A Restless Art
The opportunities and challenges of participatory art

François Matarasso, Barcelona, 19 June 2019
1. My perspective

2. What is participatory art?

3. How is it different?

4. What is community art?

5. The risks and opportunities
My perspective on participatory art
George, Andy, Debbie, Andrew & Nick are at Paul’s wake...
30,000 women encircle Greenham Common US air base protesting at the arrival of nuclear cruise missiles

December 1982
3000 people participate in the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games

July 2012
The normalization of participatory art

14-18 Now

WWI Centenary Programme

107 commissions, 269 new artworks

220 locations across the UK

420 artists from 40 countries

580 arts, heritage and community partners

35 million people ‘reached’
What is participatory art?
Participatory art is the creation of art by professional and non-professional artists.
The creation of a work of art
Professional and non-professional artists

Sociedade Artística Musical dos Pousos (Portugal)
They bring different resources

- Education
- Skill and expertise
- Knowledge
- Experience
- Context
- Informed judgement
- Talent

An open mind
New ideas
Knowledge
Experience
Something to say
A need to say it
Talent

‘Home’ Banlieues Bleues (France)
Photo: Eric Garault
They create art that is equally different

Fada Theatre (Syria/The Netherlands)
Photo: Kevin Ryan
The difference is not a matter of quality
A Border Territory of shifting intentions

Participatory Art

- Cultural democracy
- Access to culture
- Social change
Community art is the creation of art as a human right, by professional and non-professional artists, co-operating as equals, for purposes and to standards they set together, and whose processes, products and outcomes cannot be known in advance.
The Elder Tree, Writing East Midlands (UK)

Photo: François Matarasso
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Joe Brainard ‘I Remember’ (1970)

‘Brainard takes one of the oldest and most familiar of poetic devices, the list [...] and couples it with a mania for trivia more personal than any craze could be, and it works.’

Washington Post Book Review

‘I Remember is a masterpiece. One by one, the so-called important books of our time will be forgotten, but Joe Brainard's modest little gem will endure. [...] It is also one of the few totally original books I have ever read.’

Paul Auster
I remember seeing a little boy riding a skateboard.
I remember hearing his name, but I don't remember it now.
I remember thinking it was cool, but I didn't say anything.

I remember the sound of the skateboard wheels on the pavement.
I remember the way the sun was shining through the trees.
I remember feeling happy, but I didn't smile.

I remember the feeling of my heart pounding.
I remember the way the wind was blowing my hair.
I remember the way the sun was warming my face.

I remember hearing the sound of the birds singing.
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I remember tapioca and semolina at school dinners.

I remember when they built the Haymarket.

I REMEMBER: LEICESTER

I remember the first comment was always 'Oh, you speak very good English.'

I remember the first steps I took on a tennis court. I was two years old.

I remember seeing the Beatles at De Montfort Hall in my pre-Mod days.

I remember he took an item from his pocket. It was a gold ring.

‘Extraordinary and moving and glowing with art.’
The threat of institutional appropriation
14-18 Now Jeremy Deller, ‘We’re here because we’re here’

29 arts organisations
1600 participants
63% of the UK population
14-18 Now Artichoke, ‘Processions’

100 women artists
Tens of thousands of women and girls
Broadcast live by the BBC
32 Beaches
‘Tens of thousands of people’
14-18 Now

- Artist-centred
- Institutional investment
- Mass participation
- Limited creativity
- Contained dissension
Community art remains a radical alternative
Without help, without permission
Lower Sanciai Community Association (Lithuania)
Empowerment not control
An emancipatory model

- Art-centred
- Human investment
- Equal participation
- Engaged creativity
- Responsible speech
- Empowerment