

# ONCURATING.org

## REINTERPRETING COLLECTIONS



Installation view *Strange and Close*, Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Photograph by Malte Roloff. Works on display: Hüseyin Alptekin *Self-Heterotopia*, *Catching Up with Self* (1991–2007) and Harun Farocki *Respite* (2007).

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# FRESH BREEZE IN THE DEPOTS – CURATORIAL CONCEPTS FOR REINTERPRETING COLLECTIONS

1  
Filippo Tomaso  
Marinetti,  
*The Futurist  
Manifesto*, 1909.

2  
cf. James Putnam,  
*Art and Artifact,  
The Museum as  
Medium*, Thames and  
Hudson, New York,  
2001, p. 28.

3  
cf. "ICOM Code of  
Ethics for Museums,"  
accessed February  
12, 2011, [http://  
icom.museum/file  
admin/user\\_upload/  
pdf/Codes/code  
2006\\_eng.pdf](http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code2006_eng.pdf), p. 6.

**Marjatta Hölz**

"Museums, cemeteries!"<sup>1</sup> the Futurists exclaimed at the beginning of the last century. In spite of their debatable chauvinist tendencies, their protest was, together with that of the Dada movement a few years later, a precursor of institutional critique. Nonetheless, their works also ended up in museums. Discourse and interactive projects have taken hold of museums only since the 1960s. New genres such as Fluxus, happenings, performance, and site-specific installations gave artists direct opportunities to criticize the museum from inside.<sup>2</sup> But again, the remains of these artistic actions arrived in numerous museum collections. The once critical voice of the now dead artist has become more or less silent. Vitality is hard to conserve.

Thus, the Futurists' provocation persists until the present day. The torpor into which artworks fall when having entered a museum is still sometimes perceptible, and the permanent exhibition of the collection is not as well frequented by visitors as temporary exhibitions. The collection is the body and foundation of each museum and, according to the ethical guidelines of the ICOM (International Council of Museums), acquiring, preserving, exhibiting and promoting the cultural heritage and furthering knowledge are its main tasks. Inherent in this public trust is the museum's accessibility and responsible disposal.<sup>3</sup> However, since the 1980s museums have increasingly focused their activity on temporary monographic or thematic exhibitions and events. Traveling shows are promoted with well-known names, developed without or only with a marginal reference to the local collection and institution, but, they attract large quantities of visitors. Particularly under the pressure of cultural policies, the exhibition event with marketing interests drifted apart from collection activities and research. Meanwhile the public who already had seen the highlights of collections lost their interest in them, especially when they had been shown for decades in hardly modified, fusty permanent exhibitions, or in small temporary presentations addressing experts. Furthermore, much of museums' collections are kept stored without ever being shown for various (qualitative, conservational, financial, spatial, etc.) reasons. There were also some works which were banned for political reasons, for instance, artworks from dictatorial regimes.

Nowadays we can observe clear changes in relation to working with collections. One change is the comeback of the collection as the basis of the exhibition programme. At the same time, this implies a factor of site-specificity and reflects the origin of the museum. However, even if the collection is creatively varied, the core audience still prefers event exhibitions, since it has been trained to look for well-known names (cf. Stella Rollig in the interview in this issue). By trusting in familiar names, visitors perhaps hope not to be disappointed.

What is the significance of the collection nowadays, and how can audience interest be won? The insight into some successful and some criticized projects, each irradiating the theme from another perspective, enables us to make up our mind about concepts for curatorial work on collections. In this issue of *On-Curating.org*, our aim was to find out what possibilities there are for drawing new attention to the collection from visitors, artists, and curators: not only to its highlights, but to the collection as a whole, and to its history. This issue also explores which contexts can trigger new interpretations of old works, and methods of affecting museum structures from the outside so that they are less likely to fossilize.

Collections need to have strategies for acquisition and exhibition. Democratization of these processes has led to different methods of involvement: new curatorial concepts can show the collection in a different light, create a dialogue between the contemporary and the historical. We focused on two notions and their limits: *participation and intervention*.

Participation in this context does not only take place as a part of the educational discourse in outreach programmes, but is also intended to encourage a democratic approach in the development phase of the exhibition concept, the interpretation of the works, and the collection management. The intention is that this democratization will increase the identification of the participants with the results of the process.

With this in mind, we made a call for papers and chose five articles and two interviews. The theme is investigated from seven different angles: examples of the execution of participatory and democratic practices in museum collections (Subhadra Das, Cultural Property Advisor at University College London; Iris Ströbel and Malte Roloff, curators and cultural scientists); an artist's project with a museum aiming to find the essence of collecting (Annette Schemmel, curator) and a critique of interventions in museums (Khadija Carroll La and Alex Schweder La, artists; Viola Rühse, art historian). The two interviews, one with Jean-Hubert Martin, curator and former director of the Museum Kunst Palast Düsseldorf and the Centre Pompidou (conducted by Valentine Meyer, art historian and curator), and the other with Stella Rollig, director of Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz (conducted by Marjatta Hölz, art historian and curator) focus on the role of the audience, and participatory practices in curating and collection management.

Subhadra Das shows how visitor suggestions can affect the collection policy and the sharpening of its profile. She reports on a project involving audience participation in decision making at University College London (UCL), during which the visitors were asked what the university should collect and what it should dispose of. The feedback was taken into account for decisions regarding methods of disposal.

*Rewind and Fast Forward: PLAY* demonstrates an example of institutional critique from inside the museum. Malte Roloff and Iris Ströbel compare two collection exhibitions at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, a reconstruction of Rudi Fuchs' show from 1983, and a presentation of the recent acquisitions (2009/2010) by Charles Esche. While the former lets the artworks 'speak for themselves' in spite of the combination of old and new works, the latter contextualizes the works historically and offers the visitor to interactively contribute to the educative concept.

Insertions of contemporary artworks in historical collections are mostly permanent while artists' interventions in collections, which may consist of collection objects themselves, are usually ephemeral. Both can evoke unexpected relationships between past and present and thus, new interpretations. In this context we wanted to discover differences in the curatorial work of artists, and that of museum curators.

Two famous interventions can exemplify this: In 1970, Andy Warhol was invited by the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence to curate an exhibition with works from the collection in their Museum of Art. In spite of the wishes of the museum curator, the artist insisted for his project *Raid the Icebox* on showing the complete shoe collection, resulting in an unconventional installation resembling a personal wardrobe. The project was a precursor for the later custom of inviting artists as guest curators.<sup>4</sup> Fred Wilson's interventions also strongly interact with collections. In *Mining the Museum* (1992) at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore he was invited to act as curator of the exhibition and as well as creator of a site-specific installation, both referring to the history of the collection and to the history of slavery.<sup>5</sup> Since interventions are common today, we wanted to know which risks and chances they present.

Many museums owe their existence to a private collection, and an evident element of site-specificity is the collection itself. Collectors can follow their activities with fervour for years; they often identify with each object and can tell a story about it. Some collections, if they remain complete, can maintain a glow of this ardour. In the context of her curatorial research decollecting, in which she linked private, artistic and institutional collecting to each other, Annette Schemmel presents the art project *Passions* by Paul Huf in which the audience had the opportunity to visit private collections in the homes of all kinds of collectors who participated in the 'performance,' while the museum, FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, showed portraits of the collectors.

In an excerpt taken from their article *Object to Project: Artist's interventions in Museums*<sup>6</sup>, Khadija Carroll La and Alex Schweder La explore the specifics of interventions by contemporary artists in historical collections. They also point to risks, criticize problematic interventions and research what is obtained by combining new and old works. Viola Rühse critically analyses a recent exhibition of street artist, Banksy, allegedly

4  
cf. Putnam 2001, p. 18.

5  
cf. Putnam 2001, p. 30 and 157. See also the article by Khadija Carroll La and Alex Schweder La in this issue.

6  
Khadija Carroll La & Alex Schweder La, "Object to Project: Artist's Interventions in Museums" in Christopher Marshall ed., *Sculpture and the Museum*, Ashgate Press, London, 2011.

an intervention into the collection of the Bristol City Museum, which was very successful and received much attention. However, she raises some doubts regarding how much it genuinely dealt with the collection, and with the characteristics of street art.

The interview with Stella Rollig, director of the Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, investigates the relation between blockbusters and collection exhibitions, the notion of the masterpiece, and the raison d'être of a chronological presentation. Interventions of contemporary art in historical collections are scrutinized as well as participatory practices, like inviting artists to curate museum holdings (*Aufmischen/Mix it up*, 2007, with Lois & Franziska Weinberger). We also gain an in depth insight into the forms of decision-making in acquisitions, restitutions, and disposals.

The interview with Jean-Hubert Martin, curator of the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2011, is mainly about a rearrangement of the permanent exhibition in the Museum Kunst Palast Düsseldorf. For this presentation called *Künstlermuseum* he invited the two artists Bogomir Ecker and Thomas Huber in 1999 to curate the collection, which proved to be quite controversial. Jean-Hubert Martin is developing a new taxonomy for museums, beyond chronological and geographical classifications.

As a result, the key terms for the prospects of curating collections are democratization, contextualization, and education and learning. Uwe M. Schneede claims that "the museum only can preserve its societal importance and, in the long run, only achieve its educational mission, when it is able to permanently renew from within, without abandoning its obligatory tradition."<sup>7</sup> And, we should add, only if it also remains open for fresh ideas, fair comments, and feedback from the outside. Central figures in this context are the artists, guest curators, the visitors, and, last but not least, the responsible, honest critics.

I would particularly like to thank Dorothee Richter, who invited me to edit this issue of *On-Curating.org*, and her team at the Zurich University of the Arts. I am also grateful for her helpful suggestions and comments, and likewise to those of Valentine Meyer.



# DISPOSAL?: A DEMOCRATIC EXHIBITION AT UCL MUSEUMS & COLLECTIONS

**Subhadra Das**

UCL Cultural Property Advisor

In October 2009, University College London (UCL) Museums & Collections hosted a consultative, democratic exhibition about the most controversial subject in the museum sector. *Disposal?* took the innovative step of asking its audience about what the university should be collecting and what it should be getting rid of. Audience participation was a key component of the exhibition from the outset. When visiting the exhibition, UCL students, staff and the general public could contribute their views on how they think the collections should be run. The objective was to incorporate these views into governing documents, policies and procedures for the museums and collections. As a current service to and future resource for UCL and the wider public, we believe it is essential that they have a voice and their views be taken into account.

This article will describe the exhibition and how it came about, and the methods of consultation and the thinking behind them. It will also outline the feedback received, and how this will be used to inform a thoughtful disposal program at UCL and build a democratic model for future collections management.

## **Why Disposal?**

*Disposal?* was a direct result of the UCL Collections Review. Beginning in 2007, the Review was a two year survey project to assess the care, use and significance of all of the teaching and research collections held by UCL. We wanted to know:

- How many objects were in the collections?
- Where and how well were these stored?
- How and how much were the objects used?
- Were there gaps that could be filled?
- Were there things we should dispose of?

The result was an unprecedented overarching picture of the 380,000 objects across eighteen different collections – all of which had previously been managed by disparate departments – along with recommendations for their strategic, central management.

The Review also threw up some perplexing cases. For example:

- How did 98 plastic dinosaurs come to be fully accessioned objects in the zoology collection?
- Did a wooden wheelchair kept in storage actually belong to Joseph Lister, the surgeon who pioneered antiseptic treatment, and if so, what did it contribute to the collections at UCL?
- Did a wicker picnic basket in the archaeology collection actually belong to Agatha Christie, and given that it is filled with a random assortment of unprovenanced material, should we actually care?

There were also bigger questions about the overall management of the collections. What should we do with oversized objects we are unable to take proper care of due to a lack of appropriate storage space? What, precisely was our role as university collections – what should we be collecting?

We decided that, as we were asking ourselves these questions, the best way to get answers was to ask our audience: UCL staff and students in particular and the general public. Following a Staff and Student Survey in 2007 where participants had shown themselves to be open to talking about disposal, and interested in carrying on the discussion, we decided to have an exhibition, showcasing objects from the collections and asking questions about how they should be managed.

## **The exhibition and how it worked**

From October 19th to 31st 2009, *Disposal?* was open to visitors within and beyond the college gates. The exhibition was located in the Chadwick Structures Lab – one of UCL Engineering's teaching spaces.

Branching off from a central introductory area, the exhibition was divided into a number of different sections, each based around a single question about the collections and their management. What should we be collecting? What should we do with duplicates, hazardous objects or objects in poor condition? And who should decide what goes into and comes out of a collection?

Visitors to *Disposal?* could participate in the exhibition from the moment they walked in the door. The main way they could do this was by voting in an exercise which was set up in the central, introduction area. As they entered, visitors were asked to choose one of five objects – each representing a different collections care problem – to dispose of. These were 'Agatha Christie's Picnic Basket,' photographs taken by NASA spacecraft, soil samples from the Channel Tunnel, an antique anaesthetic kit and the skull of a juvenile hippo. We were careful to define what disposal meant in the context of museums. We explained that this does not simply mean throwing things away; objects can be exchanged, given as gifts, sold, recycled or destroyed. Visitors were asked to vote twice – once at the beginning of their visit at once at the end. We wanted to know what criteria people would apply when making a decision about what to dispose of, as well as if they would change their mind having explored the exhibition's themes and questions.

In addition to voting, visitors could also write comments on a comments board and fill in evaluation forms, explaining their views on disposal and their voting choices in more detail.



1 – A visitor casts his (second) vote for the hippo skull.

2 – Colour-coded stickers for the voting exercise.

3 – Visitors explore *Disposal?*

All images are ©UCL Museums & Collections. Photographs by Richard Hubert Smith.



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The key way of encouraging visitor participation in *Disposal?* was by having a knowledgeable and friendly team of exhibition assistants. Made up of UCL Museums & Collections staff – including the exhibition curators and one of the collection curators –, museum trainees, and volunteers, their role was to encourage, have and record conversations around the issue of museum disposals and to glean people's views.

### Lessons learned

The most important aspect in the success of *Disposal?* as a democratic exhibition was that evaluation had been built into the format of the exhibition from the start. During the fortnight it was open, 942 people visited *Disposal?*, and 633 of them participated in the voting exercise, numerous comments and conversations were written up on the comments board, and 10% of visitors also returned evaluation forms.

The consensus of the audience's opinions can be summarized in three main points:

1. The usefulness of objects and the role they play in teaching and research at UCL was at the forefront of their minds. The objects most people voted to dispose of were the soil samples, which had been taken as study samples and had not been used in a decade.
2. In addition to facilitating teaching and research, the history of UCL should also be a focus for collecting by UCL Museums & Collections, and finally,
3. Collections curators are knowledgeable experts in this field and they should lead decisions about what should go into and what should come out of collections.

All of these points are – in the face of a seemingly intractable aversion to disposal in the museum sector – a liberating endorsement of the position of UCL Museums & Collections as curators and managers of the collections, and an endorsement of the remit of the collections as a whole.

The exhibition was the focus of an unexpected amount of media attention. Following articles in the *Guardian* and *New Scientist*, it was featured in *The Arts Newspaper*, *Time magazine*, and other publications. Curators also gave interviews to international radio programmes including 'As It Happens' (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) and Radio Free Europe. The controversial topic of the exhibition was clearly a media draw but, like the audiences, journalists were open to the idea of discussing museum disposals. While it was undeniably daunting, this openness, along with the wide range of media coverage, was an excellent way to publicize the exhibition and help UCL as an organization deal openly and transparently about its actions in this field.

### Future work

In the months following *Disposal?* UCL Museums & Collection has developed a set of procedures for managing disposals from the collections and, following this format, enacted a number of disposals. These have included transfers of objects to other museums and private collections, along with a gift of some material to an artist. In developing these procedures and carrying out these disposals, curators took into account the views shared by visitors to *Disposal?* in order to choose the objects and also to decide on methods for disposal. Further, similar, disposals are in process,

and we plan to develop a similar procedure on the acquisition side, and these, again, will take into account the views of the *Disposal?* Audience.

We are in the process of developing a *Disposal?* website. The website will be both a virtual exhibition, designed to introduce the topic to people who did not visit the original exhibition, and a forum for continuing conversations. The site will include a blog as a means of showcasing current disposals and acquisitions and encouraging feedback in each case.

There are also plans to publish detailed analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the exhibition. It is hoped that by showcasing and discussing our practices openly and ethically, other museums, in the UK and around the world, will be encouraged to take a more proactive – and, more importantly, a more democratic – approach to managing their collections.

### Reference

Dunn and MacDonald, 'UCL Museums and Collections' survey of students and staff on views towards disposal has proved liberating, Sharon Heal ed., *Museums Journal*, Issue 108/4, 2008.

# REWIND AND FAST FORWARD: PLAY

Malte Roloff and Iris Ströbel

Two collection displays in confrontation

Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven

PLAY van Abbe Part 1, *The Game and the Players*,  
November 2009 – March 2010



Interactive Label. Photography by Hadas Zemer, Van Abbemuseum

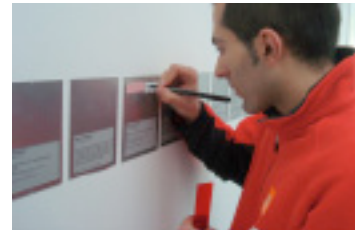
A museum is defined by its collection. Often this collection is presented and perceived in such a way that a walk through the rooms of an exhibition resembles a walk through art history. Cultural theorists and museologists, from Tony Bennett<sup>1</sup> to Mary Anne Staniszewski<sup>2</sup>, have argued that the notion of a linear, chronological history (of art) is a construct. They highlight the power of museum architecture and exhibition display in naturalising this construct and in establishing an art historical canon. In this respect modern art museums play a pivotal role in legitimising social inclusions and exclusions, and defining the positions of subjects and objects within their knowledge-power-relations, for instance the roles of the viewers, the artist or the curator. This critical perspective on art, art history, its institutions and promoters, has been adapted by art institutions like Kunsthallen, Kunstvereine and artist-run spaces since the early 1990s, and is now entering the museum. This development is signalling a shift from artistic institutional critique and academic examination from the outside towards an assessment and criticism of the methods and strategies of the museum from within the institution. One possible way of incorporating a critical view of the art museum and art history

into the institutional framework itself is to examine the collection of a museum.

One museum that has become a promoter of this new approach towards institutional and curatorial practice is the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, since the directorship of Charles Esche in 2004. Initiated by Esche and a team of collaborating curators and artists, the project *Play Van Abbe*, running from 2009 until the end of 2011, is using the museum's collection to raise and debate questions such as: *What is the role of an art museum in the 21st century? What are the conventions of a museum and to what extent are we aware of them?* It focuses not only on the artworks in the collection, but also on the way we are allowed to look at them in a museum. The collection itself is rather fragmented due to the different interests of its six directors since the beginning of the Van Abbemuseum in 1936, and hosts one of the world's biggest and most important El Lissitzky collections.

The first part of *PLAY van Abbe*, entitled *The Game and the Players*, running from November 2009 until March 2010, consisted of three exhibitions, performances, and lectures. A comparison between the exhibitions was encouraged by the museum itself, since they ran at the same time in different parts of the museum building and were juxtaposed directly through statements by the museum in press releases, information flyers, and the overall framing of the exhibitions.

This article sets out to examine two of them: A reconstruction of a display of the museum's collection from 1983 curated by Rudi Fuchs, and a display of the latest acquisitions in the collection, entitled *Strange and Close*, curated by Charles Esche. Focusing on the displays of these exhibitions, it will compare the mediation strategies employed by the two curators. By turning



Label in *Strange and Close*.

Photographs by Malte Roloff  
Tagging. Photographs by Hadas  
Zemer, Van Abbemuseum

1  
Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex" in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne ed., *Thinking about Exhibitions*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007, pp. 81-112.

2  
Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1998.

its attention towards the labeling in these exhibitions rather than towards the artworks, the role of viewer, curator, and museum become apparent within the different displays of the collection.

#### REWIND » Repetition: Summer Display 1983

Stepping into the Van Abbemuseum in November 2009 must have felt like stepping out of a time machine that had brought museum visitors back into the early 1980s. Under the title *Repetition: Summer Display 1983*, the museum showed a reconstruction of its collection display curated by Rudi Fuchs in 1983.

Next to the works on display were small white paper labels with short typewritten captions which almost faded into the white walls and were hardly visible from a distance. Looking closer visitors could read the name of the artist, title, and year of the artwork. This type of labelling was owed to the museum's attempt to present an almost literal reconstruction of the display from 1983. But while back then the artworks were not accompanied by any further background information, in 2009 the museum offered information cards for a selected number of works. These cards gave basic interpretations and contextualised work and artist within their time. For example, visitors could read about Jörg Immendorff's painting *Café Deutschland BrrrrD-DDrrr* from 1978, and learn that it depicts the artist himself and the political situation in Cold War Germany. Fuchs would have probably renounced such a connection between artwork and social context. Just one year before 1983, he wrote in his *documenta* catalogue that it " (...) seemed important to disentangle art from the diverse pressures and social perversions it has to bear."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, in Eindhoven he attempted to preserve the artworks from everyday life within the walls of the museum.

But what does this mean for the relationship between viewer and work?

The labels did not distract the viewers; their attention was solely on the artworks. Since there was no further guiding information, the viewers could follow their own interpretations. On the other hand, they were left alone with their visual experience and knowledge of art history. Today, visitors are used to such minimalist labelling and to seeing an exhibition like *Summer Display 1983*. Back then, Fuchs broke from the conventions of exhibiting the Van Abbemuseum's collection and confronted viewers with a different method of collection-based exhibition making. In one of the reconstructed rooms, the above-mentioned painting by Jörg Immendorff, a small interior by Max Beckmann, and a large print by Katharina Sieverding were assembled together with a sculpture by Mario Merz and one of Daniel Buren's striped canvases. Just like the unobtrusive labelling did not contextualise individual artworks, there was also no explanation as to why these works were assembled together in one room. Where the connection between these works of art was to be found remained anyone's guess – more a matter of intuitive access to the atmosphere of the room, than intellectual reasoning by the viewer. The works were not arranged by style, national school, or medium, but according to the aesthetic judgement and personal taste of the curator. This a-historical hanging of older works from the museum collection and new acquisitions, at that time strongly criticised<sup>4</sup>, became an established model of exhibition making in the late 1980s and early 1990s<sup>5</sup>, and is today still common practice in many museums of contemporary art.<sup>6</sup>

#### FAST FORWARD » Strange and Close

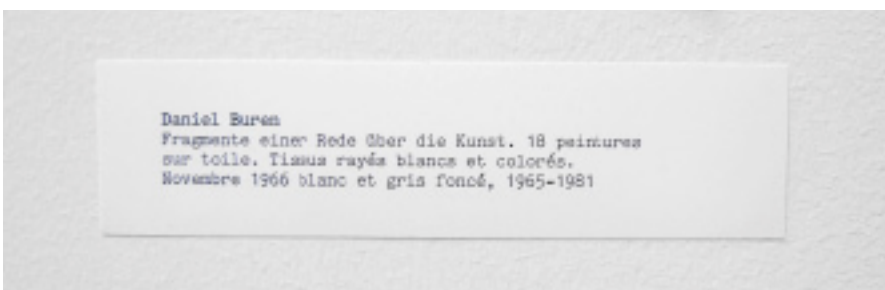
Having left the old part of the Van Abbemuseum for the new adjacent building and walking into Charles Esche's exhibition of new acquisitions for the collection, entitled *Strange and Close*, visitors were facing a very different kind of display. Wooden panels were scattered about the whole exhibition, serving as signposts and carrying quotes by various authors on the social function of the museum, the role of art in society, and on topics like memory, history, and reconstruction. In addition, labels next to every artwork provided background information on the artists and works on display. These labels not only showed the usual captions, but also keywords, which visitors could uncover with a simple reading device. In the case of Thomas Schütte's architectural model *Collector's Complex* from 1990, keywords were: *architecture, closed, museum, private*. They could loosely be associated with the work, providing a starting point for an interpretation. Furthermore, visitors were asked to interact with the works by writing keywords on the labels. With the wooden panels and the interactive labels, a textual layer was added to the artworks. At the entrance of the exhibition one of these wooden panels was proposing the question, "What did 1989 mean to you?" The turning point of the political events of 1989 provided the contextual framework, historicising the artworks and asking the viewer to relate to them on a personal level. Just like Europe opened up to the East (and vice versa) after 1989, the collection politics of the Van Abbemuseum did as well, which is reflected in the choice of artists for *Strange and Close*. One example of this geographical shift towards Eastern Europe and the thematic setting is Nedko Solakov's work *Top Secret* (1989–1990), linking

<sup>3</sup>  
Rudi Fuchs, catalogue foreword in *Documenta 7*, vol. 2, Kassel, 1982, p. XIII.

<sup>4</sup>  
See: Douglas Crimp, *The Art of Exhibition in October*, vol. 30, 1984, pp. 49–83, and critical reviews in the two issues of *Artforum international*, September and October 1982, pp. 57–75 and pp. 80–85.

<sup>5</sup>  
Harald Szeemann's *A-Historische Klanken* at the Boymens van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam (1988) is one of the most famous examples.

<sup>6</sup>  
e.g. the exhibition *Die Kunst ist super!*, Udo Kittelmann's re-hanging of the collection at the Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin in 2009/10.



1 – Exhibition entrance. Wooden panels. Photograph by Peter Cox, Van Abbemuseum  
 2 – Installation view *Repetition: Summer Display 1983*, Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Photograph by Malte Roloff. Works on display: Jörg Immendorff *BrrrD-DDrrr Café Deutschland* (1978), Daniel Buren *Fragmente einer Rede über die Kunst. 18 peintures sur toile. Tissus rayés blancs et colorés* (1965-1981), Max Beckmann *Winterbild* (1930), Mario Merz *Iqlo Nero* (1967-1979).  
 3 – Label in *Repetition: Summer Display 1983*, Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Photograph by Malte Roloff.

personal and political history in Bulgaria. The insertion of context into the collection display was taken even further by including film footage of a lecture by cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha at the Van Abbemuseum in 2007 and of interviews with Charles Esche and Rudi Fuchs. The reference to postcolonial theory and the self-reflexivity of the curators showed Esche's approach towards exhibiting a museum collection. Fuchs' collection display was mostly concerned with blocking off all factors considered exterior to the artworks and focussed on interior relations between them. Esche, on the other hand, presented art as inevitably linked to the social and historical contexts of its past production and current reception. The visitors to *Strange and Close* were guided much more than in Fuchs' exhibition. If they decided to use the reading device, the labels suggested a certain way of reading the artworks, which left less room for individual interpretations. On the other hand, by leaving comments on the interactive labels, they could participate in the mediation of the artworks. So while Fuchs left visitors and artworks without mediation, Esche's omnipresent contextualisation strongly influenced the encounter between artwork and visitor.



#### PLAY

With its project *PLAY van Abbe* the Van Abbemuseum is asking the question: *What is the role of an art museum in the 21st century?* As a first step to answer this existential question, the museum is looking back to what the museum was at the end of the 20th century. Rudi Fuchs' exhibition from 1983 is a perfect example for the alleged neutrality of the white cube, whose power viewers could experience by means of spatial reconstruction and which has been one dominant model for exhibition making until today. In juxtaposition with Charles Esche's proposal for showing a museum collection, the importance of the exhibition display for showing and perceiving art is highlighted. In Fuchs' exhibition, the curator appears as an "arbiter of taste,"<sup>7</sup> whereas Esche can be understood as an 'arbiter of contexts.' Paradoxically, the ostensibly neutral display, the scarce labelling, and the arrangement of artefacts in Fuchs' exhibition, which concentrates solely on the artworks themselves and the supposed resonances between them, primarily features his choice, his taste, and his style. Esche, in turn, is present in his exhibition in person (mediatised through television) and intellectually omnipresent in his offers of interpretation and his propositions of context. In both cases, the curator is a very powerful player in this game called art. The viewer is being allocated the role of an observing, intuitive spectator by Fuchs and that of a more active, intellectual reader by Esche. These roles viewers are allowed to play and enact in the knowledge-power system of the museum become obvious and criticisable in the confrontation of the mediation strategies of the two exhibitions.<sup>8</sup>

The Van Abbemuseum as a place where conventions and subjects are being produced calls itself into question with the project *PLAY van Abbe*. It examines its hierarchies and means of production and makes itself transparent to the public. In a time where many art museums try to compete with biennales and art fairs, the Van Abbemuseum turns to the value of its collection and history. These two unique characteristics of museums, which set them apart from ephemeral biennials, are not regarded as a burden, but as an opportunity for a sustainable engagement with art and its publics in the long run.

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Debora J. Meijers,  
"The Museum and  
the 'Ahistorical'  
Exhibition: the  
latest gimmick by  
the arbiters of  
taste, or an im-  
portant cultural  
phenomenon?" in  
Reesa Greenberg,  
Bruce W. Ferguson,  
Sandy Nairne ed.,  
*Thinking about  
Exhibitions*,  
Routledge, London,  
2007, pp. 7-20.

8

The fourth  
and last part of  
*PLAY van Abbe*,  
*The Pilgrim, the  
Tourist, The  
Flaneur (and the  
Worker)*, 2011,  
scrutinized the  
role of the visitor  
even further.

# BRIDGING THE GAP. ABOUT 'DECOLLECTING.' CURATORIAL RESEARCH ON ARTISTIC, INSTITUTIONAL AND PRIVATE COLLECTING

**Annette Schemmel**

*The attic above – of course, it is small; of course, it has shelves on every wall; of course, it is full to the brim. Everything in it has been fussily ordered and filed away. "Forty years of ardent collecting!" he had promised me. "And here," he says, "some very special envelopes..." He removes a binder from the shelf, opening it. In it are envelopes, carefully placed in vinyl sleeves, postmarked, addressed, and, for the most part, already yellowed. "Why would someone collect envelopes?" I think (and he senses what I'm thinking). But, just then, he pulls out an envelope, holding it at arm's length, and gives me a mischievous, sidelong glance. He opens it carefully, letting me look inside. At first I don't understand. Then I take a second look: inside another address, and even a return address, has been written and a stamp stuck on, as well. It takes a moment that seems to last an eternity, and then I understand: the envelope has been sent twice! The first recipient had carefully turned the envelope inside out and used it again. Here is an entire collection of re-used envelopes, most of which have a postmark from the first years after the Second World War. He hands me more envelopes and comments, "When I collect, I try to be avantgarde. Normal collections do not interest me."<sup>1</sup>*

The gentleman above is a pharmacist from Dunkirk, a shabby harbour town in the very North of France. He also collects intrauterine birth control devices (for their formal beauty and variety) and official documents from the time of the French Revolution (for their rhetoric) and he was one of the sixteen participating collectors in the art project *Passions* by German artist Paul Huf at FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, a public collection of contemporary art in Dunkirk (2008).<sup>2</sup>

Paul Huf's idea was to open to the public various private collections of a city, ranging from contemporary art to Kinder Egg toy surprises to historical postcards. Photo portraits of these collectors were displayed in the exhibition space of the FRAC.<sup>3</sup> The collectors had been photographed against a grey background, and no indication of what they collect was given. Visitors received a brochure, which contained an invitation to these "secret museums" in the collectors' private homes and to thus discover their passions.

Based on Paul Huf's idea for *Passions* I developed the curatorial project *decollecting* that aimed at bridging the gap between institutional, private, and artistic collections with a series of group exhibitions<sup>4</sup> and lectures at FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais (2007/08)<sup>5</sup>. The discursive program included seminars with students from Dunkerque's art school, a reading group with teachers from the region, as well as lectures by anthropologist Laurence Nabitz on private ethnographic collections and by Wendy Gers Lauritano on her practice as a curator at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, South Africa. At the opening of *Decollecting 1*, Paul van der Grijp lectured about the anthropology of collecting and Sands Murray-Wassink performed his installation, *Parfumes*; At the opening of *Decollecting 2*, art historian Manuela Valentino gave a lecture on the collector Paul Otlet (1868 – 1944), while Marjolijn Dijkman presented her project, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. Our workshop at Mundaneum, Mons (BE), introduced artists and designers dealing with the encyclopaedic aspects of the internet, and pupils from the region to Paul Otlet's utopia, documented on site.<sup>6</sup>

Next to Paul Huf, Marjolijn Dijkman and Sands Murray-Wassink, the artists Peggy Buth, Corey Escoto, Vesna Pavlovic, Peter Piller, and Koen Theys actively contributed to the four "decollecting" exhibits with recent projects, while works by Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Visser, and Laurie Parsons were selected from the FRAC's collection.

The title "decollecting" indicated an analytical attitude towards collecting practices. It started from a simple definition of collecting as "the process of actively, selectively and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences."<sup>7</sup> Thus collecting can be easily differentiated from hoarding, simple acquisitiveness, and possessive accumulating.

1  
Paul Huf, "Avantgarde Envelopes" in Annette Schemmel ed., *Decollecting*. Edition FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkirk, 2008, p. 296.

2  
The FRACs, or Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain, are public collections in each region of France that were initiated by the Ministry of Culture in the early 1980s in order to decentralize contemporary art.

3  
The photo portraits for *Passions* were realised by Paul Huf in collaboration with members of the photo class of Thomas Petit at Lycée Paul Duez, Cambrai. In February 2009, Paul realised a second version of *Passions* at the art space, lothringer13/laden, in Munich.

4  
The exhibitions *decollecting 1* and *decollecting 2* were held at FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais in summer 2008. The art works from both exhibits also travelled to the art spaces *Idem+Art* in Maubeuge, FR (autumn 2008), and to *De Garage* at Cultuurcentrum Mechelen, BE (winter 2008).

5  
Annette Schemmel ed., *Decollecting*, Edition FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkirk, 2008. (Available through FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais and de Appel, Amsterdam)

6  
The workshop, *Formatting Utopia*. From Paul Otlet to the Internet, on Nov. 18, 2008, was organised in collaboration with Marjolijn Dijkman/Enough Room for Space. The speakers were Stéphanie Manfred (curator at Mundaneum/Mons), members of Metahaven (designers), members of De Geuzen (art/design collective), Joachim Schmid (artist), and Sabine Niederer (curator and researcher of Network Cultures University of Amsterdam).

7  
Russel W. Belk, *Collecting in a consumer society*, Routledge, New York 2001, p. 141.

### A short history of the relationship between private and institutional collecting

The relation between official/institutional/representative collecting and private collectors is all but new. We could look at all of these collecting practices as result of a longing for the lost entirety of knowledge through a humanist lens for the moment, leaving aside the power relations behind collecting. Noah is often mentioned as the prototypical collector, and his ark, in which he saved a pair of each of the world's species from the flood, is the forerunner of the museum.<sup>8</sup> The European Cabinets of Curiosities, which flourished in private settings beginning with the 14th century expeditions and their raids, embodies another type of world knowledge in objects. As academic research fields became increasingly differentiated in the wake of the Enlightenment, the fields of collections that had still been united in the "Cabinets of Curiosity" split up into public zoos, natural history museums, national museums and art collections.<sup>9</sup> A collection of information like the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, which the French philosopher Denis Diderot initiated in 1750, attempted at presenting the entire knowledge of the world, ordered from a philosophical perspective.

In the first half of the 19th century, the enlightened writers Flaubert, Dickens, and Droste-Hülshoff caricatured the eccentric "antiquarians" of their time, who appeared old-fashioned and unworldly to them. Yet, from today's perspective, these collectors of manuscripts, correspondence, and handicrafts from the European Middle Ages represent the avant-garde of modern historical scholarship. The concept of an ongoing, chronological historiography (with its exclusions) originated at the end of the 18th century thanks to their collections that built a bridge between antiquity, which had already been well researched, and their own present.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of early museums like the British Museum in London and the Musée National du Moyen Âge in Paris can also be traced back to private collectors' initiatives. So, just as often as collectors are belittled as eccentrics they contribute to important shifts in the designation of which knowledge is considered relevant.

Industrialisation in the mid-19th century brought a plethora of new, inexpensive collector's items into circulation, which contributed to the democratisation of private collecting and made idiosyncratic specialisation more possible.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, most collectors still strive for universalism within a given area of interest today. Stamp collections, for instance, are often meant to represent the entire world in a compressed form.<sup>12</sup> So-called universal museums, like the future Dubai Universal Museum<sup>13</sup> still maintain their claim to cover humanity's achievements. If they remain unquestioned, their normative perspectives get reproduced in the organisation of private collections. But in the best case, collections may destabilise hegemonic power structures by drawing attention to diversity.

### Artists and collectors

Just like contemporary artists, collectors embark on an open-ended mission that is entirely self-motivated. They are confronted with numerous conceptual challenges, leading up to more or less avant-garde collecting projects, since initiating a collection requires a personal theme and criteria for exclusion. Both collectors and artists reference the aesthetic pleasure found in the similarities and the variations in objects of a kind as a motif for their collecting activity. And in artistic, as well as in 'normal' collections, the banal and the overlooked gain particular interest.

The 20th century has produced a range of collecting artists. Since Marcel Duchamp's invention of the *readymade*, visual artists have used the effect of re-contextualisation, which emphasises the aesthetic value and metaphorical potential of commonplace objects (or entire collections). The initiated art viewer understands such conceptual decisions – as long as the objects are contained within the proverbial White Cube.<sup>14</sup>

In his seminal 1979 article *Künstler und andere Sammler* (Artists and other Collectors), Walter Grasskamp discusses projects by Christian Boltanski, Nikolaus Lang, and Harald Szeemann with which they attempted to push the democratisation of public art collections. They declared sets of 'normal' people's leftovers (non-collectables) as art works that had to be catalogued and preserved according to museum standards.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> C.f. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal's introduction to *The cultures of collecting*, Reaktion Books, London, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> For the antique pre-history of the *Wunderkammern* and their afterlife in artistic projects of the late 20th century, see Horst Bredekamp's "Nachwort zur Neuauflage" in *Antikensehnsucht und Maschinenglauben. Die Geschichte der Wunderkammer und die Zukunft der Kunstgeschichte*. Wagenbach, Berlin, 2002. pp.103-104.

<sup>10</sup> Susan A. Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2000. pp. 61ff.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Van der Grijp, *Passion and profit. Towards an Anthropology of Collecting*, Lit, Berlin, 2006. p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 218.

<sup>13</sup> Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (DCAA) is collaborating for this purpose with Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in Munich, and Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. The statements of the heads of the German museums clearly articulated an unreflected claim to universality regardless of decades of post-colonial discourses: "Director Reinhold Baumstark from Munich stated to be ready to contribute the 'canon of world culture'." Quoted and translated from Günter Kowa's article: "Neuer Rekord für den Wüstenstaat?" 29.05.2008, in: *art Das Kunstmagazin*. Accessed 26.01.2011. [www.artmagazin.de/szene/6892.html](http://www.artmagazin.de/szene/6892.html).

<sup>14</sup> C.f. Brian O'Doherty, *In der weißen Zelle*, Merve-Verl., Berlin, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> C.f. Walter Grasskamp, "Künstler und andere Sammler" in *Kunstforum International* 32, 1979, pp. 49-50.



*Very Collectable!*, photo series from the project *Passions*, 2008/09. © Paul Huf ([www.paulhuf.de](http://www.paulhuf.de))

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With *The Uncanny* (1993–2003) Mike Kelley called upon the compulsive, narcissist and psychopathic dimension of collecting. His exhibit combined a "collection of figurative sculptures, ranging from ancient to contemporary, which had an 'uncanny' aura about them"<sup>16</sup> with non-art objects that had a similar quality and ended with a gallery featuring the so-called 'harems' consisting of fourteen personal collections of the artist, from childhood rocks to business cards.<sup>17</sup>

Towards the turn of the millennium many artistic collections began dealing with the proliferation of images in daily life and on the Internet. This tendency was documented in the exhibition, *The order of things*, at Muhka in Antwerp in 2008–2009.<sup>18</sup>

#### "Passions" and the empowerment of the collector

Coming back to our starting point, we should consider Paul Huf's project, *Passions*, in relation to a style of exhibitions that inverts the relationship between collector and museum.

During the 1990s the so-called 'People's Shows' in England brought the most varied of private collections into major museums, and it was the figure of the collector itself that attracted public attention. The overused catchword invoked at the time was "empowerment," which was tantamount to acknowledgement, participation, and democracy, bestowed through the inclusion of the cultural values of the mainstream populace in the prestigious museum context. Yet, critical observers also noted the tendency – reminiscent of a freak show – to make the "obsessive collector" an object of public amusement.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Paul Huf began with the understanding that the meaning of the collection for the collector can be discovered primarily in its domestic context, where the processes of arranging, caring for, and storing take place. When such a collection is placed in a museum, it turns into a conventionalised artefact. As a writer and a visual artist, Paul Huf was most interested in the narrative content of the collections, an aspect that only unfolds by meeting directly with the collector.

In 2004 *La Maison Rouge*, an exhibition space founded by the private art collector Antoine de Galbert, presented the show *Behind Closed Doors: the Private World of Collectors*.<sup>20</sup> Exact replicas of rooms from various art collectors' homes featured works by Bernard Frize and Ange Leccia, a Mies van der Rohe chair, a Louis XV chest of drawers, and the ostentatious coffee table literature as well. Thus, both tasteful and corny arrangements (for instance, a series of Bernd and Hilla Becher's water tower photographs hung in a water closet) were reinforced by the official framework of the exhibit. This manner of presentation was also an attempt to make the private accessible, however – owing to the socially privileged class of the art collectors – it was the "fine distinctions" which were exhibited above all.<sup>21</sup>

Paul Huf's project, on the other hand, left the collections where they were: at home with their custodians. The portraits of the collectors that were exhibited at the FRAC allowed for all kinds of speculations and activated the mechanisms by help of which we try to spot the art collectors amongst the stamp collectors, or the socially accepted researcher collectors amongst the messy maniacs. But only by taking the risk to actively participate and to visit the collectors at home was it possible for the viewer to confirm or correct these preconceived notions – clearly a challenge in a small town where avant-garde collectors as well as contemporary artists are subject to suspicion.

16  
Mike Kelley,  
*Playing With Dead  
Things: The Uncanny*  
in Mike Kelley  
and John C. Welchman  
eds., *Foul Perfection. Essays and  
Criticism*, MIT  
Press, Cambridge,  
Mass, 2003, p. 72.

17  
ibid.

18  
C.f. <http://www.muhka.be> (Accessed 26.01.2011). *The Order of Things* was curated by Dieter Roelstraete.

19  
Robin Francis, "The People's Show. A Critical Analysis" in *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 1996, no.1. Available on <http://cool.conservations-us.org/jcms/issuel/francis.html> (Accessed 26.1.2011).

20  
C.f. Patricia Falguieres, Gérard Wajzman, and Jean-Pierre Criqui, *L'intime, le collectionneur derrière la porte*, exhibition catalogue, La Maison Rouge, Paris, 2004.

21  
This thought is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu who expands on it in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984.

# BANKSY'S QUIRKY AND OVERHYPED TAKE ON THE COLLECTION OF BRISTOL CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

Viola Rühse

*"I love the way capitalism finds a place – even for its enemies. It's definitely boom time in the discontent industry." Banksy*

During the last decade the British artist operating under the pseudonym Banksy (\*ca. 1973) established himself as the cutting-edge of the international street art scene.<sup>1</sup> His roots lie in freehand graffiti and the counterculture of Bristol of the nineties. Around the year 2000, Banksy moved to London and has since frequently expressed his socio-political, provocative statements with stencils and other media. With guerrilla-like art stunts he has gained much popularity. Hollywood A-listers and hedge fund managers pay hundreds of thousands of pounds for his best canvases. Auctioneers promote Banksy as the new Keith Haring, and some journalists acknowledge his agitprop as a welcome counterpart to the Young British Artists. Banksy's rise has also fostered a greater general interest in street art.<sup>2</sup> At first art critics and curators remained reserved about the street art frenzy. But, due to its great popularity, even internationally renowned institutions now organize exhibitions exploring street art. The flagship exhibition was *Street Art* at Tate Modern in 2008.<sup>3</sup> After this, a major solo exhibition by Banksy was also expected. The street artist organized it as a guerrilla act due to his polemical critique of the art establishment and the need to keep his credibility. As a distinct contrast to his subversive exhibits, he chose a seemingly very traditional institution in his hometown, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. It is housed in an impressive Edwardian baroque building and is owned by the council that Banksy formerly provoked with his illegal outdoor works. It was said that only the museum's director had allowed the exhibition, *Banksy vs Bristol Museum*, which had been prepared in secret since the autumn of 2008 by Banksy's organization, Pest Control Office, along with just a handful of adepts in the museum staff, before its sudden unveiling in the middle of June 2009.

Behind the grand entrance of the museum Banksy positioned a Stonehenge made from portable toilets. In the elegant main hall a burnt-out, graffitied ice cream van replaced the enquiries desk. The walls were lined with subversive modified copies of famous sculptures, e.g. Michelangelo's *David* was strapped in a suicide bomber's belt. The natural

history collection was cleared out to make way for Banksy's animatronics, such as fish fingers swimming in a glass bowl. In the temporary display gallery was a mock-up studio and many canvases were in 'salon hang.' Modern motifs prevailed the first half; the second half was dominated by replicas of old master paintings that Banksy had altered in a surrealistic way with modern-day elements. More subverted paintings and other works by Banksy were placed between the normal exhibits in the permanent displays.

Most art critics complained about the lack of artistic depth after the preview. But the exhibition held in a regional museum achieved eye-popping numbers. With 308,719 visitors in twelve weeks it was not only the most popular show in the history of the museum, but also the 30th most visited exhibition in the world and the second most visited exposition in the UK in 2009.<sup>4</sup> Every day there were huge queues with an average waiting time of more than three hours. The museum anticipated that the main audience would be 14-25-year-olds, but the ages of the visitors were diverse, they came from the whole UK and abroad and many of them had not been to the museum before. Notably, after a few

1  
This article summarizes a part of my wider study of urban art in progress. For a first impression of Banksy's work see: Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, Random House, London, 2006; Ulrich Blanché, *Something to s(pr)ay: Der Street Artist Banksy, Eine kunstwissenschaftliche Untersuchung*, Tectum Verlag, Marburg, 2010.

2  
Julia Reinecke, *Street Art: Eine Subkultur zwischen Kunst und Kommerz*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2007.

3  
Cedar Lewinsohn, *Street Art. The Graffiti Revolution*, Tate Publishing, London, 2008.

4  
"Exhibition and museum attendance figures 2009," *The Art Newspaper*, no. 212, April 2010.

weeks visitors spent more time in the temporary display and the permanent exhibition with Banksy's hidden exhibits.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Banksy exhibition in Bristol is very interesting for curatorial studies in regard to topical issues of presenting street art and reinterpreting a permanent collection. But there are currently some research obstacles. An intended book on the exhibition by the artist and a detailed evaluation by the museum have not yet been published. Furthermore, only very little information is provided by the museum due to its very unusual strict confidentiality agreement with the artist. Nevertheless, behind the sales figures, the exhibition seems very critical in respect to aesthetics, curatorial quality and business morality, especially for being held in a council museum.

Art critic Brian Sewell has condemned Banksy's exhibition mainly in regard to its mass popularity.<sup>6</sup> Judged from an aesthetic point of view, Banksy is able to find new and energetic contrasts nurtured by comic and pop imagery to fill his socio-political messages. But he only grasps the problems in a populist and naive way without the satirist depths of his surrealist ancestors.<sup>7</sup> The overview of his works in Bristol makes particularly clear that the anonymous artist exhibits all the vices of humankind virulent in the "discontent industry" in the promotion of his pseudonym, his brand Banksy. His cold and soulless self-adverts seem to convey good motives, but they capitalize on the dreams of humankind and drain real revolutionary potential.

The selection of works and its arrangement were entirely in Banksy's hands. Scientific curation was abandoned. Audio guides were eschewed, there were almost no labels, and the information signs and an ironic flyer were not very enlightening. This supported the idolization of the artist's homecoming, but a critical discussion in the context of contemporary art was avoided. The chance to introduce regular museum visitors to the unestablished fields of Banksy, Bristolian graffiti, street art and their many insider discussions, in a more educational way was also missed. The exhibition design with its paradoxical alternation between a direct assault and a mystic invasion, such as the hidden objects, was very artificial. A clear segregation between new and retrospective exhibits was missing. Apparently some exhibits were saleable, reconstructed works, instead of proper items on loan. Furthermore, the selection of his work was not fully representative of his oeuvre. Strikingly, proper documentation of Banksy's famous outdoor stunts and his cheaper but favoured prints were not included.

The interesting expansion of the special exhibition to the permanent displays is reminiscent of former stunts by Banksy, when he pinned up his own works alongside masterpieces in the world's major museums without permission. Furthermore, a main characteristic of street art, namely the enlivening of monotonous big cities, was tentatively transferred to the symbolically charged museum context where Banksy's artworks were simply a funny relief, rather than aesthetic enrichment. In particular, the site-specific approach of street art was adopted very superficially. Banksy copied and altered internationally famous paintings like Millet's *Gleaners* from the Musée d'Orsay instead of local holdings. There were no deeper substantial relations to the works next to Banksy's exhibits and jokes were sometimes very infantile like the placement of a dildo in the stalagmites and stalactites area. Of course, Banksy's quirky take on the permanent displays did not reach the

quality of other projects that reinterpret collections like the recent combination of Lutz Teutloff's photo collection with the inventories of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne.<sup>8</sup> For many visitors the search for Banksy's works in the permanent displays was only an amusing adaption of *Where's Wally?*. Thus, the opportunities of an ingenious idea were wasted.

But the lack of quality of the art and its display was equated by other aspects beyond curation. Commercial and political interests, therefore, seem to have been more important than cultural and educational benefits. For the successful guerrilla marketing of the exhibition the museum worked together with Banksy's experienced PR agency. Social media in particular has been an important success factor of street art. The mystification of Banksy as a redemptory art idol in the era of disenchantment was also further cultivated. In the UK in particular he is a popular folk hero vying with the likes of Robin Hood. With the secret planning, the high security measures and the destruction of all CCTV (closed circuit television) footage of the installation, Banksy's cult of anonymity was further stylized even though he was unmasked in 2008 and is, of course, well-known to some people in his hometown. Since the price for his art has soared Banksy has tried to escape the accusation of being a sell-out and to continue working on the street to maintain credibility, because free access and non-commercialism are crucial features of street art. So the City Museum was an ideal choice because it is not as elitist as other art institutes. Even for special shows entry is free – an important success factor for an exhibition in times of recession. Besides, it has been said that Banksy only earned one symbolic pound from the council and that none of the work was for sale. In fact it was a commercially upmarket ex-

5  
Based on the short case study: 2010. "Banksy vs Bristol Museum." Museums, Libraries, & Archives. Accessed 30.01.2011. <http://research.mla.gov.uk/case-studies/display-case-study.php?prnt=1&prjId=558>

6  
Cited by Caroline Davies. 2009. "Bristol public given right to decide whether graffiti is art or eyesore." *The Guardian*, 31 August.

7  
Rachel Campbell Johnston. 2009. "Banksy plays it safe and that's the key to his success." *The Times*, 13 June.

8  
Andreas Blühm and Roland Krischel eds., *Do Or Die. The Human Condition in Painting and Photography. Teutloff meets Wallraf*, Hirmer Publishers, Munich, 2010.



Banksy, Agency Job (Gleaners), 2009, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, French Art Gallery. Photograph by Steven Böhm (www.steven.at)

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Banksy, Ice Cream Van, 2009. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (Front hall). Photograph by Steven Böhm (www.steven.at)

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Banksy, Dildo, 2009. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, Geology/Minerals Section. Photograph by Steven Böhm (www.steven.at)

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hibition which also explains the very specific selection of exhibits, though this was only briefly mentioned in the trade press.<sup>9</sup> To keep up a non-commercial appearance it was also emphasized that there was no "official merchandising" for the exhibition. But from the beginning the museum shop sold books about Banksy and street art and after a month there were also exhibition posters and postcards produced by the print company, Pictures on Walls, owned by Banksy's former agent Steve Lazarides.<sup>10</sup> In the end the museum shop made 32,000 related transactions.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the stunt was not as provocative and shocking as communicated by the media. In opposition to the sceptical art establishment, the vehement "Keep Britain Tidy" campaign and the harsh criminalization of graffiti in 2008 in London Banksy enjoyed greater popularity in his hometown and his public works have been protected by the council since 2006. The exhibition was also in line with the current cultural politics of Bristol. Instead of being shocked, the deputy leader of the council was delighted at the preview.<sup>12</sup> Bristol's council seems to promote internationally relevant contemporary art to fulfil national artistic ideals in its pursuit of excellence and innovation<sup>13</sup> and to distinguish themselves from other bigger cities in the UK enforced by globalization. The exhibition was a catalyst for diverse local businesses and a feel-good factor at the height of a recession. The positive resonance was much needed at a turning point in the history of the city's museums, which should be finally passed from the council to an independent organization because of budget cut-backs.<sup>14</sup> The special consideration for the collection could be a reaction to the critique against the cut of curator posts and against the exhibition of contemporary art without regard for the museum profile with its existing collections of art from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. The economic profits of the Banksy exhibition could also better justify M Shed, an ill-planned and costly new museum about the history of Bristol in the regenerated harbour side. The well-researched financial benefits of the Banksy exhibition could have perhaps been an important example for the marketing of the planned new city centre community on the partly council-owned Wapping Wharf site next to the new museum.<sup>15</sup> In 2010 there was another commercial exhibition of contemporary art at the City Museum in collaboration with the Los Angeles based Corey Helford Gallery. Banksy's spokesman Jo Brooks took care of the PR in the UK and street artist Buff Monster, who featured in Banksy's recent film, was also involved.<sup>16</sup> This time the shock effect was not produced with a stunt, but with a much criticized striptease performance by Dita Von Teese at the private opening party.<sup>17</sup> Luckily the permanent collection was not taken over again. But Bristol's City Museum participated in the same year with ten objects in the regional branch of the *A History of the World* project.<sup>18</sup> It was initiated by Neil McGregor of the British Museum in London in cooperation with the BBC to attract attention to the collection. This seems to be a more serious and intellectual approach to the promotion of the City Museum and its outstanding treasures than the pranks of an artist who Elizabeth Westendorf has lately characterized as a trickster.<sup>19</sup>

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- 10  
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# ... (EXCERPTING COLLECTIONS) FROM A HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONS

LOOK: Khadija Carroll La and Alex Schweder La<sup>1</sup>

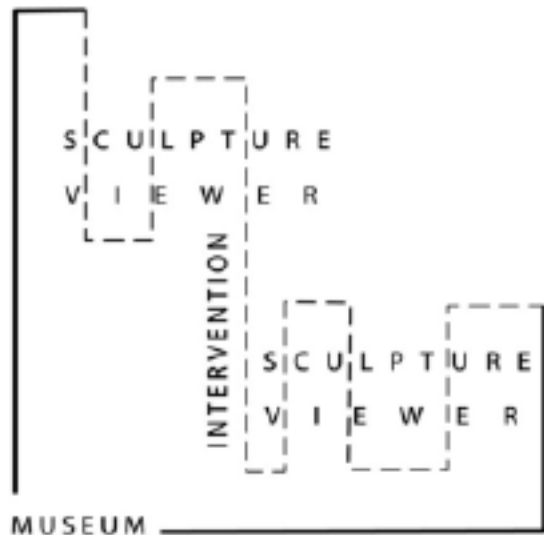
"The moment we turn our mind to the future, we are no longer concerned with 'objects' but with projects."<sup>2</sup>  
Hannah Arendt



## Inter-ven-tions, Hyphenating the Existing

When contemporary artists intervene in museum exhibitions they *intervene* between past and future ways of seeing, thereby turning museum objects into projects. The word 'intervention' is derived from the Latin *intervenire*, meaning 'to come between.' Intervention in the context of artistic practices implies an artist aiming to disrupt power relations in the museum where pre-existing objects are often presented as an authoritative representation of a given culture.

In this essay the hyphenation of *inter-vent-ion* aims to define *inter-venire* as a kind of *between-coming*, whereby the catalyst (the display-space) forms a kind of *mediating agent between museum and sculpture*, bringing both together.<sup>3</sup> Through this mediator, museum visitors are drawn into the display, and museum conventions themselves become an artistic project.<sup>4</sup> (...) The focus here will be on the evaluation of different approaches of interventions in a museum taken by artists. (...)



1  
This is an excerpt from Khadija Carroll La "Object to Project," in Christopher Marshall ed., *Sculpture and the Museum*, Ashgate Press, London, 2011. Acknowledgments: Charles McPhedran and Christopher Marshall for editing suggestions; Tina Di Carlo, Pamela McClusky, and Alex Baker for their vital institutional knowledge. A full version of the design studio LOOK's theory and practice can be read at [www.now-look.at](http://www.now-look.at).

2  
Hannah Arendt, *The Life of The Mind*, Harcourt, London, 1971, pp. 13-14.

3  
Note that the uses of the term 'intervention' in military, medicine, and social work are very different, incomparable to the specific practice of the artist's intervention in the public space of the museum.

4  
There are a series of anthologies from the 1990s that reflect the critical reception of museums and contemporary interventions: Sherman and Rogoff eds., *Museumculture: histories, discourses, spectacles*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994. Elsner and Cardinal eds., *The cultures of collecting*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994. There are also more recent studies: Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas eds., *Beyond aesthetics: art and the technologies of enchantment*, Berg, New York, 2001. Mariot Westermann ed., *Anthropologies of Art*, Clark Institute of Art, Massachusetts, 2005. Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright eds., *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, Berg, Oxford, 2006.

'ALL ART HAS BEEN CONTEMPORARY' reads a neon sign by Maurizio Nannucci that glows on the façade of the Altes Museum in central Berlin. The sign throws a red glow literally and figuratively from in-between the museum's exterior onto its sculptures inside. Powerfully and invitingly, this sign inflects with light the colonnade outside the neoclassical Karl Friedrich Schinkel building. Visitors walking under this text – which due to its presence and size marks and frames the museum, as a wall text does an individual artwork – would in the waning months of 2008 soon experience a subtraction of the distance in time between Giacometti and the Ancient Egyptians.<sup>5</sup> The exhibition of that title explored Giacometti's research into Egyptian art. Giacometti uses these explorations in historical sources for the development of his own work.

Neon light and bronze figures are very different sculptural media, yet Nannucci and Giacometti both intervene in time, and create the sense among viewers that what is past is still alive. There are many other artists who refer to museums in their work but do not transform the objects found in a museum into projects in the enlivening way that the two Berlin interventions do. The Museum of Modern Art's *Primitivism* and the British Museum's *Statue-philosophy* exhibitions are used as examples in the final sections of this chapter to show that, if not considered carefully, interventions by contemporary artists with a permanent collection can embarrassingly fail. The contrast between these insertions and effective artistic interventions will be crucial in this chapter. It is important to recognise that the insertion of artists into disjunctive times and places does not by virtue of a juxtaposition based on form alone constitute an effective intervention. Instead, an intervention should center on the critical question of what is gained by bringing contemporary and historical work together, and how this is to be achieved. In my reading, an intervention generally takes a specific course, in that an artist typically comes between the object and the museum – thus producing an intervention project. These are often site specific, but are at the same time also curated. (...)

The pleasures to be found for viewers in certain interventions relate to the inducement of reflection about the origins of the work. One is encouraged by these interventions to rethink the specific conditions under which objects were acquired in the first place. On the other hand, ethical engagement can equally mean that a museum loses these objects – and an intervention can instead take the form of empty cases with residual wall-texts, highlighting the decision of a museum to repatriate these artefacts.<sup>6</sup> Even more laudable are those curators, such as Pamela McClusky of the Seattle Art Museum, who independently repatriate items in the absence of a binding law of return between countries (Australia and the US in this case).<sup>7</sup> There is an uncomfortable relationship between the object sold or stolen, and the residual ownership that is then displayed as 'provenance' in the museum setting. Artists can cast the museum as implicated in an 'economy of desire.'<sup>8</sup> The desire to own an artefact and the conflicts induced by issues such as sale or dispossession are rendered tangible by certain contemporary interventions. (...)

An early and particularly influential example of these contemporary invitations to read a museum critically through the display of its collection was Fred Wilson's (1992) implication of every viewer's participation in racism. Intervening in the Maryland Historical Society's collections, typical of a state museum in the south, where only a couple of decades before the American civil rights

movement struggled to instate equal human rights for African Americans.<sup>9</sup>

In *Metal Work, 1793-1880*, 1992, Wilson displayed side by side the fine silvers of the Confederates in Maryland and the slave shackles made by the same workshops. Also in this *Mining the Museum* series, Wilson rotated large Indian tobacco sculptures, so that the sculptures were positioned as active participants in dialogue with viewers, rather than as static icons welcoming sale. Wilson's total re-ordering led to a political confrontation, rendering visible the social assumptions and ideological expectations underlying fine art curatorial practices. In the catalogue of visitors responses to *Mining the Museum* there was a polarised hostility on one hand from the demographic of older, white, locals (to make a fairly accurate generalization) and support on the other hand from immigrants and minorities who felt *Mining the Museum* represented them.<sup>10</sup> Though Wilson is of African American and Native American descent it was a far broader range of immigrant nationalities that identified with his *Mining the Museum*. Fifteen years later Wilson's mode of intervention is still too radical for most museums to engage with, for fear of their donors, collectors, designers, and directors looking dated or dubious. (...)

#### The Problem with Form

There have been many other exhibitions where Modern and contemporary artists insert references to non-Western influences. While the Humboldt Forum's *Die Tropen* ('the tropics') is one project that did not only insert, but invited artists from beyond Europe and the US to intervene, Modernist displays of 'primitive art' continue to reinscribe the traditional art-ethnography distinctions that the British Museum for instance is, in part, founded on.<sup>11</sup> What makes those like

5  
 Cult of the Artist: Giacometti, the Egyptian, Altes Museum, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung 29 October 2008-1 March 2009. Christian Klemm and Dietrich Wildung eds., Giacometti, der Ägypter, Deutscher Kunstverlag, Berlin, 2008.

6  
 The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) has (since 1990) forced American museums to engage in a process that often resulted in empty display cases after objects were repatriated, for instance in the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. The Peabody museum decided to leave these gaps in its 'Hall of the American Indian' and display a short text about NAGPRA when the objects were returned. The curator Castle McLaughlin also invited the Lakota artist Butch Thunder Hawk to collaborate and design the threshold for the exhibition.

7  
 Reported online as: "Seattle Art Museum Returns Important Australian Aboriginal Secret/Sacred Object to Australia." Accessed 30.06.2009. <http://www.nit.com.au/story.aspx?id=18120>.

8  
 The catalogue published these visitors comments in the back of the book. Lisa G. Corrin, Leslie King-Hammond, Ira Berlin, *Mining the Museum: An Installation* By Fred Wilson, W.W. Norton, Baltimore, 1994. Exhibition catalogue. Fred Wilson's (1954-) intervention into Maryland Historical Society's collection was also supported by The Contemporary Museum.

9  
 Alfons Hug, Peter Junge, Viola König eds., *Die Tropen: Ansichten von der Mitte der Weltkugel*, Kerber, Bielefeld, 2007. Exhibition Catalogue. The exhibition was in Berlin from September 2008-January 2009.

8  
 This notion of the collector being involved in an emotional and libidinal way with the objects traded and possessed became partly evident in: Christopher Marshall, introduction to "Economies of Desire: Art Collecting and Dealing Across Cultures," in Jaynie Anderson ed., *Crossing Cultures: The 32nd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 984-1022. A further investigation of mine in this field is a project with Erika Eiffel, an objectum sexual, one of a growing group of people who are in love with objects.

9  
 See for instance the Public Broadcasting System's *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series on the history of the American Civil Rights Movement.

10  
 The catalogue published these visitors comments in the back of the book. Lisa G. Corrin, Leslie King-Hammond, Ira Berlin, *Mining the Museum: An Installation* By Fred Wilson, W.W. Norton, Baltimore, 1994. Exhibition catalogue. Fred Wilson's (1954-) intervention into Maryland Historical Society's collection was also supported by The Contemporary Museum.

11  
 Alfons Hug, Peter Junge, Viola König eds., *Die Tropen: Ansichten von der Mitte der Weltkugel*, Kerber, Bielefeld, 2007. Exhibition Catalogue. The exhibition was in Berlin from September 2008-January 2009.



Mauricio Nannucci, *ALL ART HAS BEEN CONTEMPORARY*, 1999/2005.  
Photograph by Khadija Carroll La.

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Giacometti, the Egyptian and *Die Tropen* stand apart is the conceptual framework within which this dialog between contemporary art and historical artefacts occurs. Neither of these exhibitions prescribed a formal relationship between the seemingly disparate works shown in the museum. (...)

However, such exhibitions – that combine works from different contexts – struggle against a model of museology that groups its collection according to the formal appearance of individual objects. The most criticized of these exhibitions was the Museum of Modern Art's (MOMA) exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984). Here, for example, Giacometti's *Tall Figure* was placed next to a Nyamwezi figure of similar distortion. The MOMA exhibition, unlike the Berlin Altes Museum, made little attempt to document the influences behind Giacometti's work. The implied affinity with 'Primitivism' on Giacometti's part was based on visual similarities on the surface of his sculpture, and on the sculpture's skin. The original context of the counter-posed 'tribal' object's production was left obscure, perhaps so as to lend mystery to the modern artist's work. This visually provocative juxtaposition ignored the history of non-Europeans' reduction to their skin colour over several centuries. (...)

Context matters. Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) opened the discourse of modern art to the idea that art is determined by its context. (...) The interventions that I have hitherto discussed are therefore distinct from a different type of intervention (characterized as an 'insertion' here) that all too simply places an 'artistic' object near to ethnographic material whose status as art is disputed. Such easy reversals recall Duchamp's placement of a non-art object into an art context, but lack an acknowledgment of what the so called artefact might signify in the context for which it was produced. One example for this kind of intervention was a recent display in the British Museum, *Statuephilia* (2008). The Museum recently introduced a series of newer works into their 'ethnographic' collection, framing the ethnographic work as influential for contemporary 'high art' (and thus also indirectly justifying the Museum's participation in contemporary art collecting). Importantly, the results of this 'intervention' show that simply putting something new into an old context does not necessarily connect viewers to an existing collection. The connection of Antony

Gormley's figure *Case For An Angel I* with the permanent collection seemed particularly vague. The British Museum's text described it as following:

"*Case for an Angel I* echoes many works in the Museum – Egyptian statues, Assyrian winged bulls, Christian Crucifixions, and the Roman caryatid statue on the nearby stairs.<sup>12</sup>"

This text, as we found in relation to the MOMA exhibition, does not evince a conceptual connection to the permanent collection, beyond a superficial formal similarity. Walking past the left wing of Gormley's figure into an Egyptian wing of the museum, masses of recently mummified animals installed by the artists Tim Noble and Sue Webster cast a shadow across the artist's self-portrait. Within the Egyptian gallery, this contemporary portrait made of dead bodies – albeit remains of prey that the artists' cat brought home – was intended to evoke the same sense of wonder that Egyptian mummies do.<sup>13</sup> In this case, the material similarity of the work of art served to justify the more profound dissimilarity in the ritual function of the mummy. As in the MOMA exhibit, an overemphasis on formal similarity was apparent throughout *Statuephilia*. Indeed, the exhibition seemed grounded in the idea that existential urges are identical across space, time and history.

*Statuephilia* showed that the juxtaposition of past and present works does not necessarily imply an auto-critical impulse on the part of the host gallery. This is also to say that contemporary interventions are not necessarily critical readings of the permanent collection. The British Museum display, for example, was arguably an unself-reflexive gesture on the part of an institution that historically acquired many of these objects from the riches of the British colonies during the colonial era.

<sup>12</sup>  
The British Museum's website text for *Statuephilia* (Accessed 12.10.2008): [http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/allcurrent\\_exhibitions/statuephilia/antony\\_gormley.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/allcurrent_exhibitions/statuephilia/antony_gormley.aspx).

<sup>13</sup>  
An interview with the artists is shown at (Accessed on 12.10.2008): [http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/all\\_current\\_exhibitions/statuephilia/noble\\_and\\_webster.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/all_current_exhibitions/statuephilia/noble_and_webster.aspx).

Continuing the clockwise orbit of the great court, in the middle of the gallery we come to a cabinet lined room, where Damien Hirst has placed plastic skulls in the Enlightenment Gallery's glass cabinets. The opportunity to estrange the way that the Enlightenment received its curiosities was lost. One has to ask what the contemporary Mexican Day of the Dead (that Hirst claimed as his inspiration for this 'cornucopia' of skulls) has to do with the British Enlightenment project that underlies the British Museum's Eighteenth-Century collections?<sup>14</sup>

(...)

#### **Intervention's Media: Time, Space and History.**

The comfortable distance from which we enjoy objects derived from the colonial legacy is not as geographically and temporally distant as it may seem. Collections in historic museums are founded on the extraction of possessions from so-called world cultures. Premised on the historical and contextual absences that are significant in every museum's selective management of its own history, an ideal intervention works to reveal these absences, appropriating colonial images and interpreting displays for contemporary audiences. As a public space in which expert and interdisciplinary interests in art can find an experimental life beyond the academy, the museum is vital territory for encounters between histories, artists, and viewers. The museum's tyrannical closure of history (that often effaces the past of a given collection) can be reopened by an intervention that critiques the positions and actions of historical cultural agents. (...)

The conversation of the artist with history can be a confronting struggle, involving the difficult insertion of contemporary practice into the canon. The rigid exclusivity of the canon is a provocation to contemporary artists, who are forced to define their work in regard to the power-relations fixed by the canon. That these powers are also institutional has brought the museum under scrutiny as an institution of authentication and exclusion.<sup>15</sup> It follows that the collection is no longer perceived as a neutral set of objects to be accepted, without debate, reverently.

Within art history, much recent argumentation has focused on the way that the discipline's historiography has been written to empower certain images. This critique of methods of historiography and connoisseurship is fundamentally present in the intervention, which uses these questions as the starting point for a discussion of how we have come to display now. The intervention thus has a historicist desire to know about the context of the past. Then it wrenches that context into the present and presents it in a light – one that allows us to see ourselves in relation to that all too often neglected past. An intervention thus makes us as viewers aware of history in ways that make our bones burn. Feelings of pleasure, guilt, and desire are aroused. The contemporary artistic intervention is visceral. Brought up close to a body that may be similar to our own, we are drawn in, pleasurably. Interventionist work might shift our understanding of a collection, revealing that we are looking at something quite different to what we expected; that our pleasures might be implicated in the exploitation of others. (...)

An ideal intervention may be defined as an art form that uses space and time as media with which to show absent or obfuscated histories. Arendt's temporal distinction between *projects* and *objects* is thereby definitive of the way contemporary interventions project museums into the future.

14  
Kim Sloan ed.,  
*Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, The British Museum Press, London, 2003. Beth Lord, "Representing Enlightenment Space," in Suzanne MacLeod ed., *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 2005, pp. 146-158.

15  
This so-called 'institutional critique' began with conceptual art. See for instance: Stephen Bann, Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss, *Global conceptualism: points of origin, 1950s-1980s*, Distributed Art Publishers, New York, 1999. Exhibition catalogue.

# INTERVENTIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN CURATING ART COLLECTIONS

Marjatta Höglz

Interview with Stella Rollig

Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, January 20, 2011



Figure 1: *A Shared Place*, 2006. Left to right: Hildegard Joos & Harold Joos, 1965; Lajos Kassak, 1964; Adolf Frohner, 1963; Alfred Hrdlicka, 1964; Hermann Nitsch, 1962; Curt Stenvert, 1967. Front: Julie Hayward, 2003. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

The interview consists of two main parts: the first is on the significance of the museum collection and insertions of contemporary artworks in exhibitions of historical art collections, as well as participatory practices in curating. The second part is about collection management; restitutions, and decision making about acquisitions and removing works (to sharpen the profile of a collection).

## The museum collection and the audience

**MH:** Many museums nowadays present their collection more often instead of showing big monographic or thematic exhibitions. Is exhibiting collections a makeshift solution in times of tight budgets and decreasing blockbuster exhibitions, or is there more appreciation and awareness of the collection's own value?

**SR:** As it is so often, I think it is a mixture. The collection is the core of any museum; that is what museums are invented for, to collect and to present their holdings. As we all know, this has changed during the last decades, and now we realize a certain swing-back, although I am still a bit suspicious if it will become really successful and, foremost, if it will be appreciated by the visitors. The audience has been trained by the whole system and by art managers themselves to eagerly wait for the next temporary exhibit with an even bigger name each time, and museum programmes, marketing and public relations are all focused on that.

In a way, we have to reprogramme and to re-educate our audience, and to convince them of the value and the importance of the collection. Of course, this is easier when you have a collection full of so-called masterpieces, very very well known artists. But I think it is as least as rewarding and exciting to work with everything a specific collection has to offer, its characteristics, and most collections in middle-range museums hold some outstanding or first class pieces. Yet I have to add that I always use these terms of classification reluctantly, because I am aware that they are constructed, they are linked to certain market interests. But let us work with them for a while because they are common knowledge; so you have a couple of masterpieces and second range goods.

**MH:** Could you imagine an equality of 'High & Low'? That the masterpieces would be combined as a matter of course with trivial works of less quality, with more emphasis on the content?

**SR:** Absolutely. This is one motive behind our and my personal work as an art mediator, even art educator in a wider sense, that I would like to stimulate the ability, the curiosity and readiness of the audience to decide for themselves what they like about a specific work of art, what it means for them, independently from its market value. So we had discussions in our team even recently about the fact that tourists or visitors who come once a year they tend to expect masterpieces when they visit the museum. It was brought up again by colleagues of mine – should we have one specific gallery with the masterpieces? We discussed this and I convinced them not to go for this, because then you would reaffirm this questionable notion of a masterpiece. I acknowledge the expectations of an audience, and I don't want to act against my own visitors or, fashionably called: "clients" – but we should rather keep in mind to include in every presentation this handful of works that is being expected by the audience at the Lentos Museum, but not declared in a specific place as the masterpieces, while in the other galleries you find the rest.

**MH:** In the press release for *May I Show You Your Collection?* (2007) you said that "concentration on consistency is needed as a backlash to the effects of entertainment business," that "museums have to mediate options for orientation and cultural competences" and that "the collection of the museum is the most important benchmark of this work."

How has the audience behaviour and structure developed during the last years, concerning the exhibitions from the collection of the Lentos Museum?

**SR:** I think the concept of *May I Show You Your Collection?* is still valid, to raise an awareness in the audience that since this is a Museum by the City of Linz, every person living here is one of the owners of this collection.

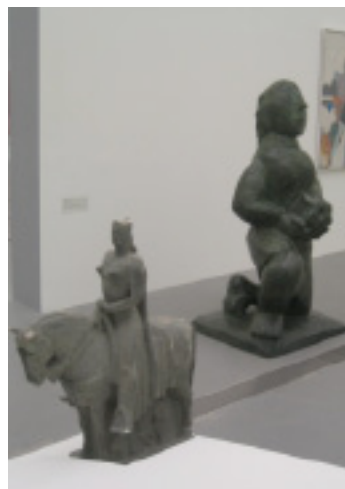
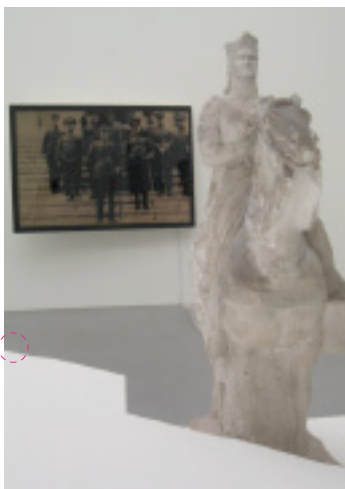
I couldn't say that the behaviour of the audience has changed during the last couple of years. I am afraid that the collection is still regarded less attractive and there is too little stimulus to go to the museum to see it. With a presentation of the collection you rarely get press coverage by the national or even international media, if you are not the Museum of Modern Art. But here in Upper Austria and Linz the leading newspapers wrote on our latest presentation of the collection: "this is a Must See Show." I am telling that because in the end the visitor figures were still disappointing. It is still very much the mentality of the audience: we have to wait until the next big temporary show.

#### **The chronological display. For education or research?**

**MH:** In many museums, the thematic exhibition of a collection has replaced the chronological display. By contrast, *The collection 1900-1960* – apart from the interventions – is still arranged chronologically, on the whole (figs. 1-4). Generally speaking, do you think that the academic display with art historical epochs and styles is going to be obsolete, or do we always need chronological displays as an educational canon which, in museums with comprehensive collections and permanent displays still are helpful for orientation?

**SR:** Since I have been working here, which is almost seven years now, we have had very different models of presenting our collection. But, as you say, the current exhibition is chronological. This has been a very profound decision, after many discussions. It is very communicative, approachable, and smoother for the audience. I think that the chronological order is less important because of its educational aspect but because it is deeply rooted and internalized in each individual experience, the passing of time, of our life, memory going back for a couple of years.

In one and the same decade very different artistic attitudes and styles have been developed. In contrast, when you learn art history you link the –isms to certain time periods.



Images from top left to bottom right:

Figure 2: The collection 1900-1960, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, 2010-11. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

Figure 3: The collection 1900-1960, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, 2010-11. Background: Kutlug Ataman, 2009. Foreground: Bernhard von Plettenberg, 1940. Photograph by M. Hölz.

Figure 4: The collection 1900-1960, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, 2010-11. Left: Bernhard von Plettenberg, 1940. Right: Baltasar Lobo, *Femme à fête de mort*, 1942. Photograph by M. Hölz.

Figure 5: *Kreuzungspunkt Linz*, 2009-10. Left: C.D. Friedrich, ca.1825. Right: Mathias Kessler, 2007. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

In fact there have always been other artistic movements at the same time. This can also be seen very well in a chronological order.

**MH:** ...Which gives an example why art history books should be regularly rewritten with corrections and additions?

**SR:** I think it is one of the main tasks for museums to question and rewrite art history, the canon all the time with all the projects, the research, the presentations.

#### Interventions. Contemporary and historical art

**MH:** Let us gain some insight into the collection exhibition in which you show the time periods 1931 to 1940 and 1941 to 1950. You combined Kutlug Ataman's *Mesopotamian Dramaturgies/Frame* from 2009 with the equestrian sculptures for the Nibelungen bridge from 1940 in the same room (fig. 3) Mostly, the time between 1933 and 1945 is excluded from museum presentations, at least in Germany. You, however, show a few separate works. What do you do with the really problematic, heroic works, from the time of National Socialism, which are in the collection?

**SR:** Of course it is not acceptable to have just a black hole or a gap for the time during National Socialism. We decided to show works from this period, both so-called "depraved" artists, those who were being persecuted by the National Socialists, and in the same room you find artists who adapted their work or who sympathized with the power. But we don't mix them, we show them on opposite walls, plus we combine them in the same space with a contemporary work like the media art work *Föhrenwald* by Michaela Melián. It is a piece of research on a location near Munich, and there is a lot about persecution and displacement.

**MH:** In the exhibition *Kreuzungspunkt Linz*, Caspar David Friedrich's *Uttewalder Grund* (1825) and Mathias Kessler's *ILULISSAT 001X, Greenland* (2007) were combined (fig. 5): Both show the deformation of landscape in favour of a geometrical composition and the idea that an ideal, untouched nature in fact never existed. But interventions are not always as successful as this one and they are also criticised. Is there a risk of contemporary artworks being used to reanimate tired-looking historical displays? Or, on the other side, do contemporary interventions "steal the show" from the older works?

**SR:** I think this concept of combining works from different times can be very rewarding but it must not be overstressed. I wouldn't install such a permanent presentation; only in a very precise way like we have it now: Only one contemporary work in a gallery with pieces from another decade. With the temporary exhibit *Kreuzungspunkt Linz* we aimed to show the Lentos collection with contemporary acquisitions. It was conceived with a little provocation in mind – to show the audience that the process of acquiring artworks is always going on and, very often, a work is not considered a masterpiece at the time of its purchase. It was like telling them: These works by these young people that you see side by side with a C.D. Friedrich, an Arnulf Rainer, Egon Schiele or other big names – it is not unlikely that they will be considered as masterpieces a hundred years from now. I think it is always important that each artwork gets the chance to be perceived in its own right. So a presentation shouldn't become too confusing. But this is our curatorial task to decide where it makes sense.

**MH:** It seems convincing to confront an old and a contemporary work when the younger artist himself has referred to the older artist. For instance, the Bremer Kunsthalle has a one to one photographic translation of C.D. Friedrich's *The Tomb of Arminius* (1813) by Hiroyuki Masuyama (2007) – so that an actually mythical place looks as if it were real. In other collection presentations, there have been combinations of Max Beckmann with painting of the 15th century, Wilhelm Lehmbruck with Gothic sculpture. The fact that both artists intensively studied the mentioned periods confers them with an intrinsic, historical affinity, which is a well-founded interpretation. Or do you think this is a bit too evident, a curatorial outcome which could be more challenging?

**SR:** According to my experience, rarely is something 'too evident'. Every good work of art is challenging in one or the other way, so we as curators can as well trust in the challenging qualities of the work. I have also learned that we should not be too afraid of being too didactic.



Images from top to bottom right:

Figure 6: *Aufmischen/Mix it up*, 2007. View of room by Dietmar Brehm. Gottfried Helnwein, 2003; Klaus Rinke, 1977/79; HAUS-RUCKER-CO, 1969. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

Figure 7: *Aufmischen/Mix it up*, 2007. View of room by Lois Renner. Left to right: Oskar Kokoschka, 1917; Tony Cragg, 2001; Albin Egger-Lienz, 1923; Hans Makart, ca. 1875; Lois Renner, 1995. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

Figure 8: *Aufmischen/Mix it up*, 2007. View of room by Lois und Franziska Weinberger. Left to right: Herbert Bayer, 1959; Inge Morath, 1955; Simon Wachsmuth, 2004; L.&F. Weinberger, ..und eins zu keins, 2005. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

**Participation. Choice of works from a collection by artists. Interventions by artists**

1  
cf. Rudolf Frieling's  
introduction in *The  
Art of Participation:  
1950 to Now*, Thames &  
Hudson, 2008, p. 12.

**MH:** In *Aufmischen/Mix it up. The collection seen by artists* (2007), each artist curated one room with works from the collection and one own work. There were unorthodox combinations like, for instance, Gustav Klimt with Gottfried Helnwein. How was the feedback? It was a temporary exhibition – could you also imagine a similar *permanent* exhibition? (figs. 6–8).

**SR:** It was something in between, it was there for almost a year. Usually the *permanent* one lasts at least a year, the *temporary* one from one to three months. *Aufmischen/Mix it up* was one of my favourite projects, and it was very well received. The visitors reacted very positively. Maybe one reason was because it was enhanced by the glamour of artists, it was not only some museum curators who did this. Each artist found a very individual concept of designing the room, choosing artworks from our collection, all of them put a lot of effort into this project. This is a surprise, because we thought they would just browse through the online database of the catalogues. But all of them came here, worked with our collection curators and found some hidden pieces, like sketches, drawings by lesser-known artists. They mixed, without any reservation, well known and less known, or different media.

**MH:** Artists who curate collections are more open-minded than art historians who sometimes judge art according to established criteria. What exactly makes them different to concepts by museum curators?

**SR:** Most of the artists have idiosyncratic approaches to art history. Almost all of the artists who I know, who I talk to, who I am friends with, they know a lot about art history, and what is so fascinating about it: they don't know the usual stuff that we art historians, curators all share. I mean I am not the one who wants to put artists on a pedestal and says they are different from all the others – but due to the specific interest which is always linked to their own work they research and discover small sidelines of the official art history and they look for specific media and techniques. They understand very well what other artists' work is about and how art is being developed. That leads to quite interesting findings.

**Choice and participation by the audience**

**MH:** Is there a conflict between the museum as an institution (for example, its obligation to do research) and a truly participatory practice<sup>1</sup>, as for example inviting a school class to curate and to make a catalogue?

**SR:** All these models have been realized in the last couple of years. Both of us could think of examples like exhibitions curated by the whole staff like in the Kunsthalle Kiel,

**MH:** ...or the project *Dienstbesprechung* (Briefing, 2008) in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart by Christian Jankowski who turned the hierarchies in the museum upside down.

**SR:** The conflict arose because the technician decided to exhibit the paintings of a person from the cleaning staff. I remember that this was the crucial point.

**MH:** It was a winking attempt of putting the theory of equality into practice, which became problematical already within this one project, since certain participants were exposed in an unpleasant way.

**SR:** Yes and, in the end, the museum director cannot pass on his or her final responsibility. If I agreed on such a Jankowski project and the cleaning lady would be the director for a given time I cannot really imagine how this should work, because every day I have to make so many decisions to run this institution. If something bad happens, somebody is harmed, I will put my head for it. Of course, I cannot say to the mayor of the city or to the media: well, I am sorry, it was the cleaning lady in the context of the project.

We have had such arguments in the nineties. I remember when artists wanted to keep the museum open all night, a famous case was the conflict between a group of artists from Vienna (Dorit Margreiter, Mathias Poledna, Florian Pumhösl) with director Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen at Kunstverein Hamburg. It is not possible, I have to guarantee certain safety rules.

I am very much interested in these ideas and participatory practices but, in the end, a museum will never be really participatory. It is always a kind of model project that you do once and then you get back to normal.

**MH:** Boris Groys claims that, if the author were dead, as argued by Barthes and Foucault, "it would be impossible to differentiate between participatory and nonparticipatory art"<sup>2</sup>. Collaborative practices have been increasing in art and curating for several years. According to you, how is the notion of authorship and artistic individuality developing?

2  
Boris Groys,  
"A Genealogy of Participatory Art", in  
Rudolph Frieling ed.,  
*The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*,  
Thames & Hudson,  
2008, p. 23.

**SR:** The author will never be allowed to die, because she/he is one of the central figures of the market, of course. In a capitalistic market you will always need arguments why a certain good, object has this or that value. The value is linked to the status of the author.

3  
Claire Bishop ed.,  
*Participation (White-chapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*, The  
MIT Press, London  
2006, p. 10.

In art, every participatory project has an author. At the Kunsthalle Kiel for example, Dirk Luckow, when he was still director there, asked every member of the staff to choose one object from the collection and that was the exhibition. In the end, it became a Dirk Luckow project, and it received lots of media coverage, which was great for the Kunsthalle Kiel and for Dirk Luckow but it was like just another smart, very originally conceived project.

4  
Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator,"  
*Artforum*, March 2007,  
p. 278.

**MH:** A collection exhibition curated by the audience – would this be part of the social dimension of participation described by Claire Bishop, which strives to "collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception"<sup>3</sup>?

Or does participation better remain on the theoretical, the mental level, as described by Jacques Rancière, who says that "we don't need to turn spectators into actors"<sup>4</sup>? He argues that there should be more respect towards the spectator and confidence that he will be able to find his own interpretation. The spectator as a storyteller; but not as a curator. What do you think, what does this mean for the practical curatorial work with the collection?

**SR:** As said before you could arrange it as a one time project, why not? But since we have between 50,000 and 100,000 visitors per year, I cannot invite all of them to curate. It is always a chosen minority. However – I think that goes with Rancière, that the spectator need not turn into an actor but we want him or her to participate by enabling him or her to develop their own attitude towards the art that we show here. And I recognize that there is more and more need for all kinds of mediation and art education.

#### Collection management. Participation in collection decision-making

**MH:** With the collection of Wolfgang Gurlitt you had to take over a problematic heritage, since he had benefitted from the National Socialist's art confiscation. The *Portrait of Ria Munk* by Gustav Klimt was restituted in 2009, then it was sold by the inheritors on the auction market. Since when have artworks from the Lentos Museum been restituted, and how many of them?

**SR:** So far three works have been restituted to the heirs of the former owner since the opening of the Lentos Museum in 2003.

**MH:** Is there an art historian doing provenance research about the Lentos Museum collection?

**SR:** We hired an art historian who is specialized in provenance research, because this is a very specific field of expertise, you have to know the archives, and there is an exchange in an international network. This provenance researcher is based in Germany, so we communicate remotely, but it is even better because many of the relevant archives are in Germany.

**MH:** What do you think about the development that restituted works are sold on the art market?

**SR:** I am totally convinced and fully support the provenance research and restitution practice. I don't enter this discourse at all that people say "but it's a shame that many of these works receive such a high price on the art market, that's unfair." It is as it is – and there has happened so much unfairness before – I don't lament on it. Of course it is a pity if a key piece is removed from the public awareness and there is no chance any more to see the original. Many museums follow the policy now that a fair deal is made with the heirs, so that the work might stay on permanent loan in the museum.

**MH:** The key tasks of museums "collecting, preserving, researching and communicating" are still important, but from time to time, some of them are shaken: The *International Council of Museums (ICOM)* congress of Switzerland 2011 will discuss in which way objects from collections could be removed. Internationally there are many different practices: from the legal proscription to the sale of objects for covering current costs. For example, the Museum Weserburg in Bremen planned to sell a painting from Gerhard Richter on the art

market for financing an air conditioner. However, the museum does not aim to build its own collection, since it is a collector's museum (cf. 2010, *Die Zeit*, September 23).

Do you think it is acceptable to sell works from a public collection for sharpening its profile or for covering current costs?

**SR:** For covering current costs, this is debatable. For an air conditioner... that is a shame, it should have been covered by the city. But why not exchange a couple of artworks from the collection for a needed new museum building? Nevertheless, the issue is really difficult and should be debated widely and openly with a board of experts, because what should not happen is that each museum director has the right to sell works from the collection. This would lead the idea of accelerating to the absurd, since every director would consider quite many of the purchases of his or her immediate predecessor as irrelevant and collect what she/he prefers.

**MH:** Who in the Lentos Museum decides about acquisitions, and what do you think about the increasing possibility for the audience to vote for and to support the choice of new acquisitions with the help of public presentations of recommendations by the museum?

**SR:** At the Lentos, it is the decision of the director. Of course, I discuss it with my colleagues, but I would not even have to. I think an advisory board is a good idea, but in the end, the director or the head of collection has the best knowledge of the collection. The Lentos does not have a huge collection, there are about 1,600 works of paintings and sculptures plus 10,000 works on paper. My colleague, the head of collections, she has been here for twenty-five years. She is my most important partner in discussing the given context for a new piece in our collection. Before I decide I consider so many facts, like what do we have from this artist, from this era, what other works are in which collection. It is a process that is nourished by a lot of information to decide in the end for one work to purchase. When you ask the audience it is just gusto, what they like at the moment.

**MH:** Maybe this proposal to the audience does not only aim to give a feeling of participating in decisions concerning the collection, but it can also be a concrete offer to act as a donator. She/he can choose among a range of works recommended by the museum experts. Could such a method, too, help citizens to identify with 'their' collection?

**SR:** Well, this could work. But again, it would address an exclusive circle only. The problem is any generalization: Who are the 'citizens'? You can only define a specific interest group and work with them.

**MH:** What is your next project with the collection?

**SR:** We will reinstall the galleries from 1960 to the present, and we will do it according to the chronological system, with one interfering work. In the future, we will again invite artists to curate, since we liked this *Mix it up (Aufmischen)* project a lot.

**MH:** Thank you very much for taking time just before the performance and the opening this evening (fig. 9).



Figure 9: Speech by Stella Rollig before *VALIE EXPORT: Restringierter Code*, 1979. Performance 2011. ©LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Photograph by maschekS.

# INTERVIEW WITH JEAN HUBERT MARTIN

**Valentine Meyer**

Paris, November 18, 2010

**Valentine Meyer:** Could you tell us a little bit more about your decision as the new Director of the Museum Kunst Palast of Düsseldorf to invite two artists from Düsseldorf, Thomas Huber and Bogomir Ecker to organize the museum collection in 1999? What were the reactions?

**Jean Hubert Martin:** I always have my heart set on mixing different periods of art history together, but until Museum Kunst Palast I had never been the director of a fine arts museum with an encyclopedic collection. I mean that, before, I worked mainly for contemporary art museums. Then with this new position, this idea became possible. I always had a very open-minded vision of long term art history (see the exhibition *Magiciens de La terre* in 1989 at Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris).

A very important discovery confirmed that believe to me: a visit to André Breton's studio in the 1980s (at that time it was not shown at Centre Pompidou and remained pretty confidential). I was fascinated by the wall with this incredible know-how of juxtaposition of *art brut*, every day life objects and art from different centuries and geographic origins. To make it short, since the 19th century, museums have been infiltrated by art historians to the detriment of collectors' taste. Collectors are used to create dialogues between artworks from different origins and periods. As a director, I feel like to revive this freedom and this sensitive contact with artworks.

Being very busy with the opening of the new museum in Düsseldorf, I chose two artists and asked them to conceive a new presentation of the collection with total freedom. Of course we spoke a lot about the topics. Even if I knew that these artists were very respectful of art, we had an agreement not to allow little jokes with the artworks, like for instance to hang paintings upside down.

To be honest, I knew it would be problematic to choose sensitiveness as a way to organize a museum. Choosing two artists for this task was also a way to protect myself, because curators, at the contrary of artists, are supposedly not allowed to transcend art history categories unless a connection has been historically proven. In fact it created from the beginning a huge conflict with two curators of the museum who refused absolutely to collaborate with us on the project.

What is great with artists, when they see an ancient artwork, is that they project themselves into the author's place with total freedom. They don't need material evidence for their sensitive interpretations.

As I knew that the project would take time, the presence of Thomas Huber and Bogomir Ecker in Düsseldorf made the organization quite simple, because they were on the spot. They actually came nearly every day for several months.

**VM:** Did you do that also in order to interest the audience in the permanent collection?

**JHM:** Yes, it was the goal. I am convinced that, if we don't make big efforts, nearly nobody will visit permanent collections in the future, except school groups forced to

go there and a few art lovers. It is the reason why we have to get away from linear approach and open up the schemes of presentation.

**VM:** So what was the reaction of the audience from the Museum Kunst Palast?

**JHM:** Disastrous reaction from the circle of professionals, I mean the German association of art curators. Enthusiasm from young people and foreign colleagues. Complaints from the local bourgeois, who could not find their favourite works in the same place anymore.

**VM:** Could we come back to the reaction of the association of curators?

**JHM:** Before the opening, I told the press about this re-interpretation of the collection we were doing with the artists. Then the president of the German association of curators, a Frankfurt Museum director, alerted by two member curators, wrote a letter to the mayor of Düsseldorf, without having had any contact with me beforehand. At that moment nobody could have seen the new scenography which was underway. He accused me of lowering the level of the museum to a 'pre-scientific' state, and therefore required my activity to be stopped to avoid a destruction of the museum, et cetera.

I decided to invite all the curators of the association to debate in two clusters, one cluster behind closed doors, one open to everyone – not only curators, but also to the audience, journalists, et cetera. You can find most of these reactions in the book, *Künstlermuseum*, published then by the Museum Kunst Palast. Around half of the curators present defended me. What surprised me was that the main issue was the temporality, the length of the project in Museum Kunst Palast which was meant to be "permanent," or to last at least two or three years. It would have aroused much less negative reactions if it had been planned as ephemeral, but it was not accepted as 'definitive'. I had the good instinct of inviting the artists to do this project with the permanent collection and not for an exhibition. For me it was not letting artists play for two or three months and then come back to "serious" things: linear art history. I wanted precisely to question the exclusive interpretation given by linear art history.

**VM:** Do you think it remains rare nowadays?

**JHM:** No, nowadays you see the intrusion of contemporary art in many ancient art museums. At that time I was not a total exception either, it was in the *Zeitgeist* or *l'air du temps*. Some colleagues had already invited artists to reinterpret ancient art, for instance Warhol in Rhode Island, Graubner at Insel Hombroich in Germany, and so on. In St. Etienne in France, they also mixed ancient and modern art, but most of the time the big difference was the temporality: it was for a temporary exhibition and not for a permanent display. The Louvre has had a program with contemporary artists for a few years, but it is like a

cherry on the cake, because the artists are not allowed to intervene in the display of the works.

In that perspective, the curators remain, in respect of the order given by art historians, over artists and collectors. On that point, concerning a new taxonomy for museums, I think I am still well ahead.

One should not forget that with the Revolution the new French state sent artworks to the regions in the *Musées des Beaux Arts* which were connected to the academies for the education of art students. The directors of both the museum and art school were artists.

Museum organization changed during the 19th century, when art history became a science (*Kunstgeschichte*) and when power fell into the hands of art historians. This led museums to be behind the times, as art historians often have difficulty recognizing novelty and avant-garde freedom.

**VM:** Since *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), you have been saying that you are still bound to end up with contemporary exhibitions based on a chronological approach and only centred on occidental artists. So what are the main dangers nowadays in contemporary art for a museum? For a curator? In trying to seduce a wider audience, what do you think about marketing?

**JHM:** I also have organized exhibitions with a chronological approach, but the point is not to do that exclusively. The danger of looking for the wide audience and of marketing is always there but I think also that the taste of the public is evolving. For example, twenty years ago, a trans-verse exhibition like *Une image peut en cacher une autre* would have been rejected by the RMN (Réunion des Musées Nationaux), which is in charge of the programme at the Grand Palais.

But today there is an audience for such exhibitions. They are a bit tired with exhibitions centred only on a specific historical period or a geographical area. For instance there were 225,000 visitors for the exhibition *Une image peut en cacher une autre* last year in Grand Palais and 200,000 for the Moscow Biennale of contemporary art this year in five weeks. Nothing to do with the figures of Monet or Picasso, but nevertheless not minor at all.

So things are changing, especially if you remember that it took ten years for Jean Clair to organize the thematic exhibition *Melancholia*, shown in 2005 at the Grand Palais. At the beginning it was rejected by the RMN as well.

**VM:** For what kind of reasons?

**JHM:** For three main reasons: too expensive to organize, no audience for such an exhibition, too difficult to acquire the loans from other museums.

**VM:** Do you think melancholia is a main topic in contemporary art, a possible expression of what Rancière called 'dissensus efficiency' in the way the spectator could be emancipated?

For Rancière, an exhibition would be an aesthetic experience and not an adaptation of art production for social goals. So the result is not the incorporation of knowledge, virtue or habit; on the contrary it is a disruption of a certain kind of experience without any goal behind it, what he names 'dissensus efficiency'.

For Rancière, what works is a vacancy, an emptiness. To illustrate his point, he takes an artwork, *The Belvedere Torso*, described by Winckelmann. As a torso, it is mutilated: it doesn't have arms to execute an action or a head to express feeling or deliver a message.

**JHM:** You should ask Jean Clair about melancholia. I agree with this idea of disruption, but I am not sure that *The Belvedere Torso* is a good example. The common knowledge tells us that antique sculptures haven't got arms and heads. The question is whether it is still really moving us today, given the fact that this stereotype of the antique is known to us more as a historical fact than an emotional factor for the taste of today. I am rather looking for disruptions established by works that establish coincidence, connection and dialogue with today's creations.

**VM:** And what do you think of Nicolas Bourriaud and *Relational Aesthetics* – is there art nowadays that is not relational?

**JHM:** The way he thinks about art is very interesting: as a soft immaterial form, as a relation between people and not only as an object. In the perspective of the artwork as a method of communication – even if it is a delayed communication – you are right to say that it is relational. But what Bourriaud means is that art can live without the help of the material form.

**VM:** What do you think about inviting audiences to organize exhibitions of historical collections?

**JHM:** What do you mean?

**VM:** I mean for example to ask a school group to reinterpret a collection with a new form of presentation.

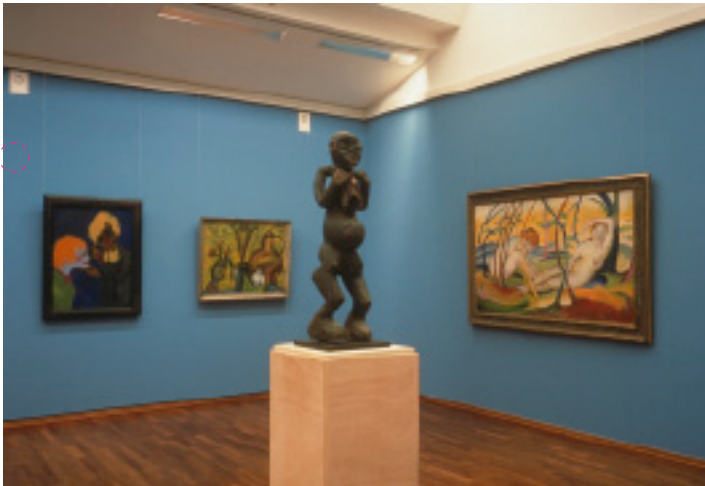
**JHM:** Why not? It could be tried under the serious supervision of a teacher. Nevertheless I think it should first be more extensively experimented with by professional adults and not given over to children as a kind of game. Art historians always come back to chronological or geographical classifications as they were taught to do. Education is evolving and school children may not have this linear vision of history anymore. May they contribute to establishing the new sort of taxonomy I am thinking of for the museum? I doubt it.

**VM:** Could you tell us more about this new museum taxonomy?

**JHM:** It is a bit too early. I have a project which is not confirmed yet. It is using a new method to show art in the widest way. Also, in 2012, I have a project for the new MONA (Museum of Old and New Art) opening now in Hobart, Tasmania.

**VM:** In between, you will curate Boltanski for the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

**JHM:** Yes, but it is not about reinterpreting collections. I am glad to have been invited as an old friend, because Boltanski can curate Boltanski by himself.



1 Foreground: Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, *Charakterkopf*, 1775.  
Background: Walter Dahn, *Die Geburt der einarmigen Malerei*.  
Part of the group installation, *Ping Pong*, 1985. Photograph by  
Werner J. Hannappel.

2 The Expressionism Room. Foreground: Female figure, *Mambila*,  
Nigeria/Kamerun. Photograph by Werner J. Hannappel.

3 The Nature Room. Foreground: Konstantin Lange, *Isolatorköpfe*,  
1991. Photograph by Werner J. Hannappel.

# BIOGRAPHIES

**Subhadra Das** is, among other things, the Cultural Property Advisor at UCL (University College London). She has been working in the museum sector for five years and plans to contribute to future democratic exhibitions.

**Marjatta Hölz** works in Stuttgart as an author and curator. She studied Art History and French at the University of Tübingen, the Ecole du Louvre in Paris, and Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts. From 1999–2008 she was director of the Municipal Gallery of Tuttlingen; she also worked for Weimar 1999 European Capital of Culture.

**Khadija Carroll La & Alex Schweder La** live in Berlin as artists. Since finishing a PhD at Harvard University Khadija is a Newton Fellow, currently working on interventions in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Together Alex and Khadija make installations as the exhibition design studio LOOK.

**Jean-Hubert Martin** was the director of Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Pompidou (Paris, 1987–1990), director of Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (Paris 1995–1999), director of Museum Kunst Palast (Düsseldorf, 1999–2006), director of Kunsthalle Bern (1982–1985), and curator of *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), *Une image peut en cacher une autre* (Paris Grand Palais, 2010), the third Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2010), and the French Pavilion for the 2011 Venice Biennale.

**Valentine Meyer** lives and works in Paris. A curator, she studied art history and exhibition curating in Paris (at the Sorbonne and Ecole du Louvre) and Zurich (Zurich University of the Arts) where she continues to organize exhibitions and events. She has worked for the Cabaret Voltaire and the Architektur Forum in Zurich.

**Stella Rollig** has been the director of the Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz since 2004. Before, the art journalist was Austrian state curator, as well as lecturer at the Fachhochschule Joanneum in Graz, The Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, the Academy of Fine Arts Munich, and The University for Art and Industrial Design Linz. Furthermore, she was art critic for the Austrian broadcast station ORF and the newspaper *Der Standard*.

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# ONCURATING.org

On-Curating.org is an independent international web-journal focusing on questions around curatorial practice and theory.

**Publisher:** Dorothee Richter

**Web and Graphic Design Concept:** Michel Fernández

**Graphic Design Twelfth Issue:** Jeannine Herrmann

**Web Publishing Twelfth Issue:** Linus Hunkeler

**Twelfth Issue:** Reinterpreting Collections

**Editor:** Marjatta Hölz

**Administration:** Amber Hickey (On-Curating.org)

**Contributions:** Subhadra Das, Marjatta Hölz, Khadija Carroll La and Alex Schweder La, Jean Hubert Martin interviewed by Valentine Meyer, Stella Rollig interviewed by Marjatta Hölz, Malte Roloff, Viola Rühse, Annette Schemmel, Iris Ströbel.

**Proofreading:** Amber Hickey

**Supported by:** The Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Institute for Cultural Studies, Department of Cultural Analysis, Zurich University of the Arts.

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The MAS Curating is a postgraduate programme and a discursive platform in contemporary exhibition making. It is a part of the Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts at the Zurich University of the Arts.

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