

Collaborations in Modern and Postmodern Visual Art:

An Overview

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These essays, given at the conference “Collaborations in Modern and Postmodern Visual Art,” have been organised along roughly chronological lines according to the subject matter, in order to chart the development in both the practice and theorisation of the nature of collaborative artistic partnerships.

Several of the papers given at the conference, including the keynote address by Ken Friedman, were given by leading artists about their own collaborative practice. This section of the conference is represented by the personal and illustrated accounts of their work by the collaborative pairs Lyndell Brown and Charles Green and Kate Daw and Stewart Russell. Brown and Green explain their practice with photography and painting, elaborating on the ways they see themselves as operating as one artist, a “third hand” in Green’s well-known theorisation of the collaborative process. They discuss the methods and processes they use, illustrating these with recent work that emerged from a period as Australian Official War Artists in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf in 2007. Daw and Russell illustrate their interest in “locating and resurrecting forgotten histories” by describing a current project which emerged from the inaugural Basil Sellers Fellowship Award, which they won in 2009. Their work *Two Homes* engages with the relationship between Indigenous people and Australian football through a

reciprocal mapping of the cultural spaces of the M.C.G. and the Yuendumu desert.

The next section examines the work of modernist artists, the collaborative aspect of whose work has been undervalued, sometimes even unrecognised, by the canon of art history. Roberta Crisci-Richardson looks at the socio-political implications of Edgar Degas' work with the Impressionists and with printmakers in late nineteenth-century France. She sees these collaborations as an expression of Degas' political belief in "social force" paired with individualism. Janine Burke addresses the question of unacknowledged artistic collaboration by asking: "How did Claude Monet, an old man with poor eyesight and arthritis, manage to complete his massive final works, the *Grandes Décorations*?" Burke's answer meticulously details Monet's close relationship with his stepdaughter and daughter-in-law, Blanche Hoschedé-Monet, re-evaluating the extent of her artistic and personal involvement in the production of these enormously important works.

Carina Nandlal provides another example of an important collaboration that has long been ignored: that between Pablo Picasso and Igor Stravinsky. She argues that the work produced during their time with Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* between 1917-1919, which culminated in *Ragtime* (1919), represents an example of unified collaborative practice, enabling each to capture the other's medium within his own. Finally in this section, Justine Grace examines the little-known collaborations of Gino Severini with the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, the Milanese artist Anton Luigi Gajoni and a group of Roman mosaicists, in the development of what Severini saw as a "modern sacred art." The paper argues that despite Severini's reticence about collective enterprises, these collaborations nonetheless represent an ideological challenge to the "fragmentary individualism" of modernist art.

In the post-war period, collaboration as both a political and aesthetic endeavour became more fully embraced. Two papers consider the effects of the milieu that emerged from the New York school in the 1950s and 1960s. Eduardo de la Fuente examines the role of social networking within creative practice, focusing on the communal patterns of interaction which emerged among the Abstract Expressionists and Pop Artists, especially the "scene" that developed around Andy Warhol's Factory and the nightclub Studio 54. While de la Fuente acknowledges that such forms of social contact may well provide stimulus to creative output, he nonetheless challenges the idea that there is a necessary correlation between networking and artistic production *per se*.

Peter Murphy, on the other hand, attempts to theorise the relationship between collaboration and creativity by examining the works of Jasper

Johns. In this nuanced argument, Murphy articulates the fine balances and tensions that exist between the ego-driven individuality of the creative process and the collaborations which inform and underpin it, finding in collaboration a constructive mirroring and promise of creativity. Jacqueline Drinkall opens up the discussion of collaboration in her detailed consideration of the nexus between telepathic practice and artistic collaboration. Beginning with the Fluxus group, she looks at the various ways that subjectivity can be re-modelled through telepathic encounters, not only in artist-to-artist scenarios, but also with non-human collaborators, such as animals and virtual avatars.

The next group of articles shifts the focus away from America. Susan Rothnie's paper looks at the emergence of organisational collectivism in Australian art movements in the 1970s. Working from Fredric Jameson's discussions of collectivism, Rothnie identifies several key movements and socio-cultural trends, including Conceptualism, Feminism and the greater promotion of Indigenous art, as key factors in the pursuit of new cultural paradigms for Australian art during this important transitional period. Anne Marsh focuses particularly on Australian Performance Art collaborations since the 1970s in order to explore what she terms "the borders of collaboration." The paper raises critical questions about the relationship between performance – an inherently ephemeral art form – audience participation, and the documentation of such events. Marsh argues that, in giving the art form materiality, and hence bringing it into being, both participation in and documentation of performance events suggest new models for the theorisation of collaboration.

Leslie Morgan looks at a different form of cooperative endeavour by tracing the alliances which emerged within the Black Art Movement in Britain. His account of the political and cultural terrain of British art in the 1980s is interlaced with his own personal narrative of involvement. Despite some success in redefining British modernism, promoting new artists and shifting the categories of identity away from fixed and essentialist notions, Morgan argues that ultimately black art became a victim of the de-politicising processes of postmodernism.

It is, perhaps, too easy in a volume such as this one simply to valorise the process of collaboration. However, the next group of essays invites us to consider, in different ways, some of the ethical, political and practical problems of working with others. In an engaging and amusing piece, Adrian Martin focuses on collaboration gone wrong. He argues that collaboration is rarely a seamless fusion of two artistic minds, or a utopian overcoming of egos. At its best he sees it as a complex negotiation and compromise, a "*dispositif*," and an ambiguous process of considerable "artistic tension." In

examining the collaborative efforts of musician John Cale and his various interlocutors, and the filmmakers Michelangelo Antonioni and Wim Wenders, he finds fraught examples of partnerships that have frustrated at least one of the parties involved. From a very different perspective, Andrew Dearman examines the ethical problems that occur when an artist employs found family photographs of the dead in a new artwork which is intended for an entirely different audience to that of the original. The paper explores the “complex thread of agencies” that are performed through such an appropriation, arguing that ultimately the use of objects such as old photographs of deceased people can re-activate the agency of the original maker “by proxy.”

Clare Loporati documents the processes and findings of an empirical research project, which produced a suite of contemporary public artworks as part of Australia’s contribution to the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010, and monitored both the physical and virtual public engagement with these. Her paper includes an honest assessment of the difficulties of collaborating across spaces of cultural difference; however, like Marsh, her conclusions include the important identification of the emergence of a new and expanded creative discourse of collaboration focused upon the blending of authorship between artist and audience.

Finally, we end with a paper that discusses in explicit terms what the other essays in this volume engage with implicitly: the negotiation between artist and critic. Ann Schilo and Anna Sabadini interrogate the nature of critical collaboration through their lyrical and poetic rendering of the dialogue between artist/creator and viewer/theorist. Using Joanne Zylinska’s notion of “impossible descriptions,” and working from an ethical feminist basis, they work to bridge the separation between art and theory, focusing on the materiality of both painting and writing.

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