

luginsland
(on art
as research)

florian
dombois

"... that this is all true in a way because it is false
in a way ..."

— Augustine, 354–430 AD



fig 1

fig 1 Florian Dombois, HORIZON WITH SEVEN HILLS (installation view), 2008, technical drawing in gallery window, dimensions variable.

fig 2 Detail of a seismogram recorded at Kunsthalle Bern as part of Florian Dombois, LUGINSLAND, 2006, spatial installation, vertical seismometer with analog recorder, 3-component seismometer with digital storage unit, chair, brackets for seismograms, open window, dimensions variable.

research on art

This kind of research, which looks at art and artists, is first and foremost familiar to us due to the division of the humanities into disciplinary fields – art, literature, music, theater, and later, media studies – which occurred parallel to the rise of the university system in the eighteenth century. Here the arts and artists are the objects of study and research. Researchers consider such typically hermeneutic questions as: How should a given work of art be interpreted? How can it be placed historically? What role does the biography of the author play? How did the work arise? What is the history of its reception? And so on.

art on research

The sciences are part of our reality, and as such can of course be made part of artistic practice. Mirroring research processes in art, theater, and literary studies, artists deal with the sciences in their work. Artistic appropriation of scientific practices and knowledge boomed in the contemporary art of the 1990s. Artists delivered pseudo-scientific lectures in the white cube; scientific experiments were replicated in museums; and artists made use of scientific charts and graphs. At the same time, this impulse could be seen across disciplines: in fiction, for instance, some writers wrote about scientific research and/or researchers, while composers created musical scores based on astronomical data. In these instances, scientific research is an object of art and scientists are objects of artistic investigation. The result is art that may also take the form of reflection on research or criticism of research, but not of research proper.

research for art

Another older variant of art research, research for art, investigates, documents, and supports the process of producing, preserving, or updating an artwork. It includes such outcomes as the development of colors for painting, casting techniques for sculpture, the creation of new musical instruments, or software tools for fiction writing, among others. Conservation and the study of materials and media play a large role in this type of research, leading to queries such as: How should the ground of reverse glass paintings be prepared?; or How does one preserve foodstuffs used in contemporary artworks? A research-for-art approach may also tackle issues of interpretation, for example, when considering how to properly present a video piece from the 1960s.

art for research

Art's influence on, promotion of, and inspiration for research has a centuries-old tradition. In this case, artists' works have led to breakthroughs in scientific research and the development of new products. Such examples include the music box's importance in the creation of eighteenth-century clocks; the significance of the technological advances in the Yamaha concert grand piano on Yamaha motorcycles in the 1950s; and the development of new media technologies, which artists quickly co-opt and sometimes co-design while these media are still in their prototyping phase. It could be said that artists take these media on extreme usability test runs, which often lead to new and unexpected outcomes. In addition, many artists are called upon to subsequently upgrade and socially ennoble scientific research. In recent years, many museums and research institutions have embraced and promoted this kind of cooperation or so-called PUS (public understanding of science).

research through art

This last variant is the most controversial and thus, perhaps, the most discussed at present. Under the slogan "Art as Research," the claim is advanced that the arts themselves contribute to research and should be taken seriously as alternative forms of knowledge. Research through art demands that we carry our notion of research beyond such typical formats as a text with appropriate graphs and illustrations. The research of artists who chose to tackle understanding some aspect of the world through their work can result in objects, sounds, and images, among other forms. In this constellation, the combination of the conceptual worlds of the arts and sciences morphs and our traditional understanding of scientific research and artistic practice is equally challenged and thus begs reconsideration.

art through research

Here an artistic practice is realized through research or said research is viewed as art—i.e. when a piece of scientific research is conferred the status of an artwork. This transformation has a lot to do with the context in which the work is presented, how it is presented, by whom, and for what aims. In Paul Feyerabend's work **WISSENSCHAFT ALS KUNST** (Science as Art), he compares the historical development of scientific research with the stylistic epochs of the fine arts and, as others have before him, demonstrates their inner relationships. For example, Leonardo da Vinci's scientific drawings are often presented as art and scientists, like Galileo, are sometimes defined as artists. Other examples of such overlaps between scientific research and artistic forms of representation can be found in Johann Wilhelm Ritter's book **PHYSICS AS ART** (1806) and Buckminster Fuller's numerous inventions, which are simultaneously engineering achievements and aesthetic objects in their own right.