FRED LONIDIER

29 Arrests: Headquarters of the 11th Naval District, May 4, 1972, San Diego

1972
Text panel and twenty–nine black and white gelatin silver prints
14 × 21.6 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and Silberkuppe, Berlin

GAF Snapshirts

1976
Thirty–two T–shirts
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Silberkuppe, Berlin

N.A.F.T.A … #2 A—I: Hyundai Piece

1997
Collage and inkjet prints mounted on nine cardboard panels
Nine parts:
3 parts (A—C) 109 × 86 cm
6 parts (D—I) 107 × 86 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Silberkuppe, Berlin

Work notes on page 8

April 28 — May 15, 2017; 1856 at The Victorian Trades Hall
Curated by Nicholas Tammens

LLTV

Labor Link TV Episode #65: Hyundai & Han Young

1997
28 minutes, 30 seconds

Labor Link TV Episode #66B: Han Young Workers Vote, and They are Counted!????

1997
9 minutes, 30 seconds

Work notes

LLTV

"Labor Link TV has been cablecasting programs for, by and about the labor movement in San Diego County since January 1988 on three cable stations. The group is mostly local trade union members but students from the UCSD visual arts department have produced the greatest amount of the local programs.

Labor Link TV's primary goal is to help the labor movement in San Diego County organize the organized.
We create and chose programming which we hope will help rank and file members better understand labor as a social movement. The object is to encourage a higher level of solidarity across the boundaries of the various locals."

1856

1856 is a program of exhibitions and events presented across sites within and around The Victorian Trades Hall. It proceeds from thinking under this roof, with a duty to experiment in thinking about the labour of artists and the many ways in which artists, through their work, address social issues with absolute diversity.

1856.com.au

The following interview was conducted with Lonidier over email in April of 2017.

Nicholas Tammens

In 1976 you made *Health and Safety Game*—your first "labor work",—since then the labour movement has become central to your work. What lead you to begin making these "labor works", working alongside workers and with trade unions?

Fred Lonidier

It was my studies in sociology and being active in the SFSC [San Francisco State College] Vietnam Committee in my senior year that began to move me towards Marx. I also joined SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] though as a national member there being no chapter at SFSC.

But unions, being pretty remote from my life and that of my loves and comrades, class and race came up in our ideas and some of our actions quite apart from the labor movement.

The AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] supported the war until the early 1970s when a few unions began to turn against it.

By the time I got drafted out of the Peace Corps with my first wife, Paulette, and we moved to Seattle into the supportive arms of my left-wing family there, draft resistance built on all our views about social class and race. We supported a number of blacks facing conscription though none became active in Draft Resistance Seattle. But we supported the Black Panthers on trial there and I took some remarkable photos in the courtroom surreptitiously. It was very obvious when we leafleted the lines of young men going into the induction center that we were looking at the drafting of the working class to fight this war.

(This might be the place to add that my father was a union man, working in sawmills in the northwest and in Oroville where my sister and I grew up.)

By the time I went to graduate school at UCSD, gender was added to the concerns of class and race. Soon, there was the well-known central four of us [Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, Phel Steinmetz, and Lonidier] with close outer circles of like-minded undergrad and graduate documentary photographers meeting and making work about a host of social issues. SDS had imploded in 1969 under the clashes of the Weathermen and the various, but sharply divided, Maoists. Many of the leftover SDS grownups formed the New American Movement and Sekula and I joined.

Around 1974, with Steinmetz and I as half-time Lecturers, we joined the revamped Local 2034 of the University Council/AFT. The wife of the new tenured faculty member who got the local up and going, Bob Heifetz, was a doctor and part-time Lecturer teaching community and occupational medicine in the medical school. Ruth pulled a number of us together out of UCSD, the labor movement and other locals to form a Council for Occupational Safety and Health.

COSH groups were springing up around the country to bring greater awareness of federal and state laws bringing some greater leverage to better working conditions.

I also became one of our Local's Delegates to the Central Labor Council. Some of the San Diego COSH people also started a reading group to explore the history of socialism in the US as well as that of labor. I had done and exhibited quite a number of artworks by about 1975 but wanted to start making work dealing with class struggle. Higher education's junior faculty ranks were filling up with former supporters and activists from civil rights and anti-war movements. Graduate students at University of California Berkley started a union drive as members of and with support from the United Auto Workers.

So, getting an education myself in COSH, my thinking began to explore occupational health and safety as both a working class subject matter but also as an artwork which could be welcome in union spaces. I really hit the library for as much background as a lay activist could have and Ruth Heifetz was instrumental in connecting me up with doctors who specialized in occupational health.

They, with a couple lawyers, led me to workers who agreed to let me record their accounts and take photos.

In time, I did have a real measure of success with the work in the labor movement and, significantly for the matter of tenure at UCSD, the art world as well.

NT

It's my understanding that most of this work has been initiated and developed by you personally, with various levels of officiated support. The job of a free-lance journalist is not too different, in the sense that you seek out and develop narratives with a community which you then mediate through forms of display. Which is to say that your work has been less dictated by briefs from any organization. What you have done is retain autonomy while developing these projects in an organic process with a community.

How do you think these projects been received by communities of workers and members of trade unions? Do you think this reception has changed?

FL

There are two major changes since the end of the 1980s.

I embraced the working class from political developments when part of the youth movements connected up with stalwarts of the old left. From Seattle to San Diego, a few were in academia, the unions and the communities.

Like feminists and people of colour within the art world, I assumed that I would soon find myself among other artists with the same practices and social class ambitions.

But, except for film/video and graphics in the visual arts, I was quite alone as a conceptual art based documentary photo artist doing wall and/or floor works. In our own circle, Rosler and Sekula did a lot of artworks and writing which addressed the working class but not really class struggle nor the labor movement as a priority audience. Without something of a community to do socially based art, I was quite literally lifting my practice up by my boot straps.

With one exception, as much as the *H&SG* was appreciated when shown, it did not gender momentum where one union show would lead to another.

For the most part, I had to go out and hustle up each and every union exhibition. Keep in mind that by the beginning of the 1990s I had produced three sizeable documentary photo/text installation artworks for, by and about class struggle in the US labor movement. One, *I Like Everything Nothing But Union*, was even asked for and installed in the Labor Council's office.

So, teaching, being a union officer, making and showing art and trying over and over a number of times to have a relationship which could last, I had to face that something had to give. From the mid 1990s on, with a couple exceptions, I have only shown in art spaces then attempted to bring the local labor movement to theses shows.

This is largely the era of my *N.A.F.T.A…* works. It really has been only moderately successful so far. The second issue it seems is that the labor movement here today is headed by my generation and younger. Like the New Left, they are far more culturally attuned to mass media than to the art of museums and galleries. Even though the generation of labor leaders ahead of mine did not generally go to art museums and galleries, read art magazines, etc., many had a sense that somehow art was important and that they wanted to be seen as supportive of it and encourage their members to value the high arts.

So, here I came with this solidly worker artwork with my own union membership, university and art world credentials. But a decade plus later, who replaced Moe Foner at the SEIU 1199 Gallery in NYC after he died?

With few formal support structures for exhibitions in union spaces, I came to realize that I needed to go beyond getting agreement to show work. There also needed to be at least one or a few members who would act like docents in their local and set up opportunities for the workers and their

spouses and friends to view the work with some introduction and a kind of walk through. I did have enough time and energy to provide some guidance and they would be excellent sources of feedback. Alas, I did not think of this at that time.

So, I am especially excited about this opportunity to show in the Trades Hall in Melbourne and learn about reception there.

NT

The journalism of the labour movement has always been central to its cause, it also sets an historical precedent in the development of a media source that is alternative to the capitalist press. For you personally, were there any particular photographic or journalistic precedents to this work?

FL

Well, sort of, in that photojournalism is a cousin of photo documentary. At our start at UCSD, we paid a lot of attention to Riis, Hine, the Soviet Constructivists, Brecht as well as the Farm Security Administration photographers and the rise of *Life* and *Look* magazine photo stars.
Both Rosler, Sekula and then many others framed our practices across these "precedents." But, it was the Conceptual Art movement which really provided the space for all kinds of socially engaged practices including new forms like performance art and video. Central to us was the department chair, David Antin whose mission was to bring in and support just about anything that could both fly in the art world while, at the same time, disrupting its avant-garde pretensions.

A work such as *N.A.F.T.A.* deals with the affect of free trade policies on working people on the Tijuana/San Diego border, it draws an important part of its value and meaning from being developed with and for the community of workers present in its making—in carrying an identificatory function. For me, it is important to think about what it means outside of that context, how it might be received in particularly different cultural, political, and historical contexts.

NT

How do you think it has been received outside of Southern California/Mexico?

FL

Yeah, well, it got censored at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California when I, and a few activists, got around to distributing flyers inviting maquiladora workers to come see the show. But, by all measures, this large and multipart work boosted its presence in Southern California and elsewhere.

NT

As this work has developed over many years, has the reaction to it changed as its audiences have changed?

FL

I think, unfortunately, the major change in this region is the realization from the Han Young struggle that any attempts to build independent and democratic unions by maquiladora workers would be crushed under the full weight of both governments, the companies and the official Mexican unions. So, the work has, I think, an unanticipated cautionary aspect. But I think it also calls for elevated awareness of unions and their necessary struggles on behalf of people who make all the stuff we use.

NT

As a document or a kind of primary material, do you see an historical responsibility in this type of work?

FL

Absolutely, there is a heavy representational responsibility. I say this with the caveat from Sekula that we work with a "certain poverty of means" at our disposal.

NT

Much of this marks some important questions regarding to who, and where photographs are used to communicate—to who they speak, and where they are called to represent something. Part of addressing this has been your choice to use trade union halls as your exhibition venues, as a means to speak directly to their constituents. This implies different terms of exhibition—its advertising, sales (or not), length of exhibition, etc.— and even the risk that is may not be recognized as art.

I want to ask whether you see this audience as the primary audience for your "labor works", but I think creating a hierarchy between audiences (art vs. non-art, non-art vs. art) is problematic and runs the conceit that audiences remain separate to their demographics without overlap or mutual understanding. How important has exhibiting in the union context been for you to think about your audience?

FL

Yes, as I said before. My ambition was to be part of an effort to bridge the labor movement and the art world with a class conscious imperative to raise the level of militancy and solidarity in the US unions which had faded a great deal during the Cold War and since. The feasibility of that seemed evident from the significant number of civil rights and antiwar activists who began to make serious commitments to find union jobs and/or work for unions as organizers.

I cite just one example, though there were dozens and dozens of such young militants right here in San Diego, and that is the publication *Labor Notes* whose masthead includes putting movement back in the US labor movement!
And thanks to those commitments, and other factors—like the great increase of women, black, brown and Asian members, as well as the organizing of workers near the bottom of income scales like farms workers, janitors, hotel room cleaners, poultry workers, etc—today's unions are more representative of those who most need them and are enlightened in ways inconceivable a few decades ago.

But, you are right to question as to whether "art" is the way to do it. You may actually get a better chance to test this with the exhibit you have curated than I have had.
Even showing in the Labor Council here, I was stretched so thin with the stuff I cited above that I could hardly spend the time and energy to assess what I had done. The head of the CLC seemed pleased with the piece he asked me to do but, when the move was made out of rented offices to an owned building, the work was not reinstalled and was returned to me. I had made three editions of it and considered that one as belonging to them. Even when it was shown in the ILO in Geneva, I did not get any interest in embracing the work which is now a historical representation of past rank and file members of the affiliates here.

On the question as to whether union members consider the work of mine they know as "art," I have never heard it questioned. Keep in mind here that I have been a Delegate to the CLC since the mid 1970s but from a local in a science oriented research university some distance from most of working class housing and work.

The unions with by far the most interaction of their members work for local employers and particularly those who work for the city and county. The boss of UC workers is the President of the University of California who is employed for the citizens of the state by the UC Regents. The labor movements have changed a great deal since the end of WWII; there are far more college educated members like teachers and professors as well as an enormous expansion of

public employment. These changes have produced cultural divides that just do not show up within the federation of labor organizations in my experience.

But, long before those changes, my uncle Russell Brodine was a union string bass player for the Saint Louis Symphony: American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO. You think when unions want some music at an event or dinner or on the picket line that they will ask for an opera singer with accompaniment who are both union members? Some day, Essex Street will put on a labor show of my work and Maxwell Graham really liked the idea that we would try and find a string quartet from the unionized NYC symphony who might volunteer to perform Bartok.
Speaking of music, the most successful cultural effort has been by folk labor musicians. Years ago, some of them talked the AFL-CIO into putting on a Great Labor Music Exchange at the labor center in Silver Spring near Washington DC. Similar festivals sprang up on most corners of the country at least for a while. Now, in addition, there is only one fairly new one in Washington State and one in the Bay Area which almost went under as no young musicians were coming in to take over from the older and tired starters.

But, the real issue in the US, I think, is the lack of social democracy which in many countries provides the funding for union cultural activities through education funding.
This is how my comrades in Toronto have been able to do a life time of work there. Like I said above, you ask a question central to my work, but believe me, this is my very short attempt to grapple with it here.

NT

Now that your work is commonly exhibited in galleries and museums, is it important to you to trust that the institution of art will historicize this kind of work? That is to say, in-lieu of disciplines like social history.

FL

Yes, it is the museums that are really in the history business though it is the galleries which largely feed artworks and art careers into them. But, there are also the magazines and the whole apparatus of academic art history. All overlap in certain ways but are not all dancing to the same tune.
Even museums differ some and there are national, regional, etc. differences as well.

I gather that "historicize" in your use is different than history with the negative connotation that a kind of mythology pertains? Well, catalogs are notoriously loaded that way but academia, for all its shortcomings in the arts and humanities, has the space for incisive work with integrity to be done. I, and many others better hope so, as there are not too many alternatives. Neither "the left" nor the labor movements across the globe really have committed cultural policies and resources to even have a discussion or debate about art and the working class. It is not a priority and, at any rate, global capital has thrown down the gauntlet threatening the very survival of many unions in many places. A lot of neoliberalism is just in undermining class consciousness, no?

But, I have to add here that for over a decade I have been interviewed by masters and PhD thesis candidates mostly about the early days at UCSD. Most have come from their first contacts with Rosler or Sekula and, when in San Diego, they also interviewed Steinmetz before his untimely death. They also looked at our more recent work.
One never sees these theses, but most of these young scholars have already published some articles and their revised thesis as a book and will continue to write and publish into the future.

Their interest in our work, as well as that of others, comes from a supportive view of socially critical art practices and, I would think, they could have far more impact on the history of such than exhibiting in galleries and/or collecting by the museums.

NT

Part of the thematic of the Hyundai series of N.A.F.T.A is its discussion of "legal" and "illegal" strikes. I find it particularly interesting that this work implicitly refers back to the truth function of documentary photography and how it often partakes in the administration of justice, for instance, as evidence in court.

Of course, the evidential or documentary function of photography was also important to artists in the 1970s (., in conceptual art or performance art)—and now, the document has become an indispensable part in the publication and promotion of art on and offline.

In your time as a photographer, have you seen a change in how we see a photograph as a type of evidence?

FL

Well, the understanding that photographs are more real than hand-produced images goes all the way back to daguerreotypes with some claiming that those were more real than what the eye could see (20/20 vision, of course). Against that were arguments that, sharp as they were, they were also black and white, small, could only be viewed from a certain angle and often had a rather limited grey scale. The advent of the half-tone process for printing was another time when this badly framed question got renewed traction. Off and on this went on, and goes on to this day.
Sekula really settled this, I believe, by making the case for documentary photographs as a representational matter so "realist" in a very limited and debatable way.

Our attempts to address the "truth" questions was to more or less make the process of making and using photos transparent. We usually "grounded" our photos with contextualizing texts and organized these with many photos. The idea was to push against the polysemic character of iconography; we wanted our photos to be clear about how we wanted them "read." Susan Meiselas talked and wrote about the problematic uses of her photos but that comes with the territory of making a living as a photojournalist—the editor decides.

It is postmodernism which most significantly went after the "false facts" of documentary, if I may use a current tag for it. Many of us saw that "movement" as a tactical retreat into obscurity in the face of the elections of Thatcher and Reagan. This cowardness prompted them to race past the soundness of the representational argument. Yes, language and iconography are problematic but there really is not anything else we've got with which to communicate. The rigor of mathematics is way beyond any ability to use it for public discourse. "Prison House...," indeed so grow up and get on with whatever it is you got to say, I say. Online communication does indeed present real new challenges in the exchange and debates of ideas.
But, again, we have been there since the advent of cheap printing and distribution.

The US Right made very effective use of bulk mail flyers and pamphlets, to huge lists of small town and rural people with fundamentalist religious views. They were white, low income, church-going people that had a very low voting turnout record. It took a while but this eventually became a tidal wave of reactionary support for anti-abortion candidates and initiatives. Elected, these representatives began to push back against the New Deal and other progressive legislation at local, state and national levels. A lot of right wing money supported all this as it still does today.

NT

And more practically, has there ever been a moment where your work has been called upon as evidence?

FL

You may know that photos of mine were used in a labor dispute here that went into an administrative law court here under the National Labor Relations Board. Later I used excerpts of my own testimony and photo in *AZTEC VS A.T.U. 1309*... but that is another story...

NT

In the 1970s, at a time when the traditional forms of art were becoming historically "deskilled" (similar to any artisan or craftsman), there was a concurrent movement in art that accepted broader possibilities and competencies for making art. In part, due to technologies of production and dissemination becoming more accessible to regular consumers.

Photography was a key part in this, but I want to ask you about photography as a skill unto itself. Because although amateur photography was becoming normalised in the 1970s, you and your colleagues in San Diego developed strong technical skills in photographic processes. Can you tell us about how photographic technique has informed the development of your work?

FL

My first photos were taken with the family's Brownie Starfex camera. All the developing and printing, of course, was done by a local camera store which sent film out to Kodak.
My first 35mm camera was bought as my first wife and I went into the Peace Corps. I didn't begin to develop my own film and make prints until we were in Seattle where I set up a darkroom in the basement of the small house we rented.

My "technique" was totally hit and miss but, luckily, mostly usable hits. When I moved to San Diego and met Steinmetz, he straightened out the film developing and printing aspects of my photography very quickly.

He was largely self-taught but a master view camera nature photographer. As the two of us were joined by Sekula, Rosler and other students, we set a minimal standard for photographic craft which was well above what was typical of conceptual artists using photography. In fact, a lot of such work being shown in NYC was deliberately done with cheap cameras and processed at Fotomat type places.

When we were hired by David Antin—after I got my MFA—to start up the department photo program in earnest, we decided to teach an attention to craft as well as critical approaches to art making. Neither my own work, nor even the best of our students, reached the darkroom skills of Steinmetz but it was certainly good enough as conceptual art anyways. Any students who wanted to raise their technical bar high could take independent study credits with him.
Meanwhile, traditional photographers continued to make craft a kind of fetish and wondered why their work could not get any traction in the artworld.

NT

To pass on these skills speaks of retaining an autonomy over production, in-lieu of outsourcing the work to a commercial dark room. How important has this lesson been for you as a teacher?

FL

It never was a consideration until I got the first of my galleries at the age of 67. On the one hand, I had all the facilities to do my own work at UCSD and, on the other, not the means to use commercial services very much.
The exception was the occasional use of Giant Photo here to make very large prints from view camera negatives I exposed and developed. Until I could print out my large panels digitally, the text parts of them would be printed out on a high resolution typesetter on campus, photographed on view camera film and printed and mounted there.
I would then print and mount the photos on these panels which made fairly seamless objects.

Later, I changed to taking the typeset pages to a blueprint company where they would be enlarged on velum, mounted and, again, my photos mounted on those: very laborious processes. Once digital output was up to looking like acceptable photographs, I began to have my 35 mm color negs scanned, imported into Pagemaker, and printed as Light Jets. Until Epson printers, these were the most photo-like prints available as the digital output was scanned onto color photo paper to be developed through a standard processor.

The Hyundai work you are showing is a mix of both as I did not have enough funds then to output the whole work as digital prints. Once digital printers reached high resolution, color balance and size, I have moved completely to their use.
In 2002, my Canon T90 died and I bought my first digital camera. And I changed to Indesign as a higher end layout program with much greater size capability. A few years ago the department acquired a Canon 60" inkjet printer and, as emeritus faculty, I can use it.

NT

I find your *GAF Snapshirt* work particularly pertinent for thinking about the conditions of labour in the production of art, as it implicitly critiques the type of artistic practices that take the labour of fabrication for granted.
We could even say that it materialises a production process that Lucy Lippard once said to be "de-materialised".

Now that outsourcing is a commonplace, how do you see artistic labour from the lens of your work, is there space to argue for its welfare as well?

FL

In my *Fox Foto Folders* work, the text attempts to directly address whatever workforce might be involved in producing for the company. I admitted in my address that I did not even know whether or not the whole thing might be automated. But, if not, I asked what working conditions, pay, benefits, job security, etc. workers at Fox Photo might have.
It is the only provocation of a few of my works like that which got a response. It was done from one of the special offers one would find on the front counter of Nelsons Photo here. That was also the origin of the GAF shirts.

When I went to pick my order, one of the women at the counter told me that a manager who brought the orders in to be picked up asked something like, "what the heck was this order about?" They knew me so he was just told that I was a professor at UCSD who was a regular customer.

I had thought that the shirts might be a problem so I tried them out first with some provocative photos including my "Art Is Opium" work and a copy of the Linda Benglis *Artforum* nude ad with the dildo. I also just wanted to see how the photos I took of the note cards would turn out. No problem either way. But, the return address was in NYC so I looked it up on a later trip there and found that all the shirt orders were outsourced to a business there.

NT

Elsewhere, art historians have commented on the relationship between your early work *29 Arrests* with the serial photography of an artist such as Ed Ruscha, how important exactly were those precedents of conceptual photography?

Was this something to argue against, or simply part of the times?

FL

We all had a rather critical view of the stars of the artworld at the time which would especially include Ruscha because of his deliberately cool banal photo books. I deliberately titled my work in his manner but with my comparatively hot and politically engaged photos. Of all those white guys, only Han Haacke was stepping up the reality of the crimes of capitalism.

NT

And at that time, did you feel there was something lacking in the political commitment of art in the United States?

FL

Once conceptualism opened the gates to subject matter outside the frame, so to speak, there was a flood of politically committed work. Certainly, feminist artists were a total breath of fresh air—although that is probably not a fitting phrase for the light and heat they brought into the field.
The problem was the institutional resistance, and even hostility to activist art. Without the sizeable alternative space scene, or funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and other sources, a lot of our work would have had no outlets. The Right caught on to this and, in the long Reagan era, began to chop away at this source of support for freedom of expression in the arts and humanities.
Luckily, all colleges and universities with art departments generally have galleries and a lot of activist art has been and is shown in those spaces.

Now, Trump proposes to eliminate federal art resources altogether, so that a military budget that is larger than all the others in the world combined can get a little bit bigger.

NT

And what about political commitment now?

In the labor movement the saying goes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same!" It is a very mixed bag in the US because the artworld here is mostly private, even though, like the foundations, they are independently governed by law (for tax purposes) from the mega rich people and corporations which started and contribute to them. Most of what they show and collect comes to them from private galleries, which is how my work began to be collected.

Over two decades ago, I began to realize that some of my comrades were mostly showing in Europe so I started asking around, "how can I get a European career?" I got a list of contacts but nothing ever came of my outreach efforts. Then there was the conceptual art group show at Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art and they took me on.
It has been a whole new experience for my work since, although all collecting, so far, has been of work I did *before* 1980! In other words, with the exception of the *H&SG*, there is no interest in the labor works I have been doing for over 35 years. I have shown some of this in two biennials now, but none of the other works in them have the partisan character of mine. My work did get singled out in the reviews but there is a sort of dismissive tone to the comments.

The thing is that my fan base is curators, galleries, artists, and an audience in their late-twenties to mid-forties. A number of major museums and biennials seem to be run by people who are a lot younger than they used to be. Maybe this opens up a kind of token space for a few old radicals. A lot of shows I have been included in are with much younger artists whose work has a socially critical edge but there seems to me to be a kind of sculptural turn.
The work is fairly abstract, requiring its audience to decode its "politics" it seems to me. Perhaps this is a reaction against postmodernism which was a highly iconographic and textual movement?

The other art question I can think to take up here is the divide which has opened up between what Greg Sholette calls "dark matter" just on the outer edge of the artworld. This is made up of artists largely trained in art schools but doing work in sort of NGO fashion with communities of fairly poor people. Collective practices are privileged and what they do is largely invisible within the field.
Some of these artists and small groups prefer an outsider place and some are, as it were, stuck with it as long as they remain committed to it. My colleague here at UCSD, Grant Kester, has also written extensively about this work which he supports and scolds the artworld for ignoring. These practices go on all over the planet and these authors and others like Susan Platt describe in some detail how they involve their communities of choice in whatever form the work takes.

Anyway, the only thing I am sure of is that socially progressive art and politics are both in a big defensive fight for the limited liberal democratic values and structures we once took for granted.

But back to your earlier question, what is the role art and artists within our field can play in the growing movements trying to hold the line, so to speak.

Time to get organized, no?

Fred Lonidier is an artist and union activist who has been making art "with, by, and for" trade union members since 1976. The labour movement and class struggle has been the subject and motivation for much of Lonidier's work since he graduated in 1972 from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). From then, until he recently retired, he served as a member of the UCSD faculty, teaching photography in the Visual Arts Department and counting among the membership of the American Federation of Teachers.

If we are to look at Lonidier's archive of exhibitions, we can be quick to detect that trade union halls supplant the art gallery as Lonidier's primary site of exhibition. What this suggests is that Lonidier is as sensitive to the reception of his work—to whom, where, and why a work of art is presented—as he is to the political content of the work itself. With this care for presentation, Lonidier's work raises questions about how political commitment is situated in the arts while retaining all the queries pertaining to medium, form, and content that fine art has traditionally held so closely. Its aims are underwritten by a take on documentary photography thought through conceptual art and the cultural heritage of the labour movement.

This exhibition presents three sets of work by Fred Lonidier selected from the past 45 years, in the Old Council Chambers of the Victorian Trades Hall. The earliest work, *29 Arrests* (1972) dates from Lonidier's time as a student at the University of California San Diego, where local anti-war demonstrators protested against the US invasion of Vietnam; produced four years later, *GAF Snapshirts* (1976) marks a transition in Lonidier's work from an analysis of photographic discourse, to a consideration of the labour practices in artistic production; and the most recent, a 1997 selection from a decades long project entitled *N.A.F.T.A (Not A Fair Trade for All)*, is an example of some of Lonidier's work developed with, by, and for organised labour on the Mexican-US border.

In union contexts, Lonidier has exhibited at
The German Trade Union Confederation
(DGB Union House),
Los Angeles County Federation of Labor,
Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union,
Service Employees International Union,
Communication Workers of America,
Gallery 1199 of the NYC Hospital Workers Union,
to name only a few.

Last year, Lonidier's work was central to *The Uses of Photography: Art, Politics, and the Reinvention of a Medium* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; elsewhere, he has exhibited in the 2014 Whitney Biennial;
The Institut Swizzero, Rome;
The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles;
Centre de la photographie, Geneva;
Palais des Nations, Salle des pas perdus,
United Nations Office, Geneva;
among many more.

Fred Lonidier is represented by Silberkuppe, Berlin; Michael Benevento, Los Angeles; and Essex Street, New York.

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Work notes

29 Arrests

Originally exhibited as a part of Lonidier's MFA thesis show at UCSD in 1972, *29 Arrests* records an anti-war demonstration amidst the United States' invasion of Vietnam. These photographs evidence the arrest of 29 demonstrators engaged in a sit-in, blocking the doors of the Naval Supply Center in San Diego, where military supplies were being dispatched to Southeast Asia.

Shot over the shoulder of a policeman recording the proceedings for the state, these photographs register a collective indictment of the state (Benjamin Young) now integral to recollecting the US invasion of Vietnam.

Its tenor of civil disobedience is underwritten by Lonidier's activism that predates this work—while an undergraduate, he served as a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); travelled to the Phillipines with the Peace Corps; and in 1967, was drafted to serve in the Vietnam War and resisted, subsequently documenting the draft resistance movement in Seattle.

GAF Snapshirts

Produced by placing an order for custom T-shirts, *GAF Snapshirts* utilises the type of novelty customisation that is now a commonplace. In making this work, Lonidier sent his research into the exploitative labour practices committed by GAF—a corporation that manufactured photographic film, and related products—as the material to be printed on t-shirts by its employees, in effect, enabling the system to expose itself.

N.A.F.T.A.

From 1997 to 2011, Fred Lonidier produced *N.A.F.T.A (Not A Fair Trade for All)*, whereby he took the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (also NAFTA) on workers into account. This selection, the "Hyundai Piece" focuses on Mexican workers' struggle against the poor labour conditions they were subject to at one of the Hyundai/Han Young manufacturing plants in Tijuana (termed "maquiladoras"—Mexican Spanish, from *maquilar* 'assemble'); the failures of the officiated union, and the efforts of workers to actively seek independent union representation; and the participation of workers in legal and non-legal strikes.

In 1964, the framework for the NAFTA agreement began when the US government terminated the Bracero Program that facilitated Mexican workers to cross the Mexican-US border for seasonal employment. The Mexican government initiated the Maquiladora program partially to alleviate the glut of unemployment that was growing on the border. Its premise was wholly predicate on the availability of this cheap, disposable labour power and the readiness of foreign investment to "make use" of it as a resource. The general concept was that the Mexican government would be lenient to duty-free, temporary importation of raw materials, machinery, and manufacturing technology as long as the products that were manufactured or assembled in Mexico were then exported to markets other than Mexico.

It wasn't until after the Mexican economy had gone through significant decline in the 1980s that the industry experienced serious growth. Seed capital came primarily from US-American corporations seeking cheaper labour costs, in an effort to compete with the growing dominance of Asian manufacturers. Increased foreign investment lead to further economic liberalisation, with Mexico becoming a contracting partner to the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), and later modifying its "Regulation of the Law for the Promotion of Mexican Investment and Regulation of foreign Investment". After negotiations began in 1992, the North American Free Trade Agreement was completely established by 1994. Its formation instituted incredible power to foreign investment in Mexico, with serious effects on the autonomy, safety, and well-being of workers throughout the region.

A consideration of its effects serves some local relevance, as the NAFTA has been exemplary for the structure of contemporary free trade agreements, such as the currently contested Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) of which Australia is/was a primary supporter and signatory.