

Declaring the forming of collective initiatives a work of art

(On the example of the Borgerstraat publication collective, as a self-organized initiative which took place in Rotterdam 2015-2019)

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Short history:

As a production collective, we have been publishing since 2015 in a program parallel to Art Rotterdam. Coincidentally meeting as artists in the Borgerstraat studio building in 2014, some of us suggested organizing an Open Studio show, while others proposed connecting with the broader art community by inviting guest artists and starting a discourse about art and art practice—by sharing images, experiences and ideas, also in terms of a contribution to shaping future society.

Statement:

Our initiative was thus self-propelled from the start. As usual with these kinds of initiatives, people tend to get very enthusiastic at the start, but are not always aware of the magnitude of work involved in their implementation: developing an idea, finding willing and competent production people, the enormous amount of organizing and communication, and engaging—all without getting paid.

Declaration:

We consider and declare the initiative itself a piece of art—even if we know that the system might not agree, and claims a distinction between artists, producers and organizers. We think differently, more inclusively. We have no doubt in declaring the organization of collective initiatives part of the field of art, and asserting societal behaviours as art. Instead of clay, wood or bronze being sculpted and shaped, our material is the field of forming initiatives. An initiative is an idea that has to be formed and formulated with the head, heart and hands (informed by H. Pestalozzi and others), or as we formulate it more popularly and updated for the post-digital present: the idea has to be formed and formulated emotionally, bodily, intellectually, willingly, mentally and so on. Once the idea is set in motion, it subsequently becomes visible, sensual, performative, audible, gestural in actions of traditional fields of art and—this is new—in all facets of art and everyday life: not least because society itself has now reached the status of creator of future living conditions and social behaviour. Initiatives are not formed for financial gain, but out of a sense of responsibility for the common weal of living together. In a word, for ethical reasons: ethics in global cohabitation, and ethics in forming the future of our living together as a global community, including the wellbeing of ecosystems and the cosmic system. Forming and organizing an initiative in this sense, with this purpose and goal, realized as artists, unequivocally makes it a work of art.