

# PRO ARTS COMMONS

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Newsletter | Workshop Edition

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*On September 25th, 28th and October 30th 2019, Pro Arts Gallery & COMMONS hosted three workshops that provide context for the work we do here in Oakland, CA to build a just creative economy, in which sharing takes center stage in the art market exchange and value creation.*



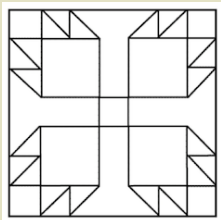
As we continue to experiment with how Pro Arts COMMONS organizes and operates within a sharing economy, we are also focusing on building a common knowledge platform that addresses the political imaginary of contemporary art. This platform has currently taken the shape of a string of political education workshops, facilitated by artists and cultural activists who align with our vision to reframe the capitalist mode of value production in the arts by transitioning from a capitalist to post-capitalist, commons-centric model, one that re-organizes the means of production. The common thread among these workshops is their reimagination of a post-capitalist art world in which the distribution of power and wealth is intrinsically linked to universal emancipation principles (often omitted when describing art), and community empowerment.

## Workshop | Towards a Solidarity Economics Conduction System

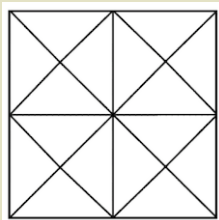
Marshall Trammell, led our first workshop in this series, entitled Towards a Solidarity Economics Conduction System for Improvisers. Trammell is the experimental percussionist and critical ethnographer known as Music Research Strategies (MRS). This identity began as a critical ethnographic framework, bridging obsessions with strategic, compositional, improvisational strategies that organize improvisation, impacting street- and global-level, social justice, organizing. MRS navigates the global economy as a touring musician, performing research and political education nationally and internationally through a battery of modular, social science based systems. His investigations produce bodies of work for fellowships, residencies and festivals.

Towards a Solidarity Economics Conduction System for Improvisers is part of a Trammell's series of Insurgent Learning Workshops. This project performs political education through creative, intercultural, participatory interventions that mobilize knowledge into a conduction method for creative music performance. The performance is synthesized as new language for Improvisation and social impact assessment, built into the very structure of the performance. Participants gain the experience of resourcing historical and cultural-bearing arts and anti-hegemonic practices into innovative performance for experimental music and produce new narratives and languages of resistance.

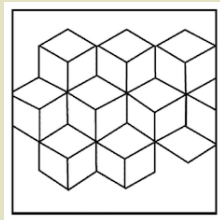
Marshall Trammell conducted this workshop as community engagement. It is an open rehearsal, inviting musicians and community members to engage in call-and-response improvisations of a global solidarity economy rendered as a collective, music conduction. Much of the workshop was devoted to introducing an array of Underground Railroad freedom quilt codes, a visual language of resistance and communication used to navigate the Underground Railroad – the network through the United States and into Canada of “conductors”, meeting places, and safe houses for the passage of African Americans out of slavery (1680-1860.) Musicians and community members were then invited to re-imagine the cultural significance of these quilt codes in contemporary, post-capitalist terms. By reading their shapes and motifs into a new visual languages, they were challenged to create ‘new social safety nets,’ based in solidarity, mutualism, and cooperation.



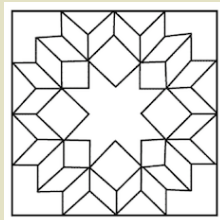
**Bear Paw**



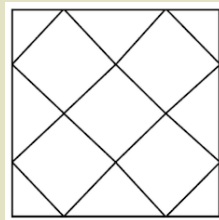
**Bow Ties**



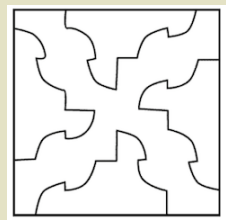
**Boxes**



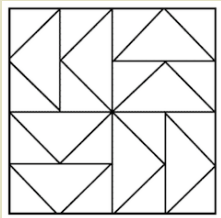
**Carpenter's  
Wheel**



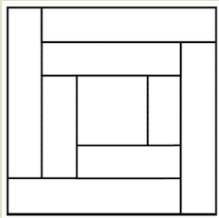
**Crossroads**



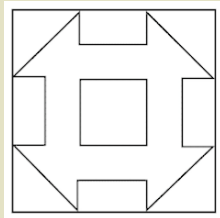
**Drunkard's  
Path**



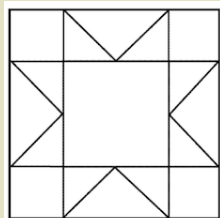
**Flying Geese**



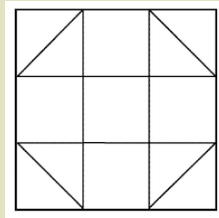
**Log Cabin**



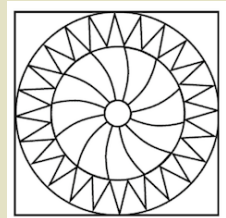
**Monkey Wrench**



**North Star**



**Shoo Fly**



**Wagon Wheel**



**Participants re-coding Underground Railroad quilt blocks**

## **Workshop | Towards a New System**

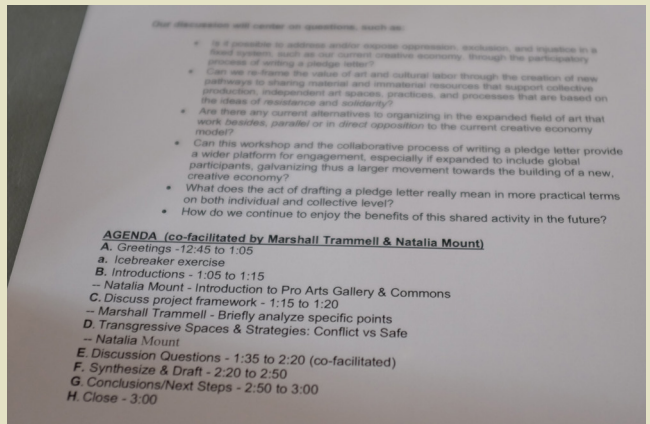
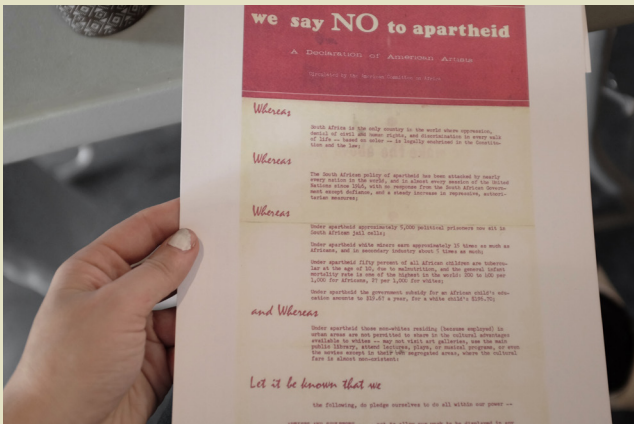
A second workshop, on new models of organizing the means of production in the arts was held at Pro Arts COMMONS in September 2019. Facilitated by Natalia Mount (Pro Arts COMMONS) in collaboration with Marshall Trammell (MRS) the workshop addressed the role of the independent art space in a future art economy.

This workshop invited artists, cultural organizers, and culture-bearers to discuss polemics of the independent art space, and the emergence of new organizational formations like community commons. Natalia introduced the idea of the 'heterotopic' space, as defined by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. The 'heterotopic' space is a space that functions as 'the other' – the in between' space; the 'counter-space'. It is a variant and ritualistic space that defies institutional categorizations, hierarchies, and art market speculation. It is a space that combines the mythical and the physical, creating subtle diversions, micro-cosmos, and normative disruptions. Heterotopic spaces are full potential, and are made abundant through conviviality and mutualized labor for the production of what can be called art. We followed this discussion with an examination of the spacial, transgressively artistic, and cultural organizing practices and strategies of Pro Arts COMMONS that, above all else, empower the community.

There are not many practical examples in America of commons-centric art practice and production. Perhaps this is because of the art market's strong hold over its participants, who seem to unconsciously opt into a rigid institutional system that proves very difficult to expand, challenge and change. Artists and art organizations are by necessity welded to authorship and yet ironically assert a claim on autonomy through their participation in the art market system (where, when convenient, they omit the 'market' from their arguments). Alternative spaces and other quasi-independent venues for art-presentation is likely where this claim on autonomy resides, but as we know, this is exactly how the patina of the art market system develops. This patina maintains the consistency of its superstructure. If we continue to operate on the premise of competition we will continue to create macro-enclosures.

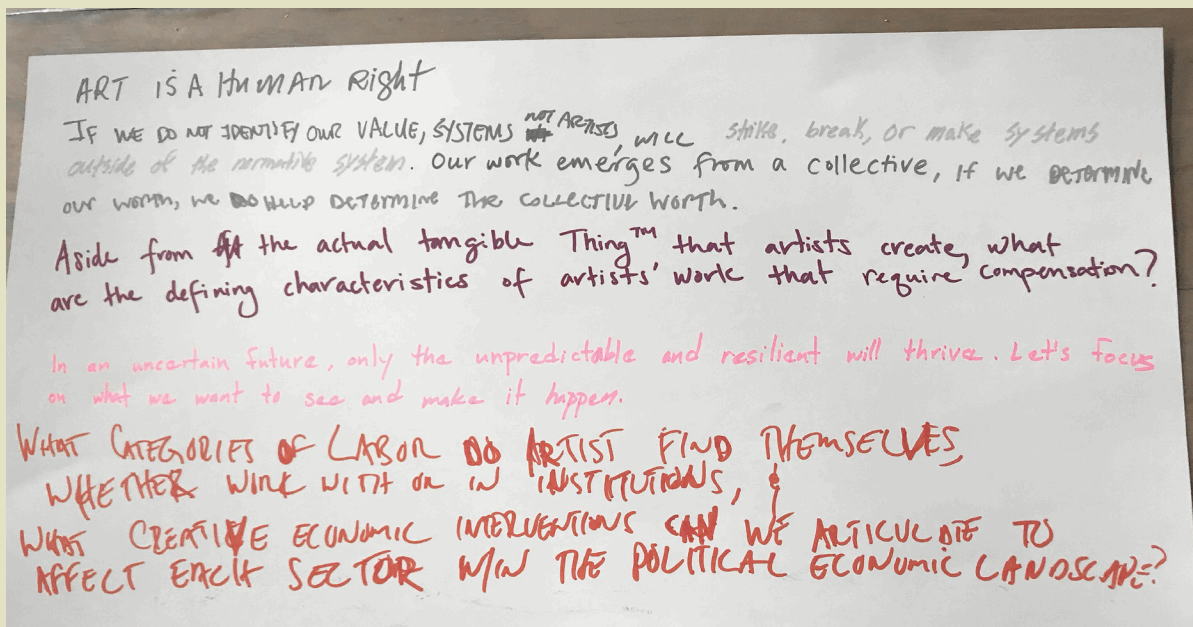
Such macro-enclosures, i.e. museums, in turn create their own exclusionary hierarchies that reproduce through exploitive value creation measured by wealth transfers. However, these macro-enclosures are the reason for the emergence of micro-enclosures, i.e. independent art spaces as we know them, and their specific avant-garde programs that in turn provide a ground for anti-establishment practices. These spaces and the artists connected to them are by extension complicit in the creation of even more fragmented micro-enclosures, limited in their formations – i.e. people interested in experimental art, collectors' circles, groups based in identity politics, etc. This is one basis for individualized semiotics that are akin to social reform rather than revolution.

What if instead of micro-enclosures we create radically open, commons-centric formations? Can we, through transgression, reclamation, and the re-envisioning of the system, broaden the value of social contributions and thus empower the community we serve? Can we reframe the value of art and cultural labor by creating new pathways for sharing material and immaterial resources that support collective production, independent art spaces, practices, and processes based in the ideas of resistance and solidarity? What are these alternatives to organizing in the expanded field of art that work besides, parallel or in direct opposition to the current creative economy model?



Participants creating their own pledge letter for today's art world

Participants in the second workshop tackled these questions. At its conclusion, participants wrote pledge letters with wishes for a post-capitalist art world, modeled on the visionary Anti-Apartheid "We say NO, A Declaration of American Artists" pledge letter, circulated by the American Committee on Africa (October 18, 1965.) We hope that this workshop and the collaborative process of writing pledge letters provides a model for engagement and subversion for a larger movement towards the building of a different creative economy.



#### ART IS A HUMAN RIGHT

If we do not identify our value, systems not artists will strike, break, or make systems out of the normative system. Our work emerges from a collective, if we determine our worth, we help determine the collective worth.

Aside from the actual tangible Thing™, that artists create, what are the defining characteristics of artists' work that require compensation?

In an uncertain future, only the unpredictable and resilient will thrive. Let's focus on what we want to see and make it happen.

WHAT CATEGORIES OF LABOR DO ARTIST FIND THEMSELVES, WHETHER WORK WITH OR IN INSTITUTIONS, &

WHAT CREATIVE ECONOMIC INTERVENTIONS CAN WE ARTICULATE TO AFFECT EACH SECTOR W/IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE?

## Workshop | Movement of Belonging

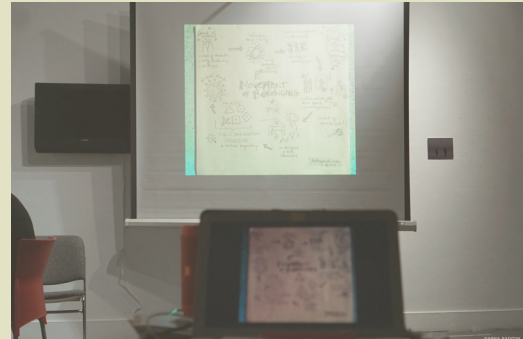
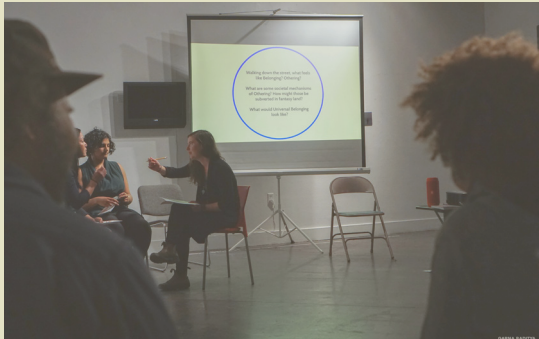
The third workshop in this Pro Arts COMMONS' series was held in October by our newest artist resident and commoner, Kate Spacek. Kate fosters belonging, creative agency, and collective ownership through design and facilitation. Her workshop launched of her long-term, community-driven arts + social justice initiative, entitled the MOVEMENT OF BELONGING (MOB.)

MOB brings together local artists, cultural producers and activists, education leaders, and youth for a meaningful community dialogue and collective imagining sessions.

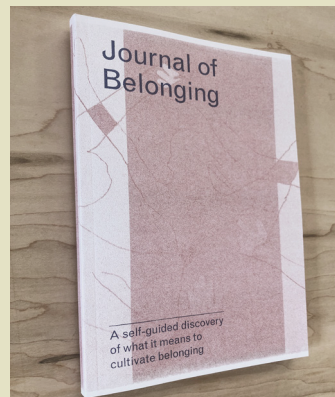
Invited participants learned about the MOB's othering and belonging concepts through movement and co-creative art experiments. Participants left the workshop with an awareness of how they can hone in their

own unique belonging sensor to foster belonging around them, while also tightening their bond to the artist within. Key project phases and workshop activities included: (1) SPARKS: inquiry + multi-sensory awareness, story sharing, and movement, (2) ROOTS: collaborative arts-based investigations, and (3) RIPPLES: participant-driven public showcase and engagement.

The Movement of Belonging reveals all humans as creators with the potential to transform realities. As the project propagates, a Public Imagination Collective grows into a repository of activated projects intended to be adapted by other organizations, schools, community groups, and municipalities.



Photos courtesy of Garma Raditya



*\* Pro Arts Commons is a collectively-held space in Oakland, California that blurs the line among art, debate, experimentation, and collaboration. Through pulling together and sharing of material and immaterial resources, we reflect the Oakland's existing artistic and cultural fabric, while creating future landscape of other commons-centric spaces that encourage the economic and cultural power of the community. Our collaborative activities are rooted in mutual values and principles. Currently, we are experimenting with developing a new contributory system that allows for shared governance, participatory budgeting, and community-driven funding mechanisms. Pro Arts COMMONS is also focusing on the way we use language and space to define our mission and practice, specifically in the context of a sharing economy.*

*\*Pro Arts Commons Project is a global, peer-to-peer networked community, spearheading a movement towards a post-capitalist art economy. Working together, commoners and affinity groups aim to reframe the value of art and art labor in the context of a sharing economy. We aim to disrupt the logic of capital, through sustaining those commons-centric spaces, practices, and value production models that aim to re-wire the broken connections between artist and community and art and everyday life.*

Marshall Trammell | Music Research Strategies  
<https://www.musicresearchstrategies.info>  
 Natalia Ivanova Mount | Pro Arts Gallery & COMMONS  
<http://www.natalias.club>

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 Mollie Underwood | irrelevant press & Project Kalahati

Transcripts of the two workshops will be published in the hybrid form of a reader and essay book by Project Kalahati in early 2020.