

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

Faculdade de Belas Artes



ART AT THE COURT OF SCIENCE

In Other Words

Richard Craig Meitner

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor em Belas Artes, especialidade em
Escultura

2016

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Júri:

Presidente: Professor Doutor Fernando António Baptista Pereira

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Professora Doutora Teresa Maria Castro de Almeida

RESUMO

Esta tese é baseada na minha prática alargada de fazer e ensinar arte e consiste nas minhas reflexões teóricas referentes ao que acredito ser fundamentalmente verdadeiro sobre o que é a arte, o fazer da arte e o ensinar da arte. Estas considerações são sustentadas pelas minhas próprias obras, às quais o texto também vai fazendo referência, e também num anexo, por um livro representando uma grande parte da minha produção artística até à data, incluindo artigos sobre a minha obra por autoridades reconhecidas no meu campo. Será também exibida uma seleção de algumas obras recentes durante a discussão da tese.

de teoria acerca dela são práticas diferentes. Este texto argumenta que elas são muito mais diferentes do que poderíamos imaginar.

Se a Natureza nos falasse em palavras, o que nos diria sobre a nossa compreensão dela? Como, por exemplo, nos apareceria uma das suas criaturas, digamos, um elefante ou um burro, se viessem trajados como nós? Estas questões são tratadas no texto como se fossem análogas em extremo à forma como um artista explicaria a sua prática se seguisse os mesmos procedimentos prescritos para historiadores ou teóricos quando discutem as práticas desse mesmo artista. Nos dois casos, erguem-se consideráveis dificuldades.

O texto, consistente com o ditado “a forma segue a função”, assume a posição de que a arte não segue os mesmos caminhos que são tanto característicos como necessários para outras práticas. A lógica constitui o instrumento essencial e produto desejável de muitas práticas, mas esse não é o caso da prática da arte. Aqui, muito pelo contrário, é a Emoção que constitui tanto o veículo como o objectivo. Este texto assume um caminho decididamente associativo, dando plena ênfase à posição que defende que seguir caminhos lineares em exclusivo quando definindo ou praticando arte é, literalmente, irracional.

Ocultas por detrás do que ensinamos actualmente na formação artística, existem, na minha opinião, algumas narrativas falsas em acção, com consequências importantes. Quando ensinamos os alunos a compreender e a explicar o fazer da arte como uma sucessão de pensamentos e considerações analíticas, na sua grande parte, estamos a apoiar essas narrativas. Este texto sugere que as nossas escolhas, ao fazermos arte, não são deduções lógicas, de todo, mas sim decisões enraizadas directamente na intuição e em preocupações emocionais. Tal significa conhecimento informado por toda a nossa experiência prévia e desencadeado por semelhanças que conseguimos intuir através de reinos muito diferentes dessa experiência. Pensamos que é muito importante entender que essas conexões sentidas são acedidas de forma primariamente inconsciente. Em primeira instância, são quase invariavelmente sentidas, e não conhecidas. E sugerimos que é apenas depois de actuarmos sobre essas conexões intuídas no fazer da arte que estamos em posição de analisar o que fizemos, de considerar os resultados das nossas acções ou de extrair conclusões delas. Ocorrem graves problemas quando alegamos ou sugerimos que a análise consciente foi a base dos processos que nos levaram a agir em primeiro lugar. Eu afirmo que este não é o caso, em absoluto, e que teorias baseadas nesse princípio revelar-se-ão sempre desadequadas.

Se eu fosse um cozinheiro e desejasse criar um novo prato, confiaria, ao escolher os ingredientes, não no que o meu pensamento me dissesse, mas, ao invés e em primeira instância, no que o meu corpo, ou seja, as minhas papilas gustativas me dissessem. A base sobre a qual agiria não seria o raciocínio a partir da memória, mas, acima de tudo, a capacidade de a minha língua se lembrar e de recriar experiências passadas. Uma decisão, por exemplo, de incluir noz-moscada no meu novo prato não seria tomada porque eu consigo pensar na noz-moscada como sendo doce e aromática, mas sim no ligeiro acrescento amargo que poderia trazer ao sabor geral. É a memória, na minha língua, desse sabor que me informa directamente acerca do que poderia ser o resultado do acrescento da noz-moscada.

Por outras palavras, ao cozinhar um prato novo ou ao fazer arte, falamos de processos que, em primeira instância, estão relacionados com o corpo e com a intuição e não com o pensamento cerebral. É verdade que podemos intuir um caminho para o pensamento – e muitas vezes, assim o fazemos. Contudo, na verdade, não podemos pensar um caminho para intuir.

Se me encarregassem de propor uma única e talvez muito importante melhoria, a ser rápida e facilmente implementada na formação artística, eu sugeriria esta:

requerer uma inclusão estrutural e curricular de “trabalhar com os materiais” no tipo de cursos que oferecemos aos historiadores e teóricos da arte seria algo relativamente fácil de conseguir. Acredito sinceramente que uma melhoria significativa na educação artística, tanto para historiadores e teóricos, tal como para os artistas praticantes que com eles estudam, seria cumprida com esta medida. Um número de confusões sobre a prática de arte que eu discuto neste texto seria em breve grandemente resolvido por esta acção. Proponho que a introdução estrutural aos aspectos materiais do significado na arte deva ser uma parte exigida na educação formal tanto de artistas como historiadores e teóricos de arte. Pessoas que tenham como função conhecer, ensinar ou produzir avaliações autorizadas a um alto nível sobre a arte devem, verdadeiramente, ter um grau significativo de familiaridade com o que faz parte dessa actividade. Existe alguma razão lógica pela qual a “**prática da arte**”, ou seja, o fazer da arte, não seja parte do currículo obrigatório de historiadores de arte e teóricos da arte, enquanto o estudo intenso da história da arte **faz parte** do currículo exigido a artistas praticantes? Parece-me uma situação desequilibrada e ilógica.

O significado na arte não é um produto estritamente linear das intenções do artista, nem está contido no material físico que constitui a sua obra de arte. O significado não é, com efeito, uma qualidade intrínseca das obras de arte, mas sim uma entidade emergente. As obras de arte não **têm** significado; elas “assumem um significado”. Esse significado não é singular na sua natureza, é pluriforme, não sendo persistente para um observador nem consistente entre vários observadores. O fazer da arte pode ser pensado como acto procriador, em vez de feito reprodutivo. Algo de novo passa a existir e começa a assumir vida, muitas vezes em maneiras e em direcções muito diferentes das pretendidas – ou esperadas. A arte mostra-nos coisas que conhecemos de formas diferentes das normais. Quando um artista cria uma nova obra tal pode assemelhar-se a um acto de Deus, a criação de uma nova realidade. O artista faz com que uma nova ordem principie a sua existência. Acrescenta a sua obra, algo muito pequeno que ele criou, e pode então considerar o mundo de uma nova maneira.

Se esperamos entender realmente o que é o fazer da arte e, assim, entender melhor como melhor ensiná-la, estou convencido de que temos de mudar algumas coisas. Devíamos despende menos tempo e energia à procura do objectivo da arte ao nível da miríade de significados sociais que imaginamos para ela. Correspondentemente, deveríamos devotar mais esforço à compreensão da natureza e da importância do seu significado individual para o

artista que produziu a obra, bem como para o observador que se emocionou com ela. Todas as outras formas de encarar a arte, na minha visão, são abstracções, meros derivados disto. Não podemos compreender e partilhar conhecimento sobre as árvores quando limitamos o nosso estudo e discussões em grande parte à floresta. Na Arte, o indivíduo, o “Eu” tem de verdadeiramente ser entendido como a personagem principal dessa história. Por outras palavras, a Arte, para o artista, é a SUA HISTÓRIA.

A Arte e a Filosofia, quando são bem praticadas, nunca nos oferecerão respostas simples. Ao invés, dão forma a questões inspiradoras e fundamentais. Não recordam, parafraseiam ou repetem o que já sabemos. Em vez disso, elas tornam manifesta a nossa curiosidade com respeito a tudo o que ainda não conhecemos. A História, a Filosofia e a Arte, quando movidas pela paixão pela descoberta e acompanhadas por uma disponibilidade de suspender a crença, cumprem muito mais do que meramente a confirmação de teorias existentes ou a produção de novas teorias. Elas motivam-nos a explorar – ou seja, a descobrir e a criar fascinantes novos factos vitalmente importantes. Talvez a arte e a ciência devam ser encaradas como as nossas tentativas, por meios muito diversos, não obstante, de chegar a verdades fundamentais que são de grande importância para nós. Ambas são direccionadas às descobertas sobre nós e o universo que habitamos, estudando e registando o que encontramos.

A ciência entende e explica o universo presumindo causalidade, tempo linear e a existência de regras ou padrões ocultos persistentes que, se se for suficientemente diligente, podem ser localizados e entendidos. A arte, de forma muito diferente, compreende e explica o universo de forma intuitiva, emocional, por vezes até “mágica”. A ciência confia no génio do intelecto, a Arte no génio do espírito. A Arte é o Bobo na Corte da Ciência.

Palavras-Chave:

Arte e Ciência, Educação artística, Subconsciente, Processualidade lógica e emocional, História da Arte

ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on my extensive practice in making and teaching art, and consists of my theoretical reflections concerning what I believe to be fundamentally true about what art, artmaking and teaching art are. Those considerations are backed up by- and make reference throughout the text to my own works, and also in annex to a book representing a large portion of my artistic production to date, including articles about that work by recognized authorities in my field. A selection of some recent works will also be exhibited during the discussion of the thesis.

Making art, understanding its history, or engaging in theory about it are different practices. In fact, this text argues, they are very much more different than we currently seem to imagine.

If Nature could speak words to us, what would they tell us about our understanding of her? How, for example, would one of her creatures, let's say an elephant or a donkey, both act and appear to us if they donned our clothes? These questions are treated in the text as highly analogous to how an artist would explain his practice when following the same procedures prescribed for historians or theorists of art when they discuss their practices. Discussed and demonstrated will be that considerable difficulties arise.

Consistent with the adage: "Form follows Function", the text takes and defends the position that art doesn't follow the same paths that are both characteristic of- and necessary for other practices. Logic forms both the essential tool and the desired product of many practices, whereas the position is taken that this is fundamentally not so in the practice of art. There, very differently, it is Emotion that constitutes both its vehicle and objective. A decidedly associative route is taken in the text, to give physical form to the argument that following linear paths alone when defining- or engaging in the practice of art is quite literally irrational.

Key Words: Art and Science, Art education, Subconscious, Logical and Emotional Processing, History of Art

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Abstract	7
2 The Bridge-with thanks to my father	13
3 Before beginning	14-19
4 Things change	19-22
5 The Emperor's new clothes	22-23
6 To spend my seed	23-25
7 Athletes and awards	25-27
8 In a state! (art)	28-30
9 Form follows Function	31
10 A begin at the beginning	31-33
11 Buzzwords and buzzpractice	33-37
12 Courage	37-42
13 Speaking with authority	43-47
14 Pushing the point?	48-52
15 Actions speak louder than words	53-54
16 Embodied cognition	55-60
17 The inconvenience of art	60-62
18 How we solve problems	62-69
19 Standing on the shoulders of giants	69-71
20 Sensitivity	72-80
21 Where does love live?	81-83
22 Is art academic?	84-86
23 Art and the artist's purpose	86-93
24 The art experience, liminality, and a few words about magic	92-98
25 The limitations of ratio	98-100
26 Synchronicity and Don Juan	101-105

27 Intellectual rigor	105-106
28 Concept....what's up with that?!	106-118
29 Material matters	118-122
30 Some certainties about uncertainty	122-125
31 The mother of intention	125-127
32 Metaphysics	127-134
33 Information and categories	134-138
34 It's about time!	139-143
35 Outliers	144-146
36 Progress through chemistry	146-149
37 Art, the individual, and the other	150-151
38 More about derivatives	151-152
39 Hors(e) Categorie	153-155
40 Art, work and play	155-158
41 Art is to logic and dancing is to walking	158-159
42 Putting the pieces together	161
43 Six legged cows and the terrifyingly impossible	163-165
44 Griots and history	165-166
45 Magister Ludi	166-167
46 Conclusion	168-171
47 The bridge	172
Images of recent works	174-185
Endnotes	186-192
Bibliography	193-196
Annexed: Book "Richard Meitner", curriculum vitae	

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 “ <i>Things Change</i> ”- 1997 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	20
Fig.2 “ <i>My Seed....to Spend or Save?</i> ”-2004 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	24
Fig. 3 Rene Magritte, 1918. © C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York consulted in http://collections.lacma.org/node/239578 , 10/10/2016	31
Fig 4. “ <i>Courage</i> ”, 2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	37
Fig. 5 “ <i>Pushing the Point-Art in Glass</i> ”-2004 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	47
Fig. 6 “ <i>Body Cognition</i> ” -2013 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	55
Fig. 7 “ <i>Balance</i> ”-1998 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	72
Fig. 8 “ <i>Fighter</i> ” by Egon Schiele, 1913, © 2000–2014 The Athenaeum . Consulted in http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=7475 , 10/10/2016	74
Fig. 9 “ <i>Falling from Grace</i> ” - 2003 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	90
Fig. 10 “ <i>Reductio ad Aurum</i> ”- 1997 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	101
Fig. 11 “ <i>Who’s Afraid of Wood, Paint and Glass?</i> ” -2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	113
Fig. 12 “ <i>Who’s Afraid of Wood, Paint and Glass?</i> ” -2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	125
Fig. 13 untitled- 1981 by Richard Meitner, photo by Robert Schlingemann©	130

Fig. 14 <i>"History"</i> - 1995 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	138
Fig. 15 <i>"History Too"</i> 2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	141
Fig. 16 <i>"Progress through Chemistry"</i> -2001 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	146
Fig. 17 <i>"Le Verre, le Contraire, et L'Autre"</i> -1990 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	150
Fig. 18 <i>"Art Before Horse"</i> 1996 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	153
Fig. 19 <i>"Cold fusion"</i> 1997 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	160
Fig. 20 <i>"History Too"</i> – 2009 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	171
Fig. 21 <i>"In Other Words"</i> 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by R. Meitner	173
Fig. 22 <i>"Nuts"</i> 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	175
Fig. 23 <i>"Capped Engram"</i> 2013 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	176
Fig. 24 <i>"F Cushion"</i> 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	177
Fig. 25 <i>"Not a Peep (ceci)"</i> 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	178
Fig. 26 <i>"The Flyer"</i> 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	179
Fig. 27 <i>"Are you Talking to ME!?"</i> 2015 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	180
Fig. 28 <i>"Blow"</i> 2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	181
Fig. 29 <i>"Strike While the Iron's Hot"</i> -2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	182
Fig. 30 <i>"Recent Additions, (+1, +2, +3 and +4)"</i> 2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	183
Fig. 31 <i>"Wurst that could happen"</i> 2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©	184

Fig. 32 *“Ready to Roll”* 2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra© 185

THE BRIDGE-WITH THANKS TO MY FATHER

Two old men, longtime friends, meet each other somewhere in Southern Europe on a small bridge that crosses the river separating an old rural village and the small farms they work that surround it. One of them, Pedro, is on his way to town while the other, Fernando together with his donkey, are returning from town to his farm. *"Hello Pedro, Greetings Fernando, nice to run into you!"* They talk of this and that for a while, and then start to take leave of each other to continue on their respective journeys. Fernando however, before leaving, suddenly grabs up a large branch that serves as his walking stick, and begins forcefully to strike his donkey over the back with it. Pedro, shocked by this sudden display of aggression, says *"Wait, stop Fernando, why are you beating that poor beast?!!"* Fernando replies, *"I'm, not beating him at all, I just want to go home now, and obviously I need the donkey to go with me!?"* Pedro then says, *"Yes, yes, my friend, that's obvious, but why don't you try to make clear to the animal what you want from him? Maybe talk to him or pull on his reins or something to show that you want him to follow you?!!"* Fernando, now clearly irritated by this questioning of his actions answers: *"Well of course I am going to do that, but first I need to get his attention!"*

-(My father told me this story when I was 10 years old)

BEFORE BEGINNING

My goals with this text are in some senses, perhaps remarkable. I am hoping to demonstrate knowledge and analytical ability consistent with the awarding of a formal PhD in the Practice of Art. At the same time however, it is my express purpose to argue that if I am successful in this, what I will have demonstrated are abilities not at all essential to my practice, the practice of art. That makes composing this text a rather complex undertaking for me. The same may well also be true for reading it!

This text is constituted largely by a selection of a number of my thoughts and writings from recent years that when taken together, represent the most important thoughts and beliefs I have related to art. Although I have now selected, edited and ordered these texts, the result does not form a straight line or a clear path. My text will unavoidably jump around a bit, possibly even quite a bit. At the same time, I imagine the meandering path of this text as giving physical form to my conviction that a deeper understanding of art can never be arrived at by simple paths or straight lines.

It seems to me that the logical place to start a discussion about Understanding Art, is with the question what function(s) making it has for the artist who makes it. In other words: “why do we have any art in the first place?” It follows that in first instance, it is artists who must offer an account of the functions making art fulfills for them. They are, after all, the most qualified and obvious source for those answers. I am an artist, and will attempt here to define some of those functions. In so doing, I will try to make the case that some of our current ways of considering, speaking about- and teaching art are inconsistent with-

even contradictory to those functions. What I say about the functions making art has for an artist, will most certainly not apply for all artists and all art. That is unavoidable because my words here do not constitute a survey, but instead, proceed very largely from my own experience. Additionally, I am unable to place any artist other than myself under a microscope or dissect him in order to offer solid evidence. I am however convinced that most of what I say would find agreement from most experienced artists.

There is an overarching and persistent current attitude regarding the teaching and understanding of art that I believe is neither correct nor useful. That attitude proceeds from the notion that a work of art can be very largely understood as an intelligible (if you are knowledgeable enough) message from the artist to the rest of us. As such, it would stand to reason that the message is one meant to be 'read' and understood by others. The proponents of that idea tend to regard the message as one that is recorded in a kind of visual code consisting of more or less standardized and decipherable symbols, similarly to our spoken language. Those people we normally imagine have the greatest ability to 'decode' artists' messages for us, seem most often to do so on the basis of an education in art history and/or art theory. The process of decoding, it seems, demands a very thorough working knowledge of art history and art theory, and sometimes of philosophy or even of science, all highly respected academic pursuits. What those experts then offer us as crucial for the understanding of art is almost invariably analysis based on collections of discrete verifiable facts.

I want to challenge this approach as one I think is logically untenable, because it fails to take into account some aspects of art I am convinced are critically important ones. One of those critical aspects is the artist's true motivations for making art, i.e. those function(s) making a work of art directly fulfill for him.

Another is the very processes by which art is made. Largely missing from the analyses of those who don't make art, is all that happens **before** artworks are shown to- or spoken of by others than the artist. I submit that there are a number of fundamental aspects of art that people who haven't made it, many of those the very 'authoritative experts' I referred to, may well be insufficiently familiar with.

Regarding art primarily as communication for example, is I think not a useful way at all to explain, understand, or appreciate it. While it is undeniably important for almost all artists that they can **show** their works to others, that cannot be simplistically presumed to issue from the need to **tell** others things

I, for example, do not make art that conveys specific central thoughts or concepts that I consider it important for others to know of. Seldom if ever, am I reacting directly with my work to political, philosophical, social, religious, or environmental issues. Truth be told, I don't 'think my way' to making a work of art at all. Instead I feel my way to it. Those last words, vague as they may seem, are highly important ones, at the very heart of a number of the most important arguments I will try to develop. There exist very considerable differences between what we come to know by thinking, and what we come to know by feeling. It is my conviction that in art, what we know or do by feeling is far more important than what we know or do by thinking .

Artists I am contending, cannot usefully be regarded as making art in order to 'pass messages' to the rest of us, that experts with entirely different training then make understandable for us by interpreting, or decoding them. Artists are perhaps not really 'speakers' in that way at all, instead they are perhaps more akin to 'actors'. By that I mean that artworks can perhaps be far more usefully regarded as actions undertaken, rather than as messages being transmitted.

When I for example make art, I am extending myself physically, availing myself

of my ability to act on space outside my own body. My artwork, once finished and coming to occupy space independently of me, becomes a permanent extension of myself. What I have externalized however, is not at all a direct representation of myself, nor of any specific thought(s) I've had that I believed it important for others to know about. My artwork is more like a memento I leave behind, indicative of-, perhaps even celebratory for me of my ability to act on material that may remain after I'm gone. It is a small record of a moment in my life rather than a bold statement readily intelligible for all- or many others. Choosing to describe an artwork as an act rather than a thought is an important distinction. The reasons why I think it highly useful to do this, will I hope become more clear in the course of this text. For now I will say that the action of making art can be likened to the action of lifting your arm, then moving it slowly outward through space in an arc that returns it to your body, when describing for example, a large expanse of land you've visited. We sometimes choose to act in such a way because of a bodily gesture's ability to encompass our experience, and in so doing, to describe it in a powerfully distinct way. At the same time, it is important to realize that the gesture is very different from the experience it describes. The body can very effectively generate metaphor for experience. But neither the gesture I described, nor making artwork, should be presumed to replace, directly communicate-, or literally transmit the individual experiences they signify. In fact in art, what we are offered are very often not specific representations at all. Instead we are being offered impressions, analogies, ones almost invariably taking on form importantly different from the experiences they refer to. Our experiences are in very large measure, retained in bodily memory. That kind of knowledge or content can be accessed as 'felt or sensed', as opposed to the very different type of knowledge we habitually reduce to verbal symbols by thought, and then transmit to others by speaking our thoughts. I submit that it is very largely not at all that kind of

content that art transmits. The mode of transmission in art already very strongly indicates that it is emotional- rather than intellectual content that is being transmitted.

In fact, without our body, I don't think we could have any relation at all to the world. Mind alone can understand the world only within very narrow and distinct limits. It is our corporeal existence in space that allows us, in fact demands of us that we engage with the world , and it is that engagement that is the basis for **knowing** in the real sense of that word. What we know, as opposed to what we merely think, is determined in critically important measure by the size of our body as it relates to all else, the movements and actions it is capable of performing, and the dangers to its integrity that exist in the world. I think it scientifically accurate to say that all emotion of any kind or degree has its origin in body rather than in intellect. I believe in fact that it is only because our body knows movement and is vulnerable to pain and damage that we are capable of feeling or knowing anything.

It is time I believe, to advance much beyond what we are able to understand about art merely by comparing paintings to ones that preceded them, and comparing what people were thinking, doing and talking about at those respective times and now. It is time to tackle some rather more difficult- but I claim, far more fundamental questions about art. Why do we make and value it, and what is the true nature of the faculties we engage when we do that? The notion that art has its origin in our ability to think, and that its communicative value for others is centered in that same ability, is in my view quite thoroughly mistaken. I submit that Art both originates in- and is understood by us primarily because we have the ability to act on the world, on materials, on each other, and literally to feel and learn important things, wordlessly, from what results from those actions.

My primary purpose here is to argue that art and artists are far more concerned with knowledge felt and sensed, than with facts or thoughts that we can express in words. Approaches to art that disregard or refute this, whether disseminated in the context of education or outside of it are, I believe, of very little service to us in coming to understand what art really means or offers.

THINGS CHANGE

There is no more readily discernible logical- or theoretical basis for very many of the choices artists make in their works, than there is for the decision to buy a chocolate ice cream cone on a warm summer's day rather than a strawberry one. I think it possible that that statement may already seem a shocking one for some who read it. My point however, is that both kinds of choices result primarily from our feelings, sensitivities and preferences at the time, rather than being time-independent or logical decisions we come to at the conclusion of fact-based thought processes. We frequently choose to act in this or that way, very largely unconscious of all of the reasons for doing so. To a limited degree, if we decide that we must do so, we can perhaps explain our choices. But far more often, we feel no need to do so, and don't. After all, we know very well that tomorrow we may choose quite differently, not bound to do otherwise by our earlier choices. We are none of us exactly the same person through time, our experiences constantly change us. In fact I think, we change very much more than we are ever aware of! Our verbal or written explanations of the choices we make as artists, I am suggesting, do not often reveal any more useful or deeper-lying truths than that one, i.e. "things change". And there is I add, precious little in the form of theory that can adequately formulate our responses to that one omnipresent condition of our lives. It is largely for that

reason that I suggest that the role theory plays in making or understanding art cannot be more than a very limited one.



fig. 1 "*Things Change*"- 1997 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

We change, what happens around us changes, and our feelings and reactions to these changes, change as well. Art, a pursuit that manifests our reactions to those many changes, is not a process of logical deduction. In fact I think it much closer to the opposite. What I mean is that like Life itself, art is not deductive or reductive, but is instead an additive process, i.e. it is an experiential- rather than an analytical activity. We very often make additions or changes, i.e. do

things, not because we are certain of positive outcomes on some theoretical basis that underlies our actions. Instead we choose much more often than not to do things because we know that we need to, in order to find out what happens! If looked at in this light, neither living our lives nor making art are usefully understood as ways to communicate or pass on knowledge. Instead I think it far more useful to imagine that we live our lives, and some of us make art, very largely because both offer us unique opportunities to find out things.

Current paradigm it seems to me clearly, persuades us that artists make artworks in order to communicate things. But the appealing simplicity of that supposition belies some very significant downsides it has. The communicative component of the function that art may indeed also have is, I think, very inadequately understood, far too highly prioritized in discussing and teaching art, and as a result, its usefulness for understanding art is very limited.

There are critical differences in both kind and degree, between knowledge we gain when we consider clear topics and structurally related individual facts, or alternatively, when we decide to search out and distil our own points of view from highly diverse ones. Facts are a little like bricks, i.e. they are individual elements that can be highly useful for constructing things. Whatever we construct with them however, begins only to take on meaningful and lasting form when we use mortar to cement them together. It seems both necessary and logical therefore to look closely at what is between facts or bricks, and to understand that as determinant for the functional usefulness we can expect to derive from their use. Clarity regarding complex entities like the nature, purposes and workings of art, I am suggesting, cannot be arrived at by microscopic examination of what we merely assume are the most important facts about it. Complex entities like art can only be understood if we take leave of the naïve hope to fully understand in that comfortable, controlled-, and

unavoidably highly limited way. That is like expecting to understand the deep meaning a song can have for us when considering only its lyrics.

The knowledge we accumulate on our journeys in art, i.e. the value art has for us, is not determined by the ease and speed with which we can describe or arrive at fixed clear conclusions or precise destinations. The point of that particular journey is in fact not at all where or when we arrive at its conclusion. Instead the real value of a journey in art, is in far greater measure a function of what we encounter, experience, and learn along the way.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

Differently than the one I cited at the beginning of this text, I imagine that we are all familiar with another story. That one tell us what happened, long ago, when a certain little boy in a crowd of onlookers watched his Emperor parading in his New Clothes. The little boy, shocked by what he was seeing, cried out loudly that the emperor had no clothes on at all, was in fact parading around quite naked! Today we know that the boy had very little reason to expect that speaking the truth would result in any immediate- or widespread public support for his position.

We don't often see many kings or emperors anymore, and when we do, they are always carefully clothed. It is however still common to hear Emperors, kings, and also politicians, and academic researchers speak of themselves as **we**. But we now know of course that when they do so, they most often mean nothing more than "I". The writer here, I, am not an emperor, a king, a politician, or an academic researcher. Instead I am an artist. For artists, the word 'I' necessarily carries far more importance than for people from many other walks of life. In an artist's case, "I" is something the artist **must** be able to concentrate- and

draw on in his work, far more so than any kind of **we**. That point is one I also think quite an essential one for any understanding of what artists really do, or what art really is. Art is after all, perhaps **the** human pursuit that licenses and promotes a focused profession, even a celebration, of what one individual **I** is capable of seeing, realizing, feeling, and offering, quite independently of whether anyone else sees, does, - feels -or says things similarly. This applies almost equally I believe, to both the making of art, and to its true appreciation by all others. It is the unique and personal experiences and points of view of both the artist and the individual viewer that are at the very center of art experience, long before anything that any larger group of people suggest- or can agree they may have in common with each other. Communication is surely intended in art. But very differently than that kind of communication we effect with words, it is not a kind that either aims at- or can assume any high degree of uniformity in the understanding of what is being communicated.

TO SPEND MY SEED

I am a professional artist and teacher of art. I have made art, exhibited my works internationally, served as a member of evaluation and advisory panels, on juries for art, and have taught art at institutions of higher education for some decades. Writing this text allows me to give form to a common human-, (or at least, human male-) impulse, to 'spend my seed'. With that perhaps misleading phrase, I am referring in fact to the tendency on arriving at a certain age, to look back-, gather up and ponder-, to try to make sense of- and, if possible, pass on some of my life's important experiences. At such a time, I re-examine all I've thought and done, experienced, felt and learned. Doing so, I can then begin to get a sense of what I know and believe, how little or how much I've changed, when- and perhaps also why that happened.



fig.2 *"My Seed....to Spend or Save?"*-2004 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

Doing that now, it is admittedly attractive for me to imagine that my own looking-back-and-pondering may perhaps have value for others embarking in life on similar similar paths. It would be great for example if some students of art, artists, or art educators are interested in some things I've seen, felt, and learned in the course of a lifetime making and teaching art. Very many of those things remain consistent with what I was taught long ago when I was myself a student. However, as I have indicated, a number of things I have come to consider very important about art seem difficult or impossible to rhyme with some of our current practices and trends in education. It is there, where what I

have learned and concluded about making art seems very different from current practices in art education that I try to focus this text.

My reason for concentrating on what I fervently believe to be true about art, which does **not** accord with current educational practice or theory is quite simple. I have always found viewpoints and opinion contrary to-, questioning-, or challenging existing paradigm, very much more interesting than affirmations of that paradigm. Dissenting or divergent viewpoints seem to offer me the possibility for quite new and valuable insights. By hindsight in fact, I think this very likely also one of the main reasons I chose the profession of artist. An artist's job, I think, cannot reasonably be imagined by anyone to consist of doing one's best to conform to- or confirm existing paradigm!

ATHLETES AND AWARDS

A belief that is a central one for me is that the degree of an artist's competence cannot and should not be determined in any other way than by evaluating the quality of his artwork. Competence in the practice of art cannot in my view, at all successfully be established through the evaluation of the quality of an artist's words about his art. Consider this: An athlete trying to break a record for the 100-meter dash proves ability in his professional pursuit when he succeeds. He is not subject to demands that he convince people that he is 'potentially' or 'theoretically' capable of doing what he has clearly just done! It will not be required that he then explain in medical-, psychological-, philosophical- or other terminology, how and why he was able to accomplish the feat. It will also not be required of him that he prove the ability to persuasively compare what he's done to what others have done before him. In other words, it is the deed itself rather than any of his words about it that constitute both the measure and proof of his ability. Having broken the record is not looked at as

qualifying him for a test of his ability. Instead, what he has done clearly constitutes passing that test. Having accomplished a noteworthy deed, whether for an athlete, an artist, or anyone else we can imagine, is not an indication of that person's **potential** ability. It is the most consequential and clear proof possible of the existence of his **actual** ability.

It's true that establishing that someone has run a fixed distance faster than anyone before him is a question of exact measurement. This can be determined quickly and easily when it happens. The same however cannot be said for evaluating the performance of an artist. There are no uniform and reliable units of measurement for an artist's performance. We have no chronometer, measuring stick, or any other instrument we can use to objectively determine any qualitative aspect of an artist's performance. That determination is clearly a much more complex one. This is a question of judgment, inarguably **subjective** in nature. Whether or not it is convenient or comfortable that this is so, it is a fact we must learn to accept and deal with intelligently, honestly, and openly. We cannot change this by imagining that we have invented- or will discover objective criteria for the subjective judgment we must render. And yet I suggest that this in many respects is precisely what we currently do, i.e. we try to 'objectify' judgments that are inherently and unavoidably subjective ones.

One manifestation of our attempts to use 'objective' criteria for the evaluation of artists' performances that we are currently witnessing is the intense focus in both education and public art fora on relating the motivation, intentions and deeds of artists working in the present to those of famous artists we revere from the past.

Let's go back again for a moment to the athlete I just mentioned. Preparing for a race he must run, one in which he perhaps hopes to break an existing record, he

cannot be concerned with any other race than that one he must now run. Although there exist clear differences between running a race and making an artwork, I suggest that exactly the same is true for artists. There seems a prevailing notion that a constant awareness of what former and currently famous colleagues have done when making an artwork is indispensable for the quality of any artist's performance. I submit that this is an entirely flawed notion. I think it important to consider what may have led to that notion, what logical basis exists for continuing to advance it as a principle in the teaching and evaluation of art. Because this prevailing notion forms a very significant component of current education in art practice, I am going to approach this same notion from different angles in the course of this text.

Being frequently asked by art lovers and by authoritative professionals to do so, I have always found it highly problematic to explain, place-, or motivate my work as it relates to the work of others. It has always seemed to me that if art as we commonly understand that practice is a means of expression, why would there then be an immediate need for words relating that expression to other expressions, other people or things? It seems to me that it is only when we don't succeed to convey what we intended, that any need exists to immediately relate-, rephrase- or paraphrase it. Requiring artists to explain or defend their works by comparing them to the works of others, as well as a number of other practices current in art and education, are approaches I intend here to challenge. As difficult as that may perhaps prove to be, I believe this is a discussion well worth having.

IN A STATE! (ART)

It may well prove problematic that my text now takes the form of an academic Phd thesis. My words here are, after all, not dispassionate ones. I believe it in fact essential that passion is present in what anyone involved in art brings to his task if he hopes to accomplish that task well. The tone of my words here necessarily departs from what may be considered 'academic detachment' with respect to my subject matter. I am presenting my opinions here as valid ones, doing so very often without citing 'authorities' who may have expressed similar- or related views. In truth, I have no academic detachment from my subject matter here or any intention to feign that. My subject is: making, appreciating, understanding, and teaching art. Those activities constitute an important part of my own life experience, are pursuits very dear to me. 'Academic detachment' in my view, implies a high degree of dispassionate objectivity with regard to one's subject matter. Expecting objectivity about art, i.e. an absence of passion in an artist's words about it, is like expecting that from a mother speaking at length of her child. That is highly unrealistic expectation to have, it seems to me!

Additionally, I must say now that following some of the existing procedural regulations for this text would be inconsistent with my purposes in writing it. Those purposes are to call attention to what I believe are some increasingly clear and worrying signs of consequential misunderstandings of art currently being propagated in education. A number of those misunderstandings are now being formalized in policy by the very institutions whose responsibility it is to promote and advance art and education in it.

With respect to my words here, I think it useful to keep the following in mind: What I speak from is not the few years of highly concentrated study characteristic of a student's experiential base. For that reason alone, both my

words and my intentions with them are unavoidably very different ones from those of a young student or researcher in an academic thesis. The thoughts and feelings I express here issue from a formal education completed decades ago, followed by what now approaches a lifetime of experience in both teaching and making art. That background clearly constitutes a very different kind- and amount of experience than a young person can accumulate in a few years of intensive study or research. What I say here, is considerably more informed by my own experiences, feelings and thoughts, than what can be derived from a highly concentrated-, but relatively brief study of the experiences and thoughts of others, in other words, academic study. The many years of my experience also mean that I can neither accurately or comprehensively cite where each of the ideas and arguments I advance originated. But I submit that it has never been central or critical to my practice as an artist to be able to cite the sources or describe the evolution of what I know and can put to use. I am, of course, very interested in acquiring knowledge. But as an artist, I'm not necessarily concerned with recording or maintaining a chronology of the sources of that knowledge. In my view, the profession of artist simply does not carry with it the responsibility to enable others to either construct or verify a chronological chain showing how and when one has learned what he knows. The ability to construct and maintain that kind of causality chain is important for art historians or theoreticians with respect to their subjects. But I believe that historians and theoreticians are engaged in entirely different professional pursuits altogether than practicing artists. There is, I am suggesting, no valid reason whatsoever for anyone to imagine or prescribe that what an artist needs to know and do, is in substantial measure, equivalent to or similar to what art historians or art theorists need to know and do. For me, it is the substance of my knowledge of art rather than the history of that knowledge that is important. It is for that reason that I relate and discuss my experience and

opinions about making art and education in it, rather than continuously to suggest a formal relation of those as they relate to anyone else's.

As a result, I am obliged by my own experience and beliefs about art to take positions that diverge from some of those prescribed for the very process and regime I now participate in, i.e. the process and regulations for submission of a PhD text. My objective is to defend the practice of Art as I know it, against what I see as some very persistent and consequential attacks on that practice. It is of course imaginable that a more accomplished writer than I, by a painstakingly careful crafting of his words, might succeed in avoiding affront to anyone, and still effectively advance all of his arguments. Instead of attempting that very difficult feat, I will now freely admit myself very likely unable to accomplish it. I have chosen instead to prioritize my arguments, rather than to prioritize avoiding confrontation in raising them with the concurrent risk of obscuring the very arguments I am making.

Training and working as an artist are focused on the fascinating but complex process of developing one's own unique and original 'voice', and then continuing to learn ever better ways to exercise it. Everything I've learned and done as a practicing artist is directed at this. Doing so, I've discovered that many things in common with others, but also many things that seem quite different about me than others. This particular reward that making art offers, remains for me one of the most valuable ones in the exercise of my profession. Conformity to formulae, to consensus opinion, or to inflexibly prescribed- but ineffective practices is quite simply inconsistent with that reward.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

A familiar adage from the field of Design is: *Form follows Function*. It is intriguing to realize that the meaning of that phrase is in fact: Function **determines** Form. The words that compose the phrase literally follow each other in the reverse order of what they signify. Meaning is communicated that in fact is the reverse of the literal meaning of the words that compose it. I imagine this phrase as a verbal equivalent of René Magritte's painting below. Both the painting and the design adage convey conceptual information that contradicts what the additional information seems to tell us. The adage: Form Follows Function can be imagined as applying to this text.



Fig. 3 René Magritte, 1918. © C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York consulted in <http://collections.lacma.org/node/239578>, 10/10/2016

A BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

Much of what I say here about art relates to issues at the center of some current scientific research into perceiving, thinking, feeling, knowing and acting. i.e. the

entirety of our conscious and unconscious experience. Although important progress is being made in science, these are issues are not yet- and may possibly never be entirely resolved. In any case, at present we have very few simple, clear answers from Science yet. I cite these issues nonetheless as important ones with regard to understanding art, and will refer to research in them that has contributed in large measure to my view of art and current practices in art education. Those areas of scientific research are:

1. Perception vs. Awareness-Are we aware of all that we perceive? What is the difference between perceiving things and being aware of them? In other words, is it possible that we 'know' things, and can act on that knowledge, e.g. in making or viewing art, that we are unaware of knowing?
2. Focused attention, and unfocused attention (i.e. mind wandering or incubation) -to what extent are creative deeds, or the appreciation of them, the result of conscious consideration, i.e. thinking? Or are they perhaps instead very largely the result of sudden insights, i.e. products of the unconscious mind? When and to what extent is it one or the other? Is there reason to assume that one is more important than the other?
3. Quantum Physics vs. Classical Physics—Does the behavior of subatomic particles and the startling conclusions already reached through study of them since 1918, not convincingly demonstrate that nothing is **really** as we see it or currently understand it? That the ways in which we see and understand things are no more than convenient but often only very limited ways of doing so, and that other much less clear and more complex ways of understanding things must be equally considered potentially valid, or **real**? Does quantum physics not in fact conclusively demonstrate that the notion that we can come to understand anything by understanding only each of its

individual parts is false, i.e, that scientific reductionism is a limited, unavoidably incomplete methodology?

I name here and will refer in the text to these matters because they are ones I consider important in coming to understand art. In the case of points 1 and 2, they are issues I think directly relevant for art and what it is that we understand through it. Point 3 is differently, one I think analogically helpful in understanding what art is. My intent is not to fully describe or explain the research I refer to, but instead to name here and later to discuss some of those issues as ones that have been important for me personally in coming to the positions I take.

BUZZWORDS and BUZZPRACTICE

I think it far to say that there considerable confusion, permeating all levels of society, about the **meaning of Art**, i.e what exactly are the purposes intended and served by it? Why do we make art, why should we bother spending time or money on it? Why do we think it has great value for us? Terms like ‘state of art’, ‘research in art practice’ and ‘concept in art’, are for me both the consequence of-, and in turn function as sources of that confusion. Those seemingly precise terms we borrow from the exact sciences seem to persuade us that we know quite well what art is and how it works, and that we advancing to a position to fully understand, isolate and study concise aspects of it. But is this true? In my view, that what those terms try to persuade us of, is not remotely true. Such seemingly precise terms as above become in fact, vague, imprecise, and confusing when we apply them in art. The real purpose served by them I suggest, is more to mask our confusion about what art is rather than to usefully indicate aspects of it that are in reality, specific or specifiable. If we ask ourselves for example: “what is it that constitutes research in art practice?” are

we with any significant degree of consensus presently able to answer the question? Is research in art the same thing, or even remotely similar to what we refer to when we speak of scientific research? Scientists conduct experiments to isolate specific results they aim for in order to arrive at more full understanding. But if one is a painter rather than a scientist, does painting constitute his research? Is that research specific in the same way? Are, consistent with the primary aim of science, any of the conclusions we reach through research in art 'universally valid'? Or are we perhaps referring only to our thoughts, reading and writings about art when we use the term, 'research in art'? The increasing, and in my view, erroneous use of scientific terminology to indicate or validate what we are doing in art may, I suggest, be far less indicative of our advancing understanding of art, than of the naïve wish to win for art a level of trust similar to that we have in science.

How, for example, might my own work be described as relating to '*the state of art*'? I find myself quite unable to imagine, much less formulate how my work relates to a hypothetical entity for me as maddeningly vague as "the state of art -in Art". And yet I am formally here required to do so. Because terms such as these have no clearly agreed meaning in art, and have already proven confusing for more people than only myself, perhaps we should begin to recognise that they may not really have any useful place in speaking of art. In my view their only function is to convince us that art can be understood on the basis of its presumed natural affinities with science and technology. Why I wonder, should we need to look to areas far removed from art for ways to define-, practice-value- or understand it? I think that the only possible answer can be because, clearly we are confused about art itself!

As a consequence of what I am calling confusion about the purposes and value of art, it seems to me that a number of other questionable approaches have

gained footing in art education. One of these is the tendency I referred to earlier, an accelerating one it seems, to consider Learning/Knowledge as of value only if we can faultlessly cite the entire chronological continuum of its 'officially validated' sources. Very worryingly for me, we seem oftentimes more concerned with memorizing and enshrining the history of knowledge, i.e. with validating the individuals and institutions we consider its 'guardians', than with undertaking thoughtful analysis of the knowledge itself, or of the ideas that issue from it.

When for example, a writer quotes his own original previously published words, but neglects to exhaustively and correctly cite all the sources, dates, places and contexts of those previous publications, he will suffer draconian penalties for that omission. Why? That seems both wildly unfair and highly counter-intuitive for me! If the writer is merely repeating what he has previously written, I must wonder what the goals and interests served by equating that with the crime of **plagiarism** are? Does that current 'rigorous' academic convention not also mean that an artist cannot use visual fragments from previous artworks he's made unless he documents in writing that he's done so before, clearly stating where and when? The term *academic rigor* denotes a lofty, beautiful, and valuable ideal. But it was I think, never intended to require rigid adherence to inviolable procedural dictates issuing from the domains of Library Science or Patent Law! This is, I argue, is neither in any way conducive to the advancement of thought and learning, nor does it represent authentic academic rigor. Instead, zealous adherence to such procedural dictates in creative pursuits, seems to me a frightening symptom of something perhaps better regarded as *academic rigor mortis*!

Academic rigor is an important principle and practice, but it is something very different than that. It requires a serious commitment to promoting honest, open

and intelligent analyses of existing knowledge, as well as encouraging new ideas and critical thinking. That requires that we actively promote the respectful, creative and fruitful synthesis of new ideas and approaches with previously existing ones. It is of course important that we safeguard history's natural evolution. But that is quite a different thing than engaging in a crusade to armor the venerated past against unlicensed incursions by the present! Academic rigor does not oblige us to engage in frenzied witchhunts. There is no need to defend cultural ideas with electric fences, armed guards, ferocious dogs and draconian penalties. When we resort to such tactics, I think it only illusion that we are thereby preserving the valuable and original thoughts and deeds that precede us. There are quite consequential differences between the purposes served by strict and binding intellectual patents, and those intended with- and served by open and constructive intellectual discourse. I think it highly important that we remain aware of- and sensitive to those differences, both in general, and in Art practice in particular.



fig..4. "*Courage*", 2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

COURAGE

With regard to that notion of the rigorous validation of knowledge, I want to recount here something that occurred in my life some years ago. As I write this, I have lived in Amsterdam for more than 40 years, having first gone there as an American citizen in 1972, immediately following my graduation in art practice from the University of California at Berkeley. I became a student at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy of Art and Design in Amsterdam, which qualified me to apply for legal residence in the Netherlands during my study. After graduating from that school 3 years later, and over the course of the next 5 years, I was obliged each year to try to persuade the Dutch Immigration authorities to grant me permission to stay longer in the Netherlands. 5 years later, around 1978, I

applied for- and was granted official permission to reside permanently in the Netherlands, with no requirement to report to- or apply to Dutch Immigrations again. Very surprisingly for me however, 28 years later in 2006, the international trend towards more restrictive immigration policies took on form in a new law passed by Dutch Parliament. That new law required every person originally from outside the European Union residing in the Netherlands to take and pass written examinations, ones that in the view of most informed people were both poorly designed and thoroughly inconclusive. Ostensibly those exams were to ascertain to what extent the examinees both spoke Dutch, and could be expected to integrate successfully into Dutch society. At the time, there were indications that a shockingly high percentage of native Dutchmen were unable to pass those exams. Having already lived in the Netherlands myself for more than 30 years when that law came into effect, and having long before then been granted official and permanent permission to remain in the country, I was astonished to learn that I was now also required to take and pass those exams. I protested this in writing, a right granted me under the new law, and received some weeks later a written response informing me that my protest had been formally registered, considered, and rejected. The reason for rejection, the letter informed me, was that everything I had noted about already having both proven all they required, and also long before been granted official permanent permission to reside in the Netherlands, did not convince the authorities that my case constituted an exception. That letter offered me, and I decided to accept the option, to schedule a meeting with several city council members and an official of the agency charged with implementing the law. At that same meeting some weeks later, I asked those officials why they believed that passing written examinations proved that I could adapt to Dutch society and customs. Had I not, I asked them, already proven this in the most direct and conclusive way imaginable, by residing there already for 30+ years without

causing that society any problems? Why I asked them additionally, did they require that I both pay for and take a written test of my proficiency in the Dutch language, while standing in front of them speaking that language as fluently as they did? My questions it seemed clear, caused them noticeable embarrassment. I will add that their embarrassment felt gratifying to me, although clearly unhelpful to the situation at hand. They responded that I needed to understand that this new law had been passed very quickly and, admittedly, had not been well formulated. But they added that as a result of its passage their hands were tied, and they had no choice but to apply the law in accordance with the exact terms of its phrasing. If I wanted to be exempted from those examinations, they could, they said, offer me the option to provide them with a certified document proving that I had completed a course in the Dutch language at an officially licensed language school. That list of approved language schools, I add, was compiled 30 years after I had learned to speak the language fluently. I explained that I had learned Dutch by speaking it, and had never taken any courses in the language. Shaking their heads ruefully on hearing this, they told me that I had no alternative but to pay for- and pass the language and cultural assimilation tests. Feeling shocked and angry, I then told them that I considered their 'resolution' of my protest an embarrassingly foolish one. I added that I would really not like to be standing in their shoes, being obliged as they seemed to feel they were to take such clearly ludicrous positions. There they stood, I said to them, mature men of quite considerable social and professional standing, 3 city councilmen and a senior government administrator, telling me that they were not competent to certify that I spoke their language, and therefore needed to get a piece of paper from someone else proving that! After a few minutes, clearly feeling frustrated by the absurdity of their position, they conferred briefly and then offered me one more solution. Could I perhaps prove that I had graduated from an officially recognized

educational institution in the Netherlands where Dutch was spoken during my study? They said they were prepared to accept this also as proof that I could now speak the language. I thought this equally remarkable, but was happily able to answer that I had not only attended such a school, but had also taught at that same school for nearly 20 years following my graduation. "*Ah, we're sorry, they answered, once again surprising me, but teaching at a school will not satisfy the law's stipulations, it is only graduating from that school that constitutes the proof the law requires.* Although it was clear to me that they would very much have preferred to do so, those authorities were quite unable to take any positions other than those completely irrational ones.

Shortly after that meeting, I enlisted the help of the new director of the Rietveld Academy. He tasked one of his assistants to do so, and after some time spent searching in the basement archives, she was able to locate a decomposing paper diploma (there were no digital archives then), that attested to my graduation in 1975. That document was then sent to me, and I submitted it to the authorities. A month or two later, I was officially exempted from having to take any examinations, and granted (once again) permanent and official permission to reside in the Netherlands.

This story recounts a case wherein, with the expense of considerable time and effort, I was finally able to produce what was patently indirect- and entirely inconclusive 'proof' of an ability I had. A graduate diploma from an art school 30 years ago was accepted as conclusive evidence that I could now speak Dutch, while a direct and clear demonstration of the ability to speak the language in the present, was unacceptable. The reason such an illogical procedure was followed, was quite simply because there was no one licensed to speak that language with me, i.e. to evaluate and officially attest to the level of my competence in the most direct and conclusive manner possible.

I recount this story because it bears for me clear relationship with what I am now tasked to accomplish with this text. My words here are formally considered a critical component for the evaluation of my ability in the practice of art. In my view proficiency in a language (for me, art **is** a language) can be correctly evaluated in one way only, namely by speaking it with someone who is qualified and licensed to make that evaluation. Ability in anything can only be demonstrated and evaluated if there are others who are willing, able, and licensed to make informed- and authoritative judgment regarding the ability in question. In the practice of art, the measure of ability must be accomplished by evaluating the product of that practice, i.e. the artwork. But that's not what we do in art, is it? Instead of structurally and responsibly delegating authority to persons qualified and licensed to evaluate artworks, we are gravitating, just as the officials in my story, towards 'less subjective' ('less risky'?) procedures, namely 'objectively' evaluating other products of the artist. It seems that more and more these days, instead of taking responsibility for our own judgments, we are opting to delegate judgment to 'independent authorities'. Those in turn then promote and deploy evaluation criteria often quite foreign to the realm being evaluated. What this comes down to is that our evaluation procedures increasingly demand and measure quite different abilities than those we are directly supposed to be evaluating. In art, the retreat from direct and informed judgment about quality needs to be understood primarily and directly as a fear of being held responsible for our own subjective judgments, rather than an even remotely responsible approach to the task at hand. I am convinced that this tendency is highly detrimental both to art education, and to art in general. It will, I think, be clear to anyone aware of evident current trends in all education, that this pattern of gravitating towards 'objective evaluation criteria' is very real. I consider it an urgent necessity in art education that we find the courage to admit honestly that the evaluation of an artist's ability simply cannot

in any important measure be based on his words about art, or by testing his knowledge of theory or history. Responsible evaluation in the practice of art must be based on the **unavoidably subjective** evaluation of the quality of what's being evaluated, i.e. the artwork.

I believe like many others that we are putting far too much faith in stamped documents, written words, standardized tests, and the opinions of independent experts. Increasingly often it seems to me that those independent experts hold authority in very different fields than the ones we ask them to evaluate. While this trend I speak of is of course characteristic of broader social and political developments, we should not imagine that we can avoid subjective judgment everywhere and always. In my view, most emphatically, we cannot avoid subjective judgment in a creative pursuit like art. The primary product of art cannot, I am suggesting, be understood as any other one than individual subjective expression. In turn, the goal of art cannot reasonably be imagined to be any other one than individual subjective response! Is there any such thing as 'objective' response to art? I believe that no such thing exists. For that reason, tendencies in art to borrow and canonize terms and methodologies borrowed from exact science or philosophy, or sometimes even much farther afield, e.g. public administration, are for me highly suspect. Science, philosophy and public administration are very different pursuits altogether. Policy that suggests that the primary goals of those different pursuits are in any important way, common ones, and that consequently procedure for qualitative evaluation in them should be the same or similar, is either badly misinformed, or worse still, is intended to misinform.

SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY

I'm no longer young now. I'm not starting out in life, am not without experience. This means unavoidably, that I am no longer naturally predisposed by youth to accept dogma or authority uncritically. I'd like to think that I am both willing and able to engage in informed discussion. However, quite naturally I believe, I'm unable *a priori* to regard those with very different training or less experience than my own, as greater authorities than I myself am with respect to my own profession. I think this quite natural and believe that the same would be true for anyone in a pursuit they have undertaken with dedication and some success for a very considerable amount of time. In this context, the Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman, in a book that collects a number of his writings and lectures, said some things I'd like to quote. What his words here tell us about science, is for me equally true of art:

ii "*Authority may be a hint as to what the truth is, but is not the source of information. As long as it's possible we should disregard authority whenever the observations disagree with it*".

iii "*Science is the belief in the ignorance of experts*"

iv "*You must here distinguish-especially in teaching, the science from the forms or procedures that are sometimes used in developing science. It is easy to say we write, experiment, and observe and do this or that. You can copy that form exactly. But great religions are dissipated by following form without remembering the direct content of the teachings of the great leaders. In the same way it is possible to follow form and call it Science, but it is pseudoscience. In this way we all suffer from the kind of tyranny we have today in the many institutions that have come under the influence of pseudoscientific advisers.*"

Those statements echo remarkably well my own attitude with respect to Art. My observations about making, teaching and understanding art, disagree in important respects with some things authorities in art and education are currently saying and doing. For that reason, I am obliged to challenge a number of those views and practices in art. Additionally, I must bring recent developments in how authority is now being determined and assigned in the practice of art into question.

With respect to the delegation of authority in art, both within education, and in government policies for it, an academic degree is very rapidly becoming structurally designated as **the** indicator of one's ability, accomplishments, and authority in that practice. For me, this is both highly irrational, and quite detrimental to education in Art. A decision taken in Portugal regarding membership of the evaluation committees that decide grants for both individual and group projects, and additionally, also that evaluate research in all higher education in Portugal, serves to illustrate this point. The agency overseeing those matters in Portugal is the FCT, (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia). Their membership rules for evaluation panels exclude participation by persons not holding a PhD followed by 5 years of professional experience. The consequence of that stipulation is that the evaluation of art projects is done by art historians and theoreticians primarily. Panel members can possibly also be selected from a highly limited number of very young PhD graduates in art practice. Why is that number a strongly limited one? The first record of a PhD thesis for art practice in Portugal I could find was in 2003 at the University of Oporto by J.R. Vaz. So if 5 years of professional experience must follow that for a person to be considered qualified for membership of a jury, it is only starting in 2008 that the very first artist-candidate for the FCT evaluation committee became eligible. That means that participation by a practicing artist in an FCT committee evaluating art is restricted to a quite

limited number of people. Inclusion of a practicing artist in an evaluation committee is impossible for anyone other than those few relatively young and inexperienced graduates. I don't of course wish to say that recent graduates of art schools, or young people in general, are incompetent. But it is undeniably so that by virtue of youth, beginning professionals do not yet have much experience. To structurally limit participation in the highest evaluatory organ in Portugal to people only from other professions, then possibly- but not necessarily augmented by a few relatively inexperienced practicing artists, is quite an irrational thing to do! All artists who currently carry recognized authority and a great deal of diverse professional experience, but don't have a PhD, and are for that reason then considered 'unqualified' according to this FCT regulation. Consider that a PhD degree in art practice did not exist when those artists attended school. As an example, I finished my formal academic studies in art some decades before any PhD in art practice existed, in Portugal or anywhere else. I think it's a safe guess that worldwide, of all of the artists we might agree are among the most influential and respected, less than 2% have a PhD. If my guess is even remotely accurate, the question then arises: what logic can we cite for a policy that rigidly excludes 98% of those artists with experience, proven track records, and world standing, from exercising authority in evaluating art? What makes sense about structurally delegating authority in a practice, any practice, only to people from other professions, and to people without much experience? I suggest that the government policy I refer to here, *prima facie*, structurally relegates authority in art practice to only those largely **without** the combination of expertise and experience on which authority has always been based. In no other realm of endeavor that I know of has such a policy been adopted. I think it additionally very probable that there is no research that supports either the conception or implementation of that policy as one that in any way can be expected way to be beneficial for art

practice. I point out that regulation this is a measure taken by the very institution responsible for promoting, evaluating and funding not only art, but additionally, all the sciences and the humanities in Portugal. Is this example of an increasingly structural insistence on **academic** authority, indicative of intellectual rigor? Or are there perhaps some other factors that may explain this tendency to structurally exclude existing and acknowledged experts from exercising authority

I believe that the motivation for the practice I just cited is not to be found in rational deliberation regarding the betterment of the field that the institution adopting them is meant to serve. Instead the real motivations must be looked for elsewhere, for example, in the strengthening of the degree of institutional control such a measure effects. When a PhD is designated as the **only** path to authority in art practice, authority is thereby conferred exclusively to graduates of those few universities that offer that PhD study. A monopoly is created in the power to both exercise and delegate authority in a practice, c.q. Art, and even to redefine it, where that state of affairs did not previously exist. Having earned a PhD degree is long accepted as an essential qualification, a very reasonable one for most other domains of human knowledge and ability. But when that same requirement is abruptly introduced in the practice of art, that constitutes a very different case altogether. It can easily be statistically demonstrated that authority in most professional pursuits is concurrent with the experience, reputation and demonstration of abilities that follow the conferral of a PhD. That however, is a very different story in the practice of art. I suggest that in art, it can be just as easily shown that a high level of experience, reputation, and demonstration of consistent professional ability have no (or perhaps even an inverse-) statistical relationship with the conferral of a PhD. In other words, in the practice of art, quite differently than in many other professions, there is no causal relation between earning a PhD and recognized authority, substantial

experience, or consistently demonstrated ability in that practice. **None.** Most of those who at present have a PhD in the practice of art do not yet have much experience, have not built a substantial reputation, nor have they consistently demonstrated ability in their practice. And those are the very criteria that are logically, prerequisites for the exercise of authority.



fig. 5 *"Pushing the Point-Art in Glass"*-2004 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

PUSHING THE POINT?

It is my sincere hope that some of the arguments I offer here may contribute to more discussion about art practice. When I say ‘discussion’, I imagine that centered on fundamental questions such as: “what is art, and what is it not, what is its purpose and value for humanity? And by extension then, which are logical and productive measures we can implement in art education, and which are not logical or productive ones?” I am in favor of balanced- and **honest** ways of understanding and advancing art practice. And I believe that in many ways today, a number of our current attitudes and practices in art education pose significant dangers for the profession. I believe they also threaten the extent to which we can expect the ‘general public’ to take or retain a serious interest in-, and continued willingness to support the profession of Art.

One of the most central aspects of our current practices in art education I think, is that we are tending towards defining and teaching art practice and its appreciation as primarily intellectual activities, i.e. ‘*art as food for thought*’. Art practice and the appreciation of art increasingly seem presumed to address distinct realms of our factual knowledge and experience, giving rise to the resulting intellectual considerations of those. My view is a very different one. It can, perhaps irreverently, be formulated as: “*thinking in Art, is seriously overrated*”. By that I mean that it is my sincere conviction that art is formed and informed more immediately and far more importantly by what we are capable of intuiting, sensing, and feeling, than by our conscious and directed thoughts. There are clear and very important differences between what we can come to know and experience at the culmination of one or the other of those two very different pathways. I believe that it is primarily our ability to feel, sense and evoke emotion, rather than to stimulate or exercise intellectual consideration,

that art both originates from- and is also first and foremost directed at. When in large measure, we ignore emotion in art, and promote instead that thinking, speaking and writing about art are what artists must learn to do well, then I believe we have not understood what art is, how it works, or what it's good for at all. Approaching art very largely through thinking, will I fear destroy it. Is it not yet clear to us that a too narrow focus on only our rational human capacity, on thinking, i.e. on the technological advances, organizational efficiency, and resulting economic worth that seem currently thinking's most highly prized products, while ignoring the importance of emotion and spirit, has brought us to the brink of very evident-, perhaps cataclysmic societal failures? Do we believe that analytical thought and logical procedures are the principle avenues by which we will arrive at deeper understanding of our very existence, at a harmonious, sustainable and fulfilling conduct of our lives? I am suggesting that promoting the systematic gathering, retention and analysis of facts as the substance- or the motor of art, is a 'rationalist' approach. Currently, it seems to me, we are actively engaged to promote reflections on- and statements about art that speak and write about it as if it were largely analogous to Science or Philosophy. In my view, that is not so.

Another set of regulations adopted in 2013 by the FCT, a guideline for the evaluation of the research groups they fund, offers a vivid illustration of the tendency I speak of. ^{vi}The Evaluation Guide for R &D units 2013, issued in July of that year states:

Mission Statements

FCT's mission statements aim to guide the FCT's action for each scientific domain and to define guidelines for the evaluation of each scientific domain, taking into account its specificities

Arts and Humanities

- To promote research that significantly adds to knowledge and critical understanding of the arts and humanities, exploring interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches;
- To enhance the study of Portugal's history, language, arts, and culture, in a comparative and global frame;
- To use the different forms of knowledge in arts and humanities in order to develop a more general scientific culture - inspired by scientific criteria, rigorous methods of inquiry, and creative attitudes of innovative discoveries.- (emphasis in yellow is mine-RCM)

Looking at what is said in these regulations, two things seem striking. The first is that the FCT seems to have no second thoughts before committing to print that they understand both Arts and Humanities to be '*scientific domains*'. That for me is nothing short of an astounding misstep! The second, as evidenced by the last mission statement under Arts and Humanities, is that all knowledge in Arts and Humanities should be directed towards-, and will only be valued by the FCT to the degree in which it can be seen to be in service of the "*development of a more general scientific culture*". The FCT is unambiguous in these regulations, leaving no room for doubt about their position. This guideline makes it crystal clear that art is presumed by the FCT to be practiced-, and should therefore be evaluated consistent with the criteria and methodologies proper to science. But are there not some very large, obvious and highly consequential differences between science and art? Science, for example, is a pursuit whereby **quantitative** measurement and evaluation is both central and critical, whereas in art, it is **qualitative** evaluation that is equally critical and central. As difficult as it may be for some to evaluate quality in art, it cannot continue to offer us what it does if we allow art, as the FCT is here clearly trying to do, to be morphed into something that should be practiced and can be evaluated quantitatively! This evaluation guideline of the FCT, the authority in Portugal responsible for the evaluation of all higher education, constitutes in fact nothing short of an attempt to radically redefine

art. That new definition bears no resemblance to any standpoint regarding art I've ever heard seriously advocated by anyone knowledgeable about it. I am therefore obliged here to say equally unequivocally, that I consider this standpoint a dangerous and shockingly uninformed one. I cannot imagine that any serious artist, or indeed any qualified scientist, on carefully considering that standpoint of the FCT, could agree that it makes any sense, either with respect to art or to science! This in my view is not a small thing, it is a serious matter, one that should motivate anyone who cares about science, humanities, art or culture, to challenge and discredit it. I point out also that the FCT with reference to Science, Arts and the Humanities, fails here quite dramatically to accomplish the very basic goal they set out in their own mission statement: "*to take into account the specificities of those domains.*"

How and why did we arrive here, at a point where such a fantastical relationship is being structurally forced between arts, humanities, and scientific culture? Science could perhaps, if we wish to wax romantic, be regarded as a brother or sister of Art, that is true. But certainly not as its parent! Art is neither Science's child nor its servant, in fact, no hierarchy of importance or causal relationship whatsoever exists between them. There exists no logical basis whatsoever, I am saying, for claiming that Art is- or should be in service of *the development of a Scientific culture!*

Efforts to redefine art like the one I just cited, seem to indicate a fervent desire to establish that the purposes of art are closely related to those of Science, and that they can therefore be discussed with analytical precision, using scientific terms and ciphers to describe and evaluate them. I think it is clear that from a bureaucratic point of view, such an approach offers very considerable time- and cost-saving benefits. Proceeding in this way also promotes the naïve idea that art can be quantitatively evaluated, thereby neatly sidestepping the need for

difficult or lengthy discussions about quality. It is clear that this offers advantages to administrators in education and politicians in government charged with policy for it. I am in fact here directly suggesting that it **is** in large measure, only the bureaucratic and political advantages gained by blurring or confusing the distinctions between art, science and other pursuits, that form the primary motivation for attempts to reposition art, influence how and why we make it, and redefine its value for society. It is contrariwise, not the result of any thoughtful or responsible analysis of how to better the understanding, the conduct, or the qualitative output of the pursuit itself. If we think of-, teach-, and evaluate art as a largely logical/analytical pursuit, as 'the product of 'research', as subservient to Science, if we believe that we can evaluate it using objective criteria, I am convinced that we are well on the way to understanding very much less- rather than more about it, or why society should value it at all. And then, quite soon I think, society won't.

I maintain, in direct opposition to the tendency I just sketched and gave an example of, both with respect to its making and to our ability to appreciate and value it, that art is **not** a logical/analytical undertaking at all. Art is almost never characterized by the objectivity of its statements, by the systematic methodologies of common research practices, nor can it be evaluated or appreciated by any objective measurement. I submit that much of what we are witnessing happen in art education, are attempts to redefine-, to change art, in overwhelming measure so that we can more easily administer, inexpensively teach and simplistically evaluate it. If our goal in art education is to guide and graduate artists able to produce artworks of real value for themselves and for society, I suggest that we must very soon openly, honestly, indeed rigorously re-examine some of our current policies, thinking, and practices in art education. Some of those in my view are quite thoroughly misguided and patently contraproductive.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

We can't make art by talking, writing, speaking- or thinking about it. Making art requires taking actions, those actions being decisive for both the kind and quality of the results. Although the two activities are very different ones, one can imagine that the performance of actions in art is just as central to that undertaking as is the case for a professional athlete. Conscious and deliberate reflection about the activity involved, i.e. thought, whether when making art or for example, running a race, no matter how comprehensively and intelligently it is undertaken, is an activity of a very different kind, one only marginally related to the resulting performance. Conscious reflection about art or a race to be run is not a bad thing to undertake by any means. But it is never the primary process by which success in either activity is achieved, nor does it constitute the primary avenue by which those results will be appreciated by the public. Both making and enjoying art are very inadequately described or undertaken as the product of 'thinking'. Instead, art originates in very different processes altogether. Art is human expression of a kind that could perhaps be called 'embodied expression'. By that I mean that Our Body, (i.e. all of the very extensive knowledge, memories, and abilities contained within it), is critical and central both in making art, and for understanding it. The immediate physicality of art, I suggest, is far more important for our attraction to-, enjoyment- and understanding of it, than all of the intangible mental constructs we try to erect around it.

With the term 'mental constructs', I refer among other things to formulations that are presumed to convey very concise, highly important information. '*Concept in art*' is one of those. I want to cite here once again from "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out" by Richard Feynman. In the following two related

passages he speaks of the difference between ‘words about science and science itself’, i.e. between talking about science and doing science. For me, what he says applies equally to ‘words about art’ and ‘doing art’. In the first quote, Feynman uses an example from a science lesson about the movement of a mechanical dog. In the second, he speaks about the word ‘friction’ in connection with what happens to the soles of our shoes when we walk:

*vii “I finally figured out a way to test whether you have taught an idea or you have taught only a definition. Test it this way: You say “Without using the new word, try to rephrase what you have just learned in your own language” “Without using the word ‘energy’ try to tell me what you know about the dog’s motion. You cannot. So you’ve learned nothing except the definition. You learned nothing about Science. That may be all right. You may not want to learn something about Science right away. You have to learn definitions. But for the very first lesson, is that not possibly destructive?” – “I think to learn a mystic formula for answering questions is very bad.....“the soles of your shoes wear out because of **friction**”. Shoe leather wears out because it rubs and bumps against the sidewalk and the little notches on the sidewalk grab pieces and pull them off.*



fig. 6 *"Body Cognition"* -2013 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

EMBODIED COGNITION

Here, I want to go back to something I stated earlier (pg 14): Without our body, I don't think we would have any relation at all either to the world around us, or to each other. Mind alone can understand the world only within very narrow and distinct limits. It is instead our corporeal existence in space that allows us,

in fact requires us to engage with the world . And it is that engagement that allows **knowing** in the real sense of that word. What we know, as opposed to what we merely think, is determined by the size of our body as it relates to all else, the movements and actions it is capable of performing, and the dangers to its integrity that exist in the world. I think it is correct to say that all emotion of any kind or degree has its origin in body rather than in intellect. Without body, without knowing movement and being vulnerable to pain or damage, we would not be capable of feeling anything at all.

If this is true, then my emphasis here on what we can feel, what we know and do bodily, on the crucial importance of the very movements that we use to create art, should be clear. Art would literally have no meaning at all if we fail to take into account those most critical constituents of art's physical existence and the means by which meaning in it is transmitted and received. Art is an action on material by the body, and that action is understood very largely because we are all capable of such action. A painting would mean nothing at all to us unless we are in some sense familiar with the actions on material that were needed to create it. There would be no essential difference in meaning for us between an Yves Klein painting and a dark patch of sky.

It is high time I think, to advance beyond what we are able to understand intellectually about art through the comparison of paintings to ones that preceded them, and the consideration from a historical standpoint of what people were thinking, doing and talking about in earlier times, compared to later times. We must now urgently tackle quite different questions, ones that in my view are both far more fundamental- and far more rewarding ones . Why do we make art or value it, and what is the true nature of the faculties we engage when we do that? Art has both its genesis in- and is understood by us because we have the ability to act on the world, on materials, on each other, and literally

to feel and learn from what results from those actions. The thinking that then follows those processes can be very interesting, useful, and enlightening, often very highly enjoyable. But I argue that we should not mistakenly believe or teach that intellect, i.e. thinking, is primary in art. Instead we need to understand and come to agree that it is only secondary.

To support why I am strongly suggesting that thinking is not as important as we imagine and teach in art, why I insist that feeling and sensing are very much more important, I need to make reference to some current research and theory in Cognitive Neuroscience. That is a branch of science concerned primarily with how our brains enable Knowing. Discoveries and recent theories in cognitive neuroscience have been tremendously helpful for me in coming to better understand what I experience through art. Because I believe that enhanced understanding may be quite useful for more people than only myself, I believe it important to understand what some recent neuroscience theory implies for the understanding of art. The discoveries and theories in cognitive science I refer to pertain to how we physically process the experiences offered us by works of art. In particular, one increasingly important school of thought within the Cognitive Sciences called ^{viii}*Embodied Cognition*, provides the basis for what I think is true of Art and believe that it is quite important that we understand about it.

Embodied cognition proposes that our direct bodily responses to external stimuli precede any conscious thought about those stimuli, and moreover, that those responses are very often of decisive influence in determining our subsequent thoughts. Recent research into the workings of the human brain offers very persuasive evidence that both the kind of information and the manner of its processing to arrive at 'the meaning' of things, are very different ones in the case of spoken and written words and symbols, than is the case

when we process the stimuli provided us by visual art. Scientific studies and theories regarding mirror- and canonical neurons in the human brain, indicate that for a real understanding of what we derive from making, viewing and appreciating art, we both can- and should look much more closely at what Science is currently telling us. Science, I am convinced, is already telling us that the immediate-, and perhaps the most important ‘meaning’ we derive from the things we see, e.g. artworks, is the product of a complex chain of the body’s immediate, automatic- but quite **un**conscious reactions, those already going very far towards determining ‘meaning’ , before that information ever reaches the level of our conscious intellectual consideration. ^{ix}Accounts of the discovery- and function of mirror and canonical neurons in the brain explain for me what happens when I make art. In fact, some years before I heard or read about mirror-and canonical neurons and embodied cognition, on looking back at a number of the works I’d made, I had been struck by the realization that a number of them had something in common. What I noticed was that in every one of those works, I had provided somewhere a physical shape or protrusion that seemed to both invite- and enable physically grasping the work at that point. In other words, I had integrated into each of those works a kind of ‘handle’. On thinking about this, it occurred to me that I had, quite unconsciously, provided a way to ‘grasp’ the work physically, but I then imagined, perhaps also grasp it in the sense of ‘meaningfully’. Some time later when I read about mirror neurons in the brain which cause a monkey watching another monkey grasp a banana, to immediately and without thinking, activate his own grasping muscles in a similar way, even though he had no banana to grasp, it was something of a ‘Eureka moment’ for me! Additionally, some time later I discovered that another type of neuron in the brain called a canonical neuron, responds directly by activating grasping muscles on merely seeing an object that is invitingly graspable, without the need to see another grasp it.

Accounts of such discoveries and the evolution of cognitive theory based on them, were able to explain for me why I had unconsciously started to develop that device, that graspable protrusion in my works, without being aware of the existence of any concrete physical/neural bases underlying its effectiveness. When our muscles are automatically engaged to perform a specific function by something we are looking at, we will, it seems to me, also feel it. That feeling will then form an important constituent of the meaning of the object we look at that has activated that process. This must apply also logically it seems to me, to an art object, very likely even to a painting or drawing, i.e. the 2 dimensional representation of a physical object. What I have learned about embodied cognition has become central to my understanding of art. That is not to say that what I believed or felt about art changed significantly as a result. Instead embodied cognition seemed to both explain and offer confirmation for much of what I have always believed, what I sensed about art.

I am convinced that study and consideration of some scientific theory and research about how our brains/bodies work, can offer us important new insights into how and why art works, and consequently, can be of considerable assistance in learning how to better teach-, appreciate- and evaluate art. A number of studies and papers by ^xFreedburg and Gallese, and later by other researchers, form for me a very convincing body of evidence for the very clear -, indeed the urgent need to reconsider the presumed centrality of 'thinking' in art.

Imagining for example that our reactions to external stimuli, e.g. artworks, are overwhelmingly the product of conscious thought about them, and that our emotional reactions then follow those thoughts, is in fact, precisely the reverse of what really happens. Embodied cognition indicates that of primary functional importance in art, as it is in our reactions to almost all external

stimuli we encounter, is all that happens directly in our bodies before we start thinking, i.e. the automatic activation of the body's very extensive and complex physical/emotional response system. That differentiation is the basis for my claim that it is important to distinguish what results from emotion, i.e. being unexplainably 'moved' by something, as very different altogether from what results from just thinking about things. Does that mean that I therefore believe that thinking in art is bad or unimportant? No, that is very definitely not the case! The very words I write here are entirely the product of thinking, and obviously I'd not like to believe that what I'm writing is either wrong or unimportant. However, what I write is not art, it is words about art. Teaching the making or the understanding of art as conducted and directed either first or foremost by thinking is, I am suggesting, in the light of current scientific knowledge, a flawed model. It ignores that aspect of art that I am now convinced is far more immediate and important than all the thinking we can do about it. That aspect is formed by our immediate and profound bodily responses to what we make if we are artists, and to what we can see, feel, and derive from art if we are viewers of art.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF ART

Quite differently than the communications we accomplish through reading, writing and speaking words, visual art does not offer us the convenience of being able to refer to sources defining for us each term we encounter. In reference books like dictionaries, we can find very concise information explaining the terms used in verbal language, in mathematics, or even in music. These resources we consult about words or symbols, often tell us even when and where the terms originated and how they have evolved. The words and symbols that we can find such concise information about are the habitual terms

of academic discourse, and they relate overwhelmingly to objectively verifiable, usually singular- and standardized concepts. In sharp contrast to this, contemporary visual art requires each viewer to decide individually if- and how he will respond to the images he sees, with the necessity to accomplish that alone. The viewer of art does not have the convenience of reference books that offer him singular, exact definitions for the visual information of art. That is simply because the images that are the terms of art discourse don't represent objectively verifiable meanings at all. They are neither singular in meaning, nor are they-, or can they be standardized or verified. Visual images in art, I submit, are in fact not merely limited to-, they are in fact **intended** to initiate **subjective** discourse, always! With the term, 'subjective discourse', I mean that the communication effected through art is of an entirely different kind than that accomplished through words. That choice we make when we decide to communicate through art rather than in words is of no small consequence, both with respect to the language by which communication is effected, and to the goals we can realistically expect to achieve by doing so. In fact we have, I suggest, an entirely different purpose when speaking through art than when we use spoken and written language. We are simply not at all speaking of- or conveying *Meaning* of the same kind in both cases.

What I've just suggested is very difficult, perhaps impossible at present to conclusively prove. Nonetheless, I offer the idea and the reasoning behind it as suggestive of substantial and highly consequential differences between the language and goals of art, and those of academic discourse and reasoning. I consider it critically important that we are aware of very serious problems that result when we confuse those two pursuits and the methodologies proper to them with each other.

In the interest of Art, we really need to examine the degree to which we have good reasons for using terminology and adopting approaches that are issue from very different realms altogether.

There is, I think, a discernible trend to move education in the practice of art into realms that are properly those of the History of Art, of Art Theory, of technology, or even of Philosophy and Science. It goes without saying that contact between differing pursuits, cross-fertilization, can at times be a very useful thing to undertake. But this doesn't mean that every instance of 'cohabitation' we encourage, or merely facilitate by inattention, results in happy partners and healthy offspring!

HOW WE SOLVE PROBLEMS

I think it revealing to look at that tendency I speak of here to teach art less autonomously, i.e. increasingly often as it relates to other pursuits, as 'a way to solve problems'. The first and seemingly most troublesome of those problems we imagine to solve in this way is that art doesn't offer us meanings or uses we all agree about. Clearly we can't speak about the meaning of art as easily as we can speak about the meaning of facts, or of those thoughts we express in words. Additionally, it is quite difficult to name and justify the societal benefits we derive from art. And if those two problems were not enough, we have the difficult task of needing to evaluate quality in art, to monitor it in education, and to compare and agree on our evaluations. So what do those problems give rise to, what might be done about such 'problems' as these?

We are all, I think familiar with the effect that fear or embarrassment can have on us when we are confronted with situations that stimulate those states in us. At such times we often find ourselves strangely inclined to start talking fast,

perhaps then changing subjects and directions rapidly. Doing so, we are in fact just 'trying to find the emergency exit', i.e. a quick way out of that uncomfortable situation. We feel at such moments the urge to proceed with haste, very often without much direction or reason guiding what we say or do. There is an urgency to resolve our unfortunate predicament, we feel then decidedly and uncomfortably uncertain. I am suggesting that the increasing tendency to speak and to write (academically, incessantly, divergently) about art is related to an 'embarrassed state'. Are we not perhaps acutely embarrassed by the fact that we cannot pinpoint the meaning of art, accurately define or evaluate with consensus its quality, or clearly formulate the 'value' it has for us? Is it not perhaps largely because we have not yet been successful enough at those very basic tasks that we are experiencing great difficulties deciding how best to teach students the practice of art, what 'meaning in art' is, or how it should be evaluated? Might it be that our increasing resort to other pursuits, the place art has within the context of those pursuits, not perhaps merely symptomatic of 'an embarrassed state'? In art practice education I am suggesting that at present, excessive talking and writing about art, and the forcing of relationships with fields quite removed from it, may well stand directly in the path of understanding art, seriously obstructing that path I'm suggesting that we may currently be looking for meaning in art 'in all the wrong places'. But if there is truth to that, where **should** we be looking? What are the 'right places' to look for meaning in art'?

Meaning in art, I suggest, must in first instance, always be looked for on the **individual** level. In direct opposition to our current approaches, I am here suggesting that *Meaning in Art* is **not** 'societal', 'political', 'philosophical' or 'universal' in nature at all. Quite the reverse, it is personal, highly individual, and very subjective meaning that art carries and offers us. As such, meaning in art should perhaps not be imagined to be **academic** at all, in any sense of that

word! An academic undertaking or pursuit, I think, must be understood in important measure as a product of the active, directed and successful effort to find- or work towards consensus. Very differently in my view, Meaning in art can only be correctly thought of as the one(s) it carries for one person viewing a work of art at one moment, whatever that meaning is. If this is in an important degree true, it constitutes a highly inconvenient fact for the institutional or organizational administration of Art. It would seem to make art uncomfortably 'vague', exceedingly difficult to define, teach, evaluate, administrate, or defend. Be that as it may, this is, I believe, the only way we can correctly describe the kind of communication art facilitates. Meaning in art is individually determined, and must be looked for and understood first and foremost on that level. That is why I argue that attempts to center or locate meaning in art in realms that are societal (e.g. philosophy, science, politics, morality, etc.) in nature are largely doomed to fail. Unless that is, we realize that in art, we have **the** language that enables one particular societal function, a quite different one that has quite profound importance!

Art is a pursuit that both enables and encourages the expression of a highly personal, individual point of view, as equal in weight and importance to all others in society. We assign that role and status to art. An unwritten convention in art is that if an artist is able to portray his subject matter very differently than others have done that, that might well be taken seriously, sometimes highly seriously, possibly, by very many others! The artist's different way of seeing things in his work can be very powerful, in spite of its constituting only one lone point of view in a veritable human sea of them. There will be no formal 'vote' concerning that alternative view point, its capacity to influence or affect viewers does not depend on economic or political factors, or on consensus of any kind. Art, I am saying here, offers a potentially powerful voice to one lone individual speaking to one- or all the rest of us. And that in turn, constitutes a

highly significant societal function. Through artworks, the ‘value and weight’ of one individual point of view is presented as equivalent to all the points of view represented in society as a whole. That function I here claim art fulfills however, diverges strongly from those we seem currently to be promoting in formal art education. We seem instead to be encouraging artists to read, speak and think about meaning in art very largely on societal levels. We imagine, teach and speak about art largely as *giving voice to- or commenting on OUR points of view*. Students are being systematically taught that art critically reflects or examines *our* notion of history, *our* idea of philosophy, *our* view of society and reality. In other words, we are promoting works of art as expressing or commenting on things we all share, but which most of us are perhaps merely incapable of noticing, understanding, or expressing until ‘visionary’ artists bring them to our attention. I believe that teaching future artists to imagine and conduct their practice in this way and role is mistaken.

Another manifestation of what I refer to as ‘confusion about art’, takes the form of the pressure we exert on artists to motivate their works as directed at the expectation that these will take up their rightful place on the existing historical/chronological continuum.

In fact, the official ^{xi}regulations applying to this very text require of me that I now do that here with respect to my own works. The relevant passage I refer to is this one: “*Por uma obra ou conjunto de obras ou realizações com carácter inovador, acompanhada de fundamentação escrita que explicita o processo de concepção e elaboração, a capacidade de investigação, e o seu enquadramento na evolução do conhecimento no domínio em que se insere*”.

I think it’s correct to translate that passage of regulations applying to this text, as requiring of me that I place my works in their rightful place on the timeline

of the evolution of knowledge in art, i.e. somewhere on “the art historical continuum”.

In response to that requirement, I pose the questions: *“how and why I am supposed to accomplish that task?”* A **continuum**, historical- or any other kind, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as: *“a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, although the extremes are quite distinct”*

It follows from that definition that I must place my work (assuming entirely counter to the facts that all of my work is similar), somewhere on what is undeniably a **chronological** (because ‘evolutionary’) sequence that represents the history of art, where it does not perceptibly differ from what precedes or what follows it. Logically, there is no place I can find such a location other than in the present time. And the present time where I therefor must locate my artwork, because history is chronological, is at the end of the continuum, at one of the two ‘*extremes*’, i.e. **now**. If I tried to situate my work anywhere else on that continuum of art history, I would most certainly be mistaken, because my work would differ very markedly from what preceded- and what follows it. So, not wishing to be mistaken, and if the present time is the only place on the historical continuum where my work belongs, what could I then say about it’s relationship to ‘the continuum’? I have no idea what will follow it on the continuum! I am most certainly not a competent historian, and now find myself quite unable to accomplish this feat credibly or usefully. I must wonder in fact, if even a very highly competent and authoritative art historian would ever attempt in this way to usefully qualify something that happens in the present, about which he cannot possibly know what will follow? I think no competent historian would do so! For that reason, I see this exercise as no more than pointless conjecture, here masquerading as a legitimate theoretical

consideration belonging to the domain of art history. My position is that my ability or value in art, my competence in that pursuit, cannot be evaluated by testing or challenging what I am able to accomplish in an entirely different pursuit, c.q. Art History! Art is a very different pursuit than Art History I must insist. They are not at all, I am saying, related in the degree to which, for example, that regulation applying to this text, indicates that some of us are all to uncritically assuming!

Quite apart from the impossibility to credibly complete the requirement to place my work on an art historical continuum, the second question that poses itself is: what **motivation** could I possibly have for undertaking such a thing? What benefit might I or anyone else derive from the attempt to satisfy it? There is when I consider the question, no answer I can offer. There exists for me no rational motivation for undertaking the conjecture dictated by this regulation. Let me try here to explain more fully why that is so.

As an artist, I am far more interested in striving for specificity rather than generality in my work. By that I mean that I am far more interested in the uniqueness of what I can imagine, see, and give form to, than in its presumed likeness to- or relationship with anything that others have produced, now or in the past. I very definitely don't make artworks in order to refer to other artworks or artists, to discuss styles or movements in art, either past or present ones. My work neither offers support for- nor attempts to refute such categories. In fact I am not engaged in making art as discourse. Instead my works are more like a monologue. Their purpose is not to arrive at generality or relate to category, but in fact, precisely the opposite, i.e. to arrive to the maximum degree possible, at specificity, uniqueness. In other words my motivation is very largely formed by the wish to do or 'say' something only I can do or 'say'. Describing in this way what is most important for me, it should

be readily understandable that maintaining constant awareness of all that other artists have ever done, or may perhaps be doing at present, is not very useful for me. Truth be told, I have no ambition to 'join the continuum'. My dream as an artist is instead to perhaps somehow come to stand apart from the rest! For these reasons, this 'historical continuum of art' is neither a central- nor even an important factor for me. If I should at times have the intention to speak of- or to generalities in my work, those pertaining to the history of art or other ones, it is always 'from the bottom up' that I do so. That is to say, I add a small tangible fact in the form of an artwork to the sum total of specifics that form the generality of artworks of the present time, and all that preceded them, the continuum. But I am not concerned with where anyone imagines my work fits into that totality of art. Determining that or influencing it is quite simply **not my job!** It is for these reasons that I am obliged to challenge practice and stipulations that insist that this must be otherwise, for myself or for anyone else.

An artist, I am suggesting, has very different purposes altogether, ones characterized by very different processes and intentions than do people charged with monitoring and administering the generalities in art. An art historian might well be tasked for example, with deciding where an artwork of mine should be filed away among all the others, for easy retrieval, to be cited or discussed when that is opportune. In this way, there exist highly consequential differences between the work of conservators, historians, and theorists on the one hand, and that on the other hand of artists. The artist's job among other things is to produce the works that historians and theorists may engage to conserve, categorize or discuss if they wish to. It's clear that these quite different tasks that each of us has are related, they all concern a professional engagement with art. But that doesn't mean that artists should therefore **carry out** the tasks of historians and theorists, any more than the reverse is true!

Analogously as an example, we would say that football players and sports journalists are clearly, both professionally and passionately engaged in one and the same game. But it should also be directly apparent that both the nature of their contributions to the game, and the qualitative criteria that apply to those contributions, are very, very different ones! They do not do the same things, and therefore cannot possibly be evaluated by the same criteria.

I suggest that we are currently, whether consciously or unconsciously, busy training artists simply to be more useful for others charged with entirely different tasks altogether. Asking or requiring artists to place their works on the 'continuum of art history' exemplifies this, and should be understood in that light. From an art historical point of view, I think that a quite illogical practice. From an artistic standpoint, I think it is a literally counter-productive one. As such, in my view, it is a practice for which no rational basis exists and should be discontinued.

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

There is no doubt that it is important to instruct future artists in the great contributions and importance of those throughout history who preceded them. No accomplishment from any realm of our human pursuits is likely to be completely new in all respects, we profit greatly from the work of those who came before us. But if at times we are enabled to see very far because we are^{xii} *'standing on the shoulders of giants'*, what questions should we then be asking of ourselves? Should we be thinking or speaking primarily of the lives and times of those giants who support us, i.e. the past? Or should we instead derive profit from our elevated position by speaking of what we can see from that marvelous vantage point? When standing on the shoulders of the giants of art, we can acquire a view of more- and very different things than they could

see in their lifetimes. Should we not then be speaking of what we can actually see at such moments, rather than speaking of how that relates to what we imagine might have been visible from an earlier vantage point? In other words, when standing on the shoulders of giants, it would seem to make far more sense to look upwards, outwards and forwards, rather than downwards, inwards or backwards!

To sum up some of what I have discussed up to this point, what an artist can 'see' or 'say' in a work of Art :

1 is imbued with the unique status that society, *a priori*, assigns to works of art. Artworks carry 'authority'. The artist is freely licensed to speak of things in ways that either agree with, or are completely contrary to convention, or to anyone else's view regarding the things spoken of. The content of artworks is not directed at consensus. As a result of that freedom, when art works at times succeed to speak directly and deeply to us as individuals, that communication is both remarkable and powerful, very different than the other forms of communication that reach us.

2 has been formulated in a language, the visual language of art, for which no dictionary exists. What the 'terms' used in a work of art mean to each individual viewer is not- and cannot be standardized. The meanings and associations triggered by each term (the pictorial elements) in a work of art are, for any given viewer, very likely entirely different ones.

3 is a statement on the part of one person, made to no one in particular. The artist's voice through his artwork becomes entirely separated from him, and cannot have been directed specifically to anyone who hears (sees) it. The degree of relevance his statement will have for a viewer is therefore something he cannot exercise much control over. He has voluntarily and consciously relinquished much of that control.

These factors taken together in my view make of art, a form of communication quite unlike others. There is perhaps even an aspect of 'ritual' we might rightfully attach to communication of this kind. The unique conventions that apply both to the making and to the viewing of art, have very real consequences for the kind of meaning we can imbue it with, and for the meaning we derive from it as well.



fig 7 *"Balance"*-1998 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

SENSITIVITY

When I spoke earlier of making and experiencing art as an action, I was by no means referring only to the deployment by the artist-, or to the appreciation by the viewer of the considerable technical abilities needed to manipulate material. I am not speaking of craftsmanship when I speak of crucial skills an artist must have that are needed for the doing. I'm referring instead to other important skills and sensitivities required to make art of quality, ones that we should more actively concentrate on in art education, and must further be

developed for -and through the practice of art. Here are a few of those I think the most important ones:

1 *Material*

For both artists and viewers of art, sensitivity to the nature, power and depth of expressive meaning contained in the very materials used in art is important. Wood, metal, paint, canvas, porcelain and glass, for example, all carry intrinsic meanings for us. A bust in plaster cannot be supposed to evoke the same things as one in every way identical to it, save that it was cast in bronze. Materials have meanings for us that remain present in artworks fashioned from them, oftentimes quite irrespective of the artist's intentions. Those meanings issue in very large measure from the physical experiences each of us has had with those materials. Quite apart from their social connotations and common uses, each of us has very personal experience or associations with materials, their feel, temperature, weight, and our individual and very diverse memories and encounters with them. If for example, when I was a young boy, I once got a very deep and painful splinter in my hand from handling a piece of wood, that experience will likely influence to an important extent how I will react when I encounter anything made of wood for the rest of my life. It is difficult to describe all the ways in which materials carry meaning for us. Some of these are indescribable, or may become changed or lost when we try to use words to describe them. The problem here is in fact that verbalization requires conscious awareness, whereas very many of the deeper meanings of experiences, objects and materials, concern things we are normally not conscious of at all. This may be in fact, an important reason why many artists become uncomfortable when asked to explain their works. Too much is lost in doing so, rich meaning that is only manifest when experiencing the artwork itself, without words.

2 Gesture



fig 8 “Fighter” by Egon Schiele, 1913, © 2000–2014 [The Athenaeum](http://www.the-athenaeum.org). Consulted in <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=7475>, 10/10/2016

Artists must also develop an accute awareness of the meaning-laden aspects of their own physical ‘gestures’ as these are transferred from hand into material. For me, a poignant illustration of the importance of this aspect of ‘material meaning’ in art is found in the paintings and drawings of Egon Schiele. Looking closely at his drawings, I am personally immediately both struck and moved by

the quality of his lines. Somehow the force, direction and intensity of Schiele's lines manage to move me emotionally, meaningfully and deeply. Those lines seem at one and the same time very purposeful, but also unpredictable, fragile and vulnerable. Schiele created with the movements of his hand, highly charged and meaningful changes of direction and intensity in the lines of his paintings and drawings. This in my view is a quintessential aspect of Schiele's work, a unique quality he conferred solely with the gestures needed to make his works. I suggest that those gestures, even though we cannot see his hands and arms moving while creating them, are movements we nonetheless somehow sense when we look at his works. We all have the ability, and can further develop that if we wish, to instantly recognize and internalize emotion-laden intentions that those now frozen gestures convey, even if we are most often, not consciously aware of that recognition

3 Movement

The issue of 'gesture' is, I suggest, also directly related to an important sense that is not among the 5 senses we usually think of as our human perceptory channels. Nonetheless it is an important one all of us have, called ^{xiii}*'proprioception'*.

Although I am not a painter, I am able to sense the movements needed for the brushstrokes I see in a painting. Additionally, when I approach a sculpture, its size and the position it takes up in space with respect to my own, will determine in large measure how I can and will 'approach' it, and that will in important measure, determine how it affects me. How and why does that happen? In an ^{xiv}article by professor of Philosophy, Barbara Montero, entitled "Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense", I find a convincing argument for my

position that body and emotion are very, very much more important in art than we are giving them credit for.

4 Trial & error

Another skill artists need to develop is the ability to decide when to continue with a work they are making in its current direction, or at other times to make considerable changes in that direction. Very frequently in artmaking, uncertainties arise about various qualities the artist wishes his artwork to have, and consequently, which choices might best advance those qualities. Let's call this the 'feeling' a particular work should have- or can evoke. Making art in my experience is not a linear process. In fact it is very far from linear. The process of making art is characterized by an obligatory openness to what is at many times unexpectedly revealed in its course, what 'emerges' while making, with the accompanying need to respond to those revelations. Every artist needs to develop a sense of how and when to 'stay his course', or contrariwise, to recognize when it is necessary to make bold changes of direction in response to what is revealed as the process unfolds. Artists must also try to remember when and why they felt it necessary to change direction in the course of their works. Doing so can help them at an earlier stage in subsequent works to avoid some of the same 'traps' they earlier fell prey to. In other words, artists must be prepared to both take risks and make mistakes, very many of them, at times even very BIG ones! They must learn to accept their mistakes as sometimes unavoidable, and develop an ability to learn from them. Artists are obliged constantly to make a great number of choices along uncharted pathways, to

develop both the necessary courage and sensitivity to decide which paths to take, or at times, when it's better to turn back and choose another path. There is no learning imaginable that must be undertaken on a more experiential and personal basis than learning of this kind.

5 Feedback

Artists need additionally to develop an ability to find and maintain a workable balance between what others say about their work, and what they themselves feel and think about it, both while making the work and afterwards. This demands a rather extraordinary capacity, one consistent with the artist's individual personality, in order to achieve it. He must constantly accept and process a great number of things others say, attempting to extract only what can be useful and, difficult as that often is, somehow disregard what is not useful. A number of the reactions artists get to their works will in fact be quite damaging if they are not able to accomplish this. I have earlier indicated my position that an artist's works are not depictions of objective reality as we all can-, should- or do see that in equal measure. Instead, depictions in art reveal the artist's own very highly personal realities, dealing often with deeply held feelings, experiences, impressions, or intuitions about those realities. Nothing we normally show or discuss with each other is as sensitive and difficult to discuss as our deepest most personal individual realities, these are often very sensitive indeed! For the artist, it is not facts about things or experiences that everyone can recognize that are being depicted in his works. Instead, that which he struggles to imbue his works with are his own very personal-, and quite often, distinctly vulnerable feelings about things. Art **is** personal!

6 Affordance

Perhaps one of the most difficult of the skills artists need to develop is the ability to 'see things differently'. Artists must learn to pay attention, to see, feel and express things rather differently than others do so. To develop this ability requires a great deal of practice, it is not something we can learn by reading- or thinking. Instead, it needs to be acted upon. Unlike scientists, artists are not engaged to find- and reveal 'universal truths', instead they are more intent on discovering what might be called 'universal possibilities'. Those are always ones that in first instance the artist recognizes as useful for himself. Artists are not in first instance busy with at what we regard as commonly held facts, truths or paradigm. Instead they look beyond-, under- and in between those. A simple way to say this is: artists both see and show us things not as we all commonly see those. Art works offer us an opportunity to consider things most of us are indeed familiar with, but then almost always depicted in very different ways than we normally encounter. If we take advantage of that opportunity to look at things differently, we may decide that it is very interesting to do so! We may discover in that way that our habitual visual or cognitive organizational systems seem often very limited. We experience quite new, different-, stimulating, and revealing ways to look at things we thought we knew. In this context, the term ^{xv}'*affordances*' is I think a very useful one.

We habitually look at things and situations in a very limited way. Much of the time, we are conscious of little more than the potential dangers things or situations may present for us, ones that we should avoid, or contrariwise, advantages those things or situations might offer to us if we decide to interact with them. A commonly cited example of the affordance principle tells us that a chair we may come across is, in first instance, only understood by us as an object offering (affording) the possibility to sit on it. That chair however, it is

interesting to consider, does not at all offer the same possibility to an elephant. When encountering a chair, an elephant will see and understand that object (its meaning) very differently than you or I. An elephant might, for example, see the chair merely as something he could easily decide to step on and crush. Doing so might be quite useful, perhaps in order to relieve some tension the animal might be feeling. In any case, what a chair affords an elephant is very different than what it affords a human. The meanings (the affordances) that a chair, a situation, a theoretical argument, a work of art, or anything else we encounter have for us, depend in very large measure on what we imagine their potential usefulness for us to be. Meaning, understood in this way, is not part of a chair, an art object, or an argument. Instead it is only the meaning that we, either socially or individually, assign to those things. Meaning depends then on our personal interests, on our societal conventions, on our needs, on our physical capabilities and limitations, and on our individual wishes and intentions at any one given time. It should be clear that all of those vary quite substantially from person to person, and additionally vary for any one person from time to time. Artists I think, must be highly aware of the fact that meaning is relative to intention, i.e. it can be freely assigned rather than being something that is fixed or inherent in an object or work of art. Artists need to learn to see, think and feel flexibly, to develop the ability to look at things from a great number of angles, rather than rely on existing viewpoints, definitions or formulae. It should in other words, be understood as very much in art's interest, to teach students of art that systems ('things') change. Organizational systems offer us confirmed and agreed 'affordances'. But it is undeniable that many other affordances can- and will be discovered when we search between- or beyond those already confirmed by the system. Artists, I claim, are not here to reinforce- or confirm existing systems or historical paradigm by referring to-, or paraphrasing those. Once again, that's just not their job! Instead, I think the

artist's job can be usefully be looked at as precisely the reverse. The artist's job is to find -or invent-, and pick holes in existing systems. We should, I believe, really be stimulating young artists to become very good at that! In a word, what I am speaking of here is ^{xvi}Creativity. There should be no discussion about the vital importance of creativity in art, let alone in science and most other pursuits. Creativity is however not being stimulated when we suggest, believe or act as if our systems (art historical-, stylistic-, philosophical-, etc.) are fixed, immutable, holy or inviolable. Care needs to be taken, I am suggesting, that our lessons about art history and philosophy do not merely enshrine or perpetuate system, suggesting to young students that 'this is what IS'. An art historical continuum in my view, suggests exactly that. Instead we should take care also to make clear to art students that History's lessons concern nothing more than what HAS BEEN UP UNTIL THIS MOMENT. It is not necessary, I'm claiming, to have or maintain a constant awareness of all previous facts in order to create new ones. In fact, the two may at times be incompatible.

The abilities and sensitivities I name here constitute of course, only a partial listing of all those needed by artists, many others are needed as well. However, all of those I've named here require training in- and attention for individual actions, impressions and feelings, in- and about the material world, and also with respect to the immaterial worlds (of thoughts and emotions) that each of us inhabits. These difficult to train abilities are not ones that can be learned primarily through reading and writing. As useful as are the lessons we absorb from art history, philosophy, art theory, psychology, indeed from academic study of any kind, they are often not very helpful when it comes to individual sensitivity. That is something we must train and develop individually.

WHERE DOES LOVE LIVE?

Those individual abilities I named don't issue from the realm of our conscious rational thought, i.e. they are not directly related to thinking processes at all. Instead, they issue from the domain of the body, i.e. its very real intuitive- and emotional capacity to retain memories, and to react automatically to stimuli, both internal and external ones. The word 'sensitivity' derives from sense, and originates in pre-cognitive, emotional processes rather than in the 'higher' brain processing centers where thinking occurs. Those more 'primitive' pre-cognitive capacities are the most immediate and essential perceptive and decision-making tools we employ when we make or appreciate art. A very considerable proportion of decisions we take in art is not constituted by what we think, but is instead directly informed by what we feel. The cognitive neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in a ^{xvii}lecture from 2009 makes it clear that it is not rational thinking that is responsible for a great number of the choices we make in life. Instead, it is the feelings we have about our respective choices that are determinant for our thinking, and consequently for the choices we make. It is clearly not the other way around as we are most often inclined to imagine. In an ^{xviii}interview with Damasio, he cites as an example, his interaction with a patient whose brain was severely damaged in an accident. Damage was incurred to a part of the brain where emotional processing faculties are concentrated, while leaving the patient's intellectual capacities entirely intact. From Damasio's description of his interactions with his patient, it becomes clear that decisions about even the simplest of things were no longer possible for the patient without his emotional processing systems because those provide the definitive impulse for deciding one-way or the other. In a ^{xix}text from "*A second chance for Emotion*", Damasio talks about the history of neuroscience, making the case that the role of Emotion in each of our lives remains very seriously underestimated in Science. From what science is now telling us, I

think it abundantly clear that the role of what is sensed, felt and emoted in life in general, and art in particular, is a very much more central and important one than we have yet accepted or understood it to be. When emotions become conscious experience we speak of *feelings*, we feel things. Without our poorly understood but acute and wondrous sensory abilities, we cannot make art that has the power to evoke complex emotions, and hence give rise to the subsequent thoughts of real value we have about them. I believe it essential that we study and learn much more about this in order that we are then able to use those lessons in art education.

It seems to me at present that, rather than undertaking that investigation in art education, what we are doing is in large measure simply ignoring the role of emotion. In large part I think, this is because we don't yet understand it at all well, making it as a result, quite difficult to discuss. Instead we tend to focus our attention on teaching students to ask and answer completely different questions. Characteristic of this preference for what I'd call 'reliable answers to unrelated questions' is our current tendency to teach the practice of art as largely dependent on critical thinking. We require of art students for example, that they read and understand highly esoteric philosophical tracts, which we persuade them are somehow related to art. For me, it's something of a mystery by what line of reasoning art and philosophy can be thought of as closely related pursuits. In my own experience, with one important exception I can think of they are not remotely related! The one thing those two pursuits do have in common I think, is that both demand the rigorous examination and acceptance of Uncertainty. Both Philosophy and Art relentlessly question the degree to which we can be certain of things. Are things really as we commonly see them, as we think we know them? What basis in fact, do we have for any of our beliefs, those concerning ourselves, or those relative to the things, people and thoughts, even the universe that surrounds us? By asking such questions,

philosophy stimulates us to imagine and analyze alternatives for the ways we commonly think, see and sense things. That practice is very conducive to Creativity. It is, after all, only by positing that things are-, or may be distinctly different from our normal understanding of them, that new ideas come into existence. In this respect, I think it valid to say that Art and Philosophy have in common that they can only be engaged in effectively, if and when we are *a priori* willing to suspend our beliefs.

In^{xx}definitions of the word Philosophy however, can also be found the reasons why I consider philosophy, in spite of the important similarity I just noted, a pursuit quite different from art. The definitions seem uniformly to make of philosophy a practice primarily determined by its dependence on reason and logic. Art in sharp contrast, I seriously hope, would not be defined by any sensible person as *relying on the exercise of reason and logic*! Yet another consequential difference between art and philosophy for me, is the fact that philosophy attempts to arrive at points of view that suggest-, represent- or aim at consensus. Art in my view attempts no such thing. Art should instead be looked at as both emphasizing and promoting the value of a great number of very divergent viewpoints. Art neither advocates nor confirms the convergence of - or the existence of any important consensus about those many points of view. To sum up here, very unlike philosophy then, art neither aims at consensus, nor is practiced largely through thinking. When we try to compare two human pursuits with each other, c.q. Art and Philosophy, and discover that both the goals they aim for and the primary processes by which they are conducted are very different, I think the conclusion warranted that we are looking at quite different pursuits.

IS ART 'ACADEMIC'?

The fact that we have bodies and the genetic imperative to defend them, requires that in addition to intellect, we are endowed with emotion, and emotion is literally antithetical to objectivity. In philosophical terms in fact, objective reality if such a thing exists, would seem to be only that which can exist independently of our emotionally biased human perception of it. I know of no current defensible scientific or philosophical claim to the existence of any such reality. Objectivity then, or even the suggestion of it, becomes quite troublesome. In fact it seems a singularly unrealistic goal or ambition when speaking of any aspect of art. Art proceeds very clearly from what is subjective, both in the case of the artist and the viewer of his art. Objective discourse is limited to those issues that we decide (all too simplistically in my view) are true for all of us, or for which that status is being strived for by our discourse, i.e. seeking agreement. That kind of discourse in my view is inconsistent with both the origins and the main purposes of art, those being subjective discourse. For those reasons, I suggest that as beneficial as academic training is for critical thinking, it cannot be imagined to constitute a major component of art making. I will add, that I do know what academic training is!

Before my training and career as an artist I was lucky enough to be able to profit from an academic education. There is no doubt that that academic training was- and remains important for me. Because of it, I came to learn many things about the world and was enabled to approach understanding from diverse realms of human knowledge. I'd like to think additionally, that I'm able to do so critically. In other words, I sincerely believe that academic training is a very good thing. However, based on my experience as an artist, I must also insist that it is neither equal to-, nor can it replace the training of an entirely different nature that is essential to making art of quality. The abilities needed

for that are very different ones indeed. They don't involve fact-based critical thinking, but instead sensitive observations, actions and reactions. The operative words in the last sentence are: **action** and **reaction**. One of the important differences between thinking and acting is the degree of mutability of the first as compared to the second. By that I mean that there is risk involved in actions, risk that is not in the same degree implicit in thinking. The presence of that risk and the need to actively engage with it is important!

For example, we can think anything we want, change direction, stop, turn back, or continue straight ahead, following the thoughts we have. We can even completely change what we are thinking, i.e. abandon earlier thoughts if we decide that is the best course of action. We cannot however, say that any of those options apply equally to our actions. Actions are not as easily denied, changed or undone as thoughts or words are. Actions bring with them a significantly higher degree of the need to consider carefully and choose, to take risk. In other words, a greater degree of commitment to the choices we make is generally implied in our actions. Moreover, for most professions we think of, there exist 'prescribed' practices, those being consistent with the specific goals of each of those professions. Contrariwise in art practice, the need to select from among an almost unlimited number of options is one of its most significant characteristics. We confront and navigate what seems often an infinite number of options that we are free to-, but also obliged to choose from in art. *"The freedom that an artist has..."* is an overfamiliar phrase for all of us. Very often, artists find themselves the envy of others because it is imagined that making art means you can *"do whatever you want"*. While that notion about art is not very accurate, it is also not without some degree of truth to it. The number of choices an artist can make, but is also obliged to make, are far more numerous than those that, for example, a shoemaker or a surgeon must make,

or is free to make. That difference is I think important, and it results very largely from what is 'prescribed' for those very different practices.

We can of course easily imagine that a surgeon's decisions are far more consequential ones than those typically faced by artists. Be that as it may, it does not change the **number** of choices open to one or to the other. A surgeon, for example, is not free to decide to incise with his surgical knife what by some people might be considered a particularly creative, evocative, or beautiful pattern of cuts in the body of his living patient. Similarly, a shoemaker is generally not free to make a pair of shoes that, for example, he renders highly unusual and attractive by virtue of a stunning pattern of through-and-through perforations in the soles of those shoes. No matter how appealing such a course of action might perhaps appear for an unusually creative surgeon or shoemaker, acting on it will defeat quite central goals of their professions. For most professions whose outcomes are dependent on *actions*, there exists a set of prescribed rules and guidelines that necessarily limit the choices their practitioners have. These restrict them in large measure to only those choices that clearly serve the purposes the practitioners **must** fulfill. In other words, 'form follows function' with respect to most practices. The choices open to a practitioner depend on the purposes his practice fulfills. It will be clear what that means in the case of a surgeon or a shoemaker, we can easily agree what the important purposes served by practitioners of those professions are. For artists however, this raises the very much more difficult question: "*what are an artist's purposes?*"

ART AND THE ARTIST'S PURPOSE

Once again, the answers here are by no means clear or easy ones. While we could quickly arrive at a high degree of consensus regarding a surgeon's- or a

shoemaker's purposes, the same cannot be said of an artist's purposes. The multitude of very different answers we hear, read or imagine when questioning art or artists' purposes indicate that we are far from any consensus regarding answers to the question. That poses significant problems when designing anything that is to become policy for art, whether in education or in the larger arena of public policy. For that reason, it is highly important that we try to find and agree on very much clearer answers than we have at present regarding the purposes of art. After all, everything we can- and must decide now and in the future with respect to policy for art, clearly depends on having those answers. So that difficult question persists: *"educate practicing artists to do what, i.e. what is art's purpose?"* Here is the answer I'd like to offer:

The artist's purpose is to transform material that cannot speak of- or for itself, into a vehicle for transmitting content. That content is not singular in nature, and is primarily emotive- rather than rational, i.e. its purpose is to evoke emotion. Complex processes of the free association of all the things we know, remember, think of and feel at that moment are initiated in an **un-prescribed** way. The result is that new things, sometimes amazing and quite important things we would not otherwise be aware of, are sometimes revealed to us. That applies in equal measure for both the artist and for his audience. That is art's main purpose.

This purpose is not one we can accomplish in the same measure by speaking, reading or writing. Words alone are normally not often able to accomplish that. The emotive capacity 'things' (art works included) have for us, is quite different from the emotive capacity of words. The words we use have quite specific definitions, every one of them. That is after all, their express purpose. The word 'shoe' for example, must evoke on hearing or reading that word, very highly similar connotations and associations for all who speak the English language.

This is the purpose of our spoken languages. By contrast, we have not agreed (indeed, we cannot agree) that any such thing is true with respect to how each of us will feel when we contemplate a real shoe, hold a shoe in our hands without having the intention to put it on our foot, or see a shoe-like form in a painting. What we think of and feel when we contemplate a real shoe or confront the image of one, is much further removed from the realm of its functionality than the word alone. When we read or hear the word 'shoe', we think in first instance only of its 'affordances'. When confronting the object or its image, we both think and feel many more entirely different things.

An artist learns quickly that the emotive qualities his work has for himself, cannot in very large measure be supposed to be the same ones it will have for others. Experience demonstrates this conclusively. In undertaking to make art works, the artist is free to do almost anything he wants. There is no pre-existing consensus concerning an artwork's 'function' or its 'prescribed meaning', either in kind or degree. The 'function' an artwork has is only what **emerges from interaction** with it, rather than something predefined. In first instance, that interaction I speak of is between the artwork and its maker. I'd like to emphasize the great importance, when discussing anything we imagine art **to be for** in my view, of that first interaction between the artist and his artwork. I will simply say this: The degree to which a critically important purpose I think art serves, the purpose accomplished during the interaction between the work and its maker, is consequently ignored in discussions about *the function of art*, is puzzling for me! I have earlier suggested that we should not imagine that artists are primarily engaged to convey information about things to others. Rather, I think it needs to be understood that they are very largely engaged to explore and discover the meanings of things **for themselves**! I think this is true of art the first humans made, and I believe that since then, that hasn't changed nearly so much as we seem to be imagining. It is decidedly strange for me that

we currently seem to limit our attention in teaching so largely to what an artwork might mean for everyone **other than** for the artist who makes it! A simple change of focus in that regard would, I think, make a great many things regarding art more understandable for all of us.

The widely propagated point of view that artists are or should be primarily motivated by the wish to show- or tell us things is in my opinion, a fallacy. I am convinced that if we tested that question in a survey, we will find that most artists make art primarily because it offers them a unique and highly rewarding way to learn and experience things that prove consistently of great value for **themselves**. I don't believe that means that artists should therefore be thought egocentric. I think that exactly the same is true for athletes, scientists, philosophers, and most others I can imagine. We are it seems to me, systematically taught or encouraged to represent and define our activities, whatever those may be, very largely in terms of the value or meaning those have for others, i.e. for society as a whole. But in simple truth, I think the overriding motivations for making art, for doing science, becoming a doctor, an athlete, or pretty much anything else, are always much more importantly highly personal ones.

Artists discover deeper-lying subjective, very personal meanings of things and experiences through the act of making art. There is no better substitute for that experience that I know of. That is knowledge of a kind that cannot be conveyed at all well in words. This is very real 'physical knowledge' which is acquired. It is true that this physical knowledge then becomes the basis of many subsequent associations and thought processes, ones we can then easily verbalize if we choose to. But the kind of knowledge I speak of here that derived from making art, is not reversible. We cannot reverse the process to distil or deduce physical-emotional knowing from the verbal abstractions we

later find to describe it. Anyone who is not able to feel and acknowledge the very real physical aspects of the experience of art (emotion), will be unable to fully understand what it is, how or why we do it, or why we should continue to teach or value it.



fig. 9 *"Falling from Grace"* - 2003 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

A great deal more attention and emphasis is indicated I think, for all that occurs and is learned during the important first stage in art I just spoke of, i.e. what is learned by the artist through the making. It is only after that first interaction between the artist and his work that the next phase begins, interaction between viewers and the artwork. Assuming, as we often simplistically seem to, that

what is learned, conveyed, felt and thought in the initial phase is in large measure similar to what happens when others view the work is I think, a mistake. Elsewhere I discuss in this text pluriformity of meaning, the centrality of bodily movement in cognition, and other issues that indicate strongly that the significance an artwork has for the artist will certainly be very different than those that it will have for almost anyone else.

Following the artist's initial interaction with his own artwork, others will see that work. The artist learns much from the experiences others relate having with his artwork. The comparison of his experiences with what others experience in his artwork is one of the most valuable rewards making art offers. Making artworks affords the artist a way to capture and preserve fleeting glimpses of subconsciously occurring processes and impressions, ones taking place inside all of us, that perhaps **only** this transfer into material can make perceptible. In other words, both making and viewing art allow normally hidden aspects of that which we intuit, sense and feel to ascend to a level that affords their conscious consideration. Art, I claim, is an eminently useful device, capable of raising normally hidden aspects of our subconscious lives to the level of our conscious consideration.

It is in that respect that I think art perhaps has its greatest value for humanity. Through art we are able to capture and share glimpses of what goes on at otherwise inaccessible levels of our subconscious existence. This function art performs, is one for which I suggest there is currently no better means of accomplishing it. If this is true, then I think that it constitutes a spectacular function art serves. What we 'recognize' in great art, what we communicate about through it then, are both the many striking similarities we discover, as well as the very great differences that characterize each of our highly individual subconscious lives. Art reveals to us what is normally thoroughly hidden from

our view. Artworks can speak profoundly of the deepest and most individual kinds of experiences and feelings that the artist and the viewers of his work can possibly exchange with each other. Art's great value resides then in its capacity to offer us glimpses of things that would otherwise remain largely unknown to us, accomplishing that in a way and to a degree that I think few other activities we undertake can parallel. To paraphrase here something I once heard a very long time ago, the source of which I unfortunately no longer recall: *'when an artist succeeds to make tangible in an artwork his deepest and most individual feelings and experiences, this can speak to us of the most universally shared and fundamental aspects of our humanity. Those that every one of us can deeply and meaningfully recognize.'* It is because it is exceedingly difficult to put that kind of knowledge/experience into words, that we have art to do it.

THE ART EXPERIENCE, LIMINALITY, AND A FEW WORDS ABOUT MAGIC

Why is it that art can sometimes have such a profound impact on us, when most other things we see daily do not seem to have a similar impact? What makes experiencing art 'special'? Part of the answer, I think, could be that conventions regarding how we exhibit and view art, e.g. the conditions that exist when we decide to undergo it, assist this. There is a term I think a useful one to describe what happens when I, for example, see a work of art and am able to give my serious attention to it. The term is *liminal*, and it applies to a concept from anthropology. Liminal refers to an experience describable as an unusual one, a sometimes unclear, difficult to describe state between two more clear and distinct states. Among other things, it applies to the period of time during a ^{xxi} *rite of passage* ritual in tribal societies. A young boy for example, on reaching the age that his tribal society defines as the point of 'passage into manhood', will be required to undergo a ritual marking that passage. Let's imagine that

we've been invited to attend such an event, and are told that next Monday, at 1:00 in the afternoon, that rite of passage for one specific boy will commence. On waking up at 7 o'clock that very Monday morning, he is still a boy, a state he knows very well because he's been that almost all his life. The very next day however, after the ritual is completed, he will have become something entirely different, a man. From that moment he will see himself-, and will be seen by others as a man, for the entire remainder of his life. That's a momentous change! In the course of his passage ritual, starting at 1:00 on that Monday, and continuing for some hours until the ceremony is completed, he will however, confusingly, be neither a man nor a boy. He will be something that is unclear, in between those two clearly defined states of identity, boy and man. During his rite of passage, things for the boy will likely be very much less clear than they were before it, and will once again become afterwards. That 'unclear' period of time during the rite of passage ritual is called *a liminal state*. I am intrigued by the similarity I sense between what that boy likely experiences during the ritual, and what happens with me when I view a work of art that succeeds to move me. I imagine that what happens when I give my entire attention to a moving work of art, might also be called a liminal state, one between other distinct, familiar, or 'normal' states of being.

When I go to a museum, I will see many paintings. I walk through the museum looking at each of them briefly until one of those paintings, for whatever reasons, captures my attention in a way the others I've seen haven't. At such a moment, I approach the start of a liminal state. Around that painting, space has been made 'neutral', left free, allowing me better to concentrate on that one painting I will now give very close attention to. I am thereby assisted to limit my focus to that one object of my interest, take advantage of existing circumstances to immerse myself for a time in only that painting. I begin to take up various positions in relation to the painting, moving perhaps first closer to

it, then away from it, then perhaps again closer. I look intensely at the painting, both as a whole, and as a function of its parts, willingly giving myself over to the experience without knowing exactly what I am looking for. What I'm engaged in doing at such times is the result of a quite purposeful decision I've made. I've decided not just to glance at the painting, and then perhaps quickly turn my attention elsewhere once I've determined that what I'm looking at is a **painting**. I might very likely unthinkingly do exactly this in my 'normal attention mode'. No, at this time I have chosen to undertake something very different from what I normally do with everyday objects and situations. I am now intent on deeply 'undergoing' the experience of focusing on that one painting, savoring all that it might bring me, or in the end perhaps disappointingly may not bring me. I have 'drawn down my focus', limited my attention to only that painting in all its aspects. I no longer pay attention to anything else. I 'take the painting inside me' to find out what happens. Why do I do that, what underlies such a decision? I do this simply because I am curious to find out what will happen, both with me and inside me. I am curious only with respect to my own individual and spontaneous reactions, disregarding others' definitions, reactions or descriptions. That means that I have effected a rather dramatic change in a number of aspects of my usual observational mode, changed my position with respect to the world quite considerably. I am, for example, no longer at all concerned with how others may regard me. I have completely, or almost completely turned off that awareness, a very unusual thing for me to do when I am among others. At such a time, I don't care if or how others see me. I'm now **doing** something that requires my complete attention. I am entirely unconcerned with the 'affordances' of that object I'm looking at, i.e. in finding out what I might do with that object. I am purposefully paying attention only to what happens while looking and feeling, with no way to know in advance what that will be. All that happens when I'm looking at art

in this way, results from a very conscious decision to put myself into a different state than my normal state of existence or awareness. Normally, I am aware of all- or most things that surround me. Normally my actions are directed at achieving clear and predefined goals. I am normally highly conscious of how others may see me. In fact, if I think about it, normally I have a very different set of purposes and awarenesses altogether than when I view art. I walk from here to there because I want to arrive there, or I pick up an object because I can use it to accomplish some task. Or I listen to a friend tell me something, formulating my reactions entirely in accordance with both the nature of our relationship, and what he tells me. But when I've made the decision to experience a work of art as fully as I am able, I'm doing something very different. I have decided to become unusually attentive to what happens to me in a situation about which I cannot predict what that will be, and on which very few external limitations are of influence. But, we could ask, is that so very different from deciding to drive to the mountains in order to take a long walk alone in nature? Is that not the same- or a very similar kind of thing? Although in first instance it's true that those two choices appear in important ways similar, there are also some quite important differences between them. Two obvious similarities are the commonality of the wish to experience 'beauty', and the likely 'contemplative states' we might arrive at through either experience. But it is also true that we know considerably more about-, can predict to a much greater degree what will happen when we take a walk through nature, than with respect to what will happen when we deeply experience a work of art we are seeing for the first time. Do we for example, typically imagine that in the course of a walk in nature, we may be confronted with something surprising, ugly, repellant, wildly out of place, or which perhaps may trigger the recall of a deeply felt painful experience? Is it likely that the nature walk will result in the same kind of free-associative, very fast moving, unpredictable and difficult to

pinpoint reactions that are likely to be evoked by an unfamiliar painting? I suggest that the answers to those questions indicate significant differences in both the degree of- and kind of 'intention' we have when deciding to do one or the other. Deciding for the nature walk, or alternatively for to go to a museum, is then a conscious decision to undergo distinctly different experiences.

There is yet another important difference between deciding to undergo what results from one or the other of those two activities. When we concentrate on a work of art, our focus is directed at what the actions of one single human being, acting over a relatively limited period of time has caused to come into existence. If we choose instead for a walk in nature, we opt to undergo what God, and/or the Big Bang, and all subsequent natural evolutionary (and human) processes, acting over billions of years, have caused to come into existence. This indicates that the choice for a walk in nature, or alternatively to undergo experiencing a painting, will confront us with both very different '*products*' and very different kinds of '*Creators*'! Although we are perhaps not always conscious of it, we do know this. I think that is certain to have important influence on the kinds of reactions we will have to one or the other experience. In the case of the painting, we carry the knowledge, whether fully conscious of it or not, that one person has caused what we're looking at to come into existence. We then naturally assume that in so doing, that person, the artist, had some purposes in mind. We can correctly assume that one of the artist's primary purposes was that others might be interested to undergo whatever results from giving close attention to his work. Because of this, we know *a priori*, that some form of communication is intended or is possible between that artist via his work, and ourselves. I suggest that this state of affairs changes very considerably if we decided instead for the nature walk. While we may also find that a moving experience, most of us will be unlikely to imagine what we experience on our walk as an intentional communication of 'content' or

‘information’ between someone else and ourselves. Quite simply, when we undergo an art experience, we know or assume that it is intended as a form of communication between humans. Our nature walk in contrast, is usually not understood by us as implying anything remotely similar. I think it is fair to say that these differences, even if we are not conscious of them, result in considerable differences in both the intentions and expectations we have when opting for one or the other of those two experiences. As a result of our choice between the two, informed by both different intentions and expectations, I think it likely that the experiences we undergo in the two cases are in important ways, very different ones. While it’s true that both can be characterized by the desire to experience beauty of some kind, *beauty* and its cousin, *aesthetics*, are quite slippery words! In my view, those words are not remotely as specific or informative as we seem to imagine when invariably using them in every definition of ART. Do we really have realistic ground for assuming that all-, or even most humans imagine very similar things when they think of *beauty*?

Both a walk in nature and a visit to an art exhibition are activities we undertake in order to have an uncommon experience, one that transports us from one state to another. Both can therefore I think be described as liminal states. When we consider what we thought, felt and did before-, during-, and after those respective experiences, both can perhaps be called liminal states. What we experience in the course of either of those ‘rites’ we decide to undergo, can be described as moving from a ‘normal’ state, passing through what is an unclear-unpredictable state, in order afterwards, to arrive at a somehow altered normal state.

There are of course, many other ways to say the same things about art experience I’ve just described using the term, liminality. Alternatively, I could

say for example: *Experiencing art in western society is one of our currently accepted ways to invoke and reverently undergo a 'magic spell'. We do this knowing that it may well change us in some way. We feel ready for a change, whatever that is, we're simply curious about what will happen. Very likely, we hope or believe that something of importance and/or good might result.* But regardless of which terms we choose to describe it, the mystery inherent in this ritual of art we decide to undergo, as well as the possible changes in us it might result in, is a very attractive and useful option we have. And it is manifested each time we look at- and are able to deeply enjoy art. If we are artists, we decide to make a work of art. Or if we are viewers, we view works of art that we hope will move us. While that movement is devoid of any measurable motion, it is nevertheless capable of transporting us from where we were before, to a quite different place. Art offers this possibility.

THE LIMITATIONS OF RATIO

That making and viewing art are very largely intellectual processes is a premise I am here challenging. When I say 'intellectual processes', I mean as a function of higher cognitive processing in the brain, in other words, 'thinking'. Currently it seems to me, we are seriously promoting that 'understanding art' is something we should teach and study academically, while forgetting that 'practice' is both the very first- and operative word that young aspiring artists signed up for. We seem increasingly to believe that in very large part, making-, understanding and appreciating art can be accomplished simply by the analysis of 'relevant facts' about it. In other words, we are saying that the analysis of factual knowledge is what is critical for both the making and for the appreciation of art. This implies that art making and appreciation are ordered, conscious analytical processes. I believe very differently, that the logical and

analytical considerations that accompany the making of-, or that emerge from a work of art, although at times interesting, are far less important aspects of art than our emotional processing of it. My view is that in first instance and most importantly, it is art's ability to move us to feel-, as opposed to think, that is the primary purpose it serves. A great deal of structural time in education seems increasingly dedicated to training and testing the ability to write and think about art, and correspondingly less attention is given to training the understanding of- and ability to emote through art. The same trend seems to apply for the structural time available for teaching art relative to the amount of time teachers must now spend on documenting and measuring, i.e. 'evaluating' their teaching. Those last activities taking up increasing portions of what used to be teaching time, demand that that measurement and evaluation is carried out and recorded on numerical scales, i.e. 'objectively' and quantitatively. I believe that there is no experimental evidence that can be produced to indicate that training the ability to think or speak about art is significantly beneficial to art making. Taking that position a step further, I suggest that there exists no demonstrable relationship between the ability to speak and reason well analytically, and the ability to make art of quality. It is undeniable that verbal and analytical abilities are important when it comes to 'selling' art. But we should not be confusing what sells art with what is required to make it and constitutes its real value for us. With respect to the trend towards 'absolute' numerical evaluation scales for art practice education, I think this a ridiculous practice simply because that evaluation is an unavoidably subjective one, and putting a number on a subjective judgment in no way makes of it an absolute or objective one. And we are using those numbers as if they are objective. The usefulness of an increasing concentration in art education on factual knowledge and analytical thinking has, to my knowledge, never been tested or demonstrated anywhere. Instead I think that it is simply being assumed that

doing so is useful and effective, and that assumption is now being acted on. With respect to the rapidly increasing resort to quantitative evaluation methodology in education as an indicator of quality, in my experience, what is currently being measured and evaluated bears almost no relationship to the real quality of the results. The notion that quality in education can be monitored and guaranteed, or even indicated by impressive sounding but very vague parameters that we call 'impact', 'partnerships', 'visibility', 'articles in peer-reviewed journals', etc. is for me very highly suspect. These are terms, after all that both define and reflect corporate interests and parameters, not educational ones! In my view, there is not the remotest empirical or logical reason for concluding that those interests are similar or run parallel!

If we consider how our human ability to think may relate to our ability to feel and act, it is interesting to realise that while our minds are capable of conceiving of perfection, our bodies can never reproduce it. For example, our brain allows us easily to imagine a perfect circle. But our hands are quite incapable of drawing what the mind has conceived. Conversely, what our hands actually will produce if we try to draw a perfect circle, is a shape that in turn, our mind could never accurately model. That simple example of a difference between what our logical/analytical abilities make conceivable for us, and what our bodies allow us to realise, is I think highly consequential. What we can think of are mental constructs. Neither our bodies, nor indeed all of the perceivable Universe however, are capable of accurately reproducing those. Conversely, we are eminently capable of creating or accomplishing with our body concrete facts, but in turn, our mind is incapable of accurately modeling those. Art I believe, is at home there, precisely in the center of that wondrous paradox!



fig. 10 *"Reductio ad Aurum"*- 1997 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

SYNCHRONICITY and DON JUAN

Another way to describe what art accomplishes that distinguishes it from thinking is offered by the principle of ^{xxii}synchronicity. That term was coined by Carl Jung to connote his ideas about the acausal linking of events, a concept that had previously been studied and written about by the Austrian biologist Paul Kammerer. The synchronicity principle holds that things can occur together or coincide not only when they are linked by causality, but also because they are linked by meaning. It would seem clear, because meaning is not universal,

whereas causality is, that being linked by causality is an objective quality things can have, whereas being linked by meaning or significance is a subjective link. In my view, both making art and appreciating it are dependent on the willingness to search for-, and more importantly, on the openness to being surprised (and sometimes moved) by the discovery that things are linked in that way, i.e. meaningfully and significantly rather than causally. That is a very different kind of linkage from the time-, space- and causally determined connections that are the steppingstones of formal logical or rational analysis, i.e. our normally directed thinking. In my experience instead, it's very often necessary to practice a kind of 'unfocused-', distinctly un-analytical attention in art. Focused attention limits our field of view to only those things being actively and consciously considered at any one time. Doing that has proven to be a highly useful practice. But at other times, I think it is not a useful thing to do at all. Scientific focused attention tends to constrain attention to only to those things that we are able to demonstrate occur consistently. It is in other words, the measure of statistical consistency that is the backbone of scientific inquiry. Sometimes however, we need to do something very different, making sure that we are attentive to things that inevitably fall outside our field of view when we look at them only on a quantitative basis, too closely, or hierarchically. In other words, at times we need to dramatically alter our focus in order to consider, or even just to notice the existence of things that we cannot readily understand analytically. Very many such things are in fact not yet understandable for us at all. But we can nonetheless profit greatly, from at the very least appreciating that they exist, and accepting that oftentimes such things have a great deal of influence on our lives, even though we not are able to understand them in an intellectual way. The author Carlos Castaneda wrote at length of that ability each of has, can use and improve on if we choose to do so, to alter our field of focus. He did so through the words of his fascinating character Don Juan, a

Yaqui Indian shaman. Don Juan, speaking of his 'magic' to his pupil Carlos Castaneda, refers repeatedly to the crucial importance of developing an ability to **see clearly**. With that term, Don Juan meant really coming to see and understand-, or even simply to deeply appreciate the existence of a thing in depth, i.e. developing the ability to look past the limitations of our habitual and automatic **conscious and reasoned** responses to things. In order to achieve this, Don Juan told his pupil, he needed to learn to *unfocus* his gaze. With that term Don Juan meant, counter-intuitively, that his pupil should learn not to look directly at the thing he wished to 'see clearly', but instead for example, to squint his eyes at it, thereby also taking in what is next to-, as well as what's 'inside-, under- and behind it'. Might Emmauel Kant perhaps have called that 'noumenon'? Who knows? At any rate, we are able to look at- and see things very differently, sometimes even more fully, by seeing them 'unclearly'. My experience as an artist has taught me that this way of looking is in fact far more than merely a romantic novelist's fictional creation! Don Juan's description of the process of becoming aware of some normally hidden aspects of things has always resonated very strongly with me. In my own experience, the 'frame of my gaze' is very highly determinant for what I am able to perceive in art, just as in life, and all that I will come to understand about both.

In Science we can also find this idea that the 'unfocused gaze' may well be a critical component of human creativity. It has been studied, discussed and validated, and we find this in scientific literature referred to variously as ^{xxiii} 'incubation', 'mind wandering' and 'unfocused attention'. Additionally, there is considerable ^{xxiv} evidence from Science that Perception is not merely the open window of our senses through which all things outside us randomly, freely, and unchanged by their passage, enter our attention and are then processed. We do not in fact see even the entirety of each individual thing we look at. Instead in very large measure, we see and process only that part of what we look at that

has a direct relation to what we're **looking for**. It seems that we choose without any awareness of that fact, not only what we look at, but also what we will register about it, and hence what we will come to feel and think about what we look at. Artists and viewers of art, I think it fair to say, are most often looking for what they have not seen before, i.e. looking to see things differently. Because we don't in first instance know exactly where to look for these new things we've not seen before, we must search them out. We therefore must try out various directions and sizes for 'the frame of our gaze', in order to locate what we are hoping to find. The 'frame of gaze' that we select when we restrict ourselves to largely logical/analytical or rational points of view, makes of that methodology alone in art, as I repeatedly suggest throughout this text, a severe limitation rather than a useful practice. The same of course is also true if an artist's gaze is always 'unfocused'. Both logical/analysis and what may be called its opposite, 'the unfocused gaze', are highly useful tools. I am 100% convinced on the basis of my own experience however, that it isn't possible to engage both simultaneously. We can choose one or the other, or we can try to go back and forth between the two. That is why I insist that it's important not to ignore or devalue either mode of operating, something I think is occurring in regard to valuing and training our ability to sense and use those things that which we perceive and 'know', not on the basis of intellect, but rather on the basis of emotion.

I submit that what I am here calling 'the unfocused gaze' is critically important for Creativity because it is a highly effective way for us to gain access to our sub-conscious faculties. If we hope to bring all we can to bear on the practice of art, make the best possible use of all of our tools, we need to understand not only the direct linear links between things through causality, but also those links that are better described as the resonance between our experiences, not

causal in nature, but instead clearly related by meaning or significance, i.e. *synchronicity*.

Clear answers for some of the most fundamental questions about art do not presently, with any significant degree of consensus, exist. That is ‘the elephant in the room’, one I suggest we currently, instead of honestly admitting it, quite irresponsibly try to ignore. I am convinced additionally that the lack of agreed-upon answers to those questions constitutes a serious problem in speaking about art, both in- and outside of education. It will only be when we formulate better answers for these fundamental questions that we can begin to discover ever better ways to teach students to make art of quality. If that’s true, how then might we start finding those answers?

INTELLECTUAL RIGOR

The first thing I think is of paramount importance if we hope to find better answers for difficult questions, is a high degree of intellectual honesty. To understand art more fully, to arrive at good answers for fundamental questions about it, will in first instance depend on educators, artists and students of art alike, being both encouraged-, and encouraging each other to understand and to represent honestly and accurately for others what making art really is for them. We must learn both more usefully and honestly to describe the true nature of the processes by which we come to make and appreciate works of art. If an artist is unable to honestly answer for himself the question, “*what is it I’m really doing here, and why?*”, that will clearly impede discovering how to get better at it. In several respects it seems to me that we are currently training art students to do something very different than finding honest answers for that question. Instead, we increasingly often teach them to accept- and to repeat for others phrases I suggest are no more than simplistic ‘fables’ about art making.

In other words, art students are currently being taught to understand and speak about their work in ways that neither represent their true motivations for making art, nor the real nature of the processes by which that work comes into existence. If there is truth to that, then it is clearly inconsistent with the term 'intellectual rigor'. That term implies scrupulous honesty in our considerations of- and statements about what really happens when we study, conduct- and present the results of our research, in art or in any other pursuit.

The premise, for example, that in the study of art practice, increasing the emphasis on academic research and promoting the use of terminology borrowed from other pursuits is grounded wholly or even largely in educational concerns relating to the pursuit of art, is in my view a fable. There exist if we think about it in fact, entirely different goals that are far more directly and effectively served by that policy than promoting quality in art. I suggest that academic rigor can be significantly served by taking a close look at our curriculum in art education, and undertaking to analyze the relative contributions to making art of quality of each of the items that compose it. Another highly useful thing to undertake in my view, would be a serious and formal discussion among authorities in art and education in it, questioning the degree to which the many current definitions of art and the terminology we use to speak of and evaluate it are understood by all of us in the same way, i.e. are really as useful as we seem to imagine they are.

CONCEPT.....WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?!

For me, yet another of the 'fables about art' is the increasingly accepted notion that a work of art starts with- or conveys *a concept*, i.e. carries *content* of a specifiable nature. On the basis of my experience in both making and teaching art, I suggest that that premise lacks valid substance and, for that reason,

results very frequently in considerable confusion. Many instructors today advise their students that concept must be clearly formulated in words before starting on an artwork, and that the work when finished, must convey the original concept in visual form. The degree in which this dictate is satisfied is then very often regarded as a crucial criterion in the formal evaluation of 'the quality' of the finished artwork. That approach to art, as being of quality in large measure to the extent that it is able to successfully 'encrypt verbal concepts in visual images' is, I suggest, nonsensical. In my opinion, it belongs in the same category as the FCT's formulation of '*art as contribution to scientific culture*'.

It is of course true that artists start their works with ideas. Sometimes these are very clear ones, but just as often, they are less clear, and at times even entirely unclear ones. Those ideas the artist sets out with relate to what he hopes he can accomplish in- and with the work he will make. But that is a very different starting point indeed than one implied by rigid policy requiring that the 'content' of an artwork must be clearly stated in words beforehand. For me it is nothing short of mind-boggling that we could imagine that the 'quality' of artworks is determined by the degree of correspondence of initially formulated verbal concepts with what can later readily be 'decoded' from finished works of art! I argue that such a notion doesn't constitute a remotely informed way to understand, evaluate-, make or appreciate art. Art cannot be simplistically reduced to a kind of visual code or shorthand for conveying verbal concept. That's the business of graphic design, not of art. The art-as-concept approach to understanding it, I think, offers in the end nothing more than a simplistic formula for imagining art as a kind of *painting by the numbers*. It presumes that artists start with well-formulated verbal ideas, and then proceed to translate those into visual 'code' using colors and materials. It is then further assumed that the results will 'say something' to a viewer, even although he

doesn't have the 'codebook' explaining how the message was encrypted. Why, I wonder, do we seem to be advocating such a simplistic approach to making and appreciating art? I think that the answer to that question must be that clearly the doctrine that art is based on concept admirably does serve some distinct purposes. But those, I submit, are very different ones than the advancement of the quality of art or art education.

The structural approach in education that the 'concept based art' model expounds offers some clear advantages. First of all, it constitutes a relatively simple to define theoretical approach to art. Additionally, teaching 'concept art' as structural theory is less costly and time consuming than more complex (and in my opinion, more accurate) formulations of what art is and should accomplish. Concept and Theory can be dealt with in classrooms with many students, requiring fewer teaching hours and less supervision. Concept-based-art is easy to define, less expensive to teach, and also far more easily dealt with by administrators. It enables additionally that instructors not trained in- or even familiar with art practice from other fields (sometimes '*far afields*!') can be regularly enlisted in art practice education. And lastly, it facilitates the considerable timesaving option of evaluating art using 'objective'- rather than subjective criteria. If all art is based in concept, we can spend far less time evaluating art, considering instead the artist's words about it, a far less demanding task. In short, a concept-based approach to art offers the attraction of a simpler, cheaper, less time consuming, and less 'risky' path to take.

Attractive as that approach clearly is proving to be for quite a number of people involved in education, I submit that the idea that art is based primarily in concept, and should therefore be taught and evaluated as such, is demonstrably inaccurate and dramatically ineffective. It ignores the most important real things that happen, both when we make art, and when as viewers we are able

to derive great value from it. One of those things it ignores is the freedom and necessity at times to radically change course when making art. If the premise were true that we make art to 'express predetermined concepts', then there would seem to be no reason to change course when making artworks. More importantly, there would perhaps be no reason to make art at all, if we are merely translating existing verbal concepts into some kind of visual code! But at any rate, changing course is often both highly necessary and clearly beneficial when making art. Expressing singular concept I am saying, cannot be imagined as the central goal that artists are at pains to achieve in their works. Only someone who doesn't understand art could imagine that that could be true. No, it is the invariably **many-faceted** emotive and expressive quality of the finished work that is far more important. The very word 'concept' as it is used in art, in fact seems to indicate nothing more than 'idea'. I suggest indeed that 'idea' is a much more useful and less presumptive term for indicating what is being spoken of at such times. We all have ideas, lots of them. We take these with us when we start any process. But that process once underway, may very often indicate-, or even demand of us that those initial ideas change in accordance with what succeeding steps will make clear. We must acknowledge both the freedom and the necessity to alter ideas when making art, allow works to evolve naturally, rather than sticking to initial ideas regardless of what the steps in that process reveal to us. Making art is not predictable enough to embark on it with fixed ideas and then, irrespective of what becomes clear during the process, hang on to those initial ideas for dear life! Fixed 'concepts' simply cannot, I am saying, be seriously considered a central aspect of either the creation-, or the deeper enjoyment of artworks.

An artist cannot expect of himself before completing his work, that he already knows what it will mean when it's finished, neither mean to himself, nor to anyone else. Artworks can perhaps quite usefully be likened to experiments.

The very reason for undertaking an experiment is in order to discover things we didn't know beforehand, things we can only find out on completing the experiment. No one conducting an experiment can be expected to describe its outcome, or the meaning of that outcome in advance. If that were possible, there would be no need ever to conduct any experiment. Advance and accurate knowledge of the resultant meaning of an experiment should under no circumstance be considered a prerequisite for a successful one, and certainly not in art. Instead, I consider that a highly useful formula for guaranteeing the production of singularly boring works, rarely revealing anything more than what both the artist and his audience already knew before the artwork existed. The reason we make art I'm suggesting, is not at all in order to **convey** meaning, but in order to **find** meaning, meaning that **emerges** from an artwork. Meaning emerges in precisely that way from almost everything we undertake in life. Meaning takes on form only when we do what is necessary to reveal it. The important meanings for example, that atomic fission now has for us, admittedly not all of them good ones, were by no means known or contained in its discovery. Those emerged, all of them, after the discovery. Is not the point of embarking on any voyage of discovery in fact, equally true of human discoveries in all pursuits throughout our history, the search for **emergent** meaning? Why do we not admit that this is also true for works of art?

I argue that in art education currently, we are gravitating towards very vague terminology, stupidly confusing quality with quantity, and simultaneously promoting a number of fables that we teach as fundamentals of art. Another of these fables in my view is the notion, one seemingly firmly entrenched in almost all discussions of art that: "*We make art to communicate things*". Those words are already very familiar and comfortable ones for most of us, they seem straight-forward and acceptable. But if we think about it, do those words not clearly imply that the artist is expressing things he already knows? And is that

not demonstrably false? A far more adequate and honest approach to what art enables I suggest, is not to imagine it as *communicating meaning*, but instead as a highly effective way to *discover* meaning, both for the artist and for his viewers. Art, I'm suggesting, is in fact not usefully thought of as *communication*, but much more accurately understood as *experiment or discovery*. That description of 'art as discovery' applies equally to what motivates artists to make their works, and to what I believe constitutes the primary basis for the public's appreciation of them. Making art I suggest, should neither be understood or spoken of as a way to express concept, or to convey knowledge. Instead, I think it very much more accurate and useful to understand art as a means to discover concept, to acquire knowledge.

If for example, we start to construct a house, we start with very little idea of the 'meaning' it will come to have for those who eventually will live in it. We also don't know what meaning it will have for those who will come to live nextdoor, the neighbors. On completion, that house will not yet have important meaning for anyone, except perhaps for those who built- or commissioned it. Later however, we can be sure that the house will take on very important meanings. Those depend entirely on what happens later, rather than on what was planned, written or hoped for before the house is occupied and begins to 'take on life'. In other words, the meanings that our discoveries, inventions, houses, and even our artworks eventually take on (i.e. **have**) can only become manifest to us as a consequence of making- and then offering them! When considered in this way, Meaning is never intrinsic, instead it's an **emergent** entity.

'Emergent', as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is: *Philosophy (of a property-) arising as an effect of complex causes and not analysable simply as the sum of their effects.*

I submit that because meaning in art is emergent, an artist is in no position to state what his work will- or should mean for viewers of it. Instead he has-, and can only express if required to do so, his hopes for what will happen. In other words, he can speculate. But should responsible qualitative evaluation of an artwork be accomplished by analyzing what is nothing more than the advance speculation of the artist? When 'concept' is considered the basis for making and appreciating art, I argue that a number of critical realities that ultimately decide the meaning and value of a work of art are being completely ignored. What the work will mean, what value it has, will in fact depend on whom we ask, and on what the circumstances of their interaction with the artwork are, both of those being entirely unpredictable factors. We entirely ignore this when we concern ourselves largely with the artist's intentions and hopes for an artwork as determinant for meanings and values that only emerge later.

Those hopes that an artist has for his artwork, his speculations about it, are without doubt very important for him. It is also true that hearing them may at times be both revealing and interesting for others. But we should not, I suggest, be teaching students that their advance hopes and speculations are of any appreciable consequence for anyone else who later views their works. That is, I think, clearly untrue. I suggest that the words of an artist about his work, whether those of a student or an accomplished professional artist, cannot and should not be regarded as a factor of importance in responsible qualitative evaluation. Is it not apparent to us already, that no matter what we have at one time imagined- or hoped for in life, is simply far too often quite different than what we actually succeed to make manifest?

I offer here an example from my own work to support my argument that 'concept' in a work of art, should not be imagined to embody what that work will come to mean, either for the artist himself, or for the viewers of that work.



fig 11 *"Who's Afraid of Wood, Paint and Glass?"* -2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

The photo above shows a work of mine from 2006. Its constituent materials are wood, acrylic paint on canvas, and glass. With the choice for its title, I was both naming those materials, and making reference to the hyper-famous series of paintings by Barnett Newman produced between 1966 and 1970, entitled ***"Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?"***. The colors I used are intentionally close to the ones used by Newman for his paintings. When I now pose myself the question: *"What was my 'concept' at the time of making?"*, the simple and honest answer is: *"I can't answer that because I didn't have one"*. When I made that work, I felt no need for- or attraction to thinking about my works in terms of concept. So the answer to that question, it's clear, doesn't help me or anyone else understand this work. Let's try another question then: *"What were my purposes in making the work?"* First of all, there was in fact no single or central

purpose in doing so. Instead I had quite a number of different purposes in mind. One of those was simply to make a work referring to that particular group of Newman's paintings. *Why?* The answer is simply that those paintings are certainly among the most celebrated examples of modern painting that exist, yet sadly for me perhaps, they are ones I never liked much or was able to appreciate deeply. The title of my work then **names**, i.e. evokes 'an icon' of modern art, one I often wonder about. Another intention I had at the time was to refer to an existing prejudice regarding the use of glass as a material for 'fine art'. It has often the case, simply because I use glass in my works, that for that reason alone they are sometimes viewed or discussed by critics, curators, or gallerists as exercises in craft rather than in art. Worse still for me, on occasion they have been referred to as prime examples of a craftsman's vane hope **to be able** to make art. I wanted to suggest then with my title that those are not logical or objective qualifications, but are instead emotional ones (fear). By that I mean that such categorical qualifications in my opinion, resulted very largely from simply 'being Afraid', i.e they are the result of anxiety about glass, a material the authorities in art making those comments are normally uncomfortably unfamiliar with.

Ok, now let's try another question: *"Were the intentions I've just named central to my 'concept' for this work?"* "No". I cannot honestly say that those concerns I just noted constituted more than a kind of private joke for my own amusement. In fact, that title itself 'emerged' quite some time after I started the work, so it cannot possibly be regarded as embodying any initial 'concept'.

The main objective I now remember having had with that work, was very simply to find out how I, and later others who saw it, would react to a blown glass shape 'folded over' a canvas. My primary goal was to bend a glass form over canvas in this way in order to find out what happened, what that meant, or

might tell me. I just wanted to do that because of the many rich associations those two materials used in that unusual way conjured up in my imagination. Simply stated, bending a piece of hard blown glass over a soft canvas was at that time, a highly interesting experiment for me to undertake. I needed to act on this in order to find out what that 'reversal' in how we normally feel and think about those two materials, would cause me to feel and think. I was, I remember now, also intent that the yellow glass element should seem to be 'holding the canvas'. I did not, either at the time of making or now, feel any need or obligation to find words explaining why this was important for me, or why it should or might be important for anyone else. This was simply what is called 'gut feeling', the strong and persistent sense that one should act on an idea because it is only doing so that will tell him what he wants to know. Past experience makes clear to us that it is important to undertake to do something, and that's enough, we do it. Calling such an impulse, as strong as that can sometimes be, 'a concept', seems for me a poor use of language. The word 'concept' means something entirely different.

Another intention I remember having had at the time of making that work was to create something 'in between a painting and a sculpture'. For a long time I have long been interested in exploring the relationship between two- and three- dimensional representations in art. Yet another aspect of that work was the wish to represent both the viewer and the viewed in it. The blue wooden dog (or coyote) was for me 'a viewer'. He gazes at the canvas and the strange glass shape holding it, trying, (not very successfully, I imagine), to decide what to make of it. A well-known trait of coyotes, 'howling at the moon', is something we commonly consider a quite senseless thing to do. Characteristic of this work was additionally my interest in the 'rhythm of movements', i.e. the position and direction of the constituent elements as they relate to each other, as well as to the empty spaces surrounding them. One last intention I can now remember

having had in this work, was my interest in the deeper-lying meanings and associations evoked by different materials, in the case of this particular work, wood, paint and glass. The materials used in art carry meanings that precede- and sometimes even override whatever manipulations of them we undertake. In most cases, that meaning remains deeply embedded in the finished work.

And there it is! These are all of the considerations, motivations and intentions I can remember having had with that work. Ok, so..... *what does all of that tell us?*

Well, having here summed up all I'm now been able to recall about this work, it should be clear that my primary motivation for making it, was my expectation that doing so would be able to tell/show me interesting things I did not know before making it, i.e. things I could find out **only** by making it. I was in fact, not at all engaged in trying to tell or show other people anything 'important' that I felt they needed to become aware of. So.....concept, message, meaning?...

Is it perhaps possible that all I've now been able to recall and say here about my considerations, motivations and expectations with regard to this work, when put together, constitute 'concept'? If for the sake of argument I assume that they do, could then someone who hasn't read this passage, derive my concept from looking at that work? I think not. But even if, quite astonishingly for me someone was able to do that, have I thereby defined the meaning the work has, for myself, for anyone else? It should I hope be clear, that my answer to all of the above questions is "no, decidedly not".

Distilling a coherent concept from the statements I'm able to make about all of the concerns and purposes I had with that work is an undertaking I neither engaged in at the time, nor one I find remotely useful now. Attempting to do so results unavoidably in phrases or words that for me are quite uninteresting to hear or read, both for myself and for others. Hearing or reading what I've

written above as my concerns or intentions with my works is in fact, something I don't normally allow to accompany the viewing of my works. In my experience, such words serve no purpose other than to 'dumb down' the works, unavoidably limiting the viewer's experience to only the words he hears or reads. As an artist, I believe it clearly in my interest **to avoid at all costs** that I or anyone else expresses in words the concepts or purposes behind my works. I am of course interested to find out about other's reactions to my works. But I am neither interested in-, nor do I think that art is served by the almost invariably simplistic, and often quite boring verbal formulations I hear or read, that are called 'concepts' in art. My conviction is that we don't make art in order to express ideas at all, but instead to discover them, in first instance ideas interesting for the artist himself. In other words, artists don't make art to *formulate or express concept*. Instead making art allows them to *discover-, to generate concept*.

Making art allows us additionally to find out how others will react to 'discoveries' revealed in our artworks. Artists I suggest are primarily driven by a fervent desire to make artworks that can reveal new things to them. When that happens, they can also find out what those new things mean for others. I submit that neither of those things can or will occur when we limit that fertile field of discovery by dictating that 'the expression of concept' is the primary goal and the most important product of the exercise.

The notion that fixed central concepts are captured and contained in a work of art, and that others will then understand those in the way the artist intended is, I think, the biggest and most troublesome of what I am referring to as 'fables' promulgated in art practice and education. For me, making concept central in art reduces art to an exercise in '*reductio ad absurdum*'. Why do we imagine that we are expressing intellectual concepts in visual art, when we have a vastly

more efficient tool for that purpose? Isn't that what mankind invented words for? Do we perhaps also maintain that this 'expression of concept' is the central purpose of the arts of Music, of Theater, of Poetry, or of Dance? It seems to me that this is clearly, quite decidedly not the case! If we think more deeply about this matter, the conviction that Visual Art is somehow an exception among the arts and is, uniquely then, aimed at the expression of literal content, becomes very hard, if not impossible to defend. In fact in my view, it begins to seem quite silly!

MATERIAL MATTERS

Under the heading *Sensitivity to Materials* (p 59), I spoke earlier of the role that materials play in the meanings artworks come to have. Wood, glass, canvas and paint for example, each trigger immediate and deep associations in us, ones initiated by our body's automatic responses to the imagined feel of them. That imagined touch, even before we act on it, carries strong meaning. The 'material meaning' of the elements that constitute artworks is however, an issue largely and, for me, very puzzlingly overlooked in most theoretical considerations of concept and meaning. Wherever that omission occurs, I think it a serious one. Later, under the heading *Progress through Chemistry* (p 129) I will refer to this issue once again. In my view, it is essential that all of us involved in teaching and/or evaluating art are aware, quite apart from the form an artwork takes, of what the choice for the materials that constitute it **already means**. That awareness requires that we are familiar with the feel and working characteristics of many of the various materials used in art. Processes and materials used to create a work invariably constitute a critical part of its meaning for the artist. This is I claim, albeit to a lesser extent, also true for the viewer of artwork, whether or not he is fully cognizant of it. How the thing got

there, how it came into being must be taken into account as a highly important constituent of what we are discussing when we talk about 'meaning' in art. Isn't that in fact, always an important constituent of the meaning of everything we encounter or experience in life, **'the how it came to be'** part?

Although those two terms are currently very often confused with each other, 'meaning' and 'concept' do not denote remotely the same thing. We invented spoken and written languages in order to express concepts. Those complex syntheses of ideas we refer to as *concepts*, are the fruits of our human ability to engage in directed intellectual thought. In addition to words, we also invented mathematics to help us express and communicate even more precise concepts than words can capture and convey. We create and pursue mathematical formulations of concept in aid of our search for truths that we are able to demonstrate are persistent ones. When we succeed to demonstrate such persistent truths, we then confirm it as universally valid and call those 'scientific truths'. That status, *scientific truth*, depends on repeated demonstration of the principals implied with the same results each time. Expressing concept then, with varying degrees of precise, constant and universally similar meanings, is the very clear purpose of both our written, verbal and mathematical languages. But long before those languages for expression and communication were invented, humans had already felt and responded to the need for another 'language'. They invented art, a language in almost every respect, entirely different from mathematics and words. The need for that language existed because with the aid of it we could accomplish very different-, but equally important purposes. I submit that those purposes that we accomplish with art have everything to do with Meaning, and nothing to do with Concept.

Art, in contrast to the other languages I named is the one we can most appropriately use to communicate one particularly highly important aspect of our human experience, i.e. our ability *to feel things*, in both the literal and figurative senses of that word. I am suggesting that concept doesn't constitute an important- or natural part of the realm of art practice at all, whereas contrariwise, *feeling* is critically central to that realm. I don't believe that it's at all true that in Art we are busy trying to capture or express intellectual constructs, simply because we can almost always far more easily and exactly accomplish that using words. Why then would we bother trying to transform words into pictures? I am arguing that we don't do that in art. Instead, we make art because our human existence is very importantly constituted by experiences and feelings, most of which we are quite unable to successfully capture in words. That central part of our human existence I speak of is the realm of emotion and it is, I argue here, **The** one art is concerned with and used for.

Very many of those arguments I am at pains here to discuss, have in my view their origin in very large part in the conflation/inflation of that one word, *concept*. I think it helpful therefore, to look at the meaning of that word. The word concept is a noun, the product of the act of conceiving. Below are some ^{xxv}definitions we can find of the verb 'to conceive'.

1. *To become pregnant with (offspring).*
2. *To form or develop in the mind; devise:*
3. *To apprehend mentally; understand:*
4. *To be of the opinion that; think:*
5. *To begin or originate in a specific way*

With the exception of the first definition above, none of these definitions indicate anything we can imagine as exact, fixed, or universally applicable. What we are typically offered as ‘the concept’ behind artworks seems almost invariably to me, a reduction of the sources, intentions, thoughts, and feelings of the artist, to some very few concise, quite limited and abstract words. Both as an artist and a teacher, whenever I’ve heard or read such formulations, I am almost never able to recognize them as having any correlation with what my own practice actually involves. Almost invariably such ‘concepts’ expressed as central to a work of art, result for me in disappointment, a feeling of deflation, of being let down. Hearing a work of art reduced this way always strikes me as sadly insufficient, empty when contrasted with the complex, varied and rich experience I have when that artwork succeeds to touch or move me. For me then, there is a distinct absence of ‘beauty’ in words used in this way, i.e. the words chosen strike me strongly as distinctly **unaesthetic**. In fact, not one of the ‘concepts’ behind individual works of art I’ve ever heard expounded has persuaded me to consider the artwork differently, enjoy it more fully, or has proven remotely adequate to encompass all that I can see, feel and think of when looking at artworks that buoy me. For these reasons, for me the phrase, “*expressing concept in art*” is akin to ^{xxvi}“*Dancing about Architecture*.” What I mean is that while both might be interesting things to try out once or twice, neither seems to me a useful path at all to the practice we are hoping to better understand by choosing for one of those actions.

Making art is a distinctly human act, through it we give birth to ideas we have carried to fruition. But we cannot presume on conception to be able to define the product of that act because we cannot yet know what life it will follow. Whether the birth we speak of is that of a human child, or a work of art, we cannot know in advance what the fresh new entity can-, should-, or will mean for ourselves or for anyone else. Seen in this way, the process of making art

relates most directly, and I think appropriately so, to the first definition above of *to conceive*, **1. To become pregnant with (offspring)**. In both the creation of art, and in the processes related to human childbirth, the overriding concerns and motivations for beginning and going through with the process are most often not at all intellectual considerations. Instead, in both cases, our primary and most important motivations are far more often bodily-, emotional-, and perhaps even spiritual ones. My point here is that Art is simply not governed by the directed logical causality principles common to Mathematics or Physics. Instead, I am suggesting that it is far more closely related to both those processes and concerns that are at home in Biology and Metaphysics. The concept behind any given work of art I argue, is little more (but also no less!), than the fervent hope that what will be born(e) into the world will be of lasting value, for the artist who gives birth to it, for the newborn entity itself, and hopefully also for others who later interact with it. Artists cannot and do not determine the meaning their artworks have . Instead, giving birth to an artwork directly changes the artist himself, subtly redefines him.

SOME CERTAINTIES ABOUT UNCERTAINTY

Art allows us to exercise our capacity to intuit wordlessly, to make unclear feelings manifest. Through art we can touch in meaningful ways the vast depot of our subconscious experience, explore the elusive, rich, and deeply seated impressions located there. As difficult as that seemingly makes it for some people, art almost always does this **UN**clearly. What this means is that, more often than not, works don't have singular, clear concepts underlying them, either as the reason for making them, or the meaning we might derive from them. Art is simply not a symbolic language in that way, whereby images have defined verbal equivalents. The pictorial elements of a work of art cannot be

regarded as representative of concepts or ideas that we can readily describe in words. The visual language of art is in fact, uniquely tailored to evoke that realm of our experience and knowledge that **isn't direct, clear, simple or singular**. The inhabitants of this realm of uncertainty don't remotely resemble the characters we habitually encounter in realms of exactitude. Instead art's realm is populated by ambiguous figures whose movements leave only light and fleeting impressions, not the clear or lasting footprints of concrete facts. Art is the realm of **uncertainty**, and can be thought of as society's institutionalized way to communicate about that multitude of unclear or ambiguous things sensed and felt by all of us. At the same time, it is important to realise that this doesn't mean that those things are **similarly** felt by all of us. All that is not precise in nature, singular, easily conveyed in words, and not necessarily experienced in the same way by all of us, is natural to this domain. It may in fact be that all that is singular and precise in nature is not native to the domain of art. It is after all, quite easy for us to express deliberated thoughts, clearly formed ideas in words. But it is considerably more difficult to express the many things that we can feel, sense or intuit in words. An obvious reason for this is that what we sense or feel **is** simply very often unclear. The nature of things we feel or sense is veery often ambiguous, fleeting, and many-sided. But, in no case should we make the mistake of assuming that those last adjectives imply that what we sense, feel or intuit is unimportant! Uncertainty in fact, is a surprisingly frequent, very real , and undeniably important condition, one that accompanies every one of us, all of our lives.

Uncertainty for example, is present in almost every decision we make, from the smallest inconsequential ones, to the biggest life-changing decisions we must sometimes face. This is true I think, of all that has ever happened in the entire course of our human history. The pluriform-, unresolved- unclear domain of uncertainty is the natural domain of art. And that domain is not in any need of

‘resolution’. We should most certainly not imagine that we do well to try to ‘clear things up’ by structurally instituting vague or simplistic terminology, or by inadequately defining complex process in art. Art, I am saying, simply cannot be moved into the comfortable realm of certainty. In fact, I suggest that attempts to find or create certainties in art are literally antithetical to art’s purposes. For that reason, advocating that the practice of art should or can be understood largely as a rational/reasoned/logical activity does nothing either to advance art or anyone’s understanding of it.

We should not see our many uncertainties about art as an unfortunate aspect of it that we should- or can resolve. Instead, we should accept that our uncertainties about art are a critically important constituent of it, even perhaps its very lifeblood. What our uncertainty about art demands of us, is simply that we undertake honestly, bravely, and curiously to investigate the many rich options on offer. There are multiple choices in art, maintaining their functional presence is essential. For these reasons we should accept and take that curious character Uncertainty, very seriously. He will be an omnipresent fellow passenger on all our richest voyages in art. Is it not true that it is only when we confront and accept the uncertainties of life that we define who we are as individuals? What we choose to do when we’re faced with uncertainty, perhaps more than anything else, is what defines us. The French 18th century writer and philosopher Voltaire said: -xxvii *"Doubt is an uncomfortable position, but certainty is an absurd one"*. Who we are, is determined by what we do when we face choices, never by what we merely intend or hope to do if we face choices.

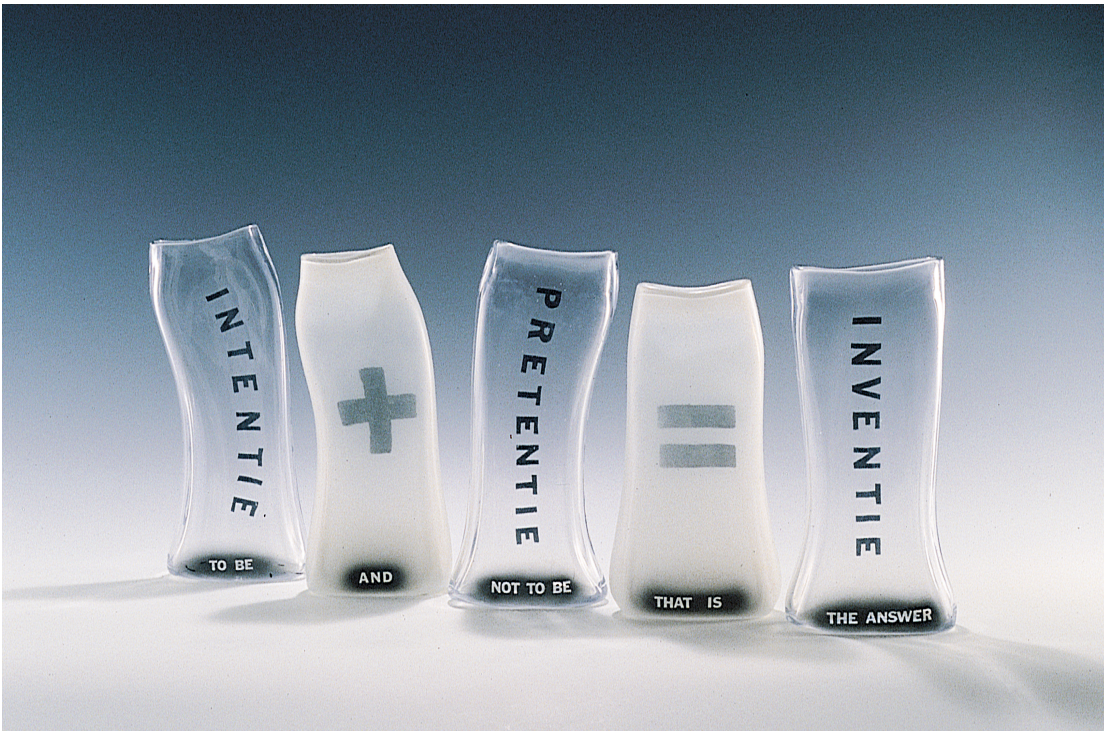


fig 12 "Intentie/Pretentie" -1990 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

THE MOTHER OF INTENTION

An artist making an artwork as I described that earlier embarks on a process that leads to a birth, the coming into existence of an entirely new entity. It will be one for which no equal exists. The same is true for the parents of a child. Whether we have conceived and given birth to a child or an artwork, in neither case can we legitimately assume its future existence to be in service of anyone- or anything other than itself. Whatever meanings the newly born entity later takes on will depend entirely on the unpredictable course of its life. Neither on conception, nor later at birth, is it reasonable to expect that the 'mother of that invention' can reliably tell us what we can expect, either from a child or an artwork. When we then ask an artist about his *intentions* with his artwork, I submit that we should regard his answer as follows: those answers are equivalent, in both kind and importance, to the answers we get from a pregnant woman if we ask her intentions for the child she will give birth to. In neither

case is there any logical reason to expect that the answers can serve us as reliable predictors. And in neither case should we imagine that the artwork or the child have the same degree of importance for anyone not its 'mother'. Neither pregnant women nor artists have any appreciable degree of control over what their offspring accomplish. I think then that devoting considerable time in formal art education to asking, training or evaluating 'the artist's intentions with his or her work', is not at all a very useful practice.

Artworks are autonomous which means that they answer to no one. They must over time carve out their own existence. An artwork cannot be presumed to carry clear and concise meaning, either for the artist who makes it, or for others who view it. Additionally, whatever meaning is conveyed will most certainly not be the same one for every person who sees it. And to compound the difficulties, meaning does not remain constant over time, not for any one person who views it, or even for the artist who made it. I think that art's entire history demonstrates that all of those things are true. We have more than ample examples of works that we regard very differently today than they were regarded in the past, also differently with respect to what the artist intended with them. Is it then either logical or defensible, that we ask art students to have and formulate carefully all the expectations regarding the function their works will have, in the same manner that we require that of engineering students designing an internal combustion engine?

Another thought perhaps worth considering is the following: It may be in very large part **because** we don't understand many things about art that it can take on great importance. There is undeniably great power in mystery. All of the world's religions and the critically important meaning so many people derive from them, demonstrate that clearly.

In very many respects, I think it obvious that the uncertainty art presents us with is one of its most critical components. Uncertainty then should not be seen as a problem we can perhaps solve by grasping at pseudo-certainties like 'intention', 'concept' or 'research', by seeking relief from doubt in hard but unrelated academic fact, or through all-encompassing theories about art. Uncertainty in- and about art is, I am saying, really not a problem! Instead it is one of its most vital constituents, essential for art's function. Uncertainty opens opportunities. It invites us to travel roads we would not otherwise know of, or even think to explore. What we learn by embarking on such journeys has, over millennia, proven of very great value to humankind.

METAPHYSICS

Acts of Magic and acts of Art are interestingly similar. Neither of those are actions we undertake in order to clarify or resolve anything. Both I suggest, are in fact largely intended to achieve precisely the opposite, i.e. to create and maintain a functional state of uncertainty. If we accept the idea that an important purpose of art is the creation of functional uncertainties, then the hesitance many artists have to explain what they do becomes more readily understandable. The requirement to explain one's artwork then becomes akin to being the main act in a 'magic show', and being required to say **how and why** he does every 'trick'! The magician or artist in that case, confronted with the demand to 'demystify' the very mystery he has just taken great pains to create, will very likely not appreciate that! That simply doesn't work well for the artist, nor for that matter, for his audience.

Here's what an artist or a magician really wants: To create for himself and his audience the state of thinking, feeling and being, that results when genuine uncertainty about things, let's call that '*a state of Wonder*', is brought about.

That state of wonder that is the fundamental purpose of the 'trick' must be painstakingly created and maintained. Demands for explanation of how and why the trick was accomplished, invariably and directly defeat the purpose of it. The magician or artist should neither be asked nor required to explain his trick as a prerequisite for 'understanding it'. If he accedes to that demand, the state of uncertainty (a quantum state) he has laboriously created will instantaneously and irreversibly collapse.

Here's what the artist's or magician's audience really wants: To be led to experience a state of wonder, being neither certain of what they are seeing, nor exactly how they will then come to think and feel about it. The most important precondition for that experience is the freedom to process what they see individually, and thereby discover what they will come to think and feel as a result. Explaining to them **before** they've engaged in that process what they **should** come to think and feel, what they should take away from that experience, will defeat the real purpose of their attendance.

What it comes down to is this: When an artist explains for his viewers what 'his works mean', or when someone else undertakes to do it, that critical purpose I am suggesting art fulfills, to create and maintain a 'state of wonder', will largely and immediately be defeated. Instead what will be arrived at is 'comfortable consensus' about meaning. That consensus necessarily takes the form of a singular and very limited way of understanding. And that then negates all other ways of understanding.

The point of a feat of art or of prestidigitation is neither the technique by which it is accomplished, nor any one person's interpretation of the 'meaning' of that manipulation. The point is the excitement and energy generated by the inspirational 'field of uncertainty' for the attending audience. Exposing the workings, the components, or the end point of the manipulation, whether in art

or magic, accomplishes nothing more than the destruction of the very illusion that **is** its purpose.

One of the more pervasive-, and I think also fallacious tenets about art, is that it can be understood as a number of discrete ‘facts’ that can lead us to ‘logical conclusions’. A fact is a concise bit of information that we insert into- or extract from a ‘system’, enabling us to predict and observe its effects on that system. But artworks neither are-, nor do they reference facts in that way. Instead they are personal and highly individual observations, more akin to opinions. Importantly also, they are not reproducible. Observational experience of the kind art offers us relies on a highly complex set of circumstances, parameters on which it is wholly dependent. That type of experience life offers us quite differently from our encounters with facts is neither objective, nor can it be seen as based on any intention to achieve universal validity.

For those reasons, I suggest that any approach to art that assumes objective meaning or intention, embarks on a fool’s errand. Works of art are the recordings of individual messages, ones that are time-, mood- and situation-dependent. We cannot, as I indicated earlier, be sure for whom the message is intended. As such, that message is one that can never be fully ‘understood’ as having any singular meaning, intention, or consequence, at least not one its creator can be held entirely responsible for. The response to a work of art by its viewer is equally time-, mood- and situation dependent. None of these are factors the artist has any appreciable control over, and therefore he cannot be expected to accurately predict them. In this light, it seems quite illogical to assume that there are singular or primary ‘messages or concepts’ contained in- or being formulated in works of art.

If such messages exist, I think that those can perhaps only be understood as ones sent by the artist to himself. As strange as that may sound, it may well be a

functional aspect of the practice of art! Could it be that artists are not sending messages to the rest of us, but instead to themselves? Maybe their works are a kind of 'messages in a bottle' that the artist first carefully composes and then 'sets adrift'. Then, some time later the artist, on reencountering his work, no longer 'the writer', but instead now 'a reader', can ponder the meaning that message now holds for him. That meaning will in many respects, not be the same one he thought to have initially recorded. That is to say that also for the artist, his works will inevitably **take on** new meanings that he cannot be aware of at the time of making. As strange as looking at art in this way might sound on first hearing it, I suggest that this may be a far truer and considerably more useful model than the one-sided, simplistic notion that artists merely compose and send messages to the rest of us!

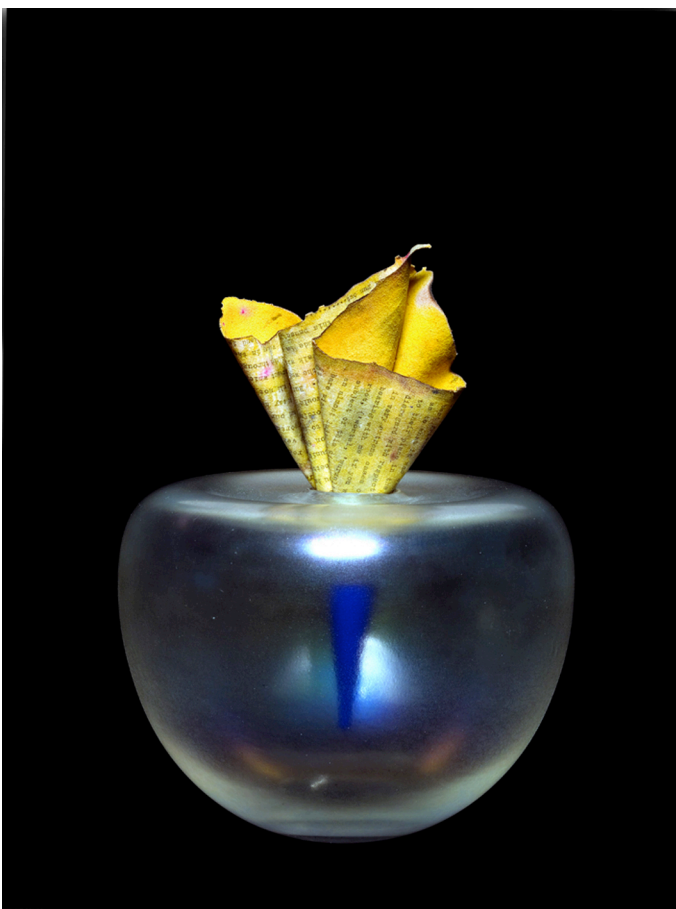


fig 13 untitled- 1981 by Richard Meitner, photo by Robert Schlingemann©

Perhaps an example from my own work may once again be useful . The work pictured above from 1981 was for me an experiment in precisely that ‘message-in-a-bottle’ type I just described. The ‘message’, in this case consisted of a somewhat mysterious text that I composed and typed on canvas. I then partially burnt, painted, folded, and rigidly plasticized the canvas and mounted it in the blue glass shape that penetrates the glass form. For me at the time of making, an important aspect of the work was imagining what I might remember and understand on re-reading that message if I much later re-encountered it. As a result of folding and burning parts of it, I had ensured that neither I nor anyone else would ever be able to read the entire text, but only fragments of it. In fact, many years later, 9 years to be precise, I did re-encounter that work. It was one of a large number of my works borrowed from various private and public collections for a museum retrospective show in Paris in 1990. Standing again for the first time in many years in front of that work, and trying to remember what message I had written and why, I found that I had very little memory of the text I had long before written. I was quite unable to reconstruct my message from the individual phrases I was now able to decipher.

A work of art can be described as a ‘quantum observation’. It is a record of a set of experiential conditions so complex in their potential interactions with each other, as to be indescribable in any one formulation. In fact, any attempt to reductively process those circumstances, to ‘distil’ from them concise parameters or meanings, is literally contra-productive to fully understanding them. Doing so, isolating aspects of the experience from each other, just as in quantum mechanics, results in what is called ^{xxviii}‘wave function collapse’, i.e. **it destroys the existing state**. We end up then describing only one aspect of an existing state, thereby irreversibly changing all the other just-as-real characteristics it had. I think that art can be quite usefully looked at as relating

to quantum mechanics in this respect. A quantum observation is characterized by the fact that we cannot describe with any exactitude any one aspect of it without substantially changing the other ones. In art just as in quantum mechanics, the information we gather from our observations depends entirely on what is being looked for- and at. In simple terms that means that a functioning work of art will be irrevocably altered by attempts to describe its nature or meaning all too precisely. There are, of course, many different ways to look at and describe the workings and meanings of artworks. Choosing or advocating only one of them as **the** way makes no sense, neither artistic- nor scientific sense. It is, I'm trying to make clear, the **simultaneous existence** of the multitude of ways in which artworks can be looked at and interpreted, that both constitutes- and informs art experience. The physicist David Bohm, in a theoretical article about the ramifications of quantum theory said this:

xxix "One is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analyzability of the world into separately and independently existing parts . . . We have reversed the usual classical notion that the independent 'elementary parts' of the world are the fundamental reality, and that the various systems are merely particular contingent forms and arrangements of these parts. Rather, we say that inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independently behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole."

In my view we often suffer from the desire to distil information from art of a kind that it cannot offer us. I opine here that that tendency results in large part from the uncomfortable confrontation with uncertainty about how we should react to artworks. Artworks speak to imagination, imagination demands that we explore of a number of seemingly equally valid alternatives of seeing a thing. We cannot however, stimulate imagination about anything by adding information that irreversibly changes that thing. Similarly, if we ignore

important aspects of the information a thing offers us, we accomplish the opposite of understanding it. Mystery and ambiguity are fields for imagination that rely precisely on the absence of any singular valid resolution of them. When we extract information from a multiple-choice field, it leads to the reduction of all possible interpretations to only that one. But is then the remaining interpretation the 'right one', the most important one? We can and often do resolve the discomfort of ambiguity by taking that course. But when we do that, I am suggesting, we're diminishing the ability of artworks to act as 'fields for imagination'.

We live now in a time when it seems increasingly, that we are convinced that 'fact trumps doubt', in pretty much all situations we encounter. We need only to look at the explosively expanding market for computers, telephones, cameras and other devices that offer instant access to- and control over the precise information we seek. Those amazing devices allow us very quickly and easily to find, alter, reshuffle, and pass back and forth between each other enormous amounts of 'information'. We have now instantly within our reach an incredible number of single isolated facts. The functional attraction of such technological magic boxes for us is the illusion that we are more completely in control of our lives as the result of instant access to-, and an almost incessant recombination of 'the relevant facts about any situation we encounter. Characteristic of these control processes is that they are most frequently geared towards 'singular' resolution. It will I think be clear that my position in art is that singular resolution is not an ally of art. Teaching artists that they should explain their artworks (i.e. offer singular interpretations of their intentions or meanings), is I think, a manifestation of the notion that knowledge is advanced through clarity and 'problem solving'. The only problem we 'solve' by promoting singular meanings in art is the existence of our uncertainty about

our reactions to it. It is my position that we are then merely pretending that simple truths exist about something for which that is patently quite untrue.

INFORMATION AND CATEGORIES

We are enabled by the amazing technological capabilities computers and other 'magic boxes' offer us, to immediately relegate any piece or pieces of information we gather to some category. We simply consign what we decide are related facts to an existing 'folder', or perhaps quickly click a new one into existence, giving it a name we invent. In fact, it is very often those names we relatively unthinkingly invent that later become the source of considerable problems we later encounter.

Computers enable us to gather and order facts very quickly and easily. We deposit those ordered facts in various files or folders we create, in the belief that that information is then both 'saved and ordered'. We can then manipulate, categorize, open and close those files any time we want, and also very easily find them again. There is no doubt that with the aid of computers, the ease with which we are able to create and maintain organizational categories, to manage and conserve massive amounts of factual information, has seen a quantum leap. But I want to suggest that it's important to realise that when we increasingly rely on **categories** (our files and folders) to access information, whether in computers or in our brains, that simultaneously creates appreciable **resistance to change**. The consideration of any alternative order to the one we thereby establish and 'give weight to' becomes impeded, and that's not a good thing in my view. The ability to imagine and give form to alternatives to existing orders, (e.g. current paradigm in art), is something I

believe it crucially important that artists are able to do well. If we're not careful when we create or confirm new categories, we accomplish the reverse of that! We are then only increasing the ease and speed of our access to what may be less useful information. We are no longer generating or accruing knowledge. Instead, we are then merely **administering** it. Additionally, what we then administer is only that type of knowledge that can take the form of independent and relatively inflexible facts. In other words, with the help of our magic boxes, we are creating information bundles that are primarily useful for historical- and statistical reconstructions. And reconstruction is a very different thing than creative advance! History and Statistics are very useful indeed for the preservation, study and analysis of the coincidence of facts. But neither history nor statistics, I suggest, can claim authority when it comes to **the meaning of those facts**. We are very easily led to incorrect conclusions by statistics if we do not sufficiently understand the interrelationship of the facts they represent. Later, under the heading **OUTLIERS**, I will offer a poignant example of what can happen when we look too closely only at statistics, i.e. the coincidence of facts, without sufficiently understanding the deeper implications or meaning of those facts. It is, I am suggesting here, critically important that we make careful choices regarding when and how we apply facts.

We believe we are succeeding to make things 'clear' by categorizing them, and that is quite often the case. At the same time, the more categories we create, the more 'unclear' the connections between those categories automatically become. That is to say that the more empty spaces we create between categories we accumulate, the less clear the relationship between those categories is. What connect those categories then, what is the nature and role of the 'mortar' that hold those 'bricks' in place? It seems we imagine that by this process of gathering and categorizing facts, we preserve, oversee and will understand better. That's true, but only when those categories we create for the

information we gather are truly functional, i.e. only when care is exercised to ensure that those categories are either mutually exclusive, or clearly and systematically connected. More often than not however, that is not at all what we do, or are perhaps even capable of doing. The 'knowledge bases' we create in this way are artificial ones, i.e. they have neither evolved nor emerged naturally or experientially from the facts we gather, and have also not been tested by time. Instead we have imposed our own order on things and consequently, functionality is limited to no more than our perceived needs at the time. In this manner, the natural and quite often consequential interfaces within any knowledge base, those either ordered by similarities or by differences, become obscured. We are then no longer able to consider-and gain important insights from the information we've gathered in any other way than what follows from its current structural organization. With organization of this kind, we are in fact prioritizing the manageability of things, and in so doing, unavoidably often impeding a deeper understanding of those things. In other words, we are currently very often effectively advancing manageability by obscuring meaning. Later, I believe inevitably, we arrive at a point where things again become unmanageable, **because** we have obscured meaning. We are no longer open to emergent meaning because we impede emergence with our static 'order'. This point is related, very directly I think, to the increasingly often heard plaint of scientists, and more recently even of social scientists, that all research is very rapidly becoming only 'applied' research, and that 'pure science' is suffering as a result. Because all research is increasingly dependent on the immediacy of its potential for useful, i.e. profitable applications (our 'perceived needs at the time'), this is radically changing the nature of science. The possibility to conduct research and perhaps make important discovery for which no immediate commercial use can be

demonstrated, becomes severely curtailed. And it may be that those are the very discoveries that could prove critically important ones for mankind.

A more familiar example of the problems created by artificial order, is I think the following one: Most of us at one time or another have experienced the frustration that accompanies being informed by someone in an office, or over the telephone or internet, that 'The System' as it was set up to administer a service we use and need, for example telephone or internet, and is now not working as it should, is not able to consider or solve the specific problem we are seeking assistance for. We are informed that the system has relegated our problem to a category, one often entirely at odds with the facts of the matter we are complaining about. Our specific problem seems to fall entirely outside of the parameters considered in the design of that system and, for that reason we cannot expect to be helped by the system. We find out at such times that The System, one nominally designed to effectively help the customer, is completely incapable of performing that service. It can do nothing more than to register our problem and assign it to some unhelpful category. In other words, that system can help us only when the specific problem we are trying to resolve matches one of the situational categories that are the most frequently encountered ones, and have been programmed into the system. We find out, maddeningly, that a very real problem we are experiencing just doesn't fit into any existing category, and that therefore the problem cannot be recognized, and no solution can be expected

Trying to solve problems, engage in meaningful communication, or arrive at real understanding exclusively through rigidly categorized and artificially administered systems can be very difficult, oftentimes even impossible. Systems such as I describe them here that are designed to more efficiently administer facts can act very quickly, but they necessarily always do so

uniformly, acting on some of the facts, but never on all of them. For any problem that requires more sophisticated or nuanced solutions, those systems increasingly often fail us. Thinking in categories, and acting primarily on the basis of what categories indicate or dictate, increases the speed of the **resolution** of a problem, but by no means necessarily advances its correct **solution**. Instead, by ignoring or obscuring pertinent facts, or the interrelatedness of those facts, categories increase the ease and speed with which we can administer things, but not necessarily resolve them correctly or sustainably. This is, perhaps we could say, the difference between taking quick, uniform and hopefully useful action based on 'the relevant facts', or alternatively, understanding things fully before acting on them. Accumulating and administering information, i.e. knowing facts, is a very different thing altogether from understanding the **meaning** of that information and those facts.



fig. 14 "History"- 1995 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

IT'S ABOUT TIME!

Contrary to an important current tendency in art practice education, I believe that learning to read, write and recite facts about those who've made art in the past does not to the degree we seem to imagine, help us make art of quality now. My standpoint throughout this text is that reading, writing and thinking about art, engage entirely different processes than making- or deeply appreciating art. Memorizing lists of great artists belonging to certain stylistic groups for example, is a practice that may even be counterproductive for artists who are trying to develop their own 'unique discourse', and also I believe, for the viewer's ability to derive real personal meaning from works of art. There is no doubt that teaching art students to look deeply, both at- and into the works of our greatest artists, offers them important experiences of quality in art. Careful, sensitive study and consideration of different aspects of those artworks can and does accomplish that. But the usefulness of that practice is, I submit, very significantly diminished when the study is led by attention only for those similarities that are the basis for the **category** within which art historians tell us those works fall. In that aspect of it, I think, 'History' may not always serve us well. My reasons for saying this relate directly to what I have just said about systems, files and categorical thinking.

Our primary focus in art practice should be, it seems to me, promoting individuality of approach for students of that practice, i.e. helping them to discover and develop their own personal approaches to making art of quality. I suggest that the institutionalized practice of looking at great art from the past

through the *categorizing lens* of art history can in some respects be regarded as encouraging the opposite. There is no doubt that looking into the past through the lens of History offers us a unique, instructive and fascinating view. But we should not forget that that our view of anything is always restricted by the focal point of the lens we are peering through. That lens specific to History offers us a view of things that are often quite distant in time, effectively permitting us to see them sharply! But there are other things within that field of view that we then no longer see sharply, sometimes those become even entirely obscured! History's lens enables a sharp focus, but only on those objects that support the category to which history relegates them **in order to enable** that extraordinarily sharp view. Anything that has no categorical function within history's field of view is rendered either vague, or is sometimes no longer visible. I think it entirely fair to say that History both establishes and promotes Category. It confirms thinking about things, events, and people from the past by grouping them. But I suggest that it is worth considering that categorization may well be antithetical to individual creativity, thinking, and actions. How, for example, does the important and daunting task instructors in art are charged with, to encourage their students to think and act '*outside the box*', relate to History's prime directive to '*create and structurally institutionalize those boxes*'? Learning to read, write and think in historical terms advances valuable skills, there is no doubt of it, but only when that is undertaken critically and sensitively. In my experience however, some of the categories that we create and imagine are helpful for understanding great art can often seem maddeningly illogical.



fig. 15 *"History Too"* 2006 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

Consider for example two artists whose work is designated in formal art history as belonging to the category: 'the Post- Impressionists'. History tells us that both Van Gogh and Seurat were post-impressionists. When standing in front of the works of those two great artists, and undergoing with some concentration and sensitivity what each of them accomplished in- and with their works, I have difficulty understanding why Van Gogh's paintings are usefully thought to belong to the same category as Seurat's. Instead, I have a feeling that I cannot shake, that the similarities that exist between their works seem far less consequential than the immediate and much more striking differences between them. The History of art, I'm saying, may in fact not be very helpful in sensitizing us to some of the consequential **differences** between things. Instead, history more often seems to systematically focus on what it construes as similar, i.e. what links things. I submit that artists need also to be highly sensitive to the often highly consequential differences between things.

It seems clear that one aspect of the way history characterizes and categorizes things is determinant for the entire view it offers us of art. That aspect is 'chronology'. The structural link between history and chronology is I think, the single most determinant factor for what art history can tell us about art, and also for what it cannot tell us about art. It's about **TIME**. Things that happen in the same time period are given consideration together. And that consideration will in very large measure influence the meaning of things looked at in that way. What happened later or earlier is usually not simultaneously considered in any one historical view. History is a fascinating view of events that we achieve by looking backwards, attempting to penetrate the haze of time. It groups the facts it can establish with the objective of creating a continuum that is linked by causality as that relates to Time. But History may not be very helpful when it comes to locating or understanding some of the unique and important events in the past or the present that it cannot establish as links in such a time-sequential causality chain. For that reason, I suggest that history's view may not always enable the focus on some important facts or events in the past in the degree that is sometimes necessary to reveal the essential meanings of those facts and events.

History is a chronologically based pursuit. Its most critical selection criterion, and consequentially its informational value, must be understood as overridingly related to the recording of events in **TIME**. For that reason alone, History should not necessarily be expected to be effective in revealing to us the **MEANING** of those events.

For example, we should not expect that history will notice and register subtle but important differences between events happening at the same time, even less so for meaningfully linked events separated by time. History tends to look at events with attention to commonality and 'causality', but only when it is able

to locate-, sharply focus on-, and reveal those. It is wise to remain aware that History with respect to some things we consider it important to know, may by itself be unable to reveal those to us accurately or comprehensively. For these reasons, I am suggesting that automatically resorting to History as the most effective tool we have to advance our understanding of the past, (let alone the present or the future), should always be critically questioned. I think in fact, that it may prove quite interesting to undertake a critical look at History in art practice education, i.e. at the academic pursuit itself. We may well, I believe, come to realise that there are important things that we should not be expecting history to be able to tell us.

I want here to make it clear here that the sweeping, perhaps even dramatic cautions I note regarding what I believe History can or cannot tell us, should in no respect be taken to mean that I'm 'against History'. History offers us a **view of process**, and it is an extraordinarily rich and useful one indeed. I want only to argue that we should not imagine to the extent we currently seem to that history is also our most useful advisor when we need to '**manage, understand, or evaluate process**'. History can only accomplish those tasks in the degree in which the methodologies, rules and biases that define that pursuit, enable-, but also necessarily confine it.

All those involved in art practice education should be cognizant of the unavoidable bias that looking at things through any one lens brings with it, whether that is the lens of History' or any other one. Conscientious, sensitive attention must always be paid to what will not be visible from any one given viewpoint. In art education, my remarks here should be seen as arguing that history should not uncritically be thought of- or resorted to as a holistic or an unbiased viewpoint.

OUTLIERS

History, among other things, tends to ignore *outliers*. An “outlier” is ^{xxx}defined as:

- 1. something that lies outside the main body or group that it is a part of, as a cow far from the rest of the herd, or a distant island belonging to a cluster of islands*
- 2. someone who stands apart from others of his or her group, as by differing actions, beliefs, religious practices, etc.*
- 3. In Statistics-an observation that is well outside of the expected range of values in a study or experiment, and which is often discarded from the data set: a person whose abilities, achievements, etc., lie outside the range of statistical probability.*

Outliers in my view, those seemingly small and unimportant exceptions to ‘the rule’, constitute a factor of importance for a holistic understanding of some of the great moments in our history, whether that is art or any other pursuit, now or in the past. Illustrative of that for me is an example from our very recent past, the world’s financial collapse in 2008, clearly not an unimportant event! That historical process on analysis of it, shows that ignoring outliers that are part of any process can result in very serious consequences, sometimes ones with literally immense repercussions.

In his book, ^{xxxi}“The Black Swan”, Nicholas Nassim Taleb provides a rare ‘insider’ description and analysis of the events that led to the worldwide financial collapse of 2007-2008 that we continue to suffer from today. His book recounts in great detail how-, when- and why that collapse resulted from ignoring the very large, sometimes even catastrophic effects that statistical outliers can have on any system. The financial collapse is shown to have had its origin in the derivatives market, causing that market first to collapse, and progressively bringing down almost the entire world’s interlinked financial

systems with it. This happened sometime after the financial industry had brought in a brilliant group of mathematicians and physicists, all of them conversant with quantum mechanics, and for that reason nicknamed 'quants. Those specialists from entirely outside the world of finance, (the author Taleb, was one of them), were tasked with making highly complex calculations that could reliably indicate the degree of confidence investors should feel in their investments, and specifically in offerings of one type of financial product called derivatives. Based on their calculations pertaining to the probability that the value of investments would increase or decrease, potent institutional investors proceeded to make huge bets in that market, and proceeded to lose almost all of their (c.q. **our**) money on those huge bets they made.

But the ensuing collapse of the world's markets was not the result of calculation errors the 'quants' made. Their calculations were quite correct and the world's biggest financial players had indeed paid heed to them, investing very largely consistent with what those calculated probabilities indicated. The problem resulted because those quants, some of whom had repeatedly tried to warn of this, failed to convince their bosses in the financial industry that they should not fail to take into account an ostensibly negligible- but critically important factor that the 'quants' were aware of. That factor was one they could describe, but could not convincingly reveal in their calculations, namely disastrous statistical 'outliers'. It was this kind of very small, seemingly impossibly improbable event within the multitude of possible events being considered, that although highly unlikely, would have an unimaginably great effect if it came to pass, that caused the world's financial system to crash. What happened was this: The financial industry proceeded to both offer and take enormous investment risks, while ignoring the highly unlikely, but potentially catastrophic effects that known but highly unlikely and very poorly understood

eventualities could have on the system if they became manifest. Because the extreme criticality of such ‘outliers’ was ignored, our financial institutions then either collapsed, or survived only after a massive proportion of our entire public wealth was injected into them. Since 2007-2008, when we were so painfully offered this crystal-clear historical lesson, the world of international finance has instituted the following preventive measures to ensure that the same catastrophe does not strike us again: **none**.



fig. 16 *"Progress through Chemistry"*-2001 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

PROGRESS THROUGH CHEMISTRY

Another question I think of some importance if we hope to become better at educating artists is: *"why is it that no concentrated training and experience with*

the materials of art is required curriculum for art historians and art theorists?" In my view, having no direct experience with the materials artists use every day is the source of a quite obvious and consequential 'disconnect' between what art historians and theorists know and can speak of, and what practicing artists do. In my view this hiatus has serious consequences. It is, I believe, very largely for this reason alone that artist-students very often can't communicate effectively with some of their most important instructors regarding subjects that are at the very heart of their practice, i.e. communication using tangible materials rather than words. Students can't effectively discuss that issue with their art history or art theory instructors because most of those instructors know very little about it. In the course of their education, historians and theorists of art are in fact not normally exposed to or required to gain any experience at all with the materials of art practice. But it is that very experience that has always been- and remains at the heart of making art! In my opinion, it is essential experience for anyone teaching anything about art.

Let me try with an example to explain why I think this so important. Imagine that you set out to make a landscape painting, deciding to execute that same painting twice. You make the first version with oil paint on canvas, using thick impasto technique. Then on completing that painting, you make a second one, depicting exactly the same landscape and trying to imbue it with the same feeling or 'meaning', i.e. communicate/express the same things. But quite differently for this second version, you use watercolors on paper. Imagine that you are making both the oil-on-canvas- and the watercolor-on-paper renditions with precisely the same composition, and using the same colors. You make both versions with the clear intention to convey the same aspects of your thoughts and feelings about what is depicted in the paintings. Additionally, you are making both in the same historical time period, and with the same hands. Will the two paintings on completion then have the same 'meaning' for you? Will

they succeed to convey the same information to an independent viewer? The answer to both of those questions, I think, will be a resounding, 'No'. Those two paintings will very likely not convey even remotely similar 'meanings'. I believe we could not possibly accomplish that. The very different 'meanings' I think those two works of art will have, for both the artist and impartial viewers of them, is in very large measure a consequence of the way materials can be- and were used to create those two respective paintings. I am suggesting here that 'meaning in art', is in very large part the direct result of bodily gestures specifically enabled by-, but also limited by the dictates of the materials used. I am referring now specifically to the very different physical-muscular efforts required for the movements of the artist's hand and brush through- and onto material in order to accomplish one or the other version of the painting. The considerable difference in the 'meanings' I've suggested the two versions in my example will have, both for the artist and the viewers, must then be in very large measure attributable to the concrete physicality of the body's interaction with materials. If what I am saying here is in any appreciable degree true, do art historians or theorists who have had no experience with how very different are the feelings and the results that accompany painting in oil as opposed to watercolor, understand all they need to about *meaning* or *intention* in art practice? I submit that at present they perhaps don't, and they cannot realistically be expected to. I believe that this very significantly impedes communication between those instructors and their students, and is something we can and should act to improve on.

If tasked with proposing a single- and consequential improvement that might quickly and relatively easily be realised in art education, I would propose this one: the structural- and obligatory inclusion of a course in working with the materials of art for aspiring historians and theorists in art. I sincerely believe that a substantial improvement in art education, for historians and theorists, as

well as for the practicing artists who study with them, would be realized by doing so. A number of those confusions about the practice of art I discuss in this text, could I think soon become far better resolved if that course of action were followed. I am suggesting therefore that structural introduction to **the material aspects of meaning in art** should be a required element of the formal education of artists, historians and theorists of art, **alike**. Those of us whose job it is to know-, teach-, and register authoritative judgments about art must have sufficient familiarity with what that activity entails. When we think about it, is there any valid reason why 'the practice of art', i.e. *making art*, is **not** an obligatory curricular item for art historians and art theorists, while the study of art history **is** required curriculum for every practicing artist? That seems obviously unbalanced and illogical. It indicates I think, that we are presently quite some distance removed from arriving at logical-, balanced- and responsible practices in art education.



fig. 17 *“Le Verre, le Contraire, et L’Autre”*-1990 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

ART, THE INDIVIDUAL, AND THE OTHER

History of art, art theory, philosophy, and science are distinct and noble pursuits that have at least two important characteristics in common.

1 the *lingua franca* for each of them is the language of our written and spoken words, (supplemented importantly in science by the even more precise language of mathematics.)

2 each is focussed on the critical analysis and discussion of things that are the products of our intellect. In other words, ‘meaning’ in the discourse characteristic of history, art theory, science and philosophy is invariably the

product of conscious logical/analytical processing that the part of our brain called the frontal cortex enables us to engage in. That discourse is characterized by the fact that it's almost invariably singular, linear, causally connected, and conscious.

And now, enter Art..... I submit that not a single one of those qualifications I just listed can legitimately be applied to Art. This indicates strongly in my view that making art with respect to its origins, goals, processes, intentions, and its audience, a profoundly different pursuit than the others I just listed.

In my experience there are many indicators signaling that we have not yet understood well enough what Art is. And because we haven't, that we are not able to offer art practice education that accomplishes to as high degree as possible what we'd like it to. Instead, we seem currently intent on simply tacking onto our insufficient understanding of art practice, curriculum and viewpoints from other pursuits, ones that we thankfully understand much better.

MORE ABOUT DERIVATIVES

It is high time that we begin to pay closer attention to some of the very appreciable differences between art and other pursuits. First of all, Art should not in my view ever be taught, introduced or thought of as derivative of- or emerging from other pursuits. It is important to consider the undisputable fact that as a human activity, making art predates art history, art theory, philosophy and science, by a very considerable number of years! Should we not ask ourselves what that might perhaps indicate in terms of the priority of our human needs? Because of this clear historical precedence, it seems quite illogical that we seem intent to teach students that Art is intimately related to-,

or worse still, that it emerges from history, philosophy, science, or anything else. Art did and does not emerge from any other human pursuit. Instead I think it highly likely that art emerges from simply being human! In fact it is also clear that both art history and art theory emerge directly from art. Art really cannot be made or taught well, (nor personally, do I believe it can be truly appreciated), if we insist that it should be taught or understood in large part through the lens of other pursuits. The widely held current notion that artworks can be regarded as charming but humble actors in the grand theatre of art history is quite untenable. That theatre was designed and painstakingly constructed to house, nurture, and advance the practice of art. It is very definitely not the other way around!



fig. 18 *"Art Before Horse"* 1996 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

HORS(E) CATEGORIE

It is my experience that artists neither are-, nor should they be concerned with categorizing things. Categorization is a useful tool indeed, but I think one primarily useful in other disciplines. I say this because rather than to categorize experience in order to better understand it, it is more often helpful on art to do the opposite, i.e. not conform to- or affirm category, but in important measure, to defy it. We speak often and admiringly of '*unique*' works of art, of '*new insights*'. Those terms embody, what society both hopes and expects artists to

accomplish. That is not to produce works that comfortably and convincingly slot into existing categories, or onto An Historical Continuum. Instead we hope that artists offer us works that **don't** do that! For this reason alone, prioritizing art history, a pursuit that depends on categorization, is not a logical choice as primary methodology in art practice education. In other words, I'm suggesting that we've gone much too far in the degree to which art historians determine curriculum for artists, and also in the degree to which the evaluation of contemporary art by art historians is deemed consequential. Art history and art theory aim to arrive at consensus regarding persons, trends, styles, social and political conditions, hierarchic status, etc.. Their task is to locate, cite and order facts, and then propose **theory based on those facts**. When consensus is arrived at about these theories, they become structurally embedded as History. Artists however, are not busy with theory. Instead they are charged with **creating new facts**. Those facts, in the form of the works artists create, represent no more (but also no less!) than what is **extraordinarily true** for only one individual, the artist himself. I believe that all great art throughout History can be characterized as fulfilling the dictate of that last sentence.

An artist must at times be able to completely ignore what history and theory tell him, both his own history and all others, to arrive at the qualities he wants his work to have. Those intense and individual 'truths' that artists find and reveal in their works are the substance of art's value for humanity. Those truths also, are what will ultimately determine the degree of note that History will take of any artwork or any artist. History, when we think about it, does not in fact consist importantly of examples of what fits seamlessly and comfortably into a given time period or category because it contributed to the continuation of that period. In fact when we think about it, quite the reverse is true. History is structurally constituted much more importantly by very different elements! The History that we all remember and pass on is primarily ordered and given

structure by events that **do not** fit with what accompanies- or immediately precedes them, i.e. it consists of '**striking breaks in continuity**'. It is because those events didn't conform to paradigm of the time, that they became turning points, i.e. initiated marked structural change. It is these events that history has always taught us are **the most important** historical events we must notice and remember!

ART, WORK, AND PLAY

We are born into this world as intruders, plopping into it suddenly, loudly and messily. We are fresh new entities that have no clear function or place here. We are born with no awareness that we are part of that system in which we suddenly find ourselves. We come clothed and armed with nothing other than a very substantial drive to remain, a will to live. We begin then immediately to do all that is within our meager powers to survive. In the early stages of development, we are importantly assisted by our parents and family to do so. But we have as yet, no idea why we should survive, or what we should be doing during the long and uncertain period of our earthly existence.

The first thing we need very quickly to learn is to gain control over our body and its various parts. We begin by exploring how we can use our mouths, our hands, and our feet. If we do not learn this quickly and well, we will most certainly die, because learning how to use our body parts is of existential importance. We learn by doing it, just trying different things out. Some of those actions we undertake will in fact endanger us, in fact could potentially result in the end our lives. It is a very serious business this, finding out how to use- and to steer our bodies away from danger. Somehow most of us can and do learn to navigate the world, avoiding mortal dangers. We accomplish this in very large part through what is called PLAY, i.e. we create our own spontaneous

experiments to see what happens if we do this, or do that. Later we're able to combine our experiments into increasingly complex ones. But no one watching us do this really understands what we're doing. Neither do we understand it ourselves in terms of intentions, concrete goals, or as the result of monitoring our own progress in any systematic and conscious fashion. We are not yet able to be analytical, systematic or to monitor things; we're way too young for that yet. It just happens, we do it, we discover and learn by playing. We are born with the urge and the ability to play, and not much else, so we just do that. What happens for example, when we try to put our toes into our mouth? What happens if we bang our head into the wooden- or plastic bars of our crib? What happens if we make sounds, either soft ones or very loud ones? What happens when we try to stand up, but don't yet understand the forces involved, and we fall down again?

Later, we extend these experiments increasingly to include others around us. What happens when we interact with others? What happens when we try to imitate them? What happens if we bite our mother's nipple while feeding? What happens if we make crying sounds loudly, or smile at someone who is looking at us? This is Play. Is it merely fun, or could that be something more serious? Might we perhaps also call it 'research'? Is play merely an attractive and entertaining waste of time, or might it instead constitute something far more important, perhaps even the primary means by which both humans and all other animals learn to survive? A marvelous book that both asks and attempts to answer such questions is ^{xxxii}The Ambiguity of Play by Brian Sutton Smith. As a result of reading that book, I became convinced that in **play**, we design and carry out some of the most original experiments we ever undertake. In so doing, we learn critically important things about surviving in this world. Play is clearly of great importance for our survival when we're very young, and its motor is **curiosity**. We just wonder, "What happens IF...?", and then we proceed

to take the actions needed to find out. Play, I'm suggesting here, is **creativity** of the highest order, its goal is learning, and it originates in every individual.

David Bohm had this to say about creativity and play:

xxxiii“One prerequisite for originality is clearly that a person shall not be inclined to impose his preconceptions on the fact as he sees it. Rather, he must be able to learn something new, even if this means that the ideas and notions that are comfortable or dear to him may be overturned. But the ability to learn in this way is a principle common to the whole of humanity. Thus it is well known that a child learns to walk, to talk, and to know his way around the world just by trying something out and seeing what happens, then modifying what he does (or thinks) in accordance with what has actually happened. In this way, he spends his first few years in a wonderfully creative way, discovering all sorts of things that are new to him, and this leads people to look back on childhood as a kind of lost paradise. As the child grows older, however, learning takes on a narrower meaning. In school, he learns by repetition to accumulate knowledge, so as to please the teacher and pass examinations. At work, he learns in a similar way, so as to make a living, or for some other utilitarian purpose, and not mainly for the love of the action of learning itself. So his ability to see something new and original gradually dies away. And without it there is evidently no ground from which anything can grow.”

We should not in my opinion be afraid to use the word play merely because it may seem to imply that that activity it is not a serious one. Play is not as we seem often to imagine it, the opposite of seriousness or work, and most especially not when it comes to art! Instead, it is an activity conducive to learning, in many respects in my view, to a higher degree than any other activity we can undertake. Play as I describe that here, is a vital constituent of

art practice. I suggest that evidence for that claim can be found in a great number of our most highly valued artworks. We would, I think, do well to learn and come to understand far more than we presently do about the vital role of play in art, and indeed in all human creativity.

ART IS TO LOGIC AS DANCING IS TO WALKING

Dancing and Walking are, both of them, means of transport. The first of those, is something we are inclined to think of as a form of amusement or play. The second, walking, we normally think of as functional, a form of work. Both of them however, are means we can choose from to effect movement from point A to point B. A and B here indicate different *locations*, but not both of them geographical ones. In the case of walking between two points, we transport ourselves physically between two geographical locations or states. In dancing, we also transport ourselves between two states, but not geographical ones. Those are then emotional states we travel between. When we dance, our movements both depict and cause that transportation, one of feeling. The important difference between the two modes of transportation is a matter of what's being changed. Walking moves us physically, causing transportation that is tangible and can be perceived and described by anyone looking on. That movement can be measured and recorded easily and accurately. In the case of dancing we are instead transported emotionally. What is being transported is very much more difficult to describe, because it's intangible and measurement of it is impossible. We make that choice to walk, or alternatively to dance, for equally valid reasons. Although the two forms of transportation are quite different ones, equally important changes in our positions result. Logic tends to investigate reality and change as a position arrived at by **linear** process. That process is characterized by **causation**, i.e. one thing happens, chronologically

preceding and causing the next thing to happen. Such processes can easily be broken down and analyzed, allowing us to understand how their mechanical and chronological constituents produce the physical result we call Reality. As is the case with walking, we can do this simply and easily, step by step.

Just as in dance, Art also advances by process, but that one is by no means a linear process. Instead it advances through intangible, parallel emotional processing of experience, rather than as a direct result of the serial individual steps that constitute the progression. Causality, I am saying again, is very much less important in art than in most other pursuits. That is to say that there is no important role played in art either by chronology or linearity of process.

Returning to the theme of walking and dancing, those logical and generally linear steps that, when added together, constitute our 'walking' from point a to point b, are more often than not, ones we choose on the basis of known, desired, and fixed destinations. 'Walking' as I describe that here, is analogous to the practice of Science. The 'dancing' of Artists by contrast, is far less focused on- or characterized by the intention to arrive at known and predetermined points or answers. Because in art, 'travel' rather than 'arrival' is its goal, much more attention can be given in the course of the 'dance', to the exercise of curiosity, i.e. we are freer to investigate any of the many waypoints along the journey. At each of those points, we may discover new things. We are free to stop or not to stop at any of those places, we can decide to undertake diversions from the line of travel we had, or we can choose not to do so. It is in this way that is largely determined when we arrive at point B, and moreover, what meanings both the journey and our arrival will come to hold for us. When looked at in this way, it is those choices we make along the way, rather than ones made beforehand, that determine both the location and the significance of the destination. It is those choices that determine in fact what the entire undertaking means.



Fig 19 *"Cold fusion"* 1997 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

In making an artwork, I manifest **for** myself aspects **of** myself and my experience that I hope may be unique about me. These become visible and tangible for me, thereby effecting my own discovery of important things about what I feel and think. But I also have the wish to share what I've done with others. In taking that second step, I may ultimately find approval, discover new interpretations, experience disapproval, or, worse still, find that my work meets with general disinterest. That last possibility, although very far from the desired result, also teaches me important things. Few other undertakings I know of can so strongly and directly make individuality vs. universality manifest, i.e. 'myself' in relation to everyone and everything else. This is the fundament of art. I am convinced that it is for this reason that the first person who ever made what we now call art did so. It is by externalizing individual experience that we learn things about the many -and deeply important aspects of that duality I named, perhaps **the** most important one for human beings throughout history, i.e. **me** as opposed to all else. That duality is a central element of almost every activity we undertake and all experiences we have. Whether or not we are aware of it, we are constantly querying ask ourselves : i.e. "how do I see, think, feel about- or react to this thing or experience?" and then, "is that similar to-, or perhaps very different indeed from how others (would) think, feel or react to this same thing or experience?"

SIX LEGGED COWS AND THE TERRIFYINGLY IMPOSSIBLE

Some years ago, I can remember being seated comfortably on a train for a long journey passing through the countryside of the Netherlands. That countryside is certainly picturesque, but would not I think, be called dramatic. The Netherlands is a comparatively flat country, not at all punctuated by mountains, deep valleys, jungles, deserts or other dramatic landscapes. Passing through it, one sees fields, farms, a very great number of small waterways, the odd strangely sculpted tree, and lots of grazing animals. At one point in my journey, I began to feel tired and started to drift off into sleep at my place by the window, when suddenly something I had caught a glimpse of, shocked me to sit up straight, and to become instantly alert. Through the window at medium distance, I had seen what seemed to be a cow with six legs! Imagine what happens if you see something like that! Everything is suddenly turned upside down, all that you had thought of as 'Reality' comes to a sudden and full stop! The brain then starts frantically to race through all memory, desperately searching for any experience or theory that might help guide our reaction to what we have just encountered. Finding then, quite terrifyingly, nothing to explain that, nothing to grab onto, we start to experience great anxiety because all of our systems of belief are now seriously threatened, in danger of being proven demonstrably invalid, useless. If we cannot explain to ourselves what we have just experienced, it means that all that we know and have experienced to date, and all that others have ever told us about the world, every system we had in place for dealing with what we might encounter, fails catastrophically. At such a moment, we suddenly find that we stand (or sit) very differently in the world than moments before. All of this happens, of course, in microseconds. That highly unwelcome event just doesn't fit into any system for understanding

we possess! All of our internal alarm lights and bells are now flashing bright red, ringing very loudly!

Of course, in the case I speak of now, one from my own experience, mere moments later my state of highest alarm was thankfully downgraded when the train had moved a bit further, and I could see that what I had seen a moment before was in fact two cows, one standing behind the other. The internal alarm bells went off, the lights stopped flashing, my calm returned, and all of my systems were thankfully, once again 'go'. I have thought about that experience and what it meant many times since. What happened, I've concluded, was that for a few moments I simply had no system or category to which I could relegate what I was experiencing. In the course of that short time, I had no other option than to conclude that everything I had ever experienced, thought and learned, was invalid, because none of it could possibly encompass or explain what I saw. In other words, I was forced, very uncomfortably and highly unwillingly, to completely **suspend all belief**.

We construct systems of belief to explain to ourselves what we experience so that we are-, or at least we may feel less threatened by new experiences. The degree to which we can believe in- and will continue to adhere to those systems is determined directly by the extent to which they consistently prove sufficient to explain our experience. Many of us hold spiritual beliefs, others scientific ones, while for others, political or economic theories provide the primary basis for understanding and dealing with what we encounter in life. Usually though, we develop some mixture of beliefs derived from several of those categories which then forms the framework for how we gather, explain to ourselves, and categorize our experiences. Experiences that fall outside the encompassing capacities of our theories are ones we very often either consciously or unconsciously ignore, in large part precisely because of the threat they represent for continuing to believe in our systems. I related this incident, my

short-lived but very memorable confrontation with a 6-legged cow, as an example of the enormously important influence that the categories we both create and unthinkingly resort to, has on our experience of reality. I hope it will by now also be clear why I believe that the absence of category at times, is a precious and useful state of being. It is from that position, whether or not it is comfortable, that we sometimes acquire seminally useful points of view. That is I think, art's job. And that is why I am critical of blind faith in the assumption that 'organized categorical thinking' is always a good thing. In my view and experience, it is often a very serious hindrance to alternative ways of seeing things, ones that offer us inspiring and highly valuable new vantage points and insights.

Art and Philosophy when they are practiced well, never offer us simple answers. Instead they very much more often give form to inspiring and fundamental musings and questions. They do not recall-, paraphrase- or repeat for us what we already knew. Instead they work to effectively stimulate curiosity with respect to all that we don't yet know. History, Philosophy and Art, when driven by a passion for discovery and accompanied by a readiness to suspend belief, accomplish far more than merely confirming facts or existing theories. They motivate us to explore-, i.e. both to discover and create fascinating and important new facts and theory. Perhaps in that sense, both art and science should be regarded as attempts, albeit by very different means altogether, to get at fundamental truths that hold great importance for us. Both are directed at discoveries about ourselves, and the universe we live in. And both are achieved through study and recording the results of our experiments. Science generally investigates, understands and explains the universe by presuming causality, linear time, and the existence of persistent hidden rules or patterns that, if diligent enough, we can discover and come to understand. Art, very differently, understands and explains the universe intuitively, emotionally,

sometimes one could perhaps even say ‘magically’. Science relies on the genius of our intellect, Art on the genius of our spirit. Art is the Jester at the Court of Science.

GRIOTS AND HISTORY

There is an important form of culturally esteemed learning whose guardians and authorities in Western Africa are called griots. Below, is a definition of ‘griot’.

Griot- West African troubadour-historian. The griot profession is hereditary and has long been a part of West African culture. The griots’ role has traditionally been to preserve the genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions of their people; praise songs are also part of the griot’s repertoire. Many griots play the kora, a long-necked harp lute with 21 strings. In addition to serving as the primary storytellers of their people, griots have also served as advisers and diplomats. Over the centuries their advisory and diplomatic roles have diminished somewhat, and their entertainment appeal has become more widespread.

-Online, Encyclopaedia Britannica, January 18, 2014

The griot was traditionally both the repository and the guardian of the most important knowledge his society believed it crucial to conserve and to pass on to succeeding generations. In order to accomplish that task, a young boy was trained from very early childhood by his father (also a griot), to record and recite those stories deemed important for succeeding generations to understand and remember. This was in fact, verbal history in its purest form. Not one word or detail of the stories taught to the aspiring griot by his father for later retelling could be changed or omitted. While a griot commanded very considerable respect within his society, it is interesting to note that

paradoxically, in many places in Western Africa, when a griot died, he was not accorded a respectable formal burial. Instead his remains were placed upright inside the hollow trunk of a baobab tree. The reason for this was that the griot was not considered deserving of the same formal burial accorded all others in his society. One explanation for this surprising paradox was that griots never, as all others in his society did, worked the soil to grow food for the community. For this reason it was believed that they had not earned the right to be buried in that ground. It was even feared that if a griot should ever be buried in the ground used to grow food, a terrible drought would follow!

In Western Africa, just as it is in all societies to the present day, what history can offer succeeding generations is considered highly valuable. At the same time, it is not normally expected or required of any member of society who is not a griot, that they should remember, recite, or repeat history as the griot can and must. For me, the parallels this story suggests between what griots, historians, and artists must-, can- or should do are quite interesting to consider!

MAGISTER LUDI

In his book ^{xxxiv}*Das Glasperlenspiel*, Herman Hesse describes a noble game. That game requires that starting at a very young age, the future contestants spend a great number of years in intense training, during which time they must become familiar with and conversant in almost all human knowledge. The founding principle of that game they will later play is that there exist central concepts across all the domains of human knowledge whose essence is essentially identical. Accordingly it thereby becomes possible to relate for example, a passage of music directly to a philosophical argument, or to a mathematical principle, because there is an element or elements common to them that is both essential and definitive for each. To these central essential components of

knowledge across different domains, symbols were then assigned, a bit similarly to the way we use symbols to write down musical passages. The goal of the game played by those highly trained adepts was to create the most 'beautiful symphony or passage', one composed of and encompassing knowledge across a great number of very different domains.

Referring to this noble game they played offers me one final way to clarify why I have here tried to both describe and to argue against the current trends to 'define' works of art in terms of concrete meanings, and/or to inextricably link or relate them to exact pursuits like science. In the 'glass bead game', the goal is to create a 'symphony, or passage of music', wherein each note composing it has specific meanings, i.e connotes very exact concept. But it is important to realise that when that symphony or passage is performed, all of the domains that share those notes/concepts, as well as their subtle interconnectedness, are simultaneously evoked. Conversely though, if a specific note/concept is extracted from that symphony or passage and heard alone or considered in isolation, the simultaneous evocation of all realms that share that concept is no longer actuated, cannot and does not occur. In other words, something, something in fact highly important is lost. What is then lost is precisely that thing I argue that we urgently need to both recognise and strongly defend as the primary goal of the entire exercise of making art .

CONCLUSIONS

Meaning in art is not the linear product of the artist's intentions, nor is it contained in the physical material that constitutes his artwork. Meaning is in fact, not an intrinsic quality of artworks at all, but is instead an emergent entity. Artworks don't **have** meaning; they 'take on meaning'. That meaning is not singular in nature, it is instead ^{xxxv} pluriform, being neither persistent for any one viewer, nor consistent across different viewers. Making art can be thought of as a procreative act rather than a reproductive deed. Something new comes into existence and begins to take on life, doing so oftentimes in ways and directions very different from those intended- or expected by anyone.

Art shows and tells us things we are often familiar with, but in other than the usual ways. When an artist creates a new work, it can be likened to an act of God, the creation of a new reality. The artist causes a new order to come into existence. He adds his work to the world, one very small thing he has created so that he can then consider that world anew. Something has been added to 'the landscape', changing it, and the artist then perceives an altered reality. In this way the artist is enabled to ask himself: "what if the world were everything it was yesterday, but WITH this small thing added?", and then to answer that question. Does something change for him when he looks at things anew in this way? What changes? Will others notice this change, and if so, how will it affect them? How will their reactions in turn, affect the artist? If making art is imagined in that very simple and, I believe, quite practical way, it will be clear that considerable difficulties are likely to arise if the artist is asked what this new thing means. The only honest answer he can then offer is: *"...Well, I don't know yet. I am interested to find out what adding this thing to everything else in the world means for me. Finding that out was the very reason I had for making it. In all honesty, I did not make it in order to answer that question for you! I made it because I wanted to pose the question to myself. However, if you are prepared to*

be patient, if and when I can answer your question for you, I'll be happy to let you know"!

The meaning an artwork acquires for the artist can be described as a number of very subtle, sometimes quite gradual changes that take place in him as a result of his act of creation. Those have to do with how he comes to 'understand' movement in space, colors together, materials, textures, and a host of other things that he deals with both consciously and unconsciously when creating his work. He learns things, and that will inevitably change the way he sees things.

What he accomplishes by doing this can perhaps be likened to creating a tiny new 'island'. That new island will then sit for a time at the center of the sea formed by all of his previous experience. The tides flowing in the sea will gradually become subtly changed by the presence of that new island. But their strength and direction will take some time to settle into any recognizable and persistent pattern. The same will also be true for the winds. Eventually however, all the different inhabitants of the sky, the land, and the waters in contact with that small new island will become familiar with-, understand-, and adapt to those new facts, each of them in their own way.

At the deepest and most important level of both the motivations and the goals of making art, I cannot formulate these in words better than I've just tried to do that. There are of course very many other levels of significance we attach to artworks, ones that are far more easily described and discussed. But I suggest that the one I've just tried to sketch is by far the most important one, for the artist himself, and for all the rest of us.

In addition to suggesting that the meaning art holds for us may be different than we seem currently often to imagine, I have argued that the process by which we arrive at meaning in art is a very different one. Hidden under some of what we currently teach in art education, I suggest that there are some false

narratives, ones with important consequences. When we train students to understand and explain artmaking largely as a progression of analytical thoughts and considerations, we support those false narratives. I have suggested that our choices in making art are not logical deductions at all, but instead are decisions rooted directly in intuition and emotive concerns. With that I means knowledge informed by all our previous experience, and triggered by similarities we sense across very different realms of that experience. I think it critically important to realise that those sensed connections I speak of are primarily unconsciously accessed. Those are almost invariably **felt** rather than **known** in first instance. I have additionally argued that it is only **after acting** on those intuited connections in artmaking that we are in any position to analyze what we've done, to consider the results of our actions, or draw any conclusions from them. Serious problems inevitably result when we claim or suggest that conscious analysis and conclusions reached by that means was the basis of the processes by which we acted. I submit that that is very definitely not the case, and that theories based on that assumption will inevitably prove inadequate.

If I am a cook wanting to create a new dish, I must rely very largely for my choice of ingredients not on what my thinking tells me, but on what my body, c.q. my taste buds tell me. The basis on which I proceed is then not what I can conclude or reason from memory, but first and foremost my tongue's ability to recall and to recreate past experience. A decision for example, to include nutmeg in my new dish, is not one I make because I conceive of nutmeg as a sweet-, aromatic-, but every so slightly bitter addition I could make to the overall taste. It is instead because of my tongue's memory of that taste, directly informing me what the results of adding nutmeg might be. In other words, when creating a new dish and also when making art, we are instituting processes that are in first instance related to body and intuition rather than to

brain and thinking. While it is certainly true that we both can- and very often do intuit our way to thinking, we do not, indeed cannot possibly think our way to intuiting.

If we wish to come to better understand what art making is, and in so doing, better understand how should teach it, I think that we urgently need to change a few things. Less time and energy should be focused on searching for art's purpose on the many levels of the societal significances we imagine for it. And far more effort needs to be devoted to a better understanding of the nature and importance of its individual meaning for the artist, as well as for a viewer who finds himself moved by art. All other ways of regarding art are in my view abstractions, mere derivatives. We cannot come to understand and share our knowledge about trees if we continue to limit our study and discussions only to the forest. In Art, the individual maker/creator, i.e. the "I", really must be understood as the main character in the story. In other words, Art for the artist, is not constituted by history, instead it IS quite literally HIS STORY.



fig. 20 *"History Too"* – 2009 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

THE BRIDGE

Returning once last time to the scene I sketched at the beginning of this text, I think we will still find Pedro, Fernando and a donkey standing on that rural bridge. The focal point of that scene was on the need Fernando apparently felt to demand another's attention by brute force. It now occurs to me that I only named and gave voice to two of the three actors on that stage, i.e. Pedro and Fernando, those two actors able to use words to communicate and express intentions. I am now imagining that if the remaining actor, that lone donkey could also speak, he might perhaps say some of the same things I've tried to say here. And I then become curious to find out whether or not his listeners would attend to what he said.

-R. Meitner –December 2014 (revised version October 2016)



fig. 21 *"In Other Words"* 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by R. Meitner

IMAGES OF RECENT WORKS

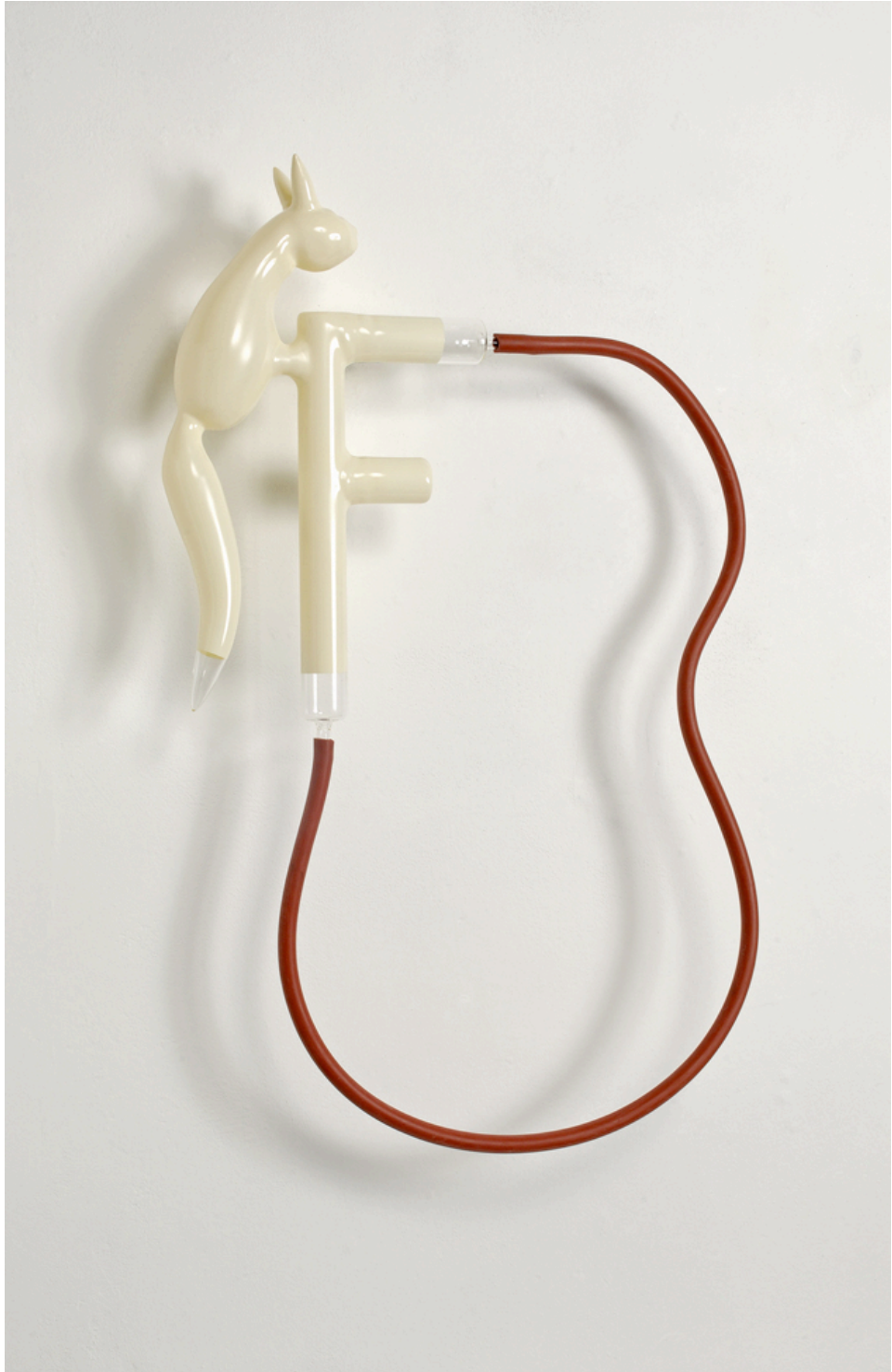


fig 22 "*Nuts*" 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

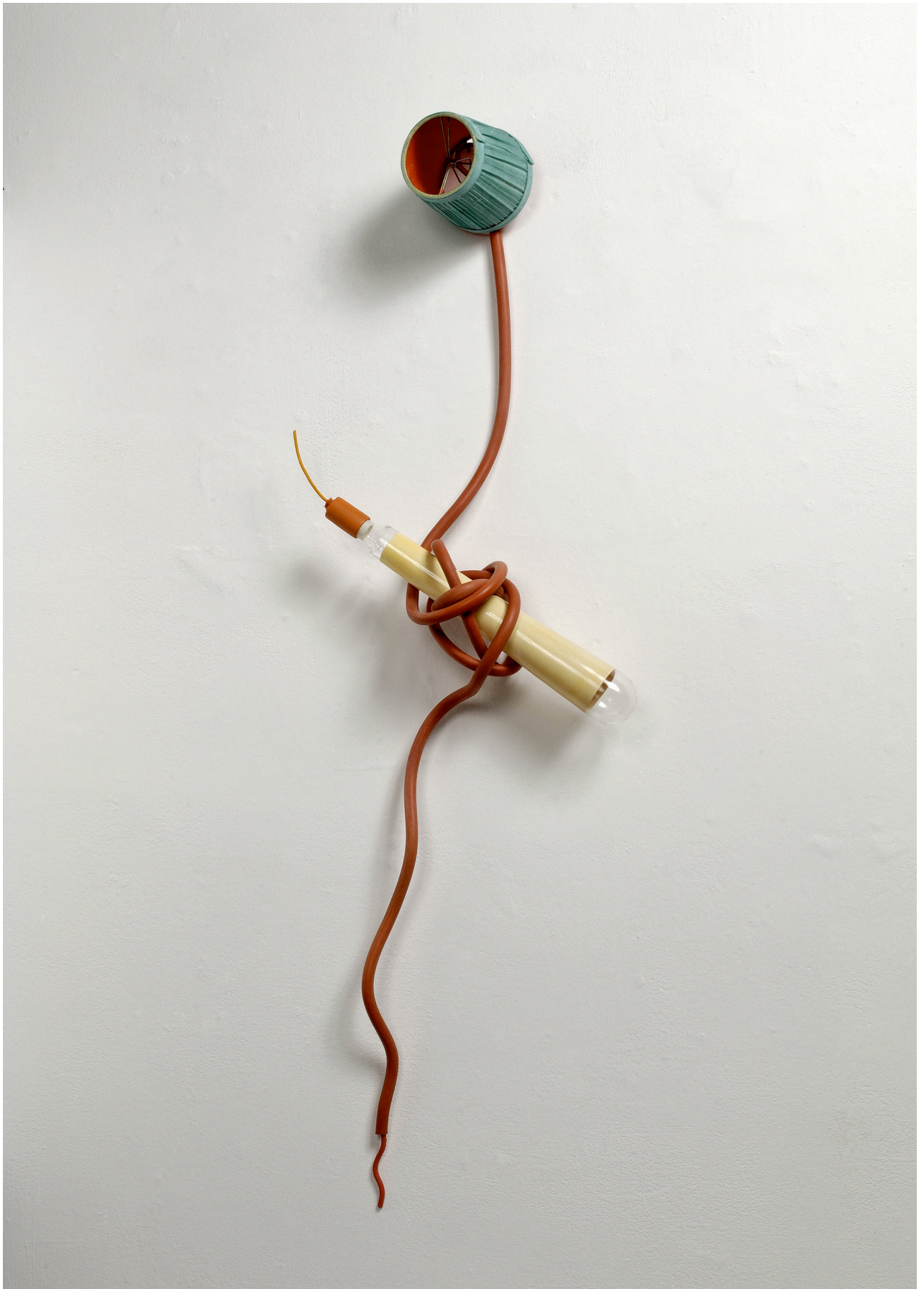


fig. 23 "*Capped Engram*" 2013 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig.24 "*F Cushion*" 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 25 "*Not a Peep (ceci)*" 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig 26 "*The Flyer*" 2014 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 27 *"Are you Talking to ME!?"* 2015 by
Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 28 *"Blow"* 2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by
Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 29 *"Strike While the Iron's Hot"* -2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 30 *"Recent Additions, (+1, +2, +3 and +4) 2016* by
Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 31 *"Wurst that could happen"* 2016 by Richard Meitner,
photo by Ron Zijlstra©



fig. 32 *"Ready to Roll"* 2016 by Richard Meitner, photo by Ron Zijlstra©

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Quantum mechanics-<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/quantum-theory> - 16/08/2014 - In 1927, Werner Heisenberg proposed that precise, simultaneous measurement of two complementary values - such as the position and momentum of a subatomic particle - is impossible. Contrary to the principles of classical physics, their simultaneous measurement is inescapably flawed; the more precisely one value is measured, the more flawed will be the measurement of the other value. This theory became known as the *uncertainty principle*, which prompted Albert Einstein's famous comment, "God does not play dice."

The Copenhagen Interpretation and the Many-Worlds Theory

The two major interpretations of quantum theory's implications for the nature of reality are the Copenhagen interpretation and the many-worlds theory. Niels Bohr proposed the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory, which asserts that a particle is whatever it is measured to be (for example, a wave or a particle), but that it cannot be assumed to have specific properties, or even to exist, until it is measured. In short, Bohr was saying that objective reality does not exist. This translates to a principle called *superposition* that claims that while we do not know what the state of any object is, it is actually in all possible states simultaneously, as long as we don't look to check.

The second interpretation of quantum theory is the *many-worlds* (or *multiverse* theory. It holds that as soon as a potential exists for any object to be in any state, the universe of that object transmutes into a series of parallel universes equal to the number of possible states in which that the object can exist, with each universe containing a unique single possible state of that object. Furthermore, there is a mechanism for interaction between these universes that somehow permits all states to be accessible in some way and for all possible states to be affected in some manner. Stephen Hawking and the late Richard Feynman are among the scientists who have expressed a preference for the many-worlds theory.

Quantum Theory's Influence

Although scientists throughout the past century have balked at the implications of quantum theory - Planck and Einstein among them - the theory's principles have repeatedly been supported by experimentation, even when the scientists were trying to disprove them. Quantum theory and Einstein's theory of relativity form the basis for modern physics.

ⁱⁱ Feynman, Richard-The Pleasure of Finding Things Out pg 104-Perseus Books, 1999

ⁱⁱⁱ Feynman, Richard-The Pleasure of Finding Things Out pg 187-Perseus Books, 1999

^{iv} Feynman, Richard-The Pleasure of Finding Things Out pg 184, Perseus Books, 1999

^v online form for application for membership on evaluation committee-
<https://inqueritos.fccn.pt/index.php?lang=en&sid=97413&token=yr8s5x3xu4y74my>
06/08/1980

vi Evaluation Guide-FCT Evaluation of R&D units 2013-

http://www.fct.pt/apoios/unidades/avaliacoes/2013/docs/GuiaoAvaliacao_AvaliacaoUnidades2013.pdf -19/08/2014

vii Feynman, Richard-The Pleasure of Finding Things Out pg 194, Perseus Books, 1999

viii“Embodied Cognition” Wilson, Robert A. and Foglia, Lucia, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Fall 2011 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/embodied-cognition/>-

Cognition is embodied when it is deeply dependent upon features of the physical body of an agent, that is, when aspects of the agent's body beyond the brain play a significant causal or physically constitutive role in cognitive processing. In general, dominant views in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science have considered the body as peripheral to understanding the nature of mind and cognition. Proponents of embodied cognitive science view this as a serious mistake. Sometimes the nature of the dependence of cognition on the body is quite unexpected, and suggests new ways of conceptualizing and exploring the mechanics of cognitive processing. Embodied cognitive science encompasses a loose-knit family of research programs in the cognitive sciences that often share a commitment to critiquing and even replacing traditional approaches to cognition and cognitive processing. Empirical research on embodied cognition has exploded in the past 10 years. As the bibliography for this article attests, the various bodies of work that will be discussed represent a serious alternative to the investigation of cognitive phenomena. Relatively recent work on the embodiment of cognition provides much food for thought for empirically-informed philosophers of mind. This is in part because of the rich range of phenomena that embodied cognitive science has studied. But it is also in part because those phenomena are often thought to challenge dominant views of the mind, such as the computational and representational theories of mind, at the heart of traditional cognitive science. And they have sometimes been taken to undermine standard positions in the philosophy of mind, such as the idea that the mind is identical to, or even realized in, the brain.

ix In the mid-1990s, scientists studying Area F5 in the ventral premotor cortex of monkeys found that certain neurons in this area sent out action potentials not only when the monkeys were moving their hands or mouths, but also when they were simply watching another animal or a human being who was making such a gesture. These neurons were dubbed **mirror neurons** because of the way that a visually observed movement seemed to be reflected in the motor representation of the same movement in the observer. In addition to mirror neurons, which are activated both when you perform an action yourself and when you see someone else performing it, another kind of neurons, called canonical neurons, become activated when you merely see an object that can be grasped by the prehensile movement of the hand whose movements they encode—as if your brain were foreseeing a possible interaction with this object and preparing itself accordingly. What these two types of neurons have in common is that they are both activated by an action regardless of whether you are carrying that action out, anticipating carrying it out, or watching someone else carrying it out. Because mirror neurons thus help us foresee the consequences of our own actions, some have argued that these neurons may be the cellular substrate for our ability also to understand the meaning of other people's actions. This understanding of other people's actions is the foundation for all social relations, and especially for communication between individuals. The discovery of mirror neurons may thus be particularly useful for

explaining how we can imagine other people's intentions and state of mind. Lastly, the fact that Area F5 in monkeys is regarded as the homologue for Broca's area in humans suggests that mirror neurons also are involved in human communication.

http://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/a/a_06/a_06_cl/a_06_cl_mou/a_06_cl_mou.html 19/02/2013

^x Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience-David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese- Department of Art History and Archeology, Columbia University, Department of Neuroscience, University of Parma, Parma, Italy-Trends in Cognitive Sciences Vol.11 No.5

^{xi} 3.5. Regime especial de apresentação da tese

3.5.1. Os que reúnam as condições para acesso ao ciclo de estudos conducente ao grau de doutor em Artes (Artes Performativas e da Imagem em Movimento) podem requerer a apresentação de uma tese nos termos do n.º 4 do artigo 39.º do Regulamento de Estudos Pós-Graduados da Universidade de Lisboa, ou dos trabalhos previstos nas alíneas a) e b) do n.º 3 do artigo 36.º do mesmo Regulamento, ao acto público de defesa sem inscrição no ciclo de estudos e sem designação de orientador. 3.5.2. A Comissão Científica deste Curso de Doutoramento pode também autorizar que, em condições de exigência equivalentes, devidamente justificadas, a elaboração de uma

tese original seja substituída pela apresentação e defesa dos trabalhos previstos no artigo 31.º do Regime Jurídico dos Graus e Diplomas do Ensino Superior, a saber:

a) Pela compilação, devidamente enquadrada, de um conjunto coerente e relevante de trabalhos de investigação, já objecto de publicação em revistas com comités de seleção de reconhecido mérito internacional; ou

b) Por uma obra ou conjunto de obras ou realizações com carácter inovador, acompanhada de fundamentação escrita que explice o processo de concepção e elaboração, a capacidade de investigação, e o seu enquadramento na evolução do conhecimento no domínio em que se insere.

Regulamento-Doutoramento em Artes, Pg 6 -Universidade de Lisboa

^{xii} Letter from Isaac Newton to Robert Hooke, 5 February 1676, as transcribed in Jean-Pierre Maury (1992) Newton: Understanding the Cosmos, New Horizons

^{xiii} "Also called proprioceptive sense, proprioception is the sense of body movement and position. This sense comes from stimulation of proprioceptors in the muscle, tendons and joints in the skeletal/muscular system and also the vestibular receptors in the inner ear. Even without visual clues, Proprioception enables the body to determine its spatial orientation".- From Psychology Dictionary Online

<http://psychologydictionary.org/proprioception/> - ixzz2sX7B02wl - 12/06/2013

^{xiv} The aesthetic senses are the senses by which we experience beauty, grace, and other aesthetic properties. Vision and hearing are commonly recognized as aesthetic senses, while smell, taste, and touch are not. Proprioception is the sense by which we acquire information about the positions and movements of our own bodies, via receptors in the joints, tendons, ligaments, muscles, and skin. My claim is that proprioception is an aesthetic sense and that one can make aesthetic judgments based on proprioceptive experience. I will argue that, just

as one can deem a painting beautiful based on one's visual experience of the painting, one can deem a certain movement beautiful based on one's proprioceptive experience of the movement. In addition, I posit that in a certain sense an observer can propriocept the beauty of another's movement. Although this may sound surprising, I argue that recent discoveries about the function of mirror neurons—neurons that are activated both when one performs a task and when one sees that task performed—as well as other empirical studies illustrating that when seeing others move we kinesthetically represent their motion, support the case and potentially pave the way toward a third-person proprioceptive aesthetics.- Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense-Barbara Montero, 2006- Journal Of Aesthetics And Art Criticism 64 (2):231-242.

^{xv} Gibson, J.J. (1977). The Theory of Affordances (pp. 67-82). In R. Shaw & J. Bransford (Eds.). *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

^{xvi} A very great deal has been written about what creativity is thought to mean and how it may be understood to emerge. A very usable account of the latter is, I think, offered by Arne Dietrich's tract, *The Neuroscience of Creativity*, the *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 2004

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.3758/BF03196731#page-1>, 06/08/2014

^{xvii} Antonio Damasio: The quest to understand consciousness-FILMED MAR 2011 • TED TALK 2011 http://www.ted.com/talks/antonio_damasio_the_quest_to_understand_consciousness,

^{xviii} Antonio Damasio: This Time With Feeling -Interview-The Aspen Institute-July 4, 2009 06/08/2014, http://fora.tv/2009/07/04/Antonio_Damasio_This_Time_With_Feeling

^{xix} A Second Chance for Emotion-Antonio Damasio-Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotions-Oxford Press 2000

^{xx} Philosophy is an academic discipline that exercises reason and logic in an attempt to understand reality and answer fundamental questions about knowledge, life, morality and human nature. The ancient Greeks, who were among the first to practice philosophy, coined the term, which means "love of wisdom." Those who study philosophy are called philosophers. Through the ages, philosophers have sought to answer such questions as, what is the meaning and purpose of life? How do we know what we know? Does God exist? What does it mean to possess consciousness? And, what is the value of morals? <http://www.whatisphilosophy.net/> - 21/09/2013

^{xxi} Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, London 1960

xxii Synchronicity is a concept developed by psychologist Carl Jung to describe a perceived meaningful coincidence. Jung described synchronicity as an "acausal connecting principle" in which events, both large and small, in the external world might align to the experience of the individual, perhaps mirroring or echoing personal concerns or thoughts.

<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/synchronicity> 15/6/14

xxiii

One of the oldest observations in the psychology of creativity is that a creative idea is often preceded by a period of unconscious incubation (Hadamard, 1945; James, 1880; Poincaré, 1913/1982). Contemporary creativity researchers have often studied incubation and its role in creative insight (Beefink, van Eerde, & Rutte, 2008; Ellwood, Pallier, Snyder, & Gallate, 2009; Kohn & Smith, 2009; Patrick, 1986; Sternberg & Davidson, 1995). The majority of studies has confirmed the existence of an *incubation effect*, although the exact nature of the associated unconscious processes remains uncertain. Hypotheses include mental relaxation, selective forgetting, random subconscious recombination, and spreading activation.

Cognitive neuroscientists have studied a closely related mental phenomenon: *mind wandering*, when thoughts drift away from the task at hand to something completely unrelated. Mind wandering involves a shift away from a primary task to process some other, personal goal, but in a way that is not obviously goal-directed or intentional. Some neuroscientists have hypothesized that people prone to mind wandering may score higher on tests of creativity (Hotz, 2009; Tierney, 2010). Recent studies of the brain's idle states can potentially help researchers identify what brain regions are associated with the mind wandering state, and potentially have implications for the understanding of the role of incubation in the creative process.-Mind Wandering and Incubation –the cognitive neuroscience of creativity-keith sawyer-creativity research journal, vol 23, 2011

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10400419.2011.571191#.U-CMTijjI8F>
(August 5, 2014)

Many psychological theories of problem solving and reasoning have highlighted a role for implicit cognitive processes (e.g., Evans, 2006; Reber, 1989; Sun, 1994; Sun & Zhang 2004). For instance, implicit processes are often thought to generate hypotheses that are later explicitly tested (Evans, 2006). Also, similarity has been shown to affect reasoning through processes that are mostly implicit (Sun, 1994; Sun & Zhang, 2006). Yet most theories of problem solving have focused on explicit processes that gradually bring the problem solver closer to the solution in a deliberative way (Dorfman, Shames, & Kihlstrom, 1996). However, when an ill-defined or complex problem has to be solved (e.g., when the initial state or the goal state can lead to many different interpretations or when the solution paths are highly complex), the solution is often found by sudden insight (Pols, 2002; Reber, 1989; Schooler & Melcher, 1995; Schooler, Ohlsson, & Brooks, 1993), and regular problem-solving theories are for the most part unable to account for this apparent absence of deliberative strategy (Bowden, Jung-Beeman, Fleck, & Kounios, 2005).

Sebastien Hélie, Ron Sun

Incubation, Insight, and Creative Problem Solving: A Unified Theory and a Connectionist Model-

Hélie and Sun, Psychological Review, vol 117, nr 3, 2010 (August 5, 2014)

<http://alpha.tmit.bme.hu/speech/docs/education/IncubationInsightSun.pdf>

^{xxiv} selective perception

<https://explorable.com/selective-perception> 06/08/2014

There are two types of selective perception: perceptual vigilance and perceptual defense. The low level of selective perception, perceptual vigilance refers to the process in which the individual notices and recognizes the stimuli that may be significant to him at some degree. On the other hand, perceptual defense occurs in an attempt of a person to create a barrier between him and the stimuli so that he could protect himself from having awareness of it. More often than not, these stimuli are perceived to be threatening or unpleasant, such as obscene words and violent actions. This is the high level of selective perception wherein violent actions are not accurately seen or foul words are not precisely heard. Researchers say that people with high level perceptual defense have a strong "perceptual wall" which serves as the filtering mechanism, making them unable to perceive unwanted stimuli.

Selective perception, when done consciously, may lead to "seeing" things that the person wants to and disregarding the opposite of such. A classic research on selective perception included subjects from Princeton University and Dartmouth University. The respondents were asked to watch a film of a football game between Princeton and Dartmouth. The results showed that the Dartmouth subjects reported noticing almost twice as much infraction in the rules by the Princeton team as that which was perceived by the Princeton viewers regarding the Dartmouth team. In this case, the subjects experience selective perception relative to the opposing team

Since the early 21st century, many researchers performed experiments and studies to develop more knowledge regarding the concept of selective perception. In 1999, psychologists Daniel called "The Invisible Gorilla Test", which revealed that people can be concentrated on one stimulus or situation and become "blind" to an incoming or unexpected situation. This effect was termed as "inattention blindness". Watch the test [here](#).

^{xxv} <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/conceive> -04/05/2013

^{xxvi} The quote referred to is: *"Writing about art is like dancing about architecture"*. The original quote seems variously attributed, depending on which reference source one refers to, to Frank Zappa, Steve Martin, and to others.

^{xxvii} -From a letter from Voltaire to Frederick William, Prince of Prussia (28 November 1770)

^{xxviii} Wave function collapse In quantum mechanics- **wave function collapse** (also called **collapse of the state vector** or **reduction of the wave packet**) is the phenomenon in which a wave function—initially in a superposition of several different possible eigenstates—appears to reduce to a single one of those states after interaction with an observer.[1] It is the essence of measurement in quantum mechanics, and connects the wave function with classical observables like position and momentum. In classical terms, it is the reduction of all possible physical states to a single possibility which is measured by the observer- Wikipedia

xxix On the intuitive Understanding of non-locality as implied by quantum theory-D. Bohm and J. Hiley-1975-Foundations of Physics-vol 4, nr 1, p 4

xxx <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/outlier> 06/07/2013

xxxi Nicholas Nassim Taleb-The Black Swan, Random House, N.Y. 2007-ISBN 9781400063512

xxxii "The Ambiguity of Play, Brian Sutton Smith, 3d edition, Harvard University Press 2001

Publisher's preface: "Every child knows what it means to play, but the rest of us can merely speculate. Is it a kind of adaptation, teaching us skills, inducting us into certain communities? Is it power, pursued in games of prowess? Fate, deployed in games of chance? Daydreaming, enacted in art? Or is it just frivolity? Brian Sutton-Smith, a leading proponent of play theory, considers each possibility as it has been proposed, elaborated, and debated in disciplines from biology, psychology, and education to metaphysics, mathematics, and sociology.

Sutton-Smith focuses on play theories rooted in seven distinct "rhetorics"--the ancient discourses of Fate, Power, Communal Identity, and Frivolity and the modern discourses of Progress, the Imaginary, and the Self. In a sweeping analysis that moves from the question of play in child development to the implications of play for the Western work ethic, he explores the values, historical sources, and interests that have dictated the terms and forms of play put forth in each discourse's "objective" theory."

xxxiii On Creativity-David Bohm-2004 Routledge **ISBN** 0415336406

xxxiv Hesse, Herman, Das Glasperlenspiel, publ. Fretz u Wasmuth, Zurich 1943

xxxv "One's conduct of inquiry is largely shaped by one's answer to the question of whether there must always be a single admissible interpretation ... Must there be a single right interpretation for such cultural entities as works of art, literature, music, or other cultural phenomenon?"- Michael Krausz, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993, chap. 2.

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v. Gennep, A., Vizedom, M. B., Caffee, G. L., Introd, & Kimball, S. T. (1961). *The rites of passage* (17th ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press

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