



Claims Department

Let us go then, you and I, into October.

The death of Doug Berry has been haunting me. He was among the best of us, and I can't seem to pull myself together enough to come up with the power to put together the compilation of his writing I wanna be able to pass out at his memorial.

And there's so much good Doug stuff to choose from.

I've also got an agreement to write an article for the Pen & Sword blog on 'Killer Restaurants' and I'm loving the fact that my publisher, tiny as they are, at least seem to be willing to let me try and make some sales.

My first sales report came - 0 dollars. The timeframe, though, was up until July 1st and my book launched the 27th.



If I Only Could Performance and Video Art My Theoretical Practice



I've thought a lot about what I'd do if I were an artist...

You see, I have two massive strikes against me. The first - I lack talent. The second - I lack connections.

These two things mean you can't get into the places you want to!

So, my Performance Art practice would be based on three ideas - that there is no such thing as non-evolutionary art, that the acts of the present have an indelible mark on the art of the past, and that the audience should find their role in any art piece unhappily.

So, I have five pieces that I've actually mapped. The first requires eBay, a willing Museum, and some paint.

First, in the days prior to the Performance, a painting is hung in the museum. It was purchased off of eBay. Ideally, it's a painting of little importance. The label is placed on it - *Painting Re-painting, Performance piece, (date of performance)*. Then, on the day listed on the painting, I arrive with a bunch of folks to mill around and after a bit, take a paintbrush and start painting over the hanging painting with white paint. No announcement. No warning, just start painting. I'm torn as to whether or not a spray painter would be a good idea.



Now, the ideal is that someone tries to stop me, becoming a part of the work. And one that's clearly marked on the label at that! The idea that the work was announced to those who would stop it from happening is fun, at the very least.

Of course, this should be recorded, and that resulting piece would be Video Art when it ended up on YouTube, especially if it was done with multiple images on the screen at a time.

I like that concept.

After putting down a layer of primer, I'd do the thing again, but this time doing my painting style, squeezing tubes of paint right on to the canvas.

I like that idea - making my mark, altering even my own work as if it has no permanence. That's sorta the message - there is nothing permanent in art.

The next would take a whole lot more. Yes, more than getting a museum to allow a performance that would at least kinda endanger their collection.

So, it starts with a small, Costco shed. They have 'em at about 8 by 12. In it, I'd hang a series of fairly large paintings. I'd sit in there, in the center in a comfy chair. People would then be invited to enter, and then when they'd look at a work, I'd have paint fall on it from above.

This, of course, would not be announced.

Now, what's this one saying? I think the obvious idea that a painting is not done when it's on the museum walls, and that the viewer has had the chance to encounter it. That's the message, that the work isn't finished until it's viewed. It's clearly performance art because it requires the interaction between the viewer and the painting, that they're getting to see the creation of it, meaning that they're seeing the creation, a performance concept, but it's also forcing the viewer to establish their opinion of the work throughout the piece.

Both of those, you'll notice, also fall into the realm of installation art, but I think the performative aspect moves them more into that realm. Site-specific artworks are fascinating to me, but when they go beyond the static installation concept, I think they do much better.



Something much easier would be painting on a roll. Start by making a super-long painting, I'd use watercolor, I'd then place the roll with a 'take one' sign. The idea is that a person can pull out a bit of the roll and then tear it off and take it home. This work would play in a few fields. One, the painting would be a prop, but also end up moving out of the performance and becoming a static piece, much like the pieces taken from *Cut Piece* after being cut away from Yoko's clothes. Second, it's a consideration of art consumption. With no indication of how much or how little a participant could take, this mirrors consumption patterns for art in purchasing an artist's work. Is it a little as something to fill a space, is it a representative sample, or is it **MINE ALL MINE** philosophy. There could be a fascinating post-work conceptual analytical piece that could come out of it as well.

Once in a while, my biggest idea pops back into my head.

So, in Improv, the first rule is Yes, *and*... The idea is that saying no is denial and ends up all possibilities that the other person might have had. The yes recognizes their idea, and the add lets you add your bit. It's the basis for almost all improvisational performance.

So, I wanna do *No, but*...

It's a piece where one artist puts a mark, then instantly covers it over or erases it and then paints their idea, which is then given to the other artist. This is clearly a performance-based reference to *Erased deKooning* but it goes to the idea that all art is a collaboration, and all collaboration requires not compromise, but destruction of singular ideas as scaffolding towards the creation of art.

What do these all have in common?

Well, the obvious is that they all require destruction of the existing art, and in these cases, the destruction of presented art. Once something hangs in a museum, it gains a sort of sanctity. Once something has been declared finished, it is considered immoral (or, quite possibly illegal) to alter their vision, but these ideas all state that the work is, in reality, just a remnant. That's very Clement Greenberg of me, I know.

The other one I've always wanted to do is to get a contemporary art museum to allow for a sewing circle. The artificial delineation between craft and high art (and there's an argument that you can start and never end. One of the big theories is that craft is seen as women's work and art as the realm of men. I do see some point there, and the work I have in mind would be a combination of everything I've done up to this point. It would be a long, several day, sewing circle, with the material being used being paintings in the Abstract Expressionist style. Now, they could be fabric printed in the style, but with actual canvas paintings, it would be far more effective. The group would make a quilt of the paintings. The themes there seem pretty clear.

The last one would be an installation piece in the style of Sol LeWitt. It starts by finding a museum that is willing to enjoy a good laugh. Then, arrange for a dozen or so paintings. Then, put up the paintings, but the labels are instructions for how to steal that painting.

Now, this is ALSO a potential performance piece and a video art piece. The performance aspect is if someone actually steals the piece. The video art would be the surveillance footage.

This is very much along the lines of danger art, much like those goldfish in blenders. It is a taunting, a tempting of someone to create a performance piece.





A Doug Story

You could always count on a few people to be in the Fanzine Lounge early in the afternoon of BayCon. There would be Milt Stevens, Randy Smith would pop by, and Doug Berry would be there, sometimes for hours. Those were my happy places, and my happy times.

This is a story about one of those days.

So, there we were, me, Doug, Milt, Jason Schachat, all of us hopped up on con and Cokes. It was one of those conversations that went all over the place and last for ages. It was mostly me a Doug with Milt enjoying the show.

We got to a wonderfully metaphysical portion of the conversation.

“You know,” I said, “I won’t consider myself having mattered unless at least 5 people have rent their clothes and jumped into the grave after the casket.”

This was before I was married with kids and the number increased to 8.

“Completely reasonable,” said Doug.

We kept talking and I don't remember why, but I said "mortality is the worst! I wish we could simply be a bundle of ideas bouncing off one another, requiring no resources."

To say Doug gave me the "What the Hell Did You Just Say" look would be the understatement. He looked at me like I was a dog who had finally firmly grasped the writing of Nietzsche but still simply said 'bow-wow.'

"Chris," Doug said, "that's the smartest thing I've ever heard that felt like it should be the dumbest thing I've ever thought of."

Milt, ever the stoic, said simply "I followed it, but worried I might understand it if I said anything."

We talked and talked for ages after that. About an hour later, in one of those pauses required to catch your breath in these discussions.

"That bundle of ideas thought keeps coming back to me."

"See,:" I said, "it's haunting!"

"if by haunting you mean like a poorly-stored piece of chicken."

Good laughs.

This was Doug to me. Funny, smart, sarcastic, and just plain good to have around.

I'm glad he got to Istanbul. I will always remember how he described seeing the Donation Panel at the Hagia Sofia. I had never seen Doug jumping up and down with glee with mine own eyes, but the description of it that ran in his article for the Istanbul issue of *The Drink Tank* left an impression, and not just a physical one, but one that truly moved me because you could sense his absolute joy.