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The object of art, which exists 'presently': Performance art

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Abstract

The break between object and image was added to the perception of reality and truth which changed with the Internet, social networks and the like in the 1990s. The possibilities that technology provides completed the effort of the postmodernist discourse in art to destroy tradition. All values are being reconstructed. While art is rapidly being digitised, Performance Art has taken its places in art's agenda. In this article, performance art will be elaborated and analysed with a focus on ceramic art. Performance art is the life itself, it is not repetitive, and it is what happens presently. It communes with the audience. As the object of art that exists at the moment, it cannot be bought, sold or moved. It is a way of transmitting the artist's ideas in an unusual, striking and unmediated way that is different from the traditional art forms. In the performances, it is mostly seen that breaking traditional forms, using the clay in raw form rather than firing it, reflecting the plasticity of the clay and revitalising it are used as assets. Performance art is a model of rebellion against the era in which we are imprisoned in mass communication and distanced from reality under the image bombardment. It is necessary to see the performance art as an experiment or suggestion, as the object of art which exists presently, rather than as a show to meet expectations.

Keywords: Present time, art, performance art, ceramics, process, audience.

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Ozet

1990'larla Internet, sosyal aglar, vb. ile degisen gerceklik ve hakikat algısına bir de nesne ve imaj arasındaki kopuk eklendi. Sanatta postmodernist soylemin gelenegi yıkma cabasını teknolojinin sagladığı olanaklar ve dijital dünya tamamlamis durumda. Tum degerler yeniden inşaa ediliyor. Sanat hızla sayısalıırken simdide olan Performans Sanati yeniden sanatın gündemindeki yerini almıs durumda. 'Sanatın "Simdide" Var Olan Nesnesi Performans' adlı bu makalede Performans Sanati; Seramik Sanati ozelinde ele alınarak degerlendirilmeye calısilacaktır. Performans sanati hayatın kendisidir, tekrarı olmayan, an da olandır. İzleyicisiyle butunlesir. Sanatın simdide olan nesnesi olarak alınması, satılması, tasınması soz konusu olmaz. Sanatcinin düşüncelerinin, geleneksel sanat biçimlerinden farklı olarak alıılmadık ve carpıcı bir biçimde dolayimsızca iletılmesinin bir yoludur. Seramik sanatçıları arasında son yıllarda performans sanati örnekleri artis göstermis durumda. Performanslarda cogunlukla geleneksel formları kırma, kılı fırınlamak yerine ham olarak kullanma, kılın plastikliğini yansıtmaya ve yasıatmanın önemli bir deger olarak kullanıldığı goruluyor. Performans sanati kitlesele iletisimin icine hapsoldüğümüz ve imaj bombardımanı altında gercekten uzaklasılan bir çağa bir baskaldırı modelidir. Sanat adına hedeflenen performans sanatına beklentileri karsılayacak birer gösteri olarak degil, tum bu bağlamın icinde birer deney veya oneri olarak sanatın simdide var olan nesnesi olarak bakmak gerekir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Simdi, Sanat, Performans Sanati, Seramik, Surec, İzleyici.

1. Introduction

1.1. Present ...

'You rehearse and act a role in theatre.

In theatre blood is ketchup and knife is not a real knife.

In performance everything's real.

Knife is a real knife and blood is blood'.

Marina Abramovic



**Ai Weiwei- Coca-Cola Vase, 2011, Mary Boone Gallery
(Online-resource 1)**

The circumstances which prepare neo-liberalism were experienced one after another with the idea that the real threat was the humans themselves, the rise of the postmodern discourse, Vietnam defeat of the US, student movements in the 1960s, deepening issues in the economic model of

capitalism, people's movements, inflation and especially the oil crisis in the 1970s. The futile Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the disintegration of the Soviet Union, unipolar World perception, globalisation, cultural imperialism, developing technology and many others displaced values (Isitman, 2017). The disconnection between the object and the image is added to the perception of reality and truth which changed with the Internet, social networks and the like in the 1990s and a new field was opened for the artist. While contemporary art is evolving into the eternal world of the 'present' in which there is neither origins nor orientations, neither past nor present, art which is in interaction with global economic, political and cultural networks focuses on subjects like environment, feminism, multiculturalism, globalisation and technology–human relations (Emrali, 2018; Isitman, 2017). While reality becomes indistinct, the art goes after what is real with the motto *anything goes*. The values of the past are questioned and torn to shreds, what is concealed, other and local is exalted. The process of the formation of the object of art gains importance and almost any material and method are included in art (Nas, 2018). While the limits of art are being pushed once more, the subjects are focused on following the agenda. With the production of infinite reproduction of the past, a war is declared to tradition, the past/tradition is lost by transferring it to the present time. For example, Ai Weiwei's work entitled *Coca Cola Vase* is a transfer of the antique form which represents China's historical and cultural values to the present by disconnecting it from its tradition. The artist's work entitled *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995) is considered in the same manner. What is aimed is neither the past nor the future but what is happening in the 'Present'. It is for this reason that in the process which we live art is articulated to what is lived and experienced more than criticising it.

With his statement 'End of History', Fukuyama (1999, p. 60) also emphasises this. He draws attention to the present, rather than the past and the future, because the reality is what is happening at the present. Yet, what is happening now is only a copy of a model and simulations that shape our times (Baudrillard, 2008; Lusdoc & Namoco, 2019). Moreover, one also cannot talk about the simulation of what is real because the simulation itself has become the reality. For this reason, people always live at the present time, and what is lived at the present time is nothing but simulation. It is for this reason that every kind of artistic representation becomes a process that comprises the present time and the moment.

Today, the possibilities provided by technology and digital world rebuild all values. While art is rapidly being digitised, Performance Art is again in the agenda as a form of resistance in the name of unifying the audience with the art object, catching the reality or not losing it.

2. Performance art

Performance art is the life itself; it is not repetitive, and it is what happens presently. As an object of art, which occurs at the present, it cannot be bought, sold or moved. It cannot be repeated. It is an act which time, space and sensations bring into existence and objectify it in the relation between the artist and the audience. While in its first examples, the audience was positioned as the witnesses of the moment, and later they became a part of the production. The borders between the artist and his/her artwork are also blurred between the artist and the audience. It is recorded as a document for history for the ones who have not witnessed that moment. It does not meet the audience after the object is formed, unlike other art objects. This is the most important difference of the performance art. It is a creation of the art object together with the artist and the audience. Even though it has similarities with stage and performing arts like theatre, it is performed without being bounded by a text. By stating '... people are shot from their arms, car windows are broken, or body gets literally burned under the sun', Turner (1984, p. 93) defines performance art not as a 'copy' but as what is 'real'. While every kind of material that comes to mind finds a place in performance art, the act begins, continues and ends in the space selected beforehand by the artist for displaying the aimed idea. For the artist, what is aimed is not building a theatre stage but sharing his/her workshop.



Man Yau, Porcelain Deck, 2012



Deborah Colker, Vasos, 2009



Mutlu Başkay, Farewell, 2019



Taylor Stamm, A Muddy Mastery, solo Show, 2012

Even though performance art starting from the early ages, dates back to Medieval shows and Renaissance festivals, it is related to a wide range of art in the 20th century from Futurism, Dada, Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism, Fluxus, Feminist Art and Land Art. The material of the performance art is the body. It focuses on all social and ecological issues like wars, social events, laws, rules, policies, religious and ideological exploitations, identity and gender discrimination. Performance Art, which maintains its influence, since the early twentieth century to the present day, is a means of conveying thought in an unmediated way^a. John Cage (4'33"-1952), Chris Burden (Shoot-1971), Stelarc (Event for Stretched Skin No.4-1977), Gina Pane (Death Control 2-1975), Carolee Schneemann (Up to and Including Her Limits-1976), Beuys (I like America and America likes me-1974) and others are related with this unmediated message which is lived at that moment. Whether the audience is a

viewer as in Chris Burden's Shoot performance or a participant as in Abramovic's 'Rhythm 10' (1974), the situation does not change. In both situations, the audience plays an active role and the idea conveyed is completed with the audience. What happens at that moment is special both for the artist and the audience, it is unique for that moment and it is real. Abramovic's words about her 'Rhythm 10' performance can be considered as an indication of this unmediated and real thing. 'I understood that... if you leave it to the audience they can kill you... I felt abused, they cut my clothes, pricked the thorns of the rose to my belly, another one interfered. An overly aggressive situation arose. After 6 hours, I stood up as I planned and started to walk to the audience. Everyone started to run away, they were running away from a real confrontation'. (Online resource 2).

3. Destroying tradition

'Art is resistance'

G. Deleuze

In recent years, examples of performance art are seen more frequently among ceramic artists. The difference is that being loyal to the material is not the aim but the means. By opening the only material of ceramic art, the clay, to the discussion, its technical features about the production processes which are thought to be indispensable are deferred. Breaking traditional forms, using the clay in its raw form rather than a fired product, acts such as throwing and pouring which reflect and revive the plasticity of clay are means for conveying expressions. The unknown, unnoticed features of the clay are revealed in the representation of the concept addressed. The debated values for the art environment in ceramic art are not rejected, hidden or deferred. On the contrary, they are highlighted. Bringing the fragility to the forefront, as it is suspected, is one of these methods. Like in Safiye Basar's *Silent Scream* (2012), Burcak Bingol's *Mythos and Utopia* (2016) or Man Yau's *Porcelain Deck* performances (2012), Basar exhibits the rebellion of woman against all social and cultural sanctions and Bingol exhibits woman's rebellion against tradition through the fragility of the material (Basar, 2018). Yau confronts skateboard which represents urban youth culture and time-consuming production means based on traditional handcrafts (Online resource 3). Deborah Colker's *Vasos* performance which is planned in a repeatable way takes place with ninety blue and white vases accompanied by music and dance. The dance of the dancers between the vases generates tension in the audience as it is aimed since vases are highly possible to be broken. And this tension is also a part of the performance (Online resource 4).

As Joanna Bond does, who addresses social issues in her performances and combines them with clay, sound, dance and the like, using clay without firing it is another method. Allison Fall (*Fragile Ceramic Footprints*, 2012), Spanish painter and ceramist Miquel Barceló and Yugoslavian dancer and choreographer Josef Nadj (*Paso Doble*, 2016), Erika Fischer and Lichte (*Performatif Aesthetic*, 2016), and Claire Twomey or Mutlu Baskaya (*Farewell-2019*) are among the artists who prefer to use clay in raw form. Baskaya suggests the audience to pour the prepared paints representing thoughts from the past on clay balls and to throw them to the apparatus which she prepared and get rid of them (Online resource 5). While Baskaya throws individual depressions and problems together with the audience, Taylor Stamm who works on sex and sexuality brings clay and body together. Stamm, stating that the plasticity of clay and its struggle with the body along with harsh or soft movements are very real, expresses that she wants or at least hopes that the audience seizes the moment and puts himself/herself into that struggle. (Online resource 6). Stamm who states that she wants people to watch or feel something rather sincere prefers particularly clay in order to emphasise the value of touching. She suggests that when touching involves emotions and sincerity, it appears as a value, which gives pain and makes one think; the connection is built through this means (Online resource 7). Agreeing with Stamm, Emma Hart who works both with photography and clay and who won Max Mara Art Award says 'Unlike photography, clay allows me to put immediate feelings on its surface. I can stroke it, scratch it, punch it, kick it, and bite it'. (Online resource 8).

In accordance with the methodology of contemporary art, which questions what comes from the past and exists in its tradition, ceramic artists resist by questioning their own materials to the end (Nawel, 2019). They analyse all definitions of ceramics in a deconstructive language and push, blur and defer limits. Critic and curator Hettie Judah who draws attention to this development describes this in her article written for the *Independent*, entitled 'The great ceramics revival: how clay is oozing back into contemporary art', as the comeback of the ancient form of art taking vengeance (Online resource 9). According to her, it is difficult to ignore that, in recent years, the artworks, which explore the digital world, dominate the field of art. However, as she notes, against the resistance of the interest for this striking, computer-dominated ground a challenge is made with one of the most basic forms of art, ceramics, and this is a response to a revival.

As Davies (2008) emphasises in his performance theory, almost art as a whole is performance art in a language. Marcel Duchamp's urinal is not an art as a readymade object but art as a performance of a re-exhibition of a readymade object as an art object. Jackson Pollock's spreading of paints on a canvas lied on the ground is painting as much as a performance which is called an act of painting, action painting^b, and the painting is the record, the documentation of this performance. Moreover, the photograph of an image, a moment which we encounter somewhere is a trace which is left after the story behind it and, in fact, it documents the performance of the photographer or the person who finds that photograph and changes its context.

Behind the influence of performance art on contemporary art, there is indexicality^c in the workings of image and reality (Vitulyova, 2020). In this respect, performance art is a reaction to this condition of mediation (dolayimlilik). For this, it either seeks ways of gaining and making people gain experience directly by realising unmediated, scriptless, unplanned actions or as a tactic which we more often today try problematising this situation by making it even more complex. When Baudrillard said 'I think that the influence of art is ever increasing. Art wants to be life^d' for sure there wasn't performance art in his target. Yet, again with Baudrillard's words at the present time when reality is lost, somewhere beyond hyper-reality, art is trying to keep what is really alive (not to lose it). In such a context in which we are imprisoned in mass communication and all values are digitised and distanced from reality under an image bombardment, performance art is consolidating its place as a revival model with its position of being the object of art which is made to exist presently.

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^a*Unmediated* is a term which comprises feeling more than seeing. A knowledge which is obtained in an unmediated way means a knowledge which is obtained without being obliged to obtain knowledge of something else.

^bAction Painting is used by H. Rosenberg for the method which the painter Jackson Pollock, who is an important representative of abstract expressionism, uses while making his paintings. It defines the method of creating a painting by spreading the paint on canvas by pouring, spraying, and the like with a brush or a cup with the help of body movements.

^cCharles Sanders Peirce's concept of indexicality is about the physicality of something. Contact takes place only in a physical World. For this reason, if the relation between indexical signs and the digital image will be established on the basis of indexicality, it should be built on the basis of physical entities rather than abstract ones like numbers. It is not sufficient for a photograph to have indexical qualities to reflect an objective reality. For instance, a hoof print tells us for certain that a horse was here before but in a horse photograph the photograph only tells us 'there was a horse'. The audience starts to construct time and place later on. An existential connection must be built with the object of the realised representation. The hoof print on the ground is a proof that the horse passed from there. To talk about the indexicality of something means to talk about a 'contact', a 'print' or an 'erosion'. Thomas Lloyd Short, Peirce's Theory of Signs, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.214–225. (Online resource 11)

^dBaudrillard, *ibid.*;88