



*Installation shot of "I Love the Art World and the Art World Loves Me." At left, Jen Dalton, "How Do Artists Live?" (2006) Middle, Dan Levenson, "Fernseher" (2011) (photo by the author)*

According to Eric Doeringer, the artist-curator of [\*I Like the Art World and the Art World Likes Me\*](#) at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space, the exhibition's title — a nod to Joseph Beuys's 1974 performance "[\*I Like America and America Likes Me\*](#)" — is meant to convey the "fraught relationship between emerging artists and the art-world establishment," one marked by a simultaneous desire to criticize the art world's excesses and to be recognized by it. Art about the institutions of art, both physical and discursive, is hardly a new phenomenon, but unlike Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke, cited by Doeringer as predecessors for the work included in this exhibition, what emerges most clearly here is not "institutional critique" but a sense of anxiety or anger about the artists' own marginalization and lack of mainstream success. There is an implicit populism to the exhibition, a trumpeting of each artist's outsider status, or at least a sense of frustration with the art world's perceived exclusivity, but a great deal of the work hinges on the viewer's ability to pick up on insider-only references, exacerbated by the exhibition's lack of sufficient explanatory texts for conceptual projects. The "established art world" is treated as a fixed entity towards which an attack might be levied, allowing Doeringer and many of his chosen artists to avoid actually offering an exploration of what it constitutes.

The most successful works in the show are those that are most clear about the direction of their critiques. Jennifer Dalton's two solo contributions stand out in particular as highlights; they not only manage to convey a coherent message, but one that resonates beyond the gallery walls. "Every Descriptive Word Used to Describe Artists and Their Work in Artforum's Best of 2007" (2008) takes the form of a 14-foot-long scroll spilling from the wall onto the gallery floor, on which Dalton has catalogued adjectives and phrases used in reference to artists and works of art in [Artforum magazine's](#) "Best of 2007." Dividing the list into "male" and "female" columns, the staggeringly disproportionate amount of attention paid to male artists — and the different language used to describe work made by men versus women — is immediately apparent, a damning statement about the still-deeply-ingrained biases against female artists and the gendered concept of genius. Writing out each word by hand in tiny cursive script seems to be a subversive nod to the frequent association of "feminine" work with the messy and handmade, particularly when applied to the supposedly more "objective" format of the infographic.



*"The Matthew Higgs Society" booth, a partial reconstruction of an installation previously at Triple Candle (photo by author)*

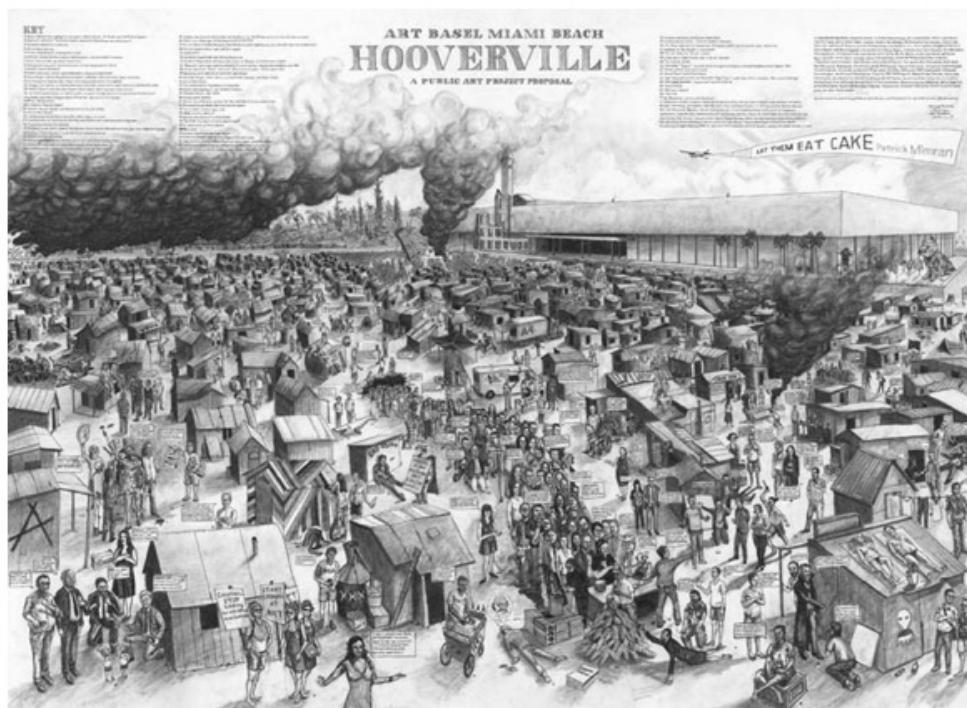
Though the fact that male artists receive the bulk of critical consideration should come as no surprise, seeing it quantified lends the piece a sense of urgency, challenging the misconceptions that female artists are truly equal participants in the cultural sphere. Dalton's piece seems particularly relevant in light of the recently released [VIDA report](#) revealing a gross discrepancy between the number of male and female fiction writers featured in prestigious English-language literary magazines, indicating that this is an issue that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

Similarly, for "How Do Artists Live?" (2006), Dalton invited hundreds of artists to take an anonymous online survey about their lifestyles, jobs, incomes, educations, and economic circumstances, displaying the results in a colorful slideshow. The charts and graphs, rendered in the same curlicue script, not only point to the precarious financial states of artists,

few of whom are able to support themselves through their art alone, but also the inequalities that exist across gender lines: male artists were twice as likely to report that they were able to support themselves financially through the sale of their work.

Like Dalton, the work of Ward Shelley and Loren Munk is primarily structured around the graphic display of information, using charts, maps and timelines to create various narratives relating to the history of art and artistic communities. Shelley's "Carolee Schneeman Chart" (2005) manages to be both astute and visually engaging, presenting an alternative view of post-war art with Schneeman at its center, highlighting her significant contributions and influence on not only subsequent generations of artists, but also her male contemporaries. "Matrilineage ver. 1" (2008) similarly takes the historiography of art history as its subject, tracing a narrative of art movements from 1840 to 1960 through important female artists. Punctuated with major events in women's history, such as the right to study at universities and to vote in various countries, Shelley's timeline features hundreds of artists, the vast majority of whom have been left out of canonical accounts of the development of modern art. His paintings function as correctives, but also as reminders that all histories are subjectively shaped.

While William Powhida and Jade Townsend's "Art Basel Miami Beach Hooverville" (2010) is also concerned with charting the figures who impact the creation, display and sale of art in New York, their approach is far more hostile, skewering individual power players and art fair culture in general. Described as a tongue-in-cheek "public art proposal," the massive drawing renders the Art Basel Miami Beach art fair as a shantytown Sodom and Gomorrah, a biting critique of the rampant consumerism of the fair and the immense economic disparity between the multimillionaire collectors and the majority of artists who struggle to get by. Though the work succeeds in highlighting the kind of hierarchies and oppositions that are seen most clearly in art fair environments, it is likely to be unintelligible to anyone unfamiliar with the coterie depicted, raising questions about the genuine potential of this sort of work as social commentary.



William Powhida and Jade Townsend, "Art Basel Miami Beach Hooverville" (2010) (image from efanyc.org)

There is an overall tendency throughout the exhibition to conflate reference with criticality, a weak assumption that does a disservice to works like Dalton's that raise legitimate questions about the mechanisms of the art world and their inequities. The six photographs from Aneta Grzeszykowska's "Untitled Film Stills" (2006), for which the artist re-staged Cindy Sherman's landmark series of the same name, are fascinating, but seem out of place here; they function not as a comment on the "art world," but on Sherman's specific body of work — and Grzeszykowska's own self-effacement in miming the poses of an artist who is herself concerned with stereotypical tropes of femininity. Their inclusion further muddies the already vague message of the exhibition and, perhaps more importantly, forces the photographs themselves into a narrative of art world critique, preventing more fruitful readings of the work.

The two projects that address the primary institutions of art most explicitly, Dan Levenson's installation "Fehrnsheer" and Filip Noterdaeme's "Homeless Museum of Art" are also the ones that seem to suffer most from lack of context. "Fehrnsheer," composed of identical archive boxes stacked floor-to-ceiling and an ancient monitor displaying a video of hands typing out names on a typewriter, is part of Levenson's ongoing project *Little Switzerland*, a fictional Berlin-based gallery invented by the artist that represents equally fictional Swiss artists. Levenson has not only created an elaborate history for the gallery, including detailed archives of its exhibition history and inventory, but perhaps most interestingly, a consistent aesthetic for its "brand." Fabricating shipping boxes, stationary, filing cabinets and other mundane supplies, the work functions as a kind of fetishization of the back-office where the business of running a gallery takes place. Citing an interest in the "aesthetics of administration," presumably a nod to art historian Benjamin Buchloh's noted essay on institutional critique in the 1960s, Levenson's project functions as an inversion of the typical gallery, with the elements typically hidden from public view placed in the spotlight. It's one of the most intellectually layered works represented in the exhibition; unfortunately, the viewer gets absolutely no sense of the broader project and its aims. Though the installation is aesthetically interesting on its own, nothing about the way the work is presented conveys what *Little Switzerland* is and how this particular piece might fit in.

Though Noterdaeme's "Homeless Museum of Art" fares somewhat better in terms of explanation — his roving booth, which he has stationed outside of various museums and cultural institutions, is accompanied by a set of framed "open letters to the art world" on Homeless Museum letterhead that provide information about the project and its mission — it is effectively experienced as an installation rather than as an ongoing project rooted in interventionist tactics given that the artist was only periodically present to interact with visitors. Within the context of the gallery space, the booth is treated as a discrete art object rather than as a vehicle for examining museum practices, which seems to distort the intention of Noterdaeme's work.

Marc Bijl's "'Forever" Marc Bijl's Flash Art Faksimile," a fake issue of international art magazine *Flash Art* in which every article is about Bijl, reflects more on his own desire to be the subject of a highbrow magazine profile than on the publication itself. More convincing is Conrad Bakker's *Untitled Project* series of paintings, reproductions of past *Artforum* covers, advertisements, and subscription slips painted on hand-carved wood. For "Untitled Project: SUBSCRIPTION (*Artforum* International: Sept. 1969-June 1970)" (2009-10), a set of ten paintings of *Artforum* covers were sold by subscription based on the cost of an actual subscription to the magazine; likewise, the paintings in the "Untitled Project: Advertisement" series are sold for the cost of the ad space in the original issue. In tying the price of his work to the costs associated with consuming and selling art, Bakker directly inserts them into a dialogue about transactional relationships, economic networks and consumption. While Doeringer's own contribution, a selection of his "bootleg" paintings copying the style of the most commercially successful contemporary artists, raises interesting questions about authenticity and value — the only real distinction between Damien Hirst's dot paintings and Doeringer's copy is a certificate with Hirst's signature — one wonders about the real necessity of asserting that art is a commodity that derives its value from the artist's name rather than its aesthetic form. In the past, Doeringer has exhibited the bootlegs in "guerrilla interventions," hawking them on the street in Chelsea or setting up booths at art fairs, an antagonistic gesture that draws attention to the conditions and structures of the market, but in a traditional exhibition setting they seem somewhat stale.

The conflicted position of *I Like the Art World and the Art World Likes Me* is perhaps best represented by one particular piece: "Our Condolences" (2008), by Dalton and Powhida, six greeting cards bearing sardonic quips such as "Sorry for your loss of representation" and "We'll miss you in Miami!" displayed on a pedestal with a set of pristine white gloves placed in dead center. The gloves were not, as I initially imagined, part of the work itself, an ironic commentary mocking the pretensions of the commercial art world — after all, such cards are intended to be handled, written in, and ultimately tossed out — but placed there in earnest by the gallery, perhaps even insisted upon by a dealer or collector lending the piece. The show suffers from a lack of clear direction and the works relying on heavy-handed gimmicks often overshadow the stronger, subtler pieces. It offers a compelling, if chaotic, look at artists' own insights into the world they occupy and what it means to be an artist today, but fails to cohere into a convincing critical statement—or to present an idea of what a better art world might truly look like.

[\*I Like the Art World and the Art World Likes Me\*](#) was presented at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space (323 West 39th Street, Third Floor, West Side, Manhattan) from January 14 through March 5, 2011.