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Day 1

Friday, November 2
Moderna Museet

Global Realities
— Challenges
for Modern
and Contemporary
Museums

Keynote 1

Daniel Birnbaum and Ann-Sofi Noring

Director and Co-Director Moderna Museet,
Stockholm, Sweden

An Open Museum in a Larger World

This is an extract from the book *A Plurality of Tongues. Giving Direction to the Museum* (Moderna Museet, 2018). When giving the keynote lecture to open the CÍMAM Conference 2018, we made a summary of some of the thematic threads that run through the programs of Moderna Museet. These include attentiveness to diversities and to alternative modernisms as well as to the great contributions of women artists. Another interest concerns the interplay between art forms: music, film, dance, poetry, design, architecture, and all the disciplines we subsume under the notion of visual art. A further leitmotif is the speculative power of the exhibition as a format and its capacity to activate the past. The primary focus of our activities is not only the work of art, but the artists themselves.

For the conference we made our keynote in a dialogue form, which cannot easily be transformed to a written text. Therefore, we have chosen to reproduce a

couple of the main themes from the book and to illustrate the text with some of the images shown at the conference:

The collection as a laboratory

A large art collection is a perfect hotbed for visual and intellectual experiments. In recent years, Moderna Museet has repeatedly challenged the standard narrative of modernism through a number of radical art installations. It all began with *Another Story*, for which we let photographic images gradually take over all the exhibition rooms. Our collection of photography, from 1840 to today, is one of the finest in Europe. Practically all the great names in photographic history are represented—from Henri Cartier-Bresson, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Man Ray to Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Wall. Our intention was to present the museum from a different angle and to make room for a story that



Image 1: *freq_out 8*, 2012, organized by Carl Michael von Hausswolff: forty-eight hours of sound in 4,250 cubic meters of the museum. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet



Image 2: Elaine Sturtevant in front of Andy Warhol's *Ten-Foot Flowers* (1967) during her exhibition *Sturtevant: Image over Image*, 2012. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

provides a new perspective and enriches our understanding of the development of art. Many of our visitors were interested in seeing more of our enormous collection of photography. *Another Story* was not only the largest-ever photographic exhibition at a Swedish museum but also incomparably the most popular.

The photography exhibition was followed by a similar presentation of moving images that featured key works in the museum's collection of films and videos, from Dziga Vertov, Maya Deren, and Andy Warhol to video pioneers such as Dara Birnbaum, Gary Hill, and Pipilotti Rist. At the hub of this activity was a major retrospective of works by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, one of the most important artists exploring the boundary between art and film today. *Before and After Cinema* was a collaboration with the Section for Cinema Studies at Stockholm University and Bonniers Konsthall, which involved us in an examination of what the moving image can be and where it is heading in our new media world.

An art museum usually displays objects for people to look at. The focus is on the eye. For forty-eight hours, we turned Moderna Museet into a museum of the ear, with a presentation consisting entirely of audio art and concerts: *freq_out* consisted of twelve individual audio works, each using a specific audio frequency, that together formed a soundscape. Carl Michael von Hausswolff initiated *freq_out* and describes the project as follows: "Sound has been a constant part of contemporary visual art for the past century. The audio installation *freq_out ...* is possibly the largest complex audio work ever to have been installed in an art museum—forty-eight hours in 4,250 cubic meters. Twelve smaller works in different frequency areas have been combined into one totality. The sounds have neither beginning nor end but are in constant flow and act in a sculptural way."

During a few baffling months, Sturtevant presented her replicas of famous works by Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp, and other male giants linked to the history of Moderna Museet. Following these fairly extreme transformations of the museum's exhibition halls, we have gradually installed a new chronological version of our collection that covers all disciplines and seeks to generate new dialogues between Swedish and international art. Moderna Museet has a collection of international standing, but our way of working with it will remain experimental. In this way, we hope to combine weight with lightness. Small art galleries and biennials are expected to take an experimental approach, but a large museum with the ambition to remain open-minded and vibrant must also continue to be a laboratory. Gertrude Stein is reputed to have said that you can



Image 3: Yoko Ono performing during the opening of *Grapefruit*, 2012.
Photo: Albin Dahlström/Moderna Museet



Image 4: The first installment of *Hilma af Klint: Abstract Pioneer*, 2013.
Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

either be a museum or modern, but you can't be both. Let us try to prove her wrong and uphold the paradox of being a modern museum.

Shifting the story of modernism

At Moderna Museet, we strive constantly to enrich and shift the narrative of modernism by highlighting artists who have been partially overlooked. Many of these artists are women. The fact that we have featured slightly more women than men in solo exhibitions over the past few years thus not only manifests our ambition to redress this imbalance, but also expresses our desire to present alternative narratives of how art has developed. By presenting a painter like Jutta Koether instead of, say, Martin Kippenberger, we gained a new perspective on German painting. Not necessarily a truer perspective, but one that has not been repeated insistently by museums around the world. The major exhibition of Eva Löfdahl was, first, a presentation of a great Swedish oeuvre, but by complementing the exhibition with a rich program of literature, dance, music, and philosophy, her art served as a prism through which we could look back at the generation that emerged in the 1980s.

The concept of certain artists serving as prisms that can reveal the artistic and political ambitions of an era has accompanied all our endeavors. By choosing Yoko Ono, one of few women artists in the Fluxus movement, you gain a specific insight not only into this particular group but also into an entire generation. Ono is, of course, an important artist in her own right, and that goes for the other women artists featured in the museum's solo exhibitions since 2010: Marina Abramović, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Yael Bartana, Loulou Cherinet, Moki Cherry, Keren Cytter, Siri Derkert, Nathalie Djurberg, Cecilia Edefalk, Marie-Louise Ekman, Annika Eriksson, İsa Genzken, Sofia Hultén, Jacqueline de Jong, Mary Kelly, Klara Lidén, Lee Lozano, Alice Neel, Lygia Pape, Hannah Ryggen, Niki de Saint Phalle, Doris Salcedo, Elaine Sturtevant, Astrid Svangren, Tora Vega Holmström, and many others.

Most modernist movements were dominated by men. Take the Situationists, for instance, the radical political and artist organization headed by Guy Debord that formed what is often considered to be the last European avant-garde. A closer look reveals women members. The Situationists included the writer Michelle Bernstein, one of its co-founders, and the painter Jacqueline de Jong, editor of *The Situationist Times*. Both were invited to the museum, de Jong for an exhibition, and Bernstein to present *All the King's Horses*, her *roman à clef* about the Situationists, which had been published in Swedish translation by the OEI in association with Moderna Museet.

American Pop art is also predominantly male. But the enigmatic artist Elaine Sturtevant, who has won recognition in recent years, belonged to the same circles as Andy Warhol and was friends with both Jasper Johns and Claes Oldenburg. In her art, she takes certain concepts of repetition and reproduction even further than her male colleagues, shedding new light on her entire generation's ideas on sampling and the appropriation of visual material. In that sense, the Sturtevant exhibition was also a prism through which an artistic and intellectual landscape was revealed in a new light.

Art history is not carved in stone; it is rewritten continuously by all of us who research and work with art and produce exhibitions. And by the public, which looks at it from new angles. How was abstract art born, and who were its great pioneers? Those who study art history at a European university are fed the same old answer: three men in Russia and on the continent, named Malevich, Mondrian, and Kandinsky. We propose a complement, an alternative: Hilma af Klint, a woman born at Karlberg Palace in Stockholm.

Bridging artistic disciplines

Film, design, music, literature, architecture, painting, sculpture, photography ... at Moderna Museet, we bridge the arts. It is often more exciting to visualize the dialogue between visual art and other disciplines than to see visual art as an isolated phenomenon. Yes, it is often essential to make comparisons with film, literature, and philosophy in order to understand the visual art of a period. This is obvious with, for example, Surrealism. It becomes apparent again in Pop art and postmodernism. Things are interlinked. Sometimes, a painting opens up a whole universe yet remains one facet of a larger cultural context.

This is an established tradition at our museum, and in recent years we have initiated several exhibitions and projects that emphasize how the arts interact. Le Corbusier was inspired by shells and other beach finds. He drew, painted, created sculptures, buildings, neighborhoods, whole cities. Our exhibition about the great architect's secret laboratory showed how some shapes can migrate from one material or technique to another: the organic morphology of a conch shell



Image 5: Kraftwerk concert in front of Moderna Museet during the Stockholm Music & Arts Festival, 2016. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet



Image 6: Simone Forti performance at the opening of *Objects and Bodies at Rest and in Motion*, 2016. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

appears in images, wood sculptures, and architectonic elements. Le Corbusier, one of modernism's most seminal and controversial figures, was also one of the previous century's most overly ambitious universal artists.

Another example is *Pop Art Design*, which presented new ways of crossing disciplinary boundaries. Today, it is evident that Pop art was one of the most influential postwar art movements, and its images still inform our understanding of cultural identity. Those who became known as Pop artists found their subject matter in everyday life, in Hollywood imagery, in the mass media, in advertising, and in commercial symbols and logotypes created by designers. The imagery and strategies of Pop art, in turn, served as inspiration for many designers. *Pop Art Design* explored the dialogue that arose between the visual and applied arts, between sculpture, painting, photography, and design. Moderna Museet has one of the most important collections of Pop art. These works, which were familiar to the audience, became visible in a new way through a dialogue with a world of utilitarian objects: furniture, lights, telephones.

The museum has also explored the borderland between dance and art. The 2014 exhibition *Dance Machines—From Léger to Kraftwerk* was about the modernist fascination with machinery and everyday mechanical devices. Works from the collection by artists such as Alexandra Exter, Marcel Duchamp, and Francis Picabia were shown alongside films by Charlie Chaplin and René Clair and monumental stage sets created for Les Ballets suédois by Fernand Léger. One large hall was devoted to a 3D installation by the electronic-music pioneers Kraftwerk, whose minimalist talk-singing and industrial rhythms provided a powerful resonance for the exhibition.

In *Objects and Bodies at Rest and in Motion*, minimalist objects were enveloped in choreographic practices developed by Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, and Trisha Brown in the same spirit as, and in dialogue with, the artists transforming painting and sculpture at the time. Choreography has been a key element of several exhibitions, not least *After Babel*, which provided a stage for numerous new dance works, and the symposium *Translate, Intertwine, Transgress*, co-organized with MDT on Skeppsholmen, exploring choreography's relationship to poetry and philosophy. The close ties to an institution such as MDT, which specializes in contemporary choreography, has opened enabled collaborations with such diverse figures as Mårten Spångberg and Marina Abramović and filled the museum's halls with choreographed bodies.

A place for research and speculation

The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery is the experimental heart of Moderna Museet. Neither library nor warehouse nor ordinary white cube, this place is for presentations that mix art and archival material—drafts, letters, sketches, models, and books. In the upper part of the space, art is hung on screens that can be lowered to where they can be conveniently



Image 7: Michèle Bernstein and Jacqueline de Jong during the opening of de Jong's exhibition *A Small Modification and Dérive of the Pontus Hultén Collection in the Renzo Piano Grotto* and the launch of the Swedish translation of Bernstein's *All the King's Horses*, 2012. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet



Image 8: Rem Koolhaas lecturing during the exhibition *Le Corbusier*, 2013. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

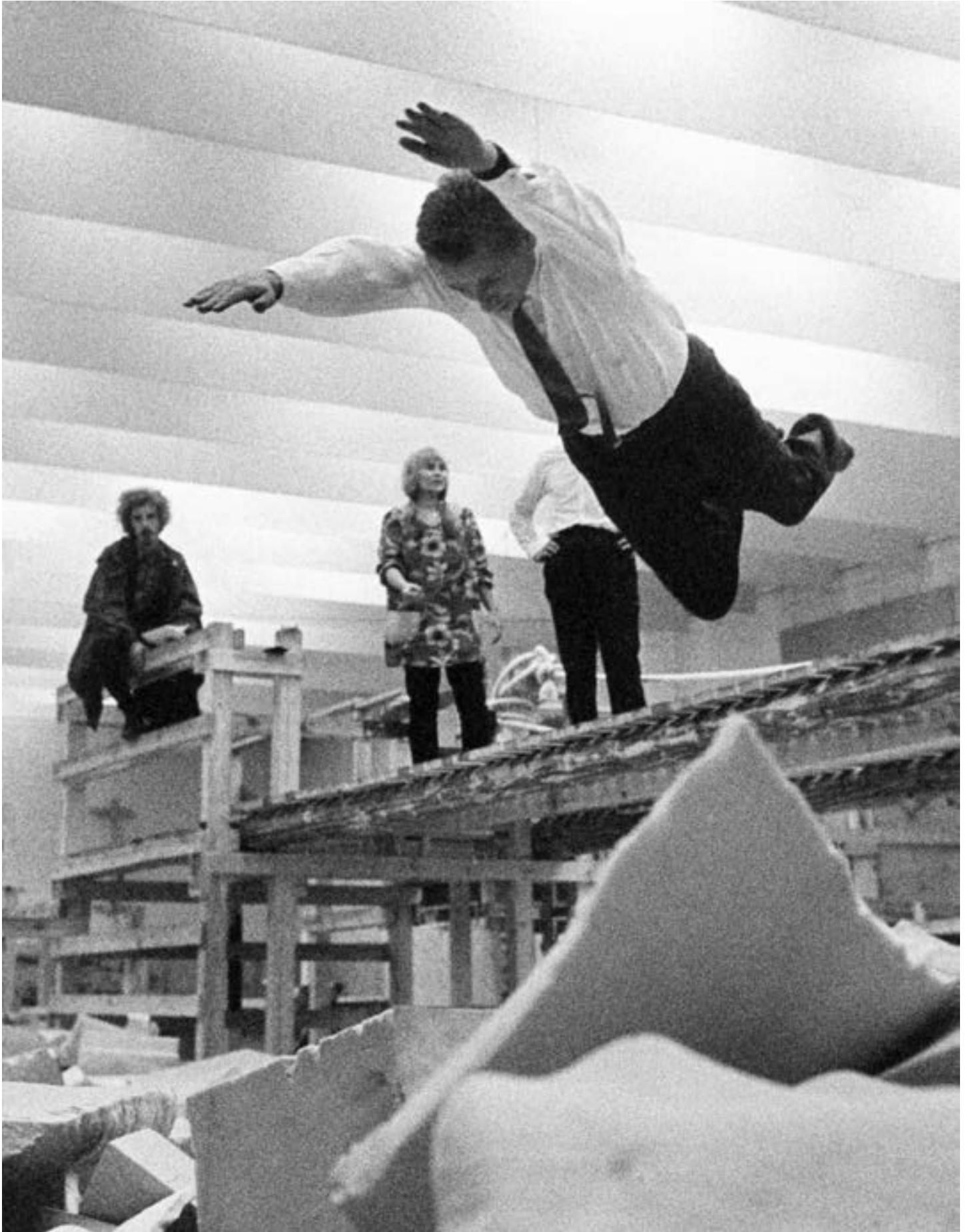


Image 9: *The Model*, 1968. Prime Minister Olof Palme dives into the exhibition and playground for all ages.
Photo: Olle Seibold/Pressens bild

viewed from the ground floor. The lower level features presentations focusing on periodicals, books, and archival material relating to the production of key works of art or exhibitions.

This is where Jacqueline de Jong, for instance, compiled the exhibition *A Small Modification and Dérive of the Pontus Hultén Collection* in the Renzo Piano Grotto (2012), featuring, apart from her own paintings, works by artists such as Jasper Johns and Niki de Saint Phalle. Another example is the presentation of the American artist Paul Thek's oeuvre, based on correspondence and photographic documentation in connection with the exhibition *Pyramid*, which took place at the museum in 1971.

A Good Home for Everyone—With Anna Riwkin and Björn Langhammer in the Shadow of the Welfare State (2015–16) was a photo-based exhibition portraying the majority of Swedish society's attitudes to the Roma people. In the Study Gallery, documentary series by the two photographers revealed the living conditions for a Swedish-minority group within the realm of the welfare state. The exhibition also raised the issue of the roles of the camera and the photographer in documentary situations. In winter 2016–17, the exhibition *Comparative Vandalism: Photography from Asger Jorn's Archives* highlighted parts of the Danish artist's monumental but unfinished study of what he called "Nordic Folk Art." Numerous other projects have emerged in a hybrid zone between curatorial experiments and archival research, transforming this space into something like a modernist curiosity cabinet or a speculative laboratory for scholars interested in phenomena specific to exhibitions and museums. Often, the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery is where Moderna Museet's research is made available in the form of symposia and publications.

Art history is normally written on the basis of individual artistic oeuvres, or occasionally particular works of art. We must not forget, however, that most seminal works have been presented to the public within the framework of an exhibition. The recent surge of interest in exhibition formats is obvious from the deluge of literature on seminal exhibitions and a number of vibrant study programs focusing on the relatively new field called curatorial studies. By and large, this perspective informs the presentations in the Study Gallery, with display cases showing material relating to certain legendary exhibitions, including *Movement in Art* (1961), *SHE: A Cathedral* (1966), *Vanishing Points* (1983)—a seminal introduction to Conceptual art—and *Implosion: A Postmodern Perspective* (1986), which introduced postmodernism in Sweden. Since its earliest years, Moderna Museet has been a place where the idea of what an exhibition

can be has been renegotiated. In this way, the history of exhibiting was portrayed not only in retrospect but also introspectively. In the Study Gallery, the Museum takes a look at itself.

The young and the very young

Half-a-century ago, Moderna Museet's main exhibition hall was transformed into a playground for a few intense weeks. *The Model* (1968) was a legendary project that emphasized the museum as a place for very young visitors. However, whereas Moderna Museet has always welcomed kids and teens, especially for intergenerational activities such as guided tours for toddlers and art-workshop sessions, young adults have often been neglected. Art can provide a much-needed platform to those at an age when many are searching for their identity. Based on this conviction, the museum established a youth project called *Zon Moderna*, which introduced hundreds of upper secondary school students to modern and contemporary art between 2004 and 2011. The concept was that an artist, an art educator, and a group of youths together studied a current exhibition and formulated ideas for a collective project at the Museum, on the Internet, or in a public space. In 2011, *Zon Moderna* was transformed into *Museum Museum*



Image 10: In the Bucky Dome during the exhibition *Explosion! Painting as Action*, 2012. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

and has since expanded to include young adults. The commitment to encourage participants to express their thoughts and ideas on contemporary art and the modern art museum is as strong as the ambition to share our knowledge about artistic processes and what art can be. *Untitled (Vernacular Furniture)*, implemented in 2013, involved a transformation of the entire museum entrance in Stockholm. Whereas projects for kids and youths are often relegated to the

margins of the main stage, this project was a full-on demonstration of the impact of young people's imagination, skills, and creativity. Together with the Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander, teenagers designed new tables and chairs for the foyer café. This furniture characterized the dialogue between Brazilian everyday life, where nothing is wasted, and farmhouse interiors from the Skansen open-air museum, and was a far cry from the range you would find in a department store. The furniture has been added to and occasionally migrated to other parts of the museum, but the core set has remained in place for years and has been used by hundreds of thousands of visitors. As a creative platform, *Museum Museum* has provided an arena for everything from DIY culture and digital art to explorations of how creative activities are expressed in private and public spaces.

Participant-based projects have periodically developed into popular movements: *Everyone is a Photographer* (2011) invited everyone—yes, everyone!—to contribute their own pictures to a monumental montage in all the museum's in-between spaces; *Art Planet* (2012) invited young people, from toddlers to nineteen-year-olds, to participate with whatever they found to be important, interesting, and/or beautiful in the museum's largest-ever group exhibition.

Acclimatize (2016) was designed as a digital exhibition, a website on which anyone could upload works—pictures, videos, discussions, dances, poems—inspired by climate or sustainability issues during two autumn months. At the outset, the website featured contributions from the artists Olafur Eliasson and Bea Szenfeld as inspiration and to generate dialogue.

Actionpaintingbabysplash is yet another of the museum's most successful pedagogical endeavors illustrating how a picture can say more than a thousand words. It involved making the entire upper floor of Moderna Museet Malmö available in spring 2015 for a veritable color action. In a hybrid creative workshop and exhibition, the citizens of Malmö gathered for a cascade of activities, dripping, throwing, smearing, and rolling paint all over the space. Toddlers were offered color tasting, based on turmeric, beetroot, and green plants, while older visitors used their own bodies and walls as projection surfaces. At the same time, the museum exhibited video works, performance documentations, and action-inspired art by artists such as Anastasia Ax, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Shozo Shimamoto. For the subsequent Malmö Festival, an annual celebration, the museum was invited to stage a similar event in the city's main square, thus putting the audience in the middle of the colors and making them an essential part of the artistic practice.

A living garden

On some summer evenings, our garden becomes one of Stockholm's most exciting musical venues. Under Yayoi Kusama's polka-dot trees and against the backdrop of Picasso's 1962 sculpture *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, a wide range of fantastic musicians



Image 11: Patti Smith performing in Yayoi Kusama's Garden, 2016.
Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet



Image 12: José González performing in the garden, 2016.
Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

performed in 2016, from José González, one balmy evening in July, to Patti Smith and her new band, in early August. For three consecutive days, the latter treated us to tributes to both the living and the dead, and obviously appreciated the intimate atmosphere of the garden, something often missing when artists of her stature perform. She noted repeatedly and with surprise that she could discern every single face in the audience from the small stage below the trees.

The garden initiates encounters between the art forms that we continuously explore. In collaboration with our neighbor, ArkDes, and various music festivals, we build new bridges between music, architecture, painting, sculpture, and artistic expressions that are still to be named. What do you call a tree that visitors create themselves by writing earnest wishes on paper notes and tying them to the branches until they are weighed down by their new load? Yoko Ono's answer: *A Wish Tree*. In 2012, this *Wish Tree* appeared in our garden.

Moderna Museet is an open museum that encourages art to leave the building and spread across the island. This happened daily for a whole summer with the exhibition *Explosion—Painting as Action*, which combined Niki de Saint Phalle's color eruptions with ZERO and Gutai, movements less known in the Nordic region. The exhibition spilled into the garden with improvised jazz by Neneh Cherry and Eagle-Eye Cherry in Buckminster Fuller's "Geodesic Dome," a venue where performance and music were presented all summer. It was obvious that all these elements, within and beyond the museum's walls, belonged to the same experimental constellation and needed no further explanation.

There have been a few especially golden periods for our garden. Anyone with an interest in the museum's history will know of other exhibitions that continued outdoors. Concerts have also been held in the garden before, of course, not least in the 1980s, when some of the most famous artists appeared on a tiny stage just outside the café. But rarely has the entire garden become a space for experimental encounters in the way it did during the Kusama exhibition. Entirely new experiences arise in the interface between all known artistic disciplines, below the branches, or maybe up among the leaves.

Word and image—literature and art in dialogue

An art museum is charged with new energies when the dialogue between visual arts and other disciplines takes place. Moderna Museet seeks to bridge the gap between different artistic expressions—and the bridge to literature has been especially strong in recent years.



Image 13: OEI's poetry festival in the exhibition *After Babel—Poetry will be made by all! –89plus*, 2015. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet



Image 14: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o presenting the opening keynote at Stockholm Literature, 2016. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

Stockholm Literature, in collaboration with the museum, has established itself as an important recurring event on the literary scene. Here, prominent writers from every continent talk to their Swedish colleagues, scholars, and artists, and read their works against a backdrop of art. So far, the event has hosted established authors such as Svetlana Alexievich, Don DeLillo, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and writers who have not previously been published in Swedish. Attention is paid to the art of translation and helping disparate cultures to understand one another.

The playwright and author Lars Norén participated in the first Stockholm Literature in 2013 with a large selection of text fragments that came to infiltrate the museum halls. Just before, the museum had published the catalogue for *Cindy Sherman—Untitled Horrors*, to which Norén, Kathy Acker, Sibylle Berg, Karl Ove Knausgård, Sjöon, and Sara Stridsberg had contributed texts relating to Sherman's imagery.

Öyvind Fahlström was one of the most innovative and multifaceted artists of the twentieth century, and his oeuvre has served as a lodestar for the

interaction between word and image. The thematic exhibition *Manipulate the World: Connecting Öyvind Fahlström* (2017) was the apex of a project lasting many years, in which the artist's activities activated the audience. Studies of performance works and readings in the spirit of Fahlström put concrete poetry centre stage, and the three books published in conjunction with the event provide material for further thoughts on the vast potential of art.

What is an exhibition at an art museum, apart from works installed in rooms? Infinitely more, as each new exhibition demonstrates in its own unique way. In the spectrum between word and image, the group exhibition *After Babel* (2015) exemplifies the museum's ambition to highlight the many idioms of contemporary art. Another, subsequent, example of multilingualism is *OEI#79* (2018). This was the seventy-ninth edition of the publication *OEI*, and it differed entirely from all previous issues. Published as a spatial presentation, it was an experimental montage of editorial practices featuring art, philosophy, poetry, documents, and historiography. It gave opportunities for expanded readings on all levels for six short weeks, with artists, poets, publishing communities, and philosophers among its special guests. A three-

dimensional magazine that went much further than simply bridging the gap between art and literature—that is how new synergies arise.

One museum, two cities

The primary purpose of a modern art museum is no longer to deliver a universal history but to tell several parallel histories. There is no “permanent” collection; instead, the presentation is perpetually challenged and brought to life in new constellations. In this respect, Moderna Museet Malmö has been an active innovator and catalyst for another historiography. The building has a specific scale, and the high ceiling of the old turbine hall begs for alternatives to all-too-common chronological displays.

Change of Scenes, in fall 2011, marked a decisive turn of events. There were expectations for this fairly new and young museum to show the “beginning” of modernism, but instead of reiterating the story of the Swedish students of Matisse and their French teachers, a new version was uncovered, one that was far more pluralistic than the textbook canon. Moderna Museet Malmö focused its presentation of the collection on the early 1900s and two main



Image 15: *The Supersurrealism* with Carsten Höller. *Giant Triple Mushroom* (2012) in the foreground at Moderna Museet Malmö, 2012. Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

themes—the fascination for non-European culture and the productive collaborations between visual artists and practitioners in dance and performance. Classic works by Ivan Aguéli, Constantin Brancusi, Siri Derkert, Henri Matisse, and many others were shown throughout the building, with comparisons drawn to alternative artistic, transnational, and gender spheres. The first “change of scene” was followed by related samples from the collection: *Supersurrealism*, in 2012, demonstrated the still explosive power of Surrealism, juxtaposing classic works by Salvador Dalí, Meret Oppenheim, and Max Ernst with contemporary artistic practices by artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Carsten Höller, and Nathalie Djurberg. The scene has changed many times since then: *Russian Avant-Garde: Visions of a Future* (2013), *A Way of Life: Swedish Photography from Christer Strömholm to Today* (2014), and *Objects and Bodies at Rest and in Motion* (2015). The latter, along with the aforementioned review of photography, toured from Malmö to Stockholm. Ideas and artistic practices often move on from the smaller museum to its parent, breathing fresh air into the entire organization.

The small scale enables a more agile and experimental approach to art history. *Scandinavian Pain: Ragnar Kjartansson Edvard Munch* (2013) was a unique exhibition at Moderna Museet Malmö and a powerful example of how Malmö, using the collection, remixes epochs and oeuvres into wholly unexpected and innovative combinations. An eleven-meter pink neon sign by Kjartansson was installed on the roofline of a new barn built in the Turbine Hall, where the Icelandic artist delivered a musical performance from his elevated position. Inside, the barn featured a comprehensive selection of works by Munch from the Moderna Museet collection. Poetic gloom matched with subtle humor united the two artists and bridged time and space.

A larger world

In today’s political climate, nothing is more important than promoting the awareness that cultural impulses from abroad are what make us grow. The art scene grows when it draws inspiration from other traditions. Today, that does not mean only art from major Western cities, but from “a larger world.” This is the name of an extensive Moderna Museet project—involving exhibitions, lectures, and works from the collection—that culminated in summer 2015 with *After Babel*, a major group exhibition about the panoply of languages in contemporary art. But the project never ended; it is now an approach that informs all our activities.



Image 16: Shozo Shimamoto creating a shoot painting during *An Experimental Conference on Art and Science to Challenge the Midsummer Sun*, 2011.

Photo: Prallan Allsten/Moderna Museet



Image 17: Arián Villar Rojas, detail of *Fantasma*, 2015.

Photo: Åsa Lundén/Moderna Museet

We are living in an era when it is imperative for art museums to review their activities. Gone are the days when one particular place could be seen as the dominant centre of art. Instead, we are bridging the gaps between languages and traditions. Maps are being redrawn, and as the guardians of one of Europe’s finest collections of modern and contemporary art, we must scrutinize our own history in the light of new knowledge in a globalised world. We do this by highlighting key works in our collection that expand the view beyond the standard Western perspective of art history. We push at frontiers, in dialogue with a few of the many artists who are in perpetual motion between languages and continents, from one centre to the next. Art may be the sphere where we can still spot the crucial differences and entirely new poetic possibilities that emerge when cultures meet.

In recent years, Moderna Museet has presented an exhibition by Tala Madani, born in Iran and living in the USA. Her paintings and animations comment with humor and seriousness on power structures at various levels. This was followed by an exhibition of Christodoulos Panayiotou from Cyprus, who produces

multifaceted works that combine methods from his background in anthropological research and choreography. In spring 2014, we showed a major retrospective of the Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco, who moves between three continents and as many languages. In a practice that includes photography, installation, and sculpture, he utilizes and challenges cultural identities. His motifs are culled from Latin American traditions, but he also elaborates on Duchamp's concept of the readymade. Other living artists who create new links between different languages are Meriç Algün, based in İstanbul and Stockholm, and Georges Adéagbo, who works in Benin and Hamburg. Adrián Villar Rojas, from Argentina, created a seemingly post-apocalyptic installation with objects presented on an illuminated platform that evoked a sci-fi atmosphere.

The list of contemporary artists who are currently bridging continents and redrawing maps is virtually endless. The very notion that art emanates from capitals such as Paris and New York has been challenged in exhibitions that proposed alternative geographies. *Art et Liberté* presented a version of Surrealism focusing on Cairo. *Concrete Matters* treated visitors to the rich modernism that emerged in Brazil and other Latin American countries. If cultural impulses from abroad makes us bigger, then nothing could be more important to Moderna Museet than to study these artistic practices and present them. Many of these artists, incidentally, live and work here in Sweden. Thus, "a larger world"

denotes not only a quest for artistic expression in distant countries, but also a curiosity about the wealth and diversity that abounds in our immediate surroundings.

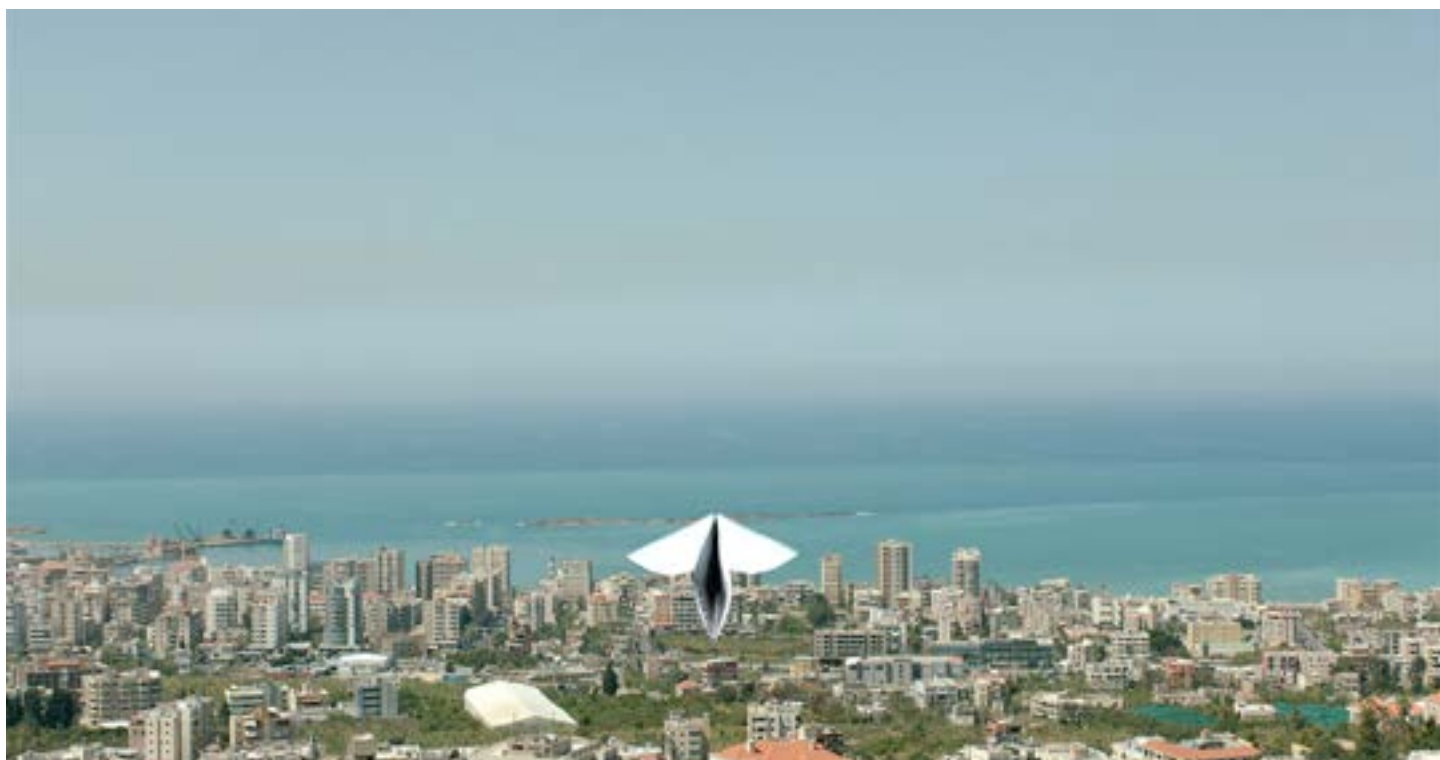


Image 18: Akram Zaatari, *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, 2013.

Keynote 2

Victoria Noorthoorn

Director, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires,
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*The Proud South Mouth: Local Museums
Rewrite World Art History*

What are the present and future roles of a Museum of Modern Art founded in 1950s Buenos Aires?

Where might its relevance lie?
What does it have to say at home and to the world?

What should its modus operandi be in order to remain in tune with our fast-moving Argentinean context and the world at large?

Where should the focus of its program lie?

What kind of dynamics should its exhibitions have?

What kind of a voice should it project?

Who should it serve and to what ends?

These were some of the questions I asked myself when I took up the challenge of directing the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in 2013.

In what follows, I signal certain turning points that have guided our work at the Moderno. But first, let me backtrack for a moment:

i.

I returned to Argentina in January 2002, after several years in New York, landing in a country devastated by one of the most profound financial crises in history. The previous month, in Argentina, people had been deprived of their savings in their bank accounts, and the peso, no longer tied to the dollar, went into a dizzying nosedive of devaluation. The riots were followed by rising inflation and by the country's isolation for years to come. The crisis affected every single Argentinean, and the artistic community reacted strongly, uniting in a series of common projects.

At the time, I was embarking on my curatorial work for the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA)—a new private museum founded a few months earlier—and I very soon realized that the toolkit I had made my own and brought with me was in many ways inadequate. In New York, I had been used to looking for a clear logic to the development of an artist's practice that would be evident both visually and content-wise. Now back in Buenos Aires, every artist I met demanded I underwent a deep process of *unlearning* (of my NYC experience) and of *relearning* (how to look, how to approach an artist's work, how to understand how their practice responds to our Southern context). With no market to follow, no dealers to listen to, no collectors demanding the repetition of a visual brand, artists were free to develop their work with no speculation, driven solely by their innermost convictions and their need to understand and communicate their position in the world.

ii.

Four years later, and exactly ten years ago, in 2008, I had the privilege of being part of a curatorial team that changed my perspective on contemporary art and institutional practices. Wilson Díaz, José Horacio Martínez, Oscar Muñoz, and Bernardo Ortiz, four powerful and distinctive artists born in Cali, Colombia, invited me to co-curate the 41st National Salon of Artists, a traditional annual exhibition to represent the state of the arts in Colombia, which, for the first time in its history, was to be held in Cali, a city that during the seventies had been a cutting-edge center for contemporary art in the region. The city had then been culturally ravaged with the advent of the cartels and the terror that took hold of urban and rural Colombia during the eighties. There we worked, some thirty years later, determined to create a highly ambitious exhibition to be held in seventeen venues

with the participation of fifty artists from Colombia and fifty international artists, on a limited budget and in less than a year. For months, we worked trying to define the issues we needed to tackle. Could Cali regain its role as a center for arts and culture after so many years? Which images could speak to Cali society, its history, and its artists? Throughout the process of defining the artists' participation in this or that exhibition for the Salon, it became clear that we needed to be skeptical of any "true" knowledge. There, in that specific context of a Colombian inner city that had seen the splendor of keen-minded intellectuals and artists followed by the destruction of its society and culture, all artwork became political. Take these skies by Leonardo Herrera photographed from a variety of sites where murders had taken place. In this context, in which FARC guerrillas kidnapped and enslaved civilians, paramilitaries exercised sheer terror mutilating men or women as they advanced on a rural village, while "narcos" destroyed families by recruiting teenagers in the cities, I found I could only learn to listen, that it was impossible to abide with any given political position and, for the same reason, it seemed impossible to judge any work of art. Any technique, finish, content, or coherence among procedures and results, among materials and messages, was immediately challenged. All logics of reason, of constructions in time, of messages to be delivered were shattered. We needed to re-think, to re-establish the Southern point of view, to speak from our own arena, from our own urgency, from our own honest understanding. Yet what mattered was how to get across to the people of Cali the urgency of the myriad messages created by the one hundred artists in the exhibition—not to mention our own questions.

This experience acted as a platform for the development of the 9th Mercosur Biennial, held in Porto Alegre in the South of Brazil, just a year later in 2009. Alongside Camilo Yañez, Bernardo Ortiz, Erick Beltrán, Lenora de Barros, Marina De Caro, Roberto Jacoby, Artur Lescher, Laura Lima, and Mario Navarro—nine Latin American artists from the most diverse poetics and backgrounds, living in Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Barcelona—we took up the artistic direction of the biennial. Our project set out to explore how artistic processes could inform the making of a biennial on an institutional level, from the broadest outline down to its operating systems and the very smallest of details. The Biennial thus endeavored to embrace the risks of art without knowing exactly what the results would be. Gradually the project grew as an organic system, exploring the role and reality of the contemporary artist, the work of art as a device

for intellectual provocation and as a vehicle for the articulation of a non-hierarchical system of knowledge. Each of the three programs created for this edition—the education, editorial, and radio programs—were meant to expand the scope of the arts beyond the seven exhibitions. This was the case, for example, with the education program curated by Argentinean artist Marina De Caro, whereby twelve artists were invited to create projects that could potentially be translated into pedagogical tools replicable by schoolteachers in classrooms throughout Rio Grande do Sul State and reaching hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren.

These experiences—my return to Buenos Aires and the collective curatorial works for Cali and Porto Alegre—shared certain traits: they were organized by a team in that emphasized the artist's role; they were the result of a multi-perspective dialogue; they welcomed flexibility in the organization of the institution's operating structures; they were organized for local publics, not the international artistic community; they did not draw on the art market, a collectors circuit, or any form of external speculation; their aim was to move our visitors' souls, bodies, and minds, and tell the stories we found most relevant from a local point of view—as created by our artists, while also bringing in foreign artists to enrich the conversation.

iii.

In 2013, I had these projects, experiences, and achievements very much in mind when I embarked on the challenge of directing the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, a public city museum, with a collection of seven thousand works, a staff of twenty-three including security guards, a public budget of US \$50,000 a year that was increasingly resorting to exhibitions organized and funded by international entities such as the British Council or the Institut Français.

The Museum had been founded in 1956 by art critic Rafael Squirru, with no venue, no collection, and virtually no budget, but a mission to bring visibility to the fifties' avant-garde scene in Buenos Aires, of which he was so very much a part. Over the first four years of its history, whenever he was asked about the Museum, Squirru would reply "Le musée c'est moi." He would stage exhibitions all over the city: at the Museo Sívori or the Botanical Gardens, or at the Bonino, Florida, or Witcomb Galleries. The Museum's very first exhibition was held on board the military hip *Yapeyú*, with works by fifty-six Argentine artists traveling to some twenty-five ports all around the world for over a year. From the outset, Squirru

established a metaphor for our Museum: it would always develop “in motion”; it needed to be flexible and adapt to changing times; it needed to be ambitious and conquer new frontiers and horizons; it had to dare to expand and grow (both physically and in terms of knowledge production) regardless of any adverse circumstances. In 1960, Squirru secured a temporary venue for the Museum on a floor of the Municipal Theater, where it staged exhibitions and programs until 1989, the year the city granted it a permanent venue in an old tobacco factory in downtown Buenos Aires, where it still operates today. This venue has seen a series of renovations—the most far-reaching in 2010, when architect Emilio Ambasz donated his services for free, under the directorship of my predecessor, Laura Buccellato. And, I am proud to say, the latest and final renovation and the addition of a new wing was recently completed in July 2018, doubling the surface area available for exhibitions, and adding new staircases and elevators, a brand new café/shop, and a new education lab.

To quickly summarize our path, over the last five years, government funding for our Museum has grown from US\$50,000 a year to around US\$2,000,000.

We have professionalized our team and grown from a staff of twenty-three in 2013 to one hundred and twenty-five, including seven new departments: the Curatorial Department (the first plural curatorial department in Argentina), Exhibitions, Exhibition Design and Production, Publications, Marketing and Communications, Fundraising, and Education. These join our existing Administrative, Collections, Library, and Conservation Departments.

We’ve curated fifty-six exhibitions to date, including major international collaborations, and have produced thirty-four bilingual publications, dedicated to contributing to knowledge about key artists from our scene and which we distribute gratis to one hundred public libraries throughout Argentina.

All in all, our public is gradually growing thanks to our Education Programs, which trained some 3,000 state-school teachers in 2017 and 5,000 in 2018, while our Chief Conservator has inaugurated a new Conservation School that is looking forward to welcoming visiting professionals from museums all over the country and beyond very soon.

How did all this come about? Where did the motivation for this change lie?

There were three factors that allowed us to embark on this process of transformation: First and foremost was the local artists’ need to reclaim an institution that historically had come to be felt as a “spiritual home for Argentine artists.” Throughout

2012 and 2013, artists and professionals had been vocal in their demands for further support, renewed attention, and a new status for the Museo de Arte Moderno.

Then there was the political will of the Buenos Aires City Government—and particularly its mayor, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta—to provide this attention and establish the Moderno as an icon of Argentine culture. This led to a renewed budget and enough government support to finally complete the Museum’s extension and refurbishment last July.

Our new curatorial team’s conviction that our Museum should regain not just a leading role in our community, but its own voice, so that we can put across our views about our own Argentinean art to local and international audiences alike on a scale and degree previously unheard-of.

IV.

Throughout, we’ve been working to restore the vitality the Museum had when it was founded and over the first decades of its history. To do this, our exhibition program became the main focus of our discursive strategy: to this end, we decided to allocate a single 400 m² gallery for the presentation of the Museum’s collection. This small exhibition would focus on core works from the fifties, sixties, and seventies, where the strength of our Collection lies. Around this core exhibition, we developed an exhibition dynamic entitled “Universes of Meaning,” whereby the Museum would present at least four exhibitions at a time, ideally focusing on living Argentinean artists, acting as a dialogue and counterpoint to each other, and representing and speaking to the vitality of our art scene today. These exhibitions were conceived not as independent entities, but as part of a larger conversation among artists within and beyond the Museum, and among generations and cultural scenes, to explore questions we consider relevant.

To date, all these exhibitions—a total of fifty-six—have been curated in-house, articulating a sincerely-held vision that responds to our history, which is one of both challenging political times and of cultural expansion and emancipation.

Throughout the exhibition program, from 2013 to the present, it’s important to point out that our exhibition program doesn’t aim to be *inclusive of the arts from the world at large*. Rather, we consider the practice of inclusion to be a benign form of colonial collecting and anxiety that doesn’t match our experience.

If, up to the 1920s, South American art history was dependent to some extent on the artistic movements developing in Europe, and looked up to them for

inspiration and direction, we are proud to assert that since the 1940s our art has developed autonomously from the Northern canon and has established a history of its own. In other words, we look *at* the Northern canon, not *up to* it, and when we look *at* it, we are free to do so in fraternal admiration, challenge, conflict, indifference, and even derision. This has also freed our gaze and allowed us to look around for all that lies outside the core of the Western canon: to art and artists from other Latin American countries, from Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia.

This is why our museum chooses to present and focus on what Argentines have to offer to the world and thereby contributes to the writing of a specifically Argentinean, Latin American, and Southern version of world art history. These were the circumstances in which this Museum was founded—making our artistic community visible to itself, offering its visions to the world—and these still constitute the Museum’s mission today.

That said, how do we choose what to show? Our decisions are taken with three different publics in mind. Firstly, the community of artists in Argentina. What are the debates in the artistic community? To which artists do we want to draw attention? Which world artists could enrich our local conversation? With which artists do we want our artists to develop a dialogue? Secondly, for the public who actually visit our Museum, it’s our wish to provide a surprising experience, an experience of a world of ideas, visions, and sensations that will be unforgettable. We want every citizen to be moved by every last one of our exhibitions or programs, and to take pride in this public museum, which is so much their own. Thirdly, we also keep very much in mind a public that is far harder to pin down, namely, the artistic and academic communities in the world at large: that virtual, potential international audience—i.e., *you*—who, we know, won’t visit us physically, given the distances involved, but who are key when it comes to critically assessing what we do and how we do it.

With these considerations in mind, we’re carrying through an ambitious program that has given life to projects by major Argentinean artists yet to be realized. My heart aches, because there’s so much more to show you! But, for now, I’ll keep to outlining just four of the universes of meaning we’ve staged at the Moderno over these years.

Universe 1 2015

In 2015, we rose to the challenge of reconstructing an exhibition that has become a legend in Argentina’s art

world: in 1965, Marta Minujín and Rubén Santantonín staged *La menesunda* (“mixture” or “confusion” in Lunfardo) at the Di Tella Institute. It consisted of an immersive, eleven-space maze, in which the spectator could experience the flow and feel of contemporary Buenos Aires life. The exhibition lasted just fifteen days, was visited by one spectator at a time, and so came to be known mainly by word of mouth. When we approached Minujín with the open-ended question of how we might honor her, she quickly communicated her desire to see this work again. In what followed, our museum became an important conservation lab working across the disciplines, between conservation, historical research, technical production, and contemporary theory, all at once. The result was labeled by friends at Tate Modern as a “forensic reconstruction.” It was one of the greatest compliments we could be paid.

This highly challenging reconstruction allowed us to test our limits. (When I visited the work, I told myself, “If we were capable of this, we’re capable of anything and everything.”) It enabled hundreds of artists to experience for the first time a key work in our history. Overall, the project has had many afterlives, when the artist decided to donate the work to the Moderno, and again, when Massimiliano Gioni took an interest and decided to stage it in June 2019 at The New Museum in New York (in collaboration with the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires).

With *La menesunda* open to the public, we staged several other exhibitions of powerful Latin American artists. The long-awaited mid-career retrospective of the Argentinean Marina De Caro, an artists’ artist, who, as a teacher, has significantly influenced the local scene and who, in drawing and soft sculpture, explores how the body perceives and how it effected and is affected by the social construct. And an immersive, revelatory experience by Brazilian artist Laura Lima, entitled *The Naked Magician*, in which a male and female magician took turns, wearing a suit with no sleeves—and no tricks!—and shared with the Moderno’s public the space they lived and worked in, together with the processes and methods that led them to perform magic.

Universe 2 2016

We have staged two important exhibitions of drawings by two major figures. Two hundred recently discovered drawings by Antonio Berni, a major figure in twentieth-century Argentinean art (curated by Marcelo Pacheco), these were crucial works that dealt with the recent political history of our country and had never

been displayed before. And, in dialogue with Berni, a retrospective curated by our Museum, of Pablo Picasso's drawings from the collection of the Musée national Picasso-Paris, thanks to the generosity of its director Laurent Le Bon. We wanted to show the vigor of drawings by two unquestionably major figures from art history—one universal, the other powerfully local—and to make the exploration of their minds accessible through their direct encounter with paper. But our universe of meaning urgently demanded a balance, a counterpoint to these exhibitions of renowned male artists, so we invited South African artist Tracey Rose to take center-stage, loud and proud, with her characteristic irreverence and incisively political work.

Universe 3 2017

Throughout these exhibitions, the Moderno was keeping dark something very special. Back in August 2016, looking forward to a grand opening the following April, we had closed our upper-floor gallery and set up a lab inside. We sealed all vents and ducts to make room for Argentinean artist Tomás Saraceno and his team to experiment with 7,000 social spiders: *Parawixia bistriata*. They worked for six months to produce what the budgets of major museums and cities had not been able to produce before: the largest three-dimensional spider web ever to have existed, occupying some 1,000 m³, created entirely by spiders in collaboration with the Moderno's team—a metaphor for the interconnectedness of the universe.

Early on, we decided to stage Saraceno's exhibition in dialogue with another major Argentinean artist/sculptor, namely, Diego Bianchi—a powerful representative of our local scene in Argentina. Bianchi was invited by our Senior Curator, Javier Villa, to work with the Moderno Collection and, in so doing, he devoured and activated the Museum's assets, freeing the artworks from their received meanings. Villa was quick to point out that "The gaze should never be tamed: it must be unleashed free of prejudice, especially when the world is experiencing a dangerous period of change."

These exhibitions showed two artists of the same generation working at the same level of perfection and obsession from two distinct latitudes and points of view: the one undoing and dematerializing sculpture; the other activating it by setting it at odds with the world and our own collection.

As a counterpoint to both major artists, curator Laura Hakel invited the younger, more emerging Gabriel Chaile, originally from the Argentinean North, to create one of his mother sculptures for our museum-goers. His mother/goddess of fertility/ceramic oven entitled *Patricia* acted as a disturbing poetic presence in the Moderno, opening a door to reflection on ephemeral materials and ancient traditions far beyond contemporary art.

Universe 4 2018

For the first time, early this year, we staged three shows devoted to photography. In one, we exhibited 700 photographs from the archive of Aldo Sessa, a major Argentinean photographer, whose work had never been seen in all its complexity (we viewed 800,000 photographs in the research process). This exhibition renewed a conversation between the Museum's first directors and the artist fifty years earlier, and was devised by Brazilian film-maker and exhibition designer Daniela Thomas. A dialogue was set up between it and another long-awaited, mid-career retrospective of the photographs of Alberto Goldenstein, curated by Carla Barbero. It included his series "90s Art World," his most recent photographs of art fairs and museums, and his early photographs taken in Boston in the eighties, where he discovered photography.

To complete the conversation, the Moderno curated an exhibition of self-portraits by South African artist Zanele Muholi, in which the artist shares her preoccupations with the world. In Muholi's words: "The series touches on beauty, giving affirmation to those who are doubting—whenever they speak to themselves, whenever they look in the mirror—to say, 'You are worthy, you count, nobody has the right to undermine you: because of your being, because of your race, because of your gender expression, because of your sexuality, because of all that you are.' [...] *This series* is my response to a number of ongoing racisms. [...] Hence I am producing this photographic document to encourage people to be brave enough to occupy spaces [...] To teach people about our history, to rethink what history is all about, to reclaim it for ourselves, to encourage people to use artistic tools such as cameras as weapons to fight back."¹

1 Quotations from: "Archive of the Self: Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renée Mussai," in Zanele Muholi, *Somnyama Ngonyama: Hail the Dark Lioness*. London: Autograph ABP, 2017.

V.

This is a very short short-list of all the exhibitions we've staged over the last five years. The series of exhibitions culminated in the grand opening of our expanded museum last July, when we presented a single monumental exhibition occupying all ten galleries of the Moderno, covering 4,000 m² of gallery space. The exhibition *A Tale of Two Worlds* was organized in collaboration with the MMK, Frankfurt, and was co-curated by Moderno curator Javier Villa, MMK curator Klaus Goerner, and myself. It included five hundred works by one hundred artists from Europe, the United States, and Latin America: around one hundred works from our collection, seventy from the MMK collection, and three hundred and thirty from public and private collections worldwide.

The exhibition was conceived from a southern perspective. It showed how Latin American art history has always been structured in dialogue, conscious of the existence of another art history (the Western canon, as defined by European and North American art practices). So far, the reverse has not been the case. Western European and North American art history have instead articulated discourses centered on their own superiority, in which "other voices" are generally established from the point of view of a dominant culture that knows what to include and from where, and in which what is included always enters the conversation in a subordinate position. In the face to this, what is generally absent is the canonical voice willing to confront on the same footing what it produces with what is produced elsewhere: on the same terms, with equal numbers of works from the same periods, of the same sizes, and so on.

Why do I mention this? Because in *A Tale of Two Worlds*—the inaugural exhibition of our brand-new Museum—that's exactly what we are doing. Works from the MMK collection representing the Western or Northern canon are staged in open conversation and on an equal footing with Latin American artworks and artists. To put it another way, from our perspective, there are no major or minor art movements. There are powerful artistic currents that sometimes run parallel, and sometimes cross or merge: independent in their identities and interactions with diverse realities—interdependent in their collaborations, conversations and debates. In this new view of art history, Latin American art or Argentinean art are not here to complete or complement or tick the box of difference, but to form—in a fraternal equality that doesn't preclude rivalry—an art that is both global and diverse, combative and democratic.

Perspective 1

Katya García-Antón

Director, Office for Contemporary Art, Oslo, Norway

*Decolonising Museologies*¹

As art professionals we all speak from a context and a position, and before engaging with this essay, it is important that I reveal mine to you, in the form of an introductory protocol adapted to the CÍMAM Annual Congress in Stockholm of 2018. It reads:

I acknowledge the institutional privilege, and the enunciative power incumbent as leader of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA).

I condemn the historic and current crimes of genocide and ecocide, by nations like Spain and Great Britain, of which I am a part.

I underline the illegitimacy of forcefully created nation states created on Indigenous lands.

I recall that the Nordic nation states (which are currently my professional context) are no exception here.

I am deeply grateful for the generosity of so many Sámi peers, and other Indigenous colleagues, in sharing their knowledge with us.

I wish to honor Indigenous Stockholm, as the site from which we are speaking in this conference.

Whilst the matter of decolonizing museologies is a global question, this essay is rooted in the context within which we in OCA are operating: the nation state of Norway. To discuss decolonization in Norway and the Nordic region, we need to recall its colonial history, and there are no better words than those of poet and artist Synnøve Persen to do so:²

When Ottar the Earl of Hålføyg sailed north along the coast of Finnmark to the Kola peninsula in the 9th century, he reported to the King of England he saw no one else than some Sámi until he rounded the peninsula by the White Sea. So what happened to this land? How did it disappear? Where did it go?

I live in the land of devils, witches, monsters, they've said, in the land outside the map, in the nothingness, in a history beyond history. The Sámi history made invisible. On the "real" map the Sámi names are washed out, do not exist. Every mountain, every lake, the remotest places.

Where is my land? Is it a trauma? A dream? A Utopia?

Who are we? Strangers? Foreigners? Guests in our own land? Brainwashed to believe the pseudo stories about ourselves.

¹ The term decolonising is a complex one. It is often used by non-Indigenous professionals, including myself, to describe the process directed at dismantling of colonial perspectives and infrastructure. However as many Indigenous peers point out, employing terms that constantly refer us to colonial histories and presents, lack the dynamics needed for transformation. In this regard generating a process which is Indigenous-led, has been recently a point of discussion with Brook Andrew (Artistic Director of the Sydney Biennial 2020) and Wanda Nanibush (Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario Canada), for its specificity in centering Indigenous perspectives. This essay starts with the use of the term decolonial, which I acknowledge belongs to a non-Indigenous field of action, and ends by pointing to the urgency for, and force of, Indigenous-led processes.

² Synnøve Persen, *en* 2016 (unpublished). Synnøve Persen, is a Sámi artist and poet, co-founder of the Sámi Artist Group in the late 1970s, vital participant in the Alta Action (1979–82), and enduring force behind the Sámi Artist Union, the Sámi Art Center in Kárášjohka, as well as relentless advocate of many other aspects of Sámi cultural life. She exhibited in Documenta 14.

A history the modern Scandinavian states do not want to hear. No, there were no military forces, no shooting, no killing, they did it in a humane way. Their refined cruelty. The assimilation programs. Loss of language, culture, history, land. The shame brought upon us.

Ottar the Earl sails on. The land is explored, the people civilized and tamed to silence. This time they suck the rest of the fjords, the mountains, the fish in the big ocean. All the resources, the natural richness of the Arctic.

She is an extremist. Don't listen to her, we've been supervising her a while. The voice of the poet. The need for a voice.

We've given this people citizenship, equality, welfare, education. What do they want? Back to the Stone Age?

We want stability in the region. Borders. Control. We've saved this uncivilized people from poverty, taught them to read and write our language. The poets should tell stories of beauty, the Northern Lights, the midnight sun.

We have no problems. We've solved them by eating them. We own the land. You're our citizens.

Unsubscribe the map of the colonizers.

Synnøve Persen, *The Land Outside the Map*, 2016 (unpublished)

As Persen indicates the colonial mechanisms are still prevalent in Norway, but have adopted a different guise. For the Sámi community there is no post-colonial. And this has become an enduring battle cry, especially among the young generation of Sámi artists.

This is the case of Máret Anne Sara, whose work *Pile o'Sápmi* <https://bit.ly/2C9uQ37> (exhibited in Documenta 14) is an ongoing bid to defend reindeer herding rights. In particular the piece brings attention to the plight of young reindeer herders in Sápmi, under pressure by the government who demand by law that they cull their reindeer herds to bankruptcy levels, for so-called "ecological sustainability reasons." Sara's 26-year-old brother is contesting the Norwegian government's demands



Image 1: *Sápmi (Sápmi from 1979) with only Sámi place names, 1975.* Hans Ragnar Mathisen

to dramatically reduce his herd, in a series of court cases regional, at national and now at the level of the International Human Rights Tribunal, despite which he has been given until 31 December 2018 to effect the cull, after which either crippling financial penalties will be implemented or the State will forcibly/violently implement the cull.

What Persen's poem and Sara's artwork do is point to one of the fundamental aspects of any discussion on decoloniality today, aptly summarized by the words of Mexican scholar Rolando Vázquez, member of the Decolonial Thought and Aesthetics group, who affirms:³

Decolonial aesthetics are an aesthetics of humility ...

Stop the Modern focus on enunciation and learn to listen, to be quiet...

Learn to listen to what Modernity has forced into silence, invisibility and irrelevance

To Decolonize, Demodernize is to illuminate existing alternative genealogies and paths.

Vazquez's decolonizing option points to three vital principles that will underpin much of this essay. Decolonization as a consideration of Worldlinesses, to bring back worlds; Earthlinesses, to restore ecosystems; and finally, Time, in his words "to break open

3 Rolando Vázquez, "The Museum, Decoloniality and the End of the Contemporary," 2017 during the Conference: *Collections in Transition. Decolonizing, Demodernizing.*



Image 2: Áillohaš / Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Goase Dušše* (The Bird Symphony), 1993: Conceived as an ecocidal lament, the work was re-staged this summer in the forests of Oslo, as part of *Let the River Flow*, OCA's exhibition honoring the history and legacy of the legendary Áltá-Guovdageaidnu Action. (*Let the River Flow* opens in Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, February 2019, and in the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art [Sámi Dáiddaguovddás, SDG], Kárášjohka, May 2019.) While you listen, read through the following schematic annotations regarding coloniality in Norway and the region, past and present. / https://youtu.be/1m_1pOWVFpM

the normative/Modern order of the present.”⁴

With these thoughts in mind let us now situate ourselves in Sápmi, Indigenous Sámi land, traversed by the nation states of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia; and listen, by clicking below, to an extract of the famous *Goase Dušše* (The Bird Symphony, 1993), by the legendary Sámi leader and artist, Áillohaš.⁵

Sámi people are one of the few Indigenous peoples of Europe.

They are part of an Indigenous worldwide family, around 370 million strong.

Sápmi is twice the size of Great Britain, and home today to around 100,000 Sámi peoples.

Four Sámi languages still survive today, Northern Sámi being the most widespread.

Norwegian colonization of Sápmi started in depth the thirteenth century. An official policy of Norwegianization was launched in the eighteenth century, including linguistic and cultural suppression (banning languages, enforced boarding schools, removal of children to Norwegian foster families, etc.), grabbing of land and resources, elimination of nomadic lifestyles, Christianization, and the removal of Sámi spiritual objects and practices.

Whilst Norwegianization was officially banned in the 1960s, it was the Alta Action (1978–82) that forced fundamental legal changes in Norway, including the ratification of UN's ILO Convention 169,

for Indigenous Rights (still unsigned in Finland, Russia, and Sweden) and the creation of a Sámi Parliament (Sámediggi) in 1989 (soon after followed by Finland and Sweden).

In Norway, however, the Sámediggi has only consultative (rather than legislative) powers. The Oslo Parliament determines budgets, legislation and regularly overrides Sámediggi's advice (particularly when it comes to resource extraction).

Sápmi's power to influence and resist Nordic legislation in the region contradicting UN-recognized processes and rights, is challenged by the following:

Endemic media indifference

Widespread ignorance across the Nordic society of colonialism's history and current impact

The influence of the Church

A judiciary system with scarce knowledge of Indigenous perspectives and minimum Indigenous representation

Intensive resource exploitation and appropriative tourism development

A cultural policy of ghettoization, leading a profound lack of nationwide visibility

Some of the common objections OCA has encountered in Norway in our early years collaborating with Sápmi are:

“There is nothing worthwhile up there, why are you bothering?”

“Sámi practices are stuck in the past.”

“Oh we dealt with that in 1979; it's a local issue!”

“They are very difficult people to work with, disorganized, fighting against each other, greedy, always complaining, prone to drinking...”

“You are only interested because as a foreigner you find it exotic.”

The Alta Action (1978–82) shook the Nordic region to the core. It was launched against the building of a

4 Rolando Vázquez, *ibid.*

5 Áillohaš / Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Goase Dusse* (The Bird Symphony), 1993.



Image 3: Alta Action, hunger strike, Oslo Parliament, 1979



Image 4: Alta Action, hunger strike, Oslo Parliament, 1979



Image 5: Alta Action, Alta river, 1979

large dam on the Alteatnu river, Norwegian side of Sápmi, whose flooding had dramatic effects on Sámi livelihood and culture. Following on from over 60 years of un-consulted damming and flooding by Nordic governments—in the name of progress—on Sámi land across the region leading to forceful relocations, loss of livelihoods, destruction of ecosystems and spiritual land, the plans for the Alta dam emerged as the final straw in this modernizing history

Historically, the Alta Action stands as the first eco-Indigenous rebellion in Europe. It galvanized the imagination and generated unprecedented support from non-Indigenous citizens across Norway and the Nordic region and beyond internationally. Its dramatic climax—the Sámi hunger strikes in front of the Oslo Parliament in 1979—was led by Sámi artists and other peers. The Action came at a time of increasing global environmental awareness and Indigenous mobilizations worldwide.

Above all, the Alta Action stood as a moment of hope, for Sámis and Nordics, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples internationally, seeking alliances to collectively imagine society.



Image 6: The Longest Walk, Red Power Indigenous Rights Movement, USA, 1978



Image 7: Orakei Māori Action Committee's occupation of Bastion Point 1977–78 (Aotearoa/New Zealand)



Image 8: Anders Sunna with face mask

Alta ushered in the possibility of a new era of Nordic decolonization, and catalyzed the beginnings of an Indigenous cultural infrastructure in Sápmi. However, by the late 1980s, the decolonial momentum stalled and the feeling of gloom was poignantly echoed in Áillohaš' remarks.⁶

Í peeped into the future
Saw nothing

Today, forty years later, young Sámi generations are unanimous in their assessment. The very survival of Sápmi today, its material and immaterial heritage, is at stake, as a direct result of a colonial apparatus embedded at the very heart of Nordic democracy. Where the mining industry machines are menacing, where black tanks occupy reindeer grazing grounds and police forces powerfully remove reindeer. Í stare at the face of a capitalist modernity everyday as it rampages through the land Í live in, with its feverish



Image 9: Sámi protests against the construction of six windmill parks in the Fosen area of South Sápmi/Norway



Image 10: OCA/D14 meetings in Máze

dreams of progress and addiction to energy consumption.

My work is about shouting loudly about this reality...

The starting point of my art is often my own family history. My family is from Sami villages in the north of the nation state of Sweden, which we have helped to build for generations. We have been in a 47-year battle for the rights of the Sami villages to reindeer husbandry, that the Administrative Board of the Norrbotten County (we live in) no longer has.⁷

For these young generation artists and citizens, Sápmi's only choice today is one of 'survivalence' (survive, resist, and be present).

Within this context, for us in OCA, to collaborate with Sápmi means to learn from and connect with their discourse in order to confront the hegemonic, normative and canonical apparatus of modernity in our institutions and in society, in the Nordic region, and beyond. As Sámi artist Máret Ánne Sara's GIF

6 This coincides with the full expansion of the oil industry in Norway.

7 Anders Sunna, introduction speech, *Museums on Fire* conference (within an installation by Sunna), OCA, Oslo, 2017.

announced at the start of this essay, for the Indigenous world “there is no post-colonial” condition. To decolonize ourselves in OCA, we are addressing the 3Ps (Personnel, Programme, Publics).⁸ By revising our statutes (a petition to do so is currently under evaluation by the Ministry of Culture in Norway), our programs and our personnel (we already have a permanent seat for a Sámi peer in our international grant jury, and are lobbying for a position for a Sámi peer within our organization in a nomadic capacity between Sápmi and Oslo, and are regularly either collaborating curatorially with our peers in Sápmi or funding Sámi curatorial mandates), and so transforming us into an organization relevant also to Sámi publics.

Around the world, art historians and museums are racing to show greater inclusivity in their programs and public outreach, expanding a still predominantly Euro-American centric canon. Inclusivity has become an institutional buzzword. But unless a profound process of institutional decolonization is enacted, is this not another form of colonization?

In Norway at least, there are no Sámi directors, curators, conservators, coordinators, or mediators in national or regional museums outside of Sápmi. In Sápmi there are a number of cultural institutions and festivals across Northern Norway/Sápmi, but my

remark addresses the lack of Sámi peers working in institutions outside of this framework, with large national and regional reach. I would also note at this point that Sámi cultural workers are also in a process of strengthening the discourse around Sámi cultural methodologies, and this might lead to a contestation of the language, institutional structures for display, and methods incumbent to the field within the framework of modernity (the term curator being one of them). At the same time, precious Sámi cultural objects are zealously guarded in the stores of museums in Nordic capitals, the Nordisk Museet in Stockholm still holds, for example, rare Sámi objects such as ancient, sacred drums. The return of these objects to their communities is undeniably an urgent matter not just for its ethical significance—as a matter of historical reparation—but also to ensure that this cultural heritage can become a force of continuity for Sámi communities moving forward.

So let us look to the future.



Image 11: *Museums on Fire* installation

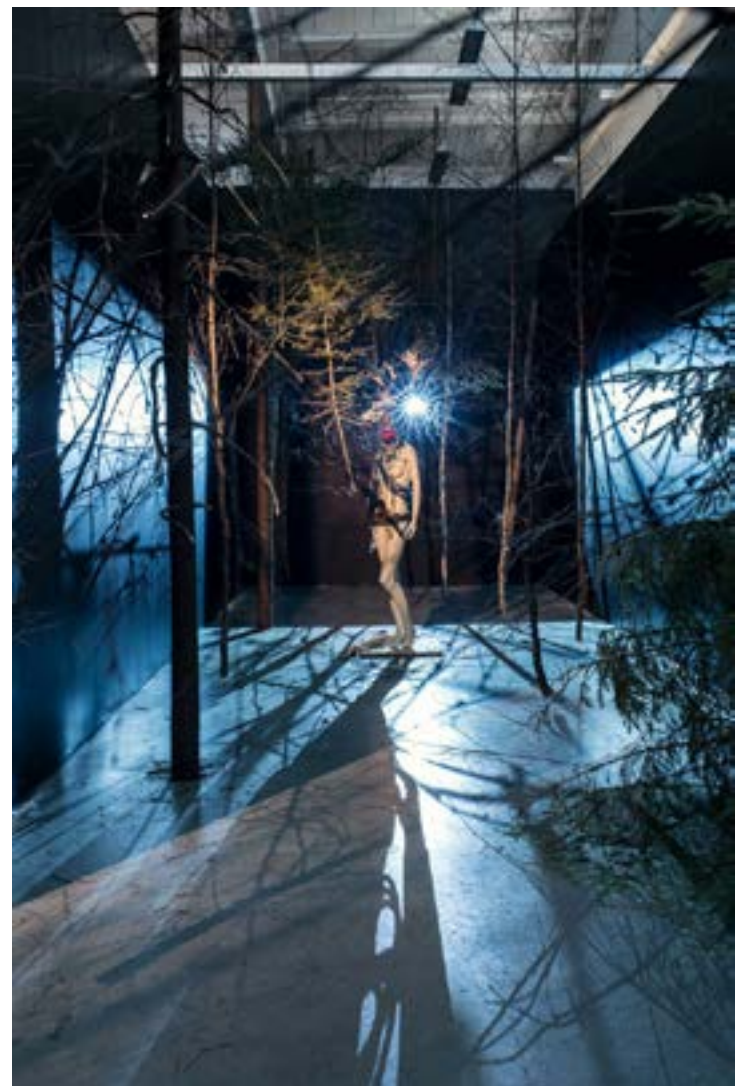


Image 12: *Museums on Fire* conference at OCA

8 Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, *The Globalized Museum? Decanonization as Method: A Reflection in Three Acts*, Mousse 58 (April – May 2017), Milan.

Image 13: Poster *Museums on Fire*Image 14: Installation *Museums on Fire*

In Norway, 2020 will mark a highpoint in museological history, with the opening of two new stunning museum buildings on the shores of the Oslo fjord—the Munch Museum and the National Museum, amongst other important national projects that will project a strong cultural message internationally. OCA's decolonial program and advocacy has achieved a heightened level of institutional awareness in Norway, influencing ground-breaking transformations, among which is the decision by the National Museum to acquire and include Sámi artworks for the opening exhibition in 2020. This in itself has elicited institutional critique within the museum regarding its own decolonial processes and how they impinge upon the entire museological structure.

These developments are historic, yet they serve to highlight the severe lacks in the field on other fronts, and very particularly with regards to the unresolved project to build a Museum of Sámi Art in Kárásjohka, on the Norwegian side of Sápmi. Promised over four decades ago, the project is needed to house a growing Sámi art collection since the 1970s, and as a signal

of decolonization. In an era of demands across the world for the decolonization of the art world, it is particularly poignant to note that to date the promise to build this institution remains unrealized, and that the collection cannot be showcased, while suffering in the interim from a deep lack of infrastructure.

If such a museum had been built in the 1980s, just after the Alta Action, it would likely have followed a modernist logic. We cannot predict how Sámi artists and cultural organizers would have resisted, or adapted their contemporaneity and worldviews, to this framing. Nevertheless, the historical failure that Norway faces today, offers Sápmi and Norway a powerful opportunity to challenge the mainstream international museum model and stand at the edge of discourse.

OCA's conference *Museums on Fire* in spring 2017 was conceived in direct response to this situation, in order to debate such transformative potential. The conference was held inside an installation specially commissioned to Anders Sunna—the Sámi artist whose words were quoted earlier.

Building a Sámi Art Museum in Kárásjohka would elicit respect amongst society and deepen the discourse of Sámi artistic and cultural practices nationally as well as deepen connectivity internationally with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In the Nordic region at least, this is an urgent need. But there is much one should consider at this point.

In the words of the Director of Sámi Museum RiddoDuottar, Anne May Olli:

It is imperative that a future Sámi Dáiddamusea (Sami Art Museum) exists as a recognized actor in the museum sector, both locally, nationally, and internationally. This has to do with its social role and the dialogue it would catalyze, with the official state structures in the Nordic countries, amongst others.

That being said, a future Sámi Dáiddamusea would quite naturally work with Indigenous knowledge and methodologies at its core, exploring throughout all its activities—from programming to leadership, outreach, education, and conservation—genuine alternatives to established models and traditions.⁹

Anne May Olli addresses here the centrality of Indigenous discourse as the motor of such a museum. One of its fundamental characteristics is best understood when considering the precise clarifications regarding Indigenous perspectives of Aboriginal and feminist scholar, Aileen Moreton-Robinson:

Our sovereignty is embodied, it is ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of

knowing), and it is grounded within complex relations derived from the inter-substantiation of ancestral beings, humans, and land.

In this sense, our sovereignty is carried by the body and differs from Western constructions of sovereignty, which are predicated on the social contract model, the idea of a universal supreme authority, territorial integrity, and individual rights.

In this sense, Indigenous discourse shares much ground with other decolonial thinking, for example, that deriving from the Afro-American experience.¹⁰

Such thinking was echoed to some extent decades earlier within a different but connected context by Audre Lorde, an important Afro-feminist in the USA, who famously stated in 1979 that: “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.” The museum world, has a central role to play in this regard, in the cultural re-articulation of today’s society. Not just for the 370 million Indigenous peoples that are alive today, but for the millions of other citizens of the world who have been and still are suppressed by hegemonic, colonial and normative power structures.

This is not a local matter, this is a planetary imperative. I can think of no excuses to stall this process.

From this perspective, it is essential that all art-world institutions stand together in the call for a decolonization of the art field, that stands too for a decolonization of society at large. So, with the above thoughts in mind, the questions are:

Can a museum structure truly be decolonized?

Can museums become catalysts for intellectual alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples stimulating social transformation?

Is the museum model an appropriate one after all?



Image 15: ČSV (Photo: H.R. Mattissen), Keviselie / Hans Ragnar Mathisen, ČSV, 1974

Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, states in her groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

To the colonized, the ways in which academic research has been implicated in the throes of imperialism remains a painful memory... *Decolonizing Methodologies* explores the ways in which imperialism is embedded in disciplines of knowledge, and argues that the decolonization of research methods will help reclaim control over Indigenous ways of knowing and being...¹¹

When considering Indigenous Methodologies, elements in diametric opposition to modernity become apparent, such as the role of Time, Place, and Eco (nature): centrism valued by Indigenous world views. With these parameters in mind, what would a museum look, smell, sound, or feel like if it was entirely informed by Indigenous Methodologies?

As Yorta Yorta woman, Kimberly Moulton, the Senior Curator of Aboriginal Collections in Victoria Museums, Australia, argues, it is for today’s Indigenous artists and cultural organizers to activate Indigenous world views within already existing colonial collections or in new Indigenous museums to come bringing the past, present and future into one.¹² With this in mind, it is also essential to problematize modernist terminologies such as the denomination curator, as Kimberley Moulton does, or imagine new ones for the future of Indigenous discourse such as “Warriors of

10 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters*, 2007.

11 Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1999.

12 Kimberley Moulton, “I am your Venus,” in *Sovereign Words. Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism*, OCA/Valiz, 2018.



Image 16: The Sámi Artists Group (with OCA and Documenta 14 team)

Words and Images” recently used by Wanda Nanibush.¹³ With regards to the future Sámi Art Museum, there are many elements to consider, but three questions of central value stand out:

1: How would a Sámi Art Museum embrace an Indigenous concept of circular time to break modernism’s constructed opposition between tradition and contemporaneity.

First Nation’s scholar Susan Fair (Turtle Island, Canada) observes in this regard that:

...the majority of native artists don’t spend too much time considering or defining tradition ... Their work is rather an aesthetic and cultural window through which one can examine the foundation of the past constantly in the present. Tradition survives, just under the surface every day. The past is the bedrock of Indigenous culture...

In Sápmi, *duodji* takes center stage in this discussion, as it encapsulates Sámi aesthetics, knowledges, and practices. Often mistranslated as Sámi handicraft by Norwegian and Nordic art historians, *duodji* has been described as a “tradition” stuck in the past, with little relevance to art as the canon understands it.

Duodji is however a vast epistemological terrain, gathering a Sámi world vision, a deep knowledge of nature, Sámi spirituality, ethical values, and also including the processes for making objects with a practical and aesthetic sense.



Image 17: Íver Jåks (1932–2007)



Image 18: Íver Jåks, *Ballin, The Holy Drum-hammer*, 1983. The Sámi High School in Kárášjohka

Duodji spearheaded the Sámi ČSV movement (translated as “Show Sami Spirit”) that informed the Sámi social mobilization and transformations of the 1970s. At this time the word *daidda* was put forward by the Boym Committee¹⁴ to assert an intellectual contemporary dimension to Sámi artistic activities

13 Wanda Nanibush, is an Anishinaabe-kwe, from Beau soleil First Nation recently appointed in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Turtle Island, Canada. Nanibush self-describes as an “image and word warrior.” See for example her bio in “Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial: A Conversation Between Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush,” *Afterall* 45 (Spring/Summer 2018).

14 They Boym Committe (led by Per Bjarne Boym) took place in 1995.



Image 19: Íver Jåks, *Ballin, The Holy Drum-Hammer*, 1983



Image 20: Íver Jåks, *Ballin, The Holy Drum-Hammer*, 1983

that were otherwise disregarded. *Daidda* was created to respond to this colonially imposed situation, and in order to give the Nordic art field a way to recognize their practice, much in the same way as the Sámi Parliament was put forward by Sápmi as the tool for Indigenous governance (rather than proposing a model in line with Indigenous practices).

The word *daidda* became broadly operative across Sápmi, and was taken up by the legendary Sámi Artist Group created in 1977 (three artists in the group exhibited in Documenta 14). Their objective was to simultaneously assert their Sáminess, their contemporaneity and worth as artists. A division was installed thus. This historical circumstance is now a challenge for any future Sámi Art Museum (or for the decolonization processes of national museums in Norway) to consider. What narratives would be revealed if those works were reconnected to the powerful discursive field of thought represented by *duodji*, including its deep link to nature and spirituality. This brings us to a second question of some urgency.

2: *A sense of place. How do both a future Sámi Art Museum and decolonized national museums challenge anthropocentrism?*

When it comes to nature, let us recall what the American philosopher and cultural ecologist Prof. David Abram defines¹⁵ as “the more than human matrix.” In other words, how could a museum structure engaged with a Sámi/Indigenous discourse embody an interrelation with the local ecosystem. One example is found in the work of Sámi artist and master *duajár* Íver Jåks. Working between the 1950s and the early 2000s, his sculptural practice was guided by the principle of continual change and rebirth.

The largest sculptural iteration dates from 1983 and is called *Ballin* in Northern Sámi; it evokes the pre-Christian use of the drum to communicate with the spirits (the work must also be understood within the context of the Alta Action). In her pertinent essay on the artist Sámi, scholar Irene Snarby makes various comments of vital relevance.¹⁶ On the one hand, the work was conceived to exist within a forest

15 David Abram, *Becoming Animal. An Earthly Cosmology*, 1996.

16 Irene Snarby, *Sovereign Words. Indigenous Art, Curation, and Criticism*, OCA/Valiz, 2018.



Image 21: Riddoduettar Museum, Kárásjohka (ethnographic)



Image 23: The Moratorium in Ohcejohka/Utsjoki, on the border between Finland and Norway



Image 22: Moratoria poster, produced by the Moratorium office, 2018.
<http://moratoriadoaimmahat.org/en/moratorium-office/>

close to the Sámi high school in Kárásjohka, transforming over time ... disintegrating, evoking cyclical time, spirituality, and ecological thought.

However Norwegian state building authorities removed the work from the forest in the 1990s, whereupon *Ballin* was relocated in a parking lot, its ecological and spiritual dimensions lost.

Another case in point would be the connection between *duodji*, Sámi spiritual perspectives, and resistance, So very present in Jáks' piece,



Image 24: The Moratorium in Ohcejohka/Utsjoki, on the border between Finland and Norway

spiritual decolonization lies at the heart beat of the entire decolonization process. This is a topic rarely discussed in the Nordic region and controversial within Sámi communities (given entrenched Christianization)

A Sámi Art Museum, a decolonial museum, would have to place these values at the core of their practice.

3: How to create a constituent decolonized Sámi Art Museum?

What inspiration could be found in the first Sámi Museum in the 1970s, the RiddoDuottarMuseat, Kárásjohka, a sort of ethnographic museum of the time.

Given the little infrastructure in place, interestingly the museum was adapted by its users to house the first Sámi radio, the first Sámi newspaper, a political center, and a meeting point—in short, a prime example of what today we would call a Constituent Museum, “a museum that put relationships at the center of their operations ... placing the visitor as an



Image 25: Máret Ánne Sara, *Pile o'Sápmi*

active member of a constituent body, for and from whom it facilitates, provokes, inspires and learns. Moving beyond the practice of mediation as such ... situate(-ing) constituent practices of collaboration and co-production within the existing social-political (neo-liberal) context ... to reimagine the physical and organizational structures of museums and galleries.”¹⁷

What would be the social contract between a new Sámi Art Museum a community who has long upheld mobility, nomadic practices as an essential identity marker (despite the colonial pressures to fix such mobility, the borders of nation states being one such pressure), and how would such a museum actively embodies the socio-political urgencies of its constituencies.

Conclusion

The creation of a Sámi Art Museum in Norway, is being debated at the same time as museums and universities internationally face heated decolonial critique emerging from not only Indigenous and diasporic communities but also from a broad platform of professional alliances to this cause. The Nordic region is already two decades behind when compared to the first wave of decolonial demands that were implemented across art institutions and academia as from the 1980s in places such as Turtle Island, Canada, or Aotearoa, New Zealand. The call to decolonize is once again gaining planetary impact. The matter is urgent.

How will Nordic art institutions respond to the global push for decolonization?

The Nordic region has a long-standing reputation as upholders of social and ethical values through their national democracies and cultural policies, and governmental international so-called “development” work. Within such a legacy, how can we as art

¹⁷ *The Constituent Museum. Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation. A Generator of Social Change*, John Byrne, Elinor Morgan, November Paynter, Aida Sánchez de Serdio, Adela Zeleznik, Valiz (eds.), 2018, pp. 11–13.

professionals in this region (from ministries to art councils, from museums to kunsthallen, from art press to academia, from commercial galleries to private collectors) be at the forefront of this worldwide debate, rather than lag painfully behind it?

My view is that there are two simultaneous paths to pursue. One that vigorously enacts decolonization of personnel, programme, and publics as a daily practice in museums and art institutions. A long and constant journey will be required, with clearly established goals proactively upheld by national policy, arts councils, and the legality of institutional statutes. Yet, with a warning! We must not simply display and perform decoloniality, we must embody it. Decoloniality cannot become an alibi. It is required on a daily basis, and we need alliances with Indigenous and other peers to achieve this. For those who imagine that decoloniality translates purely as a process of diversification and inclusivity heed the words of cultural worker Sumaya Kasim.

Earlier this year Kasim rattled the British art world with a powerful text titled “The Museum cannot be decolonized.” Kasim was invited a guest co-curator with three other women from the BAME community (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), members of non-white communities in the UK, to use the collection of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, UK, to confront its colonial history from the perspective of today’s post-colonial discourse, in the exhibition *The Past is Now*. Her text upholds that decolonising is deeper than just being represented, and warns that the so called museological commitment to “diversity” and “inclusion,” increasingly popular today, runs the risk of becoming just another buzzword. She warns that decoloniality is a complex set of ideas—requiring complex processes, space, money, and time—and reminds us that as interest in decolonial thought grows globally, we must beware of museums’ and other institutions’ propensity to collect and exhibit, because:

...there is a danger (some may argue an inevitability) that the museum will exhibit decoloniality in much the same way they display/ed black and brown bodies as part of Empire’s “collection.” I do not want to see decolonization become part of Britain’s national narrative as a pretty curio with no substance—or, worse, for decoloniality to be claimed as yet another great British accomplishment: the railways, two world wars, one world cup, and decolonization.

...Rather than place the onus on people of color—either as facilitators or as an audience for the museum—we need to flip the narrative and ask how the museum can facilitate the decolonial process for its majority white audience in a way that does not continue to exploit people of color. Key to this is

accepting that the museum needs us; we do not need the museum. Institutions need to stop considering giving access to BAME people’s own cultures something they should be grateful for, and they should definitely ensure that “focus groups” and visiting curators are remunerated adequately for their work... Given these complexities, there is a second option that must be considered in parallel to the above, and not as a replacement. This calls upon the urgent creation of new constellations of thought and practices. Will they be called museums?

Whatever the name, they should at least be equally valued and funded to the colonially established model of museology. In this parallel path, one would find the affirmation, the social proliferation, of the Indigenous artistic and cultural discourses of the future.

Imagine for a moment, the Indigenous histories of old that would be revealed.

The myriad Indigenous Futurisms that would be generated!

This essay ends for now with a suggestion. Click the link below to listen to the Sápmi *yoiker* and musician Sofia Jannok (from the Swedish side of Sápmi), in collaboration with Sámi artist Anders Sunna. The song is called We are still here.

Gæjhtoe (“thank you” in Southern Sámi).

<https://youtu.be/EVHOjvna1qU?t=245>

Perspective 2

Loulou Cherinet

Artist, Professor, Konstfack University of Arts, Craft, and Design, Stockholm, Sweden

Confidence in ignorance—the museum and the Paradox of Inquiry

How can the so-called “global museum of art” go beyond anecdotal recollections from distant biennials, occasional survey exhibitions, and exhausted secondary sources to make actual inquiry possible?

I wrote this question for my brief of this talk but now that I read it out loud, in a room full of museum delegates, I regret asking just that. It seems too easy to answer. I can hear your silent responses. “Just give me more money” or “grant me scheduled time-out from staff meetings, budgeting, social obligations, marketing strategies and logistic nightmares and I’ll easily go beyond all that.” In order to continue my line of thought—with less distraction from the reflex to put blame on our individual ability to organize and profit from labor—allow me to give you all the money and time you need and ask again. Now what will you do?

I am an artist of Ethio-Swedish descent, who for the past twenty years has studied, lived, and worked in Addis Ababa and Stockholm. In other words, I speak to you from an African diaspora experience and a multi-sited artistic practice. When thinking about what to say today, the urgent questions that came to my mind all related to knowledge and power structure. What action would I imagine a museum taking to refuse the global logic that reduces the multiple and complex subjectivities of the continent of Africa to passive receivers of concepts and stories generated outside its borders? And how can a public museum, while serving a local community, reject the semantic illusion of center and periphery?

At the heart of every claim to internationalization or global scope there is a specific relationship to difference and personhood that constrain what can be produced and imagined. This relationship cannot be pinned down to a list of artists or an inventory of elsewhere places in a museum program. It cannot be reduced to the gestures of inviting or merely allowing the Other. Contemporary art already understands itself as part of a global field, with globally recruited artists, globally acting curators,

and Biennials and Triennials spread around the globe. But the ways of the highflying international art world are not the ways of a public museum, are they? In comparison the museum seems squeezed between a globalization understood as “everything made available everywhere” and the inherent anti-globalization of the original art object—the thing that and value that can be seen and gained in the museum and nowhere else.

A critical question close at hand would be: How can museums continue to make global acquisitions without reproducing the colonial logic that once founded them? I guess we are all familiar with the scene of the captured emblem of the Other exhibited in the museum. It has shifted shape and rhetoric over the past two-hundred years, but the project remains set to educate and civilize the masses and produce systems of classifications aligned with other institutions within the power structure, such as the library or the parliament.

From my point of view the notion of a global condition in contemporary art is operating through a confluence of discovery and disregard. International cultural exchange is a set of interpersonal relationships in which there is no doubt who decides and who obeys. Many of the artists who live and work in the supposedly well-known global condition addressed in this conference don’t get to make an uncontested claim on being people, let alone artists. The scenes of subjection that surround us are perpetuated within the museum. The rationed slots for inclusion of the Other into the museum are streamlined into large survey exhibitions and an occasional visit to a biennial in Johannesburg, Dakar, or Bamako in order to cost-efficiently network art of the African continent, all at once, and maybe discover an artist or two to bring back home.

In the midst of this rather gloomy picture my personal tendency is to think that the problem does not lie with the constraint itself. There will always be a theory of the Other and a process of othering as

a consequence thereof. We can play with that. Artists are good at playing with constraints and making use of paradox as productive space. The making and breaking of rules is the core of artistic leadership. The problems start when rule-making is monopolized. The impossibility of translating the Other is a consequence of an epistemological dominance that does not allow transformation but only adjustment to the dominant discourse. We need museums to organize by means of what Fred Moten would describe as encounter, ensemble, improvisation, and the invocation of the knowledge of freedom.

When I studied art in Addis Ababa during the nineties, we had discussions lasting for days trying to think through the kind of “unknown known” that occasionally materializes in an artwork against the grain of the “known unknown” that scientific rigor seeks to uncover. Our conversations always seemed to align the ritual engagement in what we ourselves are not aware of knowing with an Ethiopian concept of learning, while the more intentional, methodological grasping and picturing of the world was an expression of *ferenji* culture. I remember one day a friend brought a ragged copy of a Socratic dialogue into the mix. The argument referred to as “Meno’s Paradox” or the Paradox of Inquiry can be reformulated as follows:

If you know what you are looking for,
inquiry is unnecessary.

If you don’t know what you’re looking for,
inquiry is impossible.

Therefore, inquiry is either unnecessary or
impossible.

Today I teach in an art academy. You could say that the attention to what it is that people need to know in order to be able to start thinking and acting is ingrained in my mind. This commitment to study is key to my perspective on the idea of a global museum. How do we make inquiry possible? What does a museum need to know in order to think and act beyond its range of experience? The academy would answer that you must formulate a question you wish to answer (and to which you don’t yet know the answer) and then you follow some appropriate procedure for answering questions of that type. As a result you will come to know what you did not previously know regarding the answer to that question. Now I have the

feeling that I must be crazy to stand in front of a room full of scholars and deliver the basics of research as if it was an important insight. But really, consider it my revenge for two decades of emails asking me the same thing, *Dear Loulou, I work for this or that institution. I got your contact from so and so, who works with so and so, whom you also know. I am visiting Ethiopia, who should I meet?*

Who should I meet? The global museum needs better questions, and it needs to sculpt those questions in the way that we imagine the act of doing something out of nothing. In the way that form comes from the informal and recedes to the informal. The pretext of professional networking is simply not good enough. I shout out for a continuous inquiry that comes from a sense of deep entanglement and mutual aid. Not the willingness to illuminate the elsewhere, but a need to acknowledge its ongoing contribution. Not in order to trace the contours of a physical or geopolitical territory, but to open up what Simon Njami calls “a mental space open to all.”

Now, the questions that frame the narrative of this conference produce a kind of convincing drama: We imagine the museum protagonist challenged by forces of globalization, migration, populism, austerity—a noble quest if any. The struggle for sustainability that the museum performs, strategizing to boost brand affinity among civil society and changing constituencies while keeping an arm’s length from government and its own lineage as key institution to European colonial projects. The scenery calls for drama, speculation, and visionary transitions—but forgive me for not being too convinced. What I have so far experienced in my professional encounters are more often variations of the infamous four undramatic plot structures:²

The museum is confronted by an antagonistic force—and ignores it until it goes away.

The museum is accused of wrongdoing—but it’s not a big thing and soon gets sorted out.

The museum is faced with a problem—but it’s really, really difficult, so the museum gives up.

The museum wants something. Later the museum is not so sure. And after a while the museum has forgotten all about it.

¹ Amharic expression for “white people.”

² Tom Gould, “The four undramatic plot structures,” *The New Yorker*. January 16, 2015. If there’s any reason to plot for the drama that emerges when an artwork, artist, or discourse crosses borders, to insist upon inquiry and the possibility of another way of being a museum on earth, it is, as Mounir Fatmi once described the reason for his struggle, “in order to understand, and to reclaim our right to understand, because our desire to understand the world has been exchanged for the idea of merely being informed.”

Day 2

Saturday, November 3
Bonniers Konsthall

The Future
Intelligence
of Museums

Keynote 3

Michelle Kuo

The Marlene Hess Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA

The Future Intelligence of Museums

Big Data

1. Scale

When we talk about the transformation of the museum over the past several decades, we are often talking about *scale*: a dilation in time and space, an extension in magnitude or duration relative to the individual object or spectator. Witness the spread of all manner of enormous museums and art centers around the world, from Inhotim to the Louvre Abu Dhabi to OMA's Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation in the Congo. But in order to speculate about the future of museums, both the fear and the possibility, I'd like to begin with some historical inquiry.

Previously, in the postwar period, we saw the rise of sprawling, peripatetic, participatory, immersive exhibition environments that investigated new scales—and new models of physical experience. We saw the rise of “intelligent” spaces and responsive environments: the shift from museums as bastions of stasis, repositories of the inert, into interactive arenas that somehow responded to our movements, our gestures, even our thoughts.

The historical avant-gardes had augured this model of immersive and responsive display within the museum—the most famous example being El Lissitzky's *Kabinett der Abstraktion* of 1927–28. But later, the world's fair becomes the testing ground for scale, precisely because who else had the capital, the resources, to mount such large-scale endeavors? (Speaking of hegemony and empire ...) Corporate pavilions such as the Philips Pavilion at Brussels in 1958 were singular experiments in interactivity and expansion.

2. The Immersive Environment and the World's Fair

In 1958, visitors to the Brussels World Fair entered the pavilion of the Dutch electronics corporation Philips—only to emerge shaken, elated. Inside was an eight-minute spectacle of sound and light, whose sensory effect was amplified by its soaring silver concrete shell. Hundreds of speakers projected swirling arcs of sound. A filmic montage splayed across the curving walls that were bathed in spectrally metamorphosing lights. It was a massive assault. One Dutch critic described being “in [the work's] stomach; it is as if the pavilion is literally digesting us and exposing us, against our will, to acids that etch us indelibly.”¹

Philips had asked Le Corbusier to create the pavilion in 1956 to showcase the company's new audiovisual technologies. After much negotiation (Philips wanted someone more traditional), the architect commissioned Edgard Varèse to compose a piece from *concrète* and electronic sound elements. A young Iannis Xenakis, then an assistant at Le Corbusier's Rue de Sèvres studio, was responsible for most of the building's design. All worked closely with Philips engineers. It was this combined effort that produced the startling experience of the pavilion—a fantastic electronic game, or *Poème Électronique*, as Le Corbusier dubbed it—whose effects enacted a new kind of empathy and involvement of the human sensorium. The pavilion posed a synaesthetic relation between the aural, tactile, and visual, overturning modernist divisions of medium specificity. It laid bare modernism's deep debt to a humanist discourse of unified sensation.

¹ Kristian Romare, “Le Corbusier's Elektroniska Skapelse,” *Byggmästaren*, no. 8, (1958), p. 175, translated and cited in Marc Treib, *Space Calculated in Seconds: The Philips Pavilion, Le Corbusier, Edgard Varèse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 223.



Image 1. The Philips Pavilion, Expo 58, Brussels, July 1958.
Photo: Wouter Hagens © Wikimedia Commons



Image 2: Interior of the Philips Pavilion, Expo 58, Brussels, July 1958.
Photo: Wouter Hagens © Wikimedia Commons

The *Poème* played in a vast, darkened, elliptical space. Overhead, a stream of static images interspersed with short filmic shots advanced on 16mm projectors. From ancient masks to mushroom clouds, mass graves, and Godzilla, the images displayed nothing less than a montage of the family of man, with all the kitsch that implies. Successive tints of color drenched the walls. Polyphonic speakers dispersed the sound in various “routes” along the curved surfaces of the shell. Listeners felt the sound moving through and around them, at times ringing through the parabolic husk as if it were a cathedral, at other moments blunt and dry.

Ear-splitting dissonances, the disjunction of image and sound, and palpably pulsating lights enabled mass communication that heightened individual perception. Such a barrage of stimuli enacted the kind of experience that contemporary continental philosophy described as phenomenological “reduction” or breakdown.

But even as it promoted this changing and fractured bodily experience, the *Poème* asserted a *unified sensorium*. According to Le Corbusier, all of the perceptual data in the pavilion—“*son, lumière, couleur, rythme*”—were commensurate as “*sensations psycho-physiologique*.”² This echoed his fellow Frenchman, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for whom all the senses were interdependent—sound synaesthetically related to vision. They “inter-communicate through the medium of my body ... a ready-made system of equivalents and transpositions from one sense to another.”³ Merleau-Ponty thereby optimistically posited subjectivity as an integrated whole. Any breakdown in normal modes of perception would emphasize such synaesthetic connection.

The pavilion’s outside effects were predicated on this intensified yet cohesive sensory apparatus. All the playback and automation equipment for both sound and visuals were linked into one network. Disjointed colors, noises, and images gave rise to associations based on their interplay—not just through referential relations. (And sounds—both *concrète* and instrumental, synthesized voices and percussive pops—were never just attributes of a corresponding visual “source.”) Space itself (what Le Corbusier termed “*espace acoustique*”) was to be *felt* in the same way as aural vibrations and luminous intensities. The immersive space was also a universe of sensory correspondences.

Space and sound came together in the architectural elevation, where Xenakis referenced musical notations of *glissandi*—rising and falling tones defined by a continuous sliding from one pitch to another. Graphed as time against tone, *glissandi* formed hyperbolic paraboloids. Having used these figures in his own musical compositions, Xenakis formally repeated them in the ruled surfaces of the pavilion and the design of the pre-stressing wires. Both support and ornament alluded to an underlying mathematical organization whose basis lay in sound.

2 Le Corbusier, “Notre Travail,” in *Le Poème Electronique*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958, pp. 24–25.

3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith (trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 234–35. In the same passage, Merleau-Ponty continued: “The unity of the senses ... cannot be understood in terms of their subsumption under a primary consciousness, but of their never-ending integration into one knowing organism ... The senses translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea.”

This structure was literally heard in Varèse's *Poème*. Sirens were used as a means of achieving the pitch (frequency) of pure *glissandi* without electronic production. Parabolic and hyperbolic curves translated from the visual to aural domain as mechanized, vertiginous wails. Like Xenakis, Varèse saw the optical analogue of sound as an intrinsic property of the sound itself. What is more, sound as haptic phenomena could be shaped, directed, diffracted through space as sculptural masses for the ear. Through these synaesthetic transversals, the pavilion participated in a postwar return to an ahistorical body—the very restoration that characterized Merleau-Ponty's endeavor. Any notion of a disembodied, interior *cogito* was subsumed by the sensory immersion of the body in the world. To this end, the phenomenology of perception informed the pavilion as a humanist strategy for integrating the subject: each constitutes a re-imagining of the body as whole after its traumatic annihilation in Auschwitz.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that the pavilion's optimistically unified sensorium and subject also fulfilled a more dystopian scenario. The alliance of image, word, and sound at colossal scale was not simply an idyllic realization of the expressionist *Gesamtkunstwerk*. For Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, writing in Los Angeles in 1948, the "Wagnerian dream" of fusing all arts into one work was now the apotheosis of industrial cultural production.⁴ The *Poème*'s overarching union of sensory and media boundaries could not help but echo the fearful homogeneity of technical processes, which vertically integrate "all the elements of cultural production, from the novel (shaped with an eye to the film) to the last sound effect." Like the mass produced record or film reel, the *Poème* could be played again and again with the push of a button. And the proliferation of such automated technology was inseparable from the site of the World Fair—its all-encompassing sensory assault of commodified display and trade show spectacle.

3. *The Museum without Walls*

The Philips Pavilion and its filmic projections, its spectacular images of a colossal Family of Man, recall nothing less than Andre Malraux's infamous idea of the *Musée imaginaire* in 1947. *The Museum without Walls* (as it was simplistically translated into English) was a conceptual space of the human faculties:



Image 3. André Malraux selecting images for *Le musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale*, 1952. Photo: Maurice Jarnoux/Paris Match

imagination, cognition, judgment. As Rosalind Krauss described it, "... works of art are ripped away from their sites of origin and, through their transplantation to the museum, cut loose from all referentiality to the use, representational or ritual, for which they might have been created. In turn, they are, through their transplantation to the site of reproduction (through media, photography, copy), unmoored from their original scale, every work whether tiny or colossal now to be magically equalized through the democratizing effects of camera and press."⁵ The *Musée imaginaire* was therefore a retrograde concept. It flattened difference into a mythically unified spirit of human creativity, humanism, the Family of Man. And this contest of modernity and postmodernity, of classical humanist iconography and thoroughly mediated spectacle, was clearly at play in the Philips Pavilion.

Against modernist medium specificity, the environment in Brussels explored, on the one hand, the total work of art—the seamless fusion of the arts—and on the other, intermedia: based on multiplicity, difference, heterogeneity. The pavilion enacted a contest between immersion and disruption, totality and multiplicity, synthesis and difference, evanescence and palpability.

4 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming (trans.). New York: Continuum, 2001, p. 124.

5 Rosalind Krauss, "Le musée sans murs du postmodernisme," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 17/18 (1986), pp 152–58.

And in the case of the *Poème Électronique*, this bid for increased scale, for an immersive environment, was directly tied to the mythical scale of the global village and the universal connectivity of global telecommunications in the postwar period: the vast expansion and proliferation of the commodity form into a network of electronic, wireless, informatic flow.

4. Dispersion

This vast dilation of the commodity object into a network was in many ways a continuation of previous economies.

Now, this might seem counterintuitive. We often think of the modernist commodity as quintessentially a *thing*: born of the Enlightenment interest in the observation and classification of objects. But the classical commodity was actually predicated on *nothing*, no thing—on immateriality.

Indeed, the Enlightenment registered the rise of a *transcendental* subject that could determine value *beyond materiality*, beyond the so-called fetish. The modern European subject was, in fact, founded on this *disavowal* of the object, on its dematerialization. And this directly paralleled the rise of the commodity fetish and of colonialism. As the historian Peter Stallybrass has noted:

What was demonized in the concept of the object, the fetish, was the possibility that history, memory, and desire might be materialized in objects that are touched ... and worn ... A by-product of this ... was the impossible project of the transcendental subject, a subject constituted by no place, no object. ... It also implied a new definition of what it meant to be European: that is, a subject unhampered by fixation upon objects, a subject who could recognize the true, i.e. market, value of the commodity object ...⁶

This subject could recognize how gold could be transformed into ships, ships into guns, guns into tobacco; not worshipping the brute stuff of beads or silver themselves but their transformative value. Not worshipping copper or lapis lazuli but the ephemerality of oil paint as the gesture of an author.

This dematerialization won out over a nascent culture of things; it paved the way for the vast nineteenth-century incursion of capital into leisure time, private life, fashion, display, mirrors; the development of that *immaterial* world within which we have long been immersed.

When we speak of networked spaces and screens today, we are still relying on an analogy to this modernist, totalizing dematerialization. But in

fact, a number of artists today are interested in the persistence of matter, of things, even—and especially—in an age of supposedly dematerialized networks, of seemingly infinite dispersal.

A generation of artists that came to prominence in the 1990s—such as Pierre Huyghe and Tino Sehgal—have recently explored networks of dispersion and greater scale, having had the opportunity to mount large survey exhibitions, for example Huyghe at Beauborg and Sehgal at the Palais de Tokyo. They have pursued what are essentially vast, responsive environments.

More recently, in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall—a space predicated on its dwarfing scale and, some would say, the overweening experience of spectacle itself—Philippe Parreno threaded networks, images, and objects throughout the architecture. Pulleys and panels and projections, sound, inflatables: all were triggered by the primordial ooze of a bacterial colony in a bioreactor. The chemical activity of the microbes was converted into electrical signals, then fed into an algorithm that controls their surroundings by responding, in real time, to information coming from their surroundings.

Other artists have broached biology and technology somewhat differently. Like Parreno and Huyghe, Anicka Yi engages the microbial and the expansive surround. But in addition, she has sampled bacteria from distinct social groups: for example, that of 100 women whose bacterial samples are cultivated and arrayed in petri dishes or large-scale vitrines. And yet these are not the only objects of display; she also synthesizes scents from the bacteria and diffuses these throughout a space, such as decaying, tempura-fried flowers that are plugged into an ecosystem of sorts, ventilating pneumatic orbs that are in fact filtering out toxic off-gassing.

Yi's interest in the persistence of matter counters the long history of the modern disavowal of the object. Her work poses a way to move beyond the modern European construction of the subject—that person disappeared inside the flows of capital. It counters the impossible project of the transcendental subject, a subject constituted by *no* place, *no* object. Yi's work materializes terms of social difference—race, class, gender, culture, subculture—a kind of displacement, a specificity of experience, that often gets lost in totalizing accounts of global contemporary networked life.

But, moreover, such works register the alterity of *all* subjects and objects: That is to say,

6 Peter Stallybrass, "Marx's Coat," in Patricia Speyer (ed.), *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 183–207.

the irreducible material difference that things confront us with; the ways in which instances of art defy dispersion, do not weightlessly expand in immaterial networks, but are instead bound by opaque, even resistant, assemblages of equipment, instruments, things, and flows.

5. Big Data

The question of size and scale—the dynamic between material difference and weightless expansion—takes on yet another set of meanings in the era of big data.

In 2011, a report from the World Economic Forum declared, “Personal data will be the new oil”—thus heralding data as the most valuable resource of the twenty-first century. And they were right. The asymptotic ascent and capitalization of data—and the accompanying dark triumphalism—is perhaps the most massive contemporary shift of our time.

In fact, the colossal scale of data before us is mobilizing the next frontier of artificial intelligence—and capital—more broadly. Because now the data set, *not* the algorithm, is the most important and coveted technology. For example, because we upload so many photographs of people to Facebook, and because we then tag those photos—*billions and billions of them*—with salient information, we train the network. We instruct it as to what these images are (and, by default, what they are not). We give the network the ability to learn. And so Facebook has been able to train their neural networks to be more and more

accurate at solving problems, such as recognizing an individual’s face, precisely because of the exponentially gargantuan quantities and increasingly diversified qualities of the information it has amassed. By the same token, many machine-learning algorithmic frameworks are freely available or open-source, but it is Google’s megalithic trove of data—culled from its total domination of Internet search—that is closely guarded, because it is the basis for making its neural networks smarter. Big data is the greatest resource, and only a few entities have been able to accumulate this asset, attain this scale.

In the case of AI, text-to-image synthesis is one of the largest fields of research, deploying Generative Adversarial Networks to learn from vast data sets of images. The classical example is one in which verbal descriptions of birds can be used to generate images of birds—each text-to-image generation growing more accurate the more data is assessed.

Such vast expansion is the towering backdrop to our time. The epic growth of data means that information leaks into, in fact becomes, the bloodstream and engine of everyday life. Images, ideas, capital, and subjectivity are inextricable from the seemingly unlimited proliferation of information. And at the forefront of this movement are social, technological, and epistemological changes not only of degree but kind. The virulent spread of disinformation, election hacking, and black markets are cases in point. How, for example, did a figure like Ross Ulbricht, former Eagle Scout, turn into a libertarian-



Image 4. Images from the Caltech-UCSD Birds-200-2011 dataset. See C. Wah et al., “The Caltech-UCSD Birds-200-2011 Dataset,” *Computation & Neural Systems Technical Report*, CNS-TR-2011-001.

gamer-cryptocurrency acolyte and launch Silk Road? Ulbricht purportedly designed the Silk Road as a kind of ultimate open-source free market, but it was also simply a failed moneymaking scheme, a new platform for the global drug trade, an experiment gone awry, a simulation turned deathly real.

As we move from the gospel of “disruption”—the motor of Silicon Valley—to the Silk Road, the black market, and the dark web, we confront a central paradox: that the decentralization of global networks has not resulted in some liberatory democratization, as we once hoped, but in ever more effective channels of power, control, and violence.

What we are witnessing now, in other words, is a colossal failure of imagination: the failure to foresee that the democratization of information would become the greatest tool of disinformation, and that the growth of data—its production of intelligence—would threaten to replace the subject altogether.

Given this failure of imagination, perhaps there is, after all, another opening for art, and maybe even for museums. Let us ask ourselves: Can we produce a wholly different kind of *musée imaginaire* today? One that goes against the grain, that does away with both a humanist glorification of some imperial god’s eye, but that also does away with its successor, a late capitalist flattening of difference; a *musée imaginaire* that contends with our ocean of images *now*, our flood of data and machine learning, that confronts the world of epistemological and material difference—and repopulates the data set for the future?

Perspective 3

Lars Bang Larsen

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Mud Muses
Extending a concentric idol

1.

I will be speaking about a curatorial work in progress, namely the group show *Mud Muses* that I am currently preparing and that is to open here at Moderna Museet in the fall of 2019. In short, *Mud Muses* will offer a perspective on the theme of art and technology through a genealogy of works from the late 1960s and up till today. The point of departure for my talk is the work that has given the title to my exhibition, namely Robert Rauschenberg's *Mud Muse*, a work in the collection of Moderna Museet. To borrow anthropologist Alfred Gell's term, the work can be understood as a *concentric idol* to the theme of art and technology and to the history of this theme as it has played out at Moderna Museet.

You will note that the exhibition's thematic point of departure is historic, or anachronistic, inasmuch as "art and technology" is a twentieth-century way of putting it. Fifty years ago, the difference between art and technology was maintained by techno-utopianists and techno-skeptics alike: the two opposing camps contended either that art was not yet, or should not

be, integrated with new technologies. Today, it is less evident than ever how the question can be posed in terms of a meeting between two distinct entities. I argue that we need to defamiliarize the concept of technology in order to review its contemporary status as integrated into the everyday, socialized, elemental, second nature.

Whatever Rauschenberg's *Mud Muse* says is uttered from a hi-tech framework of asemantic minimalism sullied by dirt and flatulence. I like to think of the work as a Dadaist techno-cosmology that plays with, but is also caught up in, the dialectic of the Enlightenment. As such it can be employed to question persistent hegemonic Western myths of technology, such as hi-tech as a driver of progress, as a signifier of growth, as a tool to overcome social separation, etc. According to another anthropologist, Roy Wagner, what we call mythology is a discourse



Image 1: Robert Rauschenberg, *Mud Muse*, 1968–71



Image 2: Rauschenberg's *Mud Muse* at New York Collection for Stockholm. Donation from Teledyne, inc. Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1973

about the *given*—primordial conditions from and against which something or someone will be defined or constructed; myths are discourses that establish terms and limits of an ontological debt, that to which you owe your existence.

Technology is more than an object of substance: in its given-ness it continues to create transcendent loops around itself. Its primordality places it at the centre of human history, while at the same time it is considered to be in excess of this history: on the one hand it makes us modern, and on the other hand it supposedly allows us to surpass ourselves as such by pulling us into the future. We need to *adapt* to new technologies, we are told, like the paying back of a debt. Or technology is understood to amplify human beings and make our species, or our culture, superior—and in doing so, it indexes human lack, our nakedness without technology. And we have made a mess of this planet, among other things by using extraction-dependent technologies—but technology can help fix that. And so on. These are paradoxes and ambiguities that Rauschenberg's *Mud Muse* can assist in inflicting on the theme of art and technology.

2.

Between 1967 and 1971, the LA County Art Museum's *Art & Technology* program paired sixty-four artists with corporations such as Lockheed Aircraft, IBM, and Universal Studios to produce new art works. All artists minus two were male, and the lineup was a mix of European and (mainly North) American artists in a disparate mix of stellar names.¹ For the production of *Mud Muse*, Robert Rauschenberg wished to collaborate with personnel of the industrial conglomerate Teledyne Inc., one of the aerospace-oriented coastal industries that developed hydraulics, optics, and electrical products for commercial and military clients. It was also Teledyne that in '73 donated the work to Moderna, where it arrived in a group of other American acquisitions that were received by some local artists and activists with accusations of "technocratic emptiness" and cultural imperialism.²

Maurice Tuchman, who curated the *Art & Technology* program with Jane Livingston, claimed a "gathering esthetic urge" among artists "to gain



Image 3: Maurice Tuchman (ed.), *A Report on the Art & Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967–1971* (1971)

access to modern industry" for the program's art and business collaborations. With this, he maintained, the program compared to "the programs of the Italian Futurists, Russian Constructivists, and many of the German Bauhaus artists"—a perspective that no doubt sanitized avant-garde history politically.³ Tuchman's rhetoric echoes that of *Experiments in Art and Technology* (E.A.T.), of which Rauschenberg was a founding partner; an initiative that was seen by its founders as representing an "organic social revolution."⁴

Mud Muse performs a continuous and random, boiling encounter between sound and synthetic mud. In a large vat, sound in the form of compressed air passes through valves to make little ploppy geysers erupt in thousands of pounds of so-called driller's mud, a mix of glycerin and finely ground volcanic ash. A hi-fi system that is a visible part of the installation plays recorded sounds of the work's abject action back to itself. These sounds are the installation's "unsounds," to use sound theorist Steve Goodman's delightful term for sonic matter that is "suspect, unsavory,

1 The women artists were Channa Davis and Aleksandra Kasuba. The list of artists included names such as Max Bill, Öyvind Fahlström, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Jean Dubuffet, Michael Asher, and Andy Warhol.

2 Kim West, *The Exhibitionary Complex. Exhibition, Apparatus, and Media from Kulturhuset to the Centre Pompidou, 1963–1977*. PhD dissertation, Södertörns Högskola, 2017, p. 240.

3 Maurice Tuchman, "Introduction," in Maurice Tuchman (ed.), *A Report on the Art & Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967–1971* (1971), p. 9.

4 I am quoting Matthew Wisnioski, *Engineers for Change. Competing Visions of Technology in 1960s America*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2012, p. 143.

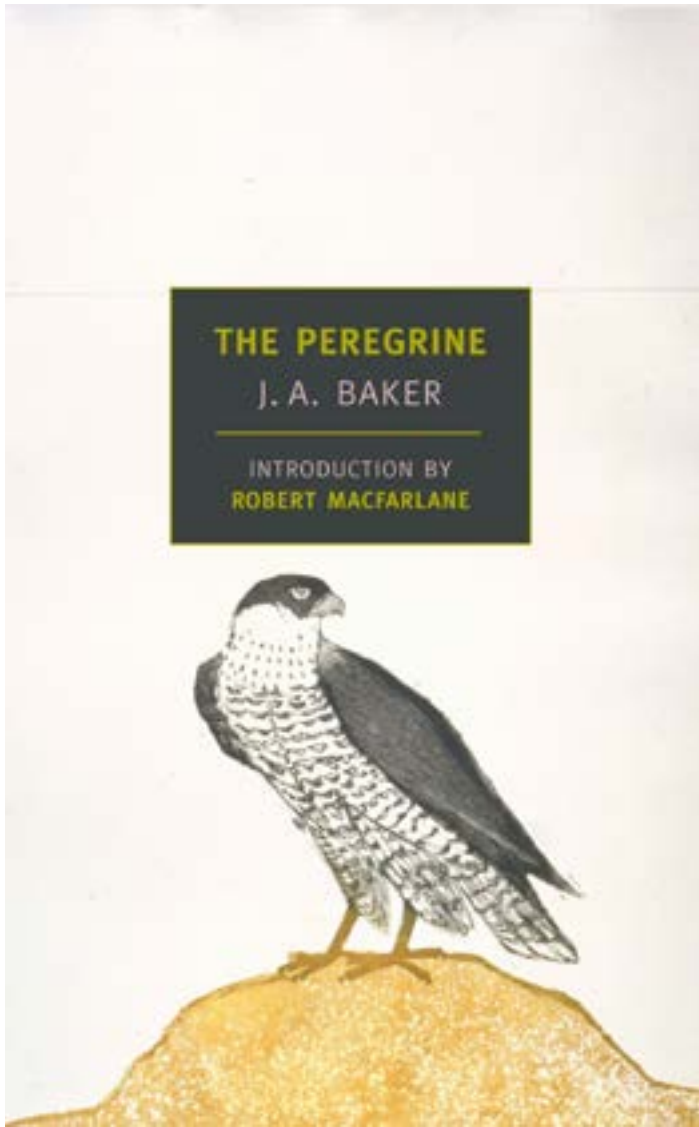


Image 4: J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine*, 1967

or ignores rules and norms.”⁵ To Rauschenberg, the work built associatively on naturally occurring, strongly colored sludge fountains at Yellowstone National Park: “Paint pots,” so called, in which rising gasses and thermal heat drive mud out of the earth; and within his own production, he relates *Mud Muse* to the “earth paintings” from the 1950s. But the aesthetic and perceptual transvaluations performed by the work go beyond media specificity. We can allow *Mud Muse* to depart for an intermedial and interdisciplinary hermeneutic framework via the channel that Leo Steinberg opened with his concept of the flatbed picture plane, which he proposed to describe the characteristic picture plane of 1960s painting. Steinberg borrowed the term from the

flatbed printing press that again associates to flatbed scanners at our end of history. We might need a printer or a scanner to compile our attempts at making *Mud Muse* legible, not as a painting, but as a system of action.

Because it is a very open question what this muse of a machine-animated queer mess is meant to inspire. The synthetic mud is “light brown in color and extremely soft to the touch,” as the catalogue helpfully specifies, but physical interaction with the work is prohibited by museum protocol.⁶

Mud Muse was a work of art “conceived as the perfectly responsive lover,” as critic David Antin put it, and Rauschenberg made no bones about the work’s lack of morality and content: “There is no lesson,” and no “interesting idea” in *Mud Muse*, he said.⁷ Instead he understood it to operate on “a basic, sensual level.”⁸ *Mud Muse*’s profane mix of “pure waste” and “sophisticated technology,” then, can be said to mediate between the scatological and eschatological: As we know, technology can be recruited for wasteful and shitty purposes, too—such as the optical systems developed by Teledyne for the US air force at the time of the Vietnam War.

In his masterpiece *The Peregrine* from 1967, J.A. Baker gives a description like none other of mud. Baker’s protagonist longs to let his “human taint wash away” in long walks on the East Coast of England, scouting for hawks. Thus on a December day, mud is “deep in the lanes”:

...thick ochre mud, like paint; oozing glutinous mud that seemed to sprout on the marsh, like fungus; octopus mud that clutched and clung and squelched and sucked; slippery mud, smooth and treacherous as oil; mud stagnant; mud evil; mud in the clothes, in the hair, in the eyes; mud to the bone. On the east coast in winter, above or below the tide-line, man walks in water or mud; there is no dry land. Mud is another element. One comes to love it, to be like a wading bird, happy only at the edges of the world where land and water meet, where there is no shade and nowhere for fear to hide.⁹

Baker’s darkly toned ecology is closer to the souled matter of Symbolism than to the earthy pieties of Naturalism. Also *Mud Muse* thrives on the symbolist or animist leanings of cybernetics.

5 Steve Goodman: *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2010, p. 9. Before the conception and building of *Mud Muse*, the team and the artist engaged in “due experimentation” on ideas including a hallucination-inducing low-frequency sound tunnel and a machine that could transubstantiate metal between molten, liquid state to solid form.

6 Tuchman, op.cit., p. 282.

7 Tuchman, op.cit., pp. 285 and 286.

8 Op.cit.

9 J.A. Baker: *The Peregrine*, 1967, p. 98.



Image 5: Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency*, 1998

This may sound like a strange claim, but a symbolist understanding of cybernetics can be said to appear in the split between, on the one hand, managerial cybernetics and its Cartesian “erasure of embodiment” (as Katherine Hayles puts it), and on the other, the way that theoretical cybernetics deliberately collapsed binaries of nature and culture, electronic circuit and animal nervous system, idea and matter, yes even of magic and science. In this light, the artificial mind of cybernetics was not an abstract thinker, but a performing organ in a live system, an ecology.

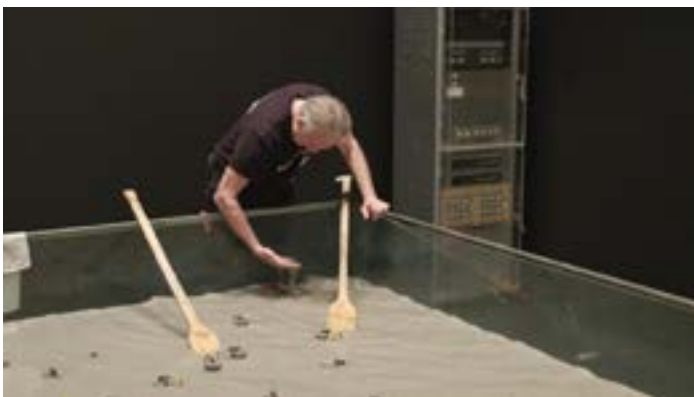


Image 6: Gunnar Marklund, *Mud Muse*'s “dad,” during installation at MoMA, 2017

3.

If *Mud Muse*'s abject activity makes for a vanishing point—“mud stagnant, mud evil,” *entropy* in other words—then what happens next? Is there a creative spirit down there, a goo-poiesis? Will a Golem or a machine slave rise out of it? Will it acquire desire and speech? Will it be able to play? Go on strike? Maybe we can redirect *Mud Muse*'s autopoietic systemic action by thinking of it as a concentric idol. In his *Art and Agency* from 1998, Alfred Gell writes how the “possession of ‘significant interiors’ is a very common feature of sculptural works specifically intended for cult use.”¹⁰ He accordingly argues for the existence of a cross-cultural commonality to interpret the actions of social others in terms of a “homunculus effect” or “ghost in the machine.”¹¹ External, physical behaviors, that is, are understood to be caused by internal, animating forces. As a result many societies

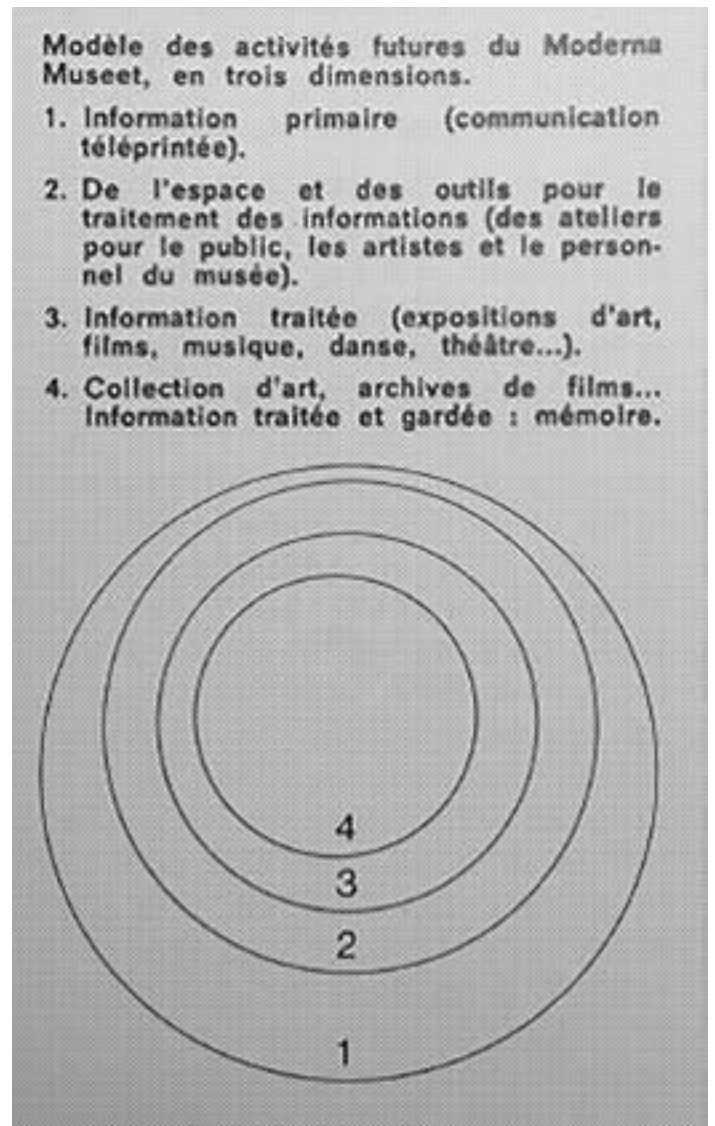


Image 7: Pontus Hultén and Pär Stolpe, “Model of the future activities at the Moderna Museet”, 1971

¹⁰ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998, p. 141.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

have activated their “idols” by providing them with layers or interior spaces or by visually and physically marking distinctions between surface and depth: “Holes or cavities (themselves filled with animating substances) may be drilled into the ‘idol’s’ body.”¹² This animating strategy does not require anthropomorphism, nor is animacy conveyed by mimetic resemblance, but through spatial modeling: Idols are “(artefactual) *bodies*,” Gell writes, and, one understands, a kind of artificial mind.¹³

Gell’s theory creates openings by which historic continuities and cultural comparability can be traced through the enchantment of technology. *Mud Muse* is explicitly an idol, and one with a significant interior to boot: the fact that this interior enframes something completely *insignificant*, or a-signifying, conflates the logic of the idol with that of hi-tech, parodically dragging both down in the mud. *Mud Muse* takes the lid off technology’s black box to reveal a decomposed and incontinent artificial mind. If it is indeed a dystopian or apocalyptic work, it can prompt us to ask, *whose* apocalypse? As we know, apocalypses have routinely been inflicted by colonialism, ending the worlds of so many non-Western others.

Importantly, the logic of layers within layers of the concentric idol extends to the built environment, too, through boxes and arks to sanctuaries and temples. Gell writes:

We may readily imagine that the idols... come to stand for “mind” and interiority, not just by physical resemblance to the human body, but by becoming the animating “minds” of the huge, busy, and awe-inspiring temple complex.¹⁴

A concentric idol signifies outwards, in our case to the home of the muses, the museum, and so *Mud Muse* can be applied to indicate a condition of possibility for the theme of art and technology at the Moderna Museet. It is not only through Moderna Museet’s exhibition history—with *Movement in Art* from 1961, the 1968 Tatlin exhibition, or through Pontus Hultén’s extracurricular activities such as *The Machine* show at MoMA in 1968—that the institution has related to a machinic imagination. Cybernetic thinking was also implied in Hultén and his collaborators’ attempts at what art historian Kim West calls “reconfiguring the exhibitionary apparatus.”

During the late 1960s systems theory and media-oriented artistic imaginaries were in fundamental ways part of the thinking of what the future Moderna Museet could be. We find another concentric model in a diagram from the mid-sixties, drawn by Hultén and curator Pär Stolpe, outlining the modern museum as a spherical institution consisting of four layers. The outermost layer ‘connects to the universe of everyday life ... characterized by an accelerated concentration of information.’ The second layer is “reserved for the workshops”—workshops where “means of production are available” to be used “by anyone.” The third layer of the sphere will “present the productions of the workshops and will be dedicated to different manifestations: visual arts, films, photo, dance, concerts...” The final layer, the core, “will contain the “memory” of the processed information; this is the ... museum’s collection.”¹⁵

In West’s summary, the diagram announced a comprehensive new vision for a future museum: “... the museum was here conceived as a center of information, as a vast databank, processor, and transmission station that should be open toward the social field and integrated into society’s circulation of information.”¹⁶ This information center model of the museum would never come to be in Stockholm—in the late sixties there were unrealized plans to move Moderna downtown—but Kim West traces it to Hultén’s work as the founding director of the Beaubourg.

This is where I will leave *Mud Muse* and Moderna Museet. I hope that my outline can serve a discussion about “art and technology” in the twenty-first century, a theme whose anachronism relates in an emphatic way to the museum as a site of many temporalities. In this light, some questions to explore through this panel’s inquiry into “the future intelligence of the museum” could be: What do we make of the technological malaise of our time; Silicon Valley greed, mass surveillance, social media’s complicity in disrupting democratic systems? How can the museum continue to be a ‘catalyst for the active forces in society,’ as Hultén put it, and set art to work on a civic scale of art, to use György Kepes’s perhaps still useful term from the same era?¹⁷ How can we think about futures of enlightenments in relation to the institutional and symbolic collapses we are living through these years?

12 I am quoting Byron Ellsworth Hamann, “An Artificial Mind in Mexico City (Autumn 1559),” in *Grey Room* 67, spring 2017, pp. 6–44.

13 Gell, op. cit., p. 98.

14 Ibid., p. 136.

15 West, op. cit., p. 8.

16 Ibid., p. 10.

17 Ibid., p. 8.

Perspective 4

Ho Tzu Nyen

Artist, Singapore

The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia

This is a map of processes created at an early stage for my collaborators, indicating the various processes.

Every viewing of this film is different, not only because it is constantly recomposed, but also because the database of images and sounds is being constantly updated with new materials. So far we have about 3,000 video clips and 300 feature films related to Southeast Asia that we are still in the middle of working through.

I will spend the larger part of this presentation sharing some of the ideas behind this project, and a good place to start is with this question: “What is Southeast Asia?”

What is Southeast Asia

Or to reframe the question more precisely: “What constitutes the unity of Southeast Asia—a region never unified by a single religion, language, or political system?”

If Southeast Asia can be understood as being constituted by nation-states that were, in one way or another, born out of the experience of European colonialism that carved up the region, then the concept of Southeast Asia itself, as a unit, was born out of war, the war commonly referred to as the

Second World War, but also referred to by various parties as the *Greater East Asian War*, the *Pacific War*, or the *15 Year War*.

Before the war, the term “Southeast Asia” was not in common usage. In some sense, the Japanese occupation of the region brought about a unity to an area that traditionally had no sense of historical contiguity.

The next decisive change came about with the creation of an Allied coalition designed to “liberate” the region from the Japanese, known as the Southeast Asia Command (SEAC), which (briefly) restored British, French, and Dutch colonialism in the region.

In any case, after the war, the name Southeast Asia stuck, and a region was produced, internalized, and perhaps projected back in time, an ambiguous object with fuzzy outlines...

What is CDOSEA?

The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia then, is an attempt to render this ambiguous object as a form, to think what Southeast Asia is, not only historically and conceptually, but also compositionally.

The Dictionary is a collection of concepts, motifs, and biographies, many of which are threads that traverse the borders of Southeast Asian nation states, that also weave together an alternate tapestry of the region, perhaps an experiment in reconfiguring how the region can be imagined.

Since 2012, as an Artist-in-Residence at the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong, I began tabulating and alphabetizing this collection, condensing the collection into 26 terms, one for each letter of the English alphabet. And this process of alphabetical condensation itself transforms the concepts that I have gathered.

For me, *The Dictionary* is not an attempt to create a static representation of Southeast Asia. Rather, in its capacity for being updated and its propensity for transformation, I think of it as a model of the region itself.



Image 1: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations

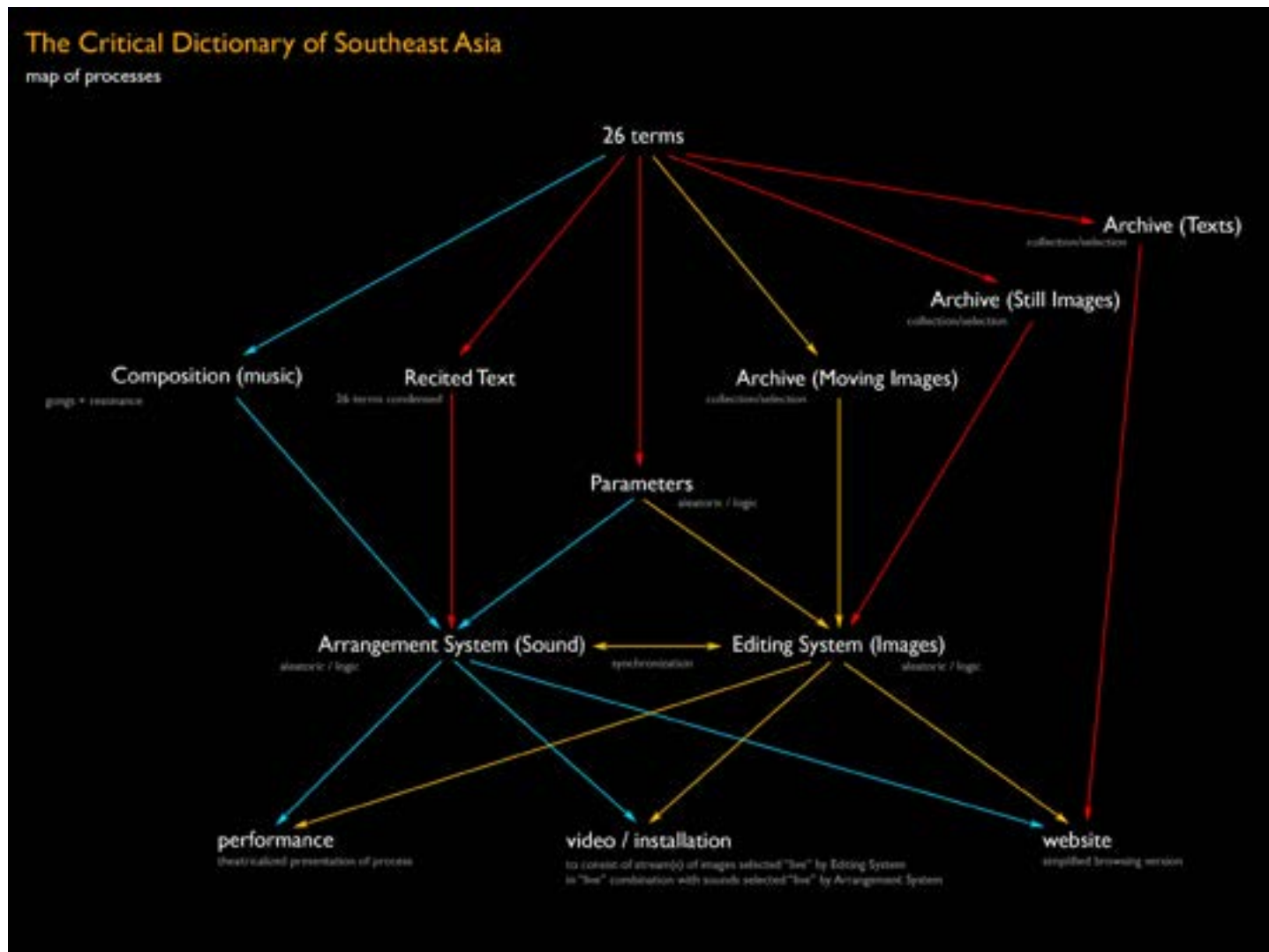


Image 2: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations



Image 3: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations

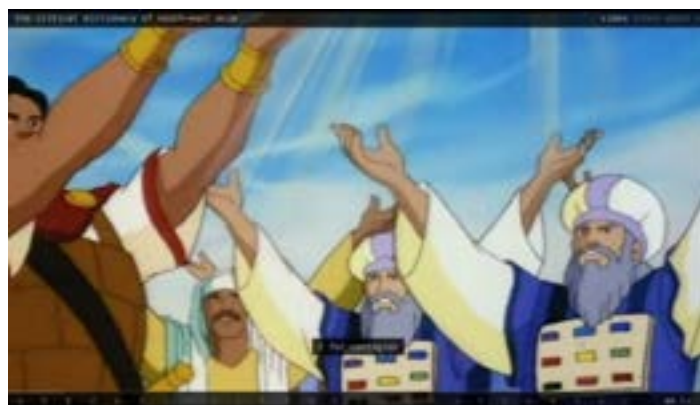


Image 4: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations

The Dictionary, when physically presented in physical spaces, has no fixed, or permanent form.

Here we see it installed at the Hamburg Kunstverein as a single channel video with a front projection, and a wall of LED lights placed behind it. The same algorithms that edit the film trigger these lights to pulsate in rhythms that express the numerical basis of the algorithms, while wiping out the image.

Here we see the work installed at an exhibition in MMCA Seoul, as a two-channel video facing each other, in a configuration that cannot be captured in a single photograph, just as it cannot be taken in from a single perspective by the audience, who are forced to choose between them, with an awareness that there is a flow of images and information always exceeding the limits of human attention and our frame of capture.



Image 5: Documentation of *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2017 ongoing), algorithmic control and editing system, single channel video, LED lights infinite loop, at the Hamburg Kunstverein. Photo: Fred Dott



Image 6: Documentation of *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2017 – ongoing), algorithmic control and editing system, double channel video, LED lights infinite loop, at The Principle of Uncertainty, MMCA, Seoul, 2017



Image 7: Documentation of *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2017 ongoing), algorithmic control and editing system, double channel video, LED lights infinite loop, at *The Principle of Uncertainty*, MMCA, Seoul, 2017

This excess brings me back to the online manifestation of the work, where the algorithms are at work 24 hours a day, generating infinite versions of the “film” with or without the presence of a human spectator, regardless of whether or not it is seen.

For me, the endlessness of this process, this perpetual, excessive generation of image, sound, and textual combinations is a ritual of an endless, incessant broadcast into the universe of images, and of participation in the stream of continuous metamorphosis.

I have tried to present an overview of *The Dictionary*, and now I would like to zoom in on a couple of individual terms from *The Dictionary*, as well as the projects that came out of these.

T for Tiger / T for Theodolite

Let me begin with the letter T — T for Tiger, T for Theodolite.

The tiger spread across Southeast Asia more than a million years ago, long before the emergence



Image 8: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations



Image 9: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations

of homo sapiens, when Southeast Asia was still a single land mass known as the Sunda Shelf.

When the first humans came to Southeast Asia, they populated the area between the forest and the waters, which is the favored habitat of the tiger. Placed in close proximity, a complex symbolic and symbiotic relationship developed between the two species.

Perhaps in recognition of their precedence, tigers were regarded as vehicles, or mediums for ancestral spirits. Certain humans, especially shamans, were said to have the ability, or the curse, to transform into tigers, just as some tigers were said to be able to take human shape.

This is a photograph from the book *Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula* by the English anthropologist, Walter William Skeat, published in 1903, of a supposed weretiger

This 1865 print, *Interrupted Road Survey in Singapore* by the German artist Heinrich Leutemann, depicts a 1835 survey mission by the British in the Singaporean forest that was disrupted by the emergence of a tiger. Miraculously, no humans were harmed in this encounter. The tiger knew what it was doing—it went straight for the theodolite, the toppling instrument in the center of the image, which was reported to have been destroyed.



Image 10: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations

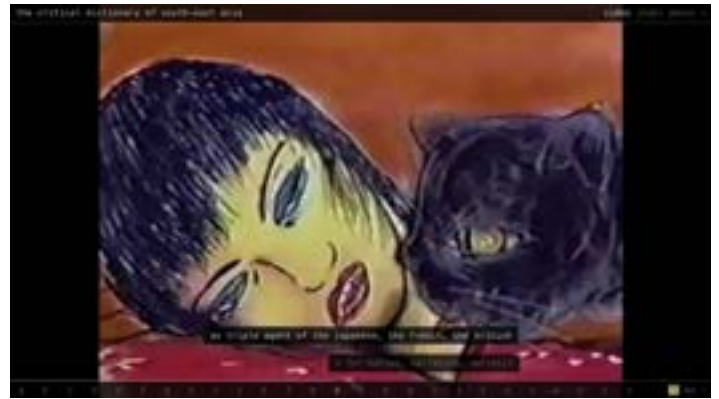


Image 11: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations



Image 12: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations



Image 13: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations



Image 14: Photograph of "Rumored Weretiger—Skeat and Blagden," 1906, from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*



Image 15: Video-still from *The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, (2015 ongoing), algorithmically composed video, infinite loop, various configurations



Image 16: Photograph of Rumoured Weretiger_Skeat and Blagden, 1906, from The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia



Image 17: *Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore*, wood engraving after Heinrich Leutemann 1888, from The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia

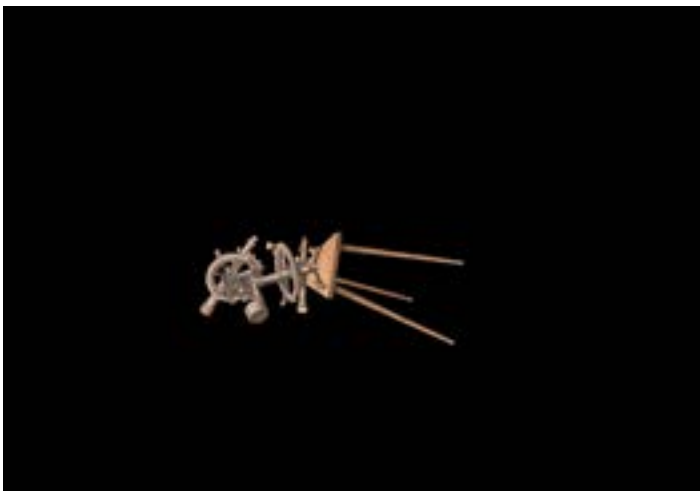


Image 18: The Falling Theodolite, from The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia



Image 19: The Japanese 25th Army in Singapore, from The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia

The theodolite was one of the survey mission’s most expensive instruments, used for measuring the angles of horizontal and vertical planes. It was a tool for the rationalization of space, for the abstraction of the landscape into a series of numerical coordinates. In the decade following this clash between the white

surveyor and Malayan tiger, an all-out war between tigers and humans would commence, leading to the eventual annihilation of tigers in Singapore. And by the twentieth century, the entire cosmological system around tigers and weretigers would be relegated into the realm of folklore. But this physical destruction of tigers would be followed by their return in spectral forms.

In December 1941, the Japanese 25th Army invaded Malaya. Moving swiftly through the forest, savage, amphibious, and full of guile in battle, the Japanese forces embody the very qualities that had made the tiger such a feared adversary of the early British settlers.

The Japanese 25th Army was led by Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita—widely known as the “Tiger of Malaya.”

The principal resistance in Malaya against the Japanese occupation was the Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army, a guerilla organization under the leadership of the Malayan Communist Party. When the Japanese forces surrendered in 1945 and left Malaya, the epithet of “tiger” gradually transferred to the Communists.

The British responded to the Communist threat by intensifying their regulation of forested zones, offering cash bounties, organizing hunts and ambushes—the same strategy that was employed earlier to annihilate the Malayan tigers.

And these Communist tigers eventually retreated into the forest, along with the other spirits and myths that were believed to take shelter in the Malayan forests.

The tiger-human relationship was condensed into a operatic duet that was sung by two digital actors who populated two screens that directly faced each other.



Image 20: General Tomoyuki Yamahsita, the 'Tiger of Malaya,' from The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia



Image 21: Guerilla soldiers from the Malaya Communist Party, from The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia



Image 22: Reward for capture of Chin Peng, Secretary General of the Malayan Communist Party

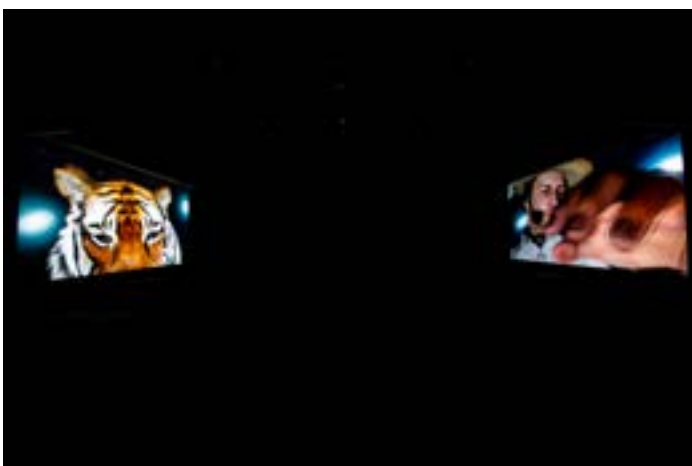


Image 23: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized-double channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 24: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 25: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 26: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 27: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 28: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 29: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM

The first is a digital construction of a Malayan Tiger—animated through the motion-capture of the actual human singer, this infusion of human movement into a digital shell—is analogical to the animistic concept of the tiger as a container of ancestral spirits.

The opposite screen is occupied by the digital construction of George Dromgoole Coleman, the Road Surveyor from *Interrupted Road Survey in Singapore*.

Much of *One or Several Tigers* takes place in a black digital void, unanchored by gravity. It is an abstracted space, that is also a kind of any-space-whatsoever, that is also capable of transformation.

And the weightlessness and “earthlessness” of this space is an extension of the process of the road survey in which the landscape is transformed into a set of numerical coordinates.

In *One or Several Tigers*, I also attempted to move beyond the binary clash between Malayan tiger and white surveyor to the remaining figures that we tend to overlook in the clamor of the clash.

These were in fact Indian convicts sentenced by the British to what was known as “transportation,” which meant a life of indentured labor in parts of the British Empire where they were often employed in all



Image 30: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM

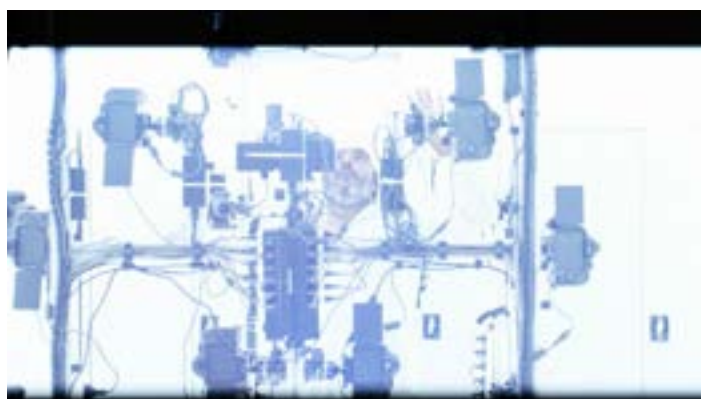


Image 31: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 32: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM

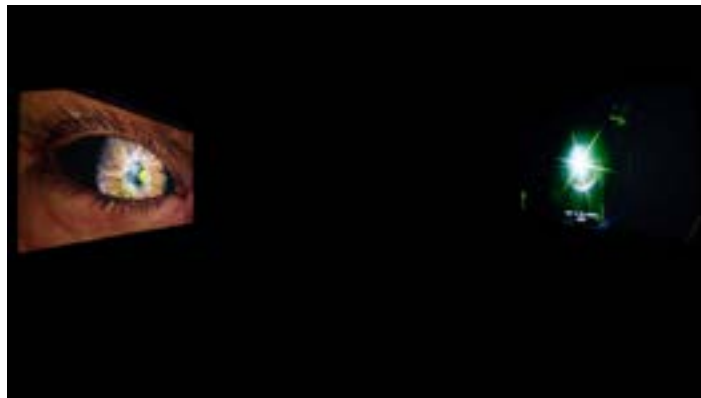


Image 33: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 34: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Image 35: Video-still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double-channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10-channel sound, show-control system. Courtesy: TPAM



Video Still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10 channel sound, show-control system



Video Still from *One or Several Tigers*, 2017, synchronized double channel HD projection, automated screen, shadow puppets, 10 channel sound, show-control system

aspects of public works, such as road surveys.

These figures of the Indian indentured laborers are generated by a process of 3D scanning of South Indian migrant workers in contemporary Singapore, a violent mode of capture involving the simultaneous usage of 180 cameras.

The same migrant worker-actors were also brought to the National Gallery of Singapore, where a print of the *Interrupted Road Survey* is permanently displayed.

Now I wish to return to the physical configuration of the installation, specifically the opposition derived from the opposition of the Malayan Tiger and the British road surveyor.

It is of course impossible for the audience to see both screens simultaneously, requiring a choice on the part of the spectator. The decision to look in one or other direction implies adopting either the tiger's or the surveyor's perspective.

This duet is a kind of ritual performed by the tiger and the surveyor for each other, and not for the spectator. It is a ritual, in which the presence of the spectator is, if not accidental, then incidental.

One or Several Tigers is a ritual performed for the spirit of the tiger and weretiger, a figure of inter-species exchange and an embodiment of the power of metamorphosis. This animism finds its proper manifestation in digital animation, which, for me, is a process characterized by its infinite propensity for transformation and the production of ambiguous objects, with fuzzy outlines, which, through the powers of ambiguity, is capable of escaping the static coordinates of the map and the fixation of identification.

Perspective 5

Yuk Hui

Philosopher, Writer, Berlin, Germany

For a Cosmotechnical Futurism

It was a big surprise when I received the invitation to speak here. I thought it was a virus because I have very little to do with museums, but I'm really happy to be here today and to share with you some of my thoughts. I'm going to touch a little bit on what was said today about scale, cosmology, and locality. I was trained, first of all, as expert in artificial intelligence before I switched to philosophy, which I now teach at the University. Although I'm not going to talk about the technical part of artificial intelligence, I am trying to raise a polemic. A polemic in view of the enthusiasm that we show for artificial intelligence and its application in our everyday life, as well as in museums, perhaps. Also, a polemic in respect to the new materialism and our incapability of dealing with such problems. I also hope that towards the end of the talk I will be able to explain to you what I mean by a "cosmotechnical futurism," but I have to warn you that what I'm doing here is a simplification and reduction of my arguments, which is against my will, but let's respect the game.

For a Cosmotechnical Futurism

Let's start with the question of scale. For me bigness evokes Elon Musk, and whenever I think of Elon Musk I think of what Heidegger called "enframing," the *Gestell*,² or the essence of modern technology. This semester I'm giving a course on the philosophy of technology and last week I did a survey of what my students think about the future of technology and about their own future. It turned out that 90% of them feel miserable. Only two or three felt good, because they are studying business not humanities

or philosophy! Some 90% of them are really miserable, and I think we are responsible for this situation. Why are they so miserable? The problem is not to do—or not much to do—with the current state of artificial intelligence, but with the imaginary of the future of artificial intelligence that we read about in the media. So, where are we heading? Where does this misery arise?

Let us consider two people. One is Henry Kissinger, the other Omar bin Sultan Al Olama. Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State and National Security Advisor for the USA, and, as a historian, is familiar with the work of the reactionary historians Oswald Spengler and Arnold J. Toynbee, for example. In June, Kissinger published an article in *The Atlantic* called "How the Enlightenment Ends." Let's simplify his argument for the sake of time: the Enlightenment ends precisely because the age of reason is now superseded by artificial intelligence. So, if the Enlightenment is finished, we need a new philosophy. What is it? Of course, he has no answer to that. But what he's trying to say is that the US needs a national politics of artificial intelligence that Donald Trump hasn't come up with yet. So, why does the US need a national politics of AI?

The first Minister for AI

Omar bin Sultan Al Olama is the world's first Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence. He was appointed by the United Arab Emirates in October 2017 at the age of 27. What he is trying to do in the Ministry of Artificial Intelligence, which I also call the "Ministry of Accelerationism," is to train a younger generation

1 Among his many achievements, Elon Musk is the founder of SpaceX and the online bank X.com, and co-founder of Zip2, Tesla Inc., Neuralink, PayPal, and OpenAI, a nonprofit research company that aims to promote friendly artificial intelligence.

2 In "The Question Concerning Technology" (1949/1953), Heidegger defines the concept of *Gestell* as "an all encompassing view of technology, not as a means to an end, but rather a mode of human existence."

to become the foundation for progress in the field of AI, and he sometimes speaks like an eighteenth-century European intellectual who wants progress. So, there is a lot of investment in this.

These two figures seem to illustrate that from now on competition in the field of artificial intelligence is going to become the core of geopolitics. Last year, China released a white paper indicating that it wants to take the lead in artificial intelligence by 2030. A month later, while addressing Russia's school children, Putin said that whoever leads in AI would dominate the world. So, we can imagine this is where we are heading.

Technological singularity

Where we are heading is what we call a "technological singularity." With these developments there is such imagination that one day we are going to arrive at a point that is called by many names: technological singularity, intelligence explosion, super-intelligence, etc. By "super-intelligence" we mean that all the administrations, governments, spending, etc. will be given over to machines, and, for me, this means precisely depoliticization. That is where we are heading. But where is it and where does this come from?

Modernization as synchronization

Modernization is a process of synchronization, and when I say "modernity," let me give you a precise definition: to me, modernity means an epistemological and methodological rupture that has taken place since the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Europe. You can check the history of science by referring to Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Descartes, and so on. And this new epistemology and method that they employed to do science is later translated into modern technologies that triggered industrialization. All different forms of history are converging towards one point that I call the "global axis of time." And finally, we end up at what is called the "homo deus" or the "intelligence explosion." So, we are in the process of synchronization and convergence, and that is what today we call "world history."

Anthropocene

Now this is a problem. And, of course, related to this is the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene simply refers to the period in which human activity has become the determining factor affecting the geochemical processes of the Earth, including ecological mutation and so on. So, we are moving towards

this apocalyptic moment, which is either going to happen or not. We don't know, but this is the dominant imaginary.

Comment penser l'anthropocène?

There have been many attempts to resolve these questions. For example, a conference that was held in the Collège de France in 2015 by some anthropologists, including Philippe Descola, set out to rethink the question of the Anthropocene and its relation to climate change. I just want to emphasize one point, because I don't have time to go into details: please don't think that there is no relation between the Anthropocene and technological acceleration related to artificial intelligence—we are talking about the same process.

Philippe Descola: Par-delà nature et culture

So, what is the anthropologists' proposal? I'll mention here a very inspiring book by Philippe Descola: *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Briefly, what he proposes is "a multi-naturalism against multiculturalism." If we say that in modernity there is a particular set of epistemologies that are transmitted outside Europe through colonization, globalization, etc., in this set of epistemologies—I prefer to call it *épistémè* in the sense used by Michael Foucault—there is a kind of naturalism that is built upon an opposition between nature and culture. There is this naturalism in the episteme of European modernity. But Descola wants to show that, besides naturalism, there are different meanings or different significances of the concept of nature. So, for example, besides naturalism, there is also totemism, there is also animism, and there is also analogism. There are different ontologies that are deep inside people's lives, and we have to recognize these ontologies. We need to recognize multi-naturalism.

Descola gives one example concerning the problematic of the concept of nature, where he refers to a text by the French writer Henri Michaux. Michaux went to live in Ecuador in the early twentieth century, and in 1928 decided to return to Paris. He took the boat along with other people from his home on the Amazon River and at a certain point they arrived in a small Brazilian town. Going to the city centre, they chanced upon a big park. One of his fellow passengers, a woman who came from the jungle, said: "Great! Finally we have nature."

The point Descola is making is that the concept of nature must be contested today. We must think of multi-naturalism. We must rethink the concept of nature and renew our relationship to it.

That is my argument, the theme of my second book. It is probably impossible to talk about such a politics on a single concept that we call “nature,” because a concept in a system of thought is always related to other concepts—we have nature, we have culture, we have technology. The problem is that in today’s process of synchronization and globalization, it seems very difficult, if not impossible, to keep a certain purity of the concept of nature. We not only need one way to think about nature and the politics of nature, but we also have to renew and rethink the concept of technology.

How can we rethink the concept of technology? I’m trying to propose a concept that I call “cosmotecnics.” As human beings, when we interact with the environment we need the mediation of technologies—this is a very simple anthropological argument—but the way technology embodies these relations differs from one culture to another. And so, we have different settings. “Cosmotecnics” is the unification between the cosmic order and the moral order. And there are different moral and cosmic orders, and the way they mix with technology varies from one place to the next.

For example, either hunters should shoot a deer or not. In some regions, hunters shoot a deer because they see love in its eyes, so feel obliged to shoot. But this is not universally the case. So, why do I want to suggest this concept of cosmotecnics and what is the implication of thinking about what I call multiple cosmotecnics? What are the implications today? I think that in the history of technology, as well as in the philosophy of technology, there has been a blind spot. Let me try to simplify this. In the philosophy of technology, there is one significant text by Martin Heidegger...

Techne vs Moderne Technik

In his 1949 lecture later published as “The Question Concerning Technology,” Martin Heidegger attempted an understanding of the essence of technology, proposing both the Greek *techne* and modern technology, whose essence is the *Gestell*, “enframing.” We cannot go far into the argument, but I simply want to say that, for Heidegger, there are two essences of technology. Now, we have a huge problem here: Heidegger’s article, published in 1953, and delivered as a speech in 1949, forms the major foundation for a certain school of the philosophy of technology, but we still face the problem of how we can articulate Indian technology. How can we articulate Chinese technology without reducing it to Greek *techne*? They have the same sense as the Greek *techne*. If not, how can we articulate them? And this question was not sufficiently tackled before.

The Needham Question

This has to do with the question of the way we understand technology, in that we tend to think that all technologies are the same. For example, in the second century, the making of paper was more advanced in China than in Europe. So, all technologies are the same, there is a kind of advancement. But is this really the case? The counterargument is that, for example, in China, as I try to suggest and try to analyze, the experience of technology, the concept of technology, the understanding of technology, is completely different from the Greek *techne* of modern technology. Not at least because there is this great Needham Question. Trained originally as a biologist, Needham is a sinologist and he asked the question: why was there no modern science and technology in China? Because China was quite advanced in technology until the sixteenth century, and then stopped, while soon after, in Europe, we began to see the emergence and development of modern technology. For Needham, the answer is very simple. He thinks that, in Chinese thought, there is a completely different way of understanding technology, an organic model that stands in contrast to the mechanism of the seventeenth century that was later translated into modern technology. The formulation of this opposition is naïve and problematic, but we cannot go into it here. However, I take it up in my new book *Recursivity and Contingency*.

I want to propose to you what I call the antinomy of the universality of technology. I’m trying to reject the concept of a universal technology. So, these are the two theses: one holds that technology is anthropologically universal, understood as the exteriorization of memory and the liberation of bodily organs, and this is a very important thesis because this is the way we understand how hominization took place in history. But the antithesis states that technology is not anthropologically universal, rather it is enabled and constrained by particular cosmologies. And that is what I propose with the concept of cosmotecnics. We have to understand technology beyond functionality and utility.

The Kantian antinomy is methodic in the sense that the antithesis and the thesis, when you look at them separately, are both correct. But when you put them together, there is a contradiction. In order to resolve this contradiction, we are forced to understand technology in a different way. I was trying to explain how I analyze the question of technology in China by reconstructing that country’s history of technological thought. But through the two key philosophical concepts, *ch’i* and *dao*, and the relation

between these two categories, the dynamic of these two categories, how they transform in different moments in history. They constitute a new *épistémè*—again in the sense of Foucault—and briefly the difference between epistemology and *episteme* is that, for me, epistemology is a way of knowing, but *episteme* is the sensible condition under which knowledge is produced, so they are very different. When trying to renew or transform the concept of technology and to trace the history of cosmotechnics systematically, it will allow us to think how to reappropriate modern technology in a different way. I emphasize the word “reappropriate” in a Nietzschean spirit, because Nietzsche said that you have to overcome nihilism through nihilism. And we have to overcome modernity through modernity, but how? I have the hypothesis that by tracing this history of different cosmotechnics it may allow us to reach a new understanding and new strategies to reintegrate and to reappropriate modern technologies in different ways.

Bifurcation of Future

Maybe it will also be possible to renew the concept of history. We can imagine this bifurcation of history, not seeing a convergence towards an apocalyptic moment but a reopening of what today we call “world history.” But this hypothesis has yet to be developed and it demands to be dialectical.

Day 3

Sunday, November 4

Kulturhuset

Ethics of Museums
in an Age
of Mixed Economy

Keynote 4

Jörg Heiser

Prof. Dr., University for the Arts, Berlin, Germany

The curator as scapegoat

In 2017 Swedish director Ruben Östlund's *The Square* won the Palm d'Or in Cannes—a biting satire on the director of a contemporary art museum.

Now, disregarding whether you liked or hated that movie—it seems to split the art world down the middle in this regard—consider the fact that in that same year, 2017, fierce debates engulfed the directors/curators Beatrix Ruf of Stedelijk Amsterdam, Adam Szymczyk at Documenta, and Chris Dercon at Volksbühne Berlin, leading to the dismissal of Ruf and Dercon, and a major institutional crisis at Documenta.

Whatever these three actually or supposedly had done to cause criticism, whether they had actually stepped across boundaries of compliance of ethical and artistic integrity or budgetary responsibility or not, the fierceness and vitriol of these debates was stunning, and it was certainly fueled by the often toxically polarizing dynamics of social media.

Why have curators and museum directors become the target of disdain, even hatred? Do they have a hand in it themselves, even getting what they deserved? Or have they become scapegoats for something? How do we distinguish warranted criticism from defamation? How do we keep open debate and vested interests apart? And what does all of this tell us about where democracies are heading?

I will try to first collect some indications that the profession of the curator—or at least its reputation—seems to be in crisis. In a second step, I will try to look at how the dynamics of the art world in general, and the dynamics of the profession specifically, have contributed to creating that situation. In other words, my aim is *not* to exempt the profession from criticism just because there are also unwarranted, instrumentalizing attempts to undermine the very foundations of art and its institutions.

Curators and museum directors are not always the innocent victims of structural and political conflicts; on the other hand, we cannot allow the blame to be dumped on them, because it's convenient for the political and cultural institutions to then go on without them.

In other words, I do think a scapegoating mechanism is at work, as I will try to exemplify.

So in order to describe some aspects of dynamics within the art world that have created problems I mainly look at three phenomena:

1. The so-called *mega-exhibition* of recent years
2. The instrumentalization of art in and through, mainly, neo-liberal politics.
3. The phenomenon of an *event*-oriented rather than exhibition—or oeuvre—oriented understanding of the art world. As you might have guessed, and as we will see, these three factors are also not isolated from one another.

These factors can obviously not be considered in isolation from larger socio-political antagonisms that are typical for our current societies: money and the way it is unfairly distributed; far right populism and the way it affects the rest of the political spectrum. Fuelled by social media mechanisms, the latter especially has brought to the fore a backlash against progressive ideas that have gained not least a footing in contemporary art, from gender equality to increasing questioning of the Eurocentric Western canon of art history. In the wake of that reactionary backlash, social and cultural identity have become stigmatized, and then weaponized.

After the world financial crisis of 2008, the banker had become the ultimate villain of choice in the popular imaginary; but strangely the banker has faded from view again, despite the ongoing scandals and absurdly dangerous wrongdoings of significant parts of the financial industry. Instead it seems that, at least in the cultural field but maybe even beyond it, the curator is the new villain of choice.

In an article published in 2017 in national German weekly *Die Zeit*, my colleague the art critic Stefan Heidenreich wrote that “curating is undemocratic, authoritarian and corrupt.” Curators, he went on, are “autocratic rulers”. Okay, let's take that with a pinch of salt and trust that he just wanted to point out that sometimes curators do get carried away with

their narcissist leanings and visions of grandeur and importance. But then, seriously, Heidenreich proposed to use Social Media as a platform to let the audiences decide by voting and posting what art should be shown in kunsthallen and museums. Even if not hijacked by bots and trolls, you might imagine what kind of sadly watered-down notion of creating art that would entail, in a place that is anything but democratic, ruled as it is by the algorithms programmed to serve the interests of the big Social Media companies and their advertising clients.

In any case, Heidenreich's polemical piece seemed to try to build momentum on the rather mixed reception of Documenta and the Venice Biennale in 2017, but maybe also on the campaign against Chris Dercon, which had been flaring up now and again since April 2016, when the former director of London's Tate Modern and Munich's Haus der Kunst had first been announced as next head of Berlin's Volksbühne theater.

There were a few soberly reasoned critiques of the somewhat run-of-the-mill, contemporary-art-at-the-theatre program Dercon presented in May 2018, to start his first season. But before the program would even have started in September last year, the outpouring of hatred on social media became increasingly frenzied, while Dercon received threatening letters, he was screamed at in the subway, beer was emptied over his head in the theatre canteen, and a heap of shit was loaded in front of his transitional office on numerous occasions.

It's not entirely clear what made the resentment so fierce. It did not seem to be the case that Dercon had become the focus of some kind of me-too-fueled protest against machismo, which in fact his predecessor at Volksbühne, German Director Frank Castorf, would have indeed deserved, given his track record of not allowing a single female director rise next to him under his 25-year reign, peppered by his dismissive comments about women as directors in general. Strangely though, all the self-confessed leftist admirers of Castorf didn't seem to have a problem with that.

Instead they had a problem with Dercon—the Belgian fluent in English and German—who seemed to be seen as a representative of a blasé cosmopolitan art jet-set, complicit or even identical with the neo-liberal elite, bent to invade and destroy, like gentrifiers in a neighborhood, a stubbornly idiosyncratic local culture. Which it, by the way, already ceased to be around 10 years ago, when everywhere in the vicinity of the Volksbühne in Berlin's Mitte district hipster and flagstip store popped up like mushrooms, including, for that matter, Swedish chains like COS.

Talking about fashion statements, it surely didn't help to alley fears that Dercon has a fondness for brightly colored silk scarves. And yes, some of his remarks sometime smack of the kind of curator—and marketing—speak that makes sensitive souls like myself wince.

But still, the caricature his opponents painted of Dercon was simply unfair; many who have previously worked with him describe him as well informed and patently collegial. And why reserve all the scorn for him? Why was Dercon suddenly the Anti-Christ? Maybe the aforementioned movie *The Square* can give us some hints.

The opening shots introduce us to the central character of Ruben Östlund's *The Square* (2017): Christian, played by Danish actor Claes Bang, is taking a nap on a Scandinavian modernist sofa. An assistant wakes the lanky, handsome, bespectacled, designer-suit-wearing museum director for a TV interview with American journalist Anne (Elisabeth Moss). They sit down in the pristine white cube gallery, in-between a neon work saying "you have nothing" and Wolfgang-Laib-style heaps of dust on the floor.

With feigned naivety, she asks him to explain a gobbledygook quote from a press release on the museum's website, something about "the exhibition as non-exhibition"—by the way a real quote that Östlund came across, released by a Nordic institution. The museum director responds with an awkward pause before wandering off topic, to which Anne responds with further pauses, as both eye each other flirtatiously (they will later have a hilarious argument about whom should be allowed to dispose of a used condom).

In the sequence that follows we see the dismantling of an equestrian statue of King Carl John of Sweden in front of the Royal Palace here in Stockholm, which—after the end of monarchy—has been turned into the contemporary art museum that Christian helms. The crane operator makes a mistake, and the statue falls down, the head ripped off. In the monument's place, a four by four meter square is marked on the cobblestone ground—a participatory art piece called *The Square* that will be at the centre of a media scandal that will cause Christian much more trouble than a bad press release.

So in other words, just five minutes into the film, all the tropes and clichés about contemporary art are in place, and as usual, there is always a kernel of truth contained in the cliché: the slick curator slouching on a designer sofa; the shallow, rip-off art works; the cryptic artspeak; the failure to respond openly and candidly; the gobbledygook curatorspeak using pseudo-intellectual, empty phrases; the non-committal

intimacy; the self-righteous liberal attitude, ignoring the social and economic realities; the brutal doing away with tradition, replaced by empty promise.

Yet Östlund's film is more nuanced than it seems at first, and so is its central character. Christian tries to be a good person, and fails because his position in the system persuades him to behave opportunistically, especially if faced with a dilemma.

The scandal produced by a promotional video for *The Square* puts him in a typical contemporary media deadlock: if he cancels the campaign, he's accused of censorship; if he continues it, he's accused of being morally irresponsible.

We will see this kind of deadlock situation play out now and again, following the social media logic of antagonization and partisan populist stance: the public figure of the museum director confronted with the impossible choice between something you shouldn't do, and something you shouldn't do.

Chris Dercon was put in that spot by Berlin's mayor Michael Müller, and the Cultural Senator Klaus Lederer. The day Dercon got a squatting group of sociology students—who, for weeks, had been occupying Volksbühne in protest to his reign—removed by the police, the scenario painted him as an insecure and insensitive director, willing to use force instead of trying to integrate the criticism and the squatters. But it was arguably a choice he may have been forced to make by his political superiors, as the householder of this public building—something that would, according to his contract and German law, make him *legally responsible* for declaring the occupiers dismissed from the premises and asking them to leave, before the police moved in. One could speculate whether Dercon should have resisted this political pressure, bitten the bullet, and be dismissed on grounds of breaking his contract by not asking the squatters to leave before the police removed them—but that's easy musing for anyone not in that tough spot. But in any case, on that same Thursday in October 2018, the Berlin parliament assembled for the first time after the German general elections, in which the Social Democrats had been defeated. It was going to be the right-wing AfD that would give Müller and Lederer a hard time if the occupation of a public theater was still tolerated—so, instead, the problem was removed that same day, but arguably by the scapegoat. Or rather, producing a scapegoat: Dercon.

It is a scenario that, with only slight adaption, would have fitted into the plot of *The Square*. The film makes achingly clear that museum directors and curators of big public exhibitions have been increasingly enmeshed in a public drama of the smoothly

marketable, popular exhibition, versus the symbolic promise of political criticality or aesthetic transgression.

Hence the problem with curating is not that curators make subjective decisions instead of submitting to their audience's majority opinion, as Stefan Heidenreich seems to suggest in the aforementioned polemical newspaper piece. Rather, it's the other way around: especially with big, major institutions, often there are already too many strings attached to the job, too much politics and marketing and opinion-polling following the attention-grabbing logic governing mainstream and social media. In that logic, curators easily become scapegoats for society's failures to confront its moral dilemmas.

But if we are honest with ourselves, we also need to ask ourselves what kept curators and directors from making the best possible exhibitions and being a little bolder when confronting the dilemmas. It's not like curators haven't, inadvertently or sluggishly, played into being cast as scapegoats.

As I said, there are three phenomena that play a role in this: the so-called mega-exhibition of recent years; the instrumentalization of art in and through neo-liberal politics and economics; and the phenomenon of an *event-oriented* rather than exhibition—or *oeuvre*—oriented style of curating.

So what does “event-oriented” mean? The attention economy of our current media landscape of news and social media platforms needs constant fodder. So you need to create a flow or chain of events that legitimizes your presence on social media channels and makes it interesting enough for people to follow it, which in turn is supposed to create visitor numbers for the institution, visitors who apparently want to become part of the image created.

But what is that image? Is it one of art? If you trust art and its appeal, yes. But if you don't, you're trying to use established signals from other worlds of celebrity and glamour. It is precisely that strategy that Klaus Biesenbach followed at MoMA for about five or six years.

The first pinnacle of media attention thus created was Marina Abramović's 2010 show at MoMA; on Biesenbach's Instagram account, a constant succession of stars turned up, including Lady Gaga, Patti Smith and James Franco.

Then, five years later, in 2015, an exhibition with and about Björk led to a kind of meltdown.

The show was heavily criticized for being a kind of half-baked affair building mainly on the aura of the pop star, exhibiting (not only but significantly) souvenirs from her career. This criticism had a real point, but it also fuelled another, more general, and I'd say reactionary resentment: we want to have our

old MoMA of the modernist classic back, just for us, the New York elite, with few tourists, so please leave us alone with our dead, white art heroes.

What had happened? Why had Biesenbach unleashed this dynamics attention economy? I would say it was an attempt to create power through generating higher visitor numbers, of generating sponsors and patrons, at a point in time when MoMA had to stay financially afloat amidst major real estate investments, building skyscrapers with condominiums, etc., turning the venerable institution at least partly into a de facto real estate investment firm.

In any case, after the Björk meltdown Biesenbach kept quiet for some years. He was basically reshuffled to concentrate on the PS1 branch of the museum, and his Instagram account became much more subdued and serene, with morning cityscapes and beach vistas.

And as you know, he has now headed to MoCA in Los Angeles, inheriting an institution that had just experienced the scandalous dismissal of a curator and a fierce debate over its exhibition politics. I'll briefly return to that too.

But let's first turn to our second point: the way the institution can become mired in the instrumentalization of art in and through neo-liberal politics. By that I mean, in our context, the cutting of public funding for culture and education and the privatization of these sectors, leaving it to private donors and philanthropists to allow museums to do the more ambitious stuff.

Well, compliance—it's such an important issue to address in the art world! Weird that the business world, at least in some parts, was faster at establishing these standards addressing nepotism, conflicts of interest, etc ... But in art, it also has to do with the importance of friendship and previous working relationships in terms of creative processes... but also, as in the Stedelijk case, with structural changes in society.

First, some years ago, you have a museum board that de facto wants a sort of "Americanization" of the system, i.e. a curator with a strong foot in advising collectors and the art market (I remember at the time having a conversation with some Dutch curators about how problematic the conflict of interest between acquiring work for a public collection and being connected to a private collector could be), because effectively it will later allow them to cut public funding. And then less than four years on she's forced to step down for the very same reason for which she was hired.

Of course, the story is more complicated than that. But indeed, in the centre-right government of the Netherlands in 2011 decided to slash the cultural budget by a staggering 25%, in line with the populist resentment against the cultural sector

fostered by far-right-winger Geert Wilders, and the neo-liberal economy's dedication to substantially reduce public spending in favor of tax cuts. In more recent years, a substantial part of those cuts have been taken back or reduced, but nevertheless, in the wake of these shock measures of the early 2010s, it's not surprising that museum boards might have thought it was a good idea to make up for cuts and future cuts in public funding by transforming the museum and following a more Anglo-Saxon model, for a future where private companies and patrons actually make up a substantial—if not the dominant—part of the budget.

In other words, Beatrix Ruf became a pawn in a game much larger than the actual or supposed wrongdoings of her as an individual. In June 2018, two reports became known: one was issued by a team of legal researchers, a 120-page report in which she was basically cleared of the allegations made against her, mainly the allegation that her income from her limited company in Switzerland represented a conflict of interest with her position.

To explain, Ruf had been a well-paid consultant to the Swiss art collector Michael Ringier. While she had gradually severed those ties, she had received a bonus of one million Swiss Francs from Ringier during her tenure at the Stedelijk. She had mentioned the sum to the former head of the board and that it had been "huuuge," and he had said it was fine.

The researchers said they had no reason to doubt Ruf's integrity as the museum's director, but added that "she does not always seem to have understood that her function must be performed not only in accordance with the wording of the governance rules, but also, and above all, in the spirit of the rules."

In an article published in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, a second report was discussed, also in June. The report is by Katja Weitering, former director of the COBRA Museum of Modern Art in Amstelveen, and Felix Rottenberg, chairman of the arts council of Amsterdam, advising on the future of the Stedelijk Museum.

The focus should no longer be on competition with top museums such as Tate and MoMA, they say. In 2003, the council had apparently given influential advice that the Stedelijk should go "Back to the Top," encouraging privatization and attracting private sponsors. Rottenberg and Weitering now state that the museum has suffered from this "tunnel vision." The Stedelijk, they say, should accept that it is impossible to bid against the super-rich that dominate the highest segment of the art market. The museum should primarily buy art from "forgotten, unknown, new, and undervalued artists." In the advisory report, the purchasing policy of the Reina Sofia museum in

Madrid is mentioned as an example. (It could be argued that this is a rather naive approach: as if museums could *only* get by through acquiring the forgotten and unknown, etc.).

In October 2017, when Ruf stepped down, the politician Ferdinand Grapperhaus had been president of the board for only a few weeks, and was soon to be appointed as the new Minister of Justice of the Netherlands. The newly appointed Minister of the Interior, Kajsa Ollongren, had been Alderwoman of Culture of the city of Amsterdam—Beatrix Ruf's direct superior.

They were appointed on the same weekend that articles in the *Dutch Business Newspaper* appeared, and on the Monday morning Beatrix Ruf was pressured into signing a formal letter of resignation, without legal representation.

Let's be clear: I think it's absolutely wrong that everything should be blamed on Ruf; but I also think that there was a problem in terms of possible conflicts of interests. But the underlying issue was that the potential conflicts of interest had not only been well known when Ruf had been hired in 2014, but that these very "conflicts" were one of the very reasons why she was hired. It would have been a good policy to establish clear rules for the museum and the new director that would have clarified the position on both sides, to themselves and to the public. There is a factually given conflict of interest in advising a private collector on acquisitions (and being very handsomely paid for that) while making acquisitions for a public museum. However, Ruf had given up that advisory role for the private collector, but the transition was not clear-cut and was not made fully transparent.

Let's not be hypocritical: as the art critic Adrian Searle once said, without conflict of interest there is no interest. Everyone has potential or actual conflicts of interest (including me), but the question is where to draw the line. The problem is if that very question is disposed of together with the person who is made to leave. One could argue that the two aforementioned politicians who were about to make a big career move into Dutch national government had a much bigger conflict of interest with their role in the Stedelijk Museum than Ruf.

So much for that—we can later maybe discuss this complicated matter further.

But let's move on to my third point: the rise of the mega-exhibition. The jury of eight international museum directors that selected Adam Szymczyk in 2013 as Documenta 14's artistic director arguably chose him over his five competitors because he proposed that the quincentennial should take place in Athens as well as Kassel. In the wake of the Greek

economic crisis, the pitch was bold and promising. Its ambition to expand to another country spoke to the Documenta institution—a limited liability company funded by the city of Kassel and the State of Hesse, as well as the German Federal Cultural Foundation—and its image of itself as the world's leading exhibition of contemporary art. The pitch also warded off any anxieties the institution may have had about becoming provincial and reflected its desire to demonstrate a sense of having confronted Germany's past by reaching out to the world by—absurdly—creating offspring. This was not a new idea: Okwui Enwezor—director of Documenta 11 in 2002—had held collateral events in numerous places including the Caribbean island of St. Lucia and Nigeria's capital Lagos, and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, director of Documenta 13 in 2012, did the same in Kabul, Afghanistan, Cairo, Egypt, and Banff in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

All of these desires and anxieties dramatically culminated in April 2017 in Athens with the opening of Documenta 14. At the press conference, Szymczyk spoke about the show's title "Learning from Athens": "The great lesson is that there are no lessons," he reasoned, and went on to say that "unlearning everything we believe we know is the best beginning." Citing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a reference in his essay for the Documenta 14 reader, Szymczyk made clear that he knows where the notion stems from. However, in her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985), Spivak's concept of "unlearning" isn't a woolly one—it's very specifically about postcolonial intellectuals understanding "their privilege as their loss." The theorist believes that you have to learn to see your privileged position not as an advantage but a hindrance if you want to speak to—rather than about—the people whose marginalization you seek to critique. In Documenta's case, its privileged position allowed a 38-million-Euro German mega art show to descend upon a Greek city in such deep financial crisis that—until the exhibition arrived—it couldn't afford to open its recently built National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST). And, one might add, in the years since, the museum still has not found its proper footing, struggling financially and conceptually after Documenta left town.

In a strange structural mirroring, Documenta—as a German organization—in taking over Athens, or allowing its artistic director to do so, perpetuated at least to some extent the colonizing structures it sought to criticize in its exhibition content. There were brilliant works in Documenta and brilliant curatorial moments too, but even within the exhibition that strange mirroring of colonizing in the very gesture of

decolonization occurred in one centrally placed work.

Adam Szymczyk commissioned British artist Rosalind Nashashibi to do a film portrait of the Swiss painter Vivian Suter and her 95-year-old mother Elisabeth Wild (who both also had work in Documenta). In the intimate, 30-minute portrait, the camera gently observes them in their shared home—a former coffee plantation in Guatemala—as they chat and have meals, while their servants of Mayan descent silently work around them.

At one point, Suter recalls how as a child she was saved from a bee attack by one of the servants, who is still around—the camera focuses on her elderly face. I appreciated the portrait of an artist and her artist daughter, but I was stunned that Nashashibi seemed to take for granted that as a filmmaker she could simply perpetuate the silence traditionally reserved for Indigenous servants serving white masters. To me, that made the TV show *Downton Abbey* look progressive by comparison. To me, this romanticized a kind of “gentle” colonialism.

Would this so easily have been taken for granted by many if Documenta wasn't as big as it was? Would the curators have had more self-reflective discussions maybe with themselves and the artists to avoid these kinds of strange perpetuations of the very things they sought to criticize? I'm not sure, but I would surely say that the supersize-me complex that Documenta had developed didn't help in being precise about these questions.

And these contradictions call into question not necessarily just the individual roles of people, but the entire Documenta institutional complex, which evinces an obsession with having *more* each time since the 2000s: more budget, more visitors, more venues, more artists, more sites around the globe, and—last but not least—more moral authority. 160 contemporary artists from around the globe showing both in Athens and Kassel, plus historic work by about another 100. No less than 47 venues in Athens, plus dozens in Kassel. In this regard, this was the culmination of a process. This said, the previous Documenta of 2012 also had 200 artists, 2,000 events, and venues in the Canadian Rocky Mountains and Kabul.

The reason why this move towards the mega exhibition has ultimately put the artistic directors in a tough spot is because it reflects on the structural issues that have come about in the art world in general. The exhibition constitutively creates the impression that you've just missed something or will miss something, which is a typical element of a capitalist media landscape driven by the currency of attention. Amidst political and economic crises, the fantasy of global reach and surplus is continued.

Or to be precise: a feeling of lack is created with surplus. You think you've seen everything and know everything? I will give you more than you can digest, I will awe you with gigantic measures and grand moral authority.

In all of this, the contemporary art world has become a kind of victim of its success. From small bohemian circles scattered around the globe it has gelled into a relatively big cultural sector, entangled in the expectation it has created, from hundreds of thousands of young people who each year start to study art, to the millions who flock to big biennials and museum shows.

Boris Groys has described the issue of a mass production in contemporary art as resulting not in a society of the spectacle, but as a “spectacle without spectators.” Which in the case of mega-exhibitions is not to say that the shows don't have visitors, but that, as spectators, these visitors will inevitably fail to see all the works in a mega-exhibition, least of all see them intensively enough to fully absorb them. In its calculated attempt to exhaust the visitor—calculated because it's a way to distribute large crowds, and a way to instate global reach and authority—the mega exhibition also exhausts itself.

In the end, this will not only put the curator in a tough spot, but also the institution. Which is what happened in Kassel with Documenta. The exhibition ended with a 7.6-million-Euro deficit. This is actually still quite modest in relative terms—less than 20 percent—and in absolute terms it's really small compared to the money often spent on other projects, say the philharmonic building in Hamburg, which ended up costing roughly ten times as much as initially planned. Nevertheless the far right AfD-party in Kassel immediately pounced on Documenta and filed a lawsuit against Adam Szymczyk and Documenta CEO Annette Kullenkampff for alleged embezzlement of taxpayer's money. It wasn't until last August that Kullenkampff, after her dismissal, was finally legally cleared of all allegations. The whole thing put the Documenta project in a severe crisis, and another example of that crisis is the discussion around artist Olu Oguibe's *Monument to Strangers and Refugees*, an obelisk that had been erected in the middle of a city square—and was removed, following, again, pressure by the far right, on the early morning of Germany's reunification day, October 3, 2018. In the meantime, a compromise has been reached and it will be re-erected in another spot. But the damage is done—the caving in to rightwing populist agitation.

But hubris followed by a fall that attracts the vultures of politics is not the only scenario that can

put curators in a tough spot. Another one is the kind of blame game that is in effect a backlash against achievements that have been made in regard to diversity and gender equality, and generally progressive politics towards immigrants and so forth.

Take, for example, what happened within a few months between late 2017 and early 2018 in regard to four major female curators: in November 2017, Olga Viso was made to step down as director of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, after she had been praised for her even-handed response to protests against the erection of Sam Durant's public sculpture *Scaffold*, which had been criticized by Native Americans and others for alluding to the US government's execution of 38 Dakota men in 1862, in nearby Mankato, Minnesota.

Less than two months later, Laura Raicovich, former executive director of the Queens Museum, resigned on January 26, 2018 after a space of the museum had been rented out, without her consent or even having been informed, for an event featuring Vice-President Mike Pence and members of the Israeli Government restaging the 1947 UN vote that established the Israeli State. On March 6, María Inés Rodríguez was fired from her position as director of the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, and on March 12 Helen Molesworth was fired from her position as chief curator of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

I don't have the time here to go into detail with all these cases, but the acceleration of scandalization is telling. And even the ones who attempt to keep up with the pace will eventually be asked to leave too, which is what happened to Molesworth's superior at the museum, Director Philippe Vergne. That his successor now is Klaus Biesenbach again will put the latter in a not-so-easy position, and we will have to wait and see how he can deal with expectations.

But what is clear here is that, as in the case of the Stedelijk, not only curators have conflicts of interest, but members of the board of trustees too. In the case of MoCA, these are big time collectors such as Eli Broad and Maurice Marciano—who happened to favor the kind of blue-chip work by mid- to late career male white artists who don't form the center of what Helen Molesworth was about, while Vergne maybe programmed a little too much in line with these leanings. Interestingly MoCA, in October 2018, appointed a new chair of the board, Maria Seferian, while Marciano has stepped down from his position as co-chair.

With all this in mind, it's maybe telling to look at yet another development that may indicate a crisis in the respect given to, and trust put in, the curator.

What had been an exception in earlier years—that artists curate major biennial exhibitions—has become much more common in the last couple of years. Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset did the Istanbul Biennial 2017, whereas the year before DIS, an artist group from New York, curated the Berlin Biennial, and the Zurich Manifesta was curated by German artist Christian Jankowski. There are numerous other examples, but the question is whether this is just a short-lived fad of the art world or another indicator of our problem: the crisis of the curator position. As if artists had to come in to revive and re-freshen the job.

But remember, not too long ago the figure of the modern curator had been described as being on the rise—with Harald Szeemann as a kind of uber figure, a larger-than-life personality celebrating the so-called "wild thinking," working with the artist on an equal footing, if not themselves being a kind of meta artist. The point was not anymore to only allow the artist to express themselves and support them, but to conceptualize, to make ideas become curated form.

Curation became a dream profession for a whole generation, as curatorial studies courses sprang up like mushrooms. Plus a whole bunch of stipends and residency programs geared towards curators. Meanwhile the word "curating" became an inflated currency—used for everything from guest-editing a magazine to putting together a wine list.

How could that happen? In Szeemann, five types of curators were actually already encapsulated:

1. The self-understanding as a kind of genius uber-curator, which was echoed in, for example, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's staging of the central rotunda of the Fridericianum as a representation of her own curator brain at Documenta 13.

2. The role of the curator as a kind of restless, tireless seismograph of innovation in the field of art, as Hans-Ulrich Obrist exemplifies with his talk marathons and myriad of artist interviews.

3. The impresario creating a social network in the vein of Klaus Biesenbach.

4. This is in fact the model that I very much guess is the kind we all strive for, at least in fantasy: the intellectual head, like the aforementioned Helen Molesworth, whose thematic ideas and curatorial conceptualizations are the things that you remember, not the social network they created. In Molesworth's case, that was, for example, her exhibition *This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s*, looking afresh at art during the Reagan Era.

5. The fifth prototype is maybe the one Harald Szeemann himself seems to represent, at least at first: the de-facto fundraising, schmoozing manager, who keeps gallerists and collectors happy. But if you

think of his 1999 and 2001 Venice Biennales, he maybe pioneered having major private galleries like Hauser & Wirth pay for big installations by “their” artists—Paul McCarthy, Jason Rhoades, etc.—in a way that became standard in ensuing years.

It is obvious that museum directors or chief curators are often put in a position where they are expected to somehow fulfill all these five roles simultaneously. The artist-as-curator is a kind of symptom of the impossibility of meeting all these expectations, and it is an ironic turn for the many students who paid hefty tuition fees for prestigious postgraduate curatorial courses.

Okwui Enwezor arguably falls mostly into the fourth prototype of curator that I just described, the intellectual head able to conceptualize these ideas into concise thematic group shows. But as you have probably heard, he had to leave Munich’s Haus der Kunst in spring 2018. What exactly happened there? It’s pretty clear that there were staff issues, and the major group exhibition *Postwar* went way over budget. But this doesn’t justify the installment of a commercial director, Bernhard Spies, who has cancelled two major retrospectives, by Joan Jonas in collaboration with Tate, and by Adrian Piper in collaboration with MoMA. Instead, Spies is planning to collaborate on financing a large show of German 1980s painter star Markus Lüpertz with the help of an art manager called Walter Smerling, who previously enlisted with his Bonn-based ‘Verein für Kunst und Kultur’ corporate sponsors to pay for Lüpertz’s sculptures being erected in the former German capital of Bonn and in Salzburg, Austria. What’s irritating about this is not so much the planning of a Lüpertz show per se, but the way it is financed, and how it follows on the heels of shows by pioneering female artists being cancelled—because between 2009 and 2011, in Bonn, the exact same thing happened: in 2008, Spies became commercial director of Bonn’s Bundeskunsthalle, and a Lüpertz show followed a year later, while in 2010–11 major shows by Rosemarie Trockel and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster were cancelled.

Faced with criticism for this development, it seems the Haus der Kunst in general, and Spies specifically, want to continue blaming everything on Enwezor personally, ignoring the fact that—as a successor to Chris Dercon—he managed to make the Haus der Kunst an internationally regarded institution able to collaborate with Tate and MoMA on major exhibitions, and shedding light on work that goes beyond the well-trodden ground of an art canon dominated by Western European and North American white, male artists.

All of which is to say that curator/museum directors have to be very mindful of the possibility of commercial directors factually taking over the programming in moments of crisis. Even more gravely, we have to take that as a sign that progress—whether it’s in regard to the intellectual quality of a program, or its acknowledgements of global art developments, and female artists—can all too easily be rolled back.

To end on a grimly pessimistic note, the rollback can take on catastrophic dimensions if it turns into a kind of erosion of civil standards and basic cultural ethos. Think of Brazil’s National Museum that burned to the ground on September 2, 2018, losing 90% of its irreplaceable archaeological holdings. Run by Rio’s Federal University, the museum was chronically underfunded and fell into disrepair. A national museum had been abandoned by a nation. Brazil’s newly elect president, the openly fascist Jair Bolsonaro, was quick to say that he will make no effort to rebuild the museum, while also announcing he will remove the Cultural Ministry of the country altogether.

We not only need to fight back, but to understand that the achievements of the political struggle towards a truly civil society—in which museums are public institutions not least highlighting the cultural achievements of those who had hitherto been neglected or discriminated—are not won once and for all, but can easily be eroded, and eventually lost. For better or worse, curators will have to weather the scapegoating, and find allies who will help them further, or reestablish, the emancipative role of public institutions.

Perspective 6

Ahmet Ögüt

Artist, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Apparatuses of Subversion

As the 19th Biennale of Sydney, 31st São Paulo Biennial, 10th Sharjah Biennial, 13th İstanbul Biennial, Manifesta 10, and many other cases attest, the existing institutional protocols and structures of large-scale exhibitions can't handle the changing nature of spectatorship, sponsorship, usership, and government involvement in art exhibitions. As artists, curators, social agents, cultural workers, writers, academics, organizers, students, and museum directors, how do we face contradictions? Is simply addressing or criticizing the contradictions enough? What can be done to maintain ethical standards in the art world? How can we learn to deal with moment of crisis caused by extraordinary incidents, economic and political crisis, even in some cases by force of nature?

Trust

Code of Ethics written by the members of The Association of Art Museum Directors in June 1966:

The position of a museum director is one of trust.

Tate Ethics Policy approved by the Board of Trustees on 16 March 2016:

Our ability to maintain a strong relationship of trust with our public is critical to our ability to fulfill our mission.

Code of Conduct of the Rockefeller Foundation, approved on 9 March 2016:

The Code begins from the premise that the Foundation—created to promote the wellbeing of humanity—is a public trust.

Looking at these three examples we would ask why is “trust” the most important keyword for an institution, when many of them react in an authoritarian way with regard to most of the public's concerns? If we give the most importance to “trust,” how are we going to demand a profound transformation of institutions that is truly motivated by a sincere notion of “trust”?

Who is in the position to do this? In order to safeguard the cultural heritage, the production of which institutions contribute to, we must start with the question “who are we?” in order to establish the right kind of trust nexus. Here are a few points I find very urgent to address:

Prioritizing Public Concerns

- Sponsorship is not ownership.
- Board Membership is not ownership.
- Not confusing cultural heritage with personal conflicts.
- Not prioritizing profit, acting as an intermediary between funding and critical politics without ethical compromises.
- Self-critical to institutional elitism.
- Non-hierarchical decision making mechanism.
- Consequences should not be confused with short-term political and financial interference of the source of finances.
- Gender gap and salary gap between genders should not exist in art museum directorships.

Para-sitic Approach

- Para-sitic activity is critical of the institution's elitism and also aims for broad social transformation through the use of the profile of cultural institutions. (J. Graham)
- Dialogic activity: Use of the space of the cultural institution has been instigated through a dialogue between social agents and individuals working in a cultural institution and cultural workers. (J. Graham)

- Problem-posing concept. (P. Freire)
- Reversing loop of circulation of structural contradiction. (H. Steyerl)
- Hiring turnaround strategists to evaluate organizations that are on the brink of failure. (D. Smith)
- Democratic control over the use of surplus. (D. Harvey)
- Subversive positions are fragile and context-dependent. Timing is everything. (E. Degot)
- Pushing and challenging the limits of structural change in a progressive manner.
- Strategies beyond symbolic critical agency (harmless criticism).

Intervenors

To challenge the distributions of power, what is needed is not a marginal outside force—or hired inside force. That is when an intervenor can take a critical role.

In law, an intervenor is the one who intervenes as a non-party in a legal proceeding.

I would propose the idea of the “intervenor” as an autonomous outside voice who nonetheless has the right to act within the institutions. intervenors could not only act within the walls of the institutions, but could also directly intercede

when it comes to matters of communication, events, bureaucracy, administration, and even the workspace itself. Intervenors would have an officially acknowledged agreement that protects their work from financial and political interference. Intervenors would have a right to vet all forms of communication before they go public. This would include announcements, press conferences, events, and statements. Intervenors would act in a time-sensitive manner, and would be flexible in times of crisis; they would not act according to pre-programmed agendas, concepts, exhibition schedules, or locations. Intervenors would be the protagonists who go beyond symbolic and harmless institutionalized critical agency. They would intercede if the institution reacted in an authoritarian or judgmental way to any public concerns.



Image 1: *Bakunin's Barricade* | a barricade inspired by Bakunin's unrealized proposal in 1849 using works from the Van Abbemuseum's Collection: Asger Jörn, *Le monde Perdu*, 1960, Oskar Kokoschka, *Augustusbrücke Dresden*, 1923, Fernand Léger, *Une Chaise, un pot de fleurs, 2 bouteilles*, 1951, Pablo Picasso, *Nature morte à la bougie*, 1945, René Daniëls, *Grammofoon*, 1978, Jan Vercruyssen, *Schöne Sentimenten*, (1986)1988, Marlene Dumas, *The View*, 1992, El Lissitzky, *Proun P23, No. 6*, 1919 | A loan contact, prepared in collaboration with a lawyer, stipulates that the barricade may be requested and deployed during extreme economic, social, political, transformative moments, and social movements. | 2015 | Van Abbemuseum



Image 2: Intern VIP lounge is an exclusive space for all the unpaid interns working at the art fair and at the galleries in Dubai. Only these volunteers, after registering at the Intern VIP Lounge's information desk, will be able to access the lounge—an exclusive space that not only provides a relaxed and entertaining ambience, but also operates as a knowledge exchange space, with a special program of events, including meetings, presentations, and film screenings. Intern VIP Lounge is initiated by Ahmet Ögüt. Commissioned by Art Dubai Projects

Perspective 7

Ann Gallagher

Director of Collections, British Art, Tate, London,
United Kingdom

Museum Ethics—Tate as Case Study

Known for bringing issues of gender and racial inequality into focus, the Guerrilla Girls address the issue of museum ethics in this 1990 work from Tate's Collection. They apply their characteristic humor and bite to a range of potential ethical pitfalls for the contemporary museum, many of which are still remarkably pertinent today, nearly 30 years later.

I would like to begin this lecture on museum ethics in an age of mixed economy with a bit of history and context. Compared to older professions, for example the medical profession with its millennia old Hippocratic oath, ours is a relatively young profession, and museums showing contemporary art are relatively young institutions whose ethical parameters have been established only gradually, with changing circumstances requiring regular reassessment.

The origin of Tate's group of galleries lies in this London building, which opened in 1897 as the National Gallery of British Art, an annex of its parent institution, the National Gallery of Art. Unlike the Louvre in France for example, no British royal palace had been vacant to house national collections, and to this day the Royal Collection remains the property of the Sovereign, so fine art museums had to be built from scratch, using existing private collections as a basis of their holdings.

While both the National Gallery's building in Trafalgar Square and its founding collection of old masters—purchased from the banker Lord Angerstein—were paid for by the UK government, the initial funding to build the Tate Gallery was provided by the man who also donated the founding contemporary art collection. Henry Tate, a grocery turned sugar refiner and philanthropist, was not offered nor wanted “naming rights” for the building—on the contrary he wanted it called the National Gallery of British art—but press and public from the outset referred to the building as the Tate Gallery. For decades there was some confusion over whether it was a gallery for contemporary art or for the history of British art,

since it grew in both directions, and in 1932 it was finally renamed what everyone called it anyway, in part because it had by then been collecting and exhibiting international art alongside British, so the name no longer made sense. The Tate Gallery did not receive full independence from its parent the National Gallery until 1955, and while always a National institution its governance was not defined in detail until decades later.

Today the legal entity “The Tate Gallery” holds a single collection of British art from 1500 to the present, and modern and contemporary international art, displayed at 4 galleries—Tate Britain, the original building once again renamed in 2000, Tate Liverpool, which opened in 1988, followed by Tate St Ives in 1993 and Tate Modern in 2000. The collection is also loaned extensively, both nationally and internationally.

With the exception of Tate Liverpool, each of Tate's gallery buildings has expanded over time, the most recent being St Ives. The funding for these expansions has been provided mostly by individuals and foundations, supplementing often very limited government support. In 1937, the art dealer Joseph Duveen paid for the first purpose-built sculpture galleries, which retain his name. The major funder of the 1987 wing to rehouse the Turner bequest was the Clore Foundation. And the recently opened new wing of Tate Modern was named after its main funder.

The founding collection of 65 contemporary British works of art donated by Henry Tate was gradually expanded through further donations, and by transfers from the National Gallery, including the Turner bequest, which had been donated to the Nation in 1856, but had been dispersed until it finally found its home at Tate. This was the first and the largest bequest by an artist, and many more gifts and bequests have followed, including significant bodies of work by Henry Moore, Mark Rothko, and others through to the twenty-first century. The first purchase



Image 1: Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool, Tate Modern, and Tate St Ives. British Art from 1500 to the present and modern and contemporary international art



Image 2: Duveen Galleries, 1937

grant for the collection was established in 1946, but donations of major groups of work have continued to shape the collection's development.

A group of 65 works gifted by the collector Janet Wolffson de Botton in 1996 is the first major donation in which female artists have a strong presence. All major important donations made throughout the twentieth century contain works of art that are overwhelmingly by male, white, European or North American artists. This has been a challenge to redress in recent decades, when the urge has been to improve the gender balance and to diversify the collection in terms of ethnic or geographic breadth. Tate's acquisitions budget currently stands at 700,000 pounds sterling (it reached a peak of two million in 1984, and has been reducing ever since).



Image 3: Clore Gallery, 1987



Image 4: Blavatnik Building, 2017



Image 5: Joseph Mallord William Turner 1775–1851, *Breakers on a Flat Beach*, c.1835–40. Oil paint on canvas



Image 8: Janet Wolfson de Botton Collection, 1996. Cindy Sherman, born 1954. *Untitled Film Still #17*, 1978, reprinted 1998. Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. Image: 745×950 mm. Frame: 970×1157×32 mm



Image 6: Janet Wolfson de Botton Collection, 1996. Roni Horn, born 1955. *Thicket No. 1*, 1989–90, Aluminum and plastic object: 51×1623×1222 mm, 250kg



Image 7: Janet Wolfson de Botton Collection, 1996. Avis Newman, born 1946. *The Wing of the Wind of Madness*, 1982. Acrylic paint, metallic paint, cotton gauze, muslin, and paper on canvas. 2730×3690 mm



Image 9: Janet Wolfson de Botton Collection, 1996. Nancy Spero, 1926–2009. *Lovers*, 1962. Oil paint on canvas. 1635×2040 mm

Fundraising for and donations to the collection are therefore an ever-greater necessity. So throughout its history, Tate's buildings and collections have relied on a very mixed economy. However, until more recent times the government had largely provided the costs of running the museum. Tate first accepted commercial sponsorship shortly before Margaret Thatcher's election as Prime Minister, which led to a government devoted to the creation of "enterprise culture."

Government funding of running costs have reduced in real terms to represent around one third of today's budget, excluding funds for buildings and collection. A welcome increase in the government grant to represent the expansion of Tate Modern has already begun to reduce again, and the indications are that it will reduce further year on year.

The exhibition program heavily influences self-generated income, in terms of admission charges (the collection is shown free), the sponsorship it attracts, and the knock-on effect for retail and cafes, prompting peaks and troughs. Gallery hire is a useful income stream, especially when it does not interfere with the business of displaying art. The most sustainable form of income, and one that considerable attention has been devoted to building in recent years, is the Members Scheme, well known in Europe through the Kunstverein model. However this was a scheme originally founded to help support acquisitions, gradually expanded to also support exhibitions,



Image 10: Tate Operating Income

and there is a very clear feel-good factor for Members in seeing an acknowledgement of their support on labels or credit boards. It is, of course, a far less attractive proposition to have funds directed towards core costs.

To navigate this expansion of the need to generate income from a number of sources for every area of the museum’s activity, we need ever-greater clarity about our objectives, and our methods of regulating ethical behavior. In this, international and national consensus provides an incredibly useful tool with which to ensure a sector-based ethical framework, but new challenges constantly arise and key to addressing them is to admit to and learn from our mistakes, and to ensure the greatest transparency leaves no room for suspicion or confusion.

As members of CiMAM, we agree to uphold the ICOM Code of Ethics, a document outlining agreed responsibilities towards our institutions, those who work in them, our collections and buildings, our publics and local communities. It also outlines standards of Professional Conduct and defines Conflicts of Interest. As the ICOM document states, this code is designed to supplement minimum



Image 11: 1992 Galleries Act

standards defined by law, or nationally agreed standards, for individual museums.

Tate’s function as a museum is defined according to UK law, the 1992 Galleries Act, which established the mission of national fine art museums and their “arms length” status from government, run by a Board of Trustees (trustees and director are appointed after the approval of government). They are also listed charities with “exempt status,” in that their legal status is defined first and foremost by the Galleries Act.



Image 12 and 13: The 7 principals of public life



Images 14 and 15: Tate Britain with BP banner

As well as adhering to the ICOM code, Tate also adheres to that of the UK Museums Association's Code of Ethics, which espouses three essential principles: Public Engagement and Public Benefit, Stewardship of Collections, and Individual and Institutional Integrity. As a national institution founded on the premise of public service, Tate's own Ethics Policy incorporates the UK government's Seven Principles of Public Life. This is supplemented by policies on Acquisitions and Disposals, Donations, Due Diligence, etc., a Code of Conduct, and the Bizot Group's recommendations on Loans and Sustainability. These codes, policies, and guidelines need constantly to be reviewed and updated and new policies added to address subjects unimagined a decade ago, such as the use of social media. The ground for making judgments is constantly shifting, as our roles as global citizens alter and as new pressures face the museum sector.

Here are a few examples.

1. For 27 years, Tate received sponsorship from the oil company BP, in recent years to support the free collection displays at Tate Britain. BP sponsor a number of national institutions in the UK. In recent years, this has attracted sustained and mounting protests. Two years ago, faced with a major downturn in its business, BP felt that it was not in a position to renew the sponsorship to Tate. Curiously, perhaps because contemporary art is more newsworthy than historic art, Tate seems to attract greater attention than any other of the national galleries, and greater wrath if it is seen to err. Tate's Ethics Committee continues to discuss every case of sponsorship where the source could have any cause for concern, and only if approved does sponsorship go ahead.

2. As the economic situation for museums and galleries becomes ever more pressured, the art world that surrounds us has enjoyed unprecedented riches. This is particularly evident in the contrast in salaries between those museum workers who choose an impoverished life in the public sector and their peers who, in crossing the divide into the commercial sector, at least double or triple their income. As the Guerrilla Girls jokingly warned us, paying curators badly at best encourages insider trading, at worst limits the employment pool to those with private incomes. It is evident also in the contrast between artists who are represented by supersized or established galleries or dealers and those of whatever age or critical reputation who are represented by more modest galleries, or are unrepresented. Museums and galleries cannot allow their exhibiting or acquisition choices to be dictated by which artist brings with them potential financial support. Therefore, we have to guard against a financial requirement that would seem to be pushing us in this direction. We need to interrogate our decisions ever more closely. For Tate, exhibitions support from an artist's gallery are permitted only as part of a wider supporters group, and credit needs to be made in the wall label. Exhibitions, or indeed catalogues, supported by artists' galleries cannot be more lavish than those for other artists in the program. With the exception of one-person exhibitions, auction houses are permitted to support strands of the museum's activity, but without consultation on content. Many lessons have been learned over years in the establishment of such protocols.

3. This image shows *The Upper Room* by Chris Ofili displayed at Tate Britain in 2015. In my first week working at Tate, my first diary appointment was to address the press at its unveiling and talk about the work. I cannot remember particularly difficult questions, it seemed generally to have been

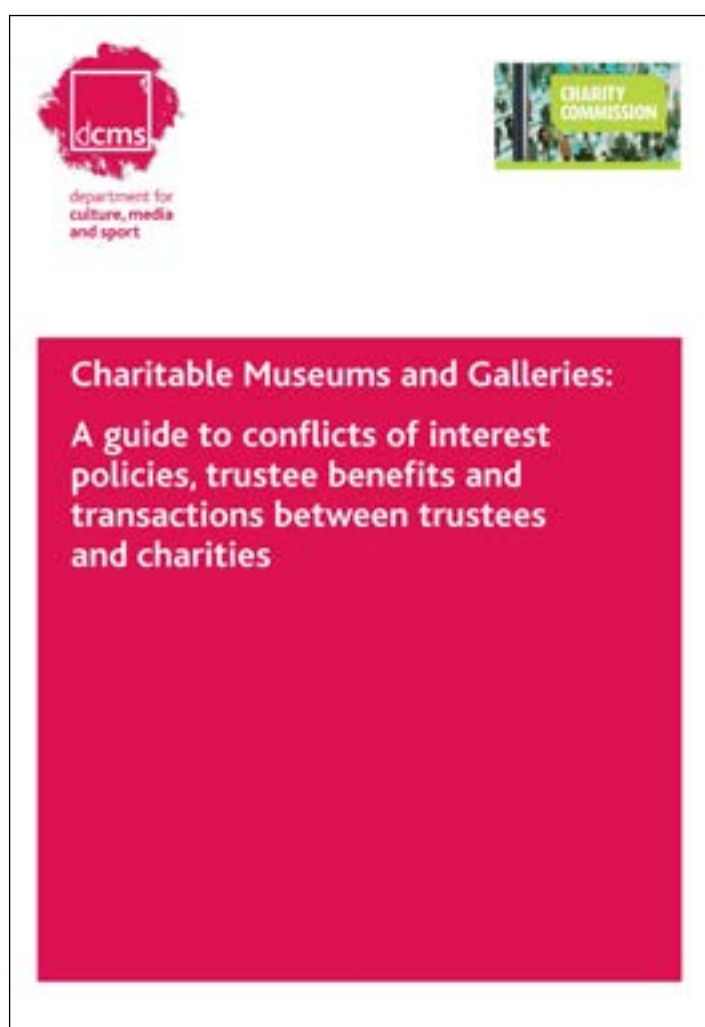
Image 18: Chris Ofili, *The Upper Room*

Image 19: DCMS/Charity Commission Guidelines

applauded as a new acquisition, but in the coming months this work of art became the subject of furious public and press debate. From well back into the twentieth century, Tate had regularly acquired works of art from its serving artist trustees, and only in the late 1980s did policy change to state that this should only happen in exceptional circumstances, if the benefit to the museum was so great as to make it

necessary. Ofili served as an artist trustee from 2001 to 2005, and according to protocol absented himself from the many discussions trustees conducted around the acquisition of his work. It was eventually agreed that the importance of the work justified the acquisition, and funds were raised for the greater proportion of it. As a result of Freedom of Information requests from an artist group who had long expressed opposition to Tate's contemporary art choices, it emerged that Tate had behaved incorrectly in not consulting the Charity Commission for permission to acquire and had in fact broken Charity Law. It further emerged that national galleries, exempt charities answerable to the Secretary of Culture, were on the whole unclear what "exempt" meant in relation to Charity Law. The National Portrait Gallery made public that it had also recently commissioned an artist trustee to create an artwork to be acquired by the gallery. It was a mistake that cost Tate dearly in terms of reputation, although it was ruled that the work should be retained in the collection. However, the repercussions have been immensely useful.

To clarify the situation for national museums on this subject, in 2008 the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport and the Charity Commission issued a joint guidance document. The Charity Commission is now consulted on any potential conflict concerning a serving trustee.

The Charity Commission had also criticized Tate's existing policies in terms of governance and ethics, and all were tightened and updated; the ethics committee strengthened by membership beyond trustees; and the purchase price of every artwork has since been published in the Annual Report in the spirit of establishing greater transparency. We learned from our mistake.

4. Transparency concerning the possibility of conflict of interest amongst trustees, directors, and decision-making senior staff has become ever more urgent, with intense scrutiny by the press. Directors' salaries over a certain level are published by law already, but details of additional earnings, hospitality, gifts, etc. are requested, through the Freedom of Information Act, on a regular basis. Declarations are now made annually by all trustees and senior staff, and permission needs to be sought for any outside employment, which inevitably excludes anything that has a commercial link, and for the acceptance of artworks. Holding on record such declarations ensures the protection of the individual by the institution. But there are many grey areas that need individual attention, so dealing with real, potential, or perceived Conflicts of Interest has become a major focus, as we seek to preserve our

integrity and abide by our own code of ethics. The latest guidance that has been complied is on the use of social media, to ensure a distinction between public and private posting for senior staff, even inadvertently showing commercial or political bias, as public servants.

This is a vast and complex subject and I am aware I have been able merely to skim the surface of the subject. However, most of the policies to which I have referred are publicly available online should you wish to consult them.

Perspective 8

Mami Kataoka

Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

How Corporate Funded Museums Could Contribute and Engage with the Larger Public

1.

A staggeringly diverse range of concerns are tied to the question of the ethics of museums, from politics and ideology to human rights issues, the relationship to their finances, and the behavior of those who work in them. The fact that I am introducing the example of the Mori Art Museum today, as I understand it, is linked to the question of how this art institution, which is run as a department of a corporation, but not as a profit-making department, can make wide-ranging artistic contributions to society and the general public. Then, what are museums being run for? What sort of sustainable fiscal framework would allow us to maintain the quality of our programs?

From a human rights perspective, one example of the ethics of the source of income can be found in the 2014 Biennale of Sydney. At the time, international criticism had been mounting over offshore detention centers for refugees to Australia on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and the Republic of Nauru. Transfield Holdings, run by the Belgiorno-Nettis family, who founded the Biennale in 1973, held a 11.3% stake in Transfield Services, a company that the government had entrusted to run these detention centers. Nine of the invited artists for the 2014 Biennale criticized the relationship between the Biennale and the government's refugee policy, announcing that they were boycotting the event, and two of them eventually withdrew their participation. As a result, Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, then the chairman of the Biennale Board, stepped down from his position, thereby ending the Biennale's relationship with the founding family, who had been the main sponsor of the event for the 41 years since it was established.

While this incident prompted museums and biennales to become more aware of the origins of their sources of income, the same was true for artists as well. In Australia, during the NGV Triennial held at the National Gallery of Victoria in December 2017, Candice Breitz and two other artists, Richard Mosse and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, lodged a protest with the gallery against the fact that Wilson Security, the company that was in charge of security for the Triennial, had also been entrusted with the security of the offshore detention centers. Breitz changed the title of her exhibiting work to *Wilson Must Go*. Although a protest by Melbourne's artist community had already taken place, Breitz's involvement turned the incident into international news. In February 2018, the NGV terminated their contract with Wilson Security.



Image 1: Archive Display. Installation view of the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Presentation made possible with generous support from Transfield Holdings. Photograph: Document Photography

Breitz posted the following message on Facebook on March 1.

Museums that proclaim progressive values must ensure that those values are reflected in the public and corporate partnerships that they espouse. We—as artists and citizens—can and must call them out when they fail to do so.

2.

Before I turn my attention to the Mori Art Museum, I would like to touch briefly on the history of the development of museums in Japan, and the history of private museums in particular.

If one looks at the history of how art museums developed in Japan, the presence and influence of private museums looms large in parallel with other important public museums. The number of privately-run art museums in China, Southeast and South Asia, and elsewhere around the world has increased in recent years. Their not-for-profit nature, the guaranteeing of their public interest, their sustainable operation, and their financial resources are all important questions that ought to be discussed and shared in greater depth. Underlying this phenomenon is the economic development of the country, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the theme of nation building, and an awareness of what constitutes an ideal society. The actual problem of the relationship between the nature of the activities of these museums and the income and expenditure associated with running them, however, is rather complicated, which I could say from my own experiences.

The very concept of museums and exhibitions in Japan was imported at the start of its modernization some 150 years ago. The dream of a national museum of modern art proved elusive, however, and the first art museum was the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Gallery, a public museum that opened in 1926. The entire construction cost came from a donation of one million yen (equivalent to about 25 million Euros today) from Sato Keitaro, a coal magnate from Kitakyushu in the south of Japan. According to Sato, he used half of his entire fortune for the benefit of society, in emulation of Andrew Carnegie.¹

Four years later, in 1930, the Ohara Museum of Art in Kurashiki was opened by Ohara Magosaburo, an entrepreneur who made his fortune in cotton spinning and other industries, as the first private art museum in Japan to focus on Western art. Ohara's friend, the painter Kojima Torajiro, had been commissioned to purchase works in Europe, and sometimes bought directly from artists like Monet and Renoir. This was an era in which new industries aimed at modernizing Japan were being promoted by government policy, which resulted in the rapid growth of the spinning, mining, and steel industries.²

With the end of the Second World War, Japan headed once again in the direction of internationalism and modernization during the 1950s, which was reflected in the environment for the arts. In January 1952, the Bridgestone Gallery opened inside the central Tokyo headquarters of the Bridgestone Group, now the world's largest tire manufacturing company. Although the museum focused on exhibiting the collection of the founder Shojiro Ishibashi, it also introduced audiences to the latest artistic movements, such as Art Informel.³ In December that same year, the first national museum of modern art finally opened its doors. This was also the year that saw Japan's first official participation in the Venice Biennale. In 1956, the Japanese Pavilion was constructed in the Giardini, the funds for which came from a donation by Shojiro Ishibashi, who also subsequently donated the entirety of the construction costs involved when the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, moved to its current location with a new building in 1969.

The Seibu Museum of Art/Sezon Museum of Art was active from 1975 up until 1999. Their diverse program ranged from solo exhibitions by major twentieth-century artists like Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Jasper Johns, and Anselm Kiefer, to design and architecture. Although the museum closed as part of the reconsolidation of the businesses operated by Seibu Department Stores, Ltd., the parent company that ran the museum, its 25-year run left behind an indelible impact on the history of art museums in Japan. The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 1979, and during the 1980s, this museum showcased the cutting edge of Japanese contemporary art through its "Hara Annual" series, while also introducing audiences to American and European artists.⁴ In 1992, Benesse Holdings, Inc. opened the

1 <https://www.tobikan.jp/en/outline/history.html>

2 <http://www.ohara.or.jp/en/about/>

3 <http://www.bridgestone-museum.gr.jp/en/about/history/>

4 They have announced that they will close the museum at the end of December 2020.

http://www.haramuseum.or.jp/en/hara/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/11/Notification_En_20181122.pdf



Image 2: View of Roppongi Hills. Mori Art Museum is located on the 53rd floor of this Mori Tower



Image 3: Mori Real Estate. Founded in 1955 in Shinbashi, Tokyo

Naoshima Contemporary Museum. Today, the Fukutake Foundation, which seeks to promote the culture of the entire Setouchi region with Naoshima Island and other islands, runs and administers the museum.

3.

The Mori Art Museum, which opened in 2003, comes from such a lineage of privately or corporate-run art museums in Japan. Although those museums are underwritten by a diverse range of objectives that include philanthropy, corporate public relations, and the promotion of local regions, rather than just the



Image 4: ARK Hills, one of the first Mori Buildings' urban development projects, which embodied its concept "Vertical Garden City" including "close proximity to work", "symbiosis between cities and nature," and "cultural dissemination." It is the origin of the corporation's commitment to culture and art

showcase of the collection of the corporation's founder, the inspiration behind the Mori Art Museum can also be gleaned from the following comment by the late Minoru Mori, former chairman of Mori Building Co., Ltd.

A company exists for the sake of society. The raison d'être of Mori Building is to make a contribution to society by thinking about how to create and nurture better neighborhoods and cities.

The mixed-use development Roppongi Hills opened in 2003 as a "creation of the cultural heart of the city"—the antithesis to a brand of urban planning focused on corporate interests. Minoru Mori believed that "cities are living things that grow by absorbing the spirit of their age." Alongside urban redevelopment and real estate leasing and management, the running and administration of cultural facilities and town management have also grown as key businesses of this developer.

Minoru Mori's involvement in the running of the company began in 1955 while he was still a student, when his father Taikichiro Mori founded Mori Real Estate. In 1959, Taikichiro founded Mori Building, which began by leasing out buildings during Japan's postwar period of reconstruction.

Mori Building then started embarking on redevelopment through mixed-use projects with the opening in 1986 of Ark Hills, which encompassed office buildings, a hotel, and the Suntory Hall concert hall.

Roppongi Hills opened 17 years after that, with the Mori Art Museum as a conceptual "magnetic field" of this "cultural heart of the city."

The upper floors (49th–53rd) of the Mori Tower are known as the "Mori Arts Center," which brings together a number of cultural facilities. Occupying the

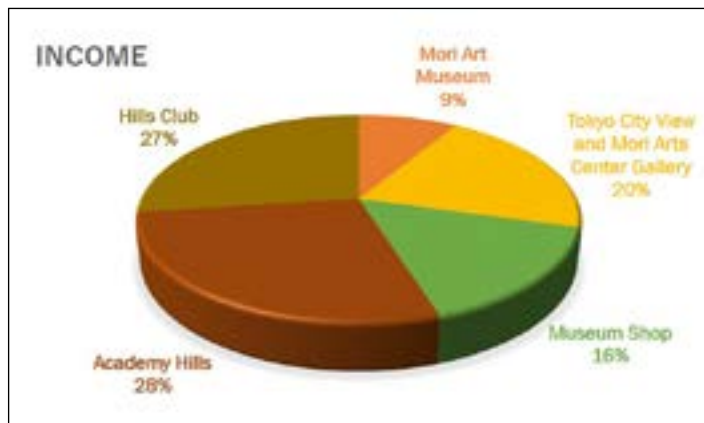


Image 5: Mori Arts Center Income and Expenditure [2018]

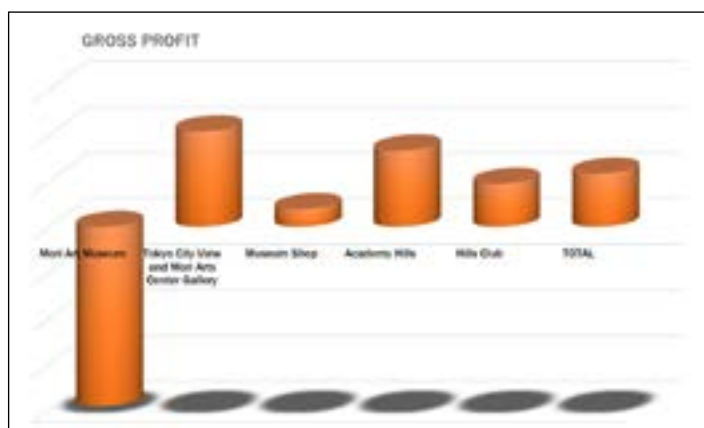


Image 6: Mori Arts Center Balance [2018]

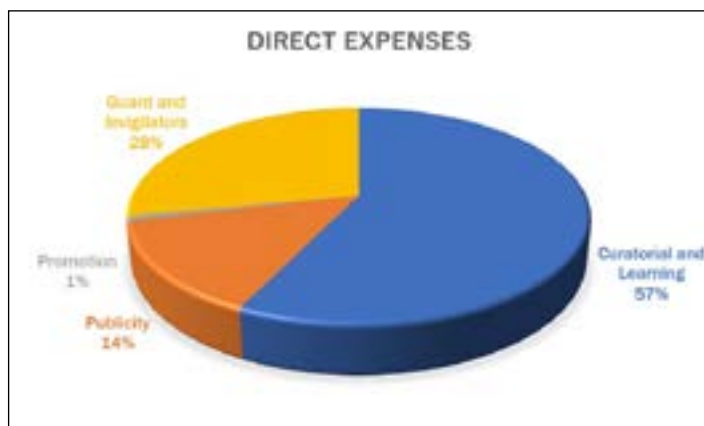


Image 7: Mori Art Museum Balance [2018]

53rd floor with around 1,800 square meters of exhibition space is the Mori Art Museum. The 52nd floor houses the Mori Arts Center Gallery, which hosts a wide range of exhibitions connected with popular culture, or which showcase the collections of famous museums from abroad, as well as the “Tokyo City View” observation deck. All of these are supported by both admission and rental income. On the 51st floor is the members-only “Roppongi Hills Club,” while the 49th floor is the Academy Hills Roppongi Forum, a venue-for-rent often used for conferences, and the members-only Roppongi Hills Library.

The scale of the businesses undertaken by Mori Building includes an annual operating revenue of 250 billion yen (1.9 billion Euros), and an annual operating profit of 60 billion yen (470 million Euros / 63.1 billion yen as of March 2018). Out of this, the amount that is appropriated to finance the expenses of the Mori Arts Center runs to about 10 billion yen (78 million Euros) per year, the breakdown of which is shown in the following graph.

There are reasons for establishing the Mori Art Museum as a department of the corporation, rather than an independent foundation. In Japan, incorporated foundations can be divided into general incorporated foundations and public interest foundations. Public interest foundations must fulfill 18 different criteria, including having more than 50% of their business based on non-profit activities, and their businesses are exempt from taxation, whereas profits made by profit-making businesses are taxed at 25.5%. By contrast, if such a public interest business is run as part of a corporation, recording a loss allows the company to write off part of the profit that would otherwise be subject to a corporate tax of around 30%, and this portion is deemed to have been appropriated to make a cultural contribution to society in the case of the Mori Art Museum. It is more realistic to run the museum as a department of the corporation to ensure its financial stability and viability, while also maintaining the quality of the museum’s programming.

However, the sustainability of the museum demands that we reduce the loss that it incurs. Its two main sources of revenue are admission income, and sponsorship income from corporations or individuals. The number of visitors varies widely according to the content of the exhibition. We all know that the sole pursuit of visitor numbers entails the possibility that the museum may not be able to adequately bear its responsibility for a certain criticality and scholarly research. The results pertaining to sponsorship also display a wide variance depending on the nature of the individual exhibition. We are currently reaching a certain limit as far as the traditional model of corporate sponsorship is concerned, where the company name is displayed and a venue is provided for corporate functions.

In addition to corporate sponsorship, there seems to be some future potential in developing sources of individual support that are more personalized. One example of this is the crowdfunding that was carried out for the Aida Makoto exhibition in 2012.⁵ Aida is known for his treatment of political issues and sexual innuendo, and we were not hopeful



Image 8: Nawa Kohei *Ether, White Deer*, 2016 ©Roppongi Art Night Executive Committee 2016



Image 9: Community Engagement Program "Roppongi Hills 15th Anniversary Installation," Roppongi Hills, 2018

of obtaining any corporate sponsors. On the other hand, he had amassed a wide swathe of support from individuals. For this project, the level of one's support was limited to two options: a contribution of US\$5,000 that came with a sculpture in an edition of 50, and US\$150 that came with a high-resolution print, limited to 1,500 copies. The result produced around US\$300,000, in addition to fostering an awareness of a new kind of public participation for new commissions.⁶

Minoru Mori once said that "the economy is the patron of culture, and culture is the barometer that measures the magnetism and appeal of a city." For Mori, the business of urban planning and creating cities is not just about building skyscrapers and developing neighborhoods: it is also a matter of fostering and growing new, lively communities within the city. In my opinion, having this motivation that underwrites the running of an art museum is a quite unique model. In this context, the very concept of a contemporary art museum is not limited to the physical building or space that houses it: what is more vital is how it expands into the city.

How can we maintain a sense of our public while ensuring a healthy revenue stream, without losing sight of our essential nature as contemporary art museums, and still manage to pursue a dialogue with a wide audience? I look forward to participating in this discussion over the ethics of museums.

6 <https://www.mori.art.museum/english/contents/aidamakoto/sanka/index.html>

Speakers' Biographies

Daniel Birnbaum is the Director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm. In 1998, he became Director of IASPIS, Sweden's International Artists Studio Program. From 2000 to 2010 he was the Rector of Städelschule in Frankfurt and Director of its kunsthalle Portikus. He is a contributing editor of *Artforum* in New York and has curated several large exhibitions, including *Airs de Paris* at Centre Pompidou, Paris (in co-operation with Christine Macel) in 2007. Birnbaum was the co-curator of the 50th Venice Biennale (2003) as well as the director of the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009). He is the author of numerous books on art and philosophy and is the co-editor (with Isabelle Graw) of the *Institut für Kunstkritik* series published by Sternberg Press. He has been the Director of Moderna Museet since 2010.

Ann-Sofi Noring has been with Moderna Museet since 2001 as Chief Curator and was appointed Co-Director of the museum in 2010. She has curated many exhibitions and worked with artists including Ed Ruscha, Karin Mamma Andersson, Andrea Zittel, and Gabriel Orozco. In the 1980s she was responsible for exhibitions and acquisitions in Solna outside Stockholm where she was instrumental in turning the city gallery into a place for contemporary art. Thereafter she was curator at Swedish Traveling Exhibitions before joining the Public Art Agency of Sweden as Head of Information in the 1990s. There she was editor of publications and in charge of exhibitions and seminars aimed at bringing art into public spaces. She has been a board member of CIMAM since 2016.

Victoria Noorthoorn is the Director of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires where she has led a process of expansion and renovation of this historical institution founded in 1956, that today holds a collection of 7,000 works with a strong focus on Argentine art. In the past, she was Projects Coordinator of the International Program at MoMA; Assistant Curator of Contemporary Exhibitions at The Drawing Center; and Curator at Malba-Fundación Costantini in Buenos Aires. As an independent curator between 2004 and 2012, she curated the Biennales of Pontevedra (2006), Mercosul (2009) and Lyon (2011), among many other exhibitions. In 2011, she was nominated finalist for The Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Excellence. In 2014, she was selected to attend the

Global Museum Leaders Colloquium organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Today, she is celebrating the reopening of the new wing of the Moderno with the exhibition *A Tale of Two Worlds: Experimental Latin American Art in Dialogue with the MMK Collection, 1940s–1980s*, which includes 500 works by 100 artists from Latin America, Europe, and the United States, organized in collaboration with the MMK in Frankfurt.

Katya García-Antón is Director/Chief Curator of the Office of Contemporary Art Norway since 2014. She graduated as a biologist conducting field research in ecology and behavior in the Amazon and Sierra Leone, and transitioned into the arts with an MA in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art history from The Courtauld Institute of Arts, London. Thereafter she worked at The Courtauld Institute of Art, BBC World Service (Latin American Broadcasts), Museo Nacional Reina Sofía, Madrid; ICA, London; IKON, Birmingham, and as Director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain (CAC), Geneva. She is responsible for more than seventy exhibitions of art, architecture, and design by practitioners worldwide. She was the lead curator of the Nordic Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennial; curated the Spanish Pavilions at São Paulo Biennial 2004 and Venice Biennial 2011; as well as co-curated the Prague Biennial 2005, and the flagship exhibition *Gestures in Time*, Qalandiya International Biennial 2012. In 2015 she launched Critical Writing Ensembles, an ongoing platform stimulating research and publishing of art histories beyond the Western canon (so far, including South Asia and Indigenous worldviews). She devised *Thinking at the Edge of the World. Perspectives from the North* in 2015 as an ongoing program of knowledge-building (symposium and exhibitions) addressing the histories of the North—including Arctic and environmental questions. The program facilitates the empowerment of Sámi artistic practices and histories; catalyzing processes and projects aimed at dismantling colonial pasts and presents. Future programming will consider questions of ethics, social justice and the environment.

Loulou Cherinet is an artist and professor of Fine Art at Konstfack University of Arts, Craft, and Design, Stockholm. She studied at the Addis Ababa University School of Fine Art and Design in the 1990s and has

since then been based alternately in Stockholm and Addis Ababa. In Cherinet's work, film and installation are tools for explorations within social science, philosophy, and fiction. Her work engages storytelling and spatial montage to think through abstract concepts such as "citizenship," "the state," "public and private," "knowledge," and "development," and how these notions entail a universal vision of the human. Emerging from the cities she lives in, her critical practice traces history and politics as a lived sense of place. Her films often bring gestures of "thinking from nowhere" and particular ways of being in the world into an humorous and productive tension.

Recent commissioned work includes *Touchstone* for the exhibition *Territories* at Havremagasinet, *Statecraft* for the exhibition *Who Learns My Lesson Complete?* at Moderna Museet, *Axis* for the Biennial of Moving Images and *House of Words* with Elvira Dyangani and *Recetas Urbanas* for GIBCA and Public Art Agency Sweden. She has participated in traveling survey shows such as *Africa Remix* and *Divine Comedy* curated by Simon Njami and *Nexus* curated by Konjit Seyoum, as well as numerous international group shows such as Momentum 9, Manifesta 8, and biennials in Dakar, Bamako, Venice, São Paulo, Gothenburg, Geneva, and Sidney.

Michelle Kuo is the Marlene Hess Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art. She was the Editor-in-Chief of *Artforum International* from 2010–17, and is a widely published scholar and lecturer. Kuo is currently working on a book on the postwar organization Experiments in Art and Technology, which was the subject of her doctoral dissertation at Harvard University.

Lars Bang Larsen is an Adjunct Curator of International Art at Moderna Museet and Guest Professor at the Royal Art Academy, both in Stockholm. He was a co-curator of exhibitions such as the 2016 São Paulo Bienal, *Íncerteza Viva; Georgiana Houghton: Spirit Drawings* (Courtauld Gallery, 2016); and *Reflections from Damaged Life* (Raven Row, 2013). Among other titles, he is the author of *The Model. A Model For a Qualitative Society 1968* (MACBA, 2010); *Networks* (Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2014); and *Arte y Norma* (Cruce Casa, 2016).

Ho Tzu Nyen makes videos, installations and theatrical performances, often with historical and philosophical texts and artifacts as a starting point. He currently lives and works in Singapore. His work has been

presented at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin, 2017); Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (Bilbao, 2015); DAAD Gallery (Berlin, 2015); Guggenheim Museum (New York, 2013); Mori Art Museum (Tokyo, 2012); the 54th Venice Biennale (Venice, 2011); Artspace (Sydney, 2011); the 6th Asia-Pacific Triennial (Brisbane, 2009); the 1st Singapore Biennale (2006); and the 26th Sao Paulo Biennale (2004). His films have premiered at the Cannes Film Festival (2009) and the 66th Venice International Film Festival (2009). His theatrical works have been presented at the Asian Arts Theatre, Gwangju (2015); Wiener Festwochen (2014); Theater der Welt (2010); the KunstenFestivaldesArts (2006, 2008, 2018); the Singapore Arts Festival (2006, 2008).

Yuk Hui teaches philosophy at the Leuphana University in Germany and China Academy of Art, he is author of *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), *The Question Concerning Technology in China. An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Urbanomic, 2016), and forthcoming *Recursivity and Contingency* (March 2019).

Jörg Heiser is the Director of the Institute for Art in Context at the University for the Arts in Berlin, Germany. From 1997 to 2017 he was an editor at *frieze* magazine, and he continues to write a column for the publication. Also since 1997, he has been a contributor to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. His books include *All of a Sudden. Things that Matter in Contemporary Art* (2008) and *Double Lives in Art and Pop Music* (2018). He has curated numerous exhibitions including *Romantic Conceptualism* (Kunsthalle Nürnberg and Bawag Foundation Vienna, 2007–8), and, together with Cristina Ricupero, the Busan Biennale 2018, South Korea.

Ahmet Ögüt, born in 1981 in Diyarbakır, Turkey, is a socio-cultural initiator, artist, and lecturer who lives and works in Berlin and Amsterdam. He is the initiator of The Silent University, which is an autonomous knowledge exchange platform by refugees and asylum seekers. Working across a variety of media, Ögüt's institutional solo exhibitions include *Bakunin's Barricade*, Kunstverein Dresden, DE (2018); *Hotel Résistance*, KOW, Berlin (2017); *No Protest Lost*, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2017); *Round-the-clock*, ALT Bomonti, İstanbul (2016); *Forward!*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2015); and *Happy Together: Collaborators Collaborating*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2015). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale (2018); the British Art Show 8

(2015–17); and the 13th Biennale de Lyon (2015). Ögüt has completed several residency programs, including programs at the Delfina Foundation and Tate Modern (2012); IASPiS, Sweden (2011); and Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (2007–08). He has taught at the Dutch Art Institute, Netherlands (2012); the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Finland (2011–16); and Yildiz Teknik University, Turkey (2004–06), among others. Ögüt was awarded the Visible Award for the Silent University (2013); the special prize of the Future Generation Art Prize, Pinchuk Art Centre, Ukraine (2012); the De Volkskrant Beeldende Kunst Prijs 2011, Netherlands; and the Kunstpreis Europas Zukunft, Museum of Contemporary Art, Germany (2010). He co-represented Turkey at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009).

Ann Gallagher has been Tate's Director of Collections, British Art, since 2006. She leads the team of curators responsible for building and researching Tate's Collection of British Art, and specializes in modern and contemporary British art, as well as Latin American art from 1950. She was the curator of the exhibitions *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour* at Tate Modern in 2007, *Susan Hiller* at Tate Britain in 2011, *Damien Hirst* at Tate Modern in 2012, and *Rachel Whiteread* at Tate Britain in 2017 (this exhibition was co-organized with the NGA Washington, where it opened in September 2018). She oversees Acquisitions Management at Tate and chairs Tate's Loans Committee. Before joining Tate in 2005, she was Senior Curator in the Visual Arts department of the British Council, where she acquired work for their collection and curated many exhibitions, including the 1997 (Rachel Whiteread) and 2001 (Mark Wallinger) Venice Biennale exhibitions in the British Pavilion, and a series of co-curated exhibitions which took place in Latin America—in Bogota, Caracas, Guatemala, Lima, Mexico, Monterrey, Panama, Santiago de Chile, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. She has written and lectured widely in her specialist area and recent publications include *Tacita Dean: Film in Connecting_Unfolding*, MCA Seoul; 'Speculative Spaces' in *José Damasceno*, Ridinghouse, London; and *Zarina Bhimji*, Heni Publishing is forthcoming.

Mami Kataoka is Deputy Director and Chief Curator at Mori Art Museum (MAM) in Tokyo overseeing exhibition programs and learning programs. She was also Artistic Director of the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2016–18) and Joint Artistic Director of the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012) in South Korea, and

International Curator at the Hayward Gallery in London (2007–09). Prior to this, she was Chief Curator at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery (1997–2002) after developing an urban complex project Tokyo Opera City at private think-tank NLI Research Institute (1992–96). Currently board member of CİMAM and professor at Kyoto University of Art and Design Graduate School. Kataoka also frequently writes and gives lectures on contemporary art in Japan and Asia.

Workshop Conclusions

Day 1: Museum Watch Workshop

Introduction

In 2012 CIMAM initiated a series of news publications regarding the different critical situations of Museums and Collections around the world, also in regions affected by world economical and political crises. The Museum Watch Program that came out of this serves as an advocacy program addressing specific critical situations that impact museum professionals and not-for-profit institutions of modern and contemporary art. We want your help to recalibrate this effort.

→ Institutional situations may be very different in different societies, what are the challenges for Museum Watch in this respect and how can they be met?

→ Museum Watch wants to always consider both sides of the situation, even if it takes longer to react. How can this due diligence be optimised and how can it be related to the wish for rapid information of the CIMAM community and eventual rapid action?

→ The CIMAM board feels the Museum Watch Committee should consider different kinds of appropriate action, on a case by case basis, including confidentially, where nothing is published. What may be actions and how can they best be tailored to the situation?

→ Museum Watch wants to be a supportive and helpful tool for museum professionals. Should it also notify the CIMAM community in cases in which colleagues are involved (for example a public conflict between a director and a curator) and if so which actions might it further undertake?

Conclusions presented by Suhanya Raffel, Director, M+ Museum, Hong Kong, China, and Board member of CIMAM

Highlights

Develop guidelines and best practice for common crises and situations.

Develop local knowledge:

Reach out to local experts who have knowledge of situations.

Have a list of local contacts, non-members, from different professions, that can provide CIMAM proper access to local knowledge, not media.

Develop a local delegation of colleagues (other CIMAM members in the city) that offer diversified expertise to help follow best practices, and to clarify if the institution and the director/curator have acted properly in specific institutions.

Develop a longer-term project resources where a series of case studies are put together.

To work in collaboration with other associations and to use its networks to achieve a higher impact. (ICOM, PEN International, The Artist Protection Funds, Arts Rights Justice EU Working Group, Association of Art Museum Directors in North America).

Extended Conclusions

A common interest was to restate the importance of having a public platform on CIMAM's website for all members and that CIMAM shows solidarity and gives support to its members at times of crisis and when others reach out to us.

Regional specificity: that the museum watch group acquires another employee in the office to deal specifically with Museum Watch cases or to liaise with local experts who have knowledge of situations that fall beyond the expertise of those within the CIMAM group.

At the same time, some groups given their local context in China, Cuba, and Turkey raised a cautionary note, calling for the ability to turn to an international group of colleagues for support, but to do so in conditions of strict confidentiality.

With that aim, pragmatic solutions were suggested:

The establishment of a legal fund as a means of support.

Guidelines and best practice for some of those situations.

A longer-term project resource where a series of case studies are put together, to which all CIMAM members can refer back and use as a learning tool.

Day 2: Public vs Private Workshop

Introduction

With the proliferation of “not for profit” private museums and the increasing dependency of “public sector” museums on private finance, modern and contemporary art museums are under increasing pressure to service the agendas of the individuals and organisations that fund them rather than the public they were founded to serve. What can museum professionals do to resist these influences and ensure the independence and resilience of their institutions.

→ What are the potential risks in accepting sponsorship from commercial galleries and auction houses?

→ Under what circumstances, if any, should a museum exhibit the private collections of their patrons?

→ How can museums ensure that governance and finance are clearly separate in “not for profit” organisations?

→ How can CIMAM best support museums in maintaining curatorial independence from the external influence of sponsors or patrons?
 Conclusions presented by Agustín Pérez Rubio, Independent Curator, Madrid, Spain and Board member of CIMAM

Conclusions presented by Agustín Pérez Rubio, Independent Curator, Madrid, Spain and Board member of CIMAM

Highlights

Develop guidelines as recommendations about the good governance and best practice in relationship with the role of the board, patrons, private collection donations, etc., in order to safeguard the institution and maintain curatorial independence.

Extended Conclusions

What are the potential risks of accepting sponsorship from commercial galleries and auction houses?

While public funding is being instrumentalized by politicians, we risk losing public trust when credibility is affected by the autonomy of programming.

A few actions were suggested:

Artists should be better paid by museums so they are less dependent on the market.

Transparency is essential.

All information must be made public.

We have to clearly define the protocols; agreements must be clear.

Correct attitudes based on ethical codes.
 Documenting the process and decision making.

Under what circumstances, if any, should a museum exhibit the private collections of their patrons?

A few actions were suggested to safeguard the institution:

Relationships must be developed with total transparency.

Private collections should only be considered in relation to a long-term commitment to the institution.

Short-term collection loans are not recommended lest this increase their market value.

Patrons or the trustees cannot use the museum for their own interests. Donations cannot be accepted if the patron or trustee imposes a condition to permanently or regularly display the works, lest future incumbents be compromised.

To have written protocols of actions or legislation that establish clear parameters.

How can museums ensure that governance and finance are clearly separate in “not for profit” organizations?

Strategies vary according to context. Specific sub-committees for finances and scientific committees are a way of maintaining independence and minimizing situations of ethical conflict. There is always a danger that political support directly influences museum budget and employment, such as changing a museum director’s contract terms at any time.

In this case, CIMAM should consider developing simple guidelines around good governance and best practice vis-à-vis the role of boards.

How can CIMAM best support museums in maintaining curatorial independence from the external influence of sponsors or patrons?

Today, directors have to deal with all kinds of issues, so the CIMAM conference is a good meeting place for addressing these questions.

CIMAM might also consider establishing regional workshops for information dissemination regarding best practices, governance, and museum sustainability. A group of advisors with whom members could discuss how to handle problematic situations.

It would be appreciated if CIMAM provides members with examples of good ethical codes used by museums of contemporary art, and for smaller institutions to have a diverse variety of examples and contexts.

CIMAM must advocate for the importance of the curators’ professional experience.

Colophon

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