The Power of Art to Improve Life Quality: Validart Project (Balázs Freisinger Validart Project, Hungary - Manager of art)

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Abstract

Our study aims to represent Validart fine art project that has a purpose to discover the overlaps and border areas of contemporary art and everyday routine, that is, to implement art into the civil reality and vice versa, to implement usability into a work of art. In the framework of Validart project well-known Hungarian artists create artwork using household appliances. The aim of Validart project is to present the concept of art as a functional, valid approach and usable receiver and life organizing structure, furthermore, to make it attractive. We present what kind of role the art has in everyday life and how it can contribute to the improvement of life quality.

Keywords: Quality of life, Validart.

Introduction

The idea of the Validart project is based on two pillars: the faith in the art’s power to improve life quality and the belief in that the connection – and the interoperability of this connection – between art and everyday life can be established and permanently operated. The aim is enabling ordinary articles for personal usage (mainly household appliances) to be work of art and also to create new trends relating to the conception of everyday living spaces, furthermore, creating new trends relating the interpretation of everyday life as well. Artists, who apply in different style and with different techniques, use a top class household appliance (in the cases of the finished pieces of art, they are all refrigerators) as base material. The result is always a unique artwork all the time which is a complete work of art and secondarily, it can fulfil its original function.

In this study we present the works of three artists (István Sweety Haraszty, Márton Barabás and Ákos Matzon) and based on the artist reflections we are also going to mention what kind of role the art has in everyday life and how it can contribute to the improvement of life quality.

A Work of Art Made of a Refrigerator?

Dangers relating the problems of rigid segregation of art and everyday life and the recognition that the destructiveness of the perception that traditionally set aesthetics and functionality as opposing values created the conditions that enabled the unconventional artistic initiative to unfold. The preparation started in 2011 and the experience of the first request and finished works as well as the reception of the audience confirmed that there are real tensions in the present society between the consideration of usefulness and beauty; and the conception that separate inclusive people enjoying beauty and doer, user people can be left behind.

According to the basic idea, the everyday civil world and the artistic area, the world of artworks and aesthetic are linked only sporadically; biological and social sense of life and intellectual sense of beauty (setting the are as power to influence on thinking, feeling and life quality in the centre) have only minimal section. This is a major problem not only in philosophical, but in social context as well since art cannot operate independently from the world (from the world that includes art) and be a separately existing thing even if we interpret it organically and biologically. Art-the process of creating and every artistic movement-has to have effect on the society, personal feelings and life of the individuals and in order to have it as a real, valid connection point, the basic values of conception of art has to be questioned and reformulated.
Validart had aspirations to find gateways, relationships and sections in regard of the people and people’s art and to highlight how the sophisticated art can be forced to communicate with everyday language. Fulfiling Validart’s request, well-known artists created works of art using household appliances as materials and by this, they attempt to prove that the connection between art and everyday life can be created and permanently operated. The art’s power to improve life could fulfill its function within valid frameworks.

**Istvan Sweety Haraszty: Safe Cooler (2012)**

István Haraszty (1934), the Kossuth-prize winner sculptor, is one of the most significant Hungarian representative of kinetic art. His moving sculptures and his static pieces of art are made of unusual material have been steadily maintaining the attention of the audience since 1970’s. His works are characterized by criticism on society formulated with fine humour; it’s common that he reacts to the current socio-political situation by his works. One of the most well-known kinetic works of István Haraszty is Steel Smile made in 1972. His piece of work, the Safe Cooler, that is a reconsideration of a refrigerator, created for the invitation of Validart in 2012, has several connection with the sculpture created 40 years earlier, although it is fundamentally different in terms of artistic conception. In both pieces of art, the central symbol is a safe.

In the case of Steel Smile, a real safe was transformed into a piece of art losing its original function, while behind the primary visual interpretation of Safe Cooler there is a functioning, everyday household object—even only secondarily. The possible interpretation of art can be further expanded by the possible cross talks of the preview that are identified on a significant place on the oeuvre but we cannot omit the fact that the piece of art can be used in conventional way during the extraction of the message. The fine playfulness of the possible interpretation that overlap, coincides with one of the most important core value of the artist which states that constructive and central conception of creation and reception, which is eventually the action of mankind and existence, is the game.

The Safe Cooler, in the name of this playfulness, encourages the receiver to be an intervener not only along the interoperability of the work of art-object but within the work’s own set of conceptions it offers choices and invites for intervention. The opening wheel of the piece of art resembling a safe can be rotated and the cover of the socket that imitates a keyhole can be opened so the artist expects the audience not only be a viewer but a doer as well. The friendly atmosphere created with these tools and framework set by the artist, in which the piece of art and the receiver can start a conversation perfectly match with the purpose of Validart. István Haraszty’s Safe Cooler and the artist’s considerable oeuvre in the background could be the best starter piece of the project.

**Marton Barabas: Vox Cooler (2013)**

Márton Barabás (1952) is a Munkácsy-prize winning painter and sculptor. Space, as a problem that can be defined with artistic tools, was an important theme in his early career of Barabás, mainly in the period of panel painting. It became amplified in the creation of three-dimensional painting sculpture. In his current creative period, he likes to use articles for personal usage as imaging element. The basement of the compositions are typically books and musical instruments, as for the latter, they are mainly old piano parts and these useless objects become a piece of art in the studio.

Márton Barabás created Vox Cooler in 2013 for the invitation of Validart which is a reconsideration of a refrigerator. He was the second artist of the invitation that aims to assert art in the everyday life and assert everyday usability in art. The composition influences mainly by the refrigerator’s rectangular and rigid shape meeting the arch of the piano lid which is completed by the keyboard installed on the arch and takes it towards illusion. Beside the functioning of the piece of art as an everyday usage object, it is also tangible by its symbols: the inclusion of the mentioned handwritten notes refers to the openness of the piece of art and proclaims the constant possibility of intervention; while the instrument does not work, in the coordinate system of illusion, created by shapes and symbols, musicality’s presence is real.

**Ákos Matzon: Mandatory Literature (2013)**

Ákos Matzon, Munkácsy-prize winning artist, is a member of many Hungarian and international art associations, His art dates back to the constructive tradition, his spatial compositions, and reliefs are on the borderline of painting and sculpture. One of the most important organizing powers of his art is geometry; his works based on architectural basic concepts express restrained,
clear and disciplined overall impact. In his current creative period, one of the main themes is set around the books’ material reality.

Ákos Matzon accepted the invitation of Validart in 2013 and the piece of art was finished in 2014. In an interview with him, he talks about Mandatory Literature as a historical meeting of a Matzon-work and a refrigerator as an unbreakable artistic deed. He was the first artist of Validart project who used built-in device – in order to keep the composition plan working on a flat base – so in contrast to the other works, it cannot be walked around and he only worked on the front side of the object. The sight provided by book slices is crossed with a tricolour ribbon and by this the shapes in the upper and low range that resembles books on a bookshelf looking like some kind of reflection.

In Ákos Matzon’s composition, system of complex references start to operate beside the obvious symbols (books, flags). The sliced books are set not with the spines on the front but with the edges in front of the viewer suggesting that they could view from a hidden and unreal point of view from behind the shelf. The view cut in two by red-white-green plait’s reflection has deeper references since the layout of upper and lower line are not the same, that is, the view that seems to be a reflection is totally different if we examine it in detail.

Results and discussion
Art and Life Quality
For now, it is widely known that culture has role in improving life quality. The concept of life quality was defined in the second half of the 20th century and related to the theory that state, the economic and social challenges of the modern life, the expansion of consumer society have negative effects on the development of the people’s personality. The conception is closely linked to Aristotle’s so called eudaimonia (identification with divine guardian) concept, which covers happiness in modern sense. For Aristotle, happiness is not a state or experience, it is activity, under which the main purpose of human existence is to fulfil human functions as much as possible. Sociological pieces of research examine social welfare of social classes in certain countries, discovering not only objective indicators but subjective elements, for example, satisfaction. The psychological approach builds on the strengths of human psyche which is close to the Aristotelian eudaimonia. In the following, we examine how the pieces of art created within Validart project can mediate between everyday world and art and how they can achieve people becoming active actors during the possession and enjoyment of art. [1]

Before starting to examine, it is necessary to isolate the basic concept of Validart and the pieces of art created within the project from directions having partly similar conception but fundamentally differing, that is, from the ready-mades and design objects. In the case of the Dadaist Duchamp’s ready-mades1, created in the beginning of 1910’s, the spirituality is very important since we talk about a conceptual genre; according to this, the method of the creation is unimportant because its aims is provoking thoughts and to activate intellect. In case of a ready-made, the process of becoming a piece of art is the most important with full reinterpretation of the object itself and losing its original purpose simultaneously. At the same time, the design object usually manufactured serially and they are not individual works, but more importantly, the object does not lose its original function: during look transformation, there is no priority change in its function. In case of the pieces of art created within Validart project, the rearrangement of the roles occurs, moreover it is an essential moment. The artistic quality and object’s nature of art become primary and the function of (fully working) the object is secondary. [2]

The central element of the artists’ pieces of art made within Validart project is playfulness and humour. István Sweety Haraszty’s Safe Cooler is a continuation of his Steel Smile created in 1970. The artist believes that the artwork has dual role;
on one hand, it is a continuation of his oeuvre, on the other hand, it is a fine art object that can

function properly, which is unconventional; this first unconventional piece of art was created in his studio. “(...) who owns it that possesses a unique, if I can say it, unrepeatable artwork (...). Occasionally, he can keep his favourite beer or ewe cheese sandwich in this artwork.” Basically, the artist wants it to be placed in an office or flat. It’s important that the original function and the view ‘sits’ on it, embraces which is the art itself. [3]

Barabás’ creation, the Vox Cooler is a meeting of a “strange cabinet” and a piano where the contrast between the two objects is enormous. There is an out-of-use piano and music sheet on it – the text of which has multiple meaning as well- it embraces the refrigerator; by this, the artist combines, collides two things that are quiet distant from each other with an unconcealed aim to have the audience startled. “(...) it is a surprise that he will find yogurt and soft drink bottles in it. “ Barabás’s view is that art and everyday life get in a positive context by this”(...) this is a game, in which we have to work much actually, the artist can be Homo Ludens, that is, playing man who can attribute to the hard reality.” In other words, the aim is to make living life easier. [4]

As for Mandatory Literature, Ákos Matzon thinks that if somebody uses the object transformed into artwork, that person will think of culture and how important role it has in our life. “(...) because the books are phenomenon ... even in the beginning of the 21st century it is the most important cultural mediator.” In this case, not the beautification or the “designing up” was the aim either, the artist does not want to disguise the refrigerator as bookshelf; the message is more complex. An unusual, unique creation is done, which can provide artistic value itself. [5]

The artist and their artwork approaches everyday life and people living in civil reality in a way that address audience with symbols’ (music, literature) easily decodable message encouraging them to create their own path to art by accepting complex system of reference. Leave behind the required distance’s usual position, start a dialogue, a game with the artwork and the creator, since enjoyment of artwork experienced in individual means greater satisfaction, in addition as a reflection, playfulness and humour as one of the organizing power of life can be integrated in everyday life. The artworks and the intellectual communities of people thinking about artwork can reflect on social reality, fulfilling some kind of super ego

function in public opinion. The core of the message is that the artist and through them, the art is approachable since art also leaves the ivory tower and exist as a human and as a human they play work, transform a household object that is distant from art and creation into an artwork. It conveys that not only a few people are privileged to understand artistic language; art is admissible, can be walked around and is tangible (for example, moving parts, piano keys) and also an essential part of everyday reality. The arts role in improving life quality can be noticed in the owner who possesses the artwork, which is a meeting of art and a household object, got dual role. On one hand, he is the art receiver and on the other hand he is the user of the object; by this, he finds sustainable and valid connection between sophisticated art and everyday life.

Conclusion

The aim of Validart project is to present the concept of art as a functional, valid approach and usable receiver and life organizing structure, furthermore, to make it attractive. According to the basic conception, the current contemporary art especially fine art is capable of opening channels between the civils world’s everyday organized by routine and art that represent elevated intellect. As for the starting point, it states that the pathos of incomprehensibility and inapproachability regarding the highly sophisticated, professional prize winning and internationally successful artists’ artwork can be demolished. With universal human creating power of the game, a connection can be made between the art and everyday existence and on this base a productive dialogue can be built and permanently functioning, in which beside the continuously renewing legitimacy of art, the receiver also get opportunity to repeatedly redefine himself: as passive or active audience and as everyday person too.

Validart does not aim to make sophisticated culture understood for broad mass of people and make them able to consume it. It aims to destroy the barrier between people who are open and sensitive to art and the intellectual content and artist and their artworks, which barrier make artist look like incomprehensive an eccentric and make the artworks unapproachable, that is, distant from the receiver, interpreter and enjoyer part of society. According to the belief of the operators, art is from people in the society and it is also for them. With dissolving isolation of artwork this “refinding” each other (and itself) can be catalysed and from this reassessed
relationship, not only art profits by strengthening its functions but the people too, who can recreate with experience by a discourse that is unusual and different from everyday discourse and also can find conceptual structures that can be applied outside the intellectual structure, by interpreting as own, can used to improve life quality.

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