

Drawn

Together

For *Drawn Together* twelve artists from Chicago and Switzerland were divided into six pairs to collaborate on drawing-based projects. The American artists were asked to draw numbers corresponding to the Swiss artists, thus creating a somewhat random pairing. The task they were given might seem simple and straightforward: create drawings together. The Surrealists did it with the Corps Exquis, with each collaborator adding to a sequence. How can this exercise be more difficult? But we know that not all collaborations are easy.

When we speak of collaboration we refer to the process of working together to achieve a common goal. In doing so, the parties involved in the collaboration must engage in a certain level of self-analysis and introspection, and be able to communicate their vision and ideas to their partner, to convince their partner of the validity of their position, but also to be receptive to the same process from their partner. Therefore, collaborating can be a double-edged sword: in most cases the collaborators must also let go of themselves, or compromise, to reach consensus, with the goal of ultimately gaining something greater than each individual's input.

Of course we cannot speak of collaboration without also mentioning its darker side. During World War II, as the Nazis took over Europe, the

meaning of the word started to take on a new dimension: working for the occupier. The element of compromise, therefore, took a much more sinister turn when considering the unequal distribution of power in such collaborations. Therefore it is not surprising that many people still wince at the thought of being called a collaborator, or engaging in a collaboration. The act of collaborating is loaded with an ugly history of lacking agency, but it also alludes to opportunism and moral laxity – a lack of integrity.

However, the form of collaboration that we are focusing on now, that which brings two or more equal parties together, has been championed in our culture for decades, on the economic, technological, social and cultural levels.

In science and technology, the last few years have seen the proliferation of user-generated content such as Wikipedia and blogs, both types of platforms relying on collaborative input, and collaboration in research (the European Space Agency, for ex.). On the economic front we have seen global exchange and trade flourish exponentially, and social networking sites have contributed significantly to entire social movements, as has been evidenced by the recent political uprisings in Arab countries, but also in the United States with the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York and its spin-offs in other

American cities, which have now been undertaken all over the world.

For hundreds of years, in the performing arts, collaboration has been used by symphonies, operas and theatre groups to entertain us. In all cases of successful collaborations, the parties involved, such as musicians, composers, conductors, actors, etc. were working together for a goal that would benefit them all.

In the visual arts, however, collaborations have been more difficult because in most cases the extreme individuality of the artist, glorified since the renaissance as inspired genius creating unique works of art, is at the root of his creative force (yes, in most cases this “genius” is a he), and also at the root of the capitalist system with which the art market is inherently linked. The capitalist structure encourages the illusion of the artist as possessing absolute agency, and making no concessions in the creation of his work.

The “individual artist as creative genius”, creating unique objects available only to an exclusive few, is a product much easier to commodify than collective authorship, which actually undermines the individual genius's status in society, and poses too many difficult questions about ownership. The illusory “no compromi-

ses” attitude of the “genius male artist” has been the motto under which art has been packaged for consumption, and which we have accepted for centuries now.

But luckily perception has been changing significantly since the 1960s, when collaborative and collaborations started appearing in the wake of that era's social and political upheavals (which in and of themselves functioned as collaborative movements), providing an idealistic model of resistance to the existing power structures and idealization of the male artist as creative genius, an idea which had reached an apex during Modernism. Influenced by the revolutionary methods taught at Black Mountain College, whose interdisciplinary approach informed the practice of so many American artists (Buckminster Fuller, Allan Kaprow, John Cage, etc.), the idea of collaborating with other artists became a way to subvert the status quo and bring about social change.

When thinking of past collaborations, another element that played an important role in their success was the ability of each party to exercise agency in at least choosing their collaborators, even if much of the process afterward still needed negotiation. So, when considering the exhibition *Drawn Together*, the exercise is complicated by several elements: the artists are

thrown into a situation where communication, an inherent part of the collaborative process, is limited by geography, culture, language, and/or technology; the freedom to choose one's partner based on artistic compatibility, vision, or even personality, is hindered – instead the artists are paired into teams based on drawn numbers and requested to work with their assigned partner whether they like it or not.

These restrictions have challenged the participants to push the boundaries of their comfort zone. Some had to negotiate in ways that they had not done before, not only through the use of language, but also by negotiating their artistic position. And of course the struggle for power is a part of that negotiation. Whose work will be shown and how? Whose idea will be implemented in the final project? How can both parties impact the concept equally? What form will the drawing take? And, of course, since we mention capitalism and the art market, which still hasn't fully figured out how to treat artistic gestures resulting from collaborations, how do we price the work and share the proceeds fairly? And who owns the final product if both contributed to it, and it isn't sold? All these questions must be answered through collaboration and negotiation.

In some of the collaborations an easy and direct solution was established from the beginning: both artists would contribute separate work to the project. This way both artists could express themselves individually without having to compromise their aesthetic and artistic process too much, yet also open themselves up to a conceptual discussion about theme and form.



For *Loredana Sperini* and *Jennifer Mannebach*, where language itself proved to be a barrier, the artists came to the conclusion that the way to effectively collaborate was for each of them to respond individually to the song by Suljjan Stevens, *Chicago*, (lyrics on last page), which speaks of a journey taken cross-country, maybe paralleling life's own journey, and the mistakes made along the way.

Jennifer's work is a portrait on paper, drawn in masking tape, pencil and yarn. It evokes a nostalgic and somewhat abstract scene with the incomplete face of a man and a little girl floating through space, dislocated and fractured. A father and daughter? A conflicted relationship? They are two people who seem to be together, yet are not.

Also fractured are the haunting faces emerging from Loredana's drawing. Like glass shards, the geometric shapes created by the folds in the paper, as well as the collage additions, become the background from which these mysterious figures arise. The prism-like forms allude to a fractured reality, where we see shadows, ghosts, and reflections, yet we lack the concrete and the permanent. The lingering refrain of *Chicago*, "I made a lot of mistakes" resonates, and speaks to the inability to capture and hold on to the present.

Jennifer Mannebach



Loredana Sperini



Danny Hein and Ray Hegelbach decided to paint each other's portrait based on their conversations via email and their knowledge of each other's appearance from photos. Each utilized his own artistic process and maintained his vision, aesthetic, and methodology, negotiating only on the form of the project.

Danny integrated Ray into a typical midwestern landscape, surrounded by other midwestern characters originating from preparatory photographs Danny has taken in the past. This decontextualization speaks to the feelings of discomfort and displacement some may have had while collaborating, but adds a very humorous touch to the possibility of acclimating to a different locale and process.

On the other hand, Ray created a very abstract portrait of Danny, one that reflects the inability of capturing the essence of the other, a point complicated further by the lack of history together.

Another model explored by the other pairs was of a more symbiotic collaboration, with both artists contributing to the same piece or pieces. This method motivated the artists to get to know each other a bit better, to ask more profound questions of the other, and/or to accept a situation that forced them to let go of the creative control, or agency, with which they might have been used.



Ray Hegelbach



Danny Hein

Old friends from Zürich, *Selina Trepp* and *David Chieppo*, who now live in each other's country of origin, started out the collaboration as a traditional Mail Art project. Selina sent a multitude of drawings to David, who was then to react to them, and then send them back to Selina for her input. They were influenced by the knowledge of the other's work and their rekindled friendship. But the collaboration took a different turn when David felt uneasy about altering the fine drawings made by Selina, which he felt did not need his intervention. Instead, he began a series of letters addressed, but never mailed, to Selina about the project, the process of corresponding, and the limitations associated with it, which have become an inherent part of the work. Yet, ultimately, through their ongoing communication, Selina convinced David to also react to her work in some way. This has resulted in a series of drawings with coloration and additional details contributed by David, with source outlines by Selina – the two artists working as one.



Selina Trepp/David Chieppo



Selina Trepp/David Chieppo



Tom Fellner, who sent to Cody Hudson his two watercolors, one of a Swiss landscape and the other of one of his signature monsters, taken out of the context of the landscape, managed to expose himself entirely and allow complete loss of control. This was accentuated by the fact that not until a few days before the start of the exhibition did Tom find out how his drawings were received and how his partner actually reacted to them. But the collaboration worked: the bucolic Swiss landscape received an urban treatment, in keeping with the street art tradition from which Cody comes. Along the same lines, Cody mirrored the form of Tom's monster, adding the word „acid“ in the center. The two worlds collided in the most direct manner possible, with irony and humor, which otherwise could have been disastrous, but worked precisely because the partners approached the project with the intent of creating together and found a way to fit into the other's world somehow.



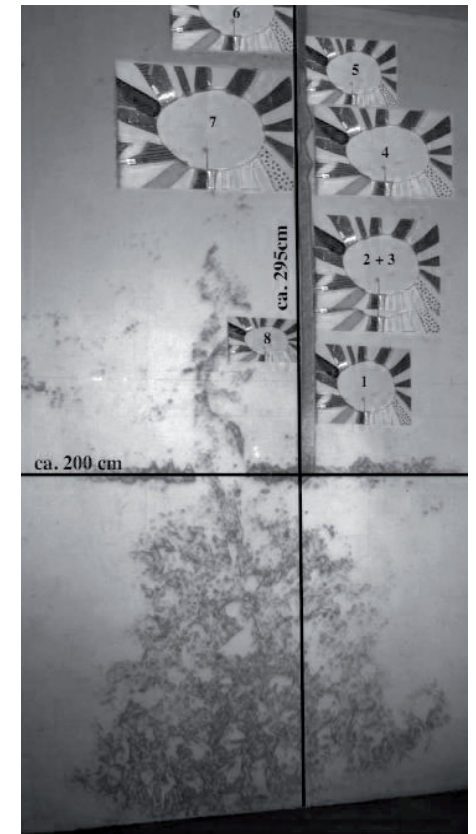
For the site-specific installation by *Dianna Frid* and *Monika Müller* the artists developed a wall drawing with components contributed by each of them. Both artists share an interest in architecture and space, but approach these in very different ways. And yet, an interesting harmony was created between the colourful and organic shapes integrated by Dianna into the nostalgic black and white drawing made by Monika, depicting herself looking out into the distance, as if searching for something long lost. The figure is emanating from the organic ground underneath her, created by, and in unity with, it. The wall drawing seems quite two-dimensional at first, but both artists play with space to create a sculptural element to the piece. Monika built the hill under her figure as if she moulded it from the earth itself, creating more and more volume as she reacted to the wall area. In installing her drawings on Monika's pole, Dianna raised some of the edges of the work away from the wall, thus creating volume through shadows and light.



Dianna Frid

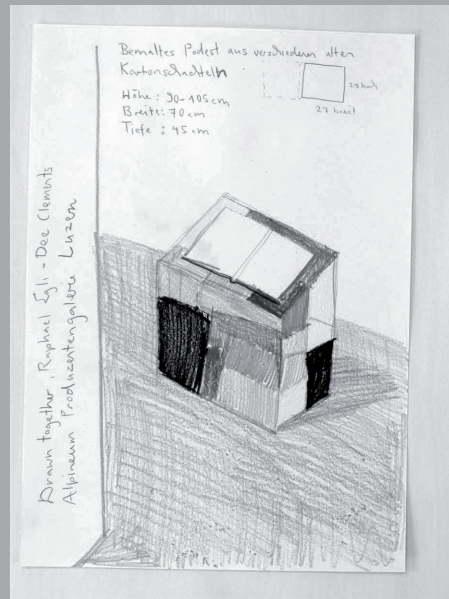


Monika Müller

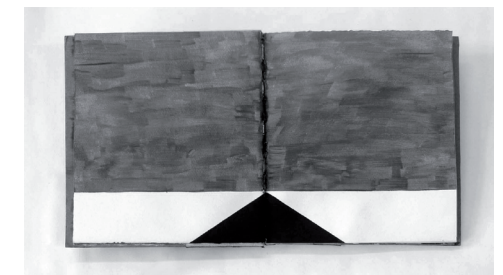
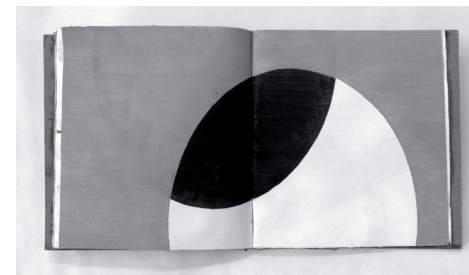
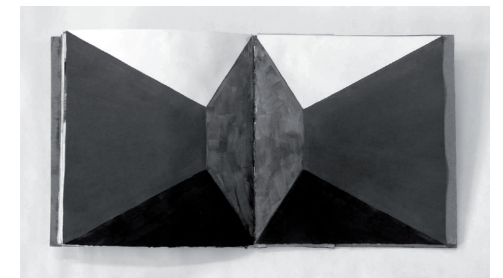
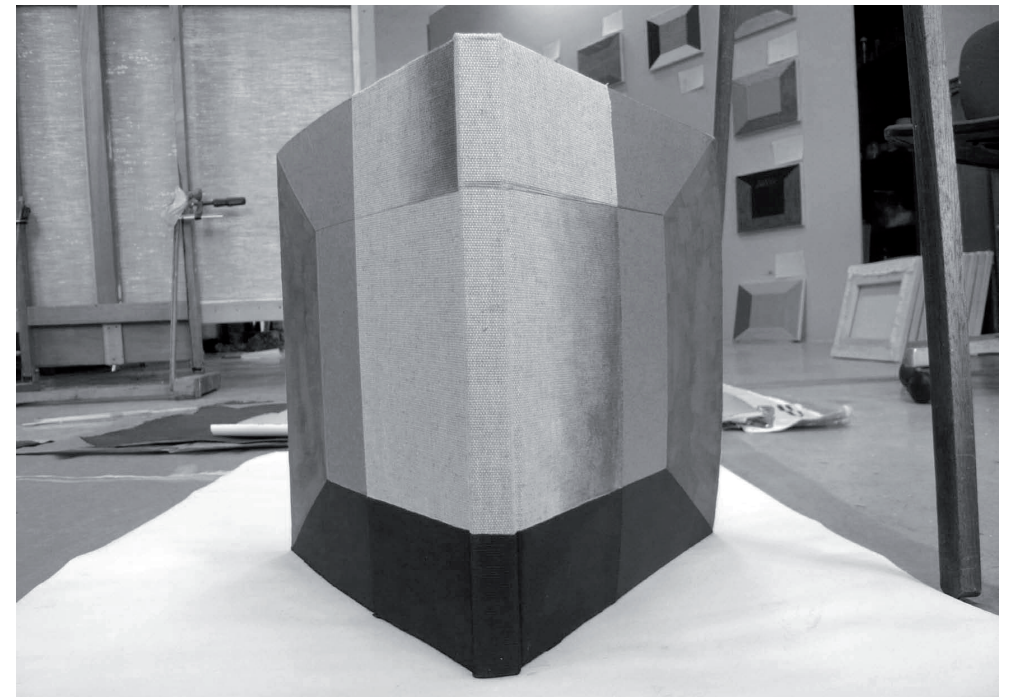


The artist book created by *Dee Clements* and *Raphael Egli* was initially sent to Raphael by Dee, with her contributions on some of the pages. She encouraged Raphael to continue from where she left off in whatever way he felt he could. Raphael decided to add to some of Dee's work, then made individual drawings of his own, while also leaving some of Dee's pages untouched, for her aesthetic to emerge as well. The organic and loose abstractions made by Dee complement Raphael's stern geometric shapes extremely well, maybe even echoing stereotypical female and male approaches to form.

The book by Dee and Raphael, as well as the two drawings by Tom and Cody, are testaments to the ability of artists, when necessary, to move entirely beyond the self, but also to the potential force of collaborative action, where compromise and negotiation are no longer seen as dirty words. Rather they become strategies for connecting people across large distances, overcoming barriers that generally hinder cooperation, and ultimately function as the only viable solution for making the world that we have to share, one in which we enjoy living.



Raphael Egli



Dee Clements/Raphael Egli

But this utopic perspective has to be tempered by the reality of the individualistic nature of most people, a result of modern society, which is not so easily inhibited. Some partners attempted to allow more intervention, but had to accept less in order to reach consensus, while others were less inclined to compromise their work. In the end, the pairs managed to create works responding to a common subject or concept, and even consented to the form. This negotiation is also an inherent and important part of the collaborative process and offers hope that on some points, at least, we can agree, and can work together somehow for the sake of the greater good. It is this greater good that needs to be agreed, and that's where the challenge really lies – for all of us.

Text: Olga Stefan, 2011

Sufjan Stevens, Chicago Lyrics

Artist: Stevens Sufjan

Song: Chicago

Album: Illinois

I fell in love again

all things go, all things go

drove to Chicago

all things know, all things know

we sold our clothes to the state

I don't mind, I don't mind

I made a lot of mistakes

in my mind, in my mind

you came to take us

all things go, all things go

to recreate us

all things grow, all things grow

we had our mindset

all things know, all things know

you had to find it

all things go, all things go

I drove to New York

in the van, with my friend

we slept in parking lots

I don't mind, I don't mind

I was in love with the place

in my mind, in my mind

I made a lot of mistakes

in my mind, in my mind

you came to take us

all things go, all things go

to recreate us

all things grow, all things grow

we had our mindset

all things know, all things know

you had to find it

all things go, all things go

If I was crying

In the van, with my friend

It was for freedom

From myself and from the land

I made a lot of mistakes

You came to take us

All things go, all things go

To recreate us

All things grow, all things grow

We had our mindset

All things know, all things know

You had to find it

All things go, all things go

You came to take us

All things go, all things go

To recreate us

All things grow, all things grow

We had our mindset

(I made a lot of mistakes)

All things know, all things know

(I made a lot of mistakes)

You had to find it

(I made a lot of mistakes)

All things go, all things go

(I made a lot of mistakes)

This magazine has been published
in conjunction with the exhibition

DRAWN TOGETHER

12.11. – 10.12.2011

with

Dianna Frid and Monika Müller /

Dee Clements and Raphael Egli /

Danny Hein and Ray Hegelbach /

Jennifer Mannebach and Loredana Sperini /

Cody Hudson and Tom Fellner /

Selina Trepp and David Chieppo

at

ALPINEUM PRODUZENTENGALERIE LUZERN

Hirschmattstrasse 30a, CH-6003 Luzern

+41 41 410 00 25

info@alpineum.com

www.alpineum.com