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AND A COLLECTION OF EMERGING ARTISTS



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ART'S NEW CUSTODIAN

What qualities do you think make a good curator?

That's the one million dollar question. I don't think there is one model of what represents a good curator. Just like there are many different art practices, and interests in the minds of contemporary artists, there's also a wide range of different curators who have different processes that are best adapted to one kind of contemporary practice or the other. I do generally find that curators who interest me the most are those who are in very close contact and dialogue with artists, who look at an artists work and practice over time rather than start with one particular work. I enjoy people who know how to work with space, because curating is of course an intellectual process, but it's also a very physical process. So it's important that someone understands how work functions in a space and what a specific space has to offer, what the limitations and possibilities are, how bodies move in one space, and how light moves in a space, so on and so forth. There's a sensibility to this that comes into the work of a curator that I admire.

And who might that be?

There are many. Just last week I spent some time with a curator from Buenos Aires, Victoria Noorthoorn. I'm think-

ing of her because of this space she curated; she did the Lyon Biennale, which I thought was one of the best international exhibitions I had seen. It was incredibly rich and varied in the number of works it represented and the practices it represented. But it also had a sort of intimate aspect to it. I think there were more than 120 artists, but the encounter to the work was always made privileged. It was thought through.

How important is space to the curatorial process?

Space can be defined in all kinds of different ways. A space can be online, it can be a website, it can be a publication; a space can be a sort of ongoing program overtime. I think it comes back to me in my head, one of the fundamental gestures of curating, which is selecting a work out of many and presenting it in relation to a space, to an audience, to works, to a context. That maybe makes you see the work in a different light.

So when you have someone like Paul McCarthy, what do you do with that, the space on Park Avenue, the armory?

Well I think that is an interesting extension of the role of the curator beyond the space of the exhibition space. Into a website or something. In a case like this, what I deeply

admired was the mediating and enabling qualities of the curator to allow Paul McCarthy to push his thinking and his practice so far, and to respect his creative process. I think, whatever you thought of the exhibition, it was clearly an incredibly ambitious project in Paul McCarthy's career. Certainly one of the most ambitious projects I've seen this year. There's something to be said about carrying that ambition as a curatorial team.

So tell me about Independent Curators International. How did it begin?

Well nowadays curating is becoming incredibly trendy. But in 1975 it was still head scratching. So to have these two women start this organization, for me it is an incredibly powerful gesture. What it meant then, I think that to me, what speaks to me most about what it meant then, is that it identified a network of venues for contemporary art that hadn't necessarily been activated and utilized for the presentation of contemporary art. Art centers and museums existed, around the country and around the world, but they didn't necessarily have sort of expertise in contemporary practice. They didn't have a contemporary curator on staff. So, ICI would work with you, know those contemporary art curators that were working in or outside of institutions and then feed them through that network and activate that system, for the good of contemporary art practice. Kind of genius.

The very first exhibition that they did was an exhibition of video work. Again, mind-boggling in 1975. It was kind of so strong to be promoting a show of video work that the title was simply "Video Art." It didn't have to go further. That went to Brazil, to the São Paulo Biennial. So ICI basically got funding from the States to show this exhibition in Brazil as the representation of the US at the São Paulo Biennial in 1975. Then once the show was there, and all the work was there, it traveled to Chile, Columbia, Peru, and Venezuela. So it was like a 5 country tour across Latin America that really established for artists and for the public what video art meant, for an entire continent. It was later credited as what began a shared understanding of video art and what began the video art festivals that started emerging in the 80s. So it's an incredibly important foundation for artists, for art practice, for people who write and think about art. So that's my sort of inspirational moment, when I think about the history of ICI.

ICI emphasizes independent thinking and fresh approaches to exhibiting art. How do you find innovation in the curatorial process?

ICI is a platform for curatorial practice and curatorial re-

search. We're in conversation with curators from around the globe about their interests, their developing ideas, and their work with artists; and we produce exhibitions, events and conferences, publications and training initiatives internationally, that provide support and resources to curators. With these programs, ICI fosters the investigation and development of innovative exhibition formats and art infrastructures that best support contemporary art and artists in different countries and contexts. But always with an emphasis on exhibitions and exhibition making and the production of exhibitions.

Can you talk in more detail about ICI's process?

We wanted to have a situation, and a kind of resource platform, that has something for everybody. Because we are also willing to learn from people we don't know. We work with curators in very informal ways, in organic ways and we produce exhibitions with them that tour. We produce events and talks and lectures with them, in New York but also other cities in the states. We have research projects, so we collaborate with curators on furthering their research into emerging structures, into artistic movements, into specific interests of theirs.

Cultivating a dialogue between emerging and established curators and artists is important to ICI. How do you intend to continue this relationship? How can younger artists and curators get involved with ICI? What training programs do you offer?

Cultivating a cross-generational dialogue is always crucial because we learn from one another. At ICI we have created training initiatives that rely on peer education and cooperative learning. For instance, the Curatorial Intensive — ICI's professional development program for emerging curators — takes a horizontal model rather than a vertical one, wherein a group of emerging curators form peer networks for continuing education, and also meet with established curators, museum directors, artists, and various other individuals who represent different facets of the world in which a curator operates. In New York we have a talk series with six established curators around the world every year.

Can you talk about the recent event you did with Terry Smith?

That was an event we did for his book on contemporary curating, the very first book publication on curating. There's been a lot of essays, or collections of essays, but this was the first time someone sat down and wrote from cover to

cover trying to figure something out. As a result of this publication, and again, not to say that we discovered the holy grail of curating, we organized a series of conversations between Terry Smith and curators throughout the US and also internationally, as a response to the book and as a way for him to collect feedback and research for a second volume of the book, to suggest that this is a kind of ongoing mode of thinking and we are not setting things in stone because it's such a young and dynamic field, that the last thing we want to do is academize it or to institutionalize it.

I don't know if that helps you understand what we do but basically it's producing exhibitions, producing events, producing resources for curators wherever they are - it's not a membership organization.

Are you involved in finding new curators for exhibitions? How do you find young curators and connect them with emerging artists and the exhibitions they might be involved in?

Almost every staff member at ICI has worked as a curator at one point or another. So somewhere in the back of our minds, we have this mindset to look for intriguing ideas, for creative individuals that we are inspired by, be they artists or other curators. So finding new talent comes out of that curatorial approach, remaining fascinated and curious of what may be out there.

What advice would you give someone interested in a career in curating? Where do you start?

It begins with a long and sustained engagement with artists, and their creative process. You can't begin to think of it as a career before that. You need this understanding of the artistic gesture to have something to say about those experiences and what the artist's role in today's society and culture at large.

ICI is based in New York yet it connects with international institutions. How do you continue to foster this international dialogue? Is having a New York base key to ICI operations?

ICI is headquartered in New York, but active wherever it is activated. As an organization without one specific place to call home, we work with partner institutions, we collaborate with curators and artists, to adapt and reconfigure a project for the local context, even in New York. We're based in New York but we're an international organization. We produce exhibitions but we don't have a space. So our exhibitions, they're in Australia, they're in Latin America, the Western

Sahara: so we collaborate with curators and art spaces and venues around the world, to realize exhibitions or to host training programs or to host our lectures. In addition, our events in the city, at the Curatorial Hub or elsewhere, enrich the curatorial and art discourse with international perspectives as well as local ones.

Have you thought about where you might want to have a show next?

I've thought a lot about cities that I think have a particular place in how they can explain what contemporary culture is. I'm not really ready to answer that questions but it's something that I'm thinking a lot about. But I'm not thinking of it in terms of one place, I'm thinking of it in terms of a number of places that can sort of reveal something about the human condition today.

Are there any trends in curating today?

Yes. Curators in general are interested in the history of exhibition, which is a very new field. There are trends in curators sort of thinking curatorial, not only in exhibitions but also educational programs, in public programs etcetera. What art and curating can achieve in the world, outside of the walls of an exhibition space. Like earlier, when I was talking about understanding the space, not just architecturally it can also be a website, but it can also be a time based program. So it could be like an educational program over a period of 6 months or it could be a public program with an artist. Each of these things kind of represents trends in curating. Then more traditionally speaking, like if you stay within the realm of exhibition making, there are definitely trends that are more art historical trends. The Venice Biennale this year for example was a very sensitive way of defining a new and different lens of how to look and appreciate art. What we consider art, what we don't consider art, pushing out limitations of what we know and pushing for a different type of understanding, a different way for us to think about print and digital culture.

What's the greatest enemy towards curation today?

I think the greatest enemy is the speed with which the curatorial field has expanded within the past few years. Which produced a kind of consensus. I think that's echoed in art as well. So to me I think there is a sort of consensus of what contemporary art is, looks like, which the grandfathers are, more than the grandmothers still. And the canons are still very, very strong.