



Honi Ryan

I N S T A N C E

an exhibition of recent works and performances



mindful encounters

mindful encounters is a
time-exchange project.

I offer you 8 hours of my time to do whatever you
want, need, or would like to see more of in the world.

In return I ask for 8 hours of your time to engage
with me in mindful activity.

We begin by listening to each other's heartbeat.

www.mindfulencounters.net

Stoop to Yarn

Most Saturdays

from 1-2pm during the show, Honi will
be perched in her installation having conversations
on a set of steps that, for her, are reminiscent of sitting
on the steps of a verandah or stoop talking to passersby.

Join her for a chat.

AN INSTANCE AT BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY ART GALLERY

JONATHAN JAMES

Honi Ryan's artwork, *Fleeting Fears* includes 16 glass jars laid in a grid. Each day, for 16 days, a jar was symbolically filled with hope for the troubled peoples of the Middle East. Placed lip down, the glasses filled with condensation. Intentionally, energy was made visible.

Mindful engagement is the focus of this exhibition. Throughout a day our level of focus waxes and wanes; now acting with intent, now reacting mechanically. Various works have projections onto real objects. A storm is projected into a teacup, and a door handle is projected onto a door. These works question the oscillating utility, futility and fealty of old and new technology in our homes. These works ask us to pay deeper attention to our interactions with people and to our use of the objects around us: to be mindful in each daily encounter.

Everyday activity is the material that Ryan harnesses in her performance-based art making. "Living as art" describes her process, and can take many forms. In academic

terms, this is referred to as social sculpture. Ryan's work includes silent dinners, structured encounters and technologically sculptural images and objects. Each project leaves material documents and/or ephemeral traces.

While a painter's brush stroke is clearly recorded by the paint, a person's actions, having chosen to live as art, are not so clearly recorded. Some of the exhibited works are documents created in response to previously enacted artworks: but there is a subtle difference between a record and a document. A record suggests an exact replay of events as they occurred, while the document suggests multiple methods of retelling are possible and that each retelling offers, but doesn't necessarily achieve, impartiality.

Should the artist document or record socially engaged performances, they may choose from technological and analogue methods including photography, film, objects, written testimony, and more. However, an

artist may insist the work exist only as an embodied action or imagined exercise leaving ephemeral traces, existing as memory, habit or another immaterial state or behaviour.

An ethical concern around documentation of such art includes the artist's ability to transcribe the participants' experience, and questions the ownership of a shared experience. Does the dynamic, lived experience need to be recorded and made into an object for spectatorship? Disrupting the gallery's privileging of images and objects by insisting that the imaginary potential of the audience complete an artwork answers some of these ethical concerns. To offer this imaginative freedom, Ryan includes in the gallery space ideas that become the premise for her events, without record or document, allowing you to fill in these gaps. An invitation may ensue if you would like to take this engagement further.

Ryan's sensitivity to her field, her interlocutors and her actions, records and documents, is carefully parsed. It comes from a deep engagement with community, and the sacrifice of ego this implies. The inherent limitations of democracy positively demonstrate the primacy of a community's diverse needs and wants. We individually express our needs and wants for our community through thoughtful engagement with various formal and informal organisations, including here in the gallery, knowing *others* needs and wants may come first. Ryan's

social works highlight the value of thoughtful engagement at home and the extension of this, out into the community.

This work is political. We are often encouraged to disengage, and we can easily be disenfranchised from decisions or action, but it is surprisingly easy to bring your point of view to a discussion. To stand up and be heard requires a conscious choice, and preferably one guided by the desire to speak respectfully and thoughtfully. A vital aspect of standing up and being heard is to first listen. Along these lines, Ryan often asks interlocutors to start an encounter by listening to their own heartbeat, or to that of their neighbour.

Our engagement with the world starts at home. Our relationship to home, including its carefully chosen objects and technology, is visible in our actions, and through the records and documents left within and beyond the home. Our conscious choices reverberate beyond the front door. In keeping with Ryan's practice, we too can commit to bringing art into life - and to rendering our ideas visible - by making each encounter mindful.

Silent Dinner Party

In April, Honi will be hosting
Silent Dinner Parties in the Blue Mountains.
A Silent Dinner Party is a regular dinner party
without spoken or written words.

For more information and dates see
www.silentdinnerparty.com

taking bookings and enquiries to
silentdinnerparty@gmail.com



SEAN LOWRY AND HONI RYAN, 'EXTENDED INSTANCE: THE ASYNCHRONOUS INTERVIEW'

EDITED EMAIL CONVERSATION CONDUCTED BETWEEN
OCTOBER 29, 2013 AND FEBRUARY 29, 2014.

SL: A creative work is a dynamic aggregate of elements contextualised in a cultural network. Comprehension therefore often demands a combination of sensory experience and a priori knowledge. To what extent is art literacy important for experiencing your exhibition?

HR: To the extent that the viewer makes it important. My work responds to the expectations and routines of its context – including the background each viewer brings to the experience.

SL: If it is the viewer that completes the work, to what extent is institutional validation important?

HR: In this Instance, the institution that hosts the work helps to define it. I don't usually work in traditional exhibition spaces, I see art more generally as a place for discussing ideas, some of which are validated by art's malleable institution. Since the objects in this show refer to domestic space, I do wonder how the experience would be altered if I concurrently displayed the same pieces in a nearby house.

SL: Of course institutional validation depends upon structural positioning, not simply physical context.

Expanded exhibition formats are now institutionally endorsed in their own right. Once it becomes clear that it is the immaterial social and political forces that validate art's production and reception, it in turn becomes clear that the art experience is something dematerialised. How do you feel about the relative value of objects versus the contexts that activate them?

HR: Context activates objects (and actions) and offers them meaning. It is endlessly fascinating how different the same thing can be in another context. I support an increasing disposition toward immateriality. After all, from an ecological standpoint, we have enough 'stuff' in the world!

SL: Indeed. Given that context activates objects that in turn perform as vehicles for an aesthetic experience, do you see art itself as something immaterial?

HR: Yes, it can be. Aesthetic experience may or may not be provoked by something material. Art defies finite definition, but I am especially inspired when art steps into a gap in society. This is the value of socially engaged art and it's ability to give voice and create dialogue. Here, immaterial art can lead to tangible change.

SL: Is tangible change an important outcome for you? In some ways, art's 'uselessness' provides a critical counterpoint to an unrelenting demand for 'productive' outcomes. Some artists speak of an 'urgency' in their practice. I prefer to actively resist this expectation. How 'urgent' is your practice?

HR: More than urgency is an immediacy that responds to the moment and allows for unpredicted transformations to be ongoing. I do not seek an endpoint but rather a lived process evidenced in subtle, often unquantifiable ways – as embodied memory that can manifest as actions and behaviours. I join you in resisting 'productivity' that leaves us distracted and without time. There is a lot to be said for being still, yet aware. Every action is a vote for more of that thing in the world, so I try and take each step consciously and openly toward creating a holistic life-practice. I love this idea of uselessness. It also encompasses and elevates unskilled actions.

SL: Absolutely. Contemporary art education often encourages formal de-skilling whilst promoting 'theoretical' re-skilling. What is your definition of unskilled action?

HR: Everyday activities. Most of what we do is a skill that we once acquired, but I mean mundane activities – those that we perform so regularly that we don't notice. There is so much potential in being more aware of those things. More recently, I have been thinking about the value of labour and alternative economies. My idea of 'unskilled action' is that without trade value in a capitalist system. These are the things I like to harness in my performances: walking, chatting, eating, sleeping etc. Simply calling them art adds a layer of critical awareness to them.

SL: Artistic de-skilling has of course long formed an implicit critique of capitalism. How do you respond to the potential for such activities becoming commodities themselves?

HR: The insidiousness of capitalism contains some of the same properties I respect in art – an ability to consume and become even that that hints its demise. It's paradoxically beautiful.

SL: What is art's point of difference within this equation? In what way do we differentiate art from the continuum of reality in which we must actually face the consequences of this paradox?

HR: I don't think there is any easy answer to that. Perhaps it is art's open ended and ineffable nature?

SL: Perhaps art is simply a mirror of all that is not. Perhaps its point of difference, being both indiscernibly immaterial yet strangely and profoundly other to 'everything else', is (in the words of John Cage) 'purposeless play.' Your practice certainly invites a sense of art/life liminality. Do ideas such as work, play, purpose, and pointlessness mean different things when they are inside or outside of the artwork?

HR: Yes, but not intentionally. The critical awareness art adds to things can make everyday activities exhausting. Perhaps I should do some sleep actions and see if I wake up tired! I identify the inside and outside of an artwork using time to start and stop, in order to keep a natural threshold between art and life feeding the practice. This liminality is then the site of the artwork, so art and life are blurred. I seek to place there a playful non-hierarchical nature to human exchange. I approach the self as existing in interactions between people, places, thoughts and objects. Here, each individual is networked into all of our constructs;

social, ecological, political, virtual and economic, which can in turn be effected every single day by every single thing that we do - giving 'pointlessness' both purpose and profundity.

SL: You have outlined some really beautiful ways of thinking about these porous boundaries. Given your temporal framing, do you see your projects as continuing to unfold following their 'completion' (like networks surrounding individuals following their mortal departure)?

HR: That is the grey area for sure! Especially when working with human relationships as sculptural form, for they are always changing and evolving. As soon as we try and pin down a moment it transforms. Sometimes I wonder how long a friendship built as a sculpture remains a sculpture, and when, or indeed if, it ever stops being art.

SL: Do you ever wonder if there is anything about friendship that is compromised in being co-opted as art?

HR: Yes. That can both become confusing and raise notion of purity. Is a friendship less pure if it is entered under certain terms of engagement? Relationships invariably involve compromise, and experiencing them through art challenges me to be the person I want to be and leave my fears behind. I also find that the performative nature of 'social sculpture' brings out wonderful parts of my collaborators. In this way, art allows us to build an existence that makes sense in a world where what's on offer can often seem foreign.

SL: Are we building a tangible existence or a mirror of lived existence?

HR: Both. As soon as something becomes a concrete form it requires

renegotiation – especially social norms. Perhaps we begin by putting a mirror up and seeing what parts people see, want to change, or keep. Then we teach and grow through empowerment, offering neither right nor wrong answers but rather trusting intuition. Ideas made real through actions give us embodied memories that contribute to collective memory – allowing us to experiment with ways of living.

SL: To what extent has art's potential for providing provisional social transactions become institutionalised? How do we meaningfully distinguish that which is 'authentically' dedicated to new potentialities in lived existence from that which is perhaps more transparently careerist? Given our inextricable need for sustenance, does being mindful of contradictions partially redeem us?

HR: Awareness is crucial. It's really all we can do. The nature of one's intention is clearly important, even while knowing that multiple meanings may contradict it. Often I don't trust things until I can locate the paradox and come to terms with it.

SL: Yes, acknowledging paradox is certainly an essential part of navigating this territory. I am particularly interested in the way in which individuals that critique the cult of individual authorship as commodity can become inadvertently 'branded'. How do you work to resist and prevent your resistance being branded?

HR: My 'resistance' is through harmony. I place peaceful harmonious actions in the world in order to propagate more of them. Our involvement in a capitalist system is more complex. I try and contribute to it ethically and educate myself accordingly. We can have a marketplace that

is fair, and I think that when we truly connect with ourselves we naturally do what is right for the other, in turn acknowledging our interconnectedness as one human organism. What perplexes me is whether human beings are naturally subordinate, as developed in our dependent years as infants. A lot of my work with group dynamics and human encounters shows me that people do want to be led, even when offered the option. This does not make them weak or apathetic but it does assign responsibility to a few rather than the group. Choosing to accept that responsibility may be what becomes 'branded'. We are all responsible for the cultural objects that we produce, and we need to continue to support them accordingly.

SL: Absolutely. Perhaps some people confuse this sense of responsibility with the authority of authorship?

HR: Confuse...or choose.

SL: Indeed. Although 'choosing' keeps bringing us back to Duchamp's antithetical reframing of authorship.

HR: Ha! Yep, I guess that's the circle.

SL: This is why I think that in taking up the responsibility of being an artist, we should by extension have a problem with calling ourselves artists (everyone is an artist/there is no such thing as an artist/I am an artist/I am not an artist etc.). Duchamp preferred the term 'anartist'. I like this term because it allows us to inhabit the productive tension between art and anti-art. This is an endlessly deferred, highly provisional, and ultimately an agnostic position. How do you feel about calling yourself an artist?

HR: It's a good point and very true. On a gut level, I feel liberated, humbled, and condemned by the

'title' and all it's shifting implications. As we have mentioned earlier, anti-art is futile insofar as it is invariably becomes institutionalised. Perhaps, in choosing to occupy borders we can grow toward inclusivity. Yet if art is somehow always 'other', do you think that creative productivity requires this tension to remain vital?

SL: These tensions are vital. I am however suspicious of any expectation that we need to be 'productive'. I imagine that this is also a gripe for you?

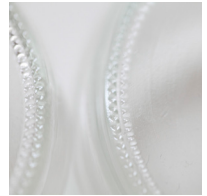
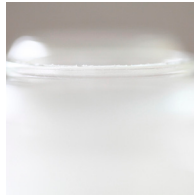
HR: It sure is. I join you in resisting productivity that leaves us distracted or repeating histories over and over. This brings me back to the sculptural element of this exhibition. Just as art's 'uselessness' provides an important critical counter to the unrelenting demand for productive outcomes, the use of projection in the show aims to question the use value of objects and technology. Progression is not the same thing as progress – we may need to revolve to evolve harmoniously. Time might be circular after all.

SL: Isn't time just one part of determining our provisional address within all that is?

HR: Yes, that's a lovely way of looking at it. And with that our time runs short. I'll be out of contact for the next while. I'm off to a nudist colony beyond digital connectivity to write a proposal. Thanks for the chat. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Fleeting Fears

performance, sept 9-24 2013




Today I laid out 16 identical recycled glass jars in a grid on my desk.

In 16 days I was starting some work with Ashkal Alwan, Centre for the Plastic Arts in Beirut. Unfortunately, due to the unrest in the area, I won't make it there when I had planned.

Each morning for the next 16 days, I will fill one of these small glass vessels with the intention to neutralise the fear felt by a child fleeing Syria in search of refuge in Lebanon, now.

I will turn the glass upside down to capture the hope.

The hope of Peace.



SEVENTH OF MARCH - MAY THE FOURTH 2014
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