



art as power  
update  
#12

## the right question?

A question that pops up regularly when having conversations about the wonders of art in the context of organisations is: how does this work in practice?

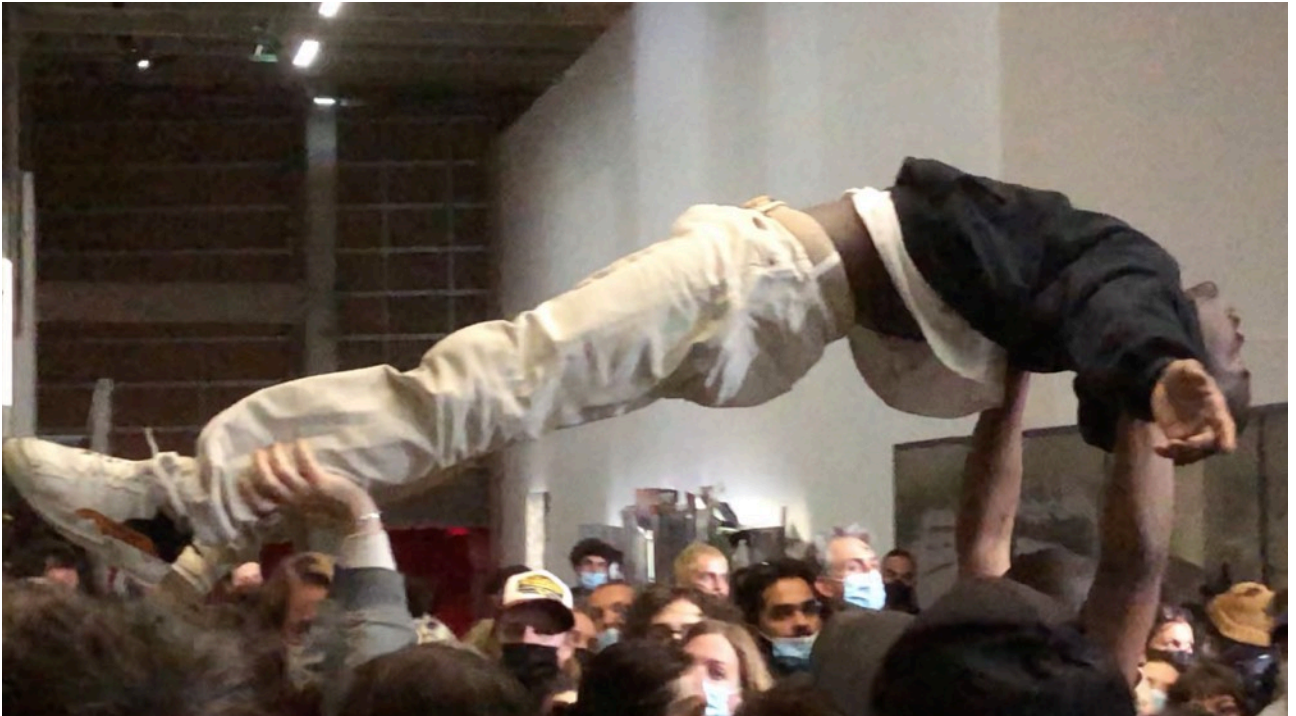
It is a genuine question for business leaders who request defined benefits and actionability. But the answer is not so straight forward for the very reason of the involvement of the arts.

I recently had meetings with two business school professors who research the role of art in business.

Giovanni Schiuma wrote a book on the subject and developed a matrix for various dimensions of the application of art in business. He believes art can play a role in the needed transformation of business facing new challenges. Yet he also recognises that the gap between the world of art and the world of business is not easily bridged and does still require intermediate facilitators.

p: 1,3,5  
anne imhof  
nature morte (2021)  
palais de tokyo

photo's and video stills  
of the performance  
on 25 october 2021



Sylvain Bureau takes another, more hands on approach. He developed together with the artist Pierre Tectin a workshop called 'improbable'. He addresses the need for true creativity in the business realm and in his opinion artistic practices can be a way forward. He talks about art thinking and has created an open source platform for collaborators to make the workshop more widely available.

Both academics look at the application of arts from a business perspective. Business as the demand and the arts as the supplier to cater the business needs. A quote from the art thinking website sums it up beautifully: 'an agile method to create the improbable - with certainty'.

And somehow, for me it feels too much business school and too little art school. Especially when I recall my experience with these two works of art.



At the Palais de Tokyo I attended the completely immersive performance of the German artist Anne Imhof. A loud feast of punk music, lyrics, performances, installations. Four hours of complete unpredictability and confusion. No clues provided, just the artists and the audience, with a distance between them maintained.

When I saw the mirror painting by the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto at galleria continua I found it very disturbing. Later, I realised that the life size of the figures pictured and the mirror make the viewer part of the image, posing the larger question of what is the role of the viewer of provocative images. I tried to make myself scarce while taking the photograph, tellingly, and I failed.

Two encounters which are far removed from daily business life. But the reason for mentioning them is not to show that business and art remain different worlds, it is to argue that we should start from the arts when wanting to enhance organisations.





p: 7

micelangelo pistoletto  
mirror painting

the photo was taken by me  
and i do not know the precise title  
of the work, for which i do apologise  
to mr. pistoletto

It is in the arts where the raw power lies, the magic, the wondrous manifestations of the human condition, undiluted, non-utile.

That is why it should be the arts that deal with business and organisations and not business that involves the arts. The artist leads in the endeavour to make business more meaningful, to create organisations as works of art.

This is not trivial, it is fundamental. It is not the application of the arts that matters, it is the essence of art. With any other approach you deny yourself the true qualities of art.

Does that make the question 'how does it work practically?' which I stated at the start, superfluous?

Not at all.

That question is part of any artistic equation, although the way to deal with it might differ quite radically from a predetermined goals oriented business approach.





p: 9  
tarek atoui  
(part of)  
the whisperers (2021)

installations about objects and  
sounds, connected, playful and  
mysterious

p: 11  
piero manzoni  
merda d'artista (1961)

photos: hein duijnste

Does such a position leave business leaders in the dark, as just objects of artistic manipulation?

Not at all. When art deals with organisations, the organisation is an integral part of the artistic creation. It can not exist without active participation. And there are constraints to deal with, practices to uphold, activities to be executed, sometimes even a planning to follow. Moreover, there are outcomes (otherwise there is nothing). Art is work too.

Yet, all these things will look and feel different, more colourful, more intrusive, louder, quieter, more fearful.

And as a final reassurance (if needed): the arts can also be subtly genteel and sensorily intriguing.

Or full of shit, although we do not know that for sure.

