

## Bibliography

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## “...these days I'm feeling very confused”

Corinne Diserens

I would like to thank Ivo, Viviana, Patricia and everybody working with SITAC. I've learned so much, and I've enjoyed this conference. Even if we are in Mexico City—a wonderful place to be—I don't regret not being able to see much of it, because we can perhaps draw energy from some of the things that have been said here. What I would like to speak about is energy when we work and where we work.

First of all, I do like museums. I felt it needed to be said because museums have been discussed and put into question a lot over the last three days. I like being in museums, I like working in museums, I like discussing museums, I like rethinking museums but at the same time I'm always fighting with museums—not with museums directly, but with the public administrations that control them, and with politicians who exploit culture as a platform for their populist campaigns.

I spent seven years directing museums, not in Paris, but in what we call *villes de province* in France. Before that I was in Spain, at the IVAM in Valencia, then with the Carta Blanca cultural association in Madrid, although we mostly worked in Bilbao, before the Guggenheim was built. We initiated dialogues with certain artists, architects and politicians about the situation in the city of Bilbao.

I believe we need to actively consider what a modern and contemporary art museum should be today and what its needs are. It can't be a traditional museum or art center. A museum has to enrich its collections at the same time as it produces temporary exhibits and art projects, and develops educational programs and research laboratories in collaboration with local and international partners. It must be an active institution that thinks, works the present day with artists and different publics. In doing so, it activates its collections and new modes of communication.

The lecture by Walter Grasskamp was extraordinary and it brought many questions to mind, because these days I'm feeling very confused about the relationship between the public and the private—and perhaps much less positive about our realities than Grasskamp is. I think that France, at this point in time, is in some sort of crisis in terms of public representation, public policies, believing in the need to delegate certain areas of cultural policy to the private sector, etc.

Let's take a very media-based example: the billionaire François Pinault and the whole Executive Life affair. Pinault made part of his fortune from his holding company Artémis, which made major capital gains in connection with the fraudulent acquisition of a Californian insurance company on the part of the then nationalized bank Crédit Lyonnais—all of which led to a highly publicized trial between the French government and the State of California. In the end, the French government was forced to pay an enormous fine.

In an article in *Le Monde diplomatique*, Olivier Toscer wrote that, “On November 25, the California courts suggested a compromise in the Executive Life affair—one which would not affect François Pinault’s holding company, which is known to have close ties to Jacques Chirac. The interpenetration between political leaders and private enterprise raises the question of just how neutral public authority really is. How can the State be expected to fight social insecurity when social insecurity itself is a direct result of wealthy industrialists’ contempt for civility?”

Pinault—owner of Christie’s—has amassed what is perhaps one of the largest private art collections in France and even in Europe. But can we call it private? Or, for the sake of argument, should we call it a kind of French public collection or an indirectly (yet heavily) State-subsidized collection, in view of the public bank’s generous loans that created a certain economic logic under which Pinault was able to build up his fortune.

Once again, Toscer clarifies: “As the lovechild of State technocracy and private elites—protected by public ignorance of economics (while the media, protagonists and profiteers of this kind of arrangements, of which they talk very little)—State favoritism has helped define the economic policies of all powers (both Right and Left) for the last twenty years. [...] In France, recycling public funds into private capital is the *mar-tingale* and basis of the fast accumulation of large fortunes in France.

Today, as we know, Mr. Pinault exhibits parts of his collection at the Venezia Palazzo Grassi, which he bought on the advice of Mr. Aillagon, former French minister of Culture and Communication, and general director of the Palazzo. Mr. Pinault is now also a shareholder at *Le Monde*, and I imagine he has had at least an indirect influence on this newspaper. Another newspaper, *Libération*, founded by Serge July and Jean-Paul Sartre, was partially bought out a month ago by Edouard de Rothschild, thus forcing out July as director, because he was incompatible with the new owner’s plans for the newspaper.

Public institutions are extremely important and worth fighting for. I think it is fundamental that we have public cultural policies, which doesn’t mean that we can’t work with the private sector. But it is necessary that we establish areas where it is possible to negotiate and clearly state the kind of relationship we want between the private sector and certain public funds.

Getting back to museums... I certainly think it is important to talk about museum development, because we all know that a large part of museum funding goes to new construction and not to the art that goes into it. The Bilbao Guggenheim is a perfect example, though I do think that this museum brings up several other important questions. For example, what does it mean to transform Bilbao from an industrial situation—with strong pressure from the working community regarding how the city’s image should be reassessed—to its self-representation?

I would like to go inside a museum’s walls, because this is supposed to be a place that houses a collection and is definitively involved in enriching and studying its

collection. Good museums have always placed an emphasis on purchasing art of their time, and that has proved to be the way to build a large collection and support the arts.

This leads us to the question of investigation, research, education, production and dissemination of knowledge. A museum was also once a place where people were paid to invest time in research, and transmit the results of that research. I would love to be contradicted here, but I think that museums today do not spend very much time and money on research.

The question of diffusion and transmission is considered to fall into the category of media relations. Today, politicians think that museums have a responsibility to fulfill the need for fast and immediate contact with culture, but they do not leave room for different kinds of relationships with museums.

We are constantly trying to explain to politicians that a museum is a long-term project. Evidently we can meet the “political time”—that is, the political terms—but “museum time” has nothing to do with “political time.” In that sense, I’m not surprised that today it is much easier to get public funding for a Biennial—planned entirely within a city’s or region’s public policy—than to find money to run a long-term project at an institution.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that museums have not succeeded in changing their structures. I was very interested to learn from Ivo that the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo is changing its administrative and creative structure. In France, on the contrary, we have inherited a very old administration, a centralized organization that believes in everything being controlled by a political “nomenclature.”

Politicians today know that something has to be done about this, but they do not want to lose their power. There was the case of a very important postwar German artist—Dieter Roth—who lived in Switzerland and Iceland, and who did not have very many shows in major museum contexts until his death some years ago, after which there was an impressive retrospective of his work in Basel, which traveled to the MoMA—the museum honored this great artist with no need to debate or negotiate with him over the economy and format of his show.

Even the Centre Pompidou—a relatively young museum, designed to be a place for creation, relating directly to the needs and conditions of artistic production—could not deal with Dieter Roth, because he was taking up every element needed to plan a show: funding, labor, students, administration, conservation, etc. This seemed impossible for a museum, which must protect itself and doesn’t want its institutional structure to be shaken up.

I think that we have an enormous responsibility in terms of defining the future museum, but we also have to find a way to combine political, economic and scientific agendas in order to redefine the museum as a real protagonist among other institutions in the public sphere.