

Moment I: Inhabit The Objects Of Gathering.

I am taken up by the reconfiguring of artworks that require that we take a position. A position where the body finds a place between comfort and discomfort. A position where we take responsibility for what we put out in the world. I am thinking of the Polish artist Katarzyna Kobro and German artist Charlotte Posenenske in particular, and I will get to them later.

Lately, it has been challenging to find a position to face the world. Rarely do I at the time of reading-or the time of listening-find myself disagreeing. I nod and think, “hmmm, yes that is a good point”. It is only later that I know where I stand. My position. Then a counterargument is offered, and I think, “hmmm, yes that is a good point”. I lose my place. The point of telling you this is not about me, but as a place to begin. A starting point that is incomplete, unresolved, and unfolding.

Moment II: Isn't This Art?

I began this project with the idea of making a reconfigurable sculptural form. Each time it is called upon, it is called into action. It is a performative structure of engagement. What I learned while making the mobile structure is that my body is not used to the positions required of it to bring it into the world. When writing this, I am preoccupied with the pain in my upper back. It makes me sleepy as is the warm sun that is flooding the room. I imagined that while building it, I would think about the ethical and performative qualities of such a structure to bring people together. Instead, I spent all my time understanding how each part is essential to the whole. My back is hurt, and the architecture leaves an impression on my spine.

Moment III: Disembodied Eyes & Naps.

When I work, I like to move around the room. Often I pretend to be the audience, and act out coming into contact with art. I can't do it any other way. I have to approach art-making and curating bodily, I can't imagine it in floor plans or in Marquettes. I find separating the eye from the body difficult but if we turn to European art history, the body is rejected as a dirty and inconvenient thing that can get in the way of art. In the 19th century, the audience treated the museum like a park, have picnics, sleep on the benches, keep warm near the open fires, and art would be the landscape.¹ Over time the body came to be seen as filthy and uneducated, and slowly the rules of the museum began to treat

INHABITING OBJECTS

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the audiences as disembodied eyes. There is no time for contemplation or time for quiet conversation in front of an artwork. You can't drag a chair up to a painting and sit there for hours. It's called loitering.

Moment IV: Closed Institutions

Riding my bike from the studio to my Dutch class, I find myself entering into dark streets. As the sun goes down my reality that it is made up of art, begins to fade out. During these rides, I learn new confidence to dodge and weave a difficult obstacle each time. Yet as I get better, I have grown aware of a new reality, or what I call the “real world” that flashes brightly in the Dutch Integration classroom. I realised that my everyday existence is severely limited to art. This reality, I find myself in, is one where art has a boundary line that I extend when I ride to class but breaks as I open my mouth. When thinking about this, I came across artist Andrea Frasers's text on institutional critique², where she tells me that my internal conflict is to be expected. As I embody the art institution and the art institution is embodied by me, that we all do here right now.

At the same time, art does have the ability to cross realities and touch us from within. It can draw us inward and break us open. I have this experience with many artworks, in particular the work of Katarzyna Kobro, an artist working in the 1920s. Initially, Kobro made her sculptures with a particular installation in mind. Over time she grew frustrated by the curators or installation teams who would install her work upside down, back to front or both. Although later she saw the work's possibility to be released from any particular format or how the sculpture should be viewed. With this in mind, she made artworks that had no top, bottom, back or front. In this way, the work opened up to ways of becoming.

Her sculptures are small, but as I walk around them I find myself merging into, or better to write, merging with them. In “The Old-Russian Art Tradition and the Unistic Sculpture of Katarzyna Kobro”³, Ursula Grzechca-Mohr wrote that Kobro's sculptures draw the viewer and the room inward rather than the work expanding outward. The artworks floated on pedestals

of glass to give the sense of total freedom. The artworks are unanchored, they are, in a sense sent adrift by Kobro to circulate in the world. Her sculptures are like flow-throughs that Joanna Macy writes about: ‘[...] what I am is a flow-through of matter, energy, and information, which is transformed in turn by my own experience and intentions’.⁴ As I enter into the work of Kobro, it changes me in that momentary encounter, but quickly we change again as we depart from one another.

Kobro’s sculptures were carefully engineered to merge into their environment. Her work was influenced by artist Piet Mondrian, which can be instantly seen in some works painted in blue, red, yellow, black and white. The idea was that the artworks would genuinely disappear. Sadly, her work eventually did disappear during WWII when she had to break them apart for firewood to keep her young daughter warm.⁵ Nowadays, it is rare to find an original Kobro work as little survived the war, the ones that are on view are reconstructions. These are made for a new generation to open up and enter the world with wonder and hope.

Whereas, German artist Charlotte Posenenske’s artworks return to remind me of the art institution, its relationship with the audience and its agency as an institutional barometer. For a short period in her life, Posenenske was a landscape painter, costume designer and theatre-set maker, as well as a minimalist sculptor. After passing away from cancer at fifty, she left behind an extensive archive and body of work administered by her widower and my friend, Dr Burkhard Brunn. She was driven to make artwork that would encourage and change society. Minimalism enabled her to express her principles for an equal society: economy, rationality, variability, and accessibility. Posenenske knew how to take a position. She was methodical and deliberate, setting clear parameters for her pieces. In the final years of her artistic career, Posenenske began to slowly release control of the production and presentation of her serial pieces.

Posenenske eventually disappeared from the art world entirely to become a sociologist. Leaving in 1968, she was frustrated that art could not change the urgent problems in society. I am sorry that Posenenske will never understand the profound effect her work has on me. Her works have enabled me to navigate institutional infrastructures and push against them. As I continue to curate Posenenske’s work, I meet others who have also changed the way they see the world, the way they work with audiences and the way

they make artworks and exhibitions public due to Posenenske’s influence. The most exciting aspect of art is its ability to permeate not only the space in which it is housed but also its impact on the people that work around it and attend to it.

Moment V: Art Approaches Us As We Approach It.

Unlike Posenenske, but because of her and many others, I am led to believe that art and exhibitions have a vital role in changing us as we have a critical role in changing the institution. This is what the mobile sculptural structure is supposed to do. It is supposed to travel, meet, and create a place that changes and grows, gathers scars, new arrangements and adapts to its environment based on what those around it need from it.

Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists who take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting. It’s the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterward either, but they matter all the same, and history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone.⁶

Art approaches us as we approach it.

POST SCRIPT: This text is part of a larger text written by Eloise Sweetman after she made what became Shimmer’s modular furniture that can be a bench, shelf, or table. Also a special thank you to Ron Bernstein for helping her design and build this structure in 2018 and to CBK Rotterdam for supporting Shimmer online. Shimmer is co-directed and co-curated by Jason Hendrik Hansma and Eloise Sweetman.

1 An Aesthetic Headache: notes from the museum bench (with Diana Fuss). Retrieved on 4 April 2017 from joelsandersarchitect.com/an-aesthetic-headache-notes-from-the-museum-bench-with-diana-fuss/.

2 Andrea Fraser. “From the critique of the institutions to the institutions of critique”, *Artforum*. New York: Sep 2005. Vol. 44, Iss. 1; p.282

3 Ursula Grzechca-Mohr, (2005) “The Old-Russian Art Tradition and the Unistic Sculpture of Katarzyna Kobro” in *Katarzyna Kobro: 1989-1951*. The Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, Leeds & Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz.

4 Joanna Macy, “World as Lover, World as Self” in *Engaged Buddhist Reader*. Parallax Press, p.159

5 Zenobia Karicka (2005). “Chronology of Kobo’s Life and Work” in *Katarzyna Kobro: 1989-1951*. The Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, Leeds & Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz. p. 57

6 Rebecca Solnit. *Hope in the Dark: untold histories, wild possibilities*. Canongate, Edinburgh. p.xii