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Biology as a New Art Medium and Its Possible Implications in Art Research

What is art research and what is its methodology?

Is there such a thing as art research and if so how can we define it, describe it or even draft some guidelines to evaluate it?

Part of this complicated process seems to be the incorporation of the art schools (which in many cases have always been separate from universities) in the official higher education system at an academic level.

Well, it is exactly the art practice, and the research within, that concerns me the most as an artist interested in researching new ways of representation in the visual arts.

It appears to me that when most people consider art practice, they never think of it as the result of research. Most frequently this vision is correct, perhaps the most visible side of art does not require significant research. However, many examples can be found where art is a more or less a direct result of research in new methodologies, new media, and new practices, which in many cases do not just emerge from the work and research of only one artist but rather from many artists, working around the world on similar concepts. It should be noted, however, that not only this art research is mainly invisible to most people, but it is also frequently conducted without the support of an infrastructure (namely academic) by several individuals who do their own thing and have their variable impact on the field of art. The need for a review of art research, I believe, has many origins.

First, if we need to assimilate art practice and research into European universities it is necessary to have a complete understanding of these issues.

Second, the field of art has always been very elusive about things like boundaries and rationalization, and that is one of the most important things about its nature that we must preserve, while still being assimilated into the

enormous machines that are universities where everything is levelled and more often than not by the lower basis of excellence (unfortunately).

So we arrive again at the point from the beginning of the text. What is art research?

What is the difference between art research and art practice?

In order to achieve the clarification between art theory and art research, it is necessary to revisit the question in the beginning of this text: What is art research?

I will start by explaining my personal prejudices concerning art research, and the reason for considering myself an art practitioner as well as an art researcher.

I am an artist. As such, I practice art and create artworks that are shown in galleries, museums and festivals around the world. I sell some artworks, some others are difficult to sell. This is my practice. I have created works that use live material, and live organisms, modulated to explore a certain concept that is important to me and my practice. Concepts like identity, fairness, manipulation, authorization, human and animal condition, the natural – artificial dichotomy, etc.

The fact that I have used live material and materials and methods borrowed from science to perform and create my work is also part of my practice, but most importantly, I place it into the realm of art research. The reason for considering the process of the development of my biological artworks as art research is due to the fact that the very nature of the process implies the use of live material for artistic expression. This is something that is being developed for the first time, making it more relevant for the field of art practice in general than just for my own practice. The more I explore the field of science, and biology in particular, to create my artworks, the more I expand the possibilities for other artists to develop their work, and this I consider as an objective of art research. The more experiments I make with the variety of materials I have at my disposal, and the more projects I pursue with different scientific partners, the more experience I will gather, as a researcher, to share with other artists. My challenge, a personal one, has been to write about it as a researcher only and not also as a practitioner, or as a practitioner only and not as a researcher as well. If it is at all possible to do the writing of the two actions separately, or if it is meaningful to try to do so.

Art practice is something that does not need to be incorporated into the universities and should not be incorporated into the academic system, but it should feed from it and most importantly be informed by it. Even if it does involve some degree of research, as it evidently frequently does.

So, to try and make clearer, or then again, maybe not: art research should base its practice on the example of the practiced scientific research, with papers being written about the developments, hypothesis being made and disproved, experiments being conducted, and evaluations on outcomes being compulsory.

Practice however, is subject to market rules, works of art being made, shown and purchased, depending on the field of practice.

Ideally (and we must always aim high) we will one day be able to see the very nature of art without trying too hard to define it. And we will do this, it is my conviction, through research in art. The definition of art has always been a problem, but even more so when you try to explain to the general public the compulsory need we have to make art. I find always that the non-artistically sensitized people will always try to define what is art when discussing art issues with an artist. And though we (artists) have all been there and done that, we know that it has not been a very useful exercise, in the short or long run, because we can always find the exception to the rule that we will still have to include in the art bag we have just defined. I have a suspicion that much more interesting than trying to define art, would be to understand a bit better the nature of art, in all of its irreverence and rebellious, smart and conscious ways of thinking about all the issues that concern us so intimately as humans and animals in this world, without the absolute need to understand how it works.