

# DO NOT TOUCH

A Clash Between Art and Audience

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## Introduction

The touch has always been present in my way of coping with the world. I use my hands and keep them busy, even while I think and talk. In my thesis I would like to focus on the touch and how it is perceived by the artist, the artwork, the audience and art institutions. Touch not only as direct physical contact, but also as a full body experience you get when you encounter or are involved with artworks.

During my research, I have reflected on my own making and how people interact with my work. It aroused a curiosity concerning control and freedom, relating to interaction, audience and artwork. Did they do what they were supposed to do? Do I want art to consist of 'supposed to'? Can I as an artist control the course of events and have a target group? How can I show that you are allowed to touch, without writing it explicitly? I have been making text pieces, where the fragile paper meant that few actually read the texts. As well as sculptural pieces suggesting interaction, like a dog stick rental, ending up standing more as a monument than as

an interactive sculpture. I was invited to do a project in a beach house on the Dutch island Texel, located between the North and Wadden Sea. I collected sticks from all parts of the island, which had clear tooth marks from dogs. Besides the sticks, there were also a catalogue and a machine with food to your dog. It was a rental place, without any suggestions of money or guidelines. It only said 50 cent on the dog food dispenser.



Photo: Rikke Goldbech, Lucky Log, 2016

So what is it? Where is my research interest? The audience – and the relation between senses and perception: to bring that notion to a cultural and societal perspective, to look at heritage and history and our behaviour towards art. I make art so people, or in the above-mentioned case, dogs will have an experience that they wouldn't have had if I were not here. But what they get is not completely in my control; they also get what they need, when they put my work into the context of their world. I would also like to discuss in my thesis what the different interactivities, intended or not by the artist, produce as an effect on the viewer, in hopes of creating a better understanding of the potential harmonious roles of artworks and audience.

## Preserve the Moment

This chapter will look at the poster as an arbitrary object, a collectible, a flag, a performative gesture and end up at the idea of 'Art's Birthday'.

When you see a stack of posters in an exhibition, it is for most people a clear message to take one home. You can touch it, roll it or fold it, so the picture gets visible lines when you hang it on your wall. Or simply forget about it, rolled up in a corner of the living room, collecting dust and cobwebs as a reminder during the weekly cleaning that time is passing, and you still don't know what to do with this piece of art. Is it an art piece? The value is low, you got it for free, and there are an endless number of prints. But why did you take it in the first place? Just because you could? Does it have to do with greed? Is it a way to show that you are interested in the work? Or a way to get involved and bring a little piece of the exhibition with you home?

I don't know the reasoning from the artist's perspective to place a stack of posters in

their exhibitions. I guess there would be tons of different reasons. I will shortly look at some examples of how the poster can be used in and outside of the exhibition space. Sometimes the poster can be representing one of the works from the exhibition. The headwork of the show: the one that sums it all up.



Photo: Anders Sune Berg. SUPERFLEX, Foreigners, please don't leave us alone with the Danes, 2002

Back in December 2013 I visited a retrospective exhibition by SUPERFLEX<sup>1</sup> at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, in Copenhagen. The poster to sum up that show was initially made as a poster in 2002. The artist group had back then hung the poster in both Denmark and Sweden as part of the exhibition The Global Complex, in O.K. Centrum für Gegenwartskunst in Linz, Austria. The piece has multiple times simultaneously worked as a wall painting in an exhibition space as well as posters in the public space, or for the audience to take with them. SUPERFLEX describes their projects as tools. And says that: “A tool is a model or proposal that can actively be used and further utilised and modified by the user.”<sup>2</sup>

*1 SUPERFLEX is an artists' group founded in 1993 by Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Nielsen and Bjørnstjerne Christiansen.*

*2 <http://www.superflex.net/information/>*

In this example the tool is the poster, which can be used as the group meant it to be; to oppose the rightwing policy in Denmark, or utilized in a way which fits better to the person hanging it, passing it, or modifying it on the street.



Photo: SUPERFLEX, Foreigners, please don't leave us alone with the Danes, 2002

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The poster is signifying the internal fight in Denmark between nationalism and globalism, which more than once have had border-crossing effects. The Danish flag is normally used for birthdays and other celebrations, but since the National Party used the flag in their logo, there has been a fight for the symbol of the flag. I see this poster as a way of taking back Denmark from the National Party. The poster has, in the best merchandise style, managed to become a new symbol, a new flag.



Photo: SUPERFLEX, Foreigners, please don't leave us alone with the Danes, 2002

Zooming in on the visitor, bending down and rolling up a poster: a collector at hunt. The practice of collecting is a basic human desire. It can be found in every society from ancient to modern times. With an anthropological approach you can get an insight into collectors and their relationship to the world they are living in. The collected object can have multiple functions for the collector but I will here only see the poster in the light of a 'souvenir hypothesis'.

An exhibition is a bodily experience; you will, in your understanding of the place and the pieces, have to define yourself in relation to the artworks and surroundings. This notion is also essential if you look into Nicolas Bourriaud and his term criterion of coexistence. Bourriaud's ideas about relational aesthetics from 1998, gave a new view on the relation between art and audience. "Relational aesthetics tries to decode or understand the type of relations to the viewer produced by the work of art."<sup>3</sup> Is the artwork giving you space to exist in

*3 Simpson, Bennett: Public Relations An Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud , Published in ArtForum, April 2001*

front of it, and to complete the experience yourself? Or is it denying you to be a part of its structure, with no holes to fill out?

The exhibition is also a bodily experience in the sense that it is only materialising in our brains, and the experience depends on our mood and company. It is an event, which is impossible to repeat. If you see the same exhibition once more, it will be a new experience coming from the current conditions. But that also means that as soon as we leave the space the moment is gone. In an attempt to keep the moment and to expand the experience to be more than a here and now encounter you can use the souvenir. Susan Stewart describes these kinds of events, where the souvenir is most needed as "...events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative."<sup>4</sup> The souvenir is an object of looking back, of nostalgia and the fear of letting go. It is a substitute, an incomplete sample of the now distanced

<sup>4</sup> Susan Stewart, *On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1993, page 135.

experience, an experience which can never fully be reproduced. The narrative connected to the souvenir is the possessor's narrative and will therefore only be a substitute for that possessor.

I like the stack of posters as a work of interactive performance, without directing too much attention to the act of you being a part of it. You will form a pattern, a wave. You will flow through the city with your own agenda. And at the same time using the public space for more than just you. You will without awareness take over space and thoughts. The lady next to you will look at you and think: What is this? Why does everybody walk around with a roll? We can name it, **the power of oddness**. In this case for the unknowing viewer it is caused by the appearance of too many similar objects in the same arbitrary place. Without having a clear connection to the objects or locations, the lady will start making her own assumptions, imaginations or pieces of art in her mind. The performance piece has a short lifetime,

as the density of people walking around with posters will quickly vanish, along with the performance piece.

The stack of posters can be seen as both a form of exchange and division. You get a poster and you give time and space in return. Both parties give a bit of themselves as well as a bit of an overview on the contemporary society, movements and ways of behaving in the public. The division makes a bigger whole than the stack of posters themselves, as they spread around the city and shape themselves in new constellations. It is difficult not to see the poster in the light of commercial marketing, as a form of teaser to get people to visit the show. The poster can become split from the original work and make a division into two alternative artworks. The performance, you are walking now, and the trailer to the show.

You walk by the big copper sculpture in the square, which is only touched by the pigeons. Your poster is sticking out of your

backpack and somehow it makes you think of the tradition of materialisation in art. How it is connected to the way you interact with art. The tradition of monuments: of art being materialised in hard and expensive materials. It is a cultural agreement of not intervening. You keep a reverent distance, which can be confusing when you walk from the museums collection to the contemporary exhibition. Children of divorced parents know the rules with mum and dad are different, and I believe that we know it as well, when we step from the collection into the current exhibition.

So why do we keep using outdated cultural manners? Can we soon agree that it is okay to laugh at art, if it is funny? Our behaviour is often not fitting to the contemporary art pieces in the show we are visiting. Behaving in silence and calm is good behaviour; thinking of your surroundings and people around you is not the problem. Not trying, touching and talking, about and with art, if art lets you do so, is an obstruction to get closer to art. But maybe the time has still

not come to a point where we can wash away the fearful behaviour towards art? You don't want to fall through, and look like an uneducated idiot, so instead you stay with the right distance to the art piece and nod slowly your head up and down.

When art became more conceptual and the materialisation didn't need to be made of hard stone, but could instead be a thought. Art became freer and closer to the people watching. Everyone could use the concepts, fill in the gaps, or be a part of the happening. I don't know how the audience acted in museums in the 60's; maybe the nodding increased, or some even started to shake their heads, unafraid of saying out loud that this is not art, but a bunch of idiots taking our time and money.

Robert Filliou (1926-1987) was a French conceptual artist, working in a way where the border between artist, artwork and audience were difficult to divide. He worked among others with the notion of telepathy.

His work Telepathic Music No. 2, from 1973 consists of a description as well as all the minds of the participants.

Filliou's idea of permanent creation is essential for his way of working. It is an art practice in close relation to daily life. He wanted to free the art from the institutions and eliminate the division between artist and audience. In a constant search for self-renewal permanent creation is often happening through exchange and collaboration. Filliou's playfulness can to some degree be present in all his projects. A good example is the ongoing project, Art's Birthday. Filliou declared a holiday back in 1963, Art's Birthday. Everybody should be off making art and eating cake. The holiday should each year expand with one extra day of celebration until every day will be Art's Birthday. Filliou suggested that it all started one million years ago, on the 17th of January, when a man dropped a dry sponge in a bucket of water and Art was born.



# CORRESPONDENCE POEMS

*Robert Filliou, Coco Gordon, Ayun Halliday, Marilyn R. Rosenberg,  
Chuck Welch, Willie Marlowe, and Dick Higgins*

## Telepathic Music No. 2

*Robert Filliou*

Dedicated but not limited to those Canadian members of the Eternal Network: Véhicule, Montreal; General Idea, Toronto; W.O.R.K.S., Calgary; Image Bank, Vancouver, and to Arman and to Corice, 380 W. Broadway, N.Y.C., R. Filliou

CONCENTRATING SILENTLY  
SEND WAVES OF

GREETINGS  
WEATHERLUCK  
MANLUCK  
WOMANLUCK

TO ANY OR ALL OF THE MEMBERS  
OF THE ETERNAL NETWORK THE  
WORLD AROUND

Duration: a split second to all day or all night or all day and night (all days and nights)

Performance Note: no proof of reaching or benefiting is necessary. Knowing yourself, suspecting others, to be performers of Telepathic Music is sufficient.

Suggested by Robert Filliou, ADA-Aktionen der Avantgarde Berlin 1973, as part of Research on the Eternal Network.\*

\* Poem courtesy of Hood Museum of Art, Flaxus Collection, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.

In his work 7 Childlike Uses of Warlike Material, from 1970, dymo labels are suggesting what you see. On the overturned chair it says 'could be mountains'. As in many of his works he is playing with the roles of the signifier and the signified and offering a potential for it to be otherwise.

So where do we stand today? How do we look at art? As a cultural burden, we need to visit once in a while, to show some respect and decency? Or as a fruitful building block we can approach so it makes sense both for the past and present?

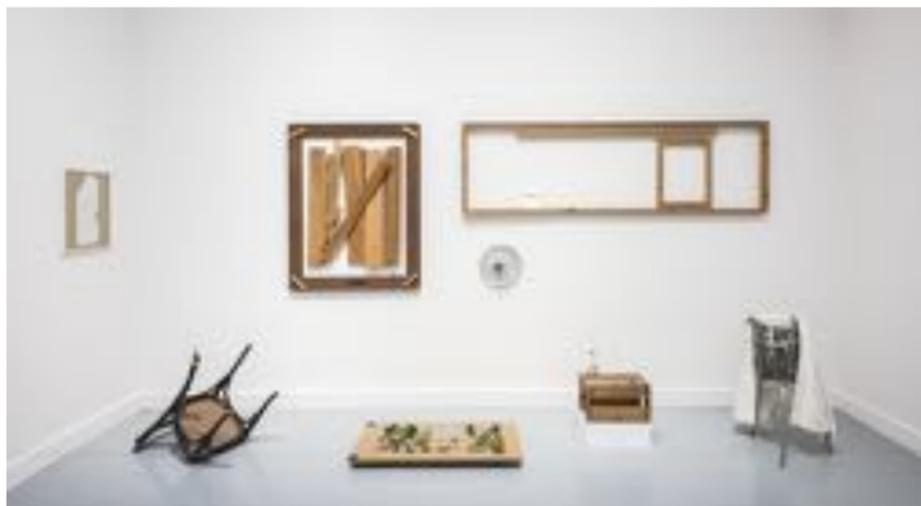


Photo: Robert Filliou, 7 Childlike Uses of Warlike Material, 1970

## Modes of Interactivity

With John Berger's deep calming voice in mind, I will take you through a fictive museum with different works and various ways of interactivity<sup>5</sup>. During the walk I will jump to already existing places and use them as examples.

When you walk into the exhibition space you try to grasp the atmosphere of the place you have just entered. What are the rules and guidelines? Are you allowed to lean against the wall, use your camera or eat your lunch in the hallway? You need to track something down, as fluid as a behaviour, something between cultural differences and the philosophy of the attitude towards art. When you travel around the world, you start to notice the different approaches of exhibiting.

In January 2016 I visited the K20 in Düsseldorf to see the Agnes Martin exhibition. While I was experiencing her life from a video, I leaned against the wall, I was immediately informed by a custodian not to do so.

5 John Peter Berger (1926–2017), British art critic, novelist, painter, poet and screenwriter.

If you drive half an hour southwest to visit Museum Insel Hombroich the atmosphere is totally different. There are no guards, the paintings are hanging lower than in standard museums and the unpeeled potatoes and rye bread in the cafeteria tells you that this is a museum for the people. You can walk around for hours, shifting between nature and art.

When you are back in the typical museum you try not only to understand the small images written on the door, 'no umbrellas' – you are also trying to understand your role in relation to the art pieces. What can I allow myself in this space? Should I leave all my things in the locker? How is the art placed in relation to the space and the audiences walking paths?

You feel good; you feel that you are allowed to be in the space. You feel that the exhibition is for you. A sculpture welcomes you as you enter the first room. It is activated every time someone pushes a button. Probably

because of the feeling you get from being in the exhibition space, you walk without hesitating towards the sculpture and give the button a push. It gives you a clear role, your position in the space and your relation to the artwork, is defined by the artist. The button is here, so that is where you stand. The piece is dependant on you, but still having its own "Stilleben" when you don't activate it. It is a controlled relationship, with no surprises. Activate, activate, bored. Going from fascination: how is it possible, how does it work, to a shrug of the shoulders.



Photo: Rikke Goldbech, installation view, Jean Tinguely, The Stedelijk Museum

I remember when I was a child, the permanent collection at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, in Denmark, had a work where you could push a button and a canon started to move. It was exciting and scary at the same time, could it go out of control and roll me over?

I remember we went there with the kindergarten and I showed the other children how to push the button. It was as if I knew of the machine's secret, and could cunningly make it move.

So when today, as an adult, I push the button of Jean Tinguely's sculptures, it both brings me back to that moment of innocent childhood and makes me see his works with an artist's eyes.



DIT WERK IS MOMENTEEL BUITEN  
GEBRUIK. WE WERKEN AAN EEN  
OPLOSSING.  
ONZE EXCUSES.

THIS WORK IS TEMPORARILY OUT  
OF ORDER. WE ARE WORKING ON  
A SOLUTION.  
OUR APOLOGIES.

Photo: Rikke Goldbech, detail of installation view, Jean Tinguely, The Stedelijk Museum

In November 2016 I saw the Jean Tinguely exhibition at The Stedelijk Museum. I couldn't help seeing the complications of showing a lot of his works together. All the details and uniqueness of his works disappeared when they were lined up like a platoon of soldiers.

The "Stilleben", the non-activated sculpture, which is normally an interesting piece in itself, was gone. They were standing on wooden pedestals to hide electronics and machinery, which is a part of the work and therefore fits more than newly cut wood do.

The placements of the sculptures made me lose interest. Since all the pieces need resting time not to break down, I also lost my patience, when I needed to look at the bad instalments for a long time, before I could activate the sculptures.

The whole show became somehow more a task of running around from room to room, following the sound to catch a glimpse of the exhibition in the 15 seconds it was lasting.



Photo: Rikke Goldbech, detail of installation view, Jean Tinguely, The Stedelijk Museum

The long gaps of time without any activation become more dominant than the short time periods where sculptures are activated. The silent intervals don't manage to expand tension and focus. I see it mainly because of the sculptures being alienated to the space they are in, without any ability to create a narrative around them. I felt that the focus was moved away from the art and interacting with the art, to be more about the interaction with the audience members. It could be because of the audience's capability to fit the demystified museum space, becoming the walking sculptures, fitting to the non-mechanic settings. Looking at the human behaviour and the fight of being the first to push the button.

The only room making a somewhat engaging atmosphere was the last room, in which the light was dimmed and the walls were dark. The row of sculptures were activated at once and became one work both because of that, and because of the whole scenery working as one big installation.

Back in the fictive museum, you leave the room to enter the next. You encounter a piece where you, the audience, are the maker. You are invited to use the given material and fill in the already given concept. The main part of the work is the concept. It can in some cases be less visually pleasing than the non-activated sculptures. The relationship is defined but still free for interpretations, nobody is stopping you. It gives the viewer another role, a role of a maker, an artist. It is in the same line as Joseph Beuys, 'everybody is an artist'. Except that the relationship here is still uneven, since the concept making is not for the viewer. It is like a colouring book, where you can fill in the blank spaces and nothing more. It is hands on, but in a very different way than in the next room where you are allowed to touch pre-existing artworks.

In the summer of 2016 I saw an exhibition at Kovács Margit Kerámiamúzeum in Szentendre, Hungary.

Margit Kovács was a Hungarian ceramist



Photo: Rikke Goldbech, detail of installation view, Kovács Margit Kerámiamúzeum

and sculptor. In a room, sculptures from different periods of her career, were on display for touching. The pieces were glued to the surface so by touching them they wouldn't fall. My father, who is a tactile-kinesthetic person, claimed that he would never forget how the sculptures felt and looked like.

Perception by the sense of touch is of course different from person to person. Howard Gardner's 'Theory of Multiple Intelligences' states the fact that humans have several different ways of processing information and that these ways are relatively independent of one another.<sup>6</sup>

I think it is important to see all aspects of a human being and to not only focus on the ability to fit into the already given frameworks of a capitalist society. By only focusing on these qualities a lot of individual potential can be lost.

The problem with the theory is, that the divisions of the categories are too black and white. Gardner himself has also endorsed the

<sup>6</sup> Howard Gardner (1943–), is an American developmental psychologist, most known for his *Theory of multiple intelligences*.

lack of certain aspects and has added more categories over time. Gardner's theories are essential in the way we understand our perception of human beings. Gardner differs the intelligence with ways of learning, as it is not necessarily the bodily-kinesthetic intelligent people who understand the world best through touch and movement. We have different ways of receiving the world in the best possible matters. For my father the touching experience was essential to remember the work and making it into a bodily experience. For others it will perhaps be more of an investigation in the making or the wow factor that you can actually touch a real art piece. By making the decision to show the work in a touch room, the artist and the artworks become closer to the audience in an intimate way. A lot of art pieces are handmade, especially ceramics, so it makes sense to perceive them through hands in a hand-to-hand experience.

In the next room you enter, a spotlight is pointing at a book on a black sloping surface



Photo: Rikke Goldbech, detail of installation view, Kovács Margit Kerámiamúzeum

with white gloves next to it. You don't really feel like putting on the gloves. It makes your senses numb, your fingers clumsy and it takes away your interest in the piece itself. The book as a format is an intimate one to one experience. You can flip through it at your own pace without thinking about standing in the way for other audience. It is a hand piece, meant for the hands, the book, the zine and the catalogue. But how do you treat them in your bag? With the different visual languages; will you more likely crumple the zine in the bottom of your bag because of the copy machine look, and treat the book better because of its hard cover?

The catalogue could be considered a piece of art in itself, or as pure documentation, preserving in and of the now. The catalogue is placing itself in the context and making a forum where the time, space and content can be discussed among curators, artists and critics.



Photo: Haupt & Binder, detail of installation view, Rabih Mroué, The Pixelated Revolution, 2012

In Rabih Mroué's work *The Pixelated Revolution*, Mroué used videos from the Syrian Revolution filmed with mobile phones. He downloaded the footage from the Internet. In the videos you see panning through the city until the camera operator has eye contact with a sniper, who shoots and kills the person filming, while the phone is dropped but still recording.

Mroué made the videos into flipbooks presented together with the original sounds. To make the visitors aware what to do, a short description was placed next to the work saying: "To watch the video, press the button and flick through the flipbook. Match the pace of the images to the audio." Furthermore you can see the URL of the video, title, date and duration.

I have seen the work both at Documenta 13 in Kassel, 2012 and in Museum Tot Zover in Amsterdam, 2014. Tot Zover is a museum placed in a graveyard with only exhibitions about death.

The theatrical setting from Documenta

with spotlights and blue ink underneath each flipbook, were as I remember it, less or even left out at Tot Zover. Even though Tot Zover is in a graveyard and focusing on death, the instalment was not as intense as at Documenta. Perhaps this was because the exhibition was spread out and showed in a hallway space, with light coming in through the windows. The blue ink from Documenta seems to be an indicator for the audience to be aware of the dirty hands war can give, and reminds one of an investigation or crime scene. I am happy that the ink was left out at Tot Zover.

For me it is an unnecessary layer, which takes away the focus from the interesting parts of the work; the modification of the media, the tangibility of taking the book in your hands, wanting to flip it, even though you already know the ending from the front page. The ink somehow became too literal and kills the poetry, as the installation with time starts to look like a public toilet with tags on all of the walls. The interaction of the audience before me becomes disturbing

for the experience I am having. I don't know what Rabih Mroué intended, and in a way it doesn't matter once the installation is activated and out of his control. People may interact in ways the artist didn't think of and this can be taken into consideration for their next instalment. Do I want people to leave fingerprints? Should there be fingerprints to begin with? Should the flipbook be changed often enough to not have visible lines of flipping? Things, which look nice, are also treated better than things in a terrible condition. In interactive art, is the choice of maintenance an important part of a work: if time and nature must take its course, or if the work should be prevented from damage and decay?



Photo: KUNSTUNDGUT, detail of installation view, Rabih Mroué, The Pixelated Revolution, 2012

## The Artist, The Artwork and The Audience

# Encouraged Participation

I will in this chapter talk about performance art in the form of encouraged participation. In this genre, the performance is coming to place as an invitation, an order or as an invisible gesture and is made by and in the meeting with the audience.

Christian Falsnaes is a Danish artist, who lives and works in Berlin. Falsnaes uses the audience as material, playing with authoritarian commanding orders, leading to violence, rebellion and border crossing behaviour. His work would not exist without the mass as he uses social experimentation as a tool. His performances can create a mob mentality, such as making the participants destroy a gallery space, or inducing submissive behaviour in situations of direct orders. The audience can walk away with a feeling of being used and need to rethink their identity – would I really go that far if it wasn't art?

In his work *First* from 2016, each day the first visitor at the exhibition, was filmed

while following a series of instructions. The film was shown the entire day and deleted when the exhibition closed for the day. The process was repeated every day.



Photo: installation view, Christian Falsnaes, First, 2016

How do you define yourself in relation to the artwork if you are the piece itself? The bodily experience approaches a new degree when you find yourself in front of the camera obeying orders, just because you went a bit early to see an exhibition. Let's call it **residual realism**. You are in a here and now, being yourself, but also being an object, being in the process of becoming an artwork. Your reality is becoming a leftover, a product, entertainment. You are being materialised into art, and need to forget your own reality for a moment. Your body can be seen as a shell, slowly being filled with the artist's content. Your involvement is making the piece but it is also reducing you to a concept. Where correlationism is relating ourselves and others to objects, residual realism is being the object. Our reality and being can be summed up as a narrative of this one event. This is what you are. The confrontation is perhaps the biggest for you, when you see yourself as the artwork and not as the person you believe you are.

The audience perceives you as not only being the First, and but also as being one of them.

When looking at contemporary art from another angle than through relational aesthetics and correlationism, it can be interesting to bring in Suhail Malik.<sup>7</sup> Malik's work is part of the rather new family of speculative realism.<sup>8</sup> Speculative realism is a philosophy of being able to see the world completely objectively. To see artworks with a speculative realist view would be to see the artworks in relation to themselves, without giving the human any particular privileges. Speculative realism is the real without human distortion, only rational thought. But how can thought exist if the human is not taken into consideration? This anthropoless way of seeing the world can create an art which acknowledges what has never been experienced. Did the tree fall in the forest? In contrast, within the democratic time we live in now, with a strong desire to comment, the audience's interpretation and reception of art is inevitable and encouraged. This can

*7 Suhail Malik is a writer and co-director of the MFA Fine Art and Reader in Critical Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London*

*8 Speculative Realism is a movement in contemporary philosophy that defines itself loosely in its stance of metaphysical realism against the dominant forms of post-Kantian philosophy. Speculative Realism takes its name from a conference held at Goldsmiths College, University of London in April 2007*

have an effect on the artist's voice, and can contribute to the loss of the artist's meaning making. The meaning in contemporary art is made in the encounter. Artwork, audience, art institute and artist exist in a tangle of arrows. Malik wants to challenge art and place it on a step past contemporary art. He wants an art, which exists without aesthetic experience as the condition, this is 'another art than the contemporary art', he says. This form of art will somehow take art back to materiality, but in an even purer way than when the man on the horse was made. The objects will stand by themselves no matter what happens to them.

Stefan Heidenreich<sup>9</sup> sees contemporary art as already being in the state of never being experienced. He brings a focus to Post-Internet Art, art shown only from a browser and the phenomena of Freeport. Freeport is storage space, free of customs duties and taxes of all kinds. The artwork can go directly from the artist's studio to the storage without being exhibited or shown to anyone.

*9 Stefan Heidenreich is a writer and theoretician based in Berlin. Currently, he teaches art theory at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf.*

If you strip the artwork from interpretation and experience the point of exhibiting it becomes completely empty. The artwork will be an object for the object's sake. It can "...live for an indefinite amount of time in eternal darkness without losing its real existence."<sup>10</sup> The collector, will own it, increasing the value the more it is out of sight. The risk of damage is as low as it can get, in a totally controlled environment: a money machine, a trophy, a collectible.

From an Anti-correlationism point of view the Freeport is ideal. It frees the "...art from aesthetic considerations and the involvement of a beholder. Under these ideological premises the existence of an artwork requires neither human perception nor consciousness."<sup>11</sup> In this terminology this is the only way to do justice to objects. We live in a time of storage. Before you showed your wealth by displaying your paintings in big golden frames. Today you have the capacity to store everything. It has an impact on the art world as well as

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Heidenreich, *Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism, Part II, e-flux, Journal #73, May 2016*

<sup>11</sup> Stefan Heidenreich, *Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism, Part II*

everything else and can create an opposition, which will bring new ways of showing and experiencing art. Confronting the increased value of non-exhibited artworks fitting to the requirements of Freeportism. This is an interesting discussion, however I will not go further into here.



Photo: Olia Lialina, Summer, 2013

To give a brief example of a browser artwork, I would like to use Olia Lialina. The audience or users' experience, as it is called in the world of technology, is slightly different every time the artwork is opened. It depends on the speed of the Internet, if all the websites are working and if the link between them is going smoothly.

Olia Lialina is in her work *Summer* from 2013, swinging from a playground swing attached to the top of the browser window.<sup>12</sup>

As long as Lialina has support to run the 21 websites where the images are uploaded, the artwork will exist. It is not closed off as a Freepart, but is as liberated as the Internet gets. It is in the same category as Open Source, where the artists can free themselves from the market and are able to show works without any physical exhibition space.

To return to a more physical experience, I will bring you back to a performance piece, which took place in 2013 at Studium Generale when artist Ei Arakawa visited The Gerrit Rietveld Academie.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <http://art.teleportacia.org/olia/summer/>

<sup>13</sup> Ei Arakawa is one of the two founders of Green Tea Gallery (Ei and Tomoo Arakawa, aka United Brothers)

He brought with him radishes, which were farmed 60 km south from Fukushima. We were told the highest exposed areas were in North. His mother, who lived there, had sent the radishes by DHL. Ei Arakawa told the audience that his mother and brother had been eating the radishes and that he will now also eat the Yum Yum soup made with the radishes.<sup>14</sup>

It was up to the audience if they wanted to eat the soup or not. The artist's performance style of running around like a confused child, gave a light and silly tone to the serious debate about radiation and the governments truth telling.

*14 "Yum Yum Vibe & Lost Love" by the mobile platform Green Tea Gallery, musician and composer Stefan Tcherepnin & artist and chef Hanna Törnudd, Amsterdam 13th of March 2013.*

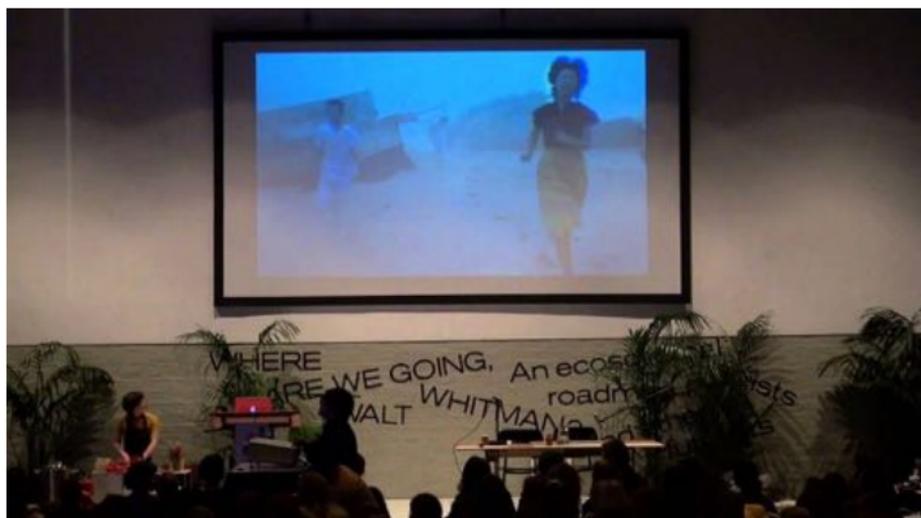


Photo: Yum Yum Vibe & Lost Love, Green Tea Gallery, Stefan Tcherepnin, Hanna Törnudd, 2013

Surprisingly enough, a lot ate the soup, without realising it could be seen as a political act to do so. It was only two years after the nuclear disaster, and to this day it is still shocking how Japan dealt and deals with the disaster.

A tourist boom is normally not what happens after nuclear emission. I will not expand on cooking, as an art form but talk about this form of invisible encouraged participation, which is fitting in a terrifyingly good way to the theme of this performance. Almost lulling people to think everything is okay by taking the attention away from the signified and placing it only on the signifier. Can it be related to the residual realism, which the participant experienced earlier in this chapter? Your reality is being used by the artist, to make his point: your decision making is becoming his work. What did people actually eat that day, an artist statement, a good soup, a poisonous liquid? The artwork was made on the stage in an unavoidable confrontation with the audience.

I myself have not worked with performative interaction in that sense. I am more using my surroundings and asking people to take part in my works.

Back in May 2014, I made a project in Gelsenkirchen as a part of a bigger project called Bochumer Straße Spricht. I started a garden in a part of the city where shops were closing and life was disappearing. I asked the people of the area to bring plants together with a story. I brought a seedling of a strawberry plant, which has been in my family for generations, together with a video of my grandmother picking strawberries from the very same mother plant. The garden slowly took form from all the help, plants and stories I got from the local residents. I decided not to make any documentation of the work while I was there. I was all the time interacting with the audience/makers, and my role was a big part of the project, which I didn't want to ruin with a camera. Afterwards I asked all the people participating in Bochumer Straße Spricht for documentation and I made a

Tumblr with all the inputs I received. Long after I left the project people have continued sending me footage, from then and now.

My work wouldn't have been the same if people hadn't joined with plants, stories, company, food and help in all kinds of ways. As with the performance pieces I have mentioned in this chapter it wouldn't have been the same without an active audience. To use the audience as ones material can leave questions such as exploitation, occupying of freewill and peer pressure. It does not always mean that the audience needs to leave their comfort zones to become art. Maybe it helps? The audience's participation gives them a strong bodily experience, in a way which they will never forget the work.



Photo: Caroline Marin, detail of installation view, Rikke Goldbech, Ükodorp, 2014



## Captured in Artworks

In this chapter I will focus on artworks where the audience's pure presence will make them a part of the artwork. And further more have a look at pieces where the artworks will not be the same or even existing if the audience wasn't there.

In yet another category of interactive works, you as the audience take part in the work, but in a discrete way, where your pure presence gets to be part of the work. Your own presence becomes central, when you, by being the spectator, become part of the work. This can of course count for non-interactive works as well. The other audience members, visiting at the same time as you, become a part of your total experience. In the Storm Room, from 2009, by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, all the people seeing the work at the same time as you are going to be part of the work you see. You are in the storm together with the arbitrary group who happened to be in the same space and time as you. No matter if you like it or not, it will effect the work itself. The little girl,

being a bit afraid, commenting live like a sport reporter on all the deeds happening around her as a way to cope and understand the whole setting, and repeatedly saying out loud that she is aware that it is just a simulation. She both breaks the illusion and makes it so much stronger, because you as an adult can pretend to play along and forget you are in a museum. She as a child can pretend to not play along, making you aware that reality is made in your mind and can be hard to always control.



Photo: CARDIFF & MILLER, installation view, Janet Cardiff, George Bures Miller, Storm Room, 2009



Photo: CARDIFF & MILLER, detail of installation view, Janet Cardiff, George Bures Miller, Alter Bahnhof Video Walk, 2012

In *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, from 2012, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller are again questioning the reality and our surroundings. You are walking around with an ipod, wearing headphones, looking at the video on the screen, which is filmed in the same settings as you are walking right now. Is the dog barking in your headphones or is it right next to your legs? While you are following the story on the ipod, millions of stories are taking place right next to you. You become a story in a story whilst walking around in the central station. It becomes an interactive performance, in the public space where you are swaddled in the power of oddness by all the people unfamiliar with Documenta.

Are you filming? Are you watching now or then? You become the poster in the backpack floating around for public exposure as a sign of your time. This time you blend in with the rest of the public who are not experiencing the artwork, perhaps they are calling grandmother, watching the game from last night or simply recording a video



Photo: Félix González-Torres, Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991

of all the people walking around in Alter Bahnhof Video Walk.

To take the presence of you as an audience member to a slightly more interactive place, I would like to discuss works where the interaction is not explicit. I will look at cases where your own actions towards the piece will actually be a part of the piece itself.

In the work *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, from 1991, by Félix González-Torres, a pile of candy is welcoming the visitor. But do you dare to take a piece? Or do you wait and see what others are doing? Or do you fill your hands and pockets as soon as you get the chance and the museum guard is gone? Our behaviour in relation to the artwork becomes essential. It questions our role with authority, as we break the agreement of not touching. The matter of moderation, our relationship to the work of art and the art institutions in general, is also central to this work.

When you know the pile of candy is starting out as the same weight as Gonzalez- Torres' lover Ross Laycock's ideal weight, you can see the reference to Jesus and how eating his flesh brings eternal life, and makes you raise upon the last day. Gonzalez- Torres made the work in 1991, the same year as Ross Laycock's death. No matter if you see the candy or the human behind it, the interpretation of rebirth and vanishing are strong aspects in the work. It will disappear but become something else. The interaction occurs, an interaction with the authority of death. Will the fact that it is art or the fact that it is flesh make you keep your hands behind your back while your head slowly encounters the work on its own? Which powers are the strongest? Not to interact with art or not to interact with death? Or will your sweet tooth forget about art and death for a moment to fill your hands, mouth and pockets?

In Yoko Ono's work *Wish Tree* there is no doubt about whether you can touch it or not. It comes with the instruction: "Make a wish. Write it down on a piece of paper. Fold it and tie it around a branch of a *Wish Tree*. Ask your friends to do the same. Keep wishing. Until the branches are covered with wishes." In some works the achieved self-realisation by taking action is clearer than others. In this work you need to think before writing, what do you wish for? I personally prefer works where the achieved self-realisation, is a bit more of an after-effect. Something that you realise without realising it: you will come back to it later when a reminder brings you there. In Ono's work the other is as present as you. All the wishes from people before you are acting in the wind, bringing you towards the tree and making you curious. What do other people wish for?

In many of the interactive pieces the artwork and the audience melt together and it becomes difficult to judge when the work starts and ends. Can we, the audience,



Photo: Leslie Jane Moran, Yoko Ono, Wish Tree, 1981

stretch the work by holding on to the performative act we have been doing? When does the artwork stop and the experience and memory begin? The piece of candy you took from Félix González-Torres' exhibition is melting on your tongue and soon leaving you with only an aftertaste and wrappers in your pocket. Do you need to digest before you stop performing? And what about the candy wrappers? Is it when you unwrap it, when you trash it or should it be burned at the incineration plant before your act stops? If you, after a show with Christian Falsnaes, decide to continue the riot, staying in character, are you then performing or being an offender? I find the transitions between the realities remarkable. Do we need the applause to get out of our bubble? When we, at some point, are left with the solitary memory, it is still an active act to remember. When we re-experience the act in our minds it is our own private cinema, storing the reality, the artworks and the encounters. Retelling, remaking, every single time a new creation is born.



## Hand or HARD-CORE

In this chapter I will look into how the way of exhibiting art makes a difference to the interaction and the ways in which we are approaching art. I will look at how old artworks can be exhibited in a current way and how you can exhibit your artworks without any direct human decisions.

In the fall of 2015 I went to the Museums Night in Copenhagen. In the Thorvaldsen Museum where sculptures of Bertel Thorvaldsen normally are shown, the lights were turned off.<sup>15</sup> Deep bass sounds and colourful lights greeted you as you stood in the long line outside the dominant building. At the entrance, flashlights were handed out. You could carry the light with you through the museum, to make it possible for you to see the works. It made a close one to one relationship with whatever you chose to have in your light cone: instead of slowly sliding your fingers over the surface you used the illuminated spot to get an intimate encounter. Your sight was narrowed down to details, calming you down like a horse

*15 Bertel Thorvaldsen (1797–1838), Danish-Icelandic sculptor of international fame, who spent most of his life in Italy.*

with blinders. It is a good attempt to get the audience over to the cultural burden of untouchable art and to see details and surfaces in a new light.

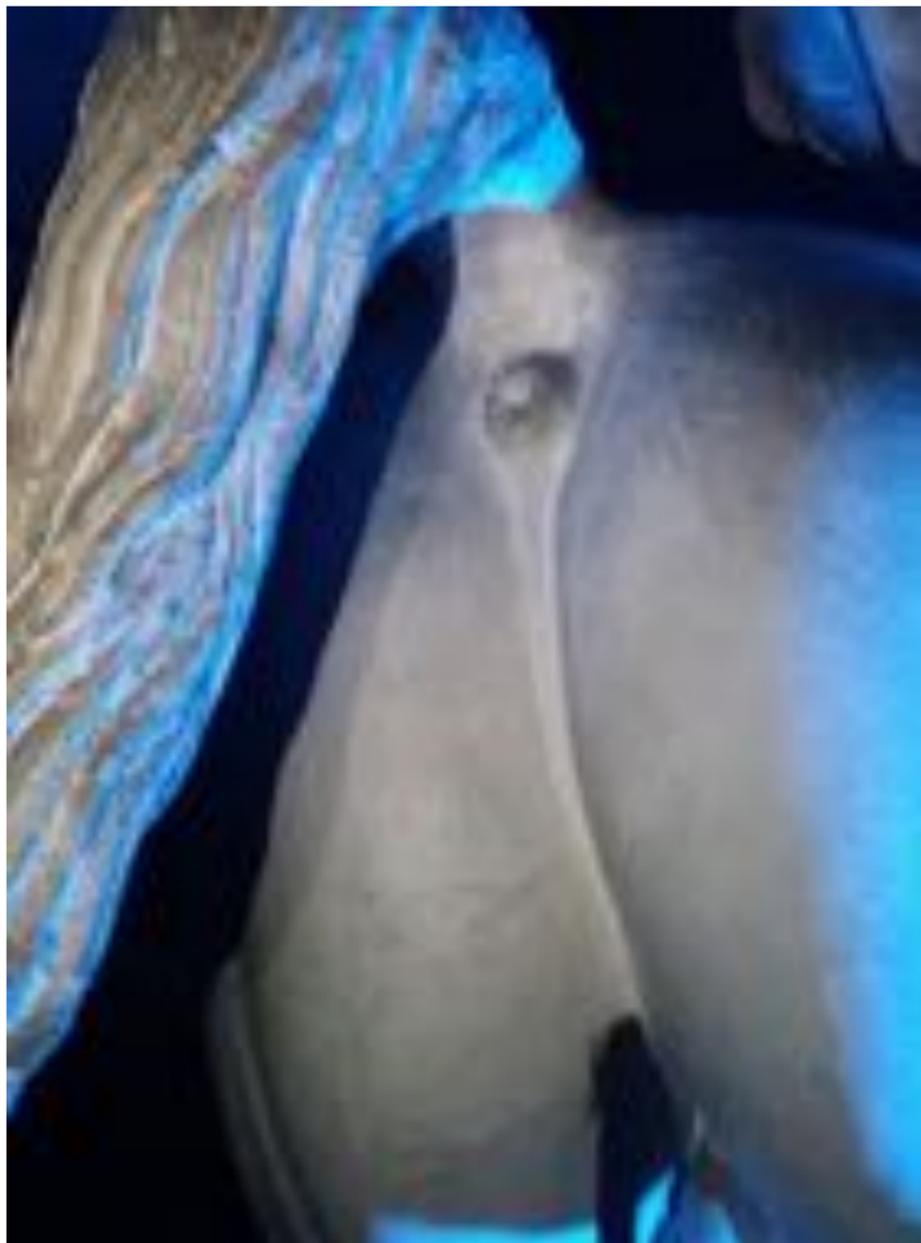


Photo: Isis Mathilde Hvitsted, Bertel Thorvaldsen, detail of Józef Poniatowski, 1826-1827

To see the full picture or to look at details are two very different ways of seeing. It can be hard to shift between the two. We slide from detail to detail, and forget the rest, or vice versa. We often don't see the details: they are just there to make the full picture. I think that our brains today use less time on details than before our society became so fast paced. With the mobile age we have lost a lot of concentration. Our attention span is now shorter than that of a goldfish.<sup>16</sup>

Since the year 2000 our average attention span has dropped from 12 to 8 seconds, whilst a goldfish has an average attention span of 9 seconds. We need to understand everything so fast that we have no time to linger. Multitasking has become better, so if you catch a funny detail, you can Snapchat it to your friends whilst trying to find the next. It is impossible to see a detail and the full picture at the same time. You can of course try to have the full picture in your memory while you are focusing on a detail. But somehow it is not really doing anything for the experience of either view.



Photo: Isis Mathilde Hvitsted, Bertel Thorvaldsen, Józef Poniatowski, 1826-1827

I think that the Museums Night at Thorvaldsen Museum was a really interesting way to bring the 19th Century into an interactive era. Calming down the people of the 21st Century with a deep bass and a flashlight. It worked on me. I slid, with my light, from detail to full sculpture, making shadows and interacting simultaneously with the magnificent architecture and audience.

Most art is made to talk in the current time it is made, some of course talk with a historical perspective or some will be prior to their time. Generally speaking contemporary art is made to be contemporary, and will after that be a window back in time. Historical art pieces can make a new entrance to the present time, when curators adapt the setting to fit both the piece and the current time. Long lasting pieces, which work on an essential level and talk in a reality which was, is and will be, can be interesting contemporary pieces throughout time.

Stefan Heidenreich elaborates on museums' function of today. It requires an effort from institutions, curators and other intellectuals to create awareness of time and history. The museums used to be the big time machines, preserving a national cultural identity and maintaining historical heritage. The focus has changed and "The absence of history becomes most visible in their focus on the "contemporary." Caught in the ever-changing presence of the now, museums have lost their function of developing a historical reserve."<sup>17</sup> The museums have gone from collection to temporary shows, and the storage can now take the function the museum used to have.

What happens if the curator of the show has nothing subjective to say about the placement, lighting and the interaction of the exhibited works? The artist-magnet HARD-CORE has made several curatorial methods, building on algorithms, totally objective and arbitrary incidence.<sup>18</sup>

In April 2016 I became a part of the magnet

*17 Stefan Heidenreich - Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism, Part II*

*18 Since 2011 HARD-CORE functions as an artist-magnet, attempting to organize and attract as many possible forces from all sides of the artistic field.*

for a couple of weeks. With guidance and lectures from HARD-CORE, we, a group of eight art students, were making our own methods for exhibiting our works. We came up with four different methods, four exhibitions in one week with the same works placed according to the day's system. To show the same work in a new way, gives you an insight that you maybe didn't have, at least not to the same degree. You are not the one thinking and deciding how the works' placement will be best. You have no control whatsoever, even though you made the system. You will never be able to figure out how it will effect your work, before you actually see it in the room: playing along with all the other works, being affected by the odd and arbitrary placement and the method.

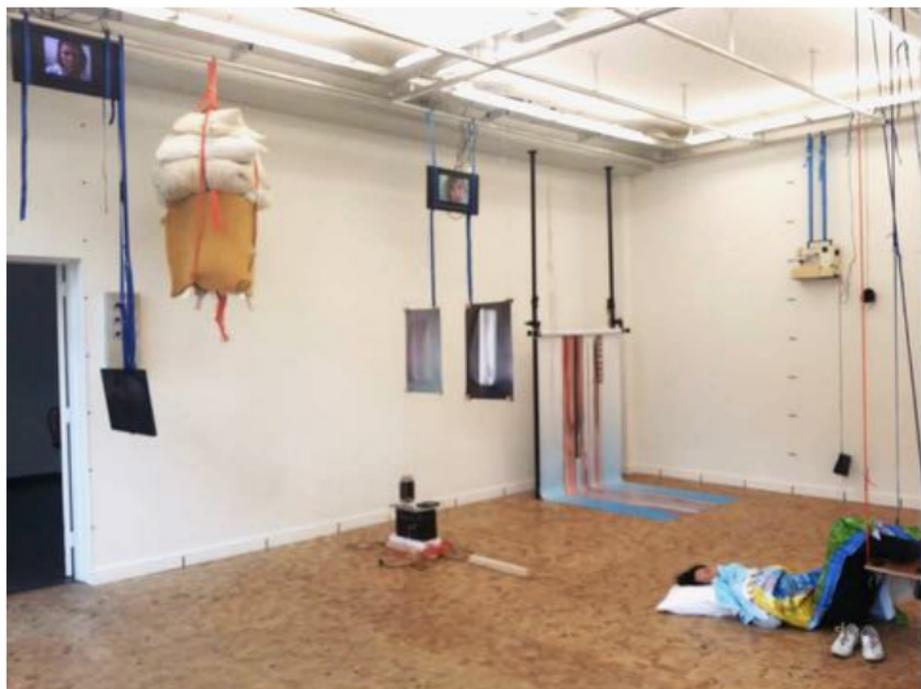


Photo: Eva Bjarnadóttir, installation view, Cut to Co-Paste, (B)ORDER, 2016

Maybe you need to use a ladder to be able to perform with your sewing machine hanging from the ceiling. Or your sculpture, which is normally on the ground, is hanging high between two screens with sound interference. You see your work from new angles and it can broaden your ideas about your work and its perfect placement. The audience could come everyday and see the new system presented on screens, take a walk around the works and maybe realise something else than the day before. I think that the playfulness and the letting go of control was visible in the exhibitions, and that the atmosphere created was an enhancement for the audiences curiosity and helping to take a step forward.

It is an interesting approach between the art and the display platform, when you create challenges to the normal showcase settings. It can bring new light to the works, encounters, placements and venues. As in the above-mentioned case, the exhibition was made from a speculative realist position,

but that attempt nevertheless opened up yet another position. A position, in which the works, could be seen in a new context every time. The changing platforms made a changing relational aesthetic and allowed coexistence to bloom in brand new ways.

## Conclusion

You walk out of the museum, stop and hold the door for a new visitor coming towards you. The sun greets you, while you start thinking about you and the space. You are tired in your head, after a long day of perceiving, but you can't let it go. The exhibition is filling your head and you hold your souvenir tight in your hand, as you sit down at a bench to digest the day. You look at it and get a bit disappointed. It looks nothing like the mess in your head: too simple and clean. You feel that you have stuff to think about for months. You feel exhausted but in a good way. The shadow from the building is moving closer. You have, during the day, tried to see the artwork from different positions. At one point like a speculative realist, with no you and no emotions: just plain material. You felt that it was easier in the collection than in the temporary show. Maybe because of your attitude towards art, with your body coming from the 20th Century with all the attention you need to give all the things around you. Your inner pace is a pace fitting to the contemporary

pace. Going in all directions and nowhere at the same time. You look at your phone: stay active, but physically still. Somebody has posted a video of an art piece from 2000, a goldfish in a blender, swimming around like they do when we have them in fish bowls.<sup>19</sup> The blender is plugged in and the audience can push the button if they dare. You start to think about how the artwork is perceived differently if the person before you had chosen to blend the fish. All of our actions are one big chain like *Der Lauf der Dinge*.<sup>20</sup> You feel it in your back like a tsunami pushing you forward. All the great history you are building on top of. What an honour to be here and be a part of this big thing. You feel like making your mark, to interact with all before and after you. You take a deep breath.

*19 Artist Marco Evaristti's piece "Helena & El Pescador" made waves because it offered viewers the choice to kill a goldfish in a blender, or let it live. Marco Evaristti (born 1963 in Chile) is a Danish artist.*

*20 The Way Things Go, is an art film from 1987 by the Swiss artist duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss.*



Photo: Marco Evaristi, Helena & El Pescador, 2000

Can interaction be a one-way force, an active energy from one side and silence from the other? Or is it a physical reaction always giving a punch back. Is it something other than interaction if the punch comes years after? You are full of ideas and beliefs and cannot see the world in any other way than correlatively. You want to be part of this and not locked up in a Freeport just to increase your value. Your stream of thoughts has returned to the space. When you place yourself in the exhibition space, looking like a sculpture, you start to talk with the artworks in a body-to-body communication. You become one of them, without realising it. You are just watching a video while others are watching you. The space between the objects is emphasised, as it becomes the negative. The full image in black and white makes you notice other things than normal, just by being reversed.



Photo: Rikke Goldbech, installation view with a visitor,  
Michèle Matyn, *Breathing holes*, 2016

Details pop out as you zoom in on each object; the full picture is gone, while you investigate a new world. All the different ways of interacting with artworks, makes you rethink your role over and over again. Every time you enter a new place you need to find out how to act here. You like to see the waves of mainstream. How do we do it this year? Materialised monuments, concepts, Freeport's. But also to try to break with all that is taken for granted: habits kill fantasy and fast assumptions kill poetry. We need both to make art. We need the after-effects of self-realisation, more than the quick 'aha that's the point', experience.

The history and heritage, being more alienated than the future. The weird one out: we need it in all the forms it can take. The building block, the thing we need to listen to, to understand, the entity we can change to make fit contemporary minds. Making attempts is essential. It is a job for curators, artists, audience and all others who want to play along. You feel that all your senses

are alert, and that you perceive everything without any filter. All is getting into your brain at the same time. You feel closer to the big inheritance of untouchable art, closer to different ways of perceiving art. The bodily experience has gone from sensory to memory. You stand up just before the shadow from the building reaches you.

invented terms

used terms

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