

courant.com/entertainment/arts/hc-artweek-0510-20120508,0,7080091.story

Courant.com

'Capitalism: Works For Me!' At MCC, Blue Back Square, Real Art Ways

'Portable Participatory Public Art' Leaves Question Up To Viewers

 Follow CT Lifestyle & Entertainment News On The Courant's [Features Buzz Facebook Page](#)

By SUSAN DUNNE, sdunne@courant.com

The Hartford Courant

11:01 AM EDT, May 8, 2012

Last week, a "portable participatory public art" installation was set up outside the atrium at Manchester Community College, which asked passersby: "Capitalism: Works for Me! True? False?" Responses were varied.

"It's what this country was built upon," said Kevin, no last name given, of Newington, who voted "true."

"It doesn't seem very fair," said John Roberts of Hartford, who voted "false."

"Capitalism is the only way every individual can have freedom," said Nathan Karmuzinas of West Hartford, another "true."

"It's ironic to have that question asked on a state facility," said an unidentified state employee, who voted "false." The people at the ground level make the most sacrifices, but it's the upper echelon that gets everything. We don't even get cost-of-living raises"

"And we're the first to get laid off," said her friend, another state employee, also unidentified.

By the end of the two-day art event, the score was True 347, False 429. More votes will come in Friday, May 11, at a local temple to capitalism, Blue Back Square in West Hartford, where "Capitalism" will be installed all day. Even more answers will come next week at Real Art Ways, which will feature the installation at its Creative Cocktail Hour.

Steve Lambert, the Boston-based creator of the piece, said that the vote tallies favoring 'false' at MCC are reflective of the tallies that the art installation has received across the country. But he added that simple numbers don't tell the whole story.

"The 'no' votes are pretty solid but the 'yes' votes are more complicated than I thought they would be," Lambert said in a phone interview. "People vote 'yes' and apologize at the same time, out loud. Some of the more interesting 'yes' votes are from people in unions. They say 'It does work for me, but only because I've worked really hard and our union works really hard to make it work.'

"Even on the 'no' side, that doesn't work for everyone. It may be OK for them, but not OK for everyone. ... Ethically, they can't vote 'yes' because that would mean thinking only of themselves," he said. "I think if I added a 'maybe,' it would get lots of votes."

advertisement



Lambert, 35, became well-known for his work with the Yes Men, with whom he created a spoof of the New York Times stating that the war in Iraq and Afghanistan were over. Lambert says that his artwork always has veered toward studies of power and systems of control, but he likes to present these themes in a playful, engaging way. The "Capitalism" installation — which Real Art Ways visual arts coordinator John O'Donnell calls "portable participatory public art" — is meant to be both fun and thought-provoking.

"Capitalism seems like the biggest challenge and the most pressing issue, in my mind," he said. "But I want it to be friendly and inviting, making it all red, white and blue, with mesmerizing, flashing lights. If it draws them in, it will get them to start thinking about this issue that otherwise they may not consider.

"A lot of people think of the numbers as an end. They're not. They're a means to an end," he said. "I want people to start thinking about it."

The installation also has roots in personal experience. Lambert said that the experience of his parents — a former nun and former monk, who married, raised a family and started a furniture-making business — is fresh in his mind.

"It was a small business, a family business, very entrepreneurial. My parents did everything right. They hired recent immigrants and Vietnam vets and gave them job training. It was an amazing business making high-quality furniture," he said. "But in the period that the business existed, factories started making mass-produced particle-board furniture. You could buy your whole kitchen at Home Depot. That affected my parents' business.

"When I hear 'if you work hard and try hard, everything will be fine,' I know that's not true. My parents worked hard and there was nothing they could do."

Lambert said that he plans to turn the results of his "Capitalism" installation into a book or a video. Whether or not he will make a profit on that, however, is questionable, as he acknowledges that as an artist, capitalism doesn't always work for him.

"Things that do well in the market are not necessarily great artworks. That's really not a standard of measurement," he said. "Artists don't necessarily do well with that kind of competition. It doesn't motivate most of us or serve us well."

"CAPITALISM: WORKS FOR ME!" will be at Blue Back Square, near 60 Isham Road., West Hartford on Friday, May 11, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., and at Creative Cocktail Hour at Real Art Ways, 56 Arbor St. in Hartford, on Thursday, May 17, from 6 to 10 p.m. Details: <http://www.realartways.org>.

Post Your Comment Below



Facebook social plugin