



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Veranderend kunstenaarschap : de rol en betekenis van de kunstenaar in participatieve kunstpraktijken

Visser, R.J.

Citation

Visser, R. J. (2018, November 1). *Veranderend kunstenaarschap : de rol en betekenis van de kunstenaar in participatieve kunstpraktijken*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/66670>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/66670>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/66670> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Visser, R.J.

Title: Veranderend kunstenaarschap : de rol en betekenis van de kunstenaar in participatieve kunstpraktijken

Issue Date: 2018-11-01

Summary

Changing Artistry

The role and importance of the artist in participatory art practices

Introduction

The last decades of the contemporary art world are characterized by a great diversity of forms of art and artists, which means a changing position of art in Western society. This dissertation focuses on artists in the Netherlands who create artworks together with participants in urban communities and public spaces. Artists are becoming aware of the important role they can play in and for our contemporary complex society, leading to the so called 'social shift' in art. (Bishop 2006) This kind of participatory art has flourished in the Netherlands during the last two decades. Besides the traditional view of the artist as an autonomous creator of artworks for gallery or museum, a new view becomes visible: the view of the artist who is working outside his studio in society itself, in participation with and for local citizens on projects for the civil society. This unusual way of working by the artist caused tensions in the art world: about the autonomy of art or art as instrument, and about the artistic or aesthetic and the social or ethical aspect of art.

Despite the different kinds of research on participatory art practices, the role and meaning of the artist himself in these studies is often missing or even neglected, as is his role and meaning in relation to the participants. What does it mean for the artist to co-operate with citizens that have not often or not at all come into contact with art?

This issue leads to the main research question: *What is the meaning of participatory art practices for the interpretation of artistry?*

This question will be answered by means of the following three related sub-questions: *How do artist and participants co-operate in participatory art practices? What effects are the result of that co-operation? What is the meaning of participatory art practices for the identity of the artist and for his artistry?*

The observed tensions in the cultural field caused by the clear connection and engagement of the artist's work within society has led to the fourth sub-question: *What is the recognition of participatory art practices in the art world?*

Methodology

A literature review has been done on the historical development of artistry, the psychological aspects of the professional artistic identity, and on the genealogy and the discourse of participatory art practices. For the empirical part of this dissertation a multiple case study approach was chosen from the broad range of qualitative research approaches as the most useful research method for the *how* and *what* questions of a

social phenomenon in its societal context. In relation to the research goals a specific choice was made for descriptive and exploratory case study research. The case studies have been chosen based on relevant criteria for exemplary case studies. Interviews were held with the artists and selected participants of the five case studies on aspects of participation and the role of the artist.

The concepts of *participatory art practices* and *identity* that arise from the research questions ask for an explanation. *Participatory art practices* are characterized by four core characteristics: they are *contextual*, *artistic*, *participatory* and *transformative* and created by an artistic process, the content of which is related to socio-political contextual issues of the participating citizens. Artist and participants co-operate in this process to come to the right artistic format in which connections and dialogue between people are important. The intended outcome should be challenging and offer citizens the possibilities for reflecting and for finding new perspectives for themselves and their environment.

The most important aspect of *participation* in participatory art practices should be seen in the role of the participants in the function of the central artistic medium and material. This doesn't only mean hands-on participation but also sharing ideas and information from participants with the artist. Both forms of participation can be seen as equal and important. This concept of participation is used to show the broad spectrum of participation in daily practice and to distinguish commonalities and differences in participation among participatory art practices.

The second important concept is *identity*. In this dissertation it means the *professional identity* of the artist: the whole of professional characteristics, skills, qualities and ideas that define a particular person as artist and differentiate him from other artists. Identity develops during the different phases of life and can be seen as a form of adaptation to changing social, economic and cultural contexts of our society. Identity is characterized by continuation and change. For the participatory artist his commitment to work, as important part of the professional identity, can be described as active engagement and care to connect art meaningfully with and in society.

The work of the artist in Western society is not always recognized as 'real' work and the profession of the artist is not clearly defined. Looking at Hannah Arendt's distinction between *labor* ('work that serves the needs of human subsistence and survival' according to Arendt) *work* (production of 'things' like artworks) and *action* (to connect with others and speak in dialogue that results in creativity and innovation), it becomes clear that *action* has a social function in participatory art practices that goes beyond the practical and usefulness of labor and work.

The *literature review* has clarified that *artistry* is characterized by continuation and change under influences of social, economic and cultural changes. Accordingly, artistry is related to the concept of identity and is subject to change. Three historical models of

artistry can be recognized: the *romantic*, the *modern* or *avantgarde* and the *classic* model (Van Winkel 2007). The models are representative of historic time periods, but have not disappeared. Parts of each model can be recognised in contemporary artistry. The question is which new aspects of the societal and cultural work of the contemporary artist become visible in participatory art practices that give rise to a new model of artistry. The genealogy of participatory art from the first part of the 20th century demonstrates artists anticipate social and political situations and are searching for direct or indirect connections with society. After a period of intended activism to change the world by, for example Manifesto's, artists changed their mission by making personal and meaningful connections with citizens with the intention to bring back the human aspect in society. Their agogic intentions seem to be to motivate people to take an active role themselves in today's fragmented and complex modern world.

The interrelatedness of art with daily life and the involvement of citizens are reflected in contemporary participatory art practices intending to encourage citizens to use their imagination and interpretation in reflection of their own contextual situation. The emphasis on the contextual aspect is one of the reasons for transferring these art practices from the official art institutions as galleries or museums to society itself. As a consequence participatory art practices often placed outside the official artworld.

The important changes in the art world during the last decades like participatory art practices, can be characterized as *dematerialization*. The art results from the co-operation of artists with non-professionals and the relational and dialogical character of this art. The process of this co-operation and the possible beginning of change to change that stem from this, must be seen as the most important result. Participatory art is therefore seen as *meaning maker* and *changemaker*. These changes have encouraged the discourse about participatory art practices and their artists. The central questions in this discourse relate to the already noticed field of tension between the social or ethical and the artistic or aesthetic aspect of these art forms. Art must no longer be seen as autonomous but as relational and democratic according to Bourriaud (2002), one of the main critics in the discourse about participatory art. The critic Kester (2004, 2005, 2011) goes a step further by connecting the relational to dialogue, empathy and the equality of artist and participant in the process to come to a qualitatively good final result. In her role of an art critic Bishop (2012) instead emphasizes as critic to look after the artistic aspect of participatory art practices. She refers to Rancière who has stated that 'the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change.' It is obvious from scientific literature that participatory art practices are still more or less controversial in the official art world. One of the reasons is the lack of conviction about the aesthetic value and quality of these participatory art practices. This case study research will investigate the role of the participatory artist in five art practices to find answers to the research questions.

Casestudy 1 Stoftot Nadenken (Food for thought). Textile and conceptual artist Sara Vrugt was invited to develop a participatory art practice for the Oude Kerk (Old Church) in Amsterdam. The artist worked in the church atelier on an installation using all hundred and eighteen seats in the church which were in dire need of restoration. She collected stories about the Oude Kerk and the neighbourhood that, together with the wooden vaulted ceiling of the church, were starting points for the new upholstery textile design. Her ambition was not only to create art collaboratively but also to make topical issues visible and open for discussion. The red light district on the square of the Oude Kerk has been a lively topic of conversation since the decision in 2008 of the local authorities to reduce drugs and prostitution. Through this participatory embroidery project the artist took stock and discussed the changing role of the Oude Kerk in the city of Amsterdam and its significance for the individual.

The concept of the art practice has been created by the artist herself. The collected stories about the church and her environment were summarized and translated by the then city poet Anna Enquist in a poem of exactly hundred and eighteen words; for every chair one word has been woven in the textile and a related symbol, designed by the artist was embroidered by hand on the chair. For the last phase of the practice, the embroidery work, the artist invited citizens to participate. The co-operation of artist and participants show a kind of reciprocity. Sara Vrugt needed the participants because of the embroidery workload for hundred and eighteen chairs. In addition she gave the participants the opportunity to participate in her work and life as an artist by explaining the design process of the artwork, to teach them the embroidery technique and invited them to work on the artwork in a way they were able to. They co-operated in a way of equality although the artist had the full responsibility for the process and result. Because of her quality demands there was little 'free room' for the participants, but enough for them to feel welcome and necessary in the process.

Casestudy 2 Groeten van Geerweg (Greetings from Geerweg). Geerweg is a small neighbourhood of the city of Delft. The community that was formerly known for togetherness, was left with a reduced social cohesion and with social isolation. Both aspects were topics in the policy of local government during that time. Dramatist Marjet Roerink was invited to arrange, in participation with the local citizens, a neighbourhood tour to strengthen social cohesion and to lead them out of isolation. The artist collected stories of the local citizens and in co-creation they developed the Groeten van Geerweg tour. The local citizens were made responsible for the content as well as the presentation of the tour. Through this process the community was re-activated and local citizens regained their pride in their neighbourhood. From the start of the art practice, dramatist Marjet Roerink kept an open mind. In her opinion the local citizens deserve the main role in the content and the presentation of the art practice in order to come to the intended results. The stories collected from the locals gave information about what connected them and what they were proud of and what they saw as the rea-

son for changes. The participants felt *heard* and *understood* by the artist. To prevent the failure of the art practice she respected the refusal of the participants to work with art. With the collected information she designed together with the participants on basis of co-creation, a local community tour with some 'hidden' art aspects, such as a local women choir especially assembled for this event, and a local rapper who created his own text with help of a rap professional, arranged by the artist. The presentation of the tours was done by the participants themselves. The artist remained nevertheless responsible for the whole process and the tour as final result. In contrast to Sara Vrugt, Marjet Roerink worked in co-creation with the participants and shared responsibility of content and performance. For this context and the aim of the art practice, co-creation was the right choice and corresponded with the possibilities of the participants.

Casestudy 3 Noorderling (Northerner). PS|theater, the young theatre company from the city of Leiden, was invited for a participatory art practice in Leiden Noord, an intercultural neighbourhood which is undergoing a five-year redevelopment. The neighbourhood will become a mix of old and new citizens. The local *Cultuurfonds Leiden* (Leiden Culture Fund), together with the local culture organisation *Wijken voor Kunst* and the building company *Heijmans* established an alliance for a positive impact in the neighbourhood by means of art projects. PS|theater initiated meetings with locals to collect stories concerning the neighbourhood and their citizens. The stories were translated in a theatre- and music tour through the neighbourhood, created and presented by the actors and a musician from PS|theater. In this way the local citizens were confronted with characteristics in their community and became aware that despite differences, there are important connecting similarities between the different cultures within their community. Individual stories have become a universal character and are given back to the local citizens and the city itself to create a collective memory. *Artists in residence* PS|theater has been able to develop during the years a neighbourhood oriented methodology of collecting, deepening and translating information. They need the stories and the information from the local citizens to be able to make a theatre- and music tour that reflects the DNA of the neighbourhood. The artists encounter the citizens with open minds and with respect. They also work in reciprocity by giving something back to the citizens for their stories: a song or a theatre tour. The deepening and translating of the information for a challenging and reflective theatre tour is done by the artists themselves and this also applies to the tour performances. This is in contrast with the approach of Marjet Roerink to give the participants the main role in Groeten van Geerweg. This difference is related to the context and to the different aims of the art practices. The aim of Noorderling is to show the citizens universal values that reflect their stories and that will give them food to think about what connects them as different cultural groups; this was in contrast with the re-activation and empowering of the citizens from the Groeten van Geerweg art practice.

Casestudy 4 Wandschappen/DNA Charlois. Wandschappen is the design and art collective of the artists Ivo van den Baar and his wife Nicole Driessens, located in the multi-cultural area Charlois in Rotterdam. They design and produce furniture and objects as well as making their own autonomous work. They initiate participatory art practices with citizens, artists, designers, local governments and NGO's. A connecting theme in the eclectic practice of Wandschappen is the adaptation of traditional crafts and skills to new contexts. All of Wandschappen's works reflect a high degree of craftsmanship, often inspired by Charlois' local heritage and the crafts of its about hundred and fifty cultures. 'The combination of craftsmen and artists leads to innovation', as Van den Baar states. The artists develop activities in relation to the circumstances and developments in the neighbourhood. As embedded artists, they made a deliberate choice to co-operate with local citizens in their local production company to deliver a useful contribution to society and local economy of Charlois. As a result, both the artists and the local citizens are benefitting. Wandschappen has co-initiated DNA Charlois, an atelier- and design label that aims to explore the artistic potential among the many different cultures in the Charlois neighbourhood. The artists are openminded, respectful and helpful to the citizens and are aware of the necessity of a good relation with them. Citizens with ideas for artworks or artprojects will be helped to realise their plans. As artists they develop art practices inspired by the neighbourhood and invite local citizens to participate in the realization of the artwork *Porsche in Progress* that is made during opening times of the Gallery where an exhibition is held of the artist's work. The work sessions are big happenings where people meet and talk with the artists about their works of art and the process of creation. Where possible the artists make citizens part of the art world by taking them to a presentation or exhibition from the artwork in which they participated. Wandschappen co-operates like Sara Vrugt with the participants in reciprocity. The artists design the art practice and have the full responsibility for the process and the final result. The participants are involved in the process of realization. There is little 'free room' for the participants, but enough for them to feel welcome and necessary in the process, and enabled to do the work. In DNA Charlois participants participate in the content by sharing specific products and crafts from their own cultures that will be used to design new contemporary products. PS|theatre too co-operates in reciprocity with participants. These artists (see case study 3) design the art practice as well as the final performance. The locals provide the content for the performance to the artists - their stories and information about the neighbourhood.

Casestudy 5 OpTrek Binckhorst. The Binckhorst is a former site of industrial companies nearby the city centre of Den Haag and in an area of development. An enormously ambitious Masterplan included a new residential district with 7000 private homes. In 2011 the Masterplan was called off due to the economic crisis. This was the reason for artist and urban curator Sabrina Lindemann to settle down with her mobile office OpTrek in the Binckhorst area. Her approach is characterized by a bottom-up

methodology for area development. Principles for her organic approach are focused on the physical, economic, social and cultural potentials of the local area, local knowledge and expertise, developmental managing, circular economy, partial utilization as a strategy besides the use of the imagination of the artist. After a period of exploration and interviewing, connections were made and ideas and opinions shared. In co-creation the artist initiated projects in shared responsibility with the local entrepreneurs. Through new connections between local craftsmanship, residual materials, knowledge and expertise from elsewhere, the newly formed organization ReSourceCity Binkchorst enlarges the cultural, social and economic power of the area. These new signs of value lead to specific products and services.

Like Marjet Roerink, Sabrina Lindemann works in co-creation with the local community. Both are facilitating the participants. The difference is the timespan of the art practice, the complexity of this art practice and the responsibility given to the participants. Roerink only had about six months – Lindemann has been in place and working since 2011 in the Binckhorst. Both artists give responsibility to the participants in the development in content and execution. Lindemann takes the initiative and responsibility in this complex task of organic development, by proposing and arranging new projects in co-creation with the entrepreneurs, and in making and maintaining contacts and dialogue with the local governments, artists and stakeholders. The Binckhorst entrepreneurs take responsibility for continuation of already implemented projects and related new initiatives from their own companies.

The five case studies make clear that participatory art practices are complex and ask a lot of dedication and different skills from the artists: from researcher to creator, entrepreneur and communicator. The artists show a high degree of interpersonal qualities to enable them to work in equality, openness and empathy with participants. The artists are aware of the need for contextual research and to work bottom up in order to come to the most appropriate art practice, with attention to the relational aspect and to dialogue.

This way of working implies a considerable difference in participatory art practices which can be divided in two main categories: art practices that are either mostly *object oriented* or *process oriented*, with categories varying between less object and more process orientation on the one hand, and with less process and more object orientation on the other hand.

Participatory art practices show different forms of participation: high and low participation in content and execution of the artist and/or the participants in relation to the type of art practice: an object-oriented art practice shows more participation of the artist and less of the participant, and vice-versa. The form and level of participation is related to the ability of the participants and to the artistic identity of the artist. The five case studies can be seen as forms of informal and in-situ learning and have shown the intended transformative impact.

The quality of participatory art practices differs from singular artworks. The criteria *fitness for purpose* and *relevance to context* can be seen as a good starting point to determine the quality for this form of art. Working in a participatory format can cause frictions with the identity of the artist, which leads to reflection and a changing identity or even arranging a *hybrid identity*. The artists of the five art practices were aware that their art practices needed an efficient form of leadership which is reflected in the relation with the art practice and the forms of participation. The schedule below shows the object- of process orientation of the art practice in relation to the participation of citizens and artists and the leadership style of the artist.

Participatory art Practice	Orientation Art Practice		Participation citizens		Participation artist		Leadership styles artist		
	Object oriented	Proces oriented	High	Low	High	Low	Directive	Democratic – directive	Facilitating
'Stof tot Nadenken'	X	x		X	X			X	
'Groeten van Geerweg'	x	X	X			X			X
'Noorderling'	X	x		X	X		X		
'Wandschappen DNA Charlois'	X	X	X		X			X	
'OpTrek Binckhorst'	x	X	X		X				X

Orientation of participatory art practices related to participation and leadershipstyles

A small cross means 'in a lesser degree'; a **red** cross means a more **object**-oriented art practice and a **black** cross a more **process**-oriented art practice.

The results of the case study research make clear that world of the arts and the way artists are working have changed in a significant way. Participatory artists are attracted by complex questions in contemporary post-industrial society and feel engaged and responsible. They fulfill a new role in relation to society, namely of facilitating and connecting, in relation to cultural entrepreneurship. In this new view contemporary (participatory) artists can be seen as *network artists* with traces of the traditional historic models of artistry.

The literature review and the case study research have made clear that participatory art practices are not appropriately acknowledged in the art world. Art still is generally assessed from outdated views on autonomy and quality. In addition to being art oriented, participatory art practices are also socially oriented. Consequently, the aspect of

participation has to be taken into account in viewing the quality criteria for this specific kind of art. Contemporary participatory art practices make clear that the current vision of the concept of art needs to be updated.