

Introduction

Introducing ...

...the catalogue for the contemporary art exhibition *Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Something – Four Perspectives of Artistic Research*. A book that is a visual documentation of the exhibition, but at the same time a document of the research practices involved in the whole process. A catalogue that consists of a long methodological essay, four discursive interviews with the artists, and four artists' statements.

A catalogue and an exhibition that, in combination, constitute the main body of results of a highly challenging and even provocative project that focuses on the question of artistic research as a multi-layered practice. A point of focus that truly awakens and arouses a wide variety of views, expectations and attitudes. A project that is demanding and fascinating because it addresses and articulates a new element both in the field of contemporary art and within university structures.

This exhibition brings together four different takes and positions adopted by artists working with a strong research dimension and sensibility. A fact that unites all these projects, but a fact that connects them to a lot of current strategies and ways of working in the field of contemporary art. These four projects present a wide variety of new possibilities for combining artistic practice with the means and methods of research. These projects stand tall and proud for themselves, and not for any institutions.

Our project does not lack self-esteem. We are talking loud, but we are – that's the claim – also saying something. We might use big words, address big themes, but we are not generating hype or a spectacle. We (as in a group of 4 + 1, standing for 4 artists' projects and 1 curator) are taking seriously the proposition of good practice, trying to work through the idea of presenting these projects together in a way that gets the most out of them as individual works of art and as a whole.

And yes, this is where the notion of research enters forcibly onto the scene. This is no longer research into what artistic research can or should be in abstract terms or on a structural level. Intentionally, and with dedication, we have left the general aspects, and moved on to the particularities, using this exhibition as a guiding light and force for thinking through the what, where and how. Again, not in an abstract sense, but within the framework of our exhibition project: the site, time, participants and theme.

We are talking loud and we are saying something. We enter the discussion as artists and a curator. We combine artistic means with research methods. We do things that include, not exclude. We work in an inter-disciplinary manner, across specific domains of knowledge production. We activate and we reflect. But we are not confused about our aims or our profiles. We are not pretending to be this or that. We offer no all-encompassing formula or instant gratification of any type. We are talking loud and saying something with the means available to us as people who do what they do, as artists and curator. We keep it close, we keep it tight – just like dynamite.

Thus, we have four projects in the form of works of art. They are not sociology, they are not art history. There is no magic hat, and there is no emergency door, no catapult to rid us all of our personal responsibilities as professionals in our own fields. What you see is what you get: works of art in a contemporary art show. Their merit is based on their ability and potentiality as works of art. The catalogue does, however, bring in some detailed, in-depth documentation of the processes – both for the group and for individual cases. These four extended interviews and the four specific statements each written by one of the artists highlight the background and the actualized, activated presence of each project. While the essay provides a theoretical and methodological framework for and interpretative perception of the whole issue, the role of the interviews is to address and articulate the background to each practice and the content of these practices. Following this logic, the role of the artist's statements is to focus on the specific works and to reflect on those that are present in the exhibitions. On their own, and especially when taken together, these are all discursive acts of knowledge production that generate practice-based information. Something that we want to share and to make it possible to develop it and to take it further.

The main single body of text in this catalogue is an argument for the open-ended, self-critical and reflexive methodology of good practice. An argument that is strongly based on an original source, Aristotle, and an argument that here takes its current shape as part of a continuing story of methodological issues in artistic research. In its previous form, it appeared as a joint effort in a book – Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta & Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research – theories, methods and practices*, 2005.

What has happened in the intervening three years is that, as a professor for artistic research at the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performative Arts at the University of Gothenburg, I have learned more about how to do everything within my reach to try to focus on the individual practices and individual projects of the PhD students for whom I am the main tutor in the programme. In plain words, this means less theory *an sich* and more, highly theory-linked, but practice-based reflection and analyses. The aim is to keep together and in tight, content-driven contact both the production of works of art and the discourse on them. Priority number one up to 212 and still running is artistic production, but not on its own. It involves artistic works and artistic processes in direct and fruitful connection with reflective, critical, yet constructive strategies. And yes, for me, the best way to combine these two (artistic production and reflective thinking through practice) and to keep them up in the air, colliding with and influencing each other, is to return again and again to the potentialities of the Aristotelian idea of good practice to which the long essay included here is dedicated.

Thus, please permit us to extend to you this invitation to come and see, come and feel, come and think with, walk with and argue with these works of

art and these words articulating the research that went into the process. This is an invitation to disagree, to keep on keeping on the process of give and take, of exchanging views and opinions on issues that we burn for – and with.

And yes, as an invitation, I will finish with a sort of metaphor. A tentative and not entirely unironic description of what artistic research might be. A description that comes from one of the PhD students, Lars Wallsten, with whom I have had the luxurious opportunity of working in the last few years. According to Wallsten, artistic research is a bit like the following everyday, tacky, but true-as-in-blue, situation. You are visiting your old hometown, and suddenly your car breaks down. You recall from the past that there is a good, reliable garage that can probably fix it. After leaving the car to be repaired, you walk through the streets, which are at the same time familiar and strange to you. You kind of think you recognize some faces and some parts of the streets, but you are not sure. It is a tantalisingly eerie feeling. You get a strong sense that this is a great opportunity to do something new in a familiar, but changed field. A nagging, challenging opportunity to do something with and about your practice, while you are walking along the road thinking how much, in the end, is that damn car repair going to cost you?

Mika Hannula