

## RESIDENCY FOR ARTISTS ON HIATUS

A collaborative art project *Residency For Artists On Hiatus (RFAOH)* is a virtual yet functioning residency available to artists who, for one reason or another, are not currently making or presenting art. The residency exists in the form of a website and the residents are selected based on their proposals of “on-hiatus” activities (or non-activities) through international calls. Represented on a dedicated page within the RFAOH website, selected residents post periodical reports on their “non-art” endeavours, and visitors can leave comments or share their reports. A modest stipend is awarded to each resident to assist in their on-hiatus activities, and at the conclusion of their residency, they submit a written report on how they benefited or were otherwise influenced by this opportunity. While principally a web-based operation, we, as co-directors, travel to promote the residency at art-related events and communities worldwide, design and produce RFAOH multiples for its promotion, and publish an “annual report” which archives the participants’ on-hiatus activities. In its ultimate/ideal incarnation, RFAOH will be “hosted” by an art institution, who may provide access to the site through their own website, and assist in funding the programme.

Stemming from our personal queries into the life/art relationship and “artist” identity issues, this project attempts to highlight the limbo space many artists tend to find themselves in at different times in their careers, and how they perceive or negotiate such times and conditions. The onset of globalism has given rise to the exotic notion of the artist-celebrity as a globetrotting, biennale-showing, party-attending cultural worker. Meanwhile, a majority of artists continue to maintain modest careers while working other jobs or foregoing any otherwise comfortable, if less “glamorous” lifestyles. As contemporary art practices become increasingly institutionalized with the growing number of MFA programs, contemporary art biennales, and the global art market, most artists must reconcile their career aspirations and current opportunities with the realities of day-to-day living, or conventional notions of “profession”. In the meantime, our everyday encounters with media and technology have created a culture where we no longer necessarily equate creativity with lengthy and strenuous activity or with a specific dexterity. We are much more open to the idea of the artist as inter-textual organiser of disparate materials and signifying processes, with plenty of platforms to reach out to an audience – perhaps a 21<sup>st</sup> century sequel to the artistic declarations by numerous 20<sup>th</sup> century artists into the possibility that anything could be art and anyone could be an artist.

RFAOH also grew out of a question of what determines one’s artistic identity, when do artists cease to be recognized as artists, or does having a professional career at anytime in one’s life

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grant life-long artist status. We are reminded of Marcel Duchamp who gave up art for chess, yet whose artist identity endures without question. Similarly we can consider Taiwanese-American conceptual artist Tehching Hsieh, who completed the last of his year-long performance pieces in 1985/86, with a work in which he did not engage with, read about, or produce "art" for an entire year. Following this project, he continued to be essentially "on hiatus" for the next 13 years, and when asked at a lecture in Montreal about the reasons for his silence during this time period, he responded only that he had no better ideas.

Regardless of the diverse understanding of "artistic" engagement, many "artists" still endure varying levels of anxiety and pressure to meet the demand to be productive. They seek the tacit approval or at least acknowledgement of their peers within an artworld economy deemed necessary to maintain their artist status. ***Residency For Artists On Hiatus (RFAOH)*** allows artists freedom from the obligations of being an artist, and offers a space for reflection on alternative modes of creative living outside the pressures of the artworld.

Since its launch in 2013 with Tehching Hsieh joining the advisory board, RFAOH has hosted twelve international on-hiatus artists with a diverse range of backgrounds and proposals. Our residents' non-art endeavours have varied widely including group meditation, organic gardening, undergoing open-heart surgery, opening up a bar, trying to repair a neglected heritage family farmhouse, or reshaping a college art program as a department head among others. Some were hoping this time would lead to new insights or approaches to art-making when they resume their practice; some just wanted a well deserved break from the demand to be constantly "on"; while others remained tentative whether they will return to art at all. In a feature interview in Cmagazine (Toronto, Canada), editor Amish Morrell asked: "is participating in RFAOH an admission of defeat (as an artist)?" By facilitating this opportunity for these artists to step back from their practices while participating in this collaborative project, we have been fascinated by how differently all our residents have negotiated this question. This modest DIY project has also piqued the interest of a number of perhaps small but critical institutions worldwide, who have invited us to bring RFAOH to their communities. These presentations have allowed us to manifest a virtual project within the real framework of the art world where the institutional authority outlining the parameters of artistic endeavour actually occur, and therefore, provided space for discussion within the very context where a central paradox of RFAOH pivots.

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Given that “contemporary art” has become a global phenomenon, it’s been essential to have an international selection of artists to talk about their lives without art, but not necessarily without creativity at RFAOH. The Internet as a medium has provided an ideal platform while also being most appropriate for the alternative or conceptually open-ended space that the project explores: the Internet is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere; it is a place sufficiently outside traditional art viewing arenas but one in which creativity abounds. Similarly, we have concocted a residency that is equally everywhere and nowhere – a kind of “non-residency” residency for individuals who are simultaneously artists and non-artists. As we ourselves work as “co-directors”, curators, webmasters, designers, publishers, and facilitators in support of other artists in this project, we also expand our own practices towards new modes of artistic production and identity, while hacking the art system itself to serve our needs to exist as artists.

Amidst of popular discussions around the institutionalization of art practice and artists’ identity and with our border-less collaboration developing beyond our expectations, we are curious to see where RFAOH really fits in the discourse surrounding the role of art within the wider culture. By inhabiting the familiar and established systems of the artist residency and the Internet, ***Residency For Artists On Hiatus (RFAOH)*** sets up conditions for re-imagining the capacity and scope of contemporary art. Together with our selected residents, we explore the meaning of art practice and the limits and liminalities of professionalism in the arts at this time of history.

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