

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

### WORKING TITLE: *Re-imagining Creative Labor: Building Inclusive Frameworks for Community Problem-Solving and Social Equity*

This research investigates, develops and enhances how communities think about and use creative labor to address the unique challenges in their immediate contexts. It rethinks the value of labor through alternative models, such as time currency and non-market exchanges, actively challenging traditional notions of labor and value. Drawing on ethnographic research, interdisciplinary studio practices and public engagement, the project creates actionable frameworks that integrate creative and artistic practice into community problem-solving. By re-imagining the role of creative practices in society, this work offers a path toward inclusive and collaborative futures where care, justice and collective well-being are prioritized.

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As a mixed media conceptual artist, curator, lecturer and labor leader, I explore how community education and fine art practice can catalyze social change. My research engages with communal spaces, addressing labor, social justice and policy while challenging traditional boundaries. I focus on anti-establishment practices, social consciousness and community involvement as pathways to equity and justice, envisioning new frameworks for creative expression that transcend both capitalist and market constraints — while also challenging the tokenistic gestures often extended to communities by the art world elite. Central to my work is the question of how artistic practices and institutional models can foster care, collaboration and social equity, reshaping the way we engage with labor and value. This inquiry is informed by historical debates that position labor as more than economic function — from early Marxist thought framing labor as the expression of human potential to David Graeber’s view of labor as a means of making culture. These perspectives provide a crucial foundation for my work, helping me to rethink the layers of labor and value within creative spaces and to foster greater public understanding of the processes that underpin creative labor.

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## Theoretical and Pedagogical Foundations

My research is grounded in radical pedagogical models such as Black Mountain College, the Antiuniversity of London, the Black School and studioELL, alongside the writings of bell hooks and Paulo Freire. These influences guide my exploration of participatory frameworks that dismantle hierarchies, resist commodification and emphasize collaboration, camaraderie and care as true measures of value. By cultivating sustainable, context-specific economies, these models encourage creative spaces to thrive while prioritizing love and resilience over profit.

Institutional critique plays a central role in my work, drawing inspiration from Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, the Museum of Care, David Graeber's critiques of capitalism and Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Maintenance Art*. These practices highlight the ways institutions can prioritize care over preservation and challenge conventional notions of labor and value. Graeber's advocacy for universal basic income and time-based currency resonates with my interest in alternative financial models that sustain creative communities. Ukeles' *Maintenance Art* underscores the importance of invisible labor, from caretaking to societal maintenance, and bridges the gap between artistic practice and the work of sustaining everyday life. Together, these frameworks inform my investigation into how care and labor intersect within creative institutions.

## Artistic Practice and Research Strategies

My interdisciplinary practice integrates drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, performance and more, alongside fields like social justice, social and economic anthropology and urban policy. By emphasizing process over output, I position art as a tool for fostering social connection and collective action.

Projects such as *somewhere, sometime* (2023) transformed the act of creating into a public, durational performance, showcasing the labor of art-making as a participatory process. Similarly, *work-in-progress* (2023) at the Intermission Museum of Art re-imagined fine art education through anti-racist and decolonized principles, challenging the commodification of knowledge and celebrating failure as part of the creative process. These works highlight my commitment to integrating every level of labor — from sourcing materials to engaging communities — into the creative process.

Ethnography is central to my research methodology. Through conversations with practitioners, I explore non-hierarchical models and sustainable, community-oriented practices. These insights inform the development of practical tools and adaptable frameworks for integrating art into daily life. For example, *Collaborative Reading Space: Anna Hoberman* (2021) created a reading archive and community lending library that fostered dialogue and emphasized art's role in social betterment.

## Project Overview, Objectives and Final Dissertation

The primary goal of this PhD research project is to develop sustainable frameworks for art, labor and education that prioritize care, collaboration and equity. Over five years, my research will evolve through iterative phases, beginning with a theoretical foundation built on key texts in labor theory, institutional critique and pedagogy. Works such as David Graeber's *Direct Action* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will guide my exploration of labor as cultural creation and pedagogy as an emancipatory process. Building on this foundation, I will conduct ethnographic studies with artists, educators and community leaders to document sustainable practices and develop tools for public engagement. Simultaneously, I will expand my studio practice to produce conceptual works informed by this inquiry.

As the project progresses, findings will be synthesized through exhibitions, public programs and publications to test ideas and foster dialogue. Collaboration will deepen in later phases, with artworks developed alongside community members to explore how creative practices foster social awareness. Ultimately, the research will culminate in a final dissertation that combines substantial written research with practice-based outcomes, including a final written piece, a series of installations, a major exhibition and a guidebook for community-driven creative practices. The written component will situate the creative work within debates on labor, institutional critique and pedagogy, while the guidebook will provide actionable models for integrating creative practices into communities. Installations, exhibitions and participatory events will demonstrate these theoretical frameworks in action, fostering care, collaboration and social equity. By re-imagining the role of creative practices in society, this work offers a path toward inclusive and collaborative futures where care, justice and collective well-being are prioritized.