Reflections on a Year

One year ago, we founded the Machete Group and launched Machete. To mark this point in our ongoing experiment, we decided to reprint the Manifesto that we drafted at the outset as well as a critical debate between the Machete Group members on where we currently stand. We would like to thank Jonathan Thomas for instigating this debate by inviting us to make a collective contribution to an exhibit he is organizing at 1419 in Minneapolis under the title “Shoot the Moon.” We hope that this marks a new moment in our collective experiments, and we look forward to future opportunities to intervene in new ways in our cultural milieu.

-M.G.

Manifesto for a Margin of Utility

The deafening critical voices in the current aesthetico-political matrix serves as a silent imperative to all of those who strive to articulate an alternative set of aesthetic, political and theoretical practices. The silence of this imperative resounds with increased urgency in times of a consensual progressivism intent on meager reformism, which is nothing short of a brief distraction in a state of affairs that is inseparable from political regimes of perception that frame the stakes, and politics constructs in a subjective void but its possibilities.

In writing on one of Zach Rockhill’s earlier exhibitions at Crawl Space Gallery in Seattle, I had no idea that the epigraph I employed by Jorge Luis Borges would only come to bear its truth well after the exhibit had come to a close and the spectators disappeared: “I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line.” In his exhibit at FLUXspace, everything begins with the simplicity of a line, with the return to the degree zero of painting. Yet, Rockhill reverses the traditional relationship between artist and tool by making his body into the very instrument of execution. He also seemingly reverses the traditional relationship between will and artistic practice insofar as the artist becomes the unwilling instrument of a handful of spectators (who, in turn, become the artists). These simple reversals invite us to question the role of the artist as it has been constructed in the modern era as a fountainhead of creative ingenuity who thoughtfully and willfully manipulates materials to construct an autonomous work for independent spectators.

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Rockhill’s straight line is ultimately a point of anamorphosis, of transformative re-making, that acts as a simple portal into a labyrinth of inverted relations: simplicity/complexity, artist/instrument, will/action, artist/spectator, mind/body, multimedia artist/painter, painting/poetry, I/other, white/black, inside (gallery)/ outside, the political/the apolitical.

- Theodore Tucker