

Vanesa Fernández

Given today's problems in financing contemporary art, there is a growing interest in knowing more about how private fundraising works and how it may have an impact on the development of art.

The juiciest case drawing our attention is the well-known phenomenon of the importance that Monterrey had taken on in the art world and its rapid growth in the 1980s and early 1990s in the hands of the private sector.

Given that the focus of this forum is to highlight bridges in the infrastructure of contemporary art, it is appropriate to make a "bridge" with the past to learn from previous experiences in the private sector. The idea would be to repeat its successes and to avoid its errors; but more importantly to begin to articulate a bridge between the Federal District and the provinces, because the diversity in cultural development could represent a process of significant enrichment.

The reflection is doubly valuable if we take into account the small number of attempts to approach this subject that have been conducted recently and that often misinterpret and underestimate the origins and results of events (both favorable as well as absolute failures), leaving only the superficial squandering and ostentation granted by distance (both in the time and geography). Suffice it to read the text by Valeria Paz published in *Curare* (no.17) to confirm the indignation still produced by cultural promotion strategies that have been employed in Monterrey.

Promotion, Dealing and Collecting

The somewhat passive role that collectors usually play in the "food chain" of the complex network of arts, was altered in the case of Monterrey in the 1980s. it may be said that at that time, the consumer-public became the principal figure assuming the task of culture promoter to an extent comparable and even superior to that of any profession in the field.

The consequences of this activity –which started at the beginning of the eighties in a simple interest in collecting figurative art in a Mexicanist style- was the support of the entire art movement, which finally materialized in the opening of MARCO (Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey) in 1991.

In the three-year period preceding the opening of MARCO and immediately following its opening, there was an unprecedented dynamic revolving around the arts, quite remarkable for any city in the provinces in this country. For the first time in history, for gallery owners, museum directors, critics, curators, artists, and the like, from all over the country, Monterrey became an obligatory city to visit. The fascination for this cultural effervescence also affected the rest of the Latin America, resulting in an enormous affluence of travelers and immigration, especially from Cuba, Peru and Brazil, but also from Ecuador, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Colombia, among others.

Without a doubt the abundance of collectors and renowned art patrons was an important incentive. However, once in Monterrey, the main attraction was the recurrent convergence of a number of luminaries in the international artworld (from the director of the Met to gallery owners such as Gian Enzo Sperone or artists of the stature of Julian Schnabel) and the cultural exchange that allowed their concentration in the same city and in a small circle of people. Countless lectures and courses extended to what were informal discussions that took place behind closed doors in the pleasant setting of cocktail parties, luncheons, or dinner parties involving promoters and professionals of art yielding fruitful and concrete results for everyone concerned.

Evidently, the avidness of these promoter-collectors in being up-to-date in contemporary art spurred them also to travel to places where they could continue the dialogue and witness the latest in artistic creativity. Independently of the fact that the principal motivation could have been due to an interest in acquiring the best work in the market (at any price), what occurred was a true pilgrimage of people from Monterrey in search of contemporary Latin American art with countless visits to exhibitions (above all in New York, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Oaxaca), visits to artists' studios (most often in Mexico City, Oaxaca, Michoacán), and to summer and autumn auctions of Latin American art in New York, and other cities, strengthening as a consequence their presence in the culture milieu. In Mexico this was common formula known to art professionals, but uncommon among collectors, especially given the organized way in which it was conducted and on such a massive scale, both due to the importance of collections as well as the number of individuals who participated.

Who Do Museums Belong to?

There is nothing new in pointing out that the public institution-professional-patron equation that takes place in government-sponsored museums is not the same as that of private museums is not the same as that of private museums. Nevertheless, MARCO and the Museum of Monterrey became so important in the contemporary art discourse in the country at that time, that the differences between public and private museum have now come to the forefront of importance. In fact, to date, their repercussions in the development and promotion of visual arts have still not yet been seriously evaluated.

As in all fields, the critical moments are when problems arise. It is for this reason that I wanted to begin there, with the disagreeable or unexpected consequence, to then go on to analyze the origins and structures that feed it.

There is, for example, a contradiction in the perception of the way in which the Monterrey public participates with their opinion in museum work. On the one hand, it is believed that in Monterrey the public lacks a critical or denunciatory attitude, probably due to lack of their impact, or else due to the small number of professionals dedicated to criticism. However, there are two key expressions of mass protest of artists and the public in general. The day MARCO was inaugurated, there was protest against the absence of local artists in the exhibition calendar (which served to reaffirm MARCO's policy of that time of exhibiting mainly non-local artists); and the protest in May 2000 against the closing of the Museum of Monterrey on the last day that it was open (this succeeding in pressuring the sponsors to deny the use of the building for any art-related activity in the future). These protests did not produce the results expected by the protestors, but what is important is that they took place at all, although with repercussions opposed to the original cause.

What is interesting in both protest events is the reason for which the massive Monterrey public seemed to lack a voice, unlike in Mexico City, for example, where the weight of public opinion can end in resignations on the part of directors, the closing of exhibitions and changes in the museum calendar. It would be naïve to think that this occurs solely due to cultural differences between the two cities.

Once established that public opinion –one of the last steps in the scheme of cultural promotion- and its relationship with institutions is abysmally different in Mexico City and Monterrey. However, the question is: What causes it and what perpetuates it?

Although making comparisons between art promotion undertaken by private institutions and the government to determine how each scheme affects their operational infrastructure is an exercise with obvious results, often these factors are ignored at the moment of evaluating and rendering judgments. Having a very clear idea of these two schemes is indispensable to undertake an evaluation solely in the area of management of private museums.

As a thumbnail sketch to avoid unnecessary repetition, the basic difference is that government museums belong to the people, while private institutions belong to the patrons. This is if one takes into account that government officials are public servants who simply manage the community's resources, while patrons are individuals or companies who feel the moral responsibility to share the riches that they have accumulated with their community by giving them a gift of sorts: a cultural institution.

This argument evidently is not entirely black and white. Factors such as tax deductions on the part of private cultural institutions and the way in which corporate sponsors support their marketing strategies by way of a museum cannot be overlooked. However, they do not cease to be simply nuances of a global situation, given that they are not sufficiently efficacious elements and therefore not as significant as they would be in other countries, such as for example in the United States.

As a logical consequence, this situation is reflected in museum management and in the objectives set by professionals operating them. The common denominator in museums of working thanks to and for a public has different intentions, propriety and bearers of authority of different origins in a private museum and a public one.

Two Cases: Museum of Monterrey and MARCO

Patrons and Professionals

The management of private museums in Monterrey, although within a similar scheme and context, occurred in very different ways. The two most important cases for their influence, both in the country as well as internationally, were the now defunct Museum of Monterrey, established in 1977, and MARCO (Museum of Contemporary Art of Monterrey), opened in 1991.

The main difference between both museums is that the Museum of Monterrey had only one patron, the brewing company Cervecería Cuauhtémoc/Moctezuma of the FEMSA (formerly Visa) Group. On the other hand, MARCO has a board of directors, composed primarily of businesspeople, who supported the museum; although it was always presided over by an identifiable figure (first Diego Sada, and later Nina Zambrano). Despite the fact that on occasions the sponsorship of certain companies has been well-known (such as the case of Pulsar and currently the case of cement conglomerate CEMEX), the main support for MARCO continues to be perceived as a plural activity.

Consequently, the activities of additional fundraising for each museum was very different. For the Museum of Monterrey, it was difficult to attract other incidental patrons. With the old building of the brewery as the primary space and emblem of the museum, the presence of other brands, or else the rental of other spaces for events outside the institution, was always a delicate obstacle. At the same time, no admission fee was charged by the museum, and there was no significant income from the small store and cafeteria, so that it suffered perpetual economic dependence on the major sponsor. In the case of MARCO, with sponsors who were not so obviously identifiable, since its inception it was managed with much greater flexibility. Fundraising was conducted by way of events, ticket sales, the presence of brands and all of the resources used by today's museums to insure that the institution itself generates income.

The way in which these schemes were seen is reflected in museum operations contrary to conclusions that might be deduced in the Museum of Monterrey, the president of the Board functioned (for the great part of the museum's life) as a mediator between the cultural institution and the company, evaluating and supporting projects generated by professionals within the museum, always taking care to fulfill the ends of the institution and to preserve the company's image, but with little interference and absolute respect for the specific development of programs and the calendar of exhibitions proposed by the museum director and his team. On the other hand, in MARCO, the president of the board has always been directly and actively involved in the decision-making process when it comes to the institution's programming and operations.

Despite the different functions of the director of each museum (in the Museum of Monterrey fairly curatorial, and in MARCO more administrative), in both cases the institution always relied on (with a brief exception in an early phase of the Museum of Monterrey) local professionals. The director's post at both institutions has mainly been occupied by people with an educational background specialized in communication.

As for the curatorial infrastructure of the institutions, they also coincide in the desire to maintain a plural vision. There was no permanent staff of internal curators; instead, for each exhibition an outside curator was hired. In the case of MARCO, there is also a Selection Board composed of national and international members, who review the exhibitions calendar.

These internal structures are relatively rare in the case of large museums (for example MoMA in New York has approximately 40 internal curators). They have produced fruitful reflections on the ideal scheme of human resources to operate a museum, sparked especially by the controversy generated by the admirable intention of maintaining plurality of curatorial vision and the questioning that has arisen on the efficacy of its execution in the decision to keep the museums without a team of the institution's own curators.

What is the Ideal System of Sponsorship?

Each sponsorship scheme (both private as well as governmental) entails a structure that presents operational problems. Despite the fact that this study represents only a starting point to begin an in-depth evaluation of the pros and cons of sponsorship models, the interest is to disprove myths on Monterrey to outline the bases of systems that are occasionally incomprehensible from a distance, precisely because they are alien, especially to Mexico City.

What is the ideal scheme? Perhaps closer collaboration between the private sector and the government, in which the marked schemes of each one could be diluted to produce a new, perhaps better one, although it might also simply result in a sum of obstacles inherent to each one.

Another option to consider is one that has been promoted and exploited by U.S. institutions: doing business (museums are included in this category) that produces its own revenue by –and for the support of– promoting art. Would it be worth seriously considering this option? Would it resolve or worsen the current situation? Would it be possible to carry it out in this country? Would there be enough of a “market” for art in Mexico?

Celeste, the magazine that I currently direct with my husband Aldo Chaparro, is perhaps a way of experimenting with this concern and putting it into practice. The project began barely a year ago, but it would certainly be worth evaluating it in the future if it really managed to produce money, form new publics, and more importantly still, to determine to what extent and in what way did it fulfill the intention of

promoting contemporary art in Mexico. Meanwhile, I hope that other structures emerge that allow for greater diversification of the options for the unfortunately tainted yet necessary act of fundraising.

CURATING | A BIENNIAL

Manray Hsu

The last decade has been decisive in the transformation of the global art scene. We saw a great amount of non-Western artists arising from their previously unknown territory and exhibiting their work in various international shows. Many exhibitions were even simply titled as contemporary art from a non-Western country or region. Obviously, this changes the idea of the contemporary, which in the past was roughly equivalent to what comes of the moment from Western Europe and North America and some exceptional locations such as Japan and Latin America which have been closely interacting with the mainstream. Right now the situation is very different. We witness the term "contemporary" grow to cover more diverse and wider areas. With this expansion, the number of non-Western institutions –museums as well as biennials and triennials- exhibiting these contemporary artists also increases. The plenitude of institutions can be seen in the list of international biennials and other similar events, which includes Berlin, Dakar, Havana, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Kwangju, Lima, London, Lyon, Manifesta, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Sydney, Tornitz, and Taipei. There are more than sixty biennials around the world and the list is still growing. Last year Yokohama, Chengdu (China) and Tirana opened their first edition and this year China will have Guangzhou and Hong Kong opening their first edition as well.

And of course, the question that is now urgent refers to the kinds of contemporary art that are being proposed and projected in a global sense. Its answer is philosophical as well pragmatic. There will certainly still be more regional or ethnic contemporary art coming out on the scene. But we need also some conceptual revisions with a global vision that can inform not only art making and interpretation, but also the art historian practice and education. This need may have to do with the rise of a global culture seen in various art forms, including film, music, literature, etc. But I believe it is also embedded in human nature –a term I usually avoid using- to have philosophical reflections on global matters. After all, we try to leap beyond ourselves, beyond what we are and what we know. We should not prevent ourselves from thinking