

Jennifer Vanderpool
1x1=X: A Germinating Collaboration
NEON, Brösarp, Sweden
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Max Presneill Essay

For the project *1x1=X: A Germinating Collaboration*, Ellen Hedberg (Sweden) and Jennifer Vanderpool (USA) are engaged in a form of anti-collaboration, much like Rauschenberg's erasure of the De Kooning drawing, engaging with a fusion of Keirkagaardian Existentialism and the resistance to rational containment suggested by Georges Bataille's 'informe'. This realigns the juncture of contemplation at the nexus points of change that arise from the process based interventions caused by Hedberg's reconstitution of Vanderpool's objects. The initial theatre of play occurs when Vanderpool's slick and abundant sculptural objects are introduced into the space. This 'sacrifice' is then considered and mutated by Hedberg's intensely introspective and quirky search for inter-relationships of form and meaning, transfiguring the 'landscape' of the forms into new avenues of being.

The destabilizing of categories which is inherent in Vanderpool's work is stretched to new configurations by this procedure. Although I find the links to old-fashioned, post modernistic destruction of categories of traditional binary ideas such as low/high, nature/culture, etc present here they seem to me to be byproducts of the materials and of little interest. There are bigger themes here, more important ideas to consider than these outmoded articles of theory. Both artists use 'low' and discarded materials – Vanderpool utilizes them to create landscapes and objects that relate to the real world (if via that of the fairy tale), while Hedberg turns the materials to an abstraction. She reflects on ways of thinking of the world, Vanderpool on ways of seeing the world.

The direction in which the whole exhibition moves is towards (or away?) from the formal to the informal, in terms of materiality and objecthood, for the artists, but in the other direction regarding the necessary approach needed by the viewer – formal decisions in reading and appreciating the final, if that is ever an appropriate word here, outcome. As this project is an ongoing investigation of the potentialities of collaboration, somewhat similar to the nTopia group's investigative projects, then perhaps this particular project is best seen as the first chapter in a larger unfinished novel of self reflexivity.

Using that analogy one can also see the project as a transformation of prose to poetry. The materials themselves are everyday and banal. They have a factness that eradicates meaning to some degree. They just are. But during the beginning stages of construction they become something else in Vanderpool's hands, transformed into delightful and decadent overabundance, a cornucopia of consumerism, ripe and nearing decay. They are entropic. They are Vanderpool's own portrait of Dorian Gray. They have become crafted sentences speaking of a narrative which only hints at resolution, but accessing slippage, avoidance of specific aims and outcomes, of predefined models, of ephemeral states of being. Vanderpool objects have the queasy underbelly, the dark side of Hollywood - the glamour slowly putrefying.

When Hedberg brings her acute, Tuttle-like aesthetic to bear upon this fairy tale – like the Grimm Brothers stories there is always a dark unsettling undertow to be found in Vanderpool’s work – the situation is further modified. This time into an intuitive decision making process that privileges the author. This making of choices is a fundamental basis for a very Nordic existentialism that searches for truth in its encounters with the sublime, the brooding North wasteland in which to try to find some small sense of the individual, of sweetness under an unforgiving sky.

The collaboration/anti-collaboration is an attempt to mate two distinct and yet connected languages – one Nordic the other American, the languages of prose and poetry, the bold and the subtle, the languages of materials and most importantly the languages which these two artists share – one where the materials and objecthood of the sculptures are fluid and amorphous, where materials and aesthetics are recontextualized. They both speak of detritus and entropy, of vanitas and death while maintaining a cynical optimism towards the validity of still attempting to make sense of the world, of the right, the duty even, of the thinking individual to interact and interpret, to select and by doing so, establish selfhood and identity. This is what makes us all human.

The act of choosing provides the basis for the self. In Hedberg’s hands it turns the fluid prose into poetry. Decision-making = responsibility. These artists recognize this and incorporate it into the model - giving parts of that up, surrendering their artistic autonomy while reinforcing individual decisions. In the rigorousness of their intent to allow the Other, to relinquish absolute control as individual artist/author, to see the binary nature of our experience in the way that the needs of the individual are always countered with the duties towards society signified by the continuous presence of the other woman’s artistic enterprise, we can see the range and depth which this project engenders.

I would like to ask a question here. That is - should we, as audience/reader ask ourselves whether the show we are walking around is one of art or artifact? Is it in fact the artifact of the performative aspects of the process of selective interventions and is, as such, already dead or close to dying itself, as we have come to look too late? Have we missed the real action and are now left only with the corpse? For us perhaps this point of reflection is what links both artists most, to each other and to us. Each moment that passes is full of actions never taken, while this exhibition is full of those completed. A call to activity and engagement for us all?

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