

Gregory Sale

American, born 1961

*So artists like Paul Chan, Laurie Jo Reynolds, and Theaster Gates—who operate in a growing middle ground between art and activism—end up working much more often outside the walls of the art world, in neighborhoods, through the Web, in long-term projects within activist circles.*¹

Among the first works encountered by visitors to *More Love at the Ackland in Chapel Hill* is Gregory Sale's *Love for Love, 2012-13* [Work 40], a grid of sensitive, hand-rendered drawings of text fragments and a trough containing thousands of metal buttons imprinted with those texts. But Sale's installation is only a fragment in itself, a remnant of a larger conceptual work, a node within an expansive circuitry of art and activism.

Love for Love is a recapitulation of Sale's 2008 project *Love Buttons, Love Bites*, in which the artist distributed tens of thousands of buttons and stickers imprinted with bits of writing about love generated by Sale's poet and writer friends. The idea was to cast a vast conceptual net, a group-think-derived aggregation of ideas about love as a means of asking if a large and diverse group of people could simultaneously and *en masse* consider the idea of love. *Love for Love* expands Sale's original project to include texts by "voices less heard—that is, voices of individuals who are more often on the receiving end of a community's generosity at the food bank, at the homeless shelter, or in an English-as-a-second-language class."² To accomplish this, beginning in June 2012, Sale began a series of regularly scheduled visits to the Chapel Hill area from his home base in Arizona. Starting from zero, knowing no one in the community, Sale forged connections within disparate marginalized groups from migrant workers to prisoners. Sale is no stranger to networking among a broad swath of social milieus. For *It's not just black and white, 2011* [see Work 39], he worked directly within Arizona's notoriously oppressive Maricopa County Jail system, pulling in educators, artists, community outreach groups, inmates, guards, and even the much maligned sheriff himself. For *Love for Love*, in a remarkably short period of time, Sale has galvanized constellations of people through a series of gatherings, brainstorming sessions, and writing workshops. The cumulative effect of Sale's work is brought into high relief when we consider, as

Sale does, that each individual connection, phone call, email, workshop, or meeting over coffee enacted by the artist is effectively part of the piece.

Sale's practice is inspired, in part, by relational aesthetics and sustains commonalities with artists such as Michael Rakowitz, whose ongoing project, *Enemy Kitchen*, begun in 2004, involves teaching the Baghdadi recipes he learned from his Iraqi-Jewish mother to public audiences. Sale's emphasis on pedagogical modes, pursuing dialogue with project collaborators and participants, bears the influence of an artist like Joseph Beuys, for whom teaching and public discourse was a central process. Sale talks about "commandeering the museum space" as a means of fostering dialogue, promoting awareness, tolerance, and education, an impulse that extends beyond institutional critique (another area of interest for Sale) and seeks out ways in which the museum can be a "space of service."³

The central impulse of *Love for Love* is the idea of bringing giving and receiving into balance, whether that exchange takes place interpersonally or within a community and its social programs. When we enter the lobby of the Ackland, and we interact with *Love for Love*, perhaps taking a button (literally receiving a gift from Sale and the project participants), noticing the texts on the buttons worn by other visitors, or later seeing signs posted in and around Chapel Hill with *Love for Love* texts, there is a convergence of thought between us and all of the project's contributors. In this way, we have been inducted into a ritual of giving and receiving that connects us to an entire networked circuitry that extends beyond the museum's walls.

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1. Randy Kennedy, "American Museums Tend to Tiptoe Around Politics," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/arts/design/american-museums-tend-to-tiptoe-around-politics.html>.
2. Gregory Sale, Artist Statement.
3. Gregory Sale, conversation with the author, October 29, 2011, Carrboro, North Carolina.



Work 40
 Gregory Sale
Love for Love, 2012-13
 [for complete details see Exhibition Checklist]
 all images documentation of social art project

Students enrolled in an ESOL class offered by the Orange County Literacy Council worked with the artist to draft short love poems in English and in their native languages. Photo: Eva Coyle

Artist/Professor Jina Valentine and students enrolled in Mixed-Media Seminar, Art Department, UNC-Chapel Hill, met with the artist to discuss collaboration and socially-engaged art practice. Photo: artist

Talking Sidewalks program co-chair Nikhil Umesh and Chapel Hill resident Charles Jenkins meet on West Franklin Street with the artist. *Talking Sidewalks* is a journal written by homeless and formerly homeless individuals. Photo: artist