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**A Report from 2024
Shared Dialogue,
Shared Space**

Art as a Collective Experience

Korea Art Forum



The Shared Insights

Reflections on the Project

Shared Dialogue, Shared Space is not just an exploration of art in public spaces—it's a lens through which we view the intersections of culture, identity, and collective action. This section captures the voices and perspectives of those who have engaged with the project, offering reflections that go beyond the immediate and into the profound impact of shared creativity.

Through these insights, we delve into the ways art fosters dialogue, transforms spaces, and builds bridges across diverse communities. Join us in uncovering the deeper meanings and possibilities born from shared experiences.

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Martin Lucas

How Can We Talk About Sharing?

As 2024 reaches its end, the concept of shared public life and its related ideals of equality in the public sphere feel increasingly fraught. In a year when over a million New Yorkers suffered food insecurity and one in eight children in the public school system experienced homelessness, a strange paradox has grown increasingly apparent: the public space that should form the vibrant heart of an urban democracy is actually full of people struggling to even get by.

2024 was also the year that Shared Dialogue Shared Space celebrated its fifth edition, and the art project dedicated to the integration of art into people's "ordinary lives in public places" has never felt more relevant or urgent. Such urgency invites a key question: How might we define art as public in a way that is at once open, productive, and aesthetically adventurous while also producing definable, beneficial outcomes?

In the run-up to the 2024 election, the figure of the immigrant in American society became, and remains, a flashpoint. Voters were told to

fear arrivals from other countries who have come to take their jobs and their homes. The word "invasion" was repeatedly invoked. In New York, a city built on immigrant stories, tensions have been exacerbated between different groups. Amidst this, how can the members of the city's various immigrant communities—already struggling to pay the rent and find employment—dedicate time to the development of communication and mutual understanding? How can art—often the province of privilege, but especially so in a global art capital like New York—become a means to sharing something more than the individualized aesthetic experiences offered at the premiere art institutions?

With events in Flushing, the South Bronx, Harlem, and Inwood, SDSS 2024 was very much a project of the boroughs and embedded in the home turf of regular New Yorkers, many of them immigrants. With over 700 languages—some ten percent of the world's total—New York City has perhaps the most diverse linguistic landscape of any city in the world, a point of pride, which is unsurprisingly closely linked to its established position as an immigrant destination par excellence.¹ Paradoxically, for many New Yorkers, language is both a conduit and a barrier—on the one hand a bond to a community, a source of personal identity, and a link to a rich culture, and on the other a serious hurdle for the non-English speaker. This complex knot of potentials and obstacles that renders language a source of both trauma and of freedom was a focus for several of the SDSS 2024 artists.

Akiko Ichikawa's project uses titles that link each iteration of SDSS to its specific location, starting with *Limited, Limited Edition (Flushing)* in June 2024, in which she utilizes that most American of apparel—the t-shirt—as a vehicle for Japanese translations of quotidian lines and slogans she collects in the surrounding areas of the place where the event is held.

Participants are asked to select a garment from her collection and have Ichikawa stencil it with a slogan. "Just Do It", "Moving forward together", and "Hip hop is Dead"

were among the selection available at the Department of Transportation's Open Streets event in Harlem, where Ichikawa placed herself next to a booth distributing free bike helmets.

Ichikawa immigrated from Japan with her family as a young child, and while growing up the question of language was a fraught one. A New England childhood spent with Anglophile parents interested in assimilating and developing English language skills, combined with tedious Saturday mornings of classes in basic Japanese, may have left her with a long-term desire to locate a liberatory subject matter in language, even with a practice grounded in visual arts and performance.

While determining and stenciling text in Japanese has its own complexities (the language has two phonetic alphabets plus kanji characters) the heart of project is the interaction between Ichikawa and the passersby, who pick a secondhand garment from her suitcase and a complementary phrase. For Ichikawa it is often the aleatory aspects of the encounter that are the richest part. The process of selecting a garment, figuring out the lettering, setting up, and stenciling—all these offer plenty of time for exchanges around the issues raised by the project. "I had a really long conversation [with one participant] about Japan, in a way he doesn't get to. His mom is Japanese. His dad is American, white American. But he'd observed certain aspects of Japanese culture. So it was cool to talk to him."²

With the Japanese language, Ichikawa engages and plays with a symbol system of great richness, albeit less for its inherent content (the meaning of the text itself remains a kind of secret message for anyone not fluent) than for its display of linguistic otherness in a world where English texts dominate. And for Ichikawa, perhaps this is the key: For the artist, the act of displaying words on one's body is itself potentially freeing.

"I've always been keenly aware of English language texts that I saw. When I lived in

Bed-Stuy in 2004 — 2006, I saw people always wearing stuff [with text]. It's a simple way to stand out on a fashion level, but I also feel like it's linked to the civil rights movement that taught us that if you don't speak up, you don't exist. Coming from Japanese or Asian culture, you would never express yourself in a tee shirt. So it's kind of me drawing out what I like about American culture."³

Ichikawa's practice, emerging as it does from her negotiations as a young person with immigration and its attendant trials, traumas, and insights, offers an entry point into a discussion about language that seems central to this year's SDSS and its aims to offer a satisfying artistic experience to New Yorkers.

Although New York is a place of opportunity, the city gives itself reluctantly. For most New Yorkers, it is the hustle part of its "hustle and bustle" that takes center stage. Jobs and side jobs, the need for the right paperwork, the hunt for a place to live. Although there are often accommodations for languages other than English, these are hardly general policies. For many, the daily experience and engagement with language is as a barrier, or an arcane system of arbitrary rules rather than a means of self-expression and the creation of meaning.

SDSS's elevation of projects that focus on language reminds us that it is not something dictated by Webster, or even Google Translate, but is rather a product of—and producer of—social interaction.

One of the goals of SDSS has been to create understanding among and between immigrant communities. Thomas Gallagher's *Lingo Bingo*, for example, is a reworking of the classic community hall bingo game that instead asks participants to identify matches between a set of words in a variety of languages, with the lexicon typically localized to the dominant tongues of the hosting neighborhood.

Gallagher grew up in an arts activist household, so public action came naturally to

1 See: <https://languagemap.nyc/info/about>

2 Interview with author, August 20, 2024.

3 Interview with author, August 20, 2024.

him. And it was in the context of international peace struggles in the 1990s that he became interested in the premise of multiple languages in public space approaching, mutually, a shared idea. He sees *Lingo Bingo* as a way of responding to the Trump campaign and its focus on immigrants as bogeymen.

"A seed for *Lingo Bingo* was when I did the banners for The World Says No to War. There were fourteen of them in different languages. And they were specifically the languages that were the countries on the UN Security Council and also the countries that were being specifically targeted."⁴

At a time when the number of refugees and forcibly displaced people has skyrocketed globally, the ability of art to offer something to people whose relation to citizenship is compromised feels threatened. Projects like those proposed by Gallagher or Ichikawa offer a kind of level playing field; by de-centering and de-privileging the role of English, they allow participants to experience a world where language is a realm for play and creative expression rather than a rules-based system for discrimination and exclusion. Put alternately, they imagine and gesture towards a near-utopian context in which one's own language is a source of pride, agency, and liberation.

For Gallagher, interpersonal interactions inform his addition of languages to the game and also the act of translation.

"The response I got from people is fantastic. My mother's from Sicily, and my father was Irish, so I'm the child of immigrants. I understand this sort of solidarity, and I was able to herd the cats and find out what was important to people and what was universal across multiple cultures."⁵

The artist recounts how his favorite participant was a little girl who initially didn't even really play the game. She'd come with her grandmother and simply identified

Chinese words in the 5×5 grid of the board. As part of the game, the player gets to take home a card with a word on it. In this case, she chose the card 爱, pronounced "ai," the word for "love." Then, later, she came back with her mother and played the game five times in a row.

Sari Nordman's *Anxiety Lean-to*⁶ is a public social engagement project involving knotting workshops to create textiles using recycled plastic film and traditional Scandinavian weaving methods. The artist has a background in dance and performance, and those who weave with her also get a chance to model and perform with the brightly colored "tapestries."

For Nordman, the origins of her project go back to her roots in Finland, a country where folk culture plays a strong, ongoing role. As a performer, COVID was a slow time, and she found herself back home. In this period, she rediscovered various aspects of the Finnish folk art weaving tradition, particularly a kind of shag carpet called a rya, which has its origins in carpets the Vikings brought back to Scandinavia from the Middle East.⁷

COVID was also an anxious period, and, for Nordman, the somewhat tedious experience of weaving knots into a tapestry also managed to be low-key enough to be quite relaxing. On the other hand, as she explains, other elements of the project are more fun and more overtly performative. Rather than a traditional rug or carpet, the end result of *Anxiety* workshops is a strip that more resembles a feather boa or scarf if scarves were made of recycled plastic, thus functioning as a wearable accessory. Consciously combining ecological concerns, performativity, and an opportunity to create a temporary but shared meditative community, the project helps frame and contain "larger anxieties about the climate, about the environment, and the idea that we're really heading in a bad direction,

maybe in a way that people are not normally able to engage with very effectively."⁸

At a time when living in New York City is already fraught with uncertainties, SDSS can perhaps offer a route to a different world. New Yorkers are often thought of as cynical—and who, faced with gridlock, overcrowding, garbage on the streets, and a transportation system that at times verges on the medieval, wouldn't be? But despite deep skepticism about the workings of the city and the ability of its officialdom to actually run it effectively, we make do. To be a New Yorker is to enjoy a kind of "vernacular citizenship" that gives us all some basic grasp of the urban environment, a relation to a specific neighborhood and its community, and, often, a sense of a shared predicament, ideally with the tolerance that goes with it.

For SDSS, as its name suggests, "What is shared?" is always a key question. One concept useful for thinking about both SDSS and participatory art more broadly is that of the "general intellect." Originally developed by Karl Marx to describe "fixed capital," the human knowledge in the form of science and engineering which, along with the craftsperson's understanding of work practices, created a new form of production as capitalism transformed work in the nineteenth century.⁹ At the end of the 20th century, the term was reworked by the Italian theorist Paolo Virno to examine the myriad forms of social understanding that define labor in the postindustrial age.¹⁰ Knowledge acquired on an ad hoc basis by pretty much everyone, like the use of the map function on a mobile phone, for example, facilitates modern urban jobs like Uber driver or takeout delivery

person.¹¹ But that shared "intellect"—part street smarts, part the insights that come with the negotiation of private and public bureaucracies—constitutes an incipient sharedness that can be energized in the space of cultural production.

Key for Heng-Gil Han, the founder of Korea Art Forum, is the idea of art as a collective creation, and he notes that SDSS has been rooted in participatory art for the last five years: "The emphasis on art's collectivity is motivated by the idea of addressing unjustified inequalities and restoring a more balanced understanding and view of art."¹²

Relatedly, the commitment to language accessibility in SDSS runs deep. Han recalls his own experiences as a young artist from South Korea, trying to navigate the complexities of an emerging career, including grants and commissions while looking at applications and proposal forms that required communication in a standardized English artspeak. For him, the fact that all SDSS events have interpreters for the main languages of Chinese, Spanish, and Korean is essential for removing the barrier to entry for the space of cultural encounter.¹³

Ultimately, Han believes that the kind of collective knowledge that enables both the artist and the non-artist to share an aesthetic relationship—ideas about everything from color to conventions of representation—needs to be allowed for and encouraged. One of the challenges, as he sees it, is getting past the notion of art as a locus for the artist's autonomous creativity. As he notes, "in art school, students are taught that 'the visual space of a painting is your sole responsibility. All things that happen on that flat surface—colors, tones, compositions,

4 Interview with author, July 25, 2024.

5 Interview with author, July 25, 2024.

6 Like other projects, this was renamed during SDSS 2024 and concluded simply as *Anxiety*.

7 See: <https://www.dorisleslieblau.com/the-history-of-rya-rugs/>

8 Interview with author, August 13, 2024.

9 The "general intellect" is an idea of the "Late Marx," and is developed passim throughout *The Grundrisse*, ed. & trans. David McLellen. (Harper Torchbooks, 1972.)

10 *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. (Semiotext(e), 2004.) The 'general intellect' includes formal and informal knowledge, imagination, ethical tendencies, mentalities and 'language games'. ... The scientific erudition of the individual labourer is not under question here. Rather, all the more generic attitudes of the mind gain primary status as productive resources; these are the faculty of language, the disposition to learn, memory, the power of abstraction and relation and the tendency towards self-reflexivity.

11 An example can be found in Boots Riley's 2018 film *Sorry to Bother You*, where a young Black man works at a call center, using his knowledge of Standard English to imitate a White middle-class accent.

12 From email communication, 11/9/24.

13 Other translators can be brought in as needed. In Harlem, an area with a strong West African population, Thomas had a Wolof-speaking informant from the Afrilingual Cooperative.

etc.—are under your autonomous decisions. It's not a collective thing.' But is there really anything that is fully and solely decided by an artist without being influenced by the social conditions and communal contexts in which the artist exists? The concept of an artist's autonomous decisions and the collective system of perception are clashing in contemporary art in the Western hemisphere due to the libertarian misappropriation of art's autonomy, which I believe originated from the Kantian idea of protecting art from the powerful influences of religion, politics, and economics."¹⁴ What is needed is an understanding that the space of art-making—and the plane surface of a painting—is already a social space or a space of social contract and construction.

SDSS 2024 can be seen in this light as a zone of respite, one where one language is not privileged over others and where art offers us not six-million-dollar bananas,¹⁵ but the experience of a world where languages and cultural folkways become conduits to new experiences. Even if brief and ephemeral, these projects offer a common humanity that can be expressed in difference and, of course, shared.

¹⁴ Interview with author, November 27, 2024.

¹⁵ Maurizio Cattelan's conceptual art piece sold for \$6.2 million at an auction in New York on November 11, 2024. See <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/21/nx-s1-5199568/a-duct-taped-banana-sells-for-6-2-million-at-an-art-auction>

Jennifer McGregor

Sharing Space and Dialogue 2024

On a steamy Saturday morning in August, I climb the stairs from the A Train, shielding my eyes from the bright sun, and step onto 125th Street. Approaching Adam Clayton Boulevard, the sound of live music permeates the air. Promenading south, tents line both sides of the street, featuring an eclectic array of organizations offering health and wellness information about boxing, Pilates, healthy eating, bike riding, and more. It's a rare chance for people to take over the street on foot, scooter, or bike. This is Summer Streets, a four-block car-free zone in Harlem that pops up for three weekends every year.

The Shared Dialogue, Shared Space tents are on the east side of the boulevard. People check out the activities devised by three artists, Sari Nordman, Thomas Gallagher, and Akiko Ichikawa. They stop briefly or linger to learn how to weave with plastic, play a round of *Lingo Bingo*, or co-create a T-shirt.

In the middle of the street, a girl is voguing and adorned with a colorful, glittery tapestry wrapped around her shoulders as Sari Nordman snaps her photo. This is a fun exchange and a selfie opportunity that evokes glamor, excitement, silliness, sexiness, sweetness, happiness, and even pride. While some of these pictures will show up on Instagram, others are part of Nordman's *Anxiety Portrait* series. She notes that "Most people were excited about being photographed. This was very interesting and quite surprising as often in the city you notice that people don't want to be photographed by strangers. Maybe because I asked them first and shared my process, they then wanted to be included in the

project in this way. I also noticed that for many people, having that attention meant something like gaining more visibility or being heard. I was touched by that and will continue to think about it."¹

At Nordman's tent, visitors contribute to making the tapestries by learning a simple knotting technique: twisting small bits of colorful repurposed plastic bags around a plastic mesh. Several people can work together on different sides of the tapestry, which once finished is a prop for the photo sessions. Repetitive movements are relaxing and lead to conversation among the participants who are delighted to see the beauty of what's being created with everyday plastic. Part of Nordman's intention is to reorient people to materials that easily join the mountains of trash produced daily in the city's overflowing trash cans.

At the next tent, Thomas Gallagher has spread four *Lingo Bingo* mats on the pavement. They are 48" square with a grid and colored squares like a bingo card. The typical numbers are replaced with words and phrases in Spanish, French, Arabic, Wolof, Haitian Creole, Taíno, and English. A boy is playing who speaks Arabic. People watch and chime in enthusiastically, searching for the same word in other languages. For the Harlem location Gallagher invited a native Wolof speaker to chat with visitors. In this setting, it's not surprising that people are familiar with multiple languages. The words and phrases used here (in English) are "Immigrants are Welcome Here," "Green Card," "American Dream," "Solidarity," and "Liberty," "Food," "Love," "Family," "Faith," and "Dignity." Some people play to match up the same words in each language instead of making a line of five answers in a row, as is usually done in bingo. He offers players a bonus card with the word of their choice as a prize.

Like a barker at a fair (which he is at Summer Streets), Gallagher encourages people to join in the game. He deftly keeps the conversation going about the day, the event, and the experiences people have as immigrants and New Yorkers. His exchanges with participants in the various locations,

¹ Phone conversation with Sari Nordman, October 3, 2024

as well as the different boards are well documented on his Instagram account. This provides a glimpse at the nature of the shared dialogue and the fun that people are having.

In the tent to the right Akiko Ichikawa is surrounded by piles of used t-shirts, sourced from two secondhand stores, one in Manhattan, the other in Brooklyn. She notes that “Being that New York is the U.S. fashion capital, with many New Yorkers who dress to impress, there are excellent secondhand shirts everywhere.”² She picks a mix of graphic and plain in multiple colors and sizes. Two friends approach the table, and the artist offers them a choice of shirts. They select from a choice of phrases that include “Moving Forward Together,” “Just Do It,” and “Queen” in Japanese. After this introduction to the process and selecting the shirts, they watch on as she stencils the phrase to create their custom shirt. The process provides ample space for dialogue with Ichikawa and the others watching on. In one conversation “Abhishri from India, whom I talked to about PM Modi and the recent elections which bode favorable to members of our gender there (& thus why NYC may lose her soon).” Abhishri selected “Just Do It” on her own gray shirt with a 28th Annual NYC Century Bike Tour logo.³

In between the stacks of shirts and the stenciling station sits a small plastic-topped cup, the kind the migrant women use to sell cut fruit at subway stations. It’s filled with \$5 bills, the suggested cost of the shirt. Proceeds from the SDSS sessions are contributed to the Legal Aid Society and Make the Road New York, an organization that is a second home to tens of thousands of immigrants and working-class people of color. Ichikawa has conducted this *Limited, Limited Edition* in multiple locations over the past two decades and has learned that people value something that they buy rather than get for free.

Interdisciplinary artist Thomas Gallagher has a background in motion graphic design. *Lingo Bingo* comes from his keen interest

in understanding the story and knowing who he’s talking to. Repeating *Lingo Bingo* multiple times in the same location (Summer Streets: Harlem and Mount Hope/Bronx) and moving to parks in other neighborhoods provided the opportunity to evolve the project. This included introducing new languages, such as Twi (Akan) in Mount Hope, and using blue in solidarity with South Bronx Unite’s ongoing mobilization for the Mott Haven–Port Morris Waterfront Plan.

Since 2019, Nordman has been working with plastics. She found it interesting to conduct the project in both park settings and Summer Streets. She noted that people in the park just want to relax. At Summer Streets, there was more of an exploratory mindset. She noted that one man came to every Harlem event and stayed for several hours, clearly enjoying the peaceful activity. Tahj Holligan, whom she met in Flushing, who is interested in climate and social justice, asked to volunteer at subsequent events and was very helpful in administering the questionnaires and explaining the project.

With a background in journalism and writing, Akiko Ichikawa has developed her ongoing project to observe and engage through her art practice. In reflecting on the difference between the settings, Ichikawa noted, “Summer Streets in Harlem was intense because of the sheer volume of people coming through, the hot weather, and the street setting. The Flushing playground was quieter, but there was one woman who expressed impatience with her shirt taking a while. But all irritation melted away once she got it! I appreciated one interaction with a man there who came just to know what I was doing and didn’t want anything from me but reflected his enjoyment of the piece, through an interpreter, that it brought focus back to the community. The riverfront barbeque and community garden gathering in the Bronx was the most bucolic setting, under the trees with the music, but people were less chatty, less willing to share about themselves for some reason, I needed to do the conversational initiating.”⁴

In a departure from the projects discussed above, *A New World’s Fair That Is Already There*, a collaboration between Art Jones and Ina Wudtke took place in April and May (since Wudtke was only able to be in New York at that time). The framework differs from the other projects since it centers on the Unisphere in Flushing Meadows Corona Park and the “World of Tomorrow”, 1939 World’s Fair. The project provides a guide map and video interviews that connect to locations in the park (it can be downloaded from the KAF website). There was a picnic, a series of walks, and guided tours were offered. The project is meant to be a growing archive of people from different backgrounds talking about their neighborhoods. It presents an alternative way for SDSS to function in a site-responsive way that connects to one location rather than having to be adaptive to different neighborhoods.

One of the SDSS’s goals is to present participatory projects that evolve from the artist’s practice in public spaces in several boroughs. By now, Korea Art Forum (KAF) has strong partnerships with the NYC Parks Department’s Art in the Parks program, the NYC Department of Transportation’s Summer Streets and Open Streets programs, and neighborhood organizations, such as the South Bronx Unite in Mott Haven, and Minkown Center in Flushing.

KAF selects the artists by first issuing a call for artists in the fall. For the 2024 cohort, a group of advisors reviewed and ranked the proposals. In the winter, Heng-Gil Han advises the artists on the feasibility of their concepts. This year, I was one of the reviewers, and I was interested in looking back at the initial proposals submitted by these artists. The final projects are in keeping with the first concepts and were adjusted to be able to be set up and dismantled quickly during the designated timeframe and leave no trace. Initially, four artists participated, but Eiko Nishida could not continue in the summer due to her changing immigration status.

After visiting the Summer Streets program on Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard in August and the Mott Haven–Port Morris Waterfront Park with South Bronx Unite in September, I was able to observe two different types of settings and draw some conclusions.

SDSS lands in the location, and the pop-up nature of the events means that people are not necessarily expecting to engage with artists. Amidst the conversations that I heard, people didn’t question whether this was art or not, they accepted the activity as engaging and fun. Whether it was art was beside the point, instead the emphasis is on sharing space and creating dialogue.

The interactivity between artist and participant is at the core of these projects. In this year’s group, the artist prompts an activity that engages people through play, based on their practices. Because the nine events occurred in different environments there’s a push and pull between interacting with a lot of people and having a more intimate experience with fewer people. The artists hone their concept for the portability and logistics of swift setup and an unknown number of participants. The repetition provides a chance to evolve the project. Interestingly each of these projects had an Instagram moment that was either part of the project as with Nordman or deliberately documented by the artists in the case of Gallagher and Ichikawa. This is a way of extending the audience for the project.

For me, one of the measures of success is how these projects broaden and deepen the artist’s practice, and by that measure, the 2024 project succeeds. After the last program in the Bronx, Sari Nordman incorporated the tapestries created through the SDSS events into *Anxiety Tower*, a fiber-art installation exhibited at Art at the Edge and NYC Climate Week at South Street Seaport/Pier 16 in late September 2024. The opportunity to work with Shared Dialogue, Shared Streets has launched a new project for Thomas Gallagher. Next spring he plans to create new *Lingo Bingo Brooklyn* iterations for Bay Ridge through Stand4 Gallery and Community Center’s exhibition *Essential Shoreline/Permeable Future*, and for *Car Free Earth Day*, an Open Streets program in Sunset Park. He’ll return to Summer Streets in August, in Crown Heights. For Akiko Ichikawa, SDSS projects form a new chapter in ongoing exchanges through *Limited, Limited Edition*.

2 Email from Ichikawa, 10/4/24

3 @theakikoichikawa Instagram carousel post, 9/7/24, 6th slide

4 Email from Ichikawa