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**RENAUD PROCH: “I’M SCARED OF HOW ARTISTS SEE THEIR CAREERS AS A  
JOB”**

BY CRISTINA MARÍ - DECEMBER 03, 2013

CULTURE

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The ginger cat from Stacion-Center for Contemporary Art lies on Renaud Proch's knees. The thirtysomething executive director of the New York-based Independent Curators International (ICI) has been in Prishtina for three days, and has had time to initiate more than a few new relationships — including one with this feline, nicknamed “Adem”. Over a three-day span last week, Proch met with local artists and had the chance to see how the “travelling exhibition” that his institution coordinates — titled “[Do it](#)” — has been adapted to the context of Pristina. Some of the artists who met Proch told us that he is immediately able to grasp the meaning of their work, as well as their choices of media. Kosovo 2.0 chatted with Proch about the historical and contemporary role of the curator, the relationship between the curator and the artist, and the challenges that naturally arise.

**Kosovo 2.0: We're trying to understand the role of the curator; in Picasso's time, for instance, the profession didn't exist as it does today... but was there someone in a similar role?**

Renaud Proch: Maybe I can answer your question from another perspective. I knew early on that I wanted to be a curator, but I didn't know what that was or if there was a word for it. When I looked into Picasso and [his art dealer Daniel-Henry] Kahnweiler, there was a relationship between the two that was not just one of artist and dealer, but really one of adviser, enabler, somebody [gave] context to the work.

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**K2.o: Why has the figure of the curator arisen? Is it because art has become such a huge business, that we need somebody to put things in context?**

RP: I don't think so. I think that the artist is the important figure. The artist is the person without which the curator doesn't exist. An artist can exist without a curator; a curator can't exist without an artist, or not without artworks, at least.

**K2.o: How difficult is it not to go beyond the line that separates the work of the artist and the ideas and influence of the curator?**

RP: I think it's a question of personal boundaries. You know, there is no rule; perhaps sadly, there is no textbook [...] for curators. Some curators take much, much more liberty with artworks, and some are more conservative. Some try to think, re-think, invent new exhibition formats or institutions to privilege one artistic practice or investigation over another, and I think it's for the curator to decide when to stop. I think a lot of curators have studied art history, and there is a moment when you have to stop thinking, when

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you have to admit that you don't know. You have to admit that you are putting words into somebody else's mouth, and so you draw that line.

Ideally, the curators that I enjoyed working most with are curators who have a very close relationship to [their] artists, and have such a tremendous respect for the creative process that they wouldn't want to risk encroaching on it. But [...] I think it's also true that, sometimes, artists also benefit from being challenged or being pushed.



**K2.0: You are describing the type of curators you like to work with, but who are the artists that you like to work with? Sometimes, you may like the artist's work, but then the relationship can be complicated. How is it for you?**

RP: Well, it's interesting. I think if I like the work, I find it easier to like the artist. If I don't like the work — even if I like the person a lot — I don't [think] I can really work with them.

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**K2.0: We were talking before about new exhibition-formats. “Do it” is an example of how far an exhibition can go — what’s the formula for “Do it”?**

RP: The formula is very simple: you make an exhibition that doesn’t end, that doesn’t have an opening and a closing date, that can happen simultaneously around the world, that can grow, that can be an exhibition of ten artists here or five artists there. And you can do that because it is based on the artists’ ideas and not on the realization of the idea in the form of an object. So it’s a sort of dematerialized exhibition, and that’s the success of the formula.

**K2.0: Stacion has adapted the exhibition in a way that lessens the primacy of the artist’s role, opening the instruction to any kind of citizen and asking for “normal people” to send their instructions...**

RP: This doesn’t necessarily mean that the focus is not on the artists — I actually don’t think that’s true. The artists’ instructions are the basis of “Do It.” The artists’ instructions can be realized by the museum, by the museum staff, by the curators, by the audience

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(there is a set of instructions named “Do It at Home”)... But the beginning of it is the artist’s instruction, verbally materialized. In realizing an artist’s instruction [...] it’s almost like you are making an artist’s work, but because there is a process of translation and ownership in making that person’s work, you are also making it your work. Your understanding becomes the way the work is produced, and I think [“Do It”] is an incredibly generous project, because it’s a person’s idea interpreted by another person.



**K2.0: How does the circumstance of the digital age — of an audience surrounded by screens and partaking in a very new, very visual culture — change or affect the job of the curator?**

RP: It is very much a work in progress. For a curator of contemporary art, the material with which one works changes everyday because of technology’s impact on arts practice and culture; on the other hand, and because of technology, the context of curatorial work changes everyday. You are exposed to much, much more information about art. We also

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live in a culture in which [what we can learn] from a distance tends to exceed what we learn from a museum, a gallery and an artwork. I think we are still negotiating this; I think curators today have to negotiate this. We have this sense that we understand [things] happening around the world because we get the press releases, we get the e-mails and we can read about these things... but [this doesn't replace] the experience of seeing an exhibition, understanding a movement or understanding an artistic practice. I think there is a tendency to understand the role of a curator as one that organizes information, but I think [the more important curatorial practice] is the selection, the discriminatory role. This is a really important function; basically you are deciding who has a chance to be remembered, and who doesn't.

**K2.0: Given that the figure of the curator is a recent one, can you imagine a future without it?**

RP: Today, every university has a program on curating — it has become a business. I was talking to Albert [Heta – director of Stacion], about how I feel a lot of artists see their practice as a career, as work, which of course it is but also isn't. If you see yourself as “having a job,” you are concerned about middle-class status, about paying rent [...] there is a very different set of expectations. I did my masters like 15 years ago, and it was different; there are many changes happening, and it has to do with mainstream artistic education.

**K2.0: You have been meeting artists from Kosovo while staying here [such as Lulzim Zeqiri, Majlinda Hoxha, Driton Selmani, and Alban Muja]. What's the feedback you got from them?**

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RP: I didn't have time to process it fully yet, but I had a series of conversations with artists who are interested in issues that are local and personal to them, but that meant a great deal beyond the local context. I think there is a risk in trying to work in an increasingly globalized contemporary art world, that you lose the connection to the personal and the local and make work that operates within a sort of established [global norm]. I was impressed by a number of artists I spoke with who [emphasize] the personal and the local; there is a real ownership in what they are talking about, but in a way that is still relevant within a contemporary arts discourse that is international. That was really fascinating.

*Photo credits: Atdhe Mulla*