

Practice as way to experience life: Artists engage in critical discussion about the primary issues that face their socially engaged practices.

15.15 – 16.00 Thursday, 9th

Art and cultural projects are named more and more as one of the key platforms having immanent relevance for the public sphere, for processes of democratisation, for the discourse surrounding growth and sustainability and for the development of civil society. Currently the latter is being put under threat worldwide, not only in specific area of crisis.

What is the role and responsibility of an artist within this global reality? What types of art projected are being initiated? What are the gaps in understanding between artists and funding/host organisations? What skills and supports are needed to build sustainable practices that operate within this context?

You are invited to share in this conversation with experienced artists to address these and other complex concerns facing contemporary practitioners.

With

Fiona Whelan, Artist, Dublin

Alia Rayyan, researcher and practitioner in visual culture, Palestine

Susanne Bosch, Artist, Belfast/Berlin



Participants © Susanne Bosch, 2012

Introduction Susanne Bosch

The frequently expressed idea about art is that art has the capacity to transform the lives not just of individuals but of whole communities. „The transformative power of art would create community, nurture cultural identity, promote leadership and consciously develop critical agents of change“¹ (Canada Council for the Arts 2007) There is a certain orthodoxy amongst advocates of the arts around the world. They all claim the same power for the arts.

I will open up this workshop with creating a complex dilemma for all of us.

We have contemporary creative practitioners, artists and artprojects what for whatever good reason have identified the public realm as their field of work. It usually **includes people**, so it has a collaborative, participatory or co-operative element to it. So people come into play in many different ways that we will need to talk about.

The **content** of that art form is usually driven by the idea of dealing with real life issues, often problems, gaps, issues that demand transformation. Art historian Miwon Kwon: „*Art in the public interest* or "new genre public art", often temporary city-based programs, is focusing on social issues rather than the built environment that involve collaborations with marginalized social groups (...), such as the homeless, battered women, urban youths, AIDS patients, prisoners, and which strives toward the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.“ (Kwon, 1997)²

The **form** of such art varies from short-term interventions to long-term engagements. That depends very much on the given framework of time and finances, of the potential ability and engagement of the artist(s), the defined aims and objectives, the nature of the artwork itself. It is often time and process-based, less focused on the creation of fixed objects and develops hypothesis as it emerges. The performative element, which means a physical presence of participants for an embodied (art) experience is almost always required.

So, we face a kind of art work that is embedded in a real life situation and that demands a framework that allows it to become 'good' art. **For that it needs two things: it needs skills and it needs resources.**

The skills direct towards the artists and potentially to the education of such artists:

What is the role and responsibility of an artist within this global reality? What skills are needed to build sustainable practices that operate within this context?

¹ Belfiore Eleonora and Bennett, Oliver, *The Social Impact Of The Arts. An Intellectual History*. Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, 2008, p 3

² Kwon, Miwon, *Public Art and Urban Identities*, 1997. [online] Available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/kwon/en> [accessed 3 January 2012]



Fiona Whelan and Rayan Alia, © Susanne Bosch, 2012

The resource question direct towards the governmental and other public and private funding organisations:

What supports are needed to build sustainable practices that operate within this context? What are the gaps in understanding between artists and funding/host organisations?

We are discussing the value of art so publicly here because it is receiving public/government funding. „Arts occupy a particularly fragile position in public policy, on account of the fact that the claims made for them, especially relating to their transformative power, are extremely hard to substantiate.“³

Since the 1990th, we have evidence–based policies worldwide. ‚Whatever works best‘ has to be proven by hard data. Most valued is what can be measured. Transformation is complex in itself, art is an intrinsic experience, so how do you measure impact/transformation through the arts?

What is measurable are things like economic growth and social impact. That created a keen interest in the specific relationship between arts and culture and the economics and social development of communities. One can name the four key areas where art is expected to contribute to governmental strategies: health, crime, employment and education. What is measured here, is the instrumental values of the arts, but not the intrinsic values that make art matter. Is there space for critical, open-ended interrogations of what the real value or impacts of these forms of arts by might be?

³ Belfiore Eleonora and Bennett, Oliver, *The Social Impact Of The Arts. An Intellectual History*. Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, 2008, p 3

And then there is a third level to address, 'good' art:

"How do we know that pedagogy happened? How do we know that this wasn't done purely to make a career and acquire social capital? How do we know if it led to political change? How do we know it is 'good' art?"⁴

Such art belongs to the contemporary discourse with standards in aesthetics (or visual language), but as it is involved in real life and with people in the most direct way, it also has to respond to ethical and political, maybe anthropological considerations in the widest sense... it has to function on various levels. That leads to the question:

What types of art projects are being initiated?



Janika Trillke doing the Mindmap I © Susanne Bosch, 2012

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As we all come from practice, we will speak here today from the point of practitioners, less from theoretical philosophy. It will help to name some of the phenomena of our works and to analyse them, further to reflect and draw conclusions.

⁴ "Socially Engaged Art Outside the Bounds of an Artistic Discipline", talk by Nato Thompson in *Living As Form summit* in New York 2011. [online] Available at <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2011/livingasform/talks.htm> [accessed 3 January 2012]

Alia intorduced her work, Fiona introduced her work and we used the res tof th etiem to discuss the upcoming issues with the audience. Janika Trillke did a mindmap of the conversation ! (Thank you!)



Mindmap II © Susanne Bosch, 2012

Audio: There exists a recording of the session, susbosch@web.de