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Recalling Seven Days in March with Industry of the Ordinary

Looking back on Industry of the Ordinary’s performance at The Arts Club of Chicago on Tuesday, March 10th, it seems we were in a different world than we are today. The Arts Club’s gallery was full of people, sound, ice, and water.

The collaborative duo Industry of the Ordinary (Adam Brooks and Mat Wilson), in keeping with their ongoing series of performances involving interaction with melting ice, presented *If you’ve got a blacklist, I want to be on it* (title pulled from the lyrics of Billy Bragg’s 1988 anthem “Waiting for the Great Leap Forward”) with cellist Katinka Kleijn, performers Luci Lei and Jay Wolke, and sound designer Dan Dehaan.

An exploration of group think, symbology, endurance, and privacy vs. collectivity; Brooks and Wilson lay prone on the floor of the club’s gallery with heavy blocks of ice sculpted into the shape of a circle with either an X or a cross through it (depending on the orientation) on their backs for 2 hours, testing their bodies and focusing their minds on the accompanying activity. Kleijn performed a deeply inquisitive scripted improvisation with



Photo: Sarah Elizabeth Larson

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live processing of her amplified sounds. She incorporated waterproof microphones scraped across the blocks of ice on her collaborator's backs, inviting the audience to don headphones and explore the sounds of the hydrophones themselves.

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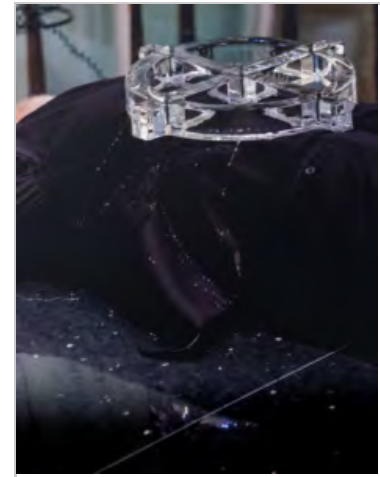
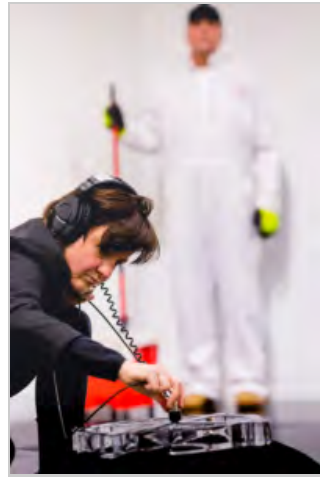


Photo: Sarah Elizabeth Larson

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Between each use, Lei carefully, diligently wiped down the headphones with an antibacterial cloth in deference to the rising pandemic yet unaware of the imminent shut-down. As ice melted down the backs of Wilson and Brooks, Wolke, wearing a janitorial uniform, mopped around the bodies of the two prone performers.

The role of the audience in the space was constantly in flux, though over time it became clear that they were co-performers from the outset.

As guests entered the gallery, they were greeted by the club's security guard, Eric Hampton. The room was silent, and there



was a stack of chairs near the wall on the right side of the room. Guests were invited to grab a chair or to roam around as they liked.

Before long, the guests in the space assembled themselves into a relatively unprompted traditional audience

arrangement, in neat rows of chairs. Everyone sat, silent, whispering, anticipating.

Wilson and Brooks came into the space in tuxedos, sitting among the audience, looking around, having quiet chats with attendees, reading the vibe of the room and following suit.

People continued to enter the gallery, now propping themselves against the back wall or tiptoeing toward an empty chair here or there, wary of disrupting the reverent, anticipatory energy of the room.

The performance itself was well underway before Kleijn played a single note and before a single drop of ice melted.

Brooks and Wilson habitually expose and examine implied contracts in their work, preferring to avoid any didactic text explaining the performance and leave the attendees to set the tone and level of interaction. Throughout the two hours of *If you've got a blacklist...*, those in attendance looked to one another and to their understood conventions of performance to craft a collaborative environment for shared experience.



Photo: Sarah Elizabeth Larson



Photo: Sarah Elizabeth Larson

This interactive gathering occurred on the heels of a week of interventions at The Arts Club, a project entitled ***Seven Days in March***.

From a list of 29 proposed interventions over the course of the week, The Arts Club selected 6.

- Swap out heads on shelf in Drawing Room for Industry of the Ordinary red rubber death masks (*we added led light plinths to lift and illuminate the rubber heads on the shelf*)



Photo: Paul Crisanti

- Replace a floral arrangement somewhere in the Club (*4 long-stemmed roses were dipped in rubber and placed in one of the club's vases on a table in the foyer between the salon and the dining room*)



Photo: Paul Crisanti

- Write a didactic tag for a single work of art in the Club's collection (*which ultimately became a solitary new artwork displayed on the gallery wall downstairs entitled Didactic with no relation to an extant work in the collection*)

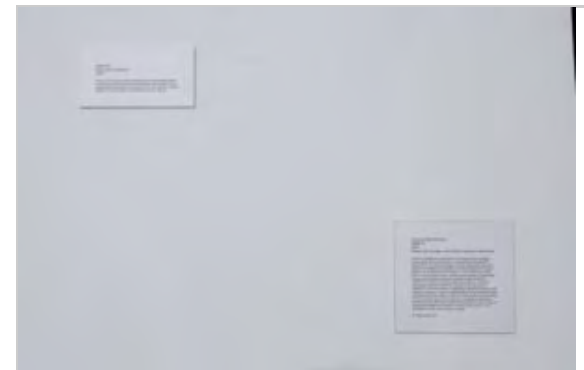


Photo: Paul Crisanti

- Make a jigsaw puzzle of a work of art in the Club's collection and leave, scrambled on a table (*We placed the puzzle on a table in the upstairs foyer where people often wait for their lunch guests to arrive.*)



Photo: Paul Crisanti

- Host a Picnic (*which ultimately became a coffee/tea/cake gathering on a Saturday in The Drawing Room, where Industry of the Ordinary printed images of Constantin Brancusi's Golden Bird, 1919, Art Institute of Chicago, and text about its sale by The Arts Club to the Art Institute onto a pair of sheet cakes and served them to visitors*)





Photo: Paul Crisanti

- Collaborate

on a brief performance at the Club with Katinka Kleijn (*which became the 2-hour performance with amplification and live sound processing entitled If you've got a Blacklist, I want to be on it*)

The theme of labor and service was never far from mind. For the picnic performance in The Drawing Room, Brooks and Wilson both wore chef's whites as they sliced pieces of cake and formally, with decorum, passed them to visitors. In The Arts Club's gallery, Jay Wolke performed in a white maintenance jumpsuit to mop dripping, melted water from a pair of 12 x 12 inch frozen sculptures placed on Brooks' and Wilson's backs as they lay prone on the floor.

Seven Days in March highlighted, among other things, the omnipresence and at times simultaneous invisibility of service workers (and laborers in general) in the arts. By putting the inherently performative act of service on the proverbial stage, *Industry of the Ordinary* call into question to whom we give our attention in arts institutions.^[1] And by subtly intervening on the Club's everyday surrounds with new objects and artworks, they call into question to *what* we give our attention.

Industry of the Ordinary have made a practice of examining the histories and structures of the sites where they produce work, and The Arts Club was no exception. They chose to highlight The Arts Club's collection, space, and the ways in which service and labor work within the club's infrastructure. Each intervention prompted a necessary awareness of one's surroundings, certain unspoken social contracts, and the way said contracts are established or upheld, leaving observers to answer emergent questions for themselves.

[r] A conversation explored in depth by Takashi Shallow and Andrew Dorkin in their 2019 essay associated with Shallow's fellowship project at the Club. They cite Julia Bryan-Wilson's "Occupational Realism," Fred Wilson's *Guarded View*, and Leigh Claire La Berge's *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art*, among other scholarly works to dig into what they refer to as "a sort of artworld limbo that complicates notions of inclusion," exploring "positions that straddle the jagged edge between inside and outside."

Posted April 30, 2020

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