

## News

## Is it Time to Blow Up the Art Fair Model?



Mostafa Heddaya May 7, 2013



Members of Occupy Museums, including Imani Brown (center) and Noah Fischer (right), protesting Frieze New York last year (photograph by Geraldine Visco for Hyperallergic)

Occupy Museums thinks the art fair model needs to be reworked. Occupy Wall Street's art offshoot has announced a new initiative, [DebtFair](#), which seeks to radically deconstruct the commercial art fair. After essentially sunning themselves in a distant corner of Frieze New York last May, [distributing flyers for Un-Frieze and other protest literature](#), the activists have decided to go for a more radical overthrow of the heavily commodified fair model. Whether or not this alternative has legs remains to be seen.

April may be the cruelest month, but “springtime is for activists,” says Occupy Museum’s Kristian Nammack, DebtFair’s founding “facilitator,” as he calls himself. We caught up with Nammack today to gauge the mission and capabilities of this ambitious effort, which seeks to predicate compensation for artists’ work on their debt load, allowing patrons to make direct payments on their student loans or outstanding consumer credit. By correlating the value of an artwork with the fiscal situation of its producer, it’s an objection to capitalist exchange that posits a profound shift in the linkage not just of price and value, but also, possibly, of value and aesthetic strength.



DebtFair, a new initiative of Occupy Museums, is in the preliminary stages of planning a debt-payoff art “exchange” at This Is Not an Abandoned Building (pictured) in Miami (photo via Google Street View)

Drawing a direct parallel to the maturing focus of Occupy Wall Street, Nammack described DebtFair as a positive and explicit articulation of an alternative art exchange system, a “constructive gesture” that follows last year’s generalized refusal. Though DebtFair has yet to nail down any specific venues in New York, they expect to work with a “decentralized” network of nonprofit and sympathetic commercial spaces to facilitate the exchange process. They do, however, have a space lined up to coincide with this year’s Art Basel Miami Beach, a 5,400 square foot warehouse at 702 NW 5th Avenue owned by the artist Skip Van Cel of Miami’s **White Vinyl Space**. The new building, called This Is Not An Abandoned Building, will be an “alternative alternative space” in the vein of White Vinyl, Skip Van Cel tells Hyperallergic, adding that the warehouse is “within a limousine ride of all the traditional festivities if anyone wants to trade some debt for art.”

The founding members of the DebtFair project include the artists Tal Beery, Imani Brown, and Noah Fischer — though Nammack repeatedly resisted the implied hierarchy of this distinction — and the goal is to radically reshape the commercial experience in favor of the artist. Describing the anti-corporate, anti-collector (“patron,” please) character of the DebtFair project, Nammack adds: “I don’t expect that Eli Broad will come, but I don’t suspect the artists would care to talk to him either.” The group plans to hand out information cards on Saturday and Sunday at the two entry sites for Frieze, the 34th Street Ferry Landing and the bus depot at 125th Street.