

## SVA 2015

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**Title:** *The Curious Case of Richie Benson; collaborative artistic identities in academe; a single square peg addressing multiple round holes*

**Abstract:** Artists who blend their identities into single collaborative entities pose challenging problems to art education, critical theory, notions of agency, studio practice and institutional expectations. This paper examines one such duo.

**Proposal:** Artists in the visual arts are typically schooled and identify themselves as individuals with independent agency through which they develop distinct sensibilities, be it focused on technical mastery, conceptual assertions, mediumistic visions, psychological authenticity and/or social critique. It is my assertion that they develop personal standing as essentially *applied philosophers* and their work may be critiqued on that basis. When they collaborate, they typically retain their individual voices, lending their unique standing as part of a dialectical exchange, a creative grinding, if you will, of one mentality against another, such as in the collaborations of Johns and Rauschenberg, Warhol and Basquiat, etc.

Komar and Melamid; and Gilbert & George (and others) have, however, *blended identities* and operate (without perceptible grinding) outside traditional values some consider sacrosanct in the art world and, by extension, academe. Despite the recent emergence of graduate-level programing focusing on creative collaboration and community initiatives, artist-faculty normally steeped in individualism struggle to provide sufficient and relevant critique vis-a-vis collaborative artists.

This paper will discuss one such pair of emerging artists my colleagues and I seek to mentor, a duo working under the alias Richie Benson, a self-described *material scientist* whose values are communal rather than individualistic. I will discuss this work and challenges Richie Benson faces (along with his colleagues and professors) vis-a-vis critical assumptions, institutions and an art world not well-structured to support collaborative entities.