

# The Museum and its Responsibilities

CIMAM 2016 Annual  
Conference Proceedings

Barcelona

November 18–20

2016

Day 1: Friday, November 18

MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona  
*Responsibility for the Community,  
Citizens, and Society*

Welcome speeches:

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- Bartomeu Marí, Director, MMCA, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea
- Mami Kataoka, Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum
- Manel Forcano, Director, Institut Ramon Llull
- Elvira Marco, Chief Executive Director, Acción Cultural Española
- Àlex Sussana, Director of the Catalan Agency for Cultural Heritage

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Perspective 02. Alistair Hudson and Miguel Amado, Director and Senior Curator, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, United Kingdom

Perspective 03. Dave Beech, Professor of Art, Valand Academy, Gothenburg, Sweden

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*Curators and Artists: New Parameters and New Responses*

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CCCB Theater: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona

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Perspective 07. Kuan-Hsing Chen, Executive Director of Inter-Asia School (NPO), Professor of the Institute for Social Research and Cultural Studies (Chiao Tung U, Taiwan), Co-Director Of the Bandung Institute for Africa-America-Asia-Caribbean (China Academy of Arts, Hangzhou), Professor of the School of Marxist Studies (Nanjing U), Cultural Studies Dept (Shanghai U), College of Humanities (Yonsei U, Seoul), the Makerere Institute for Social Research (Makerere U, Uganda), Diplomat Institute (U of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia); Editor, Inter-Asia Cultural Studies: Movement and Renjian Thought Review (Taipei)

Perspective 08. Marysia Lewandowska, Artist, London, United Kingdom

Perspective 09. Yuliya Sorokina, Curator, Asia Art+PF, Almaty, Kazakhstan

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Day 1

Friday November 18

MACBA Museu d'Art  
Contemporani de  
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Responsibility for the  
Community, Citizens,  
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# Welcome speeches

Ferran Barenblit: Good morning, welcome to Barcelona and welcome to MACBA the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona. I'm Ferran Barenblit, director since September 2015 and it's a great pleasure to have so many friends here in the city over the next three days. This is not the first time that CÍMAM visits Barcelona. I remember very well 15 years ago, I was a little bit younger... I remember very well the congress in 2001 that was held in the city. So it's great to have you here fifteen years later, especially for this very special congress that is the result of very intense organization. For one year we have been working together with the Fundació "La Caixa", Fundació Miró, Fundació Tàpies, and MACBA on this great project. This would have not been possible without the support that I want to start acknowledging. First of all, Around Art and the Han Nefkens Foundation have been very supportive of the congress. And especially the public administrations: the city of Barcelona, the government of Catalunya, the Institut Ramon Llull, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of this country via AECID, and Acción Cultural Española. All of them will be speaking later.

They'll be time today to visit MACBA and the three exhibitions that we have at the moment. You'll see on the ground floor *Hard Gelatin*, an exhibition that tries to show another vision of the eighties in Spain, our extended eighties from 1977 to 1992. This shows how, at this moment when Spain was being redefined with a new global image, there were other things happening. And I think it's very important that you understand these other things that you will be seeing during your time in our city. Then we have the Collection on the first floor and on the second we have an exhibition of Antoni Miralda, a Catalan artist.

As I said, this conference would not have been possible without the general support of all these people, but especially the team. And I would ask for a big applause for Inés, Ainhoa, Júlia, and Nuria who really have made this possible. And now we, as happens in the big countries like America, we have a president who is leaving soon and who will speak now.

Bartomeu Marí: Good morning everyone and welcome to this new edition of the CÍMAM conference that we are starting today. I want to extend our gratitude to all the institutions, private and public, that are supporting this event and make it not only possible but will contribute to making it a very

successful conference. On behalf of the board and myself, we especially want to extend our gratitude to all the speakers that have come to share their ideas with us and also to all of you coming from the four corners of the world to this event. We believe that modern and contemporary art is a central domain of public culture that needs to be brought to all through its exhibition, conservation, and study. Art defines us as human beings. 2016 is the last year of active service of the current board with Patricia Sloane as secretary treasurer and myself as president. The conference will conclude with the announcement of a new board and a new leadership for the organization for the coming three years. I would like to look back briefly to the period of these past years of our activity. After many years of hard work and negotiations, CÍMAM now exists as a legally registered organization and as of March 2016 we are a not-for-profit cultural association registered under Spanish law. We have become an affiliated organization of ICOM, which maintains our excellent relationships with ICOM itself but also means a lot for the sustainability and the efficiency of CÍMAM. We continue to be the most relevant and global platform for professional debate in our sector and we are able now to receive donations and to hire the employees who run the CÍMAM office, which was not the case before. CÍMAM is in good financial health. The secretary treasurer will report to all of us at the general assembly this coming Sunday and I want to celebrate that today CÍMAM functions like an NGO. We are a transparent organization; we are an efficient organization. We don't have fiscal benefits, we don't have fixed government grants or fixed private sponsorship, so I think it is proof of that efficiency precisely to be functioning under these conditions. We hope that they will be better in the future and we hope that we can do more. In the past years, museums have been affected by the changes and evolutions that are reshaping our world along with the constant growth of museums and events related to contemporary art around the world, especially in Asia. The need for the development of public cultures, education, and the new literacies has made museums look beyond their role as safety boxes for precious objects or arenas of spectacular events. Museums are real engines for collective intelligence and the common interest. I am convinced that CÍMAM has contributed to enlarging and deepening the debates of museum professionals and that brilliant minds from different fields have helped us along the way. With the past six years,

and I count here the three years that I also served as secretary treasurer with Zdenka Badovinac as president, there is only one regret. And that is the loss of several very valuable members of our board, who chose to leave their functions after the Tokyo conference last year. Since then the CÍMAM board has been composed of Madeleine Grynsztejn, Philipp Kaiser, Mami Kataoka, Kian Chow Kwok, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, Frances Morris, Jaroslaw Suchan, Marcela Römer, Patricia Sloane, and myself. We have enjoyed a wonderful period of strong commitment and companionship together. The contents of the 2016 conference were developed by a commission composed by the majority of those board members in collaboration with Ferran Barenblit, director of MACBA. I would like to conclude these words of welcome by expressing my enthusiasm and deep gratitude to those who have devoted their time, their ideas, and their dedication to our organization during our three year tenure, with special thanks to my colleagues on the board, to Inés Jover and Jenny Gil for their patience and brilliant support, and to all of you for making CÍMAM a very exceptional and meaningful and universal organization. I just look forward to a very exciting and brilliant conferences such as those we have had for many years.

Mami Kataoka: Good morning, everyone. My name is Mami Kataoka, one of the board members and it's great to see you after the Tokyo conference last year. I'm here to read a message on behalf of our new president of ÍCOM, Suay Aksoy. "Dear president, colleagues, guests. In its 17 years of life, which we realized in full this November, ÍCOM has enjoyed a strong and mutually benefiting relation with CÍMAM. First, as one of its international committees and now as affiliated organization. We have worked together to protect, protest, and promote cultural diversity, to create public awareness for the value of art and cultural heritage, and to support economic development through creative and cultural industries and tourism. At a time, so burdened with armed conflicts, economic constraints, and political repression, the responsibilities of the museum transcend its walls and boundaries; it now concerns the wellbeing of our societies across the world in every way possible. Therefore, the choice of the conference theme 'The Museum and its Responsibilities' could not be more timely. I wish you all a very fulfilling conference and sound elections. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the outgoing president, Bartomeu Marí, for his outstanding accomplishments in leading CÍMAM. I also wish the incoming president a very successful mandate and I celebrate the ÍCOM-CÍMAM collaboration while

looking forward to advancing it to higher levels in the period ahead. Have a wonderful conference. Thank you very much."

Manel Forcano: Good morning to everybody. Museums and art centers are a lot of things, but they are especially spaces where it's possible to be different, to transform ourselves when we go out after an artistic experience. I do love museums. I experience a lot of things in museums. I always feel that I do grow up every time that I visit a museum, that I easily find the way to change something of myself, to discover something else of myself. I feel that visiting a museum is like reading a poetry book. Suddenly we identify ourselves with a verse; suddenly somebody speaks for us and about us. My name is Manuel Forcano and I am currently the director of the Institute Ramon LLull, a public body funded by the Catalan government, with the purpose of promoting Catalan language studies at universities abroad, the translation of literature written in Catalan, and Catalan cultural production in other areas like theater, cinema, circus, dance, music, design, architecture, and the visual arts. It's a great honor to welcome you all here and we are really very pleased to collaborate this time with the CÍMAM annual conference in Barcelona because the real internationalization, we believe, is not only to export Catalan artists all over the world but also to import foreign ideas, voices, visions, and art productions from abroad that can offer us the possibility to be different, to grow up, to discover ourselves from a different point of view. Therefore, I want to thank you very much for coming but especially for being in charge of so many museums and art centers where we can recognize or discover new things of ourselves within their works, as between the pages of a poetry book. As the Roman poet Plinius wrote: "We count the days but we should weigh them." Thanks a lot for your work, for helping to increase the quality of our lives, for giving them more weight. Have a successful conference. Thank you.

Elvira Marco: Good morning everybody. It's very difficult to compete with a poet, Manuel. My name is Elvira Marco, I'm head of the Spanish Agency for Cultural Action (ACE) and I'm very happy to welcome you to Barcelona. Part of our mission is to bring to Spain cultural professionals from all over the world and to support Spanish cultural institutions at prestigious international forums related to contemporary creation such as this one. Probably some of you have already benefited from our visitors program on different occasions over the past years and perhaps you are also familiar with our mobility program. With this we support Spanish artists who

have a project commissioned by a foreign institution. ACE is very proud to support, as I said, the CIMAM Barcelona edition. I know you have very intense days ahead. I hope they prove really fruitful in the reflection that you will make about the museum's responsibilities in the twenty-first century and also that you will enjoy and get to know better the cultural panorama in Barcelona but also in San Sebastian, Bilbao, and Santander. I think they will give you an insight into Spain's rich contemporary artists and creative period and museums, and hopefully some new projects and links will be born from this meeting. Thank you very much.

Alex Susanna: Good morning everyone. My name is Alex Susanna and I am currently the director of the Catalan Agency for Cultural Heritage. And I will say a few words on behalf of our Catalan Minister of Culture, Mr. Santi Vila. It is a great pleasure to welcome museum directors and professionals from all around the world to Barcelona and to Catalonia. Today you are here at MACBA, a model of public and private cooperation that was innovative when it opened some 21 years ago and which continues to be a very dynamic and essential part of our cultural life. Besides MACBA, during your stay you will have the opportunity to visit and get to know some of our most important art institutions, for example the Caixa Foundation, the Fundació Joan Miró, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, the CCCB, Hangar, Fabra i Coats, La Virreina, the Mies Van der Rohe Pavilion, the National Museum MNAC, and also the Fundació Fotocolectania. You will see how diverse and complex our museum facilities are and I do hope you will even discover some, let's say, uniquely Catalan creativity at these institutions, as well as a passion and truly universal love of artistic expression, a sense of risk, and a shared quest for knowledge and understanding of the world with all its problems and complexities. It is therefore important for us to encourage cooperation and collaboration with institutions from around the globe. Let me give you a couple of examples. Over the past few years, we have had important success stories with joint productions. For example, I remember the collaboration between Tate Modern, the Fundació Miró, and the National Gallery in Washington devoted to Miró with the aim of showing his deep commitment to Catalan culture. That was an exhibition called *The Ladder of Escape*. And just recently, a joint endeavor between the Museum of Girona and the Hermitage in St. Petersburg concerning an exhibition on realism in Catalonia, the artists of the Empordà, and Salvador Dalí. We will be working with many of you to develop new collaborative projects and create future synergies. Over the course of your conference you will be discussing the

museum's responsibilities. A key topic and a very convenient one. You all have the mission of showing, demonstrating, and revealing how important museums are for nourishing our daily democracy, for constantly provoking discussions and debates on a very wide range of subjects. Let's say that the quality and ambition of all the different programs of our museums and art centers give the temperature or the level of a society's democracy. In any case, we are really happy to host you here and are eager to listen to the results of your debate. Many thanks and please have an enjoyable and fruitful visit to Barcelona.



# Keynote speech 01

## Marina Garcés

Philosopher and Professor, University of Zaragoza,  
Barcelona / Zaragoza, Spain

### *Short Biography:*

*Born in Barcelona in 1973, she is a philosopher and lecturer at the Universidad de Zaragoza. Her work focuses on the field of politics and critical thinking, and the need to articulate a philosophical voice capable of questioning and commitment. Her philosophy is based on an extensive experimentation with ideas, learning, and forms of intervention in today's world. She is the author of the books *En las Prisiones de lo posible* (2002), *Un mundo común* (2013), *El compromiso / Commitment, Colección Breves, CCCB* (2013), *Filosofía inacabada* (2015), and *Fora de classe / Fuera de clase. Textos de filosofía de guerrilla* (2016). Since 2002 she has promoted and coordinated the project "Espai en Blanc," a collective effort for a practical, committed, and experimental relationship with philosophical thought.*

### Presentation: *The Force of Hunger*

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The title of my paper is taken from a paragraph of *The Theater and its Double* by Antonin Artaud in which he says:

"Before speaking further about culture, I must remark that the world is hungry and not concerned with culture, and that the attempt to orient toward culture thoughts turned only toward hunger is a purely artificial expedient.

What is most important, it seems to me, is not so much to defend a culture whose existence has never kept a man from going hungry, as to extract, from what is called culture, ideas whose compelling force is identical with that of hunger."

*The Theater and its Double, p. 7*

Do these words imply that, in a world like ours that is hungry and increasingly more unequal, we should not be bothered about culture? On the contrary, we must rise to the challenge of hunger, in other words, of the sense of vital necessity as the only thing that can guide culture. To what extent does this sense of the vital necessity, associated with culture, imply a sense of institutional responsibility?

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This is an idea trapped today within a crisis of references and in a permanent conflict of interests. The responsibility of who towards whom? Where does a cultural institution begin and end? With its physical walls, in its activity, in its executive team, in the staff of workers, in its audiences and publics, in its stockholders and patrons, in its management and budgets? Does it make sense to speak of social responsibility and the common good in a market society like ours, in which institutions of learning and culture are direct agents of the interests of capitalism and its political allies?

Very often abstraction is an alibi for hypocrisy. As such, my contribution from philosophy shall be to cut through abstraction in order to fight against the hypocrisy that has accompanied the culture system since its birth.

To this end, the first step is to situate the symposium's guiding idea. Where does the idea that cultural institutions have a responsibility towards society come from? The idea that cultural institutions have a social responsibility is relatively recent and is associated with the construction of the State and

its national project. Culture is transformed into the main medium to give form and meaning to collective life when:

- \* ecclesiastical-aristocratic power, of divine origin, shifts towards the institutional power of the new emerging class of the bourgeoisie.
- \* the people go from being estates to being national: culture forges a new identity (its past, present, and future)
- \* the working class need education to be incorporated into the transformation and division of work required by the industrial revolution and the world economy.
- \* history, and no longer salvation, became the stage setting where human action acquired meaning.

In this context, modern institutions of learning and culture were founded as we know them today: museums, libraries, botanical gardens, schools, universities, auditoriums, etc. What used to be the exclusive domain of the church and of the aristocracy was opened up and, in this sense, made "public." And these institutions have a mission and therefore a responsibility: to forge (give form, conform) the political subject of the nation state. As opposed to faith and vassalage, which are relationships of obligation, of forced allegiance, this new subject is characterized by his free obedience: a free acceptance of the social contract and the labor contract, as conditions for being. The subject of the nation state is the working citizen. Today, in addition, he is a consuming and enterprising citizen, which are another two dimensions of the free acceptance of obedience. In this context, which arrives down to our days although the forms are more complicated and sophisticated, culture is in charge of constructing this freedom of the subject and at once of making him obedient (self-obedient) to the social order: legal order and national identity. And today, to neoliberal globalization.

In paragraph 187 of his *Philosophy of Right*, from the second half of the nineteenth century Hegel wrote: "Culture, in its absolute determination, is therefore liberation and work towards a higher liberation (...) Within the subject, this liberation is the hard work of opposing mere subjectivity of conduct, of opposing the immediacy of desire as well as the subjective vanity of feeling and the arbitrariness of caprice. The fact that it is such hard work accounts for some of the disfavor which it incurs."

Therefore, what culture does is to liberate us from particularisms in order to integrate the subject in the State; to liberate us from immediacy in order to force us into mediation; to liberate us from arbitrariness in order to awaken us to the viewpoint of universality. A few decades later, Freud, in

*Civilization and its Discontents*, would portray the pain of this repressive and forced integration.

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The project of the nation state and industrial capitalism, as we said earlier, also saw the birth of the revolutionary movement. In other words, the desire for freedom as a desire for true self-determination in life. From this other viewpoint, the liberation of the subject means self-emancipation. Even revolution as self-education, as Marx would say, displacing the meaning of the hard work of higher liberation proposed by Hegel. And universality is no longer that of the State and its law, but of the liberation of a social class, the proletariat, which embodies the general interest of humankind.

The liberation of the modern subject opens the possibility of thinking the radical autonomy of humankind, beyond being subjects of the State. In the same way, the system of modern culture, whose mission is to conform the voluntary servitude of citizens, is also exposed, from the beginning, to the need to develop a radical cultural critique. This critique is not one that comes from the gaze of an external, immune judge, but the self-diagnosis of suffering bodies and minds, subjected by the project of culture and its political responsibility. The critique of culture is an unmasking of the system of culture. In the three centuries in this short history of the modern State and its cultural project, the system of culture has been unmasked under different guises: as a system of hypocrisy, in the eighteenth century with authors like Diderot and Rousseau; as a system of the ideology or expression of the interests of the bourgeoisie, in the nineteenth century, with Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche; and as a new mythology, in the twentieth century, with the authors from the school of Frankfurt, Foucault, and, more recently, postcolonial critique.

From this critical position, the question of the responsibility of institutions of culture remains intact but takes on another meaning: it becomes the critical question for the effects of domination that the system of culture itself produces and the possibility of transforming them. From the responsibility towards (people, children, other cultures, etc.) to the responsibility for (damage, impositions, values, and power relations...). As cultural critique and the revolutionary drive lose their capacity for social transformation and for instituting forms of life, the critical gaze inverts its relationship with time: from the future to the previous future. And also, its sense of responsibility: from mission to guilt.

Museums have been filled with these kinds of discourses, especially since the twentieth century



and very particularly in the last few decades. Institutional critique, colonial critique, critique of art languages, critique of the market... are the major themes of art museums and contemporary culture centers, as well as university departments of cultural studies and social and human sciences dedicated to studying the world today. There are knowledgeable experts in the subject and global artists who make a living by inscribing this critique within the system of culture. For instance, MACBA itself is a paradigmatic case within this network of cultural institutions, critical of culture. The first sense of responsibility, responsibility *towards*, collaborates with power. Its mission is collaborationist. The second, responsibility *for*, creates a closed circuit, increasingly more self-referential and self-justifying. Self-emancipation, when it does not manage to be revolutionary, becomes self-justification. Without us, critique would not exist, cultural institutions seem to say, increasingly more enclosed within their own audiences and in their self-complacency... And we defend the need to continue existing in order to tell ourselves the harm that the system of culture and its powers exercise over others... The unsaid premise of this existence is the tacit acceptance that power is always there, imposing its economic conditions (cutbacks, precarious contracts, private investment in profitable markets, star signings, etc.) and its discursive limits, which at any moment allow it to say enough is enough, that one cannot speak about this or speak with those. MACBA is also a paradigmatic case in this too.

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As someone who works in a cultural institution, more specifically in the university and occasionally in museums and cultural institutions, I wonder if it makes any sense to continue involving our commitment with critique and with emancipation from there. Is it possible to break this double closed circle of responsibility (towards/for)? How can a personal cultural position be turned into an effectively critical attitude?

To outline a response to this question, I wish to introduce an uncomfortable character, a character so uncomfortable that its author, an outstanding figure of the encyclopedic Enlightenment, did not dare to publish it in his lifetime: *Rameau's Nephew*. He is a grotesque character who, according to the text by Denis Diderot, we come across in a park in Paris, where he enters into a long conversation with a philosopher. The character offends the philosopher with his vileness, because he exhibits, without any attempt at hiding it, what we could call today his

precariousness. He lives in the world of culture from a state of need and does not disguise it. He sells himself rather than starve: he sells his wit and his sensibility in order to survive. Like everybody else. The only difference is that he does not hide the fact. The force of hunger connects his stomach and his sensibility. In the eyes of the philosopher, this is his baseness, because he exposes what the system of culture tries to hide: that we are all voluntary serfs, despite the fact that we hide our servitude under elevated ideals, social justifications, or under the noble sense of responsibility.

Hypocrisy, as Rameau would say. Hypocrisy and adulation are the mechanisms of a system that reproduces differences and hierarchies, but from another relationship of class and of power: the emerging bourgeoisie. Hypocrisy and adulation, we could say today, that reproduces the differences and hierarchies of the global ruling class, of its stakeholders, its investments, and its legitimization, and even through critique. We are in the middle of the eighteenth century and the critique of the system of culture had not yet been born, and not even this clandestine work would see the light of day until much later. But I am sure that a more contemporary Rameau would not hold back his critique of the simulacrum of critique that does not dare to step outside its own circuit to justify itself. We could imagine it. We could rewrite and update the text, it would have plenty to say.

We do not wish to be responsible, Rameau would say, because we would end up responding for them and to them and, what is more, without even realizing it. Let us be honest, first and foremost: let us expose the force of hunger that moves us, because in it is the measure of our dignity. Of the hunger that ties us to the circuit of material necessity, but also of the need to go beyond our material determinations. It is hunger itself. Responsibility in general does not exist. And responsibilities can only derive from the honesty of our position.

Rameau, in his precarious baseness, is aware of his dignity. The virtuous philosopher asks him, "What dignity can you have?" Dignity consists in knowing the conditions that make us voluntary serfs and, for this reason, knowing how to put a limit on them.

If critique is the possibility of entering into an open combat for the truth, with Rameau's nephew one could imagine the power of a truth that reveals the conditions of our truths, anticipating what would be a Nietzschean critique, for instance, of ideals and values. His power is embodiment. A critique that does not close itself in the circuit of critique, but that explodes and, with it, explode the appearances (adulation, lie, mediocrity, ambition...

selfishness, as Nietzsche would say, or discontent as Freud would put it) that sustain the world of culture. A critique that shows, with the body, that even the hungry, or precisely because the human being knows that it is hungry, cannot do without art, music, literature, learning, but that we should never forget who pays for our system of needs, both physiological and spiritual, and how it is paid for.

From there, the map that appears is no longer that of institutions, their stakeholders, and their partners, but another play of forces that cuts through them in which we are all involved, committed, tied, and at once with the possibility of putting a limit on our submission. It is the dance of the earth, Rameau tells us, in which we all twist ourselves, but not all in the same way. There is no outside, as the philosopher argues. There is no delegation, as the leader claims. There is a commitment with the need that moves us and the honesty not to hide it.

## Q&A with Marina Garcés

Ferran Barenblit: Thank you Marina for your kind words. I'm sure that we're all hungry for interventions. I will not start because I'm sure you're all very hungry to speak, so I give the microphone to you.

Questioner: Thank you for this amazing lecture. I'll try to get it a bit closer to our skin, using the notion of "free serfs." What is not yet clear to me are the limits — and I wonder whether it is resolvable — between, on the one hand, us as citizens exercising our self-determination, and on the other hand, we are here exercising a role. And a role, I would say, is not the free part, but is entirely the serf-like part. It is the serf-like part to a cultural institution that may to some extent be critical but, to a large extent, in order to survive, will have to accept that its critical capacity be diminished. So, what is for me the kind of irresolvable question is that there are two "me's" in this room. There is, on the one hand, "me" as a subject, and on the other hand, "me" as a role. In a certain way, I wonder whether what you have been saying about the kind of closed circuits in which indeed we are in danger of only being virtually critical to society, whether there is really something where our honesty urges us to continue nevertheless, because we are only serfs of our role, or where we have to say, let's get out of the role. That's a limit that's not clear to me. Could you say something about it?

Marina Garcés: I think that you are expressing very clearly a paradox that is not playing with words or

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I do not know the agenda of this symposium, its visible and invisible intentions. After having analyzed the brief history of the social responsibility of culture and its implications, I hope that my paper, given that it is the first, serves to put you in a position to speak and to speak to each other, during the time we are going to share together, from this honesty with the real, from this frankness that interrupts hypocrisy and the diabolic machinery of delegation and voluntary servitude. Let us not take shortcuts. Let us take the floor. Let us be honest.

intellectual play, but is precisely the paradox in which this inside-outside places ourselves. We have the voluntary servitude, which in itself is a paradoxical expression of our condition, which is the one we live, as sons of this modern politics the way I have defined it. Freedom or self-determination and obedience, servitude, are not exterior one to the other — now I'm free, now I'm obedient, now I play a role, now I don't, now like an individual I can make free use of my will. We are in a constant double bind within this condition. So, for me, what is the main challenge? Our own place doesn't exist. There is no stable place as far as a citizen responsible for an institution, a professor in my case, etc. And the question is how to take it on in way that doesn't constitute our own place, but a common place. "Common place" doesn't mean that everybody becomes myself, or your specific responsibility in your specific role in an institution can be played by anyone. It means that here, where everyone of us accepts and is making some specific interventions, we should incorporate, and I use this word using once again the body... let's invoke this system of needs that makes us be not just "you" or "me," this "we" that is not an identity, is not sectorial, national, or class, but is just this necessary interpellation to what we are and what we do from this place in which we are placing ourselves as someone who needs, and not only as serves. And here the role becomes a little bit open, displaced, to a multiplicity of levels and scales, which in the end are incarnated in a body or action, but not enclosed in its function.

So, how do we make our roles common places? For me, this is the job that we have to carry out, this critical honest job. Not thinking we have the magic recipe or mission with which we will serve others, but that we have the great privilege of opening spaces and relations, not only in an exhibition or class, but in every decision that we carry out. How do we organize ourselves, how do we allow other people to pay us... at all levels of decisions we have this questioning that goes far beyond these binary relations between service and servitude. So, what other maps are open here? I think this constant questioning is what can make this critique — which doesn't want to be outside, but inside and against — have some effect. So, what I am proposing, in reality, is a constant self-questioning. Not self-questioning from an intellectual point of view but from where I'm talking and speaking, and where the "we" appears under ways that we are not always ready to take on.

Ferran Barenblit: We are following a tight schedule, but we have time for one more...

Questioner: Thank you very much. This question is related to the earlier one. We are here as a group of museum professionals, if you like, museum curators, directors, and so on. Now, insofar as we represent institutional interests, the kind of collective that you're talking about, the kind of... factors such as the national or the city governments and so on, but to what extent do you see a forum like this, that is able to take on precisely the kind of challenge we are talking about, the kind of questioning of limits of obedience that we likewise are collectives, just as historically the bourgeoisie, the beginning of the public, and so on... to what extent could we be the public sphere or the civil society of the museum world right here, beyond the institutional interest, the very reason why we are here as a forum? I'd appreciate your comments on that possibility.

Marina Garcés: I understand that you are talking about this possibility of establishing an institutional condition, and which therefore comes from all this system that I have described. So, it goes much beyond. I understand that, in your words, you're pointing to the role of what would be the most executive institution to go to a forum, more than a congress of professionals. So, a place where your limits, not only objectives, lack of resources, etc., but your limits as professionals — where we are willing to serve — can be explained. So, I think that this forum has another dimension, another function, which is not disconnected from the first one, just the opposite. We have never said that we have to go outside in order to introduce an effective criticism,

so how do we open other possible relations with the place where, from an institutional point of view, everybody is. And here is an effect that a place like this has to provoke, otherwise this is an encounter of professionals exchanging all their experiences, but anybody can do it. So, I think that there is an aspiration to make this forum a meeting, and I hope that it's like this.

Ferran Barenblit: There's no more time, but I'm sure that we'll continue this discussion, because I think that it's embedded in everything that will be said in the next three days, so just join me in saying thanks to Marina for these very inspiring words.

# Perspective 01

## Calin Dan

General Director, National Museum of Contemporary Art — MNAC  
Bucharest, Bucharest, Rumania

### *Short Biography:*

*With a background in Art History and Theory, Calin Dan has been active for over twenty years as an art critic, curator, and historian, and as a visual artist. He worked as a member of the post-Conceptual group subREAL and is currently conducting the long-term art-&-research project "Emotional Architecture." He acted as advisor to the Mondrian Fund and Pro Helvetia, and as a leader to cultural institutions such as Arta magazine and the Soros Center for Contemporary Art, before becoming director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art — MNAC Bucharest. He was involved with the creative industries as art director for the Dutch media company Lost Boys. His writing, curatorial, and academic work (at the Art Universities of Budapest and Bucharest, and the New Europe College, Bucharest) define him both as a thinker and creator, with a special concern for the role of contemporary art institutions today. At MNAC, he elaborated strategies of recuperation, giving a platform to local Conceptual artists from the 1970s and eighties, where starting a regional network meant generating a significant cultural pole for active artists and curators from the former communist countries. His most recent curatorial work involved solo shows and textual analysis focusing on the work of Horia Bernea, Liviu Stoicoviciu, Alexandru Chira, Deimantas Narkevicius, and Jiri Kovanda.*

### Presentation: *Donkey's dilemma — a case study*

The case study I am presenting to you, which is obviously the museum with which I have worked in a management capacity for more than two years now, and which I have known very closely since its initiation in 2001... the example is the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, with the acronym MNAC. I have to apologize that there are a few MNACs in the region, that's a coincidence. There is one in Barcelona, there is another one in Lisbon, that I visited recently. So, in my first slide I will put an "R" after the "MNAC", so it's... the MNACR of Romania so as not to mistake it for anything else. Though it would be hard to do so considering the few facts I'm going to lay in front of you.

#### *MNACR — Realists vs. Moralists: how to recycle history?*

The reason for talking about this museum is not because I'm working there and because it's something I control in terms of subject,

but because I think that it can be a useful point for discussion, formal or informal, as you wish, around the situation and condition of cultural institutions in what we could define broadly as a post-Cold War period, which could be connected also to a post-colonial period if we accept that an important number of countries that were involved in the Cold War, including Romania and other Eastern and Central European countries in the Soviet Bloc were part of a colonial system and now are trying to enter a healing period of post-colonial changes. I wouldn't call them de-colonial — it didn't go that far — but post-colonial for sure. MNACR is a good example, starting with the venue where it is placed. I'm going to say that it is located in the Palace of the Parliament, which was originally known as the Palace of Ceaușescu, and is still considered the largest office building in the world. I think everybody or almost everybody knows about that, and for sure people visiting Romania and Bucharest visit that palace, though not necessarily the museum. The museum is in a small part of a hidden wing behind



the palace. And the problem of being in that location is the problem of working between morality and realism. In order to build up that monstrous thing, I think 30–40% of the old city of Bucharest had to be demolished, and a lot of personal tragedies occurred in that process.

*(im)moral ruins?*

So, when the museum was installed in the Palace of the Parliament there was a big uproar and there was something like the *Bataille entre les anciens et les modernes*. There was this battle between the realists and the moralists and people were saying: it's immoral to put such an institution, a new institution, a renewing institution, in such a place; while the realists were saying: yeah, what can we do better, what would be the alternative? And the realists were winning, and from the ruins came the ambition of having a contemporary art institution.

*(im)moral ambitions?*

An institution that was intensely desired by the art community of Romania, and I remember at that time — in the nineties when, for personal reasons, I wasn't living in the country, but I was going back and forth — that I was absolutely amazed by the fact that the country was going through a very bad period economically, politically, with neo-communists in power, etc. People wanted to have their museum of contemporary art, while, looking from the outside, I thought that the necessities lay somewhere else. But, in a way, people know better. So, we're talking, today, about responsibilities: the responsibilities of museums towards community, towards society, towards everybody. I think I'm going to turn the tables and try to implicitly address mostly the responsibility of people, and the responsibility of politics, and the responsibility of money, and the responsibility of all other agencies towards museums, because this is hardly addressed. I enormously enjoyed the keynote this morning because it was talking about hypocrisy, it was talking about slogans, it was talking about ignoring hunger. Well, there is also a hunger inside those institutions, the hunger is not only outside. Just as we shouldn't ignore hunger in society, whether that be physical or cultural, we definitely shouldn't ignore the needs of museums.

*MNACR — wild beast or tamed pet?*

I knew you'd like that. It was part of my rhetoric. But this is, in a lighter way, condensing the condition of the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest for the last 15 years, or maybe for the

first 10–12 years of what is now an existence of 15–16 years. So, what should that museum be? Somebody's pet or somebody's beast? Should it be, as people were saying, a thorn in the side of the parliament, which is a putrid, corrupt, inefficient institution? I'm quoting... it's not my opinion. Or should it be a very nice steward of whatever: the politics, the art community in Bucharest, the international art scene, the artists themselves. Should it exist or should it fight to extinction? And that was, of course, extremely exhausting, putting a heavy weight on the curatorial policies, on the managerial policies, on the whole trajectory of the museum for 10–12 years.

*The collection: burden or challenge?*

Later on, another dilemma. Well, it was there from the beginning, but it still came out later because everybody was busy with the place, and nobody was very busy with what the place had to offer. Now, looking at the collection of the museum, and trying to put it in a historical perspective, you'll discover a dilemma that I would synthesize as the burden of collecting, or the burden of the collection. And, to my relief, because it's always good not to be alone when you have a problem, but also to my dismay... well, traveling around in the last years I've heard more people from modern museums, from other parts of the world, expressing the same problem of the burden of a collection that they took over, a collection that covers an important amount of years, a collection that was not necessarily curated, or curated according to criteria that are not currently interesting or valuable to us. And, of course, those collections have to be looked after, they have to be preserved, they have to be conserved. Deaccession is a complicated issue. Deaccession is a more complicated issue if you don't have valuable stock. So, you sell one thing and then you buy another beautiful thing. But when you have a collection for which there is no real market, what do you do with it? The collection of the museum that was recently put in a setting that allows people to reach their own diagnosis, the crowds of people who want to have a collection on view in Bucharest, to understand what the collection is about and what it can be about.

Of course, historically it's very interesting. It comes from the 1950s to the 1960s, and until the 1990s it was exclusively a State collection. It was purchased on political and administrative criteria by civil servants who were scanning the political exhibitions or the sort of shows of people who were more or less politically committed. And it includes important portraits, official portraits of politicians, mainly of the dictatorial couple, Nicolae and Elena



Ceaușescu. Now, it is a very exciting body of images for research purposes, for somebody who wants to draw a cultural history of the last fifty or sixty years. For cultural anthropologists, it's a very interesting body of work and we are very willing to work with it that way. But if you are part of the dynamic of a contemporary art museum in a city that has thousands of very young artists, who bring an extreme pressure of affirmation, with an extreme need to have a platform for themselves, and with a very important urge to have a referential place for themselves, then you're already torn between those two things. So, of course, it's very challenging to have such a collection. It's going to be very sexy to do things with it. But, meanwhile, you have people lining up at the door and wanting eagerly to be part of the museum of contemporary art.

### *Big institutions frustrated with politics*

And, even more than that, they would like to be part of something that is more like contemporary dynamics, you know, live arts, performing arts, dance, improvisations, music, and, of course, you have to cater for all those needs, while at the same time catering heavily for the collection. So, where are we in big institutions? Because, for better or worse the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest is a big institution, which is hilarious, because if I showed you our budget — which I could, because we live in a totally transparent State — you would see that we are not a big institution. Sixty people can be a lot, and sixty people can be not very many, according to the ambitions, according to the context, according to the working morale, according to the salaries they get... So, let's say we are a big institution, so... there is a problem between big institutions and politics, at least in my part of the world. We are frustrated with politics... there are many reasons for that, but the visual explanation is the easiest...

### *RO 1990-2016: 24 Ministers of Culture*

So, what would you do? Among these people, I could point out a few outstanding intellectuals, art historians, theater people, film people, philosophers, architects, cultural managers, but what can they do when they succeed each other with such speed? And I didn't want to complicate the morning by telling you that some of them returned several times as minister, so we are looking at least at 29–30 ministers in less than 26 years. So, this kind of volatility is of course not helping. Now, sometimes you have a politician in charge and you pray God that he or she is gone. But even then, it is better to have a plan... better working on a longer time scale,

better trying to negotiate and to adjust than be defensive on both sides. The ministers come in, they look around, and they say my God, in six months I'm out of here, I'm not signing anything. So, you sit in your office and you send papers, and you try to discuss with those people and of course there is no possibility for dialog.

### *People frustrated with big institutions*

Well, I think, there are a lot of commonplace things I'm telling you here. This is, I think, my contribution. In the sense that people are frustrated with big institutions. I think people today, especially the young generations, are frustrated with institutions *per se*. Now, there are a lot of reasons for that. One of them is that there are too many people around. You know, there is this American, scientist who made a huge career by demonstrating that, if we are multiplying like we do right now, we are completely doomed. And he does it in a brilliant way. I don't know about doomed or not, but I've definitely noticed an increased social, professional, and peer-to-peer tension in the last years, and I think part of this is the fact that there are more and more very well educated people who are living on skid row almost, who are living on the margins of the scene, and who really don't find a place for themselves. So, in order to find a place they have to be extremely ingenuous, they have to really fight hard day in and day out. And some institutions become their targets. Because they want to be part of the institutional discourse, they think it's legitimate that they are part of that discourse, and at the same time obviously there is no room for them, there is no filter, there is no possibility to bridge so many needs. Where I think the problem lies is in the previous slide. When I say big institutions have a problem with politicians, and when people have problems with big institutions, people tend to ignore that the institutions are not part of the crisis, they are not the source of the problem.

So, the problem right now is that people don't directly address big politics in order to make changes. Because going through this loop is never going to be effective. Saying that this museum or this library or this school or this academia doesn't do, doesn't make, doesn't give. It's good to be critical, but at the same time you have to look at the bigger picture. Why don't those things happen? And what is the chain of responsibilities? And maybe readjust the way you are addressing the issues and readjust the intensity and also the focus of your critique. The first people that would benefit from that, and that's why I'm making this egotistic plea, would be the institutions. As soon as there is a cultural force that realizes that institutions are trying

to solve problems. But they don't have the instruments for doing that. I think we are a bit further. By the way, since we like anecdotes, this is the recent opening at the MNACR. It happened on November 10. The weather was quite good. We had almost 3,000 people lining up to see the shows. That speaks a bit about the need for museums; that speaks a bit about the need for young, visual culture in Bucharest and in Romania. And if you look, they are mostly very young people. And, of course, there were some interesting triggers also, like a small lounge and a small concert, but people were really flooding the museum and going to the exhibitions and staying long into the night.

There are other institutions we are having problems with. Imagine that the Museum of Contemporary Art is trying to hold its own with this big building and with these big institutions, the Palace of Ceaușescu and the parliament. But the news is that behind the big building there is now going to come an even bigger building, which is going to be the cathedral of the nation. Well, that's to be laughed about indeed. So, with all respect I mean that topographically, geopolitically, psychologically, whatever the angle is, an institution dedicated to contemporary art, to the future, to young audiences could survive in such a position, between big politics and between the big church, which, being an orthodox church, is connected with big politics. I don't think that contemporary art has very much room to negotiate, but then what do we do? Where do we go? In order to go somewhere you need the support of politicians. In order to have the support of politicians you need the understanding of the contemporary art phenomenon, which is quite limited. But trying to post those things on the website and show them to the people who are going to go to the ballots and who are our audiences, and maybe it would be interesting to associate with us... But it's a very long run.

*Between people, politics, and market: squeezed or pleased?*

This is the terrace of the museum, it's a beautiful place to be... if you can get there, because access to the museum area is extremely difficult. You have to imagine that nowadays the parliament building is high-security, and they do everything possible to stop people coming. I have a protocol with them, but there are always glitches in the protocol, and also we're trying to have a relationship with the local government, with the municipality, which is totally against including that area, which was cut from the city in the eighties... it's totally against including that area in the city infrastructure. There is no public transportation to the area or to the museum for that

matter, and, systematically, access with automobiles in that compound is denied. And that's killing the attention, because Bucharest people are car people — they drive cars to go round the corner to buy cigarettes, so if you want them to come to the museum, you better let cars in. There is a huge area for parking there, but there is no parking area available around the compound. It's impossible to get there. On a good day and for a good party, people really crowd towards the museum. They hang out on the terrace, and that's a very pleasant thing. And I want to leave the premises of the National Museum of Contemporary Art with this beautiful and optimistic image.

So, we are sitting between people, politics, and the market... I didn't tell you yet about the invisible hand of the market. This is a beautiful metaphor, because it means something completely different than it meant originally. As you might remember, Adam Smith said the invisible hand of the market mishmash this and that... everything is fine. While, when I hear the words "invisible hand," immediately I have in my mind expressionistic films, like those by Sternberg: the hand that is coming and strangling you... So I don't know how that looks and what the invisible hand of the market really does, but I didn't see, I didn't feel its touch, until now in the contemporary art scene in Romania.

There is very little money going around, but there are many ambitions, and those ambitions are focusing on a few big collections, and the collectors are going to build for themselves very important museums of contemporary art pretty soon — two of them are already in the making. So, there will be yet another factor, another actor in the play, besides the people who don't trust us, and besides the politicians who ignore us. When I say us, I mean the bigger "us." I'm not referring to the Museum of Contemporary Art only. And, therefore, things are going to become more and more complicated. So that's why I think that pushing forward the agenda of the other actors responsible is as important as discussing, debating, and analyzing what our responsibilities are, because if I look around at myself and my modest experience, and it's about 20 years that I've been working on and off with these institutions, I think museums are doing pretty well.

*This is the donkey's dilemma*

And now, the end of it. Some of you probably know about the donkey's dilemma. It was first mentioned in a book in Arabic literature in the thirteenth century, but it was knocking around in Indo-European culture for thousands of years. So, just to refresh your memory, there's a farmer and his

son — but it can be even more complicated, because it could be the farmer, the wife, and the son — and the donkey going to market in a neighboring city, where the donkey is supposed to be sold. It's going to be a sad moment of separation. So, as they go, they pass groups of people and they go from village to village before getting to the fair. And, wherever they are, people are uttering opinions: so the donkey is hot, and the kid is tired, and it's early in the morning, it's obvious he's been woken up too early, and people say: "Why don't you put the kid on the donkey? The kid is tired." So the father puts the kid on the donkey. At the next pit stop, the opinion is that the kid is a monster, because the father is old and tired — why should the young kid ride the donkey and not the father? So, the father rides the donkey, and the kid walks. Next stop, the view is that both of them should ride the donkey. Now the donkey suffers, there are too many people on his back. The climax is that the people enter the city with the donkey on their back, but the city people don't take to this kind of arrogant behavior, and a fight ensues. The fight takes place on a bridge, and the donkey falls in the water and drowns.

I think that's where we are right now — having so many agencies, and so many opinions, and all of us being so clever and at the same time so very politically correct, I'm sorry to say that we have to please everybody. So where do we go from here? I think we have to look at things one step at a time. I think we have to look at the fact that the donkey has to survive, that people are responsible, and that at every moment in time the responsibilities are what they are, and the important thing is not to look at the road at that moment. So, if you see me on the donkey at a certain point in time, just think that maybe two days before I was taking the donkey on my back, and you don't have to blame me now, because I was looking after my donkey very well, thank you.

# Perspective 02

## Alistair Hudson and Miguel Amado

Director and Senior Curator, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, United Kingdom

### *Short Biography:*

*Alistair Hudson was appointed the new Director of Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in October 2014. His new vision for Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art is based on the concept of the Useful Museum, as an institution dedicated to the promotion of art as a tool for education and social change. You can read more about his vision at [www.visitmima.com/about/vision-for-2015-2018](http://www.visitmima.com/about/vision-for-2015-2018) For the previous decade he was Deputy Director of Grizedale Arts in the Lake District, which gained critical acclaim for its radical approaches to working with artists and communities, based on the idea that art should be useful and not just an object of contemplation. Key projects in this time include Romantic Detachment, PS1/MoMA, New York; Happystack, China; Instituto Mechanicos, São Paulo Bienal; the development of the Coniston Mechanics Institute, Cumbria; and Confessions of the Imperfect: 1848–1989–Now, at the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven. He was educated at Goldsmiths College (1988–91) and has previously worked at the Anthony d’Offay Gallery London (1994–2000) and The Government Art Collection (2000–4) where, as Projects Curator, he devised a public art strategy for the new Home Office building with Liam Gillick. He is co-director of the Asociación de Arte Útil with Tania Bruguera and was a jury member for the 2015 Turner Prize.*

*Miguel Amado is Senior Curator at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, England. He was the curator of the Portuguese Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale. He has been a curator at Tate St Ives, England, and the Centro de Artes Visuais in Coimbra, Portugal, among other institutions. He has been a curatorial fellow at Rhizome at the New Museum and Independent Curators International in New York. Also in New York, he has been a curator-in-residence at the International Studio and Curatorial Program and the Abrons Arts Center. As a freelancer, he has curated exhibitions and projects at various institutions and events. These include apexart, New York; Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon; Frieze Projects at Frieze, London; and No Soul for Sale: A Festival of Independents, X Initiative, New York, and Tate Modern, London. He is a contributor to Artforum and has been a lecturer and symposium organizer for organizations such as the Instituto Europeo di Design, Venice, and ARCO, Madrid. He is attending the MRes in Curatorial/Knowledge at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is a graduate of the MA in Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art.*

**Presentation: *If all Relations were to Reach Equilibrium, then this Building would Dissolve: The Useful Museum in Post-Artistic Times***

Alistair Hudson: Hello everybody. Thank you for inviting us from our humble institution. I’m Alistair Hudson, this is Miguel Amado, senior curator at

mima, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art. So, this is mima, which I took over as director of two years ago. It’s a medium-sized institution,



built ten years ago so that this town could have its Guggenheim. In an attention economy it couldn't compete in the world as a player, but it had contemporary art, it had culture, and it wasn't falling behind the times. This was essentially the logic of an institution like this. But several years on, this institution is in a kind of crisis, like many others, but we are far from that idea of regeneration, far from the idea of how the attention economy works in the broader situation.

This is the location of mima in the northeast of England. And this is the map of the Brexit vote and the blow up at the top left is the northeast of England: you'll see the darkest patch on that is Middlesbrough in the Tees Valley, which was the epicenter of the Brexit vote. Middlesbrough exists because of the steelworks. In 1830 they discovered coal and steel, and they built. The steelworks evolved and that is the reason why Middlesbrough is there. One year ago, the steelworks closed for good, with the loss of over 8–9,000 jobs; we don't know the exact total yet. What was one of the largest steelworks in Europe has now gone forever, and with it the logic and reason for the town. The impact of this on what was already a disenfranchised region of the country, or region of the world left behind by globalization, has resulted in it being called the Detroit of the UK and you can see why: this is not a demolition site with a purpose, this is decay where people do not have a plan. It also has the largest proportion per capita of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Not by central government planning, but by market forces at work.

The privatization of the relocation industry of migrants and asylum seekers is run by one of the richest companies in the UK. This is the image, the person who feels the effects of this most. So where did we get to, how do we make a museum run in a place like this? Museums historically were built on excess, on wealth, the extra icing on the cake. So how do you run a museum in an area of decline? What function does it have? I think we have to go back to the software of these institutions, which was designed in the nineteenth century. So here is an image I use a lot, which is Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. I continuously referred to this as the box cover image for the software of modernity. This is the singular male hero artist striding out above and beyond the world, leading us to some wonderful future or some critical future perhaps, but nonetheless this is where the die is cast.

The software engineer behind the box cover is Immanuel Kant with his duality of purposeless purpose and the disinterested spectator. This is the programming that in effect created modernity or at least modern art on our current conditions. So how

do we escape this cycle? How do we get out of where we are now that we have created these conditions that result in extreme disenfranchisement, in extreme anger and divisiveness in society? And I think we could often picture the pinnacle of modernity like this: the apex, which is somewhere between 1848 and 1989. With *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* somewhere here at the very tip or Einstein's theory of relativity, etc.

So, in looking at this historical moment, how can we rethink, how can we reboot the system, and what other software can we find in that system, in that history? One of the key figures in this, certainly from my perspective, was the nineteenth-century writer, artist, and socially engaged art practitioner John Ruskin, who at that time was campaigning against industrialization, talking about ecology, about global warming, about art as a fundamental component of human life. Not as something separated from the world, not for its own sake, but importantly as a tool and a tool for social change. Epitomized in what were a series of lectures that essentially argue for an ecological aesthetics: where we cannot escape the system we are in, we have to define it from within and modulate it and work with the complexities of life.

This is a lecture on the growth of a tree given at the Royal Institution in 1872, which was really about how we work as citizens in society, as creative individuals and collectively like the branches and leaves of a tree. This thinking of looking again at how we might reintroduce the idea of use or usership or user-value back into the equation of art in society, converged around 2012 with a number of people we'd been in conversation with about how we might do this. One of these was Tania Bruguera.

In 2012, together with some colleagues at the Van Abbemuseum, we wrote what we called the criteria of useful art or *arte útil*, art as a tool. To start to think about versions of art, approaches to art, which operated outside the normal performative frame of the system, of the market dominated system, which would start to exemplify this other way of working. So, together with a collective effort and a board or an association of *arte útil*, we set about documenting these on a website. The case studies as we called them — over 500 — were then presented at the Museum of Arte Útil, which in a way took over the Van Abbemuseum in 2013 as a major exhibition of this idea, showcasing all these examples from around the world. Some around education, some around politics, some around enterprise and business, some around domestic refurbishment, some offering hope and escape or opportunities for refugee populations. But essentially this is art working in the world on a one-to-one scale.



Not representing the issues but involved in changing them at their very core.

An example of this in the UK, which in a way I highlighted in nominating it for the Turner Prize last year, was the Granby four streets project in Toxteth, Liverpool, the area that was the epicenter of the Liverpool riots in 1981. In a region that was condemned by the council, a community group set about refurbishing the houses on their own terms from the ground up, and then enlisted an art design collective called Assemble who refurbished the houses. And they won the Turner Prize, much to the consternation of many people in the art world.

I had a few wagging fingers and angry art dealers who were aghast at the idea that something that you couldn't sell could win the Turner prize. But one of the principle things here was that this was not just the artist at work. What we are talking about here is a redistribution of the idea of authorship. So, Michael Simon who leads the group, is actually as much as an artist as anybody else. He has driven the project for the last 20–30 years but has involved artists in what they are already doing rather than looking for artists to take the lead. In moving and trying to push this agenda forward, in trying to reshape what we think of as art and how we value it in the world, we understand Stephen Wright, the Canadian theorist who put together the lexicon of usership, which is all the incoming and outgoing terms that we might start to use in describing this way of working.

You can get this book as a free pdf download on the *Arte Útil* website. And one of the key terms in this was the museum 3.0. Imagine the museum 1.0 to be the Victorian version, where you put great art in the museum and people come along, see it, and are somehow better for it. Museum 2.0 is more of a nineties touchy-feely version of this, where you put the great art in the museum and invite people to participate in it, but nonetheless it's still the same top down agenda. So, museum 3.0 becomes a museum that is created through active usership, through different constituencies' use of the museum on their terms. And what we've been trying to do within mima itself is to reconstruct, reprogram, and bend the institution. Not knock it down and start again, because you can never get outside the system. But to begin to imagine and shape how we might actually think along these terms.

The first instance of this was an exhibition called *Localism*, which was an antidote to the international blockbuster, and for this exhibition we told the story of the history of art in Middlesbrough, but us not as the expert. Rather, we invited the public to tell us what should be in the exhibition. To collectively make an exhibition that told the story of the role that the arts play in people's day-to-day

lives. Not some exceptional, internationalist idea of what art in its highest form should be. This is our version of the Alfred Barr diagram of 1936 telling the story about art in Middlesbrough by a local signwriter. And you can imagine this sort of collection device as a warehouse emerging throughout the shows.

We didn't stop at the opening. People continued to add things as we went along. It included historical things like the Linthorpe pottery, which was Christopher Dresser's nineteenth century regeneration art project that used the clay from the ground to provide employment for unemployed people, thus providing an economy that would deliver back to the community. And this platform developed new projects on the back of this, so we now have a new Linthorpe run by the artist Emily Hesse, who throughout the show and beyond had been teaching ceramics, creating new ceramic wares from the very same clay in the ground, as a way of social thinking. And it's not merely about pottery... You might ask how can you change? How can you have social effects through pottery? I could make the case given another hour, but it's interesting that Emily Hesse is now running for mayor of Middlesbrough. She launched her campaign last week.

Similarly, we can look at other moments like this to reuse our history. Take the Middlesbrough settlement of the 1930s, an artistic project to provide employment at a time when unemployment amongst miners was 95%. Basically, it was an upper class, communist family who lived in a big house in Middlesbrough and who introduced a designer called Wilfred Franks to teach the miners how to make furniture, which they then sold in Sloane Square, London, as a community enterprise. We've now restarted this, using CAD design and technology to teach young people, the new unemployed, about how to think through design and how to create and remake society: not just furniture. Now the museum begins a trajectory where it is no longer putting on exhibitions for their own sake but is beginning to use the site and the town as a center of making, to think through how we can instruct society that exhibitions are not serviced by public program, but that the public program is serviced by exhibitions that respond to current urgencies. They're about what's happening now.

One example from this summer was an exhibition that was a response to the closure of the steelworks about how those steelworkers who had lost their jobs might take control and make decisions about the future of the steelworks site. How by exhibiting and using the show as a platform to demonstrate new technologies, new startups could emerge that will build a new future for the town.

And my colleague Miguel is going to talk about the second urgent response exhibition that we conducted this summer.

Miguel Amado: Thank you. I hope it will be fine to browse through the project conceptually, demonstrating visually how it worked. One of the key issues we have, one about our identity, is the fact that Middlesbrough has the most asylum seekers in the UK. And that was a question, even for someone like myself who arrived there 18 months ago and was not aware of that reality. We intended to make the projects as an awareness-raising session, in a place that, as Alistair highlighted, was fustigated by Brexit. In a nutshell, it's an economic reason. All of the asylum process in the UK is privatized. Those arriving in Middlesbrough 18 months ago like myself became aware that asylum seekers were living in houses in an area of the town called Gresham.

The reason is because the process is privatized. The Home Office in the UK hires two or three private security companies, one of which is G4S, which then hire a housing provider across the country to buy houses very cheaply to put people in. These companies receive 40 pounds a day per person, while the asylum seekers receive a five-pound voucher per day to buy food. This exploded in the media this January and led to a Home Affairs Select Committee on the migration crisis, which in turn led to our project.

Incidentally, Alistair was working for the government art collection in the UK in the early 2000s when the Home Office designed a new building. Buildings like this need art to beautify them and at that time Alistair commissioned Liam Gillick to put together something. One of the elements of the project that was not selected was a text piece by Liam: "When all relations are equal this building will dissolve." I contacted Liam to ask whether we could use this sentence as the beginning of our project, as curatorial thinking. And this became the title. Another key element takes us back to Stephen Wright, to an essay from 2004 in which he has this amazing paragraph talking about art without art: "Art without artists, without artworks, and without an artworld." And that has shaped both our mindset and curatorial practice.

Next to mima is another public building: the library. And the library is much used by people who don't come to the museum. I very often see people queuing to enter the library: to read, to learn, or simply to have access to internet. We thought we needed to use this kind of learning and service provision as a key element of our project.

Thinking now in terms of display, these are just references that I use a lot in terms of how things should look in the gallery space: Aby Warburg's

*Mnemosyne Atlas* and Malevich's famous exhibition of Suprematist art. Chinese Dazibao is a public newspaper reading structure, with the idea of collectivity, but also kindergarten panels.

These were all shaping our ideas about the display, including utility furniture from the interwar period. We worked with a local charity called Investing in People and Culture, which operates from the basement of a Catholic community hub. And it was through this hub that we managed to start connecting deeply with asylum seekers or people living in Middlesbrough who had sought asylum in the past and had been granted leave to remain or had refugee status.

This man here is Ausama Khalil, an Iraqi who was part of the team that decorated Saddam Hussein's palaces in the early 1980s. He survived the Iran/Iraq war, the First Gulf War, and the Second Gulf War, only to end up in Middlesbrough. He makes paintings and these went into the show. We commissioned a local artist based in Newcastle to develop a project with the volunteers of IPC. Here you have the artist making the film but you also have myself as producer, operating as a co-creator of everything. Some of the people that we interviewed started working with us and became our constituents.

We also had to become aware of what's going on across the globe in terms of the situation in art. Artists and museums are now turning to these subjects, but we should look at this as a subject. This is a very important manifesto from a group in Australia, which became our introduction to the show; our text panel. And these were elements that we wanted to highlight. By taking about art without art, we are starting to put things on display that are not necessarily art, although they are a different kind of art. A toolkit from an activist group in London, a film from scholars at Goldsmiths College, a piece by artists Oliver Ressler and Zanny Beg, shot on a rooftop in the Eixample in Barcelona. Babi Badalov was showing this kind of work at the ARCO art fair in Madrid this year. And so, these all became elements that we were trying to incorporate. This is the whole list of participants and contributors, including propaganda items for display.

This is a sketch and this is how it looks. I am going to just browse quickly so you can see the kind of display we had. This is the man that runs Jomast, the country's largest housing provider, which benefits from the system. These are the paintings of Ausama Khalil and next to them is a piece by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, one of the rising stars of today's artworld. And you have more things like this. This text became a piece in itself. And these are the paintings that we brought from IPC, made by asylum seekers in the UK. Babi Badalov flags... Furniture designed by architecture students in Newcastle.

We started the project by making public the research we had to put in place. We organized a study day that incorporated scholars and activists, as well as volunteer members of IPC and other charities, including Bini who is the key player in this project in terms of facilitating the relationship between ourselves and the groups. And then we initiated what we called the community day, which included a set of activities from morning to evening, mostly bringing together asylum seekers who perhaps don't have other places where they can get together and develop what we call a set of self-empowerment strategies. The key element of this was a community lunch, which was served inside the galleries by IPC. Food produced by asylum seekers for people seeking asylum. It was free every Thursday and it became a very lively hub with a mix of staff, visitors, and members of these groups.

# Perspective 03

## Dave Beech

Professor of Art, Valand Academy, Gothenburg, Sweden

### *Short Biography:*

*Dave Beech is a member of the art collective Freee, a writer, and Professor of Art at Valand Academy, Gothenburg. His recent book Art and Value, published by Brill (2015), was shortlisted for the Deutscher Memorial Prize. His work has been exhibited at the Istanbul Biennial and the Liverpool Biennial, as well as Centro Cultural, Montehermoso, Vitoria, Spain; the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh; International Project Space, Birmingham; and 100000mph Gallery, London. He co-authored the book The Philistine Controversy, Verso (2002; with John Roberts), edited the MIT/Whitechapel book Beauty, and is a founding co-editor of the journal Art and the Public Sphere.*

### Presentation: *Protesting the Museum*

I am not an art historian or philosopher, I am an artist. I say this only to excuse myself. When I speak in public and when I write, I do so without certainty. I speak to you today in the way that I present artwork in an exhibition: it represents where my inquiries have got me so far and I have not reached a point of conclusion or clarity. I speak from within a situation that has not yet fully unfolded and I merely take a series of positions as I engage in the difficulties that I face... Thinking, speaking, and writing, for me, is a form of self-fashioning. I am not an expert on protesting the museum; I am a critical protagonist within the scene that I describe, not an objective onlooker. Maybe you could keep in mind something Clement Greenberg once said of Jackson Pollock in conversation with T.J. Clark: "...he was as full of shit as anyone else."

The museum has become a site of protests that do not focus on the museum's primary activities but its economic and social embeddedness in world systems. Art activists today demand that the politics of art must exceed the previous limits of institutional critique. I am close to many of the art activists that I am referring to today, and art critics and curators have occasionally understood my work with the Freee art collective as more or less the same as the art activism that I am referring to here. In these

circumstances I have felt it to be important to distinguish between art activism and various other approaches to the politics of art, but this is not my point today. When I was invited by Platform (one of the leading art activist groups in London) to deliver what they called a "provocation" to their symposium on art activism in 2015, I began by explaining how Marxism distinguishes between reform and revolution, and used this as a basis to explain my feelings of unease on finding myself in a room full of activists who I feel are my allies but with whom I disagree. This is what I said: "Marxists like me find themselves supporting political movements that we also criticize. What's more, we tend to find ourselves among political activists who are far more enthusiastic about a particular protest than we are because they do not share the nagging feeling that this protest, equivalent to the struggle over 'fair wages' in Marx's time, is both an expression of genuine political antagonisms and a mechanism for containing those antagonisms within the system itself."

Nonetheless, the acceleration of art activism, which appeared to reach a peak on 2014 (but I am happy for the activists of 2017 to prove me wrong on this!), gives me hope.

We have heard from Professor Garcés, in a very rich account of the conceptual and social

preconditions for the current predicament of the museum, how cultural institutions became committed to social responsibility. In speaking of protests against the museum, today, I want to raise certain questions about the agency of social responsibility. Is the museum the agent of social responsibility? Does this mean the museum supports the politically engaged artist or does it subsume critique under the agenda of social responsibility? If the museum and the artists are the agents of social responsibility, then does this mean that they support or subsume constituencies and communities of protest?

I want to focus on protesting the museum not because I am against the museum or because I want the museum to live up to its mission of being socially responsible but because I am interested primarily in nitpicking! There is a politics of unpicking what passes itself off as the political in any given situation, and this means asking sensitive questions not just of the managers of culture who recruit political movements for the institutions of culture, but also the activists and protestors who justify their activity either in terms of the ethics of their modes of association or in terms of the success of their campaign.

There is a long tradition of protests taking place in and against the museum. In 1914, Mary Richardson, a Suffragette, sneaked an axe into the National Gallery in London and slashed Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus*. "I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history," she said, "as a protest against the Government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history." In 1974, Tony Shafrazi wrote "KILL LIES ALL" with red spray paint over Picasso's *Guernica*, protesting Richard Nixon's pardoning of William Calley, a convicted war criminal found guilty of murdering 22 of the 500 unarmed South Vietnamese civilians killed in the My Lai massacre in 1968.

The Art Worker's Coalition, known as the AWC, was founded in 1969 at an event titled "Open Public Hearing on the Subject: What Should be the Program of the Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers Coalition?" Three hundred men and women attended this meeting. The AWC had an "action committee," attended among others by the *Guerrilla Art Action Group*, which announced its "Call for the Immediate Resignation of All the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art" by lying down in the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art on November 18, 1969, exactly 47 years ago today.

The AWC pioneered a new development that saw artists organize for the purpose of protesting art museum's policies, exclusions, organization, and economies. While some retained fidelity to the

values of the AWC in the years following its demise by setting up cooperative galleries or radical publishing organizations, others such as the Guerrilla Girls renewed the AWC's style of protesting the museum. This tradition remains alive and well today across the globe, not only through the continued practice of the Guerrilla Girls as a group but also through the activism of artists as individuals, temporary collectives organizing around specific events, and through long standing campaigns.

In 2014, the Yams Collective withdrew from the Whitney Biennial in protest against the alleged racism of an artwork selected for the exhibition. This kind of art activism follows the pattern set by the AWC and the Guerrilla Girls by protesting the cultural policies and practices of the museum and by pointing fingers, naming names, and calling for actual reforms. However, there is now a new form of art activism that protests the museum, not for its museological practices but for its complicity in non-museological controversies.

Liberate Tate is an activist art collective that was formed in January 2010 during a Tate workshop on art and activism. Six years later Tate announced that it would end its relationship with BP as a sponsor. The campaign by Liberate Tate against BP's funding of the Tate galleries is not only part of a global tendency in protesting the museums of art but is also part of a new expansive variant of art's politics that puts institutional critique on a global scale. Let's note, for instance, that it is not the relationship between the museum and the city's real estate or the lack of diversity of the museum board that is being protested. In Liberate Tate, the museum is not addressed as an institution but as a node in a global system.

If the museum of art has recently come under an unprecedented level of political scrutiny in the form of boycotts, protests, and campaigns, this is not because the museum is being questioned as an institution of cultural distinction or the representative of certain special interests, but rather that the museum of art has been used as a place to stage a politics that is not principally a politics of the museum.

In this respect, Liberate Tate contrasts with the politics of art exemplified by the Guerrilla Girls. Whereas the Guerrilla Girls reveal the bias of the art museum's selection and display of artworks, Liberate Tate has nothing to say about exhibition policies and curatorial patterns of the museum, but focuses instead on the social and political significance of its economic relations. The Guerrilla Girls represent a mode of art activism that is local to art and its institutionalization, whereas Liberate Tate represents a mode of art activism that is remote



from art and establishes associational bridges between art and global political events in distant parts of the world through the non-art activities of art's institutions. The museum is central to both political practices, but the former is concerned with the museum's primary function — the collection and display of art — whereas the latter is concerned with the museum's secondary function: its income.

The No Wave Performance Task Force, which in 2014 left blood and guts in front of the Dia Art Foundation's retrospective of Carl Andre in honor of the late Ana Mendieta, is closer to the Guerrilla Girls than Liberate Tate, insofar as it addresses questions about the museum's primary function in selecting and exhibiting art. It links Mendieta's death to gender inequality in art more generally, but its politics is primarily the politics of art and its institutions.

Liberate Tate belongs to a new configuration of activist art such as the campaign against the funding of the 19<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney in 2014, the São Paulo Bienal and Manifesta in St. Petersburg. The boycotting of the Biennale of Sydney was a political act aimed not at the curatorial policies of the biennale but at the objectionable business of its principal financial partner, Transfield Holdings, a commercial enterprise profiting from the mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Objections by 61 of the artists participating in the 31<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Bienal in 2014 was prompted by the appearance of a logo indicating that the Israeli government was among the funders of the exhibition. A letter by the protestors stated: "We the artists and participants of the 31<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Bienal refuse to support the normalization of Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian people. We believe Israeli State cultural funding directly contributes to maintaining, defending, and whitewashing their violation of international law and human rights." The boycott of Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg in 2014 was not based on the politics of Manifesta itself, the practices of the Hermitage Museum, or the curatorial selection of Kaspar König, but to the anti-gay laws of President Putin.

At the same time, activists have become increasingly resistant to the various forms of art-washing. Gentrification, which we can understand as the targeted investment in real estate that results in increased property values and the resulting exodus of poor communities and rapid relocation of the middle class to these areas, has been using art and artists as part of its rebranding of neglected neighborhoods since New York pioneered the process in the 1970s.

Liberate Tate has provided the blueprint for the divestment campaign, UAL Fossil Free, led by David Cross and his students at London's University of the Arts. Cross is tackling climate change from

within UAL by putting pressure on the senior management of the university to pull its money out of banks that invest in oil companies. Like the recent campaign to call on companies advertising in the *Daily Mail* to end their support of a newspaper that promotes bigotry and racism, Cross seeks political change through economic means.

The model of contemporary politics in protesting the museum is ethical consumerism. Iris Marion Young constructs a conception of political responsibility that advocates the boycotts that ethical consumers, initially students, developed in the late 1990s, as a form of political activism. The key idea, here, is that "a transnational system of interdependence and dense economic interaction" is the objective ground of an expansive moral responsibility. This sense of ethical obligation pervades the new tendency in art boycotting and art activist campaigns.

The art boycott borrows its technique from the consumer boycott. It uses a combination of non-participation and public announcements that specify preconditions for reparticipation but focuses on supply rather than demand. Rather than "effecting change through the marketplace and the media," to use Monroe Friedman's phrase, the art boycott applies pressure onto art's institutions and its partners through art's public and private organizations and events. Neither quite consumers who boycott specific products, manufacturers, or suppliers, nor workers contesting conditions at the workplace, the activists of the art boycott hold an unusual position.

What is the political anatomy of the protests of the art museum? It combines qualities of the consumer boycott with the industrial strike and it puts anti-art in the proximity of the refusal of work. Undeniably, the art boycott fuses the politics of art with political activism generally, not only in its technique (which is used by both) or its content (insofar as the art boycott tends to respond to the political circumstances of an exhibition), but primarily in their shared historical constellation.

The political revival of the boycott, in calls to boycott goods from Israel for its violent occupation of Gaza and the short-lived campaign to boycott Lawrence and Wishart for withdrawing free online access to the complete works of Marx and Engels, belongs to the tradition of consumer activism. Iris Marion Young constructs a conception of political responsibility that advocates the boycotts that ethical consumers, initially students, developed in the late 1990s, as a form of political activism. The key idea, here, is that "a transnational system of interdependence and dense economic interaction" is the objective ground of an expansive moral responsibility.

This sense of ethical responsibility pervades the new tendency in art boycotting. However, the political landscape was redrawn by the Arab Spring of 2011 ushering in new modes of political organization across Europe and America, especially through the implementation of new techniques for political activism. The Spanish “indignant” protests, known as 15M, wore the Guy Fawkes masks now associated with anonymous, staged occupations and reached decisions with consensus-based procedures. Occupy Wall Street was based on this model and the global occupy movement that followed spread its techniques and norms back across the world from which it came.

The boycotting tendency in art resembles the industrial strike and borrows its techniques from the consumer boycott, but it derives its momentum from the occupy movement, despite the fact that boycotts withdraw from sites rather than take them over. Informed and spurred on by the Italian Autonomia movement’s promotion of withdrawal, the boycott today is no longer principally associated with the withdrawal of labor but the “block” gesture, one of the General Assembly hand signals used in consensual discussions. Signified by folding your arms over your chest in the shape of a diagonal cross, the block is the most extreme of the GA gestures. “It indicates a serious moral or practical objection to the proposal,” in the words of the Writers for the 99%, “indicating that the objector will leave the group if her or his concerns are not addressed.” The block has more power than the boycott, however, since it acts as a veto, whereas the individual boycott alters the composition of an exhibition without bringing the whole thing to a halt.

Although boycotts withdraw from sites rather than take them over, the art boycott derives part of its political character — and some of its momentum — from the occupy movement. Occupy takes over a place through ethical self-organization; institution critique participates in an institution through ethical practices of critique; and, the art boycott is ethically obliged to withdraw from institutions and annuls practice temporarily as a form of critique.

Artists who protest the museum by boycotting large-scale group exhibitions represent the first serious challenge to the rise of the curator and the corporate sponsor who have shaped the neoliberal art institution. Since boycotting is at least as ethical as it is political, the public proclamations that accompany the withdrawal tend to specify with some precision what and who is at fault. Boycotting is specific at both ends, so to speak, with individuals making the decision to withdraw from exhibitions at one end, and individuals accused of wrongdoing at the other.

Does the new phase of protest in art signify a radical critique of art or a conservative preservation of its established privileges? In some senses the new style of protesting the museum is a continuation of art activism that goes back to the AWC and its campaigns to reform the art museum and protect artists economically. But politically there is also a contrast to be drawn here: whereas the previous generation of art activism carried the agenda of institutional critique, the new generation, in protesting against the detention of refugees, anti-gay legislation, and the ecological devastation brought about by oil companies, appear to have nothing to protest about art and its institutions. They seem, on the contrary, to have as their central aim the protection and preservation of art and the museum from being tainted by government, big business, and bigotry. Politically, therefore, the critique of the museum and art has been turned into the critique of everything but art and the liberation of the museum from external forces.

In 2014 I thought that a new condition of accelerated protest had broken out in contemporary art. So far, the pace of activism of 2014 has not been kept up and I am waiting to see if the upcoming Venice Biennale goes off without protests. If so, perhaps 2014 was a one off and, at least for me, that would be a pity.

Nevertheless, I want to finish by raising a fundamental question of the politics of art activism. At a recent conference on art activism, I was asked whether artists can be the agents of social change. This is a common enough question. Even though I am an artist and I have a lifelong commitment to structural political transformation, I am very uneasy with the idea of artists as agents of social change — and I would extend this, today, in this situation, to an unease in the idea of the museum as an agent of social change. It is not that I would oppose artists and museums participating in social movements, but I am nervous about them taking it on themselves to lead political change and to credit themselves with widespread political agency. I am committed to the idea that political change must be brought about by the great mass of the people. If today we are putting our hopes in the political agency of the artist or the museum, then this appears to me to be a sign either of a great political loss of agency by ordinary people or perhaps of a great chasm in art and the real political struggles of the mass of the disenfranchised. My answer to the question “can artists be agents of social change?” is “I hope not!” or perhaps better still “not the kind of social change that I am hoping for.”

However, if the question can be modified to ask whether there is something that artists and museums can do to support social movements,

then I would say there are many things that we can do. I am not here to advocate one mode of politics for artists, art, and art institutions. There are many ways in which artists and others can work alongside communities, constituencies, and individuals who have various struggles at hand. One of the things that accelerated the premature collapse of the groups and communities of politicized artists in the 1970s was the disagreement about which mode of engagement was correct. These debates were important but, if I may say so, the whole aim to decide the correct political line to take was itself incorrect. The generation of artists who established a new political landscape for art in the 1960s and 1970s, who I admire a great deal, also accentuated the critique of critique, which is to say they appear to save the greatest critical resources for complaining about former comrades rather than aiming their shared anger against the various systems that they are opposed to in their different ways. Like post-Marxist philosophers, who have turned the critique of critique into an industry, post-Conceptual artists have left us with a troubling legacy.

I disagree politically with the art activists, the boycotters, and the protestors of the museum, but I understand their activities to be part of the general political mission that I think of as my tradition and my practice. There is not one correct way of engaging politically with the current social situation or with art and its institutions. There are many parallel lines of struggle. The point is not to be correct but to be allied with those who have chosen a different line but who are not the enemy.

# Panel Discussion with speakers

Moderated by Ferran Barenblit, Director,  
MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Spain

Ferran Barenblit: Thanks so much for all of your contributions. I think that this has not been a soft landing on the core theme of this year's CIMAM. I mean, we have gone directly to the question, which is one of responsibility. For me, it's very clear that we are still re-elaborating the modernist discourse, as we have been talking about Hegel, about Marx, about Freud, but also about Ruskin. Kant is sort of flying here, which started the emancipatory project of the discourse of art. There are so many questions open here that I think that we can discuss now. Trying to survive this thinking about the modernist condition of the museum... Yes, museums were born under the light of the nation in a moment that being was owning, and the collections were a way of defining identity. And owning and displaying those collections was part of this. But I don't want to think of museums as broken toys belonging to the bourgeoisie or the bourgeois State, because they are really a project of society, and they are completely alive and useful today. Useful because we do have a responsibility, and I think that our responsibility — and that's my way of starting the discussion — is not so much trying to interfere with this immediate life in which we are inserted. It's true we are not inserted any longer in this modernist space. We are in a post-modernist, neoliberal space in which we must attend to the needs of our funding bodies, our political view, the pressure of the media, the need to please so many levels, which is why sometimes we tend to forget that that is the expectation of part of our constituencies.

I prefer to think we do not have to give an answer to that, but rather on the production of a shared space for emancipation. And I think that Marina was very clear on that. Remember that this is our responsibility to generate a space in which we can project that possibility of emancipation. I was once asked about what was, at that moment, the institution in which I was working, which was our biggest achievement to date. I remember her, and the blank space that is in that website that I invite you to visit and of which she is part.

We exist, therefore we have a responsibility, and therefore we can use that responsibility to build

a shared space. If you want to respond to each other before giving the floor to our colleagues here... Is there somebody in the room that wants to start with some issues?

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: I wanted to ask Mr. Hudson a question. You began your presentation by saying that Middlesbrough had this very high percentage of Brexit voters. What do you think your responsibility is to those voters as part of your constituency within your town? You went on to talk about refugees, which of course is an obvious way to engage socially and politically. But what about that very large number of people who actually voted against having refugees in Middlesbrough. What do you think you should do in that situation?

Alistair Hudson: Absolutely, they're part of the equation. That was a case study in how we are working with one constituency, but of course, when I talk about usership, we encourage many different groups to use the museum, us included, and I think this is also an important thing to bear in mind. It's that the institution now does not need to be this separate, autonomous identity, something to react against. If something is created collectively, then it's the sum of all these user groups. The steel workers with whom we worked on that project, we knew they were Brexit voters, so there's no differentiation. I was very publicly outspoken about my resistance to Brexit in the run-up to it. I took a position on it as the director of the museum, but nonetheless we still have a relationship with all those people, and that's absolutely fundamental. We can't just work with particular groups, otherwise you fall into these standard institutional mechanisms that we heard Dave Beech talk about.

Calin Dan: To respond to your silence, I think that I have to congratulate and, at the same time, caution the organizers, because this is such a brilliantly designed panel that it's very intimidating regarding the variety and scope of problems. Because if I'm thinking about the brilliant work that you are doing at mima — by the way, nice name,



mima — there is some cuteness in it. At the same time, I understand Elizabeth Macgregor's question very well, but I also understand the fact that this is hitting just one tiny point of the confrontational situations such an institution lives through. On the other hand, that very complex historical view of what is activism and where it leads to is almost too complex, because it is about the dilemma — how far you can play the activist game, how hard can you play the social commitment game, how far you can play the management game of trying to defend your institution, as I tried to argue in my own intervention. So, there is a worrisome diversity of very different urgencies. Thinking of the problems that the art community has in Bucharest, and the fact that nobody has the means to really address them. People turn to the museum as sort of a sponsor, which legally it cannot be, but we're trying to find ways around that. Of course, that might sound like a luxury problem, but each of us is operating in a certain specific context, what from the outside might look like a luxury problem. "Thank you very much, BP, for not soiling my museum." For a Romanian audience that would be a hilarious topic. I hope you understand why, and I hope you understand that I'm not being ironic, I'm just making an obvious statement. So, this diversity does not mean that we're not sharing a sense of crisis. That might be a good aim for CIMAM in general — to try to unify all those problems and give a sort of... I don't know, there is no set of solutions, there is no toolkit for that, but to just project the image of a community that is very much concerned about what happens worldwide. And let's not forget the fragile position we are all in. We are carrying with us Enrico Lunghi's letter from Luxembourg, and I don't have to remind you the details of that. So, there are all those looming and very urgent things in front of us.

Questioner: I'm an art collector, and I'm halfway between Buenos Aires and Paris. In Buenos Aires our situation is much richer than that of Bucharest, but much poorer than in the first world — than in the United States or Western Europe. While in Paris, our institutions, even the very large institutions, are extremely rich by any standards, they are now crying and weeping because they have less money than five years ago. I think that in the world today money has become wealth, and money holds too much importance, has become much too invasive, much too free. The wealthy do whatever they want, legally or illegally, and that is the problem we are facing in the cultural world. With money, you can do everything. In politics, you can buy a congressman in the United States or you can buy a minister in Western Europe. And, of course, you can buy museums, too. In Paris, where there is a lot of

money and great cultural institutions, gallerists can go to the most prestigious museums and propose a show of the artists they promote, because they pay for everything. And although the directors are completely honest, which is not always the case in other countries, they are so overwhelmed by what they call "lack of money" that they host a huge retrospective for hundreds of thousands of euros just because the artist's gallerist pays for most of it. So, if we want to change this, I think it goes way beyond our cultural world — it takes us in a direction where money has, of course, always had importance, but not the kind of importance that it has today, where it can rule every domain, economically, politically, culturally, and educationally. And that is a problem we are facing and which the Spanish philosopher with her brilliant presentation did not answer.

Dave Beech: This is an anecdote about money. When I was an artist living in Manchester, when the Liverpool Biennale was first started, the Arts Council came to us, a group of artists in Manchester, and told us that the money that they previously had available for artists to apply for would now be shrunk, because in future that money would be put into the Liverpool Biennale. And they expected us to be upset by that, which we were, and then they said: Boo! The good news is that they want to use some of that money to fund a fringe exhibition of local artists around the Biennale, so we could be part of the Liverpool Biennale. And we rejected that proposal: we decided we didn't want to do that. This tells us something about the relationship between museums and the ecology of art in a given region. Because what we experienced was that, whilst we support in every way the growth of Tate Liverpool, the growth of the Liverpool Biennale, and the growth of art within the North West of England and so forth, we support that with all of our might. But it does seem a shame that this has to be at a cost of the actual small-scale art organizations within that region. And I have to say that within 4–5 years of that meeting, all of the artists that were in that room had left the area. They moved to London, or they moved to Berlin, or they moved to New York. And that community of artists had been there since college. They'd been working together for 15–20 years and they'd created a special stage for art, an arena operating at a local level. And so, as well as thinking what the museum can do, I think it's also important for us to think about what can be done outside the museum, and how the museum might have a less than supportive relationship to that on occasions.

Questioner: I want to just jump in for a second and say thank you for all this. I was just reflecting on



political regression, especially when there is the impression that we have achieved certain gains. For example, we have achieved certain positions for women in society, therefore we don't need to speak about the problem of representation or quota. And I was a bit astonished that 90% of the platform is women and this table is all men. I don't mean to say it demagogically, but it's curious because when the left decided that we've achieved it, it's no longer a problem, it's old fashioned to say that. So let's get on with the job. But there are these collapses that are of psychoanalytical relevance, which return constantly. And this came to my mind when you, Dave, were saying that we went into this world critique and abandoned the institution of critique. One of the bases of institutions is quota representation, for example. And then, the other thing is... *le monsieur sur la France...* I'm not French, but the Pompidou does not choose the exhibitions on the basis of money, and the biggest thing that public museums have is eternity. The Pompidou receives hundreds of works by Kandinsky... This has something to do with the power of money. There is no power in money. In a way, there is a lot of power, but there is also no power. So, the inalienability of artworks in certain public collections that belong to the State, or to certain regional authorities, makes them the place that can accrue an enormous amount of donations, of gifts of artworks, because they are saved from the collectors of the market. I don't see it so black and dark that money can buy anything.

Questioner: Without wanting to focus too much on the French situation, but as someone who worked with the Centre Pompidou during the period when Jack Lang was the Minister of Culture, I think that the reality lies in between what the last two people have just said. The problem today is that culture is not taken seriously or considered important by a certain number of governments, including the French Government. In the past, the Government subsidized the exhibitions that were considered intellectually important, and not necessarily because they would have many visitors. And, unfortunately, since that time, this engagement, this commitment to important exhibitions as an educational tool and as something very important to society, seems to have dissolved to a certain extent. So that the Centre Pompidou is more dependent on private money and I would tend to agree, partly, with what was said earlier, that major commercial galleries, whose names we all know, promote their artists and often have access to exhibitions in a way that didn't exist before. The point I'd really like to make is that society and governments no longer consider culture as something important enough to invest in as they did in the past.

Alistair Hudson: What I think it's also important to state here is a question around what kind of culture and whose culture we're talking about, and who decides. Because I think what you also have now is a kind of polarization between institutions as well. On a large scale, well-funded institutions are starting to work in a particular way by default. But small-to-medium-sized institutions are starting to work another way. Maybe they can't afford art anymore. They can't afford to collect. They can't afford to operate in a certain circle, like you can't even get a plane ticket to Venice. And so, you do have this polarization, and there is a question about what kind of culture they're producing or facilitating. In the UK, not only is there an economic north-south divide, but there is a kind of cultural north-south divide. Northern institutions are producing very interesting alternative models, which have started to be recycled back into the big institutions. So there is a very interesting dynamic in play at the moment, which also reflects other wider social issues that we're seeing in society at the moment. In that circumstance, I actually do think that these cultural institutions have a really important part to play, not in leading social change, not being the only places doing social change, but by being part of it, contributing to it, like citizens themselves, rather than just being this old institution.

Calin Dan: I would bring into this the topic of value drain from certain countries. Romania is part of this phenomenon, and art and cultural institutions active in Romania are part of it too: they are the victims or by-standers. There is an increased international market value, as well as a secondary market value, for a number of Romanian artists. Their production is flying out of the country as we speak, and while anyone is entitled to put up their money or to sell their things, there is also almost a policy under which powerful museums and powerful institutions organize themselves in order to attract those acquisitions, while at a local or national level there is a complete impotence when it comes to competing with them. I'm not going to accuse the people who are buying from outside Romania, but I just want to draw attention to another dimension of the difficulty of being a cultural operator in Romania, because there is no support either from the State or from the private sector in order to acquire value for the future or for the Romanian public. And I totally agree with what my colleague says, that there is a sort of cleavage, a sort of gap that is widening between large, medium-sized, and medium-to-small-sized institutions, depending not only on their size but also on their geographical position.

Questioner: I wanted to comment on the presentation that was made about what's happening at mima, which was very, very interesting. And I was wondering if you have any thoughts about how to apply this to a collecting institution.

Alistair Hudson: We are a collecting institution. We have a collection that's an amalgamation of three historic-town collections, plus a ten-year acquisition policy, and we're still collecting. But on the same principle, we're basically collecting or working on our collection with the idea that it is a tool that is part of this process. So, as I said, it is a question of reversing the polarity of the institution. The galleries and the collection used to be the core activity, and the education and the public program all circled in service to that. We've flipped it around, so the public program is now the main face of the institution, and the exhibitions and collections work in thematic service to that, practically and intellectually.

Miguel Amado: Basically, you collect what you show, and you show what you collect and commission. Ideally, all sorts of small- and large-scale commissions are retained in the collection. The works that we inherited from the past are being used by and selected with the local residents. We are currently developing a project around that so we can share authorship and curatorial vision with others and have input from them, so the works will be on display as well. But there still a dilemma around, on one hand, corporate funding or not, and what type of work you can collect that can be used as a tool for education, rather than just for display. And that is a criterion that we need to apply. We don't have a collection budget, but we're trying to use other kinds of resources and funds to select work that can enable exhibitions to operate in the way we described. Also, we try to redress or address social issues, and hopefully contribute to social change. For example, through an acquisitions funding that was put in place by a London organization called the Contemporary Art Society, we recently bought a piece that will be turned into a solo presentation next year, but we also bought work that was made by a local artist, with no formal education. She's what we consider an outsider artist, and we've been funding her... we fund the projects, and the results of the projects might be incorporated as objects in the collection. I had a long conversation with her just yesterday about how we cannot only have objects incorporated, but objects that are actually tools that need to be fully activated across time. It's programming and collecting holistically, rather than just seeing these as separate things.

Alistair Hudson: But also, for example, thinking of our educational work as part of our collection as well, so we're talking about turning the top floor of the museum into a gymnasium. In effect we're buying a curriculum of physical and mental education, which would become part of our collection.

Miguel Amado: Just to conclude, I'm sorry we are monopolizing. But this is also interesting in terms of our relationship with other organizations that are potential funders of collections. We tried to buy a chocolate sculpture made by Congolese plantation workers in the context of a particular project. We tried to buy that through a fund that made available GBP 8,000 to us, and we didn't manage it because the funding body was completely resistant to buying that kind of work. But when they saw, for instance, pieces by an artist from Azerbaijan that had lived in the UK for five years and who was expelled after his claim for asylum was declined by the British Government, they went, ok, fine, these are still objects that we think can be collected, and three works went into the collection. There are a lot of dilemmas about how you work with funding bodies towards an expanded understanding what collecting and what art is.

Questioner: I think there are interesting levels of dependence and independence vis-à-vis the funding of museums operating in different contexts. Let me preface this by saying that I was a civil servant in Finland for nine years and ran museums that received close to 100% of their funding from the federal and municipal governments. I reported to a board with two Communists, two Social Democrats, two Green Party members and a few from the center-right... an amalgamation of heterogeneous individuals. I now run a museum in Buffalo, New York, a Rust Belt city, where 0% of our funding comes from Washington, and of our annual budget of USD 10 million only 5% comes from public sources. If it went away, it would not mean anything to us — it's nice that it's there but it's not important. What I think is important is bolstering a museum's endowment within an American system, because endowment funds are there and they support our operations totally independently. Depending, of course, on what the market does, but in general we use a 5% draw policy from a robust endowment, which in my opinion gives us and our curators a far greater level of independence than I enjoyed in the Nordic system, where I can assure you there was a lot of dependence and direct influence from various political interest groups. The money was awarded annually. You had to spend it by the end of December, before the next award in January. There was a constant inability to establish a level of

independence for which I think a cultural organization should strive. We've put USD 40 million into our endowment over the last three years, which gives us 40% of our annual operating budget that is now basically not contingent on asking but is there as long as the markets remain relatively healthy. And a lot of that money comes from corporations. I think the key is to try to get corporations to commit funds that are not contingent on annual-base giving but are there on a more permanent level. Could you comment on that notion of wonderful corporate philanthropy?

Miguel Amado: A gallery like mima in Middlesbrough is, I would say, 95% publicly funded, the opposite of what you described, or similar to Finland. And I personally would reject corporate funding in principle in a project like ours, not necessarily in other cases. Philanthropic money might not necessarily be corporate money. We can also discuss the ethics about that, and whether or not we need to apply a principle. And I am not even advocating that public funding is more ethical than non-public funding, but all these issues come into play when you are programming and delivering a project that has to take that into consideration.

Dave Beech: This does not feel like the right room to talk about the complete abolition of corporate funding for our museums, but I will say that I think that if 2014 is anything to go by, and I'm still not confident that it is, if the rise of art activism in this new style of not critiquing the quorum and so forth, but critiquing the financial relations of art museums, if that continues then the economic relations that you have with other bodies outside of your institutions will come under increasing scrutiny. In a sense, what I think that Liberate Tate and other groups like that are tempted to do is not so much to attack this one individual company, BP, but to issue a warning to art museums, and also issue an even louder warning to corporate funders, which is perhaps the negative from your point of view, which is to say that, if you invest in art museums, then artists are coming to get you. It has been called "art washing." If you try to conduct art washing, which is to say you do horrible things in the world and then you sponsor art exhibitions to improve your public image, then what artists are going to do is to use that money to disclose all of the other things that you do — not the things that you do for art. That's a very concerning situation for museums and for their funders. And that is what I think art activism is trying to do. I don't think that people are losing sleep over this right now, but I think that there is possibly a new ethical situation on the horizon, that funders are going to have to think very carefully about whether they are

prepared to take that risk and have everything they do disclosed just because they've put money into an art museum.

Ferran Barenblit: I'm seeing a lot of raised hands. I would ask you for shorter interventions, because I don't want to leave anybody out.

Miguel Amado: Yes, very short. Basically, independently of the funding that you might have in place for your organization, one thing is to use that money, and keep it or retain it within the art world, and another thing is to use that money and transfer it back to the civic space, or let's say the social space or society. And that's the cycle we are trying to develop in Middlesbrough. Which, basically, puts us in this question regarding the responsibility of art museums.

Alistair Hudson: Firstly, I don't think that all museums should be run the same way. It's important that they're all different and have specific contexts. Secondly, I actually value my dependency as a museum, I don't want to be independent, because we have a social contract with our constituents and it's important that we are implicit in that situation and part of it, and not somehow separate from it.

Questioner: I come from Croatia, where we don't have to worry about corporate sponsorship. I have a question to mima collectively. Was there any criticism or controversy about your programming within your constituency. And, if so, how did you handle it?

Miguel Amado: I'd like Alistair to reply because I might have a very different view from him.

Alistair Hudson: It depends on what you mean by controversy. In a way, the museum was controversial before, in that it was viewed as elitist, not wanted, disposable. When I started there was a mayoral campaign to close the museum down: that was his way of selling it to the people. There was an active body within the community who were against the museum. And what happened through the new program was that people started to go, "Oh yeah, that's what mima should do, that's how it should work." The people who'd be most upset were the people who expected a museum like that to work in a particular way: to show nice things to nice people, and do institutional critique and all those things that that kind of performative frame of art delivers. So, that's the simple answer.

Questioner: We began today talking about the construction of the nation and of national identity.

And I'm feeling a certain level of urgency because of the American election. And I think that our discussion today is very difficult to separate from the fact that a gentleman has been elected on the basis of an extremely racist program. There is no real knowledge of what will actually happen, whether he is going to construct his wall or not, but, even in the days after the election there have been attacks under the name of the Trump nation. And if we are looking at history and at the role of our institutions in climates like this, it seems that, in our discussions over the next couple of days, we should really be also asking ourselves what role museums can play, or institutions of any kind can play in this climate of legitimized violence, State violence, and racism. We've seen it in the twentieth century, how steps developed very quickly, and I think there is an obligation, as an organization... you mentioned it at the beginning, the role that these organizations can play and the kind of support that needs to be addressed for museums in a climate in which they do not know exactly how to act, how to address, and how quickly they can transform themselves. Even in the simplest manner, an American museum can lose its non-profit status, its 5013 status, if it engages in political activity of any kind. So, I would ask, at the end of each of our discussions, to just stop, pause for a moment to think about what our role might be as an organization. But also what's happening to us, internationally, with the alliance between Putin and Trump, their potential alliances, and what kind of world, what kind of nation-building or world-building we are presently engaged in, and what the aspiration of our citizens are.

Sylvie Blocher: I want to answer to you, because I think you can do a lot of things. And I can give you a very small example. A few people in CIMAM signed the petition to support Enrico Lunghi. And we worked on that for ten days, because some signatures were very famous, and we sent that to the First Minister of Luxembourg. For the first time in the history of Luxembourg, yesterday the Chamber of Deputies made a special session about Enrico Lunghi. The second thing is that for the first time in the history of Luxembourg RTL TV was obliged to show the real video against Enrico, and everybody now sees it was re-edit. So, I think you have a lot of power, because when politicians see some names on paper, they just freak out. And I think you don't even realize how powerful you are.

Questioner: I'm the director of the Center for Contemporary Art of Warsaw, Poland. So, referring to the lady concerned about the situation in the US after the Trump election, I would like to say a few

words. I don't know if there is more space for discussion later, but maybe we should somehow elaborate or discuss the subject of the violence of the State against culture, the independence of culture, and their very special attitude towards contemporary art. Mine is a national institution depending almost 100% on funding from the Ministry of Culture, so we have already experienced a lot of pressure in terms of program, censorship, and advice as to what kind of artists we should include in our exhibitions. We have also experienced dramatic cuts in funding. So this is also an emerging global issue that we should face and maybe develop during the next CIMAM, because it's not only our responsibility in terms of corporate sponsorship or corporate thinking. I agree 100% with what you said — that was a very interesting perspective, thank you — and the ways of resistance institutions could give to the globalized-in-a-corporate-way world, but globalization is also the rise of nationalism, and we see it developing in front of our eyes day by day, in very different locations around the globe. So that is a very hot issue and a challenge, because in Poland many museums and art centers are now discussing and asking ourselves questions: how we should rethink the role of museums or centers of contemporary art? How we should rethink the role of artists? How do we redefine all these issues and all these notions that you were using today and that are very relevant in terms of resistance against corporate pressure. It is an ethical responsibility, but it is also a more and more important issue in terms of the State and these national values.

Ferran Barenblit: Thanks so much for all your contributions. I have to say that despite everything I'm still optimistic. If not, I would suggest ending the conference now, but we still have three more days, and I'm optimistic. I'm optimistic because I believe in the power of what we do, and the abilities that we have to perform our role. I'm optimistic seeing you all here discussing this. Some more words: first of all, looking in the direction of the Content Committee, I'm sorry this is an all-male panel, but I hope this conference is seen as a whole and not only this panel. On the other side, we have an all-female selection of keynote speakers: today, tomorrow, and Sunday, so please consider that.

Some words also about the rest of the day. If you want to visit the old chapel next to where we'll have lunch, the first part of the Miralda exhibition is there. And then cross again to the Museum and the Richard Meier building to visit, as I said before, *Hard Gelatin*, the collection, and the man body of the Miralda show. After that, we will head to La Virreina to see two great exhibitions that opened only two weeks ago. And then we go to Hangar, a very

special place in Barcelona. It opened 20 years ago as an artist-run initiative to generate a space for production, but not only production: reflection and invention for artists. It has played a very important role here because it became a model for other places built in the last two decades. So, we will be talking to the residents and hearing more about the program. And then we'll head for dinner. So, enjoy the rest of the day and thanks for everything.



Day 2: Saturday  
November 19

CaixaForum,  
Cultural Center  
of "la Caixa" Foundation  
in Barcelona

Curators and Artists:  
New Parameters  
and New Responses

# Keynote speech 02

## Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

Director, Castello di Rivoli, Museum of Contemporary Art —  
GAM Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Italy.

### *Short Biography:*

*Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev is an author, an organizer of events and exhibitions, and a researcher of artistic practices, the histories of art, and the politics of aesthetics. She is the Director of Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art and GAM — Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Italy, and she is Distinguished Visiting Professor in Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University. She drafted the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the Istanbul Biennial in 2015 (SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms) and was the Artistic Director of documenta 13, which took place in 2012 in Kassel, Germany, as well as in Kabul, Afghanistan; Alexandria and Cairo, Egypt; and Banff, Canada. Previously, she was the Artistic Director of the 16<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, Revolutions — Forms that Turn (2008); and Senior Curator at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, a MoMA affiliate in New York, from 1999 to 2001.*

### *Presentation: The circus mistress and mastering the ceremony — A lecture*

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: I'd like to thank you for this invitation here. Thank you to the CIMAM board, "la Caixa", and MACBA for hosting this event. Just to add another commitment to the institutions that I'm now working for. Since January I have been directing the GAM, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Torino Galleria and the Castello di Rivoli Museo de Arte Contemporanea on the hill above Torino. The second being the regional museum and the first being the city museum in Torino. The second is associated with what we normally call contemporary art and the first with what we normally call modern and contemporary art. I am a bit of a novice to this job that you are all masters at but nonetheless the slave and master relationship is so complicated that I think that's fine. And before reading this text that I brought for you, I would like to just add... Someone asked me to speak on the question of corporate funding versus

government funding or public funding. But I'm not really going to do that because I find it a little boring, in the sense that both are often very intertwined. So it's not so much the fact of the money coming from tax or the money coming from the corporations that are paying less tax and deducting it. I think part of the problem that we face is using the parameter of access, which apparently is a progressive parameter, and measuring this with ticket access. It really creates a problem in that it localizes the programs at museums because it increases a number of programs that make a high access number but are not really interesting, even if we're in the age of the Internet and global communications with almost everyone else outside of the local context. And therefore it won't speak to anybody in Torino or Paris or London or Abu Dhabi or Rosario or Buenos Aires or Perth. So this is the consequence of that. I was supposed to talk about

the ethics of working in art as in art of fruitful misunderstandings able to create situations where contrasting roles of different individuals forge temporary and provisional alliances independently of whether they are artists, curators, dealers, art critics, editors, or museum directors. And I was going to speak about the apparent obsolescence of the public museum that I have just joined and thoughts on eternity versus gain.

When I joined documenta, international periodic exhibitions and biennales were in a time of crisis and decline, certainly in comparison with the so-called rise of the art fair system. That said, this Klein bottle where the inside and the outside are continuous like a 3D Möbius strip is the image I always use when I try to speak about this double nature of the relationship between the inside and the outside of anything: a group of people, an organization, art itself, and art's relationship to the world outside. The digital age that we are now in is characterized by surfaces that obscure code and detach users from their usages. Unpacking this black box and learning code may be useful to unfold modes of action. Because people living under the technological normative regime feel that, in the disembodiment of the virtual world, they need to hang on to things. Concrete objects of art, whether videos considered concrete when projected inside a room, paintings, sculptures, installations, or performances have begun to take on a great importance and aura contrary to Benjamin's idea that the aura was lost with technological reproduction, the development of photography, and the moving image in the 1920s and thirties. We are now in the opposite mode. Because of the disembodied nature of *numérotisation* as the French would say, meaning the transformation both into numbers and into code, there is a need for embodied objects and things. This explains the quick rise of speculative realism or all-object based ontologies in the mid-2000s, a swing away from constructivist discursive and subjectivist positions, from Kant to Derrida, towards fundamentally neorealist positions, from Michel Serres and Quentin Meillassoux, and an increase in the number of museums, both private and public. In today's times of crisis from *krinein* meaning to choose, to judge, but also to be on the edge and to divide, times of war and ecological disasters, the two meanings, responsibility as duty and response ability as the ability to respond in new ways to changing conditions seem to join each other.

The sense of emergency that is constantly felt is profoundly related to the notion that one is in a crisis and that there is an urgency at hand. An urgency to suspend normal living in order to act. At a time one feels that each choice of how to act, and as I said *krinein* first of all means to choose, we

feel that it's impact may determine a positive or a negative outcome. In the text describing the topic "Moment of Crisis" presented at the 2015 congress of the Lacanian School, Gil Caroz argued that it is no longer possible to read crisis according to Hannah Arendt's thesis, as a conflictive point of encounter between the past and future. I quote: "Conflict between the past and the future whose pressure the subject is submitted to." Because in our hypermodern times, no longer seen as postmodern times of disillusionment with progress and the Enlightenment after the Second World War, hypermodern in terms of its incredible faith in science and the absolute illusion of progress, there has been a qualitative modification of humanity, whereby, due to the contraction of space and time produced by digital technologies, time tends towards immediacy. And when there is immediacy, there is no time. Because the perception of time is contingent on the appreciation of difference. This contraction of time is expressed as a continuous sequence of crises with no routine in between, supported by social networks and the sense of the imminently catastrophic at every turn. It doesn't mean that there is no catastrophe. We are faced with a continuous catastrophe but I'm just speaking of the experience on the level of consciousness. But the impulse to act directly in the arena of crisis itself, when felt as an ethical imperative, must be distinguished from the acting out of a subject crashing in the trauma of language, in so far as it refuses meaning; the spinning out of control of a subject partaking in and even creating the symptoms.

The contradictions of our times are many, of course. Not least of which is that democracy, in the digital age, does not work. In so far as anti-democratic leaders are being elected democratically and anti-democratic policies supported democratically. This means that one ethical principle, which is to respect all differences and diversities and opinions, contrasts with another: our general wish to not support within our cultural institutions broad, emergent, unethical, populist positions such as racism and greed, caused by an unjust distribution of resources and an inequality of access to food, jobs, education, and joy. Because of their antithetical nature. And this is a problem not dissimilar to what Europe faced after the financial crisis of 1929 and during the early 1930s when fascisms gained popular support. In such a topsy-turvy scenario it is wise in my view to use an approach reminiscent of negative dialectics, which may seem counterintuitive and certainly leads to misunderstandings and strange alliances that however open schisms and spaces for worlding; the increase and flourishing of life and its diversity on the planet. By worlding, I don't mean *weltmachen*, the making of worlds as

in Heidegger's philosophy, the consciousness in being and space of a subject that thus creates his or her world. I mean, quite the contrary, the co-emergence of matter and thought, of stories and knowledges that were not there before and doing so in a worldly manner. And I use the word worldly from Donna Haraway to indicate a commitment to the world's wellbeing, an engagement that is affective, intellectual, perceptive, situated, and localized, as well as open and of the commons; in conscious contrast with words such as global, which presumes a superior detached, external gaze, able to see the globe as a ball from the outside and as a whole. Or the word international, which presumes the existence of nations and nationalisms to go against. Or the word transnational, which suggests financial transactions and passages. Nor the word cosmopolitan, which suggests an enlightenment elite able to travel physically or virtually.

Worldly is also close to Gaia and to terra, to the earth and why matter matters, as Karen Barad, Isabelle Stengers, Elisabeth Wilson, and other feminists science studies persons would put it, whom I always like to quote. All life forms have a perceptual ability to sense the environment and react to it, which is indeed the sense of self. To touch and be touched, interactively as becoming world and to know how one is involved in it is the basis of sensation and animality, both human and inhuman, or non-human. And that is exactly what it means to learn and know the code both of our smartphones and of the universe. But this carries us away from today's task. This is a conference by specialists for specialists and not for a broad audience. And I am asked to comment on the museum and its responsibility, which I believe mainly means the two I mentioned previously: the ability to respond, to reply, to answer a call, just as much as it's responsibilities in the ethical sense — what its duties and commitments are to its constituencies. These constituencies are its audiences, both online and offline, the communities where it is located, as well as artists and art lovers, but they are also a plethora of often contrasting agencies, politicians, who both count on art contributing to civic society-building and for decreasing social tension, but also, on the contrary, who may wish to normalize outrageous and unjust situations through the manipulatory potential of our soft power. The constituencies are also collectors of course and connoisseurs, who wish to accrue on the one hand personal status and economic profit as investors in the art market through the museum's legitimation, but also those who deeply believe in culture as a source of meaning for their lives. And given the lack of strong religious belief in most advanced societies today, this offers a space of freedom as

Hegel would have said. Artists are a double constituency. There are those who wish to engage with the museum and art institutions as safe havens for aesthetic and intellectual research or there are those who see it as the only public space left wherein to discuss social and political agencies and a trampoline for social transformation in the world at large. So the ability to respond to these contradictory impulses can be made manifest and it's also important to manifest itself in ways that may appear contradictory as well on our part.

I have worked in museums but I have worked a lot outside of museums. When outside, for periodic international exhibitions such as the first edition of Greater New York in 2000, the Torino triennial in 2005, the 16<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney that in 2008, documenta 13 in 2012, or last year's Istanbul Biennale, I am considered to be the one who brings museum logical artifacts and methods of organization to the classical biennale. Classical biennales are usually defined as a place to which a number of international artists are invited by curators to react to topics of general interest to the world outside art. Something that which is on the front page of newspapers becomes the subject of the biennale: artists react to it and make artworks. I am usually considered to be the one who distances that model from itself through a certain contamination with more museological methodologies. When I am inside the museum, however, working as a curator — for example, as director of the Castello di Rivoli in the early 2000s — I am known for something else, which is the bringing of participatory and experimental processes, events, and methodologies to the museum — which traditionally was the place of archiving our present and past — even though they are more readily associated with biennales.

Yet I remind you that there were collections in the Greek period and the first usage of the word museum was the *museion* of Alexandria in the Ptolemaic period, a campus and building that comprised the Alexandrian library, which resembled much more a modern university than a museum. Here, books and manuscripts were collected and placed under the muses' protection, and here too scholars and researchers lived and studied. It had a room dedicated to anatomy and one to astronomy. It didn't have sculptures and paintings were not collected. But objects were there to inspire as muses. So the first museum is basically a space of inspiration.

Now I am going very quickly to summarize things that are obvious to all of you, but it's always nice to be reminded of our history. An emanation of the French Revolution was the birth of the public museum of science or art, or actually science art. In the first plan of the Louvre, which was given up

a year later, was a form of what our old friend Foucault later would call a disciplinary institution. Only on one level did it perform to prove that the tyranny of the monarchy of the past and the democracy of the new was as an instrument of democratizing society through education and access to what had formerly hidden away in princely, clerical, or scholarly private collections. Normalizing what appeared as a hub hazard mind to the rational modern mind, the hub hazard mind seen in the *wunderkabinett* of curiosities that preceded it, however, which were actually organized around hidden relationships and metaphysical cosmologies that date back to the Renaissance. Behind this new order based on the measurement system, measuring everything of the French Revolution, there was also the purchasing power and there was military power, and the curatorial gaze emerged along with a network of museums across Europe to organize for the collective. Good artworks were pillaged and brought to the museums. As Ella Hooper Greenhill reminds us in her 1989 Foucauldian description of this dispositive, artworks were confiscated and inventoried. Not only were indigenous populations in colonized areas subjected to such practices, all of Europe went through it. Half of Italy went to Paris. Internally, as religious spaces were rearticulated into cultural spaces, as artists and naturalists accompanied the invading military forces.

In the new Louvre, the works of living artists were separated from those who were dead. Initiating a trend broken only in the twentieth century with the contemporary art museum. Paintings were hung chronologically by geographical historical schools, establishing modern canonical art history that performed innumerable exclusions: bourgeois, racist, and certainly sexist. However, the bipartite structure of public viewing versus hidden research was established at that time and is still dominant today in the museum system: the public face and work that goes on behind the scenes.

In 1990, Tony Bennett recalled how the modern art museum crystallized between 1800 and 1850 and becomes the place of philosophical contemplation of the art object abstracted from the context of real life. And Adorno reminds us of the importance of the public access they provided, as well as noting the shift from taxonomy to evolutionary episteme, arranging objects in evolutionary sequencing still used today: the history of the earth, of life, of civilization, and in Darwinian modes. Bennett proposed “establishing a new set of relations between the museum and its exhibits and its publics to transform it into an instrument of self-display of democratic and pluralist societies through processes of showing who takes part in those processes and their consequences.”

For constituencies to make “active use of museum resources rather than being entertained or instructed.” That was an old text but still quite topical. Museums today are collections classifying the different typologies we see around, collections of meaningful things. They are the sites to host those things, sites for public exhibitions, memory, educational institutions, research, and learning, and more recently sites for social advocacy and for the building of new public spaces or for the purpose of nation building in a postcolonial context. For the purpose of negotiating diasporic identities in places where the diasporas are located or for the purpose of localizing communities involved in places of so-called globalization.

In the Western and Eurocentric model there are art museums and history museums, memorial museums, and more. In the worst cases, contemporary art museums continue to be places with an aura of authority where bourgeois value systems and taste are reinforced, declared, and class hierarchies are reiterated. In the best cases, museums are dialogic spaces for social inclusion, a space where the canons and norms can be practiced, subverted, and redrawn. This is the more recently identifiable relational museum, just to use a term from the art of the nineties, concerned with social interaction. And they are cross-cultural contact zones as James Clifford defined them in 1997: more a cultural center than a collection and display of objects foregrounded in the social relations that make up the museum community. Now ten years after that text, I believe it's time to say that's double-edged since the participatory radical ideas of the 1990s have proven at times to be a face of the participatory episteme that is just as implicated in forms of social control through offering apparent forms of agency, say the Facebook world.

Just to continue a moment with this, we are today, in particular, in a period where we see the rise of public art collections open to the public as self-defined museums. I'm thinking of foundations of course such as today's Prada Foundation or Vuitton, Pinaud, the Garage, and so on. There are many all over the world. This began over 20 years ago with some rare examples in Miami and in Torino with Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo collection opening as a public museum space. It has extended throughout Europe, China, and Latin America. If traditionally speaking the museum is a space for three areas of activity — the conservation of artifacts, the enhancement and valorization in the sense of attribution of value through study, presentation, and exhibition, and research and publications — then it's quite interesting to note that these three criteria are more and more served by the private museums' mission, as well as with their



growing education departments. In order to emulate the functions and role of the old public museum, education departments, research projects, and community relations departments grow at incredible speed and pace, with private funding possibilities that are overwhelmingly greater in comparison to what the old public museums might still have to count on today.

But paradoxically there are only two areas where the old European enlightenment public museum can challenge these new emerging models of private museums, always assuming that it wishes to and that we want to think in that way for a moment. One of these is the inalienability of their collections, their being there forever, the question of eternity, unless destroyed by acts of war and plunder. And the other, precisely because it does not rely on the increase in value of the collected artifacts due to their inalienability, is the area of self-questioning and self-critique. The museum can partake not only of institutional critique, it can destroy itself. To see itself as the *archeion* with all that entails but it can also partake of processes, even of questioning the division of the cultural fields themselves. And it can indulge in the freedom to wonder whether art even exists as we have defined it over the last three or four centuries. And what new aggregations of artifacts both human and non-human may emerge to forge unimaginable new classificatory systems by other people who will follow us in the future. Not us.

So let's look at the first of the two specificities. If being a collecting institution seems archaic, elitist, and siding with global financial capital and its liberalization of the art market, I am currently invested in just that, competing and disturbing the market by achieving a growing collection without financial transactions or with few of them, through systems of gifts by artists and heirs of artists, able to subtract and remove the artworks definitively from the market for eternity. This goes in opposition to those who would have wished to allow for an easier deaccessioning and easier circulation of the artworks in the art market. While a book or a film must circulate as much as possible to exist, and while architecture stays where it is and was built, artworks are in a place somewhere in between. If an artwork circulates too much it no longer exists, except financially, and it is withdrawn from the public space, as it is hidden away as an asset in private storage, free ports, and banks. Some critics say that there may be excessive protectionism of cultural and natural heritage with for example the 2004 legislative decree number 42 in Italy, whereby artworks older than 50 years and where the artist is no longer alive (whether they be Italian or not), can at the discretion of the Ministry of Culture never

be allowed to leave the country, even if privately owned. However, the old *legge botai* of 1939 and which states that cultural patrimony cannot be equivalent to commercial goods, came at a precarious and critical moment: just at the start of the Second World War and in a time of instability not dissimilar in some respects to our own.

So for me what is interesting now is how to stabilize the flow of artworks through the interruption that is constituted by the public museum that abolishes the possibilities of accessioning. Yes, the works circulate but when they are intercepted by the public collecting institutions from which they are inalienable, we know that there is generally some small, rare case that can happen: there is an interruption to the flow. And this allows for artworks from one place in the world to circulate like butterflies to other parts. But at one stage the journey ends and is interrupted. It is this notion of interruption about a suspended space and time that redesigns temporality by being a time capsule shot into an unknown future, that provides the space for the symbolic and the real, which are psychotically merged today in the digital consciousness to once again separate, opening up the space of the third, which is the imaginary.

This of course returns the museum to its old definition but does not mean that the artworks are inert or need to be inert. They may be activated by artists and audiences in many ways. Works and displays may be contaminated and composted together. So it's not this old museum, but it's this one that we can still make, that produces this. So the inalienability of the collection means that the museum is dealing with eternity: it's the primary element that distinguishes this type of museum from the fantastic museums that are emerging and that are doing great work as well. The infallibility of collecting means that the museum is dealing with eternity, and eternity is no small matter for humans. It might even be no small matter for crows, given what we know of their funeral ceremonies. It is on this basis that the public museum accrues its collections through gifts even when there is very little tax benefit, or no tax benefit. It deals with a certain forging of alliances, primarily between artists and States. The old model of the Pompidou as the museum that receives gifts.

So I was going to go through some slides, in thinking about the past and the present and eternity and so forth in the documenta. This was a bit of an equation where we reconstructed a situation of viewing in the exact space, in the Fridericianum. I can't even remember why I thought this would illustrate what I just said. I was going to speak to you about an exhibition that I am working on that will open in two weeks called from *Bombs*

to the Museum 1942–59 in the GAM in Torino, which speaks of the history of the destruction of the old nineteenth-century pavilion, with the bombing of 1942. And the new building that was created later (diagonally compared to the rest of the city), because the bombing and the destruction gave the opportunity for a proto-bio architectural construction: a heliocentric building with a decrease in energy consumption. So, we are delving into the history of that museum and of course looking at the collection of the post-Second World War period that was bought at the time by my predecessor Vittorio Viale, which is greatly reminiscent of these images. It's also a way of explaining certain aspects of Informel through the destruction of form through the bombing. This was the inside of the museum previously. The Casorati collection is an example. The Casorati estate gave much. This is what I do when I am not inside the building. I have tea with the 94-year-old great-grandchild of the greatest Italian liberty sculptor, Luigi Bistolfi. In 1902, he initiated the Turin exhibition of decorative of arts, the first in the world, bringing the Arts and Craft movement and the Secession. So we have tea every week. In order to bring the State into the museum.

This is probably normal practice for most of you but for me it's very exotic coming from documenta, where I wasn't thinking about patrimony and collections and how to develop them. This is very new and I am enjoying it. Anna Sagna was the founder of experimental dance in Torino and was also a student of Casorati. She died a few years ago and left hundreds of paintings and drawings that are basically focused on the portrait and the face. Extraordinarily interesting for a number of reasons, so we are going to do an exhibition of hers and they are going to give us a hundred works. This is like this whole question of collectors. They are at the door, because I walk in and I say it's for eternity and they say yes. Yes. It's a simple tactic and it works 100% of the time.

This is an old castle: Cattelan did it to go to Biennale of Sydney about *Revolutions — Forms that*

*Turn*. A picture of Istanbul by Ed Atkins, which is now also gifted to the collection. Adrián Villar Rojas, also in our collection now... It's a royal residency and actually royalty don't really talk about money. I know I am saying this as a paradox and a kind of Marquis de Sade comment. I hope this is not pulled out and quoted because it could be catastrophic. But I do think that it was said to make a different point. Back to the compost, this was the concept for documenta. Concerning the second point that distinguishes us, which is that precisely because there is no possibility of selling artworks, the art museum, the public art museum with inalienable patrimony can question its own foundations and experiment vertiginously with the question of value and wonder whether indeed any of its collected objects have the status of value in the first place or have the status of exceptionality that the art museum conferred to them in the first place. Not being a private collection. A private collection or museum based on patrimony, even a bank foundation public museum, cannot question whether its patrimony has any specific worth, over the worth of a tree or a flower. Only we can say that perhaps we do not even exist and the king is naked.

So, I remind you that in his introduction to the history of art, in his seminal book *The Story of Art*, 1950, which even today is one of the two or three most widely read art history books to have been written in the twentieth century, Austrian-born art historian Gombrich wrote: "There is really no such thing as Art, there are only artists. Once these were men who took colored earth and roughed out the forms of a bison on a wall or a cave. Today some buy their paints and design posters for hoardings. They did and do many other things. There is no harm in calling all these activities art as long as we keep in mind that such a word may mean very different things in different times and places. As long as we realize that Art, with a capital A, has no existence." Thank you.

## Q&A with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: Carolyn, thank you. Could I invite you to say something about your experience in working with audiences in the museum context? And could you clarify what you said at the beginning about the problem of localized program and audiences?

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: Working with audiences has always been important because there

are many audiences. The artists are the audience as well. I mean, different social classes, different knowledges... There are the audiences outside the museum, so there is the work outside the museum as well in different areas. For example, now I am trying to create house museums in the city of Torino. One is the Carol Rama house. She died recently. The works must stay there and cannot move. Basically they cannot be sold or dispersed.

This will hopefully become a house museum that is creating a place, which is more domestic, and whereby the museum, the building of the GAM, becomes a node or an office for a certain number of experiences outside of the building, in the city, which implies a certain crossing and traversing of the city, for example. So the consideration of the inside and the outside comes to the fore. But there are so many programs, but as I said, not being a director of a museum, I was working in museums but as a curator of biennales. I don't really like the word curator or the word biennale. But as an organizer of large exhibitions I always found great receptiveness with the museums, when I did attempt to do a certain number of programs, like the education department... There are so many things based on for example bringing together expert knowledges in various different fields, that are not artistic and so-called art specific knowledges by creating a little university that trained volunteers that ranged from bankers to gardeners, to quantum physicists or mathematicians in the work of artists and have them lead a number of tours of exhibitions bringing their own... There were gardeners doing tours together and they bring different knowledges, cobbled together in a composting. That was a program that I believe expanded certain ways of imagining access to art. But the audience was also the people who were doing the tours, not just the people who were giving the tours and vice versa. There is nothing original in that, I don't think I've ever had an original idea. I'm more like a traffic controller of ideas and practices. I believe that proceeding that type of work is the work of artists, like the Tate tour by Dora García and so on. Andrea Fraser worked so much in experimental things of these sorts. I think most of the programs that we invent were actually started by artists generally. There are many... I only mentioned one that I think has to do with what we consider knowledge and how we consider the sharing of it, what we consider pleasure, joy, and the relationship between *jouissance* and knowledge. So that's the first part of your question. The second part refers to the first thing I said... which is that... I've always been faced with people saying, you won't have an audience if you do this. Don't do it. For example, don't go to Cockatoo Island to do the Biennale of Sydney. There isn't even a ferry, how do you expect people to go. In the end, we brokered a deal with the Sydney ferry company. I give you 20,000 dollars, you do the ferries, no matter how many people come. Certainly it became a huge sponsorship of the ferry company. So generally... what I am saying is that if we think in terms of numbers and increasing audiences, number one, sometimes we don't increase because people are not as stupid as the people who think those ideas

are. So number one, it's not so interesting to the actual local audiences. And often the so-called blockbuster exhibition is not a blockbuster at all in the end. Secondly, I think that when we do achieve that kind of program, we often have to pay a price. Even when there is a very good relationship in terms of numbers, with the location of that exhibition, for example, the Monet exhibition at the GAM, that was on when I arrived at the GAM in January. I was out in the street giving coffee to people who were lining up. It was a huge success, the most visited exhibition in Italy last year. I believe that a small portion of you may know that there was this Monet exhibition made with works coming from the Musée d'Orsay in a brokered deal through an agency that organizes exhibitions.

So what we lose in that is of course the possibility to speak to our online audiences and to the world. And to share discussions. I remember someone was mentioning the Pompidou's excellent exhibitions that were done when I was a young person. You know *Paris-Moscou* or *Paris-Berlin*. Those kind of things were extraordinary, and were research-based and were hard to do. They spoke to the world. Or when Tate did the cities exhibition. They spoke to the world and not just to museum collectors, and museum directors and curators. They spoke to everybody... in Vancouver you could be discussing, maybe that was a very good idea... the experience of the museum through the Internet is fundamental. That's what I meant. When we localize too much to increase the numbers in an idea of accessibility that is connected to the territory, we lose the worldliness. In my modest view.

Questioner: Excuse me. I am a bit confused regarding what you said about values. Yesterday you said that Nina Kandinsky's donation to the Pompidou had no value because there was no more accession and again today you spoke about a museum's treasures losing their value because they are stuck in one place for eternity. I understand that in museums, let's say European museums, where there is no deaccession, whatever enters the museum has a huge cultural value. I am not worried about the economic value. I'm rather the opposite. As a collector I would never give hard works to an American museum knowing that the first time I turn my back they will send it to Sotheby's or Christie's to make money out of it. I think it's the most ambiguous and negative attitude, while in Europe it may stay in the warehouse for a number of years but then it comes out it serves a cultural purpose, which is my purpose. I was confused about your attitude on this question.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: Thank you for that. Because it allows me to specify that I usually use words with a double entente. So when I use the word value, I can do so in different ways. Or valorization, in different ways. By removing it from the global flow of goods, the artwork does not lose its cultural value, it doesn't lose anything. It doesn't even lose its monetary value. But the museum can work with it, with an imaginary system that is totally free from its financial value. This is what I mean. I can say we must go beyond the distinction between patrimony of human things and so-called non-human patrimony. I can break down that distinction. For example, this is just one possible thing. Without any fear of its losing value because I am not caring necessarily, actually its financial value increases my difficulty to insure the works or to lend the works to other museums. So I was making a paradox on distinguishing two ways of seeing the word value. I don't mean that it loses its value in terms of world heritage. Secondly, I do not agree with distinguishing between European and American museums, because there are private museums with excellent programs in Europe and there are private museums with excellent programs in America. And if I'm not mistaken, the Detroit Museum of Fine Arts was protected from being deaccessioned by Americans. And if I am not mistaken, the Dakar museum in Senegal, which is beautiful, has also a status of inalienability. So it's not necessarily a European privilege. It's very difficult for MoMA to deaccession. How often has it happened? Once recently. So I don't think that we should make this distinction between Europe and America. Global financial corporate capitalism is a global phenomenon. It's not an American phenomenon. We can talk against the US, like in 1969. If we want to we can do that, but it's not the focus of my speech to make an attack on the United States of America. If there is an attack, it's such a complex intertwined system and it's very difficult to simplify in that way, in my view.

Questioner: My name is Nick, I'm from Washington. I can tell you that the National Gallery in Washington has a strict policy of non-deaccession. There are art museums that have those policies. But I just had a comment, not a question. Which is that like a lot of people here I love your projects and I've learnt a lot from them. I think it's really beautiful what you said about artists and their role as precedents for the projects that you create. But I also feel very strongly that your work is artistic and creative and that you facilitate their work. So thank you for what you do.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: Yes, but now I am

learning what it is to be a museum director. So I hope I can learn from all of you. It's a new challenge.

Questioner: Can you comment on your views on the future of biennales? In a hundred years we've gone from one biennale in Venice in 1895 to about 20 around the time of the Havana Biennale in 1994, to currently well over 200 and they seem to be proliferating. So how do you see the future of biennales evolving?

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: There are different phases... First of all, it's only a word. I mean David Medalla runs the London Biennale, you know. It has thousands of artists in it and it's more fictional. You can buy *Flash Art* I think at the Prague Biennale. Biennale is just a word, it means every two years. It's associated now with a temporary exhibition of, generally, art, unless it's called the design biennale or the architecture biennale. And it's usually forged through an alliance between different public and private founding agencies for the purpose of both establishing the importance of a city in a global perspective, as opposed to the old idea of the establishing of nations. This old institution was created in 1895 but it wasn't the same thing as what we call biennales now. The first Venice Biennale was more like an art fair, in the sense that all the works were on sale and it was more like a trade fair for art. Just because it's called a biennale, it doesn't mean it's the same thing throughout a certain period. The first one is in 1895 and then there is Carnegie and São Paulo in the 1950s, and then comes Sydney in 1973, founded by an Italian who was thinking about Venice and wanted one in Australia. The documenta is not a biennale, it was never called a biennale and never associated with that until the last four or five or six years, when suddenly in conferences about biennales people would say biennales and documentas. As if there was something called documentas, which there isn't. But we could think of documenta in the trajectory in the sense of a periodic exhibition, generally every five years, sometimes four, of international art. But it came out of something else, which has to do with the postwar reconstruction of Europe. It has that legacy in its founding that somehow will always keep it apart from what you were speaking of. The biennale syndrome starts with Havana and Istanbul in 1987 and then has a huge development in the 1990s up to today. With all sorts of biennales from Marrakech to the fantastic Indian initiated one, the Kerala. That moment, Havana and so on, had something to do with the birth of new political unrealities, like the Gwangju uprisings, and has to do with Nam June Paik's impulse. I didn't answer your question, I'm just trying to find an



answer. What do I think? Well, I think that it's a phenomenon that on the one hand expresses a decentralization of the old Western Eurocentric model of what art is by also providing a platform of discussion with artists from other parts of the world. For example, when I did the Biennale of Sydney, it was the biennale with the most Australian artists of any prior biennale, and indeed the one with the most indigenous Australian artists. So when you do something there is a wish on the part of the curators to connect with the art production and art communities there or, if the curator is from there, then there is a wish to connect with a broader one. So I think the biennales did serve a very important purpose and achieved it, which is to reorganize the access to visibility on the part of different cultural practices. So this is very good and it would be crazy to encourage their demise or to think of it as being in a state of demise, given that we are still in this incredible moment of proliferation of art fairs everywhere. But on the other hand, if we want to be critical undoubtedly with the collapse of the nation states and the rise of the global transnational corporations, clearly we are in a politics of cities and city-states, a little bit like Italy in the Renaissance. So in order to identify Singapore as Singapore, you can do it through this cultural arm, which is the creation of a biennale. I mean it's one of the many ways in which a city positions itself, on the platform of the world for goals that have to do with other issues that are not artistic, that have to do with positioning oneself financially and so on. I suppose you can see them as manifesting that. But I'm all in favor. I think there should be thousands of biennales. Like the biennale of CIMAM. Why not?



# Perspective 04

## Sylvie Blocher

Visual Artist, France

### *Short Biography:*

*Sylvie Blocher lives in Saint-Denis, France. Her work—since the beginning of her video series Living Pictures in 1991 — is based on “human material,” fragile and unpredictable, but endowed with an extreme presence. Found all around the world through advertising in local papers, volunteers are invited to share the artist’s authority. Her purpose is to invite the image and the voice of the Other — neither seen nor heard elsewhere, because it is simply non-existent within the communicational processes in today’s world order — and to bring them on another level of perception. Dealing with the imagination of others, her work on video commits itself to a “poetics of the relation.” It advocates another distribution of places and voices within contemporary society. She questions identities, gender, skin colors, codes of representation in a global world where Otherness is wounded. In 1997 she and the architect and urban planner François Daune founded the architectural action group Campement Urbain, which received the National Urban Planning 2012 prize of Australia. With the architect Tim Williams, they redesigned the master plan of the city of Penrith, New South Wales, with the words of the inhabitants. She has shown her work in numerous international museums and biennials. Collections: SFMoMA, MUDAM, Centre Georges Pompidou, AGO, among others.*

### Presentation: *Invent Yourself Anew*

I would like to thank CĪMAM and all the members of the board for inviting me to speak today. I’m particularly moved by this invitation because art and museums have greatly contributed to my personal emancipation. Today, in a time of extreme global tensions — fuelled by terrorism, economic violence, misinformation, and the rise of populism and authoritarian powers — we witness the destruction of artworks, censorship, self-censorship, and abuse directed at artists, museum directors, curators, intellectuals, and critics who, day after day, fight to preserve the emancipating power of art and culture.

Felix González-Torres once said that artists are not social workers. This means that museums are not social welfare centers. While art can produce magic, beauty, ugliness, and transcendence, it can also disturb, break the inertia of a normative world, or repair, help to heal, or invent provisional responses.

While art cannot save the world, it can, together with the museum, help us imagine what we still have to do together — or not. Art saves us from ignorance.

It elevates us. This must be always remembered. Few realms in society can claim to embrace both the singularity and the commonality of the world.

But museums are also reflections of the state of the world. They can either contribute to open fields and experimentation, or close in upon themselves. This dichotomy has always existed — in art as well. When I was a child, my parents did not dare to enter a museum. They were afraid they wouldn’t understand; they were ashamed. Because of my personal history, I see museums as places of intensity that ensure the exhibition of works, but also their democratic circulation. Museums, and those who run them, therefore have the duty to be attentive, sensitive, brave, and resilient.

“The Museum and Its Responsibilities?” calls for another question: What about the artist and his or her responsibilities?

In 1987, I produced *Nuremberg 87*, my first film. It consists of a single-traveling shot around the Nazi Parade Grounds in Nuremberg; the soundtrack

is a long list of first names read out by the German actress Angela Winkler. This film evokes the dark and murderous side of modernity, that is to say, the industrial liquidation of six million people during the Second World War. Through these first names, taken from archive lists of the dead, I try to “draw” viewers in a “sensible” way into a history they have not experienced personally, yet must “shoulder,” in the same way that we must “shoulder” the history of colonized countries.

While working on *Nuremberg 87* I learned that the Nazis, in addition to their hatred of Jews, had a visceral hatred of the “feminine.” For the Nazis, the feminine was a “decadence affecting heterosexual men in order to degrade them.” It took me a while to understand that this “feminine” stood in fact for otherness: the murder of the Other in each of us. Totalitarian powers, religious fundamentalisms, and patriarchal societies are composed of men and women who practice the murder of otherness and who want to kill the Other in them. The Other is also the one we don’t know, the one we fear and who must be eliminated: refugees, black- or dark-skinned people, homosexuals, disabled people, those who are different.

Otherness haunts my work. Otherness hinges on an experience with the Other: in other words, on the sense of touch, whether real or symbolic. People say I make art that “touches” — a word that is despised by a part of the art world — and is also related to my social background, or class, and my gender. In 1991 I thought that ignoring emotions was an extremely dangerous process, which would one day turn into its opposite, namely, fake emotion, storytelling for populist and advertising purposes, instead of emotions produced by our experience of ourselves and of others, and by our relationship to imagination and poetry. History tells me that I was not wrong: fake emotions built by the media are even winning elections!

In 1991, after a public debate with Daniel Buren in which I called for a modernity that would be less authoritarian, less colonialist, less white male, less anti-women, and less anti-gay, I made a last construction in the shape of a manifesto: *Déçue, la mariée se rhabilla* (Disappointed, the Bride Got Dressed), which is part of the collection of the Centre Pompidou. From that point on, I decided to work only with “non-workable material,” in other words, with “human material,” which would force me to remain conscious of the ethics of aesthetics. Video became my medium of choice.

In 1992 the world became my studio. Working with two conflicting concepts — globality and locality (universal local art), I decided to share my authority as an artist with the people I am filming. To find participants, I use the Internet, newspaper

adverts, or mailing lists of museums that invite me. I never do castings. I never hold out a microphone to someone as this is a gesture of authority that I want to undermine. I want to “give back speech to the images,” in other words, leave behind communicational speech and remove ourselves from reality by provoking a letting-go that allows people to *invent themselves anew* outside of the standardized codes that enslave us.

My participants are from various social, racial, and gender backgrounds, and I never film them where they live. I invite them into an anonymous studio and present them with strict filming protocols that they have to overcome. The result is disturbing because the participants no longer follow the codes of true speech or act. Words or gestures unknown to them are brought to the surface. I try to unsettle their unconscious relationship to authority, to cause a letting-go. Like a lover’s rapture.

Neither the participants nor I emerge from this process unharmed, because these moments can be disturbing, joyful, and painful. When I ask them if they agree to let me use what we just filmed together, they always say, “Yes, because it’s not me!” So what is this “it,” which is not them?

The films I’ve been making since the nineties speak of our radical singularity and the fact that we cannot possibly be the same as the other, but that this connection from self to self is crucial, if we want to understand the other.

I will now present three experiences with three different museums:

*1: What is Missing? Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2010–14*

For the MCA’s community program *C3West*, I chose the Penrith Panthers, a Rugby League club founded by First World War veterans. Its profits are split in two: one part goes to the sports section, the rest for art, medical care, and education.

The panthers compensate for State deficiencies, creating hundreds of jobs in this modest suburb of Western Sydney. After the filming of *What is Missing?* they invited me to reflect on the utopian aspect of their organization, and to imagine the future of their land in the center of the city. Together with the collective *Campement Urbain* (which I created in 1997 with the architect François Daune) and with the Australian architect Tim Williams, we redesigned the urban plan of this rather ugly suburb, set in a wonderful landscape at foot of the Blue Mountains.

We developed this new plan from the images and narratives of its inhabitants, but also from their imaginary representations of their countries of

origin. The project won the Australia Award for Urban Design in 2012. During the four years that this project was developed, the MCA adopted a transversal position between art, architecture, urbanism, museum exhibitions, and political utopia. It worked to bring together separate milieus and functioned as an “experimental platform.”

*2: Color of Confusion, San Antonio Museum of Art, 2014–15*

I was invited by David Rubin for a production commissioned by the San Antonio Museum of Art in Texas. He arranged for me to meet the city’s Latin-American community. I filmed three videos under the title of *Color of Confusion*.

*Skintone*

I put out a call for Latin-Americans who would agree to be filmed in their “Sunday best.” For the background of the shooting, I printed out a huge Skintone, a kind of large-scale sampler of different shades of skin. I asked the 75 participants to stand in front of the color of their choice and address us through the camera in silence, after telling me a story in relation to their skin color.

*Alamo*

The Fort Alamo Memorial in Texas is the foundation of the United States’ national narrative — the moment when Texas was taken from the Mexicans. I went on a guided tour of the monument in the company of the last chief of the Auteca Paguame tribe. As the guide was talking, he kept on muttering, “That’s not true! It’s not true!” This inspired me to shoot four versions of the tour: the complete version of the professional guide; a version by a young Latin-American woman; a version by a black woman; and the version of a Native American. I did not call upon historians’ perspectives but on four stories that haunt and structure the collective memory.

The director of SAMA (Katie Luber) proposed to relocate my exhibition outside the museum, to a venue she felt was better suited, namely a museum “reserved “ for contemporary Latin-American art. I refused, and the exhibition was dramatically canceled.

*3: Dreams Have a Language Part 1: Off the Ground, MUDAM, Luxembourg, 2015–16*

As part of my monographic exhibition *S’inventer autrement* at the MUDAM in Luxembourg, I made a two-part work. Enrico Lunghi, allowed me to shoot live in the Grand Hall of the museum, during one month. For the first part, people had to register on the website of the museum and came to the filming with “one idea to change the world.” Then I offered to lift them off from the ground — from a few centimeters to twelve meters in the air. Of the one hundred participants, 51 never came to the museum. Those who did come appeared to have no idea how to change the world. But when they were lifted off the ground, their reaction was very intense. Every evening I edited the images of the day, which means that the work was developed day by day, publicly.

For the second part I wrote a scenario based on the complaints that I had collected during the interview process. Thirty-five participants returned to star in the film. In my scenario, the film begins like a documentary about the process and turns into a tale. The MUDAM becomes the last refuge when the world comes to an end. There a handful of people await death under the leadership of an authoritarian man. I imagined a woman, presumably my alter ego, who escapes from the place to see the light one last time. Outside, she meets an unexpected character who changes the end.

\*

To conclude I would like to dedicate my intervention to Enrico Lunghi, who, has just resigned from his position as director of MUDAM under the combined pressure of populists and a disingenuous campaign by a local news organization. Despite his commendable work, for which he earned widespread international recognition, he failed to get support from his board of directors or, indeed, his minister.

This kind of situation can happen to all of us. It illustrates the lack of courage of the politicians who are elected to guard our institutions, and the power of populist groups who hate contemporary art, its high standards, and its freedom.

Everywhere we turn, we see the rise of authoritarian figures, obscurantist morals, and new fascisms. We witness the ascent of hate speech and discourses of punishment, of racial and gender conflicts, and of political and economical pressures on art.

As in the case of writers uniting around the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, maybe it is the time for artists, museums, galleries, and other places for art and culture to be more vigilant, in other words, to connect with each other more strongly. Maybe it

is time for us to leave our comfort zones, to enlist the help of lawyers, to defend ourselves against defamation and rumors, to fight those who denounce, exclude, abuse, or kill.

Maybe we should look for inspiration to other organizations such as the International Parliament of Writers, (inspired by Edouard Glissant) or the International Cities of Refuge Network, or what Achille Mbembe is doing.

The form our resistance will take, doesn't matter. But the time is now.

# Perspective 05

## Ticio Escobar

Director, Centro de Artes Visuales/  
Museo del Barro, Asunción, Paraguay

### *Short Biography:*

*A lawyer from the Catholic University of Asunción, he is a curator, lecturer, art critic, and cultural promoter. Director of Culture for the Municipality of Asunción (1991–96), he was Minister of Culture for Paraguay (2008–12) and President of the Paraguay section of the International Association of Art Critics (2004–08). He is currently President of the Carlos Colombino Lailla Foundation, Center for Visual Arts/Museo del Barro in Asunción. Author of the National Law of Culture of Paraguay (Law Escobar 3051/08), he has published over a dozen titles on art theory. He was made Doctor Honoris Causa by the National University of Arts, UNA, Buenos Aires, and has been awarded many international distinctions.*

### Presentation: *The Contemporary Museum: Other Responsibilities*

Right, so I'd like to start by thanking CIMAM for having invited me to take part in this debate. First of all, let me focus and go straightforward to the topic that has brought us here. Basically, the fact of working and studying the responsibility of the museum and the curator means trying to find the link between both responsibilities, trying to find the intersection between the curatorial discourse and the museum discourse. Increasingly, the museum requires a narrative, a critical discourse, or at least it requires a reflection or a theoretical discourse regarding the narrative to which it is going to refer, regarding the topics that the museum is going to revolve around. And I have to say that, more and more often, museums are hosting particular curatorships, and therefore there is an intersection that could be compared to the ethics on one side of the museum, the responsibility of the museum, with the ethics of the curator of the exhibition that is taking place in that museum. Let's think about the curatorship of biennials, and let's think of all of these sessions that really have the same problematic.

First of all, the responsibility depends very much on the museum itself. Yesterday it was already mentioned: responsibility. And I would like to insist on that, because it is really what I want to show

here. Responsibility implies the kind of limits we are going to accept and what kind of limits are — or are not — under our responsibility. It's like creating a contour to define the position of a museum and the position of our own ethic.

This will also depend on the model of the museum from which we depart — there is a limit there as well defining the ethical responsibilities of the curator. When I talk about the curator I have to mention that, well, in Spain we refer to a curator as a commissioner for an exhibition. Well, this is what I call a curator. The ethical responsibility of a curator relating to the model of the museum is linked to the market, and this limits some ethics with the curator and the relationship between the curator and the artist with whom he works for an exhibition, for instance, or for the museology or the museography of the museum. And the public, the audience generally leads to a problem that depends very much on the model of the market, and the society of information, entertainment, the society that gives so much importance to shows, and this determines exhibitions in museums, because everything is measured through the filter of the audience. This leads to ethical conflicts with regard to how much are we going to put at stake in order to appeal to



the audience: to what extent is it legitimate to seduce the public so that they finally enter the institution? And then, we have to sustain a model of art that is redemptory and has to reach everybody; a kind of art that has to be seductive in order to really appeal to massive audiences.

So this leads to a problem; at the very least it leads to a debate. Basically, the responsibilities for the ethics of museum or biennial curatorship lie with patrimonial museums, that is museums devoted to heritage: how to preserve, how to protect, how to disseminate all the heritage of a museum, of a collection, in order to facilitate your understanding. I will just refer to museums here, although now, more and more, and especially with modern museums, we have a social responsibility to assume as well that there is the pragmatic social responsibility, that there is a civic responsibility, and that there is a responsibility as well to teach and to reach as many audiences as possible. And it's all about trying to share with the audience the learning and the history of art.

And then there is something else, and this is something related to art in itself. And this is a topic that, in my opinion, should be defined by the limits of art, if the art is open to other responsibilities that go beyond what is the responsibility of the curator: in other words, what are the limits of the curator and what he presents as a form of art? Well, for us it's like asking what is the definition of art? This is a topic that emerged in the twentieth century. In the previous century it was nonsense to even think about trying to define art. Now how many definitions do we have? What kind of model of art? What are we referring to when we talk about art? Because, nowadays, most of what happens in relation to art is happening at the borders between what art is and what it isn't. Very often, it also happens outside of what we understand conventionally as art. Possibly, responsibilities of museums should be considered in accordance to historical models of museums, and here I'm going to simplify these historical models of museums, because I really take for granted that you know very well what kind of models of museums there are. So allow me to be quite simplistic here. There is one great responsibility of the museum: that is the foundational responsibility. The universality of art is founded on a model with great hegemonic myths — this is the large museums, the metropolitan museums. This is a model that idealizes art, not only as an expression for the universal, but also as an expression of consumption and the identification of elites — sectors that are those who are going to consume this great art.

The responsibility of modern museums is related to the responsibility of caring for the heritage, and this responsibility is related to

the autonomy of art, because it's about expressing this autonomy in the modern museum. This is related to the process of innovation, and this is the forefront of the museum, the avant-garde of the museum. And this leads to progress in art, because it's the result of an accumulation of experiences that link different styles, different shapes and forms in order to lead to ruptures, to something new, to new spaces. And this creates a problem for the public, because conventional museums from the old model didn't have that responsibility of opening up to the public. The positions there were related to public policies: education, research, documentation, publishing... Now, when the ideal model of art or the ideal model of the museum starts to get into conflict with these contingencies of a model of art that is more and more determined by the market — and I am talking here of the market in the very wide sense of the term, both market and society — well, I know then that there is a conflict. I have been to museum exhibitions whose success is measured by the attendance, where it is just a matter of how many people turn up. So, there is this on one side, and then there is the real approach to the biennial, to this form of art: and this is again measured as a statistic.

Basically, what we can call the contemporary moment is our current model, and this is clearly different from the old model. The current period opens up a new approach, a new perspective, a new way of looking at things, and if we have to summarize this approach, I would do so by saying that it's a diversity — diversity is the keyword. Diversity understood as different ways of expressing art, different forms of art. Non-Eastern, non-Western art, non-hegemonic art. Moreover, diversity understood as diversity of styles, but also diversity of ages, temporalities. There's an anachronism. This is a perspective that breaks with this dream of linearity, and this dream of progress that was there in the past and that drove the avant-garde. So, this perspective of time, this perspective of progress, and this perspective of always looking to the future, and understanding art as a perspective for the future... well, all this is broken. Now we see the emergence of different temporalities, different subjects. We see different forms of arts, and we see as well different models of museums and institutions.

This is one of the main differences, a landmark actually, that could also be connected to the following fact: the crisis of the autonomy of art. I think we're now going through a moment that is quite dramatic and quite difficult. Walter Benjamin published an article on the work of art in the age of technical reproducibility where he is almost announcing the death of the distance of form — the possibility of separating form from the art.

And the autonomy that is a significant dictatorship through which we isolate the domain of art from reality. All this is relative, because art has always been concerned with reality. Reality has always counted for art, and I guess that the great paradox for modern art is that, on the one hand, it really envisages the autonomy of form, but it also envisages the utopia of changing the world, or at least of trying to improve the world. So it goes beyond the form of art, and in general, modern art has looked at the world through a filter, through itself, through an almost open peephole from which it can watch reality and try to change it. It has the fundamental mission to change the world. This is what modern movements do. And once we are dealing with the crisis of the autonomy of art, then there are certain facts and situations that are outside of the closed field of art, and then you see the emergence of other cultures, different realities. We see the emergence of what is real, the emergence of reality understood from a Lacanian point of view. And this leads to an exacerbation of the instrumental reason of the market. And actually, the contemporary scenario is even more complex, because there is the field of art, and there is also fundamentally this opening of the field of art, which is threatened not only by history and politics, but especially by the market. Because the market gets inside the traditional field of art.

So now we are facing the very strong policy of the look, the image. There is the policy of trying to recover the critical plot and the poetical density of art as a way of seeing the world. And this is somehow inscribed within the Illustrated regime of modernity as a negative thought, as a critical thought. As Marina Garcés was saying on the first day, it's the lack of trust from art, from culture in its own instruments. So it's about trying to see things from outside and questioning the dispositions of thoughts. So there is always art questioning its very institutionality, art that keeps questioning and distrusting its own elements. And we can talk about the politics of the look upon art, or the politics of the analysis of art in its own limitations. Well, these are the possibilities that art is facing right now. Because when the circle that encapsulates art in an isolated field breaks, then there is an eruption of all the contents and all the concepts, that is, realities, narratives... And then art runs the risk of being without its own sphere, dissolved into concepts, social relationships, pragmatism, anthropology, daily life...

What then is the perspective of art? And the relationship between the autonomy, the minimal distance, and the heteronomy of a boiling world — a world that is revolving around the field of art. I think that this is the most difficult question that

modern art has to face. At a certain moment, Kant would wonder: is the frame that frames the work of art part of the work of art? Well, in principle it is not, because that painting, that sculpture can be thought of without bearing in mind the frame. But to a certain extent, yes, indeed. The frame is part of the work of art, because its size and color change our perception, just as hanging the work at one meter or two meters does... it's just setting a context. So, Kant says, well, it is true that the frame is part of the work of art and it isn't true at one and the same time. It is quite unusual for Kant to say that it is but it isn't. But the answer depends very much on the moment, on certain contingencies. So, more and more, the limit of art is defined depending on the context, on the situation, on the contingency. Art is not considered as a finished work, but it is related to a dialog between the work of art in itself and also the frame — and here I am not only referring to the physical frame but the social and cultural frame, the historical condition, the context: everything that revolves around the production of that work of art. More and more, that work of art will be defined in this contingency, in this context. Most of modern art is actually defined in this manner, and it's very much related to the specific conditions of the work of art, and there you can give a defiant look to all these different meanings of art, bearing in mind all the different situations.

This is very much related to the opening discourse of Marina Garcés regarding the problems of limits, and ethics understood as limits. Now, how do we define art? How would a curator define and determine what is art and what isn't? What kind of discourse is behind that? What kind of things may happen so that the work of art is indeed considered as a work of art? And this is all related to ethics. Sometimes, it's quite puzzling because we tend to say that ethics and aesthetics are the same: well this is quite a defying statement. We wouldn't think that ethics and aesthetics are part of the same; I think one annuls the other. But they are equal, as they are both very important. They transcend the world, and that's why the problem of what is linguistic in art is very complicated, because it's part of the ethics, and therefore it determines the limits. And we're always working around these limits, and the curator has always to establish what is the limit of the image, of the concept. Because if we refer to art here, we're talking about image and concept, so these two elements must appear somewhere. But then, how does this interaction happen between the image and the concept, so that the work of art can be produced? It's always an operation that has to be taking place in a certain void out there, and without any kind of metaphysical certainty. However, there always has to be a certain responsibility regarding

the image, because this is ultimately art, and there always has to be the possibility of adding something to that, because it is really moving us.

# Perspective 06

## Michael Dagostino

Director, Campbelltown Arts Centre,  
Campbelltown, Australia

### *Short Biography:*

*Michael Dagostino is dedicated to collaborating with contemporary artists and curators to challenge historical, economic, and social frameworks. He has been Director of the Campbelltown Arts Centre (Sydney, Australia) since 2011, where he has established an innovative interdisciplinary vision with a focus on long-term engagement and participation through an artist-led program that has local, national, and international relevance and partnerships. He has commissioned many exhibitions and projects including: Towards the Morning Sun (2013); Temporary Democracies (2011–13), an intensive three-year live art program based in the heart of a social housing suburb in Campbelltown; The List (2014); TV Moore's Rum Jungle (2014), a solo exhibition with leading Australian artist TV Moore; and With Secrecy and Dispatch (2016). He began his career in partnership with fellow artist Michael Lindeman, developing a strong curatorial approach for emerging practices. In the last ten years he has been the inaugural director of Parramatta Artists Studios, where he developed an innovative hub for emerging artists. He is currently on numerous boards, and has been chair of Artspace (Sydney). He is a current board member of FBI Radio (Sydney).*

### *Presentation: Communicating the Unspeakable — Our Role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Contemporary art exists everywhere, boundless, without restraint and diverse in its discipline. But when does it have a responsibility to community, and what is the role of the museum in the twenty-first century? Communicating the unspeakable is an ambitious proposition and best understood as a set of approaches embedded within Campbelltown Arts Centre's contemporary artistic vision. As an unwavering intension, these approaches consider the past, present and future as territory revealing the depth of our collective experiences and the profound impact art can have within society.

Understanding the transfer of knowledge through contemporary artistic practices is a complex thought, but a commonality among them is relevance, both to person and place. But as museums, what is our role in constructing this exchange, and how can we increase our vocabulary to become more relevant to our society and

community? This can be established by placing the artist, the community, and the museum together in a cohesive form. It is here that the role of the curator steps beyond the care of collections, to bring together the voice of the community, push the position of the artist, carry discussion and debate, while creating supportive platforms for collaboration. This multifaceted relationship and the strength of the dialog, and shared language operate together creating an opportunity for respect, participation, advocacy, and ownership.

Campbelltown Arts Centre attains the position of vessel both physical and fluid and is located on the edge of Greater Sydney, Australia, 50km away from the city center. The Arts Centre is the major cultural hub of Campbelltown City Council and is located on Tharawal land. It maintains strong ties to Tharawal Aboriginal Land Council, Aboriginal Elders, and community. This is extremely important

as a starting point for all our programming that there is a high level of consultation with our local Aboriginal community.

With a focus on partner-driven, community-engaged, contemporary art strategies that contribute to the sense of community cohesion and economic growth through professional development, the Arts Centre takes multi-disciplinary approach and brings together visual arts, performance, music, dance, and emergent practices.

The peripheral area of Campbelltown, where the museum is located, is a suburban setting spanning a significant area of Western Sydney. This is an area, like many it mirrors globally, rich in diversity, with wealth and poverty sitting side by side. It is fraught with negative perception and neglect, while strengthening in unity amidst great demographical change. Population growth of our community is one major difference. Our population is growing at a rapid rate, demanding the development of new suburbs to cater for our audience catchment increasing by half a million in 20 years.

As a museum, what ways do we seek to breakdown the restraints restricting our capability to explore the unspeakable that exists within our communities? Using the edge as a starting point, my ethos is straightforward: be relevant to place, exist inclusively, take ownership of the past and present, practice readiness, and challenge the perceived opinion of race, culture, and status, while placing artists at the center of this situation. The museum's program embodies this vision and responds to this question, and the various approaches are established through my curators.

As a curator and now artistic director, this ethos was formed through my upbringing. Growing up I faced racism and was marginalized; it had affected me and ingrained itself in my psyche. I have retained this energy, this agitation, in my directorship and this has created rigor and nuanced accounts of relevant, community-engaged, and artist-led programming with social justice at its core.

Now that I have established a sense of the demographic and artistic vision of Campbelltown Arts Centre, I want to talk more about the approaches we apply in developing the exhibitions and as a way of contextualizing the unspeakable, whether this is derived from tragedy or celebration, it has become the foundation of our programming.

Our community is in a constant flux of change, a momentum pushing us forward where we lose focus on the gaps within our community. It is to these gaps we often find ourselves drawn, embedding within them, seeking out ways to encourage participation, collaboration, and ownership. As a museum, we are not only just part of a community but we are obligated to it.

A recent project best articulating this was *The List* curated by Megan Monte that gave voice to the increasing population of young people in Campbelltown. With almost 30% of the population under the age of 24 we felt there was a gap in our engagement with them. While we have a dedicated education program for young people, and the concrete amphitheater acts as a skate park similar to MACBA, but they were still missing from our audience.

One day I walked over to the skaters and on my approach they went to leave. I stopped them and asked if they had seen the exhibition. They hadn't. In fact, the last time they had been into the center was on a school excursion. I also asked what kind of art they liked. They didn't know. This became the starting point for *The List*.

*The List* was a multidisciplinary art project that offered complex insights into daily rituals and current issues within youth culture through socially engaged practices. It was their story. Participating artists were Abdul Abdullah & Abdul Rahman Abdullah, Zanny Begg, Kate Blackmore, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, Shaun Gladwell, Michaela Gleave, Uji Handoko Eko Saputro (aka Hahan), Robin Hungerford, Pilar Mata Dupont, Daniel McKewen, Tom Polo, and George Tillianakis.

*The List* celebrated culture and placed young people at the forefront to take ownership of the platform and to voice current issues. *The List* stepped well outside of the gallery context, infusing contemporary practices in various ways across the community. The project succeeded because of the social engagement structure. It was genuine, created insight, fostered experience and encouraged participation. Our conversations started with the artists, then we target specific organizations working with young people. These conversations revealed all the gaps in the community. We created a fluid and exciting agenda whose collective concern was expressed. We then paired artists with organization to develop their projects. The organizations, our partners varied from local Primary and High Schools to Reiby Juvenile Justice Centre, Mission Australia, and TAFE NSW, to name a few.

Our artist-led approach required a high level of engagement and commitment, artists chose to partake in a long-term residency, ongoing workshops at the centre, offsite, and arm's length digital alternatives to realize their projects. *The List* emerged over 18 months, activating the strong voice of young people, while being sensitive to the disparities of diverse culture and status within the community. The real magic of *The List* was in the process and I will share with you some of the projects.

From the outset, we had many conversations with young people about the design of the exhibition.



The physical entrance was a transition point. Instead of walking into an open gallery, we built a wall with a doorway. On entering you experienced a cacophony of sound and video that flowed into one another. It was loud and brash, with scattered beanbags to rest and watch the video works. Some parts felt like a messy bedroom or a shared house.

Over six weeks, Marvin Gaye Chetwynd worked with acrobatic, circus, and dance students from a performing arts high school collectively developing a video and live performance that merged the Trojan story with the novel, *The Yellow Wall-Paper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Marvin's installation and video titled, *The Yolo Wallpaper*, was a raw collaboration, releasing an energy driven by the young people.

Over several trips to Campbelltown, Tom Polo's ALL I KNOW captured the conversations of youths on public transport, mostly on the train after school. As the conversations evolved it became a poetic gesture of their insight and concerns, which ranged from anxiety about growing up, school and family pressures, to violence, sex, and drugs. Tom also did a number of high school workshops, exploring painting but also talking to them about these issues. Amongst a number of phrases, the one that stood out to Tom was: ALL I KNOW IS THAT WE KEEP DOUBTING OURSELVES. This encapsulated everything and was installed on a set of billboards along the train line, forcing commuters to experience art and reflect on the phrase and what it might mean in their lives.

*Girls*, by Kate Blackmore, was a dual-screen video documenting the lives of four teenage girls growing up in Claymore, one of Australia's most disadvantaged communities. These girls featured in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Four Corners television episode entitled "Growing Up Poor," which revealed how families live in Claymore. The documentary emphasized the perceived hopelessness of the suburb and manipulated the narrative of the girls, resulting in unrelenting bullying and violence. Their reluctance to be involved was understandable, however they put their trust in the artist and us. Kate documented not only their story, but also their aspirations and dreams for the future within in the stark reality of the life and landscape of Claymore. The girls controlled the narrative, and at every step the artist shared the edits and consulted on the content. We had a private viewing for the girls, their friends, and families before the opening of the exhibition. This was important to them and they had the final say.

*This List* made a grand statement about how contemporary art can bring a generation together and forward. We dedicated time and placed significance on the voice of a generation, valuing their

insight and echoing it through the production of art. Participation and collaboration was critical if we wanted success, and this project exceeded our expectations, engaging hundreds of young people in the artists' projects. The gap on which this project was established was closed momentarily. Although we have increased our youth audience, we are under no illusion and continue to seek out new ways to engage this audience and nurture a sense of belonging at the Arts Centre.

Creating a space for culture preservation is difficult, and on this note I would like to talk about *Towards the Morning Sun*, curated by Keren Ruki, which celebrated contemporary Pacific practice, while creating a space specifically for Pacific voices, diverging into issues that are quite pertinent and personal, yet speak to global issues such as climate change, gender politics, and the global militarization.

Using contemporary art and community-engaged processes, *Towards the Morning Sun* continued longstanding connections and established new ones to consult and engage one of the most under-represented communities in Australia, the Pacific diaspora. The heart of this project was this community and to ensure success, ownership was important. Because of the determination and unrelenting commitment of the curator, the center was transformed into a hub of cultural activity, an inspiring place where personal and cultural narrative weaved the community, through the artists, to the museum.

Nine artists from across Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific were invited to partake in the project: Torika Bolatagici, Eric Bridgeman, Maureen Lander, Brett Graham, Rosanna Raymond, Niki Hastings-McFall, Latai Taumoepeau, Sam Tupou, and Salote Tawale. It created a language that permeated through the works revealing the important processes and consultation that took place. Placing new and older work together to create layers, with performance and conversation intrinsically fuelling the underlying themes.

The exhibition opened with two Aboriginal dances, a men's and women's group, sweeping the area of negativity and coming together in a sand circle to commence the smoking ceremony with a local Elder, who was then joined by a Maori Elder who led the audience into the museum.

The performances immediately after were culturally charged and politically weighted. Latai Taumoepeau lay suspended underneath two tons of melting ice that continuously dripped on her causing extreme pain. This commented on global warming, which is a major concern for many Pacific nations. Among a number of moving performances, there was a point when the gallery was called to silence

by the blowing of a shell. This calling was for Rosanna Raymond who was dressed sparsely, covered in blood, and paired with another woman, naked and painted white. Together they commenced a birthing and called to the artworks in Maori, activating their presence through performance. While this was happening, other performers enacted Pacific female heroes and a dance group performed the Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire. In some circumstances, a nude transgender female birthed with blood, while the howling in the museum would be extremely overwhelming to the Pacific Elders. Being sensitive to this possibility, over several weeks Rosanna spent time with the community, working closely with them to explain the work and meaning behind it.

*Towards the Morning Sun* remains a legacy from which we continue to learn, as a model to engage the community, to demystify contemporary art, pushing the barriers of the gallery space, and inviting cultural vibrancy to reside there. The continued nature of our approach has established a real connection with the Pacific diaspora, and ignited a renewed interest in fostering contemporary practice with reflection on tradition. It is with these moments that we attain relevance within the community.

Reflecting on this position, our community, and the land upon which the museum is placed brings me to the next exhibition, *With Secrecy and Dispatch*, a project driven by and for the local Dharawal Aboriginal community commemorating and acknowledging an important moment in our history.

April 17, 2016 marked a significant date in Australia's history — the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Appin Massacre. The Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, ordered the capture of Aboriginal people, who were shot if they tried to escape, and the displacement of communities within the South West region. The Appin Massacre was one of the first recorded massacres upon Australian soil and has mostly been erased from our Australian history. The Art Centre is located 15km away from the massacre site, which is mostly unknown to the local community.

This project was established with strong consultation and advice directly with the Aboriginal community of Campbelltown, including Dharawal Elders, community members, and stakeholders. I engaged Aboriginal and First Nations curators Tess Allas and David Garneau to produce the exhibition collaboratively with the community, engaging artists whose methodologies materialized shared experience, history, belonging, healing, and emotional labors associated with dealing with brutality of colonization. A curatorium was

established to assist in the selection of six leading Aboriginal Australian and four First Nation Canadian artists to create a new works responding directly to the Appin Massacre and other atrocities of colonization. This two-year project allowed all artists to live onsite, meet the local community, and conduct in-depth research. The center took a very local event to explore global issues. Pursuing public acknowledgement of our bloodied histories as the commemoration of these important dates from the frontier wars was long overdue.

Participating artists included Australian Aboriginal artists Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Frances Belle Parker, Dale Harding, Julie Gough, and Genevieve Grieves, and First Nations Canadian artists Jordan Bennett, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Marianne Nicholson, and Adrian Stimson. Additionally, important exciting artworks from various collections by acclaimed Aboriginal artists were also included, which juxtaposed the commissions adding gravity to this commemoration and demonstrated the diversity of artistic exploration into the history of brutality committed against Indigenous people.

The artists' projects were rich and deeply reflective of the great tragedy faced by Indigenous people, both locally in Appin, nationally, and internationally. Using drone technology, Canadian artist Adrian Stimson created *As Above, So Below*, capturing an aerial view of two massacre sites, the Appin Massacre of 1816, and the Cypress Hills Massacre of 1873, the latter where Indigenous people were hunted and murdered by Thomas W. Hardwick and John Evans on false suspicion of stealing horses. Although the lands of the Northern and Southern hemispheres were "settled" by Europeans, they remain Indigenous territories.

Through video animation Canadian artist Marianne Nicolson chronicled the 1862 smallpox epidemic that was knowingly unleashed on the Indigenous peoples of British Columbia, Canada, in *There's Blood in the Rocks*. When smallpox broke out in Victoria, Indigenous tribespeople of many different nations, visiting for trade, were subsequently forced to return to their communities along the coast, thereby spreading the disease rather than containing it. This action on the part of the colonial authority resulted in the deaths of approximately 20,000 Indigenous peoples in British Columbia, plus nearly 14,000 deaths on the West coast.

Australia Artist Vernon Ah Kee's *Authors of Devastation* references James Baldwin's writings about the hardships suffered, both historically and sociologically, by his people, Black Americans. Within this context, Vernon's work evokes connotations of "atrocities" and "cruelty." It speaks of massacres and the idea that individuals can

somehow hold themselves to be “true” and innocent of such crimes. In his artwork, Vernon implies we are all implicit in this act and responsible.

Australian artist Frances Bell Parker reflected on the atrocities of 200 years since the Appin Massacre in *Tears will flow at the bloodshed*. Telling the story through her eyes and as a visitor to Dharawal Country, Frances wanted to ensure the voice of the people were carried by the work’s twenty canvases representing the massacre. Fourteen of these canvases are subtly marked in recognition of the fourteen bodies recovered from the site — even though it is likely that many more lives were lost during this barbaric act.

Australian artist Julie Gough’s *Hunting Ground* responded to some of the places that match the written accounts of violent attacks on Aboriginal people in Tasmania by colonists in the first 35 years post invasion. She started with 78 texts and by the end of the project had found 320 writings about violent encounters with Aboriginal people in Tasmania during the frontier period, many of which resulted in death. Julie chose ten sites where she placed etched and silkscreened texts relating to the murderous encounters. It articulated the hidden histories, a demonstration of a crime scene, and a record of her reconnection with these places.

Only two events of murderous violence upon Aboriginal people were termed “massacres” by colonists, despite a probable figure in excess of 5,000 for Tasmanian Aboriginal people “disappearing” during the first 35 years post invasion. There are hundreds of printed “episodes” of violent “encounter,” and surely many hundreds or thousands more that weren’t recorded.

*Remember* by Genevieve Grieves reflects a deep and abiding recognition of Australia’s violent past. Australia is always ready to commemorate and mourn the loss of some lives, but not others. The poppy is a symbol of loss from wars the nation has been involved in but the wars, conflict, and massacres that occurred on Australian soil should also be remembered.

The fringe lily grows across the southeast of Australia. Through her research Genevieve found a story said to be from the Dharawal culture. In this artwork, the fringe lily is represented as a video, emerging from the mist and brought forth by the voices of young Aboriginal people from the Campbelltown region. The lily is manifest as a purple poppy, for it is not just the Dharawal people who must remember the past; it is all of us.

Operating within the realm of tragedy, optimism, and the deep emotional impact occasioned by revisiting these horrific events is highly sensitive. The social conscience is a powerful thing, and as a museum, we have influence over it.

Through projects such as this we can educate and acknowledge our past to protect histories. It is through remembrance that healing occurs and we were able to take this tragedy, mostly unknown to the community, and bring it to global attention. We intend to build upon the themes of *With Secrecy and Dispatch* with the second iteration in Canada in 2018, encouraging new perspectives and conversation on a history that has global resonance.

An upcoming project that encapsulates the notion of communicating the unspeakable is, *Another Day In Paradise*. Presented in January 2017, this exhibition is our most ambitious yet and will include the first major presentation of paintings by Myuran Sukumaran, who was executed as part of the Bali Nine in Indonesia in 2015. The paintings were completed during his incarceration at Bali’s Kerobokan jail and during his final incarceration on Nusa Kambangan Island. To understand these works further we have commissioned seven new works by Australian artists and, together with Myuran’s work, it is intended these commissions will respond to the death penalty while profiling human rights and restorative justice. The commissioned artists are Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Safdar Ahmed, Megan Cope, Jagath Dheerasekara, Taloi Havini, Khaled Sabsabi, and Matthew Sleeth.

In establishing the framework for *Another Day in Paradise*, we are working collaboratively with Ben Quilty, an established artist, human rights advocate and close friend and mentor to Myuran. Myuran’s family are also close to the project, and as are the various stakeholders who supported Myuran to the end.

Myuran found life in art and quickly established a daily practice, becoming a positive role model for other inmates. He was trusted by the guards and despite facing one of the most barbaric acts of execution, he was able to establish and maintain an art studio in the jail, completing over 150 artworks in four years. In February 2015 he received an associate degree in Fine Arts from Curtin University, Perth, Australia via correspondence. This alone speaks volumes about the capacity of the human condition and even more to the practice of art and the influences it can have. Myuran’s story is proof of the true potential for art to change lives, even in the most extraordinary circumstances.

Today, Myuran’s works exist as a lasting message of his rehabilitation, suggesting everyone deserves a second chance, and reminds us that compassion is at the core of a healthy society. During the exhibition we will hold a symposium on the death penalty, which will coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the last person to be executed in Australia.

The ability to communicate the unspeakable comes in many forms. Our intension to take

ownership of our time and place perpetuates the sheer capabilities art can have in influencing change. I do believe there is great fortitude to be found in art and museums are safe places to have such difficult conversation.

In concluding, I want to recognize and acknowledge other organizations working in similar capacities, mirroring the same demographic, and looking for those gaps within the community. Lastly, be present and assert the museum's power to incite real change, activate meaning and the collective to challenge the unspeakable in all its trajectories within the twenty-first century.

I would like to thank the CIMAM board and team for creating this platform and the curator Megan Monte for working on the preparation on this presentation.



# Panel Discussion with speakers

Moderated by Elizabeth Ann Macgregor,  
Director, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: I was just reflecting on the extraordinary panorama of views that we've had, and different kinds of perspectives. Some of them with common threads and some of them perhaps with diverse threads, so I thought I would begin by asking the panel to comment on whether there is a dichotomy appearing between what Carolyn described as the museum as a place for inspiration, and I think Sylvie was also talking about museums as places where artists and curators come together to share some kind of vision of the future, in a kind of very optimistic way. And, on the other hand, perhaps the challenge of the dissolving of the boundaries of art that Ticio referred to, and Michael began his presentation by saying that art exists everywhere. So, my panel members, is this a dichotomy that's art dissolving the common [inaudible] without boundaries out into the world? What implications does that have for the museum as an institution? I guess what I'm getting at is the role of the curator.

Sylvie Blocher: Perhaps what is interesting in our time is the "archipelago" concept. That means that you have different zones, and different zones can have their own life, and they don't have to be related to one center. I'm very interested in movement, and I think all institutions have this reflex to want to be the only center. So, it's very interesting in our moment, how we can have this idea of moving and crossing all these centers, and not be related to only one... and also in a symbolic way in art.

Michael Dagostino: I'd agree with that. I think there's been a breakdown. There's been quite a shift over the last 20 or 30 years with the idea of what art is. I have these conversations and it kind of gets looked a bit heated but, I think artists are taking more control of the idea of outcoming art, it's becoming more of a kind of a paradigm where art is a tool to serve. The amount of things that I've been engaging with now where the artist's intent is the purpose. The audience's intent, the commissioner's intent, you know, so... It's operating in such a diverse paradigm where there is all these kinds of layers that exist in an artwork now, which may not have been there 50 years ago. Now your commissioned work has all

sorts of expectations, the artist has expectations, the community has expectations. And so, all those have to be intertwined to create a work, even though there is an artist doing it.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: And so you see the role of the curator in a sense is to create that framework. The frame that Ticio was talking about is perhaps dissolving. The curator has to put the frame, the context, back in place.

Ticio Escobar: Yes, indeed. Well, I think yes, of course, the curator is an intermediary at a moment in time. And, actually, he's capable of creating a certain synergy between the works of art, a relationship among them, and then this is as a proposal of art. So, the role of the curator is very important because the work of art in itself is not self-sufficient, so the work of art and the curator actually need the other in this relationship. The curator is bringing a discourse in order to explain why these works of art are behaving in this position as works of art, and what the relationship is among them. And he also talks about the limits, and therefore there is a certain and specific work of art, because the works of art, placed together because of the curator, become one work of art in that very specific context, with those boundaries amongst themselves. However, I do believe that the work of art in itself, individually, must have a certain autonomy, it must come from something in itself, it must have a certain distance in order to capture the look of the Other, because otherwise the curator would just go into an exercise of reflection and that's it. The curator would reflect conceptually, but I think that the curator must always be capable of letting the work of art say something, be looked at. Therefore, the curator must allow the work of art to show that expressiveness, and to appeal to everybody's sensitivity, regardless of the discourse of the curator, however convincing. The curator is there in order to create a certain concert, but there cannot be any concert if there is no conductor.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: We were talking earlier about the different disciplines and the breaking



down of those boundaries, which is something that Carolyn has also been very interested in: bringing different disciplines into the curatorial framework. Would you like to say more about your approach on that front, Carolyn? Scientists, other thinkers...

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: It's a very complex question, actually. So, it's not easy to discuss in the format of a round table. But just to connect with my colleague here, I must say that there is a resonance between his speaking of this notion and the ideas that you explored during the talk about this limit of art. Except that I think that the position is coming from a different context, and a differently situated knowledge, which has the history of the Latin American avant-garde in it in particular. It is therefore a strong idea of the role of modernity as a revolutionary practice, as opposed to seeing modernity's cultural consequences, modernisms as a non-revolutionary practice, which is more typical of situated knowledges in Europe. Given that the last great modern project was decolonization, and therefore it is seen as a force. And that aesthetic autonomy combined with a political engagement to change the world is the story of Carlos Cruz-Diez. And basically the consequences of Constructivism in Latin America, the idea that there is no blue but there are a million blues, and therefore it's that story. Jesús Soto and so on. So I think, the notion of the breaking of the boundary between art and reality, so beautifully told as a project of the twentieth century by Peter Bürger in the seventies is where I believe our friend is mainly coming from. And that's a different story, so, to be etymological about this, or, to be archaeological about this, in my own trajectory it comes from certain feminist positions and a feminist trajectory, which is a different one. But it comes to a similar idea of the ins and outs of art and non-art.

It also comes from Adorno, this question that, once defined, art is no longer that which is was when you were defining it. So, it's the paradox of the presence of the outside in the core that moves all the movements that I've taken, not towards pluridisciplinarity, nor some superficial idea of multidisciplinary, but it just has to do with the fragilization of the boundaries, a kind of fragilization that provides energy to a core. A position of vulnerability of the field. We don't need to reiterate amongst ourselves that art is a modern Western concept from the Enlightenment, and Kant, and Winckelmann, and so on... this idea of the autonomy of art. Obviously, I think that in the world in which we live there is no reason why this globalized idea of the artwork as being a kind of practical philosophy or philosophical exercise done through the process of making, a tautological process, so that we

discuss form with form, as opposed to an art historian who discusses form with words, or a mathematician, who discusses form with symbols... According to this traditional, Western notion, art means that the history of those forms of embodied practical philosophy were the subject of one's study and engagement is the thing itself. So action with action, film with film, language with language... Representation of space with representation of space, politics with politics... and that kind of tautology that defines and is at the core of our usage of the word "art," you know, is historically bound, and probably 500 years from now will be looked at as a period in the cultural history of the world that starts at a certain point.

Maybe it has its prodrome with Vasari in the 1500s, and then it more flourished, grand definition in the 1700s, and then expands with colonialism across the board and becomes a given, just as contemporary art I see as a term defining a particular period that begins around 1960, or certainly in the period of the rise of phenomenology, where we define, with the atom bomb, the here and now. So, what is contemporary of the time of the "now," and the "now" is the bomb, basically, or Auschwitz. And this term develops in the sixties, and then declines and wanes in the early 2000s. Now it's still dominant, but as a very trendy term, which is completely fraught, which is why there are so many theories of speaking rather of contemporaneity and not contemporary, coming from the Australian thinker Terry Smith, who was part of Art & Language. "Contemporaneity" is perhaps more politically open to the ideas of different trajectories or different histories that are simultaneous, that are contemporary one to the other. I tend to doubt words. It's not that I doubt what an artist does, or a person like us does, it's that I doubt the labels and the words art, curator, contemporary...

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: Ok, on that note I think we should open it up. It would be very helpful if you could tell us who you are.

Questioner: Kuan-Hsing Chen, I'm speaking tomorrow. I'm basically an outsider to the art world, but somehow got sucked into it. So I have some sort of an outsider view. I want to continue the conversation Carolyn just opened up, and I think it is indeed a serious issue in relation to the decolonization issue. Not only the category of art, but everything else, including philosophy, literature, religion, and so on. These are all categories either imposed on [missing recording] ...we invite self-colonization from different parts of the world. Now, if you historicize the issue, I think it is complicated in the sense that art has become an institutional site, so how do

you make use of it? And at the same time, not continue to reproduce the colonization epoch. So, I think it's a highly contradictory process for a lot of people working with art institutions, especially when Carolyn wants to address these issues. How do you do it? In the sense of, how do you open up? For instance, the colleagues I work with, they start to argue that art is completely open-ended and empty, it depends on what you want to do with it. But then, there are all these complicated issues involved, with this... there are supposed to be archiving issues and so on. Tomorrow, I'm going to argue that the art center is actually, if you return to the historical context, located in a contemporary context. The temple is the site where a community is located, emotionally involved, and so on. But how do you archive that? Not to mention the spiritual medium and all these events going on. Well, the museum is everywhere in that sense. But modern art museums become completely empty, completely decontextualized. The temple has family and community surrounding it, but what is the community surrounding the art museum? And then, everything else follows — how do you archive? I'm part of the advisory board for the AAA, but it's actually difficult to address these issue with them, because the entire art education got sucked into existing European formal practices. But even if you locate Europe in its own context, and try to historicize it, you need to return.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: We're looking forward to hearing this presentation tomorrow, thank you for bringing us to the archives, which is an absolutely critical issue, and for tomorrow. I was thinking about the contextualization in terms of community in relation to what Michael spoke about, so maybe that was an interesting point for you. Is there anyone...

Questioner: João Fernandes, Museo Reina Sofía. When I was listening to you, Ticio, I was wondering what you think about the ethical responsibility of museums regarding the production of discourses. Museums are always split between the classical questions of interpretations, experience of the viewer, and information. Information to make what they do accessible to most of the people visiting them. But this excess of information sometimes is a serious limitation to knowledge, too. And we have a sort of increase of information in museums and a reduction of the possibilities of knowledge in the museum. This is the paradox we are living today, a paradox we confront each day of our lives inside the museum. What do you think about the ethical responsibility of the museum regarding the production of discourses?

Ticio Escobar: One of the characteristics of the contemporary museum is its multiple dimensions. A museum of art is first and foremost a museum of art. A museum that must gather an art collection, and this is why it must have an object to preserve. And around that object, the museum of art must preserve, protect, and disseminate it. However, this is an open issue. I am personally interested in the intersection between wise art, Indigenous art, and popular art, and I'm not talking here about contemporary art and Indigenous art, because I think Indigenous art can also be contemporary art, so I have to mention that there is illustrated art. However, normally, Indigenous art belongs to the topic of ethnography, anthropology, or natural history. Therefore, I think that it is important to facilitate this kind of intersection between one and the other, because we have the possibility that these collections can be perceived and considered as another kind of information — information of anthropological interest or ethnographical interest. But to me, a museum is supposed to show this form of art, this is the intention of the museum, the aim of the museum. I don't like the Musée Branly because it places Indigenous objects without context. It just places objects. They are aseptic, they are deprived of the history that revolves around them. Of course, a museum cannot exhaust all the information, so there is a center for documentation, research, and the library, but the main task of the museum is to understand the works of art that it gathers and to make these available to as many cultures as possible, with all the interpretations that this may lead to.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: The control of information is of course a very political act in any context.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: Did you just say you don't like the Quai Branly?

Ticio Escobar: The collections are fantastic, but not the concept of the museum.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: I agree that the Quai Branly is extremely problematic. But to answer your question, I agree with you that the excess of information just creates a top-down situation, which doesn't allow for any discussion and any imagination in the ways in which we understand the world. I don't use the word discourse for that because it has a problematic history. But if you mean a space for the imagination, words and stories that have not been told, that open up the possibility for more stories, as opposed to closing stories. Then of course, that's fundamental. I didn't speak about it this morning, but of course it's fundamental, and it's

part of the relationship between where the museum is and the people that inhabit it — they're not ghosts.

Michael Dagostino: I think it's the way we are told how to look at it as well, so within the Australian school system, for example, you go to an institution, you go to a gallery, you get an education, you participate, you get a lot of information. And so, I think that there is a bit of training or untraining that needs to happen with art audiences, where they can look at something a little bit differently. So, for example, in galleries, I don't look at any room texts, I try not to... I know who's on and that's about it. And then I start reading the information afterwards. But I know a lot of our audiences want to know everything before they walk in the door, so... We've got to cater for everybody. But there is a training that happens with school kids on how to interpret art, which sets up a structure for all institutions to follow later in life.

Sylvie Blocher: Thinking about the modernists, they promised to change the world, which was very nice, but when you promise something you begin to betray, and you'll betray everybody around you. I think it's why we must push in another direction and change the way we act, and also the way we act with our own authority and the authority of others. The question of authority is a big question for institutions: how they deal with it, how they use it, or how they begin to talk with artists, for example. I find there are two very different types of curator: there are the ones who really discuss with us, and we make a work together, which I like very much; and the other ones who will use you just like wallpaper, because they are very brilliant and they just want to succeed, which is another position. I must say, I prefer the first one, which is my own opinion, because it helps me to engage with art in a critical way. The second thing I want to say is, for me, where I come from is important. When there are people in my videos, and when they are inside... of course, it doesn't change the world, but it washes them. It really washes them. I have filmed about 500 people in my life: a lot of them continue to write to me and what I like with this process is that I have very rich people and very poor people in the same video, which you could never have in normal life.

Questioner: I'm very happy to be with the microphone again because I just wanted to thank the perspective speakers, and I think Sylvie's presentation is an answer to the worries of my friend from the Museo Reina Sofía, because I think there is a fantastic way of proving that, under the right circumstances, and with the right kind of relationships with the leadership and the curators of

museums, an amazing type of knowledge production can happen. And I think I've been there before, and I know how difficult it is to work with these kind of sensitive matters, to work with people, to put them at the center of your discourse, to consult with them, and to make them part of the process. And this is also what my colleague Michael Dagostino was talking about. Despite the callousness of the vocabulary, you're saying constantly: well, the actors have to be consulted. I think there is a lot of empathy that goes on there.

Sylvie Blocher: You must not imagine that the complexity of looking at people is just because they have problems or are poor. I filmed 12 billionaires from Silicon Valley for the SFMoMA, and these guys just speak about their obsession to be eternal. They want to buy anything that could save them, and all 12 of them have the machine to be cryogenized. It is very interesting that we are in a world where we're always told that everything is very simple: black or white. And what is interesting is to try to fight everybody for the complexity of the world, because complexity needs time, it needs to let the Other speak.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: This comes back to the point that João was making about the levels of information and not oversimplifying very complex issues. It is one of the challenges for museums and curators to actually be in a position to articulate and help people to respond and articulate for themselves these complexities without reducing it to some kind of loose common denominator.

Questioner: I'm not a museum person, not a curator or an art historian, but I've been around for 70 years visiting museums and art spaces, and so I have a very personal way of looking at it. I think that the boat is sinking, because the issues are becoming much too complex, and I think that the way out of it is to try to simplify. Simplification, of course, always has a price. Things are being left out. But, for instance, for me a statement like "everything is art" kills the issue, because it makes it much too broad. I'm thinking about what Ticio said about a CIMAM of museums of modern art. We should be talking and seeing about museums of modern art, and not go into different areas that will only make the analysis of our future worse. We've been attacked for many years because art is becoming show business; it's on the entertainments pages instead of being in the culture section. We are being attacked because a show that brings 400,000 people is much better than a show that brings in only 40,000. But the show of 40,000 people, if it has substance, can be much more culturally important

because it says something, if only to 40,000 people, but that's much better than having queues going in to see these monster shows, staying 15 minutes and taking a few pictures with their iPhone and not getting anything out of it. So, we are being attacked on many of these very important issues, and I think that — maybe it's a simple wish, and I don't expect it to be more than that — our entire discussions should be narrower, simpler, and more specific.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: Maybe the issue is that there is not one model, but several. What is appropriate in Middlesbrough, as we heard yesterday, may not be appropriate for the Museum of Modern Art or TATE.

Questioner: I'm Abbas Nokhasteh from Openvisor, sort of producing works. I wanted to ask, because working through the education and development of artists in different parts of the world, and in particularly difficult neighborhoods, I always feel it's important to have a well-developed relationship with universities, but also with local museums, mostly for the reasons that you talk about, which is: issues regarding reflection, the speed at which people are able to think about their work, and all sorts of different elements regarding education. But what has always been an important question for me is, as the artist mentioned, concerns there being any room for the idea of complexity. The great difficulty that I've seen over the years is that there is very little room for disagreement. Is this a location? Is this a museum where people can disagree with what you do as part of the colors of discussion? Because the moment a museum does something, it takes away the oxygen from any other discussion that may or may not be happening elsewhere. But it can also infuse discussions with oxygen as well. And disagreement is important because a community, a group of young people, all sorts of people, when they're shown in the museum, when they're developing their work there, it's very important, it makes them feel very good. But it also defines them in a particular way. So, I always think the safest bet is to always include room for disagreement.

Michael Dagostino: With the majority of exhibitions, we do consult with the community. There is always an open discourse; there is always disagreement. When we bring two or three different groups together there are usually factions within those groups. They disagree not for the sake of the work, but because of the politics that they follow. It always happens behind closed doors. At the end of the day, what you see as an exhibition is probably 10% of the work that has actually gone into producing it. But there are disagreements all the time, and it's our job

and the curator's job to manage those disagreements. There are ways of managing meetings, but, at the end of the day, these things happen. We try to manage them in a fairly closed environment. We do include artists, they're usually part of the curatorium, and so they're involved in those conversations. They understand the intent of their work, they understand where they're placing their work, how it's going to be read, because of all the arguments and all the conversations that we've had. So, I think it happens, and I think it happens in a lot of institutions, but nobody talks about it.

Sylvie Blocher: I think that's a very important point we call *dissensus* and *consensus*. I like very much what the philosopher Chantal Mouffe writes about that. She says the problem of democracy is a problem of *consensus*. When you have a *consensus*, you have to kill the one who doesn't agree with you. With a *dissensus*, the person with the opposing view is an *adversaire*. An *adversaire* is somebody you have to talk with. And I think that it's always important to be in the *dissensus*.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: I think it was the American artist Barbara Bloom that described museums as places of doubt and disagreement. I thought it's a very important point. Do we have one final question?

Ticio Escobar: I would just like to highlight how relevant mentioning Chantal Mouffe is, talking about who is the enemy and who is an adversary. And how natural disagreement is in art, because of the complexity of the world seen in many different ways through art. And now, with this encounter, we can democratize dissidence, we can find different ways to give an opinion, different opinions, but there are also different ways of seeing art, and we can see different diversities of art without conflict, without the destruction of the other just for the sake of them being different. There is a possibility of this radical diversity. Because every artist is one different way of seeing the world, and if that difference became an enemy relationship it would be even more terrible.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: Maybe in the end the museum is the place where we have to learn respect for dissidence.

Questioner: My name is Albert Heta, I come from Stacion — Center for Contemporary Art, Prishtina. I have one question for Carolyn. I think she was the first person, or the only person that mentioned the word "war" in her presentation, which is something that we are surrounded with presently,



even though not so close geographically. You also used a line that somehow stuck with me: you said there are times when you have to suspend normal living in order to act. I wanted to ask you how this translates in museums that still continue to function, no matter what happens around them. And then, in your biography you mention the Istanbul Biennial in 2014 and it says you basically drafted the biennial. The Istanbul Biennial happened after huge demonstrations, right around the park. I would be interested to know what that experience was like, working in such context, and also knowing what came after in Turkey. Also I have one final question: what is the function of a museum in a country that is occupied?

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: That's a lot to discuss. But actually, in the four of five pages that I didn't read there was a part about art and conflict, and the responsibility that one takes when one works around an exhibition, for example, in a place that is occupied, like Kabul was when we did the documenta there. We had 40,000 visitors, although you cannot travel there unless you are working for an NGO or one of the occupying forces who are actually the military that correspond to the countries that liberated Afghanistan from the Taliban, although the Taliban say they liberated it during the Civil War period and so on. Anyway, I'm not answering, but there were four pages on this question.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: Could you summarize in one?

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: Yes. It is not a light decision to work as if there was no war, as if there is not a situation. Or as in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, to act as if all was normal when all is not normal. So, the question is, is your work part of a process of the normalization of outrageous situations? Do the occupying forces — Germans, Americans, and so on — want to say everything is normal in the postwar period in Afghanistan? Does your work making documenta there simply serve the purpose of stabilizing the occupation in the name of some arrival of the liberal arts activities that come with peace? Or is choosing to do it participating in altering and making more complex what might be the unfolding of events there? So, to make that decision I consulted with many people, from Chus Martínez, who was working closely with me in Kassel, to Tariq Ali... And people who told me no, you shouldn't do it... We talked and talked and talked... In this particular case — because I think that there is no general rule — I chose to act as opposed to not acting, and to take the risk of the possible manipulation that could be made of a project like

documenta in a place like Kabul in 2012. So, I think each situation is different, there is no general rule.

Analogous to that, what does the museum do in the world? I think we are very close to having to take a number of decisions in a number of museums in a number of places, because we are in a necropolitical environment, which is beyond the biopolitical structures that control our lives. We are in a necropolitical world where the economy is rotating around the production of death, and the second largest industry in the world is the arms industry, and this is the consequence of it. It's not about oil — it's about arms circulating and being produced, and the economy is not collapsing worldwide. So, in that environment, what does one do? For example, in Beirut, during the civil wars, the curators and the museum directors moved objects to the basement storage, and what they couldn't move they covered with cement. So all of the Roman mosaics were covered with cement. To go back to Kabul, the director of the museum hid the so-called Bactrian gold in a cave and didn't tell anybody. They didn't even tell the politicians where it was or where the key was. The restorer in the museum painted over figures with watercolor, removable paint, so that certain paintings with animals or humans would not be destroyed. That was during the Taliban period. And then, this was removed because watercolor washes off. There are many choices that can be made. If we look at Amsterdam, there is the whole story of the bunker where many different collections were put for a certain period of time. I mean, there is no doubt that the world is not decreasing its militarization and other violent acts, and so it is wise to consider what strategies and what plans we can make for the protection of our cultural heritage, which does not necessarily imply the discourses of UNESCO, which are very dangerous in my view. Because the listing of cultural heritage, according to Dario Gamboni, who wrote a book about the destruction of art, UNESCO protocols arrived at over the past ten years may actually create targets as opposed to protecting both material works and immaterial heritage, peoples, languages, and so on. So sometimes, the singling out of what is at risk is actually the way to put it at further risk.

All these questions are serious and of our time. I don't want to be a Cassandra, but not everybody has the privilege of living in a city that is surely protected by wealth, or distance, or remoteness. I don't mean centers; it can also be a very remote place. This is a big issue, yet at the same time I also think that by speaking of the imminently dramatic, one is also catering to what a certain industry of fear is causing in us.



That's why I was quoting that text by the woman who was doing the Lacan conference. She was actually speaking about what I just said as a symptom as opposed to an objective observation of the world. As this idea of seeing crisis as continuous and imminent is also a symptom of this collapsed time of the digital age. So, at the same time that I think about everything I just said, I also think the opposite, that Matisse did well to paint beautiful, colored paintings in the middle of the First World War.

To conclude, or to go back to the discourse of knowledge production, I heard the words "knowledge production" and I shuddered at their use. Knowledge production is exactly what the forces that are producing less joy and flourishing on the planet want the museums to do — to become *fornaci*, factories of knowledge production, and factories of discourse in the cognitive capitalist society in which we live, and to deaccession the works. So we must be very careful to not simply perform exactly what is asked of us to perform.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor: I think that's an appropriate moment to stop, with that, perhaps, elevation of our responsibilities, even higher than we might have thought they'd be when we walked in today. Please join me in thanking Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Ticio Escobar, Michael Dagostino, and Sylvie Blocher.

Day 3: Sunday  
November 20

CCCB Theater:  
Centre de Cultura  
Contemporània  
de Barcelona

Collections  
and Archives

Rosa Ferré: Good morning, I'm Rosa Ferré, head of exhibitions [at CCCB], and I just wanted to welcome you all and thank you for coming to be here with us and also to invite you to see our exhibitions, especially the one that I curated about architecture and sex, which is called *1000 Square Meters of Desire*. In my name and the name of my team, welcome. Thank you.

Frances Morris: Just before we beginning this morning's session, on behalf of everybody here can I just thank Bartomeu and Patricia for being an incredible duo in dealing with CÍMAM. Leading the roller coaster, which has been CÍMAM over the last two years. The outgoing four members will be much missed, the new members well received. We are delighted to have such a strong new board. But I think all of us would like to thank Bartomeu and Patricia for their leadership for the last two periods. Thank you. We've had a challenging administration over the last two years and Inés has really taken up that challenge and provided fantastic support, single-handed, and has really helped deliver this conference together with a great team at MACBA. So, thank you Inés and the MACBA team.

It's going to be an intense morning. Today the focus is shifting to collections and collecting, and there were a number of very interesting and provocative remarks about collecting yesterday. And of course, collecting means taking objects from one context and putting them in another. Taken by purchase, often by gift, sometimes by stealth: that's a transaction. And one of the things we are going to be talking about this morning, I hope, are the responsibilities involved in that transaction: relations of trust and exchange.

We are very pleased that our keynote this morning is being delivered by Mari Carmen Ramírez. Yesterday, we heard about exhibitions of two types. Blockbusters that address the local audience and interesting theme shows, idea shows that address the world. And Mari Carmen is the author of a really major show, *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, which took place in 2004. For many of us here that was one of the shows that redefined a culture, a place. A huge welcome to Mari Carmen.

# Keynote speech 03

## Mari Carmen Ramírez

Ph.D., The Wortham Curator of Latin American Art and director of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, United States of America

### *Short Biography:*

*Mari Carmen Ramírez is the Wortham Curator of Latin American Art and founding Director of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Prior to that, she was curator of Latin American Art at the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art and adjunct lecturer in the department of art and art history, both at The University of Texas at Austin. She also served as Director of the Museo de Antropología, Historia y Arte de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus. She received a PhD in Art History from the University of Chicago in 1989. She has curated numerous exhibitions of Latin American art, including: *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (with Héctor Olea, MFAH, 2004), awarded by the American Section of the International Association of Art Critics as the “Best Thematic Museum Show Nationally” in the USA. At the ICAA, Ramírez conceptualized and oversees the continental initiative *Documents of Twentieth Century Latin American and Latino Art: A Digital Archive and Publications Project* consisting of the recovery and digitalization of primary sources related to the artistic production of the region. In 2005 she was the recipient of the Award for Curatorial Excellence granted by the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. That same year *TIME* magazine named her one of the twenty-five most influential Hispanics in America. She is also the recipient of the 2014 Latino Influencer Award and that same year made the 100 Most Powerful Women in the Arts list. She has been widely published on a broad range of topics such as the relationship of Latin American art to identity politics, multiculturalism, globalization, and curatorial practice.*

### *Presentation: Politics and the Production of Knowledge in the Museum Context*

I want to thank the CIMAM board, Madeleine Grynsztejn, Elizabeth Macgregor, Patricia Sloane, and Frances Morris, for the invitation to participate in this CIMAM meeting, which is always so stimulating and to which I hope to contribute positively. As Frances pointed out, what I am going to present here today is a theoretical and practical reflection on the work we have been doing in Houston over the past 15 years, which involves a digital archive of Latin American and Latin art. I am going to talk specifically about the perspective of working from the United States. Contrary to some of my colleagues, such as Ticio or Patricia, I have played over the last

30 years in what José Martí would call the entrails of the monster: a monster that is about to devour us all at this time.

The last 20 years have seen a significant surge of worldwide attention around the issue of archives and their capacity to preserve, recover, and uncover knowledge. What were once dusty institutional or private repositories have become the prized war chests of scholars, researchers, curators, and even artists. A situation that led French philosopher Jacques Derrida to coin early on the term archive fever to describe these phenomena. While this trend extends to a number of fields, it is

particularly conspicuous in the one that concerns all of us at this conference: the art museum. Whether conceived in terms of periodization, such as encyclopedic, modern/contemporary, or responding to public or private interests, more and more of these cultural organizations are attempting to incorporate research initiatives into their mission. Archive fever is particularly evident in art museums committed to telling the stories of underrepresented groups and artistic movements operating at the local, national, or global level, or those that have been erased from history through the repressive actions of colonial powers or authoritarian regimes. Beginning with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, a number of these institutions have sought to dedicate resources to gathering, cataloging, and displaying, in both physical and digital formats, the written manifestations and supportive materials of artists and creative individuals from emerging and marginalized regions. In the case of Latin America, which is the focus of this presentation, the trend includes the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City, the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in Madrid, the Los Angeles County Museum in Los Angeles, and more recently the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which has announced the opening of a new research center focused on Latin American Art.

In the United States, and to a certain extent in Europe and Latin America, the renewed interest in archive-based research has taken place at a time when art museums are also struggling with a host of competing, often contradictory demands, frequently involving their long-term development and even their survival. On the one hand, versus a systematic and unabated process of corporatization that has placed ticket sales, blockbuster exhibitions, spread sheet audience surveys, and bottom-line reasoning at the core of what were once not-for-profit if not probably unprofitable service-oriented educational institutions. Together with the unprecedented rise in influence of private donors, this trend is forcing many art museums, including those that rely on State or other forms of public funding, to become temples of leisure and entertainment for corporate investors, philanthropists, and mass audiences in order to stay relevant and in some cases, I repeat, survive.

On the other hand, situated for the most part in large metropolitan enclaves, these same institutions are also under pressure to respond to the demands of increasingly complex and diversified audiences. The result of these demographic shifts that are reconfiguring the planet has significantly and permanently transformed the landscape in which State institutions operate. Archives and

archive-based initiatives I will argue are integral to both regarding these institutions' paths forward, as well as articulating their position in the new cultural global order. However, this function poses a key paradox. Like the humanities in general, archives are based on critical analysis and reflection that is the opposite of the fast-track, project-driven, cost-effective, and demonstrable-impact dynamic that characterizes museum practice today.

At the core of this paradox is the opposition between the museum, as an instrument of neoliberal capitalism, versus a museum as an inactive historical agent for the production of knowledge. In this case, knowledge pertains to unknown or under-represented groups that escape hegemonic, worn-out parameters. I believe it is fair to say that at no other time in recent history has this opposition been as prevalent as it is today. This paradoxical situation in turn raises a set of questions. What is the real value for archives and broad-based research in art museums today? How can these institutions reconcile the demands of these vital yet seemingly anomalous operations with a current instrumentalization of their activities and mission? What are the specific challenges involved in the back-and-forth dynamics between archives and museum practice today?

In what follows I will address these critical issues from the perspective of the work we have developed at the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, the ICAA, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston during the last fifteen years. But first I would like to sketch out a theoretical framework or theoretical guidelines to ground this discussion. And I will do so by considering the implications of Derrida's archive fever for the subject at hand. For the most part, this archive fever has nothing to do with an impulse towards fetishization that lies at the bottom of our research-based disciplines. Nor does it signal, I hope, an ill-fated return to the gullible principles of positivism, still prevalent in a lot of art historical discourses. On the contrary, its roots can be traced to the cultural wars of the late 1980s and nineties, waged by ethnic- and gender-based minorities, as well as by the new left-oriented groups. Informed by poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, these groups set out the question of the entrenched meta narrative, tearing down established canons, while in the process redressing a key issue for this presentation: the imposed silences, gaps, and outright biases of either hegemonic mainstream accounts or official history. In this concrete context, impossible to be circumvented, the authority of the archive stands for, and I quote: "an ordered system of documents and records, both verbal and visual, that is the foundation from which history is written."



It became the codeword for a series of critical practices intent upon countering the prevalent status quo, while recovering the memory of oppressed groups and marginalized people. Understood in these broad terms, the archive is more than just a physical repository of national state or private histories. It is an emblem of a particular individual or group's origins and foundational history. As such it entails a shared experience that must be agreed upon as an unknown or under-recognized asset with well-established stories of central hierarchies and/or mainstream commonplaces. In my view this is the starting point for conceptualizing archives today.

At the core of these developments lies Derrida's notion of the archive as a political tool. For him, the archive or *archeia* in Greek refers thus: "...*there* where things commence — physical, historical, ontological principle — but also the principle according to the law, *there* were men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, in this place where *order* is given." Derrida reminds us that the meaning of the word "archive" originates in the Greek *archeion*, initially a dwelling and addressed to the superior magistrates or *archons* who commanded. The *archons* were first of all the documents' guardians. They not only ensured the physical security of the documents but they were also accorded the right to consign, in the sense of to gather together, identify, classify, and interpret such archives. Understood in these terms, the *arché* represents the now of whatever kind of power is being exercised anywhere, in any place or time. Furthermore, in Derrida's view there is no political power without control of the archive if not of memory. And he stresses, and I quote: "Effective democratization can always be measured by these essential criteria: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."

In this sense, Derrida's archive is not necessarily a place where the documents are stored, but rather a metaphor, capacious enough to encompass the whole of modern information technology, storage, retrieval, and communication. It must be underscored that such a metaphor stresses a key point for any archive: being active.

Derrida's *archeia* is particularly relevant to framing our discussion or the focus of this presentation: the archive fever at play in Latin American art historical and visual practices in recent years. It suggests that the reason why this widespread interest in the preservation or creation of archives can elude the frivolous status of either fad or craze is precisely because of this sense of political affirmation that guides the most outstanding proposals. Projects like the 1968 Tucumán Arde archive, the Centro de Documentación Arkheia at MUAC in

Mexico City, the Central American Art archives of Teorética in Costa Rica, or the Red Conceptualismos del Sur. For the most they represent the exercise of a critical practice intent upon opening up new points of enunciation in the writing of art history, both at the local and the global levels. They thus exemplify the global trend to either gain or regain collective control of the constitution of an access to the archive by the ethnic, cultural, or artistic groups involved. The aim of this operation is thus to redress the omission to which these groups in Latin America, the United States, or Europe have been subjected in the past or the constitutive challenges they have faced in the short or long terms.

In my longstanding experience with this art, this type of undertaking has the potential to significantly redraw existing art historical accounts, while at the same time opening up new road maps into the complex visual arts production of Latin America. I would like to now illustrate this argument with the ICAA documents project and then I will return to discuss some of the critical challenges involved. The notion of the archive as a political tool provides the foundation for the archival initiative that has been developing at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, International Centre for the Arts of the Americas since 2001.

I refer to the ICAA's Documents of Twentieth Century Latin American and Latino Art project, which from now on I'll abbreviate to the ICAA documents project. This archive defies traditional definitions of an archive as a physical repository of documents. That is to say that it is a digitally based project, which means that the archives from which the documents are caught never leave the respected countries. Instead they are cataloged and uploaded to the project website. Understood in these terms, the archive involves the act of forwarding or transmitting virtual documents and materials that have shaped the intellectual foundations of twentieth century art in Latin America, as well as what I would refer to as Latino USA, which are all the artists of Latin America living and working in the United States, a group that is coming up in full force and will be a very strong presence in the next decades.

The starting point for the creation of this archive is the need to both redress the glaring invisibility from prevailing art historical accounts and museology narratives of key artists and groups who have creatively and innovatively operated from Latin America and Latino USA, as well as preserve this legacy for future generations. This includes the theoretical production of these creators, in the form of individual artists or group manifestos, programmatic texts, letters, public debates carried out in

newspapers or art reviews, artists' notes, and excerpts from journals. Such a task entails introducing artists and artistic groups who have been left out of standard art histories, as well as expanding the pool of sources with which well known movements such as Mexican muralism, the School of the South, the Brazilian *Nuevo Concretismo* can be reengaged or approached from different parameters.

What distinguishes the ICAA's document project from other initiatives of this nature is the tool-based direct effort that has been placed in identifying, securing, cataloging, and publishing the documents in both digital and print format. As a curious inversion of the hegemonic power model the *archons* of this process are Latin American, Latino, and North American researchers, directly invested in the history and values of the countries under consideration. This collective undertaking involves an extensive continental network from partner institutions, agents, and museums to universities and research centers, as well as art historians, curators, librarians, catalogers, and data specialists, editors, and translators. In 2008 at the peak of the project's recovery phase, close to 150 researchers and visual arts professionals in 16 Latin American and US cities could claim some kind of affiliation to this project. The ICAA documents project is thus strategically poised as a sort of information superstructure, connecting artists and primary source materials. In this sense, our platform allows for a more complex picture of the interaction between artists, critics, curators, and other cultural agents of the region. A critical task if we consider that at present no comparative art history of these agents and movements exists and there is very little contact between the countries themselves.

All these features implied years of extensive study and discussion involving the project's teams, staff, and 17-strong editorial board. As Derrida advises, any consideration or discussion of the archives must include "...the theory of this institution alization, that is to say, the theory both of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it." The fact that this collection is being organized in a research center that is part of an encyclopedic museum operated in a hegemonic country like the United States, raises a series of questions worth considering in the context of this keynote address.

What function can this type of archive play in the strategic playing field represented by the United States? To what extent can the sources gathered in this archive succeed in altering the coordinates of established narratives of twentieth century art in the United States and elsewhere? Moreover, is it possible that such a comprehensive archive also

impacts the way that museums and hegemonic centers engage in fields previously marginalized by the same mainstream establishment? The answers to these questions will have to proceed by taking into consideration the theoretical and practical parameters of the project, in light of the transformations that have been taking place in the field of Latin American and Latino art in the United States over the last two decades.

In organizing the ICAA documents project, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston was recognizing two key factors. Firstly, the demographic changes transforming not only the city of Houston, but the entire landscape of the United States. Houston alone is 40% Latino, and I mean people from all over Latin America as well as Mexico and Central America, and 60% of children in public schools are Latino. I will come back to this point. Secondly, the strategic role of the United States as a key center for the validation and legitimization of what has come to be known for better or for worst as Latin American art.

As we all known, since the 1930s, the country has played a key part as imposition in the articulation, definition, or sanctioning of an increasingly expanded field. One that over time has come to encompass museums, universities, private collectors, galleries, and the intricate workings of the market. In the last 20 years, this field has grown exponentially as the result of complex political and economic forces that have altered the perception and status of Latin American art both inside and outside the United States. Globalization has activated the financial and cultural circuits between the US, Mexico, and countries along Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, albeit in the process transforming the art from a marginal if not risky investment into a strategic economic resource.

The last two decades have seen the increase mainstreaming of this art, as more institutions and collectors seek access to its first rate yet under-recognized and badly-understood artists. Together with other political and cultural factors, similar to those that informed the literary boom of the 1960s, this market-stimulated phenomenon has contributed to turning a previously marginalized field into a highly competitive arena for the exchange of both private and institutional symbolic capital. And yet, I will argue that increased visibility and desirability of this art in US auctions, art fairs, and exhibition circuits has done nothing to eliminate the unequal access of exchange in which the circulation and reception of this artistic production has traditionally been inscribed.

As a result, artists who enjoy immense prestige or recognition at the national or local level are for the most part still invisible in the hegemonic

playing field. While there is more straight circulation of information about these creators and their culture than perhaps ever before, this field itself lacks both depth and complexity. A gap that I repeat could only be filled by the means of an active character of the archive.

However, it must be stated with emphasis, Latin Americans are still largely absent from general textbooks of twentieth century art within the United States and minimally mentioned in the leading magazines devoted to modern and contemporary art. The vast majority of curators and other visual arts professionals either continue to ignore or blatantly refuse to acknowledge the legitimate contribution of these artists to modernism, postmodernism, and other contemporary art trends. We have to consider that the sophisticated and progressive thinking in terms of theory that went into the production of the most forward looking manifestations of this art or practice is unknown or has been completely inaccessible outside of the countries of origin. Hence artists who have pioneered important developments are denied the privileged status of innovation, originality, or precedence, all of which continue to be the well guarded territory of North American or European artists. We can mention in this regard the *Marco Recortado* or cut-out frame proposals of the Madi group or the furious coloring of space and time of Carlos Cruz-Diez, and so on and so forth.

The market commodities status of Latin American art has also blurred a significant development that in my view has the potential to exert an even deeper long-term structural change in this field over the next decades. I refer to the waves of immigrants from the entire region that have transformed the US Latino community into the largest minority group in the country. With more than 62 million Latinos according to the 2010 US census, this community is, with the exception of Mexico's 120 million inhabitants, larger than major Spanish-speaking countries like Spain and Argentina, and its influence is already making itself felt in the political and cultural spheres.

Once the exclusive province of Chicanos, Nuyoricans, and Cuban Americans, the US Latino community of today is made up of mixed Latino ethnicities and nationalities. An outstanding feature of these new communities is that unlike previous waves of immigrants from the south, these groups continue to bear strong ties with their countries of origin. This disavowment in turn suggests that the so-called identity of these groups is a fluid construct that cannot be enclosed anymore within national or regional borders. The experiences of migration, dislocation, and even diaspora are bringing together a broad range of artists from these communities in

a productive network of alliances and collaborations that is no longer limited to the traditional enclaves of California, Texas, New York, and Florida, but extends as wide as the United States itself.

The extraordinary work undertaken by the ICAA documents project team in Midwestern states such as Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin, through its Notre Dame University team, confirms such an assessment. These were places where we didn't even know there were Latino or Latin American artists working and we were able to discover tons of archives frequently kept in closets or under grandmothers' beds with absolutely no infrastructure.

In other words, my point here is that the current interplay between Latin American and Latino art in the US not only justifies but demands a new cartography of these artistic manifestations. With the potential mapping not only of current frameworks of Latin American art in their originating countries but also those in which American, that is US, art itself is inscribed. The *arché* embodied in the ICAA documents project is fundamental to this undertaking to the extent that it refers us to the sources of the visual art productions of these groups, it makes up for the legacies of absence and inertia, covers critical gaps in the history of these groups, brings to light evidence to counteract the absolute value of canons, as well as the worn-out constructs of identity or identity politics, and so on.

And now I'd like to consider some of the challenges that emerge from this back and forth between theory and practice. What insights can we derive from the ICAA documents project experience? What does it tell us about the challenges confronting these types of initiatives?

As I have sought to demonstrate in this presentation, archives are critical in helping encyclopedic as well as modern and contemporary museums meet their social and ethical responsibilities in the twenty-first century. They not only assist in uncovering facts as well as drawing connections between the works and the ideas that generated or supported them, but also allow the museum to rewrite art historical narratives, from multitemporal, multicultural, and multidisciplinary perspectives that challenge the exhausted national and disciplinary frameworks as well as the biased reductiveness that characterizes worn-out mainstream accounts of these practices.

These unsuspected narratives suggest a productive alternative to the pedestrian demands of the neoliberal model that tends to cripple the capacity of these institutions to generate new knowledge, forcing them to constantly recycle previously validated artists and movements, such as the French Impressionists, Abstract Expressionism,

and the like. The story is endless and is usually referred to as hegemonic.

For museums like the MFAH, embracing initiatives like the ICAA documents projects represents more than just supporting an emergent field or partaking of the latest art world trend. Conceived in terms of this long exhausted Enlightenment model of the encyclopedia or beaux-arts museum at the service of colonial powers, these institutions are currently struggling to find a new course that will allow them to reinvent themselves in one way or another for the twenty-first century.

In matching fields of Latin American and Latino as well as African, African American, Asian, and/or Islamic art, we not only respond to the needs of the increasingly multicultural communities in which these institutions operated. In the case of Houston, as I said, it's over 40% of the city's population. They contribute to shape the museum's *manuable* identity, as we understand it today. Shifting it from the always-problematic notion of a universal museum to an ecumenical one: that is, a museum for the various constituencies that make up the city or the nation, who are actively represented as shareholders of the museum's identity. Indeed, in Houston most of these communities have representation on the board.

From this perspective, the impact within the museum of an archival project such as the ICAA's is not limited exclusively to the realm of research. The ICAA documents project has been indeed the foundation for an extensive collection building effort focused on the artist manifestations of the vanguard in Latin America. In many case this brings together documents with related works of art and we're looking at just a small portion of the collection, which includes the Adolfo Leirner collection of Brazilian Constructivist art, which was bought by the museum in 2007 and which is the only archive that we have as a physical archive. It is the archive that came with this collection and which is now in the process of being digitized and added to the ICAA documents project.

The archive the ICAA documents project has also been the trigger for research-based exhibitions such as *Inverted Utopias*. This was related to the type of documents that are in the archive, which often relate to works of art in the collections. In addition to manifestos and testimonies, etc., the archive also has artists' notebooks, sketches, etc. This is a sketch by an artist from the Leirner collection and this is the work to which it refers, although the work here is open and this is the inside of the light bulbs, and then on the right you can see an image of what it really looks like. It's a moving painting. Very early, very innovative work presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> São Paulo Biennial. The archive has also been the foundation for research-based exhibitions

such as *Inverted Utopias*, as I mentioned. And I have to say that there's a symbiotic relationship between the archive, the genesis of this archive, and *Inverted Utopias*, because *Inverted Utopias*, which was the first exhibition that sought to bring together examples of the avant-garde movements in Latin America, also had a hundred documents that were published for the first time in the catalog and it was in the process of trying to look for those documents, through all sorts of impossible and difficult challenges all over Latin America, that we realized the need for this kind of initiative.

In many cases, archives in the countries of origin have not collected art or they're in precarious situations. Documents are still in the hands of families, and so it is a very hard process for a researcher, particularly outside of Latin America, to have access to many of these sources. Of course, while the ICAA documents project does not have everything, it is a starting point and it really points the researcher to where he needs to go in terms of calling more documents related to these topics.

The archive was also the basis for the exhibition of *Helio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, that I organized for TATE Modern. As a result of this exhibition, we also organized the archive of Helio Oiticica and digitalized it over five years. The archive was the basis for everything we did in the exhibition, including the restoration of many of the works, some of which were in bad condition. The archive is also the basis for a very robust publications program in the form of exhibition catalogs and books, and collaborations with the Fundación Cruz-Diez and many other museums like MALBA, etc. It's an archive process, a series of books generated by the center that gathers the results of symposia and other events, or their working papers. It is an on-going process to publish the work particularly of emerging researchers and scholars affiliated with the program. It's also been the source of conferences and symposia, to the extent that the archive can identify and assist unknown or emerging artists, reposition established artists with regards to scarcely pondered situations, and assist communities in validating and preserving their heritage. It can play a decisive role in the revitalization of the very notion of the art museum.

As I suggested at the beginning of this presentation, such benefits, however, also carry with them considerable challenges, from the big contradictions embedded in the current structure to the business models of these institutions. The first critical issues, of course, concerns the short and long term sustainability of these initiatives, unlike the permanent collection or the blockbuster exhibition, archives whether digital or not go against the asset-driven



culture of today's art museums. Despite their non-profit status, these institutions take great pride in the acquisition of works for their permanent collection. And these works in turn are considered assets in the museum's constantly expanding portfolio.

The opposite holds true for archives. Whatever the monitoring worth may be, it is invariably surpassed by the substantial or even massive financial investment required for their set-up, operation, and long-term relevance. This involves material acquisitions, specialized personnel, storage and maintenance infrastructure, and above all technology. The vulnerable state of these archive-based initiatives is further compounded by the almost complete defection in recent years of arts and humanities funding by major private and public foundations: something that has left support, whether for museums or autonomous entities, almost exclusively in the hands of private donors.

In the case of the ICAA, the urgency to address the sustainability of the documents project led to the creation of the ICAA ITS council. This is a think tank, stimulating dialog as well as the directive change of ideas about critical issues affecting the field of Latin American and Latino art in the twenty-first century. The council brings together philanthropic, business, and cultural entrepreneurs, as well as corporate and foundation representatives and field professionals, to debate issues and forge alliances. The fees collected from membership in this exclusive group go towards supporting the documents project.

A second critical challenge is represented by the role played by technology, vis à vis art archives in today's digital-driven world. Fifteen years ago, the possibility that an individual or institution could assemble a digital repository of archival materials in order to make it accessible to global audiences, appeared as one of the fulfilled promises of the digital revolution. Today, however, we must recognize that this revolution has failed to deliver on its promise. Raising staff and general operative costs, together with lack of dedicated funding across the board, threaten to undermine the capacity of institutions of any size to begin, let alone sustain, the type of effort required to keep these open-ended initiatives alive.

At the same time, the overriding presence of highly sophisticated, user-oriented platforms operated by technology giants such as Google and Facebook not only creates impossible-to-meet expectations on the part of users but also imposes a radically different set of challenges focused on the continuous reinvention and expansion of digital capabilities, at a scale and pace impossible to match.

A third challenge concerns the danger of fetishizing documents already evident in a number

of museum exhibitions and displays. Despite the related lack of value of documents vis à vis works of art that I described earlier, in recent years we have seen the margins of a flourishing market for art related documents complete with dealers, collectors, and the like. In my view, this is a serious mistake, which subverts the intrinsic value and purpose of these initiatives that I have described at length in this presentation.

Without doubt, these fractures combine to raise serious questions about the viability of museum-based archival initiatives. And yet I argue that it is at precisely this point that the function of this undertaking must not only be assessed but also defended and preserved beyond the parameters of instrumental value. As Clare Bishop has warned: "The task of articulating cultural value is now urgent in both the museum and the academy where a tsunami of fiscal imperatives threatens to delude all that is complicated, creative, vulnerable, adventurous, and critical in the public sphere."

Doing so, however, implies articulating a new axiology based on the museum, not as a temple of entertainment, but as a laboratory for knowledge. Are we actually capable of reimagining the art museum as a transformative agent that in addition to providing an artistic experience promotes critical questioning and cultural curiosity? Understood in these terms, the archive emerges not as a physical or virtual repository of materials, but as a critical antidote to suffocation of the museum's intellectual dimension and the invisibility of large sectors of the communities.

To conclude, it would be nice to think that the impact of the development in the field of Latin American and Latino art in the last decade is merely restricted to the limited quota of the art world. The collaborative experience of the last fifteen years in Houston, undertaken through the ICAA documents project as well as exhibitions, publications, and debates, has led me to the conviction that what is at stake in such an undertaking is not only the long-term value or legitimization of this art to the extent that it has the potential to give a visible face to ascendant countries' artists and communities. The repercussions of this project are inherently political and they extend well beyond Houston.



# Perspective 07

## Kuan-Hsing Chen

### Thailand

#### *Short Biography:*

*Kuan-Hsing Chen is Professor at the Graduate Institute for Social Research and Cultural Studies, Chiao Tung University, Taiwan, and the Chair of the Board of Trustee for the Inter-Asia School (an international NPO). He has taught at Tsing Hua University (1990–2008) and has held visiting professorships at universities in Korea, China, Japan, Singapore, the US, and Hong Kong. His current affiliations as visiting professor include Cultural Studies, Shanghai University; College of Humanities, Yonsei University; School of Marxism Nanjing University; Local History, Center Xiamen U; Makerere Institute for Social Research, Makerere University; School of Diplomacy, University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University, Kyoto; International Institute for Cultural Studies, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto; EMP Program, University of Tokyo; Critical Asian Humanities, Duke University; Cowdwell College, Santa Cruz. His recent publication *Asia as Method – Towards De-Imperialization* (Duke University, 2010) has Chinese, Korean, and Japanese editions. He has edited volumes in English, including *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 1996) and *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 1998); and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2007). Publications in Chinese include: *Cultural Studies in Taiwan* (2000) and *The Partha Chatterjee Seminar – Locating Political Society* (2000); *Chinese Revolution Reconsidered: Mizoguchi's Mode of Thought* (2010); *Paik Naik-chung: Division System and National Literature* (2010); *Chen Yingzhen: Thought and Literature* (2011). Founding chair of Taiwan's Cultural Studies Association; founding member of the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society (and its Consortium); and a core member of *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*. He is a co-editor of the journal, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies: Movements* (2000–) and *Renjian Thought Review* (Mandarin edition; 2010–). In recent years he has been involved in the West Heavens Project and in establishing the Inter-Asia School to launch the Modern Asian Thought project. With these involvements, he and other members of the Inter-Asia School have organized the Indian-China Social Thought Forum (2010), Asian Circle of Thought Shanghai Summit (2012), Inter-Asia Biennale Forum (since 2014) and Bandung/Third World 60 Years Series (2015): "Decolonizing the Earth (2016)."*

### Presentation: *We are all Foreigners... Decolonizing Contemporary Art Museum*

First of all thanks for your kind invitation, especially to Kian Chow Kwok who has taken the risk of putting his reputation on the line because he knows I don't follow the rules. As an outsider, I'll try to behave today. This is what I'm going to talk about. We are all foreigners. Everyone sitting here. And I will specify what that means. It's a quote from a Korean singer, Choi Wanshik. Let's play his music in the background. I've been involved with the art world officially since

2010: remotely, in places like Taipei and so on. Working through the art space to organize social thought or social transformation.

Today, I want to make the argument that, not only are we foreigners, but we need to return to certain spaces that have been suppressed or subsumed under the dominant power structure. These are spaces that have worked persistently, although often we ignore them and they ignore us.

These are the spaces that sustain continuity and we are the rupture. That these spaces define us is globally the case, I believe.

Most parts of the world operate on a lunar year calendar, although in Thailand it is called the Buddhist calendar. I have no idea whether there are different calendars in Europe. But I assume there are certain model-like communities that probably still live like that. So it's not only the temple, but also the street market, festivals, and so on.

So, in some ways I'm searching for alternatives, which are already there, whether we see them or not. It's not their problem but our problem. They could survive history, though not necessarily us. We will be destroyed, but not by Donald Trump. He's losing the game, but we'll see whether the universe will be destroyed and who will survive.

This is a country project that we went to early this year. We went to Putian-Xianyou, in South East China, for the lunar year lantern festival, which is the end of the New Year. The city is one thousand years old. It is not called heritage, by the way, because people live in these spaces. Tell me this is not art.

This is the community, the temple, and, if you wish, the art museum. Not a museum: these temples are lively: they live with us. You see all the names, the rich pitching more, the poor less, to host the festival. In other words, behind the temple is a family clan, villagers, and so on. In this area there are 2,000 temples, but that's nothing surprising. Where I come from, Thailand, there are 10,000 and another 10,000 unregistered. It's part of community life. And I suspect churches were once like that.

I will make certain ridiculous arguments or statements without going into detail. This is a Buddhist world, a Buddhist worldview embodied by the peasantry. Muhammad was a Buddhist; Jesus was Asian and a Buddhist. These are the so-called official religions, narrowed in the course of history. But if we historicize, the Buddhist worldview is probably the most influential. I can even make the, some would say, ridiculous argument that places like China, Vietnam, even I suspect elements of Eastern Europe, the so-called post-socialist world, where it was possible to produce something called socialism, did so precisely because of Buddhism.

We are all equal: humans, animals, stones. This is the Buddhist worldview. Buddhism is in some way necessarily on the left, not the reverse. The Buddhist worldview is not human centered. Humans are part of the universe.

This is a much more radical version of equality than say Marxism. This is the festival. These are the followers, or believers, and so on. This is a spiritual medium, communicating between God or spirit or Buddha and the people. In Korean his name means the populous space.

Actually, we don't have such a concept as religion, that's what I wanted to say. It's called a popular belief. This is technology... politics was there. The world is warming up. This is the beginning of the official visit. All temples in the Chinese context are mixed up. Anyone can be God if you contribute to the community. This is the economic basis because this land could be cultivated. So, everyone was sent to different parts of Asia, bringing back resources, connections, cultures, and so on.

The family clan is much larger than this funny thing called the nation state. I don't want to generate a controversy, but nation states were a crime created by the powers of Western Europe. Whoever created this idea should be taken to the international criminal court. And now this is not sustainable. We are trying to move beyond the nation state, but we are still sucked into it.

This is the family temple telling you the family history. This was a family created by a mother. By the way, this is the notion I'm trying to formulate. Either you call it mother power or mother authority. I don't know how to formulate it. In short, the mothers did all the work, bringing up our kids, but everyone respected them. The father is the figure-head, performing ritual functions for the children's marriage and so on. This is the spiritual medium, the head of the family. I don't know the English term. They are head of the family, but they might be illiterate. The family clan built the housing for themselves after the reform.

This is the last five years... a funny thing. And these still function that way. The men of the house congregate to say goodbye to the head of the family before going to work. We were told the most rewarding businesses were gas stations. Thirty percent return, from which 20% is given to the family clan. This is used for different purposes: for study, for taking care of the poor, and so on. They become the sentinel for capitalist transformation.

Anyone can be God. The festival was launched for family clans to display their connections, relations, and power. Five days down the road, operating twenty-four hours like Cairo or Bangkok. All sectors are involved. The State seems not to be there. But the family head may well be the secretary of the party, or retired from all that. You don't need State intervention.

So this is China. People talking about authoritarianism and so on. But where is the State? 100,000 people, 150,000 people involved. This has become a festival. This is the issue we're confronting.

This is a site where you have housing, so called commercial housing, after the transition. This site is the housing. The entire street is full of temples. Why? Villagers refused to move so the

government said, ok, let's put all the temples together. These are used, like a mobile phone, a registration system. You can see the last name. In other words, there are two ID systems. One is the State, the other the temple. If you don't come your family will be sick. So you have to come to these festivals, to welcome Buddha and God and so on. Some people say it's like a pop music festival and this is the confusion. Someone worried because housing could destroy a community. But then he found this organizing structure is still there.

Some houses have to be kept because this guy was prime minister in a Xin dynasty, so they can't move his temple. This is the Putian area and these are the local mafia. He is a scholar and his wife is working at the university. The guy sitting in the middle is actually the director of urban design. And this guy on the left is a student and his father is the deputy mayor. This is crossing the fire to bless a house. This is in front of the temple. Surrounding this is the community center.

Temples are the center of life. In the evening they line up in front of the temple and organize in families, welcoming God. These are fighting for good luck, while God is marching up to the community.

This is one of my favorite pictures. This guy is the head of the family, supporting the entire community. He is the only scholar I met who is so-called grounded. All his work is connected to his home ground, but he ends up making the argument for province, empire, or across different parts of the world. Visible and invisible. He did a 10-year research on 2,000 temples, without any English.

So this is the problem with contemporary knowledge. I don't know if people here understand what I'm talking about. This is the art biennale. This is contemporary art itself. Do we have to build? This is Indian art. Inside the community with the working group. This is something called... I don't know if Europe has this, this US government founded SSRC. This is a continental institution. And we organize this congregation for people from the Third World. These are the leading thinkers across generations. Working with friends, colleagues, in Brazil and Delhi. I guess I'm saying that all this knowledge exists, but people don't read it.

Jomo Kwame Sundaram is one of the leading scholars. He published 100 books and then became United Nations Assistant Secretary-General serving the peasantry. But people don't read his books. You still read Foucault and Derrida. But these texts exist. Why? This is the problem with contemporary structural knowledge. I claim Mahmood Mamdani is the only global intellectual who works across Africa, America, and Asia. Name another. He published fifteen books. The leading thinker. These texts exist in English, we made them available in English but...

I don't know. I have no bitterness though, alright?

I have to pay tribute to CODESRIA. As some of you may know, it was set up in 1973 by Samir Amin and by now, forty years later, they are the leading global institution. There's a problem that they publish independently. They publish their own books and so on. They defeat the entire Euro-American knowledge of Africa. They produce a global intellect. They think of Africa as a whole. Anyone here who can think of Europe as a whole, please raise your hands.

You know the details of different sub-regions. Thandika is a leading thinker. This is the Wang Dan occupy movement. The occupy movement has been there for thirty years, but people talk about New York not Wang Dan. They get the spaces and build hospitals, and so on. This is how the village looks. It's part of a larger movement called the association for popular movement, involving peasants, workers, cultural workers, fishermen, and many more. Close to one million members. They don't care about the outside, they work on their own. Indonesia at the forefront.

We are seeing the world cultural forum that will displace the world social forum. These are the five institutions we are building. It's all happening at this moment. This is a working structure. We try to produce knowledge outside of the university. The university is dead. The museum is dead. We highlight the independent soul with a cultural movement and a creative industry. This is the agenda. Our objective is to build a global platform, watching political parties and so on.

Let me engage in a two-minute conversation with what I gathered in these past two days. I think this a really great group of people. Very friendly, but you are also shaped by your own culture and history. I don't have time to engage in debate. European and American theory is what I call thought-grounded in the community, inspiring to others. The museum is a space we also have, but we are foreigners in the sense that everyone is educated by the modern education system, which is an extension of the modern State for indoctrination. Liberalism is the proxy for imperialism.

But the liberal institution can be transformed. How? We need to think together. I was surprised that some of my Spanish friends don't know their own family history. My family goes back 4,000 years. If you track it, you know where you are coming from. This is the stupid thing about any form of identity politics. Class, gender, race is flat without a historical past.

Identity is shaped by at least two forces. One is historical reincarnation. How do you know you are a woman or a man? This is something that is impossible to research. But the leading Buddhists will tell you. The other line is the family. The mother's power

shapes people. We need to construct different modes of knowledge, come to terms with this reality. Grounded in our own *Shèq*, in our own community. In our own spiritual world.

We cannot go on like this. This is fatal. I don't have the answer to all these questions. I should have disclosed my own identity. The monk who a thousand years ago went from China to India, he is my ancestor. And this is the one lotus that teacher brought from South Asia to China, to Tibet. The lotus is a symbol of that. And my living Buddha guru said I was one of his disciples.

# Perspective 08

## Marysia Lewandowska

Artist, London, United Kingdom

### Short Biography:

Marysia Lewandowska is a Polish-born, London-based artist who through her collaborative projects has explored the public function of archives, collections, and exhibitions in an age characterized by relentless privatization. Her practice critically explores the property of others. Recent projects include: the film *Museum Futures: Distributed* (2008; with Neil Cummings); *Tender Museum, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź* (2009); *How Public is the Public Museum? Moderna Museet, Stockholm* (2010); *Re-Distributed Archive, Studio Voltaire, London* (2012); *Undoing Property?* (with Laurel Ptak), Sternberg Press (2013); *Property, Protest, Commons and the Alternative Economies of Art in Asia* (with Esther Lu), Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong, and TCAC, Taipei, Taiwan (2015); *Triple C. Editing the Century, Vienna Biennale, MAK Vienna* (2015); *Re-Negotiation, Artspace, Auckland, NZ* (2015); *Comment is Free, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane* (2016); and *Cinema Island* (with Colin Fournier), K11, Hong Kong (2016). She was Professor of Art in the Public Realm at Konstfack in Stockholm (2003–13) and a visiting professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2014–15). [www.marysialewandowska.com](http://www.marysialewandowska.com)

### Presentation: *On the Museum's Commons*

In 1793, in the middle of the French Revolution, the Musée du Louvre opened its doors, transforming a private palace into a public museum. Art was mobilized to embody the movement from a monarchy to a democracy. An art collection, which had been privately owned, has now become one that was publicly shared. Inside, civic, financial, and social relationships broached between the State and museum-goer, this significant change arguably stirred a sense of agency, responsibility, and collectivity.

Today, in stark contrast, we see a drive on the part of many governments towards privileging private interests, which underpin nearly all aspects of our lives: from art, to housing, to health care, to education. What we are experiencing today feels like a near reversal of the Louvre.<sup>1</sup>

Seen as a collectively produced body of knowledge shaping both civic society and public imagination, the contemporary museum is increasingly caught up in a highly competitive global

economy of art. From scholarly research to modes of display, from acquisition policies to access to archives, can public interest remain the most important constituent part of the museum's future development?



1 Introduction to *Undoing Property?*, Marysia Lewandowska, Laurel Ptak (eds.). Sternberg Press, 2013

Image 1. Lewandowska. Women's\_Audio\_Archive. jpg



I want to begin with the *Women's Audio Archive*, one of the early projects I carried out when I arrived in London from Poland in 1985. While the initial impulse was to use audio recordings as part of a process helping to identify conceptual coordinates after arriving in a new culture, 20 years later the accumulated materials served as a basis for an online public resource.<sup>2</sup>

The reason for carrying a tape recorder with me at all times was connected to the fact that I left Warsaw at the moment of a deep political upheaval. The experiences related to the 1980 *Solidarity* movement, a free trade union inside a communist regime, and its ultimate destruction in December 1981, have marked my perception of how history is constructed, who keeps the documents, who has access to them, and who tells the story. Events of such magnitude profoundly shape one's relationship with one's own practice. Recording was a mode of participation and of gathering of knowledge, as well as a way of developing new relationships with artists, academics, and writers in London.

At the centre of the project lies conversation. What conversation offers is a chance of breaking up a code, introducing the idea of singularity and belonging, as well as rebellion. A conversation needs no stage; it does not require a setting. It is ongoing. It provides a transitional space for self-doubt and speaking out of *not* knowing. By means of recording, it represents time, it articulates histories. It makes the past present over and over again. The potential of its ever-presence is granted by the apparatus — the tape recorder, a playback machine. It is out of this particular experience of engaging with multiple practitioners and building an archive that I turned my attention to terms such as the commons, generosity, and gift. But perhaps we first need to better understand how the uses of the commons have enriched our experience of public and private realms, how they are constituted and interlinked. Let us for a moment follow what Elinor Ostrom proposed almost ten years ago, which led to her receiving a Nobel Prize for Economy in 2009, the first woman in this field bestowed with such recognition. In her acceptance speech titled *Beyond Markets and States*,<sup>3</sup> she proposed replacing the rivalry based on consumption with a drive towards use, strongly promoting ideas of a common pool of resources and the creation of public goods.

The great virtue of the commons as a school of thought is its ability to talk about the social organization of life that has some large measure of creative autonomy from the market or the State. The commons is not a manifesto, an ideology, or a buzzword, but rather a flexible template for talking about the rich potential of communities and the market enclosures that threaten them. From land ownership and access to information; from legal enclosures to expropriation of immaterial production, we are made aware of the fragility of the rights that we hold over what is most precious to our own creative work and to us.

To defend the commons is to recognize that human societies have collective needs and identities that the market cannot fulfill by itself.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps one of the outcomes of our art practices might be a well nourished cultural and knowledge commons and a just civil society. While attending to the model of the commons and recognizing both its full creative potential and its relationship to ownership that we may begin to address more sustainable formal and informal structures. The commons and the nourishment of the public sphere is one possibility for art to assert itself as a resource, which we must value in ways other than those determined by the markets.



Image 2. Lewandowska. Cummings\_Capital\_Tate Modern.jpg

2 Establishing the *Women's Audio Archive* online was financially supported by the Center for Curatorial Studies (CCS) at Bard College, Annandale-upon-Hudson, NY as part of a residency at the invitation of its director Maria Lind in 2009. Conversation with Gregor Muir in the fall of 2009. [www.marysialewandowska.com/waa/introduction.php](http://www.marysialewandowska.com/waa/introduction.php)

3 Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Prize Lecture on December 8, 2009 at Aula Magna, Stockholm University. [www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/2009/ostrom-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/2009/ostrom-lecture.html)

4 David Bollier, *The Growth of the Commons Paradigm*, in C.Hess, E.Ostrom *Understanding Knowledge as Commons*. MIT Press, 2007.



Image 3. Lewandowska. Cummings\_Capital\_Tate Modern.jpg



Image 4. Lewandowska. Cummings\_Capital\_Tate Modern.jpg

One reference shaping many of the ideas presented here was *Capital*, a collaborative research project with Neil Cummings, that explored the double-sidedness of gift and debt through an examination of the role the Bank of England plays in guaranteeing financial stability versus Tate's safeguarding the symbolic value residing in its collections. This was the very first in the *Contemporary Interventions* series, set up by Frances Morris in 2001 at Tate Modern, a platform encouraging self-reflexive approach to museum practices, giving artists a more agent role in querying the relationships between collection, its interpretation, and public engagement.

Now, 15 years since the launch of that project, its central themes of gift, economy, and trust, brought together to inform an understanding of the mechanisms that produce value in the museum, acquire new meanings under global capitalism. At the time, the project revealed, through its

methodology and outcomes, how a close collaboration between artists, curators, and a wider public contributes to discourses embedded in social processes. If museums are to continue playing a vital role in upholding the values of civil society, becoming more agent than immanent, their future will depend on an ability not only to initiate research but also to collaborate with a wider range of actors setting up the agenda for co-production of new knowledge. The project was triggered through gift giving at Tate Modern and the Bank of England Museum, establishing reciprocity between institutions, their visitors, and the museums' staff.



Image 5. Lewandowska. *How\_Public\_is\_the\_Public\_Museum?* Moderna Museet





Marysia Lewandowska  
How Public is the Public Museum?  
2010

MODERNA MUSEET®

Some of the work is an object in contact with Moderna Museet 2010. This poster is a gift received on the occasion of The Moderna Exhibition 2010.

Image 6. Lewandowska. *How\_Public\_is\_the\_Public\_Museum?* Rauschenberg poster.jpg

In 2010, I was invited to take part in *The Moderna Exhibition* at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, a survey of contemporary art in Sweden happening every four years. The edition was curated by Fredrik Liew, Gertrud Sandqvist, and Lisa Rosendhal, and as a focus for the project titled *How Public is the Public Museum?* I turned my attention to the museum's branding process. I was made aware that their logo had been commissioned by Lars Nittve after he had taken up the position of the museum's director in 2001, and that the logo was based on Robert Rauschenberg's handwriting. He had over the years enjoyed a close association with the museum through friendships with Billy Klüver and Pontus Hulten, so it seemed fitting to acknowledge that in some way. After gaining permission from Rauschenberg, Moderna Museet applied to the patent office to legally enclose what had been offered as a gift and to protect the exclusive rights to the use of the artist's distinct writing style.

My contribution to *The Moderna Exhibition* was to make this gesture of transfer of rights and the subsequent enclosure visible to the public, so I added a copyright sign next to the logo as

it appears on the museum's façade. It was also important to acknowledge Rauschenberg. In the end, his handwriting was the origin of the new logo and it was his generosity that had underwritten the gift. He was 76 at the time. I found a Robert Mapplethorpe portrait of Rauschenberg in the Moderna Museet collection, and after obtaining permission from the Mapplethorpe Foundation in New York to reproduce it, I decided to create a double-sided poster, adding on one side a copyright sign to the logo, and on the other, the creative commons sign.

After the exhibition finished, I was expecting the façade to be returned to its original state and my intervention to be removed. However, over the past five years the museum has made several attempts to paint over the copyright sign but the restoration has never succeeded. Instead, the copyright sign remained visible hovering in a somewhat orphaned state. While the initial consensus was to get rid of my work, the fabric of the building resisted the alteration, so finally the decision was reached by the curatorial team to keep the sign, restore it, and acknowledge my authorship. In 2015, the work was accessioned as my gift to the museum's permanent collection.

What began with an enclosure has unfolded in an opposite direction due to the openness of the curators faced with the endurance of metaphysical forces beyond their control. Instead of destruction, a new value was created.

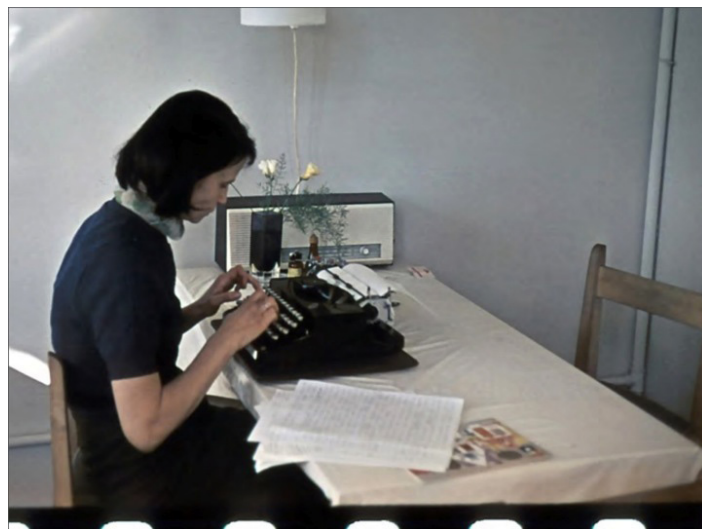


Image 7. Lewandowska. *Tender\_Museum*. Muzeum Sztuki Łódź.jpg

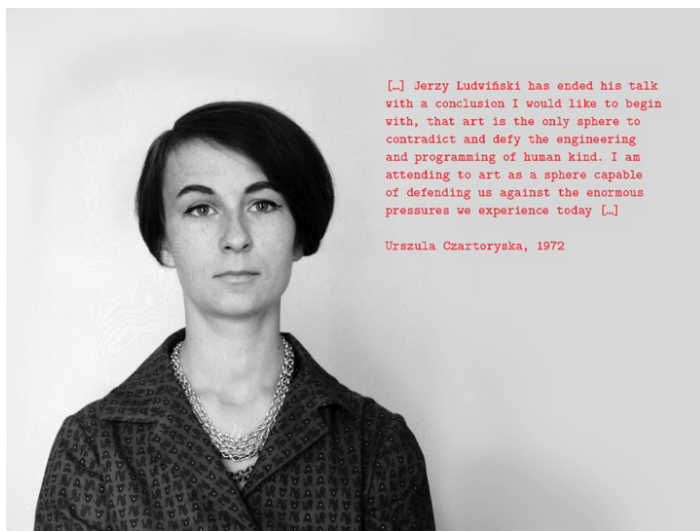


Image 8. Lewandowska. *Tender\_Museum*. Muzeum Sztuki Łódź.jpg



Image 9. Lewandowska. *Tender\_Museum*. Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.jpg

Lastly, I want to discuss the *Tender Museum*, a project commissioned by curator Magdalena Ziółkowska as part of the exhibition *Title: Archiwum*, at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. The *Tender Museum* proposed a different critical and discursive space, where questions of gender, care, and attention were articulated by re-positioning the voice of one individual, Urszula Czartoryska (1934–1998), curator, critic, and wife of the prominent director of the Muzeum Sztuki, Ryszard Stanisławski (1921–2000).

If there was something missing in my perception of how the museum discloses and discusses its own history, it was the role of women as public intellectuals. My line of enquiry was to speculate on the relationship between the distinct spheres of the private and public, testing their boundaries and finding the leaks. The ideas around tenderness emerged in two ways: firstly there was a clear indication of how important it was for Stanisławski and Czartoryska to run the museum as a caring

organization, both in their relations with staff and in their strong commitment to educational and audience-focused projects. I had an overwhelming impression that the success of Muzeum Sztuki in its public mandate was closely connected to the *economies of affect*, often marginalized or excluded and lacking endorsement in the existing institutional histories.

Mediation and negotiation were at the center of this project. By inserting the contribution of Czartoryska, I authorized the presence of the former curator, whose achievements, at least as far as I could see, found no proper representation in the archives or official commentary of the museum's account. Constructing a dialog between myself and the historically marginalized figure of the female curator — performed through a fictional radio interview — provided an important generational link.

The scene was staged in one of the exhibition spaces, which I turned into a recording studio. The recorded dialog made Czartoryska's voice reverberate in the space of the museum. Acting as an artist I was under no obligation to reproduce already existing power relations, so I decided to complicate the reading by introducing affect, as a more contentious site in the construction of the museum's history.

After all, the relevance of the artistic proposal often fully reveals itself in the emotional response of the public — that way we can move on from thinking of archives as stores of documents, and closer to an idea of a desiring archive, a reservoir of affective materials, and consider the future archive as a source of nourishment and not a sediment: maybe closer to an open-ended network of contributions, interpretations, a collaborative effort based on generosity.

For the last two-and-a-half years I have been in Hong Kong working on *Property, Protest, Commons and the Alternative Economies of Art in Asia*, a year-long research project based at the Asia Art Archive and carried out in collaboration with Esther Lu, Director of Taipei Contemporary Art Center. In this investigation I have been asking how globally networked museums can encourage a more nuanced reading of cultures with whose art they engage. If knowledge of history is linked to power and freedom, the museum must play a role in co-writing the histories of regions where documentation and archival practices are scarce, while oral traditions remain the primary source of knowledge. Museums have a responsibility to incubate artistic processes at source by collaborating with artists in parts of the world lacking democratic forms of governance. In the coming decade, increasing the emphasis on artist-generated, research driven, critically engaged practices, the museum has a chance to become a site where art can act as

a catalyst for other creative initiatives and social exchanges. The tension between trying to collect, conserve, and exhibit the history of twentieth century art, *and* at the same time trying to be a responsible twenty-first century art institution, often proves too difficult for museums to reconcile.

Could the principles of the commons and commoning as a constantly re-negotiated mode of being, production, and dissemination offer a model resisting the pressures of marketization? While tensions between the private and public ownership of culture are growing, alternative economies of art multiply as forms of resistance, and as attempts to include a wider participation; today, many more actors share a belief in assemblages as a methodology emphasizing fluidity. Globalization creates, as an unintended consequence, an opportunity for artists to ignite the extinguished connections and values they are capable of co-producing with others. Many are re-evaluating their relationship with tradition as a counterpoint to the overwhelming presence of logistics, particularly felt in Asia, as a new form of regulating exchange. By collaborating with a wider spectrum of practitioners, museums could help them to execute some of their research through exhibitions, publications, and digital platforms, participating in a renegotiation of the physical and conceptual spaces shaping the museum as commons, in the ever-evolving relationship between the digital and the material.

I leave you with an image of a lighthouse, as a template for a future museum, expressing the spirit of openness and of the commons. This is a museum as a site of conversation with the archive as its silent engine. We may be living through times of deeply troubling change, but in uncertainty resides the power to shape the future. Now is not the time to despair but to act.



# Perspective 09

## Yuliya Sorokina

Curator, Asia Art+PF, Almaty, Kazakhstan

### *Short Biography:*

*Yuliya Sorokina is a curator and lecturer, based in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She has curated several projects of Central Asian contemporary art, such as: Art Dubai Marker 2014, International Art Fair, Kazakhstani Department, Dubai, UAE (2014); In-between Past and Future. Archeology of Actuality, exhibition dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the collapse of USSR and former Kazakh Republic Independency, Goethe Institute Project "Minus Twenty," State Museum of Fine Arts, Almaty, Kazakhstan (2011); Muzykstan: Media generation of contemporary artists from Central Asia, Central Asia Pavilion, 52<sup>nd</sup> Venice Biennale (2007: commissioner and curator); UK+CA/Exchange Project Almaty-AstanaShymkent-Byshkek, Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan, Central Asian Project (2006–07: co-curator). Further exhibitions at: SPACE, London; Cornerhouse, Manchester; and Almaty, Bishkek, and Tashkent. She regularly publishes articles, among which: "The Ghost of the Garden-City," in Soviet Modernism 1955–1991 (2012; exh. cat.) and "Almagul Menlibayeva: Wanderings and Incarnations," Afterall #31 (2012). She is currently doing PhD research and working on ASTRAL NOMADS, a Digital Archive/Resource of Central Asian Contemporary Art, [astralnomads.net](http://astralnomads.net)*

### Presentation: Just Making?

I would like first of all to thank all the members and the CIMAM board for inviting me to share my experience with all of you, and probably to represent a little bit of our strategy of archiving, collecting, and sharing knowledge. But first of all I would like to show you the map of Eurasia so you can recognize the place where I am from. Below Russia lies Kazakhstan, situated in Central Asia and surrounded by several Muslim countries. Of course, by showing this map, I would like to remind you that we have Europe on one side and South-East Asia on the other. We are in the middle of something, or as somebody said, in the middle of nothing. Actually, it's not only a geopolitical point, but also a fact of nature, because we are in the so-called arid zone. Now, in November, the temperature in Almaty is -40°C with snow, but in summer temperatures reach +40°C. Of course, it is quite hard to survive in these conditions, but I'm not complaining, just explaining.

Another point that informs our situation is, of course, our post-Soviet heritage, which still exists after 25 years of so-called independence. We are

still in this post-Soviet situation and all these countries still experience the very strong influence of Russia. And so, we can tell you a lot about post-colonizing and decolonizing. Anyway, for the time being we cannot change this situation, and probably we shouldn't. This so-called big game will be played the other way, but I'm not sure it will be better.

Our situation was also built by the tragedy that, during the so-called "red terror," a lot of intelligent people were forcibly deported to Kazakhstan. We became a so-called laboratory or experimental territory in a big quasi-modernistic program initiated by Stalin. That's why we have 130 nationalities in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan had a lot of labor camps, but camps where you could even do ballet. Can you imagine? They had everybody: musicians, editors, dancers, etc. Many people from the avant-garde movements were prisoners in Kazakhstan during this time, among them Vera Ermolaeva, Vladimir Sterligov, and Robert Falc. So, we have this fragile part of society, an intelligentsia who studied the

avant-garde heritage with avant-garde people.

So, how many contemporary art museums do we have in Central Asia? None! In this territory we have no contemporary art museums. We actually tried to discover what the true situation was in the cultural field, and to this end we organized a so-called non-Silk Road and took 25 professionals from all over the world through South Kazakhstan to experience the smaller, provincial cities. Here is a map of our trip and you can see the destinations and different kinds of Asian roads.

When I was preparing this presentation, I recalled the jokes made on the first day about the invisible hand of the market. Well here, you see, we have the invisible hand of ISIS. I think you can guess which one is worse. Because the effects of radical Islam are felt in our countries every day, and this is reflected in our situation. This is why we have no contemporary art museums. In most provincial cities, we have no museums at all. This is our situation.

However, in the capital of our country, Astana, we have a museum that's very ambitious — and, to my mind, a bit strange. It looks so much like an art object, it doesn't need any kind of heritage inside. In our neighboring country, Azerbaijan, they have a very beautiful building by Zaha Hadid, who designed a museum for contemporary art. But here you see our new museum in Astana, the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and it also looks like an object from cosmic space. I can tell you they even change the color every three minutes: it glows. It's huge, and they decided to open a new original department of contemporary art in this museum, which is good. Finally, 20 years after the contemporary art community started, they understand that we have this phenomenon of Central Asian art, or Kazakh contemporary art, and they decided to play ball with us.

What do they have in the collection? They have no collection, of course, because it's a new museum, but they're trying. They got from the government a huge sum for Kazakhstan: KZT 130 million, around EUR 400,000, for buying some objects from contemporary artists. But the Ministry of Culture pushed them into buy a piece by a very superficial painter, Erbolat Tulepbay, which was dedicated to the president, to all his activities, to all his team, the history of independence, etc. After that, the museum was unable to buy any other pieces to add to the collection.

After 25 years of a developing contemporary art scene in Kazakhstan, we have a problem with the heritage of our pioneers. For instance, we are in danger of losing the Rustam Khalfin heritage. We already lost his clay project, *Base Level*. He built a two-floor gallery from clay, with a huge figure of

a man on the stairs. He was promoting the idea of a so-called nomad way of development, a nomadology, and a dialog with modernists from all over the world. Unfortunately, it was demolished, and now his heritage is under danger because his family doesn't want to do anything with it, nor will they let anybody else. We only have the pieces that he himself presented to us and which we have in our private collection.

We find the same situation with Sergei Maslov, a very important contemporary artist in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. You can see here his piece *Baikonur*. Maybe you know that in Kazakhstan we have the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Maslov was a mythologist, somehow, and he created the myth that nomads are the manifestation of aliens coming to Earth, and when they wanted to go back, they decided to hide their cosmic machines. And they created something to collect these machines: the yurt tent. Imagine a rocket: it looks a little like a yurt. So Kazakhs are hiding the aliens' rockets.

Following this situation, the community decided to organize an archive for contemporary art from Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and we called it "Astral Nomads" because it was dedicated to the creativity of Sergei Maslov. Shortly before his death in 2002, he started to write a novel in which the heroes are all the artists from Kazakhstan and Central Asia, with the narrative set in a rocket in space. And we're all going together through space, time, and the universe. He called the novel *Astral Nomads*. That's why we decided to organize an archive, online and offline, and name it after that novel. You can find this resource online. We just started, and of course it's hard work because we try to follow the standards set by worldwide archiving, like metadata. But we have no funding and all contributions are voluntarily. It's going very slowly.

Another problem that we faced when archiving was how to improve access, and especially access for local audiences. And we decided to go to local audiences by ourselves, and proposed that the museums that we have in Kazakhstan and Central Asia host our archive like a Moving Virtual Museum Astral Nomads. Some museums agreed and we got a little support from one institute in Kazakhstan-Central Asia. We organized the exhibition *Moving Virtual Museum Astral Nomads* in this fashionable, ambitious National Museum in Astana, and it is still there. It has computers, wi-fi, and a little library, and people come and discover the archive.

We also have another nomadic form of moving virtual museum, which is even simpler. We constructed this easel with a table in it, and again with wi-fi... What this museum needs is a plug-in, wi-fi, and agreement from the institution. We organize the space, for instance in the Artists Union of Kyrgyzstan, which is a pro-Soviet or post-Soviet

institution that is very archaic and conservative, but it works. And you see people coming to do it. We also have a strategy of self-generating community, because I really believe that community somehow is also an archive. Next generations, our friends, our colleagues, we all collect and generate knowledge, and we are actually somehow archives, in our memories, our souls, our feelings, and it's extremely important to come together and generate it.

One of the forms that we use is "Lazy Art." Each year we come together on the beach of the Issyk-Kul lake and spend ten days resting, eating together, discussing projects, making interviews, making strategies, what is to be done, how to do it, what would be the result, etc. So it's a kind of little CIMAM on the beach. I invite you to join us, because it's quite easy. You buy the ticket and you are welcome to stay with us at the Issyk-Kul for the ten-day presentation. After, we also have some kind of archiving.

We have a strategy for influencing audiences in Kazakhstan-Central Asia: interaction and intervention. Here you see an example. It's a totally new one. The artists were Yelena and Victor Vorobyev. It's an intervention in a very superficial place, and we all helped them. It was an object, "Ornamentizer," in the middle of Astana, with this very official symbol of the city, the *Bayterek*. In this round part of the building, you have a sacred place with the outstretched hand of the president caught in the middle of paying tribute. People come and put their hand into the president's, while looking out over Astana. This photo is from this round building, and you can see the ornaments that the authorities make for national identity. And they try to represent the identity of 130 nationalities, can you imagine? So, Vorobyev decided to do this object, which you can see is a labyrinth. People go through and the artist's joke is that they become like the people of one nation.

We also have another strategy of museology and nature. This is the museology of contemporary art on the street, and the next example is museology in nature. It's a monument, *Tekmen*. In English, *tekmen* means "mattock," a kind of agricultural pickaxe. This gigantic mattock, which we erected in a village, far away from any city, in an area where peasants and farmers grow potatoes, so they use this tool every day. Can you imagine? When it was installed, people from all over the region were coming with their families to see this monument, and they were so proud that such a work of contemporary art was dedicated to their profession, to their labor. Although it was most people's first encounter with contemporary art, they are already proud of it.

The next example is connected with education. Our community tries to share knowledge through exhibiting some contemporary art in the universities.

For instance, curator Ulan Djaparov from Kyrgyzstan made two exhibitions in the Aga Khan University and the Kyrgyz-American University, where all the auditoriums and spaces were decorated with contemporary art objects.

Another strategy was applied this summer as an intervention in the old tram depot in Almaty. The building is closed and falling into ruin, and we decided to mount an exhibition in it, a kind of metaphor for the reincarnation of contemporary art practice. After this education program and exhibition, we had 25 absolutely new, young, brilliant artists in our Central Asian community.

I also think that it's very important to fix history, and if we don't have institutions in the region, we can set up the institution ourselves by just cooperating with some structures. We organized the *Central Asian Journal of Art Studies* this year, and I kindly invite you to contribute to this magazine. We would be very happy to have all of you connoisseurs in our art community, our family or tribe of Central Asian contemporary art.

In conclusion, I would like to propose... it's a bit humoristic, of course, so don't take it seriously, but probably some of you can also use the Central Asian strategy of how to be responsible. We advise that you follow a rhizomorphic structure of community, transgress the status quo, do interventions/irruptions, use odd places for exhibiting, be proactive and provoke others to be, generate your own funds, pass on your knowledge to the young, fix actions, write the history of art on the way, use the Internet as a space, and just move.

# Panel Discussion with speakers

Moderated by Frances Morris,  
Director, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom

Frances Morris: I think because we have a limited amount of time, what I'd like to do is just open up to questions as fast as we can, but maybe just with one observation. Yesterday, Carolyn in the keynote talked about the value of artist practice in relation to rethinking the institution, rethinking art histories, helping us to reflect on our practice, and reconnect with the public space. And I thought it was interesting this morning that we also had an artist speaking whose personal practice is just that, and that the roles they're playing in the respective communities feels so incredibly important and urgent to our practice as museum curators. So, questions, from the floor. Please introduce yourself, so that we know who's speaking.

Questioner: João Fernandes, from Museo Reina Sofia. Two questions. First of all, congratulations for this beautiful morning. We had access to very interesting information. There are some questions that arise and that can be important for our discussion. One of them relates to the responsibility of archives. An archive always confronts us with a dilemma of ownership and partnership. Or we can open an archive to the politics of commons, for example. This is always a very big challenge, because we have in some way a sort of predatory tradition in our history of museums. We collect, we accumulate, we develop our strategies inside our own institutions, but today we also have the ethical responsibility to share what we collect. In general, to think about the way we are able to collect, and the way we are able to finance our strategies, too. Because we are also the result of a world, a global economy, and also of museums, to collect more than other museums, and the usual historical relationships of power as to the present. Often, some of our supporters are people that invest more in museums outside of their countries than in their own countries, for example. And this is also an ethical dilemma in our times. How we can face the activity of an archive today in terms of this politics of the commons. This is something I would like to put to Mari Carmen, with your impressions on the archive in Latin America, Latino art. It's a very interesting

situation. It's a complex situation, too, to activate a serious net with the reality of where all these materials are coming from, for example, or to develop an active net with these artists, where these materials are coming from.

The other thing is [inaudible] the artist very interestingly challenges the place of institutions today. We also face this curious situation about power. We have a responsibility as curators of a museum, as directors, not only to express our ideas to the audience that we receive in the museum, but also to the instances of power that contextualize our possibilities to work. And a lot of times we see this global society wants the monument from us, and wants the monument for reasons totally outside our programs, strategies, and goals. How can we redefine ourselves, our museums, our institutions in terms of this politics of global power, today, in terms of economy and in terms of politics? The Kazakhstan reality is a caricature of something happening everywhere in the global world. A museum can be thought of as an empty building, as a sign, as a symbol, as a useless place, but as a very symbolic place for the power of the defining it, for the possibility of building it. And it asks some ethical questions for all of us, and it would be nice to hear from you a little bit more about them.

Frances Morris: Thank you. You said so much, and I'm just wondering whether there's one specific point you want Mari Carmen or Marysia to address. Do you want to just get back to your beginning point?

João Fernandes: [inaudible] questions what about the link between the need of these politics of the commons and the problems of the [inaudible] of partnership. How can we face this dichotomy?

Frances Morris: Sorry, between partnership and the commons?

João Fernandes: Second question: how does the artist watch the museum in terms of the political and econo-



mical structure of power creating the museum today?  
 Mari Carmen Ramírez: I'm not sure I understand... I mean, if you're talking about the archive between partnership and the commons, referring to a common good, how it was described... I'm not sure how I would answer that question. I think the archive that we have built in Houston is definitely based on the notion of partnerships. It's been made possible through a very broad network. It included everything from research institutions, universities... even two banks participated in the process in terms providing all the office space, the Internet connections, you know, things of that sort. And then the people who made possible the recovery of all these documents were all both senior and junior researchers, and not only researchers and art historians, but also IT experts and all sorts of people who participated in this: librarians, catalogers, etc.

So, this is made possible through a partnership, and things like copyright, which is something that everybody always asks and is concerned about. We had an amazing rate of success with that, because everybody has been willing to give to this partnership. Artists have been incredibly generous. We had very few issues where we've had to pay humongous fees or where people have denied us the right to this, because there has been good will on everyone's part. And because the most important thing is that, even though this archive is happening in the United States, the people who have been deciding what to include in the archive, how to include it, what the methodology is, are people who are vested in the history of this movement from all over Latin America, or at least the places where we work. And there was an editorial board made of key representatives from each country that was in dialog with all these researches.

So, it's been as much of a democratic effort as we could possibly make it. And it's also very important that in no situation have we taken an archive. We have not bought archives, we have not requested archives as gifts, we never actually see a document, we never see a piece of paper. The researchers go to the homes of the artist, or they go to the repositories, and they scan the materials, and then we process the materials, catalog them, etc., and they go into the archive. And the archive is free of charge for anyone in the world. Right now, we have 18,000 registered users, about 10,000 of whom use this archive on a monthly basis, and millions of visits to the archive. So, it is fulfilling a very important need. Of course, it's an incomplete archive, it's a fragment of a huge totality. But it has the possibility, it is instant because it's a digital archive, so we have built the foundations of that archive, but the next generation will come, and they will introduce other materials. They will do

other things that will enrich the archive.

Frances Morris: Could we just maybe open up to talk about the partnership in relation to the commons? I just wonder whether our artist had a response to try and tease that out.

Marysia Lewandoska: I would like to say something that I feel is almost more fundamental, which is this question of property. Property really shapes all sorts of relations, and how we imagine property is how we imagine ourselves. If you think of the archive, which is central to our culture, to any culture, it's made with the property of many people. These people who often contribute, or their families contribute, are the very people who are locked out of using the archive. So, this whole question of permission... I suggested this many times elsewhere, but maybe we really need to make a greater effort to move from a culture of permission to the culture of acknowledgement. Because that's really all you need. All the time you need to acknowledge the sources, the owners, but you don't really need to ask for permission every time. And that's how you build the commons, because it's in our common interest.

Kuan-Hsing Chen: I think there are different horizons. Archiving is important, but an impossible task. My friend, I don't remember his last name: Simon, working in Germany, from Africa. He suggested that the archive is here. Museums archive without accounting for the entire production process, a living process. And if you use temple as a site, as an art community, you know, how do you document everything? In other words, there needs to be a certain priority for each project or for each institution that is trying to archive. I'm involved in the so-called AAA as supervisor, but I think the issue is never resolved.

Another thing is, what do you archive? In AAA, art is narrowed down to the visual arts. "Rock concert", "my mother's noodles," these are all art, depending on how you define art. I think the implication that I want to draw is: firstly, art is emotionally involved; secondly, it has to do with community, history, and politics, otherwise it will be involved in a type of banality, decontextualizing everything. Art becomes something you're not supposed to understand, but the production process involved in art cannot be simply the archive, so what do you do? The entire notion of archive needs to be called into question before anything is carried out. Art needs to be redefined unless you want to give up the notion of art, which is impossible. It isn't being practiced. A museum for what? Too centrist!

Frances Morris: Can I just pick you up on that, "My Mother's Noodles"... you know, it's a huge and

diverse temple that we're occupying today in this room, and one of the interesting things is that we are all approaching community, ownership, and the public commons in different ways, and it's really important that you should reference the impossibility of the task. But just coming back to the perspective of Kazakhstan, which is actually an interesting case study at this moment in time. We are living in a moment when, in parts of the world, democracies are emerging, while in other parts democracies are disappearing. And I just wondered, from your very particular perspective, how you would respond to that notion of partnership and the commons.

Yuliya Sorokina: First of all, I would like to contradict my colleague and say that everything is possible. I trust in my teacher who, when he asked me to find a project and I said, "Oh, it's impossible," he would reply, "Everything is possible if you have good will." So everything is possible. Secondly, it's also possible to balance cooperation and commons. I trust very much the motto of the Asia Art Archive when it says that archiving is not about ownership, it's about sharing information about art. I trust in that. I think everything is here in this motto. I also agree with you when you say that it should be acknowledged, but we should learn how to do it and teach others.

Frances Morris: Fantastic. I'm just going to read out a couple of statements that arose this morning by way of thanking my four amazing colleagues. The things that I've taken away from this morning: "everything is possible," "anyone can be God," "act not despair," "the museum is dead, long live the museum." We will continue the discussion over lunch, and this afternoon, and in perpetuity, because there are no easy answers to any of these questions. All our thanks for a really extraordinary and fascinating three days. The visits, the entertainment, the alcohol and meals, the noodles; everything has been really wonderfully, on time, and perfectly received.

For those who wish to sign the petition for Enrico Lunghi, send your e-mail and your signature to [info@cimam.org](mailto:info@cimam.org) and we really ask that you sign the petition. For those who missed the General Assembly this morning, the new CIMAM board members are: Bart De Baere, Saskia Bos, Suzanne Cotter, Calin Dan, Corinne Diserens, Sarah Glennie, Mami Kataoka, Sunjung Kim, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, Frances Morris, Ann-Sofi Noring, Agustín Pérez Rubio, Suhanya Raffel, Jaroslav Suchan, and Eugene Tan. We're thrilled to have old and new members, and we're very sad to say goodbye to many departing members. Thank you hugely for your input, some of you over many years. And again, thank you so much to Bartomé and

Patricia for steering the ship through, at times, rocky waters, but who have delivered some amazing conferences. Welcome to new members, new board members, old board members. And thank you speakers!

# Colophon

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