

ETC



Victoria Stanton

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[See table of contents](#)

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I was at a friend's house recently, for a brunch. I was observing one particular guest who I'd only met for the first time that afternoon. She was admiring a print on the wall in my friend's bedroom. She said (and I'm paraphrasing the dialogue; it's from memory): "I love his work. I have a painting of his at home. If you ever decide to sell this print, let me know. I will definitely buy it from you." My friend said, "No, I don't imagine ever selling it, but, yes, I agree, it's a wonderful piece. I can't give that up, I'm way too attached to it. It's not only a beautiful piece of art, it has much sentimental value." The guest continued, "Oh, I understand. I feel the same about the art works that I have. But, of course you're attached to it. It's not just the piece that means something. It's the creation behind it, it's the process that the artist endures to conceive and make it. This object represents the artist's philosophy. You've got a part of someone's creative output. Something the artist made is now yours."

And I listened to this conversation, and I thought, "OK. What about performance?"

If you can't hold it in your hands. If you can't take it home with you. If you can't put it on your wall. If you can't look at it, and remember the story of where you found it, why you bought it. If you can't will it to someone when you die. If you can't sell it to make back a bit of extra cash. If you can't claim that it's yours.

What about performance?

This isn't a new discussion, I know. But I couldn't help feeling entirely left out of this equation. I didn't mention to these two people that I am an artist. That I make things. That I have a philosophy and impart that with emotion and a whole host of other (artistic, aesthetic, political) considerations when I'm "on stage". I can't sell my performances. I can't give someone a clip of five minutes from my work to mount over the sofa. This isn't a new discussion, I know. But I can't help bringing it up again, because I saw an article in the *Globe and Mail* lately about a performance festival in Toronto, where one of the participating artists claimed (and I'm paraphrasing the text; it's from memory) "Performance had a really dry period in the eighties when artists were only interested in making objects to sell, because that's what the art-going public wanted; to buy art. And we, as artists needed to make a living."

Now in the year 2000, we artists can afford to be *ephemeral*?

(And anyway, it's not like the visual artists who *do* object-based work, are rolling in the dough.)

I'm a poor artist. I'm a working artist. I don't intend to become a university professor. I don't intend to go back to school to earn a Master's degree, and put myself in more debt. And it's not that I don't wish to make money off my art. It's not that I don't wish to give an art collector something to go home with. I'm not afraid of "selling out". But by being "true" to my artistic practice, I choose to present work within a space/time *continuum*. I bring the work, with my presence, in front of an audience. Sometimes this takes place in a gallery. Sometimes that environment works. Sometimes it doesn't. I'm grateful these spaces exist. But, really, "the gallery" isn't "traditionally" set up for performance. And the "art market" isn't designed to support time-based work.

This isn't a new discussion, I know. Especially in the Theory World. But it's still pertinent to us as artists. As performance artists.

What The Performance Artist's Future Needs (in no particular order)

venue

audience

subsistence

and

development of all these in a sustained way...



Victoria Stanton, *Mind Walk*,
août 2000. Événement
Les Yeux Rouges, lac Osisko,
Rouyn-Noranda.
Photo: Guy L'Heureux.