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2008

Research Into the Functioning of Interactive Works of Art in the Semi-Public Space

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Introduction

Not all interactive works of art function equally well, often for technical reasons but also because, for example, users do not partake in the interaction. In order to find out why certain works do work well and others not, and to learn a lesson from this for the future, the Research Group Art and Public Space was asked to conduct research. After consultation, ten works were selected from SKOR's portfolio and four from other organisations. Both 'older' and more recent works were looked at, as well as works that make use of new media and works where the interactivity is 'analogue'. The Research Group talked with commissioners, artists, advisors and users, asking them about their expectations, motivations and findings.

The important thing for both SKOR and the Research Group was to define the concept of 'interactivity'. It could be said that every work of art, including paintings and sculptures, in fact enters into interaction with the viewer. The use of new media and technology plays a part in what we currently mean by interactive art, but there are also examples where the artist him- or herself brings about the interaction. The following definition was decided on for this research: works whose right to exist is derived wholly or in part by an action on the part of the viewer. Works that are automatically 'switched on' when the viewer passes by them or works in which the artist him- or herself has to be present have been left out of consideration.

The conclusions of the research involve the following aspects:

- maintenance and commitment
- prior expectations
- new media and technology
- the role of SKOR
- life expectancy and technical maintenance
- the intrinsic value of the work of art
- works of art from SKOR and works from other organisations
- the relationship between budget and functioning

The research further contains statements, both in the recommendations and in the report of the discussions, for all the parties to take to heart. As a supervisory body, SKOR should be concerned about expectations that are difficult to fulfil and about genuine commitment on the part of other parties. It also needs to make extra room for follow-up procedures. Commissioning bodies should realise that interactive works require much and lasting attention and are unable to solve internal problems (of an architectural or organisational nature for instance).

Artists themselves should be experienced in working with new media and technology. What is also important is the conclusion that all those involved should not too easily assume that their work of art can 'generate' interaction in the long term. An interactive work of art has the best chance of success when it intervenes in an already existing dynamic between the users of the location concerned.

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