ART HAPS is excited to be the exclusive media partner for Four More Years: Recess Benefit 2013 on May 28th at (Le) Poisson Rouge. John Miserendino is a New York-based artist and will present an interactive installation at the benefit.

Remaking art, as an art form, is something of a tradition at this point. For John Miserendino, though, remaking often has less to do with replicating than reimagining. This includes making his own version of Sonic Youth’s “Daydream
Nation's Without having heard the album, or starring in his own shot-for-shot version of Michael Haneke's “Funny Games.” His vision is usually funnier and less encumbered than his reference—whether or not you know the story, the result is altogether something of its own.

Through Recess' Session program, Miserendino was able to execute a few very public performances, both at MoMA and in Recess's storefront space. He tells me about remakes, working as an artist's assistant, and the prospect of public failure.

Whitney Kimball: Last November for Recess at MoMA, you staged a performance using copies of Rodin's famous Balzac statue, in a range of sizes, like nesting dolls. The fake statues appear to be rolling through the lobby on roombas, and they follow people around. It's really funny. I found this to be a good entry into some of the other work you made in your residency at Recess, because you take a rather self-serious work of art and make your own version of it— it both pokes fun at it, but also sort of empowers you to include yourself in it. What was your initial interest in that statue?

John Miserendino: The invitation for Recess at MoMA was to do something related to the permanent collection. I was trying to think about it in terms of a piece of art that I was responding to, but also the specific context of where it is in the museum. Just the placement of that statue is so unusual...I guess they put it there because, you know, some people call it the first modern sculpture, and there he is at the gateway to this Pantheon of Modern Art. The result is more like everybody’s just walking by him, on their way somewhere else.
WK: It is weird to put him in the lobby...

JM: Yeah, you feel like it’s supposed to be this place of honor. But it kind of becomes Balzac’s sittin’ out in the lobby, waiting for his wife to finish looking at the Impressionist paintings so he can go home. There’s something dejected about it. I thought that was funny. I just got the idea to have him activate in the space in the same way that everybody else is activated in the space.

The bases are like custom-made roombas except they were manually controlled. We thought it would be more fun to have them appear automated, but actually have them respond to people moving through the space. And if you look at the statue, he’s almost walking off that base; his front foot is leaving the base and you can tell, he wants to get out of there.
As for the Russian stacking doll effect, each copy is a half size smaller than the larger one. The sizing allowed me to make a physical connection to the original and imply that they are now one piece. Having them relate in scale that way kind of unifies them. Plus, it’s funny to have a one-foot tall Balzac walking around.

WK: Given your interest in remakes, it seems like a huge coincidence that you worked on the production of the shot-for-shot remake of Funny Games. [During his residency at Recess, Miserendino shot a third shot-for-shot version of the film, starring himself, set inside of his own]
reinterpretation of an architectural structure designed by Dan Graham.
Did you seek that job out?

JM: No. I’d studied architecture, and then I worked with this production
designer in the city as a part-time job, and he just got offered that job. It was
such a weird process. When we first got hired to do Funny Games, Michael
Haneke wasn’t necessarily going to be the director. They basically asked him if
they could make a Hollywood version of his movie, and then he kind of
hijacked the movie. He was like “I’ll do it,” and they were like “Great, that’s so
cool,” and then he was just like, no, “I am going to literally remake the same
movie.” And they were like “Of course, of course, it will adhere very closely to
the original,” and he was like, “No, I mean, shot. for. shot. It’s gonna be the
same movie.” And it was.

I worked on a few projects with that production designer, but that was the
weirdest one because everybody was held hostage by this crazy Austrian guy.
I mean, I love his work, and I think he’s an amazing director, almost everything
else he’s done is some kind of masterwork of cinema. But that was definitely
[Laughs] kind of a fail.

That’s been the other thing that I guess has happened a lot, that the work I do
has been somehow related to a secondary job that I’m doing, a lot of times
that’s the way in, that creates a connection between me and this other thing.

WK: What are your other jobs, aside from Funny Games— has there been
anything else that’s been related to the work?
JM: I worked for an artist for a while, I did some videos where I was painting hidden messages into his paintings.

WK: What was that?

JM: I was working for Tom Sachs...

WK: No way! So you’ve seen “10 Bullets”? [Sachs made a step-by-step manual for his studio assistants, which is now an art world guideline for studio discipline].

JM: You mean the workers’ manual?

WK: Yeah, it seems like that’s a regimented gig...

JM: Well, I was there during a lull, before he’d made that video. When I started he’d just done the “Nutsy’s” exhibition at the Berlin Guggenheim and when I left he was starting to ramp up for a big show at the Prada Foundation. I was there a year and a half, he had a few shows but they were more commercial. We were doing a lot of serial paintings, a lot of scaling things he’d done before up or down...bronzes, things like that. There were only three assistants there, more or less— I think when he did that thing at the Armory, he had more like thirty assistants.

But the video was a pretty accurate representation. Watching it gave me chills, I felt like I was back at work...I mean, there were lists up in the studio. All of those rules and catch-phrases, “always be knolling,” that was a huge one, about constantly arranging all your tools orthogonally on your desk. I learned a lot of good habits working there.

WK: How was the Recess residency different from, say, a residency in Vermont?

JM: I think the biggest difference was the public aspect of it. It doesn’t feel like a residency where they’re giving you a studio in the woods and there’s no plan. You have to apply with a proposal, and it has to take the public element of the residency into account, and so it was interesting to design...you basically outline your two months there.
The most intense aspect is the possibility of very public failure. It’s a really good experience. I think artists come in there with that expectation, that’s what’s special about it for the public, too— you get to see the art process in a different light. Things are unfinished, and that’s okay. It can be about the conversation.

WK: What would you do if you had an infinite budget?

JM: [A long pause] I always wanted to do things with the city. I had the idea of catapulting things from Brooklyn to New Jersey over Manhattan...

I wanted to build a dirigible that was a full-sized upside-down version of the Empire State Building and have it dock at the real Empire State Building. A reflected image with their spires touching.

WK: Another residency.

JM: We can call Creative Time.

WK: Exactly!

**John Miserendino** (b.1980) studied architecture at Cornell University and currently lives in New York. His work is primarily concerned with the development of alternative forms of collaboration. He has exhibited in a variety of venues including the Lille Biennale, the Istanbul Biennale, Recess Art and MoMA in New York. You can see the ‘Stalking Balzacs’ this month at the annual Recess Benefit.

Whitney Kimball is a New York-based art writer and a senior editor for the blog Art F City

Celebrate Recess’ four years of ambitious artists’ projects at **Four More Years: Recess Benefit 2013** on May 28th at (Le) Poisson Rouge. The evening will feature a musical performance by TECLA, DJ sets by DJ Marty McSorley and DJ AJ Slim, artist performances by Elia Alba and Jacoby Satterwhite, artist installations by Zach Gage and John Miserendino, and an editioned benefit print by David Horvitz. Purchase tickets [here](#).