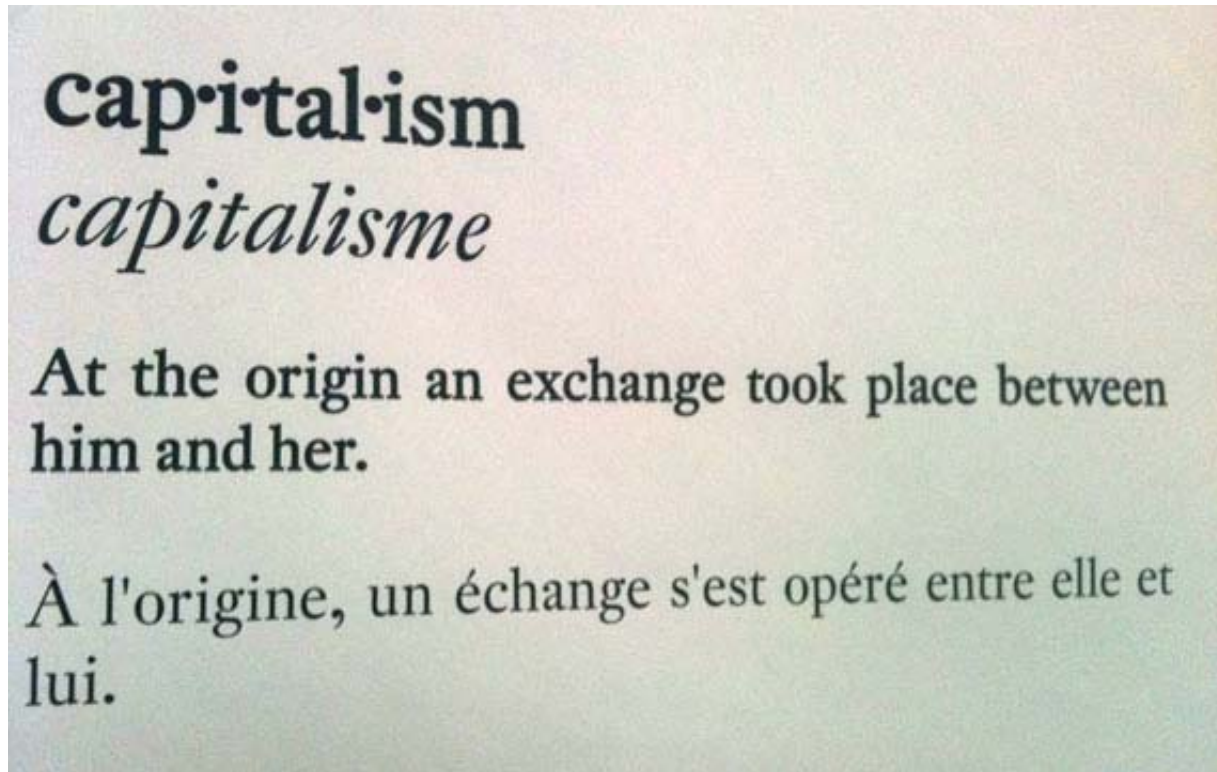


Low Definition

The Meaning of "Terrorism," 10 Years Later

by [JEN GRAVES](#)



A FRENCH DEFINITION His and hers.

All *Things Equal* at Seattle University's Hedreen Gallery is like a miniature Venice Biennale—sort of. There's not much spectacle, and not any seduction. Rather, it's mostly words printed on pieces of paper pinned to the walls. But each piece of paper represents an artist from a different country, and they hang alphabetically according to the name of the countries, from Angola, Barbados, and Cuba to Russia, South Korea, and the United States. In the midst of all these words, on the pages, are only a few scattered images: of "happy slaves" drawn by some 18th-century colonial artist, or Che Guevara's ubiquitous face, or one big man stepping on a smaller man who is stepping on an even smaller man.

This is not really an art show, but it is the documentation and continuation of an art process. (Now that I write that, it sounds like an art show.) The process was this: Curator Catharina Manchanda asked artists from 23 countries to look up three terms (capitalism, socialism, terrorism) using reference books in their own languages. Her thinking was that all three of these terms represent contemporary issues that essentially span the globe, and that are enduringly trenchant while also being incredibly flexy.

After choosing their "official" definitions, the artists were instructed to translate their

into English for presentation to a Seattle audience. They could do this any way they pleased or were able. Not all the artists speak English; some asked friends for accurate translations, some inserted the sounds of their own accents in English ("I am de nevv world," wrote artist Lisa Liedgren, representing Sweden), others preferred the automated distortions provided by Google Translate, and still others—the American representative, poet Pam Dick, for instance—deliberately mistranslated the originals, or mismatched terms with definitions, chose obviously outdated sources, or just plain lied. "There is no entry for this term in the Canadian Encyclopedia," it reads under the term "capitalism" on Canadian artist Ken Lum's printout. Canada can't be *that* cool, can it?

Manchanda—the new modern and contemporary curator at SAM (and a native of Germany and world traveler, with an easygoing and refreshing international bent)—got the idea for *All Things Equal* shortly after September 11, when she was working at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which was just then acquiring a Gerhard Richter painting of German terrorists. As a 10th-anniversary show, *All Things Equal* is the opposite of the attacks: unspectacular, dense, slow, elusive. Not much to see here, it seems to say. But of course there is, if you look—see the Cuban versus the Israeli definitions of terrorism for a jolt, or the prophetic 1970s Soviet definition of capitalism, or notice that Canada is represented by two artists, not just Lum but Raymond Boisjoly, from the Haida Nation, who submitted this reminder from Haida leader Guujaw: "If all that there was to be known was available in books, we would have little need for each other, or anything else for that matter." ★