

Sissel Lillebostad
Creative Curating
Bergen

The daily practice of imagining things differently

The freelance curator that emerged in the late 1950's, like Harald Szeemann and Seth Siegelaub, were quite aware of the gap described by Marcel Duchamp – *the creative act*. Duchamp claims that the work of art is not the sole making of the artist. The artist just delivers the raw material. The audience is playing the part of the finishing creator, the maker of the end result. A work of art therefore exists only in relation with a public and in public.

The creative act serves here as a hypothesis – which has to be tested. And artists and curators, in a mutual relationship where the border between these professions gets merged, do the testing. Curators play (in this ideal functions) the role of the mediator, putting the hypothesis in contact with an audience, which then function as the responder, maybe even as a testing ground for critical self-awareness. In this model the curator take part in the production line of art – on the same side of the creative gap as artists. They – as collaborative curators – are not the judges of art anymore. They will also be working in a state of doubt and insecurity, where the exhibitions as such are depending upon the transformation from raw art (testing ground) to a completed work being performed by an audience.

This also means that the curator does not take a hierarchical stand, every work has the same weight, the relationships between works are open-ended and in a state of flux. This might be an answer to the quest for coming-into-being as posed by Deleuze and Guattari, but we can also trace the same thinking in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. As long as the object/event is not fixed and finished, it is still alive – in the meaning it can still change.

The same thinking we can find at the core of the curatorial program at the academy of the arts in Bergen. When we investigated and planned the education, we looked into some of the other programs existing at that time. We were able to choose approaches, which felt meaningful in our specific context, and we could make decisions based on investigations made by the others. Basically our program is funded on and orientated around the individual projects of the 10 students. These projects are developed inside the group but realised outside of the academy during the 2 years of study. And it is these 10 different projects that determine the focus and theoretical discussions in the group, alongside topics being addressed through international exhibitions we see and discuss.

The specific topography of Norway also determines, to some extent, the characteristics of the program. Norway can be described as a country with quite a bit of nature and long distances, few and small institutions, a mainly publicly funded art field, a somewhat weak commercial market and a varied flora of artists run spaces in the urban centres.

We defined a few basic needs, such as getting better at what we were already doing, organising small galleries, arranging seminars and festivals, publishing journals and books. We also recognised the need to open a connection between the practitioners and the theorists, establishing a network for support and discourse, and sharing knowledge.

The last also became a method. Sharing – both knowledge and competence as well as bad experiences and failures, becomes the strength of the student groups. Each project is discussed on several occasions, and we demand that each student participate in the disseminations and supportive talks. Our programme have no curriculum except the framework that define the two steps before exam – which is a lecture and a paper presenting and discussing the realised project. The best I can say about our curriculum, is that it is a responding one, but also giving directions based on some values. Those values are defined by the experience of risk, of necessity, and of respect for the art, as well as the public.

Freestyle, presentation of projects:

Tingvoll Kunsthall, a project lasting 8 months by Paolo Manfredi

Shoes, an ongoing project by Hilde Mehti, with artist Yvette Brackman in collaboration with the masters of Lujavri.

"We never understood communism and we have no experience with capitalism"

Still Life, by Kjell-Erik Ruud, in collaboration with artist Peder Istad. Realisation in February 2011.

Suggestion for questions we can ask into this practice:

What can be considered the role of the audience as a potential collaborator?

Is art one of the areas where certain disinterested but applied speculation about imagining the world differently can take place – as Charles Esche formulated it?

How do we – the professionals – meet the non-professional collaborators in open-ended artworks, and how do we accept their contribution?