

## Artistic Research as Programme

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Art and Research: HOW?

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1.

I want to start with an anecdote. When Marko Mäetamm visited us at the Royal College of Art in London in 2006/7, he took part in an exhibition at Café Gallery Projects called *Productive Matter: Materialising Research*, organised by the Fine Art research group in order to present its current artistic research activity. Mäetamm's contribution provoked a lively discussion. The work he showed was a 15-minute, looped, text-based video that he had shown many times before. Called *No Title*, it tells the fictional story of how he had his family killed. But for once it was not the work's subject matter that caused dismay. For this particular exhibition, he chose to complement the video with a single A4 sheet of paper, which he hung next to the screen. Here, he described some of the questions that had triggered the work.

The criticism he faced was founded on the perception that the text weakened the artwork by taking away from the illusive space that was created by the narrative on the screen. In response, he agreed with this view, but said that it had been deliberate. The video without text 'worked' in the context of an ordinary exhibition, but for this particular show, announced as 'research exhibition', he wanted to upset the work's economy. The refusal to integrate video and text into a coherent work would serve to open up a discursive space within which research could take place. To him, this addition of text was dependant on the context – he would not have shown the video with the text as part of a regular exhibition, since the notion of 'research' could not be assumed in a wider context.

After much discussion, which did not appear to convince the group, Mäetamm went up to the work and took down the sheet of paper, saying that without the text, it would be a very different piece. And so it was. Surprisingly, however, his removal of the text, which somehow parallels Marcel Duchamp's shaving of the bearded Mona Lisa in his *L.H.O.O.Q. rasée* from 1965, did not appear to satisfy his critics either. His gesture – or

was it a performance? – gave his art back to the audience, but in doing so mutilated his exhibit.

This anecdote illustrates a dilemma. Mäetamm, on the one hand, appears to have held the position that an artwork that creates an illusion is not adequate for research. His critics, on the other hand, seem to have insisted that a research contribution within the context of art still needs to be an effective artwork. Neither position is wrong: something different certainly needs to happen to art when it becomes research, but it disappoints our expectations when it ceases to be artistic.

It may come as a surprise, though, that the *researchers* at the Royal College were not questioning the validity of the research enacted in the exhibit, but rather chose to question its *artistic* standing. In other words, whilst in the art world we may expect works to be criticised for their quality as artworks, we may not consider this to be the leading question in a research environment. Rather, we would expect the foremost question to be: ‘What contribution does *No Title* with text attached make to the development of knowledge and understanding?’ Or, possibly: ‘How does the text interact with the work?’

The line of questioning that was taken does not show a personal failure on the part of those involved in the discussion; in fact, I have the highest respect for all concerned. What it shows is a systematic failure, which I want to bring to your attention. The problem is that every person in the group – myself included – in addition to being a researcher, was also an artist. This is due to the fact that those who teach, study or examine research in the United Kingdom tend to be artists and that artistic research is carried out and taught in art schools.

In art contexts, it is not permissible to make a work that does not operate convincingly, i.e. that holds back its ‘artistic conviction’. The student is taught in all stages of art education to eradicate from the work what is foreign to it. If the student refuses, he is asked to give an explanation of how his art is supposed to work. An artwork that does not convince in all respects cannot be accepted as art. Naturally, nobody can force an artist to change his work, but the cultivation of an understanding of when and how a work is successful is the aim of art education and has been transferred to the field of research.

In the context of art, Mäetamm’s exhibit was, as he himself admitted, unacceptable. But is a work that manufactures its own failure as artwork possibly permissible in a research context? The group, being for the institutional reasons mentioned above, a group of artists, thought not. Mäetamm himself, however, must have thought that there could be validity in obstructing his art. Far from disregarding the conventions of art, he used

and referred to them in this piece. His work claimed, however, an additional possibility that came from taking seriously the notion of research not as art but as the development of knowledge and understanding. His proposition may thus have been to render understandable an element of the work that required the disruption of the work.

I should perhaps apologise to Mäetamm for having used his example so extensively instead of talking about my own experience. I have been through similar discussions many times before and have come here today to promote artistic research as just such a disruption of art. This approach would require a bold stance on the part of the institution, both in terms of art and of research.

2.

In philosophy beginning with Plato, art has not been seen as a contributor to human knowledge; if anything, it has been thought to obscure it. In the *Republic*, it was considered downright dangerous. As Plato writes of the poet or painter:

We are therefore quite right to refuse to admit him to a properly run state, because he wakens and encourages and strengthens the lower elements in the mind to the detriment of reason, which is like giving power and political control to the worst elements in a state and ruining the better elements. The dramatic poet produces a similarly bad state of affairs in the mind of the individual ... by creating images far removed from the truth. (Plato, 2003: Book X, 605 b-c)

According to Plato, art is dangerous because it can create an *illusion* that may not be true. In the *Republic*, he does not claim that art is insignificant; what he says is that the way in which it works is removing what it shows from the truth by giving a second- or third-rate representation of eternal, true ideas. However, he is apparently not entirely happy with his conclusion that art should be banned from the state. In fact, in a later passage of the *Republic*, he sets up a challenge, which I would like to look at in more detail. Socrates in a conversation with Glaucon says:

‘However, let us freely admit that if drama and poetry written for pleasure can prove to us that they have a place in a well-run society, we will gladly admit them, for we know their fascination only too well for ourselves; but it would be wicked to abandon what seems to be the truth [namely, that art should not be admitted]. I expect you feel the fascination of poetry yourself, don’t you,’ I asked, ‘especially when it’s Homer exercising it?’

‘I do indeed.’

‘It is only fair, then, that poetry should return if she can make her defence in

lyric and other metre.’

‘Yes.’

‘And we should give her defenders, men who aren’t poets themselves but who love poetry, a chance of defending her in prose and providing that she doesn’t only give pleasure but brings lasting benefit to human life and human society. And we will listen favourably, as we shall gain much if we find her a source of profit as well as pleasure.’

‘Yes, we shall gain a lot.’

‘But if they fail to make their case, then we shall have to follow the example of the lover who renounces a passion that is doing him no good, however hard it may be to do so.’ (Plato, 2003: 607 c-e)

The first thing that is remarkable here is the fact that Socrates is ‘fascinated’ by art. His argument is not that art should not be permitted to contribute to the state because it is irrelevant. Rather, it is that art can only be dangerous because it *is* relevant, and this is the reason why Socrates is intrigued by it. But – and this is the second remarkable point – he is *unable* to make a case for it. However, due to his fascination, he does not believe that such a case can *never* be made. He appears to be asking for somebody to convince him that the fascination he has for art is in fact constructive rather than dangerous. It is not Socrates’ attraction to art but his philosophy that prohibits art.

How can Socrates be convinced? First of all, art has to defend itself. To do so, it cannot be just art, but needs to make a case for itself in respect to the question of truth.

This means – and Socrates is not very explicit about this – that art needs to take on a question that is not originally of its own making: art has to respond to a call issued by philosophy. The artist has to understand the question of philosophy fully enough to mount his defence, while the philosopher, i.e. Socrates, has just admitted that he himself is unable to understand his fascination sufficiently to make a case for art. What is required of the artist is thus a double task: he has to (a) understand the question of philosophy and (b) create art in response.

Socrates seems to be aware of the challenge he has imposed on art, because he does not literally expect art to *answer* philosophy’s question, since this would strictly speaking be his – i.e. the philosopher’s – territory. Thus, an intermediate is necessary. What he calls ‘men who aren’t poets themselves’ are believed to be able to give an understandable voice to art’s defence, having so to speak one foot in the territory of art and the other in that of philosophy. And it is to *those* people (and not the artists themselves) to whom Socrates ‘will listen favourably’. Who are these men?

3.

The current crisis in art criticism is well-documented in books such as James Elkins' *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (2003) or Terry Eagleton's *The Function of Criticism* (1984), which for example states that 'criticism today lacks all substantive social function'. (Eagleton, 1984: 7) Despite this, however, I think it is fair to assume that art critics in general could be seen to mediate between art and philosophy. On the one hand, they have to be able to understand art, whilst on the other, they must have the ability to speak a common language and to formulate propositions.

Critics are only necessary, however, *after* art has taken up its defence, because it is this defence – I am still following Socrates – and not art in general that makes critics necessary. In fact, critical thinking and modern art seem to have developed hand in hand, although we may say that it was only after Immanuel Kant's so called 'Copernican Turn', which makes philosophy focus on the subject, that philosophy provided a formulation of the question of truth to which art really could respond. Looking at Kant's philosophy, this comes as no surprise: for him, art has always functioned in relation to the subject, in so far as beauty is not seen to be a property of an object, but rather the consequence of the free play of the imagination and the understanding that is shared by all subjects.

As Jean-Luc Nancy suggested in *The Sublime Offering* (2003), Kant did not really intend to set up a philosophy that would create a challenge to art. Rather, he attempted a critical system designed to encompass art and thus lay it to rest. The result of his third critique was therefore the opposite of what he might have envisaged. By giving art its own domain, as based on aesthetic judgements, he in effect unleashed the Romantic Movement that, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, 'is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world'. (Berlin, 2000: 1)

Romantic iconographies are back in fashion, but these are not what I am talking about. I am talking about the positioning of the artist and the relevance that art received primarily in early Romantic/Idealistic philosophy. The possibility of a subjective notion of truth that Kant's philosophy introduced may thus be seen to add a prospect to philosophy from which Socrates' challenge regarding the relevance of art may be answered.

For example, in his lecture *On Science and Art in Relation to Academic Studies* of 1806 (Schelling, 1985), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling claimed that art as science makes sense only if art produces what he called 'intellectual intuition'. According to him, there are two types of art: the first targets the production of a beautiful deception, in which case art is not seen to contribute intellectually. Alternatively, the second

possible type, which Schelling calls 'holy art', can reveal what remains hidden to the senses (a non-sensuous, intellectual quality).

In modern times, instead of having one art that is excluded from knowledge, we now seem to have two types of art, where only one truly qualifies. The use of the word 'holy' in this context indicates not only the (unfortunate) religious implication, which Nietzsche would do away with later that century, but also indicates a directness associated with artworks that gives them special meaning. In Schelling's lecture, however, even those 'holy' artworks do not speak for themselves; they require philosophy and with it, discourse.

Walter Benjamin's dissertation *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* (1919) (Benjamin, 2003a) takes the notion of 'reflection', as developed by the key Romantic thinkers Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis as a possible definition of Schelling's 'intellectual activity'. One can say that only such art that is able to reflect deserves the predicate 'holy'. According to Benjamin, the fundamental character of the notion of 'reflection' in early Romanticism is grounded in particular on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's work, where reflection is seen as essential to the subject, which otherwise could not be conceived as free. (Fichte, 1997)

In Plato, an artwork is a representation. But because it is a representation, it cannot be the thing, or rather the idea, itself: the art work is a derivative. In modernism, the artwork is a reflection. In classical modern terms, this allows for a possible identity between the artwork and the idea, which could be seen as ideal or absolute representation. 'Reflection', however, emphasises the reflective activity of the artwork – the artwork actively reflects – which makes the reflecting artwork akin to a subject. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy thus refer in *The Literary Absolute* (1988) to the modern artwork as 'subject-work'. When they refer to it as 'subject-work' they do so in order to emphasise the artwork as being beyond its representation as subject *or* object, its character lying somewhere in-between the subject-artist and the object-work.

#### 4.

In response to Socrates, we may thus say that art's defence starts with its having become reflective. An exact art-historical theory of this development is probably more difficult than I care to admit at the moment. However, I would like to propose Svetlana Alpers' *The Art of Describing* (1983) as a possible avenue into such a theory. In this book, she argues that a Northern mode of painting developed in Flanders and the Netherlands

from the sixteenth century that can be distinguished from the Southern mode. In Alpers' opinion, which was later picked up by David Hockney (2001) amongst others, it was the use of optical instruments, most fundamentally mirrors, that made painting in the Northern mode possible. Taken in this sense, reflection is a visual function.

In modern times, it has become photography's role to mirror reality. Through a discussion of the mirror, Craig Owens, for example, arrives at an analysis of photography, and of Walker Evans's photograph of *Cary Ross's Bedroom* (1932) in particular, as 'an image of the photographic process'. (Owens, 1992: 26) Most importantly, however, Owens stresses that although such an observation may be due to the photographic apparatus, this would not 'account for the photograph's capacity to *internally generate and organize meaning*'. (Owens, 1992: 26, my italics)

According to such theories, the photograph or the artwork in general does not just have the passive function of repeating something, be it *re*-presentation or *re*-reflection. Owens stretches the notion of 'reflection' to a meaningful *activity* on the part of the artwork, very much like when a thinker creates meaning by reflecting on something. The notion of the 'subject-work' that I have mentioned before seems to fit such internal reflective activity.

There is a problem, however. If the artwork is such an active agent, it ought to make a difference. The activity of reflection, although it repeats something, must nevertheless add or change something – what would otherwise be the point of claiming activity on the part of the artwork? Robert Smithson, who has done many works involving mirrors, took the concept of 'enantiomorphism' as a way of explaining such difference. One of his installations, his *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, even makes a literal reference in the title. In order to explain what enantiomorphism is, Smithson writes:

Two asymmetrical trails that mirror each other could be called enantiomorphic after those two common enantiomorphs – the right and the left hands. Eyes are enantiomorphs. Writing the reflection is supposed to match the physical reality, yet somehow the enantiomorphs don't quite fit together. The right hand is always at variance with the left ... [a] mirror looking for its reflection but never quite finding it. (Smithson, 1996: 131)

'Enantiomorphism' is the notion that Smithson uses in place of 'reflection' to make clear that something has been transformed in the process, although what remains seems to be identical. It is particularly interesting to relate such a transformative concept of reflection to the natural sciences. There, it has been claimed that a molecular structure that is an enantiomorph, i.e. a mirror image, to another structure shows different properties in experiments. (Levy, 1996)

The best examples of Smithson's use of enantiomorphism are his *Non-Sites* of 1968, installations that consist of (1) maps, photographs and documents (2) collected mineral samples, and (3) containers, in which these samples are held. All of these elements are set up as a real, albeit fragmented, point mirroring a site in its absence. The non-site is not an exact mirror-image, but an enantiomorph of the site.

Smithson has often been quoted in reference to postmodern philosophy because of the way he approached difference. Let me stress, however, that difference was already at the heart of modernism, which introduced the reflective subject into art. For Benjamin, for example, the Romantic theory of understanding is already engaged in a play of difference. There, the result of a reflection is not identical to its source; their relation is the same but on different levels of reflection. Benjamin quotes Schlegel in saying that the move from one level to the other has to be thought of as a 'jump' (*Sprung*). (Benjamin, 2003a: 27) It is through ignoring these levels of reflection, i.e. denying the 'jump', that the notion of the common 'object' is produced, in which reflection is lost.

In early Romanticism, this process of difference is directed towards the absolute: the immediate knowledge of everything through something else. Benjamin clearly states that this ultimate goal of reflection is nevertheless not the norm, not even in artworks, but cannot be excluded along the trajectory towards absolute reflection.

An artwork can thus be situated between two poles: that of absolute reflection and that of first reflection (or 'Ur-Reflection' as Benjamin calls it). As he says:

In order to differentiate between the two, one would have to assume that the absolute reflection captures the maximum, the ur-reflection the minimum, of reality, in the sense that although both carry the whole reality ... this [reality] would be unfolded to its highest clarity in the first [absolute reflection], not unfolded and murky in the other [ur-reflection]. (Benjamin, 2003a: 31)

The quality of an artwork can be judged by 'placing' it on that scale. This 'placement' is, following Benjamin, the work of the critic.

Although art criticism forms the title of Benjamin's dissertation, it is not exercised therein. In an early text from 1914/15, *Two Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin – Dichtermut – Blödigkeit*, Benjamin asserts that the judgement of an artwork must be derived from itself; not, however, from the way it solves a particular challenge, but from the 'seriousness and scale of the task' it poses. (Benjamin, 2003b: 105) By focusing on the ambition of the work, criticism looks in effect at the work's reflective potential rather than its objective qualities. Benjamin sees in art criticism a complementary reflection that follows the ambition of the work, which it seeks to complete in an act of cognition.



The ambition of the artwork is not an objective quality. Rather, we can only speak of an 'ambition' once the artwork is accepted as reflective and exposed through reflection as subject-work. Critique brings out the best in the work, which – since it is the result of a reflection – must be genuine understanding.

One would have thought that postmodern philosophy, by focusing on difference, would lend itself easily to a theory of art that is reflective. Jean-François Lyotard, for example, introduces his *Discours/Figure* boldly as a 'defence of the eye'. (Lyotard, 2002: 11) In reality, however, his defence does not really strengthen the eye – his notion of the sublime, for example, which he relates to Barnett Newman's use of the concept, is highly questionable. (Lyotard, 1992: 89ff) The eye, i.e. difference and reflection, are only defended in postmodernism because logo-centric discourse is weakened.

This has mainly to do with the spatial notion of 'reflection' – the gap that makes the jump necessary – that has always disrupted discourse without, however, being acknowledged. The deconstructive method, for example, is a method that re-introduces into discourse those of its elements that discourse suppresses when it claims to be rational.

It is certainly the case that postmodern philosophy has offered a model of discourse very suitable to art, which is the reason why it has been so successful in this context over the last decades. However, the problem is that discourse as it stands today is unable to make a difference, since it has been transformed in such a way as to repeat instead of reflect art. The postmodern, philosophical text has, so to speak, become an artwork in its own right. The crisis of art criticism, for example, may be seen in the lack of distance between art and philosophy caused by the disintegration of 'truth' within discourse.

Art is also affected. Both in Socrates' challenge as well as in Schelling's conception, art required philosophy as its different other. Friedrich Hölderlin, who as a student in 1790 was a roommate of both Schelling and Hegel in Tübingen, even proposes, according to Beda Allemann's Heideggerian reading, that our Hesperian, i.e. northern, culture would collapse if reflective distance were lost. (Allemann, 1954) According to this position, which Hölderlin adopted during his mature years, our culture desires a resolution of reflection into a mystical unity, as much as the Greek culture desired its resolution in philosophy and science, which ultimately, to Hölderlin, meant Greece's decline. Schelling, who in younger years favoured art, may be a good example of this Hesperian desire, because he shifted his work from art to mythology in his later years. In the same way, early Romanticism and Romanticism proper are worlds apart. The reflective subject-work was only a proposition in early Romanticism, while in Romanticism proper it became a fact. In other words, it was not the artwork's reflective

capacity that made it art; it was the status of the work as art that made it reflective. The category of art, however, has become so fluid that, as Marcel Duchamp proved (to put it simplistically), anything could potentially be art. (De Duve, 1996) But because of the assumption of art in objects that are supposed to be art, an artwork does not have to make a case for itself in terms of reflectivity, which means that reflectivity may be neglected.

5.

I am talking about a choice concerning artistic practice, which starts, surprisingly perhaps, with the question of philosophy. If the question of truth in art is upheld, or rather insisted upon (as now happens with regard to artistic research – where, at least in the United Kingdom, students are ‘forced’ to engage with the question of truth in their written component) our culture may reconnect with the fundamental question of the relevance of art, which I introduced as Socrates’ challenge. What kind of philosophy, however, is now suited to this task *after* the postmodern criticism of rationality has succeeded in putting into doubt the ‘classic’ rational question? We could, of course, revert to a pre-postmodern position, which may also be called ‘pragmatic’ and which is the position the United Kingdom seems to have adopted. I will talk about this first. I hope it will become clear how the ‘traditional’ concept of art, and in particular the classic question of truth in philosophy, are kept intact, and also how, as a consequence, art has to deliver something that cannot be true yet, but which is promised to become a truth once a suitable discourse has taken over.

In the institutional context in the UK, two definitions of ‘research’ are central. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) states that ‘creative output’ on its own cannot be seen as research. Rather, it ‘expect[s] this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection.’ (AHRC, 2004) The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), moreover, states that research should be an ‘original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding’. (RAE, 2001) The AHRC’s definition is somewhat ambivalent, since on the one hand it does not accept artworks as research, while on the other it downplays the function of writing, suggesting that it is there only to ‘document’, ‘support’ and ‘demonstrate’. As much as the definition seems to accept a secondary emphasis on text, it is still clear that ‘research’ is looked at only in relation to the text, since this is where critical reflection is to be found.

Thus, despite the fact that artistic practice on its own cannot be seen as research, it is

nevertheless its source, while the written elements need to supplement this practice in order for it to become research. The necessary supplementation of art by philosophy is, however, almost exactly Socrates' model. Only through a complicated process of interpretation and translation can truth be derived from an original artwork. This truth is, however, claimed to have been in art already, making it possible to admit art to the state, or in our case, to hand out research doctorates in art. Is there any guarantee, however, that there is something relevant in art? Couldn't all truth come from discourse?

In effect, neither Socrates' proposal nor the United Kingdom's pragmatic position on research offer an *artistic* notion of truth. The question of truth originates as a question of philosophy and is never developed as a question of art within art. This is true even of early Romanticism, where artistic practice, although being present in the works of Novalis, Schlegel or Hölderlin, seems always to be removed. Art, on the other hand, has become quite comfortable in its remoteness, because outsiders, as we know, can (almost) do what they want. It thus comes as no surprise that artistic research is met with suspicion from within art. It is much harder to develop truth in your work (even if this is desired) than to simply make work. If there was a strong art criticism that would put pressure on art, the situation might be different, but it would not fix the problem, because art criticism, as we know, operates within textual discourse.

This talk was advertised as *Artistic Research as Programme*. Although the title is not wrong, it may not quite express what I have in mind. I should probably have called it *Research as Artistic Programme* to make clear that it is art that has to wake up to its own reflective concerns: the status of the work, the process and the site of meaning.

Much of the supplementation that makes art the mute source of meaning has been criticised within artistic practice. Art & Language, for example, have launched a series of outspoken reflections on the state of art that have attempted to provoke a different way of thinking. As they wrote in their account of their own practice, *Provisional History*, in 1982:

[W]hat perhaps united the founder members of Art & Language more than anything else was an intuition that, under the specific circumstances of art at the time, the production of a first-order art was a virtual impossibility, unless assent was given to those fraudulent conceptualizations by means of which normal art was supported and entrenched. Defensible work must first and foremost entail a critique of those conceptualisations – the development of a 'second order' discourse in terms of which the normal discourse and production might be described and explained. (Harrison and Orton, 1982: 21)

One way in which they responded to their own concerns was to integrate their critical writing into art installations, such as in the famous *Index 01*, shown at Documenta 5, Kassel, in 1972, for which the artists used previously published material along with new manuscripts, organising their texts in eight filing cabinets.

However, although this sounds like the beginning of artistic research triggered by the concerns surrounding Conceptual practice, in effect this is not the case; there is no straight history connecting Conceptual art with artistic research. According to Art & Language's position, as cited above, art can only maintain its primacy if it engages with the discourse that has been unwittingly produced by traditional practice. If, however, that discourse is supplemental or 'second order', placing art first as the originator of meaning, then it would be repeating rather than questioning that discourse, due to the very fact that the concept of art as primary has remained in place. Exhibiting the discourse as Art & Language did in *Index 01* does not undo the discourse's supplemental function. If anything, it complicates it.

As the example of Art & Language testifies, the supplementation of art is not only a problem in regard to discourse but also in regard to practice. I hope it has become clear that both art and philosophy are dependant on the cultural order inherited from Ancient Greece. It is only when art *shapes* discourse that the supplementation of art can be undone, making it necessary to formulate discursive forms *artistically*. This means, however, that artistic research has to step out of the shadow of art and work against art as a category and for artistic research as a practice. Artistic research as programme can thus overcome the hitherto negative positioning of art through philosophy that current pragmatic positions in the research debate strive to make positive without, however, questioning the validity of the underlying order.

First and foremost, in research we cannot assume the presence of art. And only when work makes a case for itself and its reflective concerns should we speak of 'research'. If this concern appears supplemental, we take it as sign that the traditional roles of art and philosophy are, at least partially, kept intact. Philosophy or text can be used, but only deconstructively, to unlock philosophy's handle on art. Philosophy, in fact, may have to be used, because as I have indicated, it has been philosophy that has made art the outsider that it is. At the same time, art has to show not so much its relevance to start with, but its own research interest. As I have indicated, such research interest does not necessarily exist in the present climate in fine-art education, despite the academy's emphasis on critical and cultural theory. The research interest, however, must be specific to and developed by the work. Beyond this, we are in exciting, open territory.

The programme I am proposing is thus an ambition and not an institutional programme. The ambition is nothing less than the same one that Socrates experienced as fascination, which triggered the desire for the acceptance of art against the odds. Art academies should claim their history and ambition and be proud of the achievements of modern art that have made artistic reflectivity credible. This would mean that artistic research could be seen not just as pragmatic and circumstantial, but as mirroring the reflective seriousness with which many modern artists, though not all, approach their work. Although the pragmatic model may be adopted for institutional reasons, as has happened in the UK, we should not lose sight of the larger prize – a self-declared artistic research culture in art academies.

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