



The art object does not embody a form of knowledge

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volume 2 content
journal home pag
conference home pag
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to cite this journal article

Scrivener, S. (2002) The art object does not embody a form of knowledge
Working Papers in Art and Design :
Retrieved <date> from URI
http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research_papers/wpades_vol2/scrivenerfull.htm
ISSN 1466-491'

The Research Assessment Exercise recognises some activities of artists as research activities. However, the lack of widespread agreement on the theoretical foundation of this position has engendered an on-going debate concerning the meaning and nature of arts research.

At the heart of this debate is the idea that art making is a form of research activity. However, if this activity relegates the art produced to that of a by-product of a knowledge generation process, then it is research in some other discipline. We argue that art is the proper goal of arts research: making art needs to be recognised in its own right as a form of research.

The UK Higher Education Funding Councils asserts that research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. Can making art be described as an original investigation and is this undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding? To investigate means to inquire into, to examine, or to make a systematic inquiry or search. These definitions imply that there is something natural or artificial 'out there' to be investigated, whereas making art brings things into existence. Hence, we will argue that arts research is better understood as 'original creation' rather 'original investigation'.

Through original investigation we arrive at knowledge and understanding of the natural and artificial worlds, past and present. Calling something knowledge and understanding implies a certainty of fit between it and these worlds; we can apply this knowledge and understanding unquestioningly. In contradistinction, original creation brings into existence artefacts that have to be known and understood. Drawing on the natural and artificial worlds and imagination, the original creator generates apprehensions (in the sense of objects that must be grasped by the senses and the intellect) which when grasped offer ways of seeing. Rather than providing givens for dealing with situations, these apprehensions provide ways of seeing situations. Whereas original investigation is concerned with acquiring knowledge and understanding of what is/was the case, original creation is concerned with providing ways of understanding what is. Only experience will establish whether can be is, i.e., whether the apprehension fits the world. Hence, in the context of making art, research is defined to be original creation undertaken in order to generate novel apprehension.

Why then should this definition be regarded as research, since it could be just as easily be said to describe 'everyday' art making. Here, we shall argue that "researcher" intends to generate novel (by novel we mean culturally novel, not just novel to the creator or individual observers of an artefact.) apprehensions by undertaking original creation, and it is this that separates the researcher from the practitioner. Furthermore, we will argue that the "researcher" seeks to comply with accepted ways of generating apprehensions and to meet discipline determined norms of original creation.

In summary, we will argue that we should stop attempting to justify the art object as a form of knowledge and should instead focus on defining the goals and norms of the activity that we choose to call arts research.