



**Matthew Deleget**  
*Pink Nightmare*, 2007  
Pink monochrome painting  
(acrylic on panel)  
hit with a hammer  
18 x 24 inches  
Installation view at  
St. Peters College, Jersey City, NJ



**Matthew Deleget**  
*Monochrome (Asymmetric Warfare)*,  
2007  
Monochrome painting, black spray  
paint on canvas and wall  
Approximately 36 x 24 inches  
Installation view at  
Tobey Fine Arts, New York, NY



**Matthew Deleget**  
*I Love You*, 2007  
Used plastic shopping bags  
in 9 colors mounted 9 panels  
Dimensions variable  
panels 8 x 10 inches  
Installation view at  
Gallery Sonja Roesch, Houston, TX

*This is an interview with Matthew Deleget on March 12, 2008 concerning his organization of community through his project MINUS SPACE.*

J: Matthew it's wonderful to talk to you. I consider you one of my AIM success stories, so it brings me full circle that I am now coming to you for advice. I'd like to talk about this organization that you have developed with your wife Rossana. What is MINUS SPACE?

M: MINUS SPACE, as it stands in 2008, is a very different kind of entity than what we originally planned and launched it back in August of 2003. We describe it as a curatorial project.

J: Start with your background as an artist.

M: That's actually the main reason we started MINUS SPACE. Rossana, my wife, and I met at Pratt Institute. She graduated in '96 and I graduated in '97. I went through the AIM program in '98 and she went through it a couple of years later. We had been working as quasi- professional emerging artists for about four or five years, making a very specific kind of geometric abstract work. After many years, we realized that there wasn't a large audience for it, but rather a sort of niche audience.

J: Were you attracted to each other because of your work?

M: We met each other because of our work in 1994.

J: So, you were both exploring some of the same issues in your work.

M: Yeah. Similar temperaments, process, and thinking behind it. The work often ended up looking very different but coming from a similar mind set. We met because of the work. It's what brought us together and the rest of it developed after that.

J: Like marriage.

M: Exactly. So, today is fourteen years later. We are still collaborating on everything we do, from having a family to running an art project. We had been out of school for a couple of years and showing around in various group shows. Some smaller, some bigger, some thematic, some better curated, and some worse, usually with the same five to ten people. Curators usually like to match like with like, so we got matched up with other artists that were thinking and working like we did. Rossana and I sometimes showed together. Sometimes, we showed with others. It was mainly local though, in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

That went on in various iterations here at this venue and there at that venue, at galleries and non profits, for four or five years. We reached a point where we felt like it wasn't going anywhere. We had done very good shows that we felt strongly about, which showed interesting artists and ideas. It's not that we weren't doing anything. We were doing something, but it didn't amount to anything. We realized there was one critical problem. People didn't quite understand completely what the hell it was we were doing.

J: What were you doing?

M: We were making a very specific kind of art that people could only explain by what went on forty years ago, which was Minimalism or before that Suprematism, De Stijl, etc. People really didn't understand why we were making work like this in the late 90's and early 2000's. They didn't see how it was new, how it was pushing the envelope, and how it was advancing the conversation around this kind of art making, which is reductive abstraction, conceptual art, geometric abstraction.

We realized that the curators that were organizing the shows we were in were having a hard time formulating the language and the ideas correctly, so we had to work really heavily with these guys. The venues didn't really have a good understanding of what we were doing. Therefore, critics were not getting a clear message, so they couldn't write about the shows we were in. Collectors weren't buying the work. So, we were doing all these shows that we felt good about, but clearly the message wasn't getting through. We were really sort of running in place. It was a systemic problem.

After several years of this and increasing frustration, we knew we had to take matters into our own hands. We didn't know what that meant exactly, but we knew we had to do something. Rossana and I are both people that would prefer to do something than to do nothing. And I really highly recommend that the artists that are reading this do something. Anything is better than nothing.

J: Well did you have some goals initially?

M: We had goals, we had ideas, and we had a vision of what we wanted to do. It kind of came about organically through bouncing ideas off of each other and off of the artists we had been showing with. But we had to temper all of those big high-falutin things with reality. We are also realists with everything we do. We are pragmatic. You have to be pragmatic and you have to be disciplined.

We didn't have money. We still don't have money, but we had less money then, so it wasn't like we could open a physical bricks and mortar space. That was out of the question. Real estate is really expensive in NYC. I didn't even have a studio at that point that I could afford. We realized that we had some experience with the web through our various jobs. We both had websites as artists. I also run NYFA's website, so we had some comfort with technology.

What we thought was the best way to attack this problem, which was really a problem of communication and community, was to start something online. We bounced a lot of different names off of each other in terms of what we were going to call this thing. We didn't want to call it "minimalist" because again we knew language was a huge obstacle. We wanted to be smart and pointed, so we decided to call it "MINUS SPACE", because we were literally without a physical space working in the ether of the Internet.

And in addition to not having a physical place in the world that we could call our own, we were working with reductive abstraction, which is really about reducing down and getting to the point, so minus was a good word for us. So for all those reasons, we decided to call the project MINUS SPACE.

We began by collaborating with artists in our local Brooklyn community and put up online portfolios of their work. We asked each artist to give us up to twenty images, a statement about what they were doing, either by themselves or by someone else that they felt strongly about, and we asked them for a cv. We created this little online directory of about five to eight artists that we knew were feeling like us, making the kind of work we make, etc., so our project really started as an online artist registry that was self-organized.

J: Right. Like an artist registry.

M: At the time, we sort of threw a wide net-like come one come all, anyone who does this kind of work in any medium, any generation, or any discipline. We never really thought it would go beyond Brooklyn. We never even conceived of that.

J: Isn't that funny. The early Internet days and you are still thinking locally.

M: Totally locally. That was in 2003 when we started the project. We thought, "Well, let's just get our own local community up." And the beauty of the web is that once you put something online, it's instantly accessible everywhere. Much to our amazement, we attracted interest from all over the globe. We put this thing up there as a local group of artists and it instantly spread everywhere.

J: So what, you sent out an invitation on your website for other artists to join you?

M: Exactly. It was kind of an early social networking model, which we didn't know about at the time. We knew certain artists that we held in high regard and we asked those artists to recommend other artists, and so on, and so on. Within a year, we had fifty artists that were affiliated with our program. We closed off the submission process because we were receiving and still receive about ten submissions a week to the project. Our original intention was to make it democratic, everybody

included, but after much consideration and painstaking thought, we decided to close it off because we couldn't accommodate the volume of artists.

I think one of our strengths is that our project is curated. It's our curatorial vision that runs this project. It's not exactly open-ended where anyone can participate, which has positives and negatives. But for us, the work had to be very solid. It had to be made by artists who were dedicated to the work, people who were out of school for at least five years and showed a long-term commitment to this kind of art making. As we went along, we decided that it was going to be interdisciplinary so—painting, sculpture, printmaking, performance art, architecture—all media are included.

This was sort of an inversion of previous things like Minimalism, which was really about five white male sculptors in lower Manhattan. MINUS SPACE included all media. We were also going to be intergenerational. So we were interested in finding the best work out there, not the best work by twenty-year-olds, which the art world loves. We have artists on our site that are in their eighties all the way down their twenties. We didn't plan it at the time, but we took on an international focus. We have artists that live in the US, Europe, South America, and Australasia. So there are artists from all over the globe that are part of this project: men and women of different ethnic backgrounds and different ages with really different conceptual standpoints and artistic strategies. It's not monolithic. It's pluralistic, especially regarding what the artists are thinking about and what they want to express through the work. MINUS SPACE was focused, but it wasn't restrictive. It was all over.

Earlier I mentioned the language problem, which is the biggest part of the project. We knew we had problems. Constructivist, Pointillist, Op, Minimal, Post-Minimal, Neo Geo—none of these terms applied to us and we knew we had to come up with a new term. All of those terms have huge baggage. In order to set off in the right footing, we chose to use the term reductive. It was baggage-free. It meant nothing. Then we threw this framework around it. Reductive could mean artists working with certain kinds of strategies like monochrome, pattern, geometric, serial, conceptual work, etc. We had to reset the record to start again so we could work on our own terms.

J: So you think you defined a particular art movement?

M: People have perceived us as a movement, a coop, a membership entity and we don't really see ourselves as any of those things. We are a community of practice.

J: Well you said earlier. It's a curatorial project and I think that is a great way to state it. You and Rossana are the curators, so you determine what is in and what isn't and you define the terms.

M: We've kept to the terms, but we've redefined and re-evaluated the project every single year. We usually do it at the end of the year and figure out what we are going to do next and how we are going to position the program to make it fresher, newer, and more aggressive. What we have in 2008 today is very different from what we had in 2003, which was primarily a registry.

Our terminology has been taken on by others and they have run with it. Several years ago, we heard about a sculpture conference in Finland that had a session debating our language and terminology

about reductive abstraction. This was thoroughly thrilling and a little weird for us. These guys are debating our framework in an academic environment. So we feel like we are on the right track.

But let me say again, we are not a movement. Other movements weren't movements either. Minimalists never felt like they belonged to Minimalism, in fact they hated the term. This was a market packaging of them.

J: I think all movements feel that way, except maybe Dada, which coined the term themselves. In many cases, the term for movement is a pejorative term instead of a positive one.

M: There were some issues with this idea, but we consider ourselves a curatorial project. We do what we do. Even within our own project there are lots of different strains of activity. There are people that are working in reductive photography, solely in performance, or purely in pattern-making. There are lots of sub-niches that are falling within this bigger umbrella and we are okay with that. We have defined it to the point where we feel comfortable.

J: It sounds to me like what you have developed is a curatorial community.

M: Yeah. It's a community of practice. These are practitioners within this kind of art making. And this is not the only community nor is it the best community. It's one option out of every other option that's out there. We don't even describe ourselves as alternative because alternative means to what? Every artist has to determine on their own how they want to participate in the for-profit market, the non-profit world, the academic world, the curatorial world, the collector world, art fairs—you name it. There are a million worlds you can occupy. And we don't think it's us or nothing. We are just one option of what's out there and we're hoping that our option is a little more satisfying to participate in than, say, the art fair option.

J: I'm intrigued by the fact that every year you have an evaluative part of your process and that even starting this project came out of an evaluative process. I encourage artists to do that in my book—to sit down and figure out where you are and where you want to be and then how figure out how to make that jump. Can you speak to that at all?

M: Well, that was it. Envisioning and evaluating is what I do all day at my job at NYFA and that really came into play with this project. It's sort of like trial and error. Try something, see if it works, evaluate it, improve it, refine it, or pull the plug and do something else.

J: But it comes out of a need?

M: It comes out of a very specific need. We've gone through this evaluative process every year for the last five years. Every year, we set new goals in January. We actually go to Puerto Rico to visit Rossana's family for the holidays. For two to three weeks, we are on a beach in Puerto Rico super far from our studios and the rest of the art universe. And we are thinking, "What would be the next step? Where do we want to take it? What would be the strategic way to move this project? Where are we getting the most resistance? Where are we getting the least resistance?" A lot of times, you move

in the path of least resistance for obvious reasons, but we evaluate every year. We actually do it on a regular basis, but that's our big, let's figure out where we want to take the project the next year.

J: Do you apply the same evaluation process to your work as an artist?

M: Absolutely. That's the same time we evaluate our work too. We sort of envision what we want to focus on in the next year. The kind of work we want to make, what we want to think about. At this point, my studio practice and MINUS SPACE, and Rossana's too, are so closely merged together that it's kind of like one big practice. So, I can't really say that this is for my studio or for MINUS SPACE. It's all kind of part of me. They are all merged together at this point.

Through evaluation, we said we were going to put up an online registry, and we had images and other stuff. We thought it would be a good idea to interview each of the artists that are on the site, because artists never have the opportunity to speak for themselves. We are always being spoken for by curators, press, dealers. So, we thought it was a very important thing to talk about art, process, and ideas and put that up in conjunction with the online portfolios. That was the first thing we did.

In addition, we realized that the problem was bigger than just having a platform to present our work. Context was a critical part. Why do we keep having to defend our work in terms of what went on forty or fifty years ago? This seems ridiculous to us as practitioners, but we needed to contextualize what it was that we were doing. We started linking up to exhibitions that were relevant to our project. We would link up to an exhibition of Blinky Palermo or another exhibition of someone totally new to us. We had huge aggregate lists of exhibitions of reductive art that were going on around the globe that contextualized or spoke to what we were doing, our core values, and people we were interested in. This has translated into our blog five years later. We are now posting images of exhibitions, installation views, and ideas from all over the globe. We did lots of research on every venue that is interested in reductive art and every artist out there doing work of interest.

J: Whether they are in MINUS SPACE or not.

M: Take, for instance, the artist Ann Truitt, who now posthumously has a website. She is deceased and, of course, can't participate in MINUS SPACE, but we have a link to her website because she is part of—

J: She's part of history—

M: Our history and part of our lineage, our heritage in a way. We also link to every related commercial gallery, non-profit, and museum, as well as publication that has anthologized this kind of art making. We have this huge comprehensive directory of links which at this point helps contextualize us, but also brings a lot of traffic back to our site. It is an inverted way of doing marketing or advertising. Post content and then let the search engines direct people to us.

Two years ago, we actually reverse engineered our artist registry to be just a page of images and links out to people's websites. Instead of just maintaining a directory, we decided to put all of our energy

into finding exhibitions that were currently going on that we could put on our site. That is what we have been doing for two years.

It's funny, but there was a perception online with our project that we were a gallery space, a non-profit center, or some sort of physical entity, but what we really were was an online enterprise that was chugging along and doing work.

Eventually, we received so many questions from people coming in from Germany or New Zealand or Rio de Janeiro to come see our space and see artist's work that we decided to do something physical. So, we started curating projects and exhibitions. They are focused niche exhibitions, not surveys of MINUS SPACE artists, because that would be poor in terms of its curatorial conceit. But we started getting invitations to curate shows. A gallery or exhibition space would say to us "We would like to do a MINUS SPACE show. Propose something." So we did. Right now, we're doing lots more curatorial work, often in other people's exhibition spaces, which is great. We've organized exhibitions of New York artists in Sydney, Australia. Next week, we're opening a show of Sydney artists here at our space in Brooklyn. They are artists that are affiliated with a non-profit space called Sydney Non Objective. It's a lot like our project.

J: You now also have a gallery space?

M: Yes, we have a project space. About two years ago, we decided to take my studio, clean it out every three months, and offer it up to another artist to realize a project. It's not some high-end white box gallery space. It's my studio. I turn it over to one of the artists that we work with and say, "Do a project." And we ask the artist to do something specific that they wouldn't be able to do elsewhere in a gallery situation or art fair. We've done six exhibitions over the past year and a half.

J: And how long do they last?

M: They last two days, but sometimes a little more.

J: So, it's like a two week window that you give up your studio space periodically.

M: Yeah, and we do four shows a year. We started just doing shows that were by us for us. Originally, the people coming to our shows were MINUS SPACE artists or people that were interested in this stuff, but our audience has expanded to be people that we don't personally know. It's fantastic. There are all of these new people coming in that we hadn't originally intended to be part of the conversation. We'll have anywhere from 200-300 come to a show over a weekend.

J: What have been the benefits for you and Rossana as artists doing this curatorial project?

M: There are many. We have had the opportunity to meet and talk with artists from around the globe. We've also been able to travel around the globe to meet those people.

J: They've invited you?

M: They've invited us to do projects in spaces, participate in exhibitions that they've curated, participate in print portfolios that have been published, catalogs, lots and lots of exhibitions. All great experiences, but really my main concern is my community. And I have been able to meet fantastic, wonderful, amazing, thoughtful people from around the globe who I feel like I have known my entire life, even though I have only known them for a couple of years. But we share a common experience, an interest in the work we make, and a kind of common value system. So the best part of the project is that I have been able to meet and talk, in real time, with other artists and people that I wouldn't have naturally met. I feel like our project is somehow interrupting the natural progression of things by connecting an artist in NYC with an artist in Australia with someone in The Netherlands. I don't believe it would have happened naturally had it not been for this project.

J: So, it's made connections for you and then connections between everybody in this project.

M: Yeah. There's 100 degrees of connectedness. What started out originally as a geographically-defined community of practice is now a global community of practice. I may be an artist living and working in Brooklyn, but my horizons have expanded infinitely as have my opportunities as an artist and all of the people that we work with. It's taken on a life on its own. I'm delighted to see one of my good friends, a Brooklyn artist who I met through the project, is moving to Berlin for a year, because he feels like he can make a go of it there. And we can connect him to artists in Berlin that will help him.

J: He goes with an already established network welcoming him into their community?

M: Exactly. There are all of these outposts all around the globe where ideas are being shared back and forth, advancing our dialogue.

J: Like warp speed.

M: Yes, it is amped up. Everybody is aware of what everybody else is doing. Dialogue and a little competition, for lack of a better word, is always healthy in my opinion. It's a way of pushing the work.

J: Has it pushed your own work?

M: It has.

J: In what ways? Can you identify?

M: My stuff has become a little more aggressive in terms of how I have approached painting. I would say Rossana's work has completely dematerialized in that it is no longer object-based. A lot of this growth has come out of opportunities. For example, Rossana and I were recently invited to do a show in Brussels and we decided that this would be our first collaborative project. We would make everything together. It was a solo show of two people. We decided to challenge ourselves and not ship or bring any work with us for the show, but make it all there on site the week of the exhibition. There are dozens of other stories that I can tell you about how people have collaborated and worked



with each other. We have leveraged hundreds of exhibitions for people. We've had people's work go into many collections. We also dabbled a little in private dealing and realized that was a wrong turn and won't do that again.

J: So for a while you were selling some of the artist's work, but it didn't fit within your mission.

M: That was a bit of a mission creep. Our project is about community and ideas. It was never about money. And it still isn't about money. We started this project with \$75 and we haven't spent much more on it. We have, however, spent the last five years of our lives on it, but it's a huge labor of love.

J: You wear so many hats. How do you organize your life to handle all of this plus make art?

M: I mentioned earlier that everything is merged together. I work full-time at NYFA Monday-Friday 9:30-5:00, I do studio work, and I do MINUS SPACE. So I do three jobs at once. The answer is that I am working all of the time, like 24/7. That may sound like a bad thing, but it is actually a tremendously good thing because I am thoroughly engaged in what I am doing. I think it is a much better situation to be overly busy to the point of being overwhelmed than the alternative, which is to do nothing and complain that there is nothing going on. So I'm always working on something, but it's all one big project. If I'm working in an office, curating on a show, updating a website, or painting, I see it all as artwork. It's all part of my creative practice.

J: So it's basically having your entire life be your art practice and it has these different iterations. I guess it helps to have a spouse that is part of the project.

M: Yes, among many other benefits, she has a lot of empathy for what we are trying to do. She also recently started a side project, a blog called "art & life", which really speaks to the idea that there is no separation between the two of them.

J: I think what I love about your story is how your generosity to the community has made something really bloom and provided opportunities for many artists. How about artists who aren't a part of the MINUS SPACE community? Is there opportunity for an artist not a member of the MINUS SPACE community?

M: The whole project is a work in process that has taken a life on its own. We just steer it. It's going to be very different tomorrow than it was yesterday. We accept that as a given. As soon as it becomes too stale and set in its ways, too institutionalized, it will die. It needs to keep moving no matter what. The unfortunate thing is that we are only two people and we only have limited resources and time, so we can't add new artists to the space, even the most interesting ones out there. There are ways you can participate in what we are doing. We accept information from all over the world that we include in our blog. We post lots of exhibitions and other things that are going on that people can tap into and be part of the community.

What drives me nuts though is when artists come to our shows only to get something from us. They want us to give them a show. We're not looking for artists. We are looking for collaborators. What

can you bring to the table that will strengthen our community? You have to participate. You have to give to get.

J: So, an artist shouldn't be coming with a portfolio in their back pocket hoping to get into MINUS SPACE?

M: Right.

J: I suppose you have a little bit of sympathy for the gallerist or the curator out there who also has the onslaught of unsolicited submissions.

M: Absolutely. Dealing with the logistics of putting on a show, selling work, and dealing with personalities is a huge issue. Artists are human beings. Human beings have personalities that can be both a pleasure to work with and can also be very difficult.

J: Maddening.

M: Maddening. So, we've had a full range of experiences. But the reality is that we are always looking at work. I recommend getting on our email list. Tell us about your shows when you have them. Send us images. Keep us posted about what you are doing. I can't guarantee that we are going to be able to do anything about it immediately, but we can help get the word out about your project, especially if it is compelling.

J: If you were going to give an artist starting out in their career three pieces of advice, what would they be?

M: Set your goals. Without goals, you are floating aimlessly. You absolutely need to establish them no matter what. And I don't mean using your goals in a gross way. Have them tied in with your core values. What are your values as an individual? What does success mean to you? Where do you see yourself going? What is important to you as a human being?

J: Defining them for yourself!

M: Exactly. On your own terms.

J: And they can change.

M: Assume they are going to change.

J: Your goals in your 20's are going to be different from your goals in your 30's, 40's, and 50's.

M: My goals are very different today than they were five years ago, and different than five years before that.

Also, prepare yourself for a career longer than thirty minutes. This is a marathon not a sprint. You want to be a working artist twenty years from now. If that's part of your goal then think of it that way. That's critical. I'm quoting someone here. I don't know if it's Peter Schjeldahl or Jerry Saltz that said art schools are preparing their graduates for a thirty month career not a thirty year career. I think that is a great quote. That is one of the biggest turn-offs when we get submissions to MINUS SPACE. People are so desperate like it has to happen today, tomorrow, or the day after, or it's too late. That's really not the case.

Lastly, don't wait around for things to happen. It's just stupid to do so. I can't believe we waited five years to start MINUS SPACE. Make something happen. It doesn't have to be rocket science. It doesn't have to change the world. It can be one little kernel of an idea that can change everything. Asking stupid questions can be so profound. After five years, we could clearly see where our career paths were headed and we were like, "We've got to do something about this." Figure it out. Artists are amazingly innovative, creative, smart people. You will figure out a solution to whatever it is you are facing.

J: What I love about what you have done is that this speaks to the complete sea change that artists no longer have to wait. They can take action. They can be global from their own laptop computer. They can define themselves as specifically as they need to and find a community of like-minded individuals out there who will also be a part of the same definition. You can establish your community. Your community may not be in your neighborhood or city, but it can be in the world.

M: Your community is how you define it. It can be by your gender, age, discipline, ideas, process, or anything. MINUS SPACE has a very specific focus, reductive art, but there could be a hundred other projects like ours with their own defined communities.

J: Their own curatorial definition.

M: Sky's the limit and take it from there.

J: Thank you Matthew!

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*Matthew Deleget is an abstract painter and curator. He has exhibited his work nationally and internationally, including solo and group exhibitions in Europe, Asia, and Australia. He is a member of American Abstract Artists and the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation's Artist Advisory Committee. Matthew has received awards from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, Brooklyn Arts Council, and The Golden Rule Foundation. His work has been reviewed in The New York Times, Flash Art, Artnet Magazine, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and Basler Zeitung, among others.*

*Matthew co-founded and directs MINUS SPACE, a curatorial project based in Brooklyn, NY, presenting innovative reductive art by international artists working in all media. At MINUS SPACE project space, he has curated solo exhibitions by Jan van der Ploeg, Gilbert Hsiao, Michael Brennan, Michael Zahn, Tilman, Lynne*

*The Artist's Guide: Making a Living Doing What You Love* by Jackie Battenfield  
Matthew Deleget, Minus Space, March 12, 2008

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*Harlow, and Mark Dagley. Other recent curatorial projects include: Machine Learning, a national traveling exhibition examining pattern painting in the information age; and Escape from New York, a group exhibition in Sydney, Australia, surveying reductive strategies by artists living in and around New York City.*

*Matthew also works at the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA), where he founded and oversees NYFA's Information & Research Department. This includes the foundation's web site, artist magazine, learning area, and other information programs for artists.*

*Matthew holds an MFA in Painting and an MS in Theory, Criticism and History of Art, Design and Architecture from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY.*

<http://www.matthewdeleget.com/>  
[www.minusspace.com](http://www.minusspace.com)