

RESIDENCY FOR ARTISTS ON HIATUS

A collaborative art project ***Residency For Artists On Hiatus (RFAOH)*** is a virtual yet functioning residency available to artists who, for one reason or another, are not currently making or presenting art. The residency exists in the form of a website and the residents are selected based on their proposals of “on-hiatus” activities (or non-activities) through international calls. Represented on a dedicated page within the RFAOH website, selected candidates post periodical reports on their “non-art” endeavours, and visitors can leave comments or share their reports. A modest stipend is awarded to each resident to assist in their on-hiatus activities, and at the conclusion of their residency, they submit a written report on how they benefited or were otherwise influenced by this opportunity. While principally a web-based operation, we, as co-directors, travel to promote the residency at art-related events and communities worldwide, design and produce RFAOH multiples for its promotion, and publish an “annual report” as a full-colour catalogue of the participants’ on-hiatus activities. In its ultimate/ideal incarnation, RFAOH will be “hosted” by an art institution, who would provide access to the site through their own website, and assist in funding the programme.

The onset of globalism has given rise to the exotic notion of the artist-celebrity as a globetrotting, biennale-showing, party-attending cultural worker. Meanwhile, a majority of artists continue to maintain modest careers while working other jobs or foregoing any otherwise comfortable, if less “glamorous” lifestyles. As contemporary art practices have become increasingly institutionalized with the growing number of MFA programs, contemporary art biennales, and the global art market, most artists must reconcile their career aspirations and current opportunities (or lack thereof) with the realities of day-to-day living, or conventional notions of “profession”. What then, determines one’s artistic identity? When do artists cease to be recognized as artists, or does having a professional career at anytime in one’s life grant life-long artist status? In the meantime, our everyday encounters with media and technology in recent years have created a culture where we no longer necessarily equate creativity with lengthy and strenuous activity or with a specific dexterity. We are much more open to the idea of the artist as inter-textual organiser of disparate materials and signifying processes, with plenty of platforms to reach out to an audience -- perhaps a 21st century sequel to the artistic declarations/implications by numerous 20th century artists into the possibility that anything could be art and anyone could be an artist.

Regardless of the diverse understanding of “artistic” engagement in our time, many artists endure varying levels of anxiety and pressure to meet the demand to be productive. They seek the tacit approval or at least acknowledgement of their peers within an art world economy deemed necessary to maintain their artist status. ***Residency For Artists On Hiatus (RFAOH)*** allows artists freedom from the obligations of being an artist, and offers a space for reflection on alternative modes of creative living outside the pressures of the art world.

Since its launch in 2013 with Taiwanese-American senior artist Tehching Hsieh joining the advisory board, RFAOH has hosted twelve on-hiatus artists worldwide with a diverse range of backgrounds and projects. Our residents’ non-art endeavours have varied widely including group meditation, organic gardening, fulltime teaching, undergoing open-heart surgery, opening up a bar, trying to repair a neglected heritage family farmhouse, or reshaping a college art program as the head of the department among others. Some were hoping this time would lead to new insights or approaches to art when they resume their practice at the end of their residency; some just wanted a well deserved break from the demand to be constantly “on”; while others remain tentative whether they will return to artmaking at all. In a feature interview in CMagazine (Toronto, Canada), editor Amish Morrell asked: “is participating in RFAOH an

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admission of defeat (as an artist)?" By facilitating this opportunity for these artists to step back from their practices while maintaining some lifeline to their artist identity through their participation in this collaborative project, we have been fascinated by how differently all our residents have negotiated this question. This modest DIY project has also piqued the interest of a number of perhaps small but critical institutions worldwide, who have invited us to bring RFAOH to their communities. These presentations have allowed us to manifest a virtual project within the real framework of the artworld where the institutional authority outlining the parameters and limits of artistic endeavour actually occur, and therefore, provided space for discussion within the very context where a central paradox of RFAOH pivots.

Given that the artworld has become a global phenomenon, it's been essential to have an international selection of artists to talk about their lives without art, but not necessarily without creativity at RFAOH. The Internet as a medium has provided an ideal platform while also being most appropriate for the alternative or conceptually open-ended space that the project explores: the Internet is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere; it is a place sufficiently outside traditional art viewing arenas but one in which creativity abounds. Similarly we have concocted a residency that is equally everywhere and nowhere – a kind of “non-residency” residency for individuals who are simultaneously artists and non-artists. As we ourselves work as “co-directors”, curators, webmasters, designers, publishers, and facilitators in support of other artists in this project, we also expand our own practices towards new modes of artistic production and identity, while hacking the art system itself to serve our needs to exist as artists.

Amidst of the popular discussions around the institutionalization of art practice and artists' identity and with our border-less collaboration developing beyond our expectations, we are curious to see where RFAOH really fits in the discourse surrounding the role of art within the greater culture at large. By inhabiting the familiar and established systems of the artist residency and the Internet, ***Residency For Artists On Hiatus (RFAOH)*** sets up conditions for re-imagining the capacity and scope of contemporary art. Together with our selected residents, we explore the meaning of art practice and the limits and liminalities of the professionalism in the arts in this time of history.

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