

Skype Chat W.A.G.E..

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[11/25/09 3:07:16 PM] W.A.G.E.: Hi from W.A.G.E..

[11/25/09 3:07:45 PM] Oraib: Hey, are Aisha and Steiner on the same account name with you?

[11/25/09 3:07:56 PM] W.A.G.E.: Yes.

[11/25/09 3:08:08 PM] W.A.G.E.: hold on getting some things set up

[11/25/09 3:08:43 PM] W.A.G.E.: we ready

[11/25/09 3:09:30 PM] Oraib: ok perfect. So I am going to go through some questions that I have been thinking of. Take your time answering...

[11/25/09 3:10:01 PM] W.A.G.E.: ok start w/ first question

[11/25/09 3:11:57 PM] Oraib: So I am going to start off with my question of institutions having changed considerably in the past 30 years. Their role in exhibition making, artist community building, critical practice etc. has totally transformed - often to our horror (perhaps) - so how do rights advocated by W.A.G.E. reflect that change since the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC)?

[11/25/09 3:13:22 PM] W.A.G.E.: There's more artists, a changed economy in value and cultural capital, the internet (exposure) and a MFA-based artist-production system. Plus the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) doesn't offer individual grants. And prob some other things. We're not historians, but a great book is Julia Bryan-Wilson's...

[11/25/09 3:14:00 PM] W.A.G.E.: 'Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era'.

[11/25/09 3:14:48 PM] Oraib: But how does that change what you are advocating for, or the rights you have chosen to focus on?

[11/25/09 3:19:25 PM] W.A.G.E.: Actually little has changed unfortunately (see Hollis Frampton's letter from 1973 to MoMA on our site). We're more focused on one particular issue- the implementation of artist fees and institutional budget transparency. The AWC took on a myriad of important issues, as a whole- labor rights, the Vietnam War, gender & race relations, representation. Our reasoning is that we needed to be highly focused.

[11/25/09 3:22:55 PM] Oraib: One last thing on the AWC (and it seems that keeps coming up when people speak of W.A.G.E.)- AWC was really created within a broader civil rights and anti-war movement. I am interested in W.A.G.E.'s context...or political backbone if you will. In some places you openly state 'we are

capitalist pigs' in others you try and reconcile being 'pro worker' and 'pro capitalist' all at once. It's interesting, but can you expand on it?

[11/25/09 3:36:12 PM] W.A.G.E.: We are pissed that we even have to fight this fight. It's ridiculous. We are not in denial or naive- we're functioning in a capitalist system; so if people think it's capitalist, it's cause it is. We want to get paid for work- it seems fairly obvious. Then there are the people that label it a socialist agenda. And it may be that as well... because we believe in the well-being of all artists. Our real question is, how, in our late-capitalist society, can one not be pro-worker AND pro-capitalist. Are they not intrinsically entwined at the moment? The art institutions that do not pay us play by the rules of late-capitalism- and WORSE because they participate in wage theft. We need to be able to participate in income distribution by receiving payment for our work from them. Then we can distribute the monies as we please, hopefully with a conscience and be fully engaged in the economy as whole.

[11/25/09 3:41:28 PM] Oraib: I find Maria Eichhorn's work on the Artist Contract fascinating (and more recently the book publication of that exhibit/research) because you really see how quickly it was getting dated from the time of the initial contract, to her research, to her exhibition, and then to the book! I mean we are running, skidding, spinning out of control in our relation to the market economy. To think that some once accused Hans Haacke of contributing to speculation, monetizing his labour, over-commodifying the art world at large because he protected his rights in what should be a standard artist's contract on sale and resale, maintenance, royalties etc...it's actually absurd now in retrospect! And yet, like you said we are here, how do we deal with it now. On to my next question then...

[11/25/09 3:42:51 PM] Oraib: How are you individually requesting your rights as practicing artists- the three of you here in this chat? How many yes's to every no do you get, individually, as artists when claiming your rights for say artists fees for an exhibition or a screening or a performance?

[11/25/09 3:43:03 PM] W.A.G.E.: We agree that artists, ourselves, are a huge part of the problem and that's why we consider ourselves a consciousness-raising group.

[11/25/09 3:51:24 PM] W.A.G.E.: W.A.G.E..'s propaganda- our message (see www.wageforwork.com), talks and discussions- has been an empowering tool when dealing with institutions. With W.A.G.E., there is now less of a fear of speaking to the issue of requesting payment for work- you're not the "crazy" person anymore if you're an artist, performer, arts worker and/or independent curator. That doesn't mean it's still not risky or unpredictable to ask for payment- many situations have produced varied results. There's less of a surprise, shock or offense now when people ask if or what the fees are. Because of W.A.G.E.. And we are working on a re-write/update of the Siegelau contract...

[11/25/09 3:55:33 PM] Oraib: It depends, I know you are NY-focused and -centered but where I come from (in Jordan at least) sometimes you are even expected to leave a work behind for the museum collection exhibiting your work, as a favour, if you will, for putting up your work. On the one hand they really don't have the cash flow for exhibitions, on the other hand, Excel sheets are as common as note-pads now in a society relying on aid. So someone is drawing a budget and you are entitled to ask for it, so that at least next time they budget for it...but still you will sound crazy asking to be paid esp for a rotating exhibition.

[11/25/09 3:55:51 PM] Oraib: Also I have to say...

[11/25/09 3:56:42 PM] Oraib: when some artists in NY have openly and publicly claimed their exhibition fee for a rotating exhibition, it did seem high to me?...and so I can actually imagine a burden for something like a group show. So what's the limit or the logic? Do you have an accessible standard document like CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation/le Front des artistes canadiens) that is downloadable for artists claiming it?

[11/25/09 3:57:41 PM] Oraib: Sorry I just asked too many questions!

[11/25/09 4:03:36 PM] W.A.G.E.: Who or what fee are you talking about- "claimed their exhibition fee for a rotating exhibition, it did seem high to me?..."?

[11/25/09 4:04:38 PM] W.A.G.E.: We direct people to CARFAC because their fee schedule is so thorough.. we don't have a fee schedule developed yet, but CARFAC bases its new schedule on the institution's budget and annual plans.

[11/25/09 4:07:26 PM] W.A.G.E.: If people are interested in these issues, they must be active based on the realities of their own community. Budgets are complicated monsters, but it is often HOW the money is distributed and to whom- not that there "isn't any". And transparency is the first HUGE hurdle. We must be participating in a dialogue with these institutions, grants makers etc. so that policy is decided based not only on the institution's "feelings" of where their money should go, but also the needs of the arts community that they rely on for their livelihood. It's unfortunate that new art institutions are following this U.S. model of exploitation of cultural workers- we see this applied to the worker in general in late capitalism. It will be our goal to make art institutions HAPPY and SATISFIED that they have been conscious with their budgets and can offer honoraria, fees or stipends.

[11/25/09 4:10:00 PM] W.A.G.E.: Also- asking U.S. artists (obviously we don't know the tax laws in Jordan) to donate a work to an institution is complicated because artists cannot write-off the value of their works, only the cost of materials (but collectors can write-off the market-value of their "purchases" when donating). See the Artist-Museum Partnership Act that has still not passed on our site. It's bribery for an institution to ask that of you.

[11/25/09 4:10:59 PM] Oraib: I just deleted a few sentences because I realized my question is more basic- how do I calculate my actual costs as an artist- give me some examples of undisclosed expenses?

[11/25/09 4:14:34 PM] W.A.G.E.: One can value their artwork and labor how they see fit, including materials, but also labor. How long does it take to make your work, including research. Do you mean how do we calculate wages? Until we get to a point of having a standardized system, this is all up to personal negotiation, but we are seeking a standard of base fees with institutions based on their annual budget.

[11/25/09 4:15:12 PM] W.A.G.E.: and in the meantime can you be specific about whose fees are so big

[11/25/09 4:16:54 PM] Oraib: I wasn't referring to anyone's fees being too big. I was saying in the case of rotating exhibitions fees do add up...and I referred to an entry on your blog as a case in point at El Museo del Barrio.

[11/25/09 4:17:54 PM] Oraib: So thinking time included?

[11/25/09 4:22:06 PM] W.A.G.E.: yes thinking time is included in ones practice.. which is exactly the point. There's A LOT that contributes to the 'value' of work. But the point with CARFAC fees is that the "actual" value is basically irrelevant and you are actually asking to get paid for very specific contributions to a show (i.e. installation, copyright,..

[11/25/09 4:22:13 PM] W.A.G.E.: etc.

[11/25/09 4:23:41 PM] W.A.G.E.: As far as things like group exhibitions, institutions- like any organization with a budget- need to plan for their expenses, and artists cannot be left out of this equation. As humans, we've figured out a lot of things and it would be absurd to think that institutions can't abide by an ethical system and provide fees to the people they work with, esp. when many of these institutions ask for entry fees and receive non-profit status, i.e. don't pay taxes.

[11/25/09 4:24:04 PM] Oraib: But how do you respond if some artists, especially so called emerging ones, feel they can not afford to demand artist fees with so much competition around now? That they are negotiating their way out of a possible opportunity even. For example many artists responded to the Sieglaub Artist's Contract by saying that collectors will simply turn to other less demanding artists who do not use the contract.

[11/25/09 4:25:43 PM] W.A.G.E.: you should check out his video and his rant on the way 'amateurism' effects the 'professionalism'.

[11/25/09 4:25:46 PM] W.A.G.E.:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mj5IV23g-fE>

[11/25/09 4:26:51 PM] W.A.G.E.: can u watch it now?

[11/25/09 4:27:01 PM] Oraib: Hang on...

[11/25/09 4:27:33 PM] Oraib: I need to use the bathroom too. And then we wrap up

[11/25/09 4:28:01 PM] W.A.G.E.: ok

[11/25/09 4:32:23 PM] Oraib: Fantastic....

[11/25/09 4:32:59 PM] Oraib: Spot on clip

[11/25/09 4:35:04 PM] W.A.G.E.: It's what we talked about at the beginning. Artists are not organized, nor are they conscious of these problems until it's too late and you've been working for free for over a decade or more. Artists have to value their own work and realize they're not interchangeable. The artists union in the 30's was largely responsible for securing the administration of fees through the Federal Arts Program (part of the WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION). So organizing and being conscious of what we do and under what terms is an integral step in changing the unethical and criminal system we, as cultural workers, are participating in and subject to.

[11/25/09 4:37:02 PM] Oraib: Ok I will keep it there. And on

[11/25/09 4:37:28 PM] Oraib: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mj5IV23g-fE> Harlan Ellison -- Pay the Writer . Thanks for that link

[11/25/09 4:38:13 PM] W.A.G.E.: btw- writers have a union

[11/25/09 4:39:00 PM] W.A.G.E.: and receive royalties on their books (but of course, not essays...)

[11/25/09 4:40:33 PM] W.A.G.E.: are we done?

[11/25/09 4:40:38 PM] Oraib: But this is sticky- because writers have it worse off than us in many cases. Royalties (if any) are also not abided by, and the work is never a reflection of the cost. But lets keep that for a face-to-face discussion! Anything else...?

[11/25/09 4:40:40 PM] Oraib: Thanks so much

[11/25/09 4:40:55 PM] Oraib: I'll see you soon...

[11/25/09 4:40:56 PM] W.A.G.E.: you should tell us if you have more questions

[11/25/09 4:41:26 PM] Oraib: That should do for now...

[11/25/09 4:41:37 PM] W.A.G.E.: ok. Thanks much for having us!

[11/25/09 4:41:57 PM] W.A.G.E.: let us know if you have any follow-up needs

[11/25/09 4:42:35 PM] Oraib: I actually will on email tonight probably.

[11/25/09 4:42:45 PM] Oraib: bye

[11/25/09 4:43:09 PM] W.A.G.E.: ok bye! (hug emoticon)

[11/25/09 4:43:19 PM] W.A.G.E.: X W.A.G.E..

[11/25/09 4:43:36 PM] Oraib: (thumbs up emoticon)

[11/26/09 5:32:24 PM] Oraib: Hang on, so what does the art world really mean with the word ""exposure""?

[11/28/09 7:47:27 PM] W.A.G.E.: Artists, institutions and arts organizations tend to focus on exposure as "payment" when it is most definitely not, and this is a big crux of the artist's complex regarding all of the issues we discussed today. Exposure is used as a deceptive tool, one which informs all of these negotiations. In fact, the request of fees should intrinsically be a part of all discussions btw an arts worker and the art institution/organization- like all other negotiations in our economic structure- so it shouldn't be an elective or selective point of discussion by the institution. And the fact that it currently is presents the largest hurdle. It should never be mandatory that an arts worker provide free services or labor. Both the institution and arts worker are receiving the benefits of exposure- this is the use value of our work; but that should not negate the exchange value of what we provide. That applies to the function of our economy, esp. since many artists, performers and independent curators do not have anything to "sell" or may/may not be successful in the "marketplace". The marketplace is a separate economy. And herein lies the underhanded agreement that is part + parcel of the unethical practices of these institutions. We like to stress in our talks that there is always something between nothing and something...

[11/28/09 7:52:42 PM] Oraib: Thanks.

[11/28/09 7:54:47 PM] Oraib: And real quick why are you re-creating an Artists Contract...does the Sieglaub Contract not work today? Who are you collaborating with to do that?

[11/28/09 7:57:25 PM] W.A.G.E.: We haven't begun that process- can't provide specifics, as of yet. It's something we want to do. We do hope to provide information, tools and space for the community to continue dealing with these important issues that have been lingering for decades.

[11/28/09 7:58:25 PM] Oraib: Ok great. That's all then.

[11/28/09 7:58:55 PM] W.A.G.E.: ok cool! As always, let us know if you need anything further...