

# 2013/14 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships

## Anonymous Honorable Mention



**STEPHEN KWOK**

Fine Art  
Graduate Student  
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago



The collective effort, group dynamics and experiments in organizational behavior have informed both my development as an individual as well as my current artistic practice. I came to discover the potential of experimenting with group dynamics in artwork relatively recently, but foundational experiences began early in life.

I first became aware of organizational dynamics—and the potential it held—during my high school years at the small evangelical Taiwanese church in Houston I attended. At 16, I became a leader of the church’s youth group of 20 or so teenagers, and took the opportunity to generate programming, redecorate the youth room and strategize how to “brand” the group as attractive to potential new members. Two years later, I came to terms with my queer sexuality and left the church.



I took my experiences of leadership with me to Los Angeles, where I began to study business. Business was, at this point in life, my creative outlet. But my developing understanding of my own queer identity prompted me to study gender studies and feminist theory, which quickly dismantled the promise of a business education. I became dissatisfied with its creative potential and felt limited by its insistence on a financial bottom line. It was then, in my senior year of college, that I discovered art.



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I moved to New Orleans to make art and find work. The city was exploding with experimentation in education and the arts in the wake of Katrina. I worked as a technology teacher for an after-school educational initiative. I was given total creative control in creating a curriculum for a community of students dealing with various socio-economic disadvantages and troubled families. I had to learn quickly how to promote order in a room of rambunctious youths. Through these challenges I formed a personal philosophy: rather than teach by setting rules and punishing those who broke them, I would provide a creative opportunity. Encouraging an individual's understanding of his or her own creative capacity became central to my pedagogy.



My career as an artist was also making advances. I founded an artist studio and community space called T-Lot, located on a large lot in the center of New Orleans. T-Lot became a staple of the New Orleans art community—hosting exhibitions, screenings, artist critiques, workshops and weddings. The philosophy was simple—we had a large, beautiful space, and whoever wanted to use it in a creative way was welcome.



I left New Orleans to pursue my MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Encountering creative pedagogy in my graduate education has synthesized the many experiences of the youth group, the business class, my own classroom and the studio I have collected from over the years. My practice has become entirely social. I craft site-specific, moment-specific and “congregation”-specific works in an effort to energize my immediate community. I orchestrate exercises within participatory systems, exploring the social dynamics of shared experience, our individual relationships to the collective and the stakes of overcoming our differences. Through my works members of a community are brought together under unknown circumstances, and together forge new experiences comprised of individual contributions to a collective cause.

