



Doreen Remen, Yvonne Force Villareal and Casey Fremont, photographed at Villareal's New York City residence.



THE EXHIBITIONISTS

The three women behind the Art Production Fund saw an unfulfilled need in the art world and turned themselves into power players with a cause: bringing art to everyone

BY TED LOOS PORTRAIT BY FRANÇOIS DISCHINGER

In the marketplace of ideas that is the art world, it's particularly hard for art organizations to establish an original voice these days, given the many distractions and the competition among artists, critics, dealers and auction houses vying for the attention of the public.

That makes the achievements of the Art Production Fund (APF) all the more remarkable. From its inception in 2000, APF has spoken clearly and distinctly through dozens of public art projects (many in New York, but elsewhere, too) and a groundbreaking series of fundraising collaborations, notably its artist-designed bath towels. The tone and subject matter have consistently been thought-provoking, often playful and always artist-driven. But the organization has never tried to stamp a signature look or feel on what it produces, either.

One of the reasons that public art in general has taken a quantum leap in quality and popularity in the past 15 years is APF's handiwork. Its many collaborators—and collaboration is at the very heart of what the organization does—include Chuck Close, Kehinde Wiley, Kiki Smith, Rob Pruitt, Vanessa Beecroft, Shirin Neshat, Yoko Ono and Ryan McGinley.

"When we thought of a niche that really hadn't been too explored, we saw this role as producer," says Yvonne Force Villareal, who founded APF with Doreen Remen. "We very generically named ourselves Art Production because it meant that every project we took on could have this very strong identity in and of itself. That's why it's successful."

APF, which is run by Villareal, Remen and Casey Fremont, does two things at once: scrambling to get public artworks made and installed, and raising money to support those efforts.

This summer, both halves of the mission will be front and center for New Yorkers. Swedish artist Hanna Liden's humorously bagel-themed project, *Everything*—a two-location sculptural installation—goes up in the Meatpacking District on July 21. Smart sponsorship has been key for APF, and one of its stalwart supporters, Kiehl's, is funding Liden's pieces. Over at Barney's New York, a limited edition set of housewares and accessories emblazoned with images from the work of legendary artist Alex Katz are on sale, with a quarter of the proceeds going to APF.

The organization has great cachet now, but it comes from



PHOTO: MANU NICHEMENT, COURTESY OF ART PRODUCTION FUND

In 1998, Art Production Fund co-founder Yvonne Force Villareal produced her first public art project, *Everything*, seen here, at the Guggenheim Museum.

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humble beginnings. Villareal and Remen met and became close friends while attending the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in the 1980s. By the 1990s, Villareal, trained as an artist, was working as an art advisor, and Remen was a practicing architect. Both wanted to make a new kind of contribution—to enable artists to work at a large scale, and to have big audiences experience the pieces in a non-traditional context.

“Some people would accumulate money, make a business plan and lay out the next three or five years, but that’s absolutely not what we did,” recalls Remen. “We kind of just put the sign on our door and started doing projects.” Fremont started as an intern at age 16, but quickly became indispensable.

A few projects put APF into the big leagues, notably the now-permanent *Prada Marfa* installation by the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset in Marfa, Texas. The 2005 headline-maker serves simultaneously as a meta in-joke that touches on the work of the Minimalist Donald Judd, whose Chinati Foundation is nearby, commercialism, fashion (it was blessed by Miuccia Prada herself) and architecture, all while managing to hold its own as an elegant work of art.

The 2008 Whitney Biennial provided APF with another reputation-building benchmark. The organization helped put together 37 off-site projects at the Park Avenue Armory in a feat of

logistics that impressed the most blasé art world denizens. And just in the past year, APF has overseen, among other things, Rirkrit Tiravanija’s “Berlin Billboards” in the German capital and Laurie Simmons’s “Pause” in Las Vegas, part of an ongoing partnership with the hotel Cosmopolitan.

Working together as a well-oiled machine, the three women split up responsibilities. The detail-oriented Fremont is “the nuts-and-bolts girl, the hardliner,” says Remen, who is herself focused on architecture and engineering because of her background, as well as strategic thinking. Villareal tackles fundraising, communications and outreach. And they all share turf frequently.

Even when everyone’s working in her wheelhouse, getting complicated art projects installed is not easy. “We have to be extremely moved by an idea because it takes so much passion to find the venue, secure the fabricators and ultimately, raise the funds that it takes to realize it,” says Villareal. “And we also fight for the project not to lose any of its integrity. We want it to be as pure as possible with the artist’s vision.”

All of them have children, and all use the metaphor of family to describe what they are to one another. “It’s almost a family run organization, we are so close,” says Villareal. It’s not lost on them that the art world is not exactly bursting with organizations by trios of women. “We use a light

touch with that—we don’t call ourselves women-run organization, but that’s what happen to be,” she adds.

There was never any chance they were go to be a dour, old-school nonprofit; substance w flair is baked into the APF cake, and Villareal cit none other than the ebullient and stylish Peg Guggenheim as a model. “We kind of broke an mold of what a non-profit is,” she says. “We e women who love to be out in the world. We en wearing fashion and we love high design.”

That attitude is blended with a true populis since the APF team could easily be doing its thi inside a museum, gallery or private collectic “We are really trying to make art available everybody,” says Fremont, and the organizati has deftly surfed the high-low dividing line. “I would never want to sacrifice the quality of the . just to make it something people would enjc Instead, they seek works that are “high-qual but also accessible.”

Although not run by artists, APF indispensable for getting art out into the wor As the many logistics and specifications Liden’s “Everything” are being firmred up, Rem acknowledges the mysterious X factor that present in everything the trio does. “You do know how it comes together,” she says of t juggling involved. “Sometimes it’s really like miracle. No joke, a miracle.”



Rirkrit Tiravanija's Berlin Billboards, 2015
Elmgreen & Dragset's Prada Marfa,