

# Art as Muddiness

Art is

a way of being in the world.  
a way of acting.  
a way of doing what needs to be done.

You don't need to know you are making art for it to happen.

Art is

not made by artists, curators or institutions.  
happening somewhere else. Far away from Fine Art colleges,  
museums or galleries.

Art occurs all around us, everywhere, all the time.  
Art doesn't need artists, curators or institutions. We need Art.

Art is

not the art market.  
not the art object.  
not inside a museum or gallery.  
not a question of framework.

Museums and galleries are places for visibility, production and discussion.  
Museums and galleries are not for adding value, meaning or justifying.

Art is

freedom of action.  
invading territories and challenging boundaries.  
that feeling you get when you see something that challenges you  
and you don't really know what to do with it.

All art is political because embracing freedom of action is a political act.

Art is embracing the muddiness.

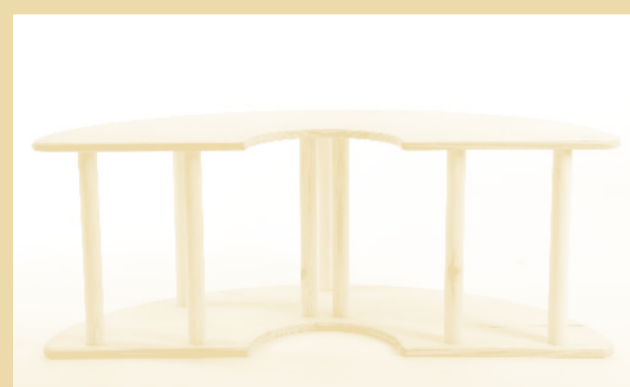
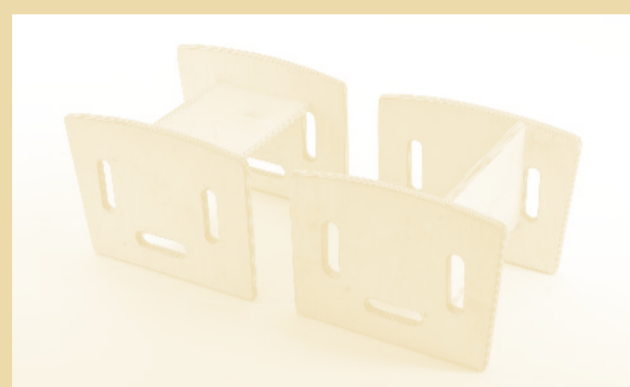
# Nursery Project

The Nursery Project started because of the decision by the University of the Arts London to close its Day Nursery at the London College of Communication. I have a 2 year old son who had started on the nursery in October of 2009 which made me personally involved with the issue from the beginning.

On March 26 we received a letter announcing the start of a Consultation process for the closure of the nursery. Although we had a meeting with Rob Imeson (Dean of Students) and Julia Yates (Assistant Director of Students Services) it was made very clear that we were not part of the consultation process and that the chances of the nursery remaining open were slim. We joined the strike action at UAL on the 27 of May by having a picnic along with the UAL University and Colleges Union at LCC. After further discussions and the protest, it became clear nothing could be done to change UAL's position on the matter and on July 30, the nursery was closed. This resulted in 8 members of staff to be made redundant and 22 parents to have to look for childcare alternatives with a very small timeframe.

In my case I put Oscar in 7 waiting lists for nurseries near my residency, and he was only accepted in one of them. Other student and staff parents faced the same challenges, and some of them were not as lucky as me.

This project is an attempt to make the issues we faced



visible in a different environment, and also to register them in the history of UAL. It involves creating a setting during the final MA Show at the Chelsea college of Arts and Design that will re-unite the parents and children of the LCC nursery. This room will be comprised of a "Utopic Nursery", an area for the children with furniture, toys, books and events developed specially for this occasion. This will hopefully not only entertain the children but enable viewers to understand the complex relations that bonded these children together. The "Parents Area" will have a sitting area with an archival book about the experiences of this past year, to which they can add comments and content as well. It is a final attempt to give the parents a voice since our feeling during this whole process was constantly one of impotence. The final version of the book will be donated to the Chelsea College library.

The nursery was started in the 90's by a group of mothers and it allowed a number of staff and students to progress in a type of environment that would have been impenetrable for them without it. It was symbolic as a successful attempt to bring gender equality to UAL. On the other hand we are living through a period of closures and redundancies that has been accepted as the only way forward. It is important to keep bringing up the effect these decisions have on individuals and communities, and to reflect on the impacts they will have on society as a whole.

# Warike and La Araña

Warike was a store / gallery in Lima, Peru. It began in 1979, when I was a few months old and my mom could start her own projects again. She started it with Hernando Suarez and a third partner who didn't remain involved for long. At the beginning it was just a small room at the ground floor of a commercial building. My mother had finished her degree in architecture and bought a set of wood tools from a craftsman. Hernando had always loved art and design, his father was the director of the Escuela de Bellas Artes de Lima. They were going to design, construct and sell modular furniture in the 2 X 3 metres space they rented. Their first action was to tear up the wall between the shop and the street and built up a display window. Then they ran out of money. But they started putting on display all the things that they were going to make, and other things that they thought were inspiring and that they may copy. People started making orders. Hernando slept in the shop under the display window. Some friends started leaving work in consignment, jewellery, ceramics, artisan's craft they re-sold, and then my mom started buying baskets from the artisan's market on the other side of town. The store became very fashionable and started doing really well. They rented a lot of other rooms and ended with the whole ground floor plus a room upstairs for art shows. They became very fashionable, lent pieces for movies and soap operas. For the first time peruvian crafts were not only for tourists but could occupy Lima's posh homes. And with that money they started La Araña.

La Araña was a magical place. The closest thing we had to place like the Chelsea Hotel in New York. They rented this huge house, painted the exterior all in white and build a gigantic black spider that seemed to be looming over the top floor. The roles were clear: Warike sold, La Araña produced. That meant not only that the rooms of the house were filled with wood and ceramic workshops, photographic studios and etc. There was always space for people that needed a setting to create things. As with all houses in Lima, La Araña had a flat roof. On that roof they had a small studio built with straw for drying baskets (it almost makes Health and Safety sense), but that room grew and grew and became a place for living. Artisans that brought work from all over the country and needed a place to stay, kids whose decision to become an artist hadn't been well accepted by their parents, designers who weren't selling enough work to support themselves. There was always a place for them there.

If the relation between handicrafts, design and art is still confusing and polemical today, we can only imagine how revolutionary these spaces were back then. Not only they were selling and exhibiting everything on the same level, they were building a community in which all these people were living together. There was no High X Low, Art X Design, Popular X Sophisticated, Copy X Originals.

It was simply about people producing.

I'm currently working on a book to document the ten years in which this spaces operated. For more information about the project, please e-mail:

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# Art as Muddiness

For quite a long time now we have lived under the assumption that art is defined by a framework. Anything can become art as long as someone decides to frame it as art. A curator, an artist, a museum, an art institution, they all happily share this capacity to transform a glass of water (Craig-Martin 1973) into Art. That's what we learn to do in art colleges. Art is completely autonomous. Nothing is inherent to it, context is everything.

But what if we got it completely wrong? What if art is happening everyday all around us and although we interact with it, we don't see it as art because it hasn't been framed for us? Does it function differently? Have we become so addicted to labels that we don't see the territory anymore? I am going to say the unthinkable: What if art doesn't need a framework? What if art is happening outside, in the real world, without us? What if art doesn't need us? What if art has an inherent quality? A set of properties that can be defined and discussed.

I'll like to propose that we are on the verge of a revolution. The most exciting moment in decades. Enclosed in MAs and Artist's Spaces, alternating residencies with public space interventions, we artists, are to busy formatting our work for museums and galleries to take notice of what is really happening around us. Institutional art is dead, any visit to a museum of gallery will prove you that. Contemporary art museums and galleries are full of corpses that are of no interest to anyone that is not involved in the profitable market that surrounds them. Art students, artists, collectors, curators, those are the people who run to private views and justify anything with their discourses. But this type of art does nothing. Like a comatose patient, it lays still while each member of the family translates a different final wish. But there is nothing there to translate from, only hopeful projections that mean that an object value could go from nothing to thousands only through a small comment by the right person. We are all partners in the delusion. We want our work to

accommodate a text that could mean we don't need to find a part time job, we can be real artists.

What is the alternative to this understanding of art? What are the functions of art that justify its existence in the world, world in its largest meaning, instead of simply the art market? Can art have a social meaning? Until the invention of photography art had an easy ride, reproduction was a clear function to define and to defend. After photography art turned into itself, art for art's sake, a meta-linguistic exploration of mediums and styles that seemed destined to last forever. The autonomy of art was embraced and cherished. Art didn't do anything, it didn't have a function, it shouldn't have a function. That's a joke that I constantly hear around my non-artist friends: "It has no function, so it must be art". But let's, even if just while reading this essay, embrace the possibility that art can have a function. What would it be? And that is my proposition: to think of art as the last place of freedom, the freedom of muddiness. I'll explain. We live in a society obsessed with labels, catalogations, methodologies and proper ways of doing and thinking in general. Everything is quickly defined, then incorporated into academia or the corporate environment. Only a couple of years ago you had teenagers with innumerable interests doing video-games. Today several universities have a BA on game developing, everyone of them with all of the the same standards and expectations. Thirty years ago we mourned our dead, now we get depressed and have to take medicines to deal with the problem. I'm here writing an essay for an MA that will allow me to officially become a fine artist. This will prepare me to do a Ph. D. and fight for the rights of Fine Art to be equal to all the other subjects in academia. But art is not equal to the other areas knowledge, and that is what makes it special, and valuable in a social sense.

We constantly profess that we can do anything and call it art (that is still one of the biggest complaints against

contemporary art in some circles). And you will hear many artists saying that they love art because is the space in which you can do whatever you want. But I'll like to take things even further, what I propose is that this freedom of action is what characterizes art, and that is by exercising this type of freedom that art gets made. It is not that defining something as art means that anything is possible. It is that realizing that anything is possible enables us to make art without even realizing. Art is not a space (actually the institutionalized space is never one of freedom), it is an attitude. It allows you to explore the world in a full manner, simply wandering through the territory without a map.

One of my favourite examples of art that doesn't need framing is the Vogue movement in New York during the eighties. Although I had contact with it only through "Paris is Burning" (Livingstone 1993), I do believe this refers more to visibility than framing. The "Competition Balls" the film shows are not easy to categorize. They involved "walks" in which each "contestant" embodied a social group or a concept that were foreign to their identity. What you had was a community of economical deprived gay subjects that used this space to perform aspirational otherness. They didn't call it art. They didn't theorize their explorations. They just did it in a collective and public way, but for themselves. For what it did to them and their community. If the film was never made this wouldn't have been made visible to us. The audience would have been limited to that of this specific sub-culture, but that doesn't change the performances and their effects. It is art and it would have been art none the less, we should feel privileged to be able to watch it, but it doesn't need us to.

When Claire Bishop criticizes relational aesthetics, and socially engaged art in general, she defends that the discourse of art being the last place for engagement is lazy because it "retreats from the political instead of searching for new territories". But I think this problem

only occurs when the artists are worried about situating their work in an artistic sphere instead of embracing an artistic freedom in the way they engage with the world. This difference is quite clear when you are compare Rirkrit Tiravanija's soup distribution in galleries and biennales with a project like "Collecting System" (2005) in which artists investigated the garbage of Monterrey (Mexico) and developed systems to transform these materials in low-cost housing systems that were then constructed through collective efforts. Here things get a lot more complicated. Even the way they chose to present the documentation, in posters-manuals that were then distributed through the city to be reproduced. It's was not about renouncing to aesthetics but about re-situating the art object and the art practice. It's about audiences and visibility.

Having made clear that I'm not proposing a "Relational Aesthetics" approach, I would also want to make clear that "Art as Muddiness" is not the same as "Socially Engaged Practices". Although I do understand that this term comes from an effort to think about the social functions art can have, I think "Socially Engaged Practices" as "Relational Aesthetics" and "Contextual Art", are theories based on the principle that you have an artist who does things that are at almost always presented in an art institutionalized setting for an art specialist final audience. What I'm hinting at is that we don't need the artist or the art institution at all. I actually agree with Claire Bishops when she mentions the need for art to search new territories, but I think those territories should be conquered by allowing art to invade them, and that can only happen if we agree that art is not a framework but a way of doing. Otherwise artists just transplant other territories to the gallery/institutional space and re-frame them without adding anything to them, or risking real dialogue or influence in those areas. Just then, in these territories, as she proposes, we can examine the "object" and judge it in relation to it's artistic and aesthetic qualities, and even include others as

ethical, functional, political, etc.

When I use the term framework I mean the use of the art system to contextualize an art object in the presence of an art audience. But there are other audiences and interacting with them without using the art framework can be a much more prolific way of working. There is an aesthetic experience occurring in the [Collecting System]. Even if we use Ranciere's understanding of the aesthetic experience (who Bishop constantly refers to) as "getting out of the ordinary ways of sensory experience" it is hard to deny that this happens, the biggest problem would be that it happens much more intensively to the people that are directly involved in the project, in a setting that is completely foreign to the art world. And it's quite clear that it happens in the case of the Vogue movement as well.

In his essay "Life Among the Pirates", Daniel Alarcón (Granta Work issue 109 pg 7 - 36, NY - USA 2009) describes the way pirate books dominate the peruvian market. Ethical discussions aside, it is quite fascinating how books there can exist in several versions, sometimes they have been intercepted at different stages of the editorial review. In other books, the ends have been rewritten, someone decides he can do better than the original writer and takes new ownership of this object. This, again, can only be read as an artistic action in itself. What is the difference between the impulse this amateur writers have to actively engage in changing these stories, taking ownership of them, and the kinds of impulses artists are stimulated to allow themselves to act upon as guides for their practices?

This type of art occurring outside (and without a need) of the art system brings up a problem. Since the sixties and seventies galleries and museums have fought back this escape from the institutionalized space by bringing this types of work inside, by showing documentation or by commissioning and financing. Does this means that we as artists should completely ignore the established art world? Does, as Vito Acconci says: "...a gallery or a museum

doesn't have to censor you because you have already censor yourself. Because once you are working on that context, you have been now learning the rules." (Hans Ulrich Olbrest interviews, pg 53) or is it possible for artists to use their interest as a way to finance and exist among other types of settings? What are the advantages of the white cube, and what can we learn from the mistakes made by the artists that came before us?

I could say the revolution is coming, but in a way I feel that it is already here. We just have to teach ourselves how to see it. When we study art history there is this eery sense that the big ruptures in the art system happened overnight but what actually usually happened is that it would start with very localized effect that would take years or even decades to be incorporated into mainstream discourse. But why would we want that?

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