

BACK TO THE SANDBOX: ART AND RADICAL PEDAGOGY

We are living in a period of unprecedented speeds of technological change. This acceleration prompts critical questions about sustainability of our institutions and way of life. It presents a challenge to our system of education created for past rather than present and future needs. The artists in the exhibition probe the educational system from kindergarten to higher education and engage us in an effort to find answers to the crucial question “What education do we need?”

THE SANDBOX

The sandbox is one of those ubiquitous objects of urban environment we take for granted. Its invention came from the Kindergarten movement in 1847, notably from Hermann vom Arnswald. This follower of Friedrich Fröbel described it as a kindergarten in miniature. Hence the sandbox was originally called sand garden or sand table. By providing an environment for play, it has become an embodiment of play and its intrinsic connection to learning. For the same reason, the word “sandbox” has functioned as a metaphor of learning toolbox, carrying pedagogical, technological and even political connotations explored by artists in various contexts.

KINDERGARTEN

As a new concept of early childhood education invented by Friedrich Fröbel in 1840, Kindergarten (children’s garden, from German “Kinder” and “Garten”) revolutionized education. Consequently, it had a major impact on 20th century culture, especially on modern art movements. In his project Kindergarten 3.0, artist and inventor Michael Joaquin Grey reflects on Fröbel’s original pedagogical model and updates it for our times. Grey’s modeling system ZOOB (from zoology, ontology, ontogeny, and botany) provides new cognitive tools for the 21st century in a way that Fröbel’s educational toys and exercises called Gifts and Occupations did for the 19th and 20th centuries.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Our education system is a typical product of institutionalization grounded in the Enlightenment, carrying a contradictory legacy that is pitting freedom against control. In primary and secondary education, it is discipline, uniformity, and conformity that suppress freedom, diversity, and creativity. Artists critique this specific institutional heritage in the present system of education, suggesting that, in Ane Hjort Guttu's words, "freedom requires free people". Their critique implies an impulse to imagine better pedagogical models and open spaces in which children and young people can voice their ideas about education.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

The education system is now more than ever governed by instrumental rationality, amplifying the dichotomies of knowledge and thinking, rationality of means and rationality of values. Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman propose to reform higher education by making the value-oriented concepts of justice, reciprocity, compassion and cooperation central to their research and practice. Their project of the Cross-Border Community Stations connects the specialized knowledge of UC San Diego with the community-based knowledge embedded in immigrant communities. Cruz and Forman thus advance the reciprocity of knowledge production, together with equitable urbanization, environmental justice, diversity and social inclusion.