

REGEN PROJECTS

Graham, Dan and Jeppe Hein. "Jeppe Hein & Dan Graham: The Mirror-Stage." Art Review
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'I cannot say that I would not have done the work I have without Dan, but it would have been different' Jeppe Hein

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JEPPE HEIN & DAN GRAHAM

The Mirror-Stage

In three decades American artist Dan Graham has become recognised as one of the most quietly influential figures in art after Minimalism, his work reinventing the language of sculpture, installation, architecture and interactivity.

Jeppe Hein wasn't even born when Graham started out, but the young Danish artist has turned heads with his playful experiments in space and perception.

Having previously collaborated when Graham created a sculpture for Karriere, a bar part-owned by Hein in Copenhagen, the two will be exhibiting together this month for the first time, at Rüdiger Shöttle in Munich

portraits BENJAMIN ALEXANDER HUSEBY

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FEATURE JEPPE HEIN & DAN GRAHAM

ArtReview: Can you describe your exhibition at Rüdiger Schöttle? What will it look like? How do you think viewers will respond?

Jepe Hein: We will show works that illustrate our differences and similarities. Although we refer to the same context, our approach to social aspects in art differs. Basically it is because we are from different generations. To explore the contrast and consensus of our art will offer viewers an insight into the work of two artists with a similar concept, but from different generational perspectives.

Dan Graham: We came up with a new outdoor piece. Jepe wanted something with water – he was talking about things like fountains – but I've done many works in the past where you can walk on water. So I designed this piece to have a variation. Instead of just being a series of rectilinear boxes, one of the walls is curved, which relates to the curvature of the sky and the curvature of people's bodies. There are four areas inside the square booths, and two feature water – one has a metal grid that you can walk on; the other is just normal water where you can put your feet in. It's going to be kind of like a family get-together round the swimming pool. So it's a pretty simple idea – child-friendly. I told Jepe, 'Let's not be serious – Rüdiger has a really silly sense of humour, why don't we make this playful and humorous?' And Jepe agreed.

AR: Your work constructs and exploits a sense of spectacle. To what extent is it about control? Is there an issue of complicity between you and the viewer? Or are you always in charge?

JH: Of course, control and complicity are important aspects in interactive installations, although you cannot control people's feedback and reactions when confronted with an artwork. You can only indicate a controlled system and play with the sensation of control and complicity, for example by letting people think they are controlling the movement of a work when in fact their movement is controlled by the work. Making people believe they can take the reins is also a form of control.

DG: It's not about control at all, or about spectacle. That's a misrepresentation. I think what I do is take the material of two-way-mirrored office buildings, which are about control. But there it's only really a one-way mirror, because the side that gets the light is reflective, and from the inside of the building it's transparent. That's a little like surveillance. With my work it's both transparent and reflective, and it's shifting all the time. My work is about intersubjective space. It's about people on both sides seeing each other. It really all started when I was fourteen and read Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* [1943], and the mirror stage from Lacan comes from *Being and Nothingness*. I have nothing to do with it, it's basically about the spectator. For little girls it's like a playful semi-narcissistic dance. I would say it's more like a funhouse than a spectacle. It's also a little baroque.

AR: Do you think your work teaches your audience anything? If so, what? Do you see it as offering a critique of the world around them?

JH: I hope so. If not, what I do wouldn't make any sense. For me, art always relates to communication. If an artwork does not communicate something to the audience, it does not work properly. Art does not

only offer a critique but also good and beautiful things. It can sharpen your senses and raise your awareness and perception of space and the public.

DG: I'm not sociological – my work is not about sociology. I hate Foucault. I think it's more related to Marcuse, it's about polymorphous perverse sexuality and the whole idea of play. More recently it's related a lot to Impressionism, particularly Georges Seurat – because my work is to be enjoyed lying down outside. In this work it relates to Seurat because I'm also using perforated stainless steel, which creates a moiré effect as it's superimposed on the glass. It's a photo opportunity for parents and a funhouse for children. Instead of changing people, and because I'm Jewish, my work relates a lot more to humour.

AR: How do you think that you, as an artist, approach the creation of environments in a way that is different to – say – architects?

JH: Art is less functional.

DG: My work has always been a hybrid between art and architecture, but I think my work springs directly from my interest in Russian Constructivism, so it's always quasi-functional. I like the things that are on the boundary of art and architecture, whereas I think Jepe is tending towards design in a certain way. I think what relates my work to Jepe is the playfulness and that it's very child-friendly.

AR: You have an interest in public art. Is it difficult to get this kind of work commissioned?

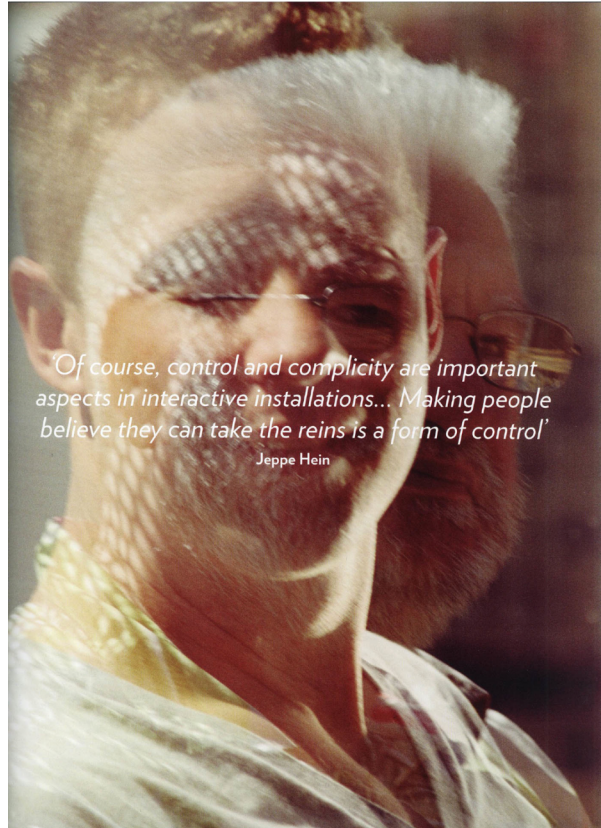
JH: If you are working with social aspects rather than simply installing an autonomous artwork, it is not that difficult to get a public art commission. In my experience, people are interested in a public artwork that is more than just an isolated artwork, one that offers opportunities for communication and social interaction.

DG: I find the problem is that it's easy to get it commissioned. What I usually try to do with my work is create a populist situation. At the Dia Center [*Rooftop Urban Park Project*, 1991, New York] I wanted to transform the roof into an outdoor ICA that was populous and free – and the same thing at the Hayward Gallery, but the new director really didn't like the idea. Generally institutions become elitist, whereas my work tends to be populist.

AR: Dan, do you think your work has been more greatly appreciated by other artists than by critics?

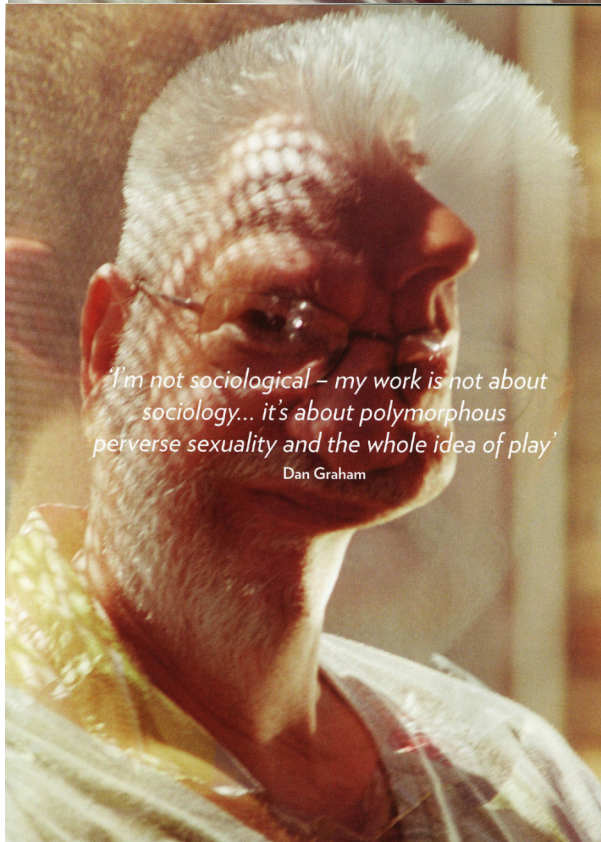
DG: I do my own writing about myself and other artists. There's no room for the critics to discover the work. I think my work is most liked by architects. It's very important for me that I have great friendship and mutual admiration with other artists. Not so much younger artists, because they have a more naive idea about the work. My best friends in America are Paul McCarthy, who has taken years to develop his work, and Ed Ruscha. The reason I like Ed Ruscha is because his work is about fun and amateurism, and my work tends to be a passionate hobby. For me it was Dan Flavin and Roy Lichtenstein who were the biggest influences.

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'Of course, control and complicity are important aspects in interactive installations... Making people believe they can take the reins is a form of control'

Jeppe Hein



'I'm not sociological – my work is not about sociology... it's about polymorphous perverse sexuality and the whole idea of play'

Dan Graham

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FEATURE JEPPE HEIN & DAN GRAHAM

AR: Dan – there's been a lot of talk about relational aesthetics recently – do you think that this, if you'll excuse the pun, relates to your work?

DG: Well, I think these people are careerist rip-off artists. It's like neo-conceptualism and neo-design. Relational aesthetics really simplifies very complex situations from the past. I don't even look at it, because I think some of the work is so terrible. Although artists can develop. I think simple solutions really turn me off; I like work that has a certain complexity. I think that relational aesthetics is simplified fast reading of work from an earlier period.

AR: When you create a work, do you think first of the work itself or the environment in which it will be shown?

JH: It depends on the situation in which an artwork is created. Much of my work is site-specific, and so influenced by the environment. But sometimes it fascinates me to show an existing artwork, as it appears interestingly different in another context.

DG: I really need a certain context. My context right now is European socialism. Many of the socialist mayors in France are commissioning works, and I really believe in French socialism. To be really honest, I often jot down ideas which come from things that I've seen in the environment and then adapt them to a specific situation that I'm encountering. I think it's like this for everybody. You have certain things you're really interested in, and you try to find a situation for that. But I don't want to impose it. My work is very different from Richard Serra.

AR: Jeppe – although your work shares many similarities to Dan's, do you think of your work as more playful? Is that partly a consequence of knowing that you cannot change anything?

JH: In my opinion, my artworks are not more playful than Dan's. I think many of his works are misinterpreted. They have always been categorised as minimalist, but they are more than that – playful, for example. On the other hand, it could be due to a generational difference. Maybe my generation is more focused on games and playful interaction. Nevertheless, playfulness is a good way to initiate communication, as people can get into contact with art more easily when it is on a humorous and informal basis.

AR: Scale – you've both worked on various scales. Is scale a restriction to your work or something that you can exploit? How big is too big? How small is too small?

JH: Nothing can be too small, but sometimes things can get too big. Both scales present challenges. Big projects are extremely interesting but often mean more time, more work, more input. I like working on different levels with different scales, but I am only able to realise these projects because my studio supports me.

DG: I think in architecture and art, big doesn't work.

AR: Your work encourages viewers to become active participants in it. Is that just a cry for attention?

JH: Attention is not that important. Actually, what I like about the artworld is that in contrast to a rock star, who needs to appear in public, an artist can step back behind his art. Communication and interaction are essential for me, as I try to challenge the role of art in different environments and social contexts, offering viewers the possibility to lose their inhibitions towards art. Therefore, my installations invite the viewer to participate in the action of a piece. In fact, some of them are almost invisible and confront them with the surprise of the unexpected.

DG: I think my work is aimed at the general public. A lot of my work is designed for single mothers who are students, and their children, even their grandparents. I guess in ex-Swinging London and also New York, everything is geared around the art star, and I tend not to work in these places, because people really don't like my work too much in London and New York. I have a piece by the North Pole in Norway, on a fjord, and it rains a lot, so people call it a flower stall, but it gets a huge general public in the summer because people come up the coast to see it. So there's a mixture of art tourism and normal people. Not so much collectors, because collectors don't buy so much of my work generally. On the other hand, Jeppe's work sells like crazy. The fact is, I'm hoping that a little bit of Jeppe's popularity can help my sales.

AR: Jeppe – what do you think about Dan Graham? How has he influenced your work? Does being in a show with him have any effect on what you do? Dan – what do you think of Jeppe's work?

JH: Dan as a person and as an artist has had a major influence on me, and I have learned a lot from him. For me, he is the best walking art encyclopedia in the world. We have known each other for a couple of years. We often meet up with each other, talk a lot and exchange experiences and stories. Dan has become a friend and has met my family. In fact, he and my father have a great deal in common and used to DJ together. It is, of course, a great honour for me to be in a show with him.

DG: Well, Jeppe's attracted to me. What I like about his work is that it's basically about participation on the level of fun interaction. I also like the fact that his work is downscaled, unlike someone who came out of Eliasson – whose work is spectacle, new age and a little bit derivative of everybody, which is typical of most of the design artists. Jeppe tends towards the smaller.

AR: What next for you two?

JH: There is still more to come. I hope this is just the beginning of a long-lasting collaboration. Although our approach to art is different, in the end that is what makes it more exciting. :

Jeppe Hein & Dan Graham is on view at *Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich, from 9 July to 2 August. See listings for further details*