



art as power update #25

getting it straight

# introduction

One of the fascinating sides of writing about *art as power* in the domain of organisations as I try to in these updates, is to mirror that what *art as power* constitutes. As a result you encounter abstractions, open ends, intensity, doubts, not to guide but to provoke. To allow room for confusion and to create the possibility to take a personal position vis-à-vis what is presented.

For the coming two updates, I will take a slightly different approach. I will try to explain a little more about what the notion of organisations as works of art implies. The notion is important when you think about which impact art can have on the way we organise ourselves in structured entities. The intention is to explain various dimensions of the notion and

to provide you with a perspective on how you can create a more art-like organisation.

In this update (#25) I will cover the idea that only the specific and unique occurrence of that one organisation carries the possibilities it to be regarded as a work of art. The context of the organisation is a largely important element to enable that.

The element of the activation, the acting, the doing, the expressing will be dealt with in the next update (#26). There I will also explain the intrinsic relationship between context and the materialisation of the acting and conclude with some thoughts on why it is worthwhile as an organisation to move towards becoming a work of art.



# one unique manifestation

In discussing what it means for an organisation to be seen as a work of art, it is important to realise that this can only occur in the specific manifestation of that organisation. There are endless forms and sorts of organisations in business, in government, in the not for profit domain. Each organisation has its own characteristics, some maybe explicit and noticeable others maybe less outspoken. What matters in the end is that one organisation with its specific attributes that makes an impact on its environment and its audiences and stakeholders.

To become something like a work of art that sole being is important. The particularity of that one organisation is in essence the only

measure. General properties which might be attached to being a work of art never touch the essence, although they might help as an orientation and to get a kind of a kind of grip on the idea.

Studying art history does not make you an artist. It could be useful and helpful to have an idea of what art is and how it has occurred and been perceived over time, but in the end it is about the actual work that is being conceived. The same counts for organisations: it is only in its specific manifestation that the artwork can be perceived.

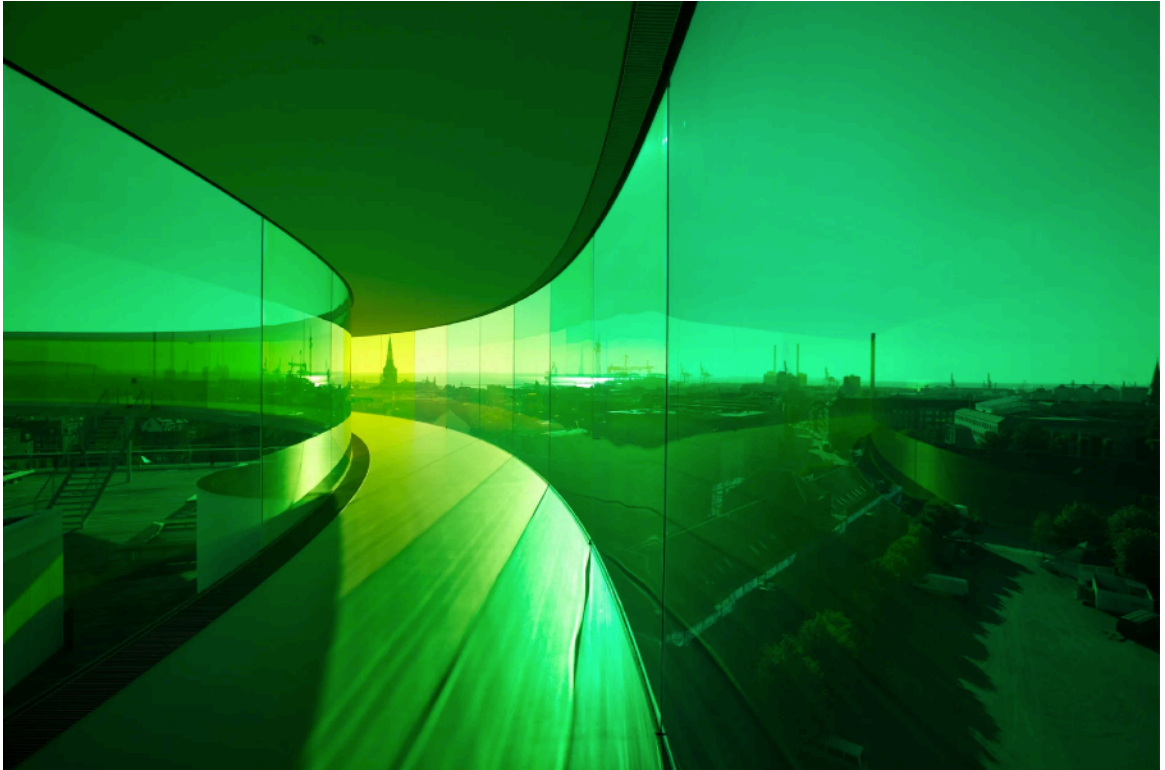
That is an important starting point to remember when you are involved in how an organisation is created and how it performs. It is in the uniqueness as an organisation where the power resides to become an artwork. Not in copying, generalising, mimicking, analysing or acquiring. In its particularity the organisation becomes remarkable and memorable. And whatever characteristics organisations as works of art may share, the only ones that matter are the ones that are the results of the own work that the organisation engages in.

When thinking about organisations as works of art various questions may pop-up: what is an organisation? What is art? Can an organisation be an artwork? These questions are relevant,

but their answers need always be seen in the light of the particular organisation you are involved in, because there the work of art evolves.

In the next part of this update we will look at the context of the organisation as the starting point to investigate further in what ways that uniqueness could be approached and defined.

There lies a paradox in my case for uniqueness and the description of the two elements as covered in this and the next update (context and activation) that contribute to that uniqueness. But that comes with dealing with the arts. You might as well embrace it.



# colouring the context

Any organisation operates in a context. The context consists of an amalgam of elements, such as the audiences of the organisation, its business models, its markets, its products and services, its history, its future, its political landscape, its people, its purpose, its spoils and contributions, its stakeholders, its physical locations and imprints, its beliefs. It is the reality the organisation operates in, both physically and virtually. The contexts of organisations vary widely.

The context is a reality that can never be captured in all its facets. It is complex, it has seen and unseen connections, it is layered in scale and meaning. It contains contradictions. Yet that context is important in the occurrence

of the organisation, however that occurrence may be materialised. It is the backdrop against which it plays its role, it is the reference for development, it is the space in which the organisation defines its meaning. In that sense the context frames the uniqueness of an organisation.

For that context to be experienced it is always filtered; in its totality it is impossible to be perceived. Positions towards that context have to be taken to create a relevant and meaningful view. The perception of the context can only be subjective. It is this subjectivity that is key in becoming a work of art. It is a source for standing out, for obtaining a meaningful appearance.

The way you as an organisation decide to view the context you operate in, is full of meaning. It is a base for your idiosyncrasy. The required subjectivity provides the freedom to make robust choices in what matters to you and what stance you take as an organisation. In choosing a specific narrative, in aiming your spotlights, in emphasising certain aspects of your operations you become distinctive. You are the master of your own context.

Organisations are engaged in many functions and domains. Not all of them have to be unique. Some play an important role in the

workings of the organisation while not having the properties to make a true difference. That is fine. Yet the middle of the road when it comes to defining your context is not the way forward to become an artwork. There is for an organisation as a work of art the need to determine where to place an emphasis, to identify the functions which most closely relate to the distinctiveness and to augment it against the defined context.





## an intriguing effort

Taking that liberty to take a decisive view on the context and to colour it in the way you are convinced of for it to become meaningful and expressive, will take intense consideration and serious decision making. The process may take many forms, including the playful, the intuitive, the conceptual, the structured, but the result embodies the mentioned characteristics.

References for this process you can find in a lot of areas that have normally little to do with management or organisational design. The arts are of course a *mer à boire* for ideas and inspirational considerations. But life itself with all its wonders and mysteries as it plays out

every day before our own eyes, is a great source, to say nothing about the natural world around us. Science, your personal life story, your interaction with other people may provide triggers too for developing an exceptional, autonomous perspective.

In that sometimes difficult but also intriguing effort there are always the people who make that wonderful human artefact which we call the organisation and who, because of their stake in that organisation, are intrinsically part of the process. In the next update I will talk about the possibilities of activations towards a work of art.

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july, 2023

p1:  
orca tuazon, white walls, 2011-12  
at museum boijmans van beuningen, rotterdam

p3:  
richard serra, *2022*, 2020-22  
forged steel

p6:  
elafur eliasson, *your rainbow panorama*, 2011  
at ARoS aarhus kunstmuseum,

p9:  
mona hatoum, *jardin suspendu*, 2008

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