

Harrell Fletcher J

The idea that artists should be limited to the production of objects in studios is strange to me. Where did that concept come from? It's probably the result of market-based interests that want to control and constrict the boundaries and possibilities of what artists can do, and what art can be. I was under the impression that art could be anything, and that artists were people who could do whatever they wanted (within legal-ish parameters). So of course it is natural that artists would, as part of that freedom, want to not only produce objects in studios, but also go on walks, write books, teach, garden, cook, collect, have conversations, and even curate exhibitions of other artists' work from time to time. I see all of those activities (and anything else) as potentially valid artistic pursuits if they are framed in that way.

Within my own practice I have created curatorial projects of all sorts for more than twenty years. For me it is important to assert and extend my agency as an artist to the activity of appreciating and presenting the work of other people. In many cases that has meant people who wouldn't have the opportunity to exhibit their art in other capacities, or through giving established artists the chance to show in contexts that are outside of normal art-world settings. A current example of this kind of work is a project called King School Museum of Contemporary Art (KSMoCA). Like most of the work I do it is a collaboration, in this case with Lisa Jarrett, a colleague of mine at Portland State University, an ever-expanding set of university students, and students and staff from King School, a K-8 public school in northeast Portland, Oregon. We also work with both local and national contemporary artists.

The idea for the project is to create a working museum inside of a functioning school. The King School students are included in the process of curating, installing, writing labels, and acting as docents for exhibitions that generate new collaborative work by established artists in conjunction with the students. This accomplishes two primary goals: inserting contemporary art into a place where people already are who would not likely go to art museums and galleries, and training and educating children as to how a museum operates.

The results have already been very interesting, as we have seen small children become familiar with terminology and concepts that normally would only be available to an exclusive set of interested adults. The project is designed to continue into the indefinite future so that the students have an ongoing experience that might expand the possible lives and career paths they choose.

KSMoCA does not fit normal curatorial models, but instead offers an example of a way that artists can conceive of and create not just objects for sale, but dynamic, collaborative curatorial projects that break the constraints of traditional expectations regarding how artists can function in society.



Harrell Fletcher studied organic farming and worked on a variety of small Community Supported Agriculture farms, which has impacted his work as an artist. Fletcher has produced a wide variety of socially engaged collaborative and interdisciplinary projects since the early 1990s. His work is in the collections of MoMA, The Whitney Museum, The New Museum, SFMoMA, The Hammer Museum, The Berkeley Art Museum, The De Young Museum, The FRAC Brittany, France, and CAFA Art Museum in Beijing, China. Fletcher is a Professor at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon.



Harrell Fletcher and Lisa Jarrett with students from Portland State University and King School Museum of Contemporary Art along with various artists, Portland, 2015-2016. Photo: Harrell Fletcher