

2. Resting on three points (2003)

Dan Wolgers is a scientific voyager who has come ashore in the land of art. When he devoted a whole exhibition to showing that all material, non-conscious objects in nature rest on three points, neither more nor less – unless they are conscious, in which case two will do – the goal was to show that nature simply is, regardless of us and our wishes. Humankind is subservient to it. We are never free of mathematics and necessity. The laws of nature have the last word when it comes to our freedom and ability to act.

Wolgers sees things as they are, both without and within our consciousness. Humans can certainly design objects and phenomena in ways that don't go together, but you see immediately that there's something odd about them. You can pretend you don't notice, and yet know at the same time you're pretending. You can claim the stone is resting on fewer or more than three points, but you're wrong, because we don't bring nature into existence simply by thinking about it or naming it.

3b. Rififi Exhibition (1991)

If everything we perceive with our senses is illusory or misunderstood, it follows that the artist neither exists nor is necessary as far as his work is concerned. Dan Wolgers took these ideas as seriously as he took anything, and since he has been working in critical dialogue with post-modern ideas about existence since the start, he decided to find out what would happen if he pursued the central tenet to its logical conclusion: the one about art without an artist.

Wolgers sought out a new gallerist, Lars Bohman, whose gallery would allow him to dramatise his idea of removing the subject from the art – i.e. removing himself, since he was, after all, an illusion. An advertising agency called Rififi was contracted to do whatever they liked in Dan Wolgers' name, inside or outside the gallery.

Rififi dutifully got to work, producing items for a proper exhibition at the gallery. They could have done nothing at all – under the contract, they didn't have to work hard – but they put in the work. For their pains they received 50,000 kronor from Dan Wolgers; the money came from a grant he had recently received. Other than that, he didn't do a thing.

How did it go? The self that bears his name grew more prominent than ever. Wolgers was noticed outside of arts circles and the exhibition became a sensation, not for its content, which the artist had nothing to do with, but for its concept. Conceptual artist Dan Wolgers had achieved conceptual artistic perfection.

In fact, though, he had done the same thing he always does, revealing the structure within which and under which we live. The world is ordered and comprehensible; things are bounded, one from the other; chaos does not reign. If the artist claims he is not present in the work, his absence

becomes his presence. It's like saying, "I don't exist." You can't negate yourself without telling a lie.

Through his absence from the exhibition, Wolgers became a bigger presence than ever before. This was to be expected, based on the worldview he had asserted in work after work: it is the idea of the dissolution of the subject that is a human construction, not the subject as such.

5. Slack Spoon (1977)

According to Plato, all objects and phenomena have an ideal form, ideal in relation to itself, its blueprint. The material realm we humans inhabit, in which all objects and people age, degenerate, die and are destroyed, is however a pale and incomplete reflection of the realm of forms in which everything is perfect, intact and unchanging, and exists in its logical, intrinsic, inevitable form.

No-one has seen a perfect apple, yet we can imagine one. We might call it an apple's apple. We immediately recognize apples that deviate in some way from the ideal form of an apple without giving up their appleness. We also recognize when an apple is approaching its essence, its actuality, its emblematic form, approaching full appleness, which only exists in the conceptual world of ideal forms. The further an apple strays from its essence, the closer it comes to the indeterminate yet nevertheless existing point at which it is no longer relevant to call it an apple, and some other category looms up to claim it.

This slack spoon is a commentary on Plato's realm of forms and its contrast with the imperfection of the material world. The platonic form of the spoon is brought to light by breaking with the idea of the spoon.

At the same time, however, says Wolgers, it helps to reveal the form of art. This useless spoon lacks any *raison d'être* other than that of being an artwork. It becomes art because it points to the idea that Plato's world of forms is not in heaven but in human consciousness.

You could put it like this: craft, or artisanry, is about getting as close to the form of a thing as possible without getting there. Crafted objects are intended for use. Wolger's work becomes art by being anti-craft. His art begins where craft ends, yet is

always in direct, intentional contact with craft, not in tension but in symbiosis.

The *raison d'être* of this piece is to highlight its counterpart, the functional spoon, and the nature of spoonness. The slack spoon is the very emblem of a failed spoon. The emblematic example of how a spoon shouldn't look tells us why spoons look the way they do. The two define each other – in the material realm, in consciousness, in Wolgers' art. Everything is dialectical.

7. Defective toys (1993)

The staff of the toy shop have already done the job for the artist. He finds the art ready-made and recognizes its power as food for thought. On tidy little notes attached to the toys, the staff have written: “missing an ear”, “ugly package”, “only barks”. Something is obviously missing from these animals and objects; something has not gone according to plan; something is wrong or defective relative to the being’s or thing’s intrinsic programming, its defining properties. Or relative to what has arbitrarily emerged, and which we have grown accustomed to, for those who prefer to make different metaphysical assumptions about the world.

This presumed-undesirable deviation lowers the price. The customer typically wants a package that has not been damaged after manufacture, or a dog which has two ears, or which not only barks but walks. If any of these attributes are missing, the customer will want a discount. The staff know this and accommodate the customers’ wishes in advance by indicating exactly how big a discount the customer will receive, without their even having asked for it.

Those who claim that nothing is as it is of necessity, and that norms are unfounded inventions, instances of cultural oppression resulting from arbitrary dominance relationships, would assert that it is performative praxis, the action of thinking and writing “missing an ear”, “ugly package” or “only barks”, that causes people to have ideas about the place of the ears, about unbeautiful packaging, and about what a dog should do besides bark; it is the act of formulating the notes and reducing the prices due to a “defect” or “deviation” that creates our understanding of right and wrong, reasonable and unreasonable, normal and deviant. This is the post-structuralist view.

A structuralist like Dan Wolgers instead asserts that the notes are written because the world is not arbitrarily constructed. Essence precedes existence. Difference is reflected in the dialectic, in causal relations. Either the notes are written because what they express is true and relevant, or they express “truth” and “relevance” – and convention – because they are written, and they are written only because we are all slaves to the Zeitgeist and its norms.

In that case, however, language is material, and the world is created by being formulated, which as we have seen is a problematic position.

It looks like a cruel and ineluctable law of economics that customers want a discount when a toy is defective, that the abnormal is less valuable. Yet deviation from the norm does not automatically reduce the price and value of an object. Indeed, it may increase its value and price. Normality and typicality are not worth as much as genius, which is also a deviation from the norm, but one which people consider valuable because it achieves things never seen before.

Only when the deviation is in the other direction, towards brokenness, when it is a deficiency that separates the being or thing from its inherent potential, its actuality, does it lose value. Until the artist steps in, that is, turning it into art with his eye for what brokenness tells us about nature and humanity, and thus making it valuable.

Wolgers did not create these works; he waited for them to come to him. His artistic act consists of understanding transactions in the cultural economy, being an observer of the real-world art that isn’t called art before an artist lays his defining hand on it and exhibits it in a gallery.

The job of the artist is not to imagine or create art, but to find it.

17. Car keys without car (1991)

Not only does Wolgers' art cost him a fair sum of money, since he needs to buy materials and services in order to complete his works, but its content occasionally revolves around value and money as structural issues. This is the case with this car key in a plastic case.

Wolgers had ten copies of the keys to his own Volvo made, offered them for sale, and used the occasion to shine a light on ideas and reasonable assumptions about ownership, payment, how parts are united to the whole through symbols, and how the symbolized object is automatically assumed to be included in the purchase.

What has an art buyer bought when he pays for a car key by an artist? As so often with Wolgers, this practically useful object has been pushed beyond its practical usefulness through the actions of the artist. What is a car key from Volvo and Wolgers worth if you don't have the car? Nobody is going to understand that it's art once it's lying around in the buyer's home. It's a valueless practical object that looks like a valuable but uninteresting practical object. There is no visual cue confirming its artistic value. It's not beautiful or "created", and it's nothing you can show off. It can't be used. Not only is the key valueless, but so is the purchase and the "art" thus acquired, making it the most diabolical of Wolgers' works. The artwork exists only in the thoughts surrounding the transaction.

The car key certainly goes to an actually existing Volvo estate, but the car is not included in the purchase. Why should it be? Wolgers isn't a car seller. Or more correctly: if the car is included, he's a car seller, but if it isn't, he's making art. It's a question of implicit contracts. The buyer understands that Dan Wolgers is not a car seller because he finds himself in an artistic setting. It's only the context that

gives the game away. Wolgers may temporarily become a car seller when he steps outside the museum or gallery, but within the confines of the art space, it's more reasonable to assume he isn't a car seller.

Wolgers is here maintaining the boundness of existence to natural law and the basis of conventions in the reasonable. Without these assumptions, this piece would not be practicable or understandable. Wolgers is underscoring the tacit agreement that context determines the role the individual takes on, and that there is an objective mutuality to it all. This does not mean that the self is multifold or fragmented. It means that most of what goes on in the world consists of mutual relations that are possible to observe and analyse.

There's a lot going on in this unassuming little artwork, and the questions the car key raises are eye-opening for those with an interest in metaphysics. At the same time, however, this is probably the most boring and bizarre artwork Wolgers has ever created. With it, he takes his art one step closer to self-obliteration through total artlessness and fully realised meaninglessness. The car key is the closest he comes to the ambition of making art that is unusable in every respect – and that's in a lifelong oeuvre devoted to showing that art does not exist except as a creator of cerebral value.

This artwork breaks out of art. It is so unaesthetic, so purposeless, that it reaches a zero point. Nothing is left. It is the most boring of boring works. The anti-artwork of all anti-artworks. All that's left in the end is the art buyer, sheepishly asking, "What have I bought?" A car? No. The symbol of a car? Maybe. A little bit of matter? Yes. A car key which can't be used, and which no-one can see is art. This is the end of the artistic road.