

L'OFFRE

Movements



Movements is a tool designed by **DHC/ART Education** to encourage in-depth explorations of key concepts evoked by the works presented in *L'OFFRE*. By highlighting these points of conceptual departure through the document *Movements*, **DHC/ART** educators intend to inspire dialogue about the exhibition and encourage visitors to elaborate on the proposed themes through their personal interpretations and reflections. Over time, these traveling concepts¹ are subsequently enriched as they inform new contributions to our evolving conversations about art.

Movements also serves as a reminder that an aesthetic experience engages the body—its senses and its movements—as much as the intellect. The body's physical, emotional, and perceptive gestures are intimately linked as we move through the exhibition space and our senses are awakened. The rhythm of our trajectories and changing perspectives also mobilizes our vision; images take shape as our memory and imagination are touched by the emerging aesthetic landscape. *Movements* is thus an invitation for the visitor to become immersed—mind and body—in **DHC/ART** exhibitions, thereby developing a rich and dynamic understanding of the works.

1. **BAL, Mieke** (2001). "Concept". *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Context: *Weight and Lightness*



Simryn Gill, *Pearls: Lenin's Predictions on the Revolutionary Storms in the East (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1967)*, 2005. One strand, silk, 134 cm. Photo credit: Jenni Carter

In *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, Lewis Hyde develops an 'ethics of gift exchange', which calls for gifts to be given and received, then transformed and re-shared with the goal of creating meaningful relationships amongst those involved. Hyde sees this "as an 'erotic' commerce, opposing *eros* (the principle of attraction, union, involvement which binds together) to *logos* (reason and logic in general, the principle of differentiation in particular)". Hyde's ideas serve to deepen our reading of L'OFFRE, which presents the work of nine artists who have re-thought the relationship between giving and gift, and in certain cases gone so far as to seek an alternative to capitalist ideas.

We propose that this *eros* carries with it both a certain 'lightness' and a certain 'weight', or 'gravity'. There is the initial joy and delight that we may experience at receiving a gift, which is followed by an uncertainty about the relationship we are then expected to forge, and about what kind of gift to offer in return. How might we propose another kind of gesture, one that could bear fruit and circulate that which has already been shared? With this new proposition comes a new fear, creating a kind of knot in our stomach: we want to open ourselves up to the other, to see ourselves transformed—but we are also uneasy at the thought of making ourselves vulnerable.

For her project *Pearls* (1999-present), Simryn Gill asks a number of her friends to give her their favorite book. She then tears the books' pages in order to remake them into beads, assembling them into necklaces that she then gives back. Each recipient is asked to take a

photo of themselves wearing the necklace and to send the image back to Gill. Participants both grieve the loss of their book and experience wonder upon seeing its metamorphosis into magnificent jewels, handmade by the artist. There is also the weight of wearing the necklace, a pressure that we can interpret as a gesture of *relief*—hands placing a therapeutic weight on another's shoulders. For Gill, there is the receiving of all these many books, these many texts—which not only serve as incarnations of her loved ones, but also symbolize destruction and the labour required for their transformation. It is worthwhile here to note that the pearl created by certain mollusks is in fact an act of defence: when a foreign body enters the shell, the oyster reacts by surrounding the object with a layer of the pearly white material.

In the case of Lee Mingwei, his work *Sonic Blossom* (2013-present) unfolds with the wanderings of a singer in the gallery space, who eventually approaches a visitor with the words "May I offer you a gift?" and goes on to propose a lied by Schubert. The chosen visitor, once they hear the music, is moved towards the sublime. They then learn that the artist and his mother listened to this very music when she was recovering from surgery. Thus we come to understand the solemnity associated with this song: a son watching his aging mother weakened, sick, becoming ever more conscious of eventual death. Thus, this exchange of breath between the singer and the visitor, this back and forth of a life force, is not only a vibrating manifestation of life itself; it is also a poignant reminder of the fragility of the body, that a breath can stop at any moment. *Sonic Blossom* is this warmth that lingers between us, held by our common existence.

Kataoka Mami draws on the principles of Zen philosophy, which also grounds the works of Lee Mingwei: "The impermanence of worldly things holds that all existences in this world are in constant flux (...)". In what ways do Sonic Blossom (2013-present) and Money for Art (1994-2010) offer a destabilizing alternative to capitalist culture?

Sonny Assu's work, Silenced: the Burning (2011), evokes potlatch ceremonies as celebrated in the Kwakwaka'wakw culture. Potlatches were banned by the Canadian government from 1885 to 1951. If you consider this context in relation to Assu's work, how would you describe its tone?

¹ HYDE, Lewis (2007 [1983]). *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. New York: Vintage Books.

² MAMI, Kataoka (2014). "Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations". *Lee Mingwei and His Relations. The Art of Participation*. Exhibition catalogue (Taipei Fine Arts Museum and Mori Art Museum).

Considerations: *Supply and Demand*



Dora Garcia, *Steal This Book*, 2009. Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art Moderne / Centre de creation industrielle. Photograph Roberto Ruiz.

At the end of the year 2016, the Fraser Institute published its *Generosity Index*¹, which measured charitable donations based on data gathered from provincial and federal income tax credit claims. The institute determined a significant drop in the number of Canadian donors over the course of the previous decade; in Quebec alone, the percentage dropped from 22.7% in 2004 to 19.8% in 2014. In the press release that accompanied the *Generosity Index*, a representative of the Fraser stated, “Many Canadians may be surprised to learn we are far less generous than Americans when it comes to charitable giving, and that’s been the case for many years²”.

Resorting to statistics such as these is not particularly surprising, in a world where everything is a performance to the point where generosity can be compiled, quantified, and indexed. The specialists from the Fraser seem concerned by the reduction of *supply* at a time of increasing demand for financial support among charitable organisations³. In response, numerous authors⁴ have argued that the Fraser’s statistics only consider one particular aspect of giving — one that is integrated into the existing economic system. In turn it becomes much more difficult to quantify the act of giving when it takes the form of an exchange, shapes intimate relationships, or exists outside of a transaction. The challenge, then, is to consider giving outside the realm of supply and demand — to consider it as a positive impulse that doesn’t need to be expressed through the tools of the market economy.

This type of reflection around giving is particularly important for artistic communities, which maintain complex relationships with it. These communities, weakened by the precariousness of both their working conditions and their funding, are too often forced to accept the pejorative aspects of the capitalist donation in order to survive. Artists and cultural workers are forever asked to give freely: they give of themselves to the point where art is considered a vocation — a vocation that justifies their precarious conditions. How, then, can we redefine generosity so that it can both bear witness to art’s sensitive contributions while remaining critical of other types of exchange that underlie power relations? Furthermore, how can we reflect on giving and exchange when, in an increasingly *economist* culture, these notions are almost entirely co-opted by capitalism? Is it still possible (or desirable) to give freely?

A certain ambiguity reveals itself in L’OFFRE, where the concept of giving clashes with a variety of well-established, authoritative forces such as the market, morality, government, and the nation. Félix Gonzalez-Torres’s *Untitled (Blue Placebo)* (1991) is a large rectangle comprising small candies in blue wrappers which the public is invited to take. The artist’s gesture, at first generous, becomes deeply poetic: each person who takes a candy takes part in the installation’s destruction. The title references the placebo given to people living with AIDS in the 1980s, when patients’ urgent need for treatment was forced into confrontation with the rigid procedures of pharmaceutical companies. Dora Garcia’s *Steal This Book* (2009) evokes another type of fragility: a minimalist sculpture composed of objects — in this case, a book compiling the artist’s projects. The title of the work (which is also the title of the book) encourages us to steal the book, which is also available for purchase at the Foundation. Does the gesture remain transgressive if the artist invites us to make it?

The works of Gonzalez-Torres and Garcia take back the formal codes of minimalism (flat, geometric shapes, the principle of the grid). Do these visual strategies, where the effects of unity are particularly strong, encourage visitors to interact with the works?

Are there other works in the exhibition that bear witness to a similar ambiguity around giving, and/or the capitalist appropriation of giving and exchange? If yes, which ones?

¹ FRASER INSTITUTE (2016). “Generosity in Canada and the United States: The 2016 Generosity Index”. *Fraser Institute*. Online. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/generosity-in-canada-and-the-united-states-the-2016-generosity-index-news-release.pdf>.

² *Ibid.* This statistic tarnishes the image of the polite, altruistic, and generous Canadian, although they could still take comfort in the fact that Canada places 6th among the 140 countries included in the World Giving Index, an annual report published by the Charities Aid Foundation.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ MCKENNA, *Barrie* (2014). “When it comes to giving, Canadians are quietly generous”. *The Globe and Mail*. Online. go.ggl/ppyfYC and ROSENFELD, Ann (2016). “Canadians Know That True Generosity Goes Beyond Giving Cash”. *Huffington Post*. Online. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/ann-rosenfeld/canadians-giving-back_b_13674792.html.



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