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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Arden in Parallel with Plan**

**Research on Alternative Object and Form in Performative Installation Art**

**Arden Tan**

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**Výzkum alternativního objektu a formy v performativní instalační umění**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis independently on the following topic:

**Arden in Parallel with Plan**  
**Research on Alternative Object and Form in Performative Installation Art**

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date: .....

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## **Abstract**

This M.A. thesis is based on author Arden Tan's latest research of a performance piece *A Plan without the Goal*; also a collection of an ongoing work of *Arden Series*. This paper aims to describe in three scopes; How the author collects materials in everyday life and transforms them into works of art? How did she land in the field of Performance Art from Visual Art with conceptual thinking? And how does she use herself as both the object and subject in artistic research?

The author relates her artworks with several notable pieces in contemporary times, addressing issues in art functions, spectator relation, and personal individualism; to explore the artistic potentiality and continue her journey in art.

## **Abstrakt**

This M.A. thesis is based on author Arden Tan's latest research of a performance piece *A Plan without the Goal*; also a collection of an ongoing work of *Arden Series*. This paper aims to describe in three scopes; How the author collects materials in everyday life and transforms them into works of art? How did she land in the field of Performance Art from Visual Art with conceptual thinking? And how does she use herself as both the object and subject in artistic research?

The author relates her artworks with several notable pieces in contemporary times, addressing issues in art functions, spectator relation, and personal individualism; to explore the artistic potentiality and continue her journey in art.

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## Introduction

Art is therapy, and art-making has always been a personal therapeutic exercise. Art is a process of questioning everyday life, experiencing emotions, and debating critical perspectives. Art is a lifestyle.

The first big-scale oil painting I made when I was eight years old, the joy of brush waving led me to a bachelor's in Fine Art and Experimental Media. After having academic study in the history of and professional art medium training, I started to develop my preference in genres and the direction to go forward.

I am fascinated by Conceptual Art in particular. The concept gets to develop first, and in the process of development to materialize the outcome of the work. In other words, the originated idea could have many multiple ways of presentation, depending on the artist's choice.

I started gaining knowledge in the field, inspirations, skills, and materials; Selecting and collecting aspirations from daily living; then, I realized that I could use myself as the subject for a research topic, the voice, the flesh, the character traits, and the identity; this is how the *Arden Series* of works begins. I created three pieces during my bachelor's study: *Meet Arden*, *Become Arden*, and *Arden in Print*. Individually those three works address different issues in identity research and the boundary of intimacy in sharing. The two first pieces focus more on searching for the meanings of the object as an object and curating the situation as a form for art installations. Step forward to discover the performative potential in installation works, *Arden in Print*, I place myself physically as part of the installation; in space and time, the body is present. I need to define if I am an entity and part of the installation work or the artist stating the artwork.

I start seeking the possibility of joining performative elements into creative works and conceptualizing installation works to become happening situations. Further, to expound on the spectator's perspective in relation to the artwork and the artist. These topics are like opened boxes that led me to pursue a master's study in Directing of Devised and Object Theatre.



From the White Cube<sup>1</sup> jump into the Black Box<sup>2</sup>; this is the position I give myself. To be confident about the Visual Art root I come from and not get overwhelmed in the new world of Performance Art. One step ahead, I can grasp these two languages and composite them into one sentence in my word. Idea generation, compiling from near, using myself as both object and subject material in works. Conceptual thinking infused with Performance Art leads me to continue adding more pieces to the series of works: *Perform Arden*, *Who's Arden*, and *Arden Rodriguez*.

The final work of the master's study resulted in an entirely new topic and a different way of doing the art practice than I used to; *A Plan without the Goal*. Because the global pandemic hit in 2019, our society stopped functioning for nearly two years, affecting the continuation of program study on practical and logical levels. And the title of the work summarizes how I perceive this bizarre time of uncertainty and insecurity. How does a plan go on with no goals? What is the goal with the strategy followed?

This thesis will guide you through my artistic journey. The jump I made from Visual Art to Performance Art, then grounding my standing and discovering my uniqueness in the blend. To pursue my subsequent development by merging conceptual art thinking and performance art approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to a certain gallery aesthetic characterized by its square or oblong shape, white walls and a light source usually from the ceiling.

"White Cube." *Tate*, 2022. [www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/w/white-cube](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/w/white-cube).

<sup>2</sup> Relating to performance art, the black box is the name for a square room painted black in which artists performed experimental work

"Black Box." *Tate*, 2022. [www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/black-box](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/black-box).

## **From White Cube, jump into Black Box**

As yet, the *Arden Series* has collected six installations of artwork; branched from the shared concept of Arden as the subject and further used as an object. From the early stages of the concept development, works are presented in standard visual art style, meaning they are more robust in emphasizing the object's material and the space arrangement; this we can find in *Meet Arden* and *Become Arden*.

Following, when *Arden in Print* brings a physical performing body as a new element, it is a turning point to lead the creation in a performative direction. The continuing series progressed into bodily interactive installation works with directional expansion, resulting in *Perform Arden*, *Who's Arden*, and *Arden Rodriguez*.

### **Meet Arden**

*Meet Arden* is part of a selected group exhibition in school; it is also my first official curated work presented to the public.

From the beginning of the "Arden" topic expansion, to create a persona with a distinctive style, I started to form the character to be recognizable with a uniform. A stripy shirt with black jeans, casual sneakers, and a laptop-size backpack; is a style of "Arden" all year round. As Arden, I wear this combination as my daily uniform everywhere I go, whenever I am in clothes. The aim is to create awareness for the people around me, to be able to be distinguished with this particular pattern. Therefore, when the installation takes the elements of "Arden" into the display, that is still recognizable even without my physical flesh or the psychological personality traits.

The exhibition shows the organization in an open-studio setting, the working progress of research stated on the window wall, with an abstract figure-like composition representing Arden.



Figure 1. The documentation of "Meet Arden" installation.

During the creation process of *Meet Arden*, I thought about Presence and Absence; Am I being shown in space? Am I being presented in time? These questions orient me to the following work: *Become Arden*.

Generally, the artwork should ideally tell the story and deliver the message in visual artwork. Viewers observe and accept the choices of the artist in their work.

From John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, we learned to use different perspectives to perceive the work of art; it has the function of being. We see what we intend to notice based on our knowledge and cultural background. As Berger says, "We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

From a different argument to discuss the relation between artwork and the creator, German philosopher Martin Heidegger says in the essay *The Origin of the Work of*

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<sup>3</sup> Berger, J. "Ways of Seeing". *Penguin Classics*, 2008. Page 9.

*Art*: "As necessarily as the artist is the origin of the work in a different way than the work is the origin of the artist, so it is equally certain that, in a still different way, art is the origin of both artist and work. But can art be an origin at all? Where and how does art occur? Art – this is nothing more than a word to which nothing real any longer corresponds."<sup>4</sup>

## **Become Arden**

*Become Arden* debuts at the 2018 Taipei Free Art Fair. The setting is a warehouse building, and the artwork space is divided by squares. The installation is a life-size cardboard figure of "Arden."

The cardboard figure's head has a hollow circle; the participant matches the frame when standing behind; it has the same photo booth function.

For the people outside the artwork zone square, I define them as viewers of the installation; for those standing behind the cardboard figure inside the artwork zone square, I describe them as participants.

From the figure's angle, there is a paper of text in front for the participant to read through. The content is to support the participant in the essence of being Arden:

"Hello Arden,

You are here at the Taipei Free Art Fair. Standing with your feet firmly, planted on the ground like a tree. It is springtime, 2018.

You see people walking, talking, and laughing. Some might look at you, but it is okay. You don't need to be nervous; just be with me. People are having fun, appreciating artworks, and getting inspiration, and you are also having a good time being part of the artwork.

The best way to participate in the situation is to pretend to be busy. Focus on being Arden. Read the text slowly; it helps relieve your nerves and be more comfortable being here in space and time.

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, M. "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Essay*, 1950, Page 17.

Oh! Before you go, please don't forget to keep an Arden wristband with you.  
See you around, Arden!"

The moment when the participant is reading the text, other observers can only recognize them as "Arden." Not the particular participant of the installation, but as "Arden." The packaged action is to place face to the cutout and read through the text; last, tie up a one paper wristband tagged with "Arden."

The whole experience of *Become Arden* is like a ritual; there are three states - as an outsider viewing the piece from a distance, as a participant joining in the work, and as a member of "Arden" having the shared experience of participating in the artwork.

"Men act, and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."<sup>5</sup>

As for the viewers, they are witnessing the transformation of the person initiating the identity of "Arden" from a distance. With the changing the faces on the figure and more and more people keeping the wristband tags, the construction of the concept of "Arden" is getting extensive and blurry at the same time. After hours later, more people join the process, then there are no identification markers to find who is the "Arden" or what is "Arden." In a sense, it creates an enormous assumption of the mystery. All viewers are part of the mystery of the "Arden" identity building; if they ever wonder about the meaning, they participate in it.

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<sup>5</sup> Berger, J. "Ways of Seeing." *Penguin Classics*, 2008. Page 47.



Figure 2. The documentation of "Become Arden" installation.

In association with the piece *Good Feelings in Good Times* by Slovak artist Roman Ondák, he presented an artificially created queue performance in 2003. Queue forming is in a particular structure, with actors leading and participants following to create a phenomenon. Despite the connotations of queuing experience, we can somehow understand and associate whether we commonly share the same situation. Quoting from the artist in an interview conversation: "... even if you are not queuing, you are participating as you are facing your memories of queues in the past. There is no description of the queue – it is about feelings, about desire and your decision to be in it..."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Baniotopoulou, E. "Good Feelings in Good Times." *Tate*, October 2004. [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ondak-good-feelings-in-good-times-t11940](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ondak-good-feelings-in-good-times-t11940).

To expand the idea, all viewers of artwork are participating moderately. Some actively join, and others are far distance examining; those who experience could connect from the memories. The viewers observe the performance through their eyes, and they experience the work of art from an inner personal recollection or even just an unconscious reaction.



*Figure 3. The documentation of Roman Ondak's "Good Feelings in Good Times" 2003.*

### **Arden in Print**

I have a habit that has been with me for a very long time. I write short sentences in my notebook; the sentences are about everything happening in my everyday life. I write them down to forget; I call it an unconventional diary. Chapters and topics categorize the note; it can be very random questions to brainstorm, such as "what are the things with endless actions?" or "what should be my typical sneaks to eat

on Sunday afternoons?" It can also be serious about personal information collecting, for instance, "my conclusion for the day" and "what is the functionality of a particular person to me?"

After several years of recording, the written notes are more than a book can file; this is another extension of "Arden." Reading the notes could feel like knowing Arden in person, the way of thinking and thoughts she has been accumulating.

This plentiful material is the prime foundation for developing the piece *Arden in Print*.

"This work is about daily life - collected conclusions. Over 30,000 words. An unbound book. The continuing story. Pieces of Arden."

The work takes place in a non-gallery raw space; it was a swimming pool back in the time. And the spot I have is precisely in the center of the swimming pool, the concave part. That creates a visual attention focus, so I choose the printer and the laptop as the production station. And high walls square the space like a cube, so I can position all the thin long paper printouts on the walls to create a surrounded space. Viewers are covered by the message, the text, and Arden.

The printer is endlessly working, higher the pile of paper. Me, sitting in front of the laptop, continuously producing text. When there are some moments people start to approach me and have a chat about the installation, my reaction to the action is uncertain. I am not sure if I should engage in the conversation as the work's creator or silently as part of the work. This question is with me even after the exhibition finishes.





Figure 4. The documentation of "Arden in Print" installation.

The spatial scheme of *Arden in Print* references the Chinese artist Xu Bing's work *Book from the Sky*, created in 1988. When I visited the exhibition, I was fascinated by the scale of the paper stalling arrangement, which makes an immersive book-like covering experience in space. Letters, in this case, are Chinese characters densely filled on the paper. Countless characters are displayed, but there is no necessity to read through all the symbols to appreciate the work. On the contrary, following the pattern of the designed chapters, the viewers can easily understand the artwork's message as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

I have applied the strategy to *Arden in Print*; to provide two possibilities to view the work: the text about the written content and the staged surrounding feeling reflecting the concept.

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<sup>7</sup> Xu, B. "Book from the Sky." *Xubing*, 1988. [www.xubing.com/en/work/details/206](http://www.xubing.com/en/work/details/206).

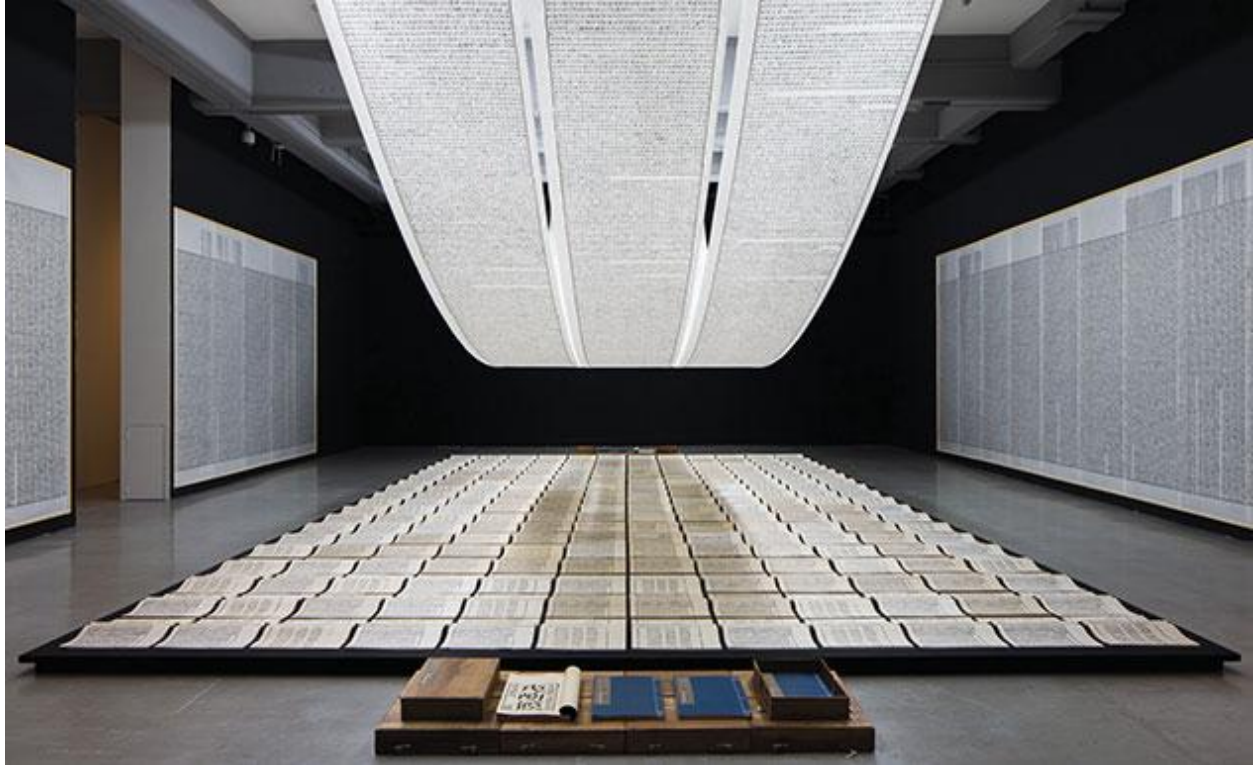


Figure 5. The documentation of Xu Bing's "Book from the Sky" 1991.

## **Perform Arden**

*Perform Arden* as the first piece with an intentional performative approach adding to the *Arden Series*. Since coming to the theater school, I have had the ambition to advance the performance and stage languages in my creations. Elevating installation works of art from static becomes interactive; the spectator role takes a significant meaning. The communication between the artwork and the spectator starts when people view it, in between understanding and message delivery. An interactive installation helps the spectator engage in the work actively, and the transmission becomes more dynamically sending; the spectator is no longer passively receiving; this allows the spectator to bodily experience the work of art.

With the approach, *Perform Arden* is established on this progress developing from a static installation structure to an interactive setting. To welcome the spectator to become an active participant of the work and partake in the performance with more

than just seeing it, but also to use other senses to feel, hear, touch, taste, and smell.

- “1. Visit the exhibition, read the works.
2. Follow the order.
3. Generate the plan, and meet the request.
4. Expect the interaction.

A pen, paper, and items. You and I, let’s perform Arden!”

The performer writes instructions in a consistently formed but grammarily odd way, such as the compositions: “Water Arden,” “Measure Arden,” or “Lavender Arden.” When receiving the tasks, the spectators improvise with the items to interpret the meaning; and act to it. The essence of the performance is to build an interplay of action and reaction. Together negotiate a way to present the tasks.

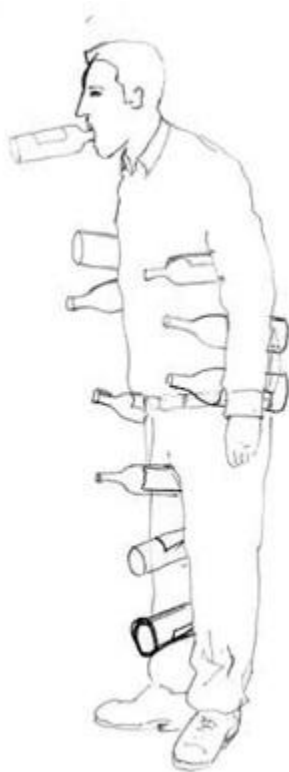


*Figure 6. The documentation of "Perform Arden" performative installation.*

There are a few similarities in works to associate *Perform Arden* with the artwork *One Minute Sculpture* by Austrian Erwin Wurm. Concise instructions, utilize physical objects, and activate the body of the participants.

Although *One Minute Sculptures* is precise about the setting in a white cube gallery space, static sculptures with or without witnesses live watching that participants are still having a delicate moment to experience the joy of the work.

*One Minute Sculptures* is an ongoing series of works that cross various styles of the outcome, adapting to several contexts of situations, groups of audience, and spaces where it takes place. Combining with design furniture kind objects to explore different uses in everyday items. It is humorous and mischievous in giving a new meaning to a normal.<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>8</sup> Wurm, E. "One Minute Sculptures: Nordic Sculpture." *Erwinwurm*, 2002. [www.erwinwurm.at/artworks/one-minute-sculptures.html](http://www.erwinwurm.at/artworks/one-minute-sculptures.html).



*Figure 7. The documentation of Erwin Wurm's "One Minute Sculptures: Nordic Sculpture" 2002*

Step forward to discuss the idea of performing and not performing in both examples of artworks. As Arden in *Perform Arden* is a genuine act, I respond the way I am; and that blunt doing makes the situation performance. The same for the participant in *One Minute Sculptures*, the process of doing the action has taken as a performative situation.

### **Who's Arden**

After tasting being in the center of attention on the stage and acknowledging more in performance making, I again challenge myself to another piece in a traditional black box space setting; to advance theater elements adoption. The new attempt to create is to try out in a different space and follow the conventional theater practice of repeating the set cues. With the script and the actors, the rehearsals focus on getting to the set and retelling the pattern rightly.

"Three individuals, ritual of Arden, dialogue of Arden, Who's Arden?"

The setup is in a daily environment, a living room with everyday items, chairs, tables, and snacks; a background voice introduces Arden, sharing the origin of the name, family detail, and personal interests. Meanwhile, three people are in the space shuffling the clothes and all dressed up in striped shirts, black jeans, a pair of glasses, and a bun hairstyle.

Three people are dressing in one identical style, acting like Arden, sharing stories of Arden, and competing to be Arden.



*Figure 8. The documentation of "Who's Arden" performance.*

*Who's Arden* is a performance piece in the narrative style, with the storyline to plant some hidden seeds to grow in the continuing creation of *Arden Rodriguez*. Thus, it can be read as the first half of the conjoint two-part work. The end of *Who's Arden* purposely leaves some questions for the spectator and does not clarify the real identity of the potential ones; it is designed to reveal it in *Arden Rodriguez*.

### **Arden Rodriguez**

*Arden Rodriguez* is the answer responding to the hidden question from *Who's Arden*. Carrying on the dialogue, *Arden Rodriguez* takes the surname from Dora Rodriguez and keeps the explorations in "Arden" as an identity, a person, and a concept.

In the work of *Arden Rodriguez*, I have invited my schoolmate Dora Rodriguez to join the research and development with me. As an experiment, Dora and I spent a month's intensive time studying me in the most profound way possible; the level of familiarity from acquaintances to two inseparable twins.

Dora and I have known each other from class. When I proposed the project to Dora, it was only the third time we had met; this background is an excellent beginning to do the research authentically since we did not know each other much. To better frame the experiment, we set the concrete directions forward:

- How much time should we spend together to start feeling comfortable?
- What activities would help us to get to know each other?
- What is the most profound level of understanding of another person?
- When do people start sharing similarities unconsciously?

During the final week of the experiment, Dora stayed with me 24 hours a day and seven days a week. She tried her best to learn my body postures, mimic my speaking tone, and adjust her mindset. Furthermore, she started to wear my scent, took my phone, and represented my identity. The goal was to let her take my existence in the social world as Arden and let go of my control of this identity and observing that would other people notice it?

Taking the suggestion from dramaturgy teacher Sodja Lotker, she suggested presenting the result of the research experiment as a lecturing style presentation. Thus, we orchestrated a conference; for the first time, we talked about the personal views of the experiment, as director and performer, as Arden and Dora.

In *Arden Rodriguez*, Dora speaks about her feeling of trying to be someone else and giving up her own identity. "This is uncomfortably against the nature of individuality, but it is an extraordinary experience to be someone else freely without thinking much of personal social image."

The emotions are truthfully expressed through in-person experiencing the dilemma of being with more than one personality.

Knowing the impacts are different from the order to the one received, it is unbalanced. From the director's point of view, this is a work of art, and the exercises are part of the process, but for the performer, it is a task, through doing it, that starts to affect the person, in and out, good and bad.

To take care of the emotions, not just the structure of the work, is a spot worth more attention and a lesson for me to progress as a director and as a creator of art.



Figure 9. The documentation of "Arden Rodriguez" performance.

With the experiment of framing two individuals together, a masterpiece *Rope Piece* also explains the concept in live performance. *Rope Piece* is in the series of *One Year Performance* by Taiwanese art performer Tehching Hsieh; in addition, the piece is in collaboration with American visual artist Linda Montano, with the year time from 1983 to 1984. Together the two people are tied by an eight-foot rope in waists for a year-long time; with the signed manifesto as the agreement, they go on this one-year journey.



"We, Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh, plan to do one year performance.  
We will stay together for one year and never be alone,  
We will be in the same room at the same time, when we are inside,  
We will be tied together at waist with an 8 foot rope.  
We will never touch each other during the year.  
The performance will begin on July 4, 1983 at 6 P.M. and continue until July  
4, 1984 at 6 P.M."<sup>9</sup>

The strict rule is not to touch each other but to remain in the same lifestyle. With the commitment, Hsieh commutes with Montano daily to home and office and accompanies her on all occasions. Even for passionate artists, when it comes to personal daily life, some compromises need to be settled, and sometimes they could lead to arguments or even fights.

This piece addresses the issues on an inner level of fundamental individuality in private life, revealing the nakedness, releasing the negativities, and facing the weakness. Coexistence makes daily activities physical and verbal negotiations; that cross differences in gender, sensibility, and legal status.

Assuredly, Hsieh and Montano develop a special bond that others do not own after the entire year spent together. Although the togetherness has achieved a great degree, they are still two independent specifics. On the other hand, the research on connectedness in *Arden Rodriguez* is the building process to a different goal. Through imitating to transform into another individual, to become an identical clone. In theater language, an actor performs the character and represents the persona.

Additionally, this experiment can result in a one-person performance, as Dora is the spectator undergoing the experience.

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<sup>9</sup> Hsieh, T. "Art/Life One Year Performance 1983-1984." *Tehchinghsieh*, 2021.  
[www.tehchinghsieh.net/artlife-oneyearperformance1983-1984](http://www.tehchinghsieh.net/artlife-oneyearperformance1983-1984)



*Figure 10. The documentation of Tehching Hsieh and Linda Montano's "Art/Life One Year Performance 1983-1984 (Rope Piece)" 1983.*

## **A Plan without the Goal**

The performance took place at Gabriel Loci on February 6th, 2022; it was a sunny Sunday afternoon in Prague. The scheduled starting time was 2 pm, and it had no defined duration and ending time for the performance. It is a plan; it goes on to reach the goal when it does. February time in Prague is about 5 degrees Celsius as regular; the room is like a cold freezer with no heater. It is an incident; it arrives without a warning sign.

The dramaturgical structure is into three parts, the body warm-up, movement training routine, and the matching. Each section has its own goal to reach before on to the next.

Every audience gets one ping pong ball when entering the space; there is no further instruction to limit the audience on how to play or use the ball.

As the starting time comes, the audience enters the room; the first object seen is a folded ping pong table in the center, and a performer is running circles around the table. The room is magnificent; the size is about 200 meters square, bright with daylight coming through from the gorgeous stained glass roof window. From the ceiling are hanging two tally counter clickers with transparent string to match the style of the space. Spectators can walk around any corner of the space to find the best angle to watch the show freely.

Stretching legs, speedy run, with loud number counts; the performer is warming the body up. In the rhythm as 1 2 3 4, 2 2 3 4 ... From head to toe, every part of the body is essential. Preparing the muscle and ready for the next round in the circle.

Grabbing the racket and starting bouncing the ball, continuing the circle round while training the skills. Practice balancing in bouncing while walking; the performer improves in training.

The concentration of the performer on the action is attention-catching, and the spectator is engaging the same focus on the move. The performer connects with

the spectators like a kite flying; one person pulls the string, and the rest of the people face the sky.

The movements are precise, and the walk follows the grid on the ground. A counter clicker records a finishing circle, and another keeps the ball-drop fail times. Take breaks and drink some water when it feels so in a natural way; it is a performance and also an actual body exercise.

The set goal is to finish the pack of body warm-ups without interrupting the counting rhythm in this section.



*Figure 11. The documentation#1 of "A Plan without the Goal" performance.*

And it comes to the second part of the performance. The performer unfolds one side of the table and keeps the other one folded; suddenly, the visual dynamic has a different view.

Racket stroke in the air, steady stand in a ready position. Repeating the strokes till the actions are keen, the performer forwards the moves onto the table.

The practice on the table begins with ball serving; when the ball hits the table, the sound echoes with the space excellently, which adds a new element to the performance.

The counter clickers also have repeatedly been kept to record ball failing and ball catching. This self-practice aims to run the ball bouncing for hundred counts without a drop to interrupt, to move on the section only when the goal is reached.



*Figure 12. The documentation#2 of "A Plan without the Goal" performance.*

The performer flaps the ping pong table, and in a ready position, the performance is on to the last part. For the first time, the performer directly communicates with the spectator by making eye contact as an invitation to join the match; nonverbal communication is one element continuing to be used here.

The second racket is available on the table, one ball is in hand, and the counter resets to zero. The spectator joins as an opponent against the performer, and let's begin the match.

One after one, the performer fights all matches until there are no more opponents. The performer's goal is to win every encountered game, with the ambition to become the final winner among all players.



*Figure 13. The documentation#3 of "A Plan without the Goal" performance.*



## The Plan

"A plan is like a map; it helps navigate the orientations and find the steady path to go on the journey."

Use a mathematical equation-like scheme to guide my thinking as a creative process, indicate each problem and solution step by step, and discover issues from various aspects connecting my personal experience with the topic; as a roadmap of *A Plan without the Goal*.

The concept development needs a guideline to move forward; the actual performance has a handbook giving guidance to prepare for the happening, comprising the notes from my project advisor to help me tune in to the best condition physically and spiritually before the performance starts. And these are the plans for me to follow in creating the piece.

## Creative Process

"If a plan is without the goal, it is just a process, not leading to any outcome; If to reach the goal, needs to have the following plan, then making a plan is a critical step; Incidents are always not part of the plan, only to include and negotiate can try to stay in the same goal."

As a systematic thinking person, naturally, I use an equation to connect the relationship of each symbol; in this case, they are *Plan*, *Incident*, and *Goal*. The proportion causes the outcome; hence my job is to formulate a balanced ratio and make a valid formula.

These are not just mathematical calculations; these are occurring in my life situation on fundamental emotional and practical levels. To apply my position to the equation, I am equal to *Plan* to architect the structure, and the audience is as *Incident* full of unplanned surprises. Together, we negotiate the *Goal* and result in a performance.

With the prerequisites:

“Arden has a goal and is good at making plans.  
Audiences are outside of the plans.  
The performance is a set goal; the outcome is neutral.”

Adding into the equation:

Incident  $\neq$  Plan

Start  $\neq$  Goal

$\therefore$  Plan = Start, will Incident = Goal?

“The acceptance of being "without the goal" is a growing up process and a feeling of comfort.”

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$\Leftrightarrow$  Incident = Goal is true  $\therefore$  My goal is to create Incidents

Messages for Arden

Messages for Audiences

Arden makes the plan only when sees a goal,

Incident leads goal.

How can Arden make the plan without seeing a goal?

Incident changes goal.

This is a contradictory question for Arden.

Audience with no plan, Audience do not know the goal.

WhiteCube and BlackBox

Audience  $\neq$  Plan  $\neq$  Goal

||

Balance or not

Audience  $\neq$  Plan + Goal

or bounce

But,

Audience + Plan  $\doteq$  Goal



So, my decision is (to be) ready to  
accept incidents  
Arden can still make Plan with/around  
Incident(s)

Incident(s) can be planned as a Goal  
||  
Incident = Goal

A Goal is not necessarily being  
planned from the Start  
⇒ Goal ≠ Start

A Plan can Start without Incident  
⇒ Plan = Start

A Goal can be Planned with Incident  
⇒ Goal = Incident

Incident ≠ Plan ≠ Goal

Σ Arden = Plan

Σ Incident = Audience

---

Σ

Goal = Plan + Incident  
= Arden + Audience

“The goal is to make a plan, but the goal is not the destination. Incident helps to make the plan; Incident is not out of the Plan.”

### **A Couple of Notes**

An hour before the performance began, I received an email from my project advisor Braño Mazúch. The notes are like a manifesto; it gives me the direction to prepare for my physical condition and tune into the character's state of mind. Following is the content from the email:

“Dear Arden, here are some notes for you:

- 1/ be aware of the space (this space is special)
- 2/ be aware of the atmosphere of the space
- 3/ be aware of the sound/voice of the space
- 4/ your performance is sport performance
- 5/ your performance is performance of power
- 6/ you need to be absolutely concentrated
- 7/ you need to be absolutely focused
- 8/ you need to be absolutely present
- 9/ you need to be absolutely balanced
- 10/ you need to have everything under the control
- 11/ you need to be warmed up before audience enters the space
- 12/ your plan doesn't allow you to fail (balls falling on the ground)
- 13/ you need to take it absolutely serious

You are not pretending anything, you exist.

Looking forward

Braño”

## **The Incident**

“A plan is meant to be followed; at the same time, it has to be flexible for adapting to all kinds of unexpected incidents that might come.”

The section is about how Covid affected my studies schedule and plan and how it changed my ideas of the final show in production. Also, the choice-making on the venue, how did it change from one to the other.

## **Impacts of Covid**

In the fourth semester of the program study, a global pandemic hit, and the world was in a lockdown situation. Schools were temporarily closed, and classes moved to

the online form. It was a bizarre time for everyone, trying to understand the happenings simultaneously recalibrating the navigation. The impact is also significant to me; the pandemic crisis was not yet reaching an optimistic ending when the time went by. Students must present the final work in the last semester of studies as the original plan. Thus, I had to postpone the schedule.

The Global pandemic crisis changed everything; the world we lived in, the society we participated in, and the daily routine we used to have. My father says: "The whole world paused on functioning, but the time never stopped counting forward." The impacts are not just on practical living conditions but also seriously affect our psychological state; the uncertainty brings insecurity.

As for me, I might have developed the procrastination disorder, feeling overwhelmed, being afraid of failure, and hiding from pressures; this caused me to change the topic of the final work many times and could not discharge from the loop to move on confidently. I lost my ambition, driven force, and enthusiasm; mostly, I have lost myself. It is supposed to be a two-year master's study program, but I retained it for four years.

These all came from a reason; covid is an unexpected incident that stirred the plans. I am a person who sees a direction to run; I need a clear goal and make a plan forward. Therefore, this caused me to stop. After realizing the reason, I learned to be more flexible in situations like these. Also, I started to acknowledge the relationship between these three factors, *Plan*, *Incident*, and *Goal*. It later also became the core of the final work.

### **Choice of Venue**

In one improvisation class before, we had the experience of using a staircase to do the exercise. The stairs we were using were a spiral shape; through the body exploring the detail of the stairs, I was fascinated by them; notably, the level of height created different viewing perspectives. Thus, I want to use it for my final show.

The spiral staircase is the searching keyword; this unique design shape has been popular in European countries since medieval times. Searching for the stairway in old buildings, I have visited the National Gallery Prague - Kinsky Palace, Desfours Palace, Czech Museum of Cubism, and more. Finally, I decided on the one at Gabriel Loci.

Gabriel Loci was built in Neo-Romanesque style at the end of the 19th century as the first convent of the Beuronese Congregation Benedictine nuns in Prague.

Nowadays, it is a multifunction art and event space; it has an artist atelier, concert hall, outdoor cinema yard, and other rooms with different activities.

The spiral staircase at Gabriel Loci is five floors high, and the ground is the ideal size to set for a ping pong table and enough space to skip around flexibly for the players. With the help of a friend, I was able to contact the right person to agree on the space rental. I started rehearsals in the space one month before the planned date of the final showing. Adapting to the condition of the raw space requires many types of equipment to set up, such as special spotlights, isolation sponges, and concise signs to instruct the orientations. It was a struggle but manageable.

Day by day, the performance structure is getting more explicit and more comprehensive; Each object of use and movement taking needs to assign the meaning to the performance. I include a part for the audience to come up to the table to play with me; the natural sound system in the staircase generates a good echo when people walk. But the echo is too loud to take over the attention, so unless I have a meaningful reason to connect the ping pong sport with the staircase, otherwise would end up spending too much time dealing with the technical issue.

There is a greenhouse-like hall space in the middle of the building; I passed by every time going to the staircase to rehearse, And I always stopped by to enjoy the sunshine from the see-through glass ceiling. The room is spacious, and with its signature design, it is indeed a gorgeous place. With the issue I discovered from the staircase, ultimately, this space became my first choice in mind.

Since the project budget was limited and different locations in the space with different prices, getting the rearrangement of the big hall was not an easy job. To

agree on the use is for academic purposes, I was lucky to convince them to rent within the budget.

When everything went well, suddenly, a week before the showing date, the contact person of the space told me they had accidentally double-booked the room on the same day; It was colossal chaos, as I had the school deadline to do the presentation and the scheduled date detail printed on the promotion material.

Thankfully, they corrected the mistake within three days; I confirmed to get the use of the room again. The feeling changing was like taking a rollercoaster ride in such a short time. The show was on, the original date and time.

## **Change of Plan**

I had a plan; a plan was completely different from this outcome of performance. I was creating the work in my head, not realizing, but just in mind thinking. It was not the soundest way to do art creation; pen and paper help visualize the idea. As for performance making, material collecting and structure devising are all in the process. Conceptual thinking helps in idea-progressing; the work is actualizing in repetitive actions.

At the beginning of the project, because of the rehearsal space scheduling, I consulted with the advisor mainly in conversation but not in action presentation. And gradually, more and more differences start showing; the actual situation is not as like planning in mind. Each participant is individually unique in improvising the condition. I had a plan to create a participant-based ping pong match game, to use instructions only to guide the audience to present the performance. It was a compelling idea, but it asked for too much effort and requests from the audience. Basically, the statement demands the audience to make a performance from a performance. And it was indeed risk experimentation rather than a performing show. The plan was no longer possible, and I only had four days before the presentation.

I was desperate for time losing and blindfolded by the project idea; feeling like running out of creativities and aspirations, I thought I would not make it. With the encouragement from the project advisor Braňo Mazúch and schoolmate Ran Jiao,

they gave me the direction to reorganize the materials and apply my visual art skills to the performance. "To use the same ingredients to make a different dish." as I am told.

I took out all the thoughts and looked again at all the materials I had. The recomposition collected the segments from the process and recreated a new piece as it is now.

## **The Goal**

"To reach the goal, it needs the plan and the flexibility to adjust the unexpected incidents on the way; Goal=Plan+Incident."

The goal means the outcome; it is not the same as before; it is the final destination coming from different directions. Following, I have included the results from *A Plan without the Goal*. First, to talk about creating visual identity and the poster design for the performance, recording feedback from the audience. Lastly, sharing my reflection on the performance.

## **Visual Identity of the Performance**

Having the advantage of my visual art background, I design the poster myself. According to the atmosphere of Gabriel Loci's space, to give the graphic a clean and minimal style and straightforwardly show a ping pong table illustration. As a monastery before, Gabriel Loci always gives a peaceful feeling in space. Natural daylight brightens the room; it is the most beautiful view. I printed the poster on transparent folio paper to match the building structure, the see-through roof, and the stained glass window; colorful, bright, and uncomplicated.

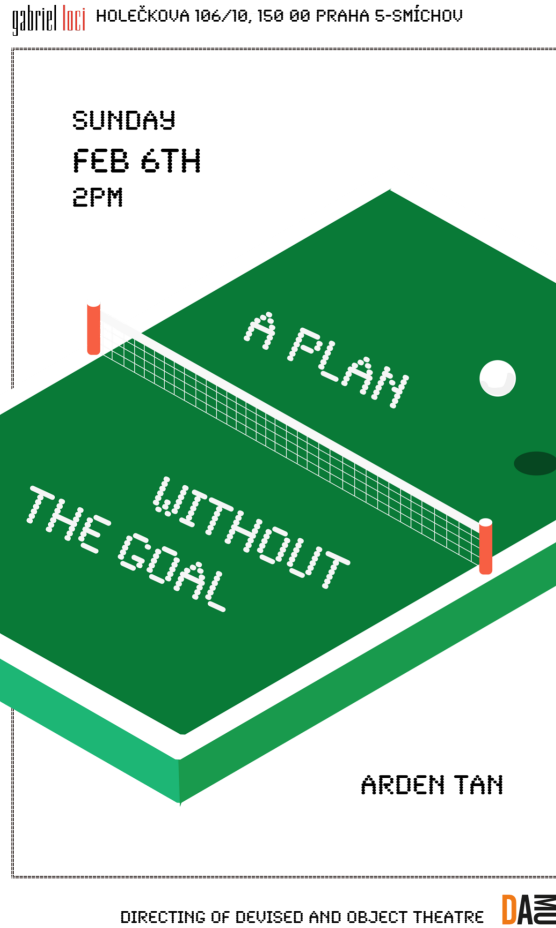


Figure 14. The promotional visual identity of "A Plan without the Goal" performance.

## Audience Feedback

From Braňo Mazúch:

- Did the warm-up help the movements be faster and agiler? (Yes, the warm-up helped to prepare the body and mind.)
- Why are the rackets on the ground? (For the technical matter, for better folding the table.)
- If the opponent is a beginner, how to lead the direction? Maybe first to teach them still basic techniques as part of the performance.
- Lose and win counts should be precisely clear, with no hesitation.

- Referencing nationality symbols to echo the current Olympic game, the sensitive political issue, this is the direction of going to political theater, can think about for future approaches.
- Winning counts by collecting balls; the winner gets all the balls as the winning trophy.
- Make the ping pong rule clear; two serves for each round. Precise the serving; you should know and be clear all the time.
- Visual Performance.
- Think about weakness, strength, and ability.

From Daniel Alberto Victoria:

- The first part of the performance is building expectedly; consider adding additional layers. It would be interesting for the audience to know the connection to the space or the personal association with ping pong sport.
- Unspoken action leads to miscommunication; it creates a good uncertain feeling in the audience.
- Could bring the performance into other different spaces, to expect the unexpected.
- Through playing to know who they are, personality traits are shown in the reaction, it is interesting to discover; for example, the male came with the shown ambition to win.
- The duration creates a different context if it is a ten-hour performance or a thirty-minute action.
- How could it be imaged if it's in a black box?
- If I seemed exhausted, would people still continually challenge me?
- Why do we count? As if a coach is watching and training you?
- Minimalism, perhaps to have a crazy or unexpected moment to break it; to see some emotional reactions in it.

From Mara Ingea:



- Audience participation is the most enjoyable part of the show.
- The exercise part feels too long; I didn't notice that the hand-changing action is significantly different.
- The counting part is evident but can have some extra layers to it.
- Each transition between scenes is distinct; I was looking forward to seeing how it would end.
- I want to see some other possible interactive activities during the performance with the ball we received at the entrance, other than playing on the table.
- Maybe the participatory part matching with the audience could be longer, or the audiences could play among themselves.
- Maybe ping pong is your thing, your sport, but to have a space for the audience to develop association, either with your personal story with the ping pong or the general reference for everybody.
- The illustration on the poster is the same activity in performance,

From Kirstine Hupfeldt Nielsen:

- The venue is terrific; it is a good surprise to use for sport; it creates a contrast in a quiet space to do intensive exercise movement.
- My attention follows the rhythm of the ball's bouncing, and your concentration makes me focus.
- Following the structure leading, slowly understand the system and direction of the performance.
- When Arden takes breaks is also for audiences to have the breaks, same as the moment getting back to the game.

From Eszter Koncz:

- I can view it subjectively; the focus is like in an untouchable bubble.
- It is a free choice to join the engagement of the performance or not.
- My head nods with the ball's bouncing rhythm.
- With Arden's focus, I could almost immerse myself in the concentration.

- It is free to walk around during the show and watch the performance from any angle.
- The performance and the space are both in Minimalist style.
- Silence and the gestures become the style.
- The first part is about Arden and herself; the dynamic changes when the audiences come up.
- The room is freezingly cold.

From Lola Madyarova:

- Unspoken, boredom, what is the purpose? I asked these questions while watching the performance.
- Body gestures are precise.
- The scene changed significantly by the ping pong table flipping.
- The invitation to play the match is through eye contact.
- I like the consistency when people try to talk to you, but you answer with a nonverbal response.
- Seeing other audiences' matches encourages me to join the game.

From Marie Sawa:

- It looked like an art exhibition when I first came into the room and saw the installations.
- When the participatory part started, it began to feel like a performance.
- Thought of what would be the use of the balls everyone had?
- I focused on the performer's concentration.
- From *Perform Arden* to this show, it gives more statements and actions to the audience rather than asking.
- Are you Arden or a performer?
- Practice time as the ritual is also the (thinking) key
- I noticed that the shirt represents the Chinese team, but I know you are from Taiwan. I wonder if it is the character's setting or playing a political element?

- Space is like a fridge, temperature exchanging with audiences, cold and hot.
- Experimental approaches.

From Yu En Ping:

- The space is big enough to walk around, and there is no seating place; it is unique for watching a performance.
- I like the most seeing how players show their personalities by playing ping pong matches.
- Each player from the audience gives a different characteristic, and it is fascinating to see Arden's reaction to each.
- The atmosphere feels stable and present.
- It feels like a ceremony.
- The reaction of Arden versus the audiences'.
- The unspoken language communicates through body gestures.
- Clean, extensive, and concentrated; Quietly watching.
- The temperature element in the space is significant; if it were in the summertime, the atmosphere would be different.

From Michał Salwiński:

- I want to know the context personally between you and ping pong.
- Ping pong is an Asian-dominated game in the current situation, and you are an Asian to represent it.
- The contrast of you being an Asian and against white foreign nations.
- It is fun to see players' reactions.
- Is it a sports situation or performative happenings?
- The warm-up part is like an exhibition, with more observing for audiences. But it is plain and easy to understand, perhaps to add more layers?
- What are the challenges set in the goal of the performance?
- If it intends to introduce ping pong as a sport, I would like to learn the history and cultural background of the performance.

- Potentially to have winning rewards and losing punishment.
- It is clever to use eye contact to provoke or invite people to join the game.

From Philipp Schenker:

- The performance did not cross the border nor have surprises.
- Missing space context.
- Too under control, too clean, and too pretty.
- Is it Sport or Art?
- A tense feeling from the beginning to the end.
- There are no questions that could be asked, no space for the audiences to reflect on themselves or get new ideas.
- Not taking risks or the significant shifts.
- Without partners, it is no theater.

## **Reflection**

The space is cold; there are temperature-sharing moments between spectators and me. Having swift-running exercise and a high rate of heart bumping when my body gets warmer; on the other hand, audiences are still and nonmoving and sense lower heat when they stay longer. We are going forward in different directions of proprioception. When in the third party of the performance, the spectators are physically joining the sports match; the longer they play more layers of clothes are becoming extras. As the game is the communication between two, the body temperature is also conveying, sharing from my warm body to low heat spectators. As the game finishes, we also find a counterbalance temperature in the middle of ours, both not feeling hot or cold but comfortably.

Before the performance, the last time I played ping pong was when I was ten years old. I used to play with my brother; we were in the sports club and trained every day for three years intensively. That was a time I picked up ping pong sport as a skill, and that was a special bounding sibling bounding memory too. As we grew up,

we stopped playing, but the muscle remembers it for me. For making this performance, I start to play and become familiar with the techniques again. The role of the performance is that I am the best ping pong player and able to win all the games. And that is also my goal to reach, training myself for three months to own the skill back.

Keeping the performance in minimalist style is becoming my tone in works. An exhibition-like arrangement in a performance is a heart I keep for being a visual artist, and this element will continue to be present in my works. In the spectrum of Visual Art and Performance Art, I am finding the perfect ratio and the place for me to be. Learning to give more stories and messages to spectators, Theatre is a collecting work about sharing and exchanging experiences.

The art creating process is a form of communication, conversing with the questions, spectators, and myself. Sometimes the sparks can happen in the process, not necessarily in the fine work. Playing against the folded table is like competing with myself in the ping pong game. The force I give is equal to what I will receive; through it, I am negotiating with myself in order to keep the bouncing rhythm, controlling the strength and tempo each time I stroke the racket.

I am not an actor, but I might be a performer. I am not an actor, but I am still exploring. Authenticity gives power to the artwork. I have my total concentration on the ping pong ball during the performance, I have lost the sense of time, and I have not felt the pressure of being watched. My focus was only on catching the successive balls and improving to better moves; the concentration drew the spectators.

I thought of the other uses for the ping pong ball for the performance and different meanings to the audience. In the end, I keep it as a one-time opportunity for the spectator to join as a player. Serve your ping pong ball and start the game.

Layers adding is a popular suggestion from the feedback; it is expected to see a more profound connection to the artist or other issues in different contexts. And yes, I do agree with it. I will take this version as the first version and develop it into an upgrade complex. Can potentially expand the directions in political, social, or environmental matters. Mainly, some sentiments are missing for the audience to feel, question, or introspect; and an accident to challenge the structure. To break and rebuild is a cycle of situation-making.

## **Conclusion**

Art is an experiment, and I am doing an experiment in Art. I am satisfied with my decision to advance in Performance Art, and I am glad to have a grounded root in the Visual Art background. With these two essential languages in Art, I have the ability to speak willingly and wisely. In balancing these two qualities in portion, I have tasted *A Plan without the Goal* in 60% exhibition and 40% performance. Then for the future creations, I will slowly increase the performance ratio, becoming a performance piece with an exhibition component. To blend out my style of Performative Installation works.

As it was before, I used to be a person with a clear picture of goals, without additional incidents or other extra overthinking to interrupt my going. I make an agenda, and I check out the box, simple as it is. That perfectly matches the studio art background I was in, and I made a habit of doing artwork. It did not require many unexpected situations to join or other people's help to complete the independent work. Same as for the concept building in the process of creation. For instance, to make a sculpture. I imagine the final look first before hands in making it, and the final look as my goal direction to sculpt it accordingly. This way is - a goal followed by a plan.

Suddenly, my method of doing it is not quite functioning when it comes to theatre. Theatre is based on social intercourse, and collaboration with one another, precisely as a legendary Broadway actress Chita Rivera says, "It is communication - that's what theatre is all about."

It has been quite an adventurous journey for me, not just struggling in learning a new language of artistic creation but also an opposite way of doing the process. I have been lost several times on the way, not being able to place myself in a position, struggling with definitions of what is art? And what is theatre? And even worse, at some point, I started to develop an avoidance syndrome to excuse myself away from creating and from Art. As the great philosopher John Dewey teaches us, "Learning by doing." I find the only way to conquer this fear and master this language is to embrace it.

Furthermore, it is to start talking about it, to open up the communication flow. Let the world participate in my universe, and let helpers in to make a performance together. By opening, it means to have space for unexpected incidents joining. There is no need to visualize the ending before the show even starts, yet to have a frame of work to still keep in the right direction of the plan. It is a plan without a goal, and the goal is to make a plan.

"A plan without a goal" is not just the chosen title for the performance; it is also my understanding and the given conclusion to this tangled but exceptional theater study history. The accomplishment is a milestone; it is the beginning of my journey as a performance artist.

As for *Arden Series*, there is no doubt that I will keep accumulating more pieces into it. I envision it will reach a broader extent and discourse more significant issues beyond more than a person's artistic works, but the work of art for society to resonate. As an artist, to give art back to our community and everyday life.

## **Manifesto**

Asking QUESTION to engage in perceptive talking,  
Grabbing an IDEA from everyday life by observing moments and criticizing facts,  
Composing pieces of ideas into a comprehensive CONCEPT,  
Validating the concept with supporting REFERENCES;

Doing by trying to realize a FRAME of work,  
Polishing the framework through excessive REHEARSALS,  
DEVISING and puzzling the fragments bit by bit;

Choosing an equipped TECHNIQUE to conduct the ceremony,  
Following the thread to find out potential ANSWER responses to the question,  
The question has been discussed, and the answer elaborated as a CLOSURE of art practice.

The question of fact  
The idea of thought  
The concept of theory  
The reference of masterpiece  
The frame of universe  
The rehearsal of ceremony  
The technique of communication  
The answer of question  
The closure of truth  
...  
The work of Art.



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Figure 2. Tan, Arden. "Become Arden." 2018. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 3. Pailley, Benoit. "Good Feeling in Good Time." 2003, *New Museum*, New York. [https://www.metropolism.com/nl/features/23968\\_gezocht\\_leden](https://www.metropolism.com/nl/features/23968_gezocht_leden). Accessed 20 April 2022.

Figure 4. Tan, Arden. "Arden in Print." 2018, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 5. Xu, Bing. "Book from the Sky." 2018, *UCCA Center for Contemporary Art*, Beijing. <https://ucca.org.cn/en/exhibition/xu-bing-thought-and-method/>. Accessed 20 April 2022.

Figure 6. DAMU. "Perform Arden." 2019, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 7. Wurm, Erwin. "One Minute Sculpture: Nordic Sculpture." 2002, *Museum moderner Kunst Museum*, Frankfurt. <https://www.erwinwurm.at/artworks/one-minute-sculptures.html>. Accessed 20 April 2022.

Figure 8. DAMU. "Who's Arden." 2019, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 9. DAMU. "Arden Rodriguez." 2019, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 10. Hsieh, Tehching. "Art/Life One Year Performance 1983-1984 (Rope Piece)." 1983, *Sean Kelly Gallery*, New York. <https://www.tehchinghsieh.net/artlife-oneyearperformance1983-1984>. Accessed 20 April 2022.

Figure 11. Ogawa, Sai. "*A Plan without the Goal.*" 2022, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 12. Ogawa, Sai. "*A Plan without the Goal.*" 2022, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 13. Ogawa, Sai. "*A Plan without the Goal.*" 2022, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.

Figure 14. Ogawa, Sai. "*A Plan without the Goal.*" 2022, Prague. Accessed 10 March 2022.