

LAWEEKLY

Occupy L.A. and the Art World

A wave of art projects go hand in hand with the protest

By Catherine Wagley

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Since the recession hit, a number of artists' projects have taken measured approaches to questioning the practices of museums, trustees and other elite players in the arts economy. In the same way that most members of Occupy L.A. would encourage the involvement of politicians, artists seem less interested in attacking institutions than reforming them.

When the collective Machine Project "occupied" LACMA for two days in 2008, building birdhouses on the balconies and playing live music in the elevators, they just wanted to open the museum up to a little more diversity. But when the current Occupy movement spread to museums in New York last month, with demonstrations outside MoMA and the New Museum, organizer Noah Fischer was confrontational, declaring, "No longer will we, the artists of the 99 percent, allow ourselves to be tricked into accepting a corrupt hierarchical system."

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One of the artists who participated in Machine's earlier LACMA project was Liz Glynn, whose current series of performances at MOCA, called "Loving You Is Like Fucking the Dead," explores her own conflicted relationship to the museum, an institution that's both an amazing resource and a "crystal palace," austere and averse to change. The first week of November, Glynn's *MOCA Goes Dark* happened a few blocks above the Occupy headquarters at the museum on Grand Avenue. Blindfolded visitors, led through the permanent collection by the sound of jangling keys, had to trust security guards and visitor service volunteers. This performance and the final one, a dinner party scheduled for Dec. 1, rearrange the hierarchy of the museum idealistically, making visitors and the employees on the pay ladder's lower rungs more central to its functioning.

Glynn is on the committee of the Public School, an artist-founded, consensus-run, curriculum-free school based out of a Chung King Road storefront. Anyone can propose a class and anyone can volunteer to teach. Justin Biren, also an artist and committee member, advocated for moving classes down to Occupy L.A. the week the encampment started. "The main purpose was just seizing the moment and showing solidarity," he says. "The whole [Occupy] thing folded perfectly into the underpinning of the Public School." Classes, including one on civil disobedience and another on architecture theory, met in the Occupy L.A. library until, days before NYPD raided Zuccotti Park, the committee decided to move back to Chinatown (a public university sanctioned by the movement had begun to hold classes at the library, too).

... Liz Glynn and members of the Public School are all interested in opening things up, pulling back covers to show the inner workings of the systems and institutions that govern us. That works for art, and, weirdly, for now at least, it seems to be working for protestors.