



Email Postings February 2007

The Role of the Artist

Summary

These emails question the relationship between artists and the business community within which they work.

Edited
Ralph Bathurst 21/02/2007

Deborah Jones

Sunday
4/02/2007

Dear fellow AACORNers

I'm curious – apart from the financial incentives, why do you think artists choose to work with business, organisations and *leadership*?

...and if someone's an artist, is she a *good person*?

With best wishes

Deborah Jones
(artist)

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Steve Taylor

Monday
5/02/2007

I would think that an artist might want to work with organizations because they could potentially have influence in the organization. Certainly here in the USA, I think businesses are one of the most dominant forces in our lives and it might be a way to reach people/audience that would otherwise not ever see your art.

I don't know that all artists are good people, but I am sure you are a good person, Deborah.

Steve

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David Weir

Monday
5/02/2007

Dear Deborah

I am truly slightly puzzled by your question.

Do you have to be a *good person* to be an *artist*?

And if so, would it matter?

Surely not. In some people's eyes many great artists have been bad people. Per contra to be *good* is neither a necessary or a sufficient condition of being anything of an *artist*. It's so in sport also.

So the media fuss about whether TS Eliot was *anti-Semitic* or whether Zidane's head-butt diminished his artistry as a footballer are simply category-mistakes, No? Is this too simplistic?

David

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Chris Poulson

Monday
5/02/2007

Hi Deborah

The world's largest mineral resources company, BHP Billiton based here in Australia, has an extensive collection of works of contemporary and emerging artists which is displayed throughout the company. The idea is not just to support young artists but to encourage creativity amongst staff in their workplace. Recently company staff had an exhibition in the lobby of headquarters displaying their own works, many of which were inspired by the works that surround them on a daily basis. BHP Billiton also has a collection in their South African headquarters in Johannesburg where the firm's art curator is based.

As far as your question about the goodness of a person I think that extends well beyond one's vocation. I have known artists across the full gamut of goodness of personhood!

Cheers

Chris Poulson

(Management lecturer and Photographer – I do the former to support my habit not only for the latter but for buying art that is well beyond my own abilities!)

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Jürgen Bergmann

Wednesday

7/02/2007

Dear Deborah

For my part, I never did choose to work within the context of business. If it would have been otherwise, perhaps I would be happier, perhaps easier for me and my family. I always wanted to overcome or to change how others did perceive me. So I was directed to study and reflect the expression of my own, which led me to art. The way out of the closed professional art context, especially theatre, was on the one side the profound deception I felt within that context who is extremely conservative and business dominated/driven and on the other side the openness of the business world itself, which allowed me to find other ways of expressions and which seemed to me more adopted and more authentic. That was not a decision but a slow evolution as the consequence of the research to express myself in a way so that others may perceive my form of expression as I do. In fact, to be recognized. But it is not possible to escape of your destiny. That's why even now, after twenty years plunging in the world of business and expressing myself by a very specific, individual and original way, the dilemma is the same. The more I'm recognized as artist sublimating managerial processes into art as a value in itself, replacing traditional management tools because that's more effective in certain situations (in between I know for which situation it is valuable – what kind of situation can be sublimated into art), the more I'm isolated by that recognition. It's a prison. And therefore I'm still looking how to escape. I don't know what I will do in some years. I only know that it will be more and more difficult to escape from the prison of etiquette, which is as a stigmatization. I want to be quite normal, but what is interesting for others, is to consider me as different or crazy. What is decisive is not the context of self-realization, it's the energy which allows you to be what you are or to become what you perceive as what you are.

Best Jürgen

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Deborah Jones

Friday

16/02/2007

Hello again AACORNers

I posed both questions (below) out of a curiosity I have about the images of the artist which can appear in interdisciplinary encounters. Not so much to invite answers, but to find out if management people working with art and artists care to ask them.

In some of the AACORN discussions I see representations of the artist as a phenomena that's minutely examined, then simultaneously raised up on a pedestal ('I want to be one') and appropriated as an instrument for other people's needs.

There are vast quantities of text explaining motivations and justifying the collaboration from an organisational position, and yet there's very little exploration of why the artist may choose to enter this other world. That just seems weird.

Perhaps my assumption about a collaborative intent is the flaw?

There'll be as many differing motivations as there are artists. I'm not convinced it's covered by hoping to influence the organisations or seeking the resources/opportunity to make new work and engage with a new audience – though these will definitely feature. I would say there are other intentions and ideas behind the move – Jürgen's gradual, complicated and ambivalent journey is an example. I'm wondering if it would be dynamic and fruitful to

consider how the artist's desires and interests interact with those of the organisation they enter into a relationship with. Probably in terms of specific instances – I can't currently imagine doing this in a general or abstract way.

My question about goodness came out of the pedestal scenario. I get sceptical and confused when an image of *the artist* seems unduly revered. (There's a perfectly acceptable mix of good and bad person in me.)

With best wishes,
Deborah

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Katja Lindqvist

Friday
16/02/2007

Hi Deborah and others

In my research on collaborative projects between artists and workplaces, initiated by a third party, an arts furthering organization, I've seen the following motives among artists

- interest in working in new ways that challenges the work-opening
- date-exhibition mode
- working with an audience that poses other demands on the artist (see above)
- finding a potential new market and mode of working
- general curiosity and will to explore

Of course these factors are linked to each other in various ways.

I also found some interesting results on the artist role in these projects, the role and especially the integrity of the artist position in such projects are clearly viewed very differently by different artists.

My research has been conducted in Sweden but I've seen that my results correspond to that of other studies and results from other projects.

Best
Katja

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Pierre Guillet de Monthoux

Friday
16/02/2007

Dear Deborah

First; I think the question of if artists want to enter the world of organizations or not is slightly theoretical. To be an artist making work that engages others implies by definition to organize. To me people doing things only by themselves and for themselves; like management professors doing knitting at home or playing the piano to their dog are either romantics or artists; have in any case little in common with artists today.

Secondly: to organize does not mean to work to order. In real artistry there is, as in any genuine business creation, rather an element of speculation paired with aesthetic risk-taking. But to take such risks you have not only to be courageous, you need knowledge and socio-economic intelligence to build your own self-empowerment as an artist. When asked what he thought about all projects that he failed to realize Christo once answered; 'we were not intelligent enough!'

Thirdly; get hold of e.g. the catalogue book from the Berlin show 2005; Product Vision, edited by Mari Brellocks and Henrik Schrat at Kadmos Kulturverlag Berlin. This is a good sample of the kind of reflections you are asking for and that becomes really frequent; in the art world too. But artists don't do this to make us at business schools feel good. Nor to make firms increase productivity. They usually do that to tackle what they feel important issues of power or try to contribute to the many problems they also feel comes out of bad organization, aesthetically mute systems and clumsy dominating often WASPy corporations. All this with the backdrop of shrinking public funding, an imperative to develop culture by PPP etc.

Fourth in addition go to a guy like Nicolas Bourriaud who is not really a brilliant new thinker but rather a powerful curator and attentive journalist-critic sensing what sort of organizational interests drives contemporary artists tackling issues of organizing. Take any of his little pamphlets (see Amazon of course) and you see what he means by organizing and what many young artists agree with.

Fifth; finally dear Deborah, let me add a little website about our nomadic university where we (group of young executives, management researchers and artists) tour around sites where all this seems to be going on. Our aim is to find out what it is and how it is connected to socio-economics. We just ended our second oasis at Biella where Michelangelo Pistoletto (ex buddy of Warhol, inventor of Art Povera, a legend of minimalist art and performance) runs a foundation doing work of the sort you seem interested in (check his site www.cittadellarte.it). He does not call it 'organizational art' but 'socially responsible art' emphasizing the passage from aesthetics to ethics.

Our next stop will be Kassel for the Documenta XII, then Solwenia, Istanbul. So just check out www.nuope.eu and if you need more we (a research team in Sweden called Fields of Flow) have done a video called Masters of Business Art you could find if you ask.

Yours faithfully

Pierre

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George Cairns

Friday
16/02/2007

Dear All

In addition to its rather instrumental and manipulative role of incorporation into the capitalist organization project as a *new tool* for *leveraging* efficiency and effectiveness, art must be nurtured in its form as opposition to and critique of the excesses of capitalism.

Essex University has just hosted a magnificent exhibition by South African artist William Kentridge, whose work not only engages with the problems of that country's political and social history, but also with the capitalist excesses which flourished under it and which have denuded swaths of its landscape.

Kentridge himself spoke very eloquently about his work. However, in another session, a professor of art theory quoted from his writing, that political art should 'keep optimism in check and nihilism at bay'.

Let political art thrive.

Best wishes

George

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Katrin Kolo

Friday
16/02/2007

Dear Deborah, Katja and Pierre

I fully agree with your answers. Especially Pierre's, reminds me of a question, I asked myself a long time ago (and which may also give another view on Deborah's question): How much artist and how much manager is Christo. My answer to this, was so far: It depends on, how you look at it. He is a great artist with fantastic management skills and a great manager with fantastic artistic skills. His projects start with a vision and the whole process of realizing this vision is quite though business with a great sense for the quality of the resulting *product*.

Why we usually first of all refer to him as an *artist*, is probably because of his artistic origins (he started of to make art and not business) and because he is acting in the arts world (galerists do as well, but are mainly seen as managers as they usually do not create *art*, but make business with it).

Also from my own background (choreographer and economist/business consultant) I can say, that there are persons who are artists and managers at the same time and it is difficult to make a clear distinction of when you are what. For me it would not matter at all, if other

people would not want to know exactly what I am and to try to classify whatever I do. My aim, for myself that is, is to make the artist in me to complete the manager and the manager to complete the artist (it's a bit like using your female side to become a complete man and your male side to become a complete woman. Just that between artist and manager there is not such a clear distinction within your body.).

Deborah,

you wrote, that you don't want to invite answers so much, but to find out if management people working with art and artists care to ask them.

From my experience, business managers never ask why or for what motivation an artist would like to work with or for them, but what benefit artists could bring to their businesses. And I have not seen the suspicion that artists would only want to work in business to earn money (in my opinion this doesn't matter to them, because in business it is quite normal, that you do work for money). Business Managers find it very often a quite challenging idea to encounter this *new world* in their work.

All the best

Katrin

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Katja Lindqvist

Saturday
17/02/2007

George and all others

I agree with your concern, as it is my concern too. But it is not that artists are forced into an exploitation situation. They choose to or not to engage in projects according to interest. And initiate their own projects too with companies etc.

The issue of compromising is constantly present. Even with curators in the international biennale world – many artists react to the power relations there as well.

The business – artist collaborations make up only a fraction of all artistic work. And remember many projects are done on pure will.

Just read that the Absolut art interpretations of the bottle was in fact initiated by an offer from Andy Warhol to a manager of the US company that imported Absolut, to interpret their bottle. And not the other way around.

At least according to the official story ... And this is not to say anything of the quality of that campaign.

But I think there is always reason to ask questions of why we use art in various contexts, and, as important, which art.

Best

Katja

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Karsten Auerbach

Saturday
17/02/2007

Dear Deborah

Thanks for the questions.

I've been standing at the sideline watching the academic AACORN conversations for 1½ year now.

Enjoying some of it.

Although I've been working professionally as an artist in the field, that AACORN is all about, for more than 8 years, reading the net-conversations most often makes feel like an object for someone else's scientific research.

Sometimes I'm not even able to recognize myself in all the philosophical and political implications of what is supposed to be my daily work/

You're just a *practitioner* I say to myself, "Too illiterate to have any contributions."

But today I'm going to give it a go.

Thanks to your questions.

Please excuse my 'Danglish'

This is my general reason for working as an artist in the field we call arts-in business.

To me this is not just about building a bridge between the fields or professions of arts and business.

It's all about humans (that's why I only paint humans)

It is all about building a bridge in our brains. Allowing some integration of the peripheral intelligences, languages or learning strategies that we – Westerners – have suppressed for centuries.

(A child has 100 languages – but 99 of them are robbed by the school and the culture, said Loriz Malaguzzi, the founder of the Regio Emilia kindergartens in Italy)

Through the industrial age two minorities have been clinging to these peripheral intelligences: We call them kids and artists.

Kids can be brainwashed at school to trust only the two core intelligences of modern Western thinking: mathematical-logical and verbal-rational

Left are the artists. And I'm one of them: A painter – or 'visually intelligent' person.

My mission is not just to sell my physical products – or to promote my own weirdness, like artists are expected to do. But to share and unfold this visual intelligence in my fellow human beings.

I teach arts to do this. But this is still 'arts for arts sake'.

Working together with a company takes arts out of its own context – and this has taught me a lot about arts, than you can't learn at the academies.

I happen to live in post industrial age (and place) where there is an increasing corporate demand for the creativity and multiple intelligences that I know as an artist.

There is a mighty shift of paradigms and view of human nature.

I'd like to explore what I can do with arts here. (Yes, wasn't 'curiosity' on your list, Deborah?)

That's my main reason

This is a list of shorter statement: reasons for doing what I do – collected over these 8 years:

Escape from the highbrow preserve.

Escape from a *red ocean* controlled by galleries, style police and who-knows-who-on-which-pedestal.

Painters traditionally produce and sell their luxury goods to those who can afford them.

I have always been longing for causing-an-effect or making-a-difference in normal people's daily lives.

I simply get high when my paintings and my professional competencies catalyze something positive in other peoples lives.

If I'm able to inspire non-artists to use *my* media as a new language and a new way of thinking and understanding – in their own personal/professional growth, I get professionally proud and happy.

When I work with a group of employees for 2 or 3 days I get so much more immediate and honest personal response than I get from the few well educated art freaks who see my exhibitions.

These close, intense encounters with groups of totally different professionals that I would never had met elsewhere, give me inspiration.

When I return to my studio to work as a *normal* painter I paint pictures that I would never had thought of on my own.

And these encounters often fill me with a great insight and respect for other professions.

While being a part of an artistic, academic, religious – or other monoculture – often smite me with instant claustrophobia.

I am allowed to look into these people's lives: one day it's the CEOs of some international brands – next day I'm visualizing while a social researcher is interviewing drug addicts in a

town.

And while I'm writing this I should have been working at my mobile studio which is set up in two production halls together with an exhibition of 60 of my paintings.

In two weeks 40 blacksmiths are going to discuss future scenarios for their line of business. Right now I'm just a craftsman among craftsmen, depicting their daily work.

The owner wants to involve the employees in their part of the corporate strategy (he is not quite normal): How will future effect my traditional *role* as a blacksmith? Which personal competencies are needed? What do we need to be good at? Which training do we need?

My job is to facilitate and catalyze the process – partly using visual methods.

I have even asked one of the bosses from the blacksmith's central union to come and tell us all about future scenarios they see.

And I am going to visualize what is being said, in the meetings and afterwards – man to man on the floor.

Are artists good people?

Yes, I also met some of these cruel capitalists, that some of you fear.

And I even collaborated with them.

Some of them are more *interesting*, more *creative*, have higher ethics, a broader outlook and a more conscious social responsibility than me and many of the artist-colleagues I know.

Should a *good* supermarket-owner kick these cruel capitalists out of his shop?

Why should an artist?

The question is more: why do some people need to put arts and artists on that pedestal?

Why does my post-religious Western culture need artists as priests and prophets for the political correctness that has replaced religion?

These cruel capitalists even pay me for using my artistic, visual methods in *political correct jobs*. Issues like: work environment, stress, conflict solving and corporate health programs are on the agenda.

And when some of my jobs are just cool creative business I still have the freedom to act according to my personal ethics – just like any other professional – doctor, butcher or teacher.

But making a living out of arts is already quite demanding. So please do not also expect me to be a better person!

Please don't even trust me when I fall into this temptation of becoming a part time messiah!

According to my religion there is just One who is good. The rest of us down here are just about half full of shit. Some of us are just better at hiding it than others!

For those of you who prefer politically correct stories I'll tell you my favorite:

Last year one of the founders of Danish Dacapo Theatre went to Eastern Africa for some months to teach Dacapo's interactive methods to local NGOs that fight corruption.

But her methods were developed from Dacapo's work with businesses over the last 10–15 years!

I must admit that I'm close to placing her on a pedestal – and wanting to walk in some of her footprints.

Deborah. I hope this was for some use.

Best

Karsten

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