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LIVE ART  
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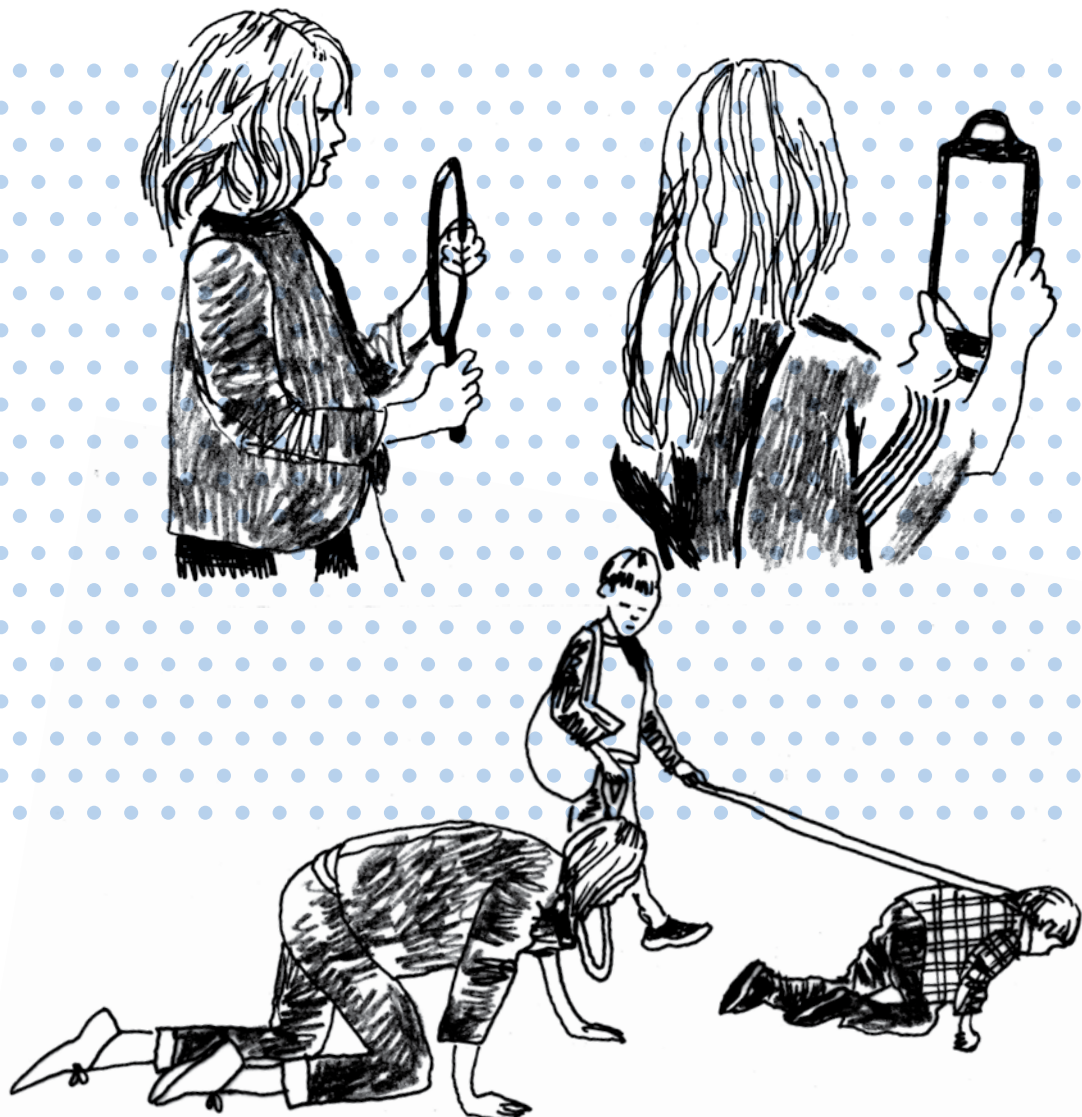
STUDY  
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Live Art  
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Agency

# live art & kids

SIBYLLE PETERS  
2017



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# Introduction

LADA is a Centre for Live Art - a knowledge and research centre, a production centre for programmes and publication, and an online centre for representation and dissemination.

LADA works to create the conditions in which diversity, innovation and risk in contemporary culture can thrive, develop new artistic frameworks, legitimise unclassifiable artforms, and give agency to underrepresented artists, practices and histories.

LADA supports everyone who makes, watches, researches, studies, teaches, produces, presents, writes about and archives Live Art in the UK and internationally through projects, publications, opportunities and resources, including the Study Room, a free open access research facility. As part of the continuous development of the Study Room LADA regularly commissions artists and thinkers to research and write Study Room Guides around practices and issues to help navigate users through the materials we hold and enhance and influence their own practices and approaches.

This guide was researched and written by the artist and researcher Sibylle Peters as part of a LADA research residency for exploring Live Art practices and methodologies in working with children and young people.

*Restock, Rethink, Reflect (RRR)* is an ongoing series mapping and marking underrepresented artists, practices and histories, whilst also supporting future generations. Following *RRR* projects on Race (2006-08), Disability (2009-12), and Feminism (2013 -15). *RRR4* (2016-18) on Live Art and Privilege, is looking at the ways in which Live Art has developed new forms of access, knowledge, agency, and inclusion in relation to the disempowered constituencies of the young, the old, the displaced, and those excluded through social and economic barriers.

The residency was also part of LADA's contribution to the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP), a transnational programme funded by the European Union focusing on collaborative practices with the aim of engaging new participants and enhancing mobility and exchange for artists.

# live art & kids

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Kids are explorers of the everyday. For them something as simple as lighting a match can be something extraordinary, that needs focus and time and creates an experience. The same is true for everyone who practices Live Art. And Live Art can potentially give something to the kids that is essential to their well being: the acknowledgement of their action and their thinking, the reassurance that everything counts, that everything can make a difference; - the frame of beauty and reflection and the experience that we can set up anytime and anywhere we want.

Nevertheless, Live Art and kids have not been regarded as a perfect match so far. On the back of the brochure for the Live Art festival *Tempting Failure 2016* that happens to be on while I'm writing this, it reads:

“This festival is for aged 16+. It is not suitable for anyone of a sensitive nature. The festival may feature nudity, extreme body art, sexual content, loud noise, smoke and strobe.”

The text goes on announcing that all festival events will be accessible for users of wheelchairs, and the program does feature a panel discussion about access and accessibility especially in regard to people with disabilities.

Spending a few hours at the festival I watch a woman in a shiny red dress carefully spreading soil over the floor of the big showroom (Helena Goldwater, *Embed*), a man, who takes strange kinds of eggs out of his trousers and puts them in glasses of water (Nathaniel Wyrick, *Not an Egg in the Hayloft*), and two people who are connected and at the same time separated by a stick attached to both of them (Zierle & Carter, *Spilling Pearls*).

In contrast to what the festival brochure somehow proudly proclaims, I'd like to argue, that young people and children would have been an ideal audience for all of that, and that in fact, children and young people are particularly interested in watching adults do strange things including “nudity, extreme body art, loud noise, smoke and strobe”. They don't get that very often. Of course, they are also occasionally interested in doing them themselves. In many ways, Live Art and children seem to be a perfect fit, as Live Art deals with the everyday and the extraordinary in the everyday, with the domestic, with games, food, misbehaving, tinkering etc., and so one might wonder why children have not been a part of the history of Live Art so far. Children are mostly missing in what might be called the classical canon of Live Art.

A few works are exceptional, in which artists reflect on and work with elements of parenting, like Judy Clark (see *Renegotiating The Body: Feminist Art In 1970s London*, Kathy Battista, Study Room Reference **P2121**) Mary Kelly (see *Renegotiating The Body: Feminist Art In 1970s London*, Kathy Battista, **P2121**) and Dennis Oppenheim's *Two Stage Transfer Drawing* (see *Dennis Oppenheim: Body Performance 1969-73*, 2016, **P3064**)

*Today, The Institute For The Art And Practice Of Dissent At Home is active in this line of work and does Live Art as a joint venture of all family members, adults and children. (see 4 Boys [For Beuys], 2016, P3037; Live Art And Motherhood: A Study Room Guide On Live Art And The Maternal, Emily Underwood-Lee And Lena Šimić, 2016, P3025; FIVE Book, 2014, P2575; <http://Playingup.thisisliveart.Co.Uk/Play-List/>)*

Looking at the history of the suppression of women, we find endless documents in which the exclusion of women from the public realm is argued for in terms of their alleged need for protection. In fact, with many of those texts, (say from the early 19th century, which argue that women are too sensitive, too naive, too easily manipulated, shocked or harmed to take part in something), you could just change 'women' to 'children' to turn the text from a historical document of suppression into something that seems perfectly normal today. It could be argued, that in the name of protection, children are excluded from the public today to an extent unprecedented in history. Given its close relation to feminist, queer and many other struggles for equality and participation, Live Art should take special care not to foster this exclusion of children and young people from the public realm. Whenever public programmes specifically address young audiences or families by calling an activity

“fun packed, creative, imaginative, colourful, thoughtful, encouraging” and utterly positive, the flipside always is the exclusion of children from everything else, everything that might be different, strange, dark and serious, though it goes without saying that their lives might be just that.

Of course, it is not as easy as to condemn all difference between adult culture and kids culture. Like any other minority children, of course, have a right to their own culture. However this right can easily be turned into legitimising the ghetto-like situation children live in in our society.

From the perspective of artists working with and for kids (which are not surprisingly predominantly women) the tendency to exclude kids from the general public is a fact that has shaped their life and work. Work produced in the realm of kids culture has no chance of being publicly acknowledged in the same way work for adult audiences is.

Seen from this perspective the recent trend of artists working with children in performances for a predominantly adult audience, like in the series of works produced by CAMPO, is an ambivalent phenomenon. It might question the boundaries between kids and adults culture, but it fails to acknowledge the work of those who kept the kids company and often had to fight viciously for kids to have cultural activities and programmes, in the first place. So, it is important to keep in mind, that the most innovative and challenging piece of Live Art by, with and for kids might happen right now in any random kindergarten, playground, school, dance lesson or summer activity group, and, of course, it happens in children's theatres and in art education. Nevertheless, it is hardly ever called Live Art, and it has rarely been acknowledged and funded and supported enough to be on public record. It mostly stays in a local realm,

not least, because it doesn't usually enter into an international, predominantly English discourse. Therefore the information contained in this 'guide' is not to be confused with a comprehensive overview. It is written from a very limited perspective looking at Live Art & Kids in central and northern Europe, mostly in places where English or German are first languages and from a perspective of cultural production.

*To get an idea of how vast the body of work might be that is out there, beyond reach and sight, I'd like to recommend two texts about historically remote settings of extraordinary practice. One is Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters / Programme of a Proletarian Children's Theatre (A0705), Walter Benjamin's essay about children's theatre in postrevolutionary USSR of the 1920's. The essay talks about the work of Asja Lacis, a Latvian artist and bolshevik, who declared the stage a kids' zone, a place where nobody ever tells children what to do. She equipped the stage with materials, tools, possible tasks and things to do, and then simply watched the children perform. She invited other people – like Walter Benjamin (who desperately fell in love with her) – to watch the performance of the children, but she never directly interfered with what the children were doing.*

The other text I'd like to recommend is The Ignorant Schoolmaster by Jacques Rancière (available to view online here: <http://abahlali.org/files/Ranciere.pdf>) which talks about the work of Joseph Jacotot, a teacher and activist of the French Revolution. His radical methods of non-teaching turned educational setups upside down and into performances following this score:

- 1) all men have equal intelligence;
- 2) we can teach what we don't know;
- 3) everything is in everything.

*Rancière describes an experiment in which teacher (Jacotot) and students taught each other a language neither of them knew before, using a single book. The ignorant schoolmaster has had a tremendous effect on work that has been done with children in recent years.*

– and while I'm writing this the artist Lottie Child enters the Study Room at LADA and tells me about participatory Live Art projects she did with kids, including one, in which young people trained a group of policemen to get better in distinguishing between potentially dangerous and merely playful behaviour regarding the way young people use public space in their neighbourhoods - or would like to use them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFQU5a5SByg>



# 1. Live Art by children for children

The field of Live Art and children shifts significantly according to the position children take: They can be active project participants of sorts, but also spectators, performers, authors and directors. Interestingly, according to the position children take, works tend to refer to quite different aesthetic traditions and discourses, which is why this Study Room Guide is organised in chapters of the same order. Of course, children can also take all said positions at once. Live Art done by children for children without adults involved is almost invisible from the perspective of the artworld. It is accessible mainly through the works of adults recalling or restaging early stages of their artistic practice.

*Think, for example, of the potent children we find in the movies of Wes Anderson, like the adolescent artist, who is kicked out of Rushmore Academy, or the children whose escape we witness in Moonrise Kingdom.*

*Recently I have attended a lecture by German performance artist Armin Chodzinski who traced back his practice to one summer, when he 'painted' his family's garden shed with water more than a dozen times, contemplating the way the water temporarily changed the shed and how it took exactly as much time to reverse itself as it took to paint the shed as whole.*

*I myself remember a game I invented together with a bunch of peers at my kindergarten at the age of five: To play this game we undressed and put only our woollen tights back on. Then we made the tights expand beyond our feet and tied the endings in a knot. Sitting on the floor in a circle with our tights in that knot, still holding them up to our waists with our hands, we started to pull trying to be the last one in the room with his or her tights still on. Significantly, we came up with this game in a room that was 'children only', adults were not allowed to enter during playtime, a memorable achievement of the anti-authoritarian movement of the 1970s.*

To create footage and some form of documentation around Live Art by children for children, I invited the LADA network of artists and their children to a gathering called *My Very First Piece of Live Art*. I asked everybody to look at games, habits, rituals, practices from their childhood and think, which of them might be called or reframed as Live Art - if only in retrospect, as the notion itself is unknown to most children (including the children we once were). Of course, one might ask whether all of those childhood practices can be reframed as Live Art in one way or another. To remember some of them as first pieces of Live Art is, of course, already a collaboration between the adults we are with the children we once were. Fortunately, many fantastic artists based in the London area contributed to the gathering.

Shared memories by Anne Bean, Richard DeDomenici, Cara Davies, Joshua Sofaer, Peter Kennedy, Andy Field, and Ansuman, Oshin and Uma Biswas are documented on video and are now accessible on the *PLAYING UP* website <http://playingup.thisisliveart.co.uk>. (Sibylle Peter's introductory text to is included as an Addendum to this guide).

Looking at the memories which are shared here, it might not appear as entirely helpful to embrace kids' experimentation with all of what professional cultural production has to offer. Instead it is about giving children space, time, means and autonomy, and most importantly, trusting them in their experiments beyond given schemes of activity. Therefore, it is also necessary to raise awareness among caretakers and educators. As, though it may be invisible in terms of 'the art world', Live Art by children happens every day, and adults will frequently come across it. In regard to the confidence kids might develop in pursuing Live Art much depends on the adults' reaction. One of the best ways to foster Live Art by children therefore would actually be to support their adults in developing the sensitivity, attention and appreciation that is crucial to Live Art as an art of action and observation.

*Publications like Wreck this Journal (P3093), This Is Not A Book (P3094) or How to be an Explorer of the World (P3092) by author and illustrator Keri Smith have contributed a lot to achieve this in recent years.*

### **Additional remark**

In recent years children are performing for child audiences more and more via the internet. Children and young people who engage in these practices might call themselves / are called Youtubers. Practices performed for the screen often take the form of tutorials. As to the DIY character of those formats they have already been included in a range of Live Art projects with kids. To gain real insights into the children who perform as Youtubers, we must ask them ourselves.

## 2. Live Art with children for adults

On a non-professional level children are performing for adults, their families, teachers, neighbours and trainers, every day – at school, at home, in parks and streets.

*To further develop the field of Live Art & Kids it might prove fruitful to revisit some of the formats which have evolved and bloomed in this non-professional field of children's performances over centuries, like for example going from door to door in a trick-or-treat-like fashion that exists in many cultures.*

Of course, when it comes to the history of the performing arts, children performing for adult audiences goes way back. In this context children performers have often been exposed to structures of extreme powerplay, abuse and exploitation. Therefore, it seems important to remember works which bear witness to these structures and make them visible.

*I would like to point out two references which might indicate the vast field of study that unfolds here:*

*Children have often been shown publicly for special abilities or features they had – may they be as Wunderkinder or as freaks, like for example the siamese twins Daisy and Violet Hilton, who were born in Brighton in 1908. As babies they had been adopted by the employer of their mother and immediately shown for profit. At the age of 24 they performed in the remarkable horror movie Freaks (D2236) by Tod Browning produced by MGM in 1932.*

*A rather shocking document of the fantasies the modern avant garde of 1900 had of educational reform and its performative potential is the novel Mine-Haha, or On the Bodily Education of Young Girls (P3095) by the German author Frank Wedekind (partly published 1903). The text refers back to The Song of Hiawatha by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1855) and drafts a totalitarian educational system that aims to avoid shame and to prolong so called “innocence” by at the same time exploiting girls sexually. In this system girls are kept apart from society, are taught grace and gymnastics and meet the public only, when they perform sexually arousing poses on stage, without knowing what they do.*

From the perspective of contemporary Live Art, children who perform for an adult audience had not been seen much until, in 2007, the Belgian production house for theatre, dance and performance CAMPO started a series in which they commissioned prominent artists to do productions with children for an adult audience. The series includes works by Tim Etchells, Gob Squad, Philippe Quesne and is currently continuing with a production by Milo Rau. So far, all of these productions have been internationally successful (see <http://www.campo.nu/en>).

*The series started with That Night Follows Day by Tim Etchells. Written for performers between the ages of 8 and 14, the work explores the ways in which adults' words and actions shape and influence young people's experience. Addressing the audience directly, a chorus of children explores*



and interrogates the range of advice, facts, truisms, white lies and excuses they hear from their elders. Tim Etchells comments on the task he was given by CAMPO: “Before long, I found myself thinking about the various ways in which my work with Forced Entertainment has often drawn on some (perhaps quite mutated) idea of children’s performance. Indeed, our collective fascination with popular and yet somehow discredited adult forms – anything from stand-up acts and B-movies to amateur dramatics – has always shared space with our love for kids’ performances, especially the makeshift narratives, scenery and costumes that you find both in kids’ theatre and in their improvised play at home. ... I was interested in the way that parents, teachers and the adult world make children, and how, in a strange mutual process, adults are themselves further defined and made in the act of bringing up, teaching or otherwise interacting with kids. ... If there is something unsettling about this, about the control and discipline of the piece, it perhaps only makes tangible the unease we might well feel at our own position bound up in the (often loving and responsible) exercise of power that adulthood brings, as we negotiate the detail of our parts in the machinery of socialisation and culturisation.” p 6-8 (*That Night Follows Day*, Tim Etchells, 2007, P1131)

In the following production *Before Your Very Eyes* by Gob Squad the audience has, as Gobsquad puts it, “the rare and magnificent opportunity to witness seven lives in fast forward”. To make that happen the children on stage perform as the adults they might be going to be, separated from the audience by a glass wall. This process is prompted

by questions and speculations of the kids themselves recorded on video and by the voices of the adult directors of the show, *Gob Squad*, who give instructions and commentaries. Sometimes the children speak text that is transmitted to them by the adult performers via headphones. (see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPwse\\_dtICo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPwse_dtICo))

The CAMPO series has been successful in raising international awareness of Live Art with children and even establishing children performing for adult audiences as a genre of contemporary Live Art. Thereby it inspired similar productions like the recent work by Lies Pauwels *The Hamilton Complex* (Belgium 2014) presented in LIFT 2016 (see [https://www.liftfestival.com/events/the-hamilton-complex/?spektrix\\_bounce=true](https://www.liftfestival.com/events/the-hamilton-complex/?spektrix_bounce=true)), or *Men & Girls Dance* by Fevered Sleep (UK 2016) (see <https://vimeo.com/153937408>).

From the project description of *The Hamilton Complex*:

“Thirteen girls reveal what it’s like to be on the precipice between youthful innocence and adult sexuality in this exquisitely chaotic journey into the mind of a 13 year old.”

From the project description of *Men & Girls Dance*:

“*Men & Girls Dance* brings together two very different groups of performers: adult, male professional contemporary dancers, and girls who dance for fun. *Men & Girls Dance* is a celebration of the rights of adults and children to be together,

*to play together and to dance together. At times playful, at times provocative, emotionally charged, and deeply political, Men & Girls Dance is a celebration of tenderness, empathy, care, protection and love.”*

Fevered Sleep’s production comments on the fact that interactions between children and adults, girls and men, who are not part of the same family, are generally seen as dangerous today, a situation that does not only ignore the fact that child abuse happens predominantly within families, but is also eliminating chances for transgenerational publics to evolve.

All productions in this line of work are dealing with relations between childhood and adulthood, children and adults, one way or another. Nevertheless, the principle of the CAMPO series to exclusively commission artists, who haven’t worked with children before, is also inclined to reproduce stereotypes, as it prompts artists to make a radical division between their seemingly new approach and given forms of cultural production with kids.

In a recent interview about his approach to the CAMPO commission Milo Rau states:

*“Obviously, we did some preparatory research and noticed that productions with children always follow the same patterns. They cover visions for the future, the absurdity of the adult world, authenticity, fairy tale-style poetry. They tell*

*bizarre life stories, adorned with rehearsed music, a performance of innocence.”*

Apart from the CAMPO series a few well known artists and directors have used children on stage. In this context children mostly appear as ‘other bodies’, as an “aesthetical and political unknown” often compared to animals or robots.

*About the highly successful dance production ENFANT by Boris Charmatz, in which seemingly sleeping, motionless children are carried around by the dancers, we read on the website of the artist:*

*“... child, like a malleable, fragile and uncontrolled material. A charge of reality upsetting the balance of the scene. Carried, laid down, manipulated by the dancers, the children’s bodies invade the space, broaden it, sculpt it.”*

*In Romeo Castellucci’s production Genesi, The Museum of Sleep from 2002 children’s bodies are stand-ins for the unconscious, the purely physical:*

*“It is necessary to avoid the expediency or tediousness of story-telling to reach immediately ... the communicable purity of the body. ... It is the visual narrative. It is the phantoms’s primary art. The arrival of infancy (Latin infans = unable to speak).”*

*Performance Research: On Animals,*  
Alan Read, 2012 (P2087).

Without any judgement regarding the artistic value of these productions as a whole I would hesitate to count them as a valid contribution to the field of Live Art & Kids, as kids are merely,

and quite frankly, used as a material in a process of Othering here. In contrast the productions by Gob Squad or Lies Pauwels work productively with the tension between kids as scenic material and kids as performers in their own right.

Somewhere in between the two ends of this spectrum are the productions of Tino Sehgal who worked with children as performers in many of his pieces. Most well known is *This Progress*, first conceived for the Guggenheim in New York in 2006, in which visitors were ushered up the spiral ramp by a series of guides – first a child, then a teenager, then an adult and finally an older person – who asked them questions related to the idea of progress.

While the CAMPO series has successfully established children performing for an adult audience as a genre in Live Art, a recent trend moves towards inter- or transgenerational works, which broaden the approach by addressing not only adults, but also kids as part of a mixed aged audience.

*One example for this kind of work is the production Real & Other Pirates by geheimagentur/secret agency and Theatre of Research, that has been performed for audiences of adults and kids alike. The production has been conceived, when in 2010 Somalian pirates were brought to Hamburg for trial – the first piracy trial in the city since 1624. Theatre of Research found that children had a lot of questions regarding the somalian pirates and piracy as a phenomenon between fiction*

*and reality, like: “How come now that pirates are real nobody likes them anymore?” So, Theatre of Research recorded these questions and went on a quest to find Somalian pirates who were willing to answer them. The piece shows the dialogue of questions and answers and documents the process of research as such.*

*Another example is the work of the performance collective SKART, who go on stage together with children and young people, collaborating with them as equals like in their performance Lucky Strike for mixed aged audiences.*



### 3. Live Art by adults for children

Only very recently and very rarely curators have started to programme Live Art for children audiences in an art museum context. Pioneers in this field are Susan Sheddan, director of Tate Early Years & Families in London, and the curators Henrik Vestergaard and Ellen Friis of Live Art DK (Denmark) who collaborate with museums throughout Scandinavia to bring Live Art to kids.

When adults perform in a professional context for a live audience of children, it happens mainly in the frame of theatre for young audiences. In fact, there is a performative turn in theatre for children and young audiences resembling the one that happened in theatre for adult audiences since the 1990s.

*This performative turn can be found in productions like those of Showcase Beat Le Mot, a performance collective from Berlin, who have been doing Live Art theatre performances for adults for more than a decade before they started to perform for young audiences, like for example in their version of Animal Farm.*

*Within the scene of artists exclusively producing for young audiences, another example are the works of the collective PULK FIKTION, for example with their production Konferenz der wesentlichen Dinge.*

<http://www.pulk-fiktion.de/>

<http://www.showcasebeatlemot.de/en/index.html>

This performative turn often goes along with blurring the lines between spectators and performers and is therefore mostly discussed in the next chapter.

However, the boundaries between theatre and Live Art for young audiences are fluid. To acknowledge that it first has to be stated that, in contrast to common opinion, theatre for children and young people has always been a highly experimental and innovative field of artistic work, though – like many other fields of artistic practice – it might often fail to fit the criteria of what is seen as ‘contemporary’ by the international art elite.

To experiment, to surprise and to innovate is simply a necessity when it comes to perform for an audience that isn’t committed either to a code of conduct or to certain aesthetical conventions, an audience which has to be won in the moment or will talk back, will do something else, will ultimately kill the performance entirely. To cope with that, theatre for children and young people has always had strong links to folk and fair culture, to puppeteers, to the circus. For ages it has been a precarious, but free space to create hybrids from this wide range of influences.

*For example: In Lübeck Germany there is a Marionettentheater, that performs entirely and only under water. <http://www.wassertheater.de/>*

Another reason for the experimental character of the field is the fact, that on the one hand, all children are potentially interested in theatre, i.e. this interest will not stop at class divides or educational thresholds. On the other hand, professional theatre venues that host performances for children have long been rare. Therefore theatre for children has created many innovative formats to reach out to their audiences, either by creating mobile performances, like puppeteers in full body figurines performing in the street, or by inventing often fascinating miniature forms of stages, which can be transported and setup in all kinds of surroundings.

*The format of the full body figurine performing in public has recently been revisited from a more explicit Live Art perspective by Lone Twin in their piece Beastie. (<http://www.lonetwin.com/nodes/view/46>)*

For obvious reasons theatre for children always embraced forms of presentation which operate beyond language. This tendency has even been increased by the recent trend towards productions for ever younger audiences, starting with babies. Clearly, to address this kind of audience, theatre has to be reinvented as a sensual, mimetic and interactive experience; in other words as Live Art.

*Like for example in the production Oogly Boogly by Guy Dartnell and Tom Morris (D2235) made in 2003:*

*“What happens when a 12-18 month old is let loose in a soft, safe space with someone who follows and reflects their every sound, move and mood? The interaction between babies, performers and the audience of parents and carers is what made Oogly Boogly an utterly unpredictable event. A delightfully simple and spontaneous experience for both performers and participants where, in fact, we could begin to wonder which is which.”*

Great theatre for children and young audiences can be found in festivals like *Imaginate* Edinburgh or *Augenblick Mal!* Berlin. Theatres for children and young people are organised worldwide in the ASSITEJ, a bottom-up-organisation, which is continuously hosting festivals on national and international levels.

## 4. Live Art by adults with children for children

Looking at productions like *Oogly Boogly* or *Konferenz der wesentlichen Dinge* it becomes obvious that whenever the Live Art character of a performance is stressed, children tend to turn from spectators into active participants.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Live Art done by adults with children and for children doesn't just stem from theatre performances for young audiences turning interactive. Instead, Live Art with children and for children, that is framed, hosted and guided by adults, happens mostly in an educational context.

*Therefore some of the best work done in this field is challenging educational paradigms in one way or another, for example through concepts of 'teaching up'.*

*A collection of projects and accounts from this perspective can be found in the German book *Stop Teaching. Kinder und Jugendliche als Akteure kultureller Bildung* edited by Jan Deck and Patrick Primavesi (No English translation available).*

As far reaching as some of these projects may be, it has to be stated that their relation to Live Art or Performance Art in the strict sense of the term is rather loose. Actually, when it comes to cultural education, Live Art and Performance Art are still massively underrepresented. There are no didactics, there is no canon taught to anyone beyond art school and university. As opposed

to music, fine arts, dance, film or theatre, most children and young people, even those who are highly interested in the performing arts, never hear about Live Art as an artform in its own right.

*To change that, LADA, Theatre of Research and Tate Families & Early Years Programme have joined forces to produce *PLAYING UP*, a resource that introduces children & their adults to the history and the different dimensions and possibilities of Live Art. Drawing on key Live Art themes and seminal works, this resource takes the form of a game played by adults and kids together.*

*Having been introduced to Live Art through *PLAYING UP*, kids between eight and fourteen years have expressed their thoughts about Live Art here: (<http://playingup.thisisliveart.co.uk/wapping-high-school-students/>)*

Whereas Live Art and Performance Art as terms are still fairly unknown among children and young people, and generally in the realm of cultural education, the dissemination of practices derived from or similar to Live Art is far more advanced. As opposed to classical theatre work, Live Art practices often allow for a more diverse, transdisciplinary and therefore more inclusive approach to performance. Therefore they are frequently used in theatre pedagogy, but mostly happen in the form of exercises or in more open-ended formats like creative laboratories. In this context Live Art practices related to the body are often applied to enhance and heighten

perception, to build trust, connect and learn how to act collectively within a group. Moreover Live Art practices are used to explore and map spaces and surroundings and to enable participants to create content from their own experience and biographical backgrounds. In other words, regarding work by adults with and for children, Live Art lives and thrives in workshops and workshop-like situations. Less frequently this importance of Live Art is visible in the way work is publicly presented.

Throughout the last two decades a combination of trends in cultural production and society has led to an increase of collaborations between educational and cultural institutions which also foster the dissemination of Live Art practices:

### **1. Audience Development**

In the course of generational turnovers and changing demographics many traditional art institutions have been confronted with a decline in attendance. To counteract this they have developed departments of learning (Vermittlung), they reach out to communities and schools and provide a limited amount of funding for artistic projects with and for children and young audiences.

### **2. Participatory Turn and Art Based Research**

Informed by Live Art, the relation between producers and recipients, performers and

spectators has been questioned in theatre as well as in fine arts and art education in multiple ways. A wide range of practices evolved which try to distribute the means and the power of art and knowledge production more equally among all participants of an art work or project. Groups like Rimini Protokoll or Mobile Academy, LIGNA or geheimagentur started doing projects collaborating with non-artists, who are experts or stakeholders of a certain field or situation that is meant to be explored in a piece. This approach of art-based collective research made working with and for kids appear in a completely new light, as kids – obviously – can be experts in their own right and good accomplices when it comes to artistic research.

### **3. Inclusive approaches in cultural education**

Following a more inclusive understanding of culture - including pop culture, the everyday, identity politics, diverse forms of cultural heritage etc. - cultural education has been developed from what formerly has been an education *in* the arts towards making use of cultural strategies to enhance communication, respect and mutual support in diverse groups and communities. Inclusive cultural education in this sense is often seen as a catalyst for integration, as a way to make children and young people perform (in both senses of that word) while they deal with challenges like

language skills, migrational trauma, cultural difference etc. At least in Germany, cultural education is sometimes presented as the universal remedy for problems educational institutions face in a (post)migrational society.

There are intrinsic problems with each of these trends,

– the entitlement of big art institutions, which often pride themselves with outreach that is actually a strategy of survival and is still funded much less than more traditional parts of the programme.

– the “artificial hells” (Claire Bishop) (*Artificial Hells: Participatory Art And The Politics Of Spectatorship*, 2012, **P2127**) created by participatory projects which do not acknowledge the freedom of participants to choose their form of partaking, or their rights to their own experience, biography and work product.  
*The Art of Being Many: A position paper, Geheimagentur* pp. 36 - 42 in *Performance Research Volume 16 Issue 3 On Participation & Synchronisation (A0706)*.

– and finally the abuse of cultural education as a cheap bandaid to put on symptoms of inequality and injustice, which would have to be addressed on a political and economical level in the first place.

However, combined they have allowed for an unprecedented development of artistic practices in between art and education during the last two decades, which goes along with the dissemination of Live Art practices in working with and for children and young people.

In this field that emerged in between cultural education, participatory theatre and public programmes of learning at big art institutions, artists and groups are increasingly able today to

create remarkable pieces of Live Art with and for kids:

Andy Field  
<http://andytfield.co.uk>  
*Curious Collectors, Outlook*

Louise Mari & Nigel Barrett  
<http://www.nigelandlouise.com/>  
*Be Bees*

Eilidh MacAskill  
<https://eilidhmacaskill.com/>  
*Gendersaurus Rex*

Forschungstheater / Theatre of Research  
<http://www.fundus-theater.de/forschungstheater/theatre-of-research/>  
*Children's Bank, 50 Dangerous Things*

Turbo Pascal  
[www.turbopascal.info](http://www.turbopascal.info)  
*Publikumsbeschwörung*  
*Die Paten*

Eva Meyer Keller  
<http://www.evamk.de/>  
*Building after Catastrophies*

Mammalian Diving Reflex  
<http://mammalian.ca>  
*Haircuts by children*

Looking at these bodies of work, we find very different forms of cooperation between adults and children, artists and participants. It seems as if to articulate a specific kind of cooperation, of working and playing, has become a main element of the creation process. On one side of this spectrum we have immersive theatre forms in which children do participate actively, but are merely taking on roles the adult producers have devised for them beforehand (for example in pieces like *Against Captain's Orders*, produced by Punchdrunk in cooperation with the Royal



Museums Greenwich). On the other side of that spectrum people are experimenting with radical forms of artistic collaboration between parents and their children (see the programme of the conference *The Child as Collaborator and Performer*, that is soon going to be published in *Performance Research*, <http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/events/faculty-events/with-children-the-child-as-collaborator-and-performer/>).

Instead of going into the details of so many remarkable projects and productions, I list a few topics and questions which are currently at stake in this field of Live Art & Kids from a social and political perspective and are addressed one way or the other by the works listed above.

### **Climate Change (the future of the planet)**

In regard to climate change the powerplay between generations becomes painfully obvious: Adult society is creating damage that in its full consequence will only become manifest when those who are children today will be grown ups. However, children and young people have no say when it comes to political decision-making regarding sustainability.

### **Risk & Danger**

Due to the regime of health & safety and a general tendency towards over-protection in the middle classes, children today have less and less experience of running free. With this background Live Art practices may appear particularly daring and therefore attractive. They can provide a much needed free space for kids *and* adults to learn how to take risks together.

### **Gender & Sexuality**

The women's movement and the sexual revolution of the 1970s hugely effected culture for kids: In the late 70s and 80s theatre for children featured plays which revolutionised sex education and challenged given gender roles for boys and girls. However, everybody who has witnessed that in the 70s and 80s (like I did, when I was kid) has

also experienced a backlash, that is going on since the mid-nineties. Reasons for this backlash are multi-layered: Kids are addressed much more today by commercial cultural industries, which have been pushing hard for the reinstatement of gender roles as a means to sell their products. The topic of sexual abuse, that has widely been ignored, if not trivialised, by the so-called sexual revolution, has grown strong since the early 90s. Moreover European societies are much more multicultural now than in the 70s and 80s, and particularly people coming from a Muslim background, have very different experiences than the white European middle classes socialised in the 1960s to 80s. For all of these reasons it is high time to refocus on gender and sexuality. Live Art has always been a forum and a means to do that. That it actually starts today is mainly due to the LGBT movement growing stronger and stronger throughout the last decades, and now finally starts to discover kids as addresses for a fluid gender education.

### **Transgenerational Publics**

For several reasons discussed above children seem to be less and less accepted as members of the general public. In the name of protection they live in cultural ghettos seemingly designed for their educational needs and weaknesses. This is a huge problem. Not only does it prevent them from learning about the public, how to navigate it, how to interact with strangers, how to find a voice and speak up, it also presents the public to them as dangerous, that ideally has to be avoided, a consequence that is particularly dangerous in a political perspective. Moreover it deprives the adults of experiencing a public including children – the public as a caring, friendly space, in which strangers can act together. Therefore allowing for transgenerational publics to emerge is a highly important task in the field of Live Art & Kids.

### **Migrational Societies**

In an urban European context the generation that is now in elementary school marks a statistical

turning point: For the first time white children with a local family background are a minority, while the majority of kids have a migrational, transcultural background. No wonder, subsidised culture for kids is urgently called to address this situation and to find strategies for transcultural exchange and peaceful ways of living together. For now, artists who work with and for kids are often struggling with this challenge, as they themselves are still predominantly from a background of white local middle classes. Obviously, it is all the more important to pave the way for the artists of the next generation who will hopefully rise to the challenges of the postmigrational societies they always have been a part of.

### **Inequality & Poverty**

Since 2007 UNICEF has published regular reports on the child well being in rich countries.<sup>1</sup>

The reports show that child wellbeing was particularly low/bad in the United States and lower than average in the United Kingdom. They show that child well being isn't connected to average income but correlates strongly with income inequality. In all rich countries children suffer from poverty more often than the adult population does. Therefore many children have severe experiences of inequality and exclusion, which are worsened by educational systems based on selectivity. For a differentiated analyse read: Richard Sennett, *Together. The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation, Part II: Cooperation Weakened*, Chapter 4: "Inequality: Imposed and Absorbed in Childhood" (P3096). Everyone who works with and for children has to address their social and economic situation and has to try and make artistic means available for them to counteract these destructive experiences.



1. UNICEF Office of Research (2013). 'Child Well-being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview', Innocenti Report Card 11, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence. [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc11\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc11_eng.pdf)

## 5. Children and young people as producers of Live Art

So far the field of Live Art & Kids has been discussed with kids taking the position of artists, performers, spectators and participants. But there is yet another position children and young people might take in Live Art, the one of producers and curators.

*Experiments in this direction have been made by Contact Theatre Manchester and by Darren O'Donnell from Mammalian Diving Reflex, who has founded the Young Mammals in Toronto to give children he once worked with as participants in his projects the opportunity to become cultural producers themselves: "Young Mammals is Mammalian Diving Reflex's training wing, succession plan, and experimental art-laboratory for young people to learn, create, and produce socially-engaged art projects. Launched in 2011, Young Mammals operates as a community economic development initiative as much as it does an arts production programme. Through friendship, network building, artistic collaboration, paid artistic opportunities and internships, in cooperation with local cultural institutions, our goals are to grow a more diverse arts and cultural landscape and to foster future industry leaders."*

Darren O'Donnell, *Haircuts by Children and Other Evidence for a New Social Contract*. (P3097 - to be published in 2017 by Coach House Books, Toronto).

*Currently, Theatre of Research has embarked on a three-year-project with the title There Is No Business Like Showbusiness, a series in which a budget of 3000 Euro each is given to several groups of children (age range 8 to 14) to produce a show for their peers with it.*



## 6. Live Art & Kids – Festivals

Festivals which are specifically dedicated to Live Art & Kids are still rare. In 2014 the ANTI Festival in Finland dedicated its programme entirely to Live Art & Kids. The organisation Live Art DK (Denmark) curates a festival for Live Art & Kids, which happens every year in cooperation with a different venue in Denmark. Z-Arts in Manchester programs *Haphazard*, a one day, mini-festival with Live Art for Kids. The *Generationism-Festival* at Hamburg Kampnagel is showing work – mainly from the category “with children for adults” in a biennial scheme.



# My Very First Piece of Live Art

by Sibylle Peters

*My Very First Piece of Live Art* invited artists to remember what their first Live Art work might have been. We can all remember paintings or stories or plays we made when we were kids, but what about Live Art? On the evening of 16 December 2016 a group of artists gathered at the Live Art Development Agency to share their memories.

## Eight Feelings I Found in Live Art a Second Time

An introduction by Sibylle Peters

1. When I was three years old my parents showed me how to send a message in a bottle. As I couldn't write a message at the time, I filled the bottle with interesting pieces of wood I had found. This picture actually captures one of my first memories. The moment before we threw the bottle in the creek and saw it disappear. The excitement of sending something out there. The infinite promise of throwing something into an ocean of coincidence. Something that might make a connection to the unknown.

2. At the time we lived in an old villa in the countryside for rent. The house was huge and falling apart. It was completely overgrown with wine, had two cellars, one attic and 11 rooms. To heat it in winter costed a fortune. Six of the 11 rooms were left empty and cold. So I made it a habit to move to another room once in a while. It always started with using one of the empty rooms for play, creating a new setup in there, a witch's hut for example, just for the afternoon, just for the night. And eventually I brought all of my stuff over to the new room to immerse myself in that

new setup and then I went slowly from the fiction of living in that room to the reality of living in that room. And when finally the feeling of make-believe wore off completely, I knew that, pretty soon, it was time to move again.

3. For one year after nappies my brother refused to use a toilet if it wasn't black and white. It had to be a white toilet with a black seat or he would shit his pants. My parents obliged. Before we entered a restaurant my mother would make sure, they had the right toilets. Otherwise we moved on. When travelling my brother refused to sleep if he couldn't have this huge old book with the maps of the world as his pillow. It had a linen cover, was about two feet high and weighed a ton. When we travelled we had to take that book with us. I remember that I admired the ability of my little brother to make my parents do these foolish things I envied how he was creating a weird reality around radical decisions simply by sticking to them.

4. When I was six years old my parents split up, my mother moved to another town and my brother and I stayed with my father. I remember how we were standing there, my father, my brother and me, in front of our house in the countryside, watching how my mother drove away in her Volkswagen Beetle. And how suddenly everything lying ahead of me seemed to be scary. For a while nobody said a word. Then my father took an empty bottle and put it down on the pavement. He said: "I'm going to spin the bottle now and the direction it will point to in the end, will be the way, we go. We will keep going, always straight ahead, come what may. Put on your jackets and boots. And then we go. And if there is a fence, we will climb over it and if there is a trench, we will walk through it and if there is a field of bulls, we will also find a way." And my brother and I fetched our jackets and boots, and still everything seemed scary and unknown and maybe even forbidden, but also - exciting.

5. After that my father decided to spend one hour each day with my brother and me, the hour after Sesame Street and before dinner. Before my mother left, he didn't bother much with us children. So, when that hour came for the first time it felt kind of awkward. None of us knew how to deal with it. My father said, now we can do anything you want, for one hour. What do you want to do? Anything? Anything. So, my brother and I decided, that we wanted to be driven around

in the trunk of the car. It was a classical closed trunk, no chance for communication between us in the trunk and my father driving. Perfect to transport victims of abduction. My father hesitated for a moment, but then he did it. For several evenings we travelled in the complete darkness of the trunk. When the hour came, we already waited in front of the garage. We loved our father for doing that and I understood that however awkward a situation, if you find that one thing to do, that is just weird enough, you can still find bliss and peace.

6. Once I invented a game together with a bunch of peers at my kindergarten. To play this game we undressed and put only our woollen tights back on. Then we made the tights expand beyond our feet and tied the endings in a knot. Sitting on the floor in a circle with all of our tights connected in one knot, but still holding them up to our waists with our hands, we started pulling. The last one in the room with their tights still on was the winner.

7. One summer when I was about seven I dragged all kinds of rusty farming equipment out of the old barn and arranged it on the lawn in the form of a fun fair. There were several rollercoasters there, which did need a bit of imagination to take a ride on them. There was also a bar where I intended to sell apple juice and cookies. I wrote three invitations to the public on three pieces of paper to make known that the fair would open

that same day at 3 pm. I took my bike to put the invitations on the wall next to the three shops in the village. I came back home, got the apple juice and the cookies ready and waited. It was the strangest kind of eternity. This hope and this fear, that people might come. This hope and this fear, that people might not come. This completely different perspective on the setup that I suddenly had, while I was there waiting and wondering, what people might make of it, if they actually showed up, not knowing on which side of reality or fiction I'd eventually end up. I ate all the cookies and drank all the apple juice. Nobody came. Only recently, my father told me, that he went after me with his car, and took the invitations of the walls. He didn't dare to tell me back then.

8. When I grew older I heard people talk a lot about their journeys to other places like Spain, Italy, France or Denmark. They all said the same: The friendliness and hospitality in all of these other countries was just amazing. Beware, people did actually talk to you in those countries. When you keep hearing those things it makes you think you know. There comes a point when you connect the dots and find that apparently you live in the coldest place on the planet socially. And it's true, you know, in a sense. Where I come from people don't speak much, not with each other, at least. Really not. But when it came to fires in the fields they knew what they were doing. Do you even

know, that there has to be a fire in the fields on friday before Easter? Yes, there has to be one. It is an old thing and it still exists. Today it is all about the food stalls. But when I was young it was just about the fire. It was a monster of a fire, huge like a house with several trees from the woods, all of our christmas trees, old furniture and all the things the neighbours really wanted to get rid of. And lots and lots of gasoline. All the neighbours were standing around the fire. There was no talking there, not even gossip. No, we kept our mouths shut, tried to take the heat and get as close to the flames as possible.





The Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP) is a transnational cultural programme (2015 - 2018) focusing on the field of collaborative and socially engaged arts practice across artform and context. CAPP is made up of a nine organisation network, led by Create the national development agency for collaborative arts in Ireland.

CAPP is a diverse range of dynamic cultural and artistic organisations supporting the development of artistic projects of excellence. Partners include: Agora Collective (Germany), Create lead partner (Ireland), hablarenarte (Spain), Heart of Glass St Helens (UK), Kunsthalle Osnabrück (Germany), Live Art Development Agency (UK), Ludwig Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art (Hungary), m-cult (Finland), and Tate Liverpool (UK).

The overall goal of CAPP is to improve and open up opportunities for artists who are working collaboratively across Europe, by enhancing mobility and exchange whilst at the same time engaging new publics and audiences for collaborative practices. The different strands of the CAPP programme consist of national and international professional development opportunities, artist residencies, commissioned works, touring and dissemination, and a major showcase in Dublin (Ireland) 2018.

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