

MODERN ART & the Kindergarten

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Pablo Helguera's School of Panamerican Unrest

Pablo Helguera, a Mexican-born, New York-based conceptual artist who combines performance and new media, explores in *Nursery*, the aesthetic influence that Friedrich Fröebel's educational theories had on Modern artists and architects of the early twentieth century. Fröebel created and revolutionized the Kindergarten (garden for children) movement. His theories support experiential learning through play. Fröebel advocated educational play and learning through classroom materials he called "gifts" and "occupations."

Technologies are the new gift and occupations (educational materials) of our time. Throughout history, artists have sought new technologies as potential art forms. Helguera's performance uses new media and is accessible through the use of technology. This creates possibilities for students to experience and analyze the work of a contemporary

artist through the use of technology.

Moreover, Helguera's work raises questions, in innovative ways, about the interconnections between art and early childhood education. These explorations can serve to enhance teaching strategies and enrich students' experiences with art.

Fröebel's Gifts

An important concept in early childhood education was Fröebel's "gifts," which consists of play objects such as balls, cubes, and cylinders. "Occupations" includes activities like perforating and folding paper, sewing, drawing, painting, building with sticks, and modeling in clay.

"Gifts" and "occupations" were

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not simply educational toys and practices that provided sensory stimulation and educational play but a new language for play, discovery, learning, and creating knowledge.

Helguera's Gifts

In his performance, Pablo Helguera juxtaposes video images of Modern painters and architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and Mondrian with visual representations of Fröebel's kindergarten teaching schemas and what appears to be the work of kindergartners.

The similarities between the two sets of work are striking and ironic,

in that pairing Modern art with kindergarten art and methods of instruction is an unlikely combination. The artist hints at the possibility that everything Modern artists and architects needed to know about design, abstraction, and aesthetics, they learned in kindergarten.

Regardless of whether the Kindergarten Movement contributed to the sensibilities of Modern art and architecture, Helguera's performance presents an opportunity to explore concepts and artistic endeavors through the use of technology.

Last, viewing the work of contemporary new media artists can inspire students to incorporate technology in their own art-making. Helguera's work is a catalyst to investigate new strategies for teaching and to enhance active learning. 

References

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WEB LINKS

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