There is no art without you. There is no art world without you. You have given up rights you probably do not know exist. Perhaps you think that you have freedom in your art. But you definitely have no freedom or rights or controls after you make your art,” wrote agitator, curator, and one-time gallery owner Seth Siegelaub in his appeal to artists in 1970. This would soon become the basis of the “Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement,” otherwise known as the “Artist’s Contract,” drafted in 1971 by Siegelaub with the help of a lawyer. It was meant to help artists maintain relative control of their artwork once it was out of their hands and to ensure that they monetarily benefit from any resale. Despite Siegelaub’s efforts to advertise and promote its use, only a few artists—most notably Hans Haacke—were willing to stake their careers on it.

This month, Maxwell Graham is using the contract as the starting point for a group show at his gallery, Essex Street, located on Manhattan’s Lower East Side (though the gallery is no longer on Essex—it is now on Eldridge Street). “All the works will be on sale, and we will offer the contract for the sale of each work,” Graham said. The show was inspired by his own artists, such as Cameron Rowland, who has successfully demanded that some of his art be only for loan, and by “the current state of affairs in the art market” where artists’ voices have been obliterated. It will include a mixture of his artists and more established names, all of whom see their responsibility as extending beyond merely making objects for shows.

With artists eager to speak for themselves, Graham has decided to step in. “The contract is an aid to raise awareness of artists’ rights and reorient the conversation away from the numbers of the art market.” He does not feel that his efforts contradict his role as a dealer. “It’s a way to own up to some of my responsibility,” he says. “What can I do to help challenge the predominant mode of the art world now?” And, he adds, “hopefully it will be a good art show.”