`Eingezäunte Perspektiven` Fotocollage, Mischtechnik, Stencils & Lack
dORNwITTCHEN 2016, essay by Dafne Moreno.
Resisting the Power of Curators and the Professional Art Class

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‘The entire life is a fairy tale’, said Snow White when I asked her to tell me about the nature of her work. After jumping out of the last tram station, and walking around those quiet streets surrounded by trees and little hills, I doubted I was still in Vienna. Following the instructions of Snow White, I crossed the little children playground, everything felt so small – I entered the romantic stone alley, then I walked up the hill through a narrow path surrounded by trees, and May leaves. I already anticipated the visit to Snow White and the seven dwarfs, and there she was welcoming me into her fairy tale, where the colours, the visuals, the light and the shadows speak for themselves, offering that ‘magic universe’ she spoke about.

dORNwITTCHEN is a mixed-art collective founded in 2014 in Zürich. Their main work fields are live-visuals, projection art and technical structure, photo- and videography, graphic and design and last, but not least music. Their concept is to intertwine both aspects, music and visuals, to seamlessly form an integral body. Through sound reactive visuals, the music interacts on the one hand with the projections in real time and with live mixed – self-filmed - videos on the other hand. Analog technology is thereby in constant touch with the digital one and successively developed by the team. Diascopes, LED screens, video projectors, DMX controlled mirror projectors (Dynamic Projection Institute Vienna), and even tube TVs are utilised. Szymon Olszowiski is ‘der Dorn’ (thorn) referring the fairy tale of the Grimm’s brothers ‘Dornröschen’ (Sleeping Beauty), and Claudia Virginia Dimoiu is Snow White; this was how dORNwITTCHEN emerged.

The artwork ‘Eingezäunte Perspektiven’ (Fenced Perspectives) in the context of the exhibition Artists’ Waste, Wasted Artists, suggests questions such as: ‘Why is this waste?’, ‘Is the picture itself waste?’ or ‘Are the artists themselves wasted?’. What if we take the picture out of its context (the gallery) and look carefully? What does it suggest? Does its removal from the gallery change the value of the work? Which role does nature play in the picture? Why are the mannequins there and not anywhere else? What does it make us feel? To be captured? Limited? Spiritual or mentally trapped? Or is it being secured, protected, sheltered? Protected from what? If we are able to answer those questions to ourselves, without requiring context, explanation, let’s say a theory that supports the art work, do we still need that someone validates the piece so we can believe that it is art? And more importantly: Can only experts such as curators, artists, collectors, professors, and people who are ‘intellectually superior’ tell us what is art and what is waste? Are we, audiences, disabled to criticise art and at the same time to define it?

This essay will analyse briefly the status quo of art presented in museums around the world, in galleries and collections, specifically referring to conceptual art like ready-mades, one of the art styles popular in contemporary art nowadays and accompanied by intellectual theory while often lacking in artistic attributes. The supporters (curators, gallerists, museums, collectors) of, according to Lésper so called, ‘fake artists’, who have the power to convert anything into art, and whose economic interests have deprived...
audiences of criticizing the VIP art by means of elaborated curatorial slang, thus making people unable to pass a judgement in respect to the art they are viewing, and for instance designate it as waste (Lésper 2015). By exploring the artwork ‘Eingezäunte Perspektiven’, labelled as waste within the exposition, I will show that through the exercise of reflection and criticism of certain works exhibited in such places, the audience can re-appropriate the definition of art.

Today, the art scene is dominated by VIP art, as Avelina Lésper calls it. This does not only refer sarcastically to the so called Very Important Person, but also to Video - Installation - Performance and the tendency to use space in galleries and museums for ‘fake art’. As she writes, ‘this fake art, called contemporary, requires the walls of the museum, of the institution and its context in order to exist as an art piece in the eyes of the people’ (Lésper 2015). She argues that usually, the VIP artwork does not sustain itself aesthetically, instead, it is overshadowed and derives its meaning from words while obeying economic interests and requiring curatorial work in order to exist.

Museums as Tate Modern for example harbour the installation Soul City, a pyramid of oranges by the artist Roelof Louw. This pyramid is created by using 5800 oranges and raises questions about ephemerality, time and decay. Visitors are invited to take an orange and, as a result, the piece literally dematerializes and changes through visitors’ participation. Maurizio Cattelan sold the piece America, a working toilet cast made of gold that has been installed in the New York Guggenheim and the curator Nancy Spector wrote about it for the catalogue that the visitors have had ‘unprecedented access to something of unquestionable value’. Visitors are allowed to use the golden toilet in privacy while thinking of America. Mexican Contemporary Art Museum MUAC (Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo) acquired for their collections in 2015 La Promesa, an installation made out of 42 tons of rubble of an abandoned house from Ciudad Juárez by the artist Teresa Margolles.

The great museums of the world harbour work of extraordinary characteristics, whose monetary value is stratospheric even if it is waste like rubble, oranges or self-brought waste deposited by any person. Such ready-mades have the fragility of an empty plastic bottle, easy to topple. Due to its lack of content, the ‘artwork’ does not communicate anything substantial, both aesthetically and in terms of content, without the text that legitimizes it. Or, maybe the piece America communicates something that obvious that it is not even necessary. However, it works, a golden toilet apparently brings crowds to the museum. If the audience rejects such a work, or questions why it is occupying the museum rooms, or does not like it, then it is the public that is ignorant. The audience is out of commission to critique what only the ones with interest behind it can see – the way of making talent ‘invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office or was unusually stupid’ as the tale of the Emperor’s new clothes. This illustrates what Hans Abbing mentioned in his book Why Are Artists Poor?

‘People in higher positions have a de facto larger say in the definition of art than people in lower positions (thesis 4). Whether they are aware of it or not, people in higher positions appropriate the definition of art’ (Abbing 2002, 24). Museums and art galleries have the ability to turn waste into art with the magic touch of the discourse and rhetoric of curators behind it, those who are there to explain to us what art is. Of course, not in
all cases, there are for sure many pieces that are carefully curated. However, these examples were not the result of an exhaustive search, but the first I found navigating online in the current exhibitions and last acquisitions of these museums in three countries, and there are hundreds of works like that: e.g. Wilfredo Prieto’s glass half full valued at 20,000 euros (really just that, and can be topped up by the owner once it evaporates), the empty shoe box by Gabriel Orozco exhibited in Venice Biennale in 1993, and so on.

There is an arrogant posture of these actors, such as curators, who underestimate the audience. As Kuldova points out in the specific case of the exhibition Spectacular Capitalism: Fashion India, which she curated, the advice she received from designers and the educators in the exhibition department was that the information that accompanies the objects should be easy to swallow, should turn complex ideas into simplified entertainment thus ending up underestimating the audience who are implicitly labelled as superficial or suffering of limited attention span (Kuldova 2014). What is happening in the Contemporary art spaces is a similar, only in reverse: showing simplified entertainment backed up by complex ideas. In both cases, the audiences are equally infantilized, something, I believe, we should resist. Objects without visible aesthetic qualities that provoke in the spectator an immediate and short emotion that expires once he or she leaves the exhibition space. Furthermore, I argue that it is disrespectful to think of the audience of contemporary art that they are the ones who are not able to understand the artwork because of their own ignorance, propagating the idea that they lack the power to define art and leaving this to the people in higher spheres who can appropriate the definition of art (Abbing 2002) in order to protect the interests of the market, as Tereza Kuldova has also observed: ‘Even in the case of fashion exhibitions, be they at art, fashion or ethnographic museums, we see the power of the interests of the market, the industry, the fashion designers, the outsourced exhibition designers and design companies, and of the increasingly influential curators’ (Kuldova 2014, 333).

**Why is this Waste?**

Dornwittchen conceptualizes their ‘magical universe’ through their own language: mixed visual arts like photography, projections and video. They present fantasies, dreams and emotions of an alternative world in which the colours, the lighting, shadows and composition of the image map out the unknown immaterial world and its landscapes in a pursuit to achieve empathy on the side of the observer. Snow White illustrated in an interview an example about the aim of her work, a particular moment at the exhibition in the Alte Post during the ‘Take Festival for Independent Art & Fashion’ celebrated in Vienna in April 2017, where Dornwittchen participated with the exhibition The beast in the beauty, an audio video experience.

‘There was one moment that touched Szymon and me a lot when an old man came inside our The beast in the beauty exhibition, and after looking at all the pictures and spending some time there, he came to us and asked if we were the artists, the creators. As we confirmed, he explained to us that from the moment he made the first step in our exhibition, he felt a very positive energy. He said, he was walking about 3 hours through the Alte Post and watching the other artworks, and he had the feeling that all the art he has seen was showing our world going down or else, the end of the world, a lot of black, depression and sadness he could see in the exposed art. From the moment he stepped
out the exhibition, he suddenly had this positive vibe and felt that even if the end of the
world is near, there is still a lot of hope that something can be changed and even if the
world will go under, the people will die happily, smiling, enjoying the beautiful colours of
their life. This is one of the main feelings I want to submit through my work: the world
is beautiful with its colours, we are beautiful people, all of us, no matter where we are,
all the colours of life can fill up our heart with the strongest emotions we can imagine,
we just have to be open to receive love and beauty.’

One of the questions above, pertaining to the artwork *Eingezäunte Perspektiven* was the
topic why this is waste, or better explained, why this is part of the selected material for
the exhibition *Artists’ Waste, Wasted Artists*. The photo was part of the series ‘Magic
Universe’ which in 2014 won the 2nd price at the Wiener Fotomarathon and made the
first place in the single category themes. For each predefined theme, the artists had a
time slot of one hour to take a photo, in order to fulfil the competitions’ rules - for that,
as well for the photo *Eingezäunt*. In 2016, dORNwITTCHEN was invited to make an
exhibition in the hotel gallery of Ruby Marie Hotel in Vienna. For that exhibition called
*Oben/Unten* it was planned to exhibit *Eingezäunt*, and in the process of pasting the photo
to the frame, some bubbles of air were trapped in between. This made the piece
unsuitable to being exhibited. Hence the artists themselves converted the piece into
waste. But as they usually recycle their materials, they knew how to give the picture a
new meaning by collaging their ideas into a new ‘trapped perspective’.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary art scene can be very tough; it is a difficult space where many fight for
survival. We have reflected on how the art is being appropriated by certain people or
professions that think themselves as superior, those ‘who love the new fine fabrics of the
emperor’, only to not to show others that they do not see art at all and to admit its
‘stupidity’. One way to work against the pedestrian intentions of these elites, who want
us to believe in their imaginary fabrics, is to exercise our critique ourselves, to pose those
questions about what we have in front of us, with a little bit of the attitude of a child
that observes and examines the evident.

Or as Lésper puts it, ‘if art needs an intermediary to explain what an artwork is, and
what were the intentions of the artist, what the artist tried to say with his or her work,
then you are not standing in front of art, because art does not need an intermediary,
instead, you are in front of an object that is a product of the academic rhetoric and the
market. Artwork says everything by itself, and there will never be words that overshadow
it’ (Lésper 2015). If you are told either that a piece is art or waste, rethink it twice – do
not let curators, museums, galleries, art specialists, collectors tell you what to believe, but
let your senses and your critical intellect to tell you.

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Amsterdam University Press.


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