Art for Change: The Artist & Homeless Collaborative examines the history of modern homelessness in New York City through the lens of the Artist & Homeless Collaborative (A&HC), a public art project founded in 1990 by multidisciplinary artist Hope Sandrow. The program, which connected women from the Park Avenue Armory Shelter for Homeless Women with artists, curators, and activists, provided a vehicle for the women to tell their stories, work creatively, and build relationships. The exhibition looks at the transformative potential of art in public and private life through a selection of art projects led by John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, Ida Applebroog, the Guerrilla Girls, Hope Sandrow, Judith Shea, Kiki Smith, and Robin Tewes, among others.

Thomas McGovern (b. 1957)
Hope Sandrow with A&HC participants working on What We Need/What We Wish, 1991
Gelatin silver print
Collection of Hope Sandrow

In many Artist & Homeless Collaborative projects, the women participants explored their pasts, their desires, their needs, and their hopes for the future. Living in the shelter meant living without privacy, with few personal belongings and restrictive regulations. By making and exhibiting art, participants could define themselves beyond the stereotypes and limits they faced as women experiencing homelessness.
John Ahearn (b. 1951), project artist
Rigoberto Torres (b. 1960), project artist
_Ernestine and Three Friends_, 1992
Acrylic on plaster
New-York Historical Society, Gift of Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 2016.63a–d

John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres developed these life-sized busts in collaboration with Ernestine, Phyllis, Yvonne, and Lydia, four residents of the Park Avenue Armory Shelter for Homeless Women. To create them, the sculptors cast directly from the women’s bodies, a process known as lifecasting.

John Ahearn (b. 1951), project artist
**Study photograph for Ernestine and Three Friends**, 1992
Color instant prints (Polaroids)
New-York Historical Society

The busts that comprise Ernestine and Three Friends were first conceptualized through photographs of potential poses.


Making art together gave participants and professional artists the opportunity to build relationships, engage in self-reflection, and aesthetically modify the shelter space. A&HC also looked outward, with exhibitions of participants’ work, museum visits, and sometimes employment.

The Artist & Homeless Collaborative used the art world's network and platforms to bring attention to the Armory shelter women’s experiences and to the broader issues of homelessness, poverty, racism, and gender-based violence. Through inclusion in exhibitions and events, A&HC hoped participants would gain experience that might result in job opportunities and a means to speak directly to the public.

Kim Hopper (b. 1949)
*Fort Washington Armory*, 1982
Courtesy of the photographer

In the 1980s, armories became an emergency stopgap to relieve overcrowded city shelters. Armories could house hundreds in their large interior spaces, but overcrowding created stressful, and at times dangerous, living situations. At the Fort Washington Armory, up to 1,400 men slept in one room. In 1982, the Coalition for the Homeless brought a suit against the city on behalf of women experiencing homelessness. At the Flushing Armory, 70 women shared one shower and three toilets. The city then ran only four women’s shelters, housing 349 single women per night.
Peter Cohen (b. 1955)
**Coalition for the Homeless poster**, 1990
Offset lithograph
Collection of the artist

Advertising professional Peter Cohen spent his Sundays volunteering at a church soup kitchen on Park Avenue in 1990. Wanting to do more, Cohen created posters to be wheatpasted throughout the city. Cohen eventually developed an official relationship with the Coalition for the Homeless and created other campaigns on its behalf, including an Emmy Award-winning public service TV ad.

Park Avenue Armory Shelter for Homeless Women
**Notice to residents**, 1993
Photocopy
Collection of Hope Sandrow

Women staying at the Park Avenue Armory Shelter could not use the front entrance to the Armory. They had to enter through a service entrance. However, they used the same elevator as people visiting to attend art shows, view the ornate lower floor interiors, or eat at the restaurant.

Unidentified photographer
Pepón Osorio (b. 1955), project artist
A&HC participants: Gerti Celestin, Dianne Dobrin, Brelzie D., Maxine Langsdrum
**Pepón Osorio and Dianne Dobrin with Homeless Blues**, 1990
Reproduction
Courtesy of Hope Sandrow

A&HC undertook collaborative projects that would personalize the shelter’s institutional atmosphere. Shelter residents spent long periods watching TV in the sparsely furnished fifth floor lounge. Hoping to uplift their spirits, artist Pepón Osorio proposed a theatrical, yet domestic-feeling space. The women helped select and sew patterned fabrics into curtains. To amplify resident Dianne Dobrin’s writing, Pepón inscribed her poem “Homeless Blues” across the valance.
Carson/Keppel, designers; Visual AIDS (founded 1988), publisher
A&HC participants: Amy, Brelzie, Gerti Celestin, Claudia, Edna Diaz, Dorothy, Cachi Gonzalez, Harparkash Kaur, Maxine Langsdrum, Lucille Lee, Pearl, Polly Anne, Shirley Satchel, Olivia Simpson, Geraldine Womack

*Self Taught/Self Represented: Homeless Women and AIDS poster*, 1990
Offset lithograph
Collection of Hope Sandrow

ACT UP members Juli Carson and Aaron Keppel designed this poster commemorating the second Day Without Art using messages on AIDS generated by A&HC participants. It resulted from a month of workshops on HIV/AIDS led by the Women’s Health Education Project and ACT UP’s Housing Committee.

Unidentified photographer

*Armory ribbon bee*, ca. 1992
Reproduction
Courtesy of Visual AIDS

The Red Ribbon pervaded popular culture in the early 1990s. Symbolizing support for people with HIV/AIDS, it decked celebrities’ lapels, public building facades, and a U.S. postage stamp. The Artist & Homeless Collaborative produced them as a cottage industry. Visual AIDS Artists’ Caucus members Frank C. Moore, Marc Happel, and Harvey Weiss devised the symbol in 1991, inspired by the Gulf War’s yellow ribbons of remembrance. Moore worked with Sandrow, also a Caucus member, to set up production “bees” to meet demand.
Guerrilla Girl “Alice Neel,” project artist
Anonymous A&HC participants
“I can survive on the street” poster, 1992
Photocopy
Collection of Robin Tewes

Artist & Homeless Collaborative participants developed these posters with Guerrilla Girl “Alice Neel” based on discussions about their experiences that took place over the course of several months. Neel aided the women in adapting their words for a poster and experimenting with the layout. Taking results back to the Guerrilla Girls, they printed 200 of each design and wheatpasted them around Manhattan.

Unidentified artist
Julia D’Amario (b. 1960), project artist
Self-portrait, 1992
Park Avenue Shelter Portraits
Hand-colored copperplate print
Collection of Judith Shea

Printmaker Julia D’Amario introduced participants to a new medium. The women scratched their self-portraits onto copper plates, whose shiny surfaces served as mirrors. Only after printing could they see the result. They also hand-colored the prints, giving further personality and detail to their works.

Kiki Smith (b. 1954), project artist
Untitled, 1992
Photocopy transfer on Nepal paper
Collection of Hope Sandrow

Leading up to her project at the shelter, the multidisciplinary artist Kiki Smith contemplated human bodies in her work. Describing it as “a kind of social activism,” she believes that power can be gained from knowledge of the body, how it functions, and how bodies are socially constructed. Smith recalls introducing the medical reference book
Gray’s Anatomy to project participants as an inspiration source for their drawings, which she Xerox-transferred and assembled into a composite.

A&HC participants at 69th Regiment Armory
Hope Sandrow (b. 1951), project artist
Michael Boodro, project artist

What I Need/What I Want (selected section), 1994
Polaroids, marker, acetate
Collection of Hope Sandrow

In 1994 the Artist & Homeless Collaborative expanded its workshops to the Lexington Avenue Armory shelter, which served women ages 20–45. Hope Sandrow and writer Michael Boodro envisioned a project combining photography and writing where the women could acknowledge difficult pasts and think creatively about the future.

Annie Faye Wilson-Rodgers (b. 1943)
Francis Palazzolo (b. 1960)
Annie, Black Woman for President, 2019
Colored pencil on paper
Courtesy of Francis Palazzolo

Artist Francis Palazzolo works side-by-side with individuals at the BronxWorks Living Room Drop-in Center and Safe Haven to create collaborative portraits. Safe havens are temporary shelters for adults who are chronically street homeless. Working from a photograph, Annie Wilson-Rodgers and Palazzolo used a transfer process for its basic contours to retain a sense of photorealism. Wilson-Rodgers chose to have a U.S. flag in the background, saying: “A Black woman ought to run for president.”