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Elaborating contingency.
Visual arts, creative process and the aesthetic implications of randomness

Abstract
How does contingency "appear" and how can it be "used" in the creation of artworks? What are the aesthetic and art historical implications of elaborating the possibilities of randomness in art? In this article I investigate these questions with the help of a series of artworks. Therefore, I am not pursuing a mere theoretical survey, i.e. scrutinising just the ideas (both the older conceptualisation and more recent theories) concerning the concept of contingency. Instead of such an idea-historical approach, here I am more interested in observing the question from the point of view of the actual practice and practitioners, hence what we can learn from the inspection of the works of art themselves. For this, first I examine some exciting aspects and questions around art, aesthetics and contingency, with the help of a piece by Alma Heikkilä. After that I provide an overview of some of the most exciting examples of the manifestation and "use" of randomness in art, ranging from the Renaissance to the 21st century. This will then help us, towards the end of the paper, to identify some curious patterns in the development of the occurrence of contingency and of the artistic "handling" of chance in art practices as well as to understand better the creative significance and aesthetic consequences of elaborating randomness.

Keywords
Contingency in art, Randomness, Aesthetics and chance

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A simple, white, rectangular construction in the middle of the forest. This is what Alma Heikkilä's exciting work looked like at first sight for the visitors of the second edition of the Helsinki Biennial in 2023. As we got closer however, the piece started to unfold its curious features, many of which will be particularly important for this paper on contingency. The first two editions of the Helsinki Biennial are famous for their enchanting location on Vallisaari island, about a 20 minutes boat ride from the city centre. The artworks exhibited in the island are placed either in old and abandoned constructions on the spot, or within the forest itself, hence it was no surprise that Heikkilä's piece is also in the woods. What was more unanticipated is the appearance of the work. There was a plaster sculpture positioned in the middle of a rectangular arrangement of white canvases that enclosed it, but visitors could enter the construction to observe the sculpture up close. There was also an opening on the "ceiling" of the structure, right above the sculpture, so that rainwater can fall on it. This proved to be quite an important aspect, since the entire piece – not only the sculpture itself, but the canvas construction around it too – was a piece of art that was constantly changing, due to rainwater, mixed with plant dyes dripping on the plaster sculpture. As a local reference, the dyes were created as infusions of different plant species that were growing both on the island and in other locations in Helsinki. In this way the work continuously changed its external appearance, especially its colours. As one can imagine however, besides the sculpture, the (originally) white canvases around it also changed over the months, small living creatures, fungi, moss etc. started to occupy it.

It is easy to see that in this work there was a high degree of contingency, and this is why it is an inspiring departure point for my present study. In the following I would like to scrutinise some of the most important aesthetic implications of randomness in art. For this, first I examine some further exciting aspects and questions around art, aesthetics and contingency, with the help of this piece by Alma Heikkilä. After that I provide an overview of some selected examples of the manifestation and "use" of randomness in art, ranging from the Renaissance to the 21st century. This will then help us, towards the end of the paper, to identify some curious patterns in the development of the occurrence of contingency and of the artistic "handling" of chance in art practices as well as to understand better the creative significance and aesthetic consequences of elaborating randomness.

Why can we then say that Heikkilä's piece could be connected to the questions of contingency in art and art practice? For example because

nobody, not even the artist herself, could exactly predict how the piece of art would appear, and be understood, in the future. It was unforeseen how it would look when "ready", because, as is now clear from the above description, it could never be considered as "ready" or "finished", in the sense that its completion – i.e. the moment the artist finished creating the structure and placing the plaster sculpture in the middle of it – was not the real completion, more like the beginning of the work, or of the "working" of the work. We could even say that Heikkilä turned the chronological order of making a piece of art upside down: the moment when other artists finish creating their piece was the point when Heikkilä's work starts to be created – by other biological entities and processes. Although this was planned and initiated by the artist, even she was unable to fully predict the ecological complexity of these processes. Its evolution, including the modifications in its outer appearance was unpredictable. This form of contingency was also referred to through the title of the piece: "coadapted with" – hence the modifications and transformations of the object was a result of the natural processes that made the work look always different, every time we re-visited it.

The question of change will then strongly challenge ideas of the 'firmness' of an artwork and the perceiver's expectation of it. On revisiting the forest to observe Heikkilä's work again in a few hours or days, new stains caused by the plant dye may appear, or other small organisms can occupy new parts of the white canvas and sculpture. No need to wait for months, years or decades to perceive changes on it. These are, however, still the "formal" aspects in the description of this piece of art, that are very important, but are still only the departure points for further questions. Of these further questions, for me the most exciting is whether we can exactly pinpoint what will we value and appreciate in the unpredictable and contingent nature of the work? Is it really 'just' the changing appearance that we like in it, hence only what is happening on a perceptual level? Or do we appreciate the very idea or concept itself that is behind the fact that the work's appearance is constantly modifying? Or, perhaps a bit more separated from all this, do we value the multiple references to Nature, and its interaction with the human artifact – that is, by the way, also emphasised by the artist's choice of title: 'coadapted with'? Or do we value the strange ephemerality of the piece? Or perhaps we appraise the modest and at the same time bold decision of the artist to step back a bit from the traditional role of being the sole creator of the piece? Or do we enjoy how new aesthetic values can be born at the intersection of sense perception, intelligible concepts and random biological processes?

All the above possibilities for the 'reasons' of why to appreciate such a work of art with a high degree of contingency demonstrate, on the one hand, that there can be many possible modes and manifestations of randomness, and on the other hand that they will also lead to different 'reasons' why and values for which to appreciate these practices. We also need to add to this that these peculiar aesthetic values cannot be to any extent apparent in other pieces of art, hence we can see the birth of new principles. This in turn will help in broadening of the concept of art in general, and contribute to the debate about what (else) can art be? This is why, in the next part of my study I would like to inquire a bit more into how artists can elaborate contingency – just to refer to the title of my paper. How can artists work with eventuality, chance and randomness? How can they put this almost paradoxical situation into the service of creative processes? Despite the fact that it is about chance and randomness, their 'use' and 'application' in the artistic practice is still the result of a conscious choice and a set of conscious actions. Contingency in art is never (entirely) accidental. It is therefore something very similar to what Alessandro Bertinetto wrote about a neighbouring field, that of improvisation: "[...] artists prepare themselves for improvisation by acquiring technical expertise and behavioural habits to be able to respond to contingencies and exploit them as an invitation to creativity: improvisers must be 'prepared to be unprepared' in order to succeed" (Bertinetto 2020: 273-4).

In order to see different artistic positions and approaches regarding the elaboration of contingency, in the following, I am giving a brief overview of some of the most exciting connection points between art and randomness. I am not pursuing a mere theoretical survey, i.e. scrutinising just the ideas (both the older conceptualisation and more recent theories) concerning the concept of contingency. Instead of such an idea-historical approach, here I am more interested in observing the question from the point of view of the actual practice and practitioners, hence what we can learn from the inspection of the works of art themselves. I think that through this we can get additional knowledge on the role of contingency and the aesthetics of (or through) contingency, and this will contribute to the theories about contingency we have so far. However, this does not mean that these connection points between art and contingency will remain 'random'. Just the contrary. There are strong and strongly identifiable patterns in this relation, and just as evident aesthetic implications. These will thus be summarised towards the end of my paper. Before then however, let's see some actual examples from previous periods, and iden-

tify the various forms and degrees of contingent aspects, as well as how and why these were 'used' in the creative practice.

There could be various possible points of departure for an overview of some of the many inspiring examples from the history of contingency in art practice, but one of the most conspicuous points seems to be the late Middle Ages. More precisely, the period when artists started to experiment with more innovative and inventive drawing practices that left significantly more space for experiment and even improvisation. As is well known, the mediaeval drawing and painting practice relied heavily upon the use of pattern books. New works of art were often created by rigorously imitating earlier visual forms, pictorial solutions or stylistic expressions, instead of 'searching' for new shapes, or trying to find a more individual way of representing the subject-matter.

This had changed gradually, preparing the creative innovations in the early 16th century. As we can learn from the by now classical study by Ernst H. Gombrich (1985), Leonardo's sketches are among the most crucial ones from this point of view. Gombrich considers his drawing style as a turning point, where the forms and figures are not represented with one strong contour-line, but with a series of soft, narrow, slight strokes through which the artist is properly experimenting with and searching for the best form. It is easy to see the increasing importance of the contin-gent element in the creation: the artist does not know in advance which line, hence which form, will be(come) the most 'successful', the most expressive and the most innovative. This experimental nature of drawing also accounts for the heightening interest in this medium itself, and its centrality in theoretical discourses of art of the era, of which the most obvious example is Giorgio Vasari's work.

All of this has also contributed to the strengthening of the role of the artist, and an acknowledgment of their innovative, creative powers. It also paved the way for the modern cult of the artist as genius, that reached another important level in Romanticism. During the Renaissance, innovation and contingency created another exciting connection point with the sociological aspect of art. We could also ask whether it is by chance that the Renaissance is also the period of the first conscious investigations of planning and image production? After seeing above the growing interest in experimental approaches in drawing practice, it is no longer a matter of pure chance. There are many textual sources, descriptions and anecdotes from the 15th and 16th centuries of seeing or discovering images made by chance. Some of these are of Antique origins, and based on, for example,

Pliny's accounts, while others are new, including Leonardo's famous consideration from his unfinished *Treatise on Painting*:

> By looking attentively at old and smeared walls, or stones and veined marble of various colours, you may fancy that you see in them several compositions, landscapes, battles, figures in quick motion, strange countenances, and dresses, with an infinity of other objects. By these confused lines the inventive genius is excited to new exertions. (Leonardo 1802: 84)

But how are these images, that are born by chance and through which we perceive random resemblances to actual forms connected to art, and especially to the status of the art(ist)? Here we can remember Horst W. Janson's seminal study on the subject, who also lists many of these sources and anecdotes, including the one by Leonardo quoted above. Janson draws our attention to the fact that in these descriptions the references to Nature as a "creator" – for example concerning stones, gems or cracked blocks of marble resembling something else – was essential and was put in the service of elevating the status of art:

> Alberti's purpose in mentioning these *mirabilia* is obviously rhetorical: the fact that Nature herself produces images becomes the crowning argument for his claim that painting is a noble and "liberal" activity. The images themselves are absurdly complete and explicit, down to the last iconographic detail, so that they (unlike the tree trunks of *De statua*) are immediately recognizable and do not need to be "perfected" by their discoverers. (Janson 1961: 255, italics in the original)

Nature, and the reference to the "creative powers" of Nature are thus key parts in the Renaissance artists' and theoreticians' argumentation, and, as we saw, randomness apparent in natural forms is an essential aspect in this reasoning.

What is noteworthy however is that it will be a similar aspect of Nature that will become essential also in the discussion of later periods. This is what I want to investigate further in our next step, concentrating on the aesthetic discourse in the 18th century. More precisely we can say that what gets a central focus in the era is the respect of Nature as an entity providing us with views or 'images' that can result in significant aesthetic experiences. We can practically take the word "images" literally, remembering that it was also the period of the discussion of the concept of picturesque: a scene in Nature which would look well on a picture, according to William Gilpin (see also Milani 1996: Chapter III). This importance of the aesthetic power of Nature and the images it 'produces' is manifested

also through the fact that – as it was repeatedly demonstrated by researchers of environmental aesthetics and of its history – in the 18th century it was predominantly Nature, and not artworks, that were "the paradigmatic object of aesthetic experiences", as Allen Carlson (2009: 2) stated.

But what is, and especially how was this view of Nature valued so highly? And how is this connected to contingency? It is noticeable that Nature started to get appreciated for its randomness, and there were significant attempts of re-creating this randomness. This paradoxical approach is, I think, one of the most exciting phenomena in the history of aesthetics of this period. What is paradoxical in it? The history of garden and landscape design comes in here to help us understanding it. In the previous periods it was the formal, geometrical, so-called French garden that dominated the aristocratic estates, where plants and bushes were designed and cut according to rigid geometrical patterns. Over the 18th century the seemingly contrary English-style and more romantic parks spread all over Europe, often including artificial ruins too (Somhegyi 2021). But it is really only 'seemingly' different, only in its appearance. It imitates the 'naturalness' of Nature, as opposed to the apparently human-designed and thus human-dominated formal gardens. However, it does not mean that the Nature in the English landscape park is just left there to grow freely. If it were like that, estate would have soon become a jungle. Hence also the English gardens needed planning, design and maintenance, just as much as the French gardens, with the exception that they were designed to look undesigned. This is the paradox I referred to above.

This is another celebration of the randomness of Nature and of the natural forms as they please the observer through their aesthetic qualities. Curiously enough, just like in the Renaissance, we find a connection point between contingency and the experimental practices in art. Here I am referring to Alexander Cozens' well-known invention of blot-sketching, a technique that the artist developed from the 1750s, and the description of the practice published in 1786, titled *A new method of assisting the invention in drawing original compositions of landscape*. The technique consisted of sketching and assembling darker forms and masses with ink on white paper, of which final result would start to look like actual forms, especially landscapes. Hence the originally insignificant, uncoordinated blots will represent something – obviously a fantasy landscape, not an actual depiction of an actual place. As it was summarised on the website of the Tate Gallery, that possesses several of these images:

> The idea seems to have originally been developed by him as a teaching aid, to liberate the imagination of the student who, he felt, spent too much time in copying the works of others. He wrote that the blot was a 'production of chance, with a small degree of design'. The true blot was 'an assemblage of accidental shapes', 'forms without lines from which ideas are presented to the mind'. (Tate website)

The technique – that Jean Starobinski (2008: 152) called "interpreted tachisme" – is thus both decisive and forward-looking at the same time. On the one hand it can be examined from the perspective of the actual geographical debates of the era, and thus it also has parallels with the idea of the sublime, actively investigated in the same period, as it was emphasised by Simon Schama:

> These "blots" were deliberately random impressions meant to express, rather than to slavishly outline, the natural heaping of rock forms. The impulsiveness and spontaneity of their production served to reinforce the new idea – so appealing to the early Romantics of Gray's generation – that mountains were dynamic, even turbulent things. But the way they built into great block-like structures also seemed a practical application of Edmund Burke's doctrine in the *Inquiry* [...] that irregular sublimity was to be shown in ark and massive forms. (Schama 1996: 461, italics in the original)

On the other hand however, this working method and process of creation is also anticipating aesthetic and philosophical references that will be further investigated by others, both practitioners and theoreticians of art in the coming decades. Through the emphasis on the irregularity of the natural forms – that are, as we have seen, represented and re-created in Cozens' method in an artistic way – there is an emphasis on the irrationality and uncontrollability of Nature. This is, in other words, the sign of the appearance of another attitude to and interpretation of Nature, as it was also highlighted by Pierre Hadot, i.e. that in the 18th century there was a conscious opposition to the increasing mechanization or mechanized view of Nature, and instead of these we can observe the development of a more aesthetic approach to Nature (Hadot 2006: 207). A strong component in this aesthetic approach was the acknowledgement of the irrationality, irregularity and uncontrollability of Nature. This also includes the acceptance, or the embracing of randomness. In previous centuries – as with the French garden – the aim was to rationalise, control and dominate, hence to organize, correct and make the view as perfect as possible. In the late 18th century however, artists were not trying to dominate the unknowable, the uncontrollable, the irrational and the random and contingent elements in Nature – including the ones in human

nature, see for example Goya's oeuvre. Instead of attempting to rationalise and control, artists are putting these irrational, uncontrollable and contingent aspects in the forefront. The impossibility of dominating, the failure of rationalising is what can become part of the subject-matter, hence inconsistency, contingency and uncontrollability could, from now on, be included in the complex reference system and interpretative field of the individual artworks.

From the beginning of the 20th century, we can see that the examination of the aesthetic potential of contingency – or the survey of the field at the intersection of "chance and design", just to quote Cozens – could became not only one of the references, but the main theme of the work, hence not only one of the explicit elements in it but practically the sole subject-matter of a piece of art. This is what we can observe the best during Dadaism. The use of chance is not only a "teaching aid" or a "help for the imagination", but the actual topic of the work. The best example for this is Jean (Hans) Arp's well-known piece from 1916-1917, from the collection of the MoMA in New York, that refers to contingency already through its title *Untitled (Collage with Square Arranged According to the Law of Chance)*. From the contemporary sources we can learn that the artist was tearing a paper into smaller pieces, threw them on a surface, and then fixed them where they happened to fall, thus giving literally the control out from his hand. However, the case is, fortunately, not that simple. If we look at the piece, it nevertheless seems arranged, at least a bit: for example the rectangles are mainly according to a vertical-horizontal grid, and none of them is touching another one. This ambiguity is also highlighted in the work's description on the MoMA's website:

> However, the grid-like composition of this collage may be evidence that Arp did not fully relinquish control. Careful examination also reveals that he used heavyweight, possibly fine-art, paper, and that the edges were torn on a slant to reveal their inner fibers. It suggests a counterintuitive interpretation: that the work may be as much a visual representation of chance as a product of it. (MoMA website)

This conscious investigation of the applicability of randomness in the creative process can be interpreted from different perspectives. On the one hand it can be a typical Dadaist critique against the former, canonized and in some ways petrified academic doctrines on how to make art. This reflects the thinking of Hal Foster et al., when they show the influence of Marcel Duchamp on his contemporaries, including Arp: "But chance, of course, rules out the tradition artist's desire to compose his or her work,

to prepare it step by step. And in abrogating composition, the use of chance also nullifies the idea of skill that had always been associated with the very definition of the artist" (Foster *et al.* 2004: 157). We can thus see that through this practice Dadaist artists deconstruct the formerly dominant image of the respected artist, whose esteem both in the society in general and within the art world in particular comes from his or her power of creating something individual, and thus achieving fame through this characteristic skill – something which, as we have seen above, the Renaissance artists were striving for. It is almost ironic how, within about half a millennium, the 'use' of contingency could point towards two, practically opposing, directions concerning the image of the artist.

On the other hand we should not forget that even Dadaist works are neither 'irrational', nor senseless. Rudolf Arnheim stated in his survey on the psychological and perceptive aspects of accidents in art: "[...] accident does not always produce disorder, deviation, lack of connection, or interference" (Arnheim 1957: 23). The Dadaists' deconstructive attitude does have, nevertheless, constructive and productive aspects. For this we can absolutely agree with Werner Hofmann's thoughts that these sorts of playing with chance had, among others, also the purpose of dissolving the regular functioning of the perception of the world, or disband traditional connections in it, like causality. However, this was not an end in itself, but a way to find new relationships in the world – just like the Romantics were trying to do – beyond the known, the rational, the immediately perceivable and the evident (Hofmann 1966: chapter on Dada, 388-97).

All this has, naturally, brought with itself the further development of the self-reflective questions of art itself. As the concept of art has exponentially expanded during the Avant-Garde, i.e. more and more stylistic approaches, forms of expressions and types of objects were accepted as art, and the self-interpretative function of art has also grown stronger. This culminated in those artistic oeuvres, where the contingent element appeared not only as an auxiliary method to help imagination (like with Cozens) or a deconstructive attitude that got represented in and as the subject-matter of the artwork (as with Arp), but something that profoundly defines the creative process, hence the very act of creation itself. It most likely does not come as a surprise that here I am thinking of, for example, Jackson Pollock, of whom his colleague, the painter Robert Motherwell wrote in 1944: "His principal problem is to discover what his true subject is. And since painting is his thought's medium, the resolution must grow out of the process of painting itself" (quoted in Anfam 2002: 108-9). This problematic could also be seen in the perspective that Dario

Gamboni analysed; although in his informative study he was focusing mainly on the 19th century, his affirmation describes Pollock's case too: "With the phenomenon of the "image made by chance" as a model, form could precede meaning rather than derive from it, and *factura* tended to replace *idea*, or to become one with it" (Gamboni 1999: 220, italics in the original).

However, also here, just like in the case of Arp's Dadaist collage, we recognise an important ambiguity of contingency. The randomness of the forms, lines, dots, spill and drips that appear on the final work all come from the (almost) uncontrollable nature of his creative practice, of the particular process Pollock developed, so of the free and energetic bodily movements. But, as I wrote, it is "(almost) uncontrollable", hence there are some aspects that are nevertheless controlled, that are subjects to conscious decisions, rational considerations, artistic and aesthetic deliberations. This we can also know directly from Pollock himself: "When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through" (quoted in Anfam 2002: 125, italics in the original).

It is also equivocal when Pollock writes: "When I am in my painting...". It may refer to his actual, physical presence in or on the large-size canvas that is, as we can learn for example from the famous photographs by Hans Namuth, placed on the pavement of his studio. But it can also refer to the emphasis placed on putting the action of painting, the importance of gestures and bodily movements in the forefront. It is thus, at least initially, a somatic act, that during creation and after painting, through a series of assessments gets nevertheless partly controlled. Pollock, just like Arp, had thus understood perfectly that only through chance, just by randomness, without at least some rational element and interaction the work could not be created. Letting mere contingency rule would jeopardise and most likely destroy the final aesthetic power and effect. Just like, in my previous example, if a park would be left uncured and without maintenance it would not become a nice English garden, but a chaotic jungle. Similarly, without this artistic and aesthetic self-reflection and judgement, Pollock's works would not be pieces of art but just doodles.

It was, among many other characteristics of course, this duality of "chance and design", randomness and rationality, casualness and self-reflection that became important for artists who got inspired by Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel in the coming decades too. We can remember

for example the Korean Park Seo-Bo, one of the most defining figures of the Dansaekhwa movement. Although this movement shared these Western styles' emphasis on "instinct and emotion over logic and rationality", Dansaekhwa artists differed, as they preferred "flat planes of dull or neutral colors with a random or organic arrangement" (Kim 2022: 31, 33).

Park Seo-Bo was also seeking answers for the ultimate questions of and about the essence of art, but, unlike Pollock, he pursued it not by (almost) random gestural painting but through unobtrusive repetition, a practice he developed, according to the explanation by the artist, by observing his son practicing writing:

> Watching his son, Park thought that true wholeness is not achieved by making or filling something, but rather by erasing or emptying the mind of thought and emotions. He thus decided to pursue self-effacement, rather than self-expression. From that point onward, his works were produced through the same repetitive process [...]. drawing became a process defined by mindless repetition, in which any trace of personal expression was suppressed. (Kim 2024: 131)

It is very nice observing this curious synthesis regarding the appearance of contingency in art practice: how ideas from Dadaism arrived here, filtered through the experience of Abstract Expressionism. The same approach of the suppression of the artist's individual, characteristic style, the keeping in the background the individual skills' person-typical expression is put in the service of understanding more of what art can actually be, and how we can arrive to "the idea of art as a structure by which to seek "the world as it is" before it became objectified (or colonized) by human consciousness or signification systems. [...] By abandoning subjective or arbitrary decision-making on the part of the artist, authorial control was eschewed in order to evacuate imposed meanings" (Shin 2022: 160). Therefore here, contingency was 'used' – or, we can say control, rationality and planning was reduced – in order to unleash the potential of the work, to maintain its universality, instead of limiting its power through confining it to a meaning. In some ways Park's work is thus completing Pollock's intentions, finding what Pollock was striving for, i.e. "to discover what his true subject is", as we have learnt above from Motherwell's description. Park's demonstration that such a "true subject" can be no subject or without actual meaning just makes his practice and artworks even more fascinating.

As my last example I would like to quote a series of works of art that, as of their departure point, are practically the opposite compared to those above. Namely, because contingency here appears not somewhere around

the creation or in the artistic process, but is manifested through the represented subject-matter. The works themselves are not created with the help of chance, but are accurately designed conceptual pieces, just like – as we will see in a minute – the objects they depict are also accurately designed devices. I am talking about the Hungarian artist Zsolt Asztalos' series titled *Fired but unexploded*, that was exhibited in the 55th edition of the Venice Biennial in 2013. The artist first photographed bombs that were fired or released but did not explode, failed to function, and hence also failed to fulfil their mission of destroying and killing. They were shown in old television screens in 4-minute video loops, just in front of a white background, unmoving – we can only see that it is a moving image because occasionally the lighting of the object slightly changes. Also because there were different sound effects that could be heard during the display of each bomb, for example praying in a church, disco music in a gym, typing on a keyboard, surfing TV-channels, supporters in a football match, etc. We can thus stare at the image of a malfunctioning object that "leaves behind its original function, assumes a life of its own, starts writing a narrative, becoming a director of our lives through the contingency it introduces" (e-flux website 2013).

It is thus easy to see that here the connection between contingency and art brings in the discussion of not only aesthetic implications, art theoretical considerations and not even 'only' metaphysical ruminations, but also moral dimensions. Not just through regarding the terrible atrocities of wars, including the horrific practice of mass destruction, but the installation also triggers us to ruminate on fate on a personal level: for example this World War II-bomb of which image I am watching here and now and that by chance failed to function could also have not failed, hence killing my ancestors (and thus not letting me be born). This is how contingency, fate and grace are intertwined in the project, as Gabriella Uhl, the curator of the installation in the Biennale reminds us:

> The unexploded bombs are manifestation of a state of grace, as their technical dysfunction allows personal and human history to be written on. Their story is a real morality play, a danse macabre; the destructive device creates an opportunity for us to think about life, to reckon with it. [...] The process frozen by chance devours time. (Uhl 2013: 14)

These will thus be the aspects for which we can say that what we see in this work is not thematizing randomness in art or the role of chance in the creation of an art piece, but it is contingency in itself, directly what is demon-

strated – as well as all its implications on our lives – in this case our actual and saved lives.

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, after examining the above examples, we can identify some important patterns regarding the history of the (inter)connection of art and contingency. This will also be interesting not only in itself, but also proves the centrality of the concept for the more profound interpretation of a great many artworks, both classical and contemporary, as well as for identifying their further aesthetic.

First, that while contingency was initially 'randomly' appreciated, especially through images made by chance, later these, as well as the modes of creation of these were consciously analysed through diverse aesthetic discourses and artistic practices. It is almost paradoxical to see this development: the more the aspects of chance, hazard or even accident have grown in importance, appearance and acknowledgement, the more these irrational and uncontrollable elements are controlled, rationalised, recreated or at least deliberately studied.

A second aspect is that the aesthetic appreciation of randomness follows the history of art and aesthetics in its greater outline, more precisely that the interest in, and positive assessment of contingent practices went parallel with the dissolution of the normative ideas and ideals of art and aesthetics. As artists started to more and more successfully dissociate themselves from strictly following the (formerly) binding canons of art, more and more space could be given to experiment with chance in and through the works. It is precisely this that made it possible for contingent practices to become self-reflective elements, auto-interpretative means for art itself.

The third facet that we could see is that contingency is nevertheless always in the service of something else too. It can be 'used' for extending the formal possibilities through experimenting (Leonardo); helping the imagination creating new works of art (Cozens), rebelling against the art system (Arp); finding new ways of defining what art is and what it is capable of (Pollock and Park); or serves to stimulate observers to think of the fate, mercy or chance in their own lives (Asztalos).

All of the above examples taken from the past couple of centuries of the history of art demonstrate the (inter)connection of chance and art, and show the force and merit of contingency in itself. As we have seen, although contingency is about chance and randomness or even accident in the creative process, still in many cases its 'application' is intentional, in fact, this is what makes it so fascinatingly paradoxical – or paradoxically fascinating. All this also helps us understand better contingency's essential

importance, and the fact that we can neither fully grasp it, nor control it. By its nature contingency will always be a hazard for us, in both senses of the word "hazard", a danger and a chance. Or, as Alma Heikkilä wrote in connection to her piece in the Helsinki Biennial, that I analysed in the beginning of my study: "The forest is a place of risk; things that I cannot predict can happen here. I might, and most likely will harm the environment that I am so curious about. Everything is already here, more than I can ever know of" (quoted in Grönroos, Krysa 2023: 70)*.

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