

CINERGY®
FOUNDATION Presents

An Active Life

September 8th - October 31st, 2000



Pauline Stella Sanchez
*Items for that...shine place 9...with The Red Drawings,
those pink ones inside the blue balls.*
1999, Wood, ink jet drawings



Jonathan Borofsky
Feel Free to Play
1980/2000 Ping pong table



Above: Stephen Shackleford
Funkionslustcar
2000



Right: Marcel Duchamp
Unknown object added by Walter Arensberg.
A Bruit Secret
1916 (1964 Edition), twine, brass.

Conviviality: Morphing Monuments into Events

An Active Life explores participatory art, an increasingly popular aesthetic practice that extends Marcel Duchamp's claim that the spectator completes the work of art. Duchamp meant that the spectator contributes to the creative act by deciphering and interpreting what he called the work's "inner qualifications," but here the spectator is encouraged to do more than contemplate an artwork's beauty or judge its aesthetic significance. Participatory works anticipate unpredictable opportunities. By activating these works or watching others play, engaged spectators become the subject of the work. What's more, charged museum visits create lasting memories, whether from the vantage of the spectator or participant, that are effectively virtual portraits.

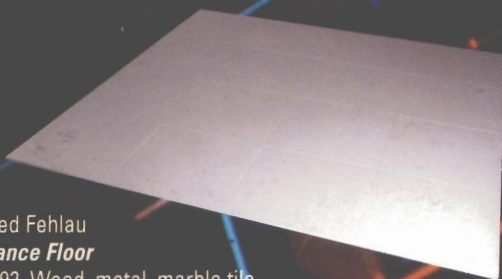
In 1916, Duchamp invited patron Walter Arensberg to hide a small object inside a ball of twine sandwiched between two square brass plates and named it *A Bruit Secret* (With Hidden Noise). Arensberg quite literally completed the work, but he also aided the creation of the first interactive work of art. As *A Bruit Secret* has resided in the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1954, spectators can only imagine shaking the object. The title's punch line has acquired new urgency, because the noise is now indeed hidden: the museum has muted it.

Regarding interactive Brazilian works from the early 1960s, Critic Ricardo Basbaum summarized the artist's attitude toward the spectator as "YOU willbecoME." Since the late 1950s, artist Allan Kaprow has encouraged "happenings" that blurred boundaries between life and art, and has sought to fuse art and audience. More and more, spectators find everyday activities like kicking balls or driving golf carts in museums. Why are artists seeking out events more often associated with recreation, amusement parks or dance clubs? Does simply displaying such ordinary activities in a museum make them worthy of being considered art? Must one try them out to gain the full art experience? What if they seem comparatively banal, yet they trigger memories of related past experiences?

Touch

Given the amount of visual information distributed these days, one could easily argue that viewing a painting, video or photograph, whether in a magazine, on television or in a museum, places visual art on par with recreational activities. One could also make a connection between the experience of everyday events and Pop Art's references to recognizable celebrities, newspaper stories, logos, household objects, tools and cartoons. One generally appreciates a particular work of art because one relates to its content or the work inspires curiosity. In either of these cases, the spectator attempts to get inside the work. With *An Active Life*, the -getting inside- encompasses both physical and mental demands.

One distinction between a work of art and an ordinary thing is that a work of art inspires spectators' fantasies, even if it is "broken." The number of damaged archaeological artifacts and sculptures displayed in museums,



Fred Fehlau
Dance Floor
1992, Wood, metal, marble tile.

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Listen

Play



Stephen Shackelford
Underdrive
2000



Nancy Evans
Arrangement Games
1997, Stained burlap, glazed ceramic.



Martin Kersels
Objects of the Dealer
1995 Office Equipment, speakers.

Background: Hiro Yamagata
Element-A Laser Installation
1997, Detail.



Left: Jennifer Moon
Facility
1997/2000, Detail.



Right: Ingrid Erickson
Goal - Score
1997, Charcoal, odd balls.



Richard Wearn
71" x 51" x 42"
1999, Plastic, air.



Carsten Höller
Flugapparat (Flying Machine)
1996, Harness.

Partic



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like the armless Venus de Milo, exemplifies this point. So, the pitcher need not hold water – Duchamp's piece need not rattle, so long as the spectator can imagine what using it or viewing it anew would be like. Fluxus kits, most of Joseph Cornell's boxes, and dozens of rearrangeable works were meant to be played with, yet they, too, lie dormant in museums. By inviting participation, *An Active Life* presents works as they were designed.

Artists tend to make things that are otherwise absent from the world, or at least, absent from the world of art. Many of the works in *An Active Life* were specifically created to subvert the "Look, but don't touch" imperative of museums. Artists who produce works that involve the spectator challenge both the idea of museum treasures (or monuments) and the authoritarian nature of most museums. Museums that dare to exhibit participatory art are allies in such a critique. Such pleasure-seeking artists want to transform museums into social spaces that connect strangers and foster joyful memories.

Obviously, artists don't have the resources to compete with King's Island, the Beach or Eden Park, but they can still investigate these concerns. The works in *An Active Life* are innovative, even though they may recall related counterpoints. In 1984, Jonathan Borofsky disrupted expectations when he welcomed viewers to play ping pong in the middle of his retrospective at the same museum that hides Duchamp's noise. With *Goal-Score*, one kicks a ball against Ingrid Erickson's charcoal wall drawing of a soccer net, which prints the net pattern on a white wall and "records the score." By placing hundreds of glazed porcelain components from Nancy Evans' *Arrangement Games* on tray tables or by moving brass objects around *Big Screen*, players compose still lifes. Fred Fehlau's autonomous dance floor and canvas maze, with two entrances and no exit, affirm the beauty of solitary experiences.

Carsten Höller's *Flugapparat* (Flying Machine) enables people to fly around the CAC's remarkable dome. Martin Kersels' *Objects of the Dealer* invites viewers to conduct a choir of musical office supplies. Jennifer Moon's *Facility* efficiently compacts dozens of useful physical and intellectual activities into a small arena. Pauline Stella Sanchez's podium features an elaborately designed box housing hand-made ink drawings of the alphabet that the viewer must handle to experience. Stephen Shackelford's souped-up go-carts enable visitors to sport wheels or lounge while traveling virtually. Richard Wearn's 71" x 51" x 42", whose scale mimics the internal cubic capacity of 100 Donald Judd boxes, seats several people comfortably. Using state-of-the-art technology, Hiro Yamagata's laser installation generates swirling images that provoke diverse emotional states.

These self-critical works continue 20th Century avant-garde protests against the separation between art and life. Their active components enliven the human condition, engender public engagement and serve as institutional critiques. These works *embody* issues, rather than *discuss* them; participatory works hardly need a museum to be art. Rather, the museum needs their generosity to remain artful. Such works are gifts, availing viewers of memorable events and inspiring exchanges among participants and spectators alike.

Sue Spaid
Curator

Experience

Hiro Yamagata
1997, Detail
Element-A Laser Installation