

# No Soul For Sale: 2 Articles, both alike in dignity

In May of 2010 the Tate Modern staged No Soul For Sale, billed as a 'Festival of Independents' that was 'neither a fair or an exhibition, [but] a convention of individuals and groups who devote their energies to art they believe in, beyond the limits of the market and other logistical constraints'(1). NSFS brought 70 artist collectives to Turbine Hall who exhibited alongside one another without partitions or walls. The organization of the non-fair was purportedly modeled after the set of Lars von Trier's film Dogville(2), meaning that the non-exhibition space for each invited party was marked out on the floor. The quasi-convention was the second manifestation of NSFS--the first was hosted by X Initiative at the former Dia Art Foundation headquarters in Chelsea, New York in June of 2009.

The Tate Modern offered the invited organizations, collectives and etcs (what are etcs?) absolutely no compensation for setting up shop in Turbine Hall--but neither were the galleries charged to be apart of the proceedings. Though many spaces accepted the Tate's invitation as a great opportunity, at least one group of anonymous British artists and arts professionals called "Making a Living" issued an open letter that stated "The title No Soul For Sale re-enforces deeply reductive stereotypes about the artist and art production. With its romantic connotations of the soulful artist, who makes art from inner necessity without thought of recompense, No Soul For Sale implies that as artists we should expect to work for free and that it is acceptable to forgo the right to be paid for our labour." Read the entire letter online at <http://halfletterpress.tumblr.com/post/598525511/tate>.

This small protest was of course accepted by curator Cecilia Alemani as a welcomed institutional critique (3), but perhaps mostly forgotten about in the nearly six months since NSFS took place. The issues raised by NSFS have a larger, (larger than what?) art-world relevance and pitch an interesting conversation about the value equated to DIY arts establishments and what those stakes (which stakes?) might mean to the creative economy. In order to explore these issues I have written two articles.



This article takes a pro stance, arguing that artists do make art from an inner necessity without thought of recompense, that money may cause more problems for artistic happenings (what is meant by the word happenings?) than it solves, and that the experience gifted by the Tate to the galleries involved in NSFS was a priceless piece of PR that will grant each of these spaces a better chance at a successful future.

The opposite argument has been published online on the artblog. Please read it on the web at <http://theartblog.org/>.

Money can't buy me love

The facts are irrefutable that artists--maybe not all artists--but artists, do create art "from an inner necessity without thought of recompense." The streets are decorated with numerous artworks that persons risked legal repercussions to showcase anonymously. Artists create entire bodies of work to showcase at non-commercial venues where they have little chance of selling anything. Artists create work that they know has very little chance of being sold. Artists regularly band together to create collective studios or gallery spaces in shifty warehouses and often use their own money to pay the rent at such spaces. Some spaces like these, termed independent or alternative or DIY (or some similar ordering of words), constitute artists who work together as a pro bono publico staff creating gallery exhibitions that rival those put on by major institutions. Most of these "alternative" spaces only wish to display excellent, groundbreaking art--which in many cases is similar to the mission of any incarnation of contemporary art museum. That artists would think it necessary to form their own contemporary art center without

the monetary backing to do so, might be the major form of critic that these spaces offer. (I don't understand- the major form of critic? Critic of who exactly?)

The organizers of No Soul for Sale pegged the majority of independent spaces working today exactly right. The majority of alternative/DIY spaces today have not been formed under like-minded political agendas, instead they have been formed simply for love of creating art and maintaining a community of artists. These spaces have started without thought to whether the economy will be able to sustain them and they have started with the thought that there should be more places to display work and more artists creating work. There are more people creating art than any economy could sustain. There is not enough money for everyone to be paid and so a choice must be made. Art is seen as work worth doing, even if there is no monetary compensation possible.

It is enlightening to take a look at what the US Department of Labor has to say on the subject of Fine Artists:

"Fine artists typically display their work in museums, commercial art galleries, corporate collections, and private homes. Some of their artwork may be commissioned (done on request from clients), but most is sold by the artist or through private art galleries or dealers. The gallery and the artist predetermine how much each will earn from the sale. Only the most successful fine artists are able to support themselves solely through the sale of their works. Most fine artists have at least one other job to support their art careers. Some work in museums or art galleries as fine-arts directors or as curators, planning and setting up art exhibits. A few artists work as art critics for newspapers or magazines or as consultants to foundations or institutional collectors. Other artists teach art classes or conduct workshops in schools or in their own studios. Some artists also hold full-time or part-time jobs unrelated to art and pursue fine art as a hobby or second career."(4)

We later find this under "Job Prospects" on the same website:

"Competition for jobs as artists and related workers will be keen because there are more qualified candidates than available jobs." and also this "Only the most successful craft and fine artists receive major commissions for their work. Competition among artists for the privilege of being shown in galleries is expected to remain intense, as will competition for grants from sponsors such as private foundations, State and local arts councils, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Because of their reliance on grants,

and because the demand for artwork is dependent on consumers having disposable income, many of these artists will find that their income fluctuates with the overall economy."(5)

A regular model of artist today (unsuccessful or quasi-successful in terms of money), might be someone who would express the fact that they are doing what they love, that they continue making art because it adds some important meaning to life, and that they believe artwork holds a value to its audience. They may issue the statement "I make what I want to make. If the money comes, great--but if it doesn't, that's fine too." This person is aware that they need money to live and so they make a modest income by other means. Most artists are aware of the fact that the odds of being very successful monetarily are against them, and yet they continue to create.

The great majority of artists, art administrators and curators are very idealistic and romantic people who try to hide that under a shallow veneer of cynicism (where is this statement coming from?). In this light, it is hard to believe that the organizers of No Soul for Sale acted with the impulse to use or mistreat anyone invited to exhibit in No Soul for Sale; the question is only whether they did so accidentally. The Tate acted in a way familiar to the art world: they offered compensation that wasn't monetary (networking, acknowledgement, visibility) for a service they did not charge for (a space in Turbine Hall and thousands of viewers). Seventy organizations accepted the invitation irrespective or regardless of the cost of getting themselves to London.

Money can cause more problems than it solves

The following is an excerpt from a conversation with Andrew Suggs of Vox Populi concerning that organization's (which organization?) participation in NSFS:

Andrew Suggs: "I think it would be great if they could pay the spaces but that would probably come with a whole host of problems too. I mean what would that mean--corporate sponsorship?"

Annette Monnier: "Would you not participate if there was corporate sponsorship?"

AS: "It would have given me more pause."\*

\*It is important to note that this is an excerpt from a half hour conversation in which Andrew expressed various views, both positive and negative, about the NSFS experience.

Money has to come from someone with money, in the case of The Tate Modern some of that money comes from BP(6) whom we are all recently very mad at. It is funny that while writing an article concerning the benefits of working for free I should think of the adage "There is no free lunch", but it seems fitting, only in this case the money would be the lunch. There is always a cost when you take payment from someone.

It is uncertain whether The Tate could have paid everyone to participate in NSFS, it seems certain that the event would have been smaller and more regulated if money had been issued for services. There is the possibility that the only reason NSFS did take place is because it was seen as programming that would be exciting and issue press coverage while costing very little. Without money NSFS could be the type of event that was allowed to be noisy and chaotic and democratic.

Just like the Master Card Commercials

No conference I have heard of (if we can be allowed to think of NSFS as being more like a conference of independents than an art exhibition) has ever allowed spaces to have a table for free and The Tate may have gotten just as many fine participants by charging for space.

It is easy to argue that what each gallery invited to participate in No Soul for Sale got for the price of an airline ticket and hotel room was a priceless piece of recognition and PR. Each Independent invited to the "Festival of Independents" has been set apart from its peers and been gifted a valuable line item on their resume. The Tate provided a space and an invitation, all these galleries had to do was come and be. Valuable networking between participants took place, the Tate created a website just for No Soul for Sale that bios each organization ([www.nosoulsale.com](http://www.nosoulsale.com)), and a discussion forum (little used) was even put to task in the attempt to solve and inconclusive findings about just what being a part of NSFS meant (<http://www.nosoulsale.com/forum/>).

The only thing a participant in NSFS didn't get was money, but they now have some better tools with which to apply to other people for it.

-Annette Monnier

Referenced in this text:

1. Tate Modern web press: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventeducation/musicperform/21839.htm>
2. "Restoring the 'Eek' to Eking Out a Living" written by Holland Cotter and published in the New York Times on June 24, 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/25/arts/design/25soul.html>
3. Artnet news May 20, 2010: <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/making-a-living-no-soul-for-sale5-20-10.asp>
4. Artists and Related Workers, "Nature of the Work" section from the US Department of Labor Statistics: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos092.htm#nature>
5. Artists and Related Workers, "Job Outlook" section from the US Department of Labor Statistics: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos092.htm#nature>
6. "Celebrate the Tate Modern and BP sponsorship with oil and dead fish" posted on Art Threat by Leslie Dreyer: [http://artthreat.net/2010/05/tate\\_bp\\_intervention/](http://artthreat.net/2010/05/tate_bp_intervention/)

This article would not have been possible without valuable conversations with Andrew Suggs, Nike Desis, Josh Kerner and Angela Jeradi--all of whom were participants in No Soul for Sale.