

At the close of 2020, *Art Handler* invited our beloved art workers to imagine a better future and cast off a fucked-up past. So we sent a list of questions to people who, like a lot of us, are below-the-line and behind-the-scenes.

This mini-issue is our tribute to the undervalued and the fed up, to the industry's problem solvers and team players, to our global community of precariat workers who understand that the art world is not just a place for consuming art but a place where we work.

Thank you to all the contributors who helped us envision a world where people are respected and valued as much as the artwork that we literally make happen.



ART HANDLER 2020

A SOCIETY IN WHICH ALL ART WORKERS ARE CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TAKES A LOT OF IMAGINATION.

■ ■ ■ Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

Art Handler is the first publication to make the behind-the-scenes of the art world its focus. We celebrate the day-to-day grind that makes possible art's rarified and glamorous scene.

art-handler.com

Q: COVID-19 has cleaved the workplace into two categories: essential and nonessential. What does a society look like in which art workers are considered essential? In which art is essential?

A: We believe art fuels the soul, provides solace, and creates an opportunity to breathe, all of which are still needed during a pandemic and an economic crisis. Therefore, art workers are essential. Sadly, cultural institutions are choosing to center their collections and access to those collections for the few instead of on their workers and the public good. Everyday these workers protect, maintain, and support those collections, buildings, benefactors, and members that their institutions prioritize. However, these same workers who were underpaid and overworked prior to a global pandemic are now receiving rhetoric and harassment from their employers instead of hazard pay and increased overtime pay. Art workers should be compensated properly and protected like the collections these organizations value above all else.

For the Culture (New York, NY)

A: Covid-19 has highlighted and amplified what art workers have been seeing glimpses of in the field for years. Even when art might still be deemed "essential," art workers are often entirely forgotten. I've seen so many folks laid off, while those who are still working are expected to casually risk their safety to hang some work. If we are to start imagining an art world where art workers are treated as truly essential, our safety needs to be as high a priority in the eyes of collectors and institutions as that of the artwork that we handle. When art workers can feel safe on a job, (Covid safe, physically safe, well trained, with access to correct tools and equipment, etc.) the artwork gets the care and attention it deserves in turn. Safety is essential. Art workers deserve it.

Abby Chistensen (Phoenix, AZ)

A: In 2020, artists and art workers have been a key dimension of community resilience in the face of global crisis. We have shown the fuck up and our collective power is essential and undeniable. In my mind, housing security and a society where art workers are considered essential are overlapping struggles. Many artists and art workers are navigating COVID-related displacement pressures and are among the millions getting pushed into unemployment as US arts institutions respond to the pandemic. Displacement is a tremendous threat to local arts and culture, especially BIPOC artists/arts workers and small, culturally-specific institutions. As more community art spaces close their storefronts or go out of business during this time, we must consider the potential consequences of this real estate, freed-up through COVID-related displacement, being acquired by corporate entities or art world real estate speculators. Here in New York, evictions are starting across the state with no rent relief in sight. 1.4 million New Yorkers are unsure if they can pay next month's rent. Rent relief and an end to evictions would exist in a society in which art workers and art are seen as essential and worth protecting.

Ariana Faye Allensworth (Brooklyn, NY)

A: The city has its own definitions of essential and non-essential work, and on a micro level, institutions have created their own distinctions. It's clear by looking at trends of who has been furloughed and laid off, whose health is prioritized and whose is not, where institutions' priorities lie. Maybe I'm in a bubble, but this is what worries me more than whether or not art workers are generally considered important in our municipal hierarchies. A society in which all art workers are considered essential takes a lot of imagination, and the pandemic has shown us that even essential workers, who are quite literally keeping us alive,

are undervalued and treated poorly. In general, I think there should be way more nuance in our definitions of artists, art workers, and "non-artists." I think those lines can be fairly blurry.

Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

A: It's hard to wrap your head around how the abuse of and disregard for labor has been laid bare by Covid. Workers will be considered essential when the economic ruling class is forced to quit their embarrassing hoarding habit and flog themselves in the street in repentance for confusing people for things.

Kari Cholnoky (Brooklyn, NY)

A: I worked at an NY art school and beginning May 16th, my role and the roles of the people I managed were all deemed essential. We were asked to be on campus to assist students and help facilitate a reopening plan. While some students were in incredibly precarious situations and needed our support without question, I often worried about the safety of my team as they struggled to patch together a semblance of the art school experience. As I asked myself if this part of the job was "essential" work, it threw into question the entire higher educational model. What does it mean to pay tens of thousands of dollars for a degree in fine art? What does this debt mean for young artists? It was essential to get these students home to their families, to reunite them with their belongings, and to make sure they could return to a safe learning environment, and I strongly believe that art itself is essential for society, for people, and for our souls, *but* is this essential art living in art schools or in the contemporary art market? My answer was not decisive enough for me to feel justified asking staff to get on the subway and come to work on May 17th, 2020.

Harriet Salmon (Brooklyn, NY)

A: Well if anything has proven that we are essential to the art world functioning it is that we still have work during the pandemic, including many people going back to work during both lockdowns in the UK. The nature and amount of work has changed over this period (less work, redundancies, more private homes & collections, no massive international shows, no art fairs—*sob!*), but still, the art-tech industry has been functioning. That shows we are very much needed, right? Now we just need them to give us the working rights and financial rewards we deserve! So, we need to make ourselves seen but also use this time to assess what our industry does and how it does it. Part of the issue in our industry is that too often we make things happen when it compromises our safety and sanity. When we push back against our employers and stand up for our rights, then we can start to make some traction towards a safer, more equitable and financially stable industry. And let's face it— they can't physically get to us from their remote working stations, so if they want it done, they have to play nice!

Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

PART OF THE ISSUE IN OUR INDUSTRY IS THAT TOO OFTEN WE MAKE THINGS HAPPEN WHEN IT COMPROMISES OUR SAFETY AND SANITY.

Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: To see art's essentiality, look outside the art world, where people for whom art is essential tag shit and braid hair and pop wheelies and stack rocks on a trail; where there is little mediation between the impulse to create and the deed, or the product (which is not necessarily an object) and those who enjoy it; where making is valued more than what is made. When we're talking about "art work" here, it seems to me that we're really discussing *commodity* work. What, then, does a society look like that values art and the difference between art and art objects? What is artwork then?

Terence Washington (New Haven, CT)

WHEN WE'RE TALKING ABOUT "ART WORK" HERE, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE'RE REALLY DISCUSSING COMMODITY WORK.

Terence Washington (New Haven, CT)

A: After nearly 30 years attending and covering art fairs and auctions—my journalistic beat—this is the longest stint I've gone without either, for which I am nothing less than grateful. Call it the upside of a tragic pandemic that has yet to abate in affecting and claiming lives; which, as a result, has resulted in a commensurate upswing in local gallery attendance, a number that had been on the decline since fairs became more pervasive. When all is said and done with the advent of Covid vaccines and we feel confident enough to leave our shells, I hope we don't forget how vital and crucial gallery patronage is to the art ecosystem. Another unintended benefit of a crisis causing the world to take stock of its collective wellbeing has been the prioritization of what matters in life above and beyond the latest art sensation. If I hear the word "important" bandied around one more time in relation to an ultimately meaningless work of art, I'll puke. What is vital and essential is health, love of family, and of course art too. In this regard, I think of Paul Thek's meat sculptures, work by an artist prematurely felled by another pandemic: AIDS. Entombed in a clinical glass or plexi vitrine, a shard of flesh-like substance hand crafted from wax, pigment and bits of Canal Street plastics reminds us just how exposed and vulnerable we are and will remain, no matter the state of the market or technology.

Kenny Schacter (New York, NY)

A: Art handling is great for musicians. It's like treading water. You get off work, and you're done with enough pay to rent a room and have a drink with friends. For artists it's harder due to the stigma around doing manual labor despite any degree you might hold. Overall, this is a great temporary job with a lot of drawbacks. But, hey, bartenders get off at four am, but at least they drink for free! Art handling is only essential for the client, not the society at large.

Sam Andoe (New York, NY)

Q: Let's say art is nonessential. OK. What does society look like without us?

A: James: *Dune II*.
Devon: We're living in it.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp
(Cleveland, OH)

A: All textures in the world would be camo with green and brown color palettes. All objects and buildings would be rectangular in shape. Basically, it would all be uninspiring.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Art is nonessential like language is nonessential. We could all cut out our tongues tomorrow, cease all forms of expression, and live another day, but what is the point of that? We're not meant to live just to work. We're meant to live for expression and to be a part of a living breathing ecosystem. Creation and joy are essential parts of that system.
Jetaime Nkiru (Brooklyn, NY)

A: A world where art in a gallery ends racism and poverty, and the art handlers are the silent warriors who take to the streets on the behalf of all artists and galleries. Then, one day, that gallery will represent them!
Joachim Casteneda (Los Angeles, CA)

A: I think the relevance of art comes precisely because it's possible to say that art is both essential and nonessential at the same time. As we have discovered recently, the notion of what and who is essential must be challenged.
Lorenzo Sandoval (Berlin, Germany)

I DON'T CARE HOW MANY CURATORIAL MEETINGS, STUDIO VISITS, OR FUNDRAISERS THERE ARE, THE SHOW LITERALLY WILL NOT HAPPEN IF WE DON'T PERFORM THE PHYSICAL LABOR TO MAKE IT SO.

Tim Anderson (Washington, DC)

Q: What would make the post-pandemic art world a better place to work?

A: Three things: (1) Organize with your coworkers—In person or on Zoom. Employers have the money and they need you. Use your collective power. (2) Familiarize yourself with this number and use it: IRS Fraud Tip Line 1-800-366-4484 (1-800-877-8339 for TTY/TDD users) You can remain anonymous. (3) Don't buy your packing supplies from Uline. The Uihlein family has caused more destruction to unions than any other in the last 50 years. They were large donors to Donald Trump and they funded the biggest campaign that ultimately created the "Right to Work" law.
Your Union Friend (Brooklyn, NY)

A: We don't believe there will be a "post-pandemic" which is not to say that the pandemic will continue in its current form forever, but that we're entering an age of pandemics that will require massive, massive spending on public infrastructure in order to facilitate any semblance of communal space. Once that happens, we will have better workplaces.
Art and Labor (New York, NY)

WE MUST HAVE EACH OTHER'S BACK. MUSEUMS WON'T.

Gisele Motta (Los Angeles, CA)

A: During this pandemic we all experienced social and emotional isolation, so I like to believe the post-pandemic world will be a more accepting and forgiving world. We must have each other's back. Museums won't.
Gisele Motta (Los Angeles, CA)

A: For things to go back to the way they were before: being pessimistic about the art industry all the while working within it for the decent wage and flexible schedule.
Joachim Casteneda (Los Angeles, CA)

A: Clear concise communication, mutual respect, creating a diverse workforce. And more cake please.
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: I think my ideal post-pandemic world would be one where those of us typically seen as "at the bottom" or "nonessential" are given the fair shake we deserve; to be recognized and compensated proportionately to the incredible amount of work we do that largely goes unseen. I don't care how many curatorial meetings, studio visits, or fundraisers there are, the show literally will not happen if we don't perform the physical labor to make it so. The fact of the matter is that while it is often a profession that allows us substantial freedom, it is not one that widely offers compensation commensurate with the skill, physicality, and precision so many of us bring to it. I want to see that change in substantive and holistic ways moving forward.
Tim Anderson (Washington, DC)

A: The global pandemic has helped to put corporate priorities in perspective, and to change the way we work within our art logistics bubble. We need to think about our infrastructure, how we work and how collectively, we can change things for the better. Since leaving the corporate world in January, my focus has shifted to the environmental impact of the industry. I'm focusing on how we can improve air quality in our cities by taking "heavy-goods vehicles" off our roads, and how we can utilize more efficient, clean, art-logistics solutions. A big part of this personal mission for me is collaborative thinking. We need to start thinking about collaboration as a positive, not as a weakness. I've been immersed in it now for over 25 years—my entire professional career—but it scares me how little regard the industry has for the environment or for changing its practices. I want a post-pandemic art world where we work collectively to build a progressive and environmentally conscious industry.
Paul Embleton (London, UK)

A: James: BERNIE, UNIVERSAL HEALTH INSURANCE, livable wages. A more democratic approach to gigs and recruiting workers.
Devon: EMPATHY, BABY. Also, livable wages, health insurance, etc., etc., etc.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp
(Columbus, OH)

**IRS FRAUD TIP LINE 1-800-366-4484
(1-800-877-8339 FOR TTY/TDD USERS)
YOU CAN REMAIN ANONYMOUS.**

Q: If you're up for an existential ponder: What are we here for?

A: We are here to make mistakes until they turn into new growth.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Surely, most arts workers have had to explain to their family what they do for a living with a response of wonder and a sense of vagabond. Whenever I say I am a freelance art handler, I get told I am lucky to be in close relationship with artworks, artists and all the production involved in putting together a show. Then I explain all the Sisyphean wall painting, goalpost leveling, didactic vinyl removal, character development, tennis spectacle leadership, dates with forklift-certified mediocres, delivery missed-connections, existential comparison of art preparators vs. art handlers . . . everyone walks away.
J Rivera Pansa (Oakland, CA)

A: James: The movie *Minions* comes to mind ohh..and the *Escape from New York* soundtrack. Devon: I gotta just go with my first thought: that scene in *E.T.* where they find him all jacked up in that drainage ditch.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

SISYPHEAN WALL PAINTING, GOALPOST LEVELING, DIDACTIC VINYL REMOVAL, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, TENNIS SPECTACLE LEADERSHIP, DATES WITH FORKLIFT-CERTIFIED MEDIOCRES, DELIVERY MISSED-CONNECTIONS, EXISTENTIAL COMPARISON OF ART PREPARATORS VS. ART HANDLERS.

J Rivera Pansa (Oakland, CA)

Q: Tell us an art handler joke.

A: There's levels to this shit.
Jetaime Nkiru (Brooklyn, NY)

A: These aren't really jokes, just funny things techs have said: What do they call a 'J' bar in Japan? (only works in countries which don't call it a pry bar). How do you install artworks on a boat using a level?
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: One time, I was doing a delivery to the ADA fair—a tube of wallpaper for the gallery booth— and I was stopped by a security guard. For some reason this guy was cranky and decided to scold me by saying, "Hey, you can't bring anything larger than that in through the front door". To which I replied: "Fortunately for us, this tube isn't any larger than itself." I'd like to say we both shared a laugh at that, but we didn't.
Pat Palermo (Brooklyn, NY)

Q: What art-world norm needs to end immediately?

A: Museums that appoint board members who've earned their money by exploiting the masses or profiting off of their pain (Warren Kanders, Leon Black, Steve Cohen et al.).
Your Union Friend (Brooklyn, NY)

A: Exploitation and all white leadership.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Majority-white institutions.
Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

A: Giving part-time (or full-time) employees 1099s instead of W2s; equating the square footage of someone's studio to the importance or quality of their work; saying "That's an awfully big _____ for such a little lady" to any woman working a labor job.
Kari Cholnoky (Brooklyn, NY)

A: Internships/work experience for rich kids of gallery clients.
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: The lack of a nationwide unionized labor force for all positions: art handlers, gallery workers, institutional workers, museum security guards, etc. We need serious, well-structured union protections not tied to one institution or employer, so as to ensure rights are upheld across a broad and diverse coalition of workers. Contracts should not be renegotiated before benefits kick in. Health insurance should not be connected to employment and not be lost upon switching jobs. Part time, unpaid internships and/or 'gig' jobs should not be taking the place of paid positions with employment entitlements and other protections.
Camille Weiner (Los Angeles, CA)

A: James: Last-minute planning. Ugh, that shit drives me nuts. And pawning poor decision-making off on "laborers."
Devon: Definitely that entire thing about shit rolling downhill, also everybody's gotta turn that frown upside down and chill the fuck out.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

THERE'S LEVELS TO THIS SHIT. *Jetaime Nkiru (Brooklyn, NY)*

I WOULD LOVE TO SEE "HEIGHTH" BANISHED FROM THE ART WORLD. "HEIGHTH" IS NOT EVEN A WORD. HEIGHT. WIDTH AND FUCKING HEIGHT, THANK YOU. ANY CURATOR, ADVISER, DIRECTOR, COLLECTOR WHO SAYS "HEIGHTH" SHOULD BE BANISHED FROM THE ART WORLD AS WELL.

Pete Ortel (Los Angeles, CA)

Q: Is there one word or phrase that you would like to banish from the art world?

A: "Art world."
Art and Labor (New York, NY)

A: "The art world."
Joachim Casteneda (Los Angeles, CA)

A: "We must not diminish our level of excellence."
For the Culture (New York, NY)

A: "Seminal."
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: James: Referring to people as "FAMILY," unless you're in Detroit.
Devon: "FAMILY."
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

A: I would love to see "heighth" banished from the art world. "Height" is not even a word. Height. Width and fucking height, thank you. Any curator, adviser, director, collector who says "height" should be banished from the art world as well.
Pete Ortel (Los Angeles, CA)

A: "Well...that's creative." We can chuck that one right out! For decades, this idiom has been used to shame independent thinkers and non-conformers. It's a gaslighting tool wielded by the status quo to delegitimize self-expression and experimentation. When it's used on youth and artists of color, it's often in an attempt to degrade our excellence and devalue our cultural labor. It's also code for, "damn, that's BEAUTIFUL and fu*k you for creating it before I had the opportunity to plagiarize your sh*t!" You know what? I just changed my mind. Let's keep it—that fear response is precisely how we know we're making work that hits!
Nico Wheadon (New Haven, CT)

Q: What work of art do you most identify with?

A: Kerry James Marshall (B. 1955), "Still Life with Wedding Portrait," 2015 (acrylic on PVC panel).
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Eiichiro Oda's manga series "One Piece."
Art and Labor (New York, NY)

A: The installation by the random guy on Crenshaw Blvd., between Washington Blvd. and Adams Blvd., at the entrance to the 10 West.
Joachim Casteneda (Los Angeles, CA)

A: James: Kevin Reynolds' 1995 film *Waterworld*.
Devon: I'll second that, I'm down to clown with anything involving lobsters.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: What work of art do you most want to take a shit on and post the video on the internet?

A: Anything Maurizio Cattelan. Cattelan tends to talk about power and exploitative capitalism, while sitting back and watching art workers make his work for him. It is one in the same.
Your Union Friend (Brooklyn, NY)

A: So many, hard to choose. Richard Prince is too easy. Pooping on a John Currin painting would make a good video. I'm afraid pooping on a Jonas Wood might make it a good painting.
Kari Cholnoky (Brooklyn, New York)

James: Roxy Paine's "Checkpoint," TSA room—just for my homies.
Devon: Jerry Saltz.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: If you could be any art tool, what would it be and why?

A: A hex key—unique, nuanced, hard to find and the only thing that will do the job.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: An adjustable spanner.
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: A spirit level, maybe for obvious reasons?
Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

A: I'd be an impact driver—compact, strong, sometimes overkill.
Kari Cholnoky (Brooklyn, NY)

A: James: Shop Vacs—Wet Vac setting.
Devon: The ever-elusive, well-crafted bullet level.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

MASOCHIST.

Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

Q: What is your “stay calm, don’t punch this motherfucker” mantra?

A: This is art handling, not open-heart surgery
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: No one makes enough money to bail me out.
For the Culture (New York, NY)

A: "It's going in the book"
Kari Cholnoky (Brooklyn, NY)

James: They have money. Just calmly ask to use their bathroom, and *fill it up!* Or resort to "water-cooler talk"—never fails. If a client really pisses me off, I’ll hang a small picture with five heavy-duty toggle bolts. Just tear the drywall up.

Devon: Try to goad them into punching you first.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: Finish this sentence: “I am an art worker, which also means I am a(n)…”

A: Human sacrifice to culture.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Human being.
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: Masochist.
Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

A: James: Available on weekends.
Devon: "What's your Pleasure?"—Hellraiser
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

AVAILABLE ON WEEKENDS.

James McDevitt-Stredney (Columbus, OH)

Q: If you were to give yourself a title, any title, that accurately describes your job, what would it be?

A: Jack of all trades, master of none.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Hostage negotiator.
Camille Weiner (Los Angeles, CA)

A: Queen Art Fluffer.
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: James: Quicker picker upper.
Devon: Professional toucher.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

QUEEN ART FLUFFER.

Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

Q: What astrological sign would you ascribe the art world?

A: Gemini Sun, Scorpio Rising, Aries Moon, Scorpio Venus.
Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: All of them! If some are less represented—that’s a problem!
Art and Labor (New York, NY)

A: Cancer-Leo cusp Sun, Scorpio Moon, Sagittarius Rising, Mercury in Gemini, Venus in Libra. Mars in Cancer, Jupiter in Capricorn, Saturn in Cancer, Uranus in Taurus, Neptune in Aquarius, Pluto in Libra.
J Rivera Pansa (Oakland, CA)

A: Leo!
Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

A: Taurus—hyper-involved in materialistic pursuits.
Camille Weiner (Los Angeles, CA)

A: Cancer/Libra/Gemini
Joachim Casteneda (Los Angeles, CA)

A: James: LEO. I’m a Leo dude.
Devon: TRIPLE CANCER. Please, Leave me alone.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: Imagine you are in a group therapy session with art workers. What anecdote would you share?

A: James: I heard this counts towards my community service.

Devon: I'm here for the bagels and coffee.
*James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp
(Columbus, OH)*

A: I applied to be a site manager for the Kara Walker installation at the Domino Sugar Factory, produced by Creative Time. I figured out that the other finalist was a white woman who was already working at Creative Time. In my interview I remember saying something like, "Whoever takes this position should be able to articulate basic thoughts around race and identity." I didn't get the position, the white woman did, and my comment in the interview ended up being famous last words. One day while I was organizing an intervention with other artists and art workers—an explicit invitation for people of color to view the work together—the site manager got into an argument with a visitor of color. That visitor was angry because a white visitor was taking an inappropriate, deeply racist picture with the sphinx. The white site manager got involved and started yelling, "This isn't about race!" Then she had a physical altercation with the white visitor who was taking the racist photo. The site manager was quickly removed from the premises by security.
Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)

A: I worked for this Chelsea gallery owned by a legendary asshole. I called him Eightball because he's round like a billiard ball and you never want to have contact with him. Every time he was even

mildly agitated—by which I mean, you did your job in front of him, or asked him a question, or volunteered a solution to a problem—you'd wait in dread to see what answer would bubble to the top. Kind of like a Magic Eight Ball! But unlike a Magic Eight Ball, his answers were just combinations of insults, anger, and abuse. One of my co-workers asked a spiritual advisor how to calm his mind when dealing with Eightball, who is brutally effective at wracking nerves even in the most placid of situations. The advisor told him to recite this mantra anytime he encountered Eightball, as a reminder to himself of their shared, common humanity: *"The spirit within me reaches out and touches the spirit within you."* I laughed when my coworker told me this mantra, but eventually Eightball wore me down so badly that I tried it. It never worked—for either of us.

Pat Palermo (Brooklyn, NY)

A: I was installing at a professional athlete's newly built home. I was hanging the last piece, a tiny shelf for baseballs, and I needed to put a screw in the wall. I checked for studs, tested with a penny nail, did all the things, but when I put a screw in (only 1 inch!) I somehow managed to find a waterline and stabbed right through it. It sprayed hot water all over me and all the way to the wall across the room. It was like a cartoon. Turns out it was a contractor error and it hadn't been up to code. Sometimes you do all the right things but just can't win.

Abby Chistensen (Phoenix, AZ)

A: I had to install a small bronze very important sculpture [for a museum refit] which required it to be attached to a marble plinth. As the marble plinth arrived late (of course) we had to make up

the time needed to drill all the mount holes for the object so I stayed late on my own [time] drilling out the marble plinth. It was the usual, diamond tipped drill bit which we only had one left of onsite and it was slow-going as the holes had to be very, very deep. I installed it and it looked great. When I arrived the next morning, the curators and collection managers all gathered around to marvel at my amazing work, but then they told me "it's facing the wrong direction." Never cried at work before, so that was fun.

Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

I WORKED FOR THIS CHELSEA GALLERY OWNED BY A LEGENDARY ASSHOLE. I CALLED HIM EIGHTBALL BECAUSE HE'S ROUND LIKE A BILLIARD BALL AND YOU NEVER WANT TO HAVE CONTACT WITH HIM.

Pat Palermo (Brooklyn, NY)

Q: Worst group of people — call 'em out.

A: Mansplainers.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: War criminals.
Art and Labor (New York, NY)

A: James: Clients that don't tip or just stand there and watch you install everything.
Devon: Nepotism within the gallery world.
*James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp
(Columbus, OH)*

Q: What would you do if you had \$1,000? A million dollars? Would you make art? Sell it? Forget it and start a yoga commune on the beach?

A: \$1,000 could support a queer dance party with drag kings and queens and everyone on a boat in uncharted waters. With a million, we would donate half to the Transgender District in San Francisco and the rest would buy us a boat, get all the performers and gogo dancers, pay everyone extremely generously and the party would never have to end!

@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Honestly, if I had \$1,000, I'd get some dental work done. But if I had a million dollars, I'd buy this big spooky historic high school that's for sale in Tombstone, Arizona. I'd turn it into an artist residency and shared workshop space. Folks could make work there, and I'd teach and help crate the work. It would be the perfect setup!

Abby Chistensen (Phoenix, AZ)

A: "What would you do if you had \$1,000?" is such a depressing fantasy question. Sadly it's very on-brand for struggling art workers. I actually have \$1,000 at the moment, which is why I'm getting an iPad Pro. I'm going to try to teach myself some digital illustration skills so I can get the fuck out of art handling forever.

Pat Palermo (Brooklyn, NY)

I'M GOING TO TRY TO TEACH MYSELF SOME DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION SKILLS SO I CAN GET THE FUCK OUT OF ART HANDLING FOREVER.

Pat Palermo (Brooklyn, NY)

A: James: I'd put a Trader Joe's on Wall Street—for the homies.

Devon: Open a museum filled with trash.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: Name a shitty tactic that museums and/or galleries use to keep art workers at the bottom and art bosses at the top.

A: Discount your abilities, education, and knowledge so that you don't speak up.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: Shittiest late stage capitalist tactic goes to *independent contractor* classification. Folks are subjected to limited connectivity with the institution or workspace culture then are expected to function as facilities managers. And with that, the expendability; limiting the work hours of an individual by treating contractors as game pieces in bureaucratic logistics. Like bruh, y'all goofy.
J Rivera Pansa (Oakland, CA)

A: Same as in politics really. Oppressed groups are taught to hate and attack each other, while the oppressors float to the top, hanging on to power while appearing blameless. Particularly pernicious is the bad faith argument that "art world administrative jobs, such as registers, artist liaison, etc., are not working class jobs." The subtext here is, firstly, that there is an immediate division created between all involved parties—say between art handlers and registrars—even though both may hold degrees, both may be paid the same base wage, neither manages other workers, and both answer to the same controlling manager in some sense. Secondly, it implies more subtly that the abuse endured while working these administrative positions—which is plenty, because the artworld both runs on and produces its own share of racist, classicist, misogynistic, and sexist policies—is to be expected and, therefore, ignored, absorbed, justified and excused. This division is a blunt but useful tool for entrenching existing prejudicial norms.
Camille Weiner (Los Angeles, CA)

A: Not discussing rates of pay, being told it's confidential, etc. They're just trying to keep us underpaid and working against each other by creating competition and secrecy. Discussing rates of pay creates transparency and unity in workforces—that's why unions and collectives are so important!

Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: James: Using the terms "PART-TIME," "contingent prep"... any of these labels will do.
Devon: Telling me that 30 hours a week is full-time.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: Many say, "Demand better, join unions!" Is that possible for you? If you haven't joined, what's stopping you?

A: Damn straight! We started one in the UK called BECTU Art Technicians branch. It's still slow going to create unity across the industry as we are still relatively small, especially as art handling is seen as a side gig for a lot of people. But the most important thing is that we help individuals with employment matters and general support. It's reassuring to know someone's got your back, especially having spent years being shat on by the art and cultural world in terms of employment rights.
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)

A: James: Eh, I've heard of a few people who gave unionizing a shot where I live, and it backfired within the collective. Institutions will be like "Oh, we'll just hire others," which inevitably makes us feel expendable and replaceable.

Devon: I don't see it happening until we get some industry-wide organization and are in a position to put the hurt on: a strike.

James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

I DON'T SEE IT HAPPENING UNTIL WE GET SOME INDUSTRY-WIDE ORGANIZATION AND ARE IN A POSITION TO PUT THE HURT ON: A STRIKE.

Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Q: Manual-labor fashion is super hot right now—thanks Carhartt! If you could cosplay any other trade, what would it be and why?

A: Internet blogger, it's all trades but without the need to commit.
@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)

A: I would be a trucker, hands down. Catch me on the road with my 18 wheeler, turning heads at gas stations across the country.
Jetaime Nkiru (Brooklyn, NY)

A: James: The fisherman Seth Feider. "Prespawner, dude!"
Devon: A scientist.
James McDevitt-Stredney & Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)

Contributors

@Arthandlxrs (San Francisco, CA)
Abby Christensen (Phoenix, AZ)
Ariana Faye Allensworth (Brooklyn, NY)
Art and Labor (New York, NY)
Camille Weiner (Los Angeles, CA)
Devon Clapp (Columbus, OH)
For the Culture (New York, NY)
Gisele Motta (Los Angeles, CA)
Harriet Salmon (Brooklyn, NY)
J Rivera Pansa (Oakland, CA)
James McDevitt-Stredney (Columbus, OH)
Jetaime Nkiru (Brooklyn, NY)
Joachim Casteneda (Los Angeles, CA)
Kari Cholnoky (Brooklyn, NY)
Kenny Schacter (New York, NY)
Lorenzo Sandoval (Berlin, Germany)
Nico Wheaton (New Haven, CT)
Pat Palermo (Brooklyn, NY)
Paul Embleton (London, UK)
Pete Ortel (Los Angeles, CA)
Sam Andoe (New York, NY)
Sarah Titheridge (London, UK)
Taja Cheek (Brooklyn, NY)
Terence Washington (New Haven, CT)
Tim Anderson (Washington, DC)
Your Union Friend (Brooklyn, NY)

Special Issue, December 2020

Editor-in-Chief: Clynton Lowry
Managing Editor: Lucy Hunter
Copy Editor: Beth Williams

info@art-handler.com