

## **Muscles, minds, footballs and sinks**

Katinka Bock traces the relationships between people, the objects they use, and the spaces they inhabit. She performs subtle transformations of perception: altering architectures, things and environments, to shift how we see, act, and behave. What she makes is sometimes visible, when it takes the form of a sculpture. Other times, it is invisible, as she alters conditions, or facilitates a network of human participation.

When Bock visited a rehearsal at Siobhan Davies Dance for the company's touring work for galleries, *material / rearranged / to / be*, she was struck by the candid critical responses that the dancers gave to one another—as this was not something she experienced working as a solitary artist. This led her to explore the differences in artistic process between dance and art, and encouraged her work with the Roof Studio, the largest space at Siobhan Davies Studios, to make something specifically for the building's main users—dancers—to experience whilst at work. Yet this posed a dilemma: sculpture fills empty space, and dancers need empty space. Which led Bock to the question, what do dancers need to work, other than space? The answer was water. And so Bock chose to give the dancers access to drinking water in their studio. Yet instead of installing a regular drinking fountain, the kind found in offices, or other communal spaces, Bock wanted to install something specific to the location of the building.

On a weekday, during playtime and lunch breaks, the sound of the children in the neighboring primary school can be heard echoing through the Siobhan Davies Studios building. These children, and, particularly, their voices, are part of the daily lives of the building's inhabitants. And so Bock decided to approach the school and ask them if they would exchange a working sink for one of her sculptures, for the duration of the project. The school happily agreed and offered a secondary sink from a classroom. A plumber removed the sink—stained with paint traces from the children's art classes—from the school, and installed it at the back of the studio, plumbing it into the Siobhan Davies building's water system. The sink is fully functional, although the plumbing is temporary: visible clear plastic pipes snake through the building into the studio to feed it, and they carry the waste water below the sink, out of the building, expunging it onto the ground in a trickle, to the left of the main entrance door. Therefore viewers can never see the entire sculpture simultaneously in one viewing. Yet, this is true for all sculpture: sculpture, as a three-dimensional form, relies on one's memory in order to be wholly seen. As the viewer moves around it, they must simultaneously recall the view of the other dimensions, in

order to understand its entire being—thus performing a theatrical illusion in their minds.

In exchange, Bock installed a hanging ceramic near where the sink was removed. The only people able to see this work are the users of the school. They are Bock's audience. The rest of us have to make do with an image. Bock also created a second work only accessible to the school children and users. She rescued a football that had been kicked onto the roof and fixed it with a blue ratchet strap to a façade of Siobhan Davies Studios that faces into the children's playground. The children's outdoor activities— football, running, skipping, tagging, and, the imaginary worlds they turn into reality via freeform play—resemble some of the work that occurs inside the dance institution that they neighbor. Yet whilst the children's movement is visible through the studio windows, they cannot see the dancers at work. Thus perhaps the football-as-sculpture functions, in its amusing readymade form, as a reminder of the relationship between playing and creativity—pediatrician and psychologist Donald Winnicott elucidated on the importance of play in creative development in his iconic book *Playing and Reality*, 1971—acting as a symbolic reminder of the relationship between the dancers and the children.

Alongside the sink, Bock installed a series of sculptures in the Roof Studio. The studio is a unique space—designed by architect Sarah Wigglesworth—in which the high wood-paneled roof is pitched, via five thick curved arches, that slope downwards on one side, their highs and lows inverted at opposite ends, so that they zigzag, swooping across one another, to form skylights which fill the room with daylight—creating an architectural experience that sits somewhere between a church and a cave. The roof has a muscular quality, its spinal curves evoking a sense of movement. Bock's ceramic sheets—which exude a precarious malleability, like pastry flattened with a rolling pin—hang, flop, and sit in the unique surroundings of dancers' work-space. One is draped over a portable radiator, like a jumper or blanket, protecting an object that produces its own heat. Three sheets of cow's leather are rolled together like a yoga mat, lying as if waiting to be used, in the middle of the dance floor. A pair of small off-white ceramics—shaped like rectangular paper bags, that morph into owls in my mind, the longer I stare—sit high on a shelf on the back wall overlooking the space. Another off-white sheet, similar to that installed in the school classroom, hangs from the ceiling on a wooden pole, mirrored by another formed from sheet of metal mesh. The works have a prop like, anthropomorphic quality, which, like the cellular roof, also evoke a sense of movement. Bock paid careful attention to the studio's inhabitant's needs. The heights

of the hanging works are carefully calculated to allow the dancers space, and those sitting on the floor can be moved if necessary.

The sculptures installed in the Studio contain traces of a previous exhibition created by Bock for Mercer Union in Toronto, Canada. There Bock visited shops local to the gallery and asked the staff if they would swap an item of stock for a sculpture, which they were to then present in the store alongside their usual items. Many agreed, exchanging items—such as an oxtail, white hat, and red spectacle frames—for one of Bock's ceramic sculptures (Bock also photographed the shopkeepers holding the sculptures, some of whom cradled them like a baby). Bock later wrapped the items she received in clay and sent them to be fired in a kiln: all the objects disintegrated in the extreme heat of the kiln, leaving only traces of dust. This enterprise, and the presence of Bock's sculptures in the "real world", prompted discussions with the users of the shops, who unwittingly became her audience, via Bock's humorous form of covert public art.

This desire to leave the studio and the institution, and work within real life situations, began in the latter half of twentieth century. Artist Allan Kaprow's book *The Blurring of Art and Life* contains a series of essays written between 1958 and 1990 (although most were written in the 60s and 70s), in which he traces a trajectory of American art, to explore its prison break from the studio (following the dominance of Abstract Expressionism) via radical works of non-theatrical performance, participatory performance, and the creation of art in the outside world, using the actions and objects of everyday life. Contemporaneously, the artist, choreographer, and film-maker Yvonne Rainer began her choreographic exploration of anti-spectacle, creating a critique of capitalist society via her unique language of movement. Rainer formed complex sequences—via a process she termed "radical juxtaposition"—which combined everyday pedestrian gestures, with political and sociological references, alongside bursts of more intuitive, sometimes humorously animalistic, movement. Rainer's assemblages position viewers as untrained anthropologists watching something equally recognisable and baffling, pushing them to draw from their own experiences for its interpretation. Rainer also worked closely with Robert Morris, Simone Forti and others at the Judson Church in New York to present a number of performances that involved physically experimenting with objects made from raw industrial materials—such as see-saws and ropes—turning minimalist sculptures into theatrical props. Choreographer Andrea Buckley was invited to create an improvised dance performance in response to Bock's exhibition. With echoes of Judson Church, Buckley created a collage of everyday movement combined with more controlled forms—interspersed with radical moments of humour,

where she swung Bock's ceiling sculptures and dunked her face in water to blow bubbles in the sink.

This history of anti-spectacle in choreography, performance and sculpture—the use of everyday movements, tasks, objects, situations, and spaces—sets the scene for Bock's own artistic approach. It also formed an important parallel to a generation of artists, who are often grouped under the banner of institutional critique—such as Michael Asher and Hans Haacke—who, like Bock, worked with institutional (for the most part galleries and museums) environments and systems to create their work. Asher's alterations, interventions, or additions, to buildings and spaces were always site-specific and temporary. The fabric of the institution was his material: he divided spaces, altered or removed walls, and adapted systems—such as heating or ventilation—to change the environment. In 1991 Asher made a replica of a working drinking fountain (the kind found in offices, schools and public buildings) out of granite, and displayed it in the centre of a lawn at the University of California campus in San Diego. For Asher, the context was part of the artwork; this gesture of public art referred to the campus's history as a military training site and its current use by students—as student's drunk from the fountain (sadly it was destroyed in 2015 by a vandal with a sledgehammer) the site-line led their eyes to an American military flag from 1943.

Asher taught a radical course entitled Post Studio Art at Calarts in California from 1976 until his death in 2012, in which students would discuss a single artwork during day long seminars that sometimes stretched into the night. Bock went to art school in Berlin in Germany in 1996-2002. During this time, the school was undergoing renovation, thus the students had no studios. As such, her teacher advised the students to use the city and its buildings as their studios, in her own version of post-studio training. In previous projects Bock has similarly altered the environments of the gallery or institution, working with heating, plumbing and other environmental factors, to create what I would term "situations". These "situations" combine aspects of the institutional critique and performance of anti-spectacle of her predecessors, with Bock's unique relational process of engaging local users and audiences, to produce sculptural interventions. The site, its systems, the people who inhabit it, and the audiences around it, are as much a part of her work, as the sculptures that arise from her experiences.

Another trait particular to dance, which Bock noted during her experience at Siobhan Davies Dance, is that the choreographic language a dancer works with remains, in perpetuity, on a cellular level, in both their minds and their muscles. The history of one's artistic experience as a dancer is carried from one performance to

the next. A work of choreography will never remain exactly the same. Even a tightly choreographed work will alter a little, via its transmission through the dancers, each time it is performed. Dance is in a permanent state of being in between, always in the present, but simultaneously in the past—as time passes living bodies are never motionless. Yet all buildings hold visible and invisible traces of their past and present users—the architecture, décor, contents, dirt and dust all morph continuously, via the everyday choreographies performed by the space's inhabitants. Bock's approach to the Siobhan Davies Dance building, and the people who use and neighbor it, alongside her role more generally as an artist, echoes this: one work leads to the next, either conceptually or physically, in a network of gestures, objects and experiences, in which nothing is final.

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