Cooper Union, Ailing Fiscally, Weighs Adding Tuition Charge

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PÉÑA

Facing serious financial trouble in a weak economy, Cooper Union, the New York City college founded in 1859 to provide free education for the working class, may begin charging undergraduates tuition for the first time in more than a century, its president said Monday.

"Altering our scholarship policy will be only as a last resort, but in order to create a sustainable model, it has to be one of the options on the table," Jamshed Bharucha, who took over as president in July, said in an interview.

Such a change would be a cultural shift for an institution whose tuition-free education and esteemed programs in engineering, architecture and art have made it one of the nation's most selective colleges, admitting 5 percent to 10 percent of applicants annually, depending on the department.

Peter Cooper, a self-taught industrialist, inventor and social reformer, founded the college with the mission of making higher education available to all; it was among the first to admit blacks, women, students of any religion and those who could not pay, making it need-blind long before the term existed.

Dr. Bharucha emphasized that lower-income students and many middle-income ones would continue to attend free, and that none of the 900 current undergraduates would be charged.

He said that if Cooper Union decided to charge tuition, it was not clear whether it would set its price comparable to those at other private colleges, $40,000 or more, or adopt a different payment structure.

Despite consternation at the East Village school and on Facebook among students and alumni who had heard murmurs of a possible change, Dr. Bharucha said no decisions had been made.

He plans to ask the board of trustees next week to approve creation of a task force to look into ways to solve the college's persistent, and worsening, budget problems, and report back next spring.

"We have to find new, robust revenue

Continued on Page A22
Cooper Union Considers Charging Tuition

From Page A19

streams, and we have to do that quickly," he said.

For many Cooper Union alumni, the idea of charging tuition feels like an assault on the college's identity and social mission.

"It's a contradiction to everything we've learned about Cooper," said Milton Glaser, 82, the graphic designer and a co-founder of New York magazine.

"It's the last opportunity for free education on that level in the entire country."

Gerard W. Ryan, an alumnus who works at Motorola and has been an adjunct professor of computer science at Cooper Union, said, "I think the idea is dreadful, and I really hope it doesn't come to pass."

"This spirit of Peter Cooper, that there should be an excellent education for everybody, that's pervaded everything," he added.

"It's in the DNA of the school."

But he praised Dr. Bharucha for confronting financial troubles he did not create.

In its first decades, Cooper Union collected tuition from students who had the means to pay. But since 1902, following major gifts from Andrew Carnegie and Cooper's descendants, it has been free for all undergraduates. (Students enrolled in nondegree night programs do pay tuition and undergraduates pay for room and board.)

A result has been a student body that, for an elite college, is unusually diverse, ethnically and economically. Fewer than half of Cooper Union's students are white, and almost two-thirds attended public high schools.

Dr. Bharucha said that in recent decades, the school had resorted to unsustainable practices to support its operations — like selling assets and dipping into the principal of its endowment, which stood at $577 million in mid-2010. In recent years, it also spent heavily on a new academic building and renovations of its historic building, both on Cooper Square.

The school also generates significant income from real estate it owns, including the land under the Chrysler Building, but the value of those properties has also been dropping.

Word of a possible change leaked out in recent days, leading to student protests over the weekend. On Monday night, Dr. Bharucha discussed the matter with a large group of students for the first time. The meeting, originally scheduled to be held in the school's Great Hall, the site of dozens of famous speeches, including the first New York address by Abraham Lincoln, in 1860, was moved to the Rose Auditorium, a smaller hall across the street.

After the meeting, which was open only to students, some students said they wanted to work with the school to find an alternative to charging tuition.

"It's what the school is about," said Hyeji Kim, 24, of the East Village, a fifth-year architecture student. "If that changes, it just becomes another college. No matter what price they make it, it's really unacceptable."

Dr. Bharucha said Cooper Union needed to introduce new sources of revenue, reaching $28 million a year by 2015, or about one-quarter of the expected operating costs. He said being more aggressive about winning research grants and raising money from alumni would cover part of that. In the meantime, he said, there will be belt-tightening, like a freeze on faculty hiring he has imposed.

Dr. Bharucha said the school needed money not just to keep up with current costs, but also to invest in academic facilities and provide more financial aid for poorer students' room and board.

"I will not be forcing solutions on the organization," he said, adding that he wanted employees, students and alumni involved in finding answers. "But we have to do the hard thinking now."
Amid Anger Over Idea of Charging Tuition, an Inquiry Is Urged on Cooper Union’s Finances

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PÉREZ

At Cooper Union officials try to quell the uproar over news that the college may start to charge tuition, some students, alumni, faculty members and college trustees are advocating an inquiry into how the school got into such serious financial trouble.

Those people say that they were blindsided by the news and that the administration had not been open enough about disclosing the problem and not aggressive enough about addressing it.

Their dissatisfaction burst into public view last week when the new president, Jonathan Bissnich, said that after years of running deficits, the venerable school in the East Village was beset by a crisis and had to consider drastic options like ending its century-old policy of being tuition-free.

“There is a lot of people asking for some kind of an audit, and on the face of it, there might be some justification for that,” said Richard J. Stock, a professor of chemical engineering and president of the Cooper Union Federation of College Teachers, the faculty union. “I don’t think that the previous administration tried to convey that there was a serious situation, and if you don’t convey that it’s serious, it’s hard to treat it seriously.”

Rebecca Long, an engineering student who is one of the leaders of the student council, said, “The majority of people are just hearing about it now.”

Before the board of trustees met Tuesday evening, two trustees, who insisted on anonymity to discuss internal matters, expressed similar views.

George Campbell Jr., who retired last summer after 31 years as president, asserted in an interview on Tuesday that Cooper’s financial problems had always been well documented in public records like financial statements, reports on trustees’ meetings and in annual addresses on the state of the college. And he noted that the idea of charging tuition had come up several times in the past.

But Dr. Campbell also acknowledged that he had not been as direct as Dr. Bissnich had been about the trouble, or about possible solutions, and said that even now he would not be so open if he were still in office. “Frankly, I think it’s a mistake to have this discussion now in the public domain, before doing all the hard work to see whether there are viable alternatives,” he said.

Dr. Bissnich and Mark L. Epstein, chairman of the trustees, held a flurry of meetings Monday and Tuesday with students, alumni and staff members, trying to build a consensus behind Dr. Bissnich’s plan to have a task force investigate options and report back next spring. The president said charging tuition would be a last resort, and would not apply to anyone now enrolled.

Cooper Union was founded in 1857 to provide free education to working-class students, though in its early decades those who could pay did so. It has been tuition-free since 1932. Officials say that for most of the last two decades, Cooper Union, which focuses on engineering, art and architecture, has run a deficit, dipping into its principal of $225 million a year in 2008, or about one-quarter of its operating budget.

Mr. Epstein cited Cooper’s low rate of donations from alumni, compared with other schools, as a significant part of its problem.

Dr. Campbell, the previous president, said that he improved alumni fund-raising in his tenure, but that it would never match elite colleges, which have fewer students from poor families, and fewer graduates who become struggling artists.

He defended his financial record overall, insisting that he had put the college on a sounder footing. “At one point in my first year, we had only about three months’ cash flow, and the endowment was down to about $100 million,” he said. By 2008, there was a balanced budget, he said, and the endowment had grown to around $225 million.

A large part of that increase was achieved not through fund-raising, but by selling assets, notably real estate near the school’s central building on Astor Place.

The school had good timing, selling those properties and renovating a new idea on the land beneath the Chrysler Building, which is owned, near the height of the real estate boom.

Cooper Union spent $15 million on a new academic building in 2007, at 41 Cooper Square, replacing two condemned buildings. To help pay for that and other projects, and to retire $60 bonds, it borrowed $475 million in 2006.

But the college also invested $15 million of that borrowing in its endowment, calculating that the endowment investments would cover a higher rate of return than the interest Cooper was paying on the loan. That turned out to be a bad bet when the recession hit.

Dr. Campbell said that he thought charging tuition was unnecessary, and that there were business ventures the college could pursue to make up its budget gap.

So, he was asked, why charge tuition next year?

“In 2008, the college looked like it was in pretty good shape,” he responded. “We didn’t know we were entering into an extended period of economic decline.”
That Cooper Union is facing a financial challenge in the current economic environment should come as no surprise. Maintaining a premier academic institution that is free has been a perennial challenge throughout the college’s storied history.

In 2001, we faced a similar financial test. The college was virtually out of cash, and the endowment had dipped below $100 million. During that economic downturn, we also considered, though not publicly, a wide range of possible solutions, including introducing tuition.

Fortunately, we were able to find alternative sources of revenues, and by 2008 had achieved a balanced budget, positive cash flow and an endowment in excess of $600 million. Developing Cooper Union’s underperforming real estate assets played a significant role in the college’s recovery.

Cooper Union has been a critical part of the evolution of New York City and has contributed mightily to the scientific, cultural and social infrastructure of the nation for more than a century and a half. It is far too important an institution not to continue to prevail. I’m confident that the current leaders, like those before them, will find a solution to the current challenge.

GEORGE CAMPBELL Jr.
New York, Nov. 1, 2011

The writer is president emeritus of Cooper Union.
NY1 Online: Cooper Union’s President Explains Possible Tuition Hike

By: Inside City Hall

NY1 VIDEO: Cooper Union president Jamshed Bharucha tells Inside City Hall’s Errol Louis why the free college is considering charging students tuition.
Amid public uproar about Cooper Union's finances, the school's new president, Jamshed Bharucha, invited A.i.A. to his office on Friday afternoon for an hourlong discussion.

Over the last week and a half, students and alumni have reacted angrily to the possibility of an end to the school's century-plus policy of free tuition for all students, currently numbering about 900, which has long been funded principally by income from real estate holdings. Citing a worrisome 28% annual deficit, Bharucha, who took office in July, chronicles a growing financial crisis that has been kept under wraps for decades.

With his reserved manner, rimless glasses and gray slacks and blazer, the soft-spoken Bombay native might look more at home in Cooper's engineering school than among its artists, but drawings and paintings by students and alumni line the walls of his airy office on the seventh floor of the school's Italianate brownstone Foundation Building, on Astor Place. The office's windows look to the south and west, onto the school's sleek new $150 million academic building, finished in 2009, designed by Thom Mayne of L.A.'s Morphosis Architects. It houses the entire engineering program, as well as some facilities for the college's art and architecture programs.

The school's twelfth president since its founding in 1859, Bharucha is a 1978 graduate of Vassar College, where he majored in biopsychology. He went on to earn an MA in philosophy from Yale and a PhD in cognitive psychology from Harvard University. Later, he held academic and administrative positions at New Hampshire's Dartmouth College, and, for nine years before taking office at Cooper in July, served as provost and senior vice president at Tufts University, in Massachusetts.

BRIAN BOUCHER Were you aware of the extent of the school's financial problem before you took office?

JAMSHED BHARUCHA I knew there was a deficit. You have to spend a lot of time with an institution's finances to fully wrap your brain around them, and I'm still learning more. But while the community is plunged into a difficult discussion, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I love challenges, and what makes this well worth waiting out is the extraordinary nature of the institution. The students here are smart and creative—I knew that. But they are also totally committed to their work and to a community of learning and creativity.

There is, understandably, a lot of anger, and some raw nerves have been touched. There is so much that the students want to fight for. And I want to fight along with them.

BOUCHER Was addressing the financial situation your first order of business?

BHARUCHA I've been discussing it since the day I started. During my first week, I talked about it with the executive committee of the alumni association, and later with faculty forums around this very table.
BOUCHER So the financial problem was known about before you arrived but it just wasn't discussed publicly?

BHARUCHA Apparently not much was known by the Cooper community, and that is one of the many sources of anger. But if you have a financial problem, you need to put that out there, along with all the possible options, even though some of the solutions under discussion may cut at the core of the identity of the institution for a long time.

BOUCHER What are some numbers that would make clear what the financial situation really is?

BHARUCHA For the last fiscal year, ending June 30, 2011, the true structural deficit was $16.5 million. For such a small institution, that is a huge number. It's nearly 28% of the budget, which was about $60 million last year. Records reveal that most years have been deficit years going back four decades. The deficit became very wide in the early '90s, when rents from our real estate assets dropped relative to the cost of operation.

BOUCHER How was the deficit bridged in those years?

BHARUCHA Three ways. One is through supercharged returns on the stock market in the '90s and early 2000s, which provided windfalls that could be used over and above the endowment spending policy. While other colleges were, for example, building gymnasiums and hiring more faculty, Cooper Union was using that money to mitigate the deficit.

Another is retrenchment of assets. When you're trying to preserve a principle as extraordinary as free tuition for all, you sell off an asset. So we sold the development rights for 51 Astor Place, where the old engineering building was, for $90-some million. And it was cheaper to locate an engineering building at 41 Cooper Square, the site of the Thom Mayne building, because we pay a discounted rent for that site.

The third mechanism was to borrow money. All these things were done to preserve the principle of free tuition for all. But we can't continue to rely on supercharged stock markets or sale of assets or borrowing. The stubbornness of the current global economic crisis has brought Cooper's problem to a head. There are no more assets to tap.

BOUCHER Is there a misperception that the school is wealthy? Since Cooper Union receives an amount equivalent to the taxes payable on the Chrysler Building property, which would typically be paid to the city, people must imagine the school is rolling in money.

BHARUCHA There is a huge misperception. In earlier decades, the Chrysler Building covered all scholarship costs. But, again, starting in the early '90s, the rents dropped relative to rising costs. At present, excluding real estate, the financial portfolio of the endowment is roughly $120 million.

BOUCHER The possibility of charging tuition is the one proposed solution that has drawn the most attention. What are some other solutions that are realistic but more palatable?

BHARUCHA Obviously we'll strengthen our fundraising, though that isn't easy in this economic environment. There's a tendency to think that will solve the problem. But does that option scale up to the size of the problem? Annual expendable gifts account for about 6% of our budget. That includes the annual fund, which accounts for about 4%, and 2% of other expendable gifts. We just e-mailed all these numbers to our alumni this afternoon. Currently, about 20% of our alumni contribute.

BOUCHER How does that compare with other institutions? Is that a good number or a bad number?

BHARUCHA It's a bad number. Thirty percent is a good number, 40% would be great. But a school that
offers a free education should have the highest number in the country. We will increase that. Alumni will rally. And we are grateful for that.

We will also seek large gifts, but those tend to be for the endowment, so they don't help the deficit directly. There are misperceptions about fundraising: "Just get someone to give you $16 million!" Well, people who give that kind of money typically don't give it to close a gap.

We could also become more successful at getting research grants, mostly in science and engineering, from the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, Department of Energy and so on. But that will take investment. That's a long-term revenue stream.

BOUCHER What are you doing in the short term?

BHARUCHA I've appointed a revenue task force. Students in all the schools are coming up with amazing ideas. Not just technological innovation and entrepreneurship, but in the art world--how we can leverage our creative work to the benefit of the institution. The task force will gather ideas from all sources--alumni, students, their parents, faculty. They'll be charged to make a recommendation early in the spring semester for a robust revenue stream with dollar targets.

BOUCHER When will the roster of the task force be made public?

BHARUCHA I hope to announce it this week. Students from each school will be represented, along with the faculty-student senate, the president of the alumni association and other alumni with financial and entrepreneurial skills. As Cooper people, they will know that you don't tread lightly on a principle like free tuition for all.

BOUCHER It seems like people are blaming the cost of the new building. Should they?

BHARUCHA The trustees will be distributing a statement to the community in the next few days, providing an analysis of its financial impact. It did reduce the total footprint, which brings savings. It's a platinum LEED building, the first such academic building in New York City.

BOUCHER But did the spending get out of hand?

BHARUCHA The market crash occurred at a time that clearly was not helpful. But it's a landmark building with extraordinary features. Also, the old engineering building was not fit for educating engineers. It was built before central air-conditioning, never mind computers. So it was constantly being retrofitted. One of the mandates to Thom Mayne was to make the best academic use of every single space in the new building, and to make it flexible to be reconfigured for rapidly changing technology.

BOUCHER But should people be blaming the building?

BHARUCHA The underlying model has been unsustainable. I seem to be the first person saying this. In the bigger picture, the federal budget needs to be sustainable if we want to preserve Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and access to health care. A balanced budget means you're not depriving future generations of their rights and privileges. It's the same for an institution. If you draw down the endowment too much, you deprive future students of access. My responsibility is to steward the institution for the future.

BOUCHER You talk about sustainability, and the hard question people are asking is, is the full-scholarship model sustainable? You refer to it as a principle.

BHARUCHA It's been a defining feature of the culture for over a century.
BOUCHER What's the likelihood you will have to charge tuition?

BHARUCHA It's on the table as a last resort. We have to explore everything first. There should be no taboos. Raising a taboo subject gets people angry. There is a lot of anger in this city and in this country about financial structures on which we're dependent but in which we may not have a lot of confidence. There's understandable anger about what happened here. I'm angry too.

BOUCHER What makes you angry?

BHARUCHA I'm angry about the global financial collapse. Banks were betting against themselves, pooling mortgages, upgrading their ratings, all of that. So the anger is valid. And the anger here is valid. But I'm committed to transparency. When you tell the truth, sometimes it hurts.

BOUCHER As a way to address the anger, what about an audit of the finances?

BHARUCHA I've asked the trustees, in response to legitimate questions and demands, that they articulate to the community the institution's financial history and that they make themselves available in a public forum. That is being planned for Monday night, Nov. 7. Mark Epstein, the chairman of the board, will appear and answer questions.

BOUCHER Are you going to change up the board, since a lot of these problems are long-standing? Essentially you report to the board, but they're responsible for the finances of the institution.

BHARUCHA I'm trying to set a new tone of openness and transparency. When you start that, there's going to be an emotional reaction among the community. Students and alumni should know if we're experiencing financial difficulties. And that's something of a cultural change.

BOUCHER People are very concerned that the caliber of the school will decline if you begin to charge tuition. Do you think that's true?

BHARUCHA Cooper Union will become stronger when we have a sustainable financial model. Our commitment to access for students who most need it will be even stronger. Our financial aid packages for living expenses will be stronger. And I'd like to invest in strengthening the institution, for example, to support the work of our faculty. When you're in a deficit, every penny is pinched and you can't unleash people's potential.

Incremental change will not work. We need fundamental change, and we have to innovate. Academic institutions tend to be reluctant to innovate organizationally.

Peter Cooper's fundamental commitment was for this institution to be free for the working classes and poor women. Those were the constituencies he was most concerned about. No matter what we do, we must reaffirm our commitment to access to the finest education for those who have the least access to it, particularly at a time when access is an increasing problem, and not just in terms of financial aid.
NEW YORK (AP) — Cooper Union is considering charging undergraduate students tuition for the first time since its founding in 1859.

The prestigious art, architecture and engineering school in New York's East Village is facing serious financial problems.

According to The New York Times, Cooper Union President Jamshed Bharucha said altering its scholarship policy would be a last resort but had to be one of the options.

Industrialist and social reformer Peter Cooper founded the school with the mission of making it tuition-free for all.

The Wall Street Journal says the school's $16.5 million budget deficit this year has been growing for decades.

Bharucha said that lower-income and many middle-income students would continue to attend free. He said none of the current 900 undergraduates would be charged.
Tuition bid sparks ire at Cooper

BY ERIN DURKIN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

A PROPOSAL to charge tuition at cash-strapped Cooper Union sparked a protest last night from students used to getting their education free.

More than 100 students and alumni gathered to voice their anger that college officials were considering reneging on founder Peter Cooper's fundamental belief that education should be "free as air and water."

"It doesn't need to involve student centers, cafeterias ... perks that would come with a $55,000 tuition," said Eduardo Alfonsi, 21, a fourth-year architecture student, referring to the ongoing and costly expansion of the Astor Place college.

Facing a budget shortfall, the Cooper Union board of trustees is scheduled to consider on Nov. 8 charging students tuition for the first time in its history.

For 150 years, the college has admitted students based on merit alone and provided full-tuition scholarships.

"The foundation of the school is we're equal in our lack of tuition," said Ariana Revilla, 21, of Brooklyn, a third-year architecture student. "It would shut the door to many people applying."

Students said they're planning a protest before the board meeting and possibly a classroom walkout.

At least two Facebook pages have been dedicated to rallying students to demonstrate.

Aarón Lampell, 31, who graduated from Cooper Union in 2002, said tuition "would change everything about the school."

"I probably wouldn't have been able to afford a private university for sure and that's the case for a lot of the students that end up here," Lampell said.
Rent Deal Aids Ailing East Village Bookstore

By JOHN LELAND
Published: November 2, 2011

A deal has been reached to reduce the rent for St. Mark's Bookshop, an East Village institution whose problems over the past year prompted an outpouring of support from neighbors and literary figures.

The deal came after months in which the store's owners said they would be forced to close unless their landlord, the Cooper Union, cut their rent.

"I really thought there wasn't going to be a deal and that we couldn't afford to stay here," said Bob Contant, an owner.

As recently as last week, after he and his business partner, Terry McCoy, met with college officials, they were not expecting a deal to be achieved, Mr. Contant said.

That changed on Tuesday, said the Manhattan borough president, Scott M. Stringer, who met with both parties to work out an agreement. At a meeting in Mr. Stringer's office, the college agreed to reduce the store's rent to about $17,500 a month from about $20,000 for one year, and to forgive $7,000 in debt. The school will also provide student help with revising the store's business plan.

The store owners previously said they needed a monthly reduction of $5,000 to remain in business.

"I tried to split the difference," Mr. Stringer said, adding that he intervened because the store, open since 1977, was important to the neighborhood's cultural life. "When an independent bookstore goes out of business, a part of us goes with it. In my neighborhood, on the Upper West Side, when Shakespeare and Company went out of business, West Siders lost something that they couldn't get back."

The Cooper Union, which gives every student a full scholarship, has its own financial problems and announced on Monday that it might begin charging tuition.
“Despite our constraints, we felt it was important to help them because of what their presence means to our community,” said the college’s president, Jamshed Bharucha, who took over in July. “The relief that we’re providing is so that the bookstore can come up with a viable and sustainable business plan not dependent on further subsidies. That’s the key piece there.”

In the past year, the bookstore’s owners have reduced their staff through layoffs and have cut their own salaries in half, but it was not enough to offset losses from the poor economy and the rise in sales of electronic books. Mr. Contant said August was the store’s worst month in memory.

But since then, as the store owners went public with their losses, the neighborhood rallied in response. A group called the Cooper Square Committee started a petition to save the store, attracting 40,000 signatures. Business picked up by about 25 percent in September and October, Mr. McCoy said, leading him and Mr. Contant to believe they could continue with a smaller reduction in rent.

The owners have no plans to rehire staff. The store’s finances remain fragile, especially as the current sales levels recede, Mr. Contant said.

“The outpouring of support for us was just incredible,” he said. “But you never know what the deal is going to be. We have to make people realize it’s not over as such just because we’re out of the woods for now.”
THE PHANTOM PHOTOGRAPHER

Reflecting on Lebanon’s seemingly endless conflicts, Walid Raad challenges “truth” on every level, beginning with the documentary image.

BY ABIGAIL SOLOMON-GODEAU

WHAT DO SUSAN MEISelas, Lee Friedlander, Sophie Calle, Sebastião Salgado and Walid Raad have in common? Very little, but all use photography (in one form or another) and all have been recipients of Sweden’s prestigious Hasselblad Prize for lifetime achievement in the medium. With a cash grant of $150,000 and an accompanying exhibition, the award (made yearly by the Hasselblad Foundation in Gothenburg) is perhaps the world’s premier prize devoted to the medium. This past March, it was bestowed on the Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad (b. 1967), previously a recipient of the $47,000 Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2007) and the $20,000 Camera Austria Award (2005).

In a certain sense, these honors simply bolster an already eminent position in the international art world, evidenced by Raad’s many exhibitions, including “Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings,” a traveling 20-year retrospective that originated last fall at the Whitechapel Gallery, London. Until he initiated an ongoing project focused on contemporary art and its institutions in the Arab-speaking world, most of his production was rooted, however obliquely, in the history of Lebanon’s wars since 1975, a complicated series of largely internecine conflicts that prompted his move to the U.S. in 1982. But these awards conferred by foundations devoted to photography are especially significant for a number of reasons. On the most obvious level, Raad is not a photographer, if that term suggests an artist’s primary medium—a caveat that might apply to several other recent Hasselblad prize winners (e.g., Calle). Nonetheless, photography journals such as Aperture, Afterimage and Camera Austria have all featured essays on Raad’s work, even though the photographic image is only one element within his multipart ensembles, which routinely employ texts, videos, PowerPoint presentations, live lectures with planted questioners, and other diverse components.

Moreover, to the extent that the photographic image does figure within Raad’s work, it is used against the grain of its traditional documentary or indexical functions, and seamlessly integrates analog and digital forms. Which is not to say that such photographs necessarily fall into the category of constructed or staged imagery, so widespread in contemporary art. As often as not, especially in the various series Raad exhibited under the aegis of the fictive Atlas Group (he now shows his work, new and old, under his own name), photographs are presented as though gleaned from vernacular or documentary sources—and sometimes, in fact, they are.

This “as though,” however, begs the question of authenticity as well as authorship. The uncertainty of the answer is precisely the artist’s underlying theme. Real or simulated, both kinds of imagery are enigmatic, albeit in different ways, and it is the enigmatic character of all photographs that informs Raad’s particular uses of the medium.

Consider, for example, the photographs of the historian Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, who features in a number of works under the umbrella title of “Missing Lebanese Wars” (1986-2003). In accompanying captions and glosses, Fakhouri is identified by his profession, hobbies and class, but his religious sect is unspecified. In one subcategory, “The Fakhouri Files” (1986), he appears in a series of black-and-white touristic snapshots, identified as made during his travels to Paris and Rome in 1958-59. But Fakhouri, who Raad states is a fictional character, cannot be the subject we see. He must be inferred, in effect, from the figure who impersonates him. Furthermore, the man in question has been photographed by an invisible companion, usually from a distance, sometimes closer up. If these are straight photos, which they certainly look to be, one wonders who took the snapshots of the Dr. Fakhouri character and in what circumstances—especially since they include some close-up shots taken in his hotel bedroom or as he dines alone in a restaurant. Might they be simulated pictures, like those that feature in Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye’s project “The Fae Richards Photo Archive” (1993-96), in which entirely convincing “vintage” black-and-white pictures of an invented subject have been cannily fabricated by the artists? Or were Raad’s photographs actually excavated from the remnants of a studio archive or someone’s personal album, and the subject provided with a new identity ex post facto?
OF NOTE HERE IS RAAD’S membership on the board of the nonprofit Beirut-based Arab Image Foundation, a photographic archive from whose holdings Raad curated (with Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari) the internationally touring 2002–05 exhibition “Mapping/Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography.” Presumably, photographs conserved by the foundation are a source for certain Raad images. However, the artist’s blurring of discursive boundaries (e.g., fact vs. fiction), along with the ambiguity of his methods (e.g., archive sourcing? Photoshop?), constantly throws historical accuracy into question. In bestowing its award, the Hasselblad jury, like that of the Deutsche Börse, has thus acknowledged, with little fuss, the effective demise of medium specificity in the artistic use of photography.

These awards ignore—or dismiss—ontological distinctions between analog and digital representation, photographic “truth” and fiction. (Conventionally, the analog image, although by no means immune to manipulation, is associated with empirical reality; the digital image has no such warranty.) By ignoring such distinctions, the awards suggest that the dismay expressed by so many photography critics at the advent of digital photography—with its highly problematic relationship to evidentiary truth—is now largely beside the point. Debates about the indexical or testimonial capacities of the camera have been overtaken (or subsumed) by more complex considerations of ideology, instrumentality, reception and meaning production. Accordingly, Raad’s artworks have been categorized by critics as “docufictional” or “parafictional”—hybrid monikers that seem to signal the eclipse of “factographic” or “archival” practices based on the camera’s capacity to witness.

No less important is the (also implicit) acceptance of diverse means of representation within a given work, including installation, multipart assemblages, textual documentation, etc., which often involve viewers in the production of meaning, even when not, strictly speaking, employing interactive mechanisms. We are thus very far from the position of once-powerful institutional arbiters of photography (such as the photography department of New York’s MoMA) that in the 1980s dismissed art by Martha Rosler, Cindy Sherman or Barbara Kruger as “not photography” and therefore irrelevant to the museum’s consecration of that medium as art. Photography—analog, digital, found or appropriated—is now such a ubiquitous element in contemporary art production as to moot any notion of definitional purity.

From his much-remarked contribution to Documenta X in 2002, under the Atlas Group (launched in 1999), to the recent work exploring the art networks and institutions springing up in the Arab world (“Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World”), Raad’s projects are created through the orchestration of a shadow world of archives and images, documents and testimonies, historical and contemporary fictions that may intersect with one another. Just as the Atlas Group was effectively Raad himself, so too are the works’ protagonists his inventions: Dr. Fakhouri and his wife, Zainab; Operator 17, a member of a surveillance unit charged with recording the activity on Beirut’s Corniche; and the hostage Suhell Bachar, who in the video Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (2000) recounts his captivity by a militia that held American and British hostages, with whom he claims he was briefly quartered.
RAAD’S ELABORATE SIMULATIONS EVOKE WARS BUT REFUSE TO EDUCATE VIEWERS ABOUT THEM, RAISING QUESTIONS OF HOW HISTORY IS CONSTRUCTED.

Within these elaborate simulations, which evoke the wars in Lebanon (or the Israeli invasions of 1982, 2002 and 2006) but by no means educate viewers about them, each project raises questions of how history, witnessing, memory and sociopolitical identification—even reference—are constructed. Raad’s use of photography, simulated or “real,” provokes what could be termed “hermeneutic doubt” as to the accuracy, inclusiveness or adequacy of what passes for the historical record. Perhaps because of the exceptionally violent histories of the 20th and 21st centuries, this skeptical approach has become a major tendency in contemporary art.

Raad’s insistence on an idiosyncratic, fragmentary, allusive, elliptical and ultimately subjective reading of people and events effectively blocks any attempt to establish culpability for Lebanon’s wars and their devastating human cost. In his writing and lectures, the artist withholds his own ethnic and religious origins, eluding the very identity issues that have fueled Lebanon’s conflicts. He also refuses to affirm any political position, a dodge consistent with his suspension of such historical categories as “cause” (especially casus belli). The artist thus stresses the collective as opposed to individual character of historical trauma (what Raad’s sometime collaborator Jalal Toufic calls “surpassing disaster”) that irrevocably alters subjectivity, perception, collective memory and, inevitably, cultural production.3

Raad’s “The Truth Will Be Known When the Last Witness Is Dead,” which exists, as does most of his work, in several formats, refers to this rupture in the fabric of “objective” historical accounting. Its title is equivocal, for the work willfully contradicts its own proposition that historical truth is recoverable—eventually, après coup. Rather, its point is that the act of witness is inescapably subjective, partial and emotionally fraught. Reasonable objectivity—if possible at all—may require temporal distance, but that in itself is no guarantee. (The still contested history of Lebanon’s wars provides ample evidence of this.) As Raad remarked in an interview, "We [The Atlas Group] have always urged our audience to treat our documents as ‘hysterical documents’ in the sense that they are not based on any one person’s actual memories but on ‘fantasies erected from the material of collective memories.’"

BUT WHAT MEANING CAN an artwork produce in the absence of viewer memory, experience, even knowledge of the happenings in question? (How many viewers of Hostage: The Bachar Tapes really understand the 1982-92 hostage crisis and its relation to the Iran-Contra scandal? Or, for that matter, anything about the history of Lebanon’s wars in the past 50 years?) This is perhaps the core issue for any artist who rejects didacticism in favor of interrogative or allusive modes of expression.

As an academic, currently teaching at the Cooper Union in New York, Raad is hardly likely to overestimate his audience’s knowledge, especially regarding “peripheral” regions of the world. The “work” of the work, especially those projects dealing with Lebanon’s wars, is to remind us that the past invariably exceeds the material evidence it produces, and that material evidence itself is insufficient to yield full historical understanding.

This is particularly evident in the Fakhouri files section of “Missing Lebanese Wars.” Its text describes a group of Lebanese historians, of different sects and liberal political affiliations, all gamblers, including Dr. Fakhouri, who meet regularly at the Sunday horse races during the 1990s. They bet not on a particular horse but on the distance of a given horse from the finish line, as registered by the decisive photo finish (an Ur-image when it comes to evidentiary function) that will appear in the next day’s newspaper. The album pages are inscribed with the amounts of the wagers, the distances proposed by the gamblers and the winning bet, translated from the penciled Arabic notations and glossed by Fakhouri’s wife, who provides brief descriptions of the victorious gambler. Serially organized, these pages allude to Conceptualism, but the photo-finish images might evoke Eadweard Muybridge’s famous sequence of a galloping horse, a visual experiment likewise staged to resolve a wager (not about speed but about the action of a horse’s feet in motion).

The stunning triviality of this elaborate documentation, its elision of a disturbing context—Lebanon’s wars, sieges, car bombings and kidnappings; the destruction of large parts of Beirut—is, of course, the point. A similar logic pervades notebook 57 of the Fakhouri files, No, Illness is Neither Here nor There, which consists of photographs of business signs for doctors, pharmacies, dentists and so forth.

NOVEMBER '11 ART IN AMERICA 131
RAAD OFTEN EMPLOY DIVERSE MEANS, INCLUDING INSTALLATION AND TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION, WHICH INVOLVE VIEWERS IN THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING.

in French or Arabic. The gulf separating the disaster that is Lebanon's recent history from these laconic placards is the measure of the inadequacy of all visual documentation. As with the apparently authentic black-and-white photos of the carbonized engines produced by car bomb explosions in the series “Already Been in a Lake of Fire” (1999-2002), the distance between the images and the event is utterly unbridgeable. This is, needless to say, no less true of journalistic news pictures displaying, more or less spectacularly, the actual carnage, despite their higher shock value.

But Raad's commitment to the Arab Image Foundation attests that, irrespective of his skeptical approach to historical documentation, he believes photographic images do tell us something—notwithstanding their lacunae, their instrumental applications, their malleability, even their deception. Yet what they tell is not reducible to their nominal contents, for they are not windows on the real, but closer to runes, to shards, to phantom traces. From these, we make constructions, conjectures, imperfect and partial propositions. We may have lost our innocence about the camera's capacity to yield an ontological truth, but that does not mean that photos always lie. Their more or less elusive (and allusive) "something," sparking the circuit between past and present, is what makes photography so much greater than its parts, and makes Raad's recent photographic awards so appropriate. ☺

In a show that’s more than twice the size of her 2009 solo at Monya Rowe, Ms. Halvorson unpacks her rugged, deeply gratifying realism. Subject choices that seemed arbitrary in the smaller exhibition look more coherent here, part of a programmatic redemption of surfaces marginalized, forgotten or so ordinary as to seem invisible.

A steam valve, a generator, an empty set of metal sign holders — all of these grim, sooty, neglected surfaces are given the oil-painting treatment. Each one is carefully observed and rendered on site, its flaws catalogued, its function (or sometimes, malfunction) acknowledged. No rivet or seam escapes notice, though Ms. Halvorson’s slightly bleary brushwork makes clear that authenticity, not illusionistic fidelity, is the point.

And though these objects may seem hard, cold and impenetrable, she is able to coax from them some moments of intense pleasure. Witness the Mardenesque grays in “Cracked Back” and “Tregardock,” or the raw, Soutine-like rib cage of “Carcass” (one of the few nonmechanical images in the exhibition).

One might see Ms. Halvorson as a gifted salvager, rummaging through the odds and ends of American experience and finding plenty that’s suitable — even desirable — for painting.

A’03
Pharmaceutical companies spent big bucks on advertising in the mid-20th century to flog their latest 'miracle' drug to the medical industry and consumers, drafting in an impressive roster of graphic design luminaries, such as Herb Lubalin, Andy Warhol and Lester Beall. Now New York's Cooper Union is casting fresh light on this advertising heyday with an exhibition entitled 'Pharma' at the Herb Lubalin Study Center. Spanning the 1940s to the 1960s, it brings together rare works and examines the lasting impact that graphic design had on the industry.

The seed for the show was planted when curator *Alexander Tochilovsky* struck upon a few remarkable pieces in the Herb Lubalin archive but couldn't determine the designer. Eventually he discovered the genius in question was Alexander Ross. The designer's punchy promotional material for Sharp & Dohme in the 1940s - featuring clever plays with outlines and negative spaces - triggered Tochilovsky to re-examine graphic design in the medical realm.

Using material from the Herb Lubalin archive, as well as pieces borrowed from the designer's families and Milton Glaser's archives, the exhibition focuses on the period when medicines like penicillin were first developed, fuelling the market for pharmaceutical advertising. Advertising agencies suddenly became more daring as this exhibition bears testament.

By Lauren Ho

*Director of the Herb Lubalin Study Center, A'00*
Listings also appeared in:

Activists Resource  NYC Activists Calendar
BookForum  NYC Political Calendar
CBS local  NYC.com
Check Out New York  Slice Magazine
City and State (first read)  Things to Do in NYC
CityGuide  Yahoo/Upcoming
CityLimits  Zvents
Eventbrite
Eventful
Gotham Center for NYC History
Gotham Gazette
Hopstop
Love My Zip
MediaBistro
NY Daily News online
NY Luxury
NY4Free
November 3, 2011

A Look Back At The Groundbreaking Drug Ads Of 50 Years Ago
By James Gaddy


You wouldn’t know it by looking at Cialis commercials today, but for 20 years, beginning in the post-war 1940s, the pharmaceutical industry owed its visual aesthetic to the cutting edge of fine art.

“Pharma,” an exhibition of pharmaceutical-focused graphic design that opened at the Herb Lubalin Study Center at Cooper Union on November 1, traces this evolution of visual trends using more than 60 pieces, some from as far back as 1898 and as recent as this year. But the bulk of the material comes from the fertile period of experimentation (in design, not drugs) between 1940s and 1960s.

The show’s curator, Alexander Tochilovsky, says the show highlights a few consistent themes in pharmaceutical design. One constant challenge is trying to depict how drugs work. “It sounds simple, but over the years, designers have had to constantly be challenged by the visual representation of sometimes invisible processes,” he tells Co.Design. (Anyone seen that erectile dysfunction ad where the rancher “pulls his truck out of the mud”?) Another challenge lies in depicting the condition for which the drug was meant to help relieve, and to do so in an interesting and sensitive manner.

The best pieces from the 1940s were influenced by cutting-edge artists.

Visually, though, the most interesting pieces from the 1940s were influenced by cutting-edge artists. Alex Ross, Paul Rand, Will Burtin, and Lester Beall were working under the influence of the new avant-garde movements coming out of Europe. Some of the designers for the Swiss pharmaceutical giant Geigy, like Nelly Rudin, were part of the Concrete Art movement in Europe. “Many of these designers were trained as artists and continued to be interested in fine art during their careers and to inject the fine art ideas into their work,” Tochilovsky says.

But the more conservative approach that drug companies use today isn’t so much a turn away from a more artistic influences, but because of regulations imposed by the Federal Drug Administration. “The energy and freedom exhibited by the designers in the 1940s was due to it being a relatively young industry with a lot of freedom,” says Tochilovsky. “That has changed quite a bit since then.”

“Pharma” opens on November 1 at The Herb Lubalin Study Center at The Cooper Union. More information  here.

*Director of the Herb Lubalin Study Center , A'00
**Pharma Exhibit at Cooper Union**

The Herb Lubalin Study Center at The Cooper Union examines the influence and impact of graphic design on the pharmaceutical industry in PHARMA, a new exhibit featuring original and rarely seen works by luminaries including Andy Warhol, Lester Beall, Will Burtin and Herb Lubalin. PHARMA’s exploration begins with the avant garde promotionals of the 1940’s, when a market need emerged to promote “miracle” drugs, such as Penicillin, to the medical industry. In a compelling and thought provoking way, PHARMA presents the relationship graphic design has had with the pharmaceutical industry ranging from the federal government’s increased regulations to new marketing tactics where the everyday consumer, not the doctor, is considered the target audience. While the exhibition provides examples of past and present, the public is encouraged to reflect and question how graphic design is used to market drugs and design has transformed these commodities into objects of desire.

In addition to graphics, the show will feature:
- the evolution of pharmaceutical marketing from early patent medicine promotionals to present day direct-to-consumer ads;
- examples of prescription drug packaging;
- the establishment of the FDA and increased regulations on drug marketing;
- the advent of agencies specializing in pharmaceutical marketing and the use of common advertising techniques such as jingles and slogans to market drugs; and
- how the ubiquity of pharmaceutical marketing cultivates the creation of spoofs, serves as source material for artists, and created a new niche of products such as “cosmeceuticals.”

WHEN: Opening reception: Tuesday, November 1, 2011 6-8pm
Exhibition Dates: November 1-December 3, 2011
Exhibition Hours: Monday-Thursday 10-6, Saturday-Sunday 12-5,
Closed: Fridays and November 24-27
WHERE: The Cooper Union, 41 Cooper Gallery (3rd Ave. b/w 6th and 7th Sts.), Lower Level 1, New York, NY 10003
Subways: Astor Place (6), 8th Street (N, R)
For more information: 212.353.4200, http://lubalincenter.cooper.edu or email lubalin@cooper.edu.
Find The Cooper Union on Facebook at https://facebook.com/cooperunion and on Twitter at http://twitter.com/cooperunion.

Calendar listings also include:

- Annals of Americus
- Art Cards
- CBS NY
- Cheap Rent
- City Guide NY
- Core 77
- Creative Review
- Eventbrite
- Eventful
- Eventguide
- Events.org
- Everyday Workshop
- Evie Says
- Eye Magazine
- Greenwich Time
- Guest of a Guest
- Hello NYC
- Imitation Objects
- Join Bklyn
- Medaesthetics
- No Mercy All Glory
- NY Daily News
- NY Luxury
- NY Press
- NYC.com
- NYC Playground
- Selectism
- Zvent
New Directions Read-a-thon Honors 75 Years of Good Books

By Emily Witt 10/28 1:10pm

New Directions’ 75th Anniversary celebration at Cooper Union last night began with a recorded reading of Dylan Thomas’s poem “In My Craft or Sullen Art.” The lines “I labour by singing light / Not for ambition or bread,” did seem appropriate for a publisher known for its refusal to compromise literary experimentation to commercial ends. New Directions’ president, Barbara Epler, had dedicated the event to Thomas, whose birthday it happened to be, as well as to Tomas Tranströmer, the Swedish poet published by New Directions who recently won the Nobel Prize, and to the publishing house’s founder James Laughlin.

The literary celebrities who participated read from their favorite New Directions authors. Lou Reed went first, choosing Delmore Schwartz’s story “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities.” Nicole Krauss read from the Israeli writer Yoel Hoffman’s The Christ of Fish. Francine Prose discussed Gustav Janouch’s Conversations with Kafka. Ms. Prose wrote the introduction for the New Directions reissue of the book and was compensated for her labor with her pick of the New Directions catalog. She said she ordered a box of the Swiss writer Robert Walser’s collection The Microscripts, which she now brings as a gift to dinner parties. The stories themselves, which were written in miniscule script on small strips of paper, are reproduced in the book. “It couldn’t be an e-book,” said Ms. Prose.

Readings of George Oppen (by Paul Auster), Eliot Weinberger (by Rackstraw Downes) and Tennessee Williams (by Carroll Baker) followed, but the highlight of the evening proved to be Anne Carson. She read an excerpt from her book Nox, an epitaph for her brother based loosely on the Latin “Poem 101” by Catullus. Ms. Carson read from Catullus’s words about his brother in Latin and from her own poem while a saxophonist played solo notes to her right and a video of two dancers was projected behind her.
Design News

By Jillian Goodman

Published Nov 2, 2011

**Designer Drugs**

When penicillin hit the mass market in the forties, suddenly pharmaceuticals became an industry—one that needed to promote itself. Cooper Union's new exhibit, “Pharma,” surveys the history of graphic design in the pharmaceutical industry starting in the mid-twentieth century, when giants of the field like Herb Lubalin and Paul Rand designed ads for drugs, and following it into the present, when the ubiquity of medical advertising has become an inspiration for art (41 Cooper Gallery; 41 Cooper Sq., nr. 6th St.; 11/1–12/3; M-Th 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Sa-Su noon-5 p.m.; closed Fri; cooper.edu).