

Studio Fletcher/Reichert  
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Since 1996, Sean Fletcher and Isabel Reichert have explored the gaps left by early conceptual performance artists, specifically in the area of life/art projects, and found ways of expanding on that research in contemporary art practice. Fletcher and Reichert begin with something simple such as an argument or something they heard about on the news. Then they elevate it to a level where it is almost absurd and repackage it as performance art. Common occurrences in popular culture become metaphoric for larger emotional or psychological imbalances in society and the two successfully walk the thin line between art and life.

In a recent video work, Fletcher and Reichert debate the evidence presented in the widely publicized and highly romanticized trial of Scott Peterson (who murdered his pregnant wife Lacy in order to pursue an adulterous relationship with a massage therapist). The video documents their arguments in familiar locations, such as a kitchen or a bedroom or the supermarket, and presses the audience to consider whether they are discussing a murder trial or trivial problems in their own relationship.

In 2003, Fletcher and Reichert hired an instructor from the Dale Carnegie School of Sales and Management to improve their “sales technique.” This internationally renowned school teaches the principles of Dale Carnegie’s book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” to the employees of such prestigious firms as Merrill Lynch, Citibank, and AT&T. The evening-long performance began with the two artists delivering an essay on the history of “self help literature” in the United States and followed with a presentation by the Dale Carnegie instructor called “How to Sell Yourself and Not Your Art.” Audience members learn the importance of professional attire, how to speak to the interests of their prospective gallerists, and they rehearse a proper introduction to a meeting with a potential art dealer.

Fletcher and Reichert frequently employ outside help from professionals from different fields to further the connection between art and life. In one of their first collaborations (called Therapy) they hired a couples counselor to sit with them in an art gallery and carry out a therapy session. With the artists on a couch, the therapist in a chair, and a microphone pointed toward unsuspecting audience members, Fletcher and Reichert respond to questions asked by their therapist with vague references to a “lack of understanding” or “an absence of trust.” As the performance wears on, the therapist occasionally queries audience members on how these comments make them feel, until it finally becomes clear to anyone watching that the problems are not between Fletcher and Reichert, but between art and its audience. The performance continues for just shy of fifty minutes, includes a trust exercise in which an audience member assists Reichert in a head-stand, and ends with the therapist announcing “that’s all we have time for right now, I think we made some break-throughs.”

Other life/art performance projects include taking two curators to small claims court over “intellectual property infringement”, interviewing 1960s conceptual artist Robert Barry on his reluctance to acknowledge a political motive behind the “anti-object” movement in art, distributing small bombs cast in Godiva chocolate to holiday shoppers from the second tier balcony of a mall (in a work titled “The Bomb Project”), and auctioning off the right to name their first-born child on EBay (in a piece called “Bait”).

Their most recent collaboration is a year long project (called “Death and Taxes”) slated to begin January 1, 2006, in which the two artists will form a corporation responsible for their food, clothing, and shelter. They will employ the help of business professionals, tax attorneys and legal consultants, lead a public relations tour, and document everything on videotape. The corporation will hire a board of directors comprised of business professionals, art administrators, and fellow artists, and Fletcher and Reichert will use their talents to turn their very survival into a profitable business enterprise.

Fletcher and Reichert deliver occasional lectures to art classes at several local colleges, and Fletcher teaches a course on “financial basics for artists.” They have appeared on KQED in San Francisco, Studio 360 in New York, Spiegle On-Line in Europe, and on KALX in Berkeley, CA. Their work has appeared in numerous art publications and the major media including Flash Art International, Art Week, Der Spiegel, The San Francisco Chronicle, and the Washington Post.