

Getting a Rise out of *ASCENDING*

***PERFORMANCE*: An Interview with Dani**

Ploeger in Conversation with Will Shüler

ASCENDING PERFORMANCE is a performance in the form of a smartphone app, which is available from *MiKandi*, an online store for adult content for Android phones. The app was simultaneously advertised in *Artforum International* and on *pornhub.com*. The work features a digitized Super 8 film of the naked artist. By making a very slow swipe gesture over the image on the smartphone screen, the user plays through the frames of the film one by one. Through repetitious performance of this – quasi masturbatory – gesture, an erection gradually emerges.

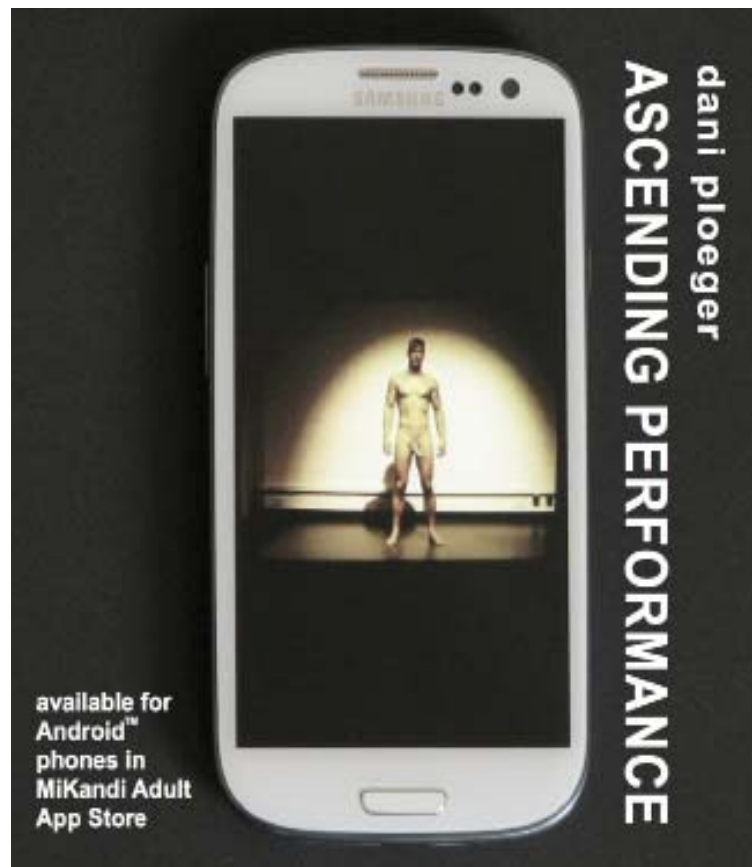
Download & Installation

System requirements: Smartphone with Android 3.0 or higher

1. Enable 'Unknown sources' (Settings > Security)
2. Download MiKandi from www.mikandi.com
3. Open the MiKandi App Store and search for ASCENDING PERFORMANCE
4. After registering, download and install ASCENDING PERFORMANCE

Video: <https://vimeo.com/78257191>

ASCENDING PERFORMANCE



ASCENDING PERFORMANCE advertisement in *Artforum International*.
Dani Ploeger (2013).

7 Comments



Bill 2 years ago

↳ [Group: naked](#)

Interesting film. There's always something to learn about, such as the uses for this device!



CNMRG 1 year ago

Bravo, maestro!



ertzub49 1 year ago

tolles Video, heißer Typ



Gay Bar 1 year ago

super!



Luv bare 5 months ago

very cute butt



darkroom photography 5 months ago

Very nice



ActionBuddy 5 months ago

Some performance artists will do anything to get people to look at their ass... :)

[This conversation is missing your voice. Please join Vimeo or log in.](#)

ELECTRODE comments on *Vimeo*. Author's Own (2015).

WS: What informed your decision to make this piece? From what you mentioned at IFTR, it was because one of your videos online was being sexualised. How did you come to realise it was being sexualised? How did you react to it? How did it make you feel? Did you ever contact the people sexualising your video? Did they ever contact you?

DP: I have been fascinated by the way in which naked bodies of performance artists—or anyone really—tend to be eroticised or sexualised by a large segment of users on generic online platforms such as *YouTube* or *Vimeo*. This is apparent when you read the comment feeds that accompany the videos, or look at the profiles of people who ‘like’ the material on *Vimeo*. In terms of my own work, I particularly noticed this with the video documentation of *ELECTRODE* (2011), in which I use an anal electrode designed for faecal incontinence treatment to repeatedly emulate the pelvic floor muscle contraction pattern of a male orgasm. Comments such as ‘tolles Video, heißer Typ’ (‘cool video, hot guy’) and ‘very cute butt’ from users with names like ‘Luv bare’ and ‘ActionBuddy’ tend to prevail on the work’s *Vimeo* page (<https://vimeo.com/38581381>). In the offline world, naked bodies are often likely to be perceived in the context of a particular representational framework, such as an art gallery, medical text book or pornographic cinema (cf. Eck 2003). In the case of online platforms, these boundaries are largely blurred; apart from people who primarily watch contents on *Vimeo* to pursue their artistic interests, there is a large segment of users who browse the same videos primarily to find material for sexual arousal and gratification, not to say that a combination of these two attitudes doesn’t exist of course. Whatever the intentions and original representational framework of the performance artwork you put online, you can be sure that it will be sexualised. I have spoken about this more in detail elsewhere (Reisz 2013; Ploeger

2015). My main interest in *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* was to make a work that acknowledges this process of sexualisation and facilitates a critical engagement with it.

Most of my work tries to juxtapose my critical engagement with normative (body) culture and my more intuitive desire to be part of that very culture. Accordingly, I don't necessarily mind people sexualising my body, especially not when I have a strong sense of control; I decide how my body is represented and exposed in my work and I can take down most of the videos of my work at any time if I wanted to (although I have never done this). I quite like the idea of being desired as a porn star of sorts, whilst at the same time I am rather critical the potential masculinist and body-normative implications of my own liking of this. I have never contacted people who 'liked' my videos on Vimeo, but I do receive some fan mail every now and then. Until now, I haven't responded to any though. There hasn't been any message that attracted me to do so yet.

WS: Is then, one of the intentions of this piece to challenge the sexualisation of artists online?

DP: I don't have a special interest in the position of artists in society. My concern is with a more general tendency to objectify and sexualise bodies that are represented on the web (including artists). I don't know if the work 'challenges' this process. As I said, I'm not sure if it is always necessarily a bad thing. It depends on the extent to which the subject concerned feels in control and empowered. This is what I hope the app does: make apparent and destabilise those structures of control that are usually taken for granted.

ASCENDING PERFORMANCE



ELECTRODE video on *Vimeo*. Dani Ploeger (2015).



Working the app. Dani Ploeger (2014).

WS: After commenting on what made you want to make the piece, can you then address what the process was like when you decided to make an app as a way of engaging? Why an app instead of a live performance? Why decide to get an erection and have the spectator the one who brings it... well, up? Did you have any reservations about sensualising your body for spectators?

DP: I chose to program an app that requires interaction, rather than make a video that is merely watched, to facilitate an engagement with the issue of control I mentioned above. The app gives the user a sense of control in terms of the emergence of my erection, but I am the one who decided where the film stops and from what perspective and distance my body is shown. As a result, it also remains a bit in the middle whether the word 'performance' in the title of the work refers to the user of the app, or my erection in the image.

It was essential for the work to be digital and to be disseminated on the web in order to address the blurring of categorisations I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, which happens to a much greater extent online than offline. Warhol's film *Blow Job* (1964) was also conceived as both art and pornography, but an important difference between this film and my app is that the former's perception as either art or porn was also very much dependent on where it was shown (Warhol presented the work in galleries, as well as 16mm cinemas). Online, my work is accessible as both art and porn in the same place, with little need to move it from one context to the other. I do coerce an art audience onto a porn platform of course, but this step is much smaller and more likely than getting them to enter a pornographic cinema in the offline world.



Super 8 film reel of *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*. Courtesy of DEFIBRILLATOR Gallery, Chicago, IL (2014).

As I said earlier, my main interests in the work have been to engage with the blurring of boundaries between art and porn, and in conjunction with this, the control over sexualised representations of bodies online. I liked the idea of reducing the app's contents to its very minimum in terms of its qualification as porn. Apart from my erection, there is no other representation or performance of sexuality. Some may question whether it is pornographic at all. At the same time, the decision to disseminate it through MiKandi, the only App Store exclusively dedicated to porn, makes it more difficult to read it only as an artwork.

This destabilisation of category distinctions informed several other decisions in the development of the work as well: mainstream pornography often strives to evoke an experience of immediacy, where the viewer is made to forget that the scenario is mediated (cf. Bolter and Grusin 2000). This is done through the use of HD recording quality and POV (point-of-view) perspectives that offer the (usually male) viewer the illusion that he is the protagonist in the film. Instead, I chose to use a digitised Super 8 film recording to generate a hyper-mediated situation: the scratches and dust on the celluloid film make the user more aware of the mediated nature of the material. This strategy of deliberately heightening the experience of mediation to facilitate a critical framework is widespread in new media art practices. In a similar vein, I heightened the toned texture of my body through application of bodybuilder tan and glaze, and the use of theatrical lighting from above to establish a typical porn star body representation. This is then 'artified' through the film's rather distantiated perspective (and the sepia-like colours). Lastly, I chose not to include a money shot: similar to mainstream porn, the user's desire to see a fully exposed body in sexually aroused state is gratified in the app. At the same time, the porn experience is somewhat frustrated by the black screen that comes up in the end, instead of the anticipated orgasm.



ASCENDING PERFORMANCE advertisement on *Pornhub.com*.
Courtesy of DEFIBRILLATOR Galler, Chicago, IL (2014).

ASCENDING PERFORMANCE



Artforum International magazines with *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* advertisement. Courtesy of DEFIBRILLATOR Galler, Chicago, IL (2014).

WS: What made you want to cross-promote the app to be consumed as both pornography (as per advertising on *pornhub*)? And what made you want spectators to also engage with it as “art” as well by advertising in *Artforum*? Does advertising in different mediums change what the artwork is? Is this a spatial difference? What made you want to blur the lines between these things? Do you feel the app achieved this blur in practice?

DP: I advertised the work in *Artforum International* (November 2013) and on *pornhub.com* to heighten its perception as both art and porn by (probably mostly) separate audiences. *Artforum* is one of the most renowned publications for the art establishment, whilst *pornhub.com* is among the top websites for the distribution and promotion of (homemade and professional) pornography. My *Artforum* ad is also a reference to Lynda Benglis’ famous 1974 advertising work in the same publication. Whereas in Benglis’s pornographic advertisement the artist holds a flesh coloured double dildo as if it is her penis to challenge the objectification of female bodies in the art world, the *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* advertisement positively asserts the ability to classify my male body as both pornographic and artistic and thus takes a more double-barrelled stance on objectification.

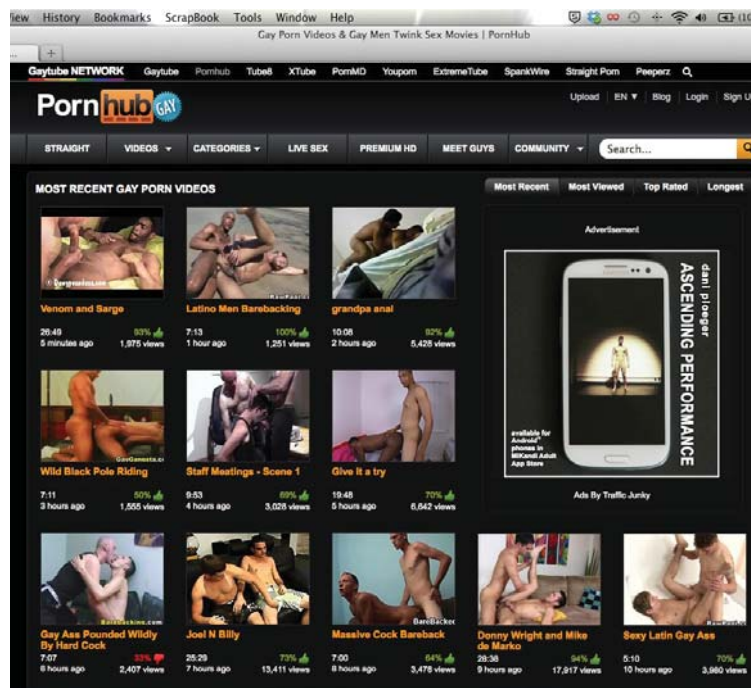
WS: How has this work been received online, perhaps, in comparison to the performance you felt was being sexualised? Is it the same? Is it different? Have people contacted you (strangers from online that is) about this performance?

DP: This work has been sexualised just as much as *ELECTRODE*. The difference is that there is a kind of meta-narrative included in *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE*. The people who regard it primarily as an artwork are likely to perceive the porn

consumers—as well as art audiences like themselves—as part of the work. Maybe there is a parallel with Jeff Koons's *Jim Beam - J.B. Turner Train* (1986) in this respect. If I recall correctly, Koons once said that the collector who would buy this artefact has fallen into the trap. In a way similar to how my app can be seen as both a work of art and pornography, the *Jim Beam - J.B. Turner Train* is both a (rather kitschy) artefact and a conceptual work about the tacky and addictive nature of the art world (and consumer culture in general). The buyer of the artefact becomes part of the work for those who perceive it as a primarily conceptual endeavour.

WS: Reflecting on the *ASCENDING PERFORMANCE* now, what do you think? Did it achieve an objective you had (if you had one)? Did it garner responses you predicted (if you did)?

DP: Some people regard the app as a critical artwork (you, I presume), others consume it as porn (apparently the vast majority of the 25,000 people who watched the trailer for the work on Vimeo). Some blogged about it as a porn novelty (<http://bigshoediaries.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/tap-my-app.html?zx=5681b379537b2a1b>), a few *Artforum* readers were confused about it and gallery visitors reflected on it. Amusingly, the satirical magazine *Private Eye* included the work's press release in their regular section 'Pseud's Corner', highlighting it as an example of pretentious art.



ASCENDING PERFORMANCE advertisement on *Pornhub.com*. Dani Ploeger (2015).

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**WS: Has anyone said: ‘Well, this is just porn—not art’?
If they did, what would your response be?**
DP: Yes, ‘I hope it turned you on.’

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