This **Self-Tour Guide** was created as an educational viewer supplement to the exhibition by the Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS). It contains a curatorial essay, specialized glossary, and questions for looking and discussion. Free tours of this exhibition are available. Please contact Camille Morgan to arrange, cmorgan@colum.edu. For more information and related programming, visit colum.edu/RISK

Glass Curtain Gallery
1104 S. Wabash Ave., First Floor
Monday through Wednesday, Friday, 9am - 5pm
Thursday, 9am - 7pm
Saturday, 12pm - 5pm
Sunday, CLOSED
Free and open to the public
Curator’s Statement

*RISK: Empathy, Art and Social Practice*

**Artists:** Alberto Aguilar, Jim Duignan, Industry of the Ordinary, Samantha Hill, Kirsten Leenaars, Faheem Majeed, Cecil McDonald, Jr., Jennifer Mills, Cheryl Pope, Museum of Contemporary Phenomenon, Potluck: Chicago, and Fereshteh Toosi

*RISK* considers the interdependent role of empathy and risk in socially engaged art as practiced by Chicago contemporary artists. The exhibition focuses on artists who work in a public arena to foster connections between individuals and to activate communities. The work is divergent in medium, content and scope, but shares and interest in initiating and negotiating relationships through personal interaction. Working with cultural partners and sites across the city, *RISK* highlights some of the most exciting projects emerging in this field and explores artists’ motivations and viewer’s expectations of social art practice.

- Amy M. Mooney and Neysa Page-Lieberman, Curators

Cecil McDonald Jr., *Dusky Record, So Black is Beautiful, One Black Eye*, Archival pigment print, 2013
**Glossary**

**Altruism:** The principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others.

**Civic Engagement:** Individual and collective actions designs to identify and address issues of public concern.

**Divergent People:** People drawing apart from a common point.

**Empathy:** The intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.

**Enfranchisement:** To be free from political servitude, and can also refer to the act of awarding a right or privilege to a person by the government.

**Entitlements:** The right to guaranteed benefits under a government program, such as Social Security or unemployment compensation.

**Participatory Art:** An approach to making art in which the audience is engaged directly in the creative process, allowing them to become co-authors, editors and observers of the work.

**Relational Aesthetics:** Term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his 1998 book of the same name - refers to a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than solely within an independent and private space.

**Social Practice:** Involves artistic engagement with communities of interest by creating a practitioner-community relationship wherein there remains a focus on the skills, knowledge, and understanding of people in their personal spheres.

**Social Work:** A professional and academic discipline that seeks to improve the quality of life and subjective well-being of individuals, groups, and communities through actions including: research, policy, direct practice, crisis intervention, teaching, etc.

**Spectatorship:** The act of being engaged in the observation of an event.
Questions for Looking and Discussion

Engage with the individual artworks and consider the following:

1. Why is there a mirror next to Alberto Aguilar’s picnic table installation? What might it symbolize?

2. Artist Cheryl Pope works with high school youth to visualize their concerns by stitching them onto colorful banner flags. What do you normally see on banner flags in a high school setting?

3. Think back to a time when a stranger empathized with you. How did it make you feel?

4. Can the artists in the show be described as truly altruistic? And does it matter?

5. Who takes the risk in participatory art? The artist(s), the audience, or the funders?

6. A great deal of the art industry is based on value of ownership. Who “owns” community-based art projects?

7. How can more introverted people participate in social practice projects in a meaningful way?

8. How does the work these artists are practicing differ from what a social worker or politician does?

9. All of the artists in the exhibit are partially funded by grant money. How are members of the community enfranchised to decide how best to spend private and government monies in their neighborhood?

10. What kind of art project do you think could benefit your current neighborhood?
A Few Polemics
As social art practice is an open ended, evolving realm, the following polemical perspectives can encourage further dialogue and inquiry as to its meaning and possibilities. Additional references are listed below.

“...visual analyses fall short when confronted with the documentary material through which we are given to understand many of these practices. To grasp participatory art from images alone is almost impossible: casual photographs of people talking, eating, attending a workshop, screening or seminar tell us very little, almost nothing about the concept and context of a given project. They rarely provide more that fragmentary evidence, and convey nothing of the affective dynamic that propels artists to make these projects and people to participate in them.”

“The cooperative artist does not separate social insight from aesthetic vision. The aesthetic vision is in fact social. The artistic product is not secluded within the academy or the art world or ‘set apart from common experience,’ but rather is integrated into and in many cases actually consists of common experience—not ‘art as experience’ but socially cooperative experience as art.”

Pablo Helguera *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011): 4
“...art students attracted to this form of art-making often find themselves wondering whether it would be more useful to abandon art altogether and instead become professional community organizers, activists, politicians, ethnographers, or sociologists. Indeed, in addition to sitting uncomfortably between and across these disciplines and downplaying the role of the individual artist, socially engaged art is specifically at odds with the capitalist market infrastructure of the art world...”

“When a political art discourse too often celebrates social disruption at the expense of social coordination, we lose a more complex sense of how art practices contrive to inter-dependent social imagining.”

Additional References
Jacob, Mary Jane; Brenson, Michael and Olson, Eva M.; *Culture in Action*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.