



Project author or developer:
Ultra Red

Where:
US / United States / Los Angeles

Website:
www.ultrared.org/mission.html

In the current discourse around the efficacy of social process art the presumption is made that the artist concludes the investigation and withdraws from the community. Often that terminus occurs at the precise moment aesthetic processes of reflection arrive at the terms of critical analysis – an analysis demanding political action. What happens, however, when the artist does not leave? In a related question; how do constituencies participating in a social process retain their specificity of practice and thematic content while learning from and teaching other constituencies? This question becomes increasingly urgent as neoliberalism appropriates the language of community autonomy. Presuming a temporary contract of mutual learning between artist and community, contemporary social art has uncritically adopted the terms of autonomy and locality even as those terms become watchwords for domestic austerity. Since 1994, Ultra-red have attempted to address these issues through decades-long engagements with specific political movements and communities constituted in struggle. Our two-year project for the Visible Award attempts to directly examine the above questions. Drawing on Ultra-red's on-going involvement in three communities of struggle, SCHOOL OF ECHOES features a process of exchange without insisting on identification. Rather, we are interested in how a lack of identification may become a condition that makes legible the themes produced by the three constituencies. In SCHOOL OF ECHOES, audio and visual objects produced in cooperation with the groups mediate the exchange between them. These objects document the organizing processes at each site. Ultra-red then gathers those objects into a traveling exhibition mounted on a tri-partite display structure to be exhibited in local community spaces. In these contexts, the exhibition, titled SCHOOL OF ECHOES, catalyzes discussion and analysis by the three constituencies of the commonalities and contradictions that define how each group organizes its resistance to the war on the poor. Ultra-red has used the title SCHOOL OF ECHOES over the years. The name signifies Ultra-red's mindfulness of the traditions of popular education as practices of cultural action and organizing. For the two-year framework of the Visible Award, SCHOOL OF ECHOES investigates ways that geographically and politically diverse communities can learn from each other in their specific struggles against poverty and its intersection with racism, gender justice, migration struggles, housing, health, and education. Ultra-red has historically arranged its procedures around the question, "What did you hear?" Now we ask, "What did you learn?" SCHOOL OF ECHOES engages communities of political struggle in three locations; the rural poor in County Devon in the southwest of England, the gender queer community of color in New York City's House|Ballroom scene, and the small working class city of Maywood in southeast Los Angeles County. These are constituencies with whom specific Ultra-red members have been politically active for ten to twenty years. For the first year of the project, SCHOOL OF ECHOES helps the three groups develop an analysis that maps intersecting struggles and concerns within the specific sites. That practice sets the stage for the second year. For year two, SCHOOL OF ECHOES begins to develop intersections of learning across the sites. In this part of the project, the constituencies learn and teach from each other based on the themes that have emerged from their uses of the protocols.

