

THE GLOBALIZATION OF ART AS A CHALLENGE FOR CURATING AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTING

INTRODUCTION

In 1980 Douglas Crimp defined postmodernism as a specific breach with modernism and institutions which shaped the discourse of modernism, most importantly the museum and art history (Crimp, 1980, 91). Crimp's essay was about the role of photography in postmodernism, but his somewhat dramatic claim that 'Postmodernism is about art's dispersal' had never been more valid than presently, in the era of global art practices. The term 'global' itself defies any illusions of the modernist universal methodology or art historical master narratives. The multitude of different cultures, which feed into the global art, is uncontainable within the limitations of a single, general aesthetics. Julian Stallabrass wrote about the 'fracturing of globalisation', indicating that the process of fragmentation of the art world still continues (Stallabrass, 2004, 98-99). Quite naturally, a shift in the way of exhibiting works of art followed the end of a single linear history of art, built essentially from a perspective of the Western canon. From its outset the institutional collecting and traditional exhibiting spaces were based on a concept of surveillance (Bennett, 1995, 59-69). In those good old days, curators and collectors fashioned themselves as arbiters of all important artistic endeavours. They selected artworks which they deemed worthy of inclusion into their institutions, thus validated them as mainstream art. Global art shattered the grounds of such methodology. This new reality manifested that a single-view perspective, while comfortably straightforward, can never do justice to the complex character of artistic practices around the globe. This paper aims to evaluate how successful curating and institutional collecting are in operating within the global conditions of art making and art viewing. I hope to show a paradoxical rapture within the global body of art. Rapture caused by the attempt of museums and other art institutions to maintain their traditional approach of arbitrary inclusion and exclusion. The 'excluded' global art is that which in the face of its global character focuses on conditions of being a human, apparently sole unifi-

ing factor of this emerging new kind of art. Such artistic practices seem to be inherently non-fetishistic and bound with current politics and economic events. The 'included' global art, is that which produces an artwork, which can be valued both financially and aesthetically. The latter type of global art tries to overcome or indeed ignore the loss of the canon. It plays by the rules of the traditional collecting and exhibiting practices, thus working for the survival of the institution and perpetuating the art historical discourse.

GLOBAL ART AND ART INSTITUTIONS

Global Art, unlike the colonial 'world art', defies any possibility of finding universal aesthetic qualities or establishing canon of art. In other words, 'it has no inherent conventions against which it may self-reflexively operate, nor criteria against which we may evaluate its success' (Bishop, 2004, 63). Consequently, in theory, global art cannot be displayed using traditional exhibitionary models, which are based on a notion of progress or at least change within acknowledged artistic schools. Various political, cultural and geographic trajectories became more and more diverse with a formation of newly recognised countries after 1989. The history of art written from a single point of view was abolished in that 'post-colonial' period. Consequently, museums were forced to begin thinking about the ways in which they can keep up with global art practices, how in their collecting and curating they should account for the new, multifaceted type of art. Those museums which were established according to the Universal Survey scheme, (Duncan, Walach, 2004, 49-59) such as Washington National Gallery, began to collect art from across the globe, assuming in fact a role of an ethnographic museum (Belting, 2009, 13). On the other hand, the modernist 'white cubes' had to rely primarily on the reinterpretation of their collections. Such institutions shifted the emphasis away from narration of a certain story of modern art toward the interpretation shaped by the multicultural identity of visitors. A good example of that exhibitionary practice is Tate Modern which from its opening in 2000 attracts national and international crowds with free entrance to the permanent collection. The London's major art institution allegedly emphasises the freedom of interpretation of their collection with flow charts in the hallway, the so called 'viewpoints'. The global viewer was invited to use his/her own experience to actively reshape the character of the artworks on display. However, the mock-up of Barr's notorious diagram of the twentieth-century 'isms' illustrates that museums like Tate Modern are still struggling

to get away from their original and arguably inherent agendas. What remains at stake is presenting the institution's cultural hegemony and its power to survey not only the accumulated from across the globe artworks, but also the multicultural crowds of visitors.

Apart from curatorial practices of redefining the exhibition spaces, institutions in their collecting began to place a lot of emphasis on works of art by people of various ethnical and cultural backgrounds to account for global character of art. The long neglected non-Western art understandably strove for its integration into the global exchange of artistic ideas. To give one example, a Russian artist, Oleg Kulik, became successful in the West and received several prestigious grants such as: the Pollock- Krasner Fund (1990) and the grant from Berlin Senate (1995). He had solo exhibitions in various parts of the world: New York, Paris, Naples, Moscow. Kulik's works were far from homogeneous in the way they could be mapped and interpreted. Initially he was acclaimed for his strategy of reciprocal exchange, of joining Western and Russian perspectives. In 1997 he arrived in New York from Moscow as a dog in an animal-van, and staged a two-week show 'I Bite America and America Bites Me'. Visitors to the gallery were invited to put on protective suits and to interact with the dog. It seems that with the show Kulik tried to expose the stereotypical perception of Russians as illiterate savages. What is striking, the artist soon ceased to play crazy for the Western audience and retreated to something far more obscure, namely a close examination of the Russian values of spirituality. Perhaps the artist noticed the failure of his attempts to address the Western audience whilst being truthful to Russian patrimony and cultural heritage. It could be argued that he tried to refer to a global consciousness by showing something Russian, which he believed was understandable to and important for everyone.

It seems to be an ambition of many other global artists to point to the universal character of values which are no longer aesthetic but human. The attempt is to overcome the inherent in art history distinction between centre and periphery and include all art in a new global discussion. Mere having within their collection works created in a different cultural context is not supporting those ambitions. Museums and other art institutions focus in their collecting and exhibiting on global art that is 'unusual and peculiar'. By making the art of other cultures visible in the seeming neutral context those traditional institutions remain empowered to write about, to evaluate and to discuss from a privileged position the different cultures in general. Consequently, it seems that inherent characteris-

tics of western art institutions and patterns of collecting always based on the canon can never really account for global art. Most of the exhibiting spaces retained the clear division between subject and object of art which was always established 'not within the national body but between that body and the other, 'non-civilized' peoples' (Bennett, 1995, 67) On the other hand, it must be emphasised that visibility of non-western contemporary artists in major art institutions, can be understood as a marketing strategy, a type of advertisement which enhances the investment value of the global artworks.

Indeed global art already in the 1990s began to escape the containment of the Western Institutions. When the potentialities of art in the world's economy were recognised, new contemporary museums started to emerge all around the globe. In Japan, for instance, new museums were created in order to boost the country's economy after the crisis of 1990s. Those new exhibitionary spaces, often without permanent collections, invite international curators to stage a temporary venue as successful and profitable as possible. This alternative type of exhibitionary space, which in its character is closely related to a laboratory, adapts far better to the aim of staging global art than discussed above outdated traditional exhibitionary complexes. As proposed by Bourriaud and other curators, the late 1990s brought a kind of thinking about art in terms of installation or performance rather than a complete work. Consequently, not only the interpretation of the art work was relative to the viewer, but the actual work of art had only a relative, more viable and less local, character. Bourriaud proposed that our aesthetic judgment about such works of art should be based on questions such as: '...does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?' (Bourriaud, 2002, 109).

NEW MEDIA AND APPARENT CHARACTER OF GLOBAL ART

Another aspect of the global art that affects the traditional curating and collecting strategies is the fact that it can often be mediated through new media. Timothy Rub, a current director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, when asked how did he view the future of the museum in the global age answered that he wanted to explore the possibilities created by Internet and other technologies.¹ He claimed that the traditional ways of

¹ I am most grateful to Timothy Rub for opening discussion on those issues during my internship at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2010.

representing the museum's collection namely the galleries and books (catalogues from exhibitions and handbooks to the collection) were both inherently self-limiting. Rub stated that only 10% of the museum's collection is at one time on view, and that the Image Data Basis provided much more access and a wider understanding of the collection. Moreover, in assisting people's interpretation of the works on display, for Rub it would be unthinkable to go (like PMA's first director, Fiske Kimball, did) to India in order to bring columns from an original temple hall, or to France to bring a fountain from a medieval cloister. Rub argued that nowadays no such 'a walk through times' is necessary or appealing as technology allows wider, more global and more contemporary viewing of art. Global art with its connective possibilities and the open-endedness of artworks seem to be suitably mediated through new media. However, new media can also operate towards the entrenchment of the local character of the visitor's viewing of art. Arguably, those new virtual possibilities of looking and experiencing discourage an audience from actual travelling, experiencing directly the original context and informing oneself about the character of the cultural fabric that influenced the art work.

It seems that new media as a tool used by curators reveal not only new possibilities but also new challenges related to the global art. With the development of Internet, curators can research faster but their research, especially in the case of contemporary art, is limited by the fact that they can no longer easily reconstruct the international network of relationships between various artists and analyse comprehensively the ideas that were used to create the artworks. The global art is accessible to all and hence every art whether it is produced in Australia, Japan or Canada can inform other artistic creativity, without any physical sign of a direct contact between artists. That new situation poses further challenges. The way of curating which takes for granted that in the age of global art virtually every artist knows international works of art, can justify in that sense connections made between works created in a completely different context, often ignoring the original circumstances that lead to the creation of the art work. Since, as discussed above, the museum of global art has no underlying universal value, any connections made between the works of art are much more intangible, harder to pin down than in traditional museums. This shift in conception of art partially resulted from the changes in social life. Already Debord wrote about: 'affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance' (Debord, 1992, Ch.1 sec. 10). Thus, the society shifted from tangible, physical *having*

which privileged the sense of touch towards immaterial, insubstantial *appearing* which is intrinsically based on vision.

WORLD ART FAIRS

It could be argued that the global art, unleashed by traditional aesthetics and free-ranging, is more suitably displayed in the context of Biennales organized around the world. The positive aspect of those undertakings is the possibility of mixing of various cultures, which assumes a form of informative and curious hybrid villages created at the site of Biennale from the contributing national pavilions. In theory, Biennale should be all about interactions, creating situations, in which the split into various nations is radically suppressed and a visitor is enabled to experience art freely without any national divisions, in other words to experience art globally. However, that possibility of global or perhaps even humanist art awareness is underscored by the persistent acting out of nationalistic allegories. The global art exhibited at Biennales can be anything with only one limitation that it has to reflect the specific ethnicity of the artist which enriches the map of art world (Foster, 1996, 198). This insistence on specific nationality of the artist is globalization's most evident paradox. One of the most fascinating comments on that irreconcilable tension inherent in global art practices is a work by Santiago Sierra *Wall enclosing a Space* created for the Spanish Pavilion at the 2003 Venice Biennale. The performance/ installation consisted of an interior containing nothing else but a reminiscent fragments of a gray paint from passed exhibitions. What was the essential characteristic of the space was that the access to it was granted by two immigration officers only to Spanish passport holders. Thus, the work commented on the apparent inclusiveness of the world at the point of globalization, which in fact was still defined by cultural, political, social and legal exclusions. Not all artworks presented at various Biennales question national identities, but it seems that the audience is always implicitly encouraged to read every piece in that context as the nationality of the artist features prominently on the accompanying labels. Furthermore, even though more and more countries are being represented during, for instance, the Venice Biennale, there are still countries which are excluded from that 'global' festival. Also the distinctions in terms of the scale and location of national pavilions continue to play a significant role in appreciation of the artworks or rather in evaluation of the artist's ethnicity which is clearly at stake.

It must be emphasised that the physical site of the Biennale is also *emphatically local* and typically determined by a rigid time frame of the event. One of the controversies around the 7th Berlin Biennale curated by Artur Żmijewski in 2012 was its ambition to break with the local and temporal specificity of the global art show. The aim was to undo the fetishist approach to art and to point to various global, universal concerns. Żmijewski commented on the importance of breaking away from ‘consumerism reception’ and the tendency to use the exhibition format as a way of setting new trends in art and establishing financial value of artworks. Instead the curator wanted to use the opportunity of encounter during the exhibition to revive ‘a common language, Esperanto that everyone speaks’ to communicate global ideas. To an extent, such ambition is a continuation of the 1960s artistic movements, such as *Situationist International* of which key figure was Debord, who claimed that artists should change the theatre of life and cease to be costumers of the immaterial reality. The artistic creativity was limited to active changing of the condition of life or at least making people realise the true, i.e. based on appearances, quality of their life. Encouraged by that legacy, artists still reject the production of artworks and instead create life changing situations for their audience or promote the awareness of life. Tomas Rafa, a Slovakian artist, during the 2012 Biennale in Berlin showed one of his projects, which is based on the idea of travelling around the world to record current manifestations. His artistic practice is formed of discovering where the manifestation takes place, taking a train to the site of such events, video recording it and then publishing it on *youtube*, for the world to see. What is important is that these ideas are the essence of supranational, yet they are not shown on major Art Fairs, which claim to be inclusive and global. Omission of these works results from the fact that they do not have a product which can become a visual label of the art event or more importantly which has a financial value. Indeed, it seems that the split in the art world is created exactly by the realisation that the new value of art, once defined by aesthetic, is now financial. One part of the art world embraces this new canon of money, and appreciates as significant those works which fetch the highest bids at world auctions. While the other group points to the global character of the financial crisis and the need to overcome the capital, which itself shifted to the apparent condition and as immaterial can no longer be simply destroyed. The latter group calls for the acknowledgment of the global conditions of living, while the former enjoys the global possibilities of buying. These are the two sides of the present world of

art. The huge criticism and controversy that followed the 7th Biennale clearly manifests the power of the art institutions which stand behind the art fairs. Ambitions of global artists to gear their works towards the direct transformation of the life's surroundings are incapable of supporting the art market and for that reason are condemned by the Institution.

CONCLUSION

The traditional museum was orchestrated in accordance with a set narrative established by history of art. Within that model curator's main responsibility was to define objects in the collection according to universal aesthetic values. The claims to the connection between various works of art were based on the Western canon. The global art with its inherent relativism defies that mode and promotes an exhibitionary space which is more like a laboratory with deliberately anti-modernist, incomplete and medium non-specific objects. The global art curator is evaluated on the grounds of how successful is his/ her staging of the art experience. Moreover, the global art which supposedly relies on viability and possibilities of sharing the cultural wealth, in fact, through its site-specificity, exposes and entrenches the nationalistic distinctions. Finally, what seems most problematic is that the informed viewing of the global art is reserved for the privileged few who can afford to travel to various regional shows and biennales, and accumulate the multicultural capital. As pointed out by, Belting: "The sharing may be global, but the owning inevitably remains local".² We still have to wait for the invention of the new interpretative schemes and new ways of displaying art which will render the distinction between Western world and the Other obsolete, and allow truly decentralised and global map of the art world. It seems that global art should be disruptive to the institutions which are always tied to specific nations and cultures. Global art should not strive to be validated by a specific presence during art fairs or exhibitions. By definition, global art should emphasise its omnipresence, which, unfortunately, seldom can be followed by financial gain.

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² H. Belting, 'Contemporary Art As Global Art', in: *The Global Art World*, Ostfildern, 2009, p. 22.

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