



## Spending Time: Interview with Anthony Huberman by Natalie Hegert

Anthony Huberman is the director of [The Artist's Institute](#) in New York, a peculiar little space on Eldridge Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Entering this below-street-level gallery, it's not uncommon to see only one work of art on the wall at any given time. Run as a project of Hunter College, The Artist's Institute, rather than running on the typical gallery schedule of an-exhibition-a-month, is on the semester system: focusing on one artist per season. Focus might be the wrong word; rather, The Artist's Institute "thinks about" one artist per season, and the show evolves gradually, one work at a time, sometimes with other works on show, or with performances, special events, and lectures. Huberman previously worked as chief curator of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, curator of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and curator of SculptureCenter, New York, as well as organizing a wide variety of independent projects around the world. I met Huberman as a student in his curatorial methods class at Hunter a few years ago, and here we talk about the curatorial concept of The Artist's Institute, spending time with artists and artwork, and "cats in art."

**Natalie Hegert:** *The origin of the word "curate" is from the Latin curare, meaning to "take care"; in its original sense a curator took care of a collection of art objects, while now it's mostly associated with the practice of putting different artworks next to each other. The Artist's Institute has a very unique curatorial program in that in every season the gallery dedicates sustained attention to one artist's work, often just focusing on one or two pieces at a time. Is this a different sense of "caring" for the artist and his/her work?*

**Anthony Huberman:** Yes, "to care" is fundamental to curatorial practice. But it's important to point out that "caring" about something isn't just an act of reverence, but is also one of agency. We all have many opinions, insights, and perspectives about the things (and the people) we care about. A curator doesn't just "celebrate" or "showcase" an artist's work, but has something to say about an artist's work. And these impressions evolve, change, become more layered, textured, and complex with time, as we spend more time with the works we care about. The Artist's Institute tries to make that possible -- my hope is that an impression or perspective one has about an artist's practice will be a lot more layered and textured by the end of our six-month season than it was at the beginning. To do that, as you said, we spend more time. We dedicate six months to a single artist. But we don't just do one exhibition with that artist, we do several. Every month, there is something different on view in the gallery, but it always features the same artist, again and again. At times, that artist is paired with other artists, and at other times, his or her work is shown alone.

The Artist's Institute is based on the simple idea that artworks contain ideas that have lives to live -- and we provide a context for those ideas to live their lives, go on detours, take on new shapes and properties, and generate a growing range of ideas and insights.

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(Rosemarie Trockel, installation view, The Artist's Institute, New York, 2012; Courtesy of the Artist's Institute.)

**NH:** *In an age where it seems we all suffer from attention deficit disorder, where we're barraged with images and content, The Artist's Institute's program bucks that trend with sustained attention and concentration on one artist's work. Super slow-core, yet ever evolving. Was The Artist's Institute program developed as a sort of antidote to any certain tendency you saw in the art world?*

**AH:** To a certain degree, yes. In New York, I think the "conveyor-belt" problem is particularly intense, with every gallery and museum always eager to move on to the next big thing and the next newly discovered artist. It's the way the market works -- the market (both the financial market as well as the

"PR" market of attracting attention and audiences) demands constant renewal and is allergic to repetition. If you repeat yourself, you're out of the news cycle. Well, I like to think that the artworld could maybe be a place that doesn't behave the same way corporations do, so I wanted to provide an alternative of some kind. But my main motivation is not a reactionary one, but comes from a deep-seated belief that thinking takes time, and that artworks are extraordinary triggers for significant and provocative reflections about the nature of the world...and do an even better job at that if we pay attention to them for a while. I should also mention that The Artist's Institute operates under the umbrella of Hunter College, a university -- which was another very important reason it's set up more like a slower "think-tank" than a traditional exhibition venue.

**NH:** *Right now your "anchor artist" is Haim Steinbach, while in previous seasons you focused on Rosemarie Trockel, Jimmie Durham, Jo Baer, and Robert Filliou. How do you go about choosing the artists you feature at The Artist's Institute?*

**AH:** The same way I go about choosing artists whenever I do a museum exhibition! I spend a lot of time looking at art, going to artist studios, and getting a sense of what kinds of questions artists seem to be asking today. Based on that, I can choose an artist whose work seems to speak to some concerns that resonate with a larger conversation.

**NH:** *A term you introduced me to that really stuck with me is the concept of the "cats-in-art show." Now I see cats in art everywhere. Can you talk a bit about what that means, or is this a secret code word?*

**AH:** That's a phrase I use with my friend Peter Eleey. It's not meant to be taken all that seriously. But it's basically a joke that refers to exhibitions that seem like they might have been organized by some kind of search engine: what are all the works by artists that have featured cats in them? Let's gather them up all together and show them. And then the audience can thank the curator for pointing out that yes, all of these works do happen to have cats in them. Unfortunately, this might not be such an interesting thing for an audience to get from their time at a museum, and even worse, the audience might go home having been introduced to several new artists, and thinking that they all make work about cats.

**NH:** *What's one nugget of advice you might have to offer to any emerging curators out there reading this?*

**AH:** Spend lots of time with artists!

--Natalie Hegert

(Image at top: The Artist's Institute, New York; courtesy of the Artist's Institute.)