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Participatory Museum Experiences: Performative Social Action in Museum Spaces

The exhibition you are planning to see tomorrow may require you to remove your shoes and dance or engage in a conversation about your greatest fears with a stranger. COVID-19 pandemic regulations aside, contemporary art spaces are sometimes host to exhibitions focused on the visitor rather than the object. Indeed, an increasing number of public and private institutions shape visitor expectations by offering a hands-on experience or performative element to exhibitions. The aim of this article is to illustrate these unique visitor experiences and question this hybrid framework as a potential space for social and political dialogue.

This proposal will focus on the museum of the future as a space for participative or peri-participative social action. Artists such as Ivana Müller and Tino Sehgal each transform museum spaces into performance spaces. We will look at two examples that engage visitors in performative and participative acts. On one hand, Ivana Müller presented *Hors-Champ* at *Lafayette Anticipations* in Paris (2019). Spectators entered a make-shift camping ground featuring a dozen tents. In each tent, two participants engaged in a mostly scripted conversation inspired by plants, animals, migration and environmental issues. On the other hand, Tino Sehgal removed all non-essential objects and walls in the *Palais de Tokyo* and used this opportunity to immerse visitors in the performative presence of others (2016). In collaboration with artists and performers, visitors navigated the immense space, listened to singing and discussed existential questions with performers. These experiences offer unique perspectives on social and ecological dialogue today.

Furthermore, they challenge the notion of documentation; after all, the imprint of the experience in the participant's memory is the principal resource when studying participatory museum exhibitions. As a final thought, this model offers an alternative form of consumption, one in which the intellectual and sensory experience is more important than the material object. The economy of ideas and experiences can be seen, however, as another mechanism that expands socio-economic divides.



Bio: Originally from Ottawa, Canada, Alexandra studied theatre production and Italian language at the University of Ottawa and obtained an M.A. in theatre at the Université Paris VIII. She is passionate about social issues as interpreted by the arts and often gives performances about the great political figure Rosa Luxemburg in a poetic and political puppet review. She is also co-founder of IGLOÛ Paris, a platform that brings together multidisciplinary artists for site-specific events. She is currently a lecturer at Ecole EAC, *marche de l'art*, culture, patrimoine, luxe, where she gives classes in communication, cultural management and patronage.