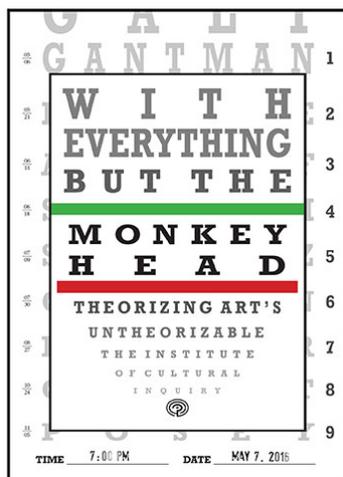


With Everything but the Monkey Head:
Theorizing art's untheorizable practices

Iteration I: Martin Gantman



EVENT: Martin Gantman residency at the ICI

DATES: April 12 – May 8, 2016

RECEPTION: **Finissage**
Saturday, May 7, 2016, 7-9 pm
Free and open to the public

LOCATION: Institute of Cultural Inquiry,
1512 S. Robertson Blvd,
Los Angeles, CA 90035

HOURS: **Tues/Thurs. by appt. 12-4 pm**
Suggested Donation: \$5.00

The Institute of Cultural Inquiry (ICI) is pleased to announce the launch of *With Everything but the Monkey Head: Theorizing Art's Untheorizable Practices*, a major project centered on the burgeoning field of studio-based research in the visual arts. This project will be a long-term collaboration with a host of diverse participants including nine researchers who have participated in some sort of visual research at the ICI during the last 5 years; a set of specially selected interlocutors whose questions will help construct and strengthen the ideas central to each researcher's project; and the curious spectators who have always enriched ICI projects with their thoughtful discussion and debate during public exchanges.

The first iteration of the project will feature Martin Gantman, a 2013 participant in the ICI's Visualist-in-Residence (VIR) project. Gantman returns to the ICI for a three-week residency during which time he'll share his thoughts about his own research practices while collaborating with the ICI to build a treatise on the organization's own visual research endeavors. His stay will culminate in a *finissage* on May 7, 2016 during which time he'll share his ideas with the public.

The term *studio-based research*, also called *practice-based research*, *research in the visual arts*, and at times, *visual research*, as it has been known at the ICI, has quickly become a catch-all term used to describe many contemporary art practices, some but not all of which are anchored by the 'new materialism.' Many of those who advocate for this designation believe the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by almost all artists is a form of research that can be equated with work (and research) in other disciplines. Other supporters of studio-based research feel that be it an interpretation, a critique, or an art object, the work produced under this banner must result in 'new knowledge,' thereby

equating the work of artists who achieve this goal with a somewhat antiquated model of the research scientist.

A small, provocative group of thinkers have rejected both these models pointing to their self-serving role in the service of an 'academy' that seeks to grow both the number of PhD programs in studio art and the bills in their pockets under the studio-based research banner. These *provocateurs* have pushed for a theory of art-based research that better reflects what is actually being done in some (but not all) artists' studios. They have challenged the art world to seek *a theory* (not **the** theory) that is focused more on processes than outcomes and that has no *a priori* "image" to which it aspires. *With Everything but the Monkey Head* answers their clarion call. With this project, the ICI does not aspire to build a theory of studio-based research as its practiced right now but to consider what theory's potential for transformation might be in response to the issues studio-based research brings to the table.

The most challenging of these issues is one that underlies the entire project. That is, that any theory about 'art as research' is, by definition, untheorizable since, as James Elkins points out, 'thinking through the visual,' is a type of inquiry that is outside language. How do we, then, theorize something that is untheorizable? The ICI believes the artist researchers at the center of this burgeoning field might have an advantage in this regard. Art is thought, not theory and most visual researchers resist those aspects of their process that hinge on language; they postpone theory, judgments, opinions, and conclusions, often delaying their consideration indefinitely but certainly while they work in the studio. It is to these researchers that the ICI has turned asking them to participate in a form of *inquiry based on their own visual inquiry* in a manner that links back to the original meaning of 'research' - to circle around and around. The ICI will encourage the researchers of *With Everything but the Monkey Head* to circle around a theory of studio-based research created *in the studio* with and through the slips, stutters and spasms of their agrammatical processes.

For the first iteration, Martin Gantman, asserts that any theory-making, including one centered on artist praxis, must first interrogate the terms used to set up that activity.



He asks, what is theory, what is research, or practice, and what is an activity or event that is 'something-based?' For Gantman, whose 2014 Visualist-in-Residence project at the ICI was centered on a critique of the institutional archive, this uncomfortable but necessary questioning can emerge in 'zones of awkward engagement' to borrow Anna Tsing's term. Whether in a museum, a studio, a Farmer's market, or back street alley full of third world vendors, these zones refuse art world rituals that work to silence or obscure issues of social or political importance.

Each iteration of *With Everything but the Monkey Head* will be accompanied with a unique laboratory workbook created by the researcher over the course of their short residency. Part journal, workbook, recipe book, and itinerary, this chronicle will provide a snapshot of the project at each stage of its unfolding. In addition, each researcher will also contribute to the project's catalog, which is being produced to emulate late 19th century 'sample' books used by traveling salesmen. These books offered the best parts of the finished book while under its cover snippets of alternate bindings, long lists of illustrations, complete indices, and 'notes to readers' on loosely inserted pieces of yellow paper pointed to the uncharted territories of thought the book might occupy. The catalog for *With Everything but the Monkey Head*, like the books whose form it borrows, lends itself to an idea that is still unfolding.

All parts of the Monkey Head project can be followed on the Institute's website at <http://www.culturalinquiry.org/laboratory/with-everything-but-the-monkeys-head/>. The construction of the lab books and the project catalog will be charted on ISSUU (<http://www.issuu.com/instituteofculturalinquiry>) where finished publications will be offered to the public through the print on demand service of ICI Press.



The **Institute of Cultural Inquiry** (ICI) is a non-profit educational and cultural organization focused on 'visual technologies' and how they are used to *document, imagine, remember* and *conceal* the convergence of human activities we call 'culture.' More information is available at www.culturalinquiry.org

