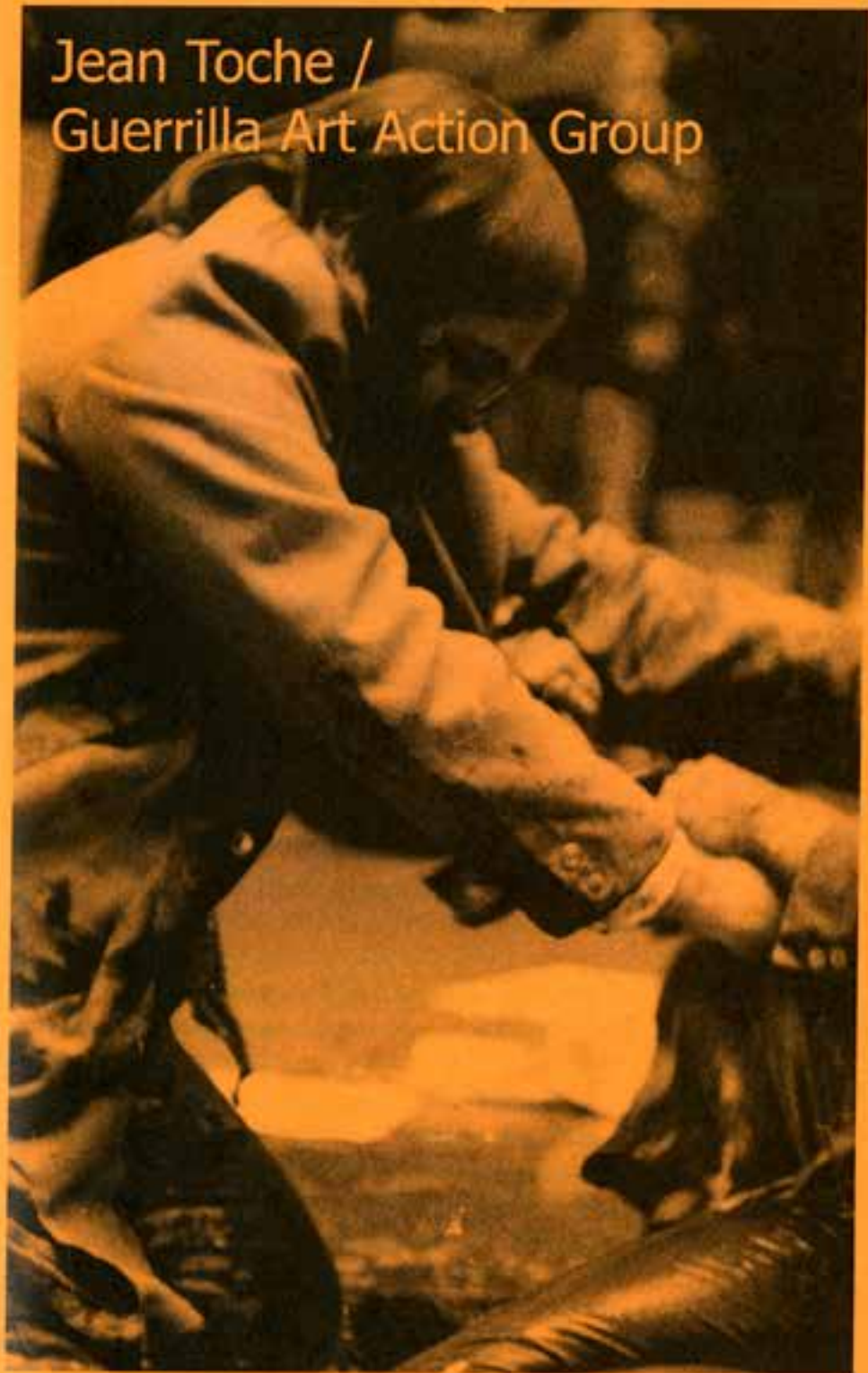




1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100, 2101, 2102, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2120, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2128, 2129, 2130, 2131, 2132, 2133, 2134, 2135, 2136, 2137, 2138, 2139, 2140, 2141, 2142, 2143, 2144, 2145, 2146, 2147, 2148, 2149, 2150, 2151, 2152, 2153, 2154, 2155, 2156, 2157, 2158, 2159, 2160, 2161, 2162, 2163, 2164, 2165, 2166, 2167, 2168, 2169, 2170, 2171, 2172, 2173, 2174, 2175, 2176, 2177, 2178, 2179, 2180, 2181, 2182, 2183, 2184, 2185, 2186, 2187, 2188, 2189, 2190, 2191, 2192, 2193, 2194, 2195, 2196, 2197, 2198, 2199, 2200, 2201, 2202, 2203, 2204, 2205, 2206, 2207, 2208, 2209, 2210, 2211, 2212, 2213, 2214, 2215, 2216, 2217, 2218, 2219, 2220, 2221, 2222, 2223, 2224, 2225, 2226, 2227, 2228, 2229, 2230, 2231, 2232, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2238, 2239, 2240, 2241, 2242, 2243, 2244, 2245, 2246, 2247, 2248, 2249, 2250, 2251, 2252, 2253, 2254, 2255, 2256, 2257, 2258, 2259, 2260, 2261, 2262, 2263, 2264, 2265, 2266, 2267, 2268, 2269, 2270, 2271, 2272, 2273, 2274, 2275, 2276, 2277, 2278, 2279, 2280, 2281, 2282, 2283, 2284, 2285, 2286, 2287, 2288, 2289, 2290, 2291, 2292, 2293, 2294, 2295, 2296, 2297, 2298, 2299, 2300, 2301, 2302, 2303, 2304, 2305, 2306, 2307, 2308, 2309, 2310, 2311, 2312, 2313, 2314, 2315, 2316, 2317, 2318, 2319, 2320, 2321, 2322, 2323, 2324, 2325, 2326, 2327, 2328, 2329, 2330, 2331, 2332, 2333, 2334, 2335, 2336, 2337, 2338, 2339, 2340, 2341, 2342, 2343, 2344, 2345, 2346, 2347, 2348, 2349, 2350, 2351, 2352, 2353, 2354, 2355, 2356, 2357, 2358, 2359, 2360, 2361, 2362, 2363, 2364, 2365, 2366, 2367, 2368, 2369, 2370, 2371, 2372, 2373, 2374, 2375, 2376, 2377, 2378, 2379, 2380, 2381, 2382, 2383, 2384, 2385, 2386, 2387, 2388, 2389, 2390, 2391, 2392, 2393, 2394, 2395, 2396, 2397, 2398, 2399, 2400, 2401, 2402, 2403, 2404, 2405, 2406, 2407, 2408, 2409, 2410, 2411, 2412, 2413, 2414, 2415, 2416, 2417, 2418, 2419, 2420, 2421, 2422, 2423, 2424, 2425, 2426, 2427, 2428, 2429, 2430, 2431, 2432, 2433, 2434, 2435, 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2443, 2444, 2445, 2446, 2447, 2448, 2449, 2450, 2451, 2452, 2453, 2454, 2455, 2456, 2457, 2458, 2459, 2460, 2461, 2462, 2463, 2464, 2465, 2466, 2467, 2468, 2469, 2470, 2471, 2472, 2473, 2474, 2475, 2476, 2477, 2478, 2479, 2480, 2481, 2482, 2483, 2484, 2485, 2486, 2487, 2488, 2489, 2490, 2491, 2492, 2493, 2494, 2495, 2496, 2497, 2498, 2499, 2500, 2501, 2502, 2503, 2504, 2505, 2506, 2507, 2508, 2509, 2510, 2511, 2512, 2513, 2514, 2515, 2516, 2517, 2518, 2519, 2520, 2521, 2522, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2526, 2527, 2528, 2529, 2530, 2531, 2532, 2533, 2534, 2535, 2536, 2537, 2538, 2539, 2540, 2541, 2542, 2543, 2544, 2545, 2546, 2547, 2548, 2549, 2550, 2551, 2552, 2553, 2554, 2555, 2556, 2557, 2558, 2559, 2560, 2561, 2562, 2563, 2564, 2565, 2566, 2567, 2568, 2569, 2570, 2571, 2572, 2573, 2574, 2575, 2576, 2577, 2578, 2579, 2580, 2581, 2582, 2583, 2584, 2585, 2586, 2587, 2588, 2589, 2590, 2591, 2592, 2593, 2594, 2595, 2596, 2597, 2598, 2599, 2600, 2601, 2602, 2603, 2604, 2605, 2606, 2607, 2608, 2609, 2610, 2611, 2612, 2613, 2614, 2615, 2616, 2617, 2618, 2619, 2620, 2621, 2622, 2623, 2624, 2625, 2626, 2627, 2628, 2629, 2630, 2631, 2632, 2633, 2634, 2635, 2636, 2637, 2638, 2639, 2640, 2641, 2642, 2643, 2644, 2645, 2646, 2647, 2648, 2649, 2650, 2651, 2652, 2653, 2654, 2655, 2656, 2657, 2658, 2659, 2660, 2661, 2662, 2663, 2664, 2665, 2666, 2667, 2668, 2669, 2670, 2671, 2672, 2673, 2674, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2678, 2679, 26

Jean Toche /  
Guerrilla Art Action Group





Art temporal # 527. Profile: unemployed, foreign-born, underachiever with no qualifications and a criminal background

**1 - According to Edward Dolnick in the New York Times of August 2, 2005: " . . . last month, the New York City Council awarded \$2 million to cultural institutions to increase security."**

**2 - Hey! All art works in all museums are to be viewed from a distance of 20 feet, behind a thick iron fence. All visitors will be stripped-searched before and after visiting those institutions. Cameras will watch your every move. And you will have to pledge your allegiance to God and The Flag.**

**3 - My invitation to bypass or avoid all cultural institutions.**

**3 - The bill's translation is: " . . . last month, the New York City Council awarded \$2 million to cultural institutions to increase fear of art and artists, increase racial profiling and cultural barriers, promote property rights, increase governmental propaganda and its control of art/artists, promote christianity, sectarianism, ban the infidels . . . "**

**4 - Go to 3.**

August 15, 2005

© jean toche



# Jean Toche / Guerrilla Art Action Group

It's easy to imagine that 75 years ago, Jean Toche came into the world kicking and screaming — not just throwing a fit like a baby, but courageously and creatively articulating what was wrong with doctors, the health care system, the staff who were indifferent to his and other babies' concerns, and every other injustice that might have been readily observable. Artists don't come a whole lot angrier or less compromising, but that's not all there is to Jean Toche.

Surely, in between the piss and the pus, and the shit and the spit, spectators in the neonatal ward would have been able to observe not just an exhilarating, fighting spirit in baby Jean. There would have been more than a couple giggles, a quickly developing delight in the absurd, and an excess of kindness and generosity toward those who care deeply for the rights of other human beings.

Okay, so to be truthful, Jean Toche's radicalization took perhaps a little longer to percolate — though not too much longer.

Jean Toche, along with Jon Hendricks and Poppy Johnson, is a founding member of the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG). The three formed the group on October 15, 1969 in New York City. Jean's wife Virginia Toche, and Joanne Stamerra were also involved in multiple aspects of GAAG's work. Toche and Hendricks still issue statements as GAAG from time to time, but for all intents and purposes, the group's primary years of activity were from 1969-76. The bulk of their actions took place, in rapid succession, between 1969 and 1971.

What follows is a highly selective and greatly abbreviated chronology of GAAG's work. Because their work is so dependent on their many written statements and accounts of their actions, the reader is urged to track down a library copy of Printed Matter's 1978 book on their work, *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group, 1969-1976: A Selection*. Photographer Jan Van Raay, who documented many of their actions in great detail, also has a website at [www.otherthings.com/janvanraay](http://www.otherthings.com/janvanraay), which includes many images and goes a long way toward showing the visual side of their work.

Toche and Hendricks first met at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village in Manhattan on the south side of Washington Square Park. The church had, and continues to have, a long history of making space available to artists for art exhibitions, rehearsals, and performances. Hendricks worked at the church as its gallery director. Toche began participating in events at Judson in 1967, two years after arriving in New York with his wife Virginia.

GAAG began at a time when artists were increasingly challenging the conduct of museums and other institutions on grounds that included sexual and racial inequality in collecting and exhibition practices; the need for free admission days so that the poor could see art, and the involvement of museum board members in corporations that were enabling the Vietnam War.

GAAG participated in a large, open, New York based group called the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), which was active from 1969-1972. While members of the coalition, GAAG staged numerous actions that critiqued a primary target: the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). GAAG eventually left the AWC because of philosophical differences with some of its other members.

The Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam was a large demonstration against the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. It first took place on October 15, 1969, and was

repeated again one month later on November 15 with a demonstration in Washington D.C. that attracted over 500,000 people. The AWC demanded the closure of museums on Moratorium Day. Some museums and many commercial galleries complied but others did not.

On October 31, 1969, Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche entered MoMA, carefully removed Kasimir Malevich's painting *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, and replaced it with a manifesto and affidavit of intent and action. The GAAG manifesto states:

1. We demand that the Museum of Modern Art sell the equivalent of one million dollars worth of art works from their collection and that the money be given to the poor of all races of this country, the money to be used by those communities and for those communities, without any interference or attached conditions.

We as artists feel that at this time of social crisis there is no better use for art than to have it serve an urgent social need. We realize that one million dollars given to the poor to help alleviate their condition can be no more than a symbolic gesture, but at this time of social crisis even the smallest gesture on the part of an art institution will have a profound effect toward changing the attitude of the establishment toward the poor. In a sense, the donation is a form of reparation to the poor, for art has always served an elite, and therefore has been part of the oppression of the poor by that elite.

2. We demand that the Museum of Modern Art decentralize its power structure to a point of communalization.

Art, to have any relevance at all today, must be taken out of the hands of an elite and returned to the people. The art establishment as it is used today is a classical form of repression. Not only does it repress the artist but it is used:

- 1) to manipulate the artists themselves, their work, and what they say for the benefit of an elite working together with the military/business complex
- 2) to force people to accept more easily – or distract them from – the repression by the military/business complex by giving it a better image
- 3) as propaganda for capitalism and imperialism all over the world. It is no longer a time for artists to sit as puppets or "chosen representatives of" at the feet of an art elite, but rather it is the time for a true communalization where anyone, regardless of condition or race, can become involved in the actual policy-making and control of the museum.

3. We demand that the Museum of Modern Art be closed until the end of the war in Vietnam.

There is no justification for the enjoyment of art while we are involved in the mass murder of people. Today the museum serves not so much as an enlightening educational experience, as it does a diversion from the realities of war and social crisis. It can only be meaningful if the pleasures of art are denied instead of revealed in. We believe that art itself is a moral commitment to the development of the human race and a negation of the repressive social reality. This does not mean that art should cease to exist or to be produced – especially in serious times of crisis when art can become a strong witness and form of protest – only the *sanctification* of art should cease during these times.

New York, October 30, 1969  
GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP

Jon Hendricks  
Jean Toche



With members of the Action Committee of the AWC and others from the New York art community acting as witnesses, GAAG removed the painting and taped up their statement. They were soon accosted by a guard who then ripped the manifesto off the wall. The GAAG members insisted on presenting their statement to a representative of the museum, while standing in position in the gallery alongside the removed painting.

Eventually the Directors of Public Relations and Exhibitions of the museum arrived and met with Hendricks and Toche in the gallery. A brief discussion of their action and intentions took place and the museum representatives were given the manifesto and asked to present it to the Board of Trustees, which they said they would. Everyone shook hands and the members of GAAG left the museum.

On November 14, 1969, GAAG, along with members of the AWC, performed an action inside the lobby of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. They issued the following statement:

At a time of pause and reevaluation of our intentions as individuals and as a nation regarding the mass murder of Asian people, it is our contention that it is essential that the cultural institutions join hands with those seeking a moral commitment to Peace.

This museum has obviously refused the request by the Art Workers Coalition that the museums be closed on Moratorium Day. Therefore we are performing a symbolic art action to dramatize our anger toward this museum's attitude of non-commitment.

We now reiterate our demands that all museums be closed until the end of the war in Vietnam, as stated in the Guerrilla Art Action Group's manifesto of October 30, 1969

New York, November 14, 1969  
Guerrilla Art Action Group  
Jon Hendricks  
Poppy Johnson  
Jean Toche

Toche entered the Whitney first and began spreading red pigment around the lobby. He was quickly followed by Jon Hendricks. Hendricks threw a bucket of soapy water onto the red powder. Poppy Johnson began mopping (and pushing the mixture further around the lobby) and additional participants got on their hands and knees and began scrubbing the foaming red mass with sponges. Toche repeatedly remarked that the museum was "dirty from war," and a printed handout protesting the Whitney for staying open on Moratorium day was handed to the Director of Public Relations before the artists were made to leave.

With support from the Action Committee of the AWC, GAAG performed *Blood Bath* in MoMA's lobby on November 18, 1969, following up on a statement issued on the 10th. A more aggressive work, it remains their most well-known action. Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson, Jean Toche, and Silvianna [Goldsmith] (an occasional GAAG participant) entered the museum at 3:10 p.m. on a Tuesday wearing street clothes for the women and suits and ties for the men.

Inside their clothing, they hid two gallons of beef blood distributed in plastic bags taped to their bodies. The artists walked to the center of the lobby and threw one hundred copies of their demands to the floor. This statement insisted that the Rockefeller brothers, who owned considerable percentages of multiple companies that were profiting from Vietnam war-

related labor and weapons manufacturing, resign from the Board of Directors at MoMA.

Having strewn their statement, the four GAAG members began to shout at and violently attack each other, causing the bags of blood to burst as they ripped at each other's clothing. A crowd gathered and the action slowly moved from a tone of violence to anguish as the

A CALL FOR THE IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION OF ALL THE ROCKEFELLERS FROM THE BOARD  
OF TRUSTEES OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

There is a group of extremely wealthy people who are using art as a means of self-glorification and as a form of social acceptability. They use art as a disguise, a cover for their brutal involvement in all spheres of the war machine.

These people seek to appease their guilt with gifts of blood money and donations of works of art to the Museum of Modern Art. We as artists feel that there is no moral justification whatsoever for the Museum of Modern Art to exist at all if it must rely solely on the continued acceptance of dirty money. By accepting soiled donations from these wealthy people, the museum is destroying the integrity of art.

These people have been in actual control of the museum's policies since its founding. With this power they have been able to manipulate artists' ideas; sterilize art of any form of social protest and indictment of the oppressive forces in society; and therefore render art totally irrelevant to the existing social crisis.

1. According to Ferdinand Lundberg in his book, The Rich and the Super-Rich, the Rockefellers own 65% of the Standard Oil Corporations. In 1966, according to Seymour M. Hersh in his book, Chemical and Biological Warfare, the Standard Oil Corporation of California - which is a special interest of David Rockefeller (Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art) - leased one of its plants to United Technology Center (UTC) for the specific purpose of manufacturing napalm.
2. According to Lundberg, the Rockefeller brothers own 20% of the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation (manufacturers of the Phantom and Banshee jet fighters which were used in the Korean War). According to Hersh, the McDonnell Corporation has been deeply involved in chemical and biological warfare research.
3. According to George Thayer in his book, The War Business, the Chase Manhattan Bank (of which David Rockefeller is Chairman of the Board) - as well as the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation and North American Airlines (Mr. Lucer Rockefeller interest) - are represented on the committee of the Defense Industry Advisory Council (DIAC) which serves as a liaison group between the domestic arms manufacturers and the International Logistics Negotiations (ILN) which reports directly to the International Security Affairs Division in the Pentagon.

Therefore we demand the immediate resignation of all the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art.

New York, November 10, 1969  
GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP  
Jon Hendricks  
Jean Toche

*Jon Hendricks, Jean Toche*

Above: A Call for the Immediate Resignation of All the Rockefellers From the Board of the Museum of Modern Art. Opposite page: GAAG Communique, November 10, 1969.



artists writhed on the floor, moaning before eventually going silent. The artists eventually rose to their feet (the crowd that stood watching applauded) and dressed in overcoats that covered the bloody remnants of their clothes. Two policemen arrived after the artists left.

In November of 1970, GAAG participated in *The People's Flag Show*, organized by the AWC at the Judson Church. The exhibition and event were prompted by a September 1970 incident where New York City art dealer Steven Radich was arrested by federal agents on

#### COMMUNIQUE

Silvianna, Poppy Johnson, Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks entered the Museum of Modern Art of New York at 3:10 pm Tuesday, November 18, 1969. The women were dressed in street clothes and the men wore suits and ties. Concealed inside their garments were two gallons of beef blood distributed in several plastic bags taped on their bodies. The artists casually walked to the center of the lobby, gathered around and suddenly threw to the floor a hundred copies of the demands of the Guerrilla Art Action Group of November 10, 1969.

They immediately started to rip at each other's clothes, yelling and screaming gibberish with an occasional coherent cry of "Rape." At the same time the artists burst the sacks of blood concealed under their clothes, creating explosion of blood from their bodies onto each other and the floor, staining the scattered demands.

A crowd, including three or four guards, gathered in a circle around the actions, watching silently and intently.

After a few minutes, the clothes were mostly ripped and blood was splashed all over the ground.

Still ripping at each other's clothes, the artists slowly sank to the floor. The shouting turned into moaning and groaning as the action changed from outward aggressive hostility into individual anguish. The artists writhed in the pool of blood, slowly pulling at their own clothes, emitting painful moans and the sound of heavy breathing, which slowly diminished to silence.

The artists rose together to their feet, and the crowd spontaneously applauded as if for a theatre piece. The artists paused a second, without looking at anybody, and together walked to the entrance door where they started to put their overcoats on over the bloodstained remnants of their clothes.

At that point a tall well-dressed man came up and in an unemotional way asked: "Is there a spokesman for this group?" Jon Hendricks said: "Do you have a copy of our demands?" The man said: "Yes but I haven't read it yet." The artists continued to put on their clothes, ignoring the man, and left the museum.

- NR: - According to one witness, about two minutes into the performance one of the guards was overheard to say: "I am calling the police!"  
- According to another witness, two policemen arrived on the scene after the artists had left.

New York, November 18, 1969  
GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP  
Jon Hendricks  
Poppy Johnson  
Silvianna  
Jean Toche

charges of violating a law against desecrating the American flag. These charges stemmed from his exhibition of an anti-war artwork by American sculptor Marc Morell.

GAAG's initial plan was to burn two flags, sewn together into a sack filled with animal bones, skulls and entrails. This was to take place at United Nations Plaza in New York City but a variety of security factors forced the group to change the location. Instead, at 5:00 p.m. on November 9, they conducted a burning ceremony in the courtyard of the Judson Memorial Church as a combined action by GAAG and the Belgian Liberation Front. Their stated intent was to:

- a) PROTEST THE LAWS RESTRICTING PEOPLE'S FREE USE OF THE UNITED STATES FLAG AS THEY SEE FIT.
- b) PROTEST AMERICA'S MULTIFACETED OPPRESSIVE ROLES IN THE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE FLEMISH AND WALLOON PEOPLE OF BELGIUM.

A reading from the Belgium Government in Exile's "Declaration of War" and the flag burning ceremony were performed in the courtyard of Judson Church on the day of the opening. Inside, more than 200 flag works were hung in the church Sanctuary and a "Symposium on Repression" was held that evening of November 9.

Detectives from the Mayor's Office attended the event and later, on November 13,



*Blood Bath*, Guerrilla Art Action at the Museum of Modern Art. November 18, 1969. Jean Toche, Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson, Silvianna [Goldsmith]. Photograph by Hui Ka Kwong. Opposite page: Government In Exile statement by Jean Toche.



## DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE

Republic of the  
Federal Socialist States of BELGIUM  
(R.F.S.S.B.)

### GOVERNMENT IN EXILE

- Action Committee for the Liberation  
of the Flemish and Walloon Workers
- Collective Committee for Direct Democracy
- Vigilance Committee against Centralized  
Authoritarian Hierarchy
- Action Committee for Sexual Liberation

Movement of May 4, 1969

Printed by Jean TOCHE  
at M. Groussin, New York, N.Y., June 4, 1969 (Page 1 of 10 pages)

Place for Flemish or Walloon translation

Hendricks, Toche and artist Faith Ringgold were arrested in the Judson Church sanctuary by four plain-clothes detectives and charged with "Flag Desecration."

The group, who became known as the Judson 3, were eventually found guilty on March 14, 1971 and sentenced on March 24 to one month in jail or a \$100.00 fine. Hendricks and Toche paid the \$300.00 fine for all three artists and that ended their ordeal. The flag desecration statute was overturned several years later. Throughout the legal process, numerous artists, cultural figures and groups rallied and demonstrated in defense of the artists and their actions including: Abbie Hoffman, Kate Millet, Leon Golub, Seth Siegelhaub, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, and the Greenwich Village Peace Center.

GAAG continued working throughout their legal proceedings in conjunction with *The People's Flag Show*. In 1971 they staged an action at MoMA to protest the change of having a free day to create a new policy that stated: "Pay what you can, but pay you must." The new policy, they argued in a January 11, 1971 letter to MoMA Director John Hightower, "... forces poor people to the humiliating position of paying 'little' or paying what they cannot afford, this under the supervised intimidation of the guards and staff." At the time of this publication, general admission to MoMA sits at \$20.00 for one adult with free visiting limited to four hours on Fridays.

On January 19, 1971, Hendricks and Toche delivered a communique, *Esthetics and Revolution*, at the Art Students League of New York. Many of these dictums remain quite useful to consider for artists who are interested in working collaboratively. GAAG's statement, in its entirety:

TO BE INVOLVED WITH USEFUL LABOR - AS A REVOLUTIONARY ARTIST  
- YOU MUST:

- 1) BE AVAILABLE WHEN NEEDED
- 2) FORGET ABOUT IMPRINTING YOUR OWN STYLISTIC ESTHETIC ONTO THE REALITY.
- 3) DEAL WITH DAY-TO-DAY REALITIES, NOT FANTASIES.
- 4) BE ABLE TO OVERCOME YOUR PERSONAL HANG-UPS.
- 5) DEAL WITH ISSUES, NOT PERSONALITIES.
- 6) BE ACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE.
- 7) BE ABLE TO WORK ALONE OR WITH OTHERS.
- 8) BE FLEXIBLE.
- 9) BE ABLE TO TAKE INITIATIVE WHEN NEEDED



- 10) NOT BE AFRAID OF MAKING MISTAKES.
- 11) NOT BE AFRAID OF BEING INCONSISTANT.
- 12) BE VERSATILE.
- 13) BE IMAGINATIVE.
- 14) GET RID OF PRECONCEPTIONS.
- 15) CONSTANTLY REDEFINE YOUR ROLE AS REALITY DICTATES.

JON HENDRICKS.

JEAN TOCHE.

Statements issued to the media, published letters, and mailed statements were as much a creative form for the group as their more bodily, performative gestures. On April 29, 1971, in support of the week-long *May Days* demonstration in Washington D.C., GAAG sent painfully sharp and dark humored performance instructions to six key officials: President Richard Nixon, Vice President Spiro Agnew, Special Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Attorney General John B. Mitchell, and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. As always, the messages were personally signed. The message to Nixon was the most succinct:

Guerilla Art Action, to be performed every day from May 1 through May 6, 1971 by Richard M. Nixon, President of the United States of America:

#### EAT WHAT YOU KILL

On December 12, 1971, GAAG participated in an open hearing at the Brooklyn Museum of art on the subject: "Are Museums Relevant to Women?" Their testimony is one of the few statements where men have openly criticized museums on behalf of women's inadequate representation in art institutions.

On February 28, 1974, Toche and Hendricks issued a GAAG statement calling for the release of Tony Shafrazi (who had been arrested for painting "Kill Lies All" on Picasso's painting *Guernica* while it was hanging in the Museum of Modern Art). Toche also sent a separate letter, issued under the name Ad Hoc Artists' Movement for Freedom. In the December 1980 issue of *Art in America*, Shafrazi argued (albeit not very persuasively):

I wanted to bring the art absolutely up to date, to retrieve it from art history and give it life. Maybe that's why the *Guernica* action remains so difficult to deal with. I tried to trespass beyond that invisible barrier that no one is allowed to cross; I wanted to dwell within the act of the painting's creation, get involved with the making of the work, put my hand within it and by that act encourage the individual viewer to challenge it, deal with it and thus see it in its dynamic raw state as it was being made, not as a piece of history.

GAAG felt that the museum was more concerned with protecting property and violating Shafrazi's free speech than upholding human rights. From the vantage point of seeing documentation of Shafrazi's action today, it is hard to see his action as particularly creative and it looks more like a base act of vandalism; a stunt by a young artist seeking attention. While hindsight is always 20/20, that Shafrazi soon became an art dealer selling high priced art as speculative property, makes it seem strange in retrospect that GAAG came to his defense. The

letter, signed only by Toche, states as they have in the past, that "property is the antithesis of art." The letter, which was mailed to sixty museums and publications in New York, called for the kidnapping of museum's trustees, directors, administrators, curators and benefactors, to be held as war hostages before a people's court.

While intended to function symbolically (past GAAG actions have never harmed people in any way), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) called the FBI upon receiving the letter. The Met were well aware of Toche from past statements and work, including an earlier action where Toche, along with writer Lucy Lippard and artist Hans Haacke disrupted a trustees' dinner and Haacke dumped live cockroaches on the table. On March 27, 1974, Toche was arrested by the FBI at his home in Staten Island on grounds that he had allegedly sent a "kidnap letter" through the mail. The government filed a motion to have Toche submit to a psychiatric evaluation to determine if he was suffering from a mental disorder. Over three hundred artists signed a statement in Toche's defense.

On November 27, 1974, Toche underwent a government imposed psychiatric exam and was found to be mentally capable of understanding the charges against him and fit to proceed to trial. Eventually, on July 11, 1975, the government decided to drop all charges against Toche without any stipulations or conditions. In a November, 2008 phone call with Temporary Services, Toche explained that after the US Attorney dropped the charges, the attorney mentioned to one of Toche's lawyers, Michael Ratner, that it wasn't really his idea to include the cockroach incident at The Met. Rather, eager law students who were working on the case suggested adding the cockroaches to the affidavit, despite the fact that Toche wasn't responsible for this particular aggression.

On December 13, 1976, Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche issued a statement announcing that the group had ended:

THE GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP IS DEAD.  
FOUL PLAY IS NOT SUSPECTED,  
POLICE SAID YESTERDAY.

Where were you?

Poppy Johnson described the collaboration of Toche and Hendricks in Printed Matter's 1978 book on GAAG: "Toche and Hendricks are separately very different people, but together they form some kind of unity of humanity which acts from a passionate conscience, sharp intelligence and dogged perseverance."

Toche and Hendricks remain friends and in regular contact with one another. Hendricks authored the mammoth book *Fluxus Codex* in 1988, and is curator of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus collection (the focus of *Fluxus Codex*). He also continues to be involved with the Artists' Poster Committee – the group that designed the famous My Lai Massacre-inspired poster, *And Babies?*, in association with the AWC. The Artists' Poster Committee Collection is housed in the archives of the International Center for Photography in New York. It includes more than 200 posters designed by artists to raise awareness of political and social issues. Hendricks and Joanne Stamerra – now Joanne Stamerra Hendricks – are married and Joanne runs a shop specializing in cookbooks. Poppy Johnson is currently the Assistant Director and Reference Librarian of the Floyd Memorial Library in Greenport, New York. Sadly, Virginia Toche died in 2000.

GAAG prefigured the important work of the unrelated groups Gran Fury, a New York City-based AIDS activism group that worked in the 1980s, and Guerrilla Girls, who formed in



New York in 1985 and continue to champion many of GAAG and the AWC's same concerns today – particularly the issue of inequalities for women and people of color in the arts. While Guerrilla Girls members are famously anonymous (members adopt the names of deceased female artists whose work is often under-recognized) GAAG signed their documents. They appeared undisguised and fully accountable in actions that often resulted in calls to the police, confrontations with security guards and museum staff, and personal repercussions for Toche and Hendricks. Educated, but still serious, risks were taken. At times, bridges were burned.

When GAAG was invited to take part in exhibitions and they had political reasons for not wanting to participate, they responded and stated explicitly what those reasons were. This can be seen repeatedly throughout their history (several examples are included in the *Printed Matter* book) and serves to provide a rare model for future generations on how to take institutions to task when it is necessary.

In the late 1990s, Toche returned to creative work after a long health-related hiatus. In the early 2000s, he began to regularly issue a self-published magazine titled *OF PISS @N' PUS*. Each digitally printed issue features up to the minute responses to then current events in the form of a signed retort to a news article, or a direct pronouncement. The design is straightforward with different paper colors, fonts, and pre-designed stationary stocks being the biggest graphic indulgences. Each page is hand-initialed in pencil at the bottom.

For the most part, the magazine features Toche launching into any incident, quote or governmental policy that demands an immediate reaction. The pages feature printing on one side of each sheet – like a collection of protest flyers – and removal or reproduction is encouraged. A sticker on the inside front or back cover notes: "Anyone can reproduce the individual pages of this art work/magazine, or any of the preceding ones, of any of the futures ones, without my permission: xerox them, mail them, put them on a web site or street walls, etc. .... providing the integrity of the art work is respected, that is, to only copy the page as a whole, without any editorial change." A similar statement encouraging flexible use is adhered to the backs of postcards Toche has created.

In 2001, Edition Hundertmark published a small compendium of texts by Toche. The



Selected issues of *OF PISS @N' PUS* by Jean Toche.



front cover of the booklet provided spaces for readers to print and sign their name and include their address, after opening with this mandate:

I, Jean Toche, declare:

"Unless you sign this chain-letter/statement, you will become afflicted with incurable cretinism."

After you sign the statement, make ten xerox copies and mail them to ten other persons involved in the arts. The statement reads as follows:

I piss on the arts

As an artist, one may perhaps feel particularly entitled to criticize one's own cultural milieu, but Toche was hardly finished. On the back cover of *I piss on the arts*, he proceeded to piss on everything else with an exhaustive list of targets:

Pus — opaque, yellowish white fluid matter, indicating an inflammation caused by the invasion of the body by a foreign microorganism; often synonymous with: the political process, Wall Street, the Pentagon, religion, property rights, censorship, museums, mono-culturalism, artists, self-censorship, the me-generation, the Internet, e-police, art critics, cops, the rich, tenpercenters, mega-corporations, GATT, Madison Avenue, the banking industry, the consumer-society, telemarketing, the rat race, the oil industry, the government, the FBI, the judicial system, the death penalty, prisons, puritans, discrimination, violations of human and civil rights, schools, family values, competitiveness, sports, gun owners, war, the software industry, the insurance industry, the health industry, pharmaceutical companies, the chemical corporations, the food industry, polluters, the CIA, bureaucrats, the real estate industry, builders, the utilities, the phone companies, the violation of privacy, the transportation industry, mega-media corporations, history solely as the history of the ruling-class...

Most recently, Toche has ceased publishing *OF PISS @N' PUS*, and taken up digital photography with Photoshop-manipulated images and added texts that he prints as large banner-like posters and smaller photo-based postcards (see pages 4 and 20) that he frequently mails to a range of people. These works were exhibited in 2007 in his show titled *Exploring the Sewers of Brutal Power*, at the Kunstverein Neuhausen in Stuttgart, Germany. Toche also showed this work at the Kunsthalle Faust in Hannover, Germany in his 2008 exhibition titled: *The Impertinence of Raising Questions / The Pertinence of Breaking Doors*.

Finding information on GAAG's work is harder than it should be. For those of us in Temporary Services, GAAG's work was not much more than a rumor for many years. GAAG showed up from time to time when we researched guerrilla actions or activist art practices, but detailed information and extended accounts didn't come easily. They are the kind of group whose work is sometimes used as an example, but they have rarely been given the serious attention that they deserve.

The key account of their work: *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group: 1969-1976 - A Selection*, published by Printed Matter in 1978, has become prohibitively rare and expensive. We secured a copy of this out of print, all encompassing resource via inter-library loan and scanned the whole thing before returning it so that all of us could read it and hang onto those writings and images for future inspiration.

Stephen Perkins, a friend of Temporary Services who is older than us, and wiser when it comes to early underground art practices, was not only up on GAAG's history, but had been in communication with Jean Toche and organized a show of his self-published postcards in his gallery. The 2006 exhibition took place at WC Gallery, a bathroom in Perkins' home where he and his family organize exhibits for their culturally limited town of De Pere, Wisconsin.

Stephen brought us up to speed on Toche's 'zine, *OF PISS @N' PUS*, and his recent digital prints. This material, further research, and the experience of seeing full documentation of GAAG's work in the Printed Matter book, filled us with excitement for this history and for the knowledge that Toche remains creatively active and pissed off as ever. Perkins had Toche's contact information. Temporary Services was frustrated by the lack of interviews with Toche and the general paucity of information on GAAG, so we set out to interview Jean Toche together with a co-authored list of questions.

It was Jean Toche's preference to answer our inquiries by mail. He responded to our first batch on Memorial Day, 2008, and then graciously let us follow up with some more questions later on. This is one of very few interviews by Jean Toche and he has shared a lot of information that is not available elsewhere. He has, at times, treated this opportunity as a poetic, political and performative space, much as he and Jon Hendricks did in 1972 when they were interviewed by critic Gregory Battcock for the February issue of *Art and Artists*.

Jean has been enormously kind to us, exceedingly generous, very patient, and also a hell of a lot of fun to work with. We are truly grateful for and inspired by all of his thought and energy and will miss receiving the many addendums to his answers that we'd pick up regularly from the post office. We are also indebted to Jon Hendricks who helped us with some facts and provided GAAG materials for reprinting in this publication. This booklet was printed in December, 2008.

**Temporary Services and Stephen Perkins (TS/SP):** At the age of 33 you left Belgium. What motivated you to come to the US?

**Jean Toche (JT):** Not true. On March 11, 1959 I had married in Brussels an American ballet dancer and Broadway performer, Virginia Poe (she had been in Colonel De Basil's Les Ballets Russes and had been one of the original performers in the Broadway musical *Oklahoma*).

In January 5, 1964 we left Belgium to live in Paris, France, where we lived, until we departed from Cherbourg (France) for New York on the Queen Mary. We arrived in New York on July 5, 1965. Age 33, as you said – still a strong stubborn Fleming: born in Bruges, Belgium, in 1932. Never mind that many in Belgian art circles claimed later that I stopped being an artist when I left Belgium.

The reasons for this move to New York were twofold:

- a) a few months before leaving Paris, Mike Sonnabend strongly suggested to me that I move to New York, that I was wasting my time in Paris.
- b) my wife had been in Europe for ten years and was anxious to go home and see her family.

**TS/SP:** Can you address your family background? Does your political activism have roots in this environment, and when did you become politically active? Was there any particular incident that precipitated this?

**JT:** My family background may have played a role in shaping what I am today, although in a



reversed way. My mother hated anything "socialist." She was the daughter of the Vice President of the Court in Bruges, and as a kid had been thrown in one of Bruges' canals by a group of socialist activists. She had developed bronchitis from that incident. I do not know the reason for that incident. She never forgave me for quitting the seminary school and going instead to public school, and the last time I saw her, a little before she died, she reminded me angrily of that decision. She was livid when I decided to go to the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) instead of going to the Catholic University of Louvain. Another cause of quarrel is that I was always criticizing my grandmother for having indentured (unpaid) servants, which I thought to be appalling. The first influence on my thinking was my high school literature teacher, who was a poet and a known communist. Later I became radicalized while at the ULB.

Another important factor in the development of my personality was a concert in Louvain by American jazz pianist Willie "The Lion" Smith. A high school friend had taken me there, and the music was an instant revelation and love. I immediately started to collect jazz records and see other jazz concerts and I started to read about this music. To study jazz is to study the history of racism in the USA and its appalling century of slavery, for which the USA has still not apologized. I started to play jazz myself (piano, bass and drums), but never became a very good musician. However I did organize two jazz concerts at the ULB (one with the blues singer Big Bill Bronzy and one with a mix of Belgian jazz musicians (tenor sax Bobby Jaspas, guitarist Rene Thomas with American jazz drummer J.C. Heard and others).

The other big influence came later, in 1958: that of my wife Virginia. I was at the time the alternate drum player and the alternate bass player in a nightclub in Brussels. She pushed me from music into the plastic arts. She paid, with her own money, for lessons that I took with a Flemish abstract-expressionist painter, Maurice Schelck. Two years later, I had my first art show. In the US, she had a lot of communist friends, and was profoundly anti-Republican. So I was well versed on American politics before I went to the States.

**TS/SP:** Why would members of "Belgian art circles" claim that you stopped being an artist when you left Belgium?

**JT:** When I left Belgium in 1964, I was an abstract-expressionist painter. When I went back two years later, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, I created there an aggressive blinding light/sound environment (the constant sound of a toilet flushing...). I also did a happening at Marcel Broodthaers' house (later he had a lot of problems explaining to the telephone company why I had broken his telephone with a hammer during that happening). Artists in Belgium spread the rumor that, while in the US, I had become a drug addict (that, of course, explained everything!).

**TS/SP:** Can you talk about your involvement with the Belgian Government in Exile and the strike at the University of Brussels?

**JT:** I was not involved in the strike at the Palais Des Beaux-Arts in Brussels nor in the strike at the ULB however my friend Marcel Broodthaers was. He had been very helpful in resolving various problems during my show at that Palais Des Beaux-Arts in 1966 (Robert Giron, then director of that Palais Des Beaux-Arts, upset by the contents of the show, had wanted to close down the show a few days after the opening). Marcel also had warned me in 1968 that the director of the Zodiaque Gallery in Brussels, under pressure from the Belgian Government, had agreed to sabotage my show there (he did: he did not mail any of the invitations – I found those invitations still in a box, several days after the opening of the show).



Marcel and I had long discussions about social issues during those two shows. When I formed the Belgian Government in Exile, Marcel printed at his home larger posters for me about it, and posted them all around, including at ULB.

However, in the early 50s, as a member of the student's union, I participated in, and in support of, the student's strike at the agricultural university of Gembloux, Belgium, and later helped organize the students' strike at the engineering university of Charleroi, Belgium. I also participated in the student movement to force into exile former King Leopold III, who infamously had tea with Adolf Hitler during World War II.

**TS/SP:** Can you give more details about the work & the problems you encountered with the 1966 exhibition at the Palais Des Beaux-Arts, in Brussels? Why did the Belgian government want to sabotage this show?

**JT:** The obvious problem was the aggressive sound track of the works involved. But I believe that it was just an excuse. A month before the show, I paid a courteous visit to Robert Giron. Marcel Broodthaers went in with me. After I had left Giron's office, Giron told Marcel that I was "an enemy." Of course, I had always been known for my "leftist tendencies," and I was known to be a strong critic of the Belgian government's policies in the arts. The last day of the show at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, the Provos came to see the show. On leaving they signed "PROVOS" in big letters on the walls of the gallery, with their spray cans (collateral damage?). However, the government's sabotage came two years later (1968), with the "manipulation" environment I had created at the Galerie Le Zodiaque in Brussels.

**TS/SP:** What was the Belgian Government in Exile, how long did it last and what was its mandate?

**JT:** The Belgian Government in Exile was an identity I had created to deal specifically with cultural and linguistic problems in Belgium. I used other identities as well (always confuse the enemy): Die Rode Brigade, The Belgian Liberation Front, the Front for Belgian Independence (FBI)...

**TS/SP:** How did you and Jon Hendricks meet and decide to work together? What made collaboration and working under a group name appealing to you?

**JT:** When I arrived in New York, artist and art critic Lil Picard, whom I had met while in Paris, introduced me to Al Hansen. As the result, I started to participate in Al's happenings. One evening, Al brought me to the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, to help Charlotte Moorman with the mailing she was doing for her coming Staten Island Ferry festival. It was my first mailing, and it was at that mailing session that I met for the first time Jon Hendricks, who was at the time the director of the Judson Gallery. Later Jon asked me if I was willing to participate in the "Manipulation Events" that he was organizing in the space at the Judson gallery. It was the beginning of a long friendship. Later, dissatisfied with the way the Art Workers Coalition was organizing demonstrations against museums, Jon and I, together with Poppy Johnson, formed GAAG. Another artist, Sylvianna, also participated in some of GAAG's actions, so did my wife Virginia, and Joanne Stamerra. Virginia also typed many of the early GAAG manifestos.

I would like to stress that GAAG was a totally independent group, never affiliated with AWC, although we were all members of AWC. AWC often supported what we were doing.

as exemplified by its stamp on several of GAAG's documents.

Why did it appeal to me to work in a group? Probably because of my earliest involvement in strikes in Belgium, when I was a law student at the ULB. Hey! In 1950 I did picket, with other ULB students, a concert in Brussels by Duke Ellington (whose music I love) because his concert was organized by a Spanish/Belgian Alliance (I also threw sulfuric acid inside the entrance hall, which delayed somewhat the opening of the concert). Many former students of the ULB had died in Spain in the 1936 war against General Franco. And I always refused to visit Spain as long as General Franco was its dictator.

**TS/SP:** How did you support yourself in New York?

**JT:** My wife worked as a secretary, then as a computer program and system analyst. She could no longer dance, having developed a slipped disc, after a fall on stage in the Broadway musical *Wonderful Town*. She explained to me once that she had transferred onto me her need for artistic expression, which is why she always tried to be a part of what I was doing as an artist. As for myself, I have always been allergic to steady working hours, such as a nine-to-five job.

**TS/SP:** Were there any models you were aware of, when you began, for artists directly challenging the authority of art museums and making this an important theme within the work? Was there anything in earlier art history that signaled to you that it was possible, or necessary to challenge these institutions as an artist, or did this feel like uncharted territory?

**JT:** The question of historical precedents was really irrelevant. We felt that, as artists we had to protest, using the tool we use: art.

You do not need to be held by the hand by big daddies, moguls (such as art critics, gallery owners, museums' directors), other artists... in order to be able to create troubling provocations against the art establishment and their often collaboration with existing governmental powers (the known collaboration between MoMA and the US Department of State, the involvement of some of MoMA's trustees in the business of the war machine...). We felt that to be silent was a moral crime and a betrayal.

**TS/SP:** In the recent book, *Realizing the Impossible* published by AK Press, Ben Morea of the group Black Mask describes a 1966 action where he told MoMA that he was going to shut the museum down. MoMA hired a massive amount of security but ultimately all Morea did was put a sticker on the door that said "Closed." Were you aware of this precedent? Did you have any contact with Morea – or was he an influence?

**JT:** No. I was not aware of what Ben Morea and his group, Black Mask, had done. Jon never mentioned it to me. But both Jon and I had faced opposition to our thinking and actions. Jon was threatened to be fired, after an event I did at the Judson Gallery. At the *Destruction Art* exhibition in 1968 at the Finch College Museum of Art in New York, my work was put in the toilet, so as "not to upset the visitors. ..."

**TS/SP:** What was your contribution to *Destruction Art* and why was it put in the toilet?

**JT:** The work in question was one of my aggressive blinding light sculptures. I have no idea of why it was put in the toilet, and it certainly upset anyone who had to use the bathroom there. Ask the Finch museum why they did it (But, Sir, you should have seen that work!).





**Remembering Virginia Fox (Virginia Toche) 1922-2000**

She was a pure atheist (not even baptized) and a gypsy dancer, from the heartland of the USA, Cincinnati, Ohio. She was a ballerina with the De Basil Ballets Russes. She was a part of the Hawthorne Concert Dance Group. She was a Broadway performer (Oklahoma, By Jupiter, Billion Dollar Baby, Allegro, Sadie Thompson, Hazel Flagg, Wonderful Town . . . ). She danced at the Folies Bergères and at Las Vegas' Flamingo (June Taylor Group). She performed on the Ed Sullivan TV Show and the Milton Berle TV Show. She was Miss Cincinnati 1948.

When we first met in Belgium in 1958, I was very wild, rebellious and self-destructive. She patiently nurtured me and carefully developed me into what I am today. She was a member of the Guerrilla Art Action Group. She was my editor.

She died on July 31, 2000.

I am her creation

July 31, 2004

IN MEMORIAM

© jean toche



**TS/SP:** In light of the many larger collaborative artist and activist groups in the 1960s and 70s, it is interesting that GAAG was generally only two people much of the time. What was the thinking behind the choice to stay small? Where was this an asset, and did you ever feel that the group could have been more effective if more people were involved?

**JT:** Jon and I always had a very good understanding of each other's limits and concerns. We were doing fast types of actions, often risking arrest. These strongly structured actions required strong self-discipline, acute awareness of our surroundings and of our actions, quick decisions and flexibility to allow possible changes in the planned scenarios (we always had backup plans). Whenever we tried to work with a lot of people, it did not work out. Chemistry.

**TS/SP:** Abbie Hoffman was a participant in the *Flag Show*, at Judson Church. Did you feel any kinship with his work? Were you ever tempted to get involved with the Yippies? Or to try to include him in your own actions?

**JT:** We all admired Abbie Hoffman, but we did not try to involve him in what we were doing. Probably again, a problem of chemistry.

**TS/SP:** You have written about the late artist Boris Lurie's<sup>1</sup> work. What were your feelings about the NO!art artists and did you feel an affinity with their work?

**JT:** Boris felt very strongly that art should be political. He was very supportive of our work. Some other aspects of his philosophy, we disagreed.

**TS/SP:** In the book on your work that Printed Matter published, several situations are described where GAAG either refused to take part in exhibitions (and explicitly told the organizers why) or where GAAG offered to participate in ways that the museum was highly unlikely to agree to (such as asking the MoMA's then director John Hightower to assemble a press conference on Moratorium day where he'd pour a gallon of blood over his head while slowly repeating "I am guilty" ten times).

In your work with GAAG, or later in your creative life, has it been a common occurrence that organizers have asked you to participate in exhibitions that you've had to decline? What were some reasons for turning invitations down? Has giving the museums critical feedback ever yielded productive dialog or changes in their institutional practice?

**JT:** I had walked away from participating in a show at the Jewish Museum when I learned that the sponsor of the show was American Motors, which had just been named as the worst polluter in America. I was going to show an anti-pollution presentation, and I felt it would have been absolutely hypocritical on my part to accept such stinking sponsorship. It had always been my experience that it is a waste of time and energy to try to deal "positively" with museums' politics. Absolutely. Museums' directors and curators just want to neutralize you, to get you out of their way.

**TS/SP:** There was often an element of absurdity and humor in GAAG's work – which is per-

<sup>1</sup> Boris Lurie (1924–2008) was a New York City-based artist and writer. He co-founded the NO!art movement, along with Sam Goodman and Stanley Fisher. His work in a variety of mediums including collage and sculpture was intensely coarse and often thrust ugly, real life realities like destruction, racism, sexism, imperialism and the Holocaust into the faces of viewers.

haps sometimes misremembered because the topics the group engaged were so serious. How important was the role of humor? Do you feel like audiences and other artists saw this humor or was it overshadowed by the more aggressive aspects of the work?

**JT:** Jon and I always could never resist a good laugh at ourselves. And in what I do today, I still persevere in that "tragic" policy.

**TS/SP:** Much of GAAG's work seems like it was very inexpensive to produce—consisting of a press release, mailings, leaflets, a few props and the cost of photographing the actions. Is it a correct assessment that the group worked very cheaply and was it a self-conscious decision to do actions that mainly put your bodies and reputations on the line and were not expensive to produce?

**JT:** Hey! We did what we could with what we had. You do not have to be a superstar or a rich artist to create troublesome provocations and bring attention to needed changes in our society. So, we were cheapies. Do you want to sue us about it?

**TS/SP:** To what degree did GAAG represent the concerns of others at the time of its actions? Were there any actions where it was impossible to get others involved or to find a sympathetic

**JT:** We were only a small part of a large group of ideas and feelings that were floating around



*Blood Bath.* Guerrilla Art Action at the Museum of Modern Art, November 18, 1969. Jean Toche, Jon Hendricks, Poppy Johnson, Silvianna [Goldsmith]. Photograph by Hui Ka Kwong.



at the time. And you cannot expect sympathy when you are trying to rock the boat. "Keep those maniacs out of here," screamed MoMA's PR to Lucy Lippard on the phone, right after *Blood Bath*.

**TS/SP:** Which actions do you think had the greatest impact – in terms of possibly affecting the behavior of the institutions or other targets of criticism? Which actions do you feel were the least effective, and perhaps even destructive to the group's aims?

**JT:** We, artists, refuse to be part of a zoological garden, where everything has to be analyzed and classified. It is for "art historians" to respond to those accusations. Boum, boum, boum.

**TS/SP:** What led to the dissolution of GAAG in 1976? There was a long period after GAAG where it seems you stopped producing art or exhibiting. Is this correct? What did you do during this time and what made you become more creatively active again?

**JT:** The dissolution of GAAG was the result in a way from my own health problems, although we continue to issue statements from time to time. The Judson 3 trial ("Send them to Russia, send them to Russia," kept screaming the clerk of the judge presiding the arrest of the three of us: Faith Ringgold, Jon Hendricks and myself), followed later by my being arrested by the FBI for hysterical and hilarious charges (thanks to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the charges mentioned my "dumping cockroaches on the dinner table during a trustees' "



*Blood Bath* at MoMA, Jean Toche in the background. Poppy Johnson in the foreground. Photograph by Hui Ka Kwong

THE DEFINITIVE/IST MANIFESTO

---

WIPE YOUR ASS VERY CAREFULLY WITH THREE PIECES OF TOILET PAPER  
FOLDED OVER, CAREFUL NOT TO GET DO-DO ON YOUR FINGERS, DISCARD  
AND FLUSH:

IT'S NEVER THEM, ALWAYS YOU.

A COP IS A JUDGE, IS A PRIEST, IS AN ARTIST, IS A PROFESSOR,  
IS A LIBRARIAN, IS A CENSOR, IS A GOOD SOLDIER, IS A DESTROYER:  
SOLDIERS, WHY DON'T YOU SHACKLE YOUR COMMANDING OFFICERS,  
AND SAY NO.

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, BELIEVING IN A RELIGION PISSES AWAY  
YOUR FREEDOM:

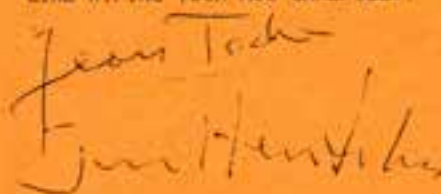
YOU MUST CONTINUE TO REDEFINE YOUR ENSLAVEMENT.

WHY DO YOU KEEP DISJOINTING YOUR BRAIN FROM YOUR TEARS  
FROM YOUR SWEAT:

EXPLOSIVES ARE A PRIMARY PRODUCT OF YOUR CREATIVITY.

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO BE SOMEBODY, WHY DO YOU ALWAYS  
HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR MARK, YOUR SIGNATURE, YOUR FINGERPRINTS:

WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE CONTENT WITH DOING USEFUL LABOR,  
LIKE WIPING YOUR ASS CAREFULLY?

Handwritten signatures of Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks in dark ink. The signature of Jean Toche is at the top, and the signature of Jon Hendricks is below it, written in a more cursive style.

NOVEMBER 15, 1981

GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP  
JON HENDRICKS  
JEAN TOCHE



banquet at the Met") contributed probably to a series of dizziness spells and seizures I started to have. "Young man, if you want to stay in this country, get a job and start earning some money," said one of the four FBI agents arresting me. I also was at the time the Chairperson of the Housing Committee of the Staten Island Branch of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and as such had been heavily involved in bringing to federal prosecution three racists (a cop, a fireman and a real estate dealer), who had set fire to a house in the village of Concord, in Staten Island, N.Y., just before a Black family, the Charles family, was to move in. The local District Attorney had refused to prosecute. The three racists were finally found guilty in a federal court for violating the civil rights of that Black family.

A good doctor in Manhattan decided to treat that dizziness problem with Valium ("totally safe," he said, and "not addictive" – he lied!). As the Valium did not solve my dizziness problems, he kept augmenting the dosage to finally full dosage. I became totally hooked for thirteen years!

I finally was able to resume work (although in a different form), after I went cold turkey from Valium. "If you have a ghetto address, I am obliged by the government to prescribe you Valium," a doctor in Staten Island told me once (it's called "cooling the ghettos"). Lately, good doctors are at it again: last year I accidentally broke my left leg. The doctors at the local hospital's emergency room immediately wanted to prescribe Valium. I refused.

**TS/SP:** Has your work in GAAG had any lasting personal impact in terms of how you are viewed by institutions? For example, do they view you with distrust because of past actions, or do you simply abstain from interaction with museums?

**JT:** For the cultural establishment, I do not exist. Who cares? Waiter, another glass of blood.

**TS/SP:** At present, you produce art but abstain from selling your work and prefer to give it away. Obviously as an artist living in New York where the market still dominates the art world, that puts you in a minority position. What is your thinking behind this?

**JT:** I refer you to the Addendum II of GAAG: "Our concern is with people, not property, or any form of property. We question the order of priorities in this country, the fact that property – how to defend property and how to expand property – always seems to have priority over people and people's needs."

I would also refer you to George Maciunas and his position that artists should not sell their art but find independent ways to survive. We are all prostitutes if we lose our independence as artists: "Bring in the gigolos (art dealers, museum's directors, art critics...)." No. We don't do that. In the good old USA, museums, cultural institutions, galleries ... are no longer places where to enlarge your vision, your knowledge, your sensibility. They have become essentially a capitalist tool – a tool for entertainment and a tool to augment the financial wealth of the art world. Change them, or destroy them.

**TS/SP:** Having moved from actions to a practice that is more focused on publications, correspondence based work and digital prints, what kind of thinking prompted the change of form and what advantages and disadvantages do you see in this type of practice?

**JT:** Necessity, no money, and other trivial factors. I do not think the change was ever a disadvantage. What counts is to continue to speak up, in whatever form.

**TS/SP:** Much of your work now, as with GAAG's work then, uses postal mailings as a means of transmission. How interested were you in correspondence art in the 1960s and 70s while GAAG was active? Did the work of Ray Johnson have any impact on your thinking?

**JT:** I had met Ray Johnson. But he was not a reference for us. Our primary concern was always to immediately put forward, after each action, our point of view and our intentions, especially in view of possible arrest with each action we were doing: who, what, when, and why.

**TS/SP:** As someone who had their own run in with the FBI, how do you perceive more recent persecutions of artists, such as the recently dismissed bio-terrorism case of Steve Kurtz of the group Critical Art Ensemble?

**JT:** As Reverent Jeremiah A. Wright so accurately said recently: "You can never trust the US government." In the past, the US government had experimentally injected syphilis into a large group of African-Americans, without their knowledge or consent. And the US government has never apologized to African-Americans for having allowed or promoted slavery.

Refer also to a postcard of mine, dated June 18, 2004 ("The US government is out of control. As a prelude to the Republican Convention next August/September, there has been massive harassment of the art community: - from Buffalo, N. Y., where artist Steven Kurtz was arrested on May 11, by F.B.I. agents, on unproven charges of terrorism...")

**TS/SP:** You've had a rather testy relationship with maintaining access to the internet - care to comment?

**JT:** I was expelled from the internet. Anyway, I disliked that process of anonymity pervading the internet (with GAAG, we always signed and identified ourselves). I also disagreed with another premise of the Internet: "be polite and courteous" - artist Louise Bourgeois once described me: "This is Jean Toche. His art form is to insult people."

This said, I strongly oppose those in Congress who presently would like to muzzle the internet, on the fallacious pretext that "it foster terrorism," or that "it gives a voice to terrorism." Fascism always starts with the muzzling of freedom of expression.

**TS/SP:** How do you get "expelled" from the internet? Despite your reservations about the internet, it would seem to offer you incredible possibilities for a very wide distribution of your work.

**JT:** It happened in the summer of 1984. At the time, the web did not exist yet. There were only a very few providers of connection. It was still very much a military/government experience, created so that scientists and researchers could quickly exchange ideas. I had become a part of a Bulletin Board System (BBS) created by the Democratic Party (I was still using a Commodore computer, with very little memory). A group for "Democrats for Reagan," became upset with my attack of Ronald Reagan. And they did not like my colorful use of the English language. So one day, I found that I had been locked out, blocked by the network - similar to what today they do to pornography users. That was it. There was nothing I could do. I was never allowed to present a defense of what I was doing. Totally undemocratic. I tried again in the early 90s to join another BBS. As soon as I started to post my political comments, everybody on that BBS left to form another group. The provider then told me they could not afford to keep a BBS just for me. A disguised form of censorship.





ner of Boulevard St. Germain and the Boulevard St. Michel. Americans were easy targets: not only were they always in groups, but, in those days, they always wore transparent raincoats. Today, you can spot them, because they all carry openly with them a water bottle.

**TS/SP:** Is there work being made today that inspires you? What have you seen recently that moved you?

**JT:** I do not need inspiration from other people. And I am not a social butterfly. I get my sources from newspaper articles, radio talk shows, TV news programs (especially foreign ones). Do you mind?

**TS/SP:** Recent exhibitions of yours have happened in countries like Germany, Italy and Japan. Have you had an easier time finding supporters of your work overseas? Have you found that there is a greater level of interest or support for work that criticizes the US Government from art galleries and publishers abroad?

**JT:** Yes. Absolutely. As an example of American bad attitudes, a little after 9/11, I received a nasty letter from a Staten Island artist. She accused me of being ungrateful, that I was "a guest" in this country, and that I had no right to criticize the US government. Of course she had her facts wrong: at the time, I had been a naturalized American for some time, with a US passport. Furthermore, I had always paid taxes, therefore I feel it is always my duty to question how the government is using my tax dollars.

I later saw her in a supermarket, and she repeated her nasty remarks, without giving



Display of digital prints by Jean Toche in Stuttgart, Germany, 2007.



me an opportunity to explain my position. If my memory is correct, a laundry list of mine of crimes against humanity committed by various previous US governments had been the cause of her ire. But to me, silence to such crimes by governments, political or religious entities, corporations, private individuals ... is never an answer. An example of that pissing reality that should have been answered is that Adolf Hitler, in the 1930s, was considered by many conservatives in the US to be a patriot and a nationalist – a view shared then by some of the major US corporations. Pro-nazi sentiments were very strong in Pennsylvania and other parts of the US – and let's not forget the scary demonstration by Nazi sympathizers at Times Square in New York City in 1940. Surprise, surprise: it is now well established that Hitler's source of inspiration for his racist and anti-Semitic deeds was the Ku Klux Klan.

No, we can never be silent to crimes committed against humanity, wherever they are, whatever they are – even if we are “guests” in a country.

Waiter: another glass of blood, with plenty of lemons this time ...

**TS/SP:** As you get older, do you have a specific sense of what you feel is left for you to do and how you want your work to be remembered?

**JT:** Reports of my getting old are premature. Doctors, in my latest medical test, described me as being in full vigor. Hey! I am only 75: half of my life? Who needs successful idiots, such as art critics, to tell me what to do next?

A matter of “standard operational procedure?”

As Betty Davis might have said: “Better fasten your seatbelt. It's going to be a bumpy road!”

“He was a nobody,” the cops said, as the ambulance pulled away.

**TS/SP:** What is the state of GAAG's archives? Who has the strongest holdings of GAAG artifacts, documentation, and materials and where can people see the work?

**JT:** Jon Hendricks would be better able to answer that question. I am a lousy and “out-of-control” archivist.

**TS/SP:** What do you think GAAG's legacy is?

**JT:** Jon and I are neither art historians, nor art critics, nor prophets. Only artists. We were only a small part of a long history of protests. But the art world should worry: seeds can germinate and others could pursue what was started.

## Further Reading and Viewing

*Alternative Art, New York, 1965-1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective*, by Julie Ault. University of Minnesota Press, 2002

PDF downloads of two key Art Workers Coalition documents and other information on the group: [www.primaryinformation.org/index.php?/projects/art-workers-coalition](http://www.primaryinformation.org/index.php?/projects/art-workers-coalition)

*Collective Creativity*, edited by What, How & For Whom (WHW). Kunsthalle Fridericianum and Revolver Books, Germany, 2005.

*GAAG. The Guerilla Art Action Group, 1969-1976: A Selection*. Printed Matter, 1978

A GAAG Bibliography: [www.leftmatrix.com/gaaglist.html](http://www.leftmatrix.com/gaaglist.html)

Photos by Jan Van Raay of GAAG: [www.otherthings.com/janvanraay](http://www.otherthings.com/janvanraay)

Judson Church in the *Greenwich Village Gazette*: [www.nycny.com/content/history/judson.htm](http://www.nycny.com/content/history/judson.htm)

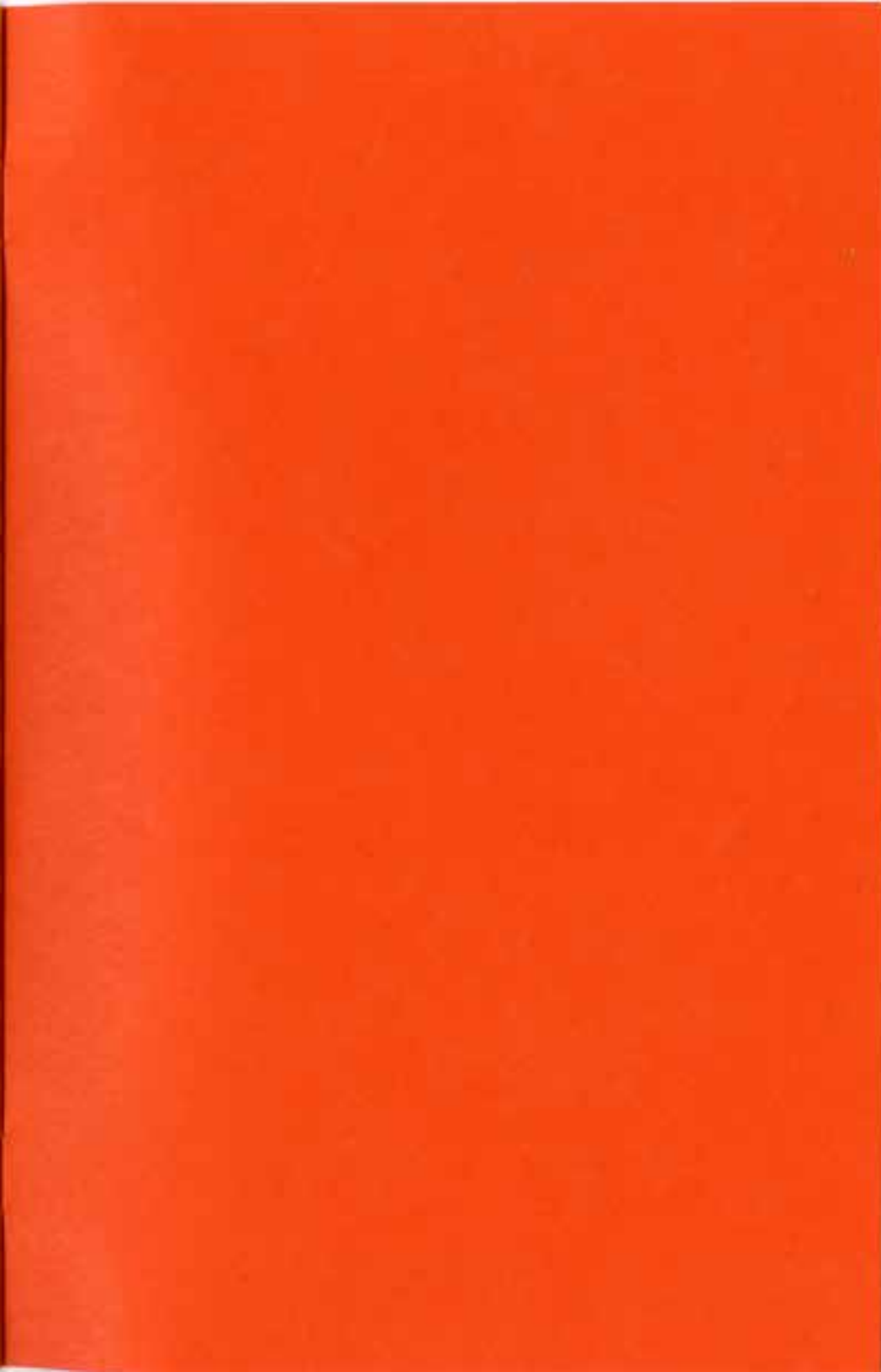
Wikipedia page on Judson Church: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judson\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judson_Church)

Wikipedia page on "Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam":  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moratorium\\_to\\_End\\_the\\_War\\_in\\_Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moratorium_to_End_the_War_in_Vietnam)

Tony Shafrazi spray painting on Picasso: [www.temporaryart.org/artvandals/03.html](http://www.temporaryart.org/artvandals/03.html)







## TEMPORARY CONVERSATIONS

We have a great appreciation for the interview format. When researching a favorite subject or person, it seems we always prioritize the interview as a primary source of information and inspiration. Essays can be effective too, but reading about someone's work, in their own words, often with a tone that makes you feel like you are sitting in the room with them, is particularly satisfying and sometimes feels more trustworthy as a reference.

Too often when we go looking for interviews with people whose work we admire, we find that they either don't exist, were done a very long time ago, or don't focus on the aspects of their work that we want to know about. This frustration has led us to conduct our own interviews where we get to choose the focus and ask the questions.

Frequently, when people conduct interviews, they have to be severely edited to fit within the confines of a book or magazine. While it's not any fun to try to follow the transcript of a rambling, fragmented conversation, sometimes too much nuance, detail and personality gets lost in the editorial condensation process.

Temporary Conversations is a series where each booklet will focus on a single interviewee or subject. The booklets can be as long as they need to be. For us they will be an opportunity to connect with and spread the ideas of creative people of multiple generations. Some will be people we have a long history with. Others will be folks that we've never met, feel rather in awe of, and needed to work up the nerve to contact for the first time. We'd also be happy to see others conduct interviews that we publish but do not participate in so if you have ideas for someone you'd like to have a temporary conversation with, please contact us.

Temporary Services, P.O. Box 121012, Chicago, IL 60612 USA  
[www.temporarieservices.org](http://www.temporarieservices.org) | [servers@temporarieservices.org](mailto:servers@temporarieservices.org)