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Discovering the meaningfulness of art in organizations: Experiences with *add art* Hamburg 2015

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Abstract

Given the growth in corporate art collecting, surprisingly little research has been conducted on how employees experience art in the workplace. This article draws on survey data collected in the context of *add art* Hamburg 2015, which included permanent and temporary exhibitions in 22 organizations. The findings confirm that the presence of artworks can interrupt routine ways of perceiving and using space. It triggers questions and conversations, which stimulate sensemaking processes and enrich relationships with colleagues. It also opens managers and employees to seeing everyday life and relationships with customers in a more holistic way. Furthermore, the study shows that the removal of artworks is experienced as loss and emptiness, as well as a harbinger of new potential. Finding that employees welcome more art at work, the article discusses the conditions under which people in organizations can engage with the arts as co-learners.

Keywords

corporate art collection; art exhibition; artistic intervention; arts and business, add art

1.

The trend towards corporate art collections is growing all around the world, and for quite different reasons (PAOLINO et al. 2016). The most frequently mentioned motivations for building collections and exhibiting artworks in companies are as an expression of corporate identity and image-building (KOTTASZ et al. 2007; 2008; MARTORELLA 1990; SCHNUGG/LEHNER 2016). Another reason is that artworks are generally assumed to be a good financial investment (FREY/EICHENBERGER 1995; LECLAIR/DOORBOSCH 1995). A strong personal interest in art and/or philanthropy on the part of the owner can also drive the will to collect and exhibit art in the company (BARRY/MEISIEK 2010). Offering clients and employees an attractive, stimulating environment is another frequently cited motivation (LECLAIR/DOORBOSCH 1995; MARTORELLA 1990). Thus, there are multiple kinds of beliefs among top managers that art at the workplace is more than just nice to have.

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Interestingly, more is known about the reasons for collecting art in business than about its effects in the workplace. Scholars have written about the potential value of art in organizations (BIEHL-MISSAL 2015; STRATI 1999) but little empirical research has been conducted to show whether or not the beliefs in the benefits are well-founded. The majority of studies have been in health sector organizations, and they have identified positive effects on patients, their families and employees (MONTI et al. 2012; NANDA et al. 2012; ROLLINS 2011). Very little is known about its effects in workplaces of other sectors, but the conceptual propositions from Barry and Meisiek (2010) and findings of an exploratory study in France (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2011, 2016; BESSIÈRE 2013) and Australia (SMIRAGLIA 2014) suggest that it is worth examining this question in other organizational settings.

The opportunity to study the perceived effects of artworks in different kinds of organizations was offered by the 2015 edition of an art show in Hamburg, Germany, called *add art - Hamburgs Wirtschaft öffnet Türen für Kunst* [add art – Hamburg’s companies open doors for art] (www.addart.de). In this initiative non-arts-based institutions invite the public to see artworks on their premises. The organizers also encourage companies to participate with a temporary exhibition of work by young local artists, an option that is particularly interesting for those that do not have a standing collection of their own. The public visits are organized over a weekend, but many organizations keep their temporary exhibits for several months, so employees, customers, and guests can continue to experience the artworks beyond the actual *add art* event. We surveyed the managers responsible for the exhibition in their organizations, the employees, and participating young artists to find out how they experienced the art in the workplace.

We start by providing a brief overview of research on artistic interventions because we conceive the exhibition of artworks in organizations as a kind of artistic intervention based on our definition of artistic interventions as processes in which “people, practices or products from the world of the arts” enter organizations outside the world of the arts (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2009: 4)¹. After describing the research method and our sample, we present our findings. We show how people experience space differently in the presence of artworks, how the art affects social interactions

1 Some scholars use different terms. For example Barry and Meisiek (2010: 1507) coined the term “workarts”, and they use a similar threefold distinction between “art collection, artist-led intervention, and artistic experimentation.” Schiuma (2011) prefers the term arts-based initiatives for which he introduced the acronym ABIs.

at work, and also how the exhibitions influence employees' connection to art and artists. Finding that employees experience the removal of art as emptiness and would welcome more art, we close by identifying research questions and suggesting implications for practice.

2. Research on artistic interventions in organizations

The past decade has seen the parallel growth of the artistic interventions in organizations around the world and of publications on the phenomenon (DARSØ 2004, 2016). Many publications are aspirational, encouraging organizations to experiment with the arts as a way of enhancing leadership and innovation (ADLER 2006, 2011, 2015; BIEHL-MISSAL 2011); some are conceptual, intending to structure thinking about the field (TAYLOR/LADKIN 2009), and a growing number are empirically-based (for an overview JOHANSSON SKÖLDBERG et al. 2016). The most extensive documentation is available for artistic interventions in Europe, possibly because of support for experiments from the European Union, whose funding often entailed a requirement to include research (e.g., the *Tillt Europe* and *Creative Clash* programs 2009-2014).

Although artistic interventions may involve people, practices and/or products from the world of the arts entering organization, the focus of research has been on artistic interventions involving artists and their practices. The interventions last a few hours, days, weeks or months, and in some organizations they extend over several years. The artists bring their practices from many artistic disciplines, inviting employees to observe or participate in activities that can develop skills, challenge organizational mindsets and stimulate innovation. A meta analysis of empirical studies found evidence of many different kinds of value-added at the personal level, the inter-personal level, and the organizational level, and certain level-spanning effects. The most frequently cited impact is seeing more and differently (BERTHOIN ANTAL/STRAUß 2016:42). At the interpersonal level, artistic interventions have been found to affect – usually positively – relationships among colleagues, often increasing the quantity and quality of communication and stimulating collaborative ways of working (BERTHOIN ANTAL/STRAUß 2016: 44-45). The effects of artistic interventions have been observed at the organizational level in organizational development processes and to stimulate innovation, but researchers have found that managers have “a healthy aware-

ness of the multiplicity of factors that affect organizational outcomes and [have] an appropriate reluctance to attribute changes to a single kind of input” (BERTHOIN ANTAL/STRAUß 2016:47). The meta analysis of artistic interventions in which artists interacted with employees also identified two kinds of level-spanning effects, namely artful ways of working (which encompass dealing with the unexpected and being open to the new; adopting artistic formats; trusting the new) and activation (BERTHOIN ANTAL/STRAUß 2016: 48-52).

A striking gap in the literature so far is that little is known about what happens when the third element in the definition, namely the *product* from the art world, intervenes in the organization. The conceptual article by Barry and Meisiek (2010) proposed that art collections could stimulate “seeing more and seeing differently” and the authors distinguished between collections that are intended to be “an expression of the culture and identity of the organization” (BARRY/MEISIEK 2010: 1511) and those whose purpose is “to challenge the status quo and to stimulate questions and reflections around existing perspectives” (BARRY/MEISIEK 2010: 1512). They point out that “ever new and rotating exhibits are thought to help people continuously notice more in what they were already doing” (BARRY/MEISIEK 2010:1511). Barry and Meisiek provide anecdotal evidence to illustrate their concepts, referring to collections at EA Generali in Austria and Novo Nordisk in Denmark, for example.

Two studies were conducted on a two and a half year residency program in Paris at Eurogroup Consulting, a French strategy consulting company (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2011, 2016; BESSIÈRE 2013). The program consisted of a series of four residencies, each lasting about four months, during which the artists created artworks under the gaze of the employees. The organizer consciously chose conceptual artists whose work was challenging and open to interpretation. Each residency closed with a vernissage, to which all employees were invited, as well as guests from the art world. The company acquired some of the artworks at the end of the residency then displayed in them throughout the organization. The first study, by BERTHOIN ANTAL, accompanied the entire process of the four residencies with individual and group interviews with employees, artists, and the project managers, as well as a Web-based survey a few months after the end of the program; the second one, by Bessièrè, followed up with interviews several years later to see whether traces remained in the organization. Both studies found that the presence of art at the workplace stimulated conversations among employees and with external stakeholders about the values of the organization and

about personal interests beyond the world of work. The conceptual art works were provocative and the conversations reflected critical thinking about the organization as well as about art. The studies thereby confirmed the expectations raised by Barry and Meisiek (2010) about the potential organizational-level effects of art works in organizations. Smiraglia has taken the field forward by conducting an empirical study in an Australian not-for profit organization in the education sector. It has a regular art exhibition program in order to address two questions:

What impact do organization affiliates (employees and board members) believe the art in their workplace has on their experience at work? What features of the art do affiliates believe are salient in their experience of workplace art? (SMIRAGLIA 2014: 285-286)

She interviewed sixteen employees and three board members who had experienced an exhibition of students' artworks. Her analysis revealed five main kinds of impacts:

- (1) Promotion of social interaction;
- (2) Facilitation of personal connection-making;
- (3) Enhancement of the workplace environment;
- (4) Elicitation of emotional responses;
- (5) Stimulation of learning.

The respondents reported that having art in the workplace promoted spontaneous conversations by providing shared topics of conversation. They indicated that the "presence of the art in the environment affected their feelings about the organization and working there" (SMIRAGLIA 2014: 288), and that it enhanced the workplace aesthetically. The interviews contained references to 'a range of positive emotions while viewing or contemplating the art: joy, wonder, and inspiration.' The impact category 'personal connection making' consists of reminders of other meaningful relationships and experiences triggered by the art. The learning that the respondents referred to in the interviews related to having a deeper appreciation of art and artists, and to having "made them think" (SMIRAGLIA 2014: 290). Many of the respondents felt that the rotation of art in the workplace was valuable, noting that "new works are usually a catalyst for discussion" (SMIRAGLIA 2014: 291). Some respondents commented on the connection between the art and the values of the organization, leading the author to conclude that "it may be beneficial to align the nature of the art collection with the mission of the organization" (SMIRAGLIA 2014: 292-293).

In summary, these initial publications suggest a diverse range of potential effects from exhibiting art in the workplace. This contribution examines whether they are limited to the contexts in which the available empirical studies were conducted, namely France and Australia, or whether they can be observed in other countries and sectors. It also addresses how the presence of art at the workplace affects members of the organization by exploring the transitional moments of adding and removing art from the work environment.

3. Research method and sample composition

In 2015, the third edition of *add art – Hamburgs Wirtschaft öffnet Türen für Kunst*, twenty two organizations opened their doors to the public to visit their permanent collections or temporary exhibitions.² We grabbed the opportunity to ask employees and the managers responsible for the exhibition of artworks in German organizations what they felt and thought about having art at the workplace. *add art* Hamburg 2015 offered several advantages for our research: it involved organizations from diverse sectors and of various sizes, and it permitted us to find out how people responded both to the presence and the absence of art because the temporary exhibits entered and then left the organizational space.

We adapted a Web-based research instrument that we have used to study artistic interventions with artists in France, Germany, Sweden and Spain (BERTHOIN ANTAL/NUSSBAUM BITRAN 2015). It is composed primarily of open questions to elicit the responses of the participants in their own words, and a few multiple choice questions. Three slightly different versions of the survey were prepared for the managers responsible for the exhibitions in each organization, the employees, and the young artists whose work was shown in the temporary exhibitions. For example, only the project managers were asked why the organization collects art and why they decided to participate in *add art* Hamburg 2015. The mix of questions elicited their initial expectations or objectives, then their thoughts and feelings about the experience, as well as how they felt after the removal of temporarily exhibited artworks.

In order to collect responses after participants had had time to reflect on the experience we asked the coordinator of *add art* Hamburg 2015 to send the links to the surveys to the participating companies and to the

2 The event attracted about 1700 visitors, but we did not seek their views for this study.

artists several weeks after the exhibitions closed. He also sent out reminders to encourage more responses to come in.

We received responses from almost all (20 out of 22) the organizations that participated in *add art* Hamburg 2015, so the sample contains a good mix of sectors and sizes. The sectors represented included professional services firms (law, accounting, advertising), finance (banking, insurance), health, hospitality, energy, and logistics. Just over 33% of the organizations had between 50 and 250 employees, and 40% had between 250 and 1000 employees. The remaining 25% were micro organizations with fewer than ten employees and enterprises with over a thousand employees. Seven organizations had permanent exhibitions, six had longer term temporary exhibitions, and seven more had temporary exhibitions specifically installed for *add art* Hamburg 2015. Our sample contains responses from seventeen project managers, thirty two employees, and nine young artists. In six organizations we received answers from project managers and employees (and in two of those the artists also responded). In nine organizations only the project managers responded (and in two more the project managers and artists responded). In three organizations only the artists responded.

4. Survey results

The two most striking findings from our survey are a) how overwhelmingly positive the respondents are about the experience, and b) how many more kinds of value they report discovering than they initially expected. Of course there may be a positive bias in the responding sample; however it is noteworthy that, unlike our other studies in Germany, the employees did not take the opportunity to use the anonymous Web-based survey to express criticism of the idea of art in the workplace, nor of the artworks themselves.

Table 1 provides an overview of the responses from artists, project managers and employees to the question “How did you feel about experiencing art exhibited in the workplace/a company/an organization outside the artworld?” They could choose up to three responses, and the most frequently mentioned are: stimulating, inspiring, surprising, helpful, and entertaining, whereby there are differences in emphasis among the groups.

How did you feel about experiencing art exhibited in a workplace/a company/an organization outside the artworld? (choose up to 3 responses)

	Artists N= 18 responses from 9 artists	Project managers N=37 responses from 17 project managers	Employees N=72 responses from 32 employees
Stimulating	5.56%	32.43%	16.67%
Irritating	0%	0%	1.39%
Surprising	33.33%	2.70%	11.11%
Disappointing	0%	0%	1.39%
Helpful	33.33%	8.11%	5.56%
Irrelevant	0%	2.70%	2.78%
Energizing	5.56%	10.81%	5.56%
A waste of time	0%	0%	1.39%
Entertaining	11.11%	8.11%	18.06%
Embarassing	0%	0%	1.39%
Inspiring	11.11%	27.03%	27.78%
Provocative	0%	2.70%	0%
Other*:	0%	5.41%	6.94%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Table 1: How the respondents felt about the experience.

*Other = *Project managers*: nice; normal because it is a collection and therefore a permanent exhibition

Employees: balancing; decorative and stimulating; communicative; livable, decorative; stimulating exchange

The project managers give a range of reasons for deciding to participate in *add art*, but few mention potential effects inside the organization. Most of them write that they are motivated by a love of art (“*because we love art and collect it*”), by corporate tradition (“*because, thanks to the company’s longstanding tradition and former CEOs, the company has a large collection of artworks; and because employees should benefit from ‘beauty’*”), by a sense of social responsibility that encompasses supporting local artists (“*We like to offer a platform for young artists. As a member of society, we are happy to see many visitors using the opportunity in this context, to look at the artworks in our premises. This is also a way of fulfilling our responsibility as a corporate citizen*”), or they simply cite decorative reasons (“*for decoration*”). Only a few project managers mention that art could be a new source of social interaction

(“We see art as a catalyst for conversations – with clients and among employees”).

The contrast between the kinds of reasons given for participating in *add art* Hamburg and the kinds of value-added they report experiencing is quite striking. When we ask the project managers and employees to think about the effects that the exhibition had, they identify a wide range of effects inside the organization. Many of the respondents report a change in the way they a) experience space, b) engage with colleagues, clients, and work, and c) relate to art.

4.1 Experiencing space differently

Several organizations exhibited the artworks throughout their premises. The reception area, meeting rooms for clients, and hallways were the most frequently mentioned exhibition spaces. Some also placed the artworks in internal meeting rooms, and one organization mentioned employees’ offices as well.

The majority of respondents (94.1% of project managers and 62.5% of employees – see figure 1) comment on how the presence of artworks pieces actually transforms the space in which they are exhibited (*“not just as workspace but also as life-space and thinking-space”; “Art always changes the space. Things people are accustomed to are suddenly sorted, seen and interpreted in new ways.”*). They observe from the *add art* experience that even permanently exhibited artworks are seen differently as a result of the temporary exhibition (*“The works have been hanging there so long that no one really notices them anymore. Add art has got some of them to look at the works more consciously again.”*). Employees, too, note that art changes the atmosphere in the workplace (*“They give the office spaces a new, sometimes also a ‘less harsh’ atmosphere”; “for example the noticeably nicer atmosphere in the meeting rooms”*).

Do you feel that the art that was exhibited in your organization had an effect on the way you perceived the space/spaces in which the works were exhibited?

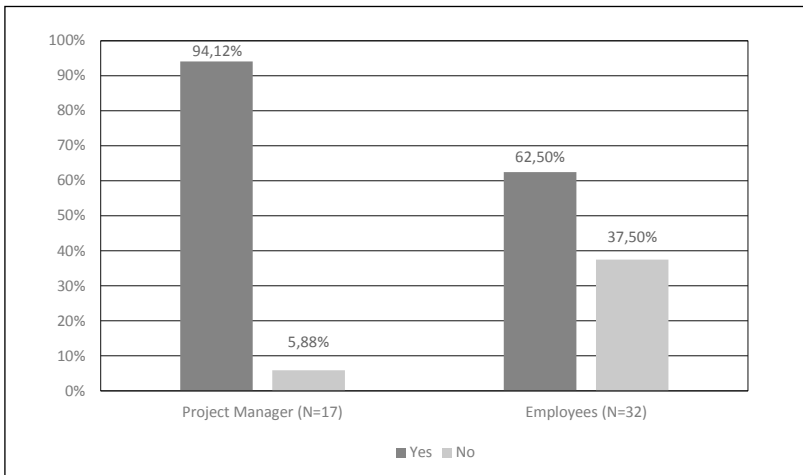


Figure 1: *Effect of art on perception of space/spaces.*

4.2 Effects on social interactions

The effects that the presence of art can have on communication and relationships at work are highlighted by 82.3% of the project managers and 64.5% of the employees (see figure 2). They report various ways art influenced conversations with their colleagues, opening up more opportunities to talk with them, enabling them to understand better with whom they are working (“*Art often generates reasons for conversations. There are – often controversial – opinions expressed, which allow one to understand personalities better*”. [project manager]; “*more exchange, topics of conversation*” [employee], also by expanding the range of topics beyond the usual work-related issues (“*a reason for communicating about more than the purely business topics*” [project manager]; “*beyond daily work*” [employee]).

Do you feel that the art that was exhibited in your organization had an effect on your conversations with colleagues?

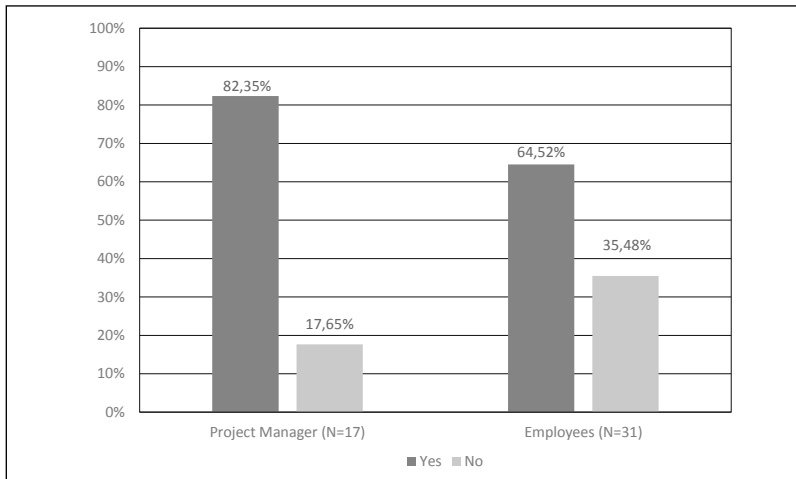


Figure 2: *Effect of art on conversations with colleagues.*

Do you feel that the art that was exhibited in your organization had an effect on your conversations with clients/customers?

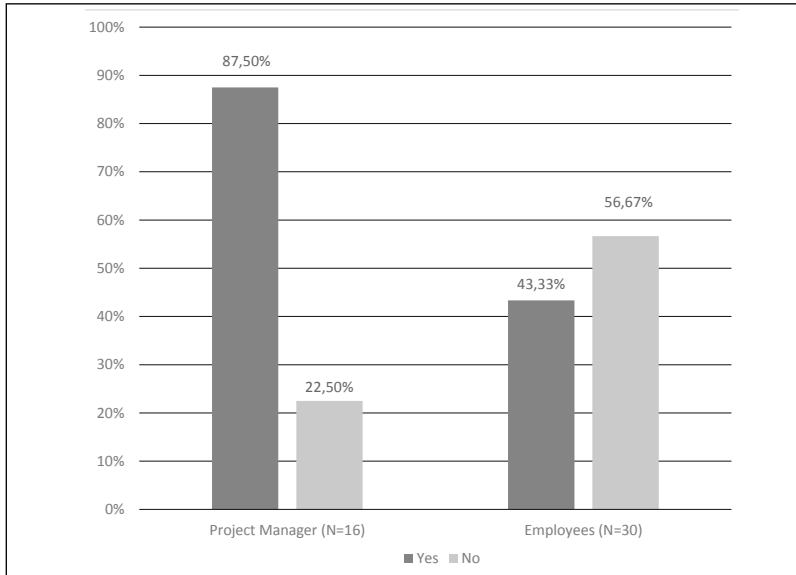


Figure 3: *Effect of art on conversations with clients/customers.*

The respondents write that the presence of artworks also has a positive influence on conversations with customers (see figure 3). More project managers (87.5%) than employees (43.3%) report that the artworks gave them new impulses for conversations with customers (*“a new trigger for conversations / a new level” [manager]; “art is often the first topic of conversation. Our art is unusual and fits us, our visitors also notice that” [employee]*).

4.3 Effects on work

A lesser but still frequently reported effect is on the work itself. Almost half the project managers (43.7%) and almost a quarter of the employees (22.5%) indicate that contact with the artworks (and in some cases with the young artists) affected their own work (see Figure 4). The main impact for the project managers was to stimulate courage (*“try to be more courageous”*), while for the employees it was related to happiness (*“I really enjoy ...working with artists, people who love art. They are a very different clientele and make it possible for me to see beyond the daily work context”*). Regarding their relation with the arts 58.8% of the project managers and 46.8% of the employees said they felt some effects. The former respondents write about being reflective (*“One learns daily from good art. It always stimulates reflection”*), while the latter express themselves in terms of better understanding the art and artists (*“taking the artists’ perspective more”*).

Do you feel that the art that was exhibited in your organization had an effect on your work or your way of working?

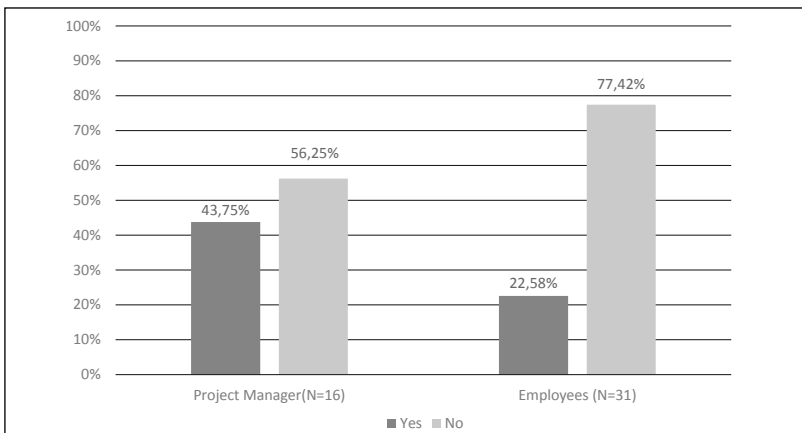


Figure 4: *Effect of art on work/way of working.*

4.4 Comparing experiences with permanent and temporary exhibitions

We were expecting to find differences in the responses from project managers and employees in organizations that only have temporary exhibitions during *add art* and those that have permanent collections. For example, people who have not experienced art in their work settings might well be skeptical about its addition, and those who see it every day might be quite blasé about it. However, we found very little difference between the answers from the two settings. Respondents in both groups are enthusiastic about the art exhibitions, and the ones who experience it at work for the first time make only positive comments, reasoning both in terms of the impact on the workplace and the opportunity for the artists. (*“Good! It brings a fresh breath of air into the daily work and opens new perspectives. It is good for the soul to engage with art”; “the free and available spaces are really well offered to the artists. No one needs to fear that the space is too small or confusing”; “very positive and beneficial”*). A small difference emerged in the responses of project managers in response to the question “Do you believe that art exhibitions have an impact on the organization?” Three of the project managers with permanent exhibitions responded “no” but none of the project managers with temporary exhibitions did.

4.5 Effects on the relationship to art

As figure 5 shows, almost 60% of project managers and almost 50% of employees felt that the experience of having art at the workplace has an effect on their connection to art.

4.6 Effects of the presence of the artists

In some organizations with temporary exhibitions the respondents not only had contact with the artworks but also with the young artists whose pieces were exhibited. The artists were sometimes available for conversations while their work was being hung and during guided visits of the exhibition. These interactions make the experience even richer. Project managers were surprised when they talked with the artists especially about their ideas and motivations which help them to understand the art pieces (*“I was particularly touched to meet one of the artists during one of the tours we offered in add art. That gave me a new access to the work.” “The conversations with the artists about their ideas and what motivates them”*). The employees also report being surprised by what

they learned from talking with the artists about the techniques and the ideas behind the art work (*“The exchange with the artist, who personifies “success,” in the sense of being satisfied with life, as opposed to the economic success that we seek as a company; “the techniques that they used, the artworks themselves – what they wanted to express”*).

Do you feel that the art that was exhibited in your organization had an effect on your connection to art?

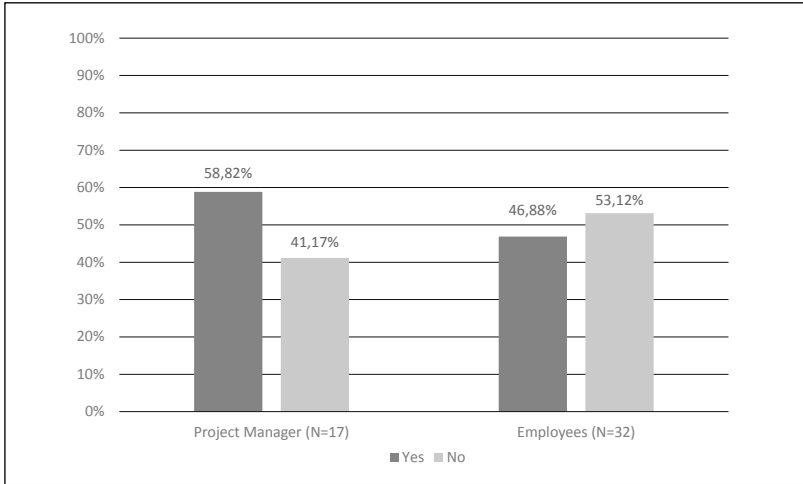


Figure 5: *Effect of exhibiting art at the workplace on respondents' connection to art.*

4.7 When the artworks leave: emptiness and expectation

The advantage that temporary exhibitions offer for research on the impacts of art is that both the presence and the absence of artworks can be studied. We speculated that people become accustomed to their environment and the moment of removal might heighten awareness for the effects the art had had in the workplace. We therefore asked the respondents not only to reflect on how they felt while the art was exhibited, but also how they felt when it was taken away. The combination of responses is telling. People comment sadly on the emptiness (*“a gap in the space and an empty atmosphere” [project manager]; “disappointing – because the space felt sad” [employee]*), but although they miss what has left, they look forward to the arrival of something new in the future (*“in this company we live a lot with the change in the art exhibitions. Change is essentially normal for us, although it is sometimes painful to take down a good exhibition, I always look forward to the new op-*

portunities” [project manager]; “a little wrenching pain of separation combined with curiosity about what will come next” [employee].

4.8 A glimpse into the artists’ perspective

Although the focus of this contribution is on the perspectives of the members of the organizations participating in *add art* Hamburg 2015, it is also interesting to discover the young artists’ perspective on presenting their work outside the artworld. Overall they, too, are positive about the experience with *add art*, and, like the employees and managers, they also discover more than they originally expected. They find that interactions with different publics than they usually experience in the artworld allow them to think about their own role while explaining their art. (“*What I found particularly interesting in the interaction with the visitors was to notice the effect that speaking about my own work had on the viewers and their way of seeing. Particularly a married couple who engaged intensely with the artworks afterwards and discovered aspects that had gone unnoticed earlier, beforehand they had not really been able to access the work*”). They appreciate the interest companies show in the arts and the way the managers and employees became involved in the process, understanding the arts and the artists as such and not simply as decoration. (“*The company was really interested in art and the works hung for two months in the office space. A catalogue was also prepared for the exhibition.*” “*The level of professionalism and that my work was explicitly recognized as “work” rather than ‘just’ art, as is often the case among outsiders*”).

The artists reflect on the implications of moving into new spaces of exhibition outside the artworld, presenting them with new challenges and new opportunities to address different publics and preconceptions to what is understood as “art” (“*I find that leaving the pure “art scene” for an exhibition has the advantage that a different public comes to the presentation and additional vernissages in add art. In the art scene it is usually the same 200 people who come to the events. Add art attracts friends of the company, newcomers, people interested in art, artists, [...] a good mix for feedback and relevant conversations*”. “*An interesting experience because it is quite rare to exhibit in such a context and to overcome “prejudices”*”).

A few artists were concerned that their work did not have anything in common with the organization, they could not feel any connection with it; some were disappointed that their host organization had selected only artworks that are nice and easy to understand. (“*I was aware that the*

selection of artworks (which I did not influence) suited the company's viewpoint. Aesthetically pleasing and easily digested pictures were shown"; "one wants to be more than 'office art.'")

**Would you like to have artworks regularly or permanently displayed?
(N=11 employees in organizations that do not have permanent collections)**

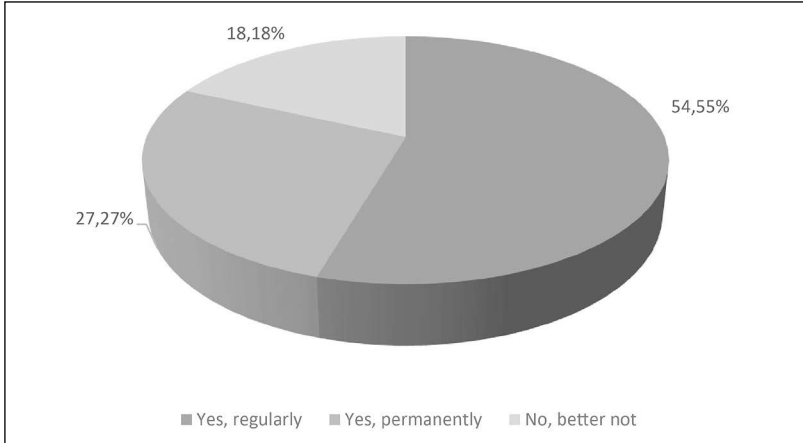


Figure 6: *Desire for art at the workplace.*

4.9 Employees propose: more and differently

The responses from all three kinds of respondents clearly document the value in continuing with *add art* Hamburg. Interestingly, the most recommendations for the future come from employees. They propose more interaction with the artists (*"more engagement with the artists, who should present themselves more, and to take a more active role"*; *"It would be nice if the artists would present themselves at the opening events and possibly would give a short explanation of their works"*), longer-term exhibitions (*"Longer exhibition. Introductory event just for members of the organization. More guests"*), and more transparent processes (*"could be longer and more transparent for employees"*). As figure 6 illustrates, the responses from employees in organizations that did not yet have corporate collections and participated in *add art* with exhibitions of works by young artists show that the overwhelming majority would welcome having art permanently or temporarily in the workplace.

4.10 Bridging between the world of the arts and the world of organizations: The intermediary

Most artistic interventions involve an intermediary person or organization to connect the world of the arts to the world of organizations (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2012; JOHANSSON SKÖLDBERG/WOODILLA 2016). The intermediary generates interest in both worlds for participating in the artistic intervention, helps match artists to organizations when needed, often translates between the codes of the two worlds, and stimulates learning from the experience. For corporate art collections, managers usually rely on curators and art dealers as intermediaries. In the case of *add art* Hamburg, the intermediary is an individual who is passionate about art, and currently works in a public relations agency. He brought the idea of *add art* to Hamburg after experiencing a similar initiative in Frankfurt.

Although our survey did not specifically address the role of the intermediary behind *add art* Hamburg, project managers and artists brought it up themselves in response to the closing question “*Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*” For example, an artist wrote “*I was very positively surprised [...] by the pleasantly uncomplicated communication and the engagement of X*”; and a project manager wrote: “*X undertakes the initiative in a really competent way*”. Their appreciative comments show how important the role is throughout the process. In this case the intermediary generated learning from experience in several ways: he collected feedback orally and in writing from the artists and conducted follow-up conversations with the participating organizations, in addition, he enabled this research project by contacting the project managers and artists and sending them the survey links, and by printing a report about the results from which other organizations could learn in future.

5. Conclusions and next steps

The lack of attention by research to how the intervention of art in the workplace affects people there is surprising, given the increase in art corporate collecting and the growing interest in artistic interventions in organizations. Artworks are noticeable either as a presence or an absence on the walls, in the air, on the floor. Scholars have proposed that the presence of art in the workplace has the potential to interrupt the routine way people experience and use the space. They suggest that its presence can ac-

tivate the senses and stimulate sense-making, it can trigger questions and conversations—about work, about life, about art. It may lead to individual and collective reflection on the purpose and values of the organization (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2014:180-181). Observers have warned, however, that presence wears off over time: “many employees quickly stop noticing and forget that the art is even around” (BARRY/MEISIEK 2010: 1513).

Overall, the responses to our survey from the participants in *add art* Hamburg 2015 support the expectations from the literature (BARRY/MEISIEK 2010; BERTHOIN ANTAL 2011, 2016; BESSIÈRE 2013; BIEHL-MISSAL 2015; SMIRAGLIA 2014): when art is exhibited in organizations it changes the space and engenders new and different conversations that extend beyond the art itself. This opening happens in two directions: first, it helps colleagues to know each other in a deeper way because of the exchanges of points of view and opinions which give space to the employees to express themselves. Second, it opens the managers and employees in these organizations to the environment, allowing them to see everyday life and relationships with their customers in a more holistic way that goes beyond the office walls.

5.1 Implications for research

The experience with *add art* Hamburg highlights the potential interplay between the presence and absence of art. The responses show that when artworks are replaced or removed, their absence can be sensed, thereby reactivating thoughts and emotional responses. They reveal that absence can also awaken an expectation of something new and different. The newness in the *add art* model is personified by the inclusion of temporary exhibitions of artworks by young local artists. The act of opening the organizational space to the public also contributes to making the context new. When external visitors enter the space to see the art, members of the organization have the opportunity to look at their daily workplace through fresh eyes. The combination of these factors may catalyze the distinction making and context shifting that BARRY and MEISIEK (2010) postulate art can bring to organizational settings. More research would be needed to clarify whether, and if so, how, this happens. For example, observations could be undertaken of formal and informal discussions and decision-making processes in organizations in the presence and absence of artworks.

The earlier publications we reviewed reported on studies in France (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2011; 2016; BESSIÈRE 2013) and Australia (SMIRAGLIA 2014), and anecdotal evidence from Scandinavia (BARRY

& MEISIEK 2010). Our current study documented similar effects in twenty organizations in Germany. The sample contained organizations from different sectors and of different sizes, but was too small to permit an analysis of the effects of size or of sector-specific factors. Future research could be designed to examine these dimensions.

Another question future research should address is the effect of aligning the art collection with the organization's mission. Whereas Smiraglia (2014:292-293) recommends attending to such an alignment, such an approach could limit the capacity of the organization to benefit from the context-shifting potential that BARRY and MEISIEK (2010) attribute to a corporate art collection.

5.2 Implications for practice

Experiencing the value of the presence of artworks in organizations may be the beginning of a learning curve. The key prerequisite is that their point of departure needs to be one of curiosity rather than instrumentality. Embarking on an artistic intervention in an organization is a journey into the unknown. It requires the capacity to "trust the process" (McNIFF 1998). It means shifting the mindset away from managing suppliers to engaging in co-learning (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2015; BIEHL-MISSAL 2015).

Companies with permanent collections might want to enable their employees to benefit more often from the heightened awareness of the presence of art at their workplace that a public event such as *add art* can trigger. Organizing small temporary exhibits by young artists to complement their permanent collection could also stimulate attentiveness by creating transitional moments of addition and removal of artworks. Organizations with permanent exhibitions could thereby also create the opportunity for employees to engage in conversations with artists, a feature that many employees report finding enriching in *add art* Hamburg 2015.

Another learning step for those organizations that chose art the artists felt was easy to understand would be to try in future to exhibit works that are more challenging and provocative. The analysis of experiences with conceptual artworks in the French company (BERTHOIN ANTAL 2011, 2016; BESSIÈRE 2013) indicates that such polysemic art is particularly effective at stimulating meaningful and wide-ranging conversations among employees and with external stakeholders.

A third potential learning step, given the overwhelmingly positive responses to exhibiting art products at the workplace in the context of *add art*, would be to undertake other kinds of artistic interventions invol-

ving people and practices from the world of the arts. Organizations with permanent exhibitions as well as those that have tried out temporary exhibitions, could experiment with opening themselves up to learning by interacting with artists in different ways. They could introduce artistic intervention residencies, during which artists create art in the organizational space and under the gaze of employees, thereby also offering opportunities for conversations. And they could invite artists to help them address organizational issues, without necessarily aiming to create artworks. For such engagements, they are likely to need intermediaries, who can be external to the organization or tandems of internal and external people capable of bridging between the world of the arts and the world of organizations.

Lastly, the learning curve could also take on international dimensions. The *add art* Hamburg experience may sow the seeds for experiments in other cities and countries. Who is next?

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