

The Exhibitionist

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REFLECTION



Chelsea Haines, Jens Hoffmann, and Lumi Tan

Jens Hoffmann (JH): For the prior seven issues of *The Exhibitionist*, we have very consciously stayed away from interviews and conversations in favor of essays. This came from a desire to reconsider writing as an essential part of the practice of a curator. It is incredibly important, I think, for us to articulate our thoughts about art and exhibition making in written form.

In addition, I've always felt that the format of the conversation can be uninspired—or, at worst, lazy and thrown together over email, rather than a carefully edited, well-considered group effort. Yet conversations are essential to any scholarly or creative professional field, and it is our wish, at this point in the evolution of the journal, to acknowledge that and offer ourselves up as a venue for valuable, productive conversations. With this, the eighth issue, we are re-evaluating a number of things about the journal, and it felt right to do an entire issue of conversations that would, in addition to exploring important questions in the field, examine the format of the conversation as a tool for the exchange of thoughts and ideas.

I want to emphasize, as well, the distinction between interviews and conversations. I find most published interviews, at least in the art world, to be blind affirmations of their subjects. And of course nobody wants to burn any bridges. Whereas the conversation can be a much more fruitful format for substantive intellectual exchange, and, yes, the occasional difference of opinion. It is interesting that curators—those supposedly hyper-connected, super-articulate communicators and producers of knowledge—are not always the best at conducting true conversations, as opposed to interviews. Hans Ulrich Obrist's ongoing interview series is a good example of what I mean. It is very much about getting the

material out to the public, and not necessarily about undertaking a careful, sophisticated dialogue.

At the end of the day, I suppose we all already talk too much, to too many people. In particular, conversations as public programs in museums, biennials, and art fairs are proliferating at a greater rate than ever, but very rarely are they productive disagreements or real discussions of actual problems. Rather, they are all about mutual celebration. I have participated in my fair share of these talks and roundtables, yet I always take part with the hope of reaching a different level of exchange. I personally wish there was less recapping and more disagreement in the world. We'd have a far more dynamic discourse.

Chelsea Haines (CH): I agree that much of the conversation around curating—or what has often been called “curatorial discourse” in recent years—has been for the sake of conversation itself. I do not want to get into a detailed discussion about this literature or the figures shaping it. The trend is self-evident for those who are up to date on developments in contemporary curating, and I'd rather think about possibilities for other types of conversations we could develop.

I do feel it's important, however, to acknowledge that much of the public programming you just described is coming from a small number of curators working in well-funded Western European countries who are essentially free to produce conferences and publications with little accountability to a public or a scholarly community.

In contrast, curators in the United States, for example, are often dependent on a hodgepodge of private and public funding, which sets the tone for developing curatorial practices in very different

ways. And for curators working far outside the established Western art centers, of course there is an entirely other set of parameters and practical considerations. For me, the practice of curating is one that is embodied, meaning that its most basic mandate is to create a critical set of relations between an artwork or object, a space, and an audience, three integral elements that are always shifting and entirely dependent on context and circumstances.

I feel like much of the current literature on curating overemphasizes certain areas and decontextualizes others, producing a cumulative body of knowledge that often appears nebulous and ill defined. I think all of us need to start thinking more precisely about how the literature we produce reflects our own practices, and vice versa. The original structure of *The Exhibitionist* was meant to bypass many of these problems by focusing only on single-author texts, and to a certain extent it has succeeded, though the strict editorial format it developed produced its own set of challenges. I wonder, however, if the real question to grapple with is not whether to be in conversation or not, but who to be in conversation *with*?

Lumi Tan (LT): As the number of curators, exhibitions, and general attention around the industry of curating has exploded in the last few years, it has become more and more necessary for curators to qualify themselves as individuals with distinct voices and opinions, which has for better or worse resulted in this overabundance of publications and conferences. Curators are now expected to excel at public relations, for themselves and the institutions where they're employed, and have a presence in both the mainstream press and institutionally generated materials such as a blog posts and video tours. This often results in a repetition of the same old pull quotes rather than critical conversation. The language around contemporary curating is contracting and becoming more insular.

So, the overall intention around this issue of *La Critique*—and, indeed, around the future of *The Exhibitionist*—is to involve a wider breadth of curators (contemporary and non-contemporary, Western and non-Western) and pull them out of the comfort zone that has been created by having the same conversations over and over.

Looking further into the field is especially important today, when the publications and conversations around curating seem to willfully ignore

the concerns of curators working in historical fields. They are treated not just as if they are *working with* the past, but as if they are actually *living in* the past. As contemporary exhibitions gain attention and praise for integrating non-art objects or outsider art in order to bring greater context to newly produced works (Massimiliano Gioni's *The Encyclopedic Palace* exhibition at the 2013 Venice Biennale is a good recent example), why has this same integration not been applied to institutions or curators who are entirely devoted to thoughtfully exhibiting and recontextualizing older objects for contemporary audiences?

The diverse museums and institutions represented in this issue—from the Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent, whose mission is to provide an “emancipating” experience around the history of mental health care, to the Musée du quai Branly, Paris, which often uses the framework of popular culture to present its collection of artifacts from Africa and Asia, to museums more frequently present in the journal such as Tate Modern—demonstrate our own recognition that we need to expand the boundaries of both the journal and our ability to look critically upon ourselves as curators. The all-conversation format of the issue is definitely an attempt to get out of various comfort zones: those of the speakers, of us as editors, and of our readers.

JH: To me this *La Critique* issue also represents a shift away from our focus on curating (contemporary or modern) art toward understanding exhibition making as an innovative practice that is not bound to one area of art and culture alone but can encompass all areas of cultural production. How can we translate some of the innovations that have taken place in the field of curating contemporary art to the making of art historical exhibitions? Or shows dealing with aspects of cultural and political history?

My hope is that some of these conversations will encourage curators to think about how they could provoke, through exhibitions, considerations of historical, social, and political significance that art alone might not be able to address. And to try to engage their exhibition visitors in thinking about issues they've never heard discussed in the context of the visual arts.

The issue begins with a focus on two primary “strains” of exhibition making: collections (in the Response 1 section) and temporary exhibitions (Response 2). Each of the six discussions is a dynamic

pairing of curators who we thought related to each other in ways both obvious and subtle. In the collections section, for example, we paired Frances Morris of Tate, London, with Manuel Borja-Villel of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. They have both been at the forefront of reinventing the traditional structure of the national collection, but in very different ways.

Julieta Gonzalez of the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City and Suhanya Raffel of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, expound upon the opportunities and challenges of collection building in institutions at the geographic margins of the art world. Pieranna Calvachini from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston and Judith Dolkart from the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia both work in institutions in which the entire museum, not just the collection, is dictated by the taste and personality of a long-since-dead founding patron.

All three conversations explore different sets of institutional structures and restraints as well as the quite free and creative curatorial practices that can develop in relation to them.

CH: Our pairings for temporary exhibitions are perhaps a little more unorthodox. We really tried to make unexpected connections between curatorial innovation in the realm of contemporary art and other forms of curating. Maurice Berger, who works at the Center for Art Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and Bice Curiger, who spent the last two decades at Kunsthaus Zürich, both bridge the contemporary and the historical in their exhibitions through a variety of means and methods. Stephanie Barron, who organizes exhibitions of modern and contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, is joined in conversation with Nanette Jacomijn Snoep from the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. And we paired Patrick Allegaert from the Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent, with Anselm Franke, whose recent traveling exhibition *Animism* (2010–12) explored animism in modern and contemporary art and culture writ large. As each conversation unfolds, it becomes more and more apparent, to me, why speaking across geographies and subfields is so necessary to curating today.

LT: Then, in the next section, rather than having curators critique specific essays from the past three issues as we did in the last *La Critique*, we broadened

the topic so that two groups of three curators from extremely different institutions and regions could speak openly regarding key aspects of *The Exhibitionist's* mission. Some, such as 8th Berlin Biennale curator Juan A. Gaitán, are coming back to the journal for the second time. His conversation partners, Sarah E. Cook, codirector of the new media initiative CRUMB at the University of Sunderland, and Lia Gangitano, founder and director of Participant Inc., one of the only “alternative” spaces to open in New York in the past 15 years, are both new to the journal. They are all currently working outside traditional museum structures, and their conversation assesses the model of the curatorial auteur that has been championed by the journal from its start.

In a separate but convergent conversation, Adam Lerner, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Weng Choy Lee, a critic and curator from Singapore, and Khwezi Gule, a curator and critic based in Johannesburg, discuss the benefits and necessity of bringing the “outside” world into the exhibition space. It is a topic, as Jens has made clear, that points toward *The Exhibitionist's* future.

CH: Finally, we as the editors added an extra layer to the conversations by providing extended footnotes for each one. These contain further relevant information and resources inspired by the each contributor's responses. We also chose to repeat the illustrated bibliography first seen in the last *La Critique*. It overviews all of the publications cited in the last four issues. The desire for both is to reveal the diverse range of source material that inspires and informs curatorial thinking, and to spark further research and conversation on the part of our readers.

All in all, this issue of *The Exhibitionist* signals both a moment of reflection and a turning point in the direction of the journal. It is a collection of thoughts as we embark on a new path. While we will always continue to be a journal by curators and for curators, we are experimenting with new ideas, formats, topics, and questions that we hope will spur relevant and ongoing debates within and beyond these pages.

RESPONSE I



COLLECTIONS

**Manuel Borja-Villel and Frances Morris
To Have and to Hold**

**Pieranna Cavalchini and Judith Dolkart
In Perpetuity**

**Julieta Gonzalez and Suhanya Raffel
Old and New Stories**

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

Manuel Borja-Villel and Frances Morris in conversation
with *The Exhibitionist*

Over the past decade, several forward-thinking museum directors and curators have radically expanded the ways in which museum collections are considered and presented to the public. This expansion has been most noticeable in major museums of modern and contemporary art, the most risk-taking of which have abandoned traditional linear, Eurocentric models of art history to explore new modalities of display. These include, among other techniques, grouping works by theme rather than date, school, or style; paying greater attention to art from outside the Western canon to embrace the notion of truly global modernisms; and incorporating non-art cultural and historical materials into collection displays.

These changes are rewriting the history of modern art and transforming the visitor experiences of the millions of people who go to museums every year. Here, *The Exhibitionist* speaks with two individuals leading this charge—Manuel Borja-Villel, Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, and Frances Morris, Head of Collections (International Art) at Tate, London—about their highly innovative, and very different, approaches to the displays of their institutional collections.

The Exhibitionist: Please give us some background on the collections of your respective museums.

Frances Morris (FM): The Tate Gallery was founded in the 1890s when a group of British paintings, released by the National Gallery on the grounds of overcrowding, was brought together with a donation of a large collection of modern British art. The works were put on view in a new building—in Millbank, on the site of a famous old prison—funded by the donor of the latter collection, Henry Tate. He was a Liverpool grocer and philanthropist who had made his fortune from the invention of the sugar cube. It was initially called the National Gallery of British Art, but Henry Tate's name was so firmly associated with the new building that in 1932 the board voted to change the name to the Tate Gallery. In 1917, the gallery also took on the

role of becoming the national collection of modern paintings from outside the United Kingdom. Lacking a rich endowment and not having had committed state funds for acquisitions (for much of its history), the collection has grown haphazardly, depending largely on the generosity of artists, collectors, and dealers for gifts and bequests. It is hardly necessary to add that it's a very British affair!

Until the turn of the 20th century, Tate's collection was devoted to painting and sculpture, supplemented by prints and drawings. Other museums in London held sway in terms of decorative arts, design, and (to a limited extent) photography. Unsurprisingly, its international collection was almost exclusively confined to Western European and North American art, and the artists represented were overwhelmingly male. While the holdings of British art since 1400 can be thought of as a broad survey, with areas of rich density and others of fascinating anecdotal interest, the international collection of art since 1900 is far more episodic, offering fascinating insights into Britain's fluctuating engagement in foreign cultural affairs, the timidity of its trustees in the face of "the modern," the prejudices—and, occasionally, the enlightened taste—of its collectors, and the conservatism of its public.

My own involvement with the collection was first as a curator in the modern collection of the Tate Gallery, then (several years before the new site was inaugurated in 2000) as one of the first two curatorial appointments to Tate Modern, and subsequently as head of displays. In 2006 I took on the role of head of collections (international art) working in tandem with Ann Gallagher, head of collections (British art). The curatorial teams we manage are based at the two galleries; these teams also curate the displays and generate the program at both sites. The interface between acquisitions, displays, and program is therefore especially close at Tate, with the collection as "core" to the whole multi-site institution. My principal task has been to reshape that core from its narrow regional and medium base to a more expansive engagement with multiple histories in different material manifestations.

Manuel Borja-Villel (MBV): The Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía was only founded as a museum in 1988. Its history, as a consequence, is very recent. Its collection was originally comprised of the former exhibits of the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo (MEAC) but it has grown with some important gifts, including works by Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí, and of course Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and its accompanying preliminary drawings. The collection is not encyclopedic, but it does contain some exceptional moments with respect to both the historical avant-gardes and the second half of the 20th century. In recent years there has been an emphasis on more delicate and ephemeral aspects of art that tend to evade official historiography.

To us, the collection is the central element of the museum. It is around the collection that mediation activities and temporary exhibitions are created. It is important that the museum sets up historical models for understanding the present, learning where we come from, and projecting our desires onto the future. In an amnesiac, postmodern era in which all critical practice seems emptied of content and meaning from its very start, it is of fundamental importance that the collection has this historical dimension. This dimension certainly doesn't correspond to any teleological or formalist vision, but just organizes itself starting from a tension between macro-historical and micro-historical perspective, narration, and documentation. As Carlo Ginzburg said, there are aspects of history that suit a micro-historical approach, while there are others that fit better in a macro-historical perspective. The issue is not the reconciliation of two distinct methods, but the questioning of a totalizing view through the articulation of exceptions and discontinuities. In it, the very learning process becomes part of the narration.

The collection of the Reina Sofia Museum refers to a local reality that is global at the same time. It doesn't wish to represent the essence of an imagined, mythical Spanish art, nor does it try to respond to streamlining market pressures. The identity of the collection is always relational, as it generates gazes based on how we see the world and how the world sees us.

This allows for the collection to be structured around a floor plan in which the center isn't privileged vis-à-vis the periphery and the latter isn't necessarily obscured or undervalued because of the alleged superiority of the former. There is really no such thing as New York having stolen the idea of modern art from Paris, and we do not perpetuate that myth. There is not just one modernity, but a plurality of modernities that intersect and compete. Furthermore, we present history not as linear, but rather as a constellation of multiple drifts and escapes. This helps us understand that modern Latin American art from 1940 to 1960 isn't inferior to modern European or American art, but just different. Its roots, processes, and intentions are different. This type of framing helps us understand the work of artists such as Gego, Mira Schendel, or Lygia Pape.

The Exhibitionist: How have you conceived of, or reconceived, the institution's collection displays in light of the concerns you just articulated regarding displays that are historically linear, or Eurocentric, or both?

FM: At the end of the 1990s, Iwona Blazwick and I were appointed art program curators for the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art.¹ Together we were given a year to reflect on museum practice and

¹ Iwona Blazwick left the Tate in 2001 to become director of Whitechapel Gallery in London, a non-collecting institution. Credited with the creation of the Unilever Series in Tate's Turbine Hall, she has brought a similar vision to the Bloomberg Commission in Gallery 2 at Whitechapel, also a large, raw space where a single artist can pursue an ambitious installation.

frame the program and collection displays for the new building. We sought a new framework, a paradigm shift, that would acknowledge art history's departure from a single master narrative, embrace multiple perspectives and multiple voices, offer insights into the many different timeframes a work of art can occupy, allow us to situate works contextually within visual culture, and deploy all media on an equal footing. We were strongly guided by conversations with key art historians, colleagues in learning, outreach teams, and one or two artists, including our artist-trustee Michael Craig-Martin, to whom we spoke at length.

We were less influenced by the ways in which other museums install their collections than by an ambition to introduce aspects of (temporary) exhibition practice to the business of curating a permanent collection. We also learned a lot from the ways in which artists were beginning to reframe and critique institutional practice. We worked alongside a number of artists. Mark Dion, for example, spent one long summer in London on a pre-opening program of projects, and he was a major influence. Conversations with Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings, which subsequently evolved into an intervention-project called *Capital* (2001), were hugely valuable in prompting the idea that the display could present a speculative, interrogative position in relation to the collection.²

The result was the idea of a display organized around ideas of genre rather than art historical "isms": Each genre was presented in a display that spanned a century of expanded territory. The four display suites (ranging across two entire floors, and following the logic of Tate Modern's architecture) were configured to include a number of different types of display: pairings of two distinct voices in dialogue across time (Claude Monet and Richard Long was a noted example), or "in-focus" displays in which we "returned" a work from the generalized context of the collection to the moment of its making.

We made a number of displays that explored recurring motifs and themes over the course of a century; in others we focused on the art of a single year. Aside from an *a priori* desire to create a new kind of museum experience for a new century, we were acutely aware of the architectural parameters of the new building, with its strange amalgam of white cube galleries, *enfilade*, and "raw" industrial spaces. The intellectual concepts behind the hang were balanced by a consideration of how artworks could be installed most effectively—even most beautifully. The plan was to work for a limited period of a few years with the genre-framework, subjecting it

² In *Capital*, visitors at both the Tate Modern and the Bank of England Museum were randomly approached by a museum staff member and given a gift of a print by Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings. The artists chose these two institutions because of their individual roles in highly specific economies; the action of gift giving pointed to the varied understandings of gifts in society. The term "gift" in relation to museum collections is especially significant, with its implication that the museum is not obliged to reciprocate.

3. The art historian and visual culture theorist Georges Didi-Huberman curated the critically acclaimed 2010 exhibition *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back?* for the Reina Sofia. Taking as its starting point the art historian Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* of images (created between 1924 and 1929, but never finished), the exhibition included images—including artworks, artists' research materials, photographs, books, maps, and documents—into an atlas that extends to our present, collapsing space and linear time.

to selective and rolling adjustments along the way. In this manner we hoped to show works of art in different contexts over time, and to allow different artists to appear in an ever-evolving constellation. The permanent collection was to be permanently changing, experimental, thought provoking, and open to debate.

MBV: The Reina collection is articulated into five historical groups that are never sharply divided, but interrelated; the groups also allow for anachronism. After all, as Georges Didi-Huberman has noted, works of art live not just one life, but multiple lives, and they survive across the years as ghosts.³ For example, a Mark Rothko painting might live side by side with Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* (1954) and pages from *La Cordoniz*, a satirical magazine that was published in Spain during Francisco Franco's dictatorship. And this group engages in dialogue with *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall* (1953), a film by Luis García Berlanga from those same years, in an adjacent room. The film is tongue in cheek; it tells the story of the arrival of a group of Americans in a village in Spain, whereupon the inhabitants try to adjust themselves to the image they think the Americans have of them.

The five historical groups respond to five important moments in the history of Spain and of the world. The first is centered on the 1920s and the 1930s. The second refers to the time of political and cultural wars between the United States and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. The third dwells on the systemic crisis that spread over the Western world at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. The fourth tries to understand the long transitional period that started at the end of the 1960s and went on until halfway into the 1990s—a moment in which the foundations of neoliberalism and globalism, which still dominate today, were laid. The fifth refers to the current moment of maximum market and

communication industry hegemony, where the contemporary isn't just a historical category, but a fundamentally aesthetic one. And also in which the only possibility of resistance dwells in a minor art, in the sense that Gilles Deleuze meant when analyzing Franz Kafka's work.⁴

These five chapters certainly have a historical dimension,

4. Borja-Villel is referencing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 1986 book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, in which the authors provide a new reading of Kafka's oeuvre that is revolutionary, political, collective, and spatial. They write: "'Minor' no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature."

⁵ *Unpacking My Library* (1931), *The Author as Producer* (1934), *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), and *The Arcades Project* (1927–40) are all books by Walter Benjamin that have become touchstones for curators. *The Author as Producer*, in which Benjamin calls for artists and authors to shift their individual, observational role to that of a producer working collectively to create social change, has spawned responses such as Okwui Enwezor's 1994 lecture "The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis" and *Manifesta* dedicating an issue of its journal to the idea of the curator as producer. Aby

but they lack any filial submission to some unique discipline and they don't pretend, either, to be parts of any large narrative. Rather, they are a series of approximations, always fragmentary. They respond to the theme presented and to the moment and place in which they are presented.

The current reflection on the 1930s, for example, is obviously defined by the fact that the museum already has Picasso's *Guernica* in its collection, but also by the similarities we find between that historical period and the present. So, even though that decade is said to be marked by a certain eclecticism and a lack of great formal discoveries (the languages of Surrealism, abstraction, and realism belong to other periods), its most intelligent artists were certainly aware of the ambiguity in an art that, then as now, swung between rebellion and absorption. How can you interrogate art starting from your own art, thus subverting your own rules? How can we maintain the political effectiveness of a painting such as *Guernica*, which was a symbol of resistance during the Spanish Civil War and an icon of the democratic transition in our country, but which today also functions like a piece of trivial merchandise, exchangeable in the form of refrigerator magnets, T-shirts, and other trinkets? This is the challenge posed by the presentation of the collection of the Reina Sofia Museum.

The Exhibitionist: Which curators, exhibitions, or other models have been influential to the way you conceptualize your collection displays?

MBV: Several thinkers and historians, including Walter Benjamin (and his reflections on history) and Aby Warburg (and his conceptions of the Atlas and the *Pathosformel*) were of fundamental importance to the way the Reina Sofia is conceptualized.⁵ The notion of the artistic institution and work found in Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno's book *Autor Des Postoperaismus* was equally fundamental.⁶

The Reina Sofia museographic model is opposed to both the modern museum model, which would be embodied in the MoMA of the 1940s and 1950s,

Warburg's idea of the *Pathosformel*, a physical expression of an emotional charge that can be provoked by a historical image, was demonstrated in panel five of his *Mnemosyne Atlas* via a montage of representations of women in antiquity. Though the images were from various periods, styles, and narratives, their portrayed emotions were distilled to essential gestures.

⁶ In the early 1990s, post-operaism theorists such as Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, Bifo Berardi, and Judith Revel introduced the concepts of immaterial labor, general intellect, and cognitive capitalism,

which are now hugely influential in contemporary art. In 2008 Tate Britain hosted the “Art and Immaterial Labour” conference, followed in 2012 by “Untitled (Labour): Contemporary Art & Immaterial Production.” The former featured the theorists listed above, while the second brought together artists such as Hito Steyerl and Carey Young with academics such as Claire Bishop and Pascal Gielen.

² Alfred H. Barr Jr. was the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and continued to work there, in different capacities, until 1968. James Johnson Sweeney began his career as the director of painting and sculpture at that same

and the multicultural and showcasing model on which the large projects of the past few decades seem to be based. We have studied and assessed the work of great museum curators and directors: Alfred H. Barr Jr., James Johnson Sweeney, Pontus Hultén, Johannes Cladders, and others.⁷ But we have developed our own model, starting above all with the practices of certain artists who placed institutional criticism at the center of their activities. If we had to mention just one of these, it would certainly be Marcel Broodthaers, whose *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles* (1968) is a masterpiece in every sense.⁸ It invents techniques, it anticipates and blocks the possible absorption of the work of art, it declares its discursive character, et cetera. The same could be said for Hans Haacke’s use of information, or for Lygia Clark’s aperture toward other kinds of sensorial experiences. I should mention Michael Asher, as well, who has been as important as anyone else to our thinking.

The Exhibitionist: How do you see your collection display in dialogue with other elements of the institution, such as the temporary exhibition program or the education department?

FM: Exhibitions are a principal driver of revenue for Tate, and thus vital to the museum. We distinguish these from the collection displays, which are free and seen annually by approximately five million visitors. This gives the curators a large measure of freedom to experiment with the template and the content of collection displays, whereas there has been less appetite or scope for risk in the temporary exhibitions.

Although there is now a fascinating interface between collection acquisitions versus the smaller exhibitions and projects in the Tanks program, which was inaugurated just last year. Normally, one would expect temporary programs to innovate and lead acquisitions policy and collection development, but here, instead, the collection is very much the driver. For example, this year, the retrospective of Ibrahim

museum from 1935 to 1946, then became the second director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Pontus Hultén was the director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm from 1960 to 1973, and he established the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, among other institutions. Johannes Cladders was the director of the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach, Germany, from 1967 to 1985. Working at a pivotal time in the development of the contemporary museum, each of these directors initiated radical approaches to

exhibitions, collections, and audience engagement.

⁸. This conceptual museum, one of Marcel Broodthaers's most notorious and influential works, used archetypal elements of a museum (reproductions of artworks, crates, didactic labels) and existed in a variety of forms between 1968 and 1971. It was intended as a comment on the subjective ways in which museums organize and present information.

El-Salahi, the retrospective of Saloua Raouda Choucair, and the presentation of Meschac Gaba's *Museum of Contemporary African Art* were all to an extent prompted by recent collection acquisitions.⁹

MB: All sections of the Reina Sofía are related to one another. *Encuentros con los años treinta* (Encounters with the 1930s) and the new presentation in the *Guernica* context halls demarcate both a temporary exhibition and a show of the permanent collection. The first relates to other temporary exhibitions, such as *Espectros de Artaud* (Specters of Artaud), *Perder la forma humana* (Losing the Human Form), and the Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa project¹⁰; the second integrates with the rest of the collection. The collection moves with a slow rhythm and along a certain memory path, which gets updated through temporary exhibitions. We need the latter for experimenting with and investigating directions and diversions, as well as new paths; and they, too, relate to one another.

The public program area, which includes education, the study center, live arts, et cetera, has the mission to utilize the museum's tools and devices, *negotiate* among the museum's proposals and the interests of the various publics, and create new readings and itineraries. If we think of the collection as an archive, this archive needs to be activated and its role continually *negotiated*. Hence, in our case, education is never meant as an explanation or as access to some superior truth that cannot be reached otherwise. There is a search for understanding, but also for the effects that it brings, and the community that this understanding generates.

The Exhibitionist: At a nationally designated museum with international scope and relevance, how does the collection reflect a national history while engaging with an international audience?

FM: Because of its particular relationship with Tate Britain, Tate Modern is relieved of the responsibility to reflect, in any systematic way, a national history, although I would argue that it does explore international art from a particular place (and time). The position it occupies is not without complexity in relation to British art. We all—curators, artists, audiences—for multiple reasons, see British art as one of the international

⁹. Meschac Gaba's large-scale, 12-room installation evokes a West African market as well as the archetypes of the museum. He started it in 1997 and gradually added rooms, including a museum shop, a library, and a restaurant, until 2002, when it was exhibited at *Documenta 11*.

¹⁰. These three exhibitions reflect a wide swath of the museum's interests while being very

much rooted in the thinking that Borja-Villel describes. *Specters of Artaud* focused on interdisciplinary artists working in France, Spain, and the United States in the 1950s who were influenced by Artaud's use of language. *Losing the Human Form* centered on artistic production in Latin America during the 1980s, a pivotal and violent political period. The Spanish artist Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa's solo exhibition *Do you want a master? You will have it!* presented new work responding to Jacques Lacan's idea of the real.

narratives explored at Tate Modern. So we include British artists within the series of monographic rooms, as the subject of “in-focus” displays, and as regular participants in pairings and thematic hangs. But it goes without saying that the British artists who do find themselves on the walls of Tate Modern tend to be those who most fully engage in conversations that cross the channel, straddle the Atlantic, or reach beyond. Therefore, while we are principally engaged in exploring international art, our displays are often inflected with a relationship to British practice where it is judged to exert a particularly broad or provocative influence or interplay. An example of this might be the current display at Tate Modern that looks at—and, indeed, compares—parallel but distinct explorations of abstraction in Brazilian and British art of the 1950s and 1960s.

As a national gallery of international art located in London, we operate within a richly diverse multicultural community. What we are trying to do with the collection—working toward multiple versions of modern art, for example—acknowledges London as a site within a network of cultural exchanges over time. This sense of interconnection and two-way dialogue, from past to present, is matched by current curatorial exchange projects with a range of public spaces, from Delhi to Warsaw, as well as by longer-term collaborative relationships with museums outside Europe and North America.

MBV: The idea of a national museum owes a lot to a 19th-century vision of identity, which is excessively bound to territory and a large foundational narrative that must be exclusive and ends up taking a defensive posture against the supposed risk of disintegration, coming from outside or the other. This type of approach obviously looks for the canonical and the fixed. Yet such a position often results in the center overwhelming the periphery. How many times have we heard the complaint that recognition is lacking and that it is necessary to claim one's own history, such as to explain “our” contribution to the great universal narrative? For us, the notion of identity is verified not with regard to a great na(rra)tion or to territory, but starting from a network of relations between subjects. This means that our notion of belonging has changed. We already do not belong to a position, a tradition,

or a side; our belonging is always relational to the rest. The narratives that the museum provides try to reflect a community and its relationship with the world, which is dynamic and in constant flow.

There is no doubt that the market—which is global and doesn't care for borders (instead it cares for classes and labels)—is currently hegemonic. In the present moment, the role of the traditional museum vis-à-vis this market or the industry of communication is very limited. Hence the need to create supranational structures. By this I don't mean some kind of multinational of museums. What I am proposing is a network, as opposed to franchises. The latter refers to a neo-colonial order that acts more out of economic or directly political motives than cultural interest, and won't allow the other to have a voice of its own. The network, however, corresponds to a horizontal structure in which everyone has a voice and the norm is negotiated in a shared context. The network doesn't try to establish itself as a hegemonic political organizational principle, and it persists as a negation of totality. It isn't about building a new order, but about questioning it. Confronted with the overwhelming manufacture of consent, the network is the manifestation of dissent and the cultivation of multiplicities, calling into question the idea of the authority and legitimacy of certain voices over others.

The Exhibitionist: How has your acquisitions process changed in recent years? What is your current focus, in acquisitions?

FM: We now collect art with the support of a number of regionally focused committees (for the Middle East and North Africa, Africa, Latin America, the Asia Pacific region, South Asia, and Russia and Eastern Europe) supported by individual specialist regional and adjunct curators. For each of these regions we have strategic priorities, including emerging, established, and historical figures. These choices correspond to an overriding strategy, which is agreed upon with our trustees on an annual basis. Where your gaps are depends on time and circumstance, as well as shifting perspectives. As we expand the collection geographically, or in relation to new media, new gaps emerge while others seem to disappear.

The advent of the Tanks at Tate Modern, while preempted and in some ways prompted by our active engagement in collecting performance, has created huge ambitions in relation to acquisitions. So, too, has the launch of a very belated commitment to collect photography. As we expand our range and our remit, we are more aware of the impossibility—and undesirability—of either a single master narrative or an encyclopedic collection in our post-colonial 21st century. So we focus in and drill down, to create networks of historical association and encounter at specific moments in time, linking art from different localities and in different media.

We can now pair experiences of “abstraction” from Latin America, Europe, and America in the late 1950s and 1960s; explore the ramifications of Bauhaus experimentation on several continents; show Arte Povera and

anti-form from the United States in conversation with Japanese Mona-ha; and explore the Sudanese modernist painter Ibrahim El-Salahi in the context of postwar figurative expressionism. An additional focus on overlooked women artists also helps to deconstruct and rewrite the canon.

MBV: Our general approach in terms of acquisitions isn't as much based on the idea of "owning" (*posesión*) as on the idea of "safekeeping" (*custodia*). The museum is an institution that serves the public. As a public institution, we are aware that cultural property—the art we produce and collect—isn't truly ours. The museum is just safekeeping it. Our proposals for acquisitions do not aim to accumulate treasures, but rather to share them. Sharing is the key notion in this context, because, in our case, the receiver becomes certainly richer, but the giver doesn't become poorer. We do not wish to expropriate goods or knowledge, but to put them into wider circulation.

Museums have traditionally oriented their acquisitions policies toward the accumulation of "treasures" or masterpieces, to provide the museum with a position of prestige in the arts rankings. However, these new additions remain consigned to the oblivion of storage rooms and, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, they increase the weight of history rather than contribute to its knowledge. Our acquisitions policy in the past five years hasn't aimed to establish any inventory of masterpieces, although several important works have been added to the permanent collection. We don't distinguish among disciplines, either. For us, the important thing has been to strive for building narratives based on the presuppositions described above and always assuming the impossibility of totality, either as the encyclopedic compilation aimed at by the universal survey museum or as the uniform, linear, exclusive vision the modern museum used to wish for.

The Exhibitionist: What do you think is the political relevance of a national museum today, and what is its role in civic space?

FM: National museums like Tate are in public ownership and freely accessible. So, while they represent the state, they also represent the polis. This is important in a world where public space is continuously under attack. They offer privileged access to experiences that one might describe as "real"—real stuff in real time and real space—which are increasingly compromised in a virtual world. Because these experiences are free, they demand nothing in return. Works of art leave the exchange economy as they enter the collection. This is fundamental, and it becomes more important as the cultural sphere is ever more compromised by capital.

In turn, museums such as Tate become spaces of social and intellectual engagement with implications that go beyond the visual arts. Museums are therefore natural conveners and receptacles for politics—both the politics

¹¹ The Tate Modern spelled out “Release Ai Weiwei” in large lettering on the side of the building; it was the strongest statement made by a museum. Other actions included Creative Time’s sit-in outside the Chinese consulate in New York and a Guggenheim petition coordinated with the International Council of Museums that gathered 140,000 signatures.

engendered from collective encounters with new experiences, and when the institution has had to defend itself in the face of threats to that freedom. Examples include Tate’s visible demonstration in favor of Ai Weiwei, or the recent advocacy of Nicholas Serota, Tate’s director, for art’s place in the national educational curriculum.¹¹

One of the interesting questions about the future is whether the museum as a virtual space will function in a similarly democratic way. It is certainly our intent that it should. The opportunities and complexities of engaging meaningfully with art produced in the virtual realm, like the challenges of communicating with audiences and collaborators via social media, are potentially game changing.

MBV: Today, the museum has a centrality that it has not enjoyed at any other moment in its history. And although our subjectivities continue to be decisively conditioned by the media and the precarious nature of cognitive work, the museum is a place of exceptional knowledge and social interaction. Museums play a key role in the regeneration of cities and the construction of national identities. Their political dimension is evident, and our ethical responsibility is therefore more critical than ever. There must be a demand worldwide for public administrations to continue to support culture, although it is clear that they may not be able to do so to the extent that has been the case in Europe in the past.

Nor should we imagine that the public is already completely defined by the private. The debate needs to be reoriented toward what is shared in common, to this sense of the community “being together,” to the shared richness of that which considers everyone, and to social production for the sake of collective development.

Manuel Borja-Ville’s responses are translated from the Spanish by Ardian Vehbiu

IN PERPETUITY

Pieranna Cavalchini and Judith Dolkart in conversation
with *The Exhibitionist*

Private collections have always been a core building block for museums. In fact, the first museums *were* the collections of wealthy European families who opened their homes for others to view their personal treasures. Over time, gifts of privately owned artworks have buttressed most museum collections, and individual or family collections frequently become museums in themselves. Today, institutions such as Instituto Inhotim in Minas Gerais, Brazil, continue to demonstrate that for private collections, the act of “going public” can play a powerful role in the development of the local art scene.

But what exactly is involved in this act? How are private collections—turned—public institutions cared for, exhibited, and interpreted once the person who built the collection gives it away or dies? *The Exhibitionist* posed these questions and more to two curators of extraordinary private collections that have recently organized initiatives involving institutional renovations and updates: Pieranna Cavalchini, Tom and Lisa Blumenthal Curator of Contemporary Art at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, which just opened a new wing designed by the architect Renzo Piano, and Judith Dolkart, Deputy Director of Art and Archival Collections and Gund Family Chief Curator of the Barnes Foundation, which recently relocated from Merion, Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia.

The Exhibitionist: Who were the original collectors of the works in your museums, and why did they decide to make their collections public?

Judith Dolkart (JD): From 1912 until his death, Albert C. Barnes (1872–1951) assembled one of the world’s finest collections of Impressionist, post-Impressionist, and early modern paintings. Acquiring works by some of the most daring artists of the time—Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Chaim Soutine, and Vincent van Gogh, among others—Barnes marked himself as a collector of great ambition and audacity.

The American painter William J. Glackens made an initial buying trip

for Barnes in 1912, returning from Paris with 33 works, including Cézanne's *Toward Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1878–79), van Gogh's *The Postman (Joseph- Étienne Roulin)* (1889), and Picasso's *Young Woman Holding a Cigarette* (1901).¹

¹ William Glackens was one of the founders of the Ashcan School of American art, which rejected the formalism and subjects of 19th-century academic art to depict everyday, working-class city life in a more realistic style. Glackens was a member of the subgroup called The Eight that captured the movement of leisure activities with a vibrant palette. Based in Philadelphia, he first traveled to Europe in the 1890s, and it was during that time that he presumably gained the knowledge to advise Barnes, a high school friend, on his collection.

Thereafter, Barnes frequently traveled to France to buy more new objects. As his interests developed, Barnes began to avidly purchase African art in the early 1920s, with guidance from the Paris-based dealer Paul Guillaume, and in the 1930s and 1940s he branched into decorative and industrial arts from a wide variety of cultures and eras.

The Barnes collection holds important examples of American paintings and works on paper, including works by Charles Demuth, William Glackens, and Maurice and Charles Prendergast; Native American ceramics, jewelry, and textiles; Asian paintings, prints, and sculptures; medieval manuscripts and sculptures; Old Master paintings; ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art; and American and European decorative arts and metalwork.

With the establishment of the Barnes Foundation in 1922, Barnes commissioned the architect Paul Philippe Cret to build a gallery in Merion, just outside Philadelphia, for his growing collection and his progressive educational programs.² In this space, completed in 1925 and crowned by Matisse's mural *The Dance* in 1933, Barnes arranged and rearranged his collections in "ensembles": distinctive wall compositions organized according to formal principles of light, color, line, and space rather than chronology, nationality, style, or genre. The ensembles changed as Barnes made acquisitions and perceived new aesthetic connections among the works. Integrating art and craft, cosmopolitan and provincial styles, and objects from across cultures and periods, Barnes sought to demonstrate the continuity of artistic traditions and the universalism of human expression. The ensembles are replicated at the foundation's new facility, which opened in May 2012 on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in the heart of Philadelphia.

At the foundation, I am responsible for the care and interpretation of the collections, and the seven departments with which I work—the archives, art library, conservation, curatorial, publications, registration, and visual resources—are directly involved in these activities. In my

² Paul Philippe Cret was already an established figure in Philadelphia at the time, having moved from France to teach at the University of Pennsylvania in 1903. He designed the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, which connects Philadelphia to Camden, New Jersey. His beaux-arts buildings for the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia were built shortly after the Barnes Foundation building.

first two and half years there, these departments prepared and conserved the collection for its move to the Parkway, installed the works to replicate the Merion ensembles within $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch, mounted a special exhibition drawn from the archives, photographed the objects before and after conservation, reclassified the art library according to the Library of Congress scheme, and published four books on the collections and buildings of the foundation. We have just launched a project to publish the African holdings.

Pieranna Cavalchini (PC): Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924) opened her museum on January 1, 1903. Initially this plain gray building stood alone in the Fenway, a neighborhood next to a park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. In the dead of winter, visitors would be astonished to enter its glass-roofed courtyard full of flowers and plants, ancient columns and statuary. The walls of the courtyard were stained pink. The upstairs galleries were filled with paintings, sculpture, textiles, and furniture. Gardner had been collecting important paintings by Titian, Rembrandt, Anthony van Dyck, Peter Paul Rubens, and Fra Angelico since the mid-1890s, and the breadth and range of the collection, and the installation of the objects, was entirely surprising.

In 1899 Gardner had hired Willard T. Sears, a local architect who had worked for the Gardner family before, to draw up plans for the building based on her ideas.³ It seems that she consciously wished for her museum to be as personal and atmospheric as possible. Her intent was to create a space that was both private and public, which is at the heart of the museum's power today. Visitors often assume that it is simply a formerly private residence now open to the public, but in actuality, the structure was expressly designed and built as a public museum, and organized for the long-term preservation of the collection.

Gardner was careful and controlling with respect to every aspect of the construction of her museum. She purchased architectural elements for its decoration, and she arranged the galleries herself. After the opening of Fenway Court, as the museum was known during her lifetime, she continued to add to the collection and rethink its display. In 1915 an entire section of the building was rebuilt to make room for a collection of Barberini tapestries, John Singer Sargent's *El Jaleo* (1882), and her Asian collection. She also placed several constraints on the conduct of the trustees, including a famous injunction that the general arrangement of the works in the galleries could not be altered.

The Exhibitionist: How is it possible to conceive of (or reconceive) the institution's collection display in light of such strict directives from the original owner? In both of your situations, has the collection changed over the course of the last century, or does the institution remain a testament to the singular vision of the individual who created it?

³. Modeled after a 15th-century Venetian palazzo and totally distinct from any other public collection or museum in America, the museum is Willard T. Sears's most notable building.

PC: The multiplicity of the Gardner Museum is an almost unique legacy. In Gardner's day, the galleries were filled not just with beautiful works of art, but also with musical performances and poetry readings. Artists, writers, and thinkers were invited to live and work in the museum. Six months after the opening, John Singer Sargent was there, painting in the Dutch room. Gardner created a true museum in the original sense: a place where all of the muses—all of the arts—could be experienced. Today the museum upholds that legacy with a very diverse program. Given that the collection and its disposition cannot be altered, the institution has grown in different directions while keeping alive the spirit of its founder. Music, contemporary art, historic exhibitions and scholarly research, horticulture, education, and now even landscape design are cornerstones of the programming.

At present, part of Gardner Museum's goal is to generate new thinking about its historic collection by engaging artists in all media, humanities scholars, and educators to develop new work—exhibitions, lectures, performances, and publications—inspired by it. This multidisciplinary approach has been greatly influenced by the success of the artist-in-residence program, which is now 23 years old. This contemporary program gives a voice to today's artists in a historical setting, asking the audience to look at the art of our time in juxtaposition with an outstanding historical collection. Inviting contemporary artists to the Gardner to dialogue with the art of the past enlivens the creative attitude in the museum while at the same time generating new thinking. We are continually building strong partnerships with a growing cadre of artists.

The artist-in-residence program is one of the programs I oversee. It aims to achieve the following three goals: to allow artists time and space to work, to reinvigorate the museum through the work and presence of living artists, and to encourage fresh insight into the museum's history and permanent collection, as well as Isabella Stewart Gardner's singular approach to art installation and display. The program currently invites five or six new artists each year for residencies, and there are seven or eight returning residents every year. The new residents are drawn from all creative fields, and always include at least one visual artist a year. Residents are housed in studio apartments located on the grounds and given a per diem and an honorarium.

Each residency is tailored to the resident, depending on their interests and needs. Artists, writers, and scholars use their time to study, think, shape new work, and take advantage of the many cultural and educational resources in the Boston area. The basic premise is to give them the gift of time with few strings attached, and as lively an interaction with the staff, collection, and grounds as they wish. Production is not a requirement. On occasion, individual artists or a collective come with a specific project in mind, but, mostly, the work develops during the residency or long afterward.

JD: Before my tenure at the Barnes, the board of trustees had already decided to move the collection from Merion, a suburb of Philadelphia, to Center City. There had been longstanding financial and access issues, and in order to remedy this situation the board sought permission from the Pennsylvania Attorney General and the Montgomery County Orphans Court to move the collection. At the hearing, the board made clear their intentions to retain the existing orientation and hang of the collection in the proposed Philadelphia location.

As promised, in the new building, the previous wall ensembles of the Merion building have been replicated. All of the rooms in the Collection Gallery are the same size as their corresponding Merion rooms, and each work has been installed in the same position it occupied in Merion. A notable exception is Henri Matisse's *Le Bonheur de vivre* (also called *The Joy of Life*, 1905–6), which was in the stairwell in Merion and is now in a room at the center of the balcony, facing *The Dance*, also by Matisse. Before, *Le Bonheur* was inaccessible to those who use mobility devices, besides simply being difficult to see because it was in the stairwell. In its new home, the work is much more accessible.

Barnes did not leave specific instructions about didactic materials or wall labels, but his philosophy of art education privileged looking over other forms of learning in the galleries. So, rather than placing labels on the walls, we have put a great deal of effort into the audio guide—actually, a downloadable app—which provides a textured and varied interpretation of the collection. We have tried to balance explication or interpretations of the ensembles—the wall as a whole—with focused discussions of individual works.

Barnes did not leave a record of the whys of the individual ensembles, so they are very open to everyone's insights—a point we try to underline in this audio. I like the idea of emphasizing the open-endedness of interpretation, inviting people to see a variety of formal relationships in the arrangements. We asked a great number of scholars (curators, academics, Barnes educators, et cetera) and some artists to comment on individual works, and they make a wide variety of observations.

The audio is now available in four languages—English, Spanish, French, and Japanese—which we hope makes the collection more accessible than it has ever been. Soon we plan to add thematic tours, to allow visitors to navigate the collection in even more new ways. This collection includes many very famous works but it is also enigmatic—little published, unavailable for loan—so there are many, many narratives to tell.

The Exhibitionist: Can you cite any particular models that have been influential in the way you've conceptualized or engaged with your museum's collection?

JD: I look at all models of interpretation in sister institutions, which can be incredibly informative. I feel lucky to have worked with Elizabeth Easton at the Brooklyn Museum.⁴ From her I learned to look, look, and look again. Also I admire her curiosity, and her breadth and depth of knowledge.

PC: Every artist who has spent time here or exhibited here has been fascinated (attracted and sometimes repelled) and invariably made curious by Isabella Stewart Gardner's methods of display. As I said earlier, she seems to have consciously designed her museum to be as different as possible—not only to display original works of great beauty, but also to present the objects in an atmospheric, rather than scholarly or “analytical,” environment.

Many artists feel an affinity with Gardner and her powerful sense of freedom and imagination in shaping the museum exactly as she wanted. Some artists dislike the orchestration. When I came to the museum years ago, one of the reason I took the job is because I understood that this labyrinth of works and their staging has so many possible active threads to it that a variety of minds can unravel it in infinitely different ways.

I have learned a lot from a host of curators around the world about how to work with artists . . . and how *not* to work with them. Building a degree of trust is essential. Selecting artists who will be able to work and create within complicated constraints (a fixed collection, a historic institution) is also extremely important to the ongoing process of reimagining the museum.

The Exhibitionist: How does the collection intersect with the other departments and functions of the institution?

JD: The Barnes Foundation is, by definition, an educational institution. Classes are held in the Collection Gallery, directly in front of the works. The Barnes has a distinctive method of learning based on the aesthetic theories of its founder. And the new facility offers an opportunity to provide more course offerings in addition to the long-standing, three-year course.

The exhibition program is new to the Barnes Foundation. We hope that the Roberts Gallery (the exhibition space) and the Collection Gallery will be in dialogue with one another, and that the exhibitions we offer will complement and illuminate the holdings. We plan to present exhibitions devoted to the core holdings of the collection as well as contemporary projects. Barnes collected the contemporary art of his time, and we hope to honor

⁴ Elizabeth Easton was a curator of European painting and sculpture at the Brooklyn Museum beginning in 1988, and she chaired the department from 1999 to 2006. Some of her most notable exhibitions were *The Intimate Eye of Edouard Vuillard* (1990), a rare major show on Vuillard that focused on the psychological aspects of his interiors, and *Monet and the Mediterranean* (1997), which included little-known paintings Claude Monet made on the Italian and French Rivas. Easton is now the director of the Center for Curatorial Leadership in New York, which she cofounded with Agnes Gund in 2007.

his commitment by displaying works from the present.

The first show, *Ensemble: Albert C. Barnes and the Experiment in Education* (2012), provided an introduction to the foundation in Barnes's own words, via his correspondence. Visitors learned about his collecting interests, installation methods, and educational theories. Barnes has been traditionally represented as a difficult man. And he could be. But his correspondence reveals him not only as irascible, but also sometimes curious, lonely, funny, and ambitious. Our current show, *Ellsworth Kelly: Sculpture on the Wall*, looks at Kelly's engagement with painting, sculpture, and architecture. While the crowded ensembles of the Collection Gallery and the spare walls of the Roberts Gallery look rather different, having them under the same roof demonstrates the ways in which both men made the wall their field of creativity. Both are interested in line, color, and form as well as balance and the relationship of the work to the wall and to other works.

PC: The contemporary department at the Gardner Museum strives to dialogue with the other programs, especially now that the new Renzo Piano building addition has given us more space to foster and enrich that dialogue. The proximity of the new gallery and the music hall will enable many exciting conversations. Easier access to scholars, archives, and conservation in their new labs and facilities offers rich additional layers of knowledge to the residents and will have a profound impact on their thinking and experiences. All these strands come together in many ways, but the collection is always the most powerful motivator.

Scholarly exhibitions in the special exhibition gallery, organized by the curator of the historic collection, make available engaging new research. These shows expand the public's knowledge of the collection, allow the institution to investigate individual works, and afford an opportunity for continued conservation treatments. One of the issues with Gardner's display is that some of the art is visible only on certain days, in certain light. A very focused scholarly exhibition on a particular work, or series of works, expands and enriches.

The Living Room, a public orientation room in the new wing, was inspired and modeled partly after a 2001 project at the Gardner Museum by the artist Lee Mingwei, who was in residence at the time.⁵ Its intimate, salon-like atmosphere is designed so that members of the public can ask volunteers and educators questions, or read through books about Gardner and the art in the museum. Additionally, twice a week, members of the public can meet here with a collector or host from the Boston area, who will talk about objects in their personal collection and explain their reasons for collecting. This interaction also dates back to Lee Mingwei's 2001 exhibition project, in which the artist facilitated intimate conversations about collecting. This program is

⁵. After *The Living Room* was commissioned by the Gardner in 2001, Lee Mingwei brought it to the Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei and the Govett-Brewster

Art Gallery in New Plymouth, New Zealand. In each location, individuals with long-term relationships to the space were brought in to lead conversations with museumgoers. The project at the Gardner was unique in that it took place in what had been Gardner's actual living room, and thus the artist was reanimating it as a social space.

co-managed by the contemporary department and the education department.

The Exhibitionist: How can a collection reflect the history and taste of an individual person while engaging on a broader level with a diverse public?

JD: I think visitors definitely come away with a sense of how distinctive Barnes's point of view, taste, and aesthetic theories were. Some love it; others find it mysterious. As we publish parts of the collection—for example, the volume on the 181 Renoirs, the *Masterworks* book—we not only discuss what is significant and interesting about these individual works, but also why Barnes sought and valued them. Barnes is always in the story.

When we add new components to the audio experience of the Collection Gallery, we may say why or how Barnes purchased a work, but we also discuss the work itself, on its own terms. After all, a great many of the pieces were produced centuries before Barnes collected them. And even when the artists were Barnes's contemporaries, the works were not produced *for* him.

I would say that, overall, we are looking to take a balanced approach. Providing the audio in several languages and for free via downloadable app certainly makes the collection available to those who are far away and cannot visit. We hope to make our online presence more robust, as well. We have had more than 300,000 visitors in our first year. Many of those have been schoolchildren from Philadelphia.

Visiting the Barnes is a distinctive, immersive experience. I hope that visitors feel this—the difference of this place. It can be overwhelming. A number of them have told me that they visit frequently but make a plan for each visit—to see the Matisses, or the African holdings, or the landscapes, or the portraits. The Barnes does not have a narrative progression, so you can start anywhere, and I hope that visitors will make their own experiences and find their favorites.

PC: We value bringing many different minds from many cultures and using the collection as a building block for new thinking and engagement with a broad audience. In Gardner's day, the museum was filled not just with beautiful works of art but also with conversations and performances by artists, musicians, philosophers, and poets. We uphold the multiplicity of this legacy with a very diversified program that few art museums would attempt. Outreach takes many new, exciting forms. For example, we run a world-class concert program, and we were the first museum to stream concerts through iTunes and directly from our website for free under a Creative Commons license

agreement. Since the beginning of the program in 2007, there have been more than four million downloads worldwide.

The museum is a place of refuge, and learning, and it is a time tunnel for travel, both forward and backward. My goal is to expand our visitor base demographically and culturally. It is not so much about increasing the numbers as increasing the range. It is about continuing to bring in a public for whom the collection and its atmospheric setting has an immediate resonance, but also about opening a dialogue with people who have little or no immediate rapport with the museum. It not just about what is in the collection, but also about what is *not* in the collection, and why.

OLD AND NEW STORIES

**Julieta Gonzalez and Suhanya Raffel in conversation
with *The Exhibitionist***

The globalization of the art world over the last two decades has been widely attributed to the proliferation of biennials. The international purview of many biennials has brought art from the so-called peripheries to the attention of the centers. And in cities such as São Paulo, Istanbul, Tirana, Shanghai, and Johannesburg, the biennial has been key to establishing an arts infrastructure—for instance creating opportunities for local artists to show their work to an international audience when there aren't museums to do that job—and cultivating a local audience of knowledgeable critics and art lovers.

These developments are well understood. What is less discussed, however, is the role of permanent art institutions, and specifically collections-based museums, in the so-called peripheries. Often they are operating in a situation where museums are a relatively recent phenomenon, and collecting practices have a somewhat different history than in Europe and North America.

Here, *The Exhibitionist* brings together Julieta Gonzalez, Senior Curator at the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City, and Suhanya Raffel, formerly Director of Collections at the Queensland Art Gallery in South Brisbane, Australia, and now Director of Collections at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, to discuss their experiences of organizing and expanding institutional collections of contemporary art in Latin America and Southeast Asia, respectively. As case studies they shed light on the various methods curators have developed to steer the collections of their museums, how museums outside major Western centers understand and distinguish themselves from “the center,” and what the future holds for further institutional development in these regions.

The Exhibitionist: Give us some background on how you have developed your practices as curators, and your roles at your respective institutions.

Julieta Gonzalez (JG): I would like to start the discussion by examining the ways that museums in the peripheries, that is, “non-Western” museums,

construct representations of the West in their collections. I have worked in several museums in different capacities over the course of my career, and each one has presented different challenges and situations that could be examined in this context.

First in Caracas, Venezuela, at the Museo de Bellas Artes, which as its name indicates was a fine arts museum aimed at universal representation. The museum had diverse collections that included Chinese ceramics, Egyptian art, a strangely named “Medieval and Modern Art” section, Latin American art, contemporary art, and a medium-based collection of works on paper that included photography, prints, and drawings. Many of these collections, especially the Chinese ceramics, Egyptian, and “Medieval and Modern,” were extremely limited and in some cases even contained works that were suspected to be forgeries. For example, the Chinese ceramics collection was donated and developed according to criteria reflecting the original collectors’ personal tastes rather than the study of the artifacts. Serious scholarship was only undertaken later, when the museum invited specialists from the United States to study the objects and produce a catalogue. The Egyptian objects were few in number and quite small, and all had come from a mid-century deaccession by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The “Medieval and Modern” collection consisted mainly of European works of art acquired by the museum throughout its history, starting with a group of works by Belgian artists that were left unclaimed after a Universal Exhibition held in Caracas in the late 19th century (it was intended to emulate the Crystal Palace show in London in 1851).¹ This incident in some way posed the need for an art museum in the country and, thus, from an accident and an act of neglect, a museum was born (at least on paper, at first).

The acquisitions starting in the 1960s, when the institution began a process of professionalization, were radically different. The collection of Latin American art gained works by renowned figures of the 20th century such as Diego Rivera, Carlos Mérida, Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Gego, Julio le Parc, and Luis Camnitzer. The collection of modern and contemporary art came to include work by major figures, from Henry Moore, Kenneth Armitage, and Max Bill to Dan Graham and Joseph Kosuth. The collection of works on paper aimed to fill gaps in the museum’s painting and sculpture collections, and acquired an important collection of Venezuelan and Latin American photography.

I worked there for some six years and became interested in how the formation of the collection could shed light on the construction of cultural identity. What could the universality inscribed in a third-world museum with limited collection possibilities tell us about ourselves and the role such a museum plays

¹ The Crystal Palace show, officially titled *The Great Exhibition*, was the first world’s fair-style exhibition. These national displays of industry and culture became very popular over the rest of the 19th century. The influence of this model is still evident in the proliferations of

international biennials featuring dramatic architecture, nation branding, and cultural exchange (and attracting a great number of tourists). The next official “world expo” is set for 2015 in Milan.

in national and even nationalistic representation? In between the periods I worked for the Museo de Bellas Artes, I worked at the Museo Alejandro Otero, which was founded in the early 1990s on the fringes of Caracas. There, the idea of center-versus-periphery was constantly being negotiated just because of its location away from the city center and close to a sprawling slum at the western border of Caracas. The collection was oriented toward contemporary art (regardless of national origin), following the international vocation of the artist Alejandro Otero, namesake of the museum.

From 2009 to 2012 I worked for Tate Modern in London as an adjunct curator of Latin American art, a position that consisted of elaborating acquisition strategies and identifying works by Latin American artists to be purchased by the museum.

This was a relatively recent initiative by Tate that is now being emulated by other major institutions around the world. Starting in 2002 they formed a Latin American committee, which provides funds to hire a curator for a period of three years to work with one of Tate’s permanent curators. The Tate did not aim to collect Latin American art as a monolithic and separate collection, but rather to collect works by Latin American artists of the 20th century that could be inserted into the major narratives of the overall collection of Tate Modern. In this sense, the category of “non-Western” was quite diluted here, as the criteria for selecting these works was based on their regional importance as well as the dialogues they could establish with canonical works of Western art already represented in Tate’s collections.

At the moment, I work at the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City, which was founded and initially endowed by Rufino Tamayo, one of the foremost figures of Mexican modern art. He began collecting in the 1960s with the aim of eventually donating his collection to the Mexican people. In 1981 the museum opened as a private institution, and in 1986 it became a public institution affiliated with the National Fine Arts Institute (INBA). The collection is international, and in fact it includes very little work by Mexican or Latin American artists, something that has also been reflected in the museum’s exhibition programming, which until quite recently devoted little attention to Mexican artists. This is partly because there are other museums in the city that are exclusively dedicated to Mexican art.

The Tamayo’s collection has works by artists such as Henry Moore, Kenneth Armitage, Barbara Hepworth, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, John Chamberlain, Antoni Tàpies, and a few Latin Americans such as the Polish-born Mathias Goeritz, Jesús Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Sergio de Camargo, Manuel Felguérez, and Francisco Toledo, among others. This collection is highly personal and reflects Tamayo’s tastes and connections. Most of the works were purchased

from the galleries that represented him, Marlborough and Martha Jackson, and although the museum has had a very dynamic exhibition program since its foundation, not many works have been added to Tamayo's initial endowment. Only in the past 10 to 15 years have other (and only a few) works been incorporated in the collection, and these have been mostly by international artists (Simon Starling, Claire Fontaine, Wolfgang Tillmans, Ryan Gander, and some Mexican or Mexico-based artists such as Gabriel Orozco, Carlos Amorales, Melanie Smith, and Francis Alÿs).

Suhanya Raffel (SR): The Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), where I worked from 1994 until July 2013, is a state-funded institution that began collecting contemporary art from Asia and the Pacific region in the early 1990s. This collection interest was sparked by two exhibition projects. The first was the 1989 exhibition *Japanese Ways, Western Means*, which came to the QAG from the Museum of Modern Art in Saitama, Japan, and featured major works by artists such as Yasumasa Morimura, Yayoi Kusama, and Lee Ufan. This exhibition awoke an institutional interest in the contemporary art of an important neighbor of Australia—Japan—while also being one of the first exhibitions at the QAG dedicated to the contemporary art of a non-Western nation. Indeed, it was one of the first of its ilk to be staged in Australia.

The second influential exhibition was the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), inaugurated in 1993, which was initiated and developed by the QAG. There was an initial decade-long funding commitment, which meant that the project really shaped the nature of the contemporary collections at the QAG. It was through the lens of this recurring exhibition project, housed within a collecting institution, that the QAG's contemporary Asian and Pacific collection was born. The structure imposed by a recurring exhibition in an institutional context is important to recognize, as it established the cycles of research phase, collection development, and commissioning, leading up to the final exhibition being realized in the third year.

The story of any collection development is complex and local. The QAG collection needs to be discussed in terms of the international rise of the contemporary biennial/triennial over the last 20 years, and in the context of Australia's vital interests in its region. The first decade of the APT in the 1990s involved a number of regionally based advisors and co-curators, and each exhibition looked at contemporary work made within the last three years.

Given the close relationship of the collection's development with the APT project, the collection paralleled much of the thinking around what constituted contemporary Asian and Pacific art. This includes an ongoing debate about historical and geographic parameters and the interrogation of ideas about the modern and the contemporary, initially conducted within a postcolonial framework and subsequently broadened to include recent

conversations about the international and the global.

And all of this was happening in Australia, where the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture is an established, intrinsic aspect regarding discussions about contemporary art and culture.

In concert with the developments of the collection and the APT was the establishment of a curatorial position within the institution. I joined the Queensland Art Gallery in 1994 and was the first curator dedicated to this collection area. In this and subsequent roles, I developed and shaped the contemporary Asian and Pacific collection while being closely involved in every APT exhibition since 1994.

The Exhibitionist: What are the criteria for building these collections? Has there been a set agenda, or have objects been acquired on a more ad hoc basis?

JG: The criteria for the acquisitions processes of the various institutions where I have worked have been very different. In Venezuela, at least when I was there, there were little to no funds for acquisitions, and on the rare occasions when these funds were made available, works were purchased at the director's whim, a situation I contested a couple of times. My work was very focused on the study of the existing collection and the organization of temporary exhibitions.

At the Tamayo there is a similar (meaning, sporadic and random) situation in terms of availability of funds, which does not allow for a long-term strategy of acquisitions. As a result, the collection has grown very little beyond the initial endowment made by Tamayo. The plan, however, is to work out a tentative strategy to try to represent the museum's exhibition program in the collection through donations of works that have been produced by the museum for its exhibitions. When this occurs, or when funds do become available for acquisitions, the curators meet to evaluate proposals with the director, but it is not a well-defined process.

At Tate Modern I was hired specifically to work on acquisitions and the collection. The process was much more systematic. I proposed an initial strategy, which I then tried to carry out over the course of my three-year appointment with very specific goals in mind as a result of a careful analysis of Tate's existing collection, gaps that were to be filled, and narratives that could be complemented with the inclusion of works by Latin American artists working along similar lines. At the museum I worked with Tanya Barson, curator of international art, to research and gather information on works according to the strategy I had proposed,

²· Tanya Barson continues to grow the Tate's Latin American collection. Along with Taisa Palhares at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, she curated the forthcoming Mira Schendel exhibition at the Tate Modern. It will be Schendel's first-ever international survey exhibition.

which she then presented to the curatorial team, who would make a selection, which would then be approved or vetoed by the directors.² After this selection process was finalized, it was taken to the members of the Latin American committee, which provided the funds for the acquisition of works by Latin American artists, and our selection would be evaluated by this committee.

I have also worked during the past year at the Bronx Museum in New York on acquisitions because they received a grant from the Ford Foundation. The collecting process there has been uneven throughout its history, as it did not have consistent funding and was enriched mostly through donations. But this year, given these grant funds, the process became similar to the one at Tate in the sense that a strategy was drafted from the study of the existing collection, we proposed works to the director and the acquisitions committee, and they made decisions. The committee does not contribute funds for the acquisition of works, except for occasional and specific donations of works, even if it does have a major say in the approval of works to be acquired, which is a radically different situation from that of major museums such as Tate and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where the primary role of these committees is to provide significant financial support for the acquisition of works.

SR: As a state institution that functions primarily within an Australian national context, the QAG has carved out a vital niche regarding international contemporary art as it is unfolding in the 21st century. Of course, because it is an art museum in Australia, the collection grows from a perspective that is first local and national, then extends to the regional and the international contemporary contexts. Importantly, in Australia, the various state art and culture institutions are sensitive to the specialized collections each has built. This has resulted in lively and nuanced art historical perspectives being seen as part of the permanent collection displays as well as collection-based exhibitions.

Views on Australian art histories from the colonial period to the present are thus very important. All state art collections include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island art, and this is now a major contemporary collecting impetus for Australian art museums and one that has enabled and opened a calibrated reading and approach to art history and collection building here. By way of example, the QAG's focus on contemporary Pacific art also establishes a framework for an art historical dialogue that includes first-nations conversations.

It is significant too that Australia's own history of colonialism and migration is contingent on the primary influences of Euro-American art history, especially that of the avant-garde as it unfolded from the 1960s, and the particular modernisms that have unfolded across the Pacific, Asia, and the Middle East. This is rich, often contested, ground. It means that parts of the collection test and challenge authoritative, canonical readings of art history, namely those that are taken for granted in the West. Attentiveness

to cultural memory and acknowledging these aspects of history is critical in the contemporary global context. The lessons of the postcolonial experience insist on this recognition. This often translates into collection displays that offer dissonant but productive juxtapositions.

With the development of the QAG's second site in 2006, the Gallery of Modern Art, the acquisition of late 20th and 21st century art is now central. Priority is given to Australian art as the base from which other collection strengths are built. With its large contemporary spaces, the Gallery of Modern Art has been able to show ambitious site-specific works and, on occasion, to commission and collect.

The Exhibitionist: Where do you see the potential of the collection within the larger function and mission of the museum?

JG: At the moment it is difficult to speak of a program at the Museo Tamayo, as I only have jurisdiction over the exhibitions I curate and am not responsible for an overall vision; each curator works with relative autonomy. In an ideal situation, and in the way I attempt to articulate a coherent narrative and establish correlations between the exhibitions I organize, even if they do deal with diverse issues and have different formats, I would say it depends on the collection itself.

I believe that the collection, however limited in scope, is the heart of a museum and should be researched and provide directions for different constructions of meaning that derive from its study. To cite one example, the Tamayo collection is deeply focused on abstraction, specifically lyrical and geometric abstraction, and this can provide a point of departure to reflect on and research the paths followed by abstraction after the 1960s, which range from the phenomenological concerns of Minimalism and Neo-Concretism during that decade to more contemporary investigations that relate to new media, new ways of approaching the painterly, et cetera.

3. The *Acercamientos al acervo* series was integral to Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy's reimagining of the museum as a space for curatorial research, exchange, and

Another way to address the collection is through dialogue with contemporary artists, whose subjective readings always shed light on the collection and its symbolic constructions. There was a program initiated by the previous director, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, and former chief curator, Magalí Arriola, entitled *Acercamientos al acervo* (loosely translated as *Approaching the Collection*), which would have been great to continue, as I feel very close to that way of working with a collection that is small and inscribed within a very specific period.³ In fact, I had previously taken a similar approach, both at the Museo de Bellas Artes and at a private collection where I worked for a period of time and organized a series of dialogues between artists and works in the collection.

experimentation when it reopened in 2010.

The program asked not only artists, but also outside curators, to interpret the collection.

Some of the artists who participated in the series included Alejandro Cesarco, who researched Rufino Tamayo's photo archive, and Jorge Méndez Blake, who worked with the museum's library.

When dealing with collections that are narrow in scope, a potentially dangerous situation arises in which curators are tempted to use the artworks as props rather than cultural artifacts, and deny them their wealth of layered meanings. It is a trend I have witnessed in several contexts and it is a hazard for smaller, younger museums with no established, systematic approach to building and displaying their collections. This is not to say that certain creative license cannot be taken when approaching a collection whose interpretation has already been somewhat exhausted by numerous collection displays, but it should be done with respect and consideration for the works.

SR: The balance between the temporary exhibition program and the collection displays is very important. I think that more museums will be making more exhibitions from their collections in the future, as it is a critical way of making audiences more familiar with what institutions hold, and of making curators think about what they have to work with and how to embolden the holdings. Collections are the long-term, slow-release legacy of curatorial work.

Museums today are vital, thriving parts of their respective communities. They are places of leisure, pleasure, learning, meeting. They are social sites. They engage audiences through ever-broader means, such as social media networks and web-based forums, as well as the familiar platforms of scholarly lectures, educational activities, and so on. Staying relevant to audiences and understanding how one informs and shapes the other is the great challenge for the 21st-century museum. The relationships between curator, educator, and audience have become more complex, and the need to maintain scholarship and drive audiences is a fundamental and ongoing discussion. Collections remain at the heart of the museum and have increasingly become sites for inquiry and risk taking.

The Exhibitionist: What stories do you want to tell through the collections of your respective institutions?

JG: However limited they may be, collections can lend themselves to the construction of different narratives that are art historical,

4. Both Gonzalez and Raffel assert that artist interventions in the collection are extremely important. At the QAG, this series most recently involved Michael Zavros creating themed interiors that included artworks and decorative objects from the collection.

5. These exhibitions by Hans Haacke and Fred Wilson have become touchstones in institutional critique. Wilson's installation of artifacts from the museum's collection brought to light a history of the state's involvement with the slave trade that had been previously repressed in the context of the institution. Haacke's installation continued his investigation into the

museum's commercial relationships. Although reinterpretations of museum collections by artists are still very popular and critically acclaimed today, as has been noted in this interview, rarely do they engage so politically with the museum itself.

⁶ In the early 1950s, the Independent Group, which was made up of artists, writers, and musicians, met at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London to discuss how mass culture could be integrated with high culture. The result was an important forerunner of Pop art. Anniversaries of two of their acclaimed exhibitions, *This*

historical, and even sociological. At the Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas, I once wanted to organize an exhibition that would display the entire collection as well as documentation related to the acquisition of the works in order to present the different discursive constructions that informed the foundation and growth of the collection, which would in turn reflect on the construction of a cultural identity through the museum and its collecting strategies.

A more recent example of working with collections is an exhibition I recently organized at the Tamayo Museum, where I showed contemporary works in period displays from the collection that referred to different visions of the modern: from Cold War aesthetics to abstract geometric works inflected by a concern for the integration of painting, sculpture, and architecture to kinetic works inspired by the space age and technological progress.

SR: Collection exhibitions at the QAG have varied from the art historical narrative that concentrates on a distinct historical period, for instance *Three Decades: Contemporary Chinese Art Since 1989 from the Queensland Art Gallery Collection* (2009); the *Artist's Choice* series, where the gallery invites an artist to respond to the collection and curate an exhibition; and *Sculpture Is Everything* (2012), an exhibition that examined late 20th and early 21st century sculptural practices.⁴ These are all examples of exhibitions that were drawn from the collection and treated as stand-alone displays for a maximum of three to four months.

Permanent collection displays are installed for much longer periods: up to 18 months, with the works on paper in these hangs being rotated every three to four months. These are historical: Australian art (from the colonial period to the 1970s), Asian art (from the pre-modern collections), and European art (primarily from the 18th and 19th centuries). The Australian art holdings are the most established, and they are shown in an important suite of galleries. They are visited regularly by large numbers of people and are an ongoing part of the Australian primary and high school art curriculum.

***Is Tomorrow* (1956) and *Parallel of Art and Life* (1953), both hailed for their innovative use of technology and exhibition design, were celebrated with exhibitions at the Whitechapel Gallery (2011) and ICA London (2013), respectively.**

⁷ René Block's biennial presented a nonlinear narrative of the readymade in the 20th century, with works by Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray as the starting point. The readymade has been a recurring theme throughout Block's career, beginning with his legendary gallery's early championing of Conceptual and Fluxus artists

using everyday materials. This eighth edition of the Biennale of Sydney is probably the most critically acclaimed and accessible in its history, and is often cited as a touchstone by the artistic directors who have followed.

⁸ *TransCulture* featured an international group of artists, including Cai Guo-Qiang, Joseph Grigely, Shirin Neshat, and Takashi Murakami, all of whom were exploring ideas of cultural exchange near the end of the 20th century. This forward-thinking exhibition seemed to be at odds with the general direction of that year's Venice Biennale, in which the

The Exhibitionist: What are your curatorial, historical, or theoretical points of departure when building a collection?

JG: I must say that my references come from various sources, which are not just art historical or museum related. One must read collections in the light of local specificities or the specific criteria that guided their formation. My influences mostly come from artists and their concern for the display of works in the galleries, collections, and modes of representation. When I was beginning to work in museums, I was specifically influenced by Hans Haacke's *Viewing Matters* exhibition at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam in 1996, and Fred Wilson's 1992 *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore.⁵ To this day they remain fundamental references. When organizing historical displays, I like to look at photographs from the period and replicate the visual vocabulary used by curators at the time to display certain works; the exhibitions organized by the Independent Group in London in the 1950s have been very formative in this regard.⁶

SR: I am interested that *The Exhibitionist* has begun a conversation about collections, curators, and art museums. So much has been written on exhibition practice, especially in relation to biennials and contemporary art, with little discussion of the work of collection builders. Unique to the Queensland Art Gallery is the relationship between the APT and the collection vis-à-vis the contemporary Asian and Pacific collections. This has also influenced how the gallery has approached contemporary art per se, including Australian contemporary art.

The building of the collection has benefited from the commissioning process. This is an unusual practice for an art museum, although perhaps it is becoming more commonplace. Art museums tend to wait before making major acquisitions, as it is perceived as being quite risky. But the QAG would not have been able to afford its collection of contemporary Asian

appointed visual arts director, Jean Clair, who had a reputed distaste for contemporary art, canceled the Aperto section of the exhibition.

⁹ Both Okwui Enwezor and Carolyn Christov-Barkagiev presented editions of Documenta that were less Eurocentric than what had come before. Enwezor was the first non-European curator to helm the role of artistic director, and he focused on themes of migration, displacement, and creolization. Christov-Barkagiev also touched on many of the same topics, using the trauma of war as a thread that connected different eras and cultures. There

was a satellite exhibition in Kabul, Afghanistan.

^{10.} *Manifesta 9* (2012) was the first *Manifesta* that did not take place in a number of locations. It was presented in one structure: a former coal mine in Genk, Belgium. This strategy may mark a new direction for the biennial, which had previously put great effort into dispersing the exhibition throughout a city, or even an entire region, to demonstrate a thorough integration with that location. *Manifesta 10* will be held in 2014 at the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

^{11.} While *Floating Life* presented only contem-

porary works, many of them commissioned for the exhibition by the QAG, *Papunya Tula* was the first major retrospective of artists from the Papunya settlement in Australia's Western Desert. The settlement opened in 1960 as an assimilation program that brought together several language groups, and was known for poor living conditions. However, an official art collective was started in 1972, bringing the first wave of institutional and market attention to Aboriginal art in the 1980s.

and Pacific art if it had waited for a body of writing to come out about the works it now owns. The ability of specialist curators to feel confident about their relationships with artists, together with a supportive institutional culture and a strong and committed benefaction base, has ensured a peerless collection in this area.

Personal points of reference in terms of biennial exhibition practice include René Block's 1990 Biennale of Sydney titled *The Readymade Boomerang: Certain Relations in 20th Century Art*⁷; *TransCulture*, curated in 1995 by Fumio Nanjo and Dana Friis-Hansen and organized by the Japan Foundation for the 46th Venice Biennale⁸; Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta 11* in 2002; Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's 2012 *dOCUMENTA (13)*⁹; and *Manifesta*'s function as a transient, recurring exhibition in Europe.¹⁰

The exhibitions *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*, curated by Hetti Perkins at the Art Gallery of NSW in Sydney in 2000, and *Floating Life: Contemporary Aboriginal Fibre Art*, curated by Diane Moon at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2009, remain with me as exemplary exhibitions on contemporary indigenous Australian art.¹¹ And I'll name just three places I enjoy returning to: Sir John Soane's Museum in London; Lunuganga Estate, the country home of the eminent architect Geoffrey Bawa in southern Sri Lanka; and the Sanjusangendo Temple in Kyoto, Japan.¹²

It is really important as a curator to always keep looking, and that the looking should include the museum (the architecture, how the visitor is welcomed, lighting, floor finishes, wall colors, labels, food, et cetera), the collections (how works are hung, what is next to what, interesting juxtapositions, what's missing, what would you put in dialogue if you had the opportunity), and the exhibitions.

Curators must also look at the most modest of collections (which are sometimes kept in very abject conditions but held together all the same), private museums, encyclopedic collection museums, and elliptical concept-based shows. And they should

^{12.} Like the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in

Boston, Sir John Soane's Museum is known for its personal, idiosyncratic displays. Soane, an architect, established the museum in 1833 and collected architectural drawings and models, Greek and Roman antiquities, British painting and sculpture from the 1820s, and other objects from around the world. A temporary exhibition program was started there in 1996, integrating contemporary works and other collections into the existing installation.

regularly return to a single object in a favorite local museum. I think about the temporary nature of some work, and the value of an experience that cannot be preserved or expanded. These, too, are part of the vocabulary of a curator. They prompt one to consider how to make sense of the provisional when making a collection.

RESPONSE II



EXHIBITIONS

Maurice Berger and Bice Curiger
Curating the Past

Patrick Allegaert and Anselm Franke
New Ways Beyond Art

Stephanie Barron and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep
Mixing and Matching

CURATING THE PAST

Maurice Berger and Bice Curiger in conversation
with *The Exhibitionist*

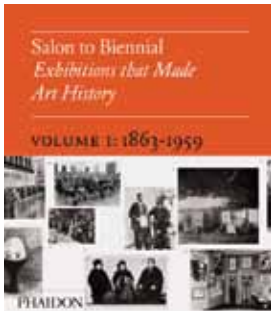
Curatorial practice has changed incredibly over the last few decades. One might argue that there was no such thing as curatorial practice 25 ago in the sense that we understand the term today. Curating has taken on an increasingly diverse array of definitions and models. We have seen the establishment of numerous formal programs for curatorial education and a plethora of publishing on the subject.

Most of these developments have happened in the sphere of contemporary art. And while some contemporary art curators have begun to experiment with juxtaposing contemporary and historical works in their exhibitions, it hasn't been much discussed how contemporary ideas regarding curating might impact exhibitions exclusively devoted to historical artworks or materials from cultural history.

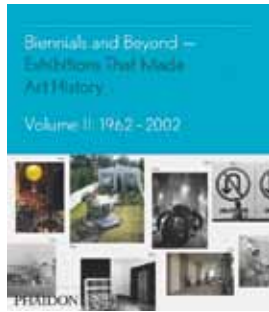
Here, *The Exhibitionist* brings together Maurice Berger, Research Professor and Chief Curator at the Center for Art Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and Bice Curiger, who for the last 20 years has been a curator at the Kunsthaus Zürich and is the recently appointed Artistic Director at the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Arles, France, to discuss the possible reasons behind this blind spot in current discussions. They analyze how and why certain conventions of displaying different types of art develop, and how recent curatorial innovations might be applied to shows of non-contemporary work.

The Exhibitionist: Do you see curatorial innovations taking place in the sphere of exhibitions dedicated to cultural history and historical artworks? Can and should historical exhibitions of art and culture be imagined in more contemporary and innovative ways and formats? What would that look like?

Maurice Berger (MB): There is no question that contemporary “curatorial practice” has been shaped by the academy, especially in exhibitions of contemporary art. More dynamically designed installations have become



Bruce Althuler, *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History Volume I: 1863-1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008)



Bruce Althuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History Volume II: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013)



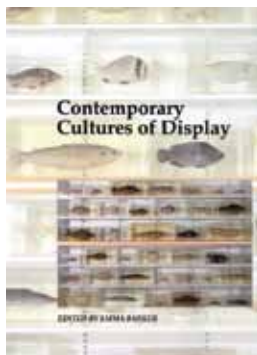
Bruce Althuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994)



Rasheed Araeen, *The Essential Black Art* (London: Kala Press, 1988)



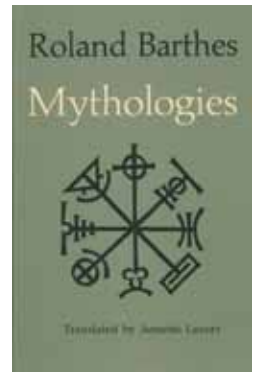
Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989)



Emma Barker, ed., *Contemporary Cultures of Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)



Joseph Backstein, Daniel Birnbaum, and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, eds., *Thinking Worlds: The Moscow Conference on Philosophy, Politics, and Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008)



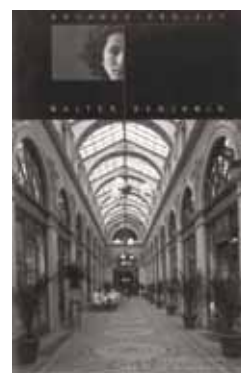
Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972)



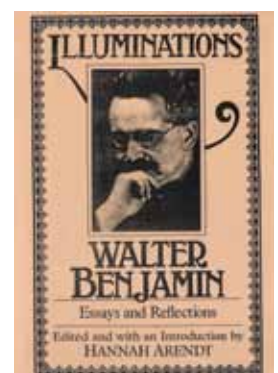
Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, eds., *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets and Museums* (Karlsruhe, Germany: Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, 2009)



Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel, eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013)



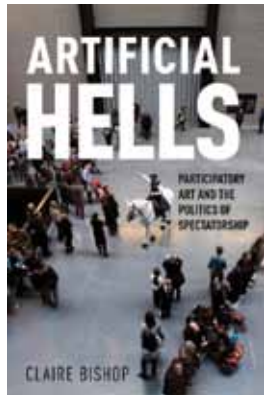
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999)



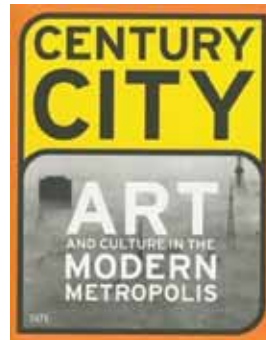
Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969)



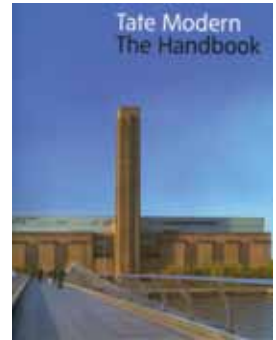
Maurice Berger, *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010)



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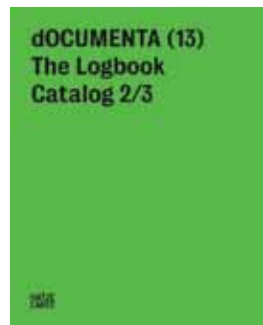
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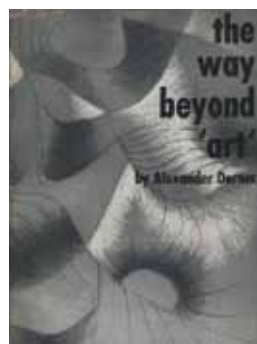
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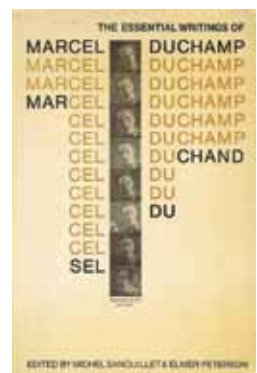
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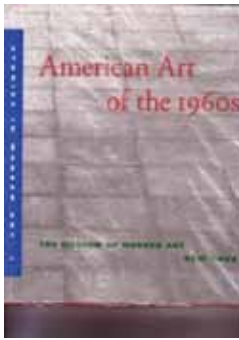
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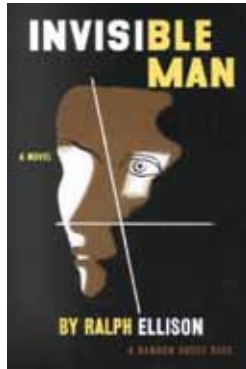
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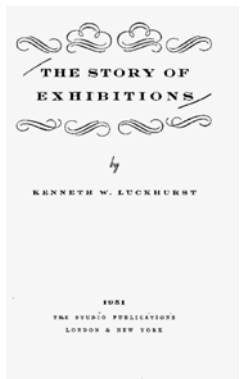
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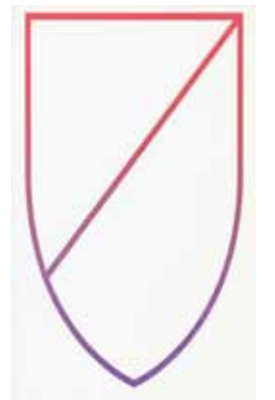
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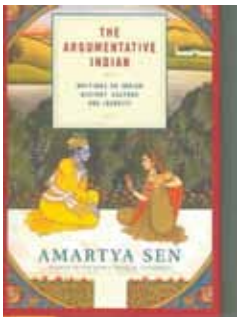
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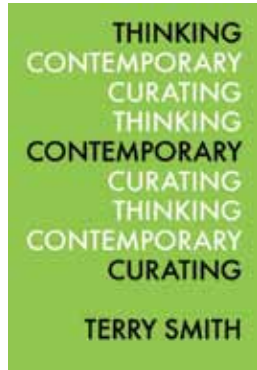
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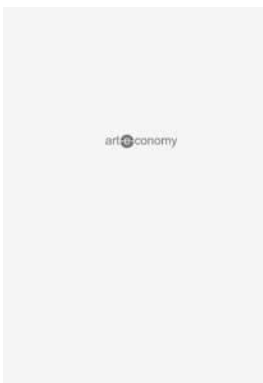
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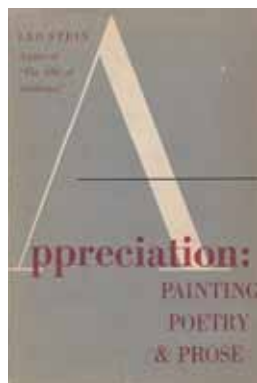
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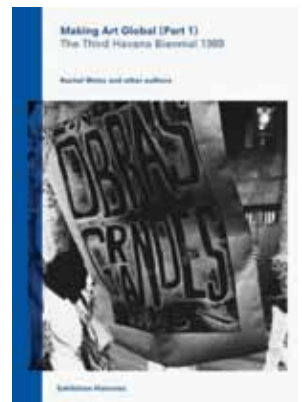
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commonplace. And new and innovative ways of contextualizing and explaining art to museumgoers have become an important part of the process of contemporary curatorial practice.

Exhibitions of cultural history and historical art have much to learn from these practices, especially with regard to the way objects are displayed. Far too often, such exhibitions rely on a traditional style of presentation, with object after object proceeding in a boring, plodding historical narrative. So, one thing that historical shows can learn from contemporary curatorial practice is how to be more dynamic, agile, and interactive presentations of artifacts and moving images.

Another thing they can learn is how to have an economy of information and visual cues. Increasingly, exhibitions of contemporary art rely on installations that permit the work to speak for itself—sometimes benefiting from a keen curatorial eye that creates visual rhythms from object to object, room to room. This pacing can give the curator great latitude in telling a story—from historical, cultural, social, and conceptual angles—about the art they are entrusted with. If they are elegantly arranged and visually compelling, and accompanied by brief, well-written wall texts as well as contextual objects and moving images, these stories can greatly enhance the viewer's experience and comprehension of art. In more historic exhibitions, this visual pacing often takes a backseat to the retelling of a prescribed narrative about the past. The shows are often inelegantly designed and contain an overwhelming amount of textual information. Countless times, I have watched viewers stymied by historical exhibitions to the point that they lose confidence in the experience and walk away.

Conversely, exhibitions of contemporary art now often go to the other extreme. While stories are undoubtedly important to the museum and the public, “storytelling” sometimes becomes a dirty word in curatorial practice. The formalist methods of the 1950s and 1960s—dependent as they were on a “close reading” of the art object—often did not provide a broader cultural or political reading of the work. Even today, some graduate programs in curatorial practice (as well as many art museums) encourage curators to eschew extended wall labels and texts in exhibitions, lest they interfere with the visitor's direct interaction with the art object.

But such methodologies ignore two basic facts: Not every museum visitor is an insider, and the museum itself is an institution of learning and enlightenment. The stories we tell about art, history, and culture, especially if we tell them well, can help our audiences understand what they are seeing and enrich their experience of viewing and interpreting art and objects.

It is true that every work of art, every film, every piece of material culture has a story attached to it. Animating these stories has been, and must remain, a key role of museums, whether they are devoted to contemporary art or historical visual culture and art.

¹ The artists in *Hypermental* explored “post-surrealistic” aspects of the imaginary. Curiger demonstrated how those directly associated with Surrealism, such as Marcel Duchamp and Meret Oppenheim, connect to such contemporary artists as Doug Aitken and Sarah Lucas despite their different historical contexts. The show dealt with themes such as sexual difference and the production of desire throughout a 50-year period of great social and political change.

Bice Curiger (BC): I agree that the main concern should be to animate—to give life to the objects. At the same time it has become clear that museums (really, all institutions dedicated to art or history) should be more than “didactic machines” subdued to routine and convention in order to meet the expectations of a large public.

Why is there a gap between curating the contemporary and curating the historical? In presenting and discussing contemporary art we are always naturally referring to our contemporary pool of shared experiences. We trust in the maturity of the viewers, and, even more, we count on their readiness to be taken aback, even baffled. We also trust that sooner or later there will be more occasions to deepen their knowledge of what they just saw. It is different in the case of historic art presentations.

That is the reason why, in my exhibitions dealing with historic objects and juxtaposing them with contemporary art, I always try to address the aforementioned background of shared experiences of the everyday, rather than some assumed knowledge of art. It starts with the title of the show. *Hypermental: Rampant Reality from 1950–2000, from Salvador Dalí to Jeff Koons* (2000) at the Kunsthhaus Zürich could also have been named something like *The Legacy of Surrealism in Postwar Art*.¹ The word “hypermental” was made up, but I believed that it would work like a teaser or a melody, accompanying viewers as they walked through the exhibition.

Museums are somehow machines to make order—a universe of labeling, classifying, et cetera.

They still are orienting their activities too much according to the *Stilgeschichte*, as we say in German: the history of styles. I was thinking of this as I organized my most recent exhibition *Riotous Baroque: From Cattelan to Zurburan: Tributes to Precarious Vitality* (2013).² In our age of stylistic skepticism, of artistic working processes that are often founded upon major changes or breaks, art has long since divested itself of any orientation toward an overarching style. If, today, it seeks to rub against reality and touch upon existential issues, old jargon regarding the “pathos of expression” is foreign to it.

² By ignoring the stylistic trappings of the baroque, Curiger was able to identify common motifs such as “the bucolic,” “the comical,” “the burlesque,” and “the grotesque,” bringing together two eras in which the concept of the visible was going through distinct transformations. The featured artists included 17th-century masters such as Giovanni Battista Langetti and Jan Steen and the contemporary artists Urs Fischer, Dana Schutz, and Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch.

The Exhibitionist: Both of you describe a tension between the visual experience more associated with contemporary art displays and the didacticism associated with displays of historical work. Do you feel that these tendencies have been dictated merely by convention (how curators are used to displaying art of their specialization), or are there practical or theoretical reasons why contemporary work should or could be treated differently than historical objects?

MB: I think this has more to do with convention than any innate difference between contemporary art versus historical materials. Curators of historical materials are invariably trained as historians. Most curators of contemporary art come out of art history or art criticism—both disciplines that are essentially visual.

Historical methodologies, by and large, focus on the chronological and the narrative. They are essentially about the word, about storytelling. And too often it is a kind of stolid, static storytelling that does little to animate the artifacts on display. As more dynamic and bold displays of contemporary art suggest, storytelling need not be visually static. Indeed, through cutting-edge design, refined visual rhythms, emotional cues, lucid wall texts, and other contextualizing materials, the best installations of contemporary art are also about storytelling, but with a more theatrical approach that creates drama and visual intrigue. Historical exhibitions can and should embrace this sensibility, as well.

Really, I think all disciplines could use a bit more drama and intrigue these days. Displays of contemporary art can be dispiriting, too. Without greater dynamism, I fear that museums in general—though I am not speaking of the always robustly attended museums of science and natural history—are destined to become more or less irrelevant to most people. Attendance is dropping in many traditional art museums, even as billions are being spent erecting bigger and better buildings.

The challenge today is not to build better buildings, but for curators to organize more visually and conceptually dynamic art and history exhibitions.

The Exhibitionist: What are some examples of recent exhibitions that have produced the types of dynamism you describe? Can you name some exhibitions that have been particularly influential or inspiring for your own practice?

MB: Well, I do try to practice what I preach. My most recent exhibition—*For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil*

3. The title of the exhibition paraphrases the infamous pronouncement of Emmett Till's mother in 1955: "Let the world see what I've seen." By allowing the photo of her son's

open casket to be published in newspapers and magazines, she revealed to the public how brutally he had been murdered. The dissemination of the photo stood for the visibility that the mass media was able to give to a population that felt invisible, and it played a large part in mobilizing the civil rights movement.

Rights (2010)—relies on this type of visual and conceptual dynamism.³ The show is the first comprehensive exhibition to explore the historical role played by visual images in shaping, influencing, and transforming the fight for civil rights in the United States. In it, I created dynamic, rhythmic juxtapositions of objects and moving images—fine art, photographs, books, magazines, posters, toys, films, newsreels, and television—that explored the power of visual culture to alter prevailing ideas about race. Over six venues in total, the exhibition has had nearly a million visitors, from scholars and collectors to families and students.

A few exhibitions stand out as models for the kind of curating I am proposing. Despite its serious omissions, Allon Schoener's 1969 exhibition for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, *Harlem on My Mind*, represents a very early example of an artful, moving, and provocative cultural history exhibition.⁴ Even if Schoener slighted the consequential history of African American painting, sculpture, and photography—in the nation's preeminent art museum, no less—he still created an

exhibition that was at once lively, visually dynamic, and informative. *Harlem on My Mind* was years ahead of its time in terms of its methodology, design, and point of view.

Recently, the exemplary work of Donald Albrecht for the Museum of the City of New York comes to mind.⁵ Beautifully designed and visually and conceptually dynamic, Albrecht's exhibitions are inevitably an exciting experience. They are at once playful and smart, sensory and intellectual. His *Paris/New York: Design Fashion Culture, 1925–1940* (2008) was one such project. In it, Albrecht explored the period between the World Wars when New York, looking to Paris for inspiration, emerged as an international cultural capital. Bringing together well-known figures such as Josephine Baker and Salvador Dalí—and bringing to light forgotten ones, as well—the show offered an agile interplay of architecture, furniture design, fashion, painting, and the performing arts. It never lost sight of bigger social and cultural narratives, and it never lost respect for the object.

BC: I have worked closely with contemporary artists in recent decades and consider them my partners, and I get a lot of inspiration from them in terms of how to look back to history. I would like to mention one of many possible examples: Thomas Hirschhorn's

4. Allon Schoener is a cultural historian specializing in New York's ethnic groups. *Harlem on My Mind* was designed as a 60-minute experience, with "communications environments" of television and sound to encourage the audience to move through the rooms. Schoener had applied a similarly media-heavy presentation and design to his previous exhibition, *Lower East Side: Portal to American Life* at the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1966.

5. Early in his professional life, Donald Albrecht worked as an architect, and then became the curator of production design and director of

exhibitions at the Museum of the Moving Image, New York, in 1986. His other exhibitions at the Museum of the City of New York have included *The High Style of Dorothy Draper* (2006) and *American Style: Colonial Revival and the Modern Metropolis* (2011). *I Have Seen the Future: Norman Bel Geddes Designs America*, the first major retrospective of the industrial designer who brought the idea of “streamlining” to many aspects of technology, transportation, and interior design in the 1930s, will open at the museum in October 2013.

Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 2001, which was a literal occupation of the museum and its collection, which spans 500 years. His intervention felt as if an alter ego of the artist, a crazy man, had been driven to tell us something about that place, Davos: its history, the important ideas that were born there. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner lived and painted there, and it was there that Thomas Mann wrote *The Magic Mountain*. Not to mention the World Economic Forum, with its violent military presence as a side effect, which takes place every year in Davos. While preparing the show, Hirschhorn wished us to leave all the artworks in the collection gallery where he was installing his exhibition. He just covered the walls with bright blue plastic, hiding the works that were hanging there by Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, A. R. Penck, and so on. You still could see bits on top sticking out behind the plastic, in between the big wooden poles with the white neon lamps. All this and more, what Hirschhorn did, was just a wonderful exercise in bringing live artistic and existential energy into a museum and shaking things up a bit.

My first really big show in a museum was called *Signs and Wonders: Niko Pirosmani (1862–1918) and Recent Art*.⁶ It was in 1995 at the Kunsthaus Zürich and at the museum in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, and featured works by this unknown, so-called “naive” artist from Georgia. He had lived as a vagabond, making wonderful, huge paintings on waxed black cloth of very generic motifs: a giraffe, a boar, a big-breasted beer-drinking woman. I had discovered Pirosmani in the museum in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1988 and found out that he was quite important for the Russian avant-garde. He’d been included in an exhibition in 1914 in Moscow together with Igor Larionov and Kazimir Malevich. But then Stalin forbade all the so-called “naive art,” and it was not until decades later that Pirosmani regained his status and even became incredibly popular in the Soviet Union as the “painter of the people’s soul,” the Henri Rousseau of the East. In the West he remained a complete unknown.

It was important for me not to show him alone in an exhibition, as I wanted to avoid misunderstandings, namely the perception of a connection with a certain sentimental folklorism, or paternalistic clichés related to naive art. Instead I saw potential in his possible inclusion in an otherwise-contemporary group show in a museum setting. I included his

⁶ The outsider/insider binary was literally flipped in the installation of the exhibition. Thirty of Pirosmani’s paintings were hung in the center of the main gallery, and the works by contemporary artists remained on the periphery regardless of their size.

paintings among works by Robert Gober, Katharina Fritsch, Fischli & Weiss, and more. They were like meteorites that had fallen into this show of recent art. It was an important test and experience for me, as a contemporary art curator, to work with historical works. But I trusted in the productive friction it would create.

The Exhibitionist: When you display the contemporary and the historical alongside one another, what have been some of the intended relationships or effects you wished to create? And were there any concerns on your part about one object diminishing certain values associated with another?

MB: I want to create collisions of images, sounds, texts, and sensations that spark thoughts, especially personal responses. In my work on race, I feel that it is very important—crucial, really—for the viewer to come away having thought about his or her personal and private attitudes about race. It is so difficult to get people to think about these things, given the incendiary nature of the subject. Rather than entangling viewers in a plodding narrative, I want to inform them, then allow them to think through a visual and aural experience that is also emotional and provocative. Striking this balance has always been my goal, so I work hard to assure that one object or text does not diminish certain values associated with another. Everything is delicately interrelated to create passionate moments while also telling a broader cultural and social story.

BC: To have trust in the visual effects of artworks is important and could be a pivotal point in breaking up existing conventions. We live in a very visual world, so, why not learn from filmmaking? I've started thinking about montage as part of the answer to how to juxtapose old and new art. But there are a lot of potential pitfalls. The most important one to avoid is superficial analogies of motif and form. Instead, one should think of two different but related realities colliding, which become mutually enriched by their clash, heightening their charge and interrupting the linearity of conventional narrative techniques. In film we talk of “cross cut” and “hard cut,” the “non-chronological link” and the “contrast montage.”

The Exhibitionist: Who is the audience you most want to reach with these techniques, and how does that affect your curatorial decisions? Or do you not have a specific audience in mind when conceiving of an exhibition?

MB: My goal is to create exhibitions that are smart, sensual, emotionally stimulating, and accessible. This last quality is the most important one, to me, because I want my projects to move viewers to the point that they begin to reevaluate their personal stake in the story I am telling. This is why educational “tours” through exhibitions are anathema to me. I believe they present a predigested version of an exhibition and circumvent personal, intimate interaction.

I do have an ideal viewer: a smart and motivated teenager. If I can reach him or her, then I will have no problem communicating with older viewers. And, I am happy to say, young people really do respond to my projects. When my shows open at my academic home—the Center for Art Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland—our educators give students room to experience the exhibition on their own. Then, under the supervision of our educators and their teachers, they create works of art based on their experience of the show. The paintings and drawings they produce are often breathtaking. We hold an exhibition of the work in our university commons gallery—a kind of meta-exhibition.

BC: I do not belong to that first generation after the war who had to passionately defend the new art, with its advanced “attitudes becoming form.” So I always felt more relaxed about all that. Also because we had pop culture, and especially a wild and extremely non-elitist music scene, to look to.

But today there is another problem, namely the almost-too-big popularity of contemporary art. Today it seems as though one has to defend art from within. Once, Joseph Beuys introduced the *Erweiterter Kunstbegriff* (Expanded Term of Art), which was an invitation to open up the *hortus conclusus* of art. Now we have completely changed urgencies. If we look for instance at the *Feuilleton*, the pages dedicated to art and culture in Europe’s daily newspapers (which are shrinking anyway), it is normal to see an article on fancy haircuts or cooking recipes. Today it seems necessary and brave to insist on a seriousness of approach—to resist falling back into an elitist, silly, blasé gesture.

With my work I am addressing an audience that is sensitive, intelligent, and, like me, wanting art and culture to help me understand the world and its complexities. To open my mind to the unexpected. I am an optimist, and therefore I believe that this audience is out there.

The Exhibitionist: In thinking about the types of curatorial innovation we’ve been discussing, where do you see the relationship between exhibitions and collections going? What are some of the most innovative collection displays you have experienced, and do you see this type of innovation carrying over into the curating of temporary exhibitions?

7. The Chinese collection at the Norton Museum of Art, a museum built from the private collection of Ralph and Elizabeth Norton in 1941, has grown significantly from its original 125 objects. *The Middle East and the Middle Kingdom: Islamic and Chinese Artistic Exchange* (2013) was presented in conjunction with *Doris Duke's Shangri La: Architecture, Landscape, and Islamic Art*, curated by the aforementioned Donald Albrecht for the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.

MB: The same issues and standards should apply to both temporary exhibitions and permanent collection displays. Installations of museum collections are often deadly dull. I recently encountered a very exciting collection installation at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida. Their curator of Chinese art, Laurie Barnes, reinstalled works from the permanent collection synchronically rather than chronologically, exploring a series of themes about Chinese art and culture from Neolithic times through the Qing Dynasty, which ended in 1911.⁷ Even more dynamically, Barnes used iPads and lucid wall texts to tell a counter-narrative—a rich and provocative story that placed objects in both a cultural/political context and a global context. For example, one temporary exhibition composed of materials from the permanent collection examined the complex interactions of Chinese culture with the art and ideas of the Islamic world. The effect was exciting, both visually and conceptually. This is a model for rethinking the permanent collection model that could also apply to installations of contemporary art.

BC: A museum must guard against the temptation to attach more value to technocratic and bureaucratic aspects of running an institution than to the love of art. A love for art and for the object should be its “core business” because art is an incredible instrument to enrich our lives. I think its collecting should always be related to its particular location, its history,

local narratives, and the sociological aspects involved. But at the same time it should reflect the will to reach new horizons and look at the bigger picture.

To mention an example, I greatly admire the Tate as a very lively institution. It is dealing with a mass public while still making you feel that there are real people working there—people who have special ideas and projects involving our future and its relation to art. Also, I find very inspiring the way in which its collection is presented nowadays. The emphasis on new dialogues with art historical movements of Eastern Europe, South America, and so on is not just superficial. Tate's African art curators Elvira Dyangani Ose and Kerry Greenberg are involved in an ambitious acquisition project.⁸

8. In 2011, the Tate and Guaranty Trust Bank, the largest bank in Nigeria, partnered to support Elvira Dyangani Ose's new position, joining Kerry Greenberg in launching the African Acquisition Committee. Since then, initiatives have included *Across the Board*, two years of events and performances that will travel to three cities in Africa in 2013–14, and the exhibitions mentioned by Frances Morris in her conversation in this issue of *The Exhibitionist: Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (2013) and Meschac Gaba's *Museum of Contemporary African Art* (launched in 1997).

It declares its new display of the British art collection as strictly chronological—something you might have thought was already typical for a museum. But no, actually, museum displays are usually all structured around schools, styles, geography. Putting artworks in strictly chronological order might seem unspectacular but it is truly exciting. Suddenly you realize two things produced at the same moment look like they are from completely separate universes. It is challenging visually and intellectually.

NEW WAYS BEYOND ART

Patrick Allegaert and Anselm Franke in conversation
with *The Exhibitionist*

In 1949, the curator and art historian Alexander Dorner published *The Way Beyond Art*, a book on the work and life of the Austrian American artist, architect, and designer Herbert Bayer. Dorner argues that Bayer's multidisciplinary practice presents hitherto unexplored possibilities for merging art and everyday life. This great utopic possibility still captivates curators; in fact, the desire among artists and curators to reject the contained, homogenous, and seemingly "neutral" white-cube exhibition space—and likewise the separation between art and other cultural forms—has only increased in recent years.

While for some this means entirely rejecting the exhibition space—or even the notion of art—for others it manifests as a call for experimentation and exploration within the exhibition as a form, in the hopes of redefining the most elementary relationships between object, space, and viewer. For these practitioners, questions of context, subjectivity, and individual reception become crucial building blocks for producing new exhibitions untethered to the often-restrictive languages and forms of modernism.

Here, *The Exhibitionist* pairs Patrick Allegaert, Artistic Director at the Museum Dr. Guislain in Ghent, with Anselm Franke, Head of Visual Arts and Film at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, and the curator of the traveling exhibition *Animism* (2010–12). They engage in a wide-ranging conversation about the conceptual and practical elements of constructing (and critiquing) new exhibition experiences.

The Exhibitionist: While your practices are not too similar, they both stand out in the monotony of contemporary curating because of the particular ways you bring contemporary ideas and concepts together with historical works of art and objects from cultural history. Patrick should perhaps speak a little bit about his work at the Museum Dr. Guislain, and Anselm can talk about *Animism*.

Patrick Allegaert (PA): The story of the Museum Dr. Guislain starts in 1986 in the attic of the first psychiatric hospital in Belgium. Joseph Guislain,

the first officially recognized psychiatrist in the southern Netherlands, had founded the hospital in the mid-19th century. The ancient building is now mostly used as a museum, but the hospital is still active on the same grounds. We have two exhibitions on permanent view: one on the history of psychiatry and one on outsider art. We also present several temporary exhibitions every year: one big themed exhibition on a topic related to mental health care, and some smaller summer exhibitions. Our last themed exhibition was *Nervous Women: Two Centuries of Women and Their Psychiatrists* (2013). The next one will open November 1, 2013, and be titled *War and Trauma*, observing the centennial of World War I.¹

1. *War and Trauma* is a two-venue exhibition presented in conjunction with the Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, Belgium. This museum commemorates the region's involvement in World War I. As Ypres was the site of two major battles, this historical museum complements the Museum Dr. Guislain's role in that it documents the history of soldiers' mental health.

Our exhibitions always combine artworks with documentary materials such as books, photographs, historical documents, and medical objects. The art can be historical or contemporary. By using this approach we aim to reach a broad public and facilitate debate on difficult but current themes, for instance child psychiatry, anorexia nervosa, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Our summer exhibitions can be very diverse: documentary photography, outsider art, solo exhibitions of contemporary artists, individual art collections, and so on.

Anselm Franke (AF): I am interested in structures. This really is the origin of every thematic exhibition I conceive (although it is less the case with the solo exhibitions, of course, which take an artist's oeuvre as their point of departure). I have an interest in systemic conditions, framings. This is a genuine curatorial concern, and it overarches all the distinctions in terms of what is being exhibited: an object, a quotation, a document, an artifact, or a work of art. I try to make exhibitions that "exhibit" a cultural imaginary. This means calling forth an element of such an imaginary so that it can become "exhibited," quoted, seen as part of already-known information within the structures that produce things. The biggest challenge in this is to exhibit objects in constellations so that they are never affirmed as "objective facts," framed and placed within an order of positivistic knowledge.

And of course through the very format of the exhibition, and the museum, this objectification happens rather easily.

I would call that latter form of exhibition "clinical," and I try to avoid it at all costs. It treats objects in an aseptic way, and everything is about maximum control over all forms of mobility and contagion. For me the question is, on the contrary, how to create dialectical images, how to urge the viewing subject to take a stance, make a necessary decision in relation to what they are confronting. I search for ways of adding to the clinical side of exhibitions a vibrant, perhaps even delirious, side. A certain musical aspect.

² The French philosopher Charles Fourier proposed the idea of communal working units called phalanxes, several of which were established in the United States in the mid-1800s. Marx called him a “utopian socialist,” and his work has been influential for important thinkers in many different disciplines, such as André Breton, David Harvey, and Walter Benjamin. Benjamin wrote on the similarities between the arcade and the ideal phalanx in his unfinished book *The Arcades Project*.

Animism is based on a curatorial, historical hypothesis. What modern anthropologists and psychologists (since the mid-19th century) called animism is the “negative horizon” of the imaginary of the modern. Meaning, it is anything “beyond” the territory of the modern. In the perspectival construction of modernity, it is the vanishing point. This is how modern people imagined the magical animism of premodern colonized subjects: that they see the world subjectively, and animate the cosmos. That they believe the wind is a person, for example.

This makes animism also a magical world of possible transformations, and hence the ultimate resource for all change, at least for the romantics and some utopians, for instance Charles Fourier.² But whether one was a positivistic scientist or a romantic primitivist, all agreed that the primitives, these colonized peoples, were unable to correctly perceive the world. That they got it “wrong.” Of course what this construction actually reveals is the inability on the part of the moderns to conceive of ontological difference. They tried to interpret and explain such differences as “epistemological errors” that are shared among primitives, children, and the insane.

Ontological difference is not a thing of the past, but rather the key question of the future, together with politics. The counterpoint on which the hypothesis was built is that when we talk about animism—the animation of the cosmos—we have to first look in the opposite direction, in the direction of what I call “in-animism”: the exclusion from full subject status of objects, things, or people, which always also means the withholding of certain rights.

So, in the exhibition, we have Walt Disney next to the Code Noir, the French decree that regulated the object- and property status of slaves in the colonies. *Animism* hence is about the entry condition into the realm of the “human,” of rationality, of representation and legitimate speech. Who would have thought that animism would be *the* key political question, the question of “entry” into politics?

This hypothesis was translated into a structure and dramaturgy for the exhibition. It allows for many historical vectors to cross and relate in rather interesting ways, such as the rise of technological media, disciplinary modern regimes, colonial conquest, the problem of “belief” and secularism, modernist primitivism, romanticism, utopianism, feminism, and desire economies in the commercial media sphere. It is a good construction because it allows for many surprising connections to become thinkable, and it allows us to move between ideas and images in a dialectical fashion.

The Exhibitionist: Both of you like to display art in parallel with cultural artifacts and other materials in order to bring to light for the visitor new stories or experiences. Can you speak specifically about certain juxtapositions between contemporary art and other objects in your exhibitions, what the intended effect was, how closed or open it was to interpretation, and whether, in hindsight, you'd say it was successful?

AF: To reflect on what happens to all kind of “things” when they become exhibitions is very important for exhibition practice. It constitutes an enlarged, expanded field of concern and reference, one that remains distinct from “contemporary art” to a certain degree. It is a curatorial field concerned with the historicity of the medium we call the exhibition, in which both objects and subjects are coproduced within a narrative space of signification, both visual and textual, called history. The exhibition as a reflective narrative essay that includes artifacts and documents of different kinds stays distinct from “contemporary art,” of course, but it can indeed also help to revive some of the latter’s powers. It can highlight its moments of resistance and its sovereignty over signification.

About artifacts: Something very different happens to “things” or “documents” according to the kind of institution showing them, the genre of exhibition, the method of display, and the narrative by which they are being framed. Essayistic narration is for me very important in exhibitions as a means of de-objectifying objects or documents, to let them “speak out” by becoming something like crystals of the “dream images” that mark the horizon of a cultural imaginary. Objects anchor this imaginary in material history, yet disrupt it at the same time. Only against such backdrop-objects can we begin to communicate with and disrupt the imaginary horizons of a specific time and milieu.

And about one thing we have to be clear: “Narrative” always exists in museums and exhibitions, but very often it is not reflected upon or part of what is “exhibited.” It simply remains an implicit function, concealed within a regime that always tends to *create* the very effects that it simply seems to register or present in a definite, neutral, and objective fashion. The task is to make these implicit narratives explicit, to put them at risk by letting the power of signification turn against itself and become a self-reflective performance: an event of signification.

What is the effect of objectivity that is created in museums? From where does its power of signification derive? Often it is the magic trick of making the frame disappear, which is similar to a process of naturalization. Think about the “human zoos,” for instance. The fact that this sort of frame is a trap in which spectators, when gazing at the exotic savage, look at their own symptoms, is made to disappear. The goal now as curators is transform such a paradigmatic non-dialogical situation in which the exhibit is “objective”

to the degree that it is a mute object. To transform such a situation into a dialogic situation means to highlight, to signify, its structural-systemic way of working within a larger set of practices and relations, both stable and lasting and event-like, performed and temporary, and to unlock its firm position in the grid where it is installed.

What must be shown and put up for negotiation is the kind of relation that is established by a particular framing. This relation can be dialogic or non-dialogic, oppressive or transformative. But in exhibitions, everything exists always already in a relational space, nothing has meaning in isolation, and it always concerns the production of both the viewer and the viewed. There is a primacy of relations in the exhibition that allows us to revisit moments in history, of which we are descendants, and which congeal a lot of transformative potential that is set free once they become something I would call “dialogic diagrams.” An exhibition such as *Animism* was about that primacy of relationships. Everything exists in mediated relations that differ vastly and are, as long as they are relations, always already animated in some way.

Today it is important to insist that we don’t stop there—for instance, to say that we are always already implicated in our environments and milieus. Such a thing once was apparently a huge discovery for Western critique. But we have to go further now. “Dialogic diagrams” allow us a) to specify that implication, and b) to reject or negate it, and transform it into something else.

PA: At the Museum Dr. Guislain we always make a mixture of contemporary art, “fine art,” outsider art, and what we like to call documentation, which includes scientific reports, books, objects, and so on. The general mission of our museum is to question the presumed borders between normality and abnormality—the deviant of a presumed normal. On the other hand, our exhibitions take place in old dormitories, and within the remembrance of the psychiatric enlightenment. That is a context, an environment, that we don’t ignore or hide. The walls, the floor, the windows are all references to a cultural heritage. So our exhibition halls are never free from an unbalanced sense of identification on the part of the viewer. There are no white cubes. That is also the reason why we look for a connection between the aesthetic and the ethical in our exhibitions.

We try to look for a dialogue between different types of artifacts and materials. The central point is never a curatorial identity or statement. We start from a dialogue between a scientific psychiatric disorder and a general problem in society. On the one hand, the history of science is an inspiration, and on the other hand, there has always been the artistic imagination. The upper layer is always some kind of narrative of a supposed “disorder.” There’s often a denial of history in psychiatry. Although the old-school alienists of the 19th century were not ignorant of their ancestors, nowadays psychiatry is a positivistic science. They build on previous findings and then try to forget them as

quickly as possible. Neuroscience is probably the best example of that. In our exhibitions we just want to put these small histories in connection by means of our narrative.

Underneath this conceptual layer, we choose and select objects. Most of the time the scientific objects are situated in relation to their time and place. For example, in *Nervous Women*, we exhibited some drawings of clinically insane women from the first half of the 19th century together with the case of Théroigne de Méricourt (her phrenological plaster head). In our narrative we wanted to present the connection between the position of women in the asylum era of Philippe Pinel and the revolutionary result of the Enlightenment. In dialogue with this we presented a work by the artist Zoulikha Bouabdellah, who in her contemporary way tries to confront the visitor with mixtures of identity. Contemporary art, in the case of Bouabdellah, casts our historical presentations in a new light.

Also important in our work are our views on outsider art. As part of a display on “excessive power” we juxtaposed a work about the Arab Spring by Mary Temple, *Currency February 2011* (2011), with two works by the so-called outsider artist Willem Van Genk. Whereas Temple gives an almost documentary and very rational artistic interpretation of power, Van Genk is personally very closely confronted and even driven by the effects of political power. In some way there’s a vibration produced by the works of these two artists, in that the gaps in each make the other work more accurate. Some collectors want to exhibit artworks in order to give a positive and artistic way out of human excess. For us the exhibition was just the right place to bring together some works that aren’t artistic sublimations of the positive.

3. The best known play by the Italian writer Luigi Pirandello is the absurdist *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), in which six characters interrupt a rehearsal of Pirandello’s earlier play *The Rules of the Game* (1818–19), looking for an author to finish their story. Though it was considered a failure at the time of its premiere, it has since been frequently adapted for television and stage.

The Exhibitionist: Anselm brought up earlier the question of the cultural imaginary, which can be defined as a way one makes sense of the world through a shared but imagined community. The exhibition space itself—a space with its own history and particularities—is one way in which a community can be imagined. Who do you imagine your audience to be? How much agency do you give your visitor to experience the exhibition however they like, and how much is under your direction?

AF: The viewer of my exhibitions is always an imaginary viewer. I like the fiction—as a working hypothesis—that the exhibition *invents* the viewer, becomes the *author* of the viewer. A little bit like a Luigi Pirandello play, in mirrored inversions.³ It’s the quasi-animistic power of an exhibition to have its gesture of signification

become an interpellation—an interpellation that calls a subject into being. The work invents its viewers, assembles them. These were pertinent ideas for many quintessential modern thinkers and artists, and it is a rather obvious animistic idea.

I spoke earlier about unlocking the object from its position in the grid of knowledge, and the same should ideally be done for the viewing subject. It gets exciting when exhibitions are transformative journeys through different forms of becoming a subject, just like *Alice in Wonderland*. The next step, then, is to turn from fantasy and phantasm to its “documentary” content: historical modes of production of subjectivity. Even a Walt Disney film speaks to us about these historical modes.

⁴ Y.E.L.L.O.W. and *Open Minds, Closed Circuits* were similar in subject but very different in context. The latter, which was presented at the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, proved more controversial to the public, as it showed works by pedophiles and murderers alongside pieces by major modern and contemporary artists such as James Ensor and Franz West. Y.E.L.L.O.W. was staged in the home of a former doctor associated with the psychiatric

PA: First of all, one has to know that our museum is a product of the anti-psychiatric movement of the 1970s. At that point there was no interest in psychiatric heritage at all. Hospitals wanted to forget the previous disasters and the terrifying or terrible ways in which patients were treated. The old dormitories and asylums were shut down. But in Ghent these dormitories were for some reason restored to their old “glory.” So, the exhibition space in the Museum Dr. Guislain is very determining for visitors.

The exhibitions shown inside this historical building are indeed part of a cultural imaginary. And even more than that, because our exhibitions try to go beyond a lot of boundaries: religious, historical, geographical, artistic. We think that is also part of the reason why our audience is very diverse. Of course some of our visitors are interested in art, but we also have a lot of school groups, professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, medical staff), students, and so on. We think the diversity of our public reflects our aims.

Because of the already stated narrative of our exhibitions, it is part of the upper layer that we guide the visitor through an exhibition. In *Nervous Women*, for instance, there was a historical trajectory that needed to be followed to understand the main statement. On the other hand, we brought to each part of the exhibition a lot of diversity in the objects and selected artworks, which the visitor could experience in his or her own way. So, even though it was histori-

hospital in Geel, Belgium, which was well known for pioneering the de-institutionalization of psychiatric patients. The exhibition specifically featured artists from the town, where Hoet had grown up as the son of physician.

⁵ Harald Szeemann's *Documenta 5*, which he titled *Questioning Reality: Pictorial Worlds Today*, was groundbreaking in that it was the first Documenta to have an overarching theme rather than simply presenting unrelated works. Szeemann famously brought in not only outsider artists, but also elements of religious art and visual culture such as advertising and political

ephemera, to demonstrate various relationships between image and reality. This multifaceted approach defined Szeemann's legacy of curating.

⁶ The Prinzhorn Collection is named after Hans Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist and art historian who in 1919 made an appeal to directors of psychiatric institutions to send him their patients' artworks. In just two years, the collection had 5,000 works by around 450 patients. Its temporary exhibition program, presenting international outsider art from all eras, started in 2001 with the opening of a permanent exhibition space. Thomas

cally guided, we wanted to mix up art of all eras, and especially contemporary art. In that way we brought a structure to the cultural imaginary, the imagined community, based upon ideas of different periods of time. And, as I said before, the very fact that psychiatry likes to ignore his own history itself became a central point of the exhibition.

It is fascinating to see how people sometimes struggle with the interpretations of the works. Of course we are aware that our selections are sometimes restricted. We don't think of works of contemporary art as a way of stating our intentions, nor as a usable reflection of the narrative, but rather as a possible way of entering the content of our exhibition theme. It is interesting that these works always show more and always create an extra vibration in the overall feeling of the exhibition.

As a third point, we like to add outsider art. In *Nervous Women*, we tried to have a balanced mixture of outsiders and artists working in the contemporary field. Although we always exhibit a selection of our own collection, we don't want to make a distinction between outsider and insider. In a sense we direct people to our own way of thinking on outsider art, in that the exhibition doesn't make any distinction. On the other hand, we do guide visitors through the texts we use in an exhibition. We always try to explain the reason for showing a certain work from the oeuvre of a particular artist. And of course the biographies of some of these outsiders involves explicitly revealing their medical histories.

The Exhibitionist: What other curators, exhibitions, or museums have been influential to your own practices?

PA: Jan Hoet has been very influential. His exhibitions *Y.E.L.L.O.W.* (2001) and *Open Minds, Closed Circuits* (1989) were very inspiring.⁴ And of course, in the same breath I would invoke Harald Szeemann, his *Documenta 5* and other exhibitions.⁵ And the work of Thomas Röske of the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg, Germany.⁶ All these curators brought

Röske became the director of the Prinzhorn Collection in 2002.

⁷ The Teylers Museum, the oldest museum in the Netherlands, preserves the 18th-century architecture and displays of scientific and art objects that were established by its founder, the merchant and banker Pieter Teyler. Bert Sliggers's exhibitions there have included *The Exotic Man: Foreign Cultures as Entertainment* (2009), on the "human zoo" that was brought up by Franke earlier in the conversation, and *Noah's Ark: The Way to Darwin* (2009), on the relationship between faith and science.

⁸ *Crime and Punishment*, curated by Jean Clair and Robert Badinter, centered on 200 years of crime in Europe, from the politician Louis-Michel le Peletier's call to end the death penalty in 1791 to the bill's actual passing in 1981. Examples from science, literature, and the media (most provocatively, a guillotine from 1827!) were exhibited with works by Francisco Goya, Théodore Géricault, and Egon Schiele to demonstrate the shifting legal definitions and societal conceptions of crime throughout the modern era.

⁹ Both Karl Jaspers and Michel Foucault had a great impact on our contemporary understanding

together the works of mentally ill and contemporary artists.

Curators such as Bert Sliggers of the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Netherlands, have been very inspiring.⁷ Because the Museum Dr. Guislain was the first museum devoted to the history of psychiatry in Europe, with the intention of making temporary exhibitions on different themes, we are still looking to hone our unique identity. For that we are especially inspired by exhibitions that make links between science and works of various art periods, for instance *Crime et Chatiment* (Crime and Punishment, 2010) at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.⁸

And in a sense we are also inspired by the virtues of Joseph Guislain and other pioneering psychiatrists with philanthropic intentions. Their works were very revolutionary and completely new, in a period when there was no real interest in the margins. Hans Prinzhorn, for example, was fascinated by the artworks of psychotic patients and was the first to collect them systematically. Although his intentions were connected deeply to his historical environment, his legacy is enormous.

Philosophers such as Karl Jaspers and Michel Foucault are also of great inspiration in our work.⁹

AF: Even if it may not appear obvious, it is above all artists who have influenced my experience, understanding, and thinking. When you curate across a variety of historical and contemporary practices, you start to recognize common problems, concerns, and what I would call "frontiers of interest," and I try to react to them, articulate them, and push the boundaries of the common and its manifold "dead metaphors."

I have furthermore been fascinated by both historiographical and speculative exhibitions. Okwui Enwezor's *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* (2002) at P.S.1 in Long Island City, New York, was important.¹⁰ Also *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (1990) curated by Jacques Derrida at the Louvre.¹¹ And more recently *The Potosí Principle* (2011) at Haus

of mental illness. Jaspers's 1913 book *General Psychopathology* was an important breakthrough in diagnosing symptoms empirically. Foucault's first major book, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1962), written after his work in a Parisian mental hospital, examines how the concept of madness has been portrayed and understood from the Renaissance through modern times.

¹⁰ *The Short Century*, which looked at a 50-year period of art reflecting the influence of the African liberation movements, has been a touchstone for many curators, including Jill Dawsey, who wrote about it

for *The Exhibitionist's* first issue. It traveled to P.S.1 in New York after showing at the Museum Villa Stuck, Munich.

Beyond art objects, it also included film, audio, literature, architecture, graphic design, and theater to give a fuller impression of the era's cultural production.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida's exhibition was the first in the Louvre's series *Parti Pris* (Taking Sides), in which chief curator Régis Michel invited such venerable guest curators as Julia Kristeva, Peter Greenaway, and Jean Starobinski to produce an exhibition from the permanent collection. Derrida's selection, centered on the idea of blindness, was

der Kulturen der Welt, which was curated by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer.¹²

The Exhibitionist: One of the greatest modern developments in psychology is the idea of the unconscious. It is a concept very relevant to the work you both make, and to exhibition making in general, and yet it's rarely overtly explored in curatorial practice. How can an exhibition examine the unconscious? Does this relate in any way to the unexpected juxtapositions of works we discussed earlier?

AF: It is a great invention, the unconscious. But we should not be too quick to take it for granted, as if it was an object that could be exhibited! Firstly, it is unconscious only to a specific form of consciousness, meaning, it exists only in relation. And it is historical—the product of a schism that runs through consciousness. The effects of this scission alone can be exhibited, in multiple ways, yet mostly connected to effects of border inflections. Think of the ultimate border aesthetics: the uncanny.

At a crucial juncture in his work, Sigmund Freud shies away from the notion of a historical *and* collective unconscious—which would have made psychoanalysis wholly animistic and historical! The only thing that kept animism at bay, as it was creeping from the unconscious into Freud's reality from all sides, was the container of the private, bourgeois psyche and its personal family history. Nothing else. Freud's unconscious creates a safe territory that allows it to discipline a whole lot of unsafe phenomena.

But Freud's unconscious was also extremely dissident and powerful, if we look at the way he, as a Jew, addressed the repressed of a militarized bourgeois society that on its historical way to Fascism did not allow for alterity. He simply added the “negative,” and the missing half. He closed the circle. The psyche became a closed system in which nothing disappears. Historically, at the same time, the last open spots on the colonial maps were being closed, and there began

primarily of Old Master drawings, specifically self-portraits. In his accompanying essay he elaborated on the blindness that is created by the attempt to portray oneself, and considered all drawing as a manifestation of blindness.

¹² In the 17th century, the silver mines of Potosí (now in Bolivia) were a major source of Spain's wealth; Potosí was a mythically prosperous city in the popular imagination, but in reality it relied on the work of tens of thousands of slaves. The curators used the mass reproduction of images during this Counter-Reformation period and the Viceroyalty

of Peru as the basis for this exhibition about the circulation of art and money. It combined works by international contemporary artists with images from the Andean baroque period. In 2011, a second part of the exhibition was presented at El Museo Nacional de Arte and El Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, both in La Paz, Bolivia.

a general turn inward. But Freud's closed system was simply too focused on the individual and its normative environment.

Another way of looking at this question is to say: Whatever was previously excluded from the dominant rationalist reality principle—emotions, mimetic relations, and so on—Freud called the unconscious and delegated it firmly into the depth of the private psyche. No claim to reality! Against this backdrop it helps to reject the existence of the unconscious in the sense that we can speak about it as a historical object, without affirming its existence as unconscious *per se*.

PA: Although the unconscious is indeed a very important theoretical development in 20th-century psychology, and therefore important in the history of psychiatry, we don't think of it as a concept that can be fully handled in the making of an exhibition. We think the most important aspect and feature of the unconscious is that it is slippery. If the unconscious was a concept a psychologist could handle, it would be easy to learn how it works.

In some way we also think that an unconscious is part of every exhibition, because it is a feature within every person. Isn't it true that the unconscious guides every human in an unknown direction? So, all curators make use of their unconscious, but of course are not aware of doing so. Maybe this is revealed in our intention of making an exhibition as rhizomatic as possible—meaning, organic without any underlying theoretical point of view. Maybe it is like a slip of the tongue where the unconscious pops up, or in the dream, the royal path to the unconscious, where it is widespread and spreads like water, just as the rhizome in culture.

MIXING AND MATCHING

Stephanie Barron and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep in conversation
with *The Exhibitionist*

“Curatorial innovation” to date has mostly referred to new ideas exclusively in the sphere of contemporary art. Thus, one of *The Exhibitionist’s* recent concerns has been the question of how to discuss innovative practices in areas not usually associated with progress in the field, such as exhibitions of cultural history or art history. Many curators working in these arenas, while constantly updating the topics of their projects in response to new scholarship, continue to rely on the same old techniques for creating displays. This has led to a gap in the discourse, in which curators working with different media and art historical categories have become disconnected from the practices of their colleagues, sometimes even when they are working within the same museum.

Here, Stephanie Barron, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, Curator of Historical Collections at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, discuss with *The Exhibitionist* their work as innovative exhibition makers working largely outside the realm of contemporary art.

The Exhibitionist: Can historical material be displayed in contemporary ways? Can older material even somehow *benefit* from nontraditional curatorial treatment?

Stephanie Barron (SB): Well, one of the most familiar ways of injecting contemporary art practice into the presentation of historical material involves asking artists to select, organize, or design presentations. We can all think of compelling examples at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, MAK in Vienna, the Brooklyn Museum, LACMA, and recently the Jewish Museum in New York. These can be special exhibitions, or unusual installations of the permanent collection.

Personally, one of the most satisfying interactions I’ve had was inviting John Baldessari to work with me on the design of the exhibition *Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images* at LACMA in 2006.¹ The exhibition was already selected and

¹ John Baldessari designed the exhibition’s entryway as a play on René Magritte’s *The*

Unexpected Answer (1933).

While the painting itself features an uninviting dark shadow at the center of an amorphous cutout in a doorway, Baldessari's design allowed a full view of the gallery through the cutout, enticing the viewer with the cloud-carpet floor and a ceiling wallpapered with a dense pattern of freeway intersections.

the catalogue written when I invited him. His ideas were terrific and really engaged the public—both a knowledgeable audience and a general one. Without a lot of text panels and interpretation, visitors immediately understood René Magritte's work and the ironic, perplexing, and surreal qualities about it that have engaged artists over the decades. People still talk about certain elements of the exhibition design that Baldessari invented, such as the cloud carpet, the freeway wallpaper on the ceilings, and the guards in bowler hats. The best of these types of collaborations, I think, requires a good relationship and strong understanding between the curator and the invited artist.

Nanette Jacomijn Snoop (NJS): I completely agree with Stephanie about the importance and the impact of collaborations with contemporary artists. One of my first discoveries of this method was an exhibition in the Netherlands about archaeological objects from a Dutch 17th-century monastery. The filmmaker Peter Greenaway curated it and delivered to the audience an extraordinary chain of huge installations mixing archaeological objects with film.² In this way, an exhibition on a quite challenging and “dry” subject that might not otherwise be appealing for a large audience became a sensitive and nuanced

demonstration of the conditions of these monks. It became an emotional journey; at the end many visitors were touched, even shaken, but also able to explain in detail the life of the monks.

Besides bringing in artists to offer new points of view about a subject, I also think that, as curators, we have to create surprises in our exhibitions. One can do this by mixing different kinds of objects in a nonhierarchical or nonlinear way—against the grain, relative to what we are used to doing in art history. We can mix masterpieces with everyday objects or kitsch, classical sculptures with popular paintings, religious non-Western objects with Western holy objects, and so on. We can show films and archives as objects, not just as illustrations of a discourse.

I created such a nonhierarchical mix in an exhibition I curated in 2011 about “human zoos” at the Quai Branly.³ It looked at how the West exhibited non-Western people in the theater, circuses, fairs, and zoos over the centuries. My method

² A notorious exhibition by Peter Greenaway, *The Physical Self*, took place in 1992 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. It was a selection of works from the permanent collection themed around the human body: paintings by Jan van Eyck, design objects, a Benetton advertisement, and models of different body types on display in vitrines. The last guest curator invited by the Boijmans Van Beuningen had been Harald Szeemann, in 1988, for *A-Historical Sounds*. Szeemann was also known for his integration of non-art objects into exhibitions.

³ Unlike Peter Greenaway's literal take on the displayed form, *The Human Zoo*

used tactics such as projected shadows of people exhibited for their unusual body types, as well as mirrors installed throughout the gallery to reflect the viewers themselves, in order to address the complexities of looking at others. Another exhibition on this subject was *The Exotic Man*, in 2009 at the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Netherlands, which focused on the exhibition of non-Western people in the 19th century.

generated astonishment (and sometimes disgust) and obliged the audience to think differently about objects and classifications.

In general, I think that a curator in the 21st century must have at least some “artistic” skills in order to reach the audience. The classical linear exhibition about one artist, or a style, or a historical approach or category, doesn’t work anymore—or at least not like it did in the last century. Personally I am very interested in looking for new exhibition approaches in order to create a nonlinguistic environment where the audience is emotionally moved and also learns something.

In a 2012 exhibition titled *Masters of Chaos* at the Quai Branly, which was about the notion of chaos in Western and non-Western societies, I mixed elements of archaeology, classical art, ethnography, and contemporary art.⁴ And for a new exhibition that will be inaugurated in 2014 in a private museum in Strasbourg, France, on contemporary African voodoo, I am trying to mix a pedagogical approach with a sensitive, intuitive one by creating nonhierarchical installations that mix African objects with “European fetishes,” films, and Western works of art that have qualities in common with voodoo (healing, catharsis, et cetera). For me, making an exhibition is like doing experiments in a laboratory. That is what I hope the audience will feel, anyway.

The Exhibitionist: Creating “surprises” to break up the flow and the audience’s expectations is an idea that both of you could discuss further in relation to history and chronology. Nanette, you describe working with different types of objects—art and otherwise—from different times and places. How important is it for you that the audience knows the stories of the individual objects you are displaying? And how do you make those stories apparent?

NJS: For me it is very important that the audience understands that objects tell more than one story. Those various narratives also allow us to create a closer relationship between the audience and the object. What I mean is that the person who looks at a completely “strange” object is capable of identifying with the object in some way, or with the maker or the owner of the object, but they also understand that an object in a museum has its own story, its own “biography,” which begins with its first meaning or

4. The exhibition opened with Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Outgrowth* (2005), which was intended to make a point of the existing chaos and violence around the world. The display for *Masters of Chaos*, designed by the agency Jakob + McFarlane, mimicked a system of cellular structures in which viewers were to feel displaced, then transformed, as they traveled through the exhibition.

use in its original context and extends to its new life in the museum. Those different narratives are important, whether the object in question is a mask from British Columbia, a drawing by Pablo Picasso, or the Venus de Milo.

Let's think about a case study. If you decide to show a 19th-century African nailed fetish from the Congo, you risk eliciting simply a feeling of fear, repulsion, or misplaced exoticism. If you explain that this object has been collected in a particular context, give details about how it came to Europe, was cleaned up in a museum, and received different meanings over time, the audience will understand that this fetish is not just telling something about African religions but also about how the West has considered African fetishism, and how collecting African holy objects is also a kind of Western fetishism. The African fetish meets the European fetish meets the European audience.

Of course, you cannot give exhaustive amounts of information for all the items you put in an exhibit. You have to select just a few things to elucidate with details and be attentive to matters of rhythm (the type of information, and the avoidance of ennui) and also repetition (simple messages). You can do this through classical museum labels, for instance showing the object at different times—in its original context, during its journey to the museum, in a glass box after cleaning, in a specific exhibition, and so on—in order to show its physical transformation as well as its symbolic transformation. Or you can tell the story through film. Or you can display objects that still have all their different historical labels attached (sometimes this can be a very powerful experience for the viewer).

There is also the possibility of displaying archival information in a separate room. Personally I like to mix and create installations inside an exhibition in order to stimulate the audience's curiosity. This is also why contemporary artists can play such an important role in such displays.

The Exhibitionist: Stephanie, you have organized a number of exhibitions that encapsulate specific periods in art history, such as *The Avant-Garde in Russia* (1980) or *Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures* (2009). How did you employ, work around, or adapt linear histories in those exhibitions?

SB: Many of the historical exhibitions I have organized have relied on a lot of archival and documentary information. For example in *Degenerate Art* in 1991, the first four rooms of the exhibition had only archival materials: posters, models, books, music, films. After going through this “frontloaded” part of the show, visitors then encountered the “pure” art rooms, each of which had only one didactic panel, documenting how the works were shown in 1937. Thus, the context was established up front, and the encounter with the works of art was greatly informed by what preceded it.

I also find that well-executed short commissioned films—set not at the

⁵ *Exiles and Émigrés* was understood as a kind of sequel to the hugely successful *Degenerate Art*, taking a wider view of the effects of World War II on European artists. *Degenerate Art* presented 175 of the more than 650 works in the original Nazi-organized exhibition. It shared many artists with *Exiles and Émigrés*, which focused on the apparent changes in their work after their exile to America. *Art of Two Germanys* featured German art and artists of the postwar era, between 1945 and 1989.

beginning but rather within the exhibition flow—can be an effective way to engage audiences. We did this in *The Avant-Garde in Russia*, *Degenerate Art*, and *Exiles and Émigrés* (1997).⁵

Another aspect I find helpful is to work with a good architect for the exhibition design. In several cases I have collaborated with Frank Gehry, and the result has been exceptionally interesting for the public. When we did *The Avant-Garde in Russia*, the exposed stud walls he designed provided a perfect setting for the Constructivist works. In two exhibitions we have employed scale models: In *Degenerate Art* there was a walk-through model of the 1937 show, and in *Exiles and Émigrés* we created one model of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery and another of Piet Mondrian's New York studio.⁶

I think the “total environment” is extremely important in historical shows. In *Art of Two Germanys* we did not include documents, but we did have short newsreel clips throughout the show, which helped Americans better understand the situation in Germany between 1945 and 1989. Showing works of art with their “original” context—either documentation or text—can help the audience follow the argument of the exhibition, but care must be taken not to overwhelm the art.

The Exhibitionist: Do you have an audience (ideal or otherwise) in mind when conceiving of an exhibition? Who do you most want to reach when employing some of the curatorial techniques you've discussed here? What are some of the more challenging exhibitions you have organized?

NJS: I don't have a special audience. My intent is to reach the widest audience possible. In the case of African or non-Western art exhibitions, besides the standard audience of the Quai Branly Museum, I also hope to inspire artists with a new view of African objects that they can use somehow for their own works. In the case of collections of colonial history, I like to offer personal stories in the form of short films, say, or personal archives.

In 2009 I organized a small exhibition about African power

⁶ Peggy Guggenheim founded Art of This Century after she fled Paris; she left just days before the German invasion in 1940 and brought hundreds of artworks with her. She established the gallery in New York as a meeting ground for exiled European artists and their American counterparts. It was notorious for its architecture by Frederick Kiesler. The concave walls forced paintings to hang in the center of the rooms, a decision intended to allow each work to exist independently.

⁷ The show, titled *Recipes of the Gods*, presented “shapeless” artifacts. Unlike the (better-known) figurative African fetishes, these abstract fetishes tied into a greater theme of how to invoke the human body without expressly taking its shape. The exhibition design used discrepancies in spacing—placing certain objects very high or very low, or close to or far from each other—to make viewers more aware of their own physical position in relation to each piece.

objects, which are non-figurative and amorphous.⁷ A lot of artists wrote me letters because they were moved by these objects and felt that they related closely to their own contemporary work. The regular audience of the Quai Branly was very amazed, because they were not accustomed to these kinds of objects and especially the way they were displayed, with accumulations of dried blood and other material, juxtaposed with quotations from African diviners. The mix of a more aesthetic Western approach with texts by African priests was quite original for that audience.

In November 2013 I will open an exhibition on African voodoo in a new private museum located in a 19th-century water tower in Strasbourg. I am completely free to do what I want, and for me this is a very big opportunity to experiment. I will mix African objects with contemporary art and short films produced by a video artist with whom I often collaborate. I will create installations of objects, rather than just displaying them in vitrines. In a way I will exceed the role of a classical curator and take more of the approach of an artist. For me, the border between artist and curator does not always need to be too clear.

SB: As a museum curator I aim for a general audience, but I always hope the presentation will be meaningful to artists as well. I think artists are, in a way, the litmus test for whether a show really succeeds. It is our responsibility as curators to offer enough context and explanation to inform uninitiated viewers, but I don't like to have too much educational material because it obfuscates the objects.

The *Degenerate Art* show was one of the toughest I have ever done. I struggled with how to frame the topic, offering enough background information so that visitors would understand the works of art that the Nazis had deemed “degenerate.” I seriously thought about including examples of Nazi-approved art, too, but ultimately decided not to. At the time I thought it was the right decision. Today I might approach it differently.

The Exhibitionist: What do you perceive as the relationship between exhibitions and collections, or exhibitions and institutions, in thinking about the types of curatorial innovations we have been discussing? And do you see those innovations as potentially carrying over to the curating of temporary exhibitions?

⁸ Jorge Pardo's celebrated design for the walls, color scheme, lighting, and display cases at LACMA literally frames the objects so that they are perceived as he wishes his own work to be: as pieces that are functional and also be contemplated as art. The displays allow for disjunctive pairings such as Diego Rivera's *Portrait of John Dunbar* (1931) hanging alongside an ancient Mexican sculpture.

⁹ In the early 1990s, the MAK in Vienna reinstalled its permanent collection, and curator Christian Witt-Döring invited contemporary artists such as Barbara Bloom,

SB: Curators struggle with how to engage the public freshly with the permanent collection. It is usually the special exhibitions that get most of the attention. At LACMA we have invited artists to install the permanent collection—for example Jorge Pardo worked with our curator of pre-Columbian art, Virginia Fields, on a fresh installation of the collection, and we invited Franz West to design the installation of our small Oceanic collection.⁸ Both installations have been on view for several years. I always was intrigued by the installations at MAK in Vienna, where different artists created displays for different aspects of the collection.⁹

NJS: It is always difficult to create innovative permanent displays, mostly because you are obligated to “talk to” a very large general audience for a very long period of time. In temporary exhibitions it is possible to take more risks. As Stephanie mentioned, for me the role of contemporary artists is essential in creating dynamic and innovative permanent exhibitions.

The Exhibitionist: Why do you think almost all recent discussion on curatorial innovation has been focused on exhibiting contemporary art? Do you see this blind spot as a small issue, or as a symptom of a larger problem in the field?

NJS: There is a real lack of a debate on curatorial innovation in historical or cultural-historical exhibitions. Yes, there has been debate over the last 15 years about exhibiting non-Western art, but without any really concrete proposals with which we might move forward, or general reflections on current exhibitions or modes of display for this kind of work. It is also true that this debate has been mostly carried out by scholars, rather than curators or artists.

Generally, if there is innovation within the realm of historical or cultural exhibitions, it is almost always thanks to an artist who realized the exhibition or collaborated with a curator to put the project

Donald Judd, and Jenny Holzer to make interventions in the displays of the furniture and woodworking collection. Holzer, working with the Empire Style and Biedermeier, replaced the long didactic wall labels with her signature scrolling LED signs to communicate more personal information about the former owners of the domestic objects. In Judd's text about the installation of the baroque, rococo, and classical room, he expresses his deep ambivalence about his role as an intervening artist, and about how much change he felt he had the license to implement.

together. Maybe it is time to more dramatically reconsider the role of a curator in such museums (as has happened in the realm of contemporary art). And at the very least we should promote and encourage different types of ongoing collaborations between artists and curators.

SB: I agree that working with artists is one way to solve stale or overly traditional exhibition making practices in historical or cultural museums. Inviting artists to engage the historical aspects of a museum collection often leads to surprising and provocative displays. Artists simply look at art differently, and sharing their points of view with the public is a real privilege of being a curator. I still find, however, that the most satisfying experiences are when there is a *collaboration* between curator and artist, rather than the total abdication of a curatorial point of view in favor of an artist's interpretation.



LA CRITIQUE

Khwezi Gule
Weng Choy Lee
Adam Lerner

Sarah E. Cook
Juan A. Gaitán
Lia Gangitano

TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

In the following two conversations, *The Exhibitionist* invited three curators working in diverse contexts to talk openly about the journal and what they view as the most relevant and provocative topics of past issues.

In this first three-way discussion, Khwezi Gule, a curator and writer based in Johannesburg, Weng Choy Lee, a critic and curator based in Singapore, and Adam Lerner, Director and Chief Animator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, discuss the ever-expanding interests and responsibilities of curators, prompted by *The Exhibitionist's* self-questioning of its own focus and direction.

Adam Lerner (AL): Would *The Exhibitionist* be a better publication if it weren't so centripetal in nature? Would it be more interesting if, after an essay about Harald Szeemann's *Documenta 5*, there was an article about the display of goods at the retail store Giant Robot? Is there room, alongside discussions of the most recent art biennial, for an article about the curatorial techniques of a guy who collects homemade Barbie outfits? Maybe it's not necessary, but I personally would enjoy it. As a curator, I like to think generally about interesting ways that objects are arranged, as much as I like to think about the work of my predecessors and colleagues.

Weng Choy Lee (WCL): "Centripetal force" is an interesting way to talk about introspection. It's never a bad thing for a discourse—like curating or art criticism—to be highly self-reflexive and inward looking, in a sophisticated way. But it's

critical to maintain a productive tension between those centripetal forces and more centrifugal forces.

In the fourth issue of *The Exhibitionist*, Kate Fowle talked about the proliferation of curating programs and the problem of people who see them as a fast track to professional standing. The educational system is, it seems to me, a major mechanism whereby curatorial discourse reproduces itself. Later in her essay Fowle argues for the importance of teaching curating as a *practice* as opposed to establishing university-level programs in which students merely *study* curating. The implication is that whereas curatorial studies programs may encourage students to be more and more self-reflexive and inward-looking regarding the field, it is better to engage with curating as an activity already *in context*, where real-world situations intrude and pull art activity outside of itself.

Curators are generally curious folk, interested in all manner of things. So maybe the question isn't whether curating itself, or curators themselves, are too inward looking, but whether certain key discursive nodes—whether they are curatorial programs or journals like *The Exhibitionist*—are fully representing the existing dynamic tensions between the centripetal and centrifugal forces.

Khwezi Gule (KG): My turn working in historical museums—the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum and the Kliptown Open Air Museum, both in Soweto, South Africa—was unexpected.¹ But it did provide me with perspective in terms

¹ These museums, both part of the Soweto Museum consortium, are dedicated to specific moments in the struggle to end Apartheid. The Kliptown Open Air Museum uses archival film footage and photographs, music, and artworks to document the drafting of the Freedom Charter in 1955. The Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum was created in memory of the hundreds of students shot by police in 1976 during a peaceful protest, and the ensuing riots.

of the different conversations that are happening within museums of history. Of course, South Africa, being 19 years into democratic rule, has had a lot to contend with in terms of new museums of history. People who have been tasked with the job of telling our story have had to confront a number of issues, including how to avoid some of the visual, architectural, and discursive devices that were used in museums and monuments under the Apartheid regime.

One of the significant outcomes of this process has been the use of art to narrate our recent history. But increasingly there are demands that museums should use the history of the anti-Apartheid struggle to inform current struggles and forms of agency. So, I am quite concerned with the issue of how creative intellectuals are mobilized toward servicing particular historical narratives. And how creative expression weighs up against the need to tell a story, especially from the perspectives of people who have suffered and struggled. The ways in which we address such issues visually, and questions relating to the social role of art, are becoming more and more important to me.

WCL: For the purposes of our discussion here, I would distinguish between two registers of the social responsibility of the curator. One is when the curator operates independently, and the other is when he or she works within an institution such as a museum. But there is something of a paradox here. Independent curators find themselves reminded of art's underlying social and political considerations because they often work with artists whose projects interrogate the social functions of art—artists who are highly conscious and self-reflexive about, for instance, the ways that art and the media have been used to support or contest certain narratives and myths of history.

But also by virtue of their independence, such curators have the freedom to take a holiday from the urgent concerns of the day, and can engage with more personal or idiosyncratic preoccupations in ways that institutional curators might be unable to. One would think the public should put constant pressure on institutions not to forget their responsibilities. It's as if the institution should never be able to catch a break, and must always be held accountable to the demand of social responsibility, even if, in reality, it usually falls far short of the ideal. The institu-

tional curator seems to be always reacting: either trying to catch up to the times, or being chased by them. I am exaggerating here; I'm being deliberately provocative and un-nuanced to make a point.

AL: I would say that institutions permit a greater diffusion of the curatorial concept. Unlike biennial commissions, which serve as platforms for creative producers, museums and alternative art spaces can be actors in themselves. Therefore, they can activate many different vehicles for creating artistic meaning.

WCL: In the sixth issue of *The Exhibitionist*, Paul O'Neill talks about how curating, at its best, prioritizes a type of working with others that allows for a temporary space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity, and how exciting it can be to make this "space" public, warts and all. In my own experience of exhibition viewing, which admittedly is much less vast than that of some of my curator friends, I have generally found lacking precisely this making public of the "co-habitational time" between curators and their collaborators. Instead, what I find more often than not is the elision of this experience.

But maybe the fault lies not with the exhibitions I have seen, but with how I saw them; perhaps I should work harder to find the seams of these elisions. Here I would appreciate some guidance from my friends in the art world. How can I—or how can we all—better notice the traces of these "co-habitations" and draw them out into the public?

AL: That essay by O'Neill is about the concept of the paracuratorial, a notion that as far as I know was codified in the fourth issue of *The Exhibitionist*, the first *La Critique* issue. He points out that the notion of the paracuratorial "assumes a binary between primary and secondary curatorial labor" and imagines a broader definition of curating that unifies the end product of exhibitions with the invisible, ephemeral discussions that they engender.

I would like to take the point one step further and ask if the "space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity" that O'Neill references needs to be connected to an exhibition at all to be considered an element of curatorial practice. When Elissa Auther and Gillian Silverman, di-

rectors of the *Feminism and Co.* program at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, organized an event that paired a Tupperware saleswoman with a woman who sells sex toys, should that be considered within the curatorial enterprise?² Or is it by definition paracuratorial if it doesn't coincide with an exhibition? I don't know.

The Exhibitionist, with its stated intention to focus on exhibition making, jettisons *a priori* non-exhibition formats. But is exhibition making still the most relevant frame? Are exhibitions evolving into something else, such that a strict focus on exhibitions will necessarily miss interesting things happening in the field? I suspect that the centrality of exhibitions will change over time, since many of the young curatorial students I have encountered seem just as interested in developing creative live programs as in curating object-based exhibitions.

The changing nature and role of art also impacts the question of the future primacy of exhibitions. Khwezi, for example, is interested in art as a way of helping people create meaning out of history, and many of the artists who engage with those issues use educational and interpersonal rather than exhibition formats. I don't necessarily disagree with *The Exhibitionist's* adherence to a narrow curatorial concept. But, following Harald Szeemann's notion that among other things a curator should be an animator, I gave myself the title "chief animator" because I am personally interested in a broad range of creative production, which may or may not be considered curatorial.³

KG: To me the term "paracurating" sounds a lot like "paratroopers." And the analogy might not be inappropriate, considering how many European curators tend to parachute into South Africa and other African countries for a day or two and then leave, thinking themselves experts on the local art. The analogy can be stretched further, to considerations about how in fact in some ways the art world mirrors the global military-industrial complex. Art mercenaries become the ground offensive that prepares the region for market expansion. Instead of the rhetoric of regime change, we have the rhetoric of multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

But parachuting can also take place internally. Relational Aesthetics, and other turns not only in art making but in curating and art criticism, have opened a window through which privilege finds a politically permissible rationale for staging art interventions in inner cities and rural areas, even when there is little or no intent to have meaningful engagement with the people living in those places.⁴ It is merely to make those spaces available for consumption to people in the leafy suburbs. Part of this cool-hunting—or, rather, Afro-hip hunting—is a result of the crisis which is that the West has won. But winning entails a crisis of meaning. Just like in the late 19th and early 20th centuries European artists sought meaning in the Orient, the Pacific, Africa, et cetera, curator-mercenaries of the latter-day church do so with a self-reflexive turn.

Although I speak here in terms of dichotomies—a taboo approach in the age of entangle-

² Elissa Auther, associate professor of contemporary art at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and Gillian Silverman, assistant professor of English at the University of Colorado, Denver, are interested in bringing together the audiences and resources of the university, the nonprofit sector, and the art world to investigate issues and debates around feminism. The *Feminism and Co.* program invited a wide range of participants from the fields of art, literature, science, and beyond, and it included sessions on women in full-contact sports, blogging, and breasts.

³ In addition to "animator," Harald Szeemann thought the role of an exhibition maker (a label he preferred over "curator") included being an administrator, amateur, author of introductions, librarian, manager and accountant, conservator, financier, and diplomat. In this acknowledgment, Szeemann identified how curators had to adapt from the traditional role of scholar or caretaker once they began working with living artists making ambitious work beyond traditional media.

ment—I have to point out that there is a tension here between the tolerant discourse of multiculturalism and the fact that right-wing and anti-immigrant parties are finding favor among European voters. I see ethnographic museums trying desperately to reinvent themselves while entrenching their privileged speaking position ever more deeply.

AL: Khwezi, do you think the content of *The Exhibitionist* reflects the mercenary attitude of the art world that you describe? Among the many things I find impressive about the journal is its ability, given the nature of the field, to express to a wide international range of curatorial voices without relying on a superficial rhetoric of multiculturalism.

KG: Interestingly, on the cover of the sixth issue is an image of the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.⁵ We are well aware of the imperialist thrust of that exhibition and its penchant for the exotic. And yet it remains a defining moment in the evolution of exhibition practice and discourses. Our current exhibition practice and the art market as a whole are not immune to the forces of cultural imperialism. Yes, art professionals and practitioners are smart enough to dodge similar ethical issues, but we are all to varying degrees implicated in these practices. So my statement is not necessarily about an individual, or a particular editorial board or gallery committee. Yes, it's important for people to self-examine and take responsibility, but the problem is systemic.

It is not entirely productive to personalize this issue. It is a condition of our age, and it will take a collective effort to deal with it.

WCL: What about another pair of terms: “diversity” and “disparity.” How often does one hear an art critic lament that international biennials are all the same? Yet those who have had the privilege to visit exhibitions as far afield as Havana and Jakarta, in addition to the Documentas and Venices, can attest to a genuine variation in their platforms.

Though surely there are practices of curating and art making that biennales elide. One can readily list artists and art projects that have not found representation but are deserving of art-world recognition. Even then, off the top of my head, I cannot think of a project that is so different that it would be a shock to find it in a biennial.

A great many mammals, birds, and reptiles are four-limbed. This is diversity. We have to venture into another order of creature to find the six-limbed or eight-limbed. This is disparity. Curating is an odd practice. It is arguably as expansive a human endeavor as anything else. It is profoundly interdisciplinary, constantly seeking engagement with other fields and forms of knowledge, and yet practitioners continually complain that it is not expansive enough. Why does curating today hunger so much for difference? And should we expect a journal like *The Exhibitionist* to address this problem head-on?

⁴ Claire Bishop's notorious critique of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, the essay “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” touched upon similar issues. One of her arguments was that Bourriaud was generally too accepting of relations and dialogues that do not address the specificities of the artist or the geographical context. Published in *October* in 2004, the article anticipated the popularity (for instance in the proliferation of international biennials) of this approach as a facile way in which an artwork could be inserted into a local population.

⁵ It is broadly acknowledged that Britain's goal in *The Great Exhibition* was to promote its empire. The exhibition included displays from each of the colonial territories. The most lavish was the Indian Court, which prominently featured a stuffed elephant and the Koh-i-Noor diamond. The subtext was that it was an encyclopedic view of Indian culture, and that India's wealth could only have been made possible through British colonialism.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

In the second La Critique conversation, *The Exhibitionist* undertakes an examination of the subjective approaches of curators, and how these curatorial perspectives in turn shape exhibition histories. Sarah E. Cook, codirector of crumbweb.org in Sunderland, England, Juan A. Gaitán, curator of the upcoming 8th Berlin Biennale, and Lia Gangitano, founder and director of Participant Inc. in New York, offer their personal takes on the subject, which has proved increasingly relevant as distinct voices continue to crowd the curatorial field.

Juan A. Gaitán (JG): For me, *The Exhibitionist* has been primarily about friends opening up to a more rigorous kind of discursive engagement with one another's practices. In other words, transcending the bipolar relationship that seems to exist between "review" and "critique," where the former is unreservedly enthusiastic, and the latter operates under the assumption that the critic will only be taken seriously if she or he is implacably negative. In my opinion, both are not only lazy, insofar as they tend to rely mostly on the very personal reactions of the writer, but also unhelpful.

At the same time, *The Exhibitionist* is part of a relatively new relationship between art and curating that Dieter Roelstraete once called

"the curatoriat," which I believe he meant in sly reference to the commissariat (a word that would also seem fitting).¹ The commissariat is traditionally the branch of the army in charge of conveying goods, ammunition, and other things to the troops. But also, in the Soviet Union, it is the branch of the military in charge of tactics. Roelstraete's joke emerged at the moment when the curator was being accused of authoring exhibitions, meaning that the works were being unfairly mobilized toward the curator's own agenda. In the second issue of *The Exhibitionist* I recall Jens Hoffmann saying that this accusation mainly comes from other curators. And I agree, to a large extent, though of course there are others who have echoed that sentiment, including artists.

Sarah E. Cook (SC): In my academic work, I try really hard to excavate exhibition histories that are relevant to my field—media art—in order to support research regarding curatorial best practices. (I have three PhD students working with me right now doing just this.) I've organized curatorial roundtables, workshops, master classes, symposia, and conferences all over the world, all in the spirit of curatorial professional development. (These are documented on crumbweb.org.)

¹ One on-the-record example of the use of "curatoriat" by Dieter Roelstraete (who is currently a senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago) was in his review for *frieze* of the 2011 Venice Biennale, in reference to the powerful group of curators who presented pavilions that year. (See *frieze* 141 [September 2011], accessible at <https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/54th-venice-biennale/>.) The term has also been used in the same sense by others, including the Norwegian sociologist and art historian Dag Solhjell in a 2003 article for *Kritiskirken* entitled "The Defeat of the Curatoriat," about the Norwegian artist Odd Nerdrum (who called for art to be seen as kitsch) and his circumvention of conventional art-world hierarchies.

This doesn't mean, of course, that I've abandoned discussions of art. My colleagues and participants, including the 1,500-plus people on the crumb discussion list, have spent a lot of time talking about formats—both for the work and for its presentation or dissemination. So, while I acknowledge the stated intention of *The Exhibitionist* to maintain a strict focus on exhibitions (and that there is a place for that in the current crisis around curatorial education, scholarship, and art history), I also recognize that curating isn't just about exhibitions in the traditional sense. Particularly in my field, in which there is a lot of overlap between contemporary art practices and digital media art practices of all kinds, "exhibitions" are problematic and challenging in terms of format.

Lia Gangitano (LG): As someone who has long departed the institutional sector of museums and universities (and has never worked in the commercial sector) my understanding of *The Exhibitionist's* mission—that it is trying to understand what exhibitions can be—is reflected in my attempts to address the evolving concerns of the field *through* exhibitions, over time, and in the most expanded sense of the term. I would also like to stress the importance of Juan's mention of "friendship," as, for me, working in the "alternative space" context has always meant working both critically and intimately with artists and groups to accomplish seemingly impossible things.

SC: It is still terrifically difficult to get curators to discuss their practices in terms of models, strategies, or precursors, in any form other than reportage of what they did and how (and sometimes why), which then usually devolves

into descriptions of the artworks they selected. A prime example would be *The Producers*, a series of talks and publications produced by Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin for the pre-opening of the BALTIC in Gateshead prior to 2002.² These conversations were useful for illuminating the activities and opinions of numerous international curators, but they didn't put forth any particular models that the then-nascent organization could adopt as ways of working.

I too feel that in my work, I am often trying to communicate that not all curators are the same; they are individuals with individual tastes and specific approaches. And I worry that the emphasis on this self-regarding authorial role (as it is supported by the kind of writing in *The Exhibitionist*) has done more to reinforce a kind of "curatorial type" than to challenge it. With the authorial role comes a power to tell your own history, to make up your own story about what you did (and how, and, more importantly, why), which is less possible within institutions that keep minutes of meetings and archives of their in-house production.

Curatorial proposals, funding bids, press releases, and exhibition reviews all tell very different stories of a show than would the participating artists, the curators, or even the visitors. Exhibition histories and curators' reports are valuable, but they are subjective. The reports of artists and audiences of those same exhibitions might be equally subjective, but they are rarely, if ever, recorded. A case in point is Jean-François Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux*, presented at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1985. We know Lyotard's take (as the curator), and now we know Hans Ulrich Obrist's anecdotal take (as published in the fifth issue of *The Exhibitionist*), and we know the takes of art historians such as

² Each of the sessions took place at the University of Newcastle, where Susan Hiller was the chair of contemporary art at BALTIC from 2000 to 2002. The series brought together a group of curators (including Ute Meta Bauer, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Matthew Higgs, Mark Nash, and Adam Szymczyk) to talk about topics (many of which are now familiar) such as the professionalization of art schools, the shifting role of curators working with contemporary artists and unconventional modes of production, and the representation of the contemporary in museums.

Charlie Gere or Simon Biggs.³ But we know very little about the opinions or experiences of the artists who were in it or the visitors who experienced it.

It is interesting in this context to consider that exhibitions are now being mounted about certain curators and their practices, for instance the *Dear Lynda . . .* traveling show of Lynda Morris's archive, which was most recently at the Cooper Gallery in Dundee, Scotland.⁴ It was a treasure trove of personal experience laid bare, with artworks as evidence of encounters. I would have liked to spend more time listening to the new interviews with Morris that were conducted for the exhibition. Likewise, I felt that the new

interviews with the curators and artists involved in *Aspen* magazine were perhaps the most engaging part of the exhibition *Aspen Magazine 1965–1971*, which took place at Whitechapel Gallery in 2012.⁵

JG: In the essay I wrote for Jens Hoffmann's *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating* (2013), I described the curator as performing a very public task (arranging art for public view) within a rhetorical space in which exhibitions and art are but props that support an imaginary bond between the institution and its public.⁶ I was speaking in the context of the museum, but I personally think that current curatorial practices extend beyond

³ *In Art, Time, and Technology* (2006), Charlie Gere (a professor of media theory and history at Lancaster University) uses *Les Immatériaux* as an early example of how, as a result of postmodernism, the institutional display of art changed from traditionally didactic and chronological to deliberately disordered. Simon Biggs (a professor of interdisciplinary arts at the University of Edinburgh) wrote on Jean-François Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* text (as well as Jean Baudrillard's texts of the same period) in a discussion of poststructuralist cybernetics.

⁴ The archive of the British curator and writer Lynda Morris begins with her experience as an art student in the 1960s and runs through 2009, at the end of her 30 years as curator of the Gallery at Norwich University of the Arts. She was developing her curatorial practice during the nascent years of Conceptual art, and she curated the first exhibitions in the United Kingdom devoted to Agnes Martin, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Gerhard Richter, and many more. *Dear Lynda . . .* originated at White Columns, New York, in 2012, where she was the second subject in an ongoing exhibition series about innovative curators; the first to be featured was the independent curator Bob Nickas.

⁵ Each of the 10 issues of *Aspen* magazine had a different designer, format, and editor. This freedom lent itself to innovations that have since become the stuff of legend, such as the Minimalism double issue of 1967, edited and designed by Brian O'Doherty, which came in two white boxes and contained such memorable elements as essays by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag; phonograph recordings by Merce Cunningham and William S. Burroughs; projects by Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, and Dan Graham; and a film reel with clips by Robert Rauschenberg and László Moholy-Nagy. The magazine's multimedia format inspired future artist-driven publications such as *Tellus*, *North Drive Press*, and *Triple Canopy*.

the museum and the museum machine. And it is precisely in this respect that the curatorial function (as distinguishable from the author function) has broken the framework of the museum, which of course dominated the artistic imagination of the modernist movements, as well as the relationship between nation and culture. Now we have several different formats and platforms—the biennials, for instance, but also other events that resist the spatial and temporal structures of modern exhibition making—that have themselves evolved according to what curating means today, at least in the world of contemporary art.

Thus, to speak of authorship is to limit the problem, if there *is* in fact a problem, and reduce it to a logic of blaming and culprit finding. I don't find it useful to move the discourse in this direction because this direction doesn't account for the fact that it was artists who made these moves first. Long before curators had any prominence or influence over the way art is framed, artists were organizing happenings and events and formulating all sorts of speculative frameworks for art and artistic practices.

SC: If, as Juan says, to speak of authorship is to limit the problem, how can we instead complicate our understanding of curatorial authorship for the betterment of our understanding of the wider field of artistic production? If you have worked with artists to create the best or most appropriate platform for the public's engagement with their work, why shouldn't you claim at least partial authorship over how that work

has been received and informed other work? The curatorial field's emphasis on individuality means that "curating in the style of Harald Szeemann" isn't something to be proud of but something to disdain as derivative, as not-new. But this isn't the case in new media art, where curatorial ways of working are shared, even open-sourced, and precursors are acknowledged and celebrated.

LG: I think it would be useful to cite a couple of examples (which might already be considered "historical"!) that directly illustrate the auteur theory of curating that is so prevalent in *The Exhibitionist*. In 1999, while I was working as a curator at Thread Waxing Space in New York, I was asked to contribute a text to the "Cultural Conditioning" section of the journal *TRANS>6*, which examined curatorial models. I was new to the city and was looking closely at the history of the organization that had brought me there.⁷ Christian Leigh loomed large in that history, although he is largely unknown to most curators today, and I considered him the instigator of the still-persistent notion of the "star curator" or "curator auteur." He had consciously adopted Alfred Hitchcock as his curatorial model.⁸

Anyway, I wrote a text examining the methods, themes, and directorial style of John Cassavetes, as, in my view, he provided the starkest counterpoint to Hitchcock. This text was not intended to become an exhibition, but rather was a way to address themes of authority and emotionality in contemporary art. Cassavetes

⁶ Each question in this series was formatted as a separate booklet inserted into issues 25 through 34 of *Mousse* magazine. It included Jessica Morgan answering "What is a curator?" João Ribas answering "What to do with the contemporary?" and Peter Eley answering "What about responsibility?" alongside visuals by artists such as Nairy Baghramian, Mario Garcia Torres, and Urs Fischer.

⁷ Thread Waxing Space was an influential alternative art space in a Soho loft, opened in 1991 by Tim Nye. In its 10 years of programming, it hosted ambitious exhibitions by artists such as Nayland Blake and Sigalit Landau alongside experimental performances, educational programs, screenings, and readings. Lia Gangitano (the speaker here) was its first staff curator; she opened Participant Inc. shortly after Thread Waxing Space closed.

addressed an interrelated set of issues in his work: the human need to communicate versus our inability to do it, love and the lack of it, emotional capacities, and the minute behaviors that comprise life.

In 2000, I curated *Mr. Fascination* for Thread Waxing Space, and a follow-up essay was published in *TRANS*⁸. It was in part a reaction to the rise in thematic exhibitions where the curators' names were appearing in ever-larger letters on the invitation cards, and the artists' names smaller and smaller. A set of goals was established that applied to an ensemble of artists who depicted states of heightened emotion. Upon entering the show, the visitor was confronted with a large-scale projection of Ellen Cantor's video *Remember Me* (1998), which intercuts Michelangelo Antonioni's film *L'Avventura* (1960) with several of John Cassavetes's films. It is messy and emotional, and, unlike Leigh's notion of controlled curatorial utterance, the aim was to create a context in which the artists' work generated its own meaning, as well as meaning in relation to other works in the show. But it wasn't to be interpreted as a "whole image" authored by a curator.

In this particular example, there are many facets to the call-and-response between types of

exhibitions, and, by association, curators themselves: Hitchcock versus Cassavetes, authority versus improvisation (although Cassavetes's films were always scripted, the actors played a major role in the writing), and visual bombardment versus slow pacing. Even talking about these shows today establishes *The Exhibitionist* as a place in which these perhaps-forgotten histories of exhibitions can be discussed. Whether friends or frenemies, it's good to have a place where we can talk.

JG: The reality is that curating has become a career. More and more people want to become curators. There is a gravitation toward this practice and thus this practice, or profession, requires analysis and self-reflection. The history of curating, which is one branch of this project to legitimize the field, is to me the less interesting part. Not at all because I think one shouldn't be aware of history, but because I see curating and contemporary art as belonging to a larger field that includes art, literature, philosophy, social critique, and so on, that takes it upon itself to produce critical relationships to the present. How we do this, and why, are the main questions to ask now.

⁸ Christian Leigh's short curatorial career was defined by his maximalist approach, beginning with *The Silent Baroque* for Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in 1988, followed by a series of international exhibitions based on different Alfred Hitchcock films.

The latter were much discussed for their themelessness, brightly painted walls, and electronic music soundtracks. Leigh disappeared in 1993 during a period of financial disputes relating to his exhibitions, the last being *I Love You More Than My Own Death*, which was part of that year's Venice Biennale. His mythic stature itself became the subject of an exhibition: *Notorious (Christian Leigh)* at castillo/corrales in Paris in 2011.

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