

Rosa Martínez

After these two days during which we have thought critically about the figure of the curator and, above all, after Olu (Oguibe) a brilliant analysis, I have felt a kind of error. As he defined the curator's roles as a bureaucrat, an explorer, someone with an egotistical sense of his own fate I recognized myself in all of these. But since this morning I was not able to attend one of the conferences that interested me the most, now I am curious to know whether or not I am a homeopathic curator. I never consciously wanted to be a curator, it is rather fate that has brought me to this profession. After studying art history I began working for the education program of the Caixa's Social Welfare Foundation a private organization that, by means of its social programs, made up for the cultural backwardness that had resulted from years of isolationism under the (Franco) dictatorship. Feeling a sense of rebellion linked to a certain Hispanic idealism, I have never wanted to be tied to any institution and even during the ten years I spent at the Calaxia (1978-1988), I always worked there freelance. Those ten years of pedagogic experimentation have had a very positive influence on my curatorial practice as they contributed in establishing my role as a translator who allows publics to gain access to information.

In 1988 the Barcelona City Government put me in charge of an emerging artists biennial. It was a new field of experimentation for me as the creator, as the producer of an event. It was a very successful biennial that brought together over 600 artists from diverse fields (music, film, visual arts, fashion, etc.) Each time it took place. However, when our politicians decided to host the Olympics in 1992, they deemed that these contests aimed at the promotion of emerging artists work were no longer useful for their image and canceled the biennial. I decided to resign from the city government and continue working as an independent curator. I worked once again for the Caixa, this time as the curator of the Sala Montcada, the space they devoted to experimental artists. Soon afterwards I was asked to curate *Manifesta*, a new European biennial conceived as a nomadic event, that is to say not as a biennial tied to any specific site but rather as an exhibition that would take place in a different European city every two years *Manifesta* was launched in order to reevaluate the meaning of Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall and to establish connections between Eastern and Western Europe. I worked with four curators: Victor Misiano from Russia, Hans Ulrich Obrist who is everywhere, Kataline Neray from Hungary and Andrew Renton from England. This teamwork opened many doors to allow me to understand European reality and also to learn to share in the decision-making process regarding the selection of artists. We sometimes decided by a majority vote, and sometimes took into account personal obsessions each curator was allowed at least one, even if it was not to

the others taste. We followed this method of negotiating the selection of artists when we organized the first *Manifesta* in Rotterdam in 1996. There have now been four shows and the next will take place in Frankfurt at the same time as *Documenta*.

After *Manifesta* and its collective curatorial experience, I was asked to work as artistic director of the Istanbul Biennial. And that has been one of the greatest, most enriching challenges in my whole personal as well as professional life, because I had to do it by myself and because I had the chance to work in one of the world's most wonderful cities. I could use the city as a text on which to write a discourse. I have often compared shows and relationships with artists with love affairs, and love was the first term that Olu used. Love affairs are encounters with places, with people, with different identities which I have worked. I am lucky that there have been many, all over the world. I understand the process of curating as one of learning and exchange. I have tried to follow a dialogical methodology, to find a point of connection and agreement with artists who initially had different perspectives from my own. I have had many group curating experiences, working with Hou Han Ru and Young Chung Lee in Korea, or working in Vienna with Paulo Herlenhoof from Brazil and Maaretta Yaukkuri from Finland. I really enjoy working in a team but I also like to work by myself because that is when my individualistic Spanish spirit comes out and I can accomplish my dreams, my desires and also deal with my dilemmas. Today I will explain the two most important solo projects I have done until now: the Istanbul Biennial and Site Santa Fe in New Mexico.

Curators have to be flexible and yet clear in their decisions since they have the power to create an ephemeral world. A biennial lasts one, maybe two months. I have been working for ten years in this area of the spectacle and of the cultural industry which we call biennials. In the context of the mega-circulation. One is directed by large corporations like the Guggenheim that try to find niches for a series of products all over the world. This is the phenomenon which has been called McDonaldization. It responds to a new imperialism, a form of colonization based on precepts that are championed as the best alternative and behind which lie undeniable economic and ideological implications. Then there is us, a group of the people who travel like bouncing gnomes trying to appease our own apprehension as well as that of certain cities who want to take part in this global discourse, though from a critical perspective and without paying the incredibly high fees that large corporations demand. I am part of this more discreet and questioning faction, and work in cities that are not part of the mainstream but that want to insert their artists within this new global discourse to liberate it from the dualistic aesthetic of mirrors (the self and the other, the center and the periphery) and resituate it within the polymorphous, multifaceted aesthetic of prisms. Now I am going to show you some slides of the Istanbul Biennial and Site Santa Fe so you can see whether what I am saying relates to what I do, and so this can be topic of discussion afterwards.

The city of Istanbul is marvelous; it is between two continents, Asia and Europe, connected by two bridges. The bridge is a metaphor of the will to establish ties between two differing realities and served as inspiration for the 5TH Biennial along with the idea after, but which inspires a practically religious atmosphere of respect, of distance between the artwork and the viewer. There are certain cities in which it can

be relatively easy to work within an urban context, but in Istanbul, which has 15 million inhabitants, it is very complex. We used the airport and train stations as symbolic of the doors through which identities circulate. Farm Workers and country folk from the poorest areas of Turkey emigrate to the great metropolis that is Istanbul through the Haydarpasa train station, which is on the Asian side. Many immigrants see the city for the first time from this station and there is a tremendous amount of movies that reflect this situation. One of the artists I invited was Cai Guo Qiang, who is used to undertaking large-scale projects, on his first research trip he went to museums and found a miniature with the imprint of the Prophet Mohammed's feet. He proposed to build wooden platforms in the shape of those feet to connect Asia and Europe both physically and spiritually. The curator must consider the budget given by the institution and the artist must adapt his work in keeping with these limitations. Thus, given our tiny budget, Cai Guo Qiang had to turn his idea of connecting the two banks (his project was entitled *Both Shores*) into a reality by simply throwing pebbles across the Bosphorus. He filmed these actions, so simple that they recall children's games, and installed two screens in the church of Saint Irene (which were installed to the right and left as you walked); the pebbles crossed the church virtually into its east and west wing. He also built a platform and a small table on which exhibition-goers made paper planes. He often works elements of traditional Chinese culture, with gunpowder and paper-folding. People wrote wishes on these planes and threw them towards the apse, connecting the human with the divine along a single axis. In other words, East and West were united in a virtual way, and so were the human and the divine a recurrent motif in all of Cai Guo Qiang's work.

There is no contemporary art museum in Istanbul and indeed biennials seem to proliferate in places where the cultural infrastructure is not fully developed. The spaces we used in this biennial were historical sites like the church of Saint Irene or the Yerabatan Cistern, though we also used public spaces such as the airport, the two train stations and Leander's Tower, located on a tiny island at the mouth of the Bosphorus. There were projects like the enormous carpet of rose petals sewn by women all across Canada. This carpet, when the biennial was over, was cut into pieces that exhibition-goers could take with them. It was a very clear example of how art can go beyond the creation of a fetish object and become an act of giving, of communication between different communities. The piece disappeared with the biennial but its remnants continued to exist scattered in the homes of Istanbul residents.

One of the goals of all the biennials I have curated has been to mix artists from different generations, different countries, and different cultural contexts. The 5th Istanbul Biennial took place in 1997, the same year Harald Szeemann curated the Lyon Biennial, and that Catherine David did the Kassel *Documenta*. There was but a small percentage of women artists involved in either of these events. I very consciously invited several women artists to Istanbul because I think that when you set foot in a new context, you have to analyze and question it. I have borne the brunt of Turkey's patriarchal, macho culture myself, being a Mediterranean woman, a Spanish woman of Catholic background. 65% of the artists I invited were women, and I chose to use the Women's bookstore as an exhibition space, founded in Istanbul in 1991. This piece we are looking at now by Chinese artists dealt with the topic of globalization and borders. Michael von Hauswolff installed two doors in each of

the train stations one on the European side and the other on the Asian side and when people arrived in Istanbul they walked through these doors; coming from the Asian side they became Europeans, as the device was a Europeanizer. Right after they walked through it, they were given a certificate that they had become European. The Asianizer made you Asian. Many people took their certificate to the police to see if they could get their visa for Europe faster that way. Architects Diller & Scofidio installed a series of billboards in the Istanbul airport that advertised a fake hotel chain. *Inter Clone Hotel* depicted different hotels in various parts of the world; everything was the same in terms of structure, and the local identity was reduced to a decorative motif on the room's bedspreads or wallpaper.

One of the most wonderful spaces you can have access to is the Yerabatan Cistern, which supplied the city of Istanbul with water and is now a historic monument that is a massive tourist attraction. That is where Spanish artist Eulalia Valldosera did an intervention she works with those bathtubs you wash dishes in at home and projects slides of them, creating those disturbing, archetypal images of the mother, of the ghosts of our collective unconscious. Eulalia is very interested in this mental introspection and in the emotional dependencies that are created in the context of the family or of a love relationship. Nikos Navridis is an artist who uses balloons as something that is filled with human breath and in which feelings are projected. In this performance, Egle Rakauskaite dealt with the topic of virginity, of paradise lost. These teenage girls, who were thirteen years old, were connected by their braids, and there was a moment when scissors cut these ties which kept them linked to each other, and they were left to face the world as individuals. Louise Bourgeois is still the youngest, most radical, most innovative artist she is the mother goddess of twentieth-century art and in Istanbul we showed one of her spiders.

I find it important for the curator to establish a long-lasting relationship with artists, to follow up on his or her work, and that is why there are certain artists with whom I have chosen to work on several occasions. One Turkish artist who interests me greatly is B. lent Sangar. He uses himself as a model in staged photographs that deal with the problems of the society in which he lives. Here he refers to immigration, to the desire to leave and leave behind a country's living conditions, but also to the fear of facing the unknown. He undertakes an imaginary trip without leaving the windowsill of his apartment. He unfolds maps, shoots a gun, looks fearfully through the windows, and creates a narrative which can be read according to two different forms of syntax; left to right or top to bottom. I also invited this artist to Site Santa Fe with a piece that dealt with the sense of loss of place there is when immigration is such a powerful force as it has been in Turkey. Rituals like the killing of the lamb are done in inappropriate context; beside highways for instance.

In Istanbul I wanted to do the total biennial, and gave it a very complex title: *On life, beauty, Translations and other Difficulties*. The notion of life alluded to the constant struggle to link the two spheres art and life. Beauty referred to the reemergence of the concept of beauty in critical contemporary discourse a concept which seemed to have disappeared in the face of abject art, while the academic notion of Western beauty was being questioned from different cultural contexts. Translations referred to the communication difficulties there are between works and their viewers. And it also referred to the artwork as text, as language. All art is language and can therefore be decoded,

but it also has to be coded and the work has to be articulated in such a way that it is understandable to spectators. Difficulties referred to the problems I knew we would face working in a context where infrastructure was non-existent and means were very limited. In spite of these difficulties the whole team's commitment allowed us to put on a marvelous biennial. As I was saying, I took B lent Sangar to Santa Fe with the piece dealing with the subject of displacement. It made me think about the place arte occupies today and in the curator's role vis-à-vis the artist and vis -a-vis the whole mass-media cultural industry in which we are all involved. That is why I entitles the Santa Fe biennial *Looking for a Place*. It was a huge contrast to go from a city of 15 million where the urban aspect is so present, so overwhelming and where traffic is a chaotic, to a mythical place in the American desert. The city of Santa Fe only has 60 000 inhabitants and its immigration pattern is quite the opposite of Istanbul's. In Istanbul it is the residents of rural areas who travel to the great metropolis. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, it is the richest people from Los Angeles and New York who go there in search of peace and quiet and the kind of landscape that no longer exist in big cities, and they build mansions that house incredible collections of native American and contemporary art, one of the most wonderful artworks of the twentieth century is without a doubt Walter de Maria's *Lightning Field*. The *Lightning Field* is totally lost in the landscape, there is not a single man-made element besides the 600 metal poles that attract lightning from the New Mexico sky and produce a spectacle of nature: lightning storms. There is a small cabin where visitors to this remote place can spend the night among the rattlesnakes, a scorpion or two, other critters and a sense of time you can only perceive there, because as you wait for the lightning to strike (and it usually does not) you experience an emotionally heightened state. The New Mexico desert also conceals frightening things like the labs at Los Alamos, where the first atom bomb was made. I thought it was important to take into account in the biennial this presence of nature but also that of science and nuclear energy is great power of destruction. That is why and this is part of my obsession to break traditional boundaries that have kept art locked up in those leak-proof compartments which are called disciplines, to allow it to touch upon other spheres of experience it seemed right to invite a non-art group: Greenpeace activists. In my mind they are following in Beuys tradition of social sculpture, that is to say that they change people's awareness of the world's problems through their actions. This is one of the actions they did in Mallorca against a ship transporting nuclear waste. Here there are mythological references to David's fight against Goliath, that is of the little guy against the big guy, of the oppressed against the oppressor, etc. and the heroic battle of the little hero against the great monsters. Some of Greenpeace's actions could be seen as installations because they consist of the placement of certain objects in public spaces to create meaning, like this one they carried out Czechoslovak nuclear plant. This other slide shows how the exhibitions was installed. At the entrance there was the large picture of a ship that seemed to sweep down on viewers. To the right there is a narrow hallway that leads to Site Santa Fe's main exhibitions space. On the ground there was a map made by Mona Hatoum, the Palestinian artist living in London. This map of Hatoum's is made of marbles. When viewers walked around this geography they had the feeling it could fall apart at any moment. The piece communicated the instability of the world we live in.

Shirin Neshat talks about the West's fear of Islam, of many stereotypes we have of the Islamic world, of the relationships between men and women, and of divisions in the use of public and private space. In Santa Fe we used ten spaces outside the main exhibition building and one of them was the Site Santa Fe parking lot where Bulgarian artist Galentin Gatev did a kind of critical reconstruction of the importance of religion in his country. Artists Diller & Scofidio transformed a room in this motel. They filmed different aspects of the room with several video-cameras. They filmed the dust balls under the bed in a very tight close-up shot and made them look like tumbleweed in Western movie. Their ideas was to come across the macro-sublime in the micro-everyday. In the images you see on the TV-screen, dirt dripping down a wall turned upside down looks like the rock formations of Death Valley and created an interpretative game that allowed you to perceive the mythological fantasy of the Wild West in this dingy, shabby little place. Another intervention took place in a cemetery, a totally run-down, derelict site. We cleaned it up so artist Michael Hauswolff could do an intervention that, as you will see, had nothing to do with the doors he made in Istanbul. In this area of New Mexico many painters have worked on spiritual abstraction. Hauswolff created a field of light that he entitled *Red Monochrome*, it alluded to how painting has unyoked itself from the easel and come to occupy other spaces, but it was also implicitly about the death of painting.

Being a woman, sometimes a curator is the artist's mother, often their friend, a facilitator and travelling companion but sometimes also a dictator. One artist whom I may admit I encouraged to step out of the narrow format of the canvas and work in public spaces is Ghada Amer, from Egypt. In her abstract paintings, she embroiders erotic motifs taken from men's porn magazines. Her appropriation (or, as she says, her submission) is twofold: she takes a traditionally male-dominated field like abstract painting and inscribes another traditionally male-dominated field onto it pornography depicting women. In one of the terraces of the Roman theater of Sagunto (in Valencia), she made a kind of abstract, Frank Stella-esque painting using flowering plants and cactuses, that is to say two elements that possess an extremely clear sexual symbology. That is the first project we collaborated on and since then we have worked on a different project practically every year, and this is something I am very proud of. I invited her to Valencia in 1998, to Santa Fe in 1999, to Pusan, Korea in 2000 and to Barcelona in 2001. In Santa Fe there was a totally derelict park we cleaned up and humanized. Ghada installed benches and green signposts like those you find in any park, turning it into a *Love Park*. She put phrases on the signs quoted from various sources (which she never credited because she did not want to broach the topic of authorship, because these were ideas that are common knowledge). There was a very funny one that said American feminism has a man problem. The benches were cut in two and were facing opposite directions they were a metaphor for the couple in love in which the partners think they are united but actually live in two different worlds and are sometimes looking in opposite directions.

Another artist who participated in Site Santa Fe was Sergio Vega, with a diorama which reconstructed the myth locating earthly paradise in America and represented in baroque painting through references to travelers and explorers. He put stuffed parrots and plants in this diorama as well as fragments of paintings by Velasquez and Rubens depicting elements of this supposed earthly paradise. Sergio Vega

based his work on the writings of Le n Pineros, who in 1650 wrote a book in Seville situating paradise-on-earth in Brazil's Mato Grosso. This morning, while I visited the Latin-American constructivism and abstraction show with my colleagues, I saw how this tendency, contemporary abstract constructivism, coexisted with the other, the baroque a legacy of religion, frowned upon by the Western mainstream. For Sergio Vega the parrot is a mythical figure because, he says, out of all the animals in paradise it is the only one that is still able to speak, but since we have lost the language of paradise we cannot understand what it is saying. Migrations are always seen as a painful movement of losing one's place and identity, of travel to another culture, but in the *Global Warming* Sergio Vega perceived Latin-American emigration to the north as something quite positive because it brings along the warmth, the color and music, etc. of another culture. Unfortunately this project could not be undertaken in Barcelona, where I commissioned three urban interventions in the summer of 2001. The parrots got there but then there were neither the funds nor the political will to complete the project, and the birds are therefore sleeping as if they were in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in a municipal government warehouse. Ghada Amer did an intervention in a boulevard called the Rambla de Raval. Raval is a very depressed area both socially and economically. It is an immigrant's neighborhood with a great deal of prostitution. This city artery was cleared in order to clean up the area and they it offered to us to do a project. Ghada had read in a book of statistics a phrase that had made a deep impression on her: Today 70% of poor people in the world are women. Normally economic differences are evaluated in terms of geopolitics (developed countries versus the Third World, etc.) But when we evaluate these differences in terms of gender we see that women are the most impoverished social sector. We have to reformulate feminism as a possibility of access to culture and power. I guess all women feel the same way, especially if we have daughters. I am selfish and I want a better world for my daughter. That is why I am a feminist. Ghada conceived her intervention as a garden where children would play, like a sculpture in which the public could participate, which means that five days later it was totally destroyed. You could not read the complete phrase in a single glance and this reflected how we need a certain critical distance to understand reality.

Well then, this where my slides end. But why did I chose to end here? First of all because I wanted to leave you with this message about feminism and the need for men to help us achieve equality, which is a project involving everyone, and also because the third artist I invited to Barcelona is a Spaniard who has lived in Mexico for several years and of whose practice I will not show any slides because I think everyone here is well enough acquainted with his work. He is a very polemic, a very controversial artist who has often been attacked. However, from the day I received a short essay from the Rufino Tamayo Museum written by Tayiana Pimentel in which she described how the artist ad shut 465 people in one of the museum's exhibition halls, I wanted to work with him and immediately invited him to another biennial I organized in Limerick (Ireland) in 2000. Limerick is another peripheral context that is anxious to know what is going on in terms contemporary art and to share this with local residents. This third artist was Santiago Sierra, who did two different actions in Barcelona. One in the port of Barcelona locking twenty immigrants in a ship's hold for a week. It fueled a huge controversy in the press because they said it was exploitation. The

immigrants were calmly shut in the hold, a little stifled by the heat, but they had fresh water, playing cards, and sold each other watches. But the guilty complex that Spanish society has for the way we are treating our Moroccan neighbors, this diabolical machinery and the desire to throw out these immigrants all this was concentrated in Santiago Sierra's piece. So you see that I exploit artists and make them work very very hard. Santiago Sierra participated at the same time in another exhibition. *Trans Sexual Express Barcelona 2001*. This show dealt with sex, which is to say power, because sexual relations have much to do with love, but also with one person's power over another. Santiago did an action here in which he kept a woman locked up for three hours a day for 15 000 pesetas. The woman had her ankle tied with ropes that crossed the exhibition space and yoked her to the institutional architecture. *Trans Sexual Express* explored relations of power distribution, something that is also part of curatorial practice. The curator sees herself as someone with authority, with decision-making power, but is also subjected to the powers who often want to use her not as an autonomous professional with her own principles, but as a puppet to carry out their own political designs. Faithfulness to her own convictions, love towards the public that is going to see the exhibition, and respect for and critical questioning of political goals must go hand in hand with the curator's theoretical, intellectual and artistic goals to create an event which will be satisfactory for all parties concerned, though never entirely so. I do not judge the biennials I have done in terms their success but rather in terms of what I have learned. In each of them there is a temporary, questioned definition of the role that a curator and specifically a female curator can and must play in the global contemporary art scene. Thank you.

HELL IS ELSEWHERE

Anda Rottenberg

There is no much space for intimacy left in the contemporary world. Different media intrude constantly into personal affairs of people. They examine their private life including sexual behaviors and preferences; intrude into their most secret habits and register their emotions. While sipping whisky on comfortable sofas we can witness any kind of sexual perversion, observe the process of giving birth in details, watch people dying till the moment of their last sigh. All these are available on request by pushing but regular peep show, for the latter became too obvious as soon as we could see naked human bodies everywhere- from ordinary newspapers to posted commercials and glossy magazines.

One could say no taboo exists in this field anymore. Especially in art. There is, however, a noticeable difference between the two-dimensional message produced by the media and considered as "artificial" and the three-dimensional, fleshy reality identified with life and