

Social Practice_Art

Week 6

Contemporary Social Artists

This lecture addresses the general definition of Socially Engaged Art from our book.

Contemporary Artists working in this form are discussed as examples.

Readings on the website expand the discussion.
A list of artists is provided for additional research.

ART AS SOCIAL PRACTICE: A Socially Engaged Art

Moves beyond dominant discipline-based art education and expressive and visual culture programs, by offering examples of art education that are engaged with:

1. **context** (teacher and students' surroundings),
2. **contemporary** art (current forms and perspectives)
3. **critical social issues** (the 'going' world and abiding justice-related concerns).

Art and Social Justice Education: Culture as Commons

Inasmuch as all art is created to communicate or be experienced by others, all art is social.

Pablo Helguera



Education for Socially Engaged Art

A Materials and Techniques Handbook

The term 'social practice' denotes the critical detachment of other forms of art-making (primarily centered and built on the personality of the artist), that is inherent to socially engaged art, which, by definition, is dependent on the involvement of others besides the instigator of the artwork.

Education for Socially Engaged Art

All art invites social interaction;
yet in the case of Socially Engaged Art, it is the
process itself—the fabrication of the work—that
is social.

Socially Engaged Art practices are not Social
Work.

While they may subscribe to the same values,
artists may make work that ironizes,
problematizes, and even enhances tensions
around those subjects **in order to provoke
reflection**. Art does not necessarily solve
problems but it should make people think.

Education for Socially Engaged Art

SEA has a double function in that when we make socially engaged artwork, we are not just offering a service to a community, we are proposing our action as a symbolic statement in the context of our cultural history (and art history) and entering into a larger artistic debate.

Even though Helguera has identified different levels of viewer participation to help us think about them, **he is not saying any one is 'better' than the other**. Simply that we need to consider the differences.

Let's start with Pablo Helguera's identification of various types of participatory structures within Socially Engaged Art. Because there are so many different ways artists are working with communities, he provides ways we might think about what it means for an artist to collaborate or participate with an audience.

- 1. *Nominal Participation***— *a viewer contemplates the artwork in a passive manner.*
- 2. *Directed Participation***— *a visitor completes a simple task to contribute to the creation of the work.*
- 3. *Creative Participation***—*the visitor provides content for part of a work that has been created by an artist.*
- 4. *Collaborative Participation***— *the visitor shares responsibility for developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration with the artist.*

BREAK DOWN AND EXAMPLES

Nominal Participation— Many artists engaged in artworks that fall into this category. Addressing issues of race, cultural and religious differences, social and political issues, etc. These kinds of works are seen in traditional art galleries and museums. See earlier lectures for more examples of these.

At this level the viewer contemplates the artwork. We may be moved emotionally, it may make us think, but we are passive in our participation with the work.

Here are some examples:

Kerry James Marshall

The subject matter of his paintings, installations, and public projects is often drawn from African-American popular culture, and is rooted in the geography of his upbringing.

His works address issues of race, juxtaposing images from the history of Blacks and Whites in America.

Many Mansions, 1994 and Our Town



Wangechi Mutu

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Mutu scrutinizes globalization by combining found materials, magazine cutouts, sculpture, and painted imagery.

Race, cultural and gender stereotypes are addressed. Much of her current work deals with violence against women.

Mutu recently installed sculptures in front of the MET in Manhattan.

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/wangechi_mutu/



Kara Walker

Walker is best known for exploring the raw intersection of race, gender, and sexuality through her iconic, silhouetted figures.

She uses the traditionally proper Victorian medium of the silhouette, applying them directly onto the walls of the gallery, creating a theatrical space in which her unruly cut-paper characters fornicate and inflict violence on one another.

These are individual images but the pieces contain an entire scene.

Learn more about her at this link:

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/kara-walker>





Race dominates everything, yet within it Walker finds a chaos of contradictory ideas and emotions. She is single-minded in seeing racism as a reality, but of many minds about exactly how that reality plays out in the present and the past. For her the reliable old dualities — white versus black , strong versus weak, victim versus predator — are volatile and shifting. And she uses her art — mocking, shaming, startlingly poignant, excruciatingly personal — to keep them this way. (from a New York Times review.)

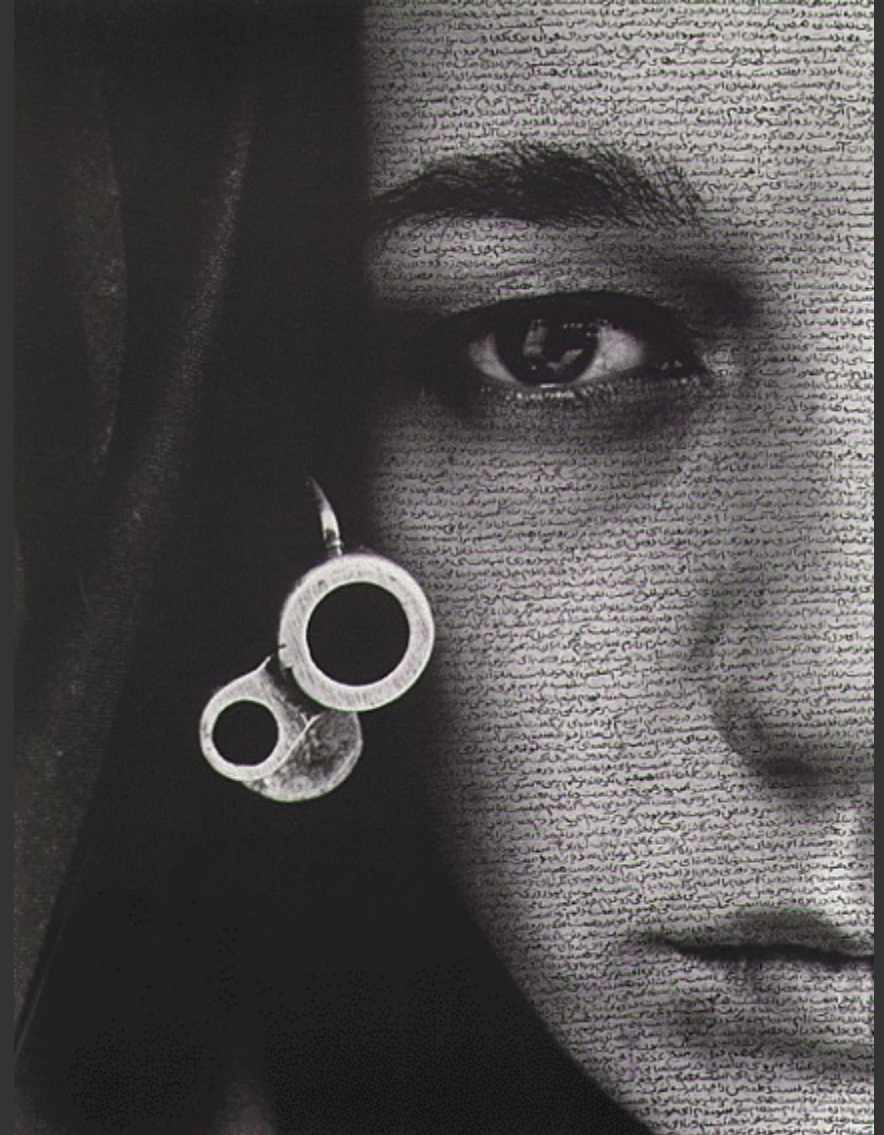


Shirin Neshat is an Iranian artist whose work addresses issues related to her culture, in particular women's issues.

Early photos from the *Speechless, Unveiling* and *Women of Allah* series explore notions of women in relation to fundamental Islamic and militancy in Iran.



Her work refers to the social, cultural and religious codes of Muslim societies and the complexity of certain oppositions, such as man and woman. The work is deliberately open-ended to reflect her own internal conflict as a Muslim women.



Photography and films are both colored by religion, gender and a sense of cultural displacement as she now lives in NYC.

The Korean artist, **Kim Sooja's** epic eleven-day journey *Cities on the Move — 2727 Kilometers Bottari Truck* (November 1997) retraced sites in her memory.

She traveled to different cities and villages where she used to live, carrying colorful bottari on a flat-bed truck. Kim considers the performance "a social sculpture, loaded with memory and history, which locates and then equalizes physical and mental space.

http://www.kimsooja.com/works_video_cities-on-the-move.html





This work moves into the
Directed Participation area.

Some of the other performances have political implications, as suggested by *A Beggar Woman* or *A Homeless Woman* — Delhi (2000), in which Kim lies down on the sidewalk of a busy street. She invites others to participate in the performance. The lack of a direct message advocating social change does allow participants to perhaps feel the suffering of others.

Kim Sooja, *Beggar Woman*: Times Square Friday, March 11, 2005 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. Times Square, NYC (Broadway and 44th street). Planned in conjunction with *The 59th Minute*, a Creative Time project. 2005

Directed Participation— the artist directs the viewer to do something. Viewer has the option to do it or not. Helguera mentions one of Yoko Ono's pieces, *Wish Tree*.

Chinese Artist, ZHANG HUAN, designed this performance to bring attention to this group of Chinese Workers, recently laid off when a government factory was closed.

In a group performance called 'To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond', he asked 40 migrant laborers to stand in a pond, their physical presence altering its volume.



For another titled 'To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain,' he and nine other artists climbed a mountain near Beijing, stripped and lay down on top of one another to create a second, mini-peak.

Both of these artworks bring attention to how one body matters. In China, where there are so many people, little attention is given to the importance of the individual.



Zhang Huan - "To add 1 meter to an unknown mountain", 1995
C-print surface archival - grand 101,6 x 152,4 cm / Edition 6

Another example of Directed Participation is *the work of*

Rirkrit Tiravanija—

The New York—and—Chiang Mai—based Thai artist became famous in 1992 when he made *Untitled 1992 (Free)*, a sculpture—performance—installed a makeshift kitchen, complete with fridge, hot plates, rice steamers, tables, and stools. He then cooked Thai curry; anyone could drop in, serve him- or herself, and eat. For free.



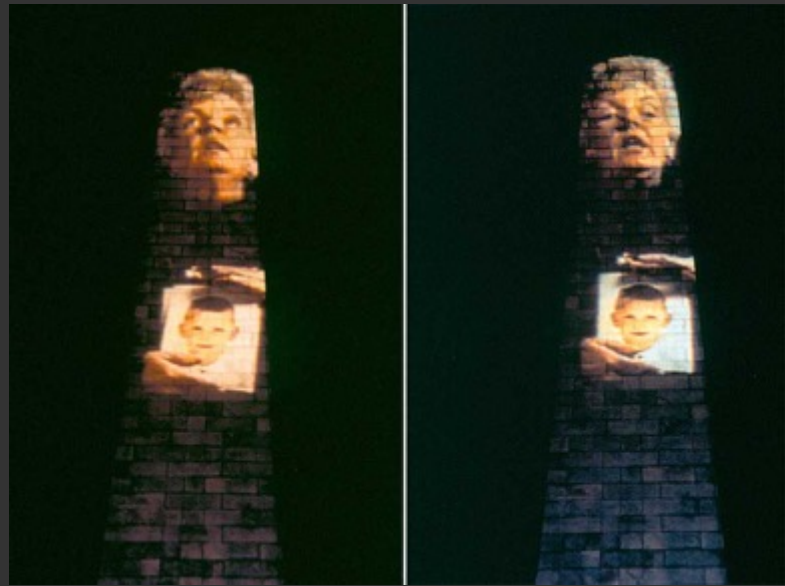


He integrates the flux of his itinerant life into museums and gallery spaces, effectively destroying the division between art and life. Installations have included re-organizing a gallery as a temporary kitchen in which he cooked and chatted with visitors.



Known for installing ping-pong tables (this one with political and sociological phrases distributed all over the exhibition space), Tiravanija is interested in the visitor and how he relates and interacts with the work. Visitors are invited to play ping-pong, even inventing their own rules.

We have also already discussed the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko . Many of his works fall into this category. But can also move into the creative category.



Directed Participation is also where we might put works like this and some of the work of Mel Chin like his 'Nomad' video game that has participants navigate through carpet designs of cultures that are dying out.



Creative Participation—the visitor provides content for part of a work that has been created by an artist.

While some of Mel Chin's work fits into the directed participatory category, Project Pay Dirt fits into the Creative one. You should already know about this project from earlier lectures.

When asked by the city of New Orleans to see what creative solutions to problems created after Hurricane Katrina, Chin, overwhelmed started with analyzing the soil.



Recognizing it was going to take money (estimated cost is \$300,000,000), Chin created the “**Fundred Dollar Bill Project**” to raise awareness and encourage Congress to provide necessary funding for the clean up of the lead contamination.

The Fundred Dollar Bill Project is designed to involve 3 million school children and teachers from across the country that creates art for change. Participating children draw or color on specially designed \$100 bill worksheets to create their own Fundred Dollar Bills.

<http://melchin.org/oeuvre/operation-paydirtfundred-dollar-bill-project>



Collaborative Participation— the visitor shares responsibility for developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration with the artist.

Artists like:

Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival

Emily Jacir

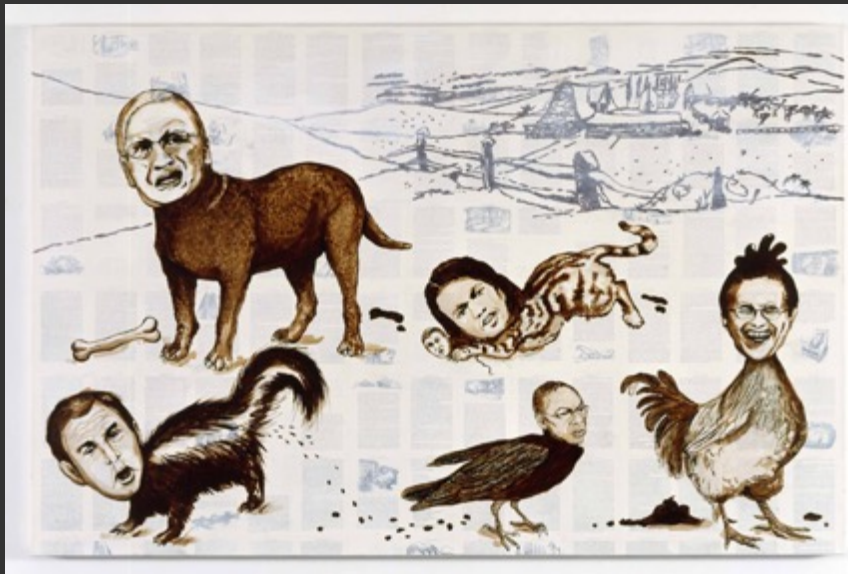
Ashley Hunt

Thomas Hirschhorn

All Art Education and Art Therapy programs with critical intention.



Tim Rollins worked with a group of young people in an at risk neighborhood. He discovered that his students responded to art - art taught his way, not the way it is usually taught in public schools. Some of Rollins' students became a group of regulars who participated in an after-school and weekend program called the Art of Knowledge Workshop.



Tim Rollins and his collaborators, high school students from the South Bronx, NY, typically make works based on classic literature.

This one is based on, *Animal Farm*.





The students named themselves K.O.S. which stands for "Kids of Survival. "What we're doing changes people's conception about who can make art, how art is made, who can learn and what's possible, because a lot of these kids had been written off by the school system. This is our revenge."

Collaborative Participation is also where we locate works like Thomas Hirschhorn's "Gramsci Monument" and Rick Low's "Project Row Houses." Ashley Hunt's "Notes on Emptying a City."



The art world has never been socially or politically neutral. Given this, many artists are recognizing the ability and responsibility to construct socially conscious practices.

There are many more artists working in social areas, working with communities, collaborating and using their creativity as artists for the social good.

For your analysis paper use artist here and in other lectures. Be creative and have more than one example. Do your research. There are also artists listed on the website and in yours and other TEAM folder.