to determining its own conventions and rules of inclusion. What structures are formed as a result of the field's tenacious refusal of structures - be it in academic schooling, bureaucratic institutions, or didactic discourse? And what programs do these collateral structures - now implicit institutions in their own right - pursue? In this workshop, we spotlight the institution of Contemporary Art as a social habitat and a market-economy in order to identify definitions that enable us to demarcate and possibly regulate the field. The ensuing disposition will later be employed, via group surveys and writing exercises, to address our many reverberations on the global surround.

<sup>1</sup> Title refers to Nina Simone's rendition of the poorly written and vague lyrics of the song Feelings at Montreux Jazz Festival - Simone stops a few minutes into the song and comments, "Can't believe the conditions that produced a situation that demanded a song like that."



James Cohan gallery camouflaged in Chinatown NYC, installation by Omer Fast. Image Credit: James Cohan Gallery, 2017

Bahar Noorizadeh is an artist, writer and filmmaker. She works on reason-oriented aesthetics in relation to the reformulation of hegemonic time narratives as they collapse in the face of speculation: philosophical, financial, legal, futural, etc. Noorizadeh concurrently works on the desubjectification of experience as a pathway for producing new social subjects. She is pursuing her practice via developing the collaborative project [Beirut] Protocol, namely, a support system that aims to formulate artists' interests as a socioeconomic class in order to extract logistically viable guidelines for negotiating Contemporary Art and its economy.