ELEMENTARY

by

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Elementary is a portable art show that critiques standardized education and institutions. Every individual piece is collapsible and fits into a transportable case. This is important because it allows the work to easy travel and opens up the opportunity to be seen in unique spaces that it would otherwise not be able to. The desired showing space is not a traditional museum, gallery, or institution. The traditional white walls of these spaces confine artists and limit the audience. This standard of presenting white-walled exhibitions represents the economic, social, and political barriers in our society. Fine art has a history of exclusivity and privileging the financially and culturally elite. However, in modern times having affordable and physical access to art and art education is of the utmost importance. This is because today we are bombarded with visual imagery and must be versed with the knowledge and vocabulary to be part of its powerful discourse.

The power of art to teach is immense. Visual art communicates and educates in ways average standardized education methods simply cannot. According to Forbes, citing a recent study by the Social Science Research Network, 65% of people are all visual learners (McCue). This means they react better to visual forms of information in order to learn. This is why we have after school art programs, art therapy, and museums. As forms of education these options are important and should be more accessible to everyone.

Through context, content and sensory stimulation, art is an enlightening experience for the audience. The role of context in an artwork, for example, the very wall it hangs upon, is import for setting the stage for the viewer to see and understand the work. Like a traveling circus going from town to town, *Elementary,* is a mobile artwork meant to inspire a discussion about the accessibility of art and the environments we experience art in. With its mystical trunk of wonders, my work is a spectacle that allows the audience to see things they have never seen

before and form new ideas. Such as the trapeze artist performance makes the audience question something as fundamental as gravity. *Elementary* is a DIY art show in a box, that like the circus, is open to all and aims to amaze.

This traditional white wall gallery structure has confined us as artists and audience. It homogenizes diverse art, stifling the variety of expressions, materials and techniques. In all, it produces a shallower experience for one and all. Museums are meant to enrich culture and educate the public. However, these days, larger museums and institutions seem to have lost their way in this mission. On one hand, the works displayed are too academic to decode, and on the other they are insultingly commercial. The economy of the art world is thinly veiled within their walls. In any event, the works that are forwarded by these institutions speak an excluding and dividing language of the privileged.

However, alternatives have been emerging since the late 1950's. At the forefront is Allan Kaprow's interactive performance, *18 Happenings in 6 parts.* This exhibition was done at the Reuben Gallery located in New York City's East Village in the fall of 1959. Despite being held in a traditional gallery space, Kaprow "constructed three rooms within the gallery from plastic sheeting and wooden beams, each meant to house six separate but simultaneous actions—such as a woman seated and squeezing oranges, two performers proclaiming a nonsensical series of single-syllable words, and painters emblazoning lines and squares on either side of a hanging canvas" (Abigail Cain, Artsy, 10). His breaking of tradition forced the audience to consider the potential of new gallery structures and how these structures effect the artist's and audience's relationship.

Alan Kaprow's Happenings grew into a cultural movement in New York City, especially in the East Village. In 1982, the artist, Gracie Mansion, "a D.I.Y. forerunner, shows artists like

David Wojnarowicz in a former East Village beauty shop." (NY Times) Recycled spaces, such as Gracie Mansion did again when showing and selling work out of her own bathroom in her apartment makes people realize the power that art has to exist and be highlighted in the spaces around us. Later, in October of 1991, "D.I.Y. invades cyberspace with "The Thing," by Wolfgang Staehle, an electronic bulletin board that has since become a Web site." (NY Times) Staehle saw the need for a new way have a conversation and share ideas outside of the norms. As he says, "No walls just human interaction." Later, Barbra Pollack, "Curated an exhibition in her West Village home called "My Friends in My Apartment;" 500 people came to the opening." (NY Times) Challenging convention, these maverick artists, curators, and gallerists are most certainly fulfilling the mission of enrich culture and making art accessible to everyone.

What makes this anti-establishment movement valuable today is the heartwarming sense of a supportive and involved community that grew from it. Grassroots groups, coalitions and collaboratives offer alternatives to stereotypical 'genius' artist working alone in his studio. Sideways, it also resulted in more traditional gallery spaces showing less traditional work, thereby expanding the dialogue in the contemporary art world. For example, in 1996, "A neo-dealing crossover triumph: At SoHo's sleek Andrea Rosen Gallery, Aaron Rose, a roving curator, shows work by Mike Mills, the graphics designer of Sonic Youth and Beastie Boys fame. The opening draws 500 people, from skateboarders to the usual art-world suspects." (NY Times) Art has the power to bring people together and bond them through a shared experience regardless of their differences. Yes, Mike Mills was the graphic designer for popular bands but his work paved the way for artists like Shepard Fairey to go from a graffiti artist to designing Barack Obama's Hope T-Shirt that moved an entire nation to wake up to the presidential election. This is why breaking boundaries and becoming free of the norms of gallery structures are important.

Elementary inherently questions the white walled gallery structure because by design it does not need a generic structure to be exhibited; it defines the environment; the environment does not define it. Offering a critique of how society commonly share knowledge and the norms of contemporary art, *Elementary* is based in critical theory, yet is still understandable to an audience not educated in academic fine art.

There are five individual artworks in *Elementar*y. Each of the five works are a free-standing attraction on their own that can be arranged depending on the exhibition space. Their layout is similar each time, including a semicircle of the freestanding pieces–Do Now, Music Class, A+ –with the work, *Nap Time* as the centerpiece and *Multiple Choice* on the floor in the middle.

Do Now is an old projection screen drawn over with crayons and Sharpies pens. This work is about the effect 9/11 had on my relationship with authority and education growing up in a Post 9/11 New York City. The anxiety and trauma of that day is inherently associated with education for me, since it was my third day of elementary school and my school was located only 7 blocks away. Doodling was an outlet, it allowed me to take notes in a way I was comfortable with and remain calm in an environment that was triggering. In this piece, I "doodled" some of the traumatic thoughts and anxieties that would affect me on an average day in school alongside the most interesting part of the lesson. "Mitochondria is the Powerhouse of the Cell" is written and sits amidst doodles of 9/11 New York City that are associated with my everyday classroom growing up. This piece encourages safe and accepting learning environment for all learners.

Music Class is a canvas with a microphone and small portable amplifier taped on to it. When hit with a drawing instrument, a mark is left on the canvas and feedback from the microphone and the amp create the instruments resonance pitch. This allows anyone to draw

music. It reflects on the rituals and hierarchy of classical and traditional instruments and constructs of music as well as critiques how dry and systematized this form of art is taught in public schools.

Nap Time, holds immense emotional ties to my memories. It is the blanket I used since before Kindergarten and 9/11, overprinted with a digital and silkscreen images. It talks about how memories serve to form identity. Through a relatable nostalgia, this work asks the viewer realize their own power wielded in perceiving the spaces, objects, materials of our experience as well as the power contextualized them through art.

Multiple Choice is a Twister game mat whose colored dots are covered in a scantron multiple choice pattern. The spinner that normally would instruct players to put a hand on red or a foot on blue now gives them the answer to a question: A, B, C or D. Guessing your answers on a quiz is similar to the positive or negative consequences that happens with random body placement in the game. This work urges the viewer to reflect on the ridiculousness of standardized education.

A+ is a collaboration with the artist George Simmonds. Simmonds is a fellow contemporary in the New York City DIY art scene. Simmonds has been creating fountain pieces while I have been developing transportable work, so together, we designed and created a transportable fountain. It resembles a briefcase when folded up but when opened, it has a rubber tube curving out of the back which projects water into an old cylindrical paint tin. At best it is ram shack, given its tongue-in-cheek title (*A+*), it is clunky but completely functional. Like the movement we are a part of, it may not be much in the eyes of traditional standards (of grading) but it is inventive and pushes the boundaries to inspires new ideas.

Growing up, I was diagnosed with PTSD, an anxiety disorder, and learning disabilities; school was not my favorite place. However, I loved learning which incited a search for educational experiences that worked for me, and eventually lead me to participate in the New York City's underground art and music scene. The lessons I learned there fueled my belief in the importance of alternative communities and platforms. Through the socialization that underscored these events, many new truths and opportunities emerged as I met and talked with complete strangers. At one show, I befriended a high school teacher who taught me that what was happening in those basements, backyards, rooftops, and living rooms was more than some kids having a good time. It was environment that truly allowed marginalized city youth to create, showcase, and discuss ideas. Not at all like standardized education, still and all, it was a viable and lively learning space.

Elementary captures the journey I have been on to reconcile my experiences with education as a person with learning disabilities and mental health issues. With this work, I aim to highlight the importance of both visual art and alternative spaces for learning. Using these we can have an everlasting impact on the way future generations experience the environments they develop in and grow as a society. My work offers a rudimentary beginning to enriching ourselves further as creatures of thought, that one could say it is even elementary.

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Images:

Left to Right: *A+, Nap Time, Music Class, Do Now, Multiple Choice (bottom)*

Images Continued:

Left to Right: *A+, Nap Time, Music Class, Do Now, Multiple Choice (bottom)*