

The Delay Museum

From an early age, Thierry Geoffroy has been interested in the idea of creating museum collections. The first instance of this was at the age of thirteen inside his own home, where he set up a collected assortment of army memorabilia that was spread out between his room, a corridor and stairs.^[1] Geoffroy may or may not have already considered himself an artist at this age; having started a series of self-portraits of himself as himself and as “the military boy”, posing with military helmets, uniforms, badges and other items in his collection^[2]. The collection started when his father, who was a captain in the military, began to give him his army medallions “The Army Museum” as the younger Geoffroy named it, grew in scope as many of his father’s army friends visited were invited to donate to his collection after the adolescent Geoffroy had given them a tour of the space.^[3] The collection would grow to include military uniforms, helmets, paintings and medallions.^[4] With a written inventory list that compiled every article he’d bought or exchanged^[5], guided tours and collection catalogues produced; the museum was a serious venture that would set a precedent for the avenues of artistic exploration that Geoffroy would elaborate on in his later work.

Throughout his career, Geoffroy would go on to experiment with creating and curating museum collections, including a project called *Roskilde Exhibitionist Museum*^[6] and the Delay Museum. Originally titled “Le Musée du RETARD”^[7], this format was founded in connection with his first ever *Emergency Room* in Nikolaj Kunsthal^[8] in Copenhagen. The Emergency Room format consists of Geoffroy inviting artists to participate in a circular space and create art that is presented on the same day^[9] and becomes the subject of a debate. The art is specifically dealing with emergencies, it is always created as a response to the question “what is an emergency today?”. Some art which was presented during the exhibition period is then exposed in the Delay Museum the day after. In the museum, visitors can see artworks that are anywhere from the past day, the past month or the past 10 years. Emergency Room has found international success and together with the Delay Museum has been exhibited in Paris, Athens, Copenhagen, Berlin^[10], Wrocław^[11], New York and Napoli, as well as twice in Hanoi. The original French name of the Delay Museum is a play on words, retard in French meaning Delay and also sounding like “trop tard”, meaning “too late”. Since 2001, Geoffroy has painted “RETARD” in bold red letters on canvas to signify the relationship between art and time, to show how art has the incapacity to be in time, and also as a reference to the ideas of Marcel Duchamp^[12]. The museum’s name changed and became anglicized once Emergency Room was exhibited in MoMA/ PS1 in New York City,^[13] as the word could be interpreted differently by an English-speaking audience.

The Delay Museum is not just an accompaniment to the Emergency Room format, rather it is also its own collection that contains artistic reactions to crises, public opinions, the media and situations of controversy, hypocrisy and violence; all in the

form of artworks^[14]. The collection of the Delay Museum can be looked at as an archive of original artworks, including the works of over 500 artists from different cultural contexts and moments in time. Over 15 years' worth of content is in the Delay Museum collection, with subjects ranging from the financial crisis in Greece to the war in Iraq.^[16] It also includes artwork that Geoffroy has made in earlier artistic projects where he was working in the same way as in the Emergency Room format, creating and exhibiting artworks on the same day. Geoffroy has been working in this way since 1988, extending the Delay Museum collection over three decades.

The Delay Museum is an important demonstration of how art in museums can be exhibited closer to the present.^[9] The Delay Museum explores how art can be in time, showing art that is extremely contemporary, as some artworks have been made just over 24 hours before, and to show by comparison that the art in museums is delayed^[20]. The Delay Museum contains art that is by far more recent than what would be shown as contemporary art in a museum, and in this way can be seen as a subtle critique of the framework of modern art exposure. The work in the Delay Museum collection gives an idea of how art can reflect the world around it, each piece surmising themes that were significant to the time in which it was created, many issues can reflect crises that are still ongoing from an earlier perspective, while others show issues that have reached a conclusion. The collection also holds a significant historic value, capturing individual artistic expressions that reflect attitudes, fears, outrage and other reactions to current issues affecting the world at the time the artwork was made. The artworks can provide insights on the zeitgeist of the exhibition time period and location, as well as an idea of international perspectives on both local and global issues due to the diverse pool of artist's involved in the Emergency Room format. The artworks can also have a predictive value, with the artists reflecting or warning of possible outcomes of situations that have ended up coming true.

As a collection, it is possible to analyse and study the artworks collected for consistent aesthetic themes found in Emergency Art.^[21] Both the creation process of Emergency Art, which involves working toward a specific deadline in a short time period, and the themes it is concerned with, relevant issues of dysfunction, can be evaluated as significant influences on the artists' work. Emergency Art therefore can be examined for the ways the unique modes of production are relayed through the artwork. The collection can also be looked through to create exhibitions on specific themes. For example, someone deciding to make an exhibition on the effects of propaganda in the media could review the Delay Museum collection and find different examples of art that expresses ideas on that exact theme, combining these separate pieces in order to create a powerful commentary on that issue.

In the *Emergency Room Dictionary*¹, Geoffroy distinguishes four separate approaches that characterise the aesthetics of Emergency Art: 1. Vox Populi; an approach characterised by showing opinions of the public in relation to a set theme, 2. Show It Again; taking an excerpt from a media article/ form of news content and creating an artwork around its topic to reify the article's message or the issue itself, 3. The Feuilleton; an artist following a specific issue throughout the exhibition and 4. Readymade Face Lifting; the (disliked) approach of bringing in an old artwork under the pretext of it conceptually relating to a present situation. While these establish some general trends, the artwork is unpredictable and the collection has grown since the publishing of the *Emergency Room Dictionary*, as a result of the continued extrapolation of the Emergency Room format and other converging formats that contribute to the Delay Museum collection.

Currently there are ca. 1000 artworks in the collection. Emergency Room has been activated seven times in a museum exhibition and more times as part of the Emergency Room Mobile format. On average, Emergency Room lasts for a month (with some exceptions, for example the MoMA/ PS1 exhibition went on for 7 weeks), with new artworks presented by 4-5 artists each day. Many artists also return multiple times over the exhibition period, bringing new artworks each time. Around 95% of the artwork from Emergency Room is kept in the Delay Museum collection. Some artworks are performative or impermanent and cannot exist as physical artworks in the museum. However, as the format is continuously filmed, these artworks exist through video documentation, this video footage is also included in the collection. Part of the collection is also made up from Geoffroy's own time-centred art formats and artworks.

Overall, the Delay Museum can be seen as a format in itself and a museum collection for all the Emergency Art created over several decades. The Delay Museum is constantly growing and expands over time, containing the artwork of artists from multiple cultures and backgrounds, responding to issues spanning across time and spatial contexts. The wealth of content present in the Delay Museum collection can reveal themes, attitudes and the progression of emergencies as they were experienced by artists in the time at which they were going on. The museum as a format is a record of Emergency Room, and other ultracontemporary² formats, giving space to artworks after they have been debated and presented, allowing them to still be seen after they have left the exhibition space. In these aspects, the Delay Museum can be seen as a primary source for artworks that reflected or still reflect the issues of the time.

¹ Geoffroy, T., 2010. *Emergency Room Dictionary*. 1st ed. Berlin: Revolver Publishing.

² Artwork made to respond to issues of the day it was created.

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- [4] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/emergencyrooms/15436017171/in/album-72157716867765778/lightbox/>
- [5] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/emergencyrooms/5502110012/in/album-72157716867765778/lightbox/>
- [6] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/emergencyrooms/albums/72157716868019883>
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[20] Murawska-Muthesius, K. and Piotrowski, P., 2016. From Museum Critique To The Critical Museum. [online] Google Books. Available at:

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