



Dan Shipsides and Neal Beggs. *Shipsides and Beggs Projects: Still not out of the woods.* Belfast, MAC, Sunken Gallery, 29 June-19 August 2012



Slavka Sverakova, 2012-07-24



Its curator, Hugh Mulholland, stated: *The work is open-ended and whilst collaborative, elements of their individual artistic practice can be detected.* The idea of open-endedness has existed as long as there was poetry and art. It is not something that can be excluded from any art process, although it came to the special attention during the Modernism and its pressure on the participation of viewers. It was expected to work as shared responsibility for meanings of each work of art and a protection against attacks issued from older traditional positions. That seems to be still its valid role while the international art elite moves the openness of art in another direction by extending inherited art system.



The perceived open-endedness forges a link between the SB Projects and the current Documenta 13 at Kassel. Noted by several reviewers of D 13 it is hailed as significant shift in contemporary art and curatorship. The current Documenta are understood as issuing a strong conviction that everything may become art. The question whether viewers will share that idea is not entertained. I chose to look at it as a secondary concern, placing all responsibility onto the intrinsic value of a work of art. If the meaning is open and malleable, two processes normally become activated: openness of the work towards the viewer and emancipation of the viewer. Dan Shipsides and Neal Beggs developed collaboration of a particular kind: it allows them to share ideas and materials and skills, without erasing their individual solutions. This both respects authorship and dissipates its overwhelming importance. They seem to be supportive of each other's preferences. It is the final variant of possible work of art that becomes emancipated.



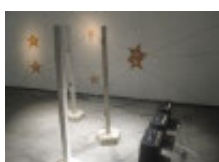
To bridging over the understandable gap between climbing and art, they established two kinds of connections: climbing as subject matter and approximation of climbing as experience. The first leads to a definition of a genre, not unlike landscape or still life, the other is paradoxically more abstract, not unlike a map, graph, timeline or concept.



Carolyn Christow-Bakargiev states that Documenta 13 is dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory.



Shipsides and Beggs Projects are that active living in a connection to a theory, I propose, of mediation and immediacy.



Since Dan Shipsides and Neal Beggs connected climbing and visual art they faced complex oppositions of ideas inside their own art practices. The choices offered themselves: climbing became a subject matter of a video, drawings, installation, and performance. In all, the divide between subject matter and a work of art was too wide to allow for aesthetic function of climbing as art, in the manner of, say, R. Tiravanija's cooking as art. Shippersides more recent framing of a new climbing route on a wild sea crag as public art re-visits Michael Holzer's concerns. (Port A Doris, Inishoven, Donegal, Ireland, 55.2degrees North, 6.9 degrees West). The idea of active living as mode of art tolerates numerous variants, and it is this kind of openness that anticipates eventual "getting out of the wood".



At the current exhibition the various media forge several distinct encounters. In that sense the media control the viewer. The material evokes associations with



ordinary life: wire fence, tape, video, sound tape, colour, document, record sleeve. More interesting is how each encounter depends on different measure of immediacy. Starting with the drawings on all three walls: polychromy associates with the art of painting, coding and mapping, famously cast by Plato as secondary to the real, twice removed from the realm of Idea=truth. Their being in the world successfully mutates that gap, mostly by poetic transformation with power to enchant. Calligraphic look receives earthy modern accent from the slim (plastic?) tapes following one another in tight togetherness. The curves may or may not map a climbed journey. But they take my eye on one. In their autonomous character their whisper about time and speed. After flowing comfortably along they knot themselves into parallel concentric circles that is allowed to house an anchoring for the fence wires. On other occasion they make themselves into a distant star. Combined, the visual rhythm and accuracy of delivery, spy on the viewer's sensitivity to abstraction.

If the "drawings" comfortably negotiate the physicality of tape and abstraction, the fence by its sheer physicality starts abruption of the imagined. Except, when by active participation, a viewer reveals its hidden part. The posts have sensitive pads, when a wire touches them various sounds reminiscent of stormy weather fill the space. It is grounded in an experience of lightening while the two artists were climbing the Via Ferrata in Italian Dolomites. The motive of the fence comes from there too. Visitors are encouraged to "play" the fence "like a guitar". I found the power of play to replace any other intended association a pleasurable defiance of a possible illustrative role.

Play continues to saturate the installation, which would benefit from more space. The large Yupa star (a variant of "bivacco star" exhibited at The Third place, Belfast, November 2011) works like a screen for continuous back projection of assemblage of video documentation and symmetrical patterns and abstract colour fields, a kaleidoscope. The physicality of the fence on its left, still in the peripheral vision, foregrounds the magic of the star lighting up in different colours. Included are some mimetic images e.g. a silhouette of a climber.

The third kind of encounter is offered by a sound track of a dialogue emitting from the box mounted on the wall. It is not necessary for this wondrously visual exhibition. It is distracting by its basic determination to tell a story. It undermines the idea of active living, and the holistic mode of the exhibition, play and poetry. Moreover – it harks back to that gap between the subject matter and art.

I think that two theoretical positions compete for interpretation of site specific art practice with one root in art, the other in skills like climbing. One is the question of defining the "theatre of operation", the situation, in Guy Debord's words. The other, is liberation of desire to share the excitement of active living as art. I sense that SBPs are moving along the line of further freedom. Yet, certain values are not in their gift. When a work of art is indoors, in a gallery, in an exhibition, it calls for and responds to available skills of mediation. When the work is outdoors, like any other Land Art or Site Specific art, other than art making skills emancipate themselves more convincingly, namely immediacy. I recollect Rueckriem's experiment in Frankfurt decades ago with his stone sculpture. When placed in a gallery, the surface of the stone emanated its belonging to nature. When outdoors, in a park, the stone proclaimed effortlessly its being art. Yet, I could not read it then as an anxious object (see Denis Donoghue, *The Anxious Object*, fifth lecture, Reith Lectures 1982). Instead, it was an object confident that it can handle two identities, collaborating so, that when one was perceived the other was hidden. It is a basic principle of visual perception, when tessellating white and black oscillate, but cannot be perceived both at once. It does not require a special state of mind.

According to Carolyn Christow-Bakargiev the Documenta 13 are guided by the four states of mind: being on a stage, under a siege, in a state of hope and in retreat.

The *Shipsides/Beggs* Projects are in a state of hope, presented as staged experience by artists who withdrew, leaving it to the others to point out when uncertainty of judgement will not matter. The beauty of the play and interplay, the skills that visually enchant, made it already the case.

photos from the web site: www.danshipsides.com

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