



**A response to Leah McInnis and David Peters'
*Mood Swings***

Flux Gallery, 11-18 January, 2019

**By Shauna Matthews
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Mood Swings, by Leah McInnis and David Peters, as the name suggests, is an installation that is constantly in motion; it does not settle into one definition. Rather, it swings back and forth between moods; it is solitary yet communal, physical yet ephemeral. *Mood Swings* comes alive when visitors interact with each other in the installation — the experiences created from these interactions gaining more significance than the physical objects themselves.

Upon entering the installation, a nostalgic atmosphere is apparent, harkening back to childhood forts and treehouses and hours spent on swings. The installation features a foam covered recliner swing suspended from the ceiling and a rocking bench with a school bus yellow vinyl shade cover. It is dominated by a treehouse-like structure made from reclaimed lumber in the back of the gallery.¹ The two-level structure, accessed by a steep staircase or ladder, utilizes the nearly 15 foot ceilings and provides visitors with a vantage point seldom experienced in an art gallery.

Mood Swings is welcoming and playful. One can swing, rock, or hang in the net in the treehouse-like structure. McInnis and Peters have created a comfortable environment in which gatherings and interactions with the space or the people in the space can naturally occur. Friends instinctively gather within the exhibition, but the installation also facilitates interactions between strangers. The poem-making corner is such an example. Based on the childhood object, ‘cootie catchers,’ the “poem catchers,” as McInnis calls them, are folded and unfolded to randomly generate a poem from a series of words and phrases printed on the “poem catchers.”² The instructions that accompany the activity encourages visitors to create a poem with a stranger. Instead of having one’s future predicted, a poem is created — an exhilarating experience, perhaps shared with a stranger.

This environment shifts the focus from the art object itself to the social interactions that the installation facilitates. This relational aspect is reminiscent of Nicholas Bourriaud’s concept of relational aesthetics. Bourriaud defines relational aesthetics as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”³ Instead of an independent experience, gleaned from more traditional art forms that typically are experienced on more of an individual and separate level such as painting, *Mood Swings* comes to rely on social interaction to activate the space. Artworks, such as Rikrit Tiravanija’s *Untitled (Free)* of 1992, in which Tiravanija set up a temporary kitchen in a gallery and cooked and served curry to gallery visitors, precipitated Bourriaud’s theory. By using more approachable materials and objects, like reclaimed wood, printer paper zines, and “poem-catchers,” McInnis and Peters make the art object more familiar. Their abandonment of the purely aesthetic art object allows for more attention to be placed on what is experienced and interacted with in *Mood Swings*.

While *Mood Swings* does not completely abandon the ‘art object,’ McInnis and Peters use it to facilitate social interactions. The objects are part of the experience but are not the whole experience. McInnis and Peters have stated that an important aspect of their work is “to

¹ *Mood Swings* artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., January 2019.

² Leah McInnis (@leah__mcinnis), Instagram photo, January 17, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BswqZO8h9uY/>.

³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 113.

produce situations that foster community building.”⁴ McInnis and Peters emphasize their goal of fostering community building through the forms their installation takes, creating stepping stones from which interactions and relations can occur. These objects help to establish a sense of community among gallery visitors and community members because they are not only able to interact, but can build upon these interactions and establish meaningful relationships while sitting on a swing or hanging in a net.

Though a large part of *Mood Swings* relies on its relational aspects the piece can also function for an individual’s unshared experience. The treehouse atmosphere of the space allows it to function both as a space of escape or retreat as well as a space of gathering. While on the foam-covered swing, the installation reminded me of spaces children escape to when company or family is visiting or when feeling overwhelmed — a hideaway from nosy and prying adults. The motion of just swinging back and forth soothes and relaxes. *Mood Swings* captures an adolescent spirit of playfulness, imagination, and creativity by allowing individuals to sit and read the zines scattered throughout the gallery, write a poem, or escape from the world for a short time while hanging in the net. *Mood Swings* is just as much a space for introspection as it is for community — time spent alone is equally as valid as time spent surrounded by others.

Mood Swings is an exhibition which fosters social interactions. While these interactions and the experiences may take precedence over the physical art object — reminiscent of Bourriaud’s concept of relational aesthetics — *Mood Swings* can also exist for the individual experience. *Mood Swings* cannot be defined purely as one thing or the other. The installation is a reminder that moods are ever-changing and unpredictable, sometimes requiring individual reflection or support from community. The flexibility of *Mood Swings* allows the space to be comfortable and familiar for both the individual and the community, constantly swinging back and forth between the two.

⁴ *Mood Swings* artist statement.

Bibliography

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002.

McInnis, Leah and David Peters. "Mood Swings," artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., January 2019.

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