

Art Build Workers: Community Building through Collective Art Activism

*Art Build Workers*¹

“Before the march and before the strike there is the art build!”
Art Build Workers’ Motto

The Art Build Workers (ABW), Jeanette Arellano, Joe Brusky, Kim Cosier, Paul Kjelland, Nicolas Lampert, Claudio Martinez, and Josie Osborne, are a group of seven artists, designers, photographers and educators who are based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Our collective work began in 2016 as the activist art scene in Milwaukee started heating up in response to the killing of Dontre Hamilton, an unarmed Black man by police, immigration issues, teacher union activism, and climate activism. There was a need for a form of art organizing that would support activist organizations to harness the power of art to bring about change. Over time, we saw in each other a shared commitment to social justice, a drive to service, diverse organizational and creative skills, and an over-the-top work ethic that made it possible to do this work.

Since then, we have been working locally and traveling around the country organizing multi-day community-based events called art builds in collaboration with unions and other social justice organizations. Art builds are a form of creative collective action in which we partner with community organizations to create artwork, such as screen printed patches, flags, and picket signs, and hand-painted banners including 24’ parachute banners. The artwork makes visible the messages of social transformation our partners are working to promote. Our goals are twofold: to support movements by amplifying their messages through visual art, media, and archiving, and to build community through creative collective action (Lampert, 2016, 2017).

A Brief History of the Art Build Workers

In 2016, Nicolas Lampert invited renowned San Francisco Bay CA area activist artist and art build organizer, David Solnit, to come to Milwaukee to talk about his work as part of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Artists Now! lecture series (Lampert, 2016). Solnit is an art organizer who is committed to racial, climate, and social justice. He has led high-impact art builds in many places including Paris, France, Seattle Washington, Oakland California, and

¹ Jeanette Arellano, Joe Brusky, Kim Cosier, Paul Kjelland, Nicolas Lampert, Claudio Martinez and Josie Osborne

the Standing Rock Resistance Camp in North Dakota. Solnit agreed to come only if we would host a multi-day art build during which he could share his organizing knowledge and skills in a more hands-on fashion. Having worked beside Solnit at art builds around the world, Nicolas knew how powerful it would be to local activists and artists to have Solnit lead an art build in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Figure 1. David Solnit (on the left) with Milwaukee-based art teacher and activist, John Fleissner, with a projection of one of John's banner designs that was later traced and painted.

Photo by Nicolas Lampert

Nicolas reached out to local activist artists Pete Railand and Sue Simensky Bietila to help coordinate the first Milwaukee build. Each of them reached out to a different organization with a goal of having representation from a diverse cross section of Milwaukee. Nicolas worked with Voces de la Frontera, an organization that works on immigration justice reform efforts by growing and mobilizing grassroots activism. Pete reached out to the Coalition for Justice, an anti-racist organization started by the family of Dontre Hamilton, a young Black Milwaukeean who was murdered by a White police

officer because he was sleeping on a bench in front of a Starbucks. Sue made plans with Citizens Acting For Rail Safety (C.A.R.S.), an environmental group that is mostly made up of White people who have been focusing on the hazard of oil transport by trains. They all tapped into their network of activist artist friends who joined with community members and got to work (Lampert, 2016). It was beautiful to have everyone come together to make art that was meant to make the world more racially, environmentally, economically just.



Figure 2. Community members construct frames for screen-printed picket signs designed by Pette Railaind. Black Lives Matter in background designed by Nicloas Lampert. Photo by Joe Brusky²

The work that goes into an art build is intense. Pre-build duties include coordinating with partner groups on messaging and logistics, working with artists and designers to create designs, ordering hundred yard bolts of unbleached muslin, 24' children's play parachutes, ink, wood, paint, brushes, and other supplies, burning screens, reaching out to volunteers to help during the build, securing the space, tracing parachute banner designs, and so forth. During an art build it is common to work twelve to fourteen hours a day, usually Friday through Sunday. The work is physically demanding, those who are able pitch in to set up stations for all of the different types of artwork that will be produced, lugging art supplies, drop cloths, tables, sawhorses, and sheets of plywood into position.

² For more photo documentation by Joe, please see his Flickr sites: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KrijgBt9PfdVGtfYBi1RH4WJTVxWccZSi/edit> and <https://www.flickr.com/photos/126164815@N04/albums/with/72157709545915927>



Figure 3. Aerial shot of an early art build. Banner designs by Raoul Deal and Nicolas Lampert.
Photo by Joe Brusky.

Solnit taught us invaluable lessons about organizing these types of events as well as his practical approach to design, summed up by his frequent proclamation “If they can’t read it we can’t win it!” which reminds us to keep visual messaging concise and designs uncluttered. The work we made in that original Milwaukee art build included parachute and regular banners, screen printed picket signs, and a large, papier mache blue heron puppet. The artwork was immediately deployed by the partners in actions across the state of Wisconsin. As has been our habit ever since, many of the artists joined our partners in the streets, putting the art to work.

That first art build ignited a fire in the activist art community in Milwaukee and we soon organized a follow up art build with the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association (MTEA), which is the local union representing education workers in the city’s public schools (Lampert, 2017). This is when our team started to gel. We emerged as the diehards who were in it for the long haul. As Joe Brusky put it “everyone is a really hard worker with a passion for justice and a super high sense of efficacy for real change.” The MTEA art build is where the seeds of our work with unions nationally were planted through Joe’s documentation and dissemination on social media.

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Sunday, February 5 from 10am - 10pm

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All parents, students, and community members welcome!

Figure 4. Poster for MTEA Art Build with artwork by Sue Simensky Bietila.

We began working together regularly after the MTEA build, but it wasn't until we started working with the National Education Association (NEA) that we had to get ourselves organized. Ironically, even though we are all anti-capitalist, it was money that forced us to choose a name and form a limited liability corporation (LLC). We had always worked on a voluntary basis with our local partners, but we started being paid for our work when we began partnering with unions. In 2018, prior to our first national engagement with the Conference on Racial and Social Justice and the NEA Representatives Assembly, we met to discuss what formalizing might mean for us collectively and individually.

Josie, Claudio, Joe, Nicolas, Paul and Kim met in Paul's studio. First, we discussed what we would call ourselves, leaving the uncomfortable money talk until later in the meeting. We decided on the name, *Art Build Workers*, in the same way we come to most of our decisions, through dialogue. We felt the name reflected what we do as well as our alignment with workers and social justice unions. Paul, who had experience setting up non-profits and LLCs in the past, walked us through what each would entail. In the end we voted to go the LLC route because we did not want to have to deal with having a governing board and the rest that non-profit status would require. Each of us affirmed our commitment to continuing in the group and contributed some funds toward the LLC. Jeanette, who had started working with us in earnest a bit later than the rest, was asked to join the LLC in 2019.

Who We Are

Many people contribute significantly to art builds in Milwaukee, but we came to see in each other the important knowledge and skills, commitment to justice, capacity for empathy, and over the top work ethic that is necessary to make an art build work. Each of us brings complementary skills to the table and we all share a goofy sense of humor, which has helped us stay close through the highs and the lows of this work. Following are brief bios of each of the individuals who make up the collective.

Jeanette Arellano is a public school art teacher and activist who identifies as a Latinx cisgender mujerx, straight person. She joyfully teaches art at la Escuela Elemental Hayes Bilingüe/Hayes Bilingual Elementary School. Jeanette also teaches citizenship classes to adults through Voces de la Frontera, and derives great happiness in her students' success. Like everyone in the Art Build Workers collective, Jeanette is part of Voces de los Artistas, an art-affinity group established in 2016 that works in collaboration with Voces de la Frontera. Voces de los Artistas has over one hundred member artists. If that weren't enough, shortly after the pandemic began Jeanette also

co-founded Ayuda Mutua MKE, an all volunteer collective that was formed to address food justice for residents on the city's South Side, many of whom are undocumented and ineligible for the meager support that has so far been offered from the federal government (for more on the visionary work of Ayuda Mutua MKE, see on <https://urbanmilwaukee.com/2021/01/27/ayuda-mutua-mke-offers-south-side-food-pantry/>). Jeanette is also very active in the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA). Along with a group of similarly dedicated art teachers, she formed an art education advocacy committee through MTEA, which successfully lobbied the school board to commit to better supporting students and art teachers in the district. In the Art Build Workers, Jeanette creates designs, organizes volunteers, and works on the banner painting crew.

Joe Brusky is a public school teacher, activist, and award-winning photographer. He identifies as a white, cisgender, straight ally. Joe works as Social Media Membership Organizer for MTEA. His position, which provides full-time release from the classroom, enables Joe to organize his fellow workers using his camera and social media – documenting their workdays and sharing their stories. He also uses his creative skills to fight for justice and equality in other ways. For example, he is a core member of the Overpass Light Brigade, a collaborative public art project in which illuminated messages are held aloft in public spaces to raise the profile of important issues. Joe serves as the organization's primary photographer, and he has supported the development of an international network of light-brigade groups. Joe has documented movements in Wisconsin and beyond. These include not only various aspects of the labor movement, but also struggles for racial, social, economic, and environmental justice. However, some of his most iconic work focuses on the immigrant rights' movement in Wisconsin, where he has captured numerous marches, rallies, public hearings, and other events. Joe is called "The People's Photographer" and documentation and dissemination of images and video is his primary work in our collective.

Kim Cosier has served as Director of Community Engagement and is an art education professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). She identifies as a non-binary queer, white ally. She has been deeply engaged in teacher activism through various Milwaukee-based teacher activist groups. She is founder and director of the Milwaukee Visionaries Project, an award-winning media literacy and production program for middle and high school youth in Milwaukee. As an anti-racist, gender queer researcher and teacher, Kim's work focuses on art and education for social justice, particularly related to entangled (Knight, 2007) cultural and social factors including race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and class. She has published books and articles on these subjects including *Rethinking Sexism*,

Gender and Sexuality, which won an American Library Association Stonewall Award. She believes in the power of art to create change in community and sees works of the imagination as essential to building a better, more just world. Kim organizes logistics behind the scenes, writes grants to support art builds, creates designs, and is part of the banner painting crew.

Paul Kjelland is an interdisciplinary artist who identifies as a white, straight, cisgender, ally. Paul works collectively with many groups, including: the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, a worker-owned printmaking cooperative of thirty artists in North America that formed in 2007; ReciproCity, a Milwaukee-based collective established in 2012 that works at the intersection of art, architecture, urban sustainability, and a socially-just version of community redevelopment; Climate Prints – a website/activist infrastructure project that shares downloadable graphics on Climate Justice and puts this work directly into movements. Paul's roles in ABW are wide-ranging and include bookkeeping, working with partner organizations to co-create designs and messaging, handling logistics behind the scenes, driving supplies to out of town builds, designing artwork, banner painting, and screenprinting.

Nicolas Lampert is an interdisciplinary artist and author whose work focuses on themes of social justice and ecology. He identifies as a white, cisgender, straight ally. His artwork is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Library of Congress, and over fifty-five archives and special collections across the US and Canada. Like Paul, Nicolas is part of Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, ReciproCity, and Climate Prints. His first book *A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements* was published by The New Press in 2013 and is part of the People's History Series edited by Howard Zinn. Nicolas is a faculty member in the Department of Art and Design at UWM with a joint appointment in Printmaking and Writing and Critical Thinking. His roles in ABW are many, along with Paul, Nicolas works ahead of the builds with partner organizations to organize messaging, designs, and logistics behind the scenes, he coordinates work with artists from other cities when we travel, he blogs about our work, designs and coordinates revisions of artwork, screen prints and joins in banner painting.

Claudio Martinez is a graphic designer who identifies as Hispanic, cisgender, straight ally. Over the years of working with corporate clients he's learned that being in the trenches with fellow artists working on political artwork and meeting like-minded misfits fulfills his soul immensely in ways his day job does not, so he made a leap and went part-time so that he could have more time to do work that matters to him. Claudio dedicates much of his free-time creating

artwork for Voces de los Artistas and he has recently been hired as a designer on a part-time basis at Voces de la Frontera. Claudio also designs materials for UWM's ArtsECO program. Claudio's roles in ABW include a great deal of designing and working on the banner painting crew.

Josie Osborne is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, curator and activist. She identifies as a queer, cisgender white ally. She has been a long-time advocate of art education and the connections/intersections between contemporary art, art history, political/social movements and social justice issues. As Senior Lecturer and Director of the Art and Design Department's First Year Program in the Peck School of the Arts at UWM, Osborne helps to connect new and continuing students, faculty and staff with issues and opportunities that engage them with community. With her wife, Kim Cosier, she is co-creator and co-PI for ArtsECO, a program that works to recruit, develop and support art teachers as changemakers. Service to her community and on non-profit and advisory boards and for local non-profits has been important to Josie over the past 22 years. Since 2011 Josie's more contemplative and quieter studio practice has taken a back seat to activism and community building through art builds. In ABW, she works on logistics behind the scenes, coordinates volunteer helpers, and is a core member of the banner painting crew.

Who Are Our Partners?

The Art Build Workers collaborate with social justice-based organizations locally and nationally. Here in Milwaukee, we work most often with an incredibly powerful immigrant justice organization called Voces de la Frontera (see figure ?). We have also worked regularly with MTEA, our local teachers' union. MTEA has now started hosting their own art builds, which we love to see happening. Other partners include Youth Climate Action Team MKE and the People's Climate Coalition, which have reached out to us on several occasions to make work ahead of planned actions. We have also collaborated with youth from March for Our Lives MKE, Take Back the Night organizers on UWM's campus, and other local groups.

Nationally, we regularly collaborate with the National Education Association (NEA), which is the largest union in the country with an estimated membership of over 2.7 million members. NEA organizer, Nate Gunderson, saw the photographs Joe took of the MTEA art build and reached out to Joe to see if we might like to take our show on the road. ABW has since partnered with NEA and union locals across the country including in Los Angeles (see <https://vimeo.com/306085680>) and Oakland, California before their historic strikes in 2019 and Prince George's County just outside of Washington, DC ahead of a statewide action in Maryland. We have also organized massive art

builds at NEA’s annual Representatives Assembly and Conference on Racial and Social Justice in several cities where we also presented our work in order to spread the gospel of the power of art in social justice unionism.



Figure 5. *Thousands of people marching through the streets of Waukesha, Wisconsin, on May Day. The gigantic 100-yard long by 10 feet wide banner made the march seem even bigger! The banner reads “They Tried to Bury Us. They Didn’t Know We Were Seeds.” Banner design, Claudio Martinez, photo by Joe Brusky*



Figure 6. Aerial shot of Oakland CA Art Build. Designs by Kim Cosier (based on Emory Douglas' design with permission) Claudio Matinez, Favianna Rodriguez and Nicolas Lampert, and David Solnit. Photo by Joe Brusky.

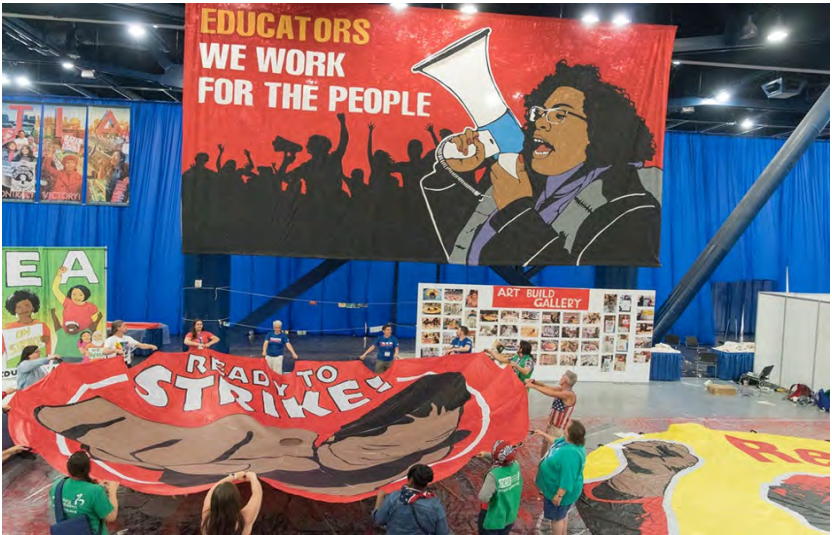


Figure 7. A group at the NEA Representatives' Assembly meeting in Houston, TX helps dry parachute banner designed by Jeanette Arellano. Other banners designed by Nicolas Lampert, Paul Kjelland, and Claudio Martinez.



Figure 8. Bird's eye view from NEA Representative's Assembly in Houston. Banner designs by Jeanette Arellano, Paul Kjelland, Nicolas Lampert, and Claudio Martinez, photo by Joe Brusky

In addition to NEA and affiliated locals, we also partnered with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the nation's second largest teachers' union in Minneapolis/St. Paul and Chicago. The Chicago build opened up new avenues for collaboration since it was a combination of the teachers' union and Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Through SEIU we have since connected to the folk at Fight for \$15 and we have done several builds to support their work, including designing and constructing thirty unique silhouettes of protestors that we drove down and installed outside of the McDonald's headquarters in Chicago when Covid 19 prevented an in-person action. This was just one of the ways we have been creatively addressing the changes brought on by the pandemic.

Our most recent builds have included fewer volunteers because of

Covid19 safety protocols, but we have managed to keep the art build momentum going. We partnered with an activist group in Laredo, Texas, that are taking actions to hold the Biden administration to its promise not to build more on the in-progress border wall. Banners were designed by artists in Laredo and sent to us to trace, paint, and ship because of our reputation for getting things done.

A recent build was a partnership with a national consortium of immigrant rights groups. The Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) is a project of Community Change, a national organization dedicated to improving the lives of low-income people and people of color (for more on their work, see <https://www.fairimmigration.org/mission>). FIRM was organizing a nationwide action across 34 cities. They learned of our work through Voces de la Frontera and reached out to us to design, paint, and ship banners ahead of the action. We look forward to working with all of these partners again as we collectively fight against White supremacy and its systems of privilege and oppression. We are gearing up for another art build with Voces de la Frontera in early April!

Why we are a Collective

In order to include everyone's voices in this article, Kim developed some questions and asked ABW members to respond in writing. What emerged was a story of seven individuals who each had personal experiences that lead them to want to work for change. Because of local, national and global challenges to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we each felt an intense desire to make art that makes a difference. Some of us had been part of formalized collectives already. Nicolas and Paul, for example, have collaborated for years and were already part of several collectives including Justseeds (<https://justseeds.org/about/>), a decentralized network of artists who use printmaking as a form of political action. Joe was already deeply engaged in the Overpass Light Brigade ([OLB http://overpasslightbrigade.org](http://overpasslightbrigade.org)), which is a group that was founded in Milwaukee during the Wisconsin Uprising³ by Joe and our colleagues Lisa Moline and Lane Hall. Nicolas also named the Wisconsin Uprising as one of the catalysts for turning toward collective action.

Others in the group had only ever worked alone before the art build movement in Milwaukee took hold. Claudio, for example, said "I

³ In early 2011, thousands of education and other public workers and their allies took to the streets in Madison Wisconsin in sub-zero temperatures. They occupied the state capital building for over a month to protest Act 10, a union-busting bill that eliminated collective bargaining for public workers and made devastating cuts to education. Inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, the Wisconsin Uprising predated the more well-known Occupy Wall Street (Yates, 2012). It has inspired many to join fights for social justice.

on me to take a more proactive role in activism after the election of Donald Trump.” Responding to a question about why we are a collective, Claudio described the reasons behind our work beautifully when he said:

We come from diverse backgrounds and with different fields of expertise: we are educators, photographers, graphic designers, and artists, but we all share the same vision for a more equitable future; we fight for the underdog in our society and as a collective, we have power in our actions and voice.

Joe affirmed Claudio’s assertion, stating “We are a collective in many ways. Each of us brings individual artistic talents and experiences and we all come from unique backgrounds that when paired together are a force for change.”

Jeanette wrote “We are a collective because we see the strength in working together. We bring strength to each other, we learn and grow together, and we teach one another how to be allies.” Reflecting on her reasons for joining ABW, Josie wrote that being part of this collective has given her a “sense of hope generated by working with a diverse group of other creative people to build community around significant issues. Kim and Josie, a queer married couple, had long been active in actions organized by others, but their creative energies had previously been rather isolating. They agree with their collaborators about the power of collective creative action and see this work as feeding a spiritual longing in these difficult times. Within this work hope, love, and joy have flourished.

What drew you to the Art Build Workers Collective?

Answering this question, Joe wrote:

As a member of an education worker labor union, I see every day what workers can collectively accomplish for our students, classrooms, and communities. The ABW is similar because each contributor brings a unique set of talents and experiences that when combined as a collective is a powerful force for justice and change.

Each of us sees the power of collective action. Josie said it was the needs of the time that drew her in, adding that she had “always been an activist, since I was a kid organizing around environmental issues or later as a young woman organizing around women’s rights. I have also always loved to work hard and collectively to see what that accomplishes.” She also named the Wisconsin Uprising as influential to her development as an activist, saying “we made our own signs

and showed up day after day and it was thrilling!” Josie went on to say, “when David Solnit came and shared his model of community-based art activism, I saw how all of that is key to feeling hopeful, connected and positive in these very strange and turbulent times.” We all feel that sense of hope in collective action and we believe that collective power is the antidote to the concentrated power of capitalism and White supremacy.

Claudio explained what drew him to the collective by saying “Personally, I never felt more vulnerable as a minority in this country as when Donald Trump became president and denigrated people of color and the immigrant community as a whole.” He came to see that “The only way to fight back was to get out of my comfort zone and use my skills as a graphic designer to create artwork and push back against some of the most egregious policies against immigrants, the environment, and unions.” Paul said that having a bigger impact is what drew him to wanting to help form ABW. He went on to say “Creating more of a structure allowed us to tighten up the workflow... which in turn allows us to produce more for movements” than we would have been able to do as individual artists.

How, if at all, has ABW changed the way you think about yourself as an artist/designer?

In response to this question, Josie wrote about the ways her participation in ABW has integrated her creative output and activism, saying “In the past, my activism and studio art making had been two very separate realms in my life, more compartmentalized from each other than they are now.” For Kim, being part of the collective has radically transformed her identity. Because of the nature of her academic position, she had been channeling her creative energies into scholarship and supporting the work of others through teaching and the like. Coming into the collective allowed her to reconnect with her roots as an artist and rekindle a love of making that had been dormant for some time, which has been life changing.

Paul’s reflection revealed the ways his role as organizer in the group has impacted his thinking, saying:

Working in ABW has impacted the way I think about my practice. I see my work less and less as being an individual artist producing work for movements, and more as a facilitator or organizer. This fills the same space that producing work as an individual used to. I see the infrastructure that uplifts other people’s art and takes movement messaging to new places as a form of art in itself.

Nicolas echoed this shift saying “I used to think of myself as an

activist-artist. Now I often think of myself as an art organizer.” He elaborates on this saying, “My priorities are listening to what the movement organizers need and making sure to uplift the work of many artists.” For Joe, who’s main tasks are to document through photographs and video and disseminate content on social media, being part of this collective is an extension of the work he was doing with the Overpass Light Brigade.

Jeanette had previously shared a story about how she had become disillusioned with the art world while she was a student at a private art college. She joyfully recounts how coming into this work has changed her point of view about what an artist may be, saying “I now see that an artist is not just meant to make something pretty to sit in a gallery.” She goes on to say being an artist in a collective has meant that she can “give spirit and energy to support the movement and lift up our people’s voices.”

Claudio’s response was powerful. He said that being part of this collective has been “a true life-transforming experience.” He continued:

I see myself as a more complete person (and artist) being part of ABW. Being part of the team has personally transformed my way of thinking from an isolated commercial graphic designer, who felt unfulfilled doing the work I was doing, to making genuine human connections with people from all over the country and hearing their stories, struggles and triumphs.

Claudio added “From a design perspective, it has freed me from the constant need to be perfect in my work.” The differences in the ways work is accomplished in our lives now, as opposed to commercial work, prompted him to reflect, “Often the turnaround time for completion of design for social movements is quick, which doesn’t leave me a lot of time to second guess myself.” Claudio has found this to be liberating. We all share an intense love of the work and a strong bond of friendship with one another.

How would you describe our collective working style?

We coalesced as a collective after the first couple of art builds because we recognized in each other the capacity to lean in, work hard, and have fun doing it. To a person, each of us named these traits as significant to our work. As Claudio said “above all, everyone in the group has a strong work ethic that makes each art build possible and successful.” There are many, many artists and community members who make an art build a success, but our collective has emerged as an organizing force that has been recognized by local and national organizers.

Another thread that emerged was how our group has developed a smooth method of working together. As Claudio said “I feel that our team is very in sync when we work together.” Nicolas called it “harmonious.” Jeanette said she would describe our style as “fluid passion and organized chaos.” She says “in the end we make it happen with the power of the people and the strength of our collective members.” Paul said “We play to each other’s strengths and interests. Each member brings a specific expertise to the crew, we trust each other, and we work hard.” He elaborated on the benefits of our working style saying “This allows us to organize builds in a way that doesn’t require a level of communication that adds extra work to the process.”

Our shared focus on standing back while amplifying the voices of our partners was also highlighted. As Paul put it, “At the end of the day we are working for movements with a focus on diverse voices, allowing the work to change based on the needs of movements by bringing in artists from all over to produce work.” We see ourselves as building a framework upon which the good work of our partners can be seen and felt by a wide audience. Jeanette pointed out that something she values about our way of working is an “awareness to make space for BIPOC activists and artists.” She goes on to say “in the end, we can make it happen with the power of the people and the strength of our collective members.” Indeed, we feel proud that our little group has had a hand in many hard-won victories of our partners, from convincing the mayor not to deputize police as ICE agents, to the historic teachers’ union strikes in Los Angeles and Oakland. The work of the Art Build Workers is making a difference.

Conclusion

Reflecting on our work in order to construct this article has given us a chance to articulate our process, which may help readers start their own activist art collectives. It has also affirmed and given shape to how important this work is to each of us and how we have come to rely on and love the community we have built with our partners and one another. Collective action is good for the soul and this work has created a longing in each of us for the comfort of community in these difficult times. If you ask any Art Build Worker, they will tell you that when we go for any stretch without an art build we start to crave another! We invite others to discover the joys of collective creative action.

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