

Expanded Box – Caring for an Expanded Conception of Art

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In the vast, variegated panorama of contemporary artistic experimentation there are various practices germinating that find it difficult to carve a niche for themselves in the official discourse and channels, despite the undeniable appeal they possess. The thing that makes them so precious, and as delicate as a flower growing under the snow, is not the fact that they use the “new media”, because everyone uses the media - and now they are anything but new. What makes them so special is the fact that like the aforementioned flower, they contain a new strength, and a new promise. The strength is that of those who go about their lives without a thought for the rules that govern the world they live in, and who create the conditions that enable them to live, successfully, in a radically altered context; the promise regards this radical transformation.

Everyone in the contemporary art field knows perfectly well that the context in which artists operate today was by and large established during the 20th century by Marcel Duchamp, and given structure and supported by a renewed museum and market system. According to this model, art no longer consists in the masterful implementation of a technique (painting, sculpture, music or writing) to present a world (the so-called “real” world, the unconscious world of the Surrealists, etc.). Anything can be art, if given a specific discourse and a specific conception, and if conveyed by means of a specific context. The aura of a work of art, which may be lost and found time and again, is now attributed by means of a precise process of consecration, which takes place on the market and in the museums. Without venturing into value judgements, it will suffice to consider the *duration* of this model to understand that what comes into being within it now is pure academicism. Murakami is to Duchamp and Warhol as Bouguereau is to Poussin and David. The gradual, unstoppable transition to the information society has radically challenged this model, nurtured in the bosom of the industrial society, but has not succeeded in destroying it altogether. It lives on as an act of faith, a consensual hallucination, a superstition boosted by the fear of what is to come. It survives, and continues to produce masterpieces, basking in the splendour which characterizes all periods of decadence.

The new world is there, just round the corner – or, to return to the cutesy flower metaphor - under the snow. It is in the art that exists outside the confines of the art world, rejecting the “contextual definition” of Duchampian origin which seems to persist, as Joline Blais and Jon Ippolito wrote in their book *At the Edge of Art*, purely by inertia; it is in the art that seeks out public space, media space, biotechnology labs and the world of information, communications and e-commerce as its operative environment; it is in the art that draws on other practices and other specific fields of knowledge, to a point where at times it has problems seeing itself (and being seen) as art; it is in the art that enthusiastically embraces technological reproducibility, the variability of data and the fluidity of information, abandoning - and radically challenging - the status of precious fetish, and it is in the art that is open to interaction with the spectator, that forges and develops relationships, that breaks down the wall which interrupts and conditions our mental and physical dialogue with a work.

This art exists, and it is at once strong and delicate, timid and aggressive, marginal and supreme. It is entrenched in the contradictions of all revolutions: it rebels against a world, but needs the cares of that world to resist. It has tried to escape, to open up new channels, but in the end it will succeed in changing our idea of art, defeating the academicism and opening the way to the future by means of dialogue and mediation. A future, which as the novelist William Gibson said, is already here, just badly distributed.

The historic function of Expanded Box, the last embodiment of an enduring attention Arco devoted to new media and languages, is precisely that of cultivating and redistributing the future, and supporting an expanded definition of art. In the last ten years, and through different programs, Arco

has done exactly that, hosting and offering market opportunities to a growing number of galleries that take up this challenge, at their own risk. When you see this compact block of eight galleries that offer their space to monographic projects - often decidedly ambitious - you could be forgiven for thinking that Expanded Box is one of those typical cultural initiatives increasingly staged on occasion of contemporary art fairs, with the idea of accompanying the dialogue and exchanges between galleries and collectors, but without attempting to compete with them. This is not the case. Expanded Box, today, is the place where Leo Castelli would go to sell and Alfred H. Barr would go to buy. I am aware that this might sound rhetorical, and possibly a little ingenuous, but I cannot find a non-rhetorical way to say that there, more than anywhere else, the seeds of an evolution are germinating. They rest, well protected, in the machines of Lawrence Malstaf and the interactive environmental installations by Pors & Rao; in the sound installations by Mañas and Moori and Thomson & Craighead; in the exploration of the dividing line between matter and the dematerialization of the media undertaken by the Korean Kim Jongku, and in John Gerrard's 3D animations. They reproduce at the speed of a virus in the works of Joan Leandre, who upends the hyperreal interfaces that filter our rapport with reality, while they lurk in UBERMORGEN.COM's media hacking activities, which uses low-tech tools to bring the giants of e-commerce to their knees.

For ten years Expanded Box has invested in this new current, the novelty of which, we should reiterate, lies not so much in the media that these works use, but in the culture they reflect and in the idea of art that they open the way for.