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Lotte Darso's Artful Creation is a significant contribution to the literature of innovation and creativity. Based on a careful and revealing series of interviews, Darso explores four dimensions of arts in business: arts as decoration, arts as entertainment, arts as instrumental activity, and arts as strategic framework.

This work deepens some of the issues that Darso (2001) explored in the doctoral thesis that became her first book. As research manager of The Creative Alliance at Learning Lab Denmark, Darso has moved from a study of the innovation process to the rich but often ambiguous exploration of how businesses create by integrating arts in management.

Through 53 interviews, Darso examined the ways that arts in business serve to open a dialogue that engenders creative social interaction and individual learning. A wide range of artists and managers narrate tales that enable us to reflect on learning opportunities that we can recast in a new theoretical framework.

Darso approaches creativity and innovation as a range of applied processes, drawing on multiple models and approaches for deep understanding and applicable learning. She draws on such authors as Chris Argyris, Donald Schon, Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley and Claus Otto Scharmer in a new and exciting way.

Artful Creation will interest the readers of Design Research News for a second reason. It is a valuable contribution to the methodological literature of design research.

First, Artful Creation enables us to explore familiar cases from a new angle. Some of the businesses we meet in this book also appear in the design research literature. These include Volvo, Bang & Olufsen, Unilever, Nycomed, Novo Nordisk and Xerox PARC. The opportunity to examine the same companies from another angle offers designers and researchers in innovation and design management a useful comparison for what they already know.

Second, Darso offers useful models for exploratory research, learning, and theory development. Design research often requires us to engage in exploratory research while working in ill-defined and ambiguous territory. In many cases, the fact that projects involve multiple academic disciplines, each with their own research tradition, while engaging multiple domains of
knowledge and practice makes such projects particularly challenging. Meeting these challenges successfully requires a level of methodological sophistication and reflectivity that some researchers in our new field have not yet developed. Darso shows how to use careful development, rich dialogue, and sensitive inquiry with gentle yet rigorous thinking to solve puzzling problems.

Because these problems are particularly difficult for researchers who use practice-based research methods for art and design research, Artful Creation can be a helpful and illuminating research methods text.

Third, Artful Creation introduces us to some of the concepts of the artful society that many of us try to bring to the practical side of our work in the practical business of design. Darso’s four approaches to arts in business compare well with the useful distinctions between design as styling, design as process, and design as innovation.


References

