

Lundahl & Seidl

Symphony of a Missing Room: abstract for a score.

After hosting the works of so many artists, perhaps the Museum has understood, that it has has the power to imitate them.

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Symphony of a Missing Room is a project by artist duo Lundahl & Seidl, commissioned for a series of museums in the UK and around Europe between 2010 - 2012. Growing along a chain of situations and places, it is an artwork in a constant state of becoming. Exhibited inside museums as well as being a temporal museum about itself, it reflects back on its own chain of discoveries. As a composite artwork it exists in virtual parallel to the physical spaces it inhabits.

Inside every new museum, Symphony... directly refers to the physical architecture of the museum, and the existing curatorial space, with its arrangement of artworks and objects therein. Over the course of the performance, an audio recording played through headphones guides the visitors through the work and through the museum. The work then operates in proximity to museum collections, the geographical and temporal space of the museum, and also the individual sensibilities of the work's visitor. This proximity opens a space of potentiality. A sensorium of imaginary architecture is built, often in direct relation to the concepts and visions of those artists whose works were placed in the museum long before. Symphony places a new emphasis on their thoughts and aims, presenting a new art history of the objects in the museum, at the same time as it evaporates the works within - they become a memory, leaving no shadow.

We used to be able to say that art reflects our society. But when art holds up a mirror to reflect the culture and the social environment that we live in, it sends back a reflection of our individual selves, that we must also look at when we look into the glass.

Over time, museums increasingly seek to intercept the observer, or visitor, recognizing that particularities of the visitor's engagement with the museum alters their understanding of the work. And so within art today, the art object may no longer exist in isolation from its observers. Its existence is dependent on our sense modalities, shaped by cultural instructions and layered traditions of viewership and participation, which over the last 200 years, have massively evolved in relation the development of media technologies. The history of museum display and its subtly shifting paradigms, might also reflect parallel shifts in science. We have moved away from a Newtonian physics independent of the 'observer', to a world understood according to a quantum mechanics, where physical reality is totally dependent on the place of the observer.

What are the relations between our consciousness and the physical world, which no longer appears to be solid and continuous? How can we become aware of our own sense modalities? Can we participate in the changing of our sensorium through a shift in our attention? Where would such a shift leave us and with what tools for control?

The contemporary philosopher Thomas Metzinger, drawing on recent neuroscientific research, states that nobody had or ever was a 'self'. That we only exist as phenomenal selves, just as we appear in our conscious experience.

This phenomenal self is not a thing but an ongoing process - it is the content of a transparent 'self model' that we cannot see because we are of it, and inside it.

With this in mind, how can the museum, or the artist, project their specific knowledge in order to intercept the wider society? Can art be more than just a showing of directions? Can it be more than a demonstration of new strategies for understanding how our general perception is influenced by conditions of freedom and control? What more can art be than a psychoanalyst of society in need of healing? And can philosophy take on physical principles of spatial dimensions in order to become a site where we invent new relations between the physical world and the world of our minds?

Symphony of a Missing Room is a new sensorium. It is its own micro universe – a constructed reality based on instructions that suggest new ways of perceiving the world. The aforementioned 'self model' is put into operation in this work and made visible. Within the walls of the work, we hear the shattering voice of the infinite possibilities and directions, and thoughts and actions that pend the moment of a decision. At the same time that the visitor is made aware of potentiality, they are asked to follow. And so they must negotiate the boundaries of an external control placed upon them by the work's pre-recorded instructions. As the work unfolds, life's constant antinomy of choice and control presents itself again, in order to be looked at differently.

In this space we are deprived of our visual orientation, and our inherent desire to move freely and plan autonomous trajectories. Here, space, time, sensory input, and all other relations we have to the external world become reconnected again. Imagination is neurologically interwoven with memory, and this co-dependence of imagination and memory are manipulated by tangible events occurring within the work.

The Virtual Museum continues to exist in the memory of its visitors, it is shared and distributed through an oral tradition, giving birth to rumors about the works existence.