

YOUR SPACE
OUR SPACE
ARTSPACE

April 10, 2014

Dear BiP:

Your letter to me has given rise to some profound discussions at Artspace about public art and our relationship to artists to making art in a more public realm happen in New Haven, and about our values more broadly. I wanted share those thoughts in a way that would also respond to your letter and your heartfelt request to us.

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As a group founded by and for artists, and shaped by the early experience of a being promised a space by the City that was then suddenly taken away from us, Artspace has always sought to defend, support and provide a public platform for the voice of the artist. This has meant advocating for, and finding new spaces for artists, and opening them up for artists to both show and make new work. For any individual artist, this means taking very seriously their intentions and following them through as best we are able, vowing to protect the integrity of the artwork and honoring the original aspirations for it.

So the short answer is that yes, we will honor your request and make it known to the Yale University Art Gallery that we cannot accept their proposal. Although YUAG stands ready to return the plaque to you, we also know that it doesn't seek to have us auction it against your wishes.

We are also moved and grateful to you for your very generous offer to make another work that could be included in our fundraiser, and we hope that its realization and its existence will continue the dialogue generated around the questions that your efforts raise—can art can exist independent of markets and commodification? Can the artists in a community—those that give birth to the community and bring life to the streets—be the ones to define and have a say in what public art should get funding in a given community—or what public art might look like in the first place?

These questions are the basis of an upcoming exhibition at Artspace and we hope you will want to be part of it. Entitled “Vagaries of the Commons” and organized by our new colleague Sarah Fritchey, it will open in late July 2014. Your letters, the original plaque, and any replica or response to it would be welcome in this effort that brings together artists who investigate the porous boundaries of what is deemed public and private space, and who criticize the policing and rapid privatization of the commons. The show looks specifically to New Haven to see how we can use the marginalized spaces within the public-private binary to claim common ground for public use and will examine the legal systems that deem what type of art is suitable for funding as public art.

In all the public discussion about the plaque in relation to the Artspace fundraiser on April 26, it seems to us that one important point has been overlooked, and that is that any proceeds that might be generated—whether from your work or the work of any of the more than 100 generous artists who are taking part—go right back into making more art happen for the citizens of New Haven. Programs free to the public need resources, and can only happen if we compensate the teaching artist; cover the cost of the exhibition signage that enlightens the audience; and pay the photographer who documents it, in recognition of his or her valuable contributions to get the word out, and so forth. Artspace's annual fundraiser is our most effective way of reminding the community to step forward and help generate the support that puts bread on the table of the very artists and creative people who make the art

programming heart of our city beat louder and faster.

When you consider your original creative act—made with such evident passion and hopes to be a positive force — and recognize that it can serve as a catalyst for change through the alchemy originally envisioned by YUAG, i.e, art transformed into art programs that stimulate more art, perhaps you might feel differently about parting with it, and see that our upcoming event provides a forum for it to unleash greater good, possibly even in the very areas that interest you most.

For example, might you consider designating the proceeds to support the public artworks we commission for display in The Lot, the open public space on Chapel Street near the corner of Orange where we recently commissioned 9 artists to make a mini-golf course, or support our Summer Apprenticeship Program, which pairs 15 New Haven Public School teens with an artist-mentor to collaborate on the creation of a major installation? Given your vision and goals, it would be especially meaningful if these efforts were recognized as being made possible by BiP.

Whatever you decide to contribute, please know that our practice is to share the proceeds with artists who donate their work, if they wish. About half of the participating artists have elected to do this, often to cover the costs they have incurred to construct the work. We hope your representatives will come down soon, see the benefit show and find room for your contribution so that more people can see it and discuss it.

Thank you for your generosity to Artspace and to our New Haven artist community, for reminding us that there is much common ground we share, and for all that you do.

Sincerely,

Helen Kauder and the team at Artspace.