



# Why It's Art

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**Abstract.** Acknowledged as a “great artist” [1, p. 83], a “pioneer” [2], and a third culture thinker [3], the speaker, through his over four decades portfolio of works, in this talk reflects on the question of “Why it’s Art?” Such questioning aligns with others who have asked, “What is Art?” [4] “Where is Art?” “Who makes Art?” [5] “What is Art for?” [6] and more. Ongoing discussions abound. However, if the art under scrutiny transcends genres, as in this case, the questioning of “Why it’s Art” art becomes multifold and more challenging for third-parties to expertly argue. Aligned to this is that because of its bespoke hybrid synthesized nature, - Performance Art as Human Performance as Performance Art -; the concept in question is posited as one that needs to be self-experienced in order to argue opposition. There are thus few experts with extended involvement given its contemporary and original nature. This keynote talk presents selections from the speaker’s works spanning decades either side the turn of the millennium that resulted in European and national awards (across genres). This brief text focuses on extracting from Tolstoy [4] in arguing the author’s contemporary position in light of historic argument. These works, awards and text support the positioning, which is further sustained by him achieving numerous national and international multimillion Euro funded projects with various collaborators from industry and public sectors where the work has been central. The work is ongoing.

**Keywords:** Human · Performance · Art · Life

## 1 Introduction

The following short paper introduces the concept behind the presented works where foci is upon implementation across artistic creative expression forms (performance, installation, festivals, museums, etc..) whilst parallel being researched as an original form of rehabilitation training to empower and motivate activity and engagement as a supplement and complement to traditional strategies. The conceiving of the concept arose from the author being born into a family having profoundly disabled members. At an early age he invented alternative means of control of music via the family member’s remaining functional ability that resulted in an empowered nuance of life quality. Whilst this activity was private, the speaker’s public profile was developing via (as a late teenager) presenting his art at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London. This dichotomy of genres had a commonality of creativity and invention and subsequently the speaker’s artistic expressivity transcended to be cross informing to his research targeting means of empowerment for those with different abilities. This

research similarly proved enlightening in the artistic works. Advances in technologies offered increased opportunities to the dualism concept that subsequently developed as a bespoke hybrid synthesized sensor-based method and apparatus applicable under both areas. The following outlines the concept and its background.

## 2 Performance and Conceptual Art and Human Performance

*Performance Art* has been referred to as “...the most adventurous twentieth-century art”<sup>1</sup> – and as an art form that is “...the chosen medium for articulating ‘difference’ whether dealing with issues of identity, multiculturalism or globalism”<sup>2</sup>. In questioning ‘what is art’, Count Lyov (also Lev) Nikolayevich Tolstoy (often in English known as Leo Tolstoy), who is acknowledged in *Encyclopedia Britannica*<sup>3</sup> as ‘a Russian writer who is regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time’, defines it as ‘an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience’ [4]. Tolstoy, in conceptualizing of art as anything that communicates emotion, reflected how “Art begins when a man, with the purpose of communicating to other people a feeling he once experienced, calls it up again within himself and expresses it by certain external signs”. Tolstoy also posited how he considered a traditionally recognized work of art as more a piece of life (See footnote 3), Tolstoy, it can thus be argued, supported the author’s argument.

The cited literature posits Tolstoy’s ability to ‘observe the smallest changes of consciousness and to record the slightest movements of the body’ [4]. In the presented work therein lies an aspect of the art aligned with the understanding of the technical form to create the interactive environment that promotes, motivates and empowers such nuances of represented behavioral transformations. Correspondingly, there is an art in the learnt comprehension of intervention with the author’s developed method and apparatus to evoke engagement. Thus, a subject’s desire to express through whatever systemic means is presented is enthused towards realizing human performance attributes previously unattainable. This aligns with how Tolstoy argued that ‘true art requires a sensitive appreciation of a particular experience, a highly specific feeling that is communicated to the reader not by propositions but by “infection” [4]. Tolstoy further divided true art into good and bad, depending on the moral sensibility with which a given work infects its audience [4]. Tolstoy also notes that the “sincerity” of the artist—that is, the extent to which the artist “experiences the feeling he conveys”—influences the infection. He further conceptualized art as anything that communicates emotion: “Art begins when a man, with the purpose of communicating to other people a feeling he once experienced, calls it up again within himself and expresses it by certain external signs”. Aligned to this is the author’s patent titled ‘Communication Method and Apparatus’ (US6893407) – i.e. an apparatus and methodology that

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Rosenblum on Performance Art – Goldberg, R. (2001). Performance Art. New York: Thames and Hudson.

<sup>2</sup> Back cover text extract – Goldberg (2001).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leo-Tolstoy>.

communicates to the self via inter- and intra- subjectivity. The resulting affect on the human performance has been related to Aesthetic Resonance [7]. Tolstoy insisted that art can and should be comprehensible to everyone. Having emphasized that art has a function in the improvement of humanity - capable of expressing man's best sentiment - he finds it offensive that artists should be so willfully and arrogantly abstruse [4].

LeWitt, on Conceptual Art, differentiates between perceptual art that depends on visual forms and conceptual art that is "made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye" [8]. It is the mind of the viewer that is targeted in the author's public works across or within a specific genre.

Two points of art critique are selected in Tolstoy's literature [4] where he posits that at some point recognized art "ceased to be sincere and became artificial and cerebral" (p. 59), which led to millions of works of technical brilliance being created but few of honorable sentiment (p. 144). However, whilst a focus is evident on painted form, and this aligns with the period of Tolstoy's writing, the author claims there is much that analogizes in consideration to arts of today. To elaborate, the following is extracted further from his text "What is Art" [4], which could be interpreted in light of contemporary art, that is, beyond solely painted works as originally stated.

Tolstoy [4] posited that there is no objective definition of art in aesthetics (p. 33) whilst condemning the focus on beauty/pleasure at length, calling aesthetics a discipline:

*according to which the difference between good art, conveying good feelings, and bad art, conveying wicked feelings, was totally obliterated, and one of the lowest manifestations of art, art for mere pleasure - against which all teachers of mankind have warned people - came to be regarded as the highest art. And art became, not the important thing it was intended to be, but the empty amusement of idle people.*

Further Tolstoy [4] posits how there is nothing to explain providing an artist - "if he is a true artist, has in his work conveyed to others the feelings he has experienced" (p. 95). In criticizing academia he also reflects how art schools, whilst educating in how to imitate the method of the masters, "cannot teach the sincerity of emotion that is the propellant of great works" as no school "can call up feelings in a man, and still less can it teach a man what is the essence of art: the manifestation of feeling in his own particular fashion" (p. 98).

In evaluating the content of art, again with a delimited focus on painted works - but herein cited as applicable in contemporary works across genres, Tolstoy [4] states his view as to the function of art being aligned to development of humanity positing how:

*just as in the evolution of knowledge - that is, the forcing out and supplanting of mistaken and unnecessary knowledge by truer and more necessary knowledge - so the evolution of feelings takes place by means of art, replacing lower feelings, less kind and less needed for the good of humanity, by kinder feelings, more needed for that good. This is the purpose of art. (pp. 123-4)*

### 3 Conclusion

The subject matter necessitates many more pages than presented herein. It is recognized that others, not versed in the form, will counter the argument of “Why it’s art”. Further questions may ask ‘who is the artist, the creator or the *performer*’ - and ‘why make an art that cannot be sold’. However, the art has been evaluated positively under its human performance attributes and centrally aligned to human aesthetic resonance [7]. Suffice to state that the interested reader may wish to explore and discuss further and this is encouraged. In closing the author reflects on how Tolstoy’s core message is conclusive in that art is recognized as a catalyst that conveys feelings and emotions. Aligned with this, the author briefly positions his argument on his work and “Why it’s art” (bias given) as one that targets mind (as [8]) and through the specific art form - the body. Aesthetic Resonance is common through which aspects of humanity difference, and humility is stated through human performance reflected in performance art.

In other words, as Duchamp eloquently stated - “It’s Art If I Say So”... [9].

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