

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 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

comprehensively. The issue is how to keep such philosophical revisions as open and free as possible. Participation of a wider scope performs as a precondition for such a dialogue. We are all on the panel. The answer is philosophical, while the way to the answer is political.

What is the role of curators in such a state of affairs? In addition to the growing number of artists and institutions that constantly cross the gaps between different cultures and nationalities, more and more curators are aware of their new roles as bridges among many constituents involved in their work. And these bridges are highly contested given the complicated political economy of exhibitions, especially in the age of globalization. Evidently, curators of international biennials are the central target in the contestation and debate. In 200, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum invited French curator Jerome Sans and myself to co-curate its biennial. We proposed “The Sky Is The Limit” as a response to the situation.

The world we live in right now is going through an extensive remixing, a word borrowed from music making in the last few years. All boundaries, be they cultural, social, gender, genre, etc; are breaking down very quickly, at least in comparison to the past. At the same time, new things are being created by blending previously unrelated, or even conflicting, ingredients. The image of the sky has several meanings for us. We somehow live under one big sky, as a precondition of our life wherever we are. This sky is not just space, but also time. It is time that keeps reopening itself like a flower. The sky is like a computer screen that connects everything in the cyberspace. Through the internet, the sky as a universal repertoire where everyone can find whatever resources they look for, begins to have a practical and celestial possibility. This is not meant to be all celebratory about the current developments and applications of telecommunication, but just being alert to what is going on around. Finally, the idea of the unlimited sky also captures the immense spectacle our society is giving us. We seem to live inside and in front of a single time-zone TV screen, where our experiences are both immediate and mediated simultaneously. For the Taipei Biennial, we try to point out these situations by the title “the sky is the limit”.

The concept of co-curatorship inspires Jerome Sans and me to work constantly in open dialogue. Given all sorts of difference, we both have a willingness to dialogue, and more importantly, to engage with people who are very different from us. We are both curious and interested in knowing about other cultures and lifestyles. I find myself learning a lot from Jerome, who obviously has more international art world experience than I. but I mean not only in artistic matters, but in other life spheres as well. We were able to travel together to visit many important exhibitions (thanks to the year 2000), and to meet with artists. We talked about each artist and project that interested us. The artists we invited tend to be traveling a lot as well, not precisely because they are stars in the international art scene, but because we find them living and somehow believing in “the sky is the limit”, no matter how they interpret the idea. That is why we don’t see the title as a working theme to which the artists have to respond or illustrate. Rather the title refers to the sensitivity to the situation of remix in both life and art. Actually, we are more concerned about how to present the biennial to the Taipei city and its people. Within our limited budget, less than \$800,000 US, we still try to have site-specific works. More than a dozen artists came to have site visit. At least two-third of the works are

produced for the biennial. More significantly, we want works that can interact and engage with the local audience. Half of them, especially those of Surasi Kusolwong, Mingwei Lee, Michael Lin, Navin Rawanchaikul, Jun-jieh Wnag, Erwin Wum, Jun'ya Yamaide, Youshen Wang, Meschac Gaba, and Hsia-fei Chang, require or encourage the viewer's participation. So the whole exhibition we envision is like an experimentation site, where artists, spectators, and our organizing team interact intensively.

We have thirty-one artists in the biennial. This amount is not simply determined by our scant budget (which would have allowed us to invite twice as many artists). Instead we want to emphasize the "human scale", as we have seen so many blockbusters fail to address the issues of friendship, collaboration, and communication in art making, we as curators hope to work with each and every artist, be their friends, and facilitate their interaction with the museum staff and local audience. So a small amount is preferable. Among them, half are Asian, including six originating from Taiwan. There are around eighteen countries of origin. But the artists travel around, many of them do not live in their countries. Candice Breitz from South Africa lives in New York, shu-lea Cheang from Taiwan is based mainly in New York and somewhere in Europe. Meschac Gaba, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Hanayo, Sooja Kim, Wang Du, and Mark Lewis, all live abroad. But the idea of immigration shall not be taken literally. All of this artists live a in kind of spiritual migration. Due to our limited time and budget, we are unfortunate not to include anyone from Latin America, a land that has produced so many excellent artists.

More and more artists create works that themselves are performative spaces. A performative space is a situation of everyday life put in bracket, where the audience experiences a moment of transcending their normal reactions while acting out some entrenched desires and fantasies. A performative space is where experiments of a real life can be carried out, with unexpected and unpredictable results that may inform new possibilities of life and community. By taking advantage of the museum's power of bracketing and quoting, the performative space gives rise to a temporary autonomous zone, an in-between region of freedom which otherwise is missing in the order of things people have to live through.

Can art and democracy be reconciled? Yes, but that calls for an expansion of the idea of democracy and revisions of the process of art making, and the role of the artist and the audience. Let's take our common ideas of democracy: the populist version and the majority-rule version. According to the populist idea, artwork and exhibition are successful if they are intellectually accessible and visited by a huge amount of people. This idea has its own virtue, because it is arguable that good art and exhibition have reach a wider audience. However, we often find good art and exhibition are not popular, due to their high intellectual requirements, or simply due to bad management of circulation and publicity. The real dark side of populism is that it is also the most popular concept of democracy in the political debate of cultural policies among politicians and decision makers, who are more than willing to sacrifice the intellectual requirements, Artwork and exhibition are good, disregarding their artistic content and form. Most politicians and decision makers love spectacles, as spectacles are situations in which cultural capital can be most readily translated into political and economic capital. The majority-rule idea of democracy does not affect so much the

judgment of artwork and exhibition as the distribution of cultural resources, even though the two are closely related. Majority rule sacrifices diversity and marginalizes the disadvantaged, or the artistic voices that are subversive or original. The two versions of democracy, populism and majority-rule, profoundly affect the political economy of art, as can be seen in museums, art schools, and exhibitions, particularly such big events as biennials. And they produce chronic headaches for museums directors, art educators, and curators as well as artists, because it is very hard for people in the art world to say no to these ideas.

Can art and democracy be reconciled? After Freud, the idea is nothing new that dreams and fantasies are configured in artistic processes. Freud analyzed dreamworks as if they are artworks. So long as one has dreams and fantasies, one is a potential artist. That is why Lionel Trilling said that Freud “democratized poetry”. For everyone is a potential poet. The artist stands out for their being able to materialize the dreamworks in artistic forms. But how can this poetic democracy put into practice?

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens has pointed out that the democratization of private life is in general an extension of political democracy. As a core concept and practice configured since the Enlightenment in the Western society, democracy comprises such norms as (a) the creation of circumstances in which people can develop their potentialities and express their qualities, implying that each individual should respect others’ capacities as well as their ability to learn and enhance their aptitudes; (b) protection from arbitrary use of authority and coercive power, leaving each person’s powers to negotiate in decision making; (c) the involvement of individuals in determining the conditions of their associations; (d) expansion of the economic opportunity to develop available resources.

Democracy is boring, while such aspects of personal life as sexuality are exciting. Yet these core principles of democracy have grown to encompass our ideas of what public and private should be organized. My argument is that this core idea of democracy, along with its application in private life, has also extended to artistic practices. The often-cited examples of the Thai artists Rirkrit Tiravanija’s work point to this development, as well as so many works of artists in the 2000 Taipei Biennial. So does the so-called new genre public art, such as the one introduced by Mary Jane Jacob.

Not only in cases of artwork can we see the democracy of intimacy growing. Various exhibitions, including international biennials, are formatted more and more with the sense of cultural sharing. This can be seen in the artists’ list; de-nationalization at the discursive level and presentation of the works; and symposium or even party. Museums are also making themselves more flexible in terms of production and circulation of art and exhibition, opening hours, etc.

We can simply call the extension of political democracy into private life and artistic practice “the democracy of intimacy”. The 2000 Taipei Biennial is organized as an exhibition that contains works in the spirit of democracy as intimacy. In the performative space provided by the artworks, the audience does not experience them through speculative perception, but by participating and temporarily “living through” a possible transformation of life. The audience is partly creators of the work. The works are open and experiential; no definite interpretations

and results can be given by the artists, the curators, or the museum guides. It is in this sense that the exhibition itself and the works reconciled art and democracy, or somehow gave a new vision for the old dreams of utopia in modern art.

SEDUCTIONS, ASYMMETRIES, GLOBALIZATIONS:
LEARNING FROM THE GUGGENHEIM BILBAO MUSEUM

Joseba Zulaika

The Guggenheim Museum is carrying out the most important experiment of museum globalization ever attempted. To its New York headquarters –Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous spiral- and the Peggy Guggenheim Museum-mansion in Venice, the Guggenheim has added branches in Soho, Bilbao and Berlin during the 1990s and, last fall, in Las Vegas. Rumors of other possible Guggenheim have spread in dozens of cities all over the world, including Venice, New York, Lyon, and more recently in several Brazilian cities. Of all these franchises, Bilbao, with architect Frank Gehry’s spectacular building, is the one that has most clearly evinces the risks taken and successes achieved by its director, Thomas Krens.

This essay examines the procedures, premises, controversies, ironies, risks and achievements of the agreement between the New York City-based museum and the Basque municipality. Faced with the final question as to whether the experiment was a failure or success, our answer demands that we distinguish the Bilbao Guggenheim’s various aspects: architecture, town planning, image, flagship project, tourism, museum organization, art, means of communication, etc.

Can a museum be tremendously successful in terms of architecture and advertising for a city, and at the same time be a questionable contribution to art or even to museums as cultural institution?