

# AUTONOMY EXCHANGE ARCHIVE

A conversation with  
Paul Branca, David Horvitz and Fawn Krieger





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PAUL BRANCA: One of the problems I have with my project-based works are how to document them. I always had an admiration for the archives and documents presented by conceptual artists of the 1970s and how their documents preserved their ideas while developing a patina of age. As someone who is involved with both the material qualities and aura of painting and painting's language 'in an expanded field' at times as components of social exchange, I often become overwhelmed at how to document these projects or events. At what lengths do you go to plan the documentation of project based works?

DAVID HORVITZ: For me, sometimes I drive people crazy, and I don't document things at all. I just intentionally subject them to time, and maybe they disappear, or maybe a fragment remains. Part of this is thinking about the internet and how people think it will hold everything. It's my attempt to make some kind of obscurity, and not give everything away... I like making art. But I don't like project managing myself, which is maybe a result of me doing too many projects! I feel there is this complex mindset happening, this contradiction of time, where you are simultaneously doing while also thinking about the future and how this will look as documentation. I don't like that. But I also do play around here, and I do think about images or objects that may come out of something, and go somewhere else. Maybe it will liberate itself from a work and make a new work. Or maybe it will contain the whole old work in it, like a vessel (like a single photograph holding a whole project within it). I do think about distribution of images and press and publicity, but I always try to play here... To be active here.

FAWN KRIEGER: I like what you say, David, about documents potentially transforming into another work, and I agree that there can be a contradiction of time at play when considering the fabrication (and subsequent effectiveness) of one's documentation. And I'm drawn too, to your question, Paul, of really what lengths we go to as artists to document our work.

I like to think of the photographs, printed material, ephemera, correspondences, video and/or film, exchanges – glances even – that accompany my projects not so much as a document, but of the work. I think of these

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matters as part of the fabric of a work. I believe that when this happens, we have archival materials that mean something, and that can hold onto a work fully, carry it into time as a sustaining experience. To actualize what eventually becomes the documents of a project of mine, I always arrive at an essential question of what does it mean to materialize this work in my chosen material? – the identity, the gesture, the moment, the urgency. So my documents may vary from project to project. For example, for my project ROOM, a collaboration with Tracy + the Plastics, for which I created immersive stage sets for Wynne Greenwood's band to play and perform within – alongside her audience, I imagined our accompanying pamphlets as their own stage... that we could create ROOM through text/image and folded paper.

I wonder when gestures become documents, and when documents become an archive... whether this is linked in some essential way to an artist's life-span, mortality, and moment. We always carry an archive from birth – our DNA is an archive.

PAUL BRANCA: Sometimes I feel that there are limits to our role as artists who make unique things and the duties that are expected of us when confronting the public interface. I just 'performed' a project for a very small space in Bologna where I presented a sausage chain made up of individual oil paintings that wrapped around a very small gallery. The works were to be sold at prices that were according to the Fibonacci sequence, i.e. 1,1,2,3,5,8... at prices that are merely symbolic and span the complete range of participant's/buyer's reaction their value. I imagined, while in NY, that there would be a small chaos of 'buyers' and the problem arose on how to document this. I am not a photographer and I lost all desire to assume the role as documentarian. I myself do not like to be confronted by a camera. Here, I think it was important to have the paintings be the document, and the idea of their distribution exist within a written and oral form. But these works become facts of their specific point of presentation and distribution, in other words, these 'facts' are not attached to the work, their owners and hopefully their future as individual parts of a once was whole. Fawn, perhaps you considered something similar with your project COMPANY?

FAWN KRIEGER: I'm currently working with a writer at the moment, Sabrina Mandanici, who is developing her masters thesis on a research

project of mine, begun in 2007 called *First Hand*, that has remained to this day unfinished and unexhibited. In her work, she is looking to make connections between my other projects and this body of research. In providing her with materials for her own work, I'm seeing that the historical archive of my projects – the stories, the moments of pointed contact – can get lost in the shuffle of professionalized documents. I think that this is perhaps an important distinction that comes up for me here: what and who is a document for? And perhaps aligned with this, how and for whom are art schools training artists to consider their own material histories?

COMPANY is a nomadic, functioning shop-as-artwork that I began, also in 2007, with a commission from the NYC art institution, Art in General. In that iteration, COMPANY existed in the storefront of the organization's headquarters, on the edge of Chinatown. COMPANY, initially inspired by Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961-1962), is a shop as theatre that sells sculptural approximations of everyday objects, and explores themes of value, ownership, desire, and touch. Like the pricing with your sausage paintings Paul, COMPANY's pricing is erratic, capricious, irreverent, and playful, but never unintentional or unconsidered. The pricing system is part of – an archive of a moment – it is at once a crucial element of the work and a document of it. What I find much harder to hold onto as an archive, are the moments of impact, threshold points between audience and work. This may come in the form of an instantaneous response, a physical gesture, tactile contact, a question posed. How do we document the livingness of a work, and is the impossibility of capturing something impossible to contain perhaps the very ingredient that shapes a project into its own myth?

In 2011, I produced a series of short Super 8 films called *FAULTS*, which focus closely on moments of tactile impacts and fissures. It was really the first time I had worked with film in place of digital media in 15 years. The three minutes on each roll of film offered a moment, one that can never be replaced, reconfigured, erased, or interrupted. It was a physical moment locked into a physical capsule. We are in a time when the historical documents we look to are analog but mostly the ones we are producing are digital. What does this mean as we shape our histories? Maybe some of these questions of the digital as archive come into play for you guys too.

PAUL BRANCA: Fawn, I like that you brought up the problem of documenting a 'livingness' of a work and how one can never truly do this. There are certainly differences between what must be documented or archived and what is not necessarily needed to go on the record. The archive normally documents material features such as those found in catalog raisonnés, which I have developed a certain passion for.

DAVID HORVITZ: It's also interesting to think about personal memory, what you remember, what you carry around in your head, and how that relates and intersects to personal experience and other memories. For me *COMPANY* is a vague memory when I first moved to *NY* in 2007, not knowing the city, trying to navigate Chinatown and Tribeca. So for me, its 'images' in my head collides with this moment of slowly becoming familiar with moving through a new urban space. If I were to have documentation of this moment in my life, maybe images of *COMPANY* should go in there. That is something I want to bring up, when images may slip into other spaces, other projects. My working practice is fluid and organic, and sometimes pieces blend with other pieces, and part of one piece, or an image of one piece, might fall out of one work, and then grow into a new independent work. Like a mushroom spore. Or like a satellite that falls into an orbit of something else — or even, in multiple orbits. Last night I was researching some things online for a new piece. I was on a random website I have never been. It was late. I was still slightly jetlagged from having just returned from Ireland. When I clicked on a link to find some information about a beach town in New York, an image I had made from my *Public Access* series was there. This was a series of photographs I made while driving up the California coast and photographing myself anonymously looking out at sea on different beaches, and then uploading these to the Wikipedia page about these beaches. These images begin to openly circulate because Wikipedia is used as a source for copyright free material, and they can end up anywhere. So I randomly encountered a website that resourced my own image.

This image is a piece from one work that entered this new work on its own, and by random chance. The photo was actually not from *Public Access*, but from an extension of the project I did on *NY* beaches. This is what I mean by fluid, because technically its not *Public Access*, but a different work. I think of them all from the same series or working practice.

To respond to a comment from Paul, about your paintings being the documents. I wonder how much is lost in art history when the objects forget their contexts. Know what I mean? In twenty years your paintings as documents of your performance may only be remembered as paintings. The performance context is lost in obscurity. Imagine if you titled your paintings this: I just 'performed' a project for a very small space in Bologna where I presented a sausage chain made up of individual oil paintings that wrapped around a very small gallery. The works were to be sold at prices that were according to the Fibonacci sequence, i.e. 1,1,2,3,5,8... at prices that are merely symbolic. The title always carried with it its context. If you reproduce a painting, you reproduce its title. If it goes to auction they will have to list the title. I'm not saying it can't be co-opted... Just thinking about different strategies....

PAWN KRIEGER: That's very Fiona Apple.

PAUL BRANCA: Lost in obscurity? Certainly not. Courbet's presentation of over 40 works at his temporary tent dubbed the Pavillon du Réalisme at the Place d'Alma was incredibly important to his summary painting: *The Artist's Studio (L'Atelier du peintre): A Real Allegory of a Seven Year Phase in my Artistic and Moral Life of 1855*. No writing on these paintings dismisses their original context. His autonomous exhibition strategy only enriched the painting's power as a political gesture that we can not ignore today. It's also funny that you bring up the importance of titles are with regards to the context and intention of a given work and how a title can describe a procedure. Today we have press releases, often instructions on how we supposed to see the work, which I find boring but am guilty of employing. These exist alongside of an almost instantaneous archive powered by social media and the web. There was a time when the very idea of titling a work did not exist, people said what it represented, i.e. the gazillions of paintings 'titled' *Madonna with Christ*, and this evolved to becoming a specific way of naming things. In the later 20th century the concept of naming works untitled entered the realm of abstraction. Responsible art historians conduct research on how a given work is presented and what the context was. Yes, works do need a lot of language to support their intentions, although not really, they still survive as objects. Just consider the confusing interpretations of Giorgione's *Tempesta* or Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. Titles do steer the viewer into a certain

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framing of the works, but the annotated archive proposes to enrich that, often results in confusion. The works will always remain the works. I mean that the sausages I painted will always be painted sausages. The fibonacci pricing strategy did go on the record with reviews and even literally featured in La Repubblica (funny for a non-profit space).

David, can you expand upon what you said with regards to the web as not being an adequate document or archive? And can you speak to your Wikipedia insertions as a document or an illustration for an entry? I am particularly interested in the middle finger entry and why the word *cinghiale* is written in pen on your intervening hand.

Fawn, I would like to turn the conversation to address the idea of autonomy, or the self-governing of an artist's work. How did you incorporate this within COMPANY and *Ruin Value*? Both projects took place outside of established commercial galleries: one at Soloway, a newly founded artist run space and the other at Art in General, a nonprofit space. Money making strategies were devised. The very title of COMPANY suggests a move towards an alternative economy. Can you talk about where these projects were presented and how these spaces lacked or could support a gesture of alternative economy?

FAWN KRIEGER: Money making is never an objective for the content of my work; it is a practical necessity. COMPANY is, and *Ruin Value* was, among many other things, a proposition for exchange. Money is only one form of exchange, and I prefer not to define exchange as an alternative. Additionally, I think art and artists are autonomous in an essential way, for the very reason that it and we must exist on the edge of what is known and unknown. To achieve this access, we must rely on systems of self-governance, on limits and trespassing beyond those prescribed by civic or territorial bodies. As I had mentioned above, Art in General, the NYC-based non-profit, was the original host and commissioning agency of COMPANY; *Ruin Value*, an exhibition hosted at Soloway, an experimental – however still commercial gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, included 100 low-fire, pink ceramic sculptures that I called *Architectural Organs*, and that situated themselves somewhere between body and building. The sculptures rested on and within a platform constructed from the wooden ruins of a Quaker Meeting House from Milton, NY. During the

exhibition's run, each *Architectural Organ* was sold by the pound. *Ruin Value*, the exhibition's title, takes its name from a term originally intended to frame a way of looking at the architectural construction and remains of Antiquity, often associated with Rousseau, and much later heralded by Albert Speer, Hitler's key architect. The philosophy surrounds architectural vision that anticipates its own ruin. I think *COMPANY* pushed up against the threshold of the institution's operation much more than *Ruin Value*, in large part because selling art in a commercial gallery, as in *Ruin Value*'s case at Soloway, is what it is designed to do. *COMPANY* was, after all, a functioning shop-as-work-of-art within a non-profit organization, which posed a number of manageable challenges. But *COMPANY* as a project has a force of pulling everything into itself, and it was made in the spirit — like all of my work — of breaking down the things that sever us from one another. *COMPANY* began at the height of the NY stock market bubble in 2007, and closed its doors at Art in General following the crash in 2008. My own personal interest in the overlap of these two projects, *Ruin Value* and *COMPANY*, has more to do with a kind of original unity or order, a system of encoded completeness and wholeness which becomes undone through its bonding with the world, and the subsequent life trajectories of these individual, sub-works taking on their own stories, while never actually truly being whole again, or always referring to a mythic order. It's a kind of celestial or galactic event, like a big bang theory, with revolutions and scattered particles that only become truly re-integrated or fully held in a moment of synchronicity. I guess, it's a kind of brokenness as wholeness.

DAVID HORVITZ: I think I was unclear, I wasn't talking about adequacy. I was maybe referring to my own resistance to the web as an archive. I say maybe because I can't remember what I was saying, and that is an interesting thing about these kind of conversations, they happen over time, over space. Where was I when I even wrote that? In a hotel room in Limerick maybe.

I like this idea of letting things disappear on their own, or turn into other things. I'm actually writing this right now in my backyard in Brooklyn, sitting in the sun, next to a compost pile of vegetable scraps, and also old photographic works that I've buried in there. It's strange, photographs don't seem to decompose... I don't have a website with a portfolio of my

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work because I hate this idea that someone can go online and figure you out, 'know' who you are and what you do. I intentionally make this more difficult. I don't like advertising myself. The internet is great for an archive, it is adequate. If that's what you want to do. If you want your 'identity' defined. It's like Facebook, here is your profile, here is who you are.

If you look up the Wikipedia article for middle finger you see my hand there. On my hand is written the word 'cinghiale.' It means wild boar in Italian. I remember this word because food is always a way for me to learn new words in languages I don't understand. I was in the big market in Torino a few years ago and I bought cinghiale because I didn't know what it was. When I asked my Italian friend what it was, what this unknown food we were about to eat was, she said: it's wild boar, it's you, you are the wild boar! So this became an inside joke. Whenever I go to Berlin everyone calls me cinghiale. This has nothing to do with middle finger. If anything, my hand became a vessel for this inside joke to be carried with it. I like these little jokes that maybe only your friends will understand. Your artwork is a terrain for lots of things to happen. Maybe there is a friendship bracelet that someone gave you that shows up. Maybe your girlfriend wrote you an email and it became a title of a show, and you didn't tell anyone this. Maybe in an exhibition there is a small pile of sand in the corner that five people know about... The Wikipedia photographs come out of a series that I've been doing for a few years, where I make a photograph illustrating an article, and my presence is somewhere in the photo. I'm usually unidentifiable. Going back to this idea of a vessel, the work is carried with the functionality of the image itself being useful to the Wikipedia article. The beach ones were a solid series. But this middle finger one happened spontaneously. It wasn't thought out. It was a joke, but a joke done seriously. There are probably some images I've done that I've forgotten about by now.

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Paul Branca, David Horvitz, and Fawn Krieger

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Text:

Paul Branca (1974, Bronx NY) received his MFA in painting from Bard College, New York in 2010. Branca's work has been featured in exhibitions at The Kitchen; SculptureCenter; Scaramouche; Marianne Boesky Gallery, all in New York; Anat Elbgi/The Company, Los Angeles; Kavi Gupta Gallery, Berlin; Golden Parachutes, Berlin; Galeria Sabot, Cluj, Romania; and West, Den Haag, Netherlands, among others.

David Horvitz (1981, Los Angeles) completed his MFA at Bard College, New York in 2010. He had solo exhibitions at Recess, New York; Statements, Art Basel 2013, with Chert, Berlin; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; West, Den Haag and group exhibitions at: MoMA Library, New York; Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, PALIAP, Norway; New Galerie, Paris; ISCP, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; Performa 13, New York, amongst others.

Fawn Krieger (1975, New York) received her BFA from Parsons School of Design, and her MFA from Bard College. Her work has been exhibited at The Kitchen, New York; Art in General, New York; Nice & Fit Gallery, Berlin; The Moore Space, Miami; Von Lintel Gallery, New York; the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, Boston; Human Resources, Los Angeles; Fleisher Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia; Soloway, NY; and Neon>[dv, Milan, Italy.

Cover image: Paul Branca: *The Fruit and Vegetable Stand*, a cash-and-carry exhibition that took place in a Queens fruit stand in 2012 and 2013, Branca asked participants to contribute a grisaille version as their 'archival' document in lieu of a photograph.

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