

Summary of
THE IMAGE-MAKING PICTURE ART PROCESS --
EXPLORING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

(an art event)

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While such activity is, can, and does remain art for many, other artists feel impelled to investigate looser modes and media, such as laser beam photography, video and film, behavioral phenomenology, the dance, storywriting and telling. (Pincus-Witten, 1973)

The basic assumption is that every artist works in the present. The objects (Art) that he produces are lessons about the environment which he wears like a mask. The artist through his mask, his art, his idiosyncratic set of goggles, is very much a part of the present. The artifact (Art) which the artist produces describes his world and, as a consequence, anticipates the future. Most artists are unaware of the critical role they play (few would admit to a status that resembles that of a social navigator). They, like most of us, do not think of the objects (art) they produce as new information which has little or no prior existence. They (the artists) are busy making their art, stirring up our perception with their products, and all the while are equally amazed when controversy occurs as the result of a new interest, a new concept, a new application, or a new technology. They are social navigators simply because they are in a better position to anticipate change because they are working in the present -- that is what all artists do. The non-artists will have difficulty with this idea because those persons are not involved in the present, and have difficulty with any kind of new information. Coping with new information is an unsettling experience because it never fits easily into old categories.

One way of dealing with the problem, then, is to involve everyone in the art-making process. Not the old art process, but the new art process of the present. This proposal attempts precisely that kind of experience. It is an art event which fits no previously well-defined category. At the same time it places each participant clearly in an environment traditionally oriented to artist-to-artifact space, that is, the picture plane. Most of the participants will sense this and rest comfortably with a procedure which is going to produce a picture, even a portrait of the group interacting as "artists".

Procedures

The event requires a minimum of twenty participants and must be an even number, 20, 22, 24 maximum. The participants are gathered in a room with two SX-70 Polaroid Instant Film Cameras. Each participant will be assigned a number by a random method of selection that determines the order

of interaction. Instructions will read as follows: Each participant will photograph another participant (only one). Your number is the order of procedure: #1 photographs #2, #2 photographs #1, etc... Your number also determines the distance, subject to camera: #1 = 1 foot, #2 = 2 feet, #3 = 3 feet, and so forth. This automatically eliminates any necessity for traditional picture-making value concepts; figure-ground arrangements, value, saturation, illusory space, etc. In other words, old information is not our concern. As the process continues, the image system takes over: #1 takes the photo of #2, #2 takes the photo of #1, and each passes the camera leap-frog fashion #1 to #3, and #2 to #4, and #3 to #5, #4 to #6 until all twenty participants have taken each other's photograph.

While this happens, a third person, the presenter as group leader, will also document each encounter with a photograph. This purpose is to provide external documentation as a kind of third eye - a profile of objectivity. We conclude the art event by arranging the photographs in sequential order on a grid-like pattern upon the wall: twenty participants = 20 prints + 20 external images each quite different as to configuration.

Question: What do we look like as a group? What does the "portrait" tell us about ourselves or, better still, what has the process (Art) which produced the image contributed to our understanding of the present? Spirited discussion is anticipated, and the lesson will be displayed as new information about the PRESENT/FUTURE to be shared with the whole conference.

References

Pincus-Witten, R. Theatre of the conceptual-autobiography and myth. Art Forum, October 1973, 12(2), 40-46.