

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

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Walking down the same street every day, one gradually becomes oblivious to one's environment. And yet, one day, for no apparent reason, one's gaze is attracted to a detail – the door of a building, the colour of a wall or the display of a store. This triggers a completely new perspective on what was deemed familiar, and therefore no longer worth much attention. Was it the light, a specific smell or noise, or the bright coat of a passerby that generated this strike of awareness? In any event, it is not necessarily anything clearly noticeable, at least consciously. But all of a sudden, all of one's senses are on alert, and one becomes engaged with the streetscape in a completely different fashion: nothing has changed, but one's ability to receive this spectrum of information. A minute, almost imperceptible detail has provoked this perceptual shift.

Over a century ago, Marcel Duchamp invented the concept of "Readymade" to describe the cognitive shift that occurred when he transposed pedestrian objects from the context of everyday life to the one of the museum. By stripping those objects from their utilitarian function, Duchamp posited he could change their status and thus invite the visitor to contemplate their mere formal qualities. Upon stepping out of the museum, one's comprehension of any object may then have changed. Duchamp thus introduced the notion of art as gesture, a practice no longer limited to the production of objects. He subsequently coined the term "inframince" (infrathin), which could perhaps be understood as a means to describe the almost undecipherable difference between that which is art and that which is life.

Hence, one may consider that art is the alteration of a visitor's perspective on reality, induced by the artist. Rather than being a field predicated by the mastery of a specific skill or the use of a specific media, it is the conscious process of using various means to create the conditions of an awakening of the senses, and a consequent change in perspective.

AMIGOS – Martin Creed's new show – stretches all the way from trees surrounding the building into the second-floor exhibition space. On the way, one may encounter a sound work in the elevator, or Visitors Services staff and gallery attendants wearing uniforms altered by the artist. Entering the second floor, one will then see wall paintings in the lobby, as well as inside the galleries, where a group of four roving musicians regularly performs a score Creed elaborated during the course of a workshop he directed just before the project opened to the public.

AMIGOS may at first appear as a fairly generic word to title a show; it is admittedly a universal word many people know and understand worldwide. One may think of a television series or a Broadway show, something perhaps closer to popular culture than an art project. This may denote Creed's interest in desacralizing the experience of art, which should probably be regarded as much integral to contemporary culture as the aforementioned forms. Upon further examination, the notion of friendship implies a human exchange for mutual enrichment, a relationship that is not predicated by any form of hierarchy or judgment. In that light, it may be an interesting paradigm to consider the experience of contemporary art. Indeed, approaching a work of contemporary art is often deemed by many as an awkward or disconcerting experience. Confidence and trust, values one associates with the notion of friendship, may therefore be useful to approach an artwork, which is the brainchild of an artist – an interface for knowledge and experience-sharing.

It seems appropriate to use the word "show" rather than "exhibition" to describe Martin Creed's undertakings. Indeed, the notion of show encompasses a wide range of enactments, which includes exhibitions, but also theatre plays, operas or concerts. In that sense, theatrical

presentations are particularly interesting to consider here, since they consist of artists wearing costumes performing in a set.

While some of Creed's shows take the form of staged live performances in which he is the main protagonist, many consist of a combination of choreographed actions and objects in space and time. Whereas the duration of his live performances is akin to the one of a concert, his "gallery" shows tend to last for months, as would any art exhibition. And while the former require the public to come at a certain time and leave at the end of the performance, the latter is much more open-ended, as would any art exhibition. Indeed, a show that takes the form of an exhibition lets the spectators engage with the work on their own timeframe: The course of their visit and the time and attention they will dedicate to it will determine the kind of experience they will get out of it. The performative components reshape one's perception of time, of the space and of the inert objects – in this case, the set of wall paintings. In turn, the geometric patterns painted on the walls tend to affect one's perception of the building, but also of the views outside the bay windows, as well as of the performance.

One could formally link Creed's "gallery work" to cabaret, a specific kind of spectacle, which roots are in the entertainment of a crowd who has gathered to eat, drink and socialize. Unlike theatre, cabaret is a place where entertainers come and go on a schedule that is dissociated from the one of the audience. This continuum of various actions forms the show, and one may or may not see it all; this perhaps best defines the conjunction of artistic proposals Creed brings together in the same time and space.

Martin Creed's interest is to invite the visitor to enter his work, with an acute awareness that it should not be imposing or daunting in any fashion. This may also be what links his shows to cabaret. The work is here; ready to be activated by the people who want to engage with it, but never in a forceful manner. Its mere presence should trigger a perceptual shift, leading those who are willing to become like "flâneurs", wander about and let one's senses be on alert to fully grasp – and enjoy – his proposal. As one goes back to the city and to one's own business, the show will continue to affect one's vision and awareness, a feeling one sometimes has when walking out of a film. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, life is a fiction that imitates art.

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