



Jaclyn Jacunski lives and works in Chicago working in many formats with an emphasis in printmaking. She received her M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and a B.F. A. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, trained at Tandem Press. She has taught at SAIC and Harrington College of Design. Her artwork explores protests and acts of resistance in local communities, examining how these things manifest in signs, in the landscape, and media.

The works were made from found objects using fencing taken from an abandoned lot near her home. Jacunski sees Chicago vacant lots as a common part of life on the west and south side of Chicago. It is a clear visual difference from other parts of the city. The physical expressions in these locations reflect the social, political, and financial networks that bind the community or divide us from one another. This urban space has many implications in everyday life in the actions one takes, in decision one makes and the crises we weather.

**JACLYN  
JACUNSKI**

**NOW IS THE TIME**  
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What does one see when passing by one of Chicago's omnipresent vacant lots, those weedy, overgrown tracts that can be found shoved unceremoniously between other buildings or taking over whole city blocks? Artist Jaclyn Jacunski sees a hell of a lot in these blighted urban spaces – she sees raw materials, embedded histories, and potential to contest the possible futures of the space. And by sharing the poetic, poignant art works that she creates in these spaces, she asks us to consider the effects of these interstitial spaces on the churning world around us.

Jacunski comes to her work with a background that is equal parts social activism and fine art training, specifically in a wide range of printmaking practices. She worked at a women's shelter crisis help-line and on several projects deep in the environmental movement. The pointed, particular projects that she worked on as an activist were balanced out by larger explorations that fostered technical expertise in print-based practices. Jacunski was able to straddle the social and the aesthetic work, finding a rich terrain where she could cultivate both fields by integrating political ideals within conceptually specific materials. The crux of Jacunski's practice became finding a way to call attention to under-represented causes or communities without shutting down the metaphoric power of the work, which can easily result from pure political advocacy. She crafted several successful projects with this strategy and came to the current work when she moved to a Logan Square apartment after the economic recession of 2008-09.

For the artist, the history and rapidly transforming character of her neighborhood became personified by the abandoned lot adjacent to her apartment. Fenced off from the rest of the world, the space nonetheless served as a gathering point for neighbors, a creative outlet for youth and street artists, and a repository of the history of the place. Meanwhile, there remained the ever-present specter of looming development, that the land was just laying dormant, awaiting the tide of gentrification that would make constructing condos profitable.

So for Jacunski, the lot was a perfect site to occupy and mine artistic source material.

She started off somewhat tentatively, by implementing small artistic interventions in the lot. Each of her actions reverberated outwards through, providing opportunities to collaborate with her neighbors and allowing the work to become representative of the tenuous existence of all such spaces. She adopted the space more intentionally and began leaving larger offerings, such as a series of faux-spider webs with cryptic messages woven in ("You're Not The Only One", "I'm Not Waiting", etc.). These meticulously crafted works were installed surreptitiously in the lot, quietly asserting their presence for those attuned enough to notice them.

For those not as sensitive to site-specific artworks, Jacunski moved to inhabit the fence surrounding the lot with sculptural interventions. Her tactics included weaving textual messages through the fencing and utilizing the fence as a site to archive objects collected throughout the neighborhood. As these signs proliferated, they took on more significance, evolving from one artist-citizen's sentiments into a community chorus. By nominating herself as an unofficial representative of the lot (and by extension, the existing, increasingly marginalized community), Jacunski saw a natural opening to utilize her printmaking skills and proselytize to a larger audience. She picked up on print's reliance on the matrix and ability to easily multiply, both of which allowed her to investigate the lot in new ways and present the work in other contexts.

Jacunski's physical works extend into the world in the double role as discrete objects and ambassadors from the lot. They take on a variety of forms, from laborious drawings and enigmatic sculptures to documentary photographs and seductive prints. For her show at the City

Colleges of Chicago, "Now Is The Time", work made directly from the lot is paired with more politically motivated art.

A large section of fence commands attention, bisecting the gallery space in a not-entirely-welcoming manner that calls to mind Tilted Arc (on a smaller scale) and exacerbates the contradiction between art venue and administrative office. The fence is woven full of cotton strips in a muted palette that were dyed with natural materials culled from seventeen of her neighborhood's vacant lots. Another sculptural element comes in the form of clay bricks presented on wooden pedestals. The "bricks" were created by extruding the raw clay through the fencing, like Play-Doh through the fun factory. Their chalky white presence has a ghostly feel, making them mini-memorials to all that has been lost in the artist's neighborhood and foreboding the current development. Large text drawings use the chain-link pattern as a foundation to present messages, ranging from the explicit ("NO NO NO NO NO!") to the solicitous, including the title piece taken from a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech in Chicago. The fence structure continues in a series of lush prints, flags, and netting.

The fence serves a metaphor for confinement and liberation, allowing Jacunski to take a position that is critical of the operations of power and property. Her intellectual ancestors include MLK, Gandhi, and Grace Lee Boggs, among others. She believes that laying claim and taking over these spaces without permission can produce massive cultural change. Ultimately, we are confronted with the leftovers from the artist's actions in the lot, forced to consider what is there and what has been left behind in the community. And maybe we will see a bit more when next we encounter seemingly empty lots in our neighborhoods.

- Jason Pallas

