

Jamie McMurry: 365 Performances Project – Investigating borders

How is it possible to cross the borders between art and life? What is the meaning of work in the life of a performance artist? How does an individual change when it pushes itself to do a performance piece every day?

From the 23rd September 2005 till the 22nd September 2006, Jamie McMurry investigated these questions and even more in 365 daily actions. It is the old dream of performative art to tear down the walls between real life and art practice. Tehching Hsieh is maybe the one who tried to chain his life to his art in the most literal way: In his One Year Performances he punched a time clock every hour for a year, was chained to Linda Montano for one year but never touched her or he did not enter a building for another one year period. Hsieh gave his life to his art totally. Jamie McMurry was trying something else. As an artist who works in a very autobiographical way, he always connects the content of his work to his personality. McMurry grew up in a rural area in the USA. His childhood was centred on hard physical labour. It was not tolerated if a member of the family does not contribute something to the household. So it is not surprising that McMurry deals with this pressure of work discipline and its symbols in most of his violent and self-destructive actions. The “365 Performances” carry his general ideas to another aesthetic level: The goal is not to create an intimate atmosphere between his audience and the images he creates daily in this project. It is more about the definition of taking performance seriously as an important, main part of ones own life and also, on a second level, push oneself to create an action every day as if it was a part of a “normal” labour activity. The actions, seen as documentation in this book, vary from interventions of everyday life (like “RAT” on 26th September) or performances in festivals (like “Tire Swing” on 20th October) to private, mostly “unseen” actions (like “Lick Crucifix” on 12th of December). Each performance, each action has got the same value. This marks a kind of philosophical definition about performance art in general that is similar to Marcel Duchamps invention of the “Ready Made”: If the action is given the definition to be a piece of performance, then it IS a piece of performance. It has to be done in full presence

and with the best possible concentration on its function as a moving image done in the triangle of body, space and time.

Throughout the year of this project McMurry had a weekly update on his website where he published the minimum of one image for each action. Also he filled out a form for each day, which was copied and stored afterwards. So this piece does also speak about the connection between the documentation of an ephemeral piece of art and its sense as a time-based action which will not remain but in the memory of its creator. With his way to document his work, McMurry gives a hint that he is also connected to “Conceptual Art”. The consequence of letting his concept be a part of his real life for one year shows his passion to step beyond the intellectual idea and give a part of himself to his art. (The tattoos he got before the beginning of the project and after the final action underline the obsession of proof in his piece.)

Like Sophie Calle, who tries to investigate the codes of human relationship in her biographical and “fake-biographical” researches, McMurry plays with intimacy and creating an atmosphere of closeness between him and his audience: By visiting his website regularly one gets a notion of the life of a performance artist with all its nomadic, interpersonal consequences. After the year was finished the regular visitor may feel a small sting of loss because McMurry gave us a small inside view into the personal life of an artist who seems to be passionate in marrying his autobiography to his idea of art. He was able to create a nearness to his audience which might be thousands of miles away. “365 Performances” was an amazing experiment of investing multiple borders related to art, life, autobiography and the self. May there be another 365 days to be the guest of the performer and human being Jamie McMurry. It was a pleasure in many ways!

Helge Meyer

January 2007

helge.meyer@performance-art-research.de