Roberto Fassone & Giovanna Manzotti



If Art Were to Disappear Tomorrow What Stories Would We Tell Our Kids?

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Roberto Fassone makes works that explore and question the notion of art and games, the processes regulating them both, and the relationship between the two. Among his performances: spending three months without saying bad things about anybody, conducting a lesson without using the letter "R", lip-synching a Prince concert. He spent the last three years designing and improving "sibi", a software able to generate instructions to make potential artworks. www.jamaicainroma.com

Giovanna Manzotti is a contemporary art curator based in Milan. She has a BA in Economics and Management in Arts and a MA in Visual Culture and Curatorial Studies. She curated the group exhibition Academy Awards I Homeostasis is not enough (Viafarini DOCVA, Milan 2014). She is currently working as assistant curator for different projects and as a contributing editor for Flash Art and Arte e Critica.

Editor's Note

This book, and the web project it comes from, are based on a few simple assumptions:

- 1. That art tells stories:
- 2. That these stories are meaningful and valuable in themselves;
- 3. That translating these stories into a short text, more specifically the 140 characters of a tweet [1] suffices to preserve them for posterity.

All of these assumptions are, of course, questionable. One may easily disagree with the first by claiming that art, rather than telling stories, generates images, activates relationships, formulates ideas and concepts, creates artifacts for a luxury market, etc.; or with the second, arguing that the stories art tells are usually pointless and with no intrinsic value, apart from that generated by a committed community of curators, dealers, institutions and auction houses. But even art lovers who believe that art actually tells valuable stories might disagree with the idea that an artwork can properly be saved in the form of a twe-et. What about aesthetics? What about the value of direct experience? What about the silent, immediate communication established by an image? And what about the artwork itself, its aura and its material presence? Are museums pointless, with their efforts to preserve works and present them in context?

But even if we believe that language, if all else was lost, has the power to give us a rough idea of a missing masterpiece, marking its place in art history and potentially inspiring further developments, it's still hard to accept that 140 characters would be enough. Some ancient masterpieces have been handed down to us in the form of an "ekphrasis", a short description provided by some talented writer, be it Xenophon or Vasari. The most radical provocations of avant-garde movements have

survived in tales told either by the artists themselves, their friends or some art historian. These stories have inspired artists and nurtured our imagination when the original was destroyed by war or natural disaster, or was simply too ephemeral. But still - words are never enough, and they are mostly perceived as a poor substitute for what is missing.

There are, of course, artworks that can be easily summarized in a few words. They are usually viewed as "one-liners" and dismissed as such. "Art must be beautiful", a woman repeats while brushing her hair with mounting violence; but it must be difficult, ambivalent, layered and nuanced, too. Can a tweet include all this?

Of course, it can't. But what it can do is reduce an artwork to what's essential in it - to its bare bones, its embedded algorithm. If it still works that way, it's probably a strong artwork, that will be able to survive forever, at least as an idea, or a story. And as such, it will be able to generate other ideas, and become part of other stories, which is all an idea can ask of History.

In this book, ideas are deprived of their material shell. Furthermore, they are anonymized, distilled and stripped of all those references that help us to locate them in history: author, title, date, etc. Someone once wrote: "Ideas can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical." Is it really that important that this sentence was written by American artist Sol LeWitt in 1969, as part of a text titled "Sentences on Conceptual Art", first published in 0-9 (New York), 1969, and Art-Language (England), May 1969? Isn't it meaningful in itself? And if it's true, and art can exist, as LeWitt and many other artists proved, in the form of a sentence, an instruction, a score, then translating existing artworks into tweets may be a useful excercise to test their strength as pure ideas, and archive and redistribute them to different kinds of audiences.

If Art Were to Disappear What Stories Would We Tell Our Kids? is a collection of stories set into a longer story, that belongs first and foremost to its authors. But it's also an open invitation to adopt a similar attitude toward existing artworks, and to keep writing new stories out of them. It's an act of insolent love for art. It can be read as a story, but also delved into like an archive, played like a game, browsed for ideas like a search engine, or burned like the Futurists wanted to do with museums. And, last but not least, it's an artwork that can be discussed, celebrated, dismissed, and saved in the form of a tweet:

«The story is composed of the description of 94 contemporary artworks. Each description is shorter than 140 characters.»

_ Domenico Quaranta, October 2014

[1] In the event that this book outlives contemporary art, it will probably outlive Twitter too. So please allow me to provide a short definition of "tweet". A tweet is the shape a thought, a sentence, or any unit of textual information takes when it is delivered through Twitter, an online social networking service founded in 2006 and still quite popular here in 2014. Twitter enables users to send and read messages that have to be shorter than 140 characters to be compatible with text messaging.

If Art Were to Disappear Tomorrow What Stories Mould Me Tell Our Kids?

(@looongstrshrt)



by Roberto Fassone & Giovanna Manzotti













f Art Were To Disappear Tomorrow What Stories Would We Tell Our Kids? is a project that aims to create an archive of tweet-structured texts capable of describing contemporary artworks. This project came about with the idea of ordering a huge amount of works that share the common feature of being very simple yet very meaningful. We have tried to condense the shapeless mass of images and information of contemporary artworks present in our computers and on the web, into a simple, functional and structured system, in which the complexity of the art world is partially compressed into the brevity of one tweet.

The limitations of the tweet represent a very interesting space for research and comparison, providing a defined parameter for analyzing something as indefinite as art. This format also reveals other features these works have in common, and could be used to outline a network of similarities and 'family' resemblances.

This project addresses contemporary art from a very analytical point of view, by trying to identify and define a modus operandi based on the ability to describe artworks in a few words.

We believe this connection could give rise to some entertaining, intriguing, compelling results, just like the works we are trying to sum up.

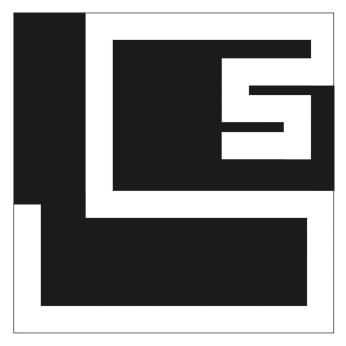
An uncanny collection of contemporary fairy tales.











The following is a selection of 94 tweets from our @looongstrshrt account





his format initially started out as an exchange, a two-player game where the meaning and message of each carefully formulated tweet triggered further writing and recapping, creating a dynamic narrative flow.

The process has given rise to mindful reflections on the concept of image-making and the "systematic correlations of similarity" that can be traced in various artworks. Starting from this spontaneous exchange, we have tried to build a story in which the narrative is shaped by time lags, manifested here in the empty space on each page.

We became co-authors of the same plot, leaving each tweet open to the possibility of reciprocal cross-contamination.

Choosing to reduce the huge amount of information collected so far into a story is a way of lending a formal structure to an extensive reservoir of visual material, here converted into the form of *ékphrasis*.

This modus operandi is based on the awareness that pictures are entities resulting from a complex interplay of "visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality". (W. T. J. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*)

The story we have created is therefore a precise archival device that evokes and channels a wellspring of artistic ideas and artworks, which are in turn influenced by multifaceted interpretations closely related to their context.

Giovanna Manzotti







man trails pedestrians on the streets of New York until they enter a private place.







In an empty room new text is constantly added on a wall. On closer inspection, the viewer discovers the text is talking about him.







The floor in a room is raised by 40 cm. The furniture merges into the floor.







A 16 foot long line of cocaine is offered up on mirrors covering the floor.







A crumpled pack of cigarettes goes round in infinite circles on the floor.







Rever-ending fountains from which whisky and coconut water flow.







A man invites people to kiss him through a glass wall.







Several people compete to tell the saddest stories of their lives. Thosever stops crying, loses.







and candas is placed under a weeping willow with marker pens tied to it. The markers draw on the candas as the wind blows.







A man covers a canvas using garbage bags.







eople are invited to go behind a canvas and expose parts of their bodies through a hole.







man is shot in his left arm by an assistant from a distance of about 5 metres with a .22 rifle.







Autch man intentionally falls off the roof of a house.







hall 167 metres long has a crack down the middle. It begins as a hairline crack, then widens and deepens across the space.







Woman contorts herself to fit into a variety of environments, from urban architecture to natural landscape.







Huge field is composed of millions of hand-crafted porcelain sunflower seeds.







4 sunflower seeds are thrown on a huge field covered by hand-crafted sunflower seeds.







7.000 trees of various types are planted throughout the city of Kassel in Germany, each with an accompanying basalt stele as a marker.







13 cacti of different species are lined up in order of increasing height.







90.000 people measure themselves and mark their height on the walls of a white room.







Life-size mannequins of an entire family stand in a row. The parents have shrunk, while the 2 children have doubled in size.







600 digital clocks are lined up along a wall, simultaneously registering the relentless passage of time.







group of young men and women reenact the school play they performed 18 years before.







A man pretends to be his father for 7 years.







real family therapy method investigates the social relationships of people and objects portrayed in 6 popular works of art.







A group of friends try to make a donkey fly.





B

Several immigrants are waiting on a mobile staircase on an airport runway.







84 fish fly by plane over the Tasman Sea. Each one is in a glass bowl on its own seat.







All the elements of the video game Mario Bros. have been removed except for the clouds.







All characters and dialogue from well-known Warner Bros. animations have been erased, leaving only the backgrounds.







In Walt Disney's Jungle Book each character speaks a different language: Balou speaks Hebrew and Bagheera Arabic.





In instructional video explains how to disappear from contemporary society, whether by camouflage or physical annihilation.







The New York Times is rendered blank using chemicals and the ink extracted is turned into a miniature.







Thinese man manages to camouflage himself in any surroundings.







A leopard wanders through 3,000 cappuccino cups.







A test wall is painted, attempting to match the colour of Coca-Cola.







photo-illusionistic wallpaper re-creates the environment of an artist's studio.







A list suggests 101 art ideas you can do yourself.







Website continuously arranges a list of all the world's capital cities according to their current air temperature.







man drags a small magnetic toy dog on wheels through Mexico City, picking up debris.







A large plasticine ball is rolled through city streets, picking up dust and debris.







In a videogame you control a horse aimlessly pushing a giant sphere up a mountain.







5 horses have their heads stuck through a wall.







300 cockroaches are trapped under 300 glasses.







A tiger shark is preserved in formaldehyde in a display case.







Derman man shares a room with a wild American copote, for 8 hours over 3 days.







Surveillance cameras observe a fox exploring some rooms of The National Gallery.







artist's studio, showing his cat and an infestation of mice.







young elephant is brought into a gallery, where a professional crew films her performing a series of tricks: play dead, stand still, back up.







group of dancers is lined up from wall to wall. The line rotates, forcing the public to move from one side of the room to the other.







I line of people move along the water's edge on a beach, following the shifting line of the waves between sea and land.







The sentence "every step I take in my life has led me here, now" is written on a marble plate at Malpensa airport in Milan.







2 private investigators follow each other.







17 cameras follow a single player for the entire duration of a soccer match.







A 16 foot-high bronze statue portrays the footballer Zinedine Zidane headbutting Marco Materazzi.







are played simultaneously on the same field.







ping-pong table with a lily pond in the middle of it can be played by 2 to 4 players.







A football table accommodates 11 players on each side.







The most famous Greek philosophers play a football match against the most famous German philosophers.

Confucius is the referee.







Several Puerto Ricans attempt to sing the national anthem of the United States.







An amateur choir from Valls, Spain, sings the Windows startup and shutdown sounds in the Sant Roc chapel.







7.000 fireworks go off at once due to a computer malfunction.







All the bells in a country are rung as quickly and loudly as possible for 3 minutes.







A mariachi band plays Joy Division's "Transmission".







piano is modified by carving a circular hole. A pianist standing in the gap, behind the keyboard, attempts to play a Beethoven symphony.







Wooden cube contains a recording of the sounds produced during its construction.







An animatronic dancer moves lasciviously in front of a large mirror.







A washing machine dances psy-trance.







Pacuum cleaners are displayed in plexiglas cases.







women walk in a circle on white, sandy floor, sweeping away each other's footsteps as they proceed.







500 volunteers dig and move a sand dune almost 200 metres wide in Ventanilla, near Lima.







A 340-ton granite megalith is placed in a 456-foot-long slot.







2 gouges are created in the edge of a mesa, in southern Nevada.







A large metal plinth, inscribed with 'The Base Of The World, Homage To Galileo' is placed upside down in a field.







Weighing scale is placed upside down on top of another weighing scale.







4 spray cans are trapped between two pillars. They spray till they run out.







A lead ball rests on the "g" key of a laptop, producing the letter "g" within the body of a Word document.







An entire book about disappearance is written without using the letter "e".







All the words in the Bible are arranged in alphabetical order and printed.







A cover of the book "La Société du Spectacle" by Guy Debord is wrapped round a brick.







multi-colored wall is made of 80 different types of bricks.







A person holds up a wall that would otherwise fall.







A lifelike wax figure of Pope John Paul II is struck down by a meteor.







666 matches are arranged next to a stereo playing a compilation of 66 black metal songs taken from a period of 6 years.







Tomato plants are exposed to the Judas Priest's infamous track, played backwards and forwards.







5 people are filmed standing on a stage stage, repetitively making the sign of the cross to the beat of techno music.







The gestures of the 3 main monotheistic religions are converted into aerobic exercises to be repeated like a mantra.







Dancer performs a series of isolated movements, layering one isolation on another to develop one long, continuous phrase.







2 30 minute film shows a sequence of chain reactions arising from ordinary objects assembled into elaborate configurations.







Crew travels across Thailand, interviewing people and asking each person to add their own words to a story, in order to create a movie.







A silent film, photographs and a postcard with the words "I'm too sad to tell you" are all linked to someone crying for an unknown reason.







Famous people read mean tweets about themselves.







A novel is composed of a selection of tweets that include the phrase "working on my novel".







artworks. Each description is shorter than 140 characters.











story inspired by:

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Domenico Quaranta, Beyond New Media Art, 2013
Curt Cloninger, One Per Year, 2014

In My Computer

#1 Miltos Manetas, In My Computer # 1, 2011

#2 Chris Coy, After Brad Troemel, 2013

#3 Martin Howse, Diff in June, 2013

#4 Damiano Nava, Let the Right One In, 2013

#5 Evan Roth. Since You Were Born. 2014

#6 Addie Wagenknecht, Technological Selection of Fate, 2014

#7 Roberto Fassone & Giovanna Manzotti, If Art Were to Disappear..., 2014

Catalogues

Collect the WWWorld. The Artist as Archivist in the Internet Age, 2011

Exhibition Catalogue. Edited by Domenico Quaranta, with texts by Josephine Bosma, Gene McHugh, Joanne McNeil, D. Quaranta

Gazira Babeli, 2011.

Exhibition catalogue. Edited by Domenico Quaranta, with texts by Mario Gerosa, Patrick Lichty, D. Quaranta, Alan Sondheim

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Exhibition catalogue. Edited by Yves Bernard, Domenico Quaranta

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By Ryan Trecartin

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Born Digital, 2014.

Exhibition Catalogue. Edited by Link Art Center

Open

Best of Rhizome 2012, 2013

Edited by Joanne McNeil Co-produced with Rhizome, New York (USA)

The F.A.T. Manual, 2013

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