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Caroline Woolard by John Haskell

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Installation view of *Barricade to Bed (for exchange café)*, 2013, police barricade, plumbing straps, hardware, 2 x 6 douglas fir cut off, maple wood dowel, tennis balls, foam, fabric, open access kit, prison abolitionist 'zines, 16 x 43 x 96 inches. Courtesy of the artist and MoMA: Artists Experiment. Photo by Ryan Temprow.

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Artists generally fall into two groups: the makers (of objects) and doers (of activities). They survive, more or less, on the largesse of the art world. And then there's a third group, not creating objects exactly and not exactly performing activities, but working to change the way the doing of art gets done. Caroline Woolard is a member of this group. Yes, she makes objects, and yes, her work is informed by an understanding of social practice, but she takes that social practice out of the art world and grounds it in the practicalities of life—her life—along with anyone who's willing to join her. Part of the appeal of her work is the invitation to join the idealized world she's trying to create.

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prison abolitionist 'zines, 16 x 43 x 96 inches. Courtesy of the artist and MoMA: Artists Experiment.
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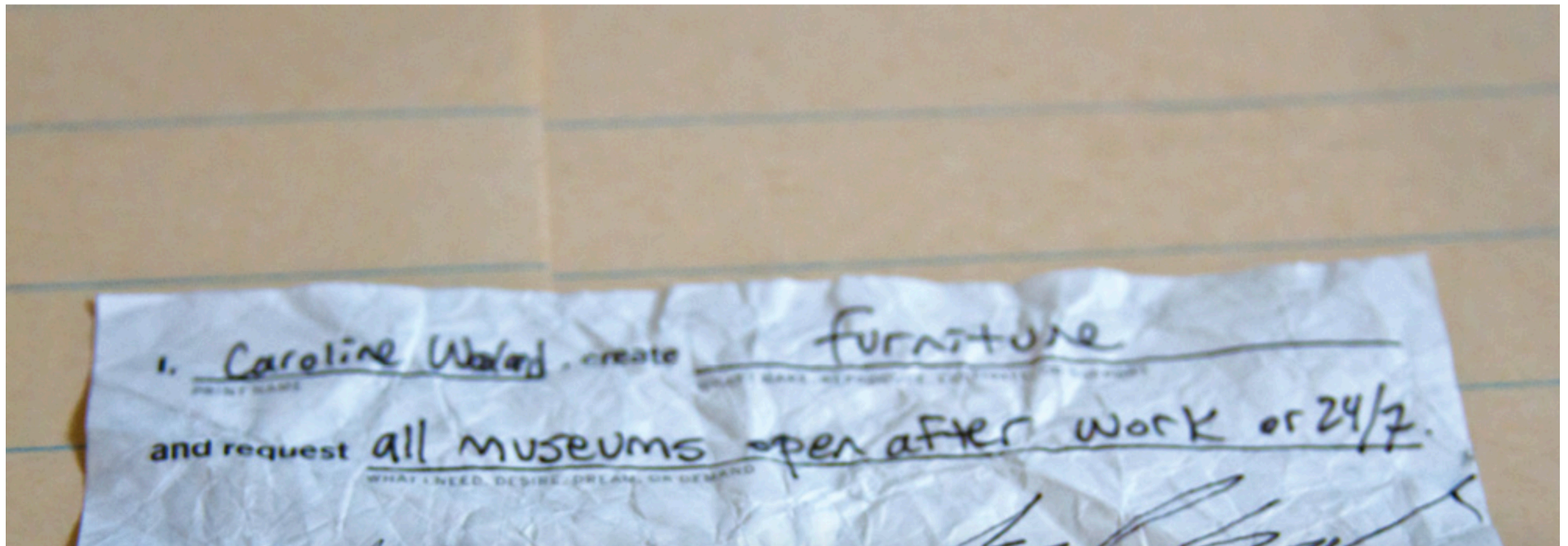
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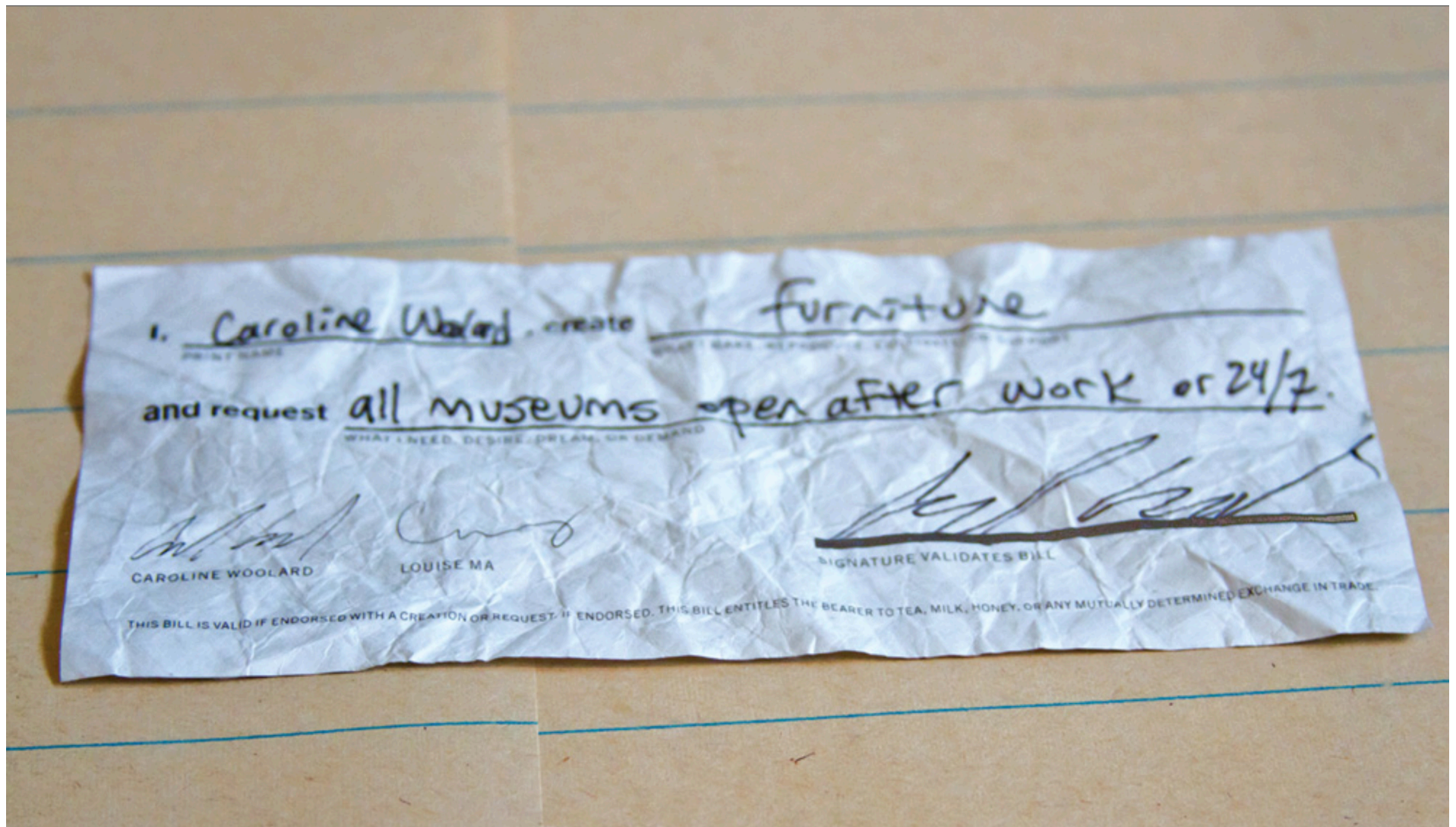
Idealized, in this case, is not the same as dreamy. With entrepreneurial gusto Woolard calls attention to injustice; and then, moving beyond that, she asks: How can we change a system that perpetuates injustice? For her it's a real question, and to answer it she uses, first of all, collaboration. Her work is about the collaborative process and about empowerment. How can disenfranchised people have access to power? Her provisional answer is: by banding together. Woolard is a co-founder of OurGoods.org, a thriving digital meeting place where the exchange of goods and services can happen independently of the normative, patriarchal structures that determine almost anything we do. TradeSchool.coop, another collaborative venture, is a place where information (like how to make a dress or how to start a beehive) is exchanged and bartered for other information, an I-can-help-you-and-you-can-help-me scenario that operates outside the mainstream of both commerce and art. Trade School is not just about the content of the education, it's about the form that education takes, a self-organizing form that ensures its own duration. Woolard isn't interested in creating a change that temporarily appears in a gallery or storefront, replaced in time by another change, another salable work of art, another exhibit of the artist's good intentions. Her ambition is not to *represent* empowerment, but to actually alter how art is distributed, how we see artistic labor, and to cause a shift in attitude that can maintain itself until change takes root.



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Installation view of *Resources (for exchange café)*, 2013, tyvek, silkscreen, signature, currency exchange, performers, 2 3/5 x 6 1/10 inches. Courtesy of the artist and MoMA: Artists Experiment. Photo by Ryan Temporo.

Woolard has made a Barricade Bed for the protesters in Zuccotti Square, a Queer Rocker for anyone who feels queer, a Work Dress for serious working, and a Subway Swing for having fun. Her *Exchange Café*, at the Education Department of the Museum of Modern Art, is a brief experiment in bringing the ideals of the solidarity economy into the belly of the institutional beast. In all of it, Woolard's medium is the actual infrastructure of lives being lived and her aim is to make that infrastructure more cooperative. A recent collaborative project, called *BFAMFAPhD*, documented, like think-tank documentation, the structure by which art gets taught, gets made, and then gets taught again

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in a cycle of sameness and disempowerment that Woolard hopes to break. Like many artists, she looks out and sees society functioning in a certain way, sees the inequity of that way, and by fostering a spirit of cooperation her art indicates what a different way might be.



Work Dress for Barter Only, 2008–2013, cotton-denim, barter agreement, dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Martyna Szczesna.

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Installation view of *Hiding Table (for Exchange Café)*, 2013, glass, cherry and poplar wood cut offs, paper, 'zines, casters, leather scraps, assorted hardware, 44 x 30 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist and MoMA: Artists Experiment. Photo by Ryan Temprow.

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John Haskell is a Brooklyn-based writer and the author of I Am Not Jackson Pollock, American Purgatorio, and Out of My Skin. His essays have most recently appeared in A Public Space, Lucky Peach, and the David Salle catalog for Mary Boone Gallery.