Collaborations: Inside the Armory, Out on the Street brings together five teams of artists who work with one another cooperatively on projects in both private and public spaces. Each team—Anne Bray and Molly Cleator; Margaret Crane and Jon Winet; Renée Edgington and Matthew Francis; Daniel J. Martinez, Renée Petropoulos and Roger F. White; and May Sun and Richard Wyatt—is represented by a new installation in the Armory’s gallery and a public project.

The artists’ collaborations are indeed intellectual endeavors—copious investigations into AIDS; class, gender and race relations; authority, power and the military; mental health; media spectacle; and issues surrounding the practice and definition of public art. Their public projects extend the collaborations from inside the Armory to “out on the street”—some quite literally; others metaphorically. The artists are documented in the catalogue by their statements and biographies and by photographic and written documentation of their work. This material will be completed after the exhibition opening and can be inserted into the envelopes bound in this book.

The idea for this exhibition results from my preoccupation with collaborative and public art in my academic and curatorial endeavors. At the USC School of Fine Arts, I have taught graduate seminars on artists’ collectives and collaborations, and the history of public art. My doctoral dissertation on Fluxus, an international network of artists active since the early 1960s, has brought me in contact with those who prefer collective forms of production. A five-year involvement with the Artist Projects Series at Santa Monica Museum of Art also fueled my ideas for Collaborations.

It was my good fortune to receive the 1994 Pasadena Art Alliance’s independent curator grant, which has enabled me to curate Collaborations at the Armory Center for the Arts. First, I would like to thank the Pasadena Art Alliance, particularly the Exhibition Committee, who have demonstrated an ongoing vote of confidence for this project. At the Armory Center for the Arts, special thanks are due to Elisa Greben Crystal, Jay Belloli and all the Board and staff members for their support. MacRae Wylde and his crew also deserve recognition for their hard work on the exhibition installation.

I gratefully acknowledge those who produced this catalogue: Kimberly Baer and Margaret van Oppen for an imaginative, elegantly designed book; Carolyn Wendt for her astute editing; and Harry Montgomery and David R. Allen for the superb printing by Typecraft, Inc. Special thanks to Jay Belloli, Linda Brownridge, Susan Caldwell and Gretel Stephens for their careful proofreading. I extend a special thank you to David Familian for his excellent photographs of the artists’ work, and for his ongoing help with our own most cherished collaboration, Maximilian Moss Familian.

Finally, I extend my deepest appreciation to the artists in the exhibition for making both the exhibition and publication such a challenging and exciting experience with such meaningful results.

Karen Moss
Curator
Collaboration is a defensive system against the shock of the modern city.1

WALTER BENJAMIN

CURATOR’S INTRODUCTION

The five teams of artists in Collaborations: Inside the Armory. Out on the Street make collective productions for both private spaces and the public arena to address specific cultural, social and political issues. Each team has produced an interdisciplinary installation inside the gallery and has also engaged in a project outside the Armory, actively intervening in a particular space, institution, organization or even the public consciousness. The artists seem to update Walter Benjamin’s definition of collaboration as a “defensive system against the shock of the modern city” by choosing subjects and methods that attempt to combat the increasing alienation of life in the postmodern megalopolis of Los Angeles. Although their processes of collaboration differ, they share a mutual interest in the dichotomy between private and public space and how art and artists function in our complex and often hostile urban environment.

The artists in each team combine their respective backgrounds in painting, sculpture, photography, media, performance, writing and architecture to create interdisciplinary and intermedial work. Some also choose to make art as individuals, while one team has produced art together exclusively for a decade. Virtually all of the artists have participated in officially sanctioned public art programs, although a few have concentrated on their own guerrilla activities. Their reasons for collaboration are as varied as their processes, but they all opt to create an ongoing exchange of ideas and energy with a collective vision.

Collaboration is anti-hierarchical, freely associative and dynamic—an open dialectic that functions within a check and balance system. It is also an arduous, time-consuming process where conflict ultimately finds resolution. Collective practice does not necessarily defy the idea of the artist as an “auteur,” nor does it negate the concept of individuality; each person’s strengths combine to form the sum total of a composite whole. Collaboration is, therefore, additive rather than subtractive. It does not signify the disappearance of a producer; rather, it is an accretion or aggregation of multiple authorship.

Collaboration in Context. Throughout history collaboration has been the rule rather than the exception: cave paintings, neolithic monuments, pyramids and temples are all authorless, collective productions. Although identifiable artistic personas date back to antiquity, medieval frescoes and murals, architectural sculpture, manuscript illumination and tapestries relied upon the talents of multiple producers working in guilds or workshops. Beginning in the Renaissance, changes in patronage exalted the idea of the individual artistic genius. After the 18th century’s age of enlightenment, democratization created public institutions to display art, but as art moved away from private hands to the museum walls, the emphasis on single, great authors or personalities increased.

The highly romanticized myth of the solitary artistic genius prevailed throughout the 19th century, but began to dissipate with modernism. During this century artists have chosen to collaborate in pairs, groups and collectives, often in a particular medium, a specific community or with a common philosophy. Formalist art historical literatures of modern “masters and masterpieces” often downplay collective practice, yet collaboration was integral to many avant-garde movements. In cubism, expressionism, synchromism or the Bauhaus, the will to collaborate arose from formal impulses: to experiment by pushing the limits of a given medium or breaking the boundaries of a prevailing tradition. Other groups such as the futurists, dadaists, cubo-futurists, constructivists and surrealists were...
more ideologically or sociopolitically motivated; they used multiple voices to radically restructure the function of art in society and to represent the dislocation of modern culture, often in public rather than in private spaces.

After World War II international avant-garde artists formed collaborative groups that often worked in the public arena. In the mid-1950s the Japanese Gutai and Neo-dada groups organized exhibitions in the open air and staged performances on Tokyo streets about the destruction of art and nature. The Situationistes Internationale, founded in France in 1957, indicted capitalist consumerism and the de-politicized spectacle of media that replaced active participation in public life. Their theories of an “integrated city life” and larger-than-life urban artworks and actions aimed to increase social interaction and influenced the May 1968 general strike in Paris. In the 1960s other groups—including the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in England; Group Zero in Germany; and Fluxus in Europe, the United States and Japan—performed collaborative interventions in various public spaces.

It is in the late 1960s that an increasing number of American artists also worked together in teams or collectives to rebel against the prevailing aestheticism and consumerist orientation of the art market. Collaborative performance, video, murals, photography and site-specific or public projects defied commodification and necessitated presentation in non-traditional sites. Alternative galleries and artists’ spaces began to flourish and present new media, as numerous collectives or groups rallied around specific issues such as women’s rights, ethnic awareness and the environment.

The collective practice that began in the late 1960s resurfaced in the 1980s and continues into the 1990s. In reaction to the huge boom in the gallery-oriented commodity art of the 1980s, groups such as Collaborative Projects, Inc. (CoLab) in New York mounted temporary exhibitions in urban sites and organized public art projects, while alternative galleries proliferated in East Village storefronts. Artist/activist groups such as the Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury and ACT UP began to use city streets and public media as a locus for protests about body rights, feminism and the international AIDS pandemic.

In the past few years the “culture wars” surrounding censorship and freedom of speech, or specific current events such as the Gulf War, have encouraged artists to come out of isolation to work with others in a proactive manner. Current post-structuralist and deconstructionist theory; the continuing debates on multiculturalism, immigration and urbanism; and the harsh realities of the economic recession have also instigated collaborative practice. This past decade an increasing number of government agencies and private sponsors have begun to initiate public art programs that not only encourage but often mandate collaborative teams. In this recent climate of activism, collaboration and public participation, contemporary art is becoming increasingly accessible to wider, diverse audiences.

Investigation / Installation / Intervention. This climate of activism, collaboration and participation also motivates the artists in Collaborations. Although their methods differ, the teams use a multi-leveled process of investigation, installation and intervention to make their work by immersing themselves in their areas of interest. They use the fruits of this research to create a discourse or dialogue among themselves, which they extend to their audiences through their interdisciplinary installations. Incorporating sculpture, photographs, audio or videotape, digitally generated images and written texts, these installations conceptually and visually articulate the results of this investigative process and become metaphors for their discursive process. The artists reveal ideas and raise questions about particular issues, some quite subtly, others more overtly. For their public projects they bring their dialogues from inside the Armory gallery to “out on the street” by intervening in various institutions, organizations and spaces. Some teams actively intervene in specific sites in the urban environment, others infiltrate public institutions or private organizations, while one access the electronic and global domain of cyberspace.
Since the artists’ projects are still in process at the writing of this introduction, the following may serve as a point of reference for their collaborations inside and outside the Armory.

Anne Bray and Molly Cleator combine their respective backgrounds as media and performance artists with their mutual interest in presenting personal material in a public context. Collaborators since 1989, they produce work that combines the live with the mediated, mixing genres such as video, movement and sculpture. They like to collect and reveal private material to the public in specific sites to examine social issues for a broad audience. For Collaborations: Bray and Cleator engaged in a cultural/personal exchange with nine women who are supporters of the arts in Southern California. The artists wrote a series of questions to create an ongoing cultural and social dialogue, then met with the women individually in their homes and as a group at the artists’ studios. These conversations have evolved into text, photographs, a selection of personal objects and other media that are integrated into Bray and Cleator’s installation. For their public project, they are collaborating with the nine participants on a project of mutual interest that will be related to the subject of women in the arts.

Margaret Crane and Jon Winet have produced over seventy-five exhibitions and projects, often interdisciplinary photographic image/text, site-specific installations and publications, during the past decade. They seek to cross boundaries of individual creative production, opting for the adventure and the unpredictability of joint authorship—a collaboration that produces “the third mind.” Crane and Winet, who work as a photojournalist and publicist/copywriter, respectively, reclaim and recontextualize the material they produce in their day jobs in their art. General Hospital, their project for Collaborations, investigates the state of mental health in America in the 1990s and strives to “take the temperature” of contemporary urban American culture. In General Hospital, personal and institutionalized issues surrounding mental health create a context for examining the current social and political atmosphere. The artists’ investigation of the parallel industries of media and mental health and their research with professionals, clients and the general public provide material for their photo/text multimedia installation. For the public aspect of their project, a computer terminal in the gallery, operated in collaboration with Caltech students, allows the audience to respond to issues surrounding mental health through a “news group”—an interactive element that can engage an infinite “electronic” public.

Renée Edginton and Matthew Francis produced a wide array of visual projects in response to the AIDS crisis through their previous affiliation with the collective Powers of Desire (POD). They now produce art as a team and run Clean Needles Now (CNN), a free needle exchange and AIDS education program. Their artistic production, ranging from printed informational pamphlets to public performances and sculptural installations, informs the public about issues surrounding safe drug use, AIDS prevention and peer education. Edginton and Francis’ gallery installation for Collaborations includes sculptures, photographs and text demonstrating their ongoing process of clean needle exchange. The title, State of Emergency, refers to Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan’s recent declaration about the AIDS epidemic and drug use, which now allows clean needle exchange within existing city and county programs. Edginton and Francis are currently working in adolescent drug education and AIDS awareness under the auspices of Children’s Hospital in Los Angeles. For Collaborations they have forged connections with the Pasadena Health Department to create a needle exchange in this area, as they continue their interventions on the streets of Los Angeles.

Daniel J. Martinez / Renée Petropoulos / Roger F. White (MPW) have collaborated for the past four years on what they call “large-scale urban art.” Martinez and Petropoulos are artists and White is an architect—different backgrounds that they find complementary. MPW describe their work together as “an equal collaboration—a contagious spiral of collective energy.” They view their process as completely interactive and integrated, preferring to first observe the whole, then to slowly reveal a multitude of lay-
ers. MPW’s projects include *This Is A Nice Neighborhood* for San Francisco, *Municipal Services Building Plaza* for Philadelphia and *Union Station Gateway* for Los Angeles. Their *Collaborations* installation is organized around, and in, a cruciform plan which affords three "aspects," each containing a one-eighth scale model of these three projects. On the walls they present documentation including their own drawings, proposals, texts and newspaper clippings to reveal the specific reactions to their proposed projects and the complexities of the public art process. For their public project, during the course of the exhibition MPW will give away more than two hundred handheld viewers containing three-dimensional images/sittings of past and possible future urban events.

MAY SUN AND RICHARD WYATT have worked on projects together since their undergraduate days at UCLA. Sun makes sculpture, interdisciplinary installations and multimedia performances; Wyatt is a painter and muralist. They are very familiar with each other’s sensibilities and share a single vision in their approach to their site-generated public work. Their most recent collaboration, with architect Paul Dieder, a project for the lobby of the Union Station Gateway, references sociological and cultural information about the *pobladores*, the first settlers of the *pueblo* of Los Angeles, and the environment of the Los Angeles river. For *Collaborations* Sun and Wyatt have created a site-generated installation about the specific history of the Armory Center for the Arts and its former incarnation as a headquarters for the California National Guard. Examining the Guard from its original proclamation to its role in the streets of Los Angeles in April 1992, they will reference the Armory’s transformation from a military to a cultural institution. Their project in Memorial Park, a site-marker that refers back to their installation, is a metaphor for issues relating to authority, militarism and the occupation of public space.

When the Armory was still the headquarters for the California National Guard, the word "collaboration" posited different connotations than it does today. For some, the word may continue to conjure up pejorative political associations to World War II Nazism or Cold War Communism. Since the Armory’s dramatic shift from a public institution for defense to a site for cultural production, it has served as a vital arts and education center emphasizing the more positive connotations of collaboration. It is appropriate, therefore, that *Collaborations* is being presented at the Armory for the Center’s participation in *LAX: The Los Angeles Exhibition*, an ongoing city-wide biennial.

The *LAX’94* exhibition addresses prominent art and salient issues in this city during the past two years—a period marked by cataclysmic uprisings, earthquakes, floods, fires and the ensuing economic problems. The five teams in *Collaborations* reveal what it is like to be an artist grappling with the frequently adverse cultural and social conditions of life in Los Angeles. In a city rampant with sterile malls, simulated micro-environments and increased privatization, the *Collaborations* artists use their collective voices to suggest ways to reclaim public space through activism and intervention. By intervening in institutions and organizations, going into the city streets or creating a forum on the Internet, they suggest new ways of thinking about specific issues and sites for art-making, encouraging the audience to seize rather than avoid public spaces. The *Collaborations* artists have indeed come to the Armory prepared for a battle—to empower individuals to act against the fear and alienation produced by contemporary, postmodern urban culture.

Karen Moss
Curator

3. See *LACE: 10 Year Document*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1986) for essays and documentation on alternative or artist-run spaces and collaborative groups.
4. Some other New York collaborative groups included CUD (Contemporary Urban Documentary) and PADD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution), while many activities also took place at Fashion Moda in the South Bronx.
What Can I Say, 1994
Armory Center for the Arts

What Can I Say brought together two artists and nine women who support the arts in Southern California to engage in a dialogue about art, women, power and stereotypes. This dialogue resulted in the installation above and the development of an award for a woman artist as the public aspect of the piece.
General Hospital, 1994
Armory Center for the Arts
Mixed media installation with Internet connection.
Untitled, 1994
Armory Center for the Arts

Series of 222 hand-held viewers containing three-dimensional photographs of images/strings of past and possible future urban events distributed to the public during the Collaborations exhibition.
**Untitled, 1994**

Armory Center for the Arts

May Sun found the guitar in this installation on the sidewalk of Wilshire Boulevard near Alvarado while cleaning up the street in the days following the Los Angeles insurrection of April 1992.