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Collaboration: An Artists' Dialogue

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Collaboration: An Artists' Dialogue

Pat Sanders on Feb 21 2002

discourse

Pat Sanders invites collaborating artists to participate in a discourse about the types and realities of collaboration, both good and bad.

When I first thought about writing something for SWITCH on the subject of artists' collaboration, I planned to interview artists I know who have collaborated in a variety of ways in recent years. This changed when I decided to take advantage of computer technology as a way to allow artists to speak for themselves and to expand the circle of voices beyond those I know. It seems more consistent with the spirit of collaboration to write an article that is truly collaborative and not just an expression of a single point of view.

I invite you to share your experiences as collaborators so that others may learn from them. Whoever has something to say on the subject of collaboration is invited to join the conversation below. Feel free to answer any or all of the posted questions, respond to answers or post a new question to start a new thread in our discussion.

The purpose of this dialogue is to discover the nature of artists' collaborations today. The kind of collaborations that exist today are something new in the annals of art history. True, there is a long history of artists collaborating, but mainly has been of the hierarchical, master-assistants variety. It's also true that in past centuries we find the collaboration of specialists--artists on a more equal footing--co-producing paintings--one does the landscape, the other painting the figures or animals, for example--and such collaborations of experts--say one in sculpture, the other in music--continue today, although this is but one of many different modes. And, of course, we know that since antiquity teams of artists collaborated in the production of massive royal projects, but this is hardly what we have in mind when we speak of collaboration today.

Beginning roughly in the 1960s, there was a shift in artistic conscious, a movement towards a collaborative model and away from the hyper-individualistic, artist-genius model that had prevailed in modern Western art. This new consciousness can be seen as part of the broader postmodern shift away from modernist values. We can see it beginning in the 60s with happenings and other early performance art, the activities of groups like Fluxus, the promotion of collaboration between artists and technologists by EAT, and the artist-architect collaborative Ant Farm, to name but a few. Other well-known collaborations grew out of 60s radicalism, for example, the Feminist Art Workers, the Guerrilla Girls, the Border Art Workshop and Group Material, among others. [1]

By the end of the 20th century, collaborations had proliferated, with artists working with other artists or with specialists in other fields or even with lay individuals who are neither artists nor specialists. It is the aspiration of this dialogue that a range of many types of collaboration as well as the realities of collaboration (positive and negative) will be revealed.

[1] This is, of course, not intended to be an exhaustive list. Many more examples of

collaborations can be found in Suzanne Lacy, ed. Mapping the Terrain. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995. See especially the Compedium by Susan Leibovitz Steinman.



::CrossReference

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