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How is contemporary art defined
by process, performance and
exhibition and at what point does
the artist start to lose control?

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How is contemporary art defined by process, performance and exhibition and at what point does the artist start to lose control?

Christian Jankowski, Tracey Emin and Kirsten Stoltmann all aim to formulate a connection with the viewer by how they finally exhibit their work in the art gallery. In the gallery, the work is revealed to the viewer and, to some extent, the artist loses authority of their work within the exhibition space to the viewer's speculation. Process fundamentally defines Jankowski, Emin and Stoltmann's practice, but the transferring of this into the gallery can both attract and repel the audience, which prompts the question- how does the work stand when the artist is not around? Dadaism encouraged artists to strive beyond the expected and create new values within the gallery space; the artist held the control as they held the idea. Dadaists were not concerned with conventional aesthetics; in their works the boundaries between art and life came together. Dadaists shaped the breakthrough of what is frequently now classed as art- 'The antithesis of everything that constituted the prevailing style, the most viable alternatives to the emphasis on self expression.' (Jones. 1991. 83) In 1917, Marcel Duchamp exhibited a urinal, "Fountain" in the gallery space. The urinal deconstructed what could be classed art, and the self expression of the artist. The signature of the manufacturer (not the artist's) was present on the urinal. The exhibiting of art became about the viewer being manipulated; thus the audience were puppets to the artist within what can be defined as their territory (the gallery). Dadaism is a fundamental influence on contemporary art, and the works and artists examined in this essay. At the same time, these artists show respect to, while departing from, traditional creative notions. Jankowski, Emin and Stoltmann all aim to engage with the viewer through process, performance, control and exhibition, these terms form the essay's sub themes.

Performance and Control.

"Fuse art and life in events that resemble theatre" (Jones. 1991. 83) Tracey Emin creates a performance with her life and art, with no players but herself. The viewer is greeted with the experience of Emin in the gallery, but no Tracey. She is the overwhelming controlling factor, and dominates the connection between herself and the viewer, as she does not allow them to think for themselves. Emin gives us everything about herself and it is our job to choose what to take away. As Ardenne argues 'Art is by its very nature a major formula for human expression, it has the automatic power to set the forms of life- all experience is a passing action.' (Ardenne. 2004.13) There is no doubt that Emin uses her art as a form of 'self expression'. She holds nothing back and is creating a visual autobiography within the work, when Emin tells the story- she is in control. The viewer experiences

Emin's story, but is unable to imaginatively recreate this. There is undoubtedly something aggressive surrounding the name of Tracey Emin, but as you become more informed about the life she has lead, it becomes evident the work is also wracked with vulnerability. This is where Emin has 'power' but she does not make it clear to the viewer that this is what she is actually expressing. We can visualise excerpts from her life throughout her work, but it is the "passing action" (Ardenne. 2004.13) which she fails to process on a performance or control level; as we are not participating within her exhibition, we are controlled in it- Emin passes us nothing. Emin cannot control relationships in her life, but this factor she controls within her art work.



Figure One. Tracey Emin. *Everyone I have ever slept with 1963-1995*. 122 x 245 x 215 cm. Applique tent, mattress and light. (Mereck. 2002. 33)

Everyone I have ever slept with (Figure One) highlights Emin's desire to dominate, which, in turn, overwhelms and isolates the viewer. The object in question, a tent is embroidered with the names of all the people Emin has ever slept next to, or had sexual intercourse with. Many do not know that some of the people named on the tent were not sexual partners but family members whom she adored. This little bit of extra information is where the vulnerability within Emin's art lies. Conventionally a tent is to protect us from the elements. Some associate a night in a tent with an adventure, or excitement, a pleasant escape from daily life; while for others it is a sleepless night and excursion they could do without. A tent acts as a temporary home from home, much like a relationship where the other person becomes

one's other half. Yet, some people suffer tormented relationships, like the idea of braving a night in a tent rather than i.e. your own bed. The process of embroidery in each name supports the argument being forwarded, that the tent is comparable to a relationship as it "reflects the labour involved, not only in the making of the work itself but in the making of relationships, traditionally a feminine task" (Mereck. 2002. 33); each stitch becomes a memorial act to lovers past. However, Emin, in this work, is not asking us to think of ourselves and camping holidays. Because this is Emin's performance not ours, her 'full and empty moments of the everyday where her organisation is a struggle with disorder' (Ardenne. 2004.26) are so self- expressive, we cannot begin to try to organise them for her.

Kirsten Stoltmann is not selfish as an artist. The work is literally in front of you, but it goes beyond the visuals it provides, by provoking involvement from the viewer; this is an integral strategy for adding meaning to the work she exhibits. *You don't know me* (Figure Two) highlights Stoltmann creating a networking experience, as opposed to Emin's personal performance. How the wine is distributed on the gallery floor spells out a confession, it acts as a catalyst of expression. The spilling of the wine out of the bottle is comparable to the spilling of words out of drunken mouths. The fluid wine has been fixed and controlled, to enhance a passing statement that has been paused for us to reflect on.



Figure Two. Kirsten Stoltmann. *You don't know me*. 2006. (Bloggy. 2006. Unpaged)

In Figure Two, Stoltmann proves simplicity can contain complexity, for when the viewer becomes involved in the performance created by the artist. They take away something about themselves that is intriguing. We want to know who does not know who anymore. Is it autobiographical or a reflection of a relationship in her life? As a viewer we begin to question in a way that we do not with Emin's work—as we are not so controlled. We can engage with the statement in front of us and about ourselves. As Brennan observes “For Stoltmann, to be allowed to make something dumb it must be meaningful, heartfelt and ultimately vulnerable.” (Brennan. 2007. Unpaged). Emin creates clutter for the viewer by not making it clear to us that she is ‘vulnerable’. Stoltmann creates a space for us to think about the ‘meaning’ of the work and the insecurities within it, this is her strength. She creates art work that is still present, long after the viewer has left the gallery. She makes work that is universal as she displays a balance of control within the work. She leaves out information about her, so that her work becomes more engaging. She creates a “reactive practice to be experienced” (Ardenne. 2004.15), we effectively become a ‘living art’ work, as we respond to her art. We do not know who Stoltmann doesn't know anymore? We only know when we felt this way about someone in our lives, when we leave the gallery, after viewing the work this sentiment plays on our mind while we continue with our daily lives. The work is a networking experience, it is essential the viewer is connected.



Figure Three. Jankowski, Christian. *The perfect Gallery*. 2010.

In *The perfect gallery* (Figure Three) Christian Jankowski creates “impact of the three dimensional, whilst occupying space in a forceful and present manner” (Dunlop. 1965. 9)

He appreciates the gallery in its own right, and the viewer and the gallery 'come together to detonate a radically new and different concept of sculpture' (Dunlop. 1965. 8) and installation. Jankowski takes a back seat throughout the renovation of the gallery and enrolls the help of Gordon Whistance (a regular face on television home makeover shows) and his team, to physically create the perfect gallery for him. Jankowski creates an element of mystery surrounding the work in progress as he controls from a distance, while allowing Whistance and his team to "be used by the artist like a paintbrush" (Perry. 2010. 133). However, Jankowski trusts Whistance and his colleagues to create the work for him. He portrays no self expression in the work, as did Duchamp with his "Fountain". In this way, Jankowski is happy to give credit to the real creators of the work. He gains his control through the lack of information he gives to Whistance and his builders, teasing them at regular intervals by only disclosing small details about the project. Unaware of it, Whistance and his team perform the creation of Jankowski's work; every move they make is recorded and is projected on a lower level of the gallery in the exhibition. It is the sum total of the show; otherwise the gallery space is empty.

This empty gallery stands bare, a curious and confusing space for the viewer to occupy. The viewer complements the labour of Whistance and his team and plays a live part in the performance of the piece, as they attempt to deduce the normal conventions of the gallery space. The public space and the public within it create an innovative experiment. The artist is the puppet master and the viewer is unaware they are performing at his command.

Process and Exhibition.

Tracey Emin creates an experience to be looked at for the viewer in the gallery. Her process, methodology and exhibition are all personal to her. For the majority of the time, her process relies on drawing on past experiences, and exhibiting them. This method demonstrates a fresh process for her as an artist, as one would presume at the time of the event; she did not know she would use it as art work. However, the memory is not fresh, and the authenticity of the events or chapters in her life she is presenting us with must be believable to the viewer, in order for the exhibition to engage with us at all. "My Bed" (Figure Four) rests upon this premise that it is necessary for there to be artistic validity, for the work to succeed. We genuinely need to know that is Emin's bed, just as she left it, "it was confessional" (Mereck. 2002. 134) of her. 'Lies might bind you together with other people, but it's not what I do.' (Emin. 2006. Unpaged) Here, Emin is demonstrating that she aims to connect with the viewer through truthfulness, a familiarity with the viewer.



Figure Four. Emin, Tracey. *My Bed*. 1998. Mattress, linens, pillows, ropes, suitcases and various memorabilia, various dimensions. (Mereck. 2002. 137)

A bed is a place you climb into; you seek comfort from and ultimately a place of rest. "My Bed" (Figure Four) is embarrassing to look at, as you feel as if it lacks a loved one, that someone should of plucked her out of bed before it got this far. The bed appears to have been Emin's life for a considerable amount of time, and gives clues to the emotional mindset of the artist by the way it has been curated. The sheets are tangled, they appear tormented in themselves. The whiteness of them displays a cleansing and purification of whatever has been going on in this bed; as pure as the bottle of vodka that sits beside it. "Vision comes from our experience of life, and it is only possible to react creatively with life and to experience with feeling". (Dunlop. 1965. 9) Emin gives us vision from experiences she has had to cope with in her life. We watch as with a movie at the cinema, waiting to see the conclusion. In an exhibition Emin comes to no conclusion, she simply gets out of bed and the feeling associated with it, terms it 'art work' and moves on, presumably to another bed.

Christian Jankowski takes a radical stance on exhibiting and the process of his work. Firstly, he satirises the idea of the labouring artist in *The perfect gallery* (Figure Five) by not physically creating any form of the end product he exhibits. The process and methodology of this work are the exhibition, as Jankowski manages to allure the viewer to an entirely vacant space. As she states "We spent a good month cleaning the gallery, taking out all the nails and screws and all

the things stuck in the ceiling from previous exhibitions” (Anderson, 2010, unpagued.) Jankowski cleansed the gallery space; much like the white sheets seemed to cleanse Emin’s activities in her bed, to rejuvenate a space to be experienced by the viewer.



Figure Five. Jankowski, Christian. *The perfect Gallery*. 2010.

This is not only experimental in idea, but to experience it live opens up the viewer to a completely different concept of the art gallery, and what should be exhibited within it. Recording the process is fundamentally integral to the exhibition, as it is the only piece presented in the gallery, which is otherwise an overwhelmingly unusual space to the viewer. To see a television screen is here a welcome familiarity. Jankowski was aware the concept was contemporary, so decided to reveal it to the viewer through something we could all relate to- we have it sitting in our home, a television. Hock states “We constantly cast the lure of expectation ahead of us, hoping to hook a desired piece of the future. Something unimaginable always takes the bait”. (Hock. 16. 2001) Jankowski has succeeded on every level. He has enticed, he has proved that we can defy our expectations, even within the walls of the expected (gallery space) and he created an exhibition of the future.

Kirsten Stoltmann uses editing in her process and methodology, to a stage of curiosity in the exhibiting of her work. Like Emin, Stoltmann is actually creating the work, but we are not sure whether it is about her, and she holds an element of mystery throughout her process- which

establishes the main connection with the viewer in the exhibition. It could be argued that Emin does not have the ability to refine at all in her process, that Jankowski has no objects to refine while Stoltmann's practice sits between them. "Jealously is a bitch" (Stoltmann. 2007. Unpaged) demonstrates Stoltmann's ability to reconstruct the value and worth of materials, when placed within the gallery. The throwaway piece of carpet becomes permanently reformed by the sinking words of the ink.



Figure Six. Kirsten Stoltmann. *Jealousy is a Bitch* 2007. Wool carpet, India ink.8 x 10 feet. (Stoltmann.2007.).

The capital letters and bold pink of the statement appears fierce, angry and in your face. It provokes a feminist reaction from the viewer, not only due to the choice of colour, but the emotion chosen and the word "bitch". We are suddenly transported to a scenario of our own where we had a confrontation with another female, over a male, and the fleeting instant it took Stoltmann to let the ink sink into the carpet, is comparable to the sudden rage felt when struck with jealousy. The ink cannot be washed off, or removed it has caused a stain. This parallel's to the inability to shake off these emotions when they have happened to you. It is an expressive outcry that makes a disposable object, anything but disposable by way of a genuine emotion. Once again, we are left to question if Stoltmann is carrying these feelings. Yet in some ways this becomes irrelevant in this work, as the art is more about evoking an outcry from the viewer, such as when they really felt the words Stoltmann is presenting us with.

Conclusion.

Christian Jankowski aims to make the viewer search through the unknown and unfamiliar. Tracey Emin attempts to connect with us through vulnerability, but we become controlled. Kirsten Stoltmann networks with the audience and we bring our experiences into the gallery in order for the work to succeed. The artists examined in this essay all create a stage for the viewer to perform upon, Jankowski is the authority figure, but contrary to Emin and Stoltmann he always remains just on the outside, merely peeking in. Stoltmann balances the element of control and performance, which in turn, creates interactions with the audience. Emin is inside; she gives away too much and is the sole performer and controller as opposed to Jankowski, who could be criticised of giving away too little. Regardless of the amount of freedom the artists examined give to the viewer, they all have taken a liberating step in creating a new movement of art. The works are radical, and undoubtedly make a statement. This is where all of the artists are wholly connected. They cannot ask questions, they can only make statements. We presume Jankowski wants us the question why the gallery is empty? Yet he only offers us the statement, it is bare. Emin hopes that through her vulnerability we will relate to how she is feeling, but she only states her feelings. Finally, Stoltmann wants us to relate to her statements and to ask questions about ourselves. However, this is down to the initiative of the viewer, not what she presents us with. Regardless of their arguable intentions, all the artists examined in this essay are relying on a highly intelligent viewer to make their exhibition fulfil the questions they could not answer themselves.

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