

Skills of Practical Ecology

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Abstract

In this presentation I will discuss my artistic research project Skills of practical ecology. Practical ecology is a photography-based contemporary art project studying my father's mission to live an ecologically sustainable life, and how that affects his relationship to objects, waste, nature and the inevitable fact that one man alone cannot change the course of the future. Through my artistic research I look at my father's practice as work of a practical philosopher, whose thinking is embedded in the inventions he's created. The question driving this artistic research is how embodied art could be seen as a method of learning and thinking. My father was born during the Finnish Continuation War in 1943, and raised during depression. He has a very practical and sustainable relation to man-made objects, and is determined not to leave any waste behind. The photographic series Practical ecology depicts objects, which he has created out of various broken or found objects. He has for example made a wooden cutting board out of an old leather sofa, skates out of old skis and a container -stool, which used to be a tree in his garden. I have photographed these objects in a commercial studio environment, to emphasize their connection to human's relation to objects as commodities. The ob-

jects are following specific aesthetics determined by the process, and could be viewed through the aesthetic solutions as sculptures. I'm especially intrigued by my father's complex relationship to the objects he's created. The importance of the objects for him is in the invention, in completing the thinking process by using his skill of making something out of nothing, regardless of how useful the final object may turn out to be. How could this (and similar practices) be looked at in the context of art education, as a critical way of thinking and creating, leading to a set of sustainable ecological choices. The neoliberal society sees citizenship as freedom of individuals, freedom to work, invest, consume, recycle, to lead a hedonistic lifestyle. What if this doesn't seem like a desirable choice? How would it be possible to create an alternate relationship to man-made objects? In this study I investigate how embodied art could open a critical position to consumer culture for current and future generations. This, for me is one of the core questions for ecologically civilized futures of art education.

Keywords

Contemporary art, Embodied art, Thinking through making, Practical ecology, Sustainability, Ecological art education.