

## Edgar Arceneaux, Charles Gaines &amp; Rick Lowe

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arceneaux-excerpt



Watts House Project volunteers painting a house exterior.

Outside his hometown of Los Angeles, Edgar Arceneaux is best known as a maker of graphic, crystalline drawings, recently of the underground histories of one of America's most contested cities: Detroit. But in LA, Arceneaux has a visible public presence as the executive director of Watts House Project, "a collaborative artwork in the shape of a neighborhood redevelopment project." The Watts House Project marries art, architecture, and sustainable community development to redefine a neighborhood that receives an influx of art tourists visiting the fabled Watts Towers. However, the community framework hasn't benefited much from the frequent visits to Simon Rodia's strange and incredible steel towers.

It was a similar impulse that engaged artist Rick Lowe to initiate Project Row Houses in Houston. In 1993, Lowe began meeting with residents in the Northern Third Ward district to imagine how this historic and struggling African American neighborhood could be reimaged in an economically sustainable way. In Project Row Houses, Project Row Houses has evolved from a single block to span six-and-a-half blocks, and it has spearheaded not only a major artist residency program (where Lowe and Arceneaux met), but has helped boost the community's basic services and infrastructure.

Charles Gaines is an artist and a professor at CalArts, where he taught Arceneaux. For several years, Gaines's work has emphasized the iconography of accidents, disasters, and environmental degradation as a means of analyzing how these phenomena are mediated and subjectively internalized. Gaines acts as something of a moderator for this discussion, which took place at his LA studio, bringing philosophical focus to a paradox faced by both Arceneaux and Lowe: what does it mean when the artwork itself assumes the guise of an institution?

—Nick Stillman

*In the Open: Art and Architecture for Public Spaces is sponsored by Cary Brown-Epstein + Steven Epstein with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State agency.*

**Edgar Arceneaux** I was introduced to the concept of the will to power in Charles's essay "The Theater of Refusal." I thought the concept was relevant to the Watts House Project because there's a struggle between the idea and its material manifestation. It possesses a non-utilitarian character because it justifies its own being. The work we're doing in Watts is normally bracketed within a community-service dialogue. I felt that *that*, as a concept, severely limits the work we're doing. Something I've tried to do at the site is focus on the creative act, not on fixed results. The problem with the notion of the will to power is that it perpetually justifies using art as vehicle to advance a particular message. The best art is paradoxical in

nature; concepts colliding without making sense or having a predetermined end.

**Charles Gaines** In the article, I was making a point that you're making: that the will to power is Nietzsche's critique of knowledge. Under this critique, the formation of ideas is driven by the need for power, not truth. Universal knowledge becomes its justification, since power reveals special interest—subjective—and truth claims objectivity. He speaks of it as a way of gaining agency and authority where concepts, ideas, or premises have this incredible egocentric base. Based on this, Edgar seems to propose that you advance political issues in art because you want to make them significant and to be considered. But in doing that, there's a problem of authority, where other things are cancelled out by your particular occupation of that space. I think you're saying that trying to pass an idea on that basis makes it a totalizing point that negates other positions.

**EA** Exactly. When you're in the space of making work, there are multiple readings and possibilities in which the work can move and flow, but if it's only understood as utilitarianism, then it's limited to this binary code of cause and effect: you do this, it makes a person's life better. Rick, could you talk about the case of values being expressed within an organizational structure and how you diffuse that across an organizational mission?

**Rick Lowe** So you create work, and you may have reason to bracket it in a particular way because it empowers you to continue to do what you're interested in doing. But then there are other people with different needs bracketing that same work in a way that suits them. That's the case when you're doing work that has an organizational structure or is community based. Most often in the art world, markets consume art in a way that empowers people in the market, monetarily. Everybody has their own way of bracketing things and extracting power.

**EA** The use of it from the minority position is that the acquisition of power or authority is justified by the struggle to replace or dismantle the current majority position. But the concept's flaw is that it is tied to finding pleasure by taking power from others. The danger is that once that power is established, one must maintain it by the same tactic used to get it.



A Watts House Project site in progress.

**RL** Often it's a complete disregard for others. That's real power, right?

**EA** You don't do that.

**RL** Of course I do. I think we all do it.

**EA** How do you manage that in the space of Project Row Houses? People there love you.

**RL** It's a battle to sustain my sense of purpose within that relationship. Socially engaged or community work is never stagnant. This is very different than most traditional artwork, where physical and social relationships are pretty defined. Sometimes there are opportunities for long-term sustainability in which you build structures; that's what I did with Project Row Houses. It was conceived by me as something that could be a transformative entity within a

neighborhood in Houston. It could have stopped as a one-shot thing: a group of artists doing some installation stuff in this depressed neighborhood, calling attention to it, and walking away. But folks got interested in contributing their expertise to develop the project into an ongoing activity. It became an organization. With any activity, everybody has their own sense of how they gain power and what kind of power is needed for sustainability.

**CG** Is the mission fluid?

**RL** It evolves. Right now it's at a very good state because I've learned that the broader your net is, the more capacity you have. Early on, we started with a mission that described historical preservation, brought artists into this low-income neighborhood, and provided education for youth and transitional housing for single mothers. Originally, we weren't looking philosophically beyond that. Later, we crafted a mission statement that didn't define but was a *potentiality*: to be a catalyst for community transformation through the celebration of African American history and culture. It's very broad, which leaves it open for people to figure out which roles they can play in it, creating this dynamic of constant power struggle. I've lost people in that process and gained others who saw opportunities.



The Watts Towers seen from a Watts House Project site.

**EA** I'm curious how you consider your role in the organization today as opposed to ten years ago.

**RL** Ten years ago, the sustainability of the organization was a huge part of my responsibility. Now I'm getting close to the point where I would like to be, where I think all artists should strive to be in their practice: the role that I play at Project Row Houses is effectively that of a resident artist. But because I've been in this process for so long, it's very easy for me to see creative opportunities for the institution. My role is to constantly funnel in creative ideas that help move the agenda forward. I think that's a role of artists we need to value within society. When Mierle Ukeles appointed herself the artist in residence of the New York Sanitation Department, it was more of a symbolic gesture. My thinking is that there should be a possibility to push that even further, that being an artist in residence with the New York Sanitation Department should be an *empowered* position.

**EA** Are you physically, kinesthetically involved? Like rolling up your sleeves and digging

ditches or moving pallets?

**RL** On some projects. Like Brother-N-Law's, the community store, or the wash-and-fold. I'm not doing the *work* but I'm lining up contractors to do the build-out, that kind of stuff.

**EA** Would you consider that a curatorial position?

**CG** There's the issue of definition.

**EA** It's an important question.

**CG** The question is: how are values or notions of art being played out at Project Row Houses? It's a location, an institution—additionally, with ideas about art practice. How is Project Row Houses playing out ideas of art practice—particularly within the standpoint of *works of art* as opposed to, say, curatorship? So you have to differentiate between work as a curator and work as an artist. I've got a general idea that art is the philosophical activity of proposing ways of seeing or looking at the world. The debate around socially engaged art that's difficult to address is what is *art* about it, because you're trying to solve the question in relationship to autonomous art. As long as you have to struggle against autonomous art, you have lost power as a practitioner. My idea is that the only way to produce art is to produce fewer identifiable activities of art practice. Adorno wrote that identifiable markers of art practice can play themselves out in a socially engaged practice which isn't devoid of politics. But he says nevertheless, "That is identifiably art." I don't agree with that, and I can accept the entire social network or social language as a place where art ideas can be placed. Art needn't be distinguished from other activities.

**RL** I like that, Charles. When you start trying to define nontraditional or socially engaged work in relation to traditional forms of practice, you put yourself in a pretty weak position.

**EA** Yes, because the practice is bracketed as a negation: it's *not* this, it's *not* that. It's only described in relation to its opposite, not as autonomous.

**RL** I'm going to stick with your word, "bracketing." You were bracketing the role I explained as curatorial. I've become accustomed to allowing many brackets to encompass what I do and I don't have a problem with it. I would even extend the curatorial bracket and say it's like teaching, too. On a daily basis. A big part of my practice—not just with Project Row Houses, but anywhere—is recruiting and involving collaborators who understand what the practice is about for me: introducing poetic moments into mundane activities. Hell, every community is trying to open a store and a washateria, so I have to convince people that it's about opening Brother-N-Law's, which is a *story*, a poetic gift to the community. I constantly remind people who work at Project Row Houses that the community we're building is part of that practice.

**EA** I actually don't think it is curating. This articulates a fundamental problem: the sense of necessity to describe what we do in concrete, functionalized modules. I've always felt like the best place to be in one's practice is complete uncertainty of what you're actually doing, but understanding intuitively and conceptually that it's *working*. A teacher, a philosopher, a person who makes people more aware of mundane things around them . . . I don't know what to call that other than to say that it's Rick. So it's sort of understood through a charismatic author, in your instance. How do you navigate being an enabler but also the manifestation of the organization? It produces an interesting dynamic between the individual as a practitioner and the institution itself.

**RL** I've dealt with that by running from being the embodiment of Project Row Houses. I've impacted and influenced it, but there are many other people who work in it. At the same time, when I try to run away from it, I sometimes find myself in battles and seek every source of power so that I can impose my identity on the project because of the feeling I have about it.



Charles Gaines. Installation view of *Airplanecrashclock*, 1997, 5 x 12 x 9', and a graphite drawing from the *Explosion* series, 2007. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects.

**CG** So Edgar, what about the presence of your subjectivity? What is it about this issue that's informative?

**EA** Well, as someone who is a progeny of both of you, I'm assuming there's some aspect of what you're doing that you hope is reproducible. I'm not trying to *resolve* the problems but to articulate them for other people who are interested in this kind of work. There are a ton of contradictions in here that are engaging engines for making work.

**RL** Let's take what you've been getting at and flip it. I didn't know how to do anything that a "director" does, which allowed me the freedom to just be the artist.

**EA** You mean you didn't have any formal training in economic or neighborhood redevelopment?

**RL** Being an artist is about intuition, insight, perception, imagination. You pull them all together and sometimes good things come out of it, but there's not much of a scientific approach. You've assumed the role of director of Watts House Project. Does that position give you more comfort in terms of your ability to assert power?

**EA** Fundamentally, I've always figured that when in the middle of a project, its evolution shouldn't be based on my personal taste but should be determined by the organization's interpretation of what the project needs. Once we decided that this continually expanding project needed to be an autonomous organization, I found myself being transitioned into the director position simply because there was nobody else suited to do it. Additionally, I believe it was a way for me to channel whatever reputation I've been able to build in the institutional art world into resources toward the project. I didn't really feel comfortable with the title, but to call myself anything else within this framework would have been insincere.

**CG** But there's a practicality to it. You guys created institutions, like it or not, and they have to run. The difference between the two of you seems to be one of temperament. You each created a concept and its institutional framework separates you from it, allowing you to think about what kind of relationship you're going to have with it as an artist. Rick, you used the words "creativity" and "intuition," and it sounds like these play out in how you want to relate to the autonomous thing you produced. Edgar, I don't think those are concepts that you have of yourself; therefore, unlike Rick, I don't think your project is an opportunity to experiment with ideas of your own subjectivity. Rick, the nature of the thing you produced creates for you a discussion about *what* and *how* to produce without compromising your identity as an artist. For you, the institution becomes this dynamic indeterminacy, a locus where any number of possible things can occur. "Institution" itself is normally considered hard and fast. Since your temperament as an artist is based on creativity and intuition, you find it hard to sustain these things within the normative framework of the institution. The difficult part is trying to resolve the issue between the dynamic nature of the individual who wishes to be free of constraints and the static organizational needs of the institution. You both have an object that appears much like—or is—an institutional structure. So it becomes a question of your relationship to

it.

**EA** I'm so glad we got that on tape. (*laughter*)

**RL** Charles, this relates to the relationship between work that is driven purely by creative intent and then work that is anchored in mundane, necessary activities. How does that struggle play itself out? It relates to teaching, which you do. You bring your own energy to it and your work comes out of it. With artists who don't live 100 percent of the time in that creative space, there's always that dynamic of trying to reconcile.

**EA** Charles, you're saying the relationship between the artist and object in our cases is complicated because we're working within a social framework.

**CG** The object has the resemblance of an institution!

**EA** I was wondering if the thing that ultimately complicates it and produces tension for both participants and audience is its relationship to class. I say "class" because I don't want to say "poverty," which is too totalizing a term. Are you saying there's a tension that's produced in relationship to the autonomy of the object? Or maybe that's what I'm saying.

**CG** Well, you have to resolve something about the hierarchy of relationships you have with other people involved in the project. I wasn't saying that specifically, but it's one of the consequences. That's a marker of the nature of the self and the nature of the object you made. You may want to be less authoritarian in relation to something you produced, but you're identified with the object as the producer. What that indicates is the autonomy of the object you produced. It's not just static—it lives in time and space; it's going to have its own ideas about things. How you deal with that depends upon your temperament.

**EA** What do you mean by "temperament?"

**CG** The way I interpret Rick's relationship with Project Row Houses is almost Deleuzian: Rick's like a rhizome constantly weaving in and out, like Magic Johnson.

**EA** Whoa, good thing this is only audio! (*laughter*)

**CG** He's constantly reconsidering his relationship to the object he made because of his self-perception; that's what I mean by temperament. Your relationship, Edgar, might be more systematic. Institutional structure does not conflict as much with your artistic temperament. I think Watts House Project is in fact being played out in accordance with your temperament. There's a certain idea of putting things together in your practice that becomes institutionally useful. For example, your desire to decentralize authority is a result of your affection for ideas of decentralization. Your role as director is more temperamental than ideological, driving you to implement institutional strategies that decentralize ideological authority. Even if your organizational strategies appear on the surface ideologically driven—political—they are in fact informed by the belief that the more systematically you approach the project, the more your own ego is disempowered. Community organizing is the institutional goal, but the way you play with organizational structure to create a non-egocentric institutional space reveals your critical and aesthetic interest—temperament—in structures.

**EA** That's beautifully said. There is a selfish aspect to me asking these questions, because I too want to have that rhizomatic relationship to the organization! (*laughter*) But right now it necessitates that I do a certain thing, and that has ramifications.

**RL** Charles, temperament shows up in other strands of life too. The way Edgar makes drawings is within his temperament. I could never draw with that precision.



Publicity image for Project Row Houses' Brother-N-Law's.

**EA** Charles, you've been teaching at CalArts for how many years?

**CG** (*Inaudible*)

**EA** How many? (*laughter*) Yeah, we'll check your resumé on that. Like Michael Asher, you performed a very important function at CalArts. My introduction to postcolonial theory and semiotics changed everything for me. You were the person I was always looking for. I had never met anyone who cared about the things I did, and who had an intellectual, systematic, and philosophical approach. Other practices I was being introduced to were more identity based or activist oriented. What is it about your temperament that you *didn't* do something outside of the school in your practice?

**CG** It would have been a stroke of genius for me to have framed an idea like Rick's in, like, 1969. There was no model; it wasn't even a possibility. A lot of things had to happen in order to get to the point where such ideas were conceivable. Even at the point that Rick conceived of them, it was a huge leap.

**RL** Had you done it then, Charles, you probably would have been so marginalized that Edgar wouldn't have met you at CalArts.

**CG** The only exception—this was 1972—was Judy Chicago's Womanhouse. But that was a very specific pedagogical effort. So I guess it was quite possible. But I didn't do it. I didn't have ideas that advanced a political use of art practice. What was most interesting to me were moments in the art experience when the world was redefined. To me, intellectual disciplines and ideas did that. Reading the ideas of others changed the way I thought and I could employ that and rethink what I did as an artist out of these new positions. I thought it was a way of radicalizing my thoughts and vision, really. Actually, I wasn't doing this alone; Michael Asher and John Baldessari are famous examples of a West Coast conceptualism: the idea of the classroom being an extension of the studio, where ideas are *part of* practice. For them, ideas were part of artistic production; that ideas were produced by artists who were *workers*. So the classroom was like a factory space for the production of ideas. I was in Fresno at the time and had no idea this was going on. But I treated the class as an experimental space. For years, I would have a class and although I didn't quite understand what I'd be giving people for reading, I'd say, "We're going to try to understand this together." For me, the classroom was a very experimental place, but at the same time, in my studio practice, I was making these rather mundane paintings.

**RL** It's interesting to hear you reference paintings as mundane; I'm always talking about mundane activities *outside* of art.

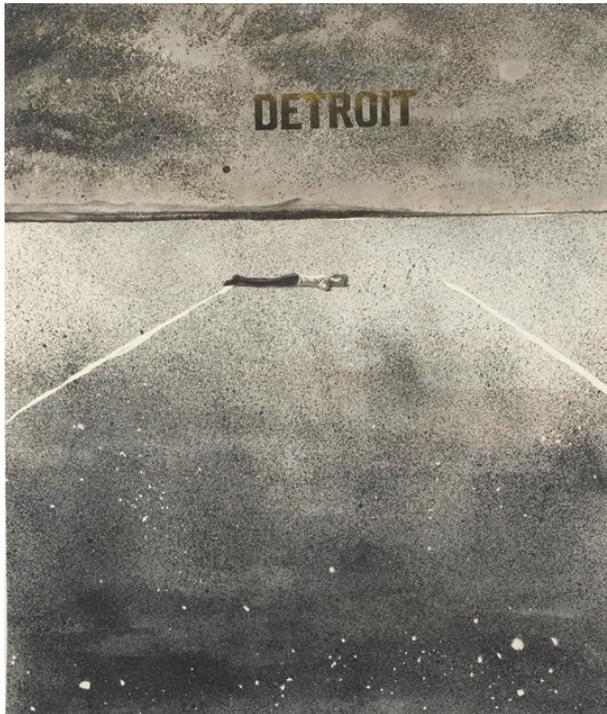
**CG** I started figuring out that the ideas that should be my art were the ideas I was sharing with students. That was the first moment of understanding the relationship between teaching and my studio. It was just luck that I got to CalArts, the only place that would tolerate this teaching approach.

**EA** Was there some degree of terror or did you feel total resolve in what to me seems like an incredibly terrifying transition to give up painting?

**CG** No, it was emancipating, because it came out of reading ideas, and going through the process of really making them part of you! I was reading Henri Focillon and ideas about form and chance; these led to my interest in systems. I could have made art in my studio for 16 trillion years and never would have come up with these ideas! A series of events culminating in seeing a Hanne Darboven exhibition—who made systematic and endlessly repetitious drawings around that time—cemented it. I rolled up the paintings and started working on something else.

**RL** There are three different temperaments here. Charles took advantage of the institutional framework to carry out the work he wanted to do, I'm continually dodging an institution I created but have never *controlled*, and Edgar has situated himself as an institution builder—but we've all revealed parts of our work through some kind of institutional structure that we've either brought about or forced ourselves upon.

**CG** I would buy that.



Edgar Arceneaux. Detroit, 2009, acrylic and graphite on paper, 73 × 61 1/2". Photo by Lutz Bertram.

**EA** Rick, in your project, you had to give up the studio practice entirely . . . well, maybe not entirely, but you stopped making paintings.

**RL** That's also because I wasn't very good at it! (*laughter*) Just you hope, Edgar, that you don't wake up and realize you're no good at your studio practice.

**EA** I have nightmares about it every night. I actually wrote Charles an email saying I was having these deep fears that I was going to lose it and not be able to make studio work anymore. . . he never responded. (*laughter*) He didn't even touch it!

**RL** Edgar, when I met you years ago, you were developing your skills as an artist in a traditional sense. What drew you to social engagement, community engagement, institution building? Because you didn't have to do that.

**EA** The Watts House Project is in a unique position to leapfrog over the dominant discourse within contemporary art, which, I think, is in kind of a negative spiral. Academia seems to constantly deal with the same issues over and over, issues around identity and representation

in relationship to the market. Because the WHP doesn't make anything object oriented—though the houses themselves are vehicles for people to rally around—we don't have to deal with issues of representation, for example. Or how to retell the story within the context of the museum—that would be impossible. You can't capture the experience of these moments in a museum.

But when I look out into the world—at science, biotechnology, chaos and complexity theories, and the rapid development in social networks and emerging economic models fueled by the Internet—things are happening that are so radical people don't even know what to call them. When I look at something like the operating system Linux, a viable alternative to Microsoft and Apple that is generated completely by volunteers and built on collaboration and cooperation and sharing . . . When you add up the amount of human hours people have collectively spent to build this thing, it's something like 60,000 human lifespans! It doesn't fall into this rhetoric in contemporary art about "collective production," which is viewed as a stepchild to studio or institutional practices. It's actually producing something emergent in our time, autonomous, complex, and free. And it really works! It's beautiful. So because I've always had a certain disdain for the art market and have realized after long conversations with Charles and others that there's an arbitrary relationship between the work that you make and the success you have in this business, I've found myself driven toward a practice where I'm steering the success of it. It's being articulated by a collection of people independent of the whim or taste of the powerful. Since my practice has always been invested in process, there's no compromise for me. The ramification is that I'm not having as many shows and not making as much money. But the reward is immeasurable. There's potential for some very radical opportunities and outputs that are unique to this place. I don't have to deal with the dilemma of how I export it to a major art center or to a collector base. People understand intrinsically that its power is local, but that it has a national and international scope in its approach or perspective. We care about three things: the families, the neighborhood, and the development of the craft. Nurturing these over time has been a lesson in figuring out that we can't be Project Row Houses and I can't be Charles. It took me a long time to figure out I couldn't be either one of you.

**RL** Clean your mirror! (*laughter*)

**EA** But this specific moment in time has produced a condition that allows for the practice to progress at a very rapid pass. It's the age of the incubator; progressive social models are being given tremendous resources to experiment and offer alternatives to dominant approaches that have proved either unsustainable or outdated. In California, the state must rethink its use of water or fall deeper into financial ruin. Green Streets Committees are being supported by Los Angeles in hopes of producing alternatives to the ways storm water is channeled, stored, or reused. These challenges are producing partnerships between planners, artists, architects, environmentalists, farmers, and average citizens. As we know, environmental imbalances go hand in hand with social imbalances, and the poor pay the greatest cost. From cities to corporations to art museums and foundations, all are reevaluating how to best service their audiences and are investing in incubator projects. The WHP has grown within this moment, one which I could not have predicted, and it's an exciting and engaging aspect of the work right now.

**CG** I'm not convinced that you're disenchanted with your studio practice.

**EA** I didn't say I was disenchanted with the studio *practice*; I said I was disenchanted by the market.

**CG** Okay, so the Watts House Project addresses the idea of the market but it isn't intended to address your studio practice. But as long as you *have* a studio practice, you're going to be drawn into the market. So there's an interesting paradox—which you probably would embrace—that keeps you from defining the project in completely instrumental terms. I was talking to Renée Green, who believes that any artwork has to be an echo of the history it is part of. So the market might be this strange factor, but there may be a paradoxical tension between an investment in both the Watts Houses and studio practice that may be unresolvable because of what your studio practice requires. How does one person do both of these things? In other words, it's back to Renée's question: to keep the Watts House Project from being entirely instrumental, it should exist within this indeterminate space of "art." Maybe the studio

practice is one way of maintaining that paradox.

**EA** Is it too broad to paint the market as a totality? The art market is pretty particular, right? It's a taste-driven economy.

**CG** See, I don't think it is a taste-driven economy. *Art* has always been driven by taste, but I think the art market is a capital-driven economy. It converts taste to capital. I have the same problems with the art market that you described; I regret that there isn't another way to disseminate works of art and that I need to have a relationship with a framework and structure that's completely mercantile. I can't do something to retreat completely. I could stop showing, but I don't think that's a solution.

What you're doing is being done *in relation* to the problems of the studio. You're not making static works of art, and a tension is produced by the paradox. It's quite beautiful how you described it—the idea of discovery being played out in your experience with developing this project. But I don't think you should try to establish it as something concretely autonomous to the problems of studio practice.

**EA** I didn't mean to give that impression. I love paradoxes and see them as perpetual-energy machines because they constantly force you to reorient your understanding of relationships among things. They don't allow for rest. This energy machine is embedded in the framework of the WHP, manifest as the friction between the activity—process as abstracted object—and the tangible results on the site. The architecturally renovated houses should be understood as markers of that activity. The result is a mutual benefit for both the neighborhood and its practitioners. Part of my answer to your question was emotionally driven, because we all understand that the way the social framework of the art world is set up—particularly in New York—is to strip your ability to self-validate. The control is external to you and can be taken from or given to you at any point. So to be able to maintain a practice over which you have agency is something I learned from you and your practice, Charles. I was also inspired by studying Sol LeWitt's work of determinate and indeterminate systems for making art that gauged the success or failure of the work objectively for the practitioner.

**RL** I hear what you're saying, and I'd be very interested to hear you five or ten years down the line. Many of the complications you just articulated about the art market are still there with the approach you're taking with Watts House Project. Whether you're aware of it or not, you're still in the art market. The art market is about capital. Artists enter the market to get some of it, and they release that control you're talking about. It's the same with institution building. Just look at the big cultural institutions in LA right now; they're all beholden to the market and the powerful.

**EA** From the gut, I can accept what you say to be true right now. But to participate in that system is not to the detriment of the other participants, the residents of East 107th Street in Watts.

**RL** But you're saying that the relationship between you and the art market is a detriment to you?

**EA** I don't know if I would necessarily flip it in that direction; what I'm saying is that since there's some aspect of intellectual knowledge we're producing on-site, that's pretty much all we make that can be exchanged. Everything else stays there.

**RL** Right, but you're going to continue to rely on the lifeline of the art market to allow you to explore those ideas. It's no different than the studio practitioner selling work in the market.

**EA** My issue isn't that the art market *exists*, it's that its forces push toward a kind of mediocrity. It expects one to conform to the most expedient ways of a justified end: to make a return. The evidence is found most clearly in the rising dominance and current decline of art fairs over the last decade or so. For fairs to be located in different cities implies a difference in the work they're showing. But most of the fairs consist of the same galleries and artists. The audiences for these events, though vast, only allow for the work to be discussed through bullet points and catchphrases for the ease and expedience of sales. No one is forced to participate, but the ripple effects are felt by everyone.

**RL** All I'm saying is that, institutionally, you'll also find yourself being forced to mediocrity all the time.

**CG** Edgar, I think in the beginning you created a microcosmic space with a set of parameters you felt you had power over or were extensions of you. Now it's leaking, being determined and influenced by external forces. LeWitt came up with a system and played it out so that nothing could enter. I think that's maybe what you're addressing. In these projects, the institutional framework can operate like a system, and you can then feel a certain autonomy that can justify the system.

**EA** That's but one part of it, though. Because we're not actually *making* anything, what we're producing are other kinds of pictures. That's completely exciting to me, because I don't know what those pictures are going to be like and they're producing a different kind of merit. We're not doing things at the site that filter into studio practice. The fact that the market doesn't have the same sort of effect on the WHP is one of its very promising characteristics, but not the thing that *produced* it. I would hope that at the end of this conversation, it doesn't appear that fleeing the art market was the rationale; it was a feature that I realized was a latent possibility. It proves that divergent art practice can be sustained and be mutually beneficial without being tied only to object exchange. I imagine this could be transposed to other types of practices, too. Though I often wonder about how all of this would be different if I didn't maintain a studio practice.

Charles, I was given pause by your comment about the disconnect between what you were teaching and the work you were making—your discovery that there were certain things you couldn't realize if the studio work didn't change. I feel like I'm at that point too. I'm making these installations, and I make them because they *were* the best vehicle to express my interests and ideas. But I feel like there's something else that should be introduced into that part of the practice, and I'm afraid of what that is.

*Edgar Arceneaux has had exhibitions at the Hammer Museum, The Kitchen, SF MoMA, Susanne Vielmetter, and the Studio Museum. In 2008 he appeared in the Whitney Biennial and the California Biennial. Since 1999, Arceneaux has been director of the Watts House Project, an ongoing collaborative work in the shape of a neighborhood redevelopment, centered around Los Angeles' Watts Towers.*

*Charles Gaines was included in the 2007 Venice Biennale; the 1999 Triennale der Photographie, Hamburg; the 2004 Esslingen Triennial; and the 1975 Whitney Biennial. He is represented by Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects; Kent Gallery, New York; and Brigitte March Gallery, Stuttgart. Awards: United States Artist Fellowship (2007); National Endowment for the Arts (1997).*

*Rick Lowe lives in Houston and is the founder of Project Row Houses. Exhibitions include the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, La Moca, and the Venice Architecture Biennale. Community Projects include Project Rowe Houses, Watts House Project, and the Arts Plan with Jessica Cusick for Rem Koolhaas's Seattle Public library.*

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Tags: Community, Philosophy, Art market, Public art, Art residency, Photography, Installation art

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Architecture : Interview

Samuel Mockbee

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