

Performance Art Final

The rush of excitement, the great anticipation, the joy and confusion of life, and the perplexities of modern social interactions. The feelings derived from great performance art are irreplaceable and many times indescribable. While other art mediums let you enjoy contemplate for hours on end, performance art takes you to another place for a few minutes, hours or days, and after the performance is over, it leaves you thinking about your own life, the plight of others, and how to live moving forward. The sensations people take away from performance art show that it is not a fleeting sensation and there is as much inward contemplation as there is outward exchanges with other people. "What does it mean? What are they saying about actions and reactions?" One amazing thing about performance art is that it is live, human and turning back time is impossible. In painting and in sculpting, the art lives as it does within the clay or canvas. But performance art lives within the mind of those who have seen it. The works are compelling and have a great effect on observers, however the interesting part is that often performance art works are intangible. Artists often struggle to get funding for performance art, as it is difficult to sell the work to investors, however it is possible. By focusing on a few key successful performance artists it shows that by creating tangibility and brand equity it is possible to create a market for performance art work.

Key Successful performance artists

Andrea Fraser is a perfect example of how performance artists can transcend mediums and be self sufficient from their performances. Fraser's art comments on the exhibition and sales of art. Her main targets are galleries, museums and auction houses. Her most notable performance, *Museum Highlights* showed Fraser impersonating a museum tour guide in the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art, under the name Jane Castleton. Her character gave a fictional tour around the museum, showing strange and everyday items as art. She highlights a water fountain on the side of the room and professes that this "art" is a work commenting on commerce and the art market. Then takes her tour group to the cafeteria and proclaims that the room shows the "heyday of colonial art in Philadelphia". All of these comments are met with laughs and confusion from her tour group. The work is a commentary on the snobbery of museums and tour guides, as well as how the public views the credibility of art's perceived intention. The comments about the water fountain and the cafeteria could have just as easily been said about any painting or sculpture. Art is what you make it and what feelings you get out of it, are your own. By showing her audience that their jeers of her art critiques could be applied to many in the art world, and thus the snobbery and elitism of art should be looked past.

Marina Abramovic is seen as the Mother of Performance Art. Her work has tried to lend comments to human pain and suffering, the passing of time contrasting with the future, and the accessibility of artists. For over three decades Abramovic has been pushing the limits of performance art, bordering on painful to experience yet creating her own brand of commentary. Some of her early works include, *Rhythm 10* (1973), in which Abramovic uses twenty knives one at a time to play a game, jabbing the knife between her outstretched fingers. Each time she cut herself, she would pick up a new knife. A picture of the performance is included below. The entire process was recorded and Abramovic listened to the recording to try and reproduce the actions. The work is seen as commentary on the pain of the past and the difficulty in combining the past, present and future. One of her more recent projects, *The Artist is Present* featured Abramovic sitting silent and static in the Museum of Modern Art for 736 hours and 30 minutes. MoMA visitors could sit with Abramovic during any one of her daily 10-hour sessions. Visitors stood for hours just to sit with her, and some visitors' experiences with the silent Abramovic even pushed them to tears. The exhibition affected so many visitors that blogs, facebook groups, and videos were made to document visitors experiences. The use of actual visitors to a museum, interacting with a silent and static artist provides interesting commentary on how artists are accessed



in museums.
(*Rhythm 10*)

Brand Equity

The key to successful performance artists in monetizing their work is through brand equity. The "me too" aspect of performance art copycats many times serves to emphasize the commonality of a problem, emotion, or action, however the first movers, capitalizing on the public's surprise gain notoriety and respect within the art community. By creating a brand image, successful performance artists can often profit off their work.

David Hammons is an interesting example of brand equity within Performance Art, while not limiting art to one style. Hammons uses his performance art pieces as commentary on Civil Rights for African Americans and their continuous struggle, along with the increased consumerism of the American society. He states that roughly "85% of his time is spent in the streets" so that the remaining 15% in the studio shows exactly what he feels and sees. His performances have stretched across mediums, from films which primarily show discarded items normally associated with African Americans, to covered paintings, to he, himself participating in a social experiment. However, his brand equity is noticeable because of his first-mover commitment in his commentaries.

One of the most celebrated performance artworks of Hammons is *Bliz-aard Sale* (1983) in which Hammons stood outside after a snow storm, selling snowballs from a cart (**Below**). The balls were priced by size and by how white the snow was. The work gave commentary to consumerism, status, and racial issues. The snow was no different from any other from which even a child could make a snowball, however collectors actually bought into the sale.



(Bliz-aard)

The notoriety has caused copycat artists to try to replicate Hammons' work. As seen in the video below, another artist tried to emphasize Hammons' point by selling palm fronds, yet does not arrive at the desired outcome. The brand equity of Hammons' first mover advantage has made him a legend within the performance art community.

In another exhibition, *Crap on Crap*, Hammons creates an exhibition in which abstract art paintings are covered in black tarp with holes just big enough for the audience to peek through. The title of the exhibition gives it all away. Visitors are pushed to wonder what is behind the tarp, and also experience the whole art piece including the tarp. In one part of the show, an armoire is placed in front of a painting, cutting off all views entirely. The exhibit has been said to have left many visitors scratching their heads, however blends perfectly with Hammons' quote of "The art audience is the worst audience in the world. It's overly educated, it's conservative, it's out to criticize not to understand, and it never has any fun. Why should I spend my time playing to that audience?" His brand is a satire on the elitist art culture and the inherent racism and classism in America. His revolutionary exhibits cause him to remain notable and profitable, while conveying a message.

Tangibility

The major issue in creating performance art for profit (or even to get your money back) is creating something which collectors can buy and own. In some ways this defeats the purpose of the art. Performance art has some intangible beauty because it can be experienced live, and the feelings one gets from actually experiencing the art may not be felt again by replaying or simply looking at the remains of the art. In order to monetize their performance, artists have to offer something tangible to the public. Recording devices has made the sale of these performances easier, however it is often the physical parts of the performance which collectors enjoy and feel they can connect with the artist and the issues.

David Hammons does a fantastic job of changing everyday items into performance art. Further, the tangibility of these items brings the connection between the artist, collector and the meaning together. During *Bliz-aard*, Hammons created snowballs to sell on a blanket along side other vendors. Collectors have bought the snowballs, however keeping them tangible (frozen) is often an issue.

Another one of his projects is a series of works which are created by bouncing a dirty basketball on a silver-framed canvas. While the result may be visually appealing, the compelling feature of the art is that it was made with a dirty basketball. The performance, essentially drives the value of the art. The story of the creation of the piece is the performance feature of it, but the canvas is what is tangible. Recently *Hail Mary* sold for \$657,000. This is significant because the artwork's value is based on the methods not the result. Even without experiencing the methods live, the work still is worth a small fortune. .
(Hail Mary)

A simple approach to tangibility is exemplified by Andrea Fraser and Marina Abramovic, in changing mediums to distribute their work. Fraser's *Museum Highlights* is the transcript from her original performance. While the audience cannot experience the performance with the full sights and sounds, the transcript gives access to the art for years beyond the initial performance. The transcript has been produced with multiple editions, and for the low price of around \$20, collectors everywhere can experience Fraser's performance. Abramovic often records her performances and recently has been featured on HBO documentaries for her work, *The Artist is Present*. A link to the project is: <http://marinafilm.com/>

Conclusion

Ultimately it is difficult financially for many performance artists. The ones who actually turn a profit create a brand image, and can market a tangible piece of art, be it a used item, or recording for the performance. The interesting part about the market for performance art is that it has some aspects which make it the ideal market. Often one cannot take the performance out of the venue and collect it. Further, the feelings derived from the performance are reactions both with the performer and other observers. Artists such as Marina Abramovic and Andrea Fraser exemplify performance art's ability to bring meaning to the masses. By providing inexpensive recordings and transcripts it extends the audience to those not just in the immediate area, and goes beyond the snobbery of certain aspects of the art market.

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