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NEW YORK

## HYPERALLERGIC

# An Art Handler's Magazine Breaks Down Art World Myths

Clynton Lowry on acknowledging the invisible people of the art world: art handlers and preparators.

Interview by Ken Tan



Clynton Lowry in March 2015 (photo by Maayan Strauss)

Awkwardly small before a grand wall, a man is cautiously trying to catch a balloon fish with a long landing net. He moves as if afraid of the balloon fish. His apprehension is valid, for that balloon is an artwork by Philippe Parreno, and it recently sold for a whopping \$516,500 at Christie's. Absurd as it sounds, videos like this have recently been proliferating on my Instagram feed, thanks to the cult account Art Handler Magazine.

In the past year @ArtHandlerMag has boomed to almost 27,000 followers who enjoy a daily riot of engaging and often hilarious content. As a gallerist, I am intrigued by the account's propensity for humor. Amidst today's hullabaloo of failing gallery systems and academic rhetoric, it is refreshing to see the lighter side of the art world. More importantly, it gives us a chance to see past the mega-names of the industry and acknowledge the invisible people behind the scenes: the art handlers and preparators. I sat down with founder and editor Clynton Lowry, who explained how it all works.

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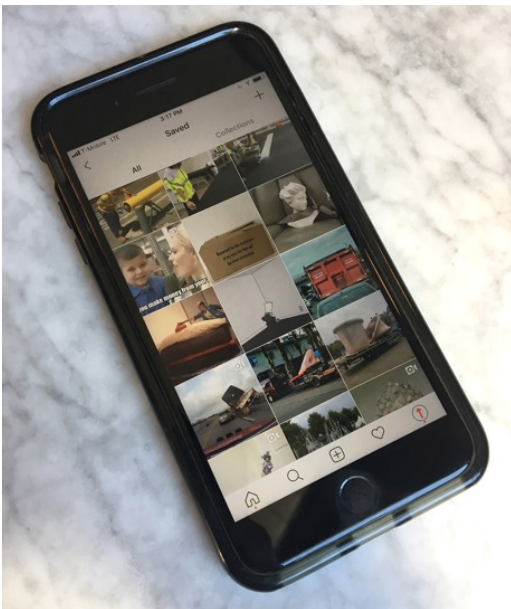
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**Hyperallergic:** *Tell me about yourself. What was the impetus for starting Art Handler Magazine?*

**Clynton Lowry:** I'm an artist and still am. I graduated in English at Berkeley, then went to Yale for the two-year painting program. Like everyone else, I moved to New York, where I worked for Chuck Close as his assistant until recently. I also worked at The Hole gallery and freelanced at a few art handling companies. All these gave me two different perspectives as a behind-the-scenes worker.

I was thinking about artists like Louise Lawler, Rachel Harrison, and Walead Beshty. In my earlier work I was making sleeping bags and wearable jackets out of moving blankets, but they were inadequate. That's when I thought of the magazine as the perfect medium to create a dialogue between production and labor — one that would allow people from this world, but especially outsiders, to talk about this behind-the-scenes space. When you see how something is handled, or how it is moved from point A to B, it's revelatory, insightful. Those are the kinds of things that personally, make art accessible.

We launched Art Handler Magazine in 2014. In 2015, the Instagram account — and we organized a successful symposium at ALLGOLD's MoMA PS1 Print Shop. One advantage of Instagram was that much of our content was already on it, but nobody was really paying attention. My ambition was to create a channel to contain all of it, and to get other artists to consider this space.



Saved posts on Clynton Lowry's phone. (photo by Ken Tan for Hyperallergic)

**H:** *What role does humor have in your Instagram feed?*

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**CL:** Humor is definitely an essential running theme. It keeps our voice sincere and accessible. Even in the printed magazine, which serves the more theoretical side, there is a sense of irreverence. The notion of an art publication that doesn't really talk about the art itself is fundamentally silly. With Instagram we decided to turn this irreverence up a notch — you know what, fuck it, the feed can be about anything. People send me funny posts, so we're participating in this collective humor. There's a real bloopers feel to it.

**H:** *We have to thank Bob Saget.*

**CL:** Yeah, right. I love for us to get funnier. At some point I would like to produce original funny content. Humor keeps it open-ended.



Savash Erenler. In Situ, in Art Handler, no. 2 (November 2016)

**H:** *Humor is a great way into deeper conversations. You see a video of a guy putting his hand through a painting, we laugh, but that kind of stuff really happens.*

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**CL:** Right, exactly. Isn't there a saying that there's some truth to every joke? As outrageous as it is, everything I publish on Instagram is relatable in this world. There's a post where a large cement pipe was coming off the back of the truck. The two guys are looking incredulously at the supervisor, who is insisting they roll it off onto some cushioning. Obviously it smashed. It's ridiculous. The humor comes as a release — you are in those tense situations with artwork, and it can be grim.

**H:** *When we're handling art at the gallery, we sometimes joke about whether this situation is "Art Handler" material.*

**CL:** I love it. The fact that it has become its own thing is really exciting. With Instagram, we could achieve the core desires such as accessibility, community building, demonstrating how vast this network is, and within it how universal the experience is. Maybe half the followers have never handled art, but the nature of the content makes it inclusive. Social media is a form of inclusivity that is not possible with the print publication.

**H:** *Please share some of your social media strategies.*

**CL:** I use the business account that provides analytics, so I have insights to the most effective timings for postings. Currently it's three from 12:00 to 12:30 pm, then another three at 3:00 or 3:30 pm, every day.

Content is organized based on a loose theme — a combination of reposts, magazine content, memes, and other stuff — then chronologically. Reposting was the perfect answer to the early pushback we faced in collecting content for the magazine. For example, several art handlers and directors declined being part of an article or image out of fear of getting fired. However, if the images are already there, it's alright to use them in a different context.

The way I obtain content is by searching — there's drudgery to it — and also what people have been sending me. Lately it's been impossible to keep up! I feel bad that a person is going to be upset if I posted someone else's content that was similar. It's funny to make judgment calls for something so arbitrary. The "bookmark" feature changed the game: before, I would get tagged in a post that gets quickly buried in the feed. I was constantly trying to take screenshots, which was exhausting. Now I can efficiently save posts for future perusal.

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Mock-up cover for Art Handler, produced by Steven Sarkozy (June 2014)

**H:** *How do you see Art Handler expanding?*

**CL:** First, get the business sustainable so the team is always compensated. We're in the works to form an advisory board for fundraising. Then our ambition is transitioning to a more robust online platform that better serves new audiences while expanding our reach. For example: interviews, skits, and original programs. With all this we hope that art handlers will become essential to any organization and have their voices heard at the board level. Finally, a dream would be to revive the Art Handling Olympics.

**H:** *Has any renown art handler come to shake your hand?*

**CL:** Marshall Didier of Marshall Fine Arts. Didier is the art handling legend in New York, who has been at it since the '70s. He spoke at the 2015 symposium and enjoyed the crowd's enthusiasm for the magazine. This old guy probably never saw this thing coming. He shook my hand, and that's really badass. And then there are the art handlers who I freelance with. When they discovered what I do, they were like, "Oh, whatever, dude." That's cool too.

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*You can find Art Handler Magazine online and in print.*

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*<https://hyperallergic.com/456267/an-art-handlers-magazine-breaks-down-art-world-myths/>*