

Some Observations of Recent Art through tART By Heng-Gil Han

The present exhibition *Collectivity: Art-making in a Collective* attempts to measure various implications of collectivity or collective action in today's visual art field by looking at the tArt Collective. The exhibition, by no means, claims to provide a whole picture of collective actions that are currently prevailing.

Collective artist groups and collaborative endeavors are proliferating in present art. This phenomenon draws a parallel to the increasing awareness of social networking and the emphasis on the value of community building. As web-based funding strategies prove the effectiveness of crowd funding (New York Times, March 16, 2012 and this exhibition as well), building alliance or being a part of a small and local action is valued in our shared social consciousness.

Collective movements are not a new phenomenon. There have been collective art groups or movements in the 1960s and the 1970s. CoLab, Fashion Moda, and The Heresies Collective are only a few examples among many. The past collectives were organized and structured as they often ended up with establishing a non-profit status. They had a certain "mission" that prescribed the framework of their actions. Their actions were limited and not totally free—in other words, slightly repressive one way or the other—while they were meant to be a means of fighting for total liberty (anarchism) and resisting repressive system of political structure (Cold War) or oppressive belief system dominating the society and culture back then (such as racial and gender-based oppression).

Unlike past ones, today's collective endeavors are not ideology-driven. In other words, today's collective actions are not an ideological struggle. They do not claim to paint a big picture of the universe. Instead, they focus on local conditions and attempts to produce small effects. Today's collective actions indicate that phrases such as "social change" or "shifting community" are delusional although they often use those terms. What they actually do is to secure individual freedoms, respecting cultural, social, and sexual differences of individuals.

What emerges from these small collective actions is the temporary state of organic unity rather than a permanent security of mathematical unity. The organic unity is found in the constellation of different parts making up a whole by being connected together. The mathematical unity is found in the same element repeating ad infinitum (for example, soldiers in uniform). One accomplishes a small success and works for another one to happen. This clearly differs from the accumulative way of linear thinking in which a big long-term goal is set prior to all small steps that are controlled by the big scheme as

a mathematical unit, which may get repressive. Process art taught us this and how the organic unity works.

The tART Collective is quite loose in their group structure and goals. Their actions are often spontaneous, quick, and immediate as they are done with a short-term planning with no grand narrative or long-term objective. tART's collective actions are resilient and possess sophisticated adaptability. They change as situations change. Their network (or the configuration of their network) is constantly on the move. The present exhibition of the tART Collective presents only one moment of its many faces and reports the changing notion of an art collective.